

**Past Visions, Present Lives: sociality and locality in a Torres  
Strait community.**

Thesis submitted by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores dynamics of sociality and local identity on Warraber Island in the Torres Strait. I argue that Warraber residents' representation of themselves as a distinctive collectivity needs to be understood in terms of indigenous conceptions of relatedness and difference and with reference to local moral terms of communal life, in particular a valorised striving towards the idealised vision of moral relations known as *gud pasin*. This value is informed by a dense network of cognatic connections existing among Warraber residents – encapsulated in the local discourse of “*ol wan pamle*” (all one family), in addition to shared identification as a Christian community.

Warraberans envision the past through ideas of temporal rupture, indexed to the arrival of Christianity in the region and linked to the positive transformation of Warraber life. This forms a reference point in local thinking about ancestors. Warraberans depict their ancestors as both 'natives' and 'foreigners' linked respectively to the pre-Christian period and the marine industries of the post-missionised colonial era. These temporal associations, and their implicit moral inscriptions, generate poignant areas of ambiguity concerning personal ancestry, and also prominent pre-Christian sites and dance performances thought to be associated with head-taking and sorcery. The image of the sorcerer is itself contentious, appearing partly as a moral Other, and partly as a source of local power.

Such dynamics of difference appear as integral to contemporary social life on Warraber. Differing Christian affiliations, ancestral emphasis and perspectives on the past certainly contain potential for contestation. Productive activities are markedly gendered and family networks involve strong personalised loyalties that compete with broader social obligations. However, the value of *gud pasin* is shown as ultimately valorising inclusiveness, generosity and a concern with community harmony. Moreover residence on Warraber Island emerges as an important context for common experiences that help distinguish the population as a distinctive, emplaced community within the diversity of Torres Strait populations.

Intense attachments to Warraber Island are communicated in local notions of 'belonging' to place. This is characterised by knowledge and familiarity and also by birth and residence. In this context, the marine realm continues to be a central component within Warraber collective identification and notions of local distinctiveness. Warraberans represent themselves both in historical and contemporary terms as incomparable marine workers, hunters and fishers. Transactions in marine products, whether related to generating income or for consumption, continue to be a focus of Warraber life and are inextricably woven into the practice of familial relations, whereby marine resources are transformed by human activity into a 'currency' of relatedness shaped by moral understandings that inflect the landscape as much as the conduct of sociality.

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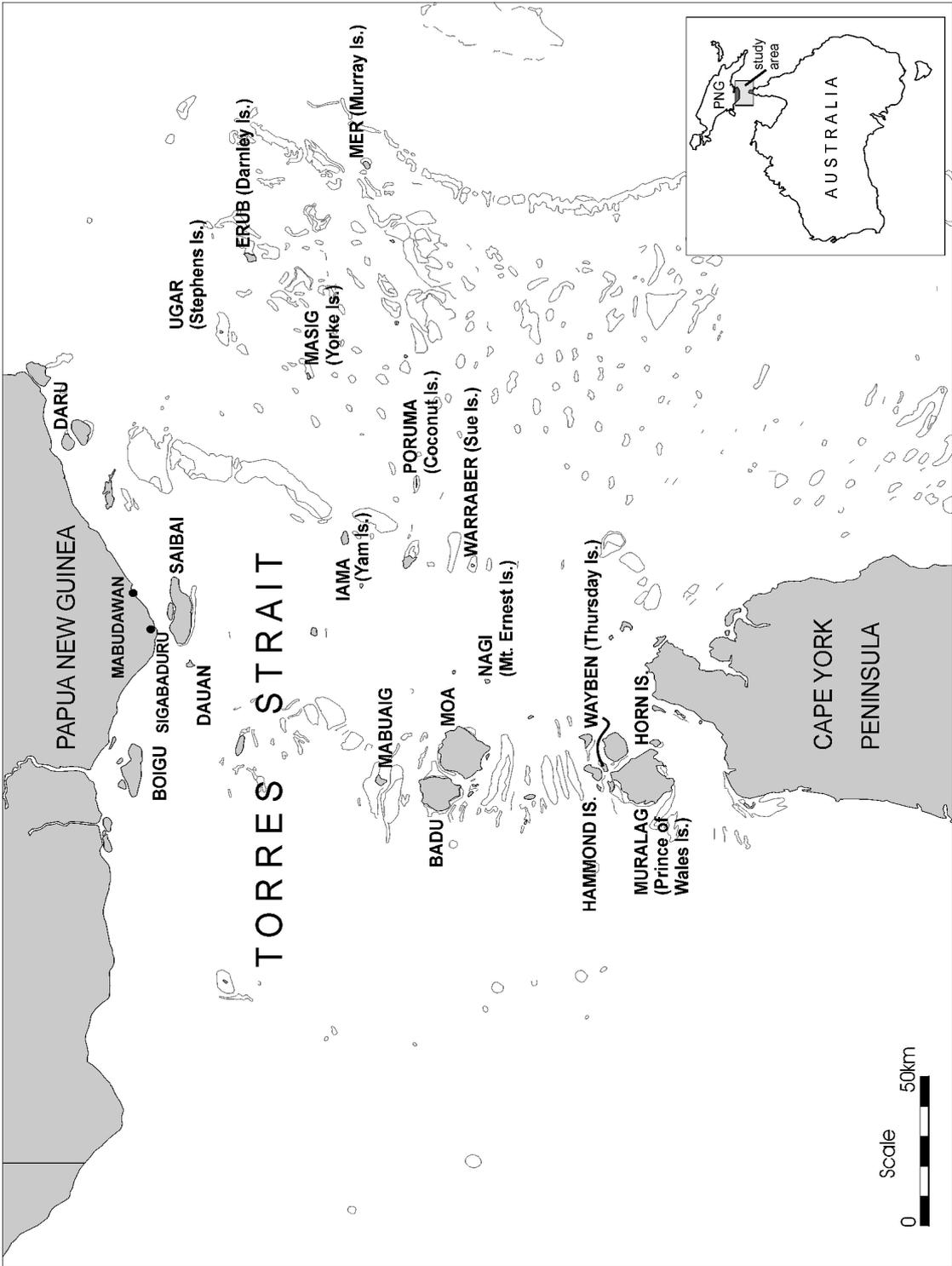
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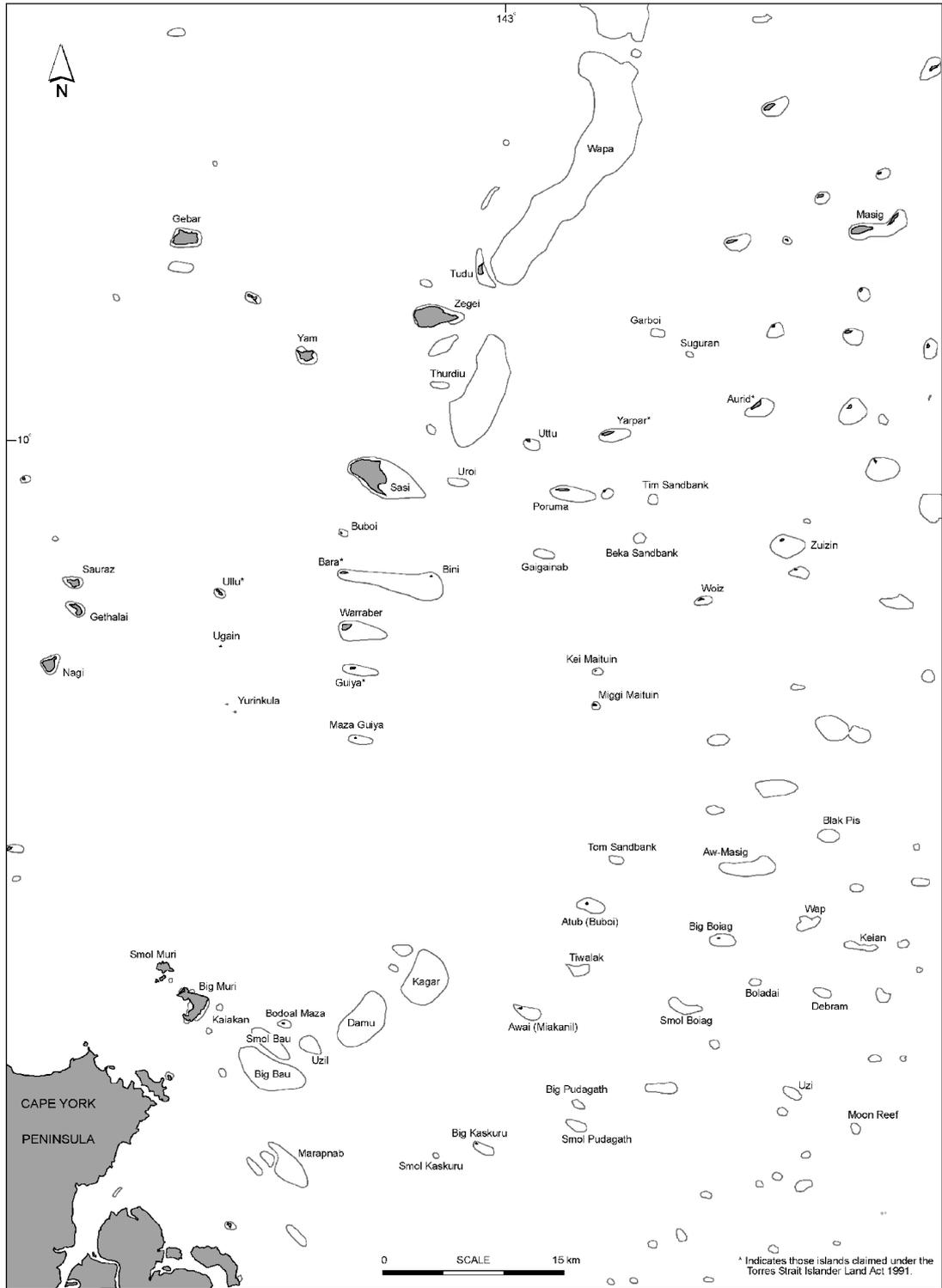
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**Map 1: Torres Strait**



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**Map 2: Central Islands**



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**Map 3: Warraber Island**

## Note on Language and Orthography

At Warraber Island, everyday speech events occur in the language called Torres Strait Creole (TSC). TSC has attracted a variety of names. Warraberans variously refer to it as *Kriol*, *Blaikman tok*, *Yumpla tok*, *Brokin* or *Brokin Inglis*, and as *tok blo mipla* (our way of speaking). Following Shnukal (1991, 1983), I refer to it herein as Torres Strait Creole or simply TSC.

In the Torres Strait, TSC was developed out of the altered speech contexts associated with the introduction of Christianity in the 1870s. Warraberans associate TSC with the 1871 arrival of the London Missionary Society to the Torres Strait, regionally referred to as the "Coming of the Light". A common expression is that *wen lait lo worl bin kum, ol tok brokin inglis* (When Christianity arrived, everybody spoke TSC). Warraber ancestors were less directly affected by this language shift than other Islanders as no foreign missionaries were resident during the early decades of missionisation. Their early introduction to this new form of speech occurred via marine industries.

Warraberans say that their ancestors learned to speak what Ray (1907:251) referred to as 'jargon English', on marine industry boats which afforded extended interaction with Europeans, Pacific Islanders, Papuans, and other Torres Strait Islanders. Fluency in this new speech form was required in marine industry contexts where different language speakers required a common language of understanding. Ray described this 'jargon English' as

the usual medium of intercourse between Europeans and the islanders of Torres Straits ... consisting of colloquial English words, with many phrases based on native idioms. This jargon is also used by Australians in the straits, and by the people of Mowata and Kiwai on the opposite coast of New Guinea (Ray 1907:251).

Warraberans probably began working on boats as early as the 1870s when marine industry boats were recruiting from Warraber's neighbouring island, Poruma (Mullins 1995). Shnukal (1988:5) says that TSC became the first language of Yam and Masig Island people in the 1920s and a decade later by those resident at Warraber, Poruma and Hammond Islands.

According to Shnukal (1988) the TSC vocabulary remains eight-five per cent English derived. Fourteen per cent of the vocabulary is derived from the preceding languages and used in contexts where there are no English words available. One per cent of the vocabulary is from Japanese, Malay-Indonesian and a number of Pacific languages.<sup>1</sup> TSC may have developed out of Pacific Pidgin English but speakers of eastern and central-western Torres Strait languages "... radically modified its phonology (sound system), syntax (grammatical system), lexicon (vocabulary), semantics (system of meaning) and pragmatics (system of use) ..." (Shnukal 1983:26).<sup>2</sup>

TSC, as recorded by Shnukal, may well be primarily used in daily interaction between familiar interlocutors. Shnukal (1992:97,99) notes that the language she records comprises "everyday conversations" that "I heard spoken around me", rather than "formal elicitation".

In the current period it seems likely that the linguistic 'ecology' of the Torres Strait Islands is dynamic, and that Torres Strait Creole is neither static nor definitive of local variations of English use, particularly as it is co-present in the islands with standard English (as taught in the classroom). Certainly I encountered interactions that involved greater or more restricted mixtures of TSC and standard English, rather than a discreet separation of the two, and the use of TSC definitely carried associations of informality and intimacy.

As a result, it may be that more and less formal variants of creolised English exist in the Torres Strait, perhaps in the form of a continuum with TSC at one pole (most informal/intimate) standard English at the other (least informal), with a diverse range of intermediary forms. The resulting spectrum of linguistic options would mean that any given choice is dependant upon the context and purpose of a given speech act alongside the known linguistic repertoire of an interlocutor.

These preceding languages spoken in the Torres Strait comprise two languages, which although distinct, partially consist of a shared vocabulary (Ray 1907:265) and

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<sup>1</sup> There are a few Austronesian words in the Warraber Broken vocabulary: *talinga* (ear), *susu* (breast) and *kaikai* (food; to eat). These are derived from Pacific Pidgin English (Shnukal 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Other languages like Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea), Bislama (Vanuatu) and Pisin (Solomon Islands) also developed in relation to Pacific Pidgin English (Shnukal 1988:3, 1991).

phonology (Wurm 1972:346).<sup>3</sup> The eastern language is related to Papuan languages and has generally been referred to as *Meriam Mir* or *Miriam* (Bani, 1976, Haddon 1935, Ray 1907, Shnukal 1991, Passi and Piper 1994). The language spoken in the western and central islands has been classified as a member of Pama Ngungan family, the largest sub-group of Australian languages (Bani 1976; Ford and Ober 1991; Ober 1994). Haddon (1935) and Ray (1907) referred to this language as the 'Western Language' or 'the Mabuiag'. According to Ray (1907:6, 509, 510), the language form spoken by *Saibai* (from Saibai, Dauan and Boigu), *Kulkalgal* (Tutu, Yam, Nagi and Masig), and *Kaiwalgal* or *Kauralgal* (from Muralug and Moa) were dialects of the 'Mabuiag' language spoken by *Gumulgal* (people of Mabuiag and Badu).

Unlike the eastern language, the language spoken in the western and central regions of the Torres Strait has attracted a variety of names by scholars. The language has been variously referred to as *Kala Lagaw Ya* (Bani 1979, Ford and Ober 1991, Passi and Piper 1994, Shnukal 1991, Wurm 1972), *Kala Lagau Langgus* (Bani 1976, Bani and Klokeid 1976, Ford and Ober 1991), *Yagar Yagar*<sup>4</sup> (Bani 1976, 1979, Ford and Ober 1991), 'Western Torres Strait Language' (a direct translation of the term *Kala Lagaw Ya*) (Bani 1979, Ford and Ober 1991), and 'Mabuiag' (Ford and Ober 1991, Ray 1907, Shnukal 1991).

The central islands have not always received explicit mention in descriptions of the 'western language'. Recently, Ober and Kennedy (1992:1) have countered this trend by opting for a more inclusive term: 'Western-Central Language'. They note four dialects within this language that are geographically commensurate with Ray's (1907) classification. Ober and Kennedy (1992:2) maintain that there is "very little difference" between the four dialects: *Kala Kawaw Ya* (Saibai, Dauan, Boigu), *Kala Lagaw Ya* (Mabuiag and Boigu), *Kulkalgaw Ya* (Central Islands) and *Kawalgaw Ya* (Kubin and Noerupay (Horn Island)).

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between western-central and eastern languages and neighbouring languages spoken in Papua New Guinea and Australia, see for example, Ray (1907), Ober and Kennedy (1992), and Wurm (1972).

<sup>4</sup> Bani (1979) points out that his earlier use of the term *Yagar Yagar* (Bani 1976) was incorrect according to 'island elders', who regarded this term as a 'slang word'.

The term *Kulkaḡaw Ya* is being increasingly used at Warraber to denote the language spoken throughout the Central Islands though it is also referred to as *Mabuiag* and *Kala Lagaw Ya*. One informant suggested that the language should technically be called *Dada Lagaw Ya*, where *dada* means 'midway' or in the 'middle'. Warraberans generally view *Kulkaḡaw Ya* as constituting a 'dialect' of *Kala Lagaw Ya* that is very closely related and mutually intelligible. They note that the main differences are reflected in intonation and nomenclature both between and within island groups. For example, Yam Island residents call the Smudgefoot Spinefoot fish *kibim*, while Warraberans refer to it as *kurbim*. Another difference mentioned by Warraberans is the use of the suffix *pa* in the top western islands and *ka* used in the middle-western and central islands. A common Warraberan way of referring to *Kulkaḡaw Ya* in the Creole language is *langus blo sentral* (the language belonging to the Central Islands) or simply *langus*. Warraberan competency of *Kulkaḡaw Ya* is highest among elderly people (see chapter 4). I use the term *Kulkaḡaw Ya* (KY) throughout this thesis.

I conducted interviews in TSC as it is the first language of almost all Warraberans,. In the chapters that follow, I have translated all narratives and discussions into English but retain certain phrases and terms employed by Warraberans. I use an italicised font throughout this thesis to highlight everyday speech events in TSC including terms derived from *Kulkaḡaw Ya*. In this thesis, I follow Shnukal's (1988) orthographic conventions. The phonetics of Warraber TSC speakers is predominantly similar to that described by Shnukal (1988:12). Shnukal's orthographic conventions are set out below. I have replaced her examples with those from the Warraberan TSC vocabulary.

Torres Strait Creole Vowels are:

a – pronounced as 'a' in 'ask' (e.g. *angere*; hungry)

i – as 'ee' in 'see' (e.g. *biri biri*; species of bird)

e – as 'e' 'set' (e.g. *peleth*; species of fish)

o – as 'or' in 'for' (e.g. *sokoro*; raw clamshell dish)

u – as 'oo' in 'boot' (e.g. *yupla*; plural form of 'you')

Diphthongs:

ei – as 'ay' in 'say' (e.g. *Meiu*; an island)

ai – as 'ie' in 'lie' (e.g. *thaiwa*; broken coral)

oi – as ‘oy’ in ‘boy’ (e.g. *mathaiomoi*; a Warraber lagoon where mathai fish are likely to be caught)

au – as ‘ow’ in ‘now’ (e.g. *paunga*; clamshell lip)

Consonants:

The consonants p, b, t, d, k, g, s, z, l, m, n, y and w are all pronounced as in English. There are two exceptions.

r – ‘is sometimes a flap and sometimes a trill’.

ng – as ‘n’ in ‘sing’ (e.g. *ngursi*; snotty nose)

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Warraber Island is the southernmost of the Torres Strait's central islands – a diminutive coral atoll, some 1400 metres long and 750 metres wide with approximately two hundred permanent residents. This is a small population compared to many islands in the Strait, but might also be considered surprisingly large given Warraber's size and relatively poor fertility. However, the island is surrounded by extensive reefs that yield a plentiful variety of marine biota, harvested regularly by local women and men for consumption and sale. This activity helps sustain the population materially and provides the context for much of the movement about the island and the surrounding region, fostering detailed knowledge and profound personal associations with the local environment. Marine-related pursuits form a critical component in residents' characterisation of their lives and identity as both island and Warraber people.

The research presented here considers Warraber residents' notions of collective identification through conceptions of relatedness and difference and with reference to local moral terms of communal life. I explore a number of salient categories and concepts used by Warraber people to make distinctions and/or highlight connections among themselves and others in the region. I am concerned less with notions of an embracing Torres Strait Islander identity than with what Carsten (2000:1) describes as “a picture of the implications and the lived experience of relatedness in local contexts”, in this case, a particular island community in the Torres Strait. The main impetus for this approach comes from Warraber residents themselves, in particular their emphasis on local rather than regional identification and their insistence that Warraber people comprise a distinctive collectivity.

‘Torres Strait Islander’ is a form of identification actively embraced and asserted by a minority segment of Australia's population that includes people residing in the Torres Strait itself and many more on the mainland, as the work of Beckett (1987) and a recent exhibition of Torres Strait Islander artists (Mosby and Robinson 1998) attest. Part of the success of the expression ‘Torres Strait Islander’ within the range of varied discourses of collective identity in Australia is its ability to draw on powerful naturalistic tropes within Western understandings of group boundaries that assume the essential ‘rootedness’ of distinctive communities in discrete locales (Gupta and

Ferguson 1997:13). But collective forms of self-representation are rarely if ever self-evident; the existence of Strait-identifying mainland Papuans and an Strait island population with identificatory connections to Aborigines in Cape York problematise essentialised notions of Torres Strait Island identity, as do important conditions of difference between islands and within resident populations in the Strait itself. My research does not assume that society and culture are necessarily coterminous bounded entities. In particular, I seek to avoid a ‘cultural itinerary’ approach to sociality and collective identity, with its echoes of ethnic groups, dangers of reifying notions of ‘Islander culture’ (*ailan kastom*) and unproductive debates concerning the relative importance of continuity and change, which inevitably mesh with evaluations of historical authenticity.

I argue instead that the most critical issues in any representations of custom or tradition involve the modes of legitimation these encompass. In this regard, I give significant attention to narratives of Christian conversion on Warraber. These play a critical role in informing local representations of moral community or *gud pasin* which encompasses social expectations and obligations embedded in religious understandings. I also emphasise contemporary approaches to identification which stress notions of difference and alterity as being at once constitutive and enabling of group identification, and always containing the potential to challenge or undermine the coherence of collectivity. In the Warraber context, this involves exploring community stress on the epochal transformations of Christian conversion, in addition to contestations surrounding the completeness of that transformation. In particular, discussion centres on ambivalence concerning the place of significant pre-colonial sites and the ambiguity inherent in local visions of the sorcerer both as ‘moral other’ and as a figure of power.

Warraber people insist that they comprise a coherent and cohesive collectivity, summed up by the phrase “*ol wan pamle*”. This expression can be used to refer to a dense network of cognatic connection among Warraber residents, such that any individual on the island can trace some genealogical connection to any other. But importantly, it also conveys an idealised vision of sociality. In this sense, I argue that *ol wan pamle* should be seen as a moral exhortation as much as describing an existing state of affairs. It is the discourse of an imagined community, and it is the terms of belonging to this community that is at the heart of the research presented here.

At the same time, dynamics of difference are integral to contemporary social life on Warraber. Productive activities are markedly gendered and family networks involve strong personalised loyalties. Understandings of Christianity, of ancestry and of the past contain potential for contestation as much as commonality. Cohesion and cleavage, tension and harmony, self and other are dynamics that confront Warraber people and mark Warraber social life as they do human sociality everywhere. Residence on Warraber Island emerges as an important context for common experiences that help distinguish the population as a whole, despite internal differences, as well as situating Warraber people as a distinctive, emplaced community within the broader diversity of Torres Strait populations.

### **Borders and Frontiers**

The Torres Strait became known to Europeans as an important but treacherous route through which they had to take particular care navigating ships (McInnes 1978-1979). In geographical terms, a strait seems easy enough to define – it consists of a narrow passage connecting two large bodies of water, in this case the Pacific and Indian Oceans. This particular strait is dotted with islands as well as numerous coral reefs. Yet the core emphasis of the term ‘strait’ in etymological terms is not actually with water but rather the notion of something tight and confining. The landmasses that bound a narrow passage of water are then, as fundamental a part of constituting any strait as the water itself, if not more so. The Torres Strait is formed by the proximity of the northern tip of Cape York Peninsula to a short stretch of southern Papua New Guinea coastline. But landmasses and coastlines tend to recede to the background in conceiving of the Torres Strait, displaced by the prominent utility of the term in marine navigation.

To the extent that the coastlines defining a strait can be said to be simultaneously present but also not present, it is possible to suggest a similar situation complicates the question of social relations and the dynamics of identification in the Torres Strait region. Indeed, it may be deemed somewhat arbitrary to separate the islands from the rest of the Torres Strait, to deal solely with the populations of islands occupying the passage itself and not also with adjacent coasts. Lawrence (1994; 1990, Laade 1973 and Moore 1979) has argued for the existence of historical trade that united islands and coastal areas: “all the islands in the Torres Strait – western, central, and eastern – were connected to each other and to communities in New Guinea and Australia in a single

trading network” (1990:188). Herle & Rouse (1998:12) note “while the indigenous islander population would be defined today as primarily Melanesian, people from the lower western islands also maintained links with Aboriginal groups in Cape York”. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that the two coastal areas mentioned are separated by far more than a physically narrow passage of water. They are each situated on either side of one of the most potent symbolic boundaries human societies have been able to create – the frontier between two nation-states. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the 1898 Cambridge Expedition to the Torres Strait, unencumbered by the constraints of (yet to emerge) national boundaries, gave explicit attention to the populations of these coastal areas.

The Cambridge expedition was required to carefully delineate its research focus in order to clarify the ownership of collected specimens.<sup>1</sup> A written agreement signed by participants prior to departure stated: “the Expedition has for its main object the study of the Anthropology of the Torres Straits Islanders” (Herle & Rouse 1998:9-10). The capitalisation and use of the definite article in the phrase ‘the Torres Straits Islanders’ certainly indicates an a priori conception that island-dwelling populations of the Strait constitute a discrete and singular entity. However, the agreement then actually specifies the territorial boundaries of its research ‘object’ by means of an enclosing line drawn on a sketch-map (Herle & Rouse 1998:11). Geographical locations outside this enclosed area are described as being “extra-territorial” to the expedition’s focus of study. The area thus delimited extends well beyond the Strait’s islands to include areas of the adjacent coasts, both north and south. To the north, it takes in a zone between the Mai Kussa and Fly rivers, incorporating Kiwai Island at the mouth of the Fly. The Agreement explains that “the islanders are allied to the Papuans of the neighbouring coast of New Guinea” (Herle & Rouse 1998:10). The southern boundary incorporates the “extreme north of the Cape York Peninsula of Queensland”, with the settlement of Somerset set as the southernmost limit.

Haddon’s Expedition helped inaugurate anthropology as a fieldwork-based research endeavour (Sillitoe 1976). It is fascinating that at this early stage in the discipline’s development it is viewed as necessary to give attention to the populations bordering

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<sup>1</sup> Those objects relating directly to the expedition’s focus were to remain the property of Cambridge University rather than the individual collector.

those constituting the main focus of research. Cohen (1994:62-3) notes the geographical distinction between ‘boundary’ as denoting a narrow line of demarcation or delimitation (often with narrowly legalistic connotations) and ‘frontier’ as having a more diffuse, zonal connotation with broader social significance. It strikes me that the spirit of this contrast would likely be appreciated by Haddon, and that the sketch-map in the expedition agreement represents an attempt to suggest cultural and social frontiers rather than demark rigidly enclosing group boundaries. This is not to suggest Haddon anticipates the later emergence of theoretical concerns with ethnic boundaries (eg Barth 1969), which would certainly exaggerate his prescience. Haddon sought to place his research on islands in the Torres Strait within the broader context of Oceanic studies (Urry 1982:202). As a figure of his era, he was concerned primarily with cultural diffusion and therefore with a regionalised study located between Melanesia and Aboriginal Australia; the islands’ position as a “bridge” exhibiting a “mixture of features” from both is what made them an attractive object of study (Sillitoe 1976:6).

Nevertheless, there seems an implicit acknowledgement that the interaction of bordering populations was somehow fundamental to the dynamics of collective identification – in this case, between island dwellers and nearby mainlanders in the Torres Strait. Haddon notes, for example, that the early European observer MacGillivray regarded the ‘Kowraregas’ (Kuarareg) of Muralag (Prince of Wales) Island as “a Papuanized colony of Australians”:

one might hesitate whether to consider the Kowraregas as Papuans or Australians, so complete is the fusion of the two races. Still the natives of the Prince of Wales Islands rank themselves with the islanders and exhibit a degree of conscious superiority over their neighbours on the mainland; although themselves inferior to all other islanders, they have at least made the great advance in civilisation of having learned to cultivate the ground ... which is practised by none of the Australian aborigines” (Haddon 1935:65-66).

Embedded alongside Haddon’s now-dated unilineal understanding of social evolution and concerns with racial taxonomy is a surprising allusion to the importance both of self-definition and of local ideas of social difference within group identification. Combined with the recognition that the islands are not easily separated from the broader Torres Strait region, Haddon’s work serves as a reminder that the identificatory relations of island populations to others in the Strait remains poorly understood. Certainly the socio-geographical boundaries of Torres Strait populations continue to be blurred – in the north by the presence of mainland-dwellers in Papua New Guinea who

identify strongly with the entire Torres Strait region and in the south by the presence of island-dwellers who have an identificatory relation with mainland-dwelling Aborigines.

### *Blurred Boundaries*

Papua New Guinea communities in the northern Torres Strait are said to possess a “feeling of connectedness” towards the marine realm that extends well beyond village or clan held marine territories, i.e. seaward extensions of village or clan estates (Schug 1995:16). These feelings relate to a complex network of social ties that link the inhabitants of these northern mainland areas to the Strait as a whole and foster a “feeling of identity with the entire region” (Schug 1995:18). This regionalised identity flows from ancestors said to have originated from certain islands, centuries of exchange, intermarriage, sharing access to land and marine territory in addition to a long historical tradition of extended marine voyages in the Strait linked to trade, subsistence and involvement in commercial marine industries.

Schug (1995:18) cites a coastal village informant in the Papua New Guinea section of the Strait who declared himself still first and foremost a “Torres Strait man”, regardless of the politics of national boundaries. At the very beginning of his examination of “masculine identity and subjectivity among Saibai Islanders” (an island that borders Papua New Guinea), Davis (1998:1) explains that

‘Saibaian’ refers to Saibai Islander, ‘Papuan’ refers to Papua New Guinean, ‘Coastal Papuan’ refers to Papuan residents of the southwest Papua New Guinea Coastline adjacent to Saibai, ‘Saibai Papuan’ refers to Papuans and their descendants who have settled on Saibai and ‘Islander Papuan’ refers to Papuans resident throughout the Torres Strait.

The need for such a carefully elaborated nomenclature serves to highlight the complicated interrelation of community and identification in the Strait. Davis (1998:300-1) notes that “the conceptualisation of Papuans by Islanders is complex, including the mutual recognition of shared cultural features, history and kin relationships”, including cross-generational links and Papuan clans that possess the same totems as Saibai clans.

The southern boundaries of Torres Strait Islanders are also problematised. Tindale (1974) describes Prince of Wales Island (Muralag) and other southwestern islands in the Torres Strait as peopled by “a blended group of Australian and Torres Strait Island people speaking an Australian language”. Haddon (1935:290) drawing on the work of

Sidney Ray, the Expedition's linguist, recognised that the Kaurareg language has close affinities with Aboriginal languages, an observation later confirmed by linguists, who classify it and other dialects spoken in the Western and Central Islands as being members of the Australian family of languages (Bani 1976; Ford and Ober 1991; Ober 1994, see note on orthography). According to Southon (1998:6-1) Kaurareg people themselves refer to it as 'Aboriginal' in contrast to 'Torres Strait language'. A key origin narrative among the Kaurareg concerns the major cultural hero Waubin. He is considered to have been an Aborigine, a warrior giant from Central Australia who comes to Muralag Island and proceeds to kill or chase away other resident warrior figures before acquiring their wives (Southon 1998:6-2). Waubin is considered to have been the first Kaurareg man (Moore 1979:289; Sharp 1992:105) and he wielded a weapon – the '*baidamal baba*' – that is viewed as a unique and therefore an important symbol of Kaurareg identity (Sharp 1992:105).<sup>2</sup> Later, he metamorphosises into a rock off the northeast end of Hammond Island and establishes a deep channel with strong ocean currents that protect and separate these southern islands from others in the Torres Strait, discouraging movement in either direction (Southon 1998:6-2).

Sharp's (1992) account of the Kaurareg offers an abundance of information concerning the historical interconnections between populations of coastal Cape York and nearby islands in the Torres Strait, including ties of exchange, warfare, shared dialects and intermarriage. But Sharp is notably ambiguous concerning Kaurareg collective identification in relation to mainland Aboriginal people. While emphasising the historical coherence of the Kaurareg as a distinct group – “the identity of the Kaurareg as an ethnic-cultural entity ... was quite distinct from neighbouring groupings” (Sharp 1992:105) – she also describes the Kaurareg as “related *both* to other island peoples, especially those at Moa, and to the groupings within northern Cape York Peninsula” (Sharp 1992:3, my emphasis). Sharp nowhere describes the contemporary significance of such relations in the Kaurareg's own terms, or their perspective on forms of embracing regional identification.

While local instances of the use of broadly encompassing categories such as 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander' are absent from Sharp's account, her own use

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<sup>2</sup> The *baidamal baba* was carved from a single piece of wood and studded with shark's teeth (Sharp 1992:105).

of the rubric ‘Torres Strait Islanders’ is extensive, and frequently appears not to include the Kaurareg, though this is nowhere made explicit. When she writes for example that “Torres Strait Islanders were not driven from their lands or exposed to unstemmed violence” (1992:25) Sharp is pointing to shared historical conditions that may well play a role in underpinning contemporary ideas about group-relatedness. But shortly after she notes: “in the islands close to the Australian mainland and the Cape York area, the train of events were quite different” (Sharp 1992:25), suggesting that Kaurareg experiences of the colonial period are in this respect distinct from other island populations and closer to those elsewhere. Indeed, the Kaurareg’s islands are described evocatively as “a bridge into the Torres Strait” (Sharp 1992:14) – a metaphor that might suggest separation from the Strait region itself, or at best a state of transition or even liminality, of being ‘betwixt and between’ mainland populations and those of the Strait.

According to other sources, Kaurareg people consider themselves as Aborigines rather than Torres Strait Islanders and they are sometimes referred to as the Kaurareg Aboriginal people or Aboriginal Kaurareg.<sup>3</sup> Sanders (1999:2) for example, reviews national census data on different forms of indigenous identification within Torres Strait Island communities and notes that Horn (Ngurapai) and Thursday (Waiben) Islands “are [locally] regarded as traditional Kaurareg Aboriginal land, not Islander land”. In the context of native title, the Kaurareg have insisted on being represented by the Cape York Land Council rather than the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), which nominally functions as the government recognised Native Title Representative Body for the Strait’s islands. The representative for Horn and Prince of Wales Islands in the TSRA, Mr Phillip Bowie, has stated that “the Kaurareg are unique because they live in the Torres Strait but have Aboriginal ancestry” (*TSRA News* 2001:3).

At a Kaurareg native title determination ceremony, the Kaurareg elder who ceremonially received a text of the Federal Court determination from Chief Justice Michael Black did so while wearing a red, black and yellow headband.<sup>4</sup> And a brief flurry of media interest surrounded one Kaurareg “traditional owner” who publicly asserted that the administrative boundary separating the Torres Strait and Cape York

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<sup>3</sup> Warraberans refer to Kaurareg as ‘*agei*’ meaning ‘Aboriginal person or people’.

<sup>4</sup> The colours of the Aboriginal flag; the Torres Strait Islander flag is green, blue black and white. The individual concerned was Bill Wasaga.

should be shifted to the north of Hammond Island in the Strait. This was so that Kaurareg “Aboriginal tribal lands” would become part of Cape York: “this is about identity – we’re Aboriginals, we’re not Torres Strait islanders [*sic*], and we want control over our lands”.<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that such a shift would exclude Moa Island, despite colonial relocations of Kaurareg people to the island and resulting kin links to local populations there, as highlighted by Sharp (1992).

Clearly in the case of Kaurareg people, the application of identificatory categories such as ‘Aborigine’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ is problematised, even openly contested. This serves to reinforce Schug’s (1995:22) assertion that

Scholars should exercise caution in treating the indigenous population of the Torres Strait as a homogenous entity. A more effective and equitable course is to actively seek out multiple perspectives on the use, value and meaning of the landscape.

Equally, there is a need for much greater elaboration of the role of inter-island relations and other dynamics of difference that give rise to expressions of collective identification more particularised and more complex than that of being a Torres Strait Islander. Fuary (2000:226) suggests that ‘self’ in the Torres Strait is constituted within a range of overlapping and shifting realms “from the intimate domain of a small group of people who are known and loved ... to the household, the village, other islands, the Torres Strait region, the national and the international domains.” A major focus in the research presented here is to examine those domains which significantly influence and shape Warraber sociality and expressions of local collectivity.

## **Island Distinctions**

The examples of the Kaurareg population and the existence of Strait-identifying mainland Papuans undermines representation of ‘Torres Strait Islanders’ in naturalistic terms, a discrete group essentially ‘rooted’ in a discrete locale (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:13). Important terms of difference between island populations in the Strait itself also make this apparent. Beckett suggests that “Islanders experience the society of their fellows at varying intensity” (1987:214). He notes the continuing importance of “identification with the [home] island” (Beckett 1987:222,228) as does Fitzpatrick-

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<sup>5</sup> Isaac Savage, quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* 2003.

Nietschmann (1980a:125). Beckett also stresses a certain level of island “chauvinism” both on Badu and Murray (1987:232).

For their part, Warraber residents have long been marine-oriented and this remains the case. Horticulture is of minor importance on Warraber, providing a point of important contrast with western and eastern groups of Torres Strait Islands and one basis for asserting commonality with other islands in the central group. Notwithstanding the presence of a greater variety of income-generating activities than in the past or the importance of welfare payments, the regular collection of marine resources for consumption and sale plays a critical role in underpinning Warraber residents’ self-definition as a people who are primarily (and somewhat distinctively) sea-oriented.

The other main Central Islands with permanent settlements are Poruma, Yam and Masig islands. Originally an administrative division, this ‘group’ of islands is not uniformly more proximate to each other than to other islands in the Torres Strait (see Map 1). However, Warraber residents, located towards the centre of the group, view these islands as their nearest and most familiar neighbours. They also represent themselves as far more closely related to the populations of the Central Islands than those elsewhere in the Strait. Warraber residents and others living in the Central Islands region describe themselves variously as ‘*sentral ailan man*’ and as *Kulkalgal* (plural; singular - *Kulkalaig*), communicating both a sentiment and an assertion of relatedness.<sup>6</sup> The expressions denote people belonging to the central region and those who can trace links the region recognised by others. On Warraber, this overarching relation is generally depicted in terms of language, consanguinity and emplacement.

The central islands share a dialect of Kala Lagaw Ya that is referred to by Warraber people as ‘Kulkalgaw Ya’ and described as ‘*langus blo Sentral*’ (Central Island language) or ‘*langus blo mipla*’ (our language). By contrast, Kala Lagaw Ya is called ‘*Mabiog langus*’ (Mabuiag language) or ‘*Westin Ailan langus*’ (Western Islands language).<sup>7</sup> Warraber people state that ‘Kulka’ means ‘blood’. The name Kulkalgal could

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<sup>6</sup> While all residents use the term *sentral ailan man*, it is especially prominent among Pentecostal (Assembly of God) adherents who associate the alternative term ‘Kulkalgal’ with the period before the arrival of Christianity via the London Missionary Society in 1871 (*bipo taim*) and therefore link it to immoral or dark (*satana*) associations. This difference among Warraberans is discussed briefly below, and in detail in chapters 2 & 3.

<sup>7</sup> Both of the latter languages are also referred to simply as ‘*langus*’ where the context makes their specific identity clear.

be translated then as 'blood people' (i.e. people who share blood) and indeed the expression *Kulka* is often explained as signifying '*wan blad*'. This idiom of consanguinity is also used by Central Islanders in explaining their relatedness to one another, stating '*miplo ol blad pipel*' ('we are related by blood').<sup>8</sup> The term *Kulka* also draws on shared narratives in the central islands that concern a figure known as *Kulka*. The best known of these is usually called the 'Four Brothers' story (*stori blo po balla*).

The narrative of the Four Brothers relates the travels of the culture heroes and siblings *Kulka*, *Sigai* and *Sau* through the Central Islands (along with *Malo*, who moves further into the Eastern Islands).<sup>9</sup> Various land and sea features throughout the central islands are named after these brothers or are considered to have been created by them. An early version recorded by Haddon (1904:375) at *Tudu Island* (near *Yam*) at the end of the nineteenth century runs as follows:

Sagai [*Sigai*], *Koga* [*Kulka*], *Malu*, and *Sau*, all these brothers went from the mainland (Australia) to the island *Boydong Cay* (*Ianakau*), thence they went to *Pinaik*, and *Dugong Island* [*Atub*], and later to *Half-way Island* [*Zuizin*], where they had a big wind and sea; after a time they left and landed on *Dove Island* [*Uttu*], where *Malu* and *Sau* had a quarrel and *Malu* speared *Sau*; *Malu* then said he would go to *Murray Island* and *Sau* said All right, he would go to *Masig*, and they agreed to wear the same style of fighting costume, white feathers in the hair and red seeds round the neck, *kusa* seeds in the rim of the ear and a finger of the cray-fish to be worn on the back, they agreed to fight by magic (*puri puri*); then they shook hands and each went to his island. *Sagai* and *Koga* had a talk and each asked the other where he was going to, *Koga* said he was going to *Aurid* and *Sagai* said all right, he would go to *Yam*. *Sagai* said to *Koga* "You go first, my place is close to"; *Koga* said "Well we will take one fashion in clothes, when we fight we fight in day time." *Koga* went to *Aurid*, and *Sagai* with his mate *Kodal* went to *Yam*.

Contemporary accounts of the narrative told to me at *Warraber* and *Poruma* broadly agree with Haddon's version though frequently incorporated different named localities. A typically brief example runs as follows: the four brothers came from *Cape York*, near

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<sup>8</sup> Shnukal (1988:181) spells people as *pipel* and says that not all Torres Strait Islanders pronounce English derived Creole words in the same way (1988:13). The spelling of this word according to *Warraber* and *Poruma* phonetics varies between *pipel* and *pipol*. This probably reflects differing local phonetics according to age groups (see Shnukal 1988:13).

<sup>9</sup> There are different versions of the Four Brothers stories. *Lawrie* (1970:252-254; 326-336) and *Haddon* (1904:373-377) both give versions. In *Lawrie's* (1970) versions, the story told by a *Yam* Islander focuses on *Sigai* (1970:252-254) while that told by a *Murray* Islander relates *Malo's* travels to that island (1970:326-336).

present day Weipa. Their grandmother (*aka*) was staying at Aureed Island. So the boys went to look for her. They were in animal form: Malo was a *sugu* (octopus), Sigai a *daiman pis* or *debol pis* (Manta Ray), and Kulka a *sak* (*baidham* or shark). They went to Warraber first and stayed at Malun Gud, a place on Warraber's reef. Malo sent Kulka to go and look for their grandmother on land. Their grandfather (*athe*) was a *kod* man at Warraber. He told Kulka that his grandmother was at Aureed. They passed by Poruma on the *Gagainab* side (a sandbank to the south of Poruma). Reaching Aureed, they stopped at *Zamuran* (SW end of Aureed), resting underneath an *alup* (Baler Shell) on the reef. Kulka went onto land and spoke to the boss (*bos*) at Aureed. He asked if he could stay there with his grandmother. So he stayed. Malo said he would go to *Marelan* (Murray Islands). Sigai went towards Yam Island and buried himself in the sand at a place now called *satana pleis* (an un-Christian place).<sup>10</sup>

For Warraber people, the idiom of blood connection contained in the discourse of Kulka rarely extends to imagining Kulka himself as the indigenous apical ancestor of all Central Island people (Kulka<sup>gal</sup>), though the suggestion that this might be the case is not rejected outright. The connection between Kulka as 'blood' and Kulka as Central Island figure, if any, is not made explicit. Nonetheless, his association with Warraber and Poruma, and especially his eventual presence on Aureed, serve to mark the central islands strongly as Kulka territory and its occupants therefore as Kulka<sup>gal</sup>. Early theories of human sociality place stress on consanguinity as underpinning 'mechanical' social solidarity, the compelling "ties of blood" (Durkheim 1973:73). The coercive or constraining relation of social life to the individual is modified in later work to emphasise ideas of moral obligation – religion famously becomes a representation of the power of society as a moral community to create bonds of solidarity. The discourse of Kulka seems to incorporate both perspectives. The consanguineal idiom of 'one blood', stretched perhaps to its limit in encompassing the entire population of the Central Islands, does carry a certain moral weight.

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<sup>10</sup> The Torres Strait Creole term *satana* likely derives from Satan (*Seiten*) (Shnukal 1988:304). It has a diverse range of uses and covers meanings ranging from 'naughty' (*yu prapa satana brid*, 'you're a real evil child'), where it forms an affectionate or tongue-in-cheek admonition, through to a serious description of evil or diabolical (i.e. devilish) practices. It can be glossed in moral terms as referring to un-Christian behaviour in the present and to pre-Christian or *bipo taim* ('before time', i.e. before the 1871 arrival of Christianity) practices and places in the past. On Warraber it is often used to refer to sites associated with the activities of sorcerers.

But in an everyday sense Warraberans tend to place most emphasis on a more exclusive relation between themselves and the residents of Poruma Island. This is described as being particularly important, certainly far stronger than their links to all other island populations in the Strait. Again, this draws at least partly on the discourse of Kulka. As noted, Kulka is said to have remained at Aureed Island and Aureed is viewed as the territorial possession of Warraber and Poruma people.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this archaic presence of Kulka in their territory, Warraber and Poruma people consider themselves as possessing the closest relation to Kulka of any people in the Central Islands – they are most truly (or pre-eminently) ‘Kulkalgal’. The term can be used in this more restricted sense on either island, referring not to the population of the Central Islands but to Warraber and Poruma alone.<sup>12</sup> Again, this identificatory link emphasises location rather than descent; local genealogies do not feature Kulka.

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<sup>11</sup> This view rests on local assertions that Aureed had settlements in the past, and that descendants of Aureed residents are among the contemporary populations of Poruma and Warraber. The exclusivity of this claim is not uncontested; certain families on other islands (including those in the central group) also assert descent from residents of Aureed in the past.

Part of the complexity of Aureed in local understandings likely stems from the historical role of the island as the geographical focus of socio-religious organization centring on the figure of Kulka. According to Haddon (1904) a ‘cult’ of Kulka was part of a series of cults previously existing in the region, which he theorises as having formed “one cultural whole” (1935:90). The physical locale of much male ‘cult’ activity (including head-taking ritual and male initiation) was a site known as a *kod* where images and ‘shrines’ had been kept (Haddon 1904:365; 1935:90). The *kod* of Kulka was said to have been located on Aureed Island (see Haddon 1904:378).

Human occupation of Aureed was severely disrupted by a punitive expedition authorised by colonial authorities in 1836, which destroyed all built structures and gardens on the island including what was likely the *kod* precinct. Various artefacts from this precinct were also taken at this time, including an effigy Haddon (1904:378) imagined to be that of Kulka. For details of the event and the circumstances surrounding it, see Ingleton (1952), King (1837), Lewis (1952) and McInnes (1983).

Individual informants on Warraber and Poruma identify both Aureed Island and the term Kulkalgal with the notion of a *kod* dedicated to Kulka. It is also described as being akin to the ‘headquarters’ of *bipo taim* (i.e. pre-Christian) ritual activity in the Central Islands, despite the existence of other *kods* and significant sites in the region. However, the representation of Kulkalgal as referring to *bipo taim* ritual activity is not widely stated by comparison with other interpretations provided above. This is certainly influenced by the general discomfort with notions of continuity between *bipo taim* practices and contemporary life (see below).

<sup>12</sup> As noted, Sigai and Sau are described as remaining in the vicinity of Yam and Masig Islands. Warraber and Poruma informants suggest the populations of these islands should therefore be able to take the names of these locally resident culture heroes.

Fuay (1991a:337-8) offers a local Yam Island version told by the late Getano Lui Snr. His telling focuses on Sigai (after the four brothers decided to split up at Uttu [Dove Island]). Sigai and comes to Yam and becomes the *augad* of the people there, taking the form of a canoe as he travelled to the *kod*. Interpretations on the split vary and this storyteller explains that the brothers split up in order to “...increase their influence and power. Their followers would be united as brothers” (ibid:337). An interpretation told to me at Poruma suggests that Kulka may have been the eldest of the four brothers as he stayed at Aureed while his brothers moved out from this island to others.

But for residents of Warraber, it is not just a common occupation of Kulka's 'home' area that explains their closeness to Poruma people but also a tangible sense that their collective histories and personal memories are intertwined with those of Poruma. In particular, Warraber and Poruma men shared working lives as boat-crews in the burgeoning marine industries during the early twentieth century. Marine activity remains an important focus of men's lives. Most male adults on Warraber, regardless of other employment, continue to be active in commercial marine activity which today focuses on gathering trochus, crayfish and beche-de-mer. And Warraber men still regularly join with their male relatives or affines from Poruma Island to gather these items for sale.

Proximity also plays a prominent part in fostering everyday ties between Warraber and Poruma; the islands are each others' nearest inhabited neighbours. A trip to Poruma takes around two hours by dinghy (the most common form of transport) – much less when the sea is calm. Here proximity and consanguinity fold into each other. Decades of intermarriage between these islands have resulted in a web of familial interconnection. During my fieldwork, the extent of these links was such that general attendance was expected at funerals taking place on either island. Poruma residents and Warraberans regularly contacted each other by telephone and visited each other's island for a variety of reasons such as weekend trips, significant birthdays (particularly 21st), church occasions and school sports carnivals.

### **Culture, Identification and Difference**

Expressions such as "Torres Strait Island culture and society" (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:2) "the culture of the Torres Strait Islanders" (Beckett 1987:x) and "the society of Islanders" (Beckett 1987:23) suggest a relatively unproblematic, homogenous group defined both by residence on islands in the Torres Strait and by the possession of a shared culture. In this sense they can be seen as inherently ethnicising. This can be problematic to the extent that the relationships between location, sociality and identity are blurred rather than explored. Classically, discussions of ethnic groups have involved a tension between such naturalistic or commonsense notions of communities 'rooted' in localities – often implying a primordial and essential dimension to group identity – and those perspectives that rely instead on ideas of the sovereign individual subject, suggesting instrumental and strategic practices by 'rational' actors (Gupta & Ferguson

1997:13). Davis (1998:1) for example, refers to regional Torres Strait Islander identity as an “emergent politico–ethnic polity”, and as such best understood in terms of the dynamics of citizenship, indigenous recognition and political autonomy within the Australian nation-state.

In their influential ethnographic accounts of Torres Strait Island societies, neither Beckett nor Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann adopt a rigid stance in these terms. Their respective areas of analytical stress do reflect something of this enduring division, particularly in their earlier work. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a) is concerned to highlight the conservativeness of beliefs in “traditional Torres Strait Islander culture” and the maintenance of “crucial cultural precepts” (1980a:3-5). A Geertz influenced theoretical exploration of ritual practice in the conduct of island funerary rites in the Torres Strait provides valuable insights into areas of continuity and parallel between the contemporary tombstone opening ceremony and pre-colonial secondary burial rites. But Geertz’s primordialist orientation also tends to represent ‘culture’ as overly constraining, with Islanders “compelled by custom to perform culturally prescribed duties” (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:196).

Beckett’s (1987:12) emphasis is rather with Islanders operating as a somewhat self-conscious group within the political opportunities and constraints offered by encompassment in the Australian nation-state. He overtly positions island populations in the context of transformative global forces, in particular the economic relations of colonialism. Drawing on the materialist work of economic anthropologists such as Mintz (1974) and Wolf (1982), Beckett (1987:11) argues that Islander culture emerges from the articulation of a kin-oriented mode of production with the Australasian periphery of European capitalism, functioning “to involve [islanders] in the cash economy not as individuals but as members of their communities and of an emerging indigenous minority”. His exploration of the “construction of Islander identity” in historical terms offers a particularly comprehensive account of the part played by a range of colonial influences within “the processes by which ethnic groups are formed” (Beckett 1987:210).

Despite clear differences between the two authors’ substantive theoretical assumptions concerning the determining factors that shape contemporary Islander society – enduring cultural institutions or shifting political-economic contexts – both authors actually have a great deal in common, perhaps more than they sometimes acknowledge (see e.g.

Fitzpatrick 1989:812; Beckett 1990:1024). Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:40-41), for example, regards change as a ubiquitous character of social systems and affirms that “few, if any, cultures remain untouched by the effects of the world system”. For his part, Beckett agrees with the critical importance of island funerary practices: “the tombstone opening is the centrepiece of island custom” (Beckett 1987:221). Both authors also share an approach to issues of identification in the Strait in terms of an “underlying uniformity of culture” (Beckett 1987:21) deriving from a broadly shared colonial experience and a collective sense of continuity with the pre-colonial past (Beckett 1987:12). Thus whatever its ultimate origins and influences, both Beckett and Fitzpatrick point to the practice of ‘Island custom’ as defining Torres Strait Islander identification as a distinct group. Island custom “is something that is common to all the islands in Torres Strait” (Beckett 1983a:100) and is critical in “anchoring social identity” (Fitzpatrick 1989:812).

### *Ailan Kastom and Ailan Pasin*

Beckett (1983a; 1987) makes particularly regular use of the term ‘island custom’. In stressing the ubiquity of the tombstone opening event, Beckett (1987:4) suggests the elements it contains are “manifestations of what Islanders call ‘island custom’ ”. Elsewhere he notes again that “[Islanders] have transmitted something that, although itself changing, they have long called island custom” (Beckett 1987:12) and explains its defining features in local terms:

[Torres Strait Islanders] would probably first cite their dancing and music, and their way of celebrating important occasions such as tombstone openings or Christmas. But they would also have in mind a certain ordering of relations among themselves, usually in the idiom of kinship. Island custom stands in a contrapuntal relationship to 'white man custom', something that is appropriate for Islanders and inappropriate for Europeans, as for example dancing. Alternatively, it may be something that is appropriate only in their own domain, like the *lavalava* men wear at home, in preference to the trousers they put on for town.

Beckett also equates ‘island custom’ in the Torres Strait with the discourse of *kastom* in the Pacific Islands (1987:4); “following the work of others in the Pacific and elsewhere, I call [Torres Strait Islander] culture ‘Custom’ ...” (1990:1024).

In the Pacific context, Jolly and Thomas (1992:241;247) note that *kastom* (with variant spellings across several Pacific pidgins, such as *kastam* and *kastomu*) are often translated as ‘tradition’ but in fact have an uncertain relation to this English concept and

its anthropological usage. Slippage can easily occur between the term's use by analysts and its indigenous use, particularly where the relation, if any, between these two contexts is not carefully specified and separated. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:195, 214, 311) frequently employs the term 'custom' when analysing local obligations to kin in general and the conduct of death ceremonies specifically. And Beckett states that the term 'custom' is also one of his own choosing: "what I have called for the sake of simplicity their custom ..." (1987:11). To the extent that such slippage occurs, there is potential for a reified discourse of custom to emerge that obscures as much as clarifies the concrete behaviours and motivations of local actors. Sapir (1949:370-1) categorises 'custom' as a "practical moral universe" – law and ethics exist as moral encodings, authorised differently under the embracing rubric of 'custom'. The most critical issue in representations of custom then, involve the unpacking of the term – the operation of particular modes of legitimation.

Shnukal's (1988) extensive wordlist of Torres Strait Creole (encompassing both the Western and Eastern forms) does not contain the word 'kastom' or its Pacific spelling variations, nor the phrase 'ailan kastom'. This might suggest the term is more complex in derivation and usage than it first appears. It may be seldom used in informal speech events between indigenous interlocutors, for example, and associated more with the presence of outsiders.<sup>13</sup> White (1993) describes a range of different socio-linguistic contexts surrounding and shaping the discourse of 'kastom' in the Pacific. Similar factors may be relevant to the use of *kastom* on the islands of the Torres Strait.

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<sup>13</sup> Shnukal notes that her study of Broken is not a linguistic work (1988:vii) and contains "many gaps, inaccuracies and inconsistencies" (1988:97).

In several contemporary institutional contexts the expression 'kastom' does occur, such as the Torres Strait Regional Authority's (TSRA) 'Vision Statement' which outlines the organization's goal: "to empower our people to determine their own affairs based on our unique Ailan Kastom bilong Torres Strait from which we draw our unity and strength" (TSRA Annual Report 1999:vi). See also Lui (TSRA Annual Report 1996:2). The use of the term 'bilong' here is curious. My own experience, and the work of Shnukal (1988) suggests that the term used in Broken is actually *blo*. 'Bilong' is common to Tok Pisin spoken in Papua New Guinea, and may, like 'kastom', indicate a more formal creole register.

Section 8 of the Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991 also makes use of the term "island custom" and defines it as follows:

Island custom, known in the Torres Strait as Ailan Kastom, is the body of customs, traditions, observances and beliefs of Torres Strait Islanders generally or of a particular group of Torres Strait Islanders, and includes any such customs, traditions, observances and beliefs relating to particular persons, areas, objects or relationships.

Unfortunately, the authors of both passages have not been recorded. Clearly future detailed, substantive research attention to socio-linguistic dynamics in the region is required.

Certainly on Warraber, I rarely encountered the term *kastom* or the expression *ailan kastom*. When examples of its use did occur, these noticeably involved interaction with non-indigenous English speakers and related contexts. One of the rare instances I recorded Warraber residents making use of the expression was during *Torres Strait Islander Land Act* investigations. In the presence of a non-indigenous researcher, several residents discussed the question of what matters the visitor was likely most interested in hearing about; one suggested his focus of interest was ‘*kastom*’ things.

Shnukal (1988:275) provides ‘*pasin*’ as the Torres Strait Creole equivalent of English ‘custom’. *Pasin* (from the English noun ‘fashion’) is a polysemic term able to refer variously to fashion, style, ways, habits, custom, tradition, and customary law (Shnukal 1988:178, see also Fuary 1991a:319; 1993:181). Hence for ‘island custom’ she provides the Torres Strait Creole ‘*ailan pasin*’ (Shnukal 1988:104). This resonates with my own research experience. *Ailan pasin* was an expression I often heard used on Warraber Island across a variety of contexts. It encapsulates the kinds of meanings associated above with ‘*kastom*’, including explaining ritual or ceremonially linked practices such as singing, dancing and feasting. Importantly, it is not restricted to these activities, but is also used to describe moral frameworks for behaviour. In these contexts, Warraber people offered their own gloss for *ailan pasin* as ‘*pasin blo mipla*’ or ‘our way’.

The Warraber Island community does not represent a context where a reified discourse of ‘custom’, ‘culture’ and/or ‘tradition’ is mobilised self-consciously as occurs in the Pacific, particularly in the terms Gewertz & Errington (1997:129) describe as being “a central and explicit determinant for current identity and political efficacy, as the ultimate and enduring basis of local value and power”.<sup>14</sup> I argue that in its own terms, the Warraber population is more usefully described as a moral community rather than a custom (or *kastom*) community. This is exemplified by local representations of Warraber social life and identification in the terms of *al won family*, a vision of sociality that does not rely on a local notion of *ailan kastom* but rather on eliciting the practice of moral behaviour, described on Warraber as ‘*gud pasin*’.<sup>15</sup> While there was little talk of

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<sup>14</sup> However, this can occur among Islander politicians engaging in higher levels of national politics, which – as Beckett suggests (1987:200) – is itself a realm somewhat detached from the experience of local island communities.

<sup>15</sup> A recent major travelling exhibition of Torres Strait artwork was entitled ‘*Ilan Pasin (this is our way)*’ (Mosby and Robinson 1998). The exhibition book contains a preface written by John Abednego, then

*ailan kastom* on Warraber there was certainly regular discourse concerning *gud pasin*, which addressed variously the nature of community life, of social expectations, obligatory behaviour, and the moral values underpinning these things.

Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann highlights moral obligation as existing at the centre of Mabuiag Island identity: “to be an Islander means to take responsibility for others” (1980a:196). She depicts sharing foodstuffs, for example, as an obligation “based on a sense of morality resulting from custom” (1980a:218). Obligations to kin are seen as one of the most persistent ontological features of Mabuiag culture, and one that does not conflict with the basic tenets of Christianity. The centrality of beliefs concerning duty and obligation therefore constitute an integral part of contemporary religious life on Mabuiag, and this is true also of Warraber society, a feature I explore in detail in chapters 4 and 5. Indeed, the salient features of the ‘moral order’ that characterise both the practice and representation of social life on Warraber forms a consistent theme throughout this thesis.

## **Community, Christianity and Morality**

Battaglia (1999:119) has argued that “the struggle for identity reveals itself as based in claiming a *distinctive moral order*, rather than in maintaining national, ethnic or any other sort of mappable boundaries”. More recent approaches to ethnic identification have often built on Barth’s (1969) suggestion that the route to understanding group identity is not to focus on the cultural stuff enclosed by ethnic boundaries but rather the boundaries themselves. In this view, the emphasis on ‘shared culture’ is analytically demoted, and attention is refocused on how frontiers or boundaries around particular communities are drawn, and ultimately on the dynamics of social difference (Norval 1996:65). As a result, cultural dimensions of ethnicity are problematised as is difference itself: “difference does *not* always matter, nor do all differences matter” (Verdery 1996:41;44). The process of identity formation is not imagined in terms of an elaboration of a set of characteristic features, a “logic of enumeration” (Norval 1996:65). Rather, the positing of an often symbolically opposed ‘other’ is necessary, a “logics of inclusion and exclusion” (Norval 1996:65). Identity, then, is brought into

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chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, who notes: “good pasin is one of the principles of Ilan Pasin and this is a major attribution to the identity of the Torres Strait people” (Abednego 1998:7).

being through the drawing of frontiers that establish a constructive (or constitutive) outside, a process increasingly viewed as providing the conditions of both the possibility and impossibility of identity.

In this respect, Beckett (e.g. 1987) has usefully addressed aspects of the interrelation of Islander and white Australian identity, particularly with respect to mainland dwelling Torres Strait Islanders, and Aboriginal, Papuan and Islander distinctions (Beckett 1985:109). But an exploration of the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion have often been insufficiently applied within the Torres Strait itself, and this is responsible for many unanswered questions concerning identificatory relations within island populations in the Torres Strait. Island populations are frequently not homogenous. Beckett (1987:222) states that until recently, many Badu families asserted links to countries outside the Strait. Indeed, he suggests funerary rites (in particular, tombstone openings) play a critical functional role in ‘integrating’ the diverse population (Beckett 1987:222).

Similarly, Davis (1998:6) carefully defines ‘Saibai Papuans’ as “residents of Papuan descent, predominantly from the coastal village of Mabudauan who settled in the early 1970s on land granted to them by Saibaian and have taken out Australian citizenship”. He explains that “the bulk of the community identify themselves as Saibaian” (1998:6) – the others presumably being Saibai Papuans.<sup>16</sup> In his engagement with “the conjuncture of two sets of meanings, Australian and Saibaian” (1998:4) Davis provides the reader with a limited sense of how both sets of people can be said to constitute one ‘community’. The observation is made for example that all men, women and girls on Saibai are able to join Anglican church groups and that these institutions form important foci for the community (1998:8). Without further explanation, Davis’ introduction of the terminological distinction ‘Saibaian’ and ‘Saibai Papuan’ risks appearing as an imposition of differentiating ethnonyms by the researcher himself. Despite being heuristically useful to the analyst, exonyms of this kind can easily submerge the subtle contexts of locally negotiated meanings.

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<sup>16</sup> He does note that linguistic differences exist between the groups, with an uneven distribution and use of Kiwai (a Papuan language) and the local Kala Kawaw Ya, while *Broken* (Torres Strait Creole) is understood by both groups (Davis 1998:7).

However, Davis does hint at complex identificatory relations on Saibai, involving Saibaians, ‘Papuan’ and ‘Coastal Papuans’ – especially evident in Saibaian thinking about sorcery:

Papuans are often regarded by Saibaians as being of lesser status than themselves. Finer distinctions are made between the different groups of Papuans, but Coastal Papuans are often regarded as being less Christianised and more embedded in beliefs and practices, of which sorcery is a part, which while recognised as common at the time of colonisation, are now looked at as questionable ( Davis 1998:300).

Sorcery, Davis observes, has been transformed from its role as part of a “widespread cultural system shared along the coastline southern Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait” to “a negative status now ascribed by Saibaians as a distinctive feature of ethnically differentiated Papuans” (1998:301). In its role as the “the iconic Other of Christianity” (Davis 1998:301) accusations of sorcery in the Torres Strait “reverberate with implications of moral impurity” (Davis 2002:297). Sorcery helps mark an ethnicised and racialised boundary of difference that reinforces and exceeds national frontiers.<sup>17</sup> According to Davis (2002:297) Papuans in the Torres Strait Islands who have gained residency or Australian citizenship are still regarded as inferior by non-Papuan Islanders.

Fuery (2000), faced with a similar situation on Yam Island considers processes of self-definition in more detail, both in relation to the ‘non-Torres Strait Islander Australian population’ and to Papuans, who form a significant proportion of the island’s people. She notes that long resident families containing Papuan members or ancestors are described by others as Papuans despite rejecting such a label themselves and asserting a self-definition as Yam Islander (2000:223). At the same time a distinct population exists that is ascribed Papuan identity by others and in their own self-description. As at Saibai, many of these people are from Mabaduan, having arrived in recent decades. Fuery

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<sup>17</sup> In its strong association with Coastal Papuans, Davis states that depictions of sorcery by Saibaians is “intertwined with racism” (1998:301). The implication is that some pejorative folk taxonomy based upon (real or imagined) differences in physiognomy is a part of the means by which Saibaians differentiate themselves from Papuans. Davis doesn’t mention what characteristics are invoked here, but it is interesting to note Warraberans also assert phenotypic differences between themselves and Papuans, focused mainly on skin colour (Papuans ‘shine’ – a feature attributed to darker skin) and facial features (particularly the shape of the nose). At the same time, Warraberans describe Saibai, Dauan and Boigu people in similar fashion, and tend not to differentiate them from Papuans in these terms. Their dance performances are noted by Warraberans as more ‘Papuan’ in form (see below). They do, however, view Papuans as being more likely to be engaged in sorcery than any Torres Strait Island populations, including those closest to the Papuan coast.

(2000:223) relates how some have been welcomed into Yam Island families and are therefore accorded honorary Islander status in more formal, public interactions. However, at an informal, private level their Papuan-ness is regularly noted.

This highly ambivalent relation illustrates the fundamentally mutable and contextual boundaries between selves and others: “conceptualising membership in one group or the other as being essentially dichotomous, misrepresents the fundamental dynamic of identity construction and negotiation” (Fuay 2000:220). The key point that emerges is that identity and alterity are produced simultaneously; they are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. Rather than being a product of a characteristic set of features (as the ‘cultural’ approach to ethnicity suggests), it is the positing of an ‘other’ constituted in symbolic terms as opposed to the identity of the self which enables identification, forming what Norval (1996:65) has described as the “constructive outside”. This is brought into being through the drawing of frontiers that function as the condition for the possibility of identity as well as having the capacity to “call into question the very identity that is constructed through its externalisation” (Norval 1996:65).

For Warraber people Papuans form one important source of alterity. Both Papuans and Aborigines are viewed as moral others, powerful and dangerous peoples whose existence outside an envisioned moral community defines Warraber Island’s population as a distinctive group in its own terms. Importantly however, there are no resident Papuans on Warraber (or Poruma), although Papuans do visit the islands on a regular basis. Rather than constituting an absolute or irredeemable Other, Papuans are seen as able to change given the same access to education and medical facilities enjoyed by Torres Strait Islanders. Nevertheless, no Warraber person has married a Papuan and they are not considered suitable marriage partners, unlike Yam Islanders (see Fuay 2000). Sorcery remains the resident moral ‘Other’ for Warraberans, and rather than being projected onto a specific segment of the island’s population, it is said to exist as a secretive practice within the community itself, forming a link to the pre-Christian period and the practices with which islanders of the past (including their own ancestors) were associated. Its ambivalent and fraught presence in the contemporary era serves to reinforce the necessity for the community’s constant striving for an idealised form of Christian sociality.

## *Narratives of Transformation*

Christianity arrived in the Torres Strait relatively recently, and its arrival continues to be ceremonially marked. The moment remains significant not simply as an historical event, but as a socially transforming one. For Warraber people, the arrival of Christianity marked an epochal rupture with pre-Christian modes of life and in so doing, effectively refigured and reconstituted the shape of Warraber moral community. Ricoeur (1995:70) suggests that sacred practice is an ongoing interpretation of the substance regarded as grounding community; for a community to address itself to a substantially different notion of the sacred would be to make a decision concerning its social identity. The annual ‘Coming of the Light’ ceremony represents a celebration of that decision ultimately affirming of local agency, despite the overt arrival of missionary outsiders in the re-enactment that defines the event.

There are clear implications here for identification as much as sociality. Taylor (1989:112) argues that “being a self is inseparable from existing in a space of moral issues, to do with identity and how one ought to be”. The operations of the sacred (in Ricoeur’s terms) offer insights into the constitution of subjectivity, while Csordas (1994:165) maintains that discourse concerning the sacred, shapes/delineates the terms of the cultural objectification labelled ‘the person’, the local subject. In this respect Douglas (2002:9) suggests that

the most pervasive “western’ versions of the person in Melanesia are Christian concepts of the individual as a moral agent in personal communion with God, concepts that are selectively appropriated and socialised in locally meaningful terms.

Researchers in the Pacific have argued that the process of missionisation is a dialogue that entails a refashioning and reconfiguring which is never complete. “Terms that originate in missionary language are assimilated to local frameworks of meaning and modes of understanding” (White 1991:9); “Christianity is taken up and given new meanings and inflexions within the horizons of the local’ (Eves 1998:93). In particular, narratives of conversion are typified by oppositional categories of Christian-influenced discourse (old and new, light and dark).

The relevance of these discussions to the Torres Strait is outlined in chapters 2 and 3. It suffices here to point out that throughout the region, the period before Christian missionisation is referred to as *bipo taim* (before time) or *taim blo dak* (dark time). ‘Dark’ time or ‘before the light’ is associated on Warraber, as it is elsewhere, with

practices considered antithetical to Christianity – notably headhunting, polygamy and sorcery. Such discourse provides a narrative framework for understanding self and identity in historical terms. Paradoxically, White (1991:9) suggests it is by virtue of representing difference or change that conversion narratives establish lines of connection between the present and the past, fostering a sense of temporal continuity fundamental to the experience of self. Temporally organised sequences of action and reaction also represent human action as meaningful; historical contact and change is often depicted in terms of persons, actions and interpersonal events that carry personal, social and moral significance (White 1991:137). This simultaneously draws on, reinforces and invites comparison with contemporary identities and ideals: “present and past, self and others are joined in mutually defining relations” (White 1991:137). As Ochs and Capps (1996:21) note, narrative provides “an unfolding reflective awareness of being-in-the-world”.

The broad significance of historical narratives (particularly when the subjects of recollection are connected to the narrator and/or their community) is as contemporary commentary both on self and sociality. It is in this context that chapter 2 places Warraber representations of ancestors. At one level, a distinction between ‘native’ (*neitiv*) ancestors and ‘foreign’ or ‘outsiders’ (*poren* or *ausaid*) – those originating from outside the Torres Strait – is simply descriptive. But in associating the former with *bipotaim* and the latter with Christianity and missionary activity, the labels can also carry differential status which has a resonance in contemporary social affairs. The difference becomes especially poignant in the context of native title deliberations, where new frameworks of value, based in western notions of authenticity, are imposed that highlight the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in such common analytically opposed metacategories as tradition and modernity, or individualism and communalism.

Douglas (2002:9) argues that the "intersections of kastom, Christianity, community and modernity involve “endless practical interplay and slippage [and therefore] elude simplistic binary categorization." This depiction reinforces the persistence of the categorical oppositions characterising narratives of Christian conversion. It does not result from their ability to express timeless meanings, but rather an adaptive capacity to articulate identity and experience within the changing circumstances of small communities caught up in global processes (White 1991:133).

Indigenous expressions of world religions may serve to ... remake categorical identities as a result of religious debate; manage moral understandings through spiritual reconfiguration in the light of global tensions; produce and reproduce varying types of religious syntheses in response to changing social contexts and political agencies (Magowan & Gordon 2001:257).

This is not to suggest the relation of Christianity to practices linked with the pre-colonial period are free of the “troublesome contradictions” and contestations noted elsewhere (e.g. Burt 1994). In common with a pattern observed in the Pacific, mainstream churches (in this case Anglican) are losing membership to evangelical and/or Pentecostal groups (Barker 1999:109). In some respects, such groups do present a more antagonistic attitude towards certain existing practices on Warraber, including identifying them with paganism. This problematises the assertion that Torres Strait Islander culture remains self-evident for those dwelling in the islands themselves:

the Strait does not have to worry about custom; the society of Islanders there remains axiomatic as long as they are in occupation of their ancestral lands and are living off resources which, whatever the legalities, are theirs by customary right (Beckett 1987:234).

One context where contestations visibly emerge on Warraber is the group-based costumed performance of music and movement known as *ailan dans*. Pentecostals and Anglicans contest one another’s interpretations of the practice, which is commonly held in conjunction with ceremonial and festive occasions on Warraber. This debate is examined in detail in chapter 3. A second important point of divergence involves locally significant sites in the Warraber landscape, referred to as *zogo* and associated with powerful sorcerer figures, or *maidhe* men. While there is no definite physical separation of communities of ‘traditionalists’ and ‘Christians’ (as Burt [1994:253] describes for the Kwara’ae in the Solomon Islands) Anglican and Assembly of God households on Warraber Island are somewhat clustered (see chapter 3).

Nevertheless, both communities share the same fundamental religious world-view, in particular the perspective of a transformative shift from the *bipo taim* to the Christian eras. The difference is rather in their understanding of the degree of completeness of this temporal and moral transformation. Christianity can be said to offer “a powerful promise of present and future community” (Douglas 2002:9). The recent effervescence of Pentecostalism on Warraber does not represent the ascendance of scriptural fundamentalism over spiritual syncretism or modernist individualism over island communality, but in many ways offers a renewal of the longstanding Christian promise

of moral community, of *gud pasin*. As Caplan (1995:101) notes of Pentecostalism in India, it has “revived the message of certainty brought by the early missionaries but subsequently overtaken by the social gospel of ‘faith’ with its acknowledgements of alternative truths”. Warraberans also appreciate the oratorical skills and ‘strong messages’ of the evangelists, which “speak to and reinforce their own knowledges about both the basic truths of Christianity and the aetiology of affliction” (Caplan 1995:104). Indeed, Assemblies of God (AOG) Church members affirm they have no fear of *maidhe men* not because such figures do not exist, but because their sorcery is unable to affect those who ‘*sabe Jesus*’ (literally ‘know Jesus’). The AOG Church is understood by its members as offering a more powerful and protective source of power than is found in Anglican beliefs.

I agree with Barker (1999:110) when he calls for more attention to what adherents themselves make of the new Christian affiliations. In the Torres Strait the expansion and impact of new Christian churches is underway and ongoing detailed research is required. In addition to Pentecostalism there is a growing Baha’i and Seventh Day Adventist presence in the Strait, alongside a Presbyterian Church “revitalised by ministers from Port Moresby, with an appeal reaching beyond the increasing population of Papua New Guinea migrants” (Mullins 2001:25). The emergence of the Church of the Torres Strait (CTS) in 1997 exemplifies the complexity of local engagement with Christian religious forms. The formation of the CTS was declared by the Torres Strait Regional Anglican Council and marked the secession of most of the islands’ Anglican congregations (including sixteen of eighteen active Islander priests) from the Anglican Church of Australia (ACA), and their affiliation instead with an international Anglican splinter group known as the ‘Traditional Anglican Communion’ (Wetherell 2001:201-4).

Taken as a whole, the shifting terrain of Christian affiliations in the Strait may be more about processes of religious diversification than the simple displacement of a distinctively ‘Islander’ congregation by more aggressively Western ones (Barker 1999:111). Both Pentecostal and Anglican churches on Warraber can be depicted as embracing forms of traditionalism as part of their appeal. Despite the AOG’s use of ordinary Western dress and English at church gatherings, its emphasis on the epochal break with the darkness of *bipo taim* renews a longstanding feature of local Christian discourse. And the ‘new’ CTS involves an affirmation of an older, more ‘Catholic’ style

of Anglican practice preferred by many Islanders, that embraces High Mass (sung in a mixture of English and local language), Confession, Benediction, the Angelus, in addition to costuming mass officiants with such items as chasubles and dalmatics (Barnier 2002).

In this thesis, I will refer to Warraber residents as ‘Anglicans’, though they are members of the CTS and mainstream Anglicans do continue to have an island presence in the Torres Strait. There were no Anglican Church of Australia (ACA) residents on Warraber or Poruma during my fieldwork and the CTS congregations continued to regard themselves simply as Anglican.<sup>18</sup> Throughout the recent changes in formal affiliation, existing Anglican practices on Warraber were maintained, including performances of *ailan dans* at religious celebrations. Distinctions between Anglican forms are of little relevance to issues of community and identification on Warraber by comparison to the local impact of Pentecostalism.

Certainly Pentecostal-Anglican differences provide an axis for cleavage among Warraber Christians, but it is also true that the community is itself mindful of this potential. Even as they are involved in interpretive competition they nevertheless remain concerned to prevent community fragmentation. In common with other islands in the Strait, Christians on Warraber engage in “genuine attempts ... to promote an ecumenical spirit among all Christian denominations” (Mullins 2001:26). In particular, the moral ideal of *gud pasin* – inseparable from the idealised social vision of *ol wan pamle* – continues to find local expression through joint AOG and Anglican fellowships. These events regularly occur under the local rubric of ‘*wan lo Zizus*’ (‘one/united in Jesus’), featuring statements such as ‘religions will come and go but Jesus is here forever’ and that ‘everyone worships the same God’. The occasions are punctuated by religious songs sung in Creole (see Lawrence 1998). The frequency of

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<sup>18</sup> As the title of the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC) suggests, this organization views itself as more truly aligned with the precepts of historical Anglicanism than the mainstream Anglican Church. The TAC formed in 1992 at a meeting of conservative Anglican bishops in North and South America, Australia and Britain and is aligned with the earlier 1988 breakaway Anglican group known as the Anglican Catholic Church of Australia (ACCA) (Wetherell 2001:203-4). Anglican Catholic bishops from within and outside Australia attended the consecration of the CTS bishop Gayai Hankin in 1998 on Badu Island (Chislett 1998).

The CTS formalised its close relationship with the TAC in April 2002; during a Dioscean Synod church canons were adopted stating that the CTS “is in full Eucharistic communion and fellowship with ... the Traditional Anglican Communion” (Barnier 2002:2).

joint fellowships has increased over the period I have been visiting Warraber (and Poruma), and seem calculated to avoid the *bad pasin* that would follow splitting the community along religious, political, and ultimately social lines. The rhetoric of being "*wan lo Zizus*" matched with "*yumpla ol ailan pipel*" (we are all island people) invokes and maintains notions of community interconnection and a collective commitment to their island home, Warraber.

Indeed, local notions of 'belonging' to Warraber (*ai blo Warraber; ai Warraber man/oman*) express sentiment and attachment that is able to cut across distinctions of Pentecostal and Anglican, *poren* (foreigner) and *neitiv* (native), closer and more distant relatives. The concept of 'belonging' is important for all Warraber residents, drawing variously on ideas of home places, personal places and individual place-based memories (explored in chapter 6). 'Belonging' to Warraber as a distinct locale accentuates the actions and relationships that are formed in a place and affirms the meaningfulness of a home place as an intensely experienced terrain typified by relationships with others who live there or who have lived there.

## **Fieldwork**

This research is the first substantive ethnographic study concerning the population of Warraber Island. Indeed, few Torres Strait central island populations have been studied in any detail.<sup>19</sup> The main period of research, during which I was resident on Warraber, took place between August 1996 and September 1997. I have since made several additional trips to the island of varying duration. The first of these was to attend a ceremony in 1998 in which the Queensland Government formally recognised Warraber and Poruma peoples' ownership of five surrounding islands through the Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991 (an event discussed in detail in Chapter Seven). Subsequent visits to Warraber combined with the role of Native Title Consultant contracted by the Torres Strait Regional Authority.

In 1999 I conducted additional field-based research as part of a native title claim lodged by Warraber and Poruma people (Lahn 1999). In 2000 I was again employed as a

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<sup>19</sup> Notable exceptions are Fuary's work at Yam Island (e.g. 2000, 1997, 1991a, 1991b) as well as contributions by Sugimoto (1983) at Warraber, Shukul (2000) at Masig Island, and Haddon's work at Yam (1935).

researcher linked to native title claims lodged by Warraber and Poruma people to Uttu (Dove) and Yarpar (Roberts) Islands (Lahn 2000a).<sup>20</sup> I also conducted fieldwork at Warraber, Poruma, Masig, Thursday Island, Murray Island, and Seisia on Cape York in connection to a native title claim to Aureed Island (Lahn 2000b). Later in the same year I conducted further research at Yam, Mabuiag, the St. Paul's community at Moa Island, Thursday Island and at Cairns, Innisfail and Townsville in relation to a native title application concerning Gebar Island (Lahn 2000c). In 2001 and 2002, I prepared two additional reports regarding Warraber and Poruma's position in a regional native title claim over sea areas, based in part on fieldwork in December 2001 at both islands (Lahn 2001; 2002).

Serendipity is an inevitable aspect of anthropological fieldwork. In my case, some of the most defining elements of what is sometimes referred to as 'Island custom' were not accessible to me and so were not able to become a focus of my research interest. One well-described aspect of Islander culture for example has been the hunting of large marine animals, in particular turtle and dugong. These have been highlighted as critical to important ritual activity through kin-based provision of favoured food items (Beckett 1987:2,160-1; Davis 1998:245; Fuary 1991a:261; Fuary 1991b:149; Nietschmann 1989:79; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:222).<sup>21</sup> Yet travelling with men in their dinghies to hunt turtle or dugong was certainly not regarded as suitable behaviour for a young, unmarried woman. The Torres Strait Islander ritual activity par excellence – the tombstone opening – was also out of reach as no tombstone openings occurred on Warraber or Poruma during my stay. In fact, it had been several years since one had taken place on either island.

Such 'obstacles' to fieldwork in fact create opportunities to generate their own research questions and insights. In the case of gendered restrictions on my movements, I quickly came to be concerned with the nature of women's interactions with the marine environment, the relative importance of their fishing as a contribution to household economy and social life and the part such activity played in processes of local identification. Such areas are relatively neglected in existing accounts of island life. In

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<sup>20</sup> This claim, QC6043, filed on the 30 November 2001 by the National Native Title Tribunal was notified on the 4 September 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Evident by the frequency with which material dealing with Torres Strait populations features illustrations of men leaping from dinghies holding a harpoon.

the absence of tombstone openings – even, as it turned out, much discussion about tombstone openings – I became interested in far more regular social events and in the everyday expression of community and familial sociality. Tombstone openings certainly remain highly significant events, activating complex social networks of obligation and relatedness. Yet in terms of ceremonial activity on Warraber it became obvious that *ailan dans* was not only held far more regularly but was considered much less fraught, and therefore was more often the subject of conversation than tombstone openings.<sup>22</sup> For these reasons, *ailan dans* (and associated feasting) can be said to constitute a far more important means by which Warraber people represent themselves to themselves, and to others.

Throughout this thesis I use the term ‘Warraberans’, ‘Warraber people’ or ‘Warraber residents’ in referring to the people among whom I conducted research, largely residents of this island.<sup>23</sup> During infrequent trips elsewhere I sometimes had discussions with other Torres Strait Islanders, particularly about their connections to Warraber people. Usually this involved accompanying Warraber people for events such as school sports, shopping trips, and multi-denominational Christian fellowships. Destinations included Thursday Island, Yam Island and Poruma Island, while other Torres Strait Islanders visited Warraber on occasion for similar events. It was through my Warraber relationships that I developed more independent relationships with particular Poruma people. Poruma people acknowledged my known connections with Warraber and I was encouraged to extend my ‘kin networks’ with particular Poruma residents. Post-fieldwork return trips as a Native Title consultant have allowed me to sustain a punctuated connection with Warraber residents and further develop relations with Poruma Island, without being accompanied by Warraber people.

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<sup>22</sup> When they do occur, tombstone openings are videotaped and circulated within and between island and mainland communities. This extends the ‘influence’ and relevant effects of the rite far beyond the people that actually attended or were involved in preparations. Such tapes are eagerly awaited and watched with interest, and do generate substantial attention, reflection, criticism, even censure. But the tapes are also short lived, passing as they do from hand-to-hand in a tropical climate. Certainly on Warraber such tapes seldom circulated more than a few months at most beyond the date of the event itself before being damaged and unplayable.

<sup>23</sup> At the time of fieldwork, there were relatively few Warraber people living permanently on the Australian mainland. While I had some opportunity to meet such people when they visited Warraber for special occasions such as Christmas, the absent voice of permanent residents of the mainland is something I hope to address in future work.

During fieldwork I lived in three houses located in different areas of the village, contributing different experiences to the research project. The first house was owned by an elderly Warraber couple I had met in Cairns who agreed to allow me to live in their home, along with their son and niece. I remained there for several months enduring a jukebox and two video game machines in a family business three metres outside my window. Eventually I shifted into a vacant Anglican Church 'Mission House' usually reserved for Priests or visiting Clergy. While there I obtained quiet but missed the intense sociality of sharing a house with others. When the Mission House was required a few months later for the imminent arrival of a new Deacon, I opted once again to live with other residents. I moved into a neighbouring house of predominantly adult unmarried women. The two older women (who became my classificatory grandmothers) in particular approved of this arrangement, as they felt they could 'look after' me far more adequately than when I occupied the neighbouring Mission House.

On one of the first of what would become almost daily fishing trips to Warraber's beach and reefs in the company of women, one of my grandmothers presented a specially woven coconut leaf basket to me for use while fishing. None of the more usual plastic buckets happened to be spare. I used this strongly made and useful basket throughout the duration of my fieldwork, to her evident satisfaction. When I departed Warraber for the first time, I had expected to take the basket with me as a keepsake. But its maker demurred, and taking it from among my things hooked it once more in its usual spot in a shady tree above our preferred outside sitting place at the rear of the house. She explained that it would be there for my use when I returned to the island in the future.

Later, during a return trip, the grandmothers pointed to my still-hanging basket, adding that they had 'kept' it for me. By this time, it had deteriorated in the sun and rain and was no longer fit for use. But the basket served as a reminder, and a sign to others, that my place in their household extended beyond my fieldwork and my physical presence. This small but for me, poignant moment served to highlight the manner in which personalised connections to locales emerge through relations to people and as a result of regular, shared activity of the most incidental kind. Even as an obvious outsider – neither Islander nor Kulkalgal – the reciprocity of sociality and emplaced memory on Warraber extended something of the experience of 'belonging' in this Island and community to me.

## **Chapter Two: Identifying with Ancestors**

### **Introduction**

Narratives of temporality shape Warraber representations of personal ancestry. A pivotal motif is that of rupture, where a sharply drawn contrast is asserted that separates Warraber's pre-Christian past from the Christian present. This chapter explores the local theme of temporal rupture and ancestral identification in the context of the impact of the colonial presence, in particular the arrival of marine industries to the Central Islands region and its impacts. A prevailing Western tendency in approaching ideas of temporal rupture is through the discourse of modernity, which contrasts traditional practices with contemporary ones, enchantment with disenchantment, communal sociality with highly individuated persons, the local with the global (Englund & Leach 2000:225, Robbins 2000:243). Aspects of this framing apply on Warraber, particularly in a widespread valuing of processes of historical change that are viewed as having been driven by outsiders in the Strait. But this chapter also begins to highlight the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in such categorical oppositions that render them unsatisfactory as full explanations of local circumstances.

The focus of my concern here is not to explore evidence for processes of cultural persistence or change on Warraber (see Carrier 1996). Rather, through examining local socio-historical circumstances, this chapter seeks to understand the terms of Warraber's "distinctive engagements with modernity" (Knauff 2002:10). At the same time, the importance of local historical narratives is also explored, in particular their ability to provide contemporary commentary both on self and sociality. The character of Warraber residents' relations with their ancestors needs to be understood in terms of both processes.

### **Warraber Ancestors**

Residents on Warraber and Poruma Islands use a terminological division when discussing their ancestors that is profoundly significant both in perceptions of the past and the shape of contemporary identity. This is the distinction between 'native' (*neitiv*) and 'foreign' (*porena*). The specific origin of *neitiv* figures is usually not elaborated,

and does not mean they are necessarily considered autochthonous, particularly in the sense of arising in situ – inherently emplaced. Rather, the primary significance of the term involves the belief that such figures were present in the islands before the sudden influx of foreigners or outsiders (*ausaid man*) into the Torres Strait from the mid-nineteenth century. This occurred as part of the arrival of marine industries to the region, which brought a labour force, composed predominantly of Pacific Islanders, with a number of Europeans in supervisory roles. Their presence on many islands in the Torres Strait became significant from the beginning of the 1860s (Beckett 1977, 1987; Shnukal 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Mullins 1990, 1995). Hence the notion of ‘foreigners’ is not exclusive to Warraber. In the Eastern Islands, for example, the term *nog le* (‘outside men’) is used to designate ‘foreigners’ or ‘outsiders’ (Shnukal 1992a:13) in much the same way that *porena* is used on Warraber. But the influence of Pacific Islander residents and their descendants on every central island is especially marked, enduring well beyond their withdrawal as the main source of marine labour.

Among a number of named individuals, male and female, who are viewed as the earliest ancestors of the Warraber population, two figures above all personify the *neitiv-porena* distinction – Bubarei (a *porena* from Vanuatu) and Gagabe (a Warraber *neitiv*).<sup>1</sup> These figures serve as ‘apical’ ancestors in the sense that they are both viewed as the earliest known males in their respective categories. Warraber residents generally show a patrilineal emphasis in local thinking about descent, preferring to trace a patrilineage whenever possible. To this end, female ancestors tend to be minimised by comparison to their male counterparts – as few as necessary will be included in delineating a personal lineage. This parallels a predisposition among Warraber Islanders to depict men as the most active and influential social agents. The part played by women is generally overlooked or disregarded. All Warraber narratives concerned with historical events stress male ancestors, in particular the roles played by exceptional and powerful men. This tendency of prevailing gender norms to shape historical accounts has been highlighted elsewhere in the Torres Strait (for example Davis 1998).

All Warraberans can potentially trace genealogical connections to both *neitiv* and *porena* figures. However, a large majority of residents do not have any male *neitiv* ancestors. They generally describe their descent wholly in terms of *porena* male figures,

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms have been employed throughout this thesis. Only the names of apical ancestors remain unchanged.

rather than any *neitiv* female ancestors with whom they might be able to assert a connection. This majority segment of Warraber's population represent themselves as descended from *porena* people. Ideally, this group traces ancestry to Bubarei, and exceptions to the tendency of excluding female ancestors (whether *neitiv* or *porena*) from descriptions of personal descent may occur if a female ancestor offers a link to Bubarei. Hence, for example, the descendant of an in-migrating *porena* male ancestor thought to have married one of Bubarei's female descendents may cite this connection when asserting Bubarei as a personal ancestor. Equally, a small minority of Warraber residents claim descent from the sole known *neitiv* male ancestor, Gagabe, and this is stressed both in their own identification as *neitiv* Warraberans and also in their depiction of the rest of Warraber's population as the descendants of *porena* or *ausaid* people.

The categorising of significant personal ancestors in terms of a *neitiv-porena* duality then, is engendered by temporal association as much as by origin: presence on Warraber before or after the arrival of the marine industries. For Warraber people, this in turn generates further multifaceted associations that give rise to particular discourses of value. The first might be called the *neitiv* 'power of precedence'. By pre-dating the arrival of others, *neitiv* figures are recognised both as original local landholders and as possessing an intimate relation to locality, manifest in a close relation to significant sites in the landscape. *Porena* ancestors are instead valorised as 'agents of change', linked to the positive historical transformation of pre-existing life on Warraber. For the wholly Christian Warraber population, the arrival of the marine industry is inextricably entwined with the arrival of Christianity. Pacific Islanders were prominently involved in both, as missionaries and as boat crew and owners.

Importantly, while these valorising discourses coexist in Warraber society, they do not convey equal status or prestige on the two sections of the population. There are very few contexts where the 'power of precedence' asserted by the minority of *neitiv*-identifying residents (henceforth simply '*neitiv*') are relevant, and to date, it has not provided a basis for eminence or influence in the Warraber community. By contrast, the descendants of *porena* figures (henceforth glossed as '*porena*') have monopolised positions of standing and authority for some period on the island. To appreciate how these local patterns became established – what might be glossed as the rise of the *porena* and the eclipse of the *neitiv* – it is necessary to firstly explore local discourse

surrounding the arrival and significance of Christianity, and then review the historical presence and impact of marine industries in the region.

## **Christianity as Rupture**

The origin of Christianity in the Torres Strait Islands is acknowledged locally as the result of the activities of the London Missionary Society (LMS). Founded in 1795 (and originally known as ‘The Missionary Society’), the LMS was a British Protestant missionary movement of inter-denominational origins with a strong emphasis on the Gospel and the importance of ‘heathen’ peoples hearing its messages (Goodall 1954). It established missions in a variety of places including South Africa, Madagascar, India, China and the Pacific. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, a large number of LMS missionaries were influenced by evangelical revivalism (Wetherell 1977). It was at this time that the LMS turned its attention firmly toward Papua New Guinea, withdrawing from the Strait but leaving an enduring impression upon Torres Strait Islanders.

1 July 1871 (*zulai wan*) is an enormously significant date for Torres Strait Islanders, associated with the arrival of the London Missionary Society. Not only is it linked to the earliest entry of Christianity into the region, but the date is understood as marking a temporal boundary that divides their history into two distinct epochs: the early, pre-Christian era and the more recent post-mission period.<sup>2</sup> This first period is referred to throughout the region as *taim blo dak* (dark time) and also as *bipo taim* (before time), and it ends with the arrival of Christianity, the ‘Coming of the Light’ (Beckett 1987:96; Davis 1998:95; Fuary 1991a:156).

On Warraber Island the central theme surrounding the arrival of Christianity is one of rupture both with the past and with the previous conditions of existence. The ‘light’ is seen as a period typified not just by conversion to Christianity, but by a rejection of past practices that serves to suffix the transformation to ‘living in the time of God’ [*lib lo taim blo gad*]. In addition, this motif of temporal division carries important moral

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<sup>2</sup> Warraberans were not aware of the earlier Christian arrival to the region at Cape York. In 1867, a few years prior to the LMS arrival in the Torres Strait, Reverend Jagg of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel moved to Somerset to minister to Aborigines based in and around the settlement (Moore 1979:235). Jagg departed later that year, but not before he and the resident teacher, Kennett, had developed relations with both Aborigines around the settlement, Kaurareg, and Kulkalgal from the Nagi area (see their journals in Moore 1979).

inscriptions. On Warraber, depictions of ‘dark’ time or ‘before the light’ are always associated with a standard set of practices considered antithetical to Christianity, indeed, commonly characterised as being evil or *satana* (see chapter 1). These consist of headhunting, polygamy, inter-island fighting/warfare, and powerful sorcery. All these behaviours are interpreted as inimical to the full realisation of human sociality.

Other Torres Strait populations possess parallel ideas. Beckett (1987:94) notes that Murray Islanders understand the ‘light’ implied in the expression ‘Coming of the Light’ as referring to the arrival of the Gospel and Christian conversion, whereas the ‘dark’ “was used to represent the heathen state in which the missionaries found the Islanders”. The same terms are used by Saibai Islanders to valorise ideas of collective progress in moral and civil terms from the period “prior to their missionisation and their subsequent incorporation into the Australian nation-state” (Davis 1998:127).<sup>3</sup> For Saibaians, ‘light’ is “a metaphor for progress operating against the metaphorical darkness of turpitude and savagery” (Davis 1998:95). This motif of Christianity ending and supplanting the era that came before it, and utterly transforming the conditions of existence, is starkly evoked on Darnley Island, where one narrative suggests the Maizab Kaur reefs were created in a “moment of ancestral petrification ... coinciding precisely with the birth of Christ” (Scott and Mulrennan 1999:172).

Among Christians throughout Melanesia this discourse of darkness and light is also prevalent, similarly aligned with narratives of Christian conversion and with the motif of temporal rupture. It has been described as a key missionary metaphor (Clark 2000:108). Re-enactments of the 1875 arrival of Methodist missionaries by Karavan people at the Duke of York Islands (East New Britain) are strikingly similar to those found in the Torres Strait; the event is celebrated as ending a ‘time of darkness’ (Errington and Gewertz 1995:78). Christian metaphors of darkness and light among the Lelet in New Ireland regard the period prior to Christianity “... as the ‘time of darkness’ (*taim tudak*) when warfare and cannibalism were rampant.” (Eves 1998:98-99).<sup>4</sup> For the Maring of Papua New Guinea, life prior to conversion is “re-presented as an endless era

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, some Saibaians posit the existence of three epochs not two. ‘Jehovah time’ occurred before the birth of Jesus. It is conceived as a time when founding Saibaian clan members were living at Saibai (Davis 1998:132).

<sup>4</sup> Clark (1985) also mentions an identical Wiru (southern highlands) indigenous term for dark time or time of darkness, *taim tudak*, as mentioned by Eves (1998) whose work was some distance away at New Ireland.

of warfare and violence, pain and sickness, the poverty of stone tools and ‘bush’ clothes” (LiPuma 2000:230). Karavans use an indigenous concept to describe the period: *momboto*, a time when “... people could not see the path of proper conduct, into the enlightened present” (Errington and Gewertz 1995:78). This pre-Christian era is overtly represented as chaotic and asocial:

... those who lived during the *momboto* were depicted as not only savage but precultural. They were presented in the [reinactment] drama and in stories about the *momboto* as being unable, for instance, to paddle their canoes properly. Their one area of competence lay in killing and eating each other; in fact, stories about the *momboto* often depicted a Hobbesian war of all against all. (Errington and Gewertz 1995:92).

Those Maring who adhere most strongly to Christianity conceive it in terms of clearly separating good from bad through teaching essential moral truths (LiPuma 2000:230). The separation is not merely moral or behavioural; it frequently involves a turning from the past, and even from the places or sites with which it is associated. Clark (2000:171) notes that the Wiru (Pangia, Papua New Guinea) rhetorically claim to have abandoned the past “so that it has no influence on the present. ‘Time before’ is rendered sinful, and Wiru hold that they formerly inhabited a satanic geography in which they behaved like wild pigs in a time of darkness.”

Warraber conceptions of the historical transformation that occurred with the arrival of Christianity is also represented in terms of a definitive epochal break, producing the temporal duality of *bipo taim* and the ‘Coming of the Light’. This rupture is both ontological and moral, resulting in the abrupt cessation of dark (‘bad’) pre-Christian practices. In fact, the boundaries of this transformative moment emerge as being far more porous than is openly acknowledged, a situation that is explored in detail in the following chapter. But it is important to note here that in terms of idealised local representations, a definitive separation from the past – a transformative rupture – emerges as the key feature of Warraber narratives surrounding the Coming of the Light.

### *Porena as Moderns*

Clark (2000:171) describes a view of the past as something that has to be denied or forgotten to enable progress as “a peculiarly modern disposition”. Hirsch (2001:143) defines modernity in a colonial Melanesian context as “the break or rupturing of temporal perception and consciousness” emerging from indigenous peoples’

engagements with Europeans whose intentions were to introduce radical breaks in their lives. This perspective seems highly relevant when set against the Warraber discourse of ‘before time’, which suggests quite literally that temporality itself is traceable to the arrival of Christianity. It may be then that the transforming rupture of Warraber temporal discourse could be described as the simultaneous recognition and disjuncture with the past that could be said to epitomise the experience of modernity. Certainly for Hirsch, ‘modernity’ is characterised by temporality. At the same time, he is careful not to locate modernity simply in the presence of colonial agents (Hirsch 2001:143). Rather, it is “the way Melanesians became implicated in the descriptions and actions – the intentions – of those seeking to transform their lives that appears to be critical.” Thus modernity is characterised both by ‘historicity’ and the implicit power relations surrounding missionaries and colonialists, in addition to indigenous engagements with the varying ideas of these agents.

Modernity should be approached as a ‘middle ground’ whereby socio-historical circumstances are scrutinised in order to understand the distinctiveness of particular engagements with modernity (Knauft 2002:10), the “particular form of local historical consciousness” involved (Clark 2000:171). For example, the use of the present in order to explain the past (rather than vice versa) is, as Clark (2000:171) notes, somewhat distinct from orthodox narratives of Western modernity. Englund and Leach (2000:244) emphasise the importance of avoiding “interpretation of specific experiences as examples of the ruptures that characterize modernity ... other ruptures exist for the people we write about”. Utilising the trope of modernity as an interpretive framework risks obscuring local ideas about rupture, change and personhood which need to be understood in their own terms (Englund and Leach 2000; Robbins 2000:243). Knauft (2002) seeks to redefine modernity in approaching notions of ‘progress’ by the multiple perspectives that define it. He suggests “modernity can be defined as the images and institutions associated with Western-style progress and development in a contemporary world.” (Knauft 2002:18). Robbins (2001:902) goes further in not characterising modernity in terms of particular institutional forms but instead positing ‘modernity as a culture’ envisaged as a ‘set of linked promises’. He argues persuasively that:

to be modern, it is enough merely to hold the promissory notes, to feel that one has a right to what they promise, and to struggle to redeem them through institutional experimentation with new kinds of exchange, of polity, and of knowledge seeking (Robbins 2001:902).

Christianity itself can be said to offer “a powerful promise of present and future community” (Douglas 2002:9). Implicit in the narrative of the ‘Coming of the Light’, this promise provides moral content and social coherence to Warraber notions of historical progress contained in local thinking about *porena* as agents of change. In this sense it may also be appropriate to characterise *porena* as agents of modernity (though with Englund and Leach’s [2000] cautions in mind). While Warraber people do embrace Christian conversion as rupture in the lives of their pre-Christian ancestors, this does not necessarily invoke an opposition (or rupture) between tradition and modernity. This opposition, as with the ideas of mass consumption and individuality that are often caught up in Western notions of modernity, are themselves temporally referenced notions, and therefore subject to variation (Hirsch 2001:145).

In a Warraber context, local traditions (*ailan pasin*) are framed positively as being post-conversion. They express a model of moral relations reliant on obligations to others and a commitment to being hardworking, and contrast with pre-rupture practices like polygamy and head taking which are seen as subversive to sociality (see chapters 4 and 5). In this sense, tradition is understood in local terms as expressing ‘rupture’ rather than continuity, and therefore may also be deemed ‘modern’, a perspective that is lost within analytical debates centring on the relative degrees of continuity and change in contemporary island practices.

Tangible evidence of the moral content of modern (post-colonial) life occurs in the form of plentiful marine harvests, interpreted on Warraber as a ‘blessing’ from God for adherence to notions of hard work as against being ‘lazy’ or ‘shiftless’. These ideas are reflected in statements such as ‘*kristen laif i no isi laif, i prapa had laif*’ (‘Christian life is not easy, it’s a really hard life’) and ‘*ip yupla wande sabi god, yu mas sabi had wok*’ (‘If you want to truly know God, you have to work hard in your own life’). Priests and Pastors frequently employ such discourse when encouraging men to give a portion of their earnings to the Church. The historian, Mullins (1995:74), has suggested the historical engagement of large numbers of male marine work can only be explained “in terms of their own eagerness”. The fact that marine work is universally understood and valued today on Warraber as a key component of ‘Christian life’ may provide some insight into the processes through which this participation was elicited. In any case, Christianity and marine industry work are viewed as arriving together, defining the shift in behavioural preoccupation and moral awareness heralded by the temporal rupture

that both instituted and stigmatised *bipo taim*. Marine work continues to be a major preoccupation of male Warraber residents (see chapter 5), and *porena* ancestors are valued as much in terms of their expertise and prominence in industry activities as their role as missionaries.

## **Marine Industries in the Central Islands**

The presence of beche-de-mer in Queensland waters was first recorded by Matthew Flinders in 1803, but it was not until the Pacific trade based on beche-de-mer, pearlshell, copra, and sandalwood was in decline that a beche-de-mer fishery firmly established itself in the Torres Strait (Ganter 1994:15,17). In 1862, a Captain Edwards established the first beche-de-mer station at Albany Island off Cape York, the same year that a government outpost was established on the same island (Ganter 1994:243). In 1863, Tudu became the first of the Central Islands to have a beche-de-mer station, established by a Captain Banner. In 1869, the location of pearlshell beds around Tudu was revealed to one of Banner's crew, a Pacific Islander (Fuary 1991a:146, Mullins 1995:54).<sup>5</sup> This prompted a temporary abandonment of beche-de-mer fishing, which was later resumed, and both resources were pursued in tandem. By the following year, 1870, five boats were working in the Torres Strait.

Pacific Islanders were a dominant presence in the industry until the arrival of the Japanese in the 1890s. In 1870 an estimated 150 Pacific Islanders were working on the boats (Mullins 1990:153). In 1872, this number had increased to 500 (Mullins 1990:153). Also until the 1890s, the largely Pacific Islander crews operated from 'shore stations' making trips to the fishing grounds for up to one month, before returning to process the resources on-shore.<sup>6</sup> By 1875, of 6 island stations recorded as operating in the Torres Strait, 3 were operating in the Central Islands – two at Nagi and one at Tudu (Ganter 1994:22). Later, as shore stations spread throughout the Torres Strait, Masig became the site of a new Central Islands station. Shnukal (2000:55) claims that in addition to Tudu, Nagi and Masig, "there were also stations or occupation licences for Auridh [Aurid], Dhamudh [Damud], Gebar, Zegei, Puruma [Poruma], Sasi, Yam and

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<sup>5</sup> By October of that year, 50 tons of shell with a value of £7500, had been collected by Banner's men. This haul quickly became known in Sydney trading circles, prompting further interest.

<sup>6</sup> With the introduction of 'floating stations' in the 1890s, a fleet of 15-18 luggers deposited shell and received provisions by a large schooner. This system allowed boats to stay on the shell grounds for an entire season (Ganter 1994:154,161).

Yarpar ... [that were] ... small or temporary operations managed by a single individual or a partnership of two or three countrymen.”

Little detail of the direct impact on local populations stemming from the presence of the marine industry/Pacific Islander presence is recorded. Though colonial administration was established at Somerset in 1864 (later shifting to Thursday Island in 1877), there was in fact little supervision of contact between the newcomers and *neitiv* residents (Mullins 1995:33). Official inspections of inhabited islands were occasionally conducted, but rarely extended to small islands such as Warraber whose populations were deemed too few to warrant either attention or protection (Mullins 1995:164). However, it would certainly have been appreciable, if only because of the small size both of the islands themselves and of resident *neitiv* populations. In the earlier part of the nineteenth century the residents of Warraber, Poruma and Nagi appear to have been seasonally transient, with periodic migrations of entire island populations apparently quite common (Beckett 1972; Fuary 1991a). An observer in 1848 noted: "nearly the whole tribe [of Nagi] are now upon Sue Island [Warraber]" (MacGillivray 1852:35). The combined population of the three islands at that time was estimated at 350 individuals, with Warraber accommodating just 60 persons (Brierly 1849:135).

Warraberans describe relations between *neitiv* Torres Strait Islander residents and *porena* arrivals as contentious and often violent:

Torres Strait Islanders didn't like them. They fought over pearlshell work and women. There would be a fight if a Pacific Islander man had a Torres Strait Islander 'girlfriend'. Torres Strait Islanders fought with Pacific Islanders on opposite sides.

Captain Pennefather of the government vessel, *Pearl*, noted that *neitiv* Tudu men resorted to extreme methods of protecting local women and girls from Pacific Islanders burying them in the sand whenever ships were in the area, leaving only their nostrils exposed. Similar practices were employed by *neitiv* residents of Masig (Fuary 1991a:142). Haddon (1908:190-1) records a story involving Poruma men killing a Maori member of the *Woodlark* beche-de-mer vessel at Murray Island in the early 1860s. The Poruma visitors, apparently at Mer to acquire food, participated in the killing after Pacific Islanders had seized Murray Island women for sex. In retaliation, the Pacific crew killed several Murray Islanders. As a result, Poruma Islanders likely had first hand knowledge of Pacific Islanders from an early period of their activity in the region.

Nevertheless, in the first half of the 1870s, Captain Walton with Thompson, a white resident at Poruma, had recruited enough Poruma Islanders to work three boats (Ganter 1994:245-6). Under Walton, Poruma crews were taken as far as the Great Barrier Reef for beche-de-mer work. When not working, Walton left his boats and guns with the residents. During this time Poruma Islanders came under investigation by the Police Magistrate for alleged killings of other Torres Strait Islanders at Atub (Dugong) Island and for fighting at Darnley Island (Fuary 1991a:358). Mullins (1995:83) comments that:

...Walton left his beche-de-mer boats at Paremar [Poruma] during the 'off' season and the Islanders used them to cruise about the Strait...the Paremar [Poruma] Islanders ...considered that they had earned the right to use Walton's boats and were not deterred from cruising about the strait in much the same way as the Pacific Islanders.

Given the *porena* example, it is perhaps hardly surprising that Poruma (and likely Warraber) people might choose to appropriate the powerful and symbolically potent technologies of whites and Pacific Islanders — their large vessels and guns — to use for their own purposes. Warraber people suggest that conditions were especially harsh at Nagi. A Samoan by the name of James Mills had been appointed to run a pearlshell station there during the 1870s and 1880s. Mills' enduring Central Islands' reputation as a violent man includes shooting a number of *neitiv* residents. When this occurred there was said to have been only a handful of predominantly *neitiv* people living on the island. Warraber people describe some as swimming out into the sea to escape, fearing their lives were in danger, trying to reach the Prince of Wales islands. It is assumed no one survived.

### *Declining Population*

These events (and in all likelihood, others like them that are neither recorded nor recalled) contributed to what appears to have been a declining *neitiv* population. Central Island people had certainly already been affected by retaliatory methods employed by colonial powers, especially in response to the killing of European shipwreck survivors.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In the much-publicised *Charles Eaton* Affair (Ingleton 1952; King 1837; Lewis 1952; McInnes 1983), speculation surrounding the safety of Torres Strait as a shipping route prompted an expedition to search for survivors of the shipwrecked vessel, the *Charles Eaton* (Mullins 1995). Some passengers drowned, others escaped in a cutter and those remaining were picked up by Islanders. All were killed but two young boys who were taken to Aurid in the Central Islands before being passed on to a Murray Island couple in exchange for a quantity of bananas.

Captain Lewis commanded a vessel sent specifically to find any survivors. His search took him from Mer (where he located the two boys) to Erub and west to the Central Islands, stopping at Masig and finally

But the greatest impact of the *porena* influx on the size of *neitiv* populations came with disease. Smallpox epidemics occurred in the 1860s, and were followed by forms of 'fever' in the early 1870s (Fuary 1991a:148). But perhaps the most devastating population decline throughout the Torres Strait is linked to an 1875 measles epidemic that swept through Torres Strait to Papua New Guinea, introduced unwittingly by Samuel McFarlane of the London Missionary Society (Mullins 1992:41). The colonial administration's Police Magistrate Chester in 1882 estimates that a resulting minimum twenty per cent death rate applied across Torres Strait (Mullins 1995:135-6). Again, the specific effect on the populations of Warraber, Poruma and Nagi is undocumented.

At other islands, introduced diseases, are claimed to have had a severe impact on local populations. For example the population of Erub in the Eastern Islands declined from between 400-500 in 1848 to 120 in 1871 (Scott and Mulrennan 1999:151) and by 1875 had fallen to 80 (Mullins 1995:135). The timing of this latter decline is attributed to the 1875 measles epidemic (Mullins 1995:135). On Ugar (Stephen's Island), "only a few indigenous families remained and rapidly intermarried with the Pacific Islanders who settled there" (Shnukal 1992a:11). Beckett (n.d.a:13) says that 'exotic diseases' reduced Murray Islands' population by half by the turn of the century.

For Warraber, Poruma and Nagi, precise details of early impacts are unknown. During an 1874/5 fisheries inspection, Aplin found 40 people on Nagi (Aplin 1875) compared

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Aurid. At Aurid he discovered an arrangement of heads and skulls that he believed to be the remains of the *Charles Eaton* passengers and crew. He wrote: "...many heads were of European origin, and bore marks of violence; some few having the hair driven into indentations made by blows with a tomahawk (Brockett 1836:51-3). The heads were attached to a turtle shell carved with anthropomorphic features. He found no people, but signs of habitation led him to deduce that they had fled on hearing of his search. The heads and turtle shell 'effigy' were removed and the island was then burnt, including plantings of tobacco and coconuts, thatched structures and the "skull house" (Brockett 1836). The raid and burning of Aurid, at that time an important ritual centre for cult activities, appears to have been unsuccessful in deterring local populations from continuing to raid shipwrecks and kill survivors.

In 1868, retaliation for the killing of passengers of the *Speerwer* vessel occurred. Its crew had been trading with islanders at Wednesday Island (near Thursday Island) when they were attacked, overpowered and killed by Kaurareg. The islanders searched the vessel for useful goods before setting it alight. Some months later a beche-de-mer fisherman found the decapitated bodies of the crew and items from their vessel. An expedition of investigation by Police Magistrate Chester at Somerset, Cape York was spurred by the belief that a female survivor was being held captive. He found twenty islanders camped at Wednesday Island. Chester had 'Gudang' (Cape York Aboriginal) people with him who informed him that these islanders were from Nagi. Several items in their possession were believed to be from the *Speerwer*. The 'Gudang' interpreters had previously informed Chester that Kulkalgal people (i.e., residents of Nagi and Warraber) had assisted Kaurareg people (bottom Western Torres Strait) in the *Speerwer* attack. As a result, three Kulkalgal 'leaders' selected from among this group of twenty were summarily executed on the beach in front of their companions. The rest were released (Moore 1979:12-13, Mullins 1995:49-52).

with MacGillivray's (1852:35,40) earlier combined Warraber and Nagi estimate of 150.<sup>8</sup> Estimates taken of Nagi residents in 1885 by Acting Government Resident Hugh Milman amounted to just “twenty natives” and “one South Sea Islander” who was running Police Magistrate Jardine’s pearlshelling business (Milman 1886:1027). But given the movement of people in this area both prior to the industry’s inception and as marine workers after it began, it is likely that everyone else was on Warraber (or Poruma).

Over a longer period, it is possible to gauge a general population decline in the Warraber, Poruma and Nagi area. People were affected by disease well into the twentieth century (Lee-Bryce 1912:22, MacFarlane 1917-1956) in addition to dysentery post 1910, and into the 1920s (MacFarlane 1917-1956) and Spanish Flu after 1920 (Fuary 1991a:148). By 1921, the combined populations of Nagi, Warraber and Poruma were reduced from the 1848 estimate of 350 to just 150 people. The decline seems more devastating given that the latter population estimate would have presumably included the *porena* descendents also. Given this decline, it seems unremarkable that relatively few *neitiv* figures are now able to be recalled by Warraber or Poruma residents.

### ***Porena* Ancestors on Warraber**

For some decades between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Warraber informants suggest that *porena* men married *neitiv* women from Warraber and elsewhere in the Torres Strait, in addition to the children of *porena* already residing at Warraber and neighbouring islands. According to Warraber people, their known *porena* ancestors arrived in the vicinity of Warraber and nearby islands like Nagi and Poruma while working either as Pacific Islander crew or as white boat skippers. Most Warraber, Poruma and Nagi genealogies contain both white and Pacific male ancestors.<sup>9</sup> As noted,

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<sup>8</sup> The writer Singe (1979:193) speculates that the "rapid decline and disappearance of Nagi's original inhabitants" may have been due to fighting with Moalgai (inhabitants of the Moa Island area), and following, the killing of three of their leaders by Europeans in 1869. Singe says, twenty years later Nagi people "dropped out of sight". However, Warraber people know of one person living at Warraber in addition to a family living on the Australian mainland whose *neitiv* ancestor is Sorogo of Nagi.

<sup>9</sup> There were other *porena* said to have been present in the area but they did not become local ancestors. For example, 'Malay men' or 'Manillaman' were apparently living on some sandbanks in the area. According to Warraber residents, they were left there by ships in order to catch nesting hawksbill turtles (*unuwa*). Their shells were collected, cleaned and sold. Reefs, islands and sandbanks are named after these men: Dugong Island (apparently the name of one of the men), Big Boiag (a reef), Small Boiag (a reef with sandbank), Awai (a sandbank) and Miak (a sandbank). These men did not establish relations with people at Warraber and have no local descendants.

the populations of these Central Islands were highly mobile, moving regularly amongst the islands. The male *porena* ancestors that are cited on Warraber are associated with residence on one of these three islands. They are: Johnny Maori, a Maori from New Zealand (Warraber); a Samoan named James Mills (Nagi); two Europeans – a Scotsman George Pearson (Poruma) and a Frenchman Jeremiah Dedong (Poruma); and a Vanuatan known as Bubarei. Bubarei is the most important of these *porena* ancestor figures and is depicted as the earliest *porena* ancestor of Warraber, Nagi and Poruma people. He is not associated with a particular island, but because of employment in the marine industry, is said to have moved about from place to place.

One writer mentions Bubarei as a captain in James Mills' fleet (Singe 1979:193).<sup>10</sup> Warraber people suggest Bubarei worked for Mills, but that he predated the latter's arrival in the Central Islands, and note also that Mills married one of Bubarei's daughters. Bubarei is said to have fathered ten offspring – five daughters and five sons. The sheer number of his direct descendants over the next three generations in the islands means that he functions as something of an apical ancestor for many Warraberans as well as Poruma and Nagi people, the literal progenitor of a large section of their contemporary populations. The woman who gave birth to Bubarei's ten children was named Wawa and considered to have been a Torres Strait Islander from an 'old village' called Poid on Moa Island. According to Warraber people, this village was abandoned long ago and was located some distance from the present communities of Kubin and St. Paul's. Wawa and her children are considered to have resided on Warraber.

Informants noted that 'Pacific Islanders were a different kind of people (*nadakain*) to Torres Strait Islanders'. The terms of this difference incorporate a range of elements. The contemporary descendants of *porena* figures at Warraber did not shirk, for example, from including their ancestors in the somewhat notorious local depictions of Pacific Islanders noted earlier. They often described them as drifters and troublemakers:

Our grandfathers [Pacific Islander ancestors] used to move around from place to place. They were looking for work and sex. For this reason fighting took place on islands in the Torres Strait. Torres Strait Islander men fought

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<sup>10</sup> While Singe (1979:193) does not explicitly name Bubarei as the captain in Mill's fleet, I interpret this source as referring to Bubarei as it mentions that Mills married the 'captain's' daughter, Nero Bob. Nero Bob is one of Bubarei's daughters, and the surname Bob is a shortened version of Bubarei that became the surname of his children. The surname Bob is only used in the Torres Strait among descendents of Bubarei.

Pacific Islander men because they kidnapped women for sexual purposes and generally made trouble.

Nonetheless, they are also esteemed for their prominence in local affairs, in which they and their descendants are considered to have eclipsed *neitiv* people in playing a demonstrable role in shaping the local community.

The prominence of Pacific Islanders is rooted in colonial social relations. Pacific people could communicate far more effectively with whites than *neitiv* through their command of Pacific Pidgin English (Shnukal 1991, 1992a, 1992b) allowing them to occupy a unique position as “linguistic and cultural middlemen, interpreters of European ways of life” to Torres Strait Islanders (Shnukal 1983:220). Mullins (1990:159) also points to the ability of Pacific Islanders to earn high wages as an important aspect of their local influence. This reflected an institutionalised racial hierarchy that continued to exist in the marine industries well into the twentieth century, further disadvantaging *neitiv* islanders. Beckett (1977:101) notes:

Around the turn of the century Islanders occupied an inferior position in the labour force, *vis-à-vis* Asians and Pacific Islanders as well as whites. With the elimination of foreign labour after 1945 they were able to become skippers and divers. However, almost all of the top-notch skippers were part-Asian or Pacific Islanders, perhaps because the notion of foreigners being superior survived. This brought into existence a small elite who ... could earn as least as much as unskilled whites, and who enjoyed a much higher standard of living than other Islanders.

Alongside other *porena* men, such as the Europeans who lived on outer islands, Pacific people were able to command positions of power as boat owners and employers of local labour. In all these senses they came to constitute a local elite of sorts, “a class initially composed of Pacific Islander maritime workers and missionary teachers, and subsequently of people of mixed Pacific and Torres Strait Islander descent” (Mullins 1990:152).

### *Enduring Influence*

The local descendants of Pacific Islanders and Europeans continued to occupy prominent and influential positions like priests and teachers, further cementing the status of Pacific Islanders in Torres Strait communities. Shnukal (1983:232) suggests a phenotypic element evolved: “...*apkas* ‘half-castes’ were highly regarded by all (especially as marriage partners) because of their light skins and straight hair”, in all

probability an enduring legacy of the racialised practices in the marine industry. Beckett (1987:166) notes at Badu Island “the doctrine that capacities are inherited not only predicts that the children of able parents will succeed, but assumes that the parents of successful children gave some indication of the same qualities”. At Warraber and Poruma notions that intelligence and general capability are primarily due to parentage and inheritance continue to be widespread today.

Such perspectives likely assisted in fostering the creation of ‘dynasties’ consisting of large families dominating formal community positions sometimes over generations (cf Beckett 1977, 1987). These families tended to emphasise their descent from Pacific Islanders (or whites) often at the expense of ‘Torres Strait Islander’ ancestors. Elderly Warraber people suggest that marriage between members of Pacific Islander families was valued and encouraged by them in order to ‘to keep the blood strong’ (*kipe blad strong*) that is, to guarantee the Pacific Island heritage. Marriages with members of other large dynastic Pacific Island families from other islands are a common feature in local genealogies, although marriages with relations of *porena* descent living on the same island were also tolerated.

In the early period of the marine industries, knowledge of Creole afforded *porena* the role of intermediary between island populations and governmental and religious axes of power (Shnukal 1983). At islands like Warraber and Poruma, the descendants of these ‘foreigners’ consistently held significant institutional position/s such as Priests, Churchwardens, School Teachers, boat Skippers, and local Councillors. Power was often concentrated in particular men, with a single individual sometimes holding more than one position either simultaneously or repeatedly over different periods or occasions.

At Warraber and Poruma, concentration of power in individuals descended from *porena* ancestors became a feature of the twentieth century. Notwithstanding the substantial control exercised by government institutions such as the Department of Native Affairs (Beckett 1987:67), Warraber people emphasise the past role of individual local and regional leaders. The locally elected Council (administratively responsible to the State of Queensland) was one arena that formed a key focus for these powerful figures. Tom Johnson, for example, became Council Chairman of Poruma therefore also of Warraber as this island remained under Poruma’s jurisdiction until 1969. His eldest son, Jerry Johnson succeeded him, becoming Chairman of Poruma and Warraber. Jerry’s Deputy

Chairman was Francis Lupin, a Pacific Islander descendant who was sent from Murray Island as a schoolteacher to Poruma. Thereafter, Lupin became Chairman of Poruma and is remembered as a strict disciplinarian administering punishments. For offences like adultery, or revealing the details of adoptions, punishments included head shaving and carrying a heavy ‘punishment stone’ around to each house, whereby the offender had to state the reason for their punishment and was allocated ‘jobs’ by each household to complete.

Up until 1969, Warraber always had one resident Councillor referred to as the ‘number three councillor’ (i.e. after the Chairman and Deputy Chairman). These councillors all comprised descendants of ‘foreigners’ and included Frederick James (1946-56), another son of Bubarei, and Stuart Johnson (1956-62), the brother of Jerry Johnson, Poruma’s chairman. Stuart was also a boat skipper (of the vessel *Caroline* and the *Makoi*) and an Anglican Church Warden, while his wife was the head of the Anglican Mother’s Union. Scott James, one of Bubarei’s sons, became a Councillor for Warraber (1962-8). His sister was married to Poruma Chairman Tom Johnson. Scott James had also been a diver in the pearlshell industry, a position that attracted respect and admiration because of the high wages and the considerable dangers involved.<sup>11</sup>

Among Warraber residents today, these prominent men of *porena* descent are all regarded as important ‘island leaders’ as *dempla gad neim* (they are renowned). Whether their style of leadership was severe or unyielding seems to matter far less than the fact that they were able to gain governing positions. Their influence may well have been viewed differently at the time; certainly there is considerable discussion today about the performance of Councillors. But the general contemporary opinion is that these past Councillors were all highly capable in the positions they occupied and the fact they all shared *porena* ancestry is not lost on their contemporary admirers (including those who emphasise *neitiv* ancestry). Their descent from *porena* figures is popularly envisaged as enabling such prominent individuals to achieve positions of power and authority on Warraber. This in turn, is linked to the development of Warraber in terms of the introduction of services, a growing population, and the continuing local presence of a marine ‘industry’ (now focused largely on rock lobsters –

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<sup>11</sup> Decompression sickness, also known as ‘the bends’, was one danger of diving. Other dangers included simple drowning. Divers died at the rate of one in ten every year and those who survived often suffered from ailments including paralysis, rheumatism and pulmonary disease (Ganter 1994:114).

see chapter 5), all testifying to the influence of men who occupied central positions in the Council, School and Church. The migration and final establishment of a sedentary community at Warraber is seen as providing ample illustration of this and is often cited by *porena*.

For the most part of the first half of the twentieth century, Warraber families lived at Poruma. This occurred in order to enable greater access to work in the marine industry, as one informant suggests:

There were quite a few people living here [Warraber] before they went to Poruma. They went from here to live at Poruma because of the pearlshell and beche-de-mer industries. Poruma was closer to the reefs than Warraber, and beche-de-mer was close at Tudu, boats can go to work there and quickly return. Warraber was okay in other respects but it was too far. Tudu is to the north and the other reefs are to the east. People went from here [to Poruma].

During the first half of the twentieth century, Poruma had a school and a store while Warraber did not. However, Poruma lacked firewood for cooking and adequate water. As a result, people returned regularly to Warraber in boats to obtain wood and water. Only a few families (around twenty people) are said to have remained at Warraber during this period.<sup>12</sup> Informants suggest they included a *neitiv* ancestor along with a few older *porena* men and their families.

The Government and Anglican Church encouraged people on a number of occasions during the 1920s and 1930s to move back to Warraber, but apparently met with a consistently negative reaction. Missionaries were baffled by the resistance to move as Warraber possessed the water and firewood that Poruma lacked, and a recently constructed Anglican Church (*The Carpentarian* 1920:621; 1921:674). But informants today state that people were concerned about moving back to Warraber because of a known sorcerer who was living there, a *porena* descendant who had married a Warraber woman. Some people currently regard him as having used his power for good, for example in manipulating relations with the government representative at Thursday

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<sup>12</sup> MacFarlane (1917-1956) notes major flows of people to and from Warraber in the 1920s due to residence on Poruma linked to the presence of marine industry ships, as well as periodic return to Warraber for the purposes of gardening and drying *wongai* fruit (a Central Islands staple). In the 1930s the population increased to around 20 as the following government estimates show: 21 in 1930, 12 in 1933 and 19 in 1934, 23 in 1935, 20 in 1936 and just 2 in 1937. In the 1930s, Nagi has similar population estimates, ranging from 15 to 31. By contrast, figures for Poruma's population were consistently above 100, once again a reflection of the location of remaining marine boats (and therefore paid work), as well as schooling and store facilities (Buxton 1931:892; 1932:846; O'Leary 1938:1108; McLean 1935:986; 1936:1037; 1937:1199).

Island.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, people were not inclined to live in close proximity to someone who possessed such powers.

Following this individual's death, a Warraber *porena* descendant is considered to have made a strong case for Warraber people to return to their island. The advantages of adequate land, water and firewood were still relevant, and people were persuaded that returning to Warraber would encourage the state government to provide services such as a school and store on their own island. Their return would facilitate 'building up the island' in terms of attracting such services and even the operation of marine industry boats from there. The Warraber *porena* was successful, and people returned to Warraber in 1956. His predictions proved correct. A small school was established in 1958 and a Poruma Islander teacher was duly sent to the island. An Islander priest, Father Jonathon Bruce and his family arrived from Darnley in 1956 to minister to Warraber residents in their Anglican Church. The existing Church was rebuilt during Father Bruce's period on the island.<sup>14</sup> A small store opened shortly after the move with the assistance of the government administered Island Industries Board. Following the return of the *Makoi*, a vessel skippered by a local *porena* descendant, marine work became locally available to men who had moved to Warraber. The vessel was obtained from the Queensland Government run 'lugger scheme' where contributions from all workers on the vessel contributed toward its 'hire purchase'.

The results of the changes that flowed from the *porena* presence are now considered to be everywhere and self-evident. As one Warraber man who cites Bubarei as his personal ancestor, observed: "you look front, behind and sideways, you only see Bubarei". His statement echoes a common view that everything on Warraber Island - houses, boats, schools, even the people who currently live there - are present only because of the historical presence and activities of this *porena* ancestor and others like him. Bubarei's place as the earliest foreigner of influence in the region, and as the literal progenitor of many later leaders, provides him with enormous symbolic importance on Warraber.

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<sup>13</sup> See Davis (2002) for a consideration of sorcery discourse as a means of influencing remote figures of authority.

<sup>14</sup> For a brief local history of the Anglican Church see Bob et.al. (1997)

## ***Neitiv* Identification**

With the historical conditions and contemporary circumstances outlined, the presence on Warraber of individuals not only able to trace descent to a male *neitiv* ancestor, but emphasising this as a form of identification – being *neitiv* rather than *porena* – may appear surprising. As noted, *neitiv* ancestors are those understood as present at Warraber and Poruma before the entry of the marine industries, and therefore preceding the influx of foreigners this created. As a consequence, *neitiv* figures are not linked to the arrival of Christianity, but are instead associated with the *bipo taim* period and the pre-Christian character that defines it. Added to this is the systematic devaluing of *neitiv* status both within the marine industry, through lower wages, and under successive administrations, through limited access to positions of authority.

However, one crucial area of authority is retained by the *neitiv*: original possession of the islands and the ability to grant land to others. In narratives of the past provided by the descendants of *porena* ancestors, this *neitiv* authority is recognised and is revealed as legitimising the local emplacement of outsiders. In a typical narrative, a *porena* descendant on Warraber reprises the theme of conflict over relations with local women between *neitiv* and *porena* people in the early marine industry period, in this instance at Mabuig Island. He goes on to explain:

They had to send [the Mabuig-based] Pacific Islanders to St. Paul [a community established at Moa Island specifically for Pacific Islanders]. The people there now are descendants of Mabuig people and Pacific Islanders. ... Kubin people made those Pacific Islanders their brothers [Kubin is the name of a *neitiv* settlement on Moa Island]. They said to them "I give this particular land to you, look after it".

This scenario, whereby Pacific outsiders are considered as kin and provided with land, did not occur initially on Warraber. In this respect, a different *porena* descendant on Warraber describes Bubarei's relation to Warraber *neitiv* people:

Our ancestor [Bubarei] never stayed here. Nobody applied kinship terms to him to make him a relative. He never became a brother to anyone at Warraber.<sup>15</sup> He used to travel around the islands, looking for pearlshell work. He became close to a woman at Nagi who moved there from Kubin. He brought her to Warraber ... that grandmother came to this island. She

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<sup>15</sup> The linguist Shnukal (1992a, 1992b) also notes the practice of making 'brothers' but purely in terms of Pacific Islanders making other Pacific Islanders kin. She notes that Pacific Islander men "were quick to establish 'brotherhood' relationships. When unrelated men from the same village or region travelled and worked together, as often happened, they called their countrymen 'brother'" (Shnukal 1992a:9).

gave birth to all her children here. Every child was later married. Two went over there [to Poruma], another two went to Nagi. There were five sisters. That old man was in a hurry to have children. Yes. You can see the resulting people here today, from the five sisters and five brothers.

According to Warraber informants, Bubarei was never welcome at Warraber and was neither given land there nor allowed to construct a house. He is reputedly buried at Nagi Island. However, the children of Bubarei and the Moa Island woman are all thought to have been born at Warraber. They married and settled on Warraber as well as Nagi and Poruma.

Gagabe is the only male among the *neitiv* ancestors associated with Warraber. The remaining female ancestors are: Thaiyai, Mapoo, Wawa and Ullud. These women do not feature prominently in local narratives and many younger people are no longer aware of their names.<sup>16</sup> Warraber residents assumed there were other people, both male and female, also living at Warraber when Gagabe was alive, but there is no one who asserts a relationship to them and their identities are no longer known. They stated that this situation – where just one named male *neitiv* ancestor is associated with Warraber – parallels other Central Islands that also have single locally prominent (and sometimes regionally renowned) *neitiv* male ancestors, whom they are able to name: Kebisu on Tudu Island, Sorogo on Nagi Island and Lai on Poruma Island.<sup>17</sup>

Gagabe functions as an apical ancestor for those who consider themselves as *neitiv* and personifies the authority and prerogatives of *neitiv* identity. In this sense, Gagabe attracts a different valorising discourse from Bubarei, one that can be glossed as ‘the power of precedence’. Samuel, who was recognised during my fieldwork as the oldest

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<sup>16</sup> There is one notable exception. A few elderly people tell a narrative about Tudu Islanders who were led by their powerful *neitiv* ancestor Kebisu in a surprise attack at Poruma. Ullud is said to have been present on Poruma at the time. She hid in a tree and watched as Kebisu chased one man out onto a reef and after catching him, cut off his head.

Residents often debate where these female ancestors are said to originate in the Torres Strait. For example the ancestor Ullud is usually said to be from Warraber, but at other times she is associated with Aurid Island, where she is said to have resided with one of her husbands. Part of the difficulty people experience in absolutely and/or consistently assigning individuals to particular island localities probably relates to the historical propensity of population movement both traditionally and according to labour demands in the marine industries (particularly in its early period), as previously described. But it is also true that male ancestors appear much more firmly attached to particular locales than females.

<sup>17</sup> Tudu Islanders (or more accurately in a contemporary sense, Yam-Tudu, see Fuary [1991a]) have several other ancestor figures that Warraber and Poruma residents view as *neitiv*, but for them Kebisu is certainly the most famous. Poruma’s *neitiv* ancestors include one woman (Mapoo) and three men (Gaid, Kalai, and Lai). However, among Warraber and Poruma residents, Mapoo’s white husband is a more prominent figure in local histories, attracting greater renown than his *neitiv* wife.

and therefore most senior of Warraber's *neitiv* residents, often made a point of emphasising that his ancestor Gagabe was living at Warraber before outsiders came. Gagabe was alive, Samuel suggests, when 'there were no foreigner people' at Warraber. On one occasion, he stated:

Before the arrival of Christianity in 1871, there were no *porena* people, there were only Warraber *neitiv*. There were no *porena* people from *ausaid* [outside; beyond Torres Strait]. There were only *neitiv* here. Among them was my great grandfather, the Warraber *mamus*. He was my grandfather's father ... He lived here, other people lived here too but he was the *mamus*, which is something like a *bipo taim chif* [chief]. I'm telling you, there were no *porena pipel*.

Warraber people regarded the title of *mamus* as applying to individuals acknowledged by their peers as having greater status than others. These people were envisaged as de-facto leaders in the *bipo taim* period, significant and influential local figures that were also able to exercise authority as a *primus inter pares*.<sup>18</sup> It was the son of Gagabe who was considered to have given the male children of Bubarei land on Warraber in recognition of their local birth (see chapter 6). Samuel provided a version of a narrative known as the Mutiuk story, where the term *mamus* is used to emphasise the figure Gagabe, as a recognised Warraber leader.

### *The story of Mutiuk*

Mutiuk is a Warraber *neitiv* who has no identifiable contemporary descendants and whose story was related by Warraber informants (both *neitiv* and *porena*) on a number of occasions. Important variations appear between the versions held by each of the two groups. Samuel provides the following version, which involves his ancestor Gagabe, and is told by other *neitiv* people with only minor differences:

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<sup>18</sup> *Mamus* (or mamoose) is a term that likely derives from the Meriam Mir word '*mamus*' meaning 'red hair' (Beckett 1963:15). It is used on most Torres Strait Islands to denote individuals who received recognition from the Government Resident Chester in the 1880s as having authority to speak for all Islanders resident on that particular island. This was not always the case on some islands. Beckett (1987:121) says that:

Before annexation a Queensland magistrate had visited Murray and appointed two *mamooses* on the advice of the missionary Samuel McFarlane.... Remarkably, one of the *mamooses* was Passi, heir to a senior office in the Malu-Bomai cult, though by now a church leader. (The other appointee, known as Harry *mamoose*, was not heir to any important ritual office, and the reasons for his elevation are obscure. He seems, however, to have been a forceful figure.) Whether the colonial regime was co-opting the indigenous leadership, or the old leadership was perpetuating itself through the new structures must remain in doubt.

**Samuel:** I know that the totem bird (*augad uroi*) of this island is the *womer* (frigate bird). You've seen it, it's the black bird that flies high in the sky. When people killed Mutiuk, that bird was flying around. That was during *bipo taim*. My great grandfather [i.e. Gagabe] was involved. He killed Mutiuk where the two large *wongai* trees stand next to the Mission House. When he cut off Mutiuk's head, the *womer* gathered in the sky. Gagabe also killed the Boigu people who were with Mutiuk. My great grandfather killed Mutiuk. Then the *womer* started to fly and circle around Warraber. They circled around, then flew over to Bara, then over Yam Island, Saibai Island and Dauan. When the *womer* reached Boigu, people at Boigu guessed that Mutiuk and the other Boigu people must have been killed at Warraber. They killed them underneath the two *wongai* trees where the Mission House now stands. The Warraber people spread out mats and hid their *gabagab* (stone-headed clubs) underneath the mats. Gagabe said to the Warraber people, 'watch me, when I nod my head, take out your *gabagab* and kill them. That man, Gagabe was a *mamus* and a Warraber headhunter.

**JL:** Why was Mutiuk killed? How did he wrong Warraber people?

**Samuel:** Mutiuk escaped from Warraber to Boigu. When he used to spear fish at Warraber, he wouldn't always take a portion to the men in the *kod* (sorcerer's/men's ritual precinct).<sup>19</sup> That's why he was killed. The last time he went spearfishing at Warraber, he speared a *gaigai* [short for *gaigai bulzi* or giant trevally]. The fish had been ensorcelled, causing it to swim away with the spear. Mutiuk swam after the fish to retrieve his spear and was swallowed by a shark. The shark too had been ensorcelled and he swam away with Mutiuk inside his belly. When the shark swam over reefs, Mutiuk could feel the shark's belly heating up. He said, 'I must be over a reef now'. When the shark reached the deep water (*malu*), he said 'no, this is deep water now'. The shark travelled on in this way over shallow reefs and through deep water with Mutiuk in his belly. When they reached Boigu, Mutiuk escaped from the shark. Mutiuk had a sister at Boigu. So he went ashore and climbed up into the branches of a tree and waited. When his sister came to the well, she could see Mutiuk's reflection (*sadow*, 'shadow') in the well. She said 'that looks like Mutiuk'. She looked up and told him to come down and they went to her house and then to see the *kod* men at Boigu. She explained who Mutiuk was and how he arrived at Boigu in the belly of a shark. He was allowed to stay at Boigu for a while, after which some Boigu men accompanied Mutiuk back to Warraber.

[repetitive section omitted]

**JL:** Who was waiting for Mutiuk underneath the *wongai* trees?

**Samuel:** Warraber people. They were hiding their *gabagab* under the mats. Those Warraber...troop [as in 'army troop', Samuel laughs as his use of the term]...they laid out mats to welcome the Boigu people. When the Boigu people landed at Warraber, they were warmly welcomed. The Boigu men were asked to sit down and the Warraber men sat too. The Warraber people

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<sup>19</sup> The Torres Strait Island literature suggests that *kod* were places of male ceremony linked to headhunting, funerary rites, and male initiation (Davis 1998:73; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:154-5, 161; Fuay 1991a:98; Haddon 1904:365; 1935:386).

spoke to the Boigu men as friends and used kin terms to address them (*pamli pren*, family friend). All the time, the *gabagab* were underneath the mats and the Warraber men watched Gagabe for his signal. When he nodded his head, all the *gabagab* were taken out and Mutiuk and the Boigu men were killed by blows to the head. They killed everyone.

[repetitive section omitted].

**Samuel:** They took their *gabagab* and killed them. They cut off their heads and buried them at the *zogo* place where Robert's house is. Where the *bu* (trumpet shells) are today. They took all the skulls there. There are skulls of many others buried there too and at the *big zogo*. Skulls are also buried there.

This version of the Mutiuk story provides a somewhat positive portrait of *bipo taim* male power.<sup>20</sup> Samuel provides a moral framing that links male leaders, male cult-activity and sorcery, where the selfishness and greed of Mutiuk is punished by the *kod-men*, first indirectly through the ensorcelled fish (from which he escapes) and finally, directly through the command of Gagabe. But Samuel's telling of the story also constitutes a highly personalised account. It is a moral tale about Mutiuk, but it is also a narrative that depicts his personal ancestors, and firmly establishes Gagabe in particular as a powerful *bipo taim* headhunter and Warraber leader. On other occasions, Samuel

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<sup>20</sup> The Anglican priest, MacFarlane also recorded a Warraber story of 'Mootook' told to him in 1924 by a female resident of Poruma named *Largod* (1917-1956: MS2616/1 Item 1). In this version, Mutiuk is not punished by local sorcerers but is simply swallowed by a shark one day while fishing. He travels to Boigu in the belly of the shark whereupon a similar version of events occurs. Upon Mutiuk's return, he and the Boigu men were killed and transformed into frigate birds. Mutiuk was killed because he was assumed drowned when residents found his abandoned fishing spear. Consequently, funerary rites had already been performed which essentially separates the *mari* (spirit) from the physical form. When the women and children saw Mutiuk returning they shamed the 'ceremonial leaders' by reproaching them for assuming his death. Yet the men proceeded to kill Mutiuk and the Boigu men. When the residents of Boigu saw the frigate birds flying overhead, they realised that Mutiuk's Boigu companions had been killed at Warraber. In retaliation, Boigu residents killed Mutiuk's in-married sister.

Interestingly, both Haddon (1904:89-92) and Lawrie (1970:68-9) also record Badu Island versions of this story. Haddon's version closely approximates the earlier Warraber version told to MacFarlane. Haddon (1904:279) interprets *Mutuk's* (Mutiuk) death as constituting a typical response of Islanders toward 'strangers'. All newcomers to the island, shipwreck survivors, whether white or Islander were apparently killed. Haddon (1904:279) says that strangers are killed as they pose some form danger to the community and I infer this to mean that they have ceased to be fully human. In releasing Mutiuk's *mari*, his physical form had ceased its connection with the human world. From his outward form, Mutiuk's appearance in the Haddon version demonstrates this idea in that his hair had fallen out from travelling inside the shark.

In the first Warraber contemporary version of the story, the speaker says that Mutiuk's sister saw his 'shadow' (reflection) in the water. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:141) says that at Mabuiag, the term *mari* is the ghost of the person after death but it is also used to signify a "shadow or reflection", and furthermore, that *mari* resided in treetops, mourning the separation from their relatives. Though tempting to infer from these insights, the contemporary Warraber narrative makes no mention of Mutiuk becoming a 'stranger' or transformed into a ghost or spirit form. However, Warraber residents are well aware of the tendency for *bipo taim* people to kill any strangers or kin who had spent considerable time in the water. Together, these ideas suggest the existence of a broadly common perspective concerning foreign-ness in the Torres Strait Islands that predated the arrival of Pacific Islanders and Europeans.

had also described this ancestor as a ‘dangerous old man’, alluding to Gagabe’s prowess both in taking heads and in the (associated) emplaced sorcery from which his power derives. In this respect, the Mutiuk narrative also situates three main *bipo taim* sites in the context of the actions of his ancestor.

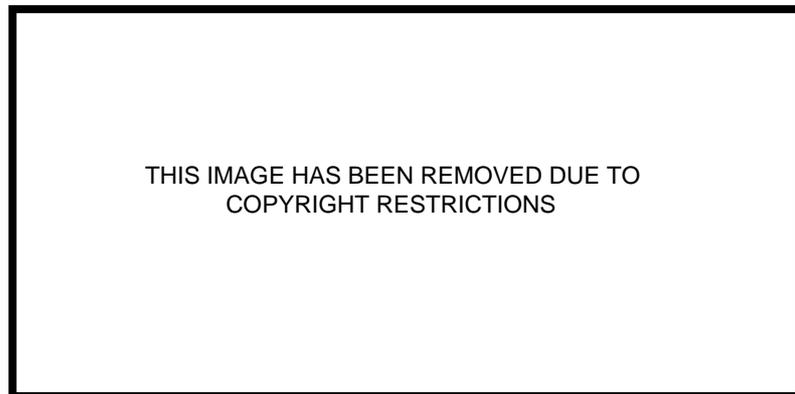


Figure 1: *Big zogo* place

These sites (*smol zogo*, *big zogo* and the two *wongai* trees) remain as important features within local understandings of Warraber as place, but attract a range of interpretations as to their significance. The three sites still exist at Warraber (see figures 1 and 2). The Mutiuk story not only names them but links Mutiuk’s death to one of the sites, the *smol zogo* place. The arrangement of trumpet shells that mark this site are narratively linked only to this event. The three sites constitute a significant aspect of Samuel’s own relationship to Warraber. As the most senior living relative of Gagabe he considers himself as possessing a direct relation to Warraber’s significant ‘before time’ places. He maintains that he alone has inherited magic words and knowledge regarding the use of one of the sites, along with the responsibility for its management. However, Samuel stresses that he never uses this knowledge, the implication being that to do so would be

immoral in contemporary Christian terms. Nonetheless while many of the practices mentioned in the story, including sorcery and headhunting, are today considered un-Christian, Samuel tells the story without invoking judgement. Although he also regards those specific *bipo taim* practices as immoral, a more significant aspect of the story is the power of Gagabe. Linked to the *bipo taim* actions of his *neitiv* ancestor, they provide an intimate connection between himself, the landscape and significant historical events, authorising his personal identification as a Warraber *neitiv*.

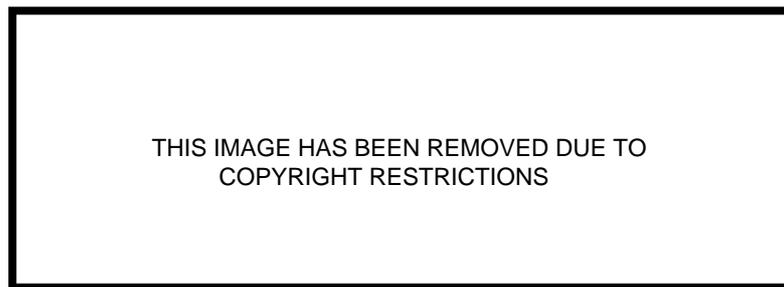


Figure 2: *Smol zogo* place (Source: M. Lawrie. 1970. *Myths and Legends of the Torres Strait*. Copyright: John Oxley Library).

Like the *neitiv* descendant Samuel, the descendants of the ‘foreigners’ also know stories about *bipo taim* Torres Strait and Warraber. They assert that knowledge about this period is spread throughout the community, not restricted to the *netivs* alone (‘everyone knows the stories’). Nevertheless, there are some notable differences in the way they are told by comparison with those identifying with *neitiv* ancestors. The following is a typical example of the Mutiuk story, as told by a *porena* informant:

Mutiuk's children were being taught in the *kod*.<sup>21</sup> Mutiuk used to go spear fishing on the reef and being a good fisherman he would always return with fish. However, he did not give his best fish to the men in the *kod*. He gave small fish to the *kod* men and kept all the large fish for himself. When the *zogo* men found out, they set upon punishing him. When Mutiuk next went fishing, he speared a *gaigai* (giant trevally). The fish swam away with the spear. Mutiuk swam out to retrieve his spear because he needed it to feed his family. As he swam out, a shark swallowed him. The shark swam to Bara Island where Mutiuk felt heat of the reef inside the shark's belly. When the shark swam out to deep water, the belly was cold. Mutiuk continued on in this way, travelling in the shark's belly to Yam Island, Gebar Island, and Dauan Island before reaching Boigu. Mutiuk felt the heat of Boigu's shallow water. Here Mutiuk cut open the shark with an *akul* shell.<sup>22</sup> Fishermen used *akul* as a knife and kept them behind their ears when they went fishing. Mutiuk went ashore at Boigu and hid in a tree in case any of the Boigu sorcerers spotted him and killed him. When his sister came to the well to collect water, she saw Mutiuk's reflection in the well water. She was surprised to see him. Mutiuk climbed down and told his sister and her Boigu husband what had happened. They took him to see the Boigu leader who arranged for some Boigu men to accompany Mutiuk back to Warraber. Some Warraber men spotted the canoe carrying Mutiuk and the Boigu men some distance from the island. They told the *zogo* men who then instructed everyone to arrange mats and hide *gabagab* (stone headed clubs) at the beach. They waited for the canoe to land. Upon the signal of one of the *zogo* men, everyone ran down the beach and attacked Mutiuk and the Boigu men. *Womer* (frigate birds) gathered at Warraber then flew off in the direction of Boigu. When the Boigu people saw the *womer*, they knew that Mutiuk and his Boigu companions had been killed.

In this second Warraber version of the Mutiuk story the basic events remain the same. Mutiuk was not giving the correct share of fish to the men in the *kod*. Wanting to punish Mutiuk, they ensorcelled a giant trevally and a shark, the latter of which carried Mutiuk all the way to Boigu. When Mutiuk returned with Boigu men, Warraber men killed all of them with their *gabagab* (stone-headed clubs).<sup>23</sup> But differences are also apparent.

The only named participant in this version is Mutiuk, a Warraber man genealogically unconnected with anyone now living at Warraber. What was a profoundly personal narrative to Samuel is retold here as a description of *bipo taim* life, with no explicit

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<sup>21</sup> Some Warraber residents likened the *kod* to a school, a learning place (in addition to being the site of sacred ritual activity) where old men looked after children who had not yet reached maturity.

<sup>22</sup> The term *akul* refers to a species of clamshell (*Polymesoda coaxans*). The origin of this term is unclear as it also used along Cape York by Aboriginal people currently residing at Weipa (Mick Morrison pers.comm.). The use of the term beyond Torres Strait is conceivable given the nineteenth century contact between Central Islanders and populations living adjacent to or at Cape York (see Moore 1979).

<sup>23</sup> For discussion of the multiple and complex historical roles of *gabagab* in inter-group social relations (including ceremonial exchanges in addition to head-taking), see McNiven (1998).

connections to the present, whether personalised (through descent) or physical (through the three named sites). This illustrates a mode of discussing *bipo taim* that is commonly adopted by Warraber people emphasising *porena* ancestry. Their narratives are always highly generalised and attention is rarely given (if at all) to issues of continuity between Warraber life in the present and in the distant past. Instead, stress tends to be placed on distance and dislocation, even contrast.

It is notable that there is no mention of the position of *mamus* and that the Warraber 'zogo men' are entirely anonymous. While the account does suggest Mutiuk was punished for a local transgression, the tenor concerning the actions of the *zogo* men is nevertheless ambivalent. Rather than failing to give a correct share (Samuel's account) Mutiuk here fails to give the *zogo* men his best fish. His subsequent treatment by the *zogo* men conveys to the listener the vindictive power of sorcerers during *bipo taim*. Needing his spear 'to feed his family' Mutiuk was forced to swim after it, whereupon an ensorcelled shark swallows him. The sorcerers at Boigu are described as ruthless men that Mutiuk must hide from. Mutiuk appears to be caught between two different sets of violent sorcerers and only his kinship links saved him from those on Boigu. *Porena* narrators may mention the names of *neitiv* ancestors from other islands, but in discussing Warraberan 'before time' history, the clear tendency is to minimise any important role that Samuel's *neitiv* ancestors may have played.

In dismissing the view that *neitiv* people have a sole claim to stories regarding the remote past, the descendants of *porena* male ancestors are implicitly denying any privileging of the *neitiv* descendant's personal connections to such narratives. A few senior non-*neitiv* men even chose to tell me details about Samuel's ancestor Gagabe, though with much less vigour than Samuel's conversations on the same topic. Some even suggested that Samuel and his relatives have exaggerated the importance of their ancestor as a leader figure. When *porena* descendants play down Samuel's *bipo taim* ancestral connections, they are also accentuating the sameness of all contemporary Warraberans. The stories they tell about *bipo taim* aim to demonstrate their knowledge of the period, and of Warraber as a place, suggesting that *porena* ancestry does not preclude the possibility of being considered a Warraber person. At the same their more generalised, distanced (almost folk-tale) form serves to dissociate themselves from the period of the story and to contrast the valued conditions of the present over the difficulties of the past.

## Conclusion

The chapter has highlighted perceptions of ancestors that inform important local terms of identification within Warraber's contemporary population. The categories *porena* (foreigners) and *neitiv* (natives) were shown to attract two distinct (and somewhat contradictory) valorising discourses, respectively 'agents of change' and 'power of precedence'. The chapter also described the general valuing of historical changes driven by outsiders – most notably Pacific Islanders – especially in their association with the shift from *bipo taim* to the current Christian era that has followed the 'Coming of the Light'. This has tended to confer a moral legitimacy to the status and dominance long enjoyed by *porena*, who had early prominence in missionary activity, an elevated rank in the marine industries and a greater role in local administration, all of which can in turn be traced to the operations of colonial racial stratification.

Nevertheless, the image of the *neitiv* retains significance. Despite their minority status, the descendants of male *neitiv* figures readily assert their ancestor's prior occupation of Warraber Island. They claim knowledge of local significant sites and consequently a connection to forms of power that, despite their *bipo taim* connotations, bestow some standing, albeit contested, to identification as *neitiv*. Everyone (*neitiv* included) imagines themselves as now living in the 'light'. Those residents that emphasise *neitiv* ancestry remain committed to local ideas concerning the 'Christian life' and generally endorse a negative representation of the past by comparison with the era of Christianity. Nonetheless they continue to hold a range of ambivalent views about aspects of *bipo taim*. While ancestral actions such as sorcery are regarded as immoral in Christian terms, they remain acknowledged as being powerful (and even productive) in their own contexts. *Neitiv* people value their descent from these powerful and precedent ancestors, harbouring mostly private ideas of positive difference from the descendants of 'foreigners' that provide recourse to an alternative source of status, distinguishing them positively from the 'foreigners' who have constituted a dominant force in local relations of power since their entry into the Torres Strait. Nonetheless, their relationships to other contemporary Warraber residents are always described in terms of inclusive Christian relatedness.

Obvious ambiguities prevent the seamless convergence of Christian metaphors of dark and light with the local categories of *neitiv* and *porena*. While Warraber people collectively embrace Christian conversion as a fundamental transformation in the lives

of pre-Christian Warraber populations, this does not invoke the wholesale rejection of distinctive local practices in the name of modernity. In the next chapter, continuing contestations that surround local narratives of Christian conversion on Warraber are explored, highlighting local engagements with Christianity and church affiliation. These expose further possibilities for community cleavage that involve competitive conceptions of the completeness of post-colonial rupture with the past, and the contemporary boundaries of moral and immoral community practices.

## Chapter Three: Warraber Christianities – Morality and Power

### Introduction

This chapter explores Christian identification and moral discourse among Warraber residents. Understandings of Christianity on islands in the Torres Strait are neither homogenous nor static, but remain dynamic and evolving, continuing to play a prominent part in shaping local thinking about the past and the present. While all Warraber residents are Christians, there are two distinct expressions of Christianity on the island: the Assembly of God, a Pentecostal congregation, and the Church of Torres Strait, an Anglican splinter-group. Pentecostals and Anglicans on Warraber have been involved in contesting the framework of moral interpretation concerning local Christian practice, fostering significant tensions and ambivalences within the community. A particular focus in this chapter is with the debates surrounding the performance and interpretation of ‘island dance’ (*ailan dans*).

Island dance has been described as a source of community pride, as an expression and affirmation of both regional Torres Strait Islander and local island identity (Beckett 1987; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; Fuary 1991a; Lawrence 1998). Celebrations incorporating *ailan dans* provide frequent occasions for gatherings of intra-island families and often inter-island communities. Through historical processes of experimenting with dance forms, Torres Strait Islanders have actively created new contexts and meanings for dance performances, adapting them to reflect their changing lives and spiritual understandings. Anglicans have long viewed island dance as entirely compatible with Christian practice, distinguishing it from earlier pre-conversion dance forms associated with the period before the arrival of Christianity (*bipo taim*).

In recent years, Assembly of God (AOG) members have challenged this view by depicting island dancing as a ‘dark practice’ that incorporates and valorises elements of *bipo taim*. In doing so, the AOG has raised the issue of activities persisting into the present from the time before Christian conversion in 1871 – effectively subverting the standard depiction of that event as a definitive rupture. This reinterpretation of island dance by the AOG attempts to reinscribe the contours of local moral thinking by

highlighting ambiguities in the temporal division asserted between the pre-Christian *bipo taim* and the Christian present. Such ambiguities are certainly a feature of Anglican history in the region but are arguably also inherent in the process of missionisation itself and the discourse of light and dark. In this context, I briefly examine the use of these metaphors in Pacific and Papua New Guinea Christianities and compare this with the Torres Strait Islands.

The AOG effectively seeks to distance itself from *bipo taim* continuities by avoiding *ailan dans*. It positions itself as offering a more potent source of protective power as a result, particularly with regard to local sorcery – an element from pre-Christian period which is widely believed to have endured into the present, but has a muted presence in everyday discourse. The shifting local articulations of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, linked to conceiving practices as more or less remote from the ‘Coming of the Light’, potentially create different collectivities with different pasts and futures on Warraber. It also serves to highlight the importance of moral ideas couched in Christian discourse to debates about distinctive regional practices, which in turn problematises their representation as indicative of Torres Strait ‘culture’.

### **Warraber Dancing: *ailan dans***

During my research on Warraber, *ailan dans* (island dance) was the only style of dance performed, and it continues to be the major dance form among other Torres Strait Islanders (see Beckett, 1987, 1979; Davis 1998; Mabo and Beckett 2000; Lawrence 1998; and Fuary 1991a; York 1998). *Ailan dans* is a prominent part of the feasting-dancing complex throughout the Torres Strait involved in the celebration of birthdays, weddings, wedding anniversaries, twenty first birthdays, farewell feasts, house openings, tombstone openings, and Christian events including Easter, Christmas, New Year and the annual ‘Coming of the Light’ celebrations. Fuary (1993:177) characterises dance on nearby Yam Island as follows:

island dancing is central to celebratory feasts. In island dance, one dances, sings and drums for others and for one's island. In performing to the best of their abilities, dancers, drummers and singers show the importance the event holds for them. One's identity as an Islander from a particular place is signified in dance, as are one's kinship and sexual identities. The audience is aware of the performers' kin-based relationships to each other and to the people being honoured by the dance, and it is this recognition which gives the performance its impact and ultimate meaning.

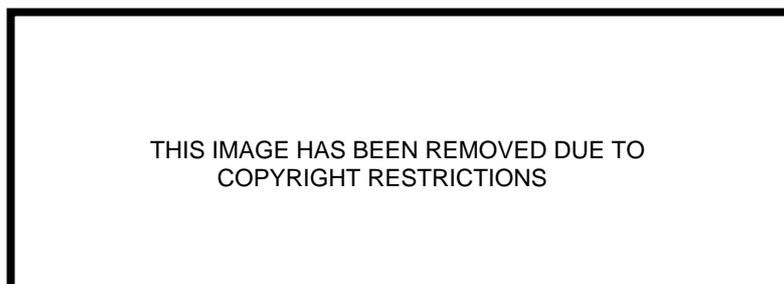


Figure 3: Women performing *ailan dans*

*Ailan dans* is performed by all male, all female or cross-sex ‘teams’. As on other islands, dancers ideally wear matching dress of the same fabric design or colour (see Fuary 1991a:275). Women wear *ailan dres* (island dress), *zazi* (coconut frond over-skirts tied around their waists), *makamak* (white cotton fabric strips tied around their ankles) and other additions such as christmas tinsel or strings of plastic flowers fastened around the head (see figure 3).<sup>1</sup> Men wear white singlets, *zazi* worn over *kaliko* (a cotton sarong with locally crocheted edging), *makamak*, and sometimes a *sweta* (purchased towelling fabric tied around the head) (see figure 4). A head-dress known as a *dari* is also sometimes worn by men for dance, though infrequently (see Philp 2001).<sup>2</sup> *Dari* consist of white seabird feathers fastened to a painted cane framework. The feathers have trimmed ends that together with the colouring of the cane framework, reflect stylistic preferences of the person who fashioned the object. The visual effect of

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<sup>1</sup> Women’s dress designs change from occasion to occasion, depending on the availability of money to purchase *kaliko* (fabric) to make new dresses. A recognised Warraber colour is purple. The current manner of dress is mainly purple with flowers and a lace collar. This is referred to as ‘Warraber colour’, ‘Warraber design’, ‘Warraber dancing clothes’ or ‘Warraber mark’. Other islands have locally distinctive colours and designs associated with men and women’s dancing costume.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson (1988:54) refers to *dari* also as *deri*. At Warraber there is a deep ‘h’ sound joined with the ‘d’.

the *dari* is to elliptically frame the wearer's face. When dancing at night, sharply abrupt head movements from side-to-side create a striking effect of the *dari* appearing (when facing the audience) and disappearing (when a dancer's head is turned).

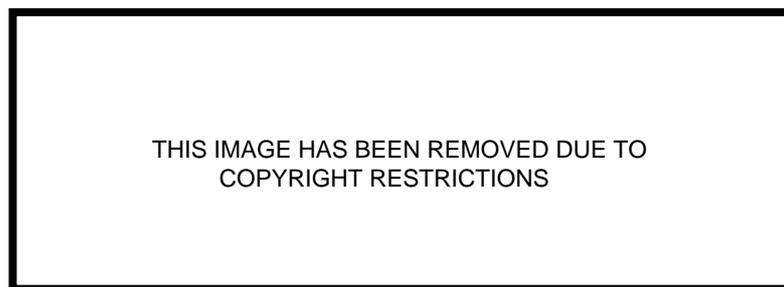


Figure 4: Men performing *ailan dans*

Beckett (1981:6) provides a vivid description of *ailan dans* as follows:

In island dancing [*ailan dans*] as in Taibobo [a Rotuman dance style], the dancers form ranks, but the ranks do not move throughout the piece. The characteristic posture of the dancers is somewhat like that of the traditional dance... they face the watchers, knees apart, trunk forward and arms flexed. ... But instead of the rapid skipping steps there is stamping on the flat of the feet, somewhat as in Taibobo but heavier. At points in the dance the performers may stand, kneel on one or two knees or even lie down before leaping to their feet. Some of the arm movements are reminiscent of Taibobo but there is less in the way of clapping. Each dancer carries a matchbox bean rattle (*gor*; *kolap*), which he shakes as though to accentuate each movement.

Warraber people generally use the Eastern Islands Meriam language word *kulap* to refer to rattles rather than the Kala Lagaw Ya word *gor* (Beckett 1981:6) or the Kulkalgaw Ya term *guwa*, as used on Yam Island (Fuary 1991a:275). Both men and women may carry these items. Alternatively, Warraber women sometimes hold a small bow and

arrow with rattling seeds attached. They may also carry two (fashioned) sticks to clap together or a *marap* (a split section of bamboo that ‘claps’ when shaken sharply). Children dance either without accompaniment or carrying a *kulap* if there are sufficient available. In addition to the *kulap*, men sometimes carry mechanical ‘dance machines’ (*dans masin*). Dance machines are wooden handheld objects manufactured by Islanders for use in island dance and commonly feature articulated, moveable elements used by the dancer during performances (see figure 5).<sup>3</sup> The images represented by dance machines, for example the constellation of the Southern Cross, relate directly to the song content. Movements with the object are often triggered by particular lyrics that are in turn composed to accompany a series of choreographed dance movements.

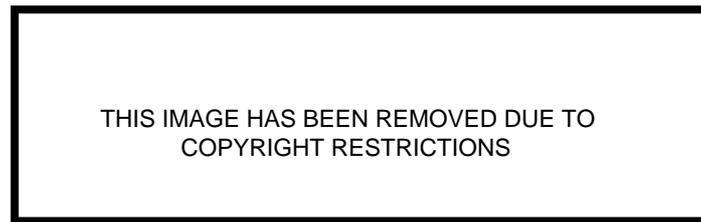


Figure 5: Men using 'dance machines'

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘dance machine’ is also used in the Australian art industry. See Mosby and Robinson (1998), where it features within the larger category of Torres Strait ‘dance objects’. This is divided into ‘objects’ (rattles or *kulap*, bamboo clappers or *marap*, clubs and bows and arrows), ‘musical instruments’ (bamboo slit drum and hourglass drum or *warup*) and ‘dance machines’. Wilson (1988) uses the term ‘dance instrument’ and later ‘display instrument’ (Wilson 1993).

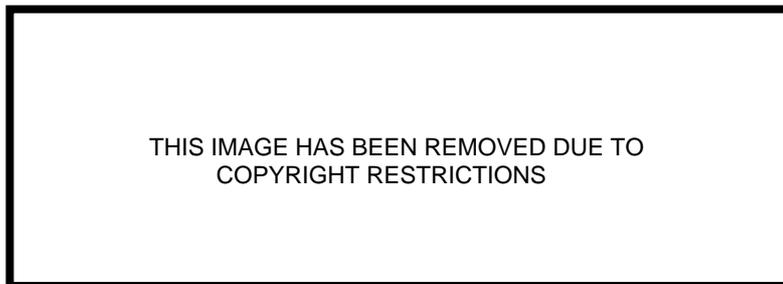


Figure 6: Women singing and drumming for male dancers

Many songs focus on marine industry experiences; others talk about winds, incarceration on Thursday Island, mythological stories, lightning, constellations, or trips to other islands for Christian events.<sup>4</sup> Most songs in the Warraber repertoire were composed by men during the 1950s and song-writing and musical composition continues to be a predominantly male practice. A common view holds that there have been far fewer songs and dances, especially of any quality, created over more recent decades. While contemporary composers and choreographers were living at Warraber during my fieldwork, very few individuals were popularly deemed to be especially competent. This may reflect a contemporary aesthetic preference for songs and dances from a particular period, but it is true that the previous intensity of interest in composing – reflected in the numerous songs and dances dating to the 1950s – was not apparent during my fieldwork.

Women (during male dancing) and men (while women dance) sing in Kulkalgaw Ya while accompanying themselves on instruments: the *warup* (hourglass drum) struck to a

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<sup>4</sup> These songs have some resemblance to the secular form of dancing songs noted by Haddon (1912:291-2). See also York (1998) for a translation and analysis of similar Yam Island songs.

slow beat and a large petrol tin to a faster beat (see figure 6). A *warup* is an hourglass drum obtained from Papuans through purchase, exchange or gift. On acquisition, *warup* are painted by men, usually a single background colour with flowers in the foreground and the names of children, or close female relatives painted along part of their length. The 25 litre petrol tins slip easily between the legs or are secured between the feet for striking with two wooden sticks.

### *Historical Innovation*

Warraberan informants state that prior to *ailan dans*, all Torres Strait Islanders performed *prapa dans* (real or proper dance). This form of dance involved lighter steps and only a few dancers, as opposed to the heavier stamping and multiple line formations that characterise the style of *ailan dans*. Warraberans also note that some of these dances were similar to a form still practised by Saibaian professional dancers and on other occasions describe *prapa dans* as somewhat akin to what they regard as Aboriginal dancing styles. They humorously refer to this dancing as ‘shake a leg’. Mabo and Beckett (2000:166) also note that other Islanders refer to a pre-missionary style called ‘real’ dance or ‘old fashioned dance’. It is

performed to ‘Old Fashioned Songs’ and accompanied only by drums and the dancers’ rattles. The musicians precede the dancers onto the ground and build up a sense of expectation with a slow prelude. Two dancers emerge, adopt a crouching posture and perform skipping steps on the tips of their toes; arm movements show off the decoration on the left forearm, and head movements, the white feather head-dress [*dari*] (Mabo and Beckett 2000:166).

The most significant impact on Torres Strait dance forms was from particular Pacific styles. Mabo (1984) and Beckett (1981) both claim that the contemporary form of *ailan dans* involves a syncretising of the Pacific Rotuman *taibobo* dance with *prapa dans*. Contemporary hand movements known as ‘pulling’ and ‘hauling’ have been traced to *taibobo*, while stance and head movements derive from *prapa dans* style (see also Mabo and Beckett 2000). Certainly Warraber dance has long been a site of dynamic innovation, drawing on a range of influences and sources.

The earliest detailed description of a dance performed by Kulkalgal, of the Warraber and Nagi area, is from 1849 and highlights the presence of local invention:

“The natives of Nagir [i.e. Nagi] seem to have the most friendly communication with the ships that pass and vessels have frequently anchored there and men from them stopping ashore all night. Within the last 12 months they have made a *kowb*, a dance, about the white men. In this dance two of them are dressed up to imitate a white man with a mask made of bark and ... the rest beat the drums and sing ... . They rubbed white on their legs and wore shirts the white men had given them. The rest are dressed out in their own *sameal* – ornamental things which the men wear are called *sameal* ... a *dibi-dibi* [conus shell] breast ornament [and head, below knee, wrist and ankle bands] ... . While in this *kowb* they sing songs about ships, that they are gone away to their own land and will come again with biscuits, tobacco, and knives and shirts, the two *marki* (men acting as Whites) imitate the motions of a white man, holding up and shaking their hands. ... They call this dance *marki angul kowb*- ghost ship dance. It is about two months since they brought it over to show our people [Kaurareg] (Brierly in Moore 1978:199-200).<sup>5</sup>

Participation in the marine industries brought Torres Strait Islander men and women into contact with new styles of dance to observe and to perform and afforded new occasions for dance performances. A view emerges of Torres Strait Islanders being highly receptive to new dance forms. Haddon (1912:290) remarks that “...it is evident that visitors to an island took a pride in exhibiting their local dances, and there is reason to believe that the dances of other islands were occasionally adopted.”<sup>6</sup>

During the early period of Christian missionisation after 1871, the London Missionary Society objected to *prapa dans* due to its links to warfare and initiatory ritual. The organisation made attempts to prevent *prapa dans* performance through the close supervision of its Pacific missionaries who were residing on some islands – though not Warraber or Poruma. Haddon (1912) remarks that LMS missionaries attempted to replace early dance styles with ‘South Sea’ dancing, and to align the occasions for dance performances with the Christian calendar. Haddon (1912:290) notes

[d]ancing has been greatly discouraged by the missionaries although, so far as I have seen, the dances did not possess any objectionable features; but the

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<sup>5</sup> A European woman named Barbara Thompson provided this account. After being shipwrecked she had then lived with Kaurareg for some time, hence in the quote she refers to the Kaurareg as ‘our people’. She here describes the performance to Brierly, the ship’s artist of the *Rattlesnake*, a survey vessel that retrieved her. The accompanying song to this dance consisted of a set of repeated lines: “Tobacco no good (they heard the sailors say this) White man ship dance and sing/ Tobacco biscuit knife/ They have all gone to get for us” (Brierly in Moore 1978:226). The text in parenthesis is Thompson’s explanations to Brierly.

<sup>6</sup> Warraber people still sometimes perform dances and songs from other islands, especially from the Central region, and this is also recorded at Yam Island (Fuery 1991a).

‘teachers’, who are South-Sea men, do not discourage the dances of the Polynesians and Melanesians who reside on or visit the islands, consequently one finds at the present day natives dancing alien dances, those of the Rotuma men being especially popular when we were in Mer.

Warraber, along with its Central Island neighbours, escaped any sustained missionary gaze for a significant period, however contact with numerous outsiders such as Europeans and Pacific Islanders had been facilitated through the marine industries for some time (see chapter 2).

Certainly by the early 20th century, Warraber and Poruma people were performing quite different dance styles to those encountered in the previous century. In particular, they appear to have been experimenting with the use of the line formations that distinguishes the style now known as *ailan dans*:

Mrs F. W. Walker states in a letter that at Christmas 1909, there was a dance of Paremar [Poruma] and Warraber men at Badu; each man and boy carried in one hand a very clever model of a large wooden fish, painted blue and white, and mounted on a stick; the dance and words were all connected with this fish, its life in the sea, the catching of it, etc. Some of the women and girls joined in the dance, forming rows on each side a little distance from the men and boys (Haddon 1912:296).

Innovations in performance style began to slow after 1910, when outside influences were severely reduced by government restriction over population movement between islands (Beckett 1983a:103). It was during this period that Beckett (1987) suggests *ailan dans* was ‘perfected’, i.e. attaining the basic form it currently possesses. At the same time the London Missionary Society (LMS) formally withdrew from the Torres Strait in 1914 to concentrate on Papua New Guinea.

### *LMS Withdrawal*

Establishing missions in Papua New Guinea had been an objective of the LMS for some time, though their struggle with Australian authorities likely sped their movement in this direction. Pacific Islander Missionaries had resisted ceding any authority to the school-teachers installed on some islands by the Queensland Government. The teacher at Murray Island, for example, established a ‘court’ where grievances of diverse nature were heard. The local pastor, a Samoan, reacted by setting up a rival court “appointing his own ‘magistrates’ and levying fines” (Wetherell 2001:206). Senior LMS figures

Samuel McFarlane and James Chalmers had both objected to behaviour of an “authoritarian” nature among Pacific Islander missionaries, but no response from the Society was ever forthcoming (Wetherell 2001). An LMS request to take control of education of Torres Strait Islanders (in addition to their provision of ‘spiritual guidance’) was denied by the government (Beckett 1987:44). The organization subsequently withdrew in 1914, passing control of the mission to the Anglican diocese of Carpentaria (Beckett 1987:44).

For many Islanders, there had been longstanding dissatisfaction with the LMS mission. Struggles had ensued when Samoan LMS missionaries attempted to force the leaders of an Eastern Islands-based cult (known as ‘*Malo-Bomai*’) to abandon their practices. Murray Islanders were on the brink of secession from the LMS with one Murray Islander describing the church’s withdrawal as occurring ‘just in time’ (D. Passi quoted in Wetherell 2001:206). The Anglican hierarchy was generally far more tolerant of aspects of Torres Strait Islander practices than the LMS. A shortage of non-Islander clergy may have meant that the Church had little choice but to be flexible. Local people were frequently left largely to manage their own religious affairs (Beckett 1987:80-1). But MacFarlane, the Anglican missionary to Torres Strait responsible initially for the Central and Eastern Islands from 1917 (MacFarlane 1917-1956), exemplified this attitude.

MacFarlane developed a correspondence with the British anthropologist Haddon through which he provided data on Islander traditions, especially those of the small islands in the Central region about which Haddon had collected little information.<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on the differences in LMS/Anglican policy in a letter to the Australian anthropologist Jeremy Beckett, MacFarlane characterised Anglican policy in the region as adaptive to local conditions:

The L.M.S. had at times teachers who were rather narrow and rigid in outlook: others, like Chalmers, were men of vision and understanding. But as you know, there was something too much of the idea of requiring the new

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<sup>7</sup> Some of this information was included in *Volume One* (1935) of the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Strait* (1901-35). The close connections of MacFarlane and Haddon reflect the increasing contact between other missionaries (LMS) and anthropologists after 1890 (Barker 1996:110). Philp (1999:59) notes that three others (two traders and one teacher) provided Haddon with details of Islander practice and acted as intermediaries between Haddon’s earlier informants and himself over some decades.

converts to abjure that which was not actually ... [unreadable word] of harmony with Christian precepts, or, if I may put it in another way, the Calvinistic-Pentecostal teaching enforced by some did not make appeal. It was rather interesting to find, for instance, when the Anglican Church took over, one of the questions put to the Bishop by some of the old men was concerned with the use of native drums (which had been banned under the L.M.S. in connection with dances): drums were brought back into use again, and we also introduced them into our church services to accompany the singing, etc. (MacFarlane to Beckett 16.7.1959)

The Anglican Church embraced the use of dancing and feasting to commemorate Christian events like Christmas and Easter. Drums (used formerly in *prapa dans*) became acceptable in Anglican church services as were hymns sung in the ‘vernacular’ (Beckett 1987:80-1).

## **Religious Rivalry**

Beckett describes religious politics in Torres Strait Island communities as a heightened social arena where community “rivalry, competition and conflict” are features (1971:29; 1978a). His main focus here concerns the inner politics of the Anglican Church and participation in church events. Aspects of this assessment of intra-Anglican politics can be applied to Warraber, though its much smaller population reduces the severity and duration of disputes. The relevance of age and gender to community standing is readily apparent in Anglican church ceremonies, where older men take precedence over younger men and older women over younger women in receiving communion. At Christian feasts on Warraber today, as in the past (Haddon 1912:130), older and more senior men always eat before women, while children’s food is often separated from the adults’ table. Older men dominate the positions of Anglican Priests and AOG Pastors, in addition to less senior positions such as lay readers, deacons, and churchwardens.

Despite how one may have behaved in one’s youth, positions acquired in the Church hierarchy are regarded as conveying high status, just as the Christian commitment of particular families is also a source of standing in the Warraber community. Commitment to Christianity is often couched in terms of personal motivation, but the actions of others in one’s close family can undermine or embellish that dedication in the eyes of others. Local perspectives suggest that an accomplished Christian must first establish a relationship with God, which in turn will provide an example to other kin

less devoted to Christian practices (such as a spouse or child). It is imagined that families cannot operate according to Christian morality if only a few of its members are engaged in being committed Christians. There is a danger that uncommitted family members may cause those otherwise practising Christians to backslide.

Kinspeople uncommitted to Christian values then, exemplified by a disinclination to share or to work hard, a desire to drink alcohol, and irregular attendance at Church, are embarrassing for their families, and carry a muted implication that the family itself has somehow erred. In particular, the attendance of some but not all family members at a Church service reflects on the family as a whole. Senior members of families encourage all family members to attend. Without full familial attendance, it is doubted that individuals can be wholeheartedly maintaining their devotion to a Christian life, and therefore the admiration of others is diminished (as is, potentially, access to positions of influence, particularly in their church).

These general patterns of interfamilial competition for community standing and individual status tended to be shared across the AOG and Anglican congregations. However, Beckett points also to a 'religious schism' (1971; 1987) created by the addition of a Pentecostal Church on the island whose identity he conceals. This certainly comprised the most evident and serious form of religious rivalry on Warraber, and involved Anglican and AOG congregations contesting the moral boundaries of appropriate Christian practice. *Ailan dans* appears at the heart of this inter-faith dispute.

### *The Rise of Pentecostalism*

The AOG is the largest Pentecostal denomination and its appeal is demonstrated by the rapidly increasing numbers of adherents throughout the world. Numbers topped 61,000 in 1992 in Oceania (Ernst 1994:24), with notable concentrations in places such as Fiji where half of the Pacific AOG adherents live. Numbers there have increased by over 600% since the 1960s (Ernst 1994:24; see also Barker 1990, 1999). The AOG arrived at Warraber approximately twenty years ago, several decades after it began in controversy at Mer, one of the Murray Islands (Beckett 1987:83). In both these cases, the religion was introduced by Torres Strait Islanders into their own communities.

Murray Islanders first encountered Pentecostalism in 1938. Two men returning from the Australian mainland brought with them an interest in Pentecostal forms of healing and styles of song after interaction with Mackay Pentecostals (Beckett 1987:129). After some troubles with the local Anglican priest and Island Council (including the gaoling of the men – see Beckett 1987:129) there were no further public attempts to establish Pentecostal practices until after World War II. At this time Murray Islanders began to intensify their travel to the mainland and found white Anglicanism “both unfamiliar and unwelcoming” (Beckett 1987:81). Islanders had made Anglicanism their own in the islands and in doing so, their religion developed a different appearance to that practised by white Australians. The style of Anglicanism that had developed in the Torres Strait – hymns sung in local languages, drums used to accompany church singing and particularised Islander styles of dress for worship – was incommensurate with Anglicanism on the mainland.<sup>8</sup> While Islanders experienced rejection from white Anglicans, they received encouragement from Pentecostalism. Beckett (1987:81) however, suggests that while Pentecostalist churches were “welcoming Islanders, [they] made no attempt to cater for their cultural idiosyncrasies”. When a converted Murray Islander returned to Mer in 1950, this time Pentecostalism took root (see Beckett 1987:128-130).

Pentecostalism on Mer initially received strong opposition from other Island Councils in the Torres Strait and by Church Officials who successfully prevented Pentecostalism from reaching other islands for a time. Indeed, the Chairman of Murray Island was excommunicated by the Anglican Bishop after giving permission for a Pentecostalist hall to be built on his land in 1950.<sup>9</sup> This was probably deemed necessary by the Anglican Church as an example to prevent the new religion undermining the hegemony of the Church in the region. Other Island Council leaders backed the Anglican synod in enforcing several rules through the island courts: “no pastors would be allowed onto the reserves. No meetings would be permitted. And no Pentecostalist would be allowed to hold public office” (Beckett 1978a:224). Islander-run courts had the power to detain,

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<sup>8</sup> Styles of dress consisted of men wearing *kaliko* (sarong) and women wearing *ailan* dress (also known as *katalasod*).

<sup>9</sup> Beckett (1987) understands the Island Chairman’s actions as resulting from a new commitment to the rights of individuals. He was apparently not interested in becoming a member of a Pentecostal religion himself, and he did not attend worship there.

prosecute and fine Torres Strait Islanders (not Europeans) for a number of mostly moral offences.

In contrast to Mer, the Assemblies of God faith did not arrive in Warraber directly from mainland Australia but instead via other islands in the Torres Strait during the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> By then, Island Councils had collectively agreed to allow the introduction of different Christian denominational churches to the islands (Lawrence 1998:55). Interestingly, it was an Island Councillor who introduced AOG to Warraber after experiencing Pentecostalism at Darnley, his wife's island of origin. At Warraber, adherents of the AOG faith currently constitute a significant proportion of the island's population. The division between Anglican and AOG congregations is expressed in both age, gender and spatial dimensions, frequently cutting across existing complexities in local social relations which include such aspects as 'families', household composition and kinship networks (see chapter 4).

Warraber Pentecostals, like other Australian Pentecostals, are generally characterised by younger and more educated congregations. They are heavily represented by people under fifty years, especially young, single women, while Anglican Church followers have a larger proportion of those over fifty (see Hughes 1996:72; Ernst 1994).<sup>11</sup> Conversions to evangelical Christianities are not uncommon in the Pacific and there too, converts are mostly young with higher educational levels than their elders (see for example Errington and Gewertz 1995). At Warraber, the older section of the village remains primarily an Anglican enclave (see Map 3). Some eighteen households were consistent adherents of the Anglican faith during my fieldwork. Nine AOG households were located in the newer part of the village and comprised mostly young to middle aged families. A further sixteen households situated between old and more recent village areas were more fluid, moving often back and forth between Anglican and AOG affiliation. One complicating pattern involved the tendency of some younger people to

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<sup>10</sup> A similar dynamic has been noted in other parts of the Pacific where the tendency has been for a "redistribution of members between already established Pacific churches [as much] as an invasion from without" (Barker 1999:111).

<sup>11</sup> This contrasts with aspects of Beckett's (1978a) description of earlier Pentecostal congregations at Mer Island: "the Pentecostals consisted of people who had little hope of holding public office: women, for whom no offices were open; men with low educational achievement and defective English; and some failed theological students and teachers" (Beckett 1978a:255).

suggest that they continued with Anglicanism out of ‘respect’ for their elderly kin, especially if their elders held a formal role within the Anglican church hierarchy. In the few cases where such concern to ‘respect’ kin was insufficient to hold younger people to Anglicanism, houses existed that comprised several generations of mixed AOG and Anglican adherents. In such houses, the usually animated, noisy sociality of Warraber households was often relatively muted, particularly on Sundays, when inter-congregational tensions could be aired in competitive critiques of each other’s religious commitment.

In some respects, there seems to be little to separate the congregations in daily life. Among both congregations, there is an emphasis on sharing with older kin, and a general association of men with prominent religious positions. As with Anglican Priests, there are no female Pastors in the AOG church on Warraber, although two women speakers occasionally facilitate the Pentecostal service, something not seen in Warraber Anglicanism.<sup>12</sup> To an extent, Pentecostalism does provide a greater opportunity for relatively younger people to gain positions of authority and standing than would be the case in the Anglican congregation. There are, for example, three AOG pastors on Warraber compared to just one Anglican priest. At the same time, Anglicans regard the difficulty of becoming a priest as enhancing the status of Anglicanism. They observe that other ‘old’ religions such as Catholicism also require extensive scriptural study, and on this basis, can disparage AOG pastors – one Anglican church official referred to their rank as ‘gammon’, i.e. not a sufficiently rigorous qualification.

The energetic, animated preaching style and singing in English and the absence of island drums, combined with contemporary Western church-going dress among Warraber AOG adherents create both a visual and aural contrast to the local Anglican Church (see Beckett 1987:84). In addition, the Assemblies of God emphasise the religious practice known as the three ‘gifts of the spirit’. These comprise *glossolalia*, or ‘speaking with tongues’, the ability to heal by laying on hands, and a notion of personal holiness. Achieving personal holiness requires repudiating and abstaining from dancing, reading novels and wearing make-up (see Hughes 1996). In Warraber contexts,

cigarettes and alcohol are notable targets of moral discourse in both Anglican and AOG missiology. However, Anglicans most obviously continue to engage in these behaviours. To my knowledge (and certainly in public) there were no adherents of the AOG on Warraber Island who smoked cigarettes and very few who were known to consume alcohol. In this sense, AOG assertions of the effectiveness of Pentecostal practice in reinforcing the Christian message is publicly demonstrated. Pentecostalism at Warraber is embraced by its adherents as a laudatory renewal of existing and shared Christian values, part of the potency of evangelical Christianity generally (Caplan 1995:104).

But a far more poignant and important public difference that has emerged between the two Christian congregations, and a source of discernable tension on Warraber, involves AOG objections to the practice of *ailan dans*. Ideologically, both AOG and Anglicans are concerned to emphasise a definitive break from the pre-Christian past and its associations of sorcery, polygamy and violence. In this, both churches exemplify the Judeo-Christian emphasis on rupture, especially in moral terms (McDonald 2001:68). As noted, the style of dance linked by all Warraber residents to the pre-Christian epoch of ‘darkness’ was *prapa dans*. This is categorically separated from *ailan dans*, which Anglicans associate with the ‘light’. By contrast, Warraber AOG people are strongly committed to a view of island dancing as un-Christian and even as linked to the devil. As a consequence, *ailan dans* is not performed at feasting events and Christian celebrations organised by AOG people (see also Lawrence 1998; Beckett 1978a). In 1997 a local primary school concert was cancelled because AOG-affiliated parents objected to the inclusion of *ailan dans* in the performance.

In their objection to this contemporary dance style which remains both popular and frequently performed by Anglicans, the AOG is seeking to discursively shift communal Christian boundaries of temporality and morality, situating *ailan dans* within the pre-Christian ‘darkness’. Not only does this overtly challenge the Anglican congregation’s commitment to Christian values, but it is a substantive reinterpretation of appropriate sacred practice, which Ricoeur (1995:70) characterises as the very substance grounding community. He argues: “for a community to address itself to a substantially different

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<sup>12</sup> See Davis (1998:98-101) for a discussion of Anglican gender roles on Saibai Island and Douglas’

notion of the sacred would be to make a decision concerning its social identity". The AOG challenge does not alter the fundamental shape of the sacred on Warraber – this remains Christianity (underpinning shared identification as Christians). But its concern with the continuation of *bipo taim* behaviour addresses a point of very real vulnerability. While the Anglican congregation, like the AOG, subscribe to the notion of an idealised separation between *taim blo dark* and the Coming of the Light, the reality is that this division is deeply and inherently ambiguous, on Warraber as in many other post-colonial Christian communities where the light-dark metaphor expresses a temporal divide.

### **Ambiguous Temporality: darkness and light**

While missionaries in Pacific and Melanesian contexts were concerned to foster a motif of 'before' and 'after', by which transformation to Christianity ensues after abandoning certain practices, it has been suggested that this discourse may also reflect distinct pre-Christian indigenous symbols (Thomas 1992b:373). In some instances this leads to images of light and dark being put to distinctively local uses. In New Ireland, Christian metaphors were clearly preceded by positive indigenous metaphors of 'light', such as "metaphors of the sun, revelation and abundance ...[and] knowledge acquisition magic" (Eves 1998:98-99). The existence of indigenous metaphors like 'light' here helped to consolidate the salience of the discourse of light and dark in the context of Christianity.

The existence of pre-colonial metaphors of light and dark have been inferred in the Torres Strait from early ethnographic sources, and their link to later Christian discourse has also been suggested: "[w]hile the biblical associations of 'light' versus 'darkness' are obvious, the association of 'light' with Christian power may also be a strong traditional referent to the 'light' which emanated from totemic effigies..." (Fuary 1991a:156). Drawing on Haddon's (1904) research regarding the now defunct Sigay-Mayaw cult at Yam Island during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Fuary (1991a:103-4) notes:

The cult officials for Sigay, lifted up the turtle shell effigy, placed it on a bed of stones, and then danced and chanted. A similar ritual followed for Mayaw so that the effigies of both cult figures were brought to life and ... became the totem. The 'spirit' of each of these effigies, a clear stone (*buya*),

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(2002) analysis of Christian women's groups in Vanuatu.

was then placed in or under them. Each stone was kept in a case made from large bivalves (*akul*), decorated with dog and crocodile teeth. One end could be opened so that the stone reflected its light.

Fuary maintains that certain key ancestors of Yam Island residents are said to have seen the stones from which light shone. At Warraber, some elderly people also claim to have seen light generating stones during their childhood. Though missing for many years, these stones were said to have been once held inside the same species of large bivalve shell (*akul*) and stored at a still-venerated site known as the *big zogo pleis* (big zogo place, see figure 1). Other islands, like Poruma, are also reputed to have kept such stones in bivalve shells, although as at Warraber they are now missing. The objects were described as forming part of a (long abandoned) ritual process associated with the *zogo pleis*, through which *wongai* fruit was attracted to the island's trees. Warraber residents claim to have a reputation among other Torres Strait Islanders as being a plentiful source of particularly sweet fruit.

In 1919 Anglicanism instituted the annual July 1 celebration of the 1871 landing of the LMS as the 'Coming of the Light'. At Darnley Island, MacFarlane suggested the incorporation of two 'stones' brought to the site of a sandstone cross erected to commemorate the landing of the LMS missionaries. These stones – *med* and *geger* – were said to represent the sun and moon. MacFarlane says that he had "suggested the symbolism of their location beneath the cross and association with the 'Coming of the Light'" (MacFarlane to Beckett 16.6.59).

Jolly (1996:141) makes the cautionary remark that an extreme, even 'overdrawn,' antithesis between the dark and the light is not found in all indigenous conversion narratives; many are "far more subtle and ambiguous in their rendering of the transformation from the 'time of darkness' to the 'time of light'." Certainly, temporal metaphors of 'darkness' and 'light' were ubiquitously understood and used at Warraber as indexing the significance of regional conversion to Christianity (and without reference to light-bearing stones). Nonetheless Islanders have sometimes argued that the existence of indigenous spiritual precursors to Christianity facilitated the acceptance of the new religion. Church of Torres Strait Bishop Dave Passi for example, in reference to Torres Strait Islander artefacts appearing in a National Museum of Australia exhibition

has interpreted the objects as “visual expressions of ... profound ... spiritual values” (Philp 2001:viii).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Passi has suggested elsewhere that Anglicanism was intrinsically linked to earlier cult-based spiritual practices. His evidence to the Mabo land rights case included the claim that “the cult hero Malo had been sent by God as a precursor of Christ, and clerical orders of the Anglicans were the 'fulfilment' of the *Malo* priesthood” (Wetherell 2001:207; see also Sharp 1993:106-110; 1998; Mullins 2001).

The suggestion that pre-colonial cult activity in the *bipo taim* period facilitated the arrival of Christianity blurs the moral distinction between darkness and light that the category *bipo taim* indexes, or at least, problematises its rhetorical function as marking discrete and contrasting moral epochs. In this interpretation, the expression *bipo taim* is potentially reduced to a mere historical marker – signifying the period before the arrival of missionaries – rather than a fundamentally transforming shift in moral behaviour through the awakening of Christian understandings, the dawn of a new era of ‘Jesus time’ (*taim blo Zizus*).

In fact, a range of views throughout the region reiterate the idea that it was Torres Strait Islanders’ powerful *bipo taim* spirituality that facilitated their transition to Christianity. A prominent political leader from Darnley Island, George Mye, explained:

it was easy for the people to adapt to Christianity because of the spirituality that had already existed in the islands; accepted by our people before them. In zogo times, zogo is what spirituality is all about; because it’s not the intrinsic value of the thing that the people worship in the zogo house, the same as in the church now, but it’s that spirit, the power, because of that spirituality when Christianity came in, Christianity was all about spirituality (SBS 2001).

In this instance, the suggestion is not just that existing *bipo taim* spiritual values smoothed the path to Christian conversion. An explicit link is being asserted between Christianity and *zogo* practices, notwithstanding the general association of the *zogo* sites with headhunting (as in the story of Gagabe, chapter 2). This seems to contradict the salient terms of an absolute contrast between *taim blo dak* (dark time) and the Coming of the Light, which very much rely on a view of headhunting and of sorcery as not just a

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<sup>13</sup> The exhibition was titled *Past Time: Torres Strait Islander Material from the Haddon Collection, 1888-1905* and appeared at the National Museum of Australia and the Cairns Regional Gallery in 2001.

feature of the dark *bipo taim* period but as immoral (and un-Christian) behaviour. While the speaker does not openly emphasise sorcery here, it is implicit in his use of the term 'power'. The idea emerges here that spirituality and power, including that of sorcerers, may somehow be aligned or possess characters in common.

One Warraber Anglican informant who also maintained that Christian-type 'rules' existed before the arrival of LMS Missionaries represents the *bipo taim* sorcerer as a figure representing moral power somewhat equivalent to contemporary Christian values:

The way people were taught, was the same as in the bible. That word [Christianity] hadn't arrived yet. But people knew that one shall not steal. People made gardens but they knew not to steal from another's gardens. If you were caught stealing from gardens, *maidhe man* would kill you. You couldn't steal. People had to obey these laws.

According to many Anglican informants then, not only did a life of positive moral codes exist prior to Christianity, but importantly, the sorcerer was a form of moral figure, enforcing similar forms of sociality as Christian values do today.

The evident ambiguity in popular Anglican thinking about 'dark time' and the 'Coming of the Light' can be attributed in part to Anglican missionary teaching itself. In their deliberate departure from the practices of the LMS period, Anglicanism intentionally promulgated the view that there were aspects of continuity between Christianity and earlier indigenous cults (Beckett 1987:80; Wetherell 2001). The Anglican Priest MacFarlane notes:

Our policy was to "Christianise" old customs where possible, and retain native forms of expression (rather than so-called "white man custom"), instead of arbitrarily cutting-out everything. The "making of the new yam" ceremonies were taken over into our harvest thanksgiving; and in other things we tried to give an interpretation of the fullness of the Christian faith by emphasising its "breadth" rather than a series of prohibitions. The Islanders, somewhat like our Celtic people, have a deep sense of the supernatural and the spiritual, and so found in our own church ... something into which they could perhaps enter with a sense of greater understanding. ... "Spirits" play a big part in their life: we tried to show them that their ideas in this way were not something to be laughed at and ridiculed but that there is the reality of a good spirit protecting them against evil spirits (MacFarlane to Beckett 16.7.1959).

Doubtless, this orientation facilitated aspects of older practices being transposed into the new religion, both intentionally and unintentionally.

Elsewhere, authors have drawn attention to the active grafting of Christian concepts onto local understandings in what Thomas (1994:63) has described as the “interpenetration of specifically religious ideas”. According to the Karavan people of the Duke of York Islands (East New Britain), for example, “major cultural institutions such as moiety groupings and the use of shell money were often attributed to the arrival of [the missionary] Brown (or to his ostensible age-mate, the biblical figure Noah)” (Errington and Gewertz 1995:92). The crucial point is that it is rarely possible to speak either of the effacement of local culture by the penetration of Western ideas or the assimilation of imports into prior cultural schema (Thomas 1994:63).

A number of authors discuss at length the “complexity of exchange in the colonial process” (Thomas 1994:63-64) which gives rise to critical points of ambivalence and incoherence in representations of Otherness, difference and alterity on both sides of inter-cultural encounters. Douglas (2002:13) for example, draws attention to slippage and ambivalence, ambiguity and movement in this context, producing what she terms “slippery intersections” of local thinking about tradition, Christianity, community and modernity which “elude simplistic binary categorization”. For indigenous peoples, these uncertainties open spaces for a wide array of acts of resistance, acceptance and incorporation:

representations of the Other are transposed, deployed in debates within indigenous society concerning its affirmation, reform and refashioning; they are projected back at Europeans with a variety of serious and parodic intentions, and enter into discourses of tribal, customary and national identities (Thomas 1994: 64-65).

According to Eves (1998:97) for example, the Lelet of New Ireland use a Christian imagery of oppositions - darkness and light - as points around which they have ‘refigured’ their identity and their past in the colonial and postcolonial context. As part of this process, Europeans came to be viewed as a source of power, knowledge and wealth, while locals constitute themselves in negativity, as inferior to the lightness which Europeans embody. However:

the importance of all these oppositions *is that they are ambiguous*, they denigrate the black as evil, inferior, savage, but often, as in Christian discourse, hold out the opposite possibility – of becoming elevated, good or civilised (Eves 1998:97-8, emphasis added).

White’s work in the Solomons reveals considerable ambiguity in local understandings of the past: “perceptions of ancestors and their pre-Western ways may be fraught with

ambivalence, encompassing both ridicule of primitivism and respect for a lost vitality and power (White 1991:14). Thomas (1994:63) suggests that indigenous understandings often deflect representations of Christianity as a missionary import “by positing a latent or implicit Christianity in ancestral religion and sociality, which evangelists merely brought into the light”.

These insights are clearly relevant to the Warraber situation. While ‘white’ Australians are not a common part of Warraber Islanders everyday lives, they nonetheless view them as possessing considerable political power and economic wealth. The desirable qualities of outsiders and attempts to appropriate these are also juxtaposed with positive views of themselves in comparison, especially in images of the past. Warraber people can reflect nostalgically about *bipo taim* people, depicting them both as healthier and enjoying a greater abundance of foods than contemporary island populations. Male warriors are particularly emphasised in such portrayals, represented as being stronger, taller and more independent than men today. Importantly, these formidable men are also seen as having exercised power over whites and other outsiders in the past, particularly by removing the heads of unlucky visitors. People emphasise their past autonomy, equated as a time before the ‘*guvman*’ (state governance).

Representations of greater male power existing during ‘darkness time’ in the Torres Strait is noted by a number of authors (see for example, Beckett 1987; Davis 1988; Fuary 1991a; 1997). In some instances, this is contrasted with the ongoing physical decline of bodies during the ‘light’.<sup>14</sup> Saibaians, for example, apparently consider that they have been literally ‘shrinking’ as a people. Their ancestors are envisaged as

men of great physical stature, ... taller, broader of chest, possessed of greater visual abilities, more patient waiting on the prow of the canoe for passing dugong or quicker and lighter across the dance ground. Their abilities were congruent with the overwhelming physicality of their life: the many hours each day spent hunting dugong and turtle, gardening and in earlier times, warring (Davis 1998:127-8).

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<sup>14</sup> Compare Clark (1989) where a Wiru (Southern Highlands, PNG) notion of male bodies as ‘shrinking’ is linked to their experience of Christianity and development and local interpretations of these through gendered idioms of the body.

Fuary (1997:253) suggests that Yam Island men find Ion Idriess’s ‘boy’s own style’ novels regarding the Torres Strait particularly salient, especially *Drums of Mer*, as they provide a “representation of Torres Strait Islander men as fierce, beautifully bodied, preoccupied with magical power and warfare, as a world unto themselves ... . [T]hey can see themselves and their Meriam counterparts as potent and impenetrable, ambivalently engaged in resisting colonial incursions.”

Similarly, Murray Islanders note that “the ‘old people’ were bigger than their present day descendants and – unlike the latter – merciless killers, a quality that enhanced their sexual powers.” (Beckett 1987:95). At Yam Island “reflections on *bipo taim* typically focus on the actions of ... key local men, and the power which they managed and exerted through correct ritual performance and warfare.” (Fuary 1991a:122).

*Ailan dans* overtly incorporates and seems to valorise a number of these elements which Warraber Anglicans connect to their pre-Christian history. A motif on men’s white dancing singlets for example (see figure 7) consists of two images that are readily identifiable to local people as signifying significant *bipo taim* sites. The first image is that of a large wooden ‘hook’ called a *tudi* which Warraber informants associate with increase rituals performed in the *bipo taim* period (see figure 1). In the ritual, this hook is said to have been used by sorcerers at the *big zogo pleis* in conjunction with spoken ‘magic words’ in order to increase the island’s supply of *wongai* fruit. The word *tudi* appears on the singlet, under the motif.

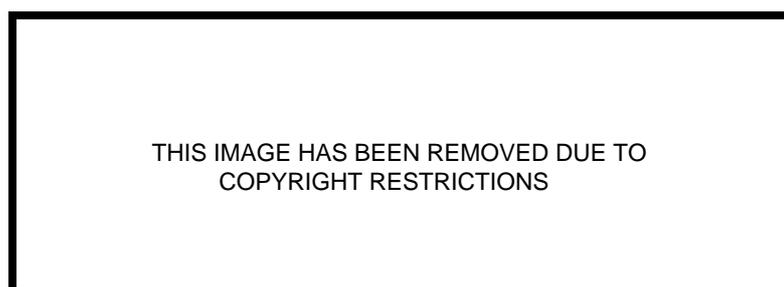


Figure 7: Men dancing in *zogo* motif singlets

The second component is a circular arrangement of trumpet (*bu*) shells, an illustration of the Warraber site known as the *smol zogo* (see figure 2). Widespread local narratives concerning the creation of the *smol zogo* explain that each shell represents a head taken during *bipo taim* by Warraber head-hunters. The word *zogo* appears above the Warraber singlet image of a collection of trumpet shells from the *smol zogo pleis* with the wooden hook (*tudi*) from the *big zogo*. This *zogo-tudi* design is the only motif recently worn by Warraber male dancers. It is only worn by Warraber men and not by women or dancers from other islands who have their own motifs. Poruma Island men, for example, wear singlets bearing the image of two coconut palms and the name *urab* (the Kulkalgaw Ya term for coconut).

The male *dari* headdress is another object linked to *bipo taim*. In this case it is not explicitly linked to sorcery, but rather to male power, and in particular, fighting prowess in warfare and head-hunting raids. The *dari* has come to serve as a regional symbol for collective identity as Torres Strait Islanders, a role that has been enhanced by its appearance (in simplified graphic form) on the Torres Strait flag. However, it also remains for Warraber Island men an important local symbol of masculinity and in particular, male potency or vigour. Local aesthetic judgements of male dance performances often focus on the relative ‘strength’ that appears in the dancing. Male dancers themselves explain that they are not celebrating male sorcery or head-hunting in *ailan dans*, but that the images of male power represented variously by the *zogo*, *tudi* and *dari* (and their combination) serves to invigorate the dancing.<sup>15</sup> Beckett (1987:95) notes on Murray Island that:

There was no question of going back to the old ways. It would have been socially ruinous for anyone to suggest such a thing; but the Islanders were unwilling to forget their past, or to let the missionaries appropriate it. Instead they took refuge in the picturesque and dramatic, celebrating the warfare and the ritual in a way that revealed a nostalgia for lost male power.

As noted, *ailan dans* performances are usually components of larger events that have important Christian religious foci, such as Christmas, or a tombstone unveiling incorporating Christian ritual and prayer. The alignment of dance with Christian practice in this way by Anglicans on Warraber seems to involve overtly limiting the

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<sup>15</sup> Some men try to make their performance ‘strong’ by drinking alcohol before a performance. However, this can result in the performance being described as *ovamak* (obviously exaggerated) if the dancer is overly affected.

possibilities of ambiguity inherent in the use of such *bipo taim* imagery, of negating any suggestion of a desire to “go back to the old ways”. For the followers of Assemblies of God, however, these components of *ailan dans* allow it to be categorised as a dark practice, in opposition to the light of Christianity.

### **Competing Sources of Power**

For AOG on Warraber, the male dancing singlets’ motif of *zogo* paraphernalia connect the dancers to an image of power prevalent during the *taim blo dark* and in particular, male fighting power in the form of headhunting. The singlets suggest an association of island dancing with sorcery, which AOG members envisage as an alternative or competing spiritual power to Christianity associated with the pre-Christian period. Indeed, they urge against wearing *dari* headdresses in any context. Knowing and speaking *langus sing* (dancing songs in Kulkalgaw Ya) is also regarded by them as un-Christian, and is described as *satana*.

Attempts to abandon *ailan dans* have occurred at other islands in the Torres Strait. At Darnley Island, the Assemblies of God Church has attracted young people who are “forbidden by the Pentecostals to perform secular dances and thus most contemporary Islander dances are performed by members of the Anglican Church” (Lawrence 1998:59). While *ailan dans* is understood among Warraber Anglicans as being consistent with Christian practice, sorcery is envisaged as antithetical to the practice of Christianity. But sorcery is also understood as transcending, and to an extent subverting, the temporal rupture represented by the Coming of the Light, ensuring some aspects of the dark endured into the light (see also Beckett 1987:96). For the AOG, *ailan dans* performance embodies the fact that the rupture was incomplete – the AOG church continues to advocate that people must turn away from ‘superstitious’ (sometimes ‘devilish’ and ‘un-Christian’) belief and practice. These suggestions constitute a considerable enlargement of the indicators of *satana* beliefs and practices in the Warraber community. However it is also true that sorcery itself, as a negative practice enduring from the *bipo taim* period, continues to be a source of concern to all Warraberans, including Anglicans.

The term ‘power’ (*powa*) is used by Warraberans as a contemporary euphemism for sorcery and to describe the healing abilities of Priests and Pastors. When distinguishing sorcery from Christian forms of *powa*, the word is usually whispered and accompanied by a hand gesture where the fingers make a ‘clicking’ motion without producing sound. The gesture alone may be used if the speaker is within earshot of others. The English expression ‘sorcery’ occurs infrequently among Warraber people, but equivalent Kulkalgaw Ya terms are used: *maidhe* to denote the practice of sorcery and *maidhe man* to denote a practitioner of sorcery. While contemporary practitioners of *maidhe* are all considered to be malevolent, pre-Christian *maidhe man* are regarded as having possessed both curative and malevolent power. Which of these was exercised relied largely on the mood or temperament of the individual sorcerer.

Within local understandings, envy is the critical motivation for sorcery, with prominent and skilful dancers as well as song and dance composers described as being particularly likely targets. The public nature of their performances means they risk inadvertently overshadowing a participant who is also secretly a sorcerer, thereby inviting their ire.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that the common Warraber observation concerning a lack of exceptional song composers and dance choreographers today is only partly nostalgic, and also relates to concerns about sorcery. Exceptional talent in these areas not only potentially attracts a sorcerer’s attention but is itself often linked to the power of sorcery. Denying the existence of such skills in the contemporary period effectively distances the practice of *ailan dans*, and its present-day practitioners, from associations with sorcery. Nonetheless, aesthetic or competitive discussions of *ailan dans* continue to be entangled with talk and suspicions concerning sorcery and this constitutes a sub-text of every performance event, an entanglement that likely adds weight to AOG opposition to the practice.

### *Protection from Sorcery*

Both churches claim to possess superior powers of resistance to the influences of sorcerers and both link their claim to the power of healing; the Anglicans through prayer and priestly blessed paraphernalia, the AOG through the laying on of hands.

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<sup>16</sup> Sorcerers’ targets are not restricted to such individuals but include people skilled in other areas.

Interestingly, *bipo taim* sorcerers are also associated with the power to heal, as well as to harm. In this sense both the AOG and the Anglicans have attempted to displace the power of sorcery with the power of Christian churches, although in the former case this is taken much further.

Sorcery (*maidhe*) continues to be regarded as a potent and active force; there are individuals suspected or reputed to be practising sorcerers known at both the local and regional level.<sup>17</sup> Haddon (1904:320) recorded *maidhe* as a term encompassing both malevolent and curative potential depending on the temperament of the practitioner:

A *maidelaig* [laig=person] was a man who understood all kinds of magical and medicinal lore; for example, a *maidelaig* could cause disease and death and could cure an illness. He could lure dugong, turtle and fish by charms or he could strike and kill animals with unerring aim, and he knew furthermore the virtues of animal and vegetable products. At all events such was his reputation. (1904:321)

When talking about *bipo taim*, contemporary Warraber informants agree with Haddon that *maidhelaig* possessed both malevolent and curative powers. These were seen as part of the same schema, dependent on the temperament of the individual sorcerer. However, it is interesting that contemporary *maidhelaig* are represented as having wholly malevolent intentions. It is Anglican priests and AOG pastors who are attributed powers of healing.<sup>18</sup> At Warraber both priestly and pastoral prayer is frequently employed in both curative and protective capacities (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:260).

Beckett (1987:98) writes that it was not unusual on Mer for an Anglican priest to be viewed as possessing curative powers, and some priests were also reputed to have clairvoyant insights, though there is no mention whether this is ever referred to in terms relating to sorcery. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:260) notes that in the 1970s

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<sup>17</sup> The identities of sorcerers are usually known or suspected if they are from one's own or even from other islands. However there are occasions where phenomena are observed that signify sorcery is being practised but the practitioners are unknown to the observer.

<sup>18</sup> There are instances of other individuals being credited with healing powers, though no ordinary Warraber residents were regarded as being healers at the time of my fieldwork.

Particularly potent healers are regarded as coming from Papua New Guinea or from Aboriginal Australia, where superior efficacy in all *maidhe*-related matters is taken for granted. These same locations are also considered to contain an abundance of sorcerers.

Mabuiag people used the term 'maidelaig' for Anglican priests. She envisages a more direct connection between the distant and more recent past at Mabuiag in saying that

...many [positions] maintain a resemblance to their precursors-both in function and importance. For example, Anglican priests educated and ordained on the Australian mainland are considered to be "good" maidelaig on their home island. They perform helpful puri puri (magic) with modern tools from the church in addition to using methods learned from their ancestors.

At Warraber, the term *maidhe* was solely used to refer to malevolent powers. No Warraber priest – past or present – was described as possessing *maidhe* power, though some Islander men holding other official positions within the Anglican Church have been suspected of sorcery.

Malevolent sorcery is believed to target people largely through illness and many deaths are attributed locally to this cause. Suspicions of sorcery extend to the deaths of elderly persons. Despite being known to suffer a diagnosed illness, medical explanations do not preclude the illness as deriving from a malevolent source. Instead, the social position of the ill or deceased person becomes significant in ascertaining whether their status could have inflamed jealousy in known or unknown sorcerers, whether deservedly or undeservedly. Illness causing objects lodged in an afflicted person's body by sorcerers (*maidhe man*) were said to have been removed from time to time by healers.

As a result of this danger, many Anglicans own phials of water blessed by a priest and referred to as 'bodyguards'. These are considered able to prevent attacks by sorcerers and are carried when an individual is especially fearful or more routinely, hidden in a cupboard (often in a bedroom) as protection for an entire home. Phials of coconut oil, similarly blessed by a priest, can be used for curing illness (especially caused by sorcery) by being rubbed onto the body. Both bodyguards and healing oils can be passed to others for use, although Warraber residents are generally reluctant to do so because the items are very highly valued. Their power is not personalised but has a function that, in this sense, can be described as reified.

The AOG eschews such practices as themselves constituting a form of sorcery. As noted, AOG pastors, like Anglican priests, are linked to curative powers. However the AOG conception of this power is far more personalised, and as inseparable from its

moment of use. To heal, the pastor 'lays hands' on the congregation member and the intervention of God and/or Jesus is invoked. In other words, the location of agency in AOG healing practice is much more firmly linked to God and to prayer, and to the individualised belief in Jesus by the AOG adherent. It is not attached to or present in an object. In the context of an inter-island combined denomination religious Fellowship in 1999 a visiting Islander pastor openly questioned the efficacy of Anglican blessed oils and holy water. Promoting the direct healing power of Jesus acting through the 'laying on of hands', the Pastor labelled bodyguards as 'idols'. Effectively, he was publicly recasting local Anglican beliefs as pagan and pre-Christian, in comparison to AOG practices (and doing so in the presence of Anglicans). Indeed, AOG informants affirm that they do not need to carry bodyguards or keep them in their homes; they claim to have no fear of *maidhe men* because sorcery is unable to affect those who *sabe Zizus* (know Jesus). The AOG Church is understood by its members as offering a more powerful and protective source of power than is found in Anglican beliefs.

### *Cleavage and Community*

The AOG presents a potent challenge to institutionalised Anglican hegemony in the islands. Mullins (2001:27-28) is correct in suggesting that the continuing presence of sorcery

is enough to convince many Torres Strait Islanders that there is still a need to strenuously maintain the divide between 'darkness' and 'light', and the unambiguous and uncompromising stand Pentecostal churches take on things *bipotaim* [sic] has surely contributed to their success.

In condemning the persistence of aspects of 'darkness' in the time of 'light' the AOG draws on existing moral discourses of temporal rupture shared by both Churches while urging the completion or perfection of that rupture. At the same time it (re)frames as wholly negative the ambiguity that constitutes a fundamental feature of local thinking about the *bipo taim* period. This becomes a kind of un-Christian recalcitrance responsible for continuing community fears surrounding malevolent *maidhe*. The endurance of aspects of *bipo taim* power in the guise of *ailan dans* and bodyguards, with their undercurrents of positive (powerful/curative) sorcery, are linked to the practices of another local (and competing) religious collectivity and stands condemned.

Contention is quite evident in combined Christian Fellowships of AOG and Anglicans held at Warraber, often involving congregations from other Central Islands. Loud proselytising using a microphone dominates these events and the few older Anglicans who engage in quieter modes of address seem oddly out of place. As the event moves deeper into the evening, voices grow louder and the amplification increasingly distorts as speakers try to rouse the audience, exhorting them to shout affirmations as a sign of agreement with their views. Inter-denominational Fellowships are one of the main events where rival participants exhibit their commitment to Christianity through competitive speaking. The aim is not for speakers to debate or contradict other speakers, but rather to out-perform them in terms of manifestly eliciting audience appreciation.

Interestingly, the occasion shares this feature with *ailan dans*. In Fellowship proselytising, the nature of ‘the word’ is debated through different styles of talking, just as *ailan dans* involves different ‘styles’ of singing or movement. Appreciative observations and critical comments after the event, pointing to one or another of the speakers being more or less effective compared to others, closely parallels the talk that follows dance performances.

But it is also the case that the AOG and Anglican Joint Fellowships manifest a commitment to shared Christian community that cuts across denominational difference. This is evident in the discourse of inclusion that surround these events. Fellowships stressed common values within an embracing Christian religiosity, featuring the sayings that ‘religions will come and go but Jesus is here forever’ (*rilizin i seinz bat Zizus i matha stap*) and that Warraber Christians all ‘worship the same God’ (*mipla ol preya lo wan gad*). The events were also often represented in terms of Christians coming together as ‘*wan lo Zizus*’ (one in Jesus). Residents characterise the carefully delivered invitations to Joint Fellowships between officials of each Church as an act of *gud pasin* (literally, good fashion). The expression refers variously to correct behaviour (*akt gud wei*), generosity, kindness, and being thoughtful towards others, all of which are qualities interpreted as constituting moral Christian practice.

*Gud pasin* could be described as a central value within locally idealised notions of sociality and moral community (see chapter 1). Indeed, the rhetoric of ‘*wan lo Zizus*’ (‘one in Jesus’) is closely matched with ‘*yumpla ol ailan pipel*’ (‘we are all island people’), invoking and affirming the dense network of familial connections and

commitment to their common place of residence, Warraber Island. It appears that while Warraber people are involved in competing discursive practices surrounding *powa*, they nevertheless are also mindful of cleavage and concerned to prevent its exaggeration and possible community fragmentation. Indeed, Fellowship occasions are punctuated by religious singing in Creole (see Lawrence 1998). The frequency of joint fellowships has increased over the period I have been visiting Warraber (and Poruma), and seem calculated, at least in part, to avoid the *bad pasin* that would follow splitting the community along religious, political, and ultimately social lines.

AOG-affiliated individuals in the Warraber community also generally participate alongside others on important celebratory occasions that involve *ailan dans*, such as tombstone openings. Tombstone openings (the ritualistic unveiling of a newly erected permanent headstone) are one of the most important Christian ceremonial and social occasions in the Torres Strait Islands, involving a network of kin in considerable planning, preparation, organization and commitment of resources (see Beckett 1987:221; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:314; Fuary 1991a:300). The event “demonstrates and reifies approval of the enduring cultural principle for morally based obligatory behavior between kin and identity as ... [an] ... Islander” (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann’s 1980a:314). Feasting and *ailan dans* usually form the culminating features of the event. In this context, and despite the attitude of their church, AOG members have formed part of the audience watching *ailan dans* and some individuals have even spontaneously participated in the dancing (though not practising as part of the team in the preparations for the event), reinforcing Beckett’s (1987:233) point that a tombstone opening “has the capacity to override religious divisions”. Local Anglicans for their part privately noted this apparent inconsistency while affirming the individuals’ actions as reflecting the poignancy of their familial connections to the deceased and obligations to living relations.

However, at a recent tombstone opening held at Warraber during 2001, the boundaries of dancing and not dancing between Anglicans and AOG were sharply drawn. On this occasion, no *ailan dans* was performed. The husband of the deceased woman was a prominent member of the AOG Church, and his wife had been a committed follower. As with other ceremonies, the post-tombstone opening feast was held in Warraber’s Public Hall. The Hall is adjacent to a large open space where *ailan dans* usually takes place after the feasting. At this particular event, people finished eating and instead of

moving outside to wait for island dancing to begin, everyone was directed to move away from the public space to the widower's house (adjacent to the AOG Church) where songs were sung that usually accompany AOG Church events.

Warraber residents stated that this was the first local tombstone opening anyone could recall at which no *ailan dans* occurred.<sup>19</sup> As a leading church member, the widower's hymn-singing version of a tombstone opening established a clear example to other AOG members of an innovated arrangement more consistent with AOG teachings. For their part, Anglicans articulated several responses to this AOG variation of the ceremony. Young people commented openly that it was '*slaik*' (slack or dull) while older Anglicans, more disinclined to court controversy, tended to state simply that it was the '*wei blo dempla*' (their way, not ours) and perhaps not surprising given the obviously declining interest of AOG people in *ailan dans* performance. A third, more candid response was that it made the tombstone opening feel '*nadakain*' (odd) in terms of the longstanding mode in which tombstone unveilings are celebrated. This recent AOG controlled tombstone event constituted the most public and categorical statement to date of AOG difference in the communal arena. It remains to be seen what future tombstone openings held by AOG people and their families will look like. At the same time, the frequency of joint fellowships has been increasing.

## Conclusion

Far from existing in some remote and reified historical past, the 'Coming of the Light' continues to unfold in the practices and discourse of contemporary Torres Strait island life. This chapter has highlighted contestations surrounding the temporal terms of Christian and non-Christian practice, good and evil on Warraber as no longer involving missionaries and Islanders, local heathens and Pacific/European Christians. What has emerged is "a more complicated configuration ... within the collectivity and the subjectivity" (Jolly 1996:253) of Warraber Christians themselves. Intra-community denominational splits can "threaten to dissolve the identification between the community and a specific denomination" (Barker 1999:116). At Warraber this split was

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence (1988) has observed AOG celebrations of Christian events at Erub as also involving feasting but not *ailan dans*.

evidenced according to debates surrounding what constitutes appropriate moral Christian practice and the superior efficacy of AOG protective power.

While the Pentecostal-Anglican difference provides an axis for cleavage among Warraber Christians, it remains the case that the community appears concerned to prevent social fragmentation on Warraber. The moral ideal of *gud pasin*, inseparable from the idealised social vision of Warraber residents as constituting a single, closely related whole or ‘family’ (*ol wan pamle*) continues to find expression through joint AOG and Anglican fellowships, where a discourse of Christian unity is prevalent. These seem deliberately calculated to avoid the *bad pasin* inherent in fostering community tensions and difference as against harmony and collectivity.

However, the potential for cleavage within the Warraber community needs to be kept in perspective, ranged against such factors as the small population of the island – approximately two hundred people living in less than fifty households. The embracing capacity of local cognatic kinship ties results in each island resident being able to address every other by a kinship term. With the obvious exception of a few periodically transferred government teachers and nurses, there are no strangers living on Warraber. The notion of family (*pamle*) is a key discourse of sociality that cuts across other forms of antagonism and social differences and continues to affirm Warraberans as a collectivity. Warraber forms of familial relatedness are described in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four: Kin Relatedness and the Family

### Introduction

We saw in chapter 3 how Assembly of God and Anglican views diverge regarding the issues of *ailan dans*, healing power and sorcery. But the two congregations have a common perspective on important aspects of social life at Warraber, in particular notions of familial composition and of relationships shaped by age and gender. In reviewing recent trends in Pacific Christianities, Barker (1999) has questioned whether new religious groups such as Pentecostals have fully moved toward notions of individualism that requires the convert to “[break] with his or her community; especially practices and beliefs that elevate communal ties” (Barker 1999:113). On Warraber terms of kin relations permeate everyday life and form a dimension of sociality that works to bind Warraber people together rather than separate them.

This chapter describes the character of familial relatedness on Warraber. It outlines significant Warraberan concepts concerning the recognition of kin, the constitution of households, parent-child relationships (including the practice of adoption) and in particular, the key discourse of *pamle* (family). An almost universal embrace of all residents as kin is a feature of Warraberan modes of tracing cognatic descent. But clearly, not everyone can always be treated the same. Various degrees or levels of relatedness are shown as operating to prioritise certain relationships over others. That these all tend to be referred to by the rubric of *pamle* attests to a marked preference for overt social inclusiveness that can be described as characterising Warraber sociality, while at the same time requiring a more detailed and careful unpacking of the notion of *pamle* and its applications.

### Bases of Relatedness

Warraber residents view links of descent as an important form of connection, sometimes described through an idiom of shared ‘blood’.<sup>1</sup> Relatives are traced through both parents, and include all males and females linked by descent or by marriage. This

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<sup>1</sup> For example, a common rationale for keeping the fact of their adoption secret from an adopted child is the concern the child will wish “to return to their blood” (*go baik po blad*), that is, to their biological parents.

mode of reckoning kin relatedness can be described as cognatic. Classic discussions of cognatic 'systems' question their social 'effectiveness' due to a lack of discreteness (eg Fox 1967:150-151; Keesing 1975:15). The considerable overlap and potentially enormous reach of each personal (ego-centred) kindred has led to it be described as a "cultural category" (Keesing 1975:14). Due to the lack of discreteness of cognatic connections, viable corporate groups (particularly property-holding) were seen as unlikely to emerge. At most, transitional "action groups" drawing on this category were seen as arising for a specific purpose, such as conducting significant life cycle occasions (birth, marriage, death) and focusing on a particular individual to whom all members of the action group are related (Keesing 1975:15). After the event, this 'assemblage' (as it was sometimes also called) would effectively dissipate, merging back into the nearly limitless possibilities of overlapping individual kindreds.

Aspects of this generalised portrayal certainly applied in Warraber, including the situational relevance of kindred action groups in prominent life-cycle occasions and their associated activities. However, it represents a simplistic and limited perspective when viewed against the complex significance attributed to parent-child relations, to the everyday use of kin terminology which mark particular kinds of kin connection (alongside related responsibilities and obligations) and to the prominence of households, which exist at the centre of enduring and functional social relationships in Warraber. The local term *pamle* (or 'family') can refer to all three.

### *Warraber 'Family'*

The term *pamle* or 'family' is used throughout the Torres Strait and appears to be a core expression in discursively asserting and delimiting forms of relatedness. Davis (1998) and Fuary (1991a) concur with Beckett's (1983b:206) assertion that Torres Strait Islander societies in general are "organised in terms of 'families'". Davis adds that for Saibaians, the 'family' is "the most immediate and important of social groupings" (1998:62). Fuary (1991a:228) glosses the term 'family' as referring to "groups of cognates" which are also "small kindreds". This raises the question as to the potential limits or boundedness of the 'family'. Beckett defined 'families' as being "small descent groups, often bilateral and rarely more than three generations in depth" (1983b:206). His use of the phrase 'descent group' would imply the existence of local principles operating to bound a discrete number of individuals and exclude others; a

cognatic descent group for example, would typically be marked by ancestor-focus, while a cognatic kindred suggests ego-focus.

Fuary (1991a:228) also notes of Yam Island that “despite recognition of both lines of descent, there is a strong tendency to give greater recognition to the patriline” while Davis (1998:62) points to a “patrilineal/clan emphasis” on Saibai Island. So ‘family’, seems to refer variously to a cognatic descent group or a more undifferentiated personal kindred, delimited both by generational depth and by patrilineal emphasis. Importantly, the existence of kindreds and cognatic descent groups can be a matter of perspective:

which perspective one takes depends on the kind of person one is. Crucially, it will depend on whether one has lived long enough ... to imagine oneself as a generative (ancestor-like) source of relatedness. In this respect, perspectives can change gradually and according to context (Astuti 2000:93).

Parents, for example, can imagine themselves the generative source of their own small group of descendants, but in other contexts as subsumed among the descendants of a larger cognatic descent group with origins further back in time (Astuti 2000:93).

Beckett elsewhere alludes to the shifting character of the category ‘family’ in describing Meriam society as “highly optative [where] the factors influencing group recruitment are diverse and variable” (1963:193). Davis (1998:62) similarly states that “while there is a patrilineal emphasis to familial identification, a Saibaian may choose to adhere to matrilineal kin in significant ways rather than show strong affiliation with their patrilineal kin”. Scott and Mulrennan (1999:153) avoid the use of ‘families’ altogether, referring instead to Darnley Island ‘social identities’ as variously reflecting “households, patronymic groups, clans and island communities”. It is likely though that each of these terms would comprise differing expressions of the term ‘family’ (*pamle*).

On Warraber, as elsewhere among island communities in the Torres Strait then, *pamle* is a multivalent concept relying on context and intent for its precise meaning. Fundamentally, the concept represents an assertion of kin connection, which may or may not be able to be traced in genealogical terms by those using the expression. In this sense it is capable of signifying narratives of collective identification at a very broad level, such as envisaging Warraber and Poruma Island residents as being one related collectivity or ‘all one family’ (*ol wan pamle*): “*miplo ya blo Warraber ane Poruma, miplo blo wan pamle*” (Warraber and Poruma residents are all related) (see chapter 7).

*Pamle* may also refer to extended networks of kin-relations of various kind, such as an individual's cognatic kindred or more bounded groups within their cognatic kindred, including those sharing a patronym (mainly relevant in the context of land inheritance (see chapter 6).

Two generations of descendants of a conjugal couple are also referred to as a *pamle*, i.e. a relatively shallow cognatic descent group, and this provides the most common focus of everyday relationships occurring in Warraber social life. The members of this 'family' are spread among a number of houses, often in relatively close proximity, generating daily inter-house sociality including circulating habitation (particularly by young adult children) and cooperation in labour and food distribution. A nuclear family - a conjugal couple and their offspring - is also referred to as a *pamle*, but its import is generally sublimated to the multi-house 'family'. Nevertheless, it clearly represents the source of a future cognatic descent group, and it is interesting that the word *pamle* is in widespread use on Warraber and elsewhere to indicate marriage (*Ai pamle oman naw*; I'm married now), pregnancy (*Yu pamle?*; are you pregnant?) or one's parents (Shnukal 1988:177).

Against the breadth of variation and contingency surrounding the *pamle* as kindred and cognatic descent group, Beckett argues "the only stable and regularly effective kin group is the nuclear family ... children form, with their parents, the stable core of a domestic unit" (1963:194). Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:196) similarly discusses conjugal groups – mother, father and children – as constituting the basic social group at Mabuiag Island, referred to as *buai* in Kala Lagaw Ya.<sup>2</sup> Keesing (1975:97) regards the "nuclear family" as providing a form of enduring corporation in the absence of descent groupings and which, in combination with the periodic "mobilisation" of kindred, assumes the necessary 'functional load' of social organisation. Kinship-oriented studies of cognatic societies also often emphasise the centrality of the household as an analytical strategy to overcome the problem of locating structural principles in such "undifferentiated" societies (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:18; Howell 1995:150). On Warraber, *pamle* as a conjugal group – the nuclear family – has an important relation to

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<sup>2</sup> *Buai* is also somewhat multivalent (though not to the same extent as *pamle*) in being used to refer to a cognatic lineage.

the constitution of households, but the social contours of the Warraber household are also dynamic and fluid.

### **Warraber Households**

Theoretical framings of households are dogged by conceptual confusion in distinguishing kinship-based notions from those of locality, or of function/activity (i.e. what household members do) from morphology/form (i.e. the composition of its personnel) (Yanagisako 1979; Netting, Wilk and Arnould 1984). Additionally, studies of the functioning of the household in cognatic societies have often overlooked the importance of a notion of the 'house' itself as an indigenous category (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:22). A more holistic focus is clearly required, an approach made difficult by the fragmentation of households through disciplinary divisions and specialisations such as kinship, demography and economics (Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995:4-5).

On Warraber, the term *aus* (i.e. 'house') refers primarily to an erected structure, a physically constructed dwelling-place in which people reside. However, in the form *aus man* ('house-people') it also reveals the intimate ideational connection between a conjugal couple and their home. A prominent Warraber ideal, explained in terms of Christian values, is that a couple should marry prior to living in their own dwelling or sharing a private sleeping space. The local Council, staffed by Warraber people, practically enact this view by allocating government-funded houses to married couples only (with the number of children influencing the size of the house).<sup>3</sup> A conjugal couple, then, can be said to be at the centre of the sociality that surrounds a dwelling, because it is this status that has literally created the house that contains them. With very few exceptions, Warraber dwellings have at least one conjugal couple that resides there permanently; this may be the couple who established the house originally – in that it was built by or for them – or they may have inherited it from another couple (usually their parents).

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<sup>3</sup> During 1996-7, only three single people were living in their own houses. Two of these houses had originally been built for deceased relatives of the occupants. The third house, unusually, was given to a man approaching middle age who was deemed unlikely to ever marry and who had long expressed a wish for his own dwelling.

A house which was specifically built for a conjugal couple tends to be referred to as ‘belonging’ to them, even if they later move to a newer house (usually passing their original house to one of their married children) and sometimes even after they are deceased. Places where derelict houses stand or once stood (known as *aus pleis*) continue to be associated with the founding conjugal couple. In this way, an enduring attachment exists between a couple and the ground where their houses are or once were, adding temporal depth to the social knowledge of place and to the narratives of emplacement that characterise Warraber Island as a lived and peopled landscape.

Alongside the presence of a ‘primary’ conjugal couple, a range of other individuals may sometimes reside in the dwelling for variable periods. On Warraber, young unmarried adults in particular regularly shift between houses, imparting a fluid character to the constitution of households, while children also commonly circulate among houses, though for much shorter stays. Residential arrangements of Warraber dwellings can be described in terms of the following categories: conjugal (husband and wife with adopted, fostered or birth children); extended (conjugal + additional kin); compound (conjugal sharing a house with a de facto couple and their children); couple (husband and wife, no children); and single (single person dwelling). In December 1996 the proportion of these arrangements appeared as follows:

Table 1: Household Composition

Type	Dwellings	% of Total
Conjugal (couple + children)	22	53.7
Extended (conjugal + other kin)	8	19.5
Compound (conjugal + de facto)	6	14.6
Single	3	7.3
Couple (no children)	2	4.9
Total:	41	100

Conjugal houses included those dwellings where one parent had died and where a widowed spouse and children continued to share the dwelling. At Warraber a person whose spouse is deceased is considered as remaining married to that person until the secondary burial rite of tombstone opening is performed. After this ceremony, the

surviving spouse is free to re-marry.<sup>4</sup> Not included in the conjugal category were small numbers of dwellings that housed divorced or separated parents and their children. Few separations or formal divorces occur at Warraber. During 1996/7 there were just three instances of people separating from their spouse and no further cases had occurred when I revisited the islands in 2001. One separated man was living in his parents' home. Another was living in the house of his deceased parents.

Extended dwellings are residential arrangements that allow for the direct care of relatives in the ascending generation. Around one-fifth of all Warraber dwellings housed an extended group of people – that is, a conjugal group and other, usually close, kin such as grandparents, adult siblings and their own children.<sup>5</sup> In some of the extended and conjugal houses belonging to an elderly couple (or individual in the case of a widow/er), adult children were still sharing their dwelling although, as noted, people have a preference for moving into their own houses after marriage. Establishing a separate conjugal dwelling is especially desirable for women, as it measurably eases their workload in the form of cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes for the husband's parents and siblings. Nonetheless, it is relatively common for a favoured son (generally the eldest) to live in the house of his parents after marriage as the latter often express a direct wish that he take over their house following his father's death.

Importantly, the table above should be regarded as representing a 'frozen moment' in the shifting contours of Warraber household composition. In another period, a number of the conjugal houses are highly likely to appear as compound or extended, while some of the latter would have become conjugal. This is a result of considerable residential mobility among Warraber people outside the conjugal couple, particularly young adults.

### *Residential Mobility*

Aside from the primary conjugal couple of a house, the social composition of dwelling is subject to change. While the primary couple remains associated with a particular

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, many older women choose not to re-marry, enjoying their independence in domestic and ritual arrangements (see Fuary 1991a for similar assertions on Yam Island).

<sup>5</sup> Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:226, 228) notes the high fluctuation in household composition at Mabuiag. Of 22 households she recorded three as being nuclear, some with a 'nuclear core' with the addition of "grandchildren belonging to either a household member or an individual living elsewhere". The 'extended family type' is the most common and half are 'consanguineal'.

house and a house place, young unmarried people are less attached and tend to be highly mobile between dwellings. Unmarried adults often come and go between the houses of their parents and those of married classificatory parents, such as their parents' siblings. The most noticeable changes effecting household composition during fieldwork consistently involved the movements of young adults, who may choose to move between the houses of kin for a wide range of reasons. At Mabuiag, Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann observes that social rather than economic factors were generally responsible for prompting mobility between houses (1980a:226). At Warraber, both factors were in evidence. While the propensity and reasons for movement vary according to the individual, greater access to food, money and a telephone were common explanations, especially in combination with relatively undemanding occupants, most importantly the married house couple. This increases the desirability for residence at particular dwellings. Social factors include arguments with their parents, boredom with their present home, and emotional attachments to the primary couple or others residing in a particular house.

From the perspective of the primary couple, these younger people who come and go can be burdensome. One of the most frequent complaints made by married women is that a young woman living in her house does not contribute sufficient money or labour to maintaining the household (*em no sabe meke wok*). Additional people residing with a couple certainly increase the general workload of cooking and the costs or effort of food provision from the store or sea. Young adults are given to late-night socialising away from the gaze of older residents and often sleep well into mid-morning and beyond. If a dwelling lacks sufficient bedrooms to accommodate every individual, a young itinerant may well have to sleep in the 'dining room' where meals are often eaten and guests are welcomed. It follows that a young person sleeping-in frequently prevents other people in the house from using and cleaning the space. This particularly irks married women who are usually awake at dawn and spend their mornings preparing children for school and cleaning the house.

While these kinds of complaints suggest that house couples or parents have limited authority over younger people resident in their houses, the situation is generally managed by confronting the young man or woman or allowing reproof to flow back to them in the form of local gossip or hearsay. Minor disputes often follow and the young

persons will usually move on to another house where someone takes pity on them (*sori em*). The gender of the offender is another aspect – women have least control over the unmarried male relatives of their spouse, relying on husbands who spend much of the day away from home and may fail to perceive a problem. At the same time, young visitors (particularly women) can exercise a keen sense of their situation and can suddenly appear one morning with a large fish from an early fishing trip in time to forestall tensions.

### *Spatial Arrangements of Houses*

Local ideas of familial relatedness then, are reflected both in dwelling composition and movement between particular dwellings, but also in the spatial arrangements of dwellings. House placement is a matter of sentiment, and older couples ideally like to have their children's houses clustered around their own. At the same time, parents tend to favour their male children in providing the closest house sites, as male children will inherit land ownership from them. The same tendency was evident in Meriam practice some decades ago. Beckett (1963:195-6) commented that “first degree patrikin live on the same section; those more distantly related are generally residentially dispersed.” Those people in a position of ownership will try to allocate proximate house-land to their children or seek other landowners to bequeath ‘house places’ nearby.

Where land is available to realise parental preferences, settlement takes on a clustered effect with houses belonging to elderly couples surrounded by the dwellings of their married children and grandchildren. This arrangement can be understood as a multi-house 'domestic collectivity' and constitutes an emplaced dimension of *pamle* composition at Warraber. However, proximate house sites are not always available and so arrangements of this kind are not necessarily discernible solely in terms of proximity. Land scarcity in the older section of the village, in particular, has meant that some newly built houses on the settlement outskirts are separated from those of their closest kin. Houses may also be separated by streets, small gardens and house-yard boundaries marked by coconut trees. Under these circumstances, people's intensity of movement between houses, the relative time spent socialising among sets of houses alongside the frequency of contributions of labour, food and money to one another make inter-house collectivities most clearly visible. In all cases, the degree of activity is markedly increased within a particular multi-house grouping. The individuals who make up these

domestic collectivities (ideally as residents of a number of contiguous houses) comprise the most practical everyday expression of ‘family’ (*pamle*) on Warraber.

The dwellings of elderly couples are frequently the social centres of multi-house networks in which children and grandchildren have a continuous presence. For example, married adults and their own children may spend considerable time at their parents' house if their spouse is fishing or absent from the island for any period. If a woman has married locally, she will often spend afternoons at her parents' house, particularly if her husband is away from their own dwelling. For their part, men are likely to eat at their parents' house if their wife is absent. Sisters and brothers on Warraber also frequently visit each other. When one spouse is ill or has recently died, their adult married children will temporarily reside in their parents' house in order to comfort the other.

While there are many reasons for adults to visit their parents' dwelling, the specific reasons for visiting are deemed far less important than the adult child's presence. Parents suggest that they would prefer their children arrived just to request money and food in comparison to not visiting at all. Minor disputes between parents and their adult children sometimes result in temporary avoidance by both parents and adult children, but disputes tend to be quickly forgotten, and regular visitation soon resumes. Parents inevitably complain to others about any prolonged absences by their adult children, while gleaning information from others as to their child's movements about the house and village, especially if the latter's residence is out of view. Unexplained absences that extend to a few days are investigated by a visit to the offending child's house. However, generally the parents of married adults expect to receive rather than initiate visits, and seldom move from their own house in order to visit the dwellings of their children. If there is an urgent message to convey – such as news of a relative's illness – one parent, (usually a woman) may visit, though in such cases young children are frequently employed as messengers. In the event parents do visit their married children they formally announce their arrival by calling out before going inside.

### **Conceptions of Kin**

As noted, at its most basic, the expression *pamle* represents an assertion of kin relatedness in some degree. This is made more meaningful in Warraber social life

through the everyday use of kin terminology marking particular kinds of kin relationships and to an extent, the associated responsibilities and obligations these demand. Warraber people suggest they are able to differentiate kin terms across six generations, three ascending and two descending. The application of specific kin terminology for members of the third ascending generation (*kei aka*, ‘big grandmother’; *kei athe*, ‘big grandfather’) is rare because there are few if any living persons to which the terms can be applied. Regardless, Warraber residents maintain that there are correct terms for the third ascending generation. However, these people are usually addressed as *athe* and *aka*, the terms applied to the second ascending generation.

Table 2: Warraber Kin Terms:

Generation	Relation	Term
second descending	CC, BCC, ZCC	<i>Ngep</i>
first descending	D, BD, ZD S, BS, ZS	<i>gel / mai gel</i> <i>boi / mai boi</i>
ego	B, FZS, FBS, MZS, MBS Z, FZD, FBD, MBD, MZD	<i>Balla</i> <i>Sissi</i>
first ascending	FZ, MBW MB, FZH M, MZ F, FB	<i>Anti</i> <i>Awa</i> <i>mama / ama</i> <i>papa / dadi / baba</i>
second ascending	MM, MFZ, MMZ, FM, FMZ, FFZ MF, MFB, MMB FF, FMB, FFB	<i>Aka</i> <i>Athe</i>

As shown above, all kin of the first ascending generation are viewed as siblings of one’s mother and father. In ego's generation, the English language derived terms *balla* (brother) and *sissi* (sister) are inclusively ascribed to kin of that entire generation. *Balla* and *sissi* are applied to both parallel and cross cousins.<sup>6</sup>

These kin terms are not used with equal frequency. A person will almost always refer to a person of the first and second ascending generations by their term of address followed by their name, for example, *awa Fred* or *aka Ginnie*. However, in reverse the use of *mai gel* and *mai boi* are applied infrequently, with first names often replacing the kin term. These forms tend to be used much more when an older relative requests a younger relative for a particular task (such as running errands for an elder relative), as a means of asserting the relationship and its obligations.

Knowledge of the precise lineal and collateral connections is not required among younger generations. It is rarely necessary to recite these links though some young people do press their older relatives to explain them from time to time. Instead, children learn about the application of kinship terminology from the use of the terms by their parents and older siblings. The interweaving of kin-terms and relationship behaviour begins to be learned from a very young age. Young children pay visible attention to correct forms of addressing kin and often repeat these strategically to their advantage, for example when entreating particular relatives to buy them treats at the local store. Children also quickly learn that they are able to spend time at the homes of particular kin, such as their grandparents or parent's siblings'. Children visit these houses frequently to play with other children, to eat meals and to be cared for when parents are busy elsewhere, for example fishing. Children also use these houses as a refuge when their parents are angry.

### *Adoption*

Adoption involves a permanent alteration to kin arrangements in relation to a child. Adoption was recorded in the Torres Strait before the turn of the twentieth century (Haddon 1904) and it continues to be widely practised throughout the Torres Strait (Ban 1994; 1993; Beckett n.d.b.; Davis 1998; Fuary 1991a; 1984; MacDonald 1995; 1980). In principle, adopted children are accorded the same status as birth children, though there is the potential for disputes regarding inheritance to challenge the legitimacy of particular adoptions (Ban 1994; Beckett 1995:22).

A common form of adoption on Warraber involves the first child of an unmarried mother being given to her parents, whereupon the child is regarded as a sister or brother to the birth mother, with consequent shifts in kin terminology. A widespread local interpretation of this practice in the Central Islands is that the child will eventually assume their birth mother's role in the family. This understanding is based on the expectation that a woman who marries can no longer devote her labours singularly to her parents. A woman must divide her labours between her new home and husband and substantially reduce her efforts in relation to her parents. The child adopted by a

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<sup>6</sup> For comparative terminology used at Yam Island, see Fuary (1991a:230), at Mabuig Island in the Western Islands, see Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:351) and in the Eastern Islands at Mer, see Beckett (1963, 1987:144).

woman's parents will contribute the labour that its mother once did (Fuary 1984). Another adoption scenario involves an unmarried girl's parents taking her baby, especially if it is a boy in order to *gro em* or *gromape* (raise them) as the child of one of her brothers. The birth mother's parents formally regard their *ngep* (grandson) as the child of their son, not their daughter. The only local rule applying to adoption that is cited by Warraber informants is that the child concerned must not be given to someone unknown to the birth mother. There are many possible variations and in all of these, the terminological kin position conferred by the child's actual birth status is forfeited in favour of its adopted place.

In ideal situations, adopted children never learn that this occurred. Warraber residents stipulate that the details of adoptions ought to remain hidden from the adopted person, a scenario Beckett (n.d.b.:8) notes elsewhere in the Strait

The intention of adoption is to establish a new filiation for the child and virtually to wipe out the filiation established at its birth. Not only should it lose its rights as a member of its family of origin, and they in it, but it should be kept as far as possible ignorant of that origin.

However, in practice most adopted persons become aware of their adoption at some point. This frequently occurs when other residents disclose the details to the child during its adolescent years, whether inadvertently or on occasion even maliciously. Adopted persons may also discover their status themselves, such as in the acquisition of a birth certificate for banking purposes (see Ban 1994).<sup>7</sup>

Instances are related on Warraber of considerable emotional turmoil being experienced by those who discover their adoption (see also Davis 1998:217). I was told of one Warraber girl who learnt of her adoption as a young adult and as a result temporarily rejected her adoptive mother. This was considered an extreme response. Most women agreed that the girl's (adoptive) mother had 'grown her' (*gro em*), by 'giving her food' (*pide em*), and treating her like a 'proper daughter' (*mekem wase prapa dota*). Given this behaviour, they viewed the young woman as having no legitimate reason to reject

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<sup>7</sup> The Family Court of Australia now offers the possibility of recognising 'island adoptions' in Australian law ([wysiwyg://23/http://www.familycourt.gov.au/forms/html/kupai\\_omasker.html](http://www.familycourt.gov.au/forms/html/kupai_omasker.html)). Warraber residents have generally not taken up this option because of the cost involved in processing the relevant application.

her adoptive mother. The clear principle is that once adopted, there are no grounds for birth parents or birth children to reject an adoptive situation.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Wadhwam*

Primary responsibility for child rearing falls to parents, whether biological or adoptive. It is the parents' role to ensure that their children are cared for in terms of the provision of basic material and emotional needs: affection, meals, clean clothes and sleeping spaces. However, the parents are assisted by a number of kin, including grandparents, who encourage young grandchildren to spend time at their houses. Children also spend time with the siblings and affines of their parents. Grandparents and parents' siblings are those kin Warraber children generally feel most comfortable with and visit most often. Among these relatives, the *wadhwam* (MB, FZH) plays a crucial role in relation to Warraber 'families'.

At Warraber, the term *wadhwam* usually refers to an individual's mother's brother (MB) but according to Warraber informants it can also comprise their father's sister's husband (FZH) in the event that their mother has no male sibling. The father's brother (*papa* or *dadi*) may also be called on to play this role if a mother has no surviving brothers and there is no FZH. The *wadhwam* is (non-reciprocally) referred to as *awa*.<sup>9</sup> A child's *wadhwam* is regarded as having authority over the parents in their upbringing. For the most part *wadhwam* rarely interfere in everyday child-rearing decisions of parents, intervening only if parents are being unnecessarily harsh, for example in physically punishing a child.

The *wadhwam* responsibilities can be described as relating primarily to ensuring the proper 'social maturation' of his sister's (or wife's brother's) children. Male children are generally much closer than female children to their *wadhwam* as they tend to spend significantly more time with them. Warraber men and women often socialise separately, and boys are able to engage in male activities with their *wadhwam*. For instance, *wadhwam* may take boys to work nightly at crayfishing. On one occasion, this was an

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<sup>8</sup> Davis (1998:217) discusses the loss that 'unrecognised' birth fathers feel in response to their children being adopted by others. He says that "men rarely forget the children they have fathered and their absence is often keenly felt for the rest of their lives."

<sup>9</sup> Fitzpatrick Nietschmann (1980a:352) says that at Mabuiag, *awdhe* is a reciprocal term of address, restricted to the mother's brother and sister's child.

explicit request by a mother and father of their child's *wadhwam* in response to the young man's recent public drunkenness, associated with a violent outburst and the destruction of property. His *wadhwam* was a committed Christian from the AOG congregation (AOG), and a successful commercial fisherman. Though the man's father was a prominent figure in the Anglican Church, he invited the intervention of the youth's *wadhwam*, hoping it would prompt his son to reflect on his actions and alter his behaviour. This was especially pressing because the young man had recently passed through a locally significant life course event, his 21st birthday.

A *wadhwam* must be present at the boy's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday ceremony and the feasting that accompanies a boy's first successful turtle hunt (*pas totol*, first turtle). As ceremonial occasions involving the wider community, the significance of these life-course events is heightened. Both occasions are understood as marking key stages in a boy's progressive maturation to adulthood, and their *wadhwam* play important roles at these times. The ability to hunt turtle is one of the most important expressions of masculinity among Warraber men as it is on other islands in the Strait (see Fuary 1991a:205; Nietschmann n.d.:140).<sup>10</sup> It is the *wadhwam* who largely provides instruction to a male child in the proper techniques of hunting and particularly spearing the turtle (referred to as *zubup ngurpi*), though other older males may assist. The *wadhwam* will also give a speech at the feasting celebrations that mark a boy's first successful turtle hunt (see Fuary 1991a:241). On this special occasion the turtle captured by the young man is eaten by all the members of his kindred who currently reside on Warraber (in essence, the whole population). As at all feasting events, men eat first, and older men before younger. But on this occasion the young man's *wadhwam* will be among the first to place turtle meat on his plate, regardless of his age.

In effect, this shared turtle constitutes the young man's first adult contribution to his kin and to Warraber social life. The young man's first successful hunt is imbued with expectations that he must henceforth contribute to the material support of his *pamle*. In a practical sense such activity will focus predominantly on his own home (and before marriage, that of his parents) but will also include the multi-house network to which he

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<sup>10</sup> The general act of hunting any large marine animal with a spear is a definitive male pastime, and this includes dugong as well as turtle. It may be that it is the relative rarity of a dugong capture for Warraber people that makes the turtle the decisive animal in this context. The Warraber marine environment (relatively deep, cold, with a lack of sea-grass) is not suited to dugong.

belongs (through his relation to his parents).<sup>11</sup> Hunting turtle will form a significant mode of fulfilling this obligation, one that is specific to men and is an integral feature of numerous community-wide ceremonial occasions.

At Warraber, 21<sup>st</sup> birthday ceremonies are often combined with first shave celebrations.<sup>12</sup> The public component of the 21st ceremony includes consuming turtle and other feasting foods (particular species of fish, sweet potato, pumpkin, chicken and a local tuber, *gasi*). As part of the ceremony, the boy is given instructions about community expectations now placed on him as an adult male. Again, these include that he provide money and food to his *pamle*, usually demonstrated by the *wadhwam* presenting the boy with a *whap* (turtle hunting harpoon) and a fishing spear (a bamboo pole with an iron point). On one occasion I witnessed a boy also being given pens and notebooks, in recognition of more recent expectations pertaining to an adult male's future income-generating activities.

Twenty-first birthdays are also celebrated for girls, who receive similarly symbolic gifts from a number of their *anti*, such as baskets, fishing lines or lighters or matches (evoking food preparation on gas stoves, or previously, over fires). Although this ceremony marks a movement to adulthood, girls are also schooled on a daily basis and from an early age in household work such as cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes. Young boys and girls also learn how to fish from an early age, mostly using hand-lines. They either fish with other children or accompany their mothers, aunts and grandmothers while hand lining (see chapter 5). Boys also spear fish from primary school age using long multi-pronged spears on the reef at low tide. Nonetheless, boys and girls are not expected to contribute to households in significant ways through marine-based activity until they become an adult, as heralded by the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday ceremony. The *wadhwam* is also described by informants as playing a role negotiating the marriage of his sister's son or daughter. The MB's position is influential also in

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<sup>11</sup> In the following chapter, I discuss in more detail the issue of male productive activity and the distribution of its proceeds.

<sup>12</sup> Along with other women, I was restricted from attending the preparation of a man for 21st occasions but see Davis (1998) on male focused ceremony.

sanctioning a union in preparation for marriage, an event that signals the culmination or fulfilment of adulthood, from being a *boi* or *girl* to a fully-fledged *man* or *oman*.<sup>13</sup>

The special status of a mother's brother has been noted elsewhere in the Torres Strait by Davis (1998:217), Fuary (1991a:240), and Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:209). These authors do not offer any explanation of the position's origins, yet the relationship is not self-evident, particularly in the context of cognatic societies.<sup>14</sup> Warraber informants explained the position simply in terms of 'our way' (*wei blo mipla*). It may be that the *wadhwam* represents a vestige of the patrilineal clans that had an historical presence, yet ambiguous significance, in Torres Strait life (see Beckett 1983b:204, 1963:24; Haddon 1904:159-162). Patronyms still sometimes play a part in locally legitimising claims of access to land and land holdings on Warraber, while clans themselves maintain some relevance in a number of Torres Strait Island populations (see Davis 1998:64-6; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:200). On Warraber, the specific marking of the FZH or the FB as replacements for the MB as *wadhwam* seems significant, suggesting the position has altered, if its roots are indeed in earlier clan structures. The FZH, like the MB, is outside an individual's patronymic group, but as an affinal relation he cannot be said to represent the abiding interests of an individual's non-patronymic consanguines. The FB is a consanguine, but remote from the MB in sharing membership of the patronymic group with his brother's child.

However, all three kin positions do share important features. Each would usually be expected to reside in a separate dwelling from the individual with whom they possess their respective relation. Equally, they would all generally be a part of the multi-house family network that this individual would be expected to participate in. This could be relevant to the contemporary importance of the *wadhwam* position. As a transformation of its residual historical significance, the *wadhwam* has come to personify the broader *pamle* network that lies outside the conjugal couple as potential founders of a smaller,

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<sup>13</sup> While bearing children certainly marks another acknowledged stage in Warraber life-course, married women who do not have children are still eligible to join the local Mother's Union of the Anglican Church, affirming that their full participation in the community as adult women is not dependent on their child-bearing capacity.

<sup>14</sup> Anthropological description of the significance of the mother's brother position are varied (Bloch and Sperber 2002) but often focus on patrilineal societies, where the mother's brother represents the enduring connections of the mother's descent group to her child (who will, of course, be a member of a different descent group). This figure may mediate between his sister's child and his own descent group, especially where the child has residual rights of some kind (eg to land) potentially inherited through his mother.

nucleated cognatic descent group, likely focused on one residence. Just as the MB elsewhere serves to remind his sister's child of enduring connections outside its own patrilineal group, on Warraber the *wadham* plays a formal role as reminder of relationships and responsibilities outside one's most intimate parental connections. This interpretation may also shed some light on the preferred order of *wadhwam* candidates. Given the virilocal tendency of post-marital residence, the MB more than likely occupies a house at a distance from his sister. The FZH would similarly reside further away than the FB, the last choice for the *wadhwam* role.

Complementing his role as the source of 'socialisation' of his sister's children then, the *wadhwam* relation physically draws the child to his house, ensuring its immersion and movement in the multi-house networks which, through their overlapping character, constitute the social fabric of Warraber life. The *wadhwam* represents the broader *pamle* network, the multi-residence cognatic descent group within which people spend the earliest and most formative parts of their lives. It is the *wadhwam* who personifies these ties and the obligations they carry. Following marriage and separate residence, the individuals who form conjugal couples increasingly become the source of their own descendants as they age, and their ascending generations of cognatic ancestors and kin pass away. Elderly Warraber residents are less mobile, becoming a focus of a multi-house network in their own right, receiving visitors far more than actively participating in inter-house visits themselves. It is their own siblings (or that of their spouses) who will stress the broader social demands of Warraber life with their children, through the *wadhwam* relation.

## **Marriage and Households**

Following their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, men and women are considered to have reached marriageable age. A marriage heralds significantly altered relationships between the new conjugal couple and their extended kindreds. The marriage ceremony requires sections of kin to make decisions as to their future relationships to the couple, decisions that are often said to be a matter of sentiment in relation to the marriage couple. As the majority of marriages are between persons who are identified as *pamle* (in the broadest sense), some persons attending the wedding must choose between being a cognate or

affine, called *said* (sides), hence, *boi said* or *gel said* (see Fuary 1991a). Once chosen, this 'side' will be maintained and becomes important at future ceremonies where one of the conjugal couple is centrally figured, such as their death and associated tombstone opening, where duties are arranged according to affinal and cognate relationships to the deceased.

In the context of cognatic kin-reckoning, Astuti (2000:94-5) draws attention to a critical issue facing societies such as Warraber that both enthusiastically embrace extended networks of relatives but prefer to marry those to whom they are unrelated: how does one find a marriageable partner amidst so many kin? The issue is particularly problematic in a context where populations are as small as those in the central islands of the Torres Strait. Warraber people suggest that marriage partners ought not be relatives, and particularly not close relatives, marked by a shared patronym. While this does occur it attracts general disapproval that usually dissipates over time. In one case where first cousins who shared a patronym were married, some residents explained that it was technically a 'wrong' marriage but their having only adopted children helped to lessen others' opposition to their union over time. It was unclear whether the couple chose not to produce progeny (and if so, whether this was in any way linked to their kin relation), while rumours assumed infertility and hinted at it being the consequence of their choice of spouse.

The dynamic of 'choosing a side' effectively ensures the re-ordering of previously undifferentiated cognatic kindreds associated with each of the marrying persons (in all likelihood overlapping substantively) into two nominally separate kindreds, newly positional kin and non-kin. With the bride and groom now positioned at the centre of distinct individual kindreds, their social difference to each other is retrospectively enhanced, even exaggerated, ensuring that general proscription on marriage between close relations is maintained. The immediate effect of choosing sides is that the newly positional affines attract naming prohibitions, as with other affines, essentially barring the use of their first name.

Men and women often use 'play names' (*plei neim*) to refer to male or female affines. Every Warraber person possesses a play name additional to the formal names given to them at baptism (Anglican) or at a naming ceremony (AOG). Some play names are standardised, so that for example, every man named Francis will have the same play

name: Panzi. If one's sibling shares the name of an affine, the sibling's name can no longer be used, however the play name they share can be used. Alternatively the possessive particle *blo* is also used to indicate the affine's identity through reference to others. Hence, a woman may call to her husband's brother by reference to his wife as in *man blo Zina* (Gina's husband). If the affine is male, the affinal terms of address *thawi* is also used (see table 3 below).<sup>15</sup> While a woman is not generally addressed as *thawi*, she and her female affines sometimes jokingly refer to each other as such. Affinal terms of address are applied across three generations.

Table 3: Affinal Forms of Address:

Generation	Relation	Term
male ego's descending generation	SW	<i>Oman</i>
	SW, DH	'play name'
	DH	<i>Thawi</i>
female ego's descending generation	SW	<i>Oman</i>
	SW, DH	'play name'
	DH	<i>Thawi</i>
male ego's generation	BW, WZ	<i>oman, missis</i>
	WB, ZH	<i>Thawi</i>
	BW, WZ, WB, ZH	'play name'
female ego's generation	HZ, BW	<i>oman, missis</i>
	HB, ZH	<i>Thawi</i>
	HZ, BW, HB, ZH	'play name'
male ego's ascending generation	WM	<i>ol ledi, mama</i>
	WF	<i>ol man, papa/dadi</i>
female ego's ascending generation	HM	<i>ol ledi, mama</i>
	HF	<i>ol man, papa/dadi</i>

After marriage, Warraber people mostly reside virilocally although uxori-locality can sometimes be evident. Thus a woman leaves the proximity of her *pamle* on marriage, sometimes even her natal island, in order to live in the vicinity of her husband and his

<sup>15</sup> For comparative Yam Island affinal terms of address see Fuary (1991a:234) and for Mabuiag, see Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:351).

*pamle* on Warraber. This general trend is mirrored at other Central Islands e.g. Yam Island, where a virilocal emphasis is also evident (Fuary 1993:176).<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, this is not locally prescriptive. Post-marital residential practices are influenced by a range of economic and social factors on Warraber as on other Torres Strait islands such as Mabuiag (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a) and Murray (Beckett 1987:116). Post-marital residence may be affected by the availability of land, for example. A married daughter may be encouraged to build a house on her parent's land because she is a favourite child and her family may have more adequate land for a house-site than her husband's. The possibility of employment may also be greater on particular islands where the wife's kin reside.

### *De facto Relationships*

A contemporary tendency among young adults to establish de-facto relationships rather than marry was of great concern to married Warraberans, both Anglican and AOG. All anthropological writing concerning island marriage practices in the Torres Strait note a decline in marriage and the increasing presence of de facto relationships (e.g. Beckett 1987:218; 1961:42; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980b; Fuary 1991a:247; Davis 1998). At Warraber this tendency was particularly apparent among young people between twenty and thirty years of age. Known as *kip* (from 'keep'), this relationship is defined in local terms by its two-fold transgression of the behaviour that is expected of more approved 'boyfriend-girlfriend' relations: a sleeping space is shared permanently (i.e. cohabitation) and the couple spend time together publicly. Boyfriends and girlfriends on Warraber usually meet surreptitiously at night. Pre-marital sexual contact remains illicit, but sexual relations are not uncommon under these circumstances. However, the two people are rarely seen in each other's company in public. Beckett (1987:218) describes this tendency in terms of the social importance of marriage in the Islands feeding senior kin involvement in an individual's choice of sexual partner, rather than allowing personal preference in sexual relations.

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<sup>16</sup> Fuary (1991a:256) states that if Yam Island spouses share a natal island, they will continue to reside there following marriage. If their natal islands are different, they will live on the husband's island unless he was already resident of his wife's island, in which case they may continue to live there. In the latter case, they will make an initial post-marriage trip to the husband's natal island in order to visit his kin.

*Kip* couples on Warraber that behave as married couples in public certainly draw the ire of older onlookers. Older kin of the couple frequently refer to the situation as outside the expected or sanctioned terms of social relationships and state they would prefer to formalise the couple's relation or to quickly dissolve it. Not all young people are indifferent to this. Indeed, it is reasonable to suggest that *kip* relationships on Warraber are inevitably a delay, sometimes extending to several years, rather than an indefinite postponement of marriage. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980b) observed at Mabuiag that a disinclination toward marriage, or a tendency for its indefinite delay, can be linked to the increased costs of marriage and the receipt of a single parenting welfare payment that ceases after marriage. It is the latter that is cited most often by Warraberan women in *kip* relationships in the context of a number of advantages in remaining a *single gel* (single woman).

Nearly all women in *kip* relationships have had at least one child, and cited the control they were able to exercise over their own money as recipients of a 'Single Parent Payment' from the Australian government. This money provides a source of income and independence for unmarried women with children that they are disinclined to forfeit. The money allows travel to other islands for example, and even to the mainland. If married, they may be forced to rely on the generosity of their husbands to provide them with personal spending money in addition to that required for household expenses. Women explained that they are able to remain *bos demplaselp* (their own bosses), highlighting the way marriage formalises the socially sanctioned male role as decision makers in relation to their spouse.

Nonetheless, to my knowledge no *kip* couples have remained unmarried indefinitely on Warraber. It seems to me that the discourse of independence among young unmarried women often speaks to a desire to extend youthful freedoms as much, if not more than, it constitutes an unequivocal repudiation of marriage. It can be the case that a male in a *kip* relationship has not offered the possibility of marriage. In these circumstances, talk of maintaining independence by young women could incorporate an element of saving face. The *kip* couple is also sometimes 'waiting out' parental disapproval of their match, which blocks any possibility of an 'island wedding', but this situation (as in many instances of serious conflict with close and/or senior relations) tends not to be referred to directly.

An important dimension to shifting patterns of contemporary marital practice on Warraber could be characterised then as involving a greater willingness to engage in freely chosen sexual relations and cohabitation (in particular, against the wishes of parents) as against a rejection or deliberate turning away from marriage per se, a point that is also suggested by Beckett (1987:218-219).

James, in his mid 20s, approached his parents to request that they allow him to bring his girlfriend, Tania, and their one year-old child, into the house. His parents refused and tried to persuade him to end the relationship. They had not agreed to their son's choice because the woman had already been married and was much older than he (around ten years his senior, she had been separated from her Warraber husband for some years). A large and protracted dispute arose leading to James moving out of his parent's home and moving with Tania and their child to an uninhabited neighbouring island, Guiya. The island is usually used only for fishing and weekend camping. James and Tania made a permanent camp and resided there over some weeks. James returned regularly in his dinghy to maintain CDEP work and Sunday church commitments. Throughout this period he was estranged from his parents. Other kin encouraged him to move back to Warraber and he was given a shed to live in. A few weeks later he resumed communicating with his parents though his de facto wife continued to be unwelcome at his parent's home. Tania's movements about the settlement were minimal because of the disapproval of their relationship.

Men in a *kip* relation move about the village normally, whereas women have to contend with much more intense disapproval, particularly from the male's parents and parents' siblings and thus tend to restrict their movements. If the female *kip* partner is living at her partner's parents' house, she will carefully avoid encountering his parents as much as possible. Clearly, this can be difficult, and women in this situation spend much of their time either in a bedroom or away from the house during the daytime period.

Lena lived with her de facto, Peter in his room in his parents' house. They had no birth children of their own but Peter had adopted his sister's son who was being 'grown' by his parents. When Lena moved in with Peter, the child, Stuart, preferred to spend much greater time with Peter and Lena than his grandparents. The situation seemed to upset Peter's parents who had cared for the child themselves for a number of years prior to Lena moving in and who seemed to feel Lena was usurping their position in raising Stuart. Additionally, Peter's parents generally disapproved of his relationship with Lena but were reluctant to estrange Peter by forcing them both to leave. Lena remained in the shared room whenever she was at the house because she was aware (through rumours and behaviour) that Peter's mother did not agree to the 'match' nor approve of her son, Peter, living as a de facto. Peter's mother rarely spoke to Lena and avoided looking at her unless absolutely necessary. For the most part, Peter's mother tried to ignore Lena's presence entirely. She complained Lena performed little housework yet clearly resented any attempts because of her disapproval of the

relationship. Though a seemingly intolerable situation, Peter and Lena continued to live in this house from 1997 to 2001.

The more significant effects of increasing *kip* relationships are visible in decreasing affinal distinctions among people in this age group and reduced patrification among children.<sup>17</sup> Entering into a *kip* relation involves no alteration to kinship terminology. Like other unmarried people, *kip* couples remain categorically single (unmarried) and hence continue to be referred to as *boi* and *gel*, and nor do any of their cognatic kindreds need to choose a 'side'. Neither individual in the *kip* couple is addressed as an affine by the kin of their partner. Without marriage, any children the couple produce will take the mother's surname, while the individuals in a *kip* relationship are not obliged to assist their partner's kin in the they would be expected to assist affines following marriage. As noted, marriage acts to establish a couple's links and roles in relation to the parents of both spouses and to the extended kin in general that comprise their *pamle*. The formalising of a sexual relationship through marriage actually precipitates the flow of expected contributions in labour and money from the couple to both sets of parents. Marriage forms a reference point for moral action in relation to cognates and affines.

While Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980b:1) states that Western islands people "are not getting married", during the period of my fieldwork there were very few Warraber people over the age of thirty-five that remained unmarried and in a *kip* relationship. Beckett (1987:219) argues that "most couples get married eventually" but that the ceremonial, Church-based island wedding is now a rarity (Beckett 1987:218), replaced by registry office marriage. On Warraber, registry office marriage is regarded as a course for *kip* couples whose parents persist in opposing the match. After an extended period in a *kip* relation, the couple tends to be increasingly encouraged by older, more senior relatives including aunties, *wadhwam*, and even their potential affines to formalise the relation through marriage. This is especially so if the couple has children and if there is no serious opposition to the match, though in fact many elderly relatives are likely to do so regardless, eventually becoming motivated more by a discomfort with the relationship continuing in an unsanctioned form than any enthusiasm for their

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<sup>17</sup> Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980b) suggests that a growing disinclination toward marriage at Mabuig might lead to depleted opportunities for the mother's brother (MB) to negotiate marriage on behalf of a sister's son or daughter. Though this may be the case, the *wadhwam*'s position continues to persist in other areas of responsibility, as noted above.

child's choice of spouse. In 2001, for example, a double church wedding was held at Warraber that involved two couples, respectively in their late twenties and early thirties. The latter couple had been living in a *kip* relationship for a number of years prior to the marriage. The 'double-wedding' format is a significant cost saving measure and is one means by which 'Island weddings' are adapting and continuing on Warraber in the face of significant costs.

The local teachings of Christianity and idealised forms of Warraber sociality merge most evidently in the general valorisation of marriage, especially among older generations. Notions of *pamle* promoted by Warraber residents stress the centrality of marriage to living a *kristen laif* (Christian life). To erode or diminish the importance of marriage is to challenge a fundamental component in the composition of social life on Warraber, its networks of interconnected kin relations and the webs of obligations and responsibilities these generate. The Pentecostal AOG church is unambiguous in its endorsement of marriage as the only legitimate context for sexual relations between men and women. It is interesting then, that among the first principles incorporated into the new Canon Law of the Church of Torres Strait were those concerning the family and marriage. Father Gordon Barnier, a prominent participant in the April 2002 Church Synod that developed these new Canons, notes:

Some things in Canon Law are sensitive, especially matters to do with Marriage and Family Life. Teaching on these matters has been neglected in the Torres Strait for many years, the old church [i.e. mainstream Anglicanism] not being willing (or able?) to be definite in its teaching. Synod tackled these things head-on and there was an attitude that we must do what is right, even when it painfully affects us. Synod passed on the voices the Canons that teach that Christian Marriage may not be dissolved, that sexual relations are for marriage only ... now the task begins of teaching and encouraging our people in these things (Barnier 2002).

It remains to be seen what effect, if any, these new stricter teachings will have on the frequency of *kip* relations, given that the long-standing parallel stance of the AOG has not precluded its members from adopting the practice.

## **Conclusion**

Carsten (2000:1) suggests "it is a truism that people are always conscious of connections to other people. It is equally a truism that some of these connections carry particular weight – socially, materially, affectively". This chapter has outlined those

Warraber connections that can be described in genealogical terms. It has also explored the composition and importance of Warraber *pamle* as individual household, multi-house network, and as an important mode of identification among Warraberans. The discourse of encompassing kin relatedness, illustrated by the potential reach and inclusiveness of the *pamle* notion, pervades and shapes Warraber sociality.

However, relatedness ought not to be seen simply as reflecting idioms of kinship but also as being actively constructed through everyday practice (Carsten 2000:17). On Warraber, most daily activities and movements are carried out within ‘familial’ multi-house networks, and this becomes especially visible in the demands made on individuals’ labour and the distribution of the products of that labour, in particular, food and income. As noted, married children are expected to contribute their labour according to parents’ and affines’ needs within these collectivities. A married couple must balance such obligations against their responsibilities to their own household on the one hand, and the wider demands of more distantly related people, their neighbours, and even the church.

In the following chapter, I extend the discussion of household and multi-house networks through examining marine-based productive activities. This serves to illustrate not just the importance of marine activity (in both historical and contemporary terms) to Warraber collective identification, but illustrates how concerns for the appropriate distribution of the products of marine labour constitute a key practice of relatedness on Warraber, and forms an enactment of moral thinking in this regard.

## Chapter Five: Marine Activity and Sociality.

### Introduction

It would be difficult to overstate the degree to which Warraber residents consider themselves a sea people. From a Warraber point of view, their dominant marine focus remains the most salient feature that characterises their way of life. Anthropological research has documented the extensive socio-economic links between Islanders throughout the Torres Strait and marine environments (Beckett 1987; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; Fuary 1991b; Scott and Mulrennan 1999; Southon 1998). Warraber people understand themselves, and others living in the Central Islands, to possess a continuing interest and expertise in the optimal use of important sea resources. They contrast their own abilities as skilful fishers, turtle hunters and marine industry workers with that of other Torres Strait Islanders, like Kaurareg and Eastern Islanders, whom they consider to possess less skill or interest in marine-based activities.

People's use of the sea is a marked feature of daily life on Warraber. Considerable time is spent on nearby reef sites and those more distant from Warraber Island, and daily conversations inevitably concern weather and tidal conditions alongside the most appropriate methods of fishing, hunting or gathering a particular resource under such conditions. Residents always find the successes and failures of marine-based activity an absorbing topic of interest. Discussions focus on fish, turtle, and shellfish obtained by individuals for subsistence and ceremonial occasions, the income generated by working in commercial marine industries, and the ensuing distribution and consumption of these products.

I am concerned in this chapter to examine the range of marine activities Warraber residents engage in and in particular, the movement and consumption of the products of these activities. The comparative study of kinship has devoted relatively little attention to intimate domestic arrangements and the behaviour and emotions associated with them (Carsten 2000:17). Warraber residents reference their productive marine activities to notions of *pamle*-based relatedness, involving the occupants of several dwellings contributing their labour and its products to particular kin. These transactions are

understood as basic expressions of sociality in terms of kin relatedness as well as constituting a strong indication of the state of these relationships.

Marine labour and the distribution of its products (whether as foodstuffs or as income) are perhaps the most important and practical everyday contexts in which Warraber residents' enact their ideas concerning the moral terms of relatedness and sociality. Being a resident at Warraber carries the expectation of attention to *pamle*. To 'belong' to Warraber, a person must have a *pamle* to contribute to in daily life, or exercise an entitlement to claim a share of the labour of others. Giving and eliciting the products of marine labour constitute a fundamental Warraber mode of being in relation to others. Belonging to Warraber as a community entails a commitment to participating in these kinds of transactions on a highly regular, indeed daily, basis. And Warraber residents actively gauge the extent to which the actions of those giving and receiving reflect adequate attention or inattention to *pamle* members – both their own and others – in addition to local ideals of sociality, usually framed in terms of the Christian discourse of 'sharing' as another key element of *gud pasin*.

## **Work on Warraber**

Warraber residents acquire regular and irregular incomes through welfare payments and money earned through marine and terrestrial activities. On the whole, island-dwellers in the Torres Strait are not wealthy by Australian standards. Household income is well below the earnings of Torres Strait Islanders living on the mainland and non-indigenous Australians. Drawing on 1996 ABS census data, Arthur (2000:14) has calculated the median weekly income of Torres Strait Islander households in the Strait at \$116. The median weekly income of Islander households living on the Queensland mainland was \$228, while non-indigenous median weekly household income in the same period was \$354.

The notion of *wok* (work) is broader than income-generating employment; it can be considered as referring broadly to activities and tasks necessary to sustain the household. Gendered divisions of labour are marked; men and women each have separate domains of work. Women's work centres on home-based activity, including maintaining the cleanliness of the house and house-yards (see chapter 6), washing

clothes, caring for children and food preparation. Labour is often arranged hierarchically, with female children instructed to perform tasks like washing dishes to assist the mother or mother figure in age-linked levels of responsibility. As girls become older, their level of participation in child-care, house cleaning and food preparation is expected to increase. Mothers look forward to their teenage daughters returning from Thursday Island or Cairns-based secondary schools whether for week-ends or holidays as they are expected to provide substantial assistance with regular household work during their visit. Mothers continue to expect assistance from their female children after the latter marry and throughout their adult lives, though to a lesser degree.

By contrast, men are considered to primarily *wok ausaid* (work outside) the home to contribute to the life of their household. This idea is heavily focused around the impetus to provide for a spouse and children. But it also finds expression in distributing food and money and providing labour or ‘caring’ for kin of the ascending generation. Men’s work includes involvement in commercial marine activity (known as *industri* or ‘industry’) and in Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) programs.<sup>1</sup> CDEP work at Warraber ranges from transporting community garbage to a local dump, to participating in building projects under the supervision of local tradesmen or temporarily resident white-Australians. Men ‘work CDEP’ (*wok sidipi*) every second week throughout the year except for a month over the Christmas period where they are given a one-off payment to cover the holiday period. Other Warraber men acquire money from employment as councillors, police, priests, pastors, teachers, water quality technicians, and electricity supply monitors.

Women’s access to income is largely through welfare payments rather than employment, though some permanent jobs are available to women. A small number work as teacher aides, health workers and in administrative positions in the local Island

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur (1992:25) argues that men’s participation in the CDEP scheme is possibly hindering their increased involvement in the commercial fisheries. He says “because the scheme is a form of income support, it may also be a disincentive to increase fishing effort. For instance, the commercial catch on one island dropped by 70 per cent when the CDEP scheme was first introduced in 1990.” However, I would argue that CDEP work isn’t likely to eliminate men’s work in marine industries as it is tied up with notions of masculinity including men’s knowledge of the marinescape and the moral imperative for men to work outside the home and provide contributions to large purchases like dinghies and tombstones.

CDEP wages are paid directly to the council with extra money allocated to cover any costs involved with administrating the payments. CDEP wages are equivalent to unemployment benefits (Arthur 1992).

Council. Women whose husbands under the CDEP scheme are excluded from working in the same scheme. Only one spouse can participate in the CDEP at a time. Given that many adult men are in the scheme, the majority of wives directly receive income only in the form of government parent subsidies based on the number and age of their children (Partnered Parent Payment). This money is usually expended in purchasing store goods including food, disposable nappies, and infant formula milk. For some women, the higher level of income they can receive as single parents constitutes a disincentive to marry (see Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980b, and chapter 4 this thesis).

Unmarried women with children receive Single Parent Payments and can earn additional income by working in the CDEP.<sup>2</sup> They often remain living with their parents and are able to spend their money freely on themselves and their child or children. Some young women in de facto relationships stated that if they were to marry, they would forfeit this independent income and spending would be subject to negotiation with their husbands. As a result women sometimes expressed a desire to remain single in order to stay as their own 'boss' (see previous chapter). At the same time, being an unmarried woman in their parents' household created its own demands on her income. If they did not contribute substantial amounts to acquiring household foodstuffs and maintaining electricity, gas supply and a house phone, their parents could become noticeably irritated and even angry.

Elderly male and female residents receive government Old Age Pensions.<sup>3</sup> As Warraberans age, they are encouraged by their children to give up sustained fishing, including commercial marine activities. Many tend to give up full time work but continue to fish for subsistence purposes. Unlike elderly residents, other adults are consistently focused on the marine realm as a source both of food and income. In this regard, active adult women participate in subsistence-oriented line fishing while men engage in commercial crayfishing and trochus gathering in addition to any other permanent employment or CDEP work.

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<sup>2</sup> As at November 2002, Centrelink rates were as follows: Single Parent Payment: maximum of \$429.40/fortnight; Partnered Parent Payment: maximum \$338.10/fortnight.

<sup>3</sup> Centrelink rates as at November 2002: Old Age Pension: single \$429.40/fortnight, partnered \$358.40 each/fortnight.

## Women's Marine Activity

Warraber households consume a combination of store-bought and marine gathered foodstuffs. Main meals are consumed in the evening, and preference is for fish or chicken with rice and vegetables, in particular, sweet potato, potato and pumpkin. On average, fresh fish comprises a part of lunch or main evening meals on four or five days in any week. As well as bearing primary responsibility for preparing meals, women on Warraber are expected to regularly gather marine foods – mostly fish – for consumption in their own household and in their broader familial (*pamle*) network.<sup>4</sup> This effort is supplemented by men's efforts at spearfishing and turtle hunting. Providing fish is an established part of women's duties on Warraber; a part of each day will be spent trying to catch fish (given suitable weather). If necessary, small children will be left with relatives in order to allow this to occur.

Women's marine activities do not generally provide a source of income. Women catch fish for consumption rather than for sale to outside buyers or to other people in the community.<sup>5</sup> Johannes & MacFarlane (1991:112) state of Warraber that "most fish are taken by underwater spearing", an activity carried out solely by men. At the level of individual catches, spearfishing can certainly produce much larger numbers of fish than are usually obtained through women's hand-line fishing. This makes spearfishing especially useful for provisioning a ceremonial feast. However, male fishing is somewhat erratic due to the competing demands of paid employment and of income-generating marine activities, particularly crayfishing and trochus. If the total fish catches made by male spearing and female hand-lining on Warraber were compared over the course of a year, it is far from clear that the men's catch would necessarily eclipse that made by women.<sup>6</sup> In any case, the regularity of women's fishing made it the most consistent source of the fish consumed in an everyday fashion by Warraber's population.

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<sup>4</sup> For a list of commonly caught fish (local names, scientific names and common Australian names), see Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> While women may occasionally participate in trochus gathering and crayfishing, these activities are considered a male domain, as described later in the chapter,

<sup>6</sup> If fish catches from men's intermittent netting were added to the total male figure, this would seem more likely. As far as I am aware, such data has not been generated at Warraber. Certainly Johannes & MacFarlane (1991) do not cite research of this kind.

Women's use of marine places forms a pattern that differs markedly from those frequented by men. Predominantly women walk to fishing destinations along Warraber's coastline or on reefs at a distance from the shore. Again, this is a regular activity – given suitable lunar cycles and weather conditions, many Warraber women walk to a line-fishing location on a daily basis. Men generally prefer to fish and hunt from metal dinghies equipped with outboard motors, allowing them to travel relatively large distances. Women cannot access dinghies unless men are available as pilots and drivers. As a consequence, women's participation in dinghy fishing is restricted to occasional weekends or periods outside of men's working hours. At such times, women readily grasp the opportunity to fish at a far greater number of locations on Warraber's reef in one session, or at the reefs at *Bara* or *Guiya* (see map 2).

Apart from bait, little equipment is required for women's fishing. A bucket is used for carrying necessary items and caught fish. Two or more hand-lines of varying sizes and thickness are usually carried in the event one line becomes too tangled to unravel on the spot, is lost, or broken by a large fish. Hooks and sinkers are often lost if fish disappear into holes or reef patches. Spare hooks and sinkers (called *led*) are therefore always carried, as is a knife for gutting and scaling fish, and spearing small crabs for bait. Fish are often gutted and scales removed in shallow pools on the return journey, reducing the food preparation time after returning home.

The range of bait women use includes: ghost crabs (*pokas*), small sea crabs (*tadu*), crayfish flesh (*kaiar mit*), gar fish (*zaber*), octopus (*sugu*), small sardines (*tup* and *dad*), other fish, chitons (*nata*), trochus flesh (*kabar*), dough laced with margarine or oil in which meat or fish was cooked (*gris*, 'grease'), and rotting food scraps called *slop* ('slop', food scraps). Throwing *slop* or *gris* into the sea is especially effective in enticing garfish (*mathakoi*; *zaber*) and occasionally Smudgefoot Spinefoot (*kurbim*). Ghost crabs (*pokas*) are useful for catching Blackspot Tuskfish (*wanakuboi*) while sardines are preferred for enticing Coral Trout (*withi*) or Golden Trevally (*mathai*). Blue Tuskfish (*bila*) can be caught using most baits, as can Black-Spot Seaperch (*tanik*), Honeycomb Cod (*takam*) and Stripey Seaperch (*tanab*). The flesh of crayfish head and legs are used as bait when fishing from the island's jetty to attract *waitpis* (Golden Trevally) or other large fish like Bream (*snapa*), Giant Trevally (*gaigai bulzi*), Queenfish (*kabar*), Minstrel Sweetlips (*peok*), and so on. Squid and octopus are excellent bait for hand lining smaller to medium sized fish, best caught before and

during sunrise at low tide. They are speared with a short spear called a *pat*, a thin length of bamboo attached to a single iron prong used only by women. An iron hook is also carried to drag the animals out of rock holes.

Women sometimes combine gathering shells on the reefs with hand-line fishing, especially if there are few fish biting. Shells such as bailer shell (*alup*), spider shell (*ithai*), and giant clams (*selpis* or *mi*; larger specimens are called *adedoi*; *Tridacna spp.*) are gathered as a supplement to any fish caught or as a less desirable substitute in the rare event that there is no catch of fish. Shells are rarely targeted as an alternative to fish. Women state that finding shells requires more energy to procure than fish as it involves wandering through thigh and waist deep water. It is much easier to stand in one place than search in the water for shells. Fish are also simpler to cook, as they are either boiled or fried.

Women fish in a range of environments – in small lagoons (*moi*), from the beach, from the island's single jetty, or in deep water (*malu*) over the reef edge (*thara*) marked by wave-heaped coral (*thaiwa*). Hand-line fishing occurs most often on Warraber's extensive fringing reef and on an incoming tide, when fish follow the cooler water flowing back into the lagoon. Specific locations are chosen for a variety of reasons, such as tidal and wind conditions, and according to the known habitats of particular species of fish. For instance, *bila* (Blue-Spot Tuskfish) are found ubiquitously on all parts of the reef, *wanakuboi* (Black-Spot Tuskfish) are caught from a particular stretch of Warraber's northern beach, and *mathai* (Golden Trevally) are found in a lagoon (called *Mathaiaumoi*) on the southern part of the reef.

Individual women may also develop their own preferred places on the reef and return to these on a regular basis. The sites can become associated with them, and other women will give them precedence in access. Nonetheless, individuals or families do not assert 'ownership' over reef places; the reef as a whole is regarded as a communal possession, its resources accessible to all Warraber residents. Another common factor influencing a woman's choice of fishing site is her available time. A woman with limited time will usually fish on an incoming tide on the reef northeast of the village, despite the catch at this location inevitably tending to be less-favoured species (mostly tuskfish). The site increases the chances of quickly catching a sufficient quantity of fish by shortening the walking distance to the fishing ground, allowing more time for actual fishing.

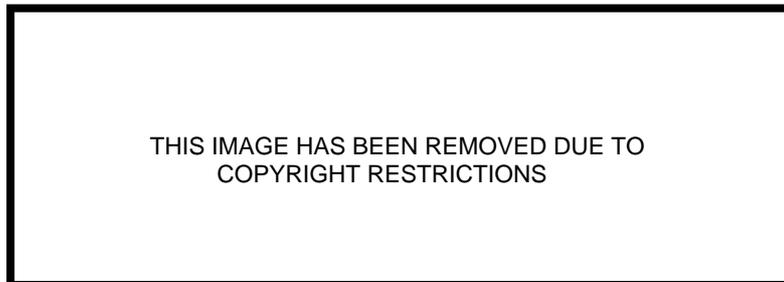


Figure 8: Young girls fishing

Warraber women take pleasure in the challenge of fishing and the respite it provides from the demands of village life. Young girls learn to fish in two ways – by accompanying their mothers, parents’ sisters, and grandmothers during more social occasions, and by practising their skills fishing with other children (figure 8). The stratified nature of age relationships meant that adult women often choose fishing companions of the same generation (*sista*) who belong to a similar married or unmarried category (*oman* or *gel*). Elderly women tend to require younger women to give them assistance while fishing, such as providing bait and untangling lines. For younger unmarried women, fishing forms a legitimate means to avoid miscellaneous home chores. They usually fish in groups, enjoying the social aspects of the activity and tend to move some distance from the village, away from the gaze (and demands) of older adults. There are many combinations of women in fishing groups, but they usually comprise friends who might also be close relatives or affines. Neighbours in the same multi-house *pamle* network (households sharing surplus food) also fish together; these women were likely to be sisters or sisters-in-law (as described in chapter 4).

It was also reasonably common to see married women with school-age children fishing alone. On such occasions, women tend to be intent on catching fish more than on

socialising. With the demands of children and a husband, married women often face constraints on their time, and with serious fishing, children are considered something of a hindrance. Opportunities to fish must be seized while older children are at school, and younger children are passed to a carer for the duration. In these circumstances, married women suggest they often feel reluctant to wait for other fishers to organise themselves. Local fishing lore also stipulates that fishing by oneself ensures a higher catch – one person makes less noise and there is only one source of bait attracting the fish. A woman fishing alone may also be concerned to catch a particular species of fish, requiring particular concentration on signs of fish aggregation. In this situation the social atmosphere of group fishing is viewed as not conducive to the focused observation needed. Older married women also acknowledge enjoying the relief from housework and from caring for children.

### *Distributing the Catch*

Women's fishing activities provide significant quantities of marine food, often more than is required in their own dwelling. Haddon (1912:130) described food sharing as a prominent feature of daily interactions:

In some of the western islands several families might occupy one house, and even now this sometimes occurs; when this was so each family had its own fireplace, and each provided its own food, but if one man had no fish or other food while another in the same house had some, the latter was bound to give some to him who lacked.

As at other locations in the Torres Strait and the Pacific (eg Eves 1998:37-9; Fuary 1991a; Kahn 1986), Warraber Islanders place a great significance on the distribution of food outside one's home. Informants state this act constitutes a demonstration of concern and respect for others, in effect illustrating an individual's willingness to engage in correct social behaviour, a demonstration of *gud pasin*. This shared value forms the fundamental basis for comprehending food distribution at Warraber. Food eaten in the presence of others must be shared, whether a packet of potato chips eaten outside the local storefront, or a meal that is served with a casual visitor present in the home. Denying or withholding food from another person was interpreted as a denial of basic sociality, an act of *bad pasin*. The inadequate distribution of food, or the perception thereof, formed a regular basis for tensions in the community, mainly

expressed through gossip, but at times extending to the chastising of individuals considered at fault.

Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:222) says of Mabuiag that subsistence production and consumption is governed by “obligation to kin”. Warraberan women certainly felt that others harboured expectations about the distribution of their fish and were also always mindful that careless distribution could lead to others’ displeasure, even anger. Fuary (1991a:203) notes that “redistribution of marine products helps facilitate and maintain the ideal of harmonious group interrelations”. Equally it can be a source of conflict. Distribution is painstakingly considered, as arguments or malicious gossip will likely ensue if it was performed without due care. The importance of fish and of sharing food in general produces a close monitoring and interpretation of the dispersal of a woman’s catch.

At the same time, as Eves (1998:38) notes in a Papua New Guinea context, “the morality of sharing is bound up with whether others have knowledge of the items or not.” If receivers never see the total catch, they can only assume that they are being given the portion that adequately reflects their relationship to the fisher. Distribution then is not entirely rule-bound; rather than a strict stipulation of orders of priority, women often have room to negotiate their response to requests – who they give fish to, and in what quantity, is rarely if ever a given.<sup>7</sup> The ways in which food and other products were hidden from or shared with the members of one’s community reflects a certain tension between *gud pasin* as an overtly affirmed social ideal and *gud pasin* as an actual social practice. The muted but always present disjuncture between the ideal

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<sup>7</sup> This kind of strategic calculation is raised by Peterson (1997), who discusses the applicability of a notion of ‘generosity’ in the context of Aboriginal ‘hunter-gatherer’ society. He argues that the endemic sharing characteristic of these societies are less acts of benevolence and more often responses to direct demands: “compassion... is usually only evoked when people present themselves as lacking something” (Peterson 1997:187). On this basis, he labels the redistributive practices of hunter-gatherer societies ‘demand-sharing’.

Peterson suggests that a preparedness to recognise a widespread range of kinship ties creates numerous demands, often more than can be easily met, leading to socially created scarcity (1997:89). The resulting stress of having too many social relationships to negotiate leads people to try to reduce demands. Adopting a largely passive approach to sharing, retreating into smaller groups, or keeping production to a minimum all comprise strategies to this end. At the same time, calculation also plays a role:

Calculation is undeniably part of the everyday practice of demand sharing, as the evidence of concealing alone makes clear; but, for demand sharing to be a pervasive social practice, it has to be a part of the habitus and of moral education in the management of interpersonal relations (Peterson 1997:89).

and practice always has the potential to create suspicion or resentment and regularly creates friction or stress in relationships between older and younger women, particularly affines.

When women fish together, an initial distribution of the catch takes place within the fishing group itself. This is restricted to women who do not live in the same house, and therefore do not share a kitchen. The aim is to make each individual's bucket less unequal by comparison with others, though not necessarily equal. When a woman gives one or more in her fishing group a portion of her larger catch, she tends not to give away the biggest or best species but rather chooses a range of fish – balancing size (larger, smaller) against variety (more and less desirable). The receiver inevitably exclaims she is being given far too much, effectively highlighting the generosity of the giver. A woman sharing her fish in this way also sometimes stipulates that a certain fish is earmarked for a particular individual in the receiver's ascending generation (who is likely also to be in the giver's own ascending generation), such as a parent, auntie, in-law or childhood foster-parent.

Following any sharing within the fishing group, individual women face further social pressure to distribute fish long before they reach their home. When a woman returning from fishing carries her bucket through the village, passers-by are always curious to look inside, especially other women and children. Children strain over each other to see into the bucket and identify the types of fish caught and the quantity. Adults are equally curious but their inquiries are more subdued. Warraber women are generally reluctant to become a focus of others' attention, most importantly, male affines, describing such a situation as involving embarrassment (*sem*, shame).<sup>8</sup> Women answer queries as to how the most significant fish in her bucket was caught, and certainly evinces a measure of pride in a successful catch. However, they are also careful to be self-effacing and to embellish mistakes and difficulties – the other, better fish that eluded capture, the weather and water conditions that made it difficult to attract and hook fish. Not only is bragging generally disliked (other than in jest), but boasts about one's skill and catch invite requests for fish, perhaps above and beyond what might be regarded as reflecting an established obligation.

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<sup>8</sup> This relation of avoidance between in-laws is briefly described in chapter 4.

In any case, if close female kin such as parental affines or an elderly neighbour are encountered, some inevitably request fish: “do you have any fish for me?” Asking directly for fish in this way is sometimes softened through using humour, or an offer is enticed by complaining about other relatives who have not been contributing to their household or in speaking sentimentally to appeal to a sense of the obligation due to kin of the woman’s ascending generation. Women rarely refuse outright, but can demur and dissemble, perhaps noting the lack of fish at their own home, or their outstanding debts to other close kin. In the case of younger unmarried women, any older female kin from their household who was present will usually move to take charge of the situation, fending off queries and requests while urging the returning fisher to return home quickly.

If they can, women will avoid these kinds of public encounters in order to evade being the focus of attention or being asked or expected to offer fish. This often involves taking back-roads or routes through the village where a minimal number of onlookers and houses are passed, or even returning from fishing after sunset, when many residents are inside their homes rather than out in the street. This strategy can be difficult, depending on where a woman lives in the village, but some effort will always be made to choose paths that pass the least number of households she knows will expect a share of fish. Few women returning from a fishing trip will pass a crowd lingering outside the local store, for example. The preferred situation is to take control of fish distribution by first returning home, then choosing the fish to distribute to particular households and individuals without pressure. In this way, the receivers are unable to scrutinise their portion in relation to the total catch, except perhaps by obtaining information from others. Young children were often used as fish ‘couriers’, able to answer any questions regarding a woman’s catch with a childish shrug.

While the choice of fishing companions can illustrate a wide range of relationships including friendship, distribution of caught fish is not as flexible. There are strong expectations to give a share of fish to particular sets of relatives and affines as well as to elderly neighbours who may not be part of a woman’s *pamle* (multi-house network). The multivalence of ‘*pamle*’ as a discourse of familial relatedness does not create finite limits of distribution. Warraberans recognise wide ranging kinship links. In addition, there is a recognised seniority of men over women and of the elderly over younger persons. On Warraber children are particularly encouraged to consider themselves

forever in a parent's debt, that of having been raised (*gromape*, grown up). Thus, to give freely to parents is said to be simply mindful of one's obligations to them. These ideas feed into relations of seniority, such as that of the elderly over younger persons, which facilitate more general demands and reduce peoples' capacity for outright refusal as being *bad pasin*.

The most difficult aspect facing a Warraber woman in distributing her catch involves the competing demands from the close kin of her husband (i.e. her affines) and the expectations of her own cognatic kin. Women's fishing catches tend to be directed primarily both to their own *pamle* and that of their husband. In doing so, women are expected to provide their affinal relations in the ascending generation with fish of desirable size for their species and of a favourable type in relation to their overall catch. In particular, women distribute fish to the parents of their husband, their husband's unmarried and married siblings, and to these respective households. Given virilocal emphasis in post-marital residence, a married woman's conjugal home is likely closest to her husband's family, and these kin constitute an important part of the everyday multi-house *pamle* network in which she participates. Proximity is important – any elderly neighbours who are not strictly 'familial' kin for example will still often be included in gifting fish because of the existing notion of caring for 'older' residents.

Fuary (1991a) notes that at Yam Island, a married woman is expected to turn her attention to her husband's family, that she work with other female members of that family, and that all her productive labour should be consumed by her affines.<sup>9</sup> Local ideology on Warraber does emphasise the woman's attachment to her husband and his closest kin. However, there is a continued expectation from the woman's kin that she will also distribute fish to them. This may be less of an issue for women who reside away from their natal island, that is, those women marrying into the Warraber population. In this situation, the numbers and range of resident kin and affines who expect to be included can be substantially reduced. But in-marrying women from neighbouring islands like Poruma inevitably have close ascending kin at Warraber, reflecting the considerable movement and inter-marriage between the islands over a long period, producing substantive genealogical overlaps. During 1996-7, 20 out of 36

married women living on Warraber were from that island and thus were living in proximity to their kin. Some of these women were also living adjacent to their own parents.

Table 4: Island Origins of 36 Married Couples Residing at Warraber

Men	Women
32 Warraber	20 Warraber
1 white Australian	2 Darnley
3 Saibai	4 St. Paul's (Moa Island)
	2 Horn Island
	2 Poruma
	6 Yam

Claims to women's productive labour by particular multi-house networks exhibits some flexibility beyond a woman's responsibility to her own husband, children and husband's parents. Much of the demand placed on a woman's labour and her own voluntary participation depend on the availability of other women, including the number of daughters already present to help a woman's parents and in-laws, the demands made on their labour, and the size of her own conjugal family and locality (which domestic collectivity she resides closest to). One woman from Warraber who married a man also from Warraber lived across the road from his parents and regularly gave fish to her in-laws. In addition, she visited her parents almost daily and sent fish to them as well. However, her labour was also requested from an elderly woman living next door to her affines who had no grown-up daughters (only sons). Her labour and distributive capacities were regularly stretched by the expectation that she contribute labour and fish to four houses, including her own, where she had five children to care for. Her husband often assisted her by spearing fish while crayfishing in order to supplement her own efforts. Women often juggled the demands they faced and would avoid some if this was possible without substantially upsetting kin.

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<sup>9</sup> Fuary (pers.comm. 2001) says that in practice a woman will however, give fish to her parents in addition to that of her husband's.

Attachments generated in childhood often continue to adulthood and these are also visible in distributive practices, as is the particular importance of ‘mother’s brother’ (MB) relationships. For example, one widowed woman with children was regularly given fish by her daughter and by her son’s de facto, who was living with them. Another woman who was not her daughter, also frequently gave her fish because she was close to the woman’s parents and because the old woman had periodically looked after her when she was a child. This widowed woman, Jenny, lived next door to her elderly brother, Sam, and his family. Jenny’s children also gave excess fish to Sam, their MB, on a regular basis, who took an active interest in his sister’s children – particularly after Jenny’s husband had died. The children would also reside in his house for short periods after fighting with their mother. These children gave fish to Sam because of their own relationship with him, because he was their MB, but also because Sam and Jenny continued to have a very close relationship. Because Sam lived next door to Jenny, the households always knew when fish were caught, either by seeing the fishers bringing their catches home, or by smelling the aroma of cooking fish.

In another situation, one married woman regularly gave fish to a household comprising unmarried women who had fostered her husband when he was growing up (*gromape*). He had no surviving parents, so the married couple’s labour was regularly directed towards these women. In the women’s house, containing three generations of unmarried women, the granddaughters and daughter provided fish for the house.<sup>10</sup> A married woman living next door, whose parents were long deceased, also gave her excess fish to these women, the eldest of whom was too old to fish anymore. In all these examples, proximity and sentiment, age hierarchies, as well as kin relationships all influence the extent to which fish are distributed to particular persons. At the same time, the behaviour of the receiver of an individual’s gift of fish can also provide an indication of the condition of their relationship.

As an act of socially approved *gud pasin*, a delivery of fish is rarely if ever refused. But fish that are given by disliked individuals are placed in the home freezer. Few if any of

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<sup>10</sup> In the first generation, an unmarried woman adopted her younger unmarried sister’s daughter (generation two). The third generation comprised the sister’s (unmarried) daughter’s own two daughters. This was an unusual household situation on Warraber; the fact that they were provided a house was testament to community respect for the eldest woman.

these frozen fish will ever be thawed and consumed. On Warraber, frozen fish are regarded as vastly inferior to freshly caught fish and as a consequence are rarely eaten. Fuary (1991a:203) suggests the advent of large deep freezers on Yam Island has had a marked effect on distributive practices in that marine foods no longer need to be eaten or given away shortly after their harvest. It may be that more extensive and accessible reef systems surrounding the island make fish more abundant and large catches more frequent than occur at Yam Island. In any case, freezers at Warraber do not play a role in delaying consuming or gifting fish, but rather in postponing the disposal of fish that will neither be consumed nor distributed. In this way the fish can be disposed of at a later date (usually after some weeks), when the origins of the fish will be less obvious.

Household rubbish heaps are in clear view of neighbours and visitors may spot or comment on discarded fish. There is also a concern that scavenging dogs could retrieve a fish and carry it into public view, where it will once again be remarked upon. The delay in disposal enabled by home freezers reduces the chance of openly or publicly repudiating the gift, an act that would constitute *bad pasin*. On one occasion, I saw a mother put a fish given by her married daughter into the freezer because she was angry (*wail*, wild) with her for not providing her with fish for a number of days, despite having gone fishing several times. The mother suspected her daughter of withholding fish in order to consume them at home with her husband and children.

Refrigerators (rather than freezers) are sometimes used to store fish, though strictly short-term, one day or so at most. Warraber fishers say that they may store fish in refrigerators when other relatives already have fish or more desirable foods like turtle and turtle eggs. If a fisher returns home after sunset, evening meals are likely to have already been prepared, both by their household and those of other kin. Particularly choice fish will then be stored in the refrigerator for household consumption the following day and these tend not to be distributed as they are no longer regarded as fresh (*tidei pis*, today fish) and therefore constitute an inferior gift.<sup>11</sup> If a woman is avoiding relatives or in-laws due to a minor dispute, she may well not pass on fish to them. Just as some individuals are renowned for being demanding in their requests for fish, particular women are regarded as being 'greedy' fishers, reputedly retaining marine

foods rather than passing them on to others, and storing excess fish in their refrigerator to consume the next day. Rumoured accusations of ‘greediness’ are not always an indication that a woman does retain fish any more than other women, but often reflect current disputes or a general dislike. Some older women for example are quick to assess a daughter-in-law as ‘greedy’ or ‘lazy’. The criticism suggests she is insufficiently solicitous to her in-laws; the spectre of ‘retaining food’ serves as a social synonym for poor conduct towards kin.

### **Men’s Marine Activity**

Warraber men spear and net fish and hunt green turtle (*waru*, *Chelonia mydas*) (see figure 9).<sup>12</sup> The majority of turtle hunts are organized specifically for ceremonial events, as is evident in the catch of green turtle over a twelve-month period from 1996 to 1997. Fifty-three turtles were captured (mostly adult female), with thirty-one of these captures occurring on a weekend (Friday evening to Sunday evening). Most ceremonial occasions and church events are held during weekends and men specifically hunt turtle for the feasting associated with these events. In order to provide enough *total mit* (turtle-meat) for these widely attended occasions, up to five turtles were sometimes captured, with the average being two.

Three men are usually required as crew when turtle hunting: one to steer the dinghy, another to spear the turtle while a third holds a rope attached to the harpoon point. The harpoon (*whap*) is comprised of a long wooden handle and an iron harpoon point (*koiur*). A small circlet of rope (*yad*) is attached to the *koiur* and to a thicker rope (*amu*). When the spear is thrust into the turtle, the *koiur* lodges in the turtle’s shell and detaches from the *whap*, but remains connected to the *amu* carefully held by one of the dinghy crew. The turtle is retrieved by hauling on this rope, and then maneuvered into the dinghy.

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<sup>11</sup> Sometimes, this fish might be cooked before being delivered to a relative. Such gifts are always regarded somewhat sceptically by the receiver, who (often rightly) suspects the fish is not freshly caught.

<sup>12</sup> Dugongs are rarely targeted specifically by Warraber men, being found mostly in the shallower waters in the Western region of the Torres Strait where there is more plentiful seagrass. They are, however, captured opportunistically (though seldom). Beckett (1987:28) maintains that dugongs are also a rarity in the Eastern Islands. In the Western Islands dugongs provide large quantities of meat for Mabuig people (Kwan 2002, Nietschmann 1976, 1979, Nietschmann and Nietschmann 1977, 1981).

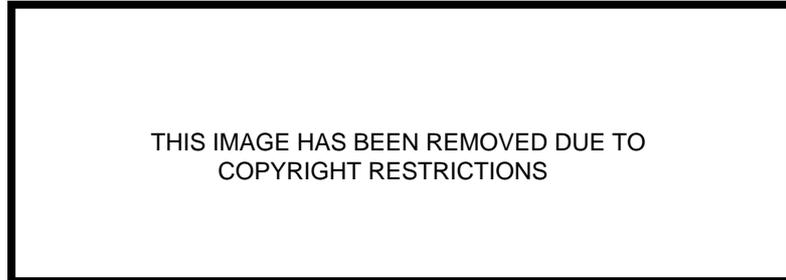


Figure 9: Men completing the butchering of a turtle

In addition to hunting turtles for large events, men also spear turtles for everyday subsistence.<sup>13</sup> Turtle hunts are often pre-arranged, but turtles will be pursued spontaneously if sighted during other activities such as crayfishing. Young unmarried men spend a considerable number of evenings and weekends in dinghies searching for turtle. Married men are more likely to spend their time crayfishing, restricting their turtle hunting to provision specific ceremonial occasions. In everyday life, butchered meat is distributed between the man who speared or caught the turtle, as well as to the owners of the dinghy and spear (*whap*) used, those assisting in the butchering (which takes place on the beach) and sometimes also (in small amounts) to people in the vicinity of the butchering process.

These individuals divide their shares of turtle meat further among a small number of houses, usually those comprising the *pamle* of the hunters. People stated that in the past, turtle and dugong meat was distributed to all houses but given that the population has

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<sup>13</sup> See Bird et.al. (1995:6) for information regarding seasonal hunting of turtle by Meriam people in the Eastern Islands. For a general overview of turtle hunting, see Johannes and MacFarlane (1991:53-71).

grown substantially over several decades, this is no longer feasible.<sup>14</sup> Distribution may be restricted to the hunter's own domestic group, that is, to his house and that of his siblings, his parents and perhaps the parent's siblings. Neighbours often expect to receive a share even if they were from another *pamle*. In apportioning meat to each household recipient, the aim is to fill the respective buckets with the same kinds of meat cuts, so that no one receives better meat than another. Every bucket therefore receives a portion of meat, fat (*pat/gerged*), intestines (*akul*), lung (*saka*), kidney (*kagi*), liver (*leba/siib*) and any un-laid eggs (*gabuyal*).

Unlike turtle hunting, men rarely participate in hand lining for fish. When they do, the activity usually occurs at weekend 'picnics' with girlfriends or siblings, or wives and children. On such occasions men will walk through lagoons at a slight distance from women, but off-loading any catch to them (to be placed in their buckets). At the weekends, men and women also sometimes fish from the beach on an incoming tide for larger fish with heavier hand-lines than those routinely used, as well as larger hooks and sinkers and live bait such as *sadin* or *tup* (Ogilby's Hardyhead). Men or women catch sardines by throwing a sling-net into schools of the small fish gathered close to the beach. The heavier lines are propelled by the large bait and hook and by twirling the line above the head in a circular motion, building momentum before release. The bait usually lands some distance inside the lagoon. These hand lines are then left on the beach and monitored casually by their owners for movement or occasionally hauled in to replace the bait with a more active live fish.

Certain kinds of fish are also highly desired for the feasts accompanying ceremonial events, alongside turtle-meat.<sup>15</sup> To acquire these fish in the necessary quantity, men free-dive on reefs with spears. Smaller quantities can also be caught by spearfishing on foot through the lagoons. This is a more solitary activity, with men searching for fish on the early morning incoming tides, those already speared hanging from the fishers' body on a rope strung through the fish's mouth. Various men are said to be better at spearing

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<sup>14</sup> At Mabuiag the meat from a successful dugong hunting trip is distributed between several houses or even among every house in the village (see Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:220). The range of distribution varies according to the size and number of animals caught and the purpose of the hunting trip.

<sup>15</sup> Fish targeted for feasting include *parsa* (Golden-Lined Spinefoot), *kurbim* (Smudgefoot Spinefoot), *withi* (Coral Troup sp), *mathai* (Golden Trevally), *kabar* (Queenfish), *gaigai bulzi* (Giant Trevally) and less so the *silba malet* (Blue-Tail Mullet) and *gagaral/murugudlai* (Diamond Scaled Mullet).

fish than others, but prowess in fishing is held in much less regard among other community members than success at turtle and dugong hunting. These activities are celebrated at life stage rituals where the links between hunting and adult male identity is made explicit through speeches and presents (see chapter 4).

For large ceremonial events, underwater spear fishing is preferable to other methods like reef walking. *Gangar* (coral-features) are targeted during spearfishing as areas in which fish are most likely to be found. Other sites that are said to yield good catches were shipwrecks. The reef adjacent to Bara Island has several wrecks, some of which are locally named. These range from smaller yachts (which tend to break up quickly) to a large (and imposing) commercial prawn ‘mother’ or collection ship. Fish congregate around these objects and provide high-return sites for spearing. Men wear facemasks both when diving and swimming, but flippers are not used and diving is always carried out close to a dinghy (as with crayfishing).

Different spears (*spiya*) are used according to the desired catch and appropriate conditions. For underwater diving for *kwikumak* (Many-lined Sweetlip), *parsa* (Golden-Lined Spinefoot) or *ibai* (Surgeonfish), a short spear is used comprising a bamboo or aluminium shaft with an iron barb (together about 1.5-2 m). For walking along the reefs at low tide, a multi-pronged spear known as a *tathalai* is used to capture larger fish such as *gaigai bulzi* (Giant Trevally), *pekoe* (unidentified) or *kal* (Surf Parrotfish). This spear consisted of a bamboo pole, generally taller than its user, with several prongs fastened to one end. Spear making involves straightening lengths of bamboo over burning coconut husks, then attaching iron prong/s. For a single iron *niki kalak*, a thick wire prong is attached to one end that has been split and hollowed out and then fastened from the outside by thinner wire. To preserve its straightness, a spear may be hung vertically from a tree and weighted by a dry coconut.

Warraber and Poruma do not have locally available bamboo. Bamboo for spear making is obtained from both Yam and Ullu Islands. Sasi Island also has bamboo, but the island is renowned as being inhospitable to visit for any length of time due to sand flies residing in the large mangrove forests found there. As a result, Sasi's bamboo resources were not utilized extensively during my fieldwork, though plans to do so were being discussed and people had apparently done so in the past. Warraber, Yam and Poruma people are described as owning the resources of this island collectively.

## *Commercial Activities*

Unlike women, Warraber men engage in a number of income-generating marine activities. They refer to these together as ‘industry’ (*indastri*) noting for example that there are few *indastri* remaining in the islands now compared with the past. *Indastri* can be thought of as any regular boat-linked activity that is focused on gathering a marine resource that can be sold. Though the small aluminium dinghy and outboard has replaced the timber schooner and pearl-lugger, participating in marine-based ‘industry’ remains a critical aspect of Warraber male self-identification. Men of all ages often remarked that their main source of skills relates to boats (*‘ai bin larn lo bot’*). This highlighted the role of the dinghy as near-defining male marine activities. Even when not actually engaged in seeking some form of marine resource, men (particularly young men) spend a great deal of time in dinghies, charging to and fro in the deep channel leading to Warraber’s public jetty or outside the reefs fringing the island, sometimes at significant speeds. This practice, often conducted self-consciously under the gaze of people on shore, constitutes a complex social performance with components of youthful bravado, sheer delight and thrill, as well as masculine swagger. Skill in handling dinghies is a serious business, and the ‘learning’ involved and demonstrated in the activity is linked as much to *indastri* as it is to gender relations, masculine identity, and sexuality.

The remaining commercial marine-based activities available on Warraber comprise harvesting crayfish and trochus shell, with the addition from late-1997 of beche-de-mer.<sup>16</sup> Trochus gathering as an activity by Warraber men stretches over several decades, but it has waned somewhat as returns have declined. By contrast Warraber men’s participation in crayfishing is relatively recent, becoming established around thirty years ago. Previously, trochus and pearlshell work required men to spend much of the year

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<sup>16</sup> The fishery focused on a number of species, most commonly, black teatfish (*Holothuria nobilis*), white teatfish (*H. fuscogilva*) and prickly redfish (*Thelenota ananas*). Stringent management regimes have been enforced in recent years as Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) studies revealed a devastating decline in sandfish (*Holothuria scabra*) numbers, since protected from collection (Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority 1999). I do not discuss beche-de-mer (locally called *boiath*) here. Though Warraber men had collected these in recent years, it was occurring infrequently during my main fieldwork in 1996 and 1997. I was interested to note that men considered the activity unpleasant and described it as more suited to women and children, despite its capacity to generate income. This was perhaps due to the fact it does not require much swimming and required little skill to locate or capture.

away from their islands. Local recollections suggest men returned to Warraber just before Christmas for a holiday, before setting out once again a few weeks later. The pearlshell season stretched from March or April to December and involved movement from eastern to western Torres Strait reefs. Pearlshelling work took men far away from Warraber, some working throughout the Torres Strait and down the eastern coast of Cape York to reefs off Townsville.

Men have continued to dominate work in marine industries. Some older women were said to have worked trochus during the 1950s and 1960s when young and on reefs close to Warraber. But their participation fell short of full engagement during this era, with the majority of their time reserved for subsistence fishing and some gardening. Wives would receive some of the men's marine industry wages through an arrangement with the local store. Part of a man's wages were withheld and directed to the local store where families could offset purchases like flour and tea against their husband's projected earnings. Thus, women, children and older men and women were cut off from men working on the boats for months at a time, largely directing their own efforts toward subsistence. Currently, it is Warraber men who regularly engage in crayfishing and, more sporadically, gather trochus shell.

Crayfish and trochus are not important foods in ceremonial feasting and are not targeted for these large events. Freshly collected trochus flesh (once removed from the shell) is reserved for subsistence and distributed among the fishermen's families, though if it becomes two or three days old it tends to be discarded rather than cooked. By contrast, residents ate crayfish fairly regularly in the past. These animals are now consumed only occasionally – and usually those too small to sell – though larger (commercial size) crayfish may be served to important guests. The earnings provided by the sale of crayfish are considered far more important than its decline as a local food item.

### *Crayfishing*

Commercial crayfishing, also known as the tropical rock lobster fishery, began in the Torres Strait in 1957. Since that time, Islander participation has greatly increased as have fishing efforts. In recent years, crayfishing has come to attract the highest levels of local participation among all commercial marine activities in the region, increasing from eight Islander crayfish divers in 1969 to the involvement of most mature Torres

Strait Islander men today (Williams 1994; Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority 2001). This is due to a number of factors, including the establishment of a processing factory in the Torres Strait in 1969, the introduction of carrier boats ('freezer mother ships') in 1982 that processed the catch locally, the creation of community freezers and most recently, trade in live crayfish bought directly from local fishermen. In the 1995 season the total catch was 208 tonnes, with a value of \$6.5 million. In 1998, 242 tonnes yielded \$8 million. Torres Strait Islanders work under a community licence established by the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority (TSPZJA). 'Traditional inhabitants' register their vessels with the Chairperson of their respective island who then become attached to a community licence. In the Torres Strait, between 300 and 400 vessels under 6 metres in length were licensed under this scheme before it was changed from 'Community Licences' to Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) fishing licence (Australian Fisheries Management Authority 2002).

At Warraber the majority of adult men engage in searching for crayfish (*Panulirus spp.*), known as *kaiar*. Indeed during peak catching periods, the entire able-bodied adult male population can be involved on a daily basis. Poor eyesight, fatigue and slower reflexes are factors that physically limit the participation of more elderly men. The activity occurs mainly at night (when crayfish are most active), which enables men to arrange the activity around other work commitments, such as paid employment or CDEP work. Techniques vary, but generally sealed torches or fluorescent lights connected to car batteries are used to locate the crayfish, a technique known locally as 'show a light' (*so e lait*). The crayfish are then either speared or picked up live in a gloved hand by a swimmer. The tails of speared crayfish are separated from the heads and kept in house freezers waiting to be sold to outside buyers. In the past Warraber men sold crayfish tails directly to a Council-run 'community' freezer. Men were paid by cheque and proceeds of the sale were reputed to have gone to the Council. The freezer is no longer operating as outside buyers offer higher prices. At Poruma men continue to sell directly to a privately owned local freezer. Crayfish that are captured by hand are kept alive in locally made enclosures, either secured to a buoy in Warraber's lagoons, or tied to the island's jetty. These live crayfish are sold whole to buyers who regularly fly their own planes to islands paying cash directly for the catch.

Crayfishing requires a heavy commitment of resources such as time, labour and petrol. To participate, a man requires his own dinghy or that of a crayfishing partner. Men wear

special gloves to protect their hands from the animal's sharp shell and they prefer to use a wetsuit especially at night. They also need a light and containers in which to keep the live crayfish until they can put them in their traps on the home reef. Crayfishing also requires daily activity according to the tide. Men work on Warraber's reef, and also at *Bara*, *Guiya* and *Maza Guiya* and sometimes further afield at *Aurid* and *Thurdiu*.<sup>17</sup> Most crayfishing trips last only a few hours, but with the use of ice, longer trips of several days are possible to more distant southerly reefs like those at and in the vicinity of *Atub*. The privately operated freezer at Poruma supplies ice to both Poruma and Warraber men for longer trips to southern reefs. The ice can keep crayfish tails fresh for several days. However, the ice is supplied on the understanding that all crayfish tails are sold to this freezer. The price paid for crayfish is variable. Crayfish were being bought at \$29 per kilo in 2001 whereas in 1994, Islanders were receiving \$35-40 per kilo for crayfish (Altman, Arthur and Bek 1994:13).

The use of individually owned aluminium dinghies introduced a degree of flexibility in the organisation of labour that was not present in earlier forms of commercial marine activity such as pearlshelling. Though men may fish alone (sometimes bringing their wife, or one or more older children) two man crews are the general norm. Beckett (1987) points to a fundamental transformation in marine work:

There has been a re-ordering of the lines of dependence that characterised the old 'skipper class-crew class' formation. ... In the absence of any official funding or management or a need for 'strong leadership' at the local level, the kinship system provided the organizing structure (1987:214, 215).

The composition of crayfishing crews resonates with kinship relations. Most dinghy owners crew with their brothers, male affines or younger male relatives such as their sister's son. But men at Warraber suggest they go crayfishing together primarily because they like each other. In other words, they prefer to fish with their friends, usually men of similar age or marital status who they regard as hard workers. Certainly it is often difficult to discern a point where kinship ends and friendship begins as the two are interconnected. But it is important to note that if a man has an argument with his kinsman, he will not team up with him for fishing, or any other social interaction for that matter, until the disagreement has been resolved. Thus there are limits to the role of kinship in men's productive activities. Religious affiliation is also reflected in crews and

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<sup>17</sup> See map 2 for locations mentioned in this chapter.

this partly follows familial lines. As *pamle* are usually living in close proximity, some crews are derived from men who live close by, who belong to the same family or are affines and belong to the same church. Occasionally a wife may accompany her husband if child-care can be arranged.

The two person working system allows the man in the water greater freedom of movement by not being forced to regularly surface to order to relocate the dinghy. The swimmer can search for the animals while the person in the dinghy follows. The few men who regularly go crayfishing alone tend to travel to places on the reef that they know from experience contain crayfish. This allows them to anchor the dinghy, and after spearing or capturing the crayfish, motor to the next known location. Individual dinghies usually work in concert with other dinghies, as most men prefer to work in sight of others.

Warraber men search for crayfish during a period defined by south-easterly winds, known as *sager*. *Sager* follows the *kuki* period, a rainy season typified by north-westerly winds from which it derives its name. Seasons are said to differ from year to year and much overlap occurs. The *kuki* season overlaps with the *sager*, where rainy north-westerly weather is interspersed with calmer *sager* winds. Thus informants state that *sager* type weather broadly extends from January to July, but that *kuki* periods of rain continue to be experienced during the first few months of *sager*. These periods are distinguished by descriptions of *sager* or *kuki* type weather, from *prapa sager* and *prapa kuki* when the seasons are in full swing. At the beginning of the *sager* period when intermittent *kuki* rain occurs, the crayfish are small but still saleable. They become bigger as the season progresses, and the level of participation also increases. Men suggest that during high tides at the new moon and full moon crayfish are especially prolific; the activity at these times can become intense, with every Warraber man who is physically able to do so engaged in searching for crayfish. With the onset of the northeast wind called *naigai* (usually around August), the water is said to become hotter, causing the crayfish to move away from shallow reefs to the deeper sea floor. Around this time, the focus of male marine activity shifts to trochus shell.

## *Gathering Trochus Shell*

Trochus shell (*Trochus niloticus*) is called *kabar*. It was actively sought in a marine resource focused industry that spanned a century (1860s to 1960s), focused on the procurement of pearshell, trochus and beche-de-mer, but which ultimately declined due to inflexible management when confronted with changing world markets (Ganter 1994:3). In particular, the introduction of plastics profoundly influenced the pearlshell industry decline of the in the 1950s, precipitating a full collapse in the following decade (Beckett 1987; Ganter 1994:222); trochus fishing disappeared and pearlshelling was replaced with pearl culture farming (Ganter 1994:225). A re-emerging demand for mother-of-pearl in the 1970s resulted in the renewed collection of trochus shells for commercial sale, though on a lesser scale than existed prior to the 1960s collapse.

Trochus shell can be found locally throughout the year but gathering is strongly influenced by regional weather conditions, taking place during the *naigai* period, also known as ‘fine weather season’ (approximately August and December). As noted, this is the off-season for crayfish. With the shift to the southeast winds of *sager*, not only do crayfish become available once again, but rough sea conditions make it too difficult to gather trochus. According to Warraberans, the shells lie close to dense coral formations fringing the limits of sandy lagoons, particularly on the southern sides of reefs where large waves break. These breakers make it difficult to anchor nearby, dragging or even capsizing a dinghy. It also becomes difficult to locate the shell as the force of the waves churn the sandy bottom, obstructing visibility and preventing a fisherman from maintaining position in the water.

Trochus is not an important source of income – it does not compare to crayfish either in terms of earnings or in male participation. Its primary significance is social rather than economic, so that even men in full time employment on Warraber will also collect trochus from time to time. The activity retains a strongly nostalgic association with marine industry activities of the past. This lends it an import in excess of its relatively small contribution to household income. The genuinely hazardous depths and duration of the dives and the general status linked historically to involvement in pearlshell gathering results in a near-heroic stature being accorded to Islander participants. Expertise in trochus-gathering continues to carry something of this prestige, such that

elderly men (many born in the 1930's) who cannot engage in crayfishing enjoy a prominence through demonstrating their knowledge about the activity. Trochus gathering occurs during daylight hours and trochus are relatively stationary, so elderly men are able to take part directly. Nonetheless, they tend not to gather much shell themselves, except perhaps in the most shallow reef areas – swimming is left to younger men.<sup>18</sup> Their standing rests with their experience and knowledge of trochus.

Trochus fishing is organised around dinghy owners who team up with other men in similar configurations to crayfishing. Crews are often composed of experienced senior men alongside younger and relatively inexperienced men. The younger men need to be shown the distant reefs and the *rod* (paths) to take in getting there, knowledge of which is required in order to navigate a dinghy at night.<sup>19</sup> A multi-personnel dinghy crew ensures more profitable shell quantities and reduced petrol costs. If alone, a man has to drag his dinghy by a rope as he moves along the reef picking up *kabar* (trochus). Some men also regularly gather with in-laws resident at Warraber and at Poruma. Working with men from another community requires them to spend some time on the others' residential island before and after a trip, providing opportunities to visit relatives and to socialise. Two men from different communities working in this way again tend to take only one dinghy between them to reduce petrol costs. A few women have crewed with their husbands, de-facto partners or male relatives, but it is generally not considered an activity appropriate for women.<sup>20</sup> Children are also sometimes taught how to swim for trochus at a young age. But smaller children of early primary age are generally not taken to the more distant reefs, instead occasionally swimming for trochus on Warraber's nearby reefs such as *Bara*.

Warraber men frequently travel to southern reefs for gathering trochus. Here some reefs have sandbanks and vegetation making them suitable for camping, such as *Atub* (also called Dugong Island), *Big Boiag* reef, *Kaskuru* and *Bodoal Maza* (see map 2). Dinghy

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<sup>18</sup> In this regard, it is notable that the term 'diving' (*daiv*) is reserved in Warraber for the historical activity of pearlshelling. While gathering Trochus (and crayfishing) can mean swimming to depths of up to three metres, it is not considered 'diving'. Instead, people 'swim' for trochus. Any suggestion that marine activities today involve diving would invite the derision of those with memories of the pearl-lugger era.

<sup>19</sup> Refer also to the discussion of local perceptions concerning 'freedom of movement' in chapter 6.

<sup>20</sup> Men maintain that women in general lack sufficient expertise in handling boats and are relatively inexperienced at enduring the physical requirements of long distance or extended dinghy travel.

crews discuss their intended destinations and plan the timing of trips together. Despite gathering trochus individually, dinghies travel in a group and work near each other. This is seen as a safe practice; even the few men who regularly prefer operating their dinghies alone, will travel with others to trochus areas. Dinghies usually meet up at a designated location (such as *Atub*), pick up trochus, and then move on as a group to other areas, such as *Big Boiag*.

Dugong Island (*Atub*) is a favoured base of activity in the southerly area. It is the most heavily vegetated island and is known to have abundant trochus. People may initially spend two or three days camping at the island while working adjacent reefs. It is also used as a sleeping place, a respite from the reefs, and a place to boil trochus to remove the meat (which is sometimes eaten) and clean the shell. If the catch has been unsatisfactory at *Atub* or *Big Boiag* and there is adequate fuel and time available, dinghy and camping gear may be shifted to *Kaskuru*. *Kaskuru* has a grassy sandbank and a single *bodo* (unidentified) tree bearing large leaves suitable for wrapping damper to cook in the coals of a fire. *Kaskuru* and other grassy sandbanks also host *sara* birds (Lesser Crested Tern, *Sterna bengalensis*) whose eggs are collected for eating. From the base at *Kaskuru*, reefs like *Kagar*, *Damu* and *Pudagath* are worked. *Bodoal Maza* is suitable for camping and is proximate to *Bau*, *Marapnab* and *Muri* (see map 2).

The duration of each trochus fishing trip varies from a single or several days to periods in excess of a week, according to commitments of waged employment and the quantity of petrol available. A single day trochus fishing trip to *Atub* requires a mid-day or afternoon tide. When the tide is high, dinghies leave from Warraber to catch the low tide at *Atub* where people swim for trochus and subsequently return on the incoming afternoon or evening tide. While it is physically possible to travel to southern reefs like *Atub* for a day trip, men state that they prefer not to do so, as the returns from a single day of work are considered insufficient against the costs of petrol.

Longer trochus fishing trips require greater quantities of petrol but generate higher quantities of trochus. Three drums of petrol are required for a single day trip to an outer destination such as *Atub*, with each (25 litre) drum costing around \$30 (ie a total of \$90). The first drum allows a dinghy around ninety minutes travelling time to reach their destination. The second is used while searching for trochus and the third is reserved for the return journey. In one day a person hopes to pick up around 50

kilograms of Trochus shell. Between 1996-1999 trochus was being sold at around \$3 per kilogram to the freezer at Poruma or to buyers at Thursday Island. The need for fuel varies with gathering skills. Some men take as many as ten drums of petrol for a period of six to eight days, while others take several drums for a week.

### *Income Disposal*

While many dinghies may be working one reef simultaneously – either for crayfish or trochus – income is not shared between dinghies, but only among men working in the same dinghy. While the costs of operating a dinghy are high, gathering marine products can offer the means to make substantial amounts of money. Selling accumulated live crayfish to a buyer can, for example, return thousands of dollars in a single transaction. The relatively lower returns derived from trochus do not undermine the status derived from the local imperative, couched in highly moral terms, that men must ‘work hard’ outside the home in order to provide income for their family. All crayfish are sold directly to freezers or mainland buyers at a rate set by each buyer, at least for a particular season. This applies also to Trochus shell. Marked differences in returns then, are attributed locally to the skill and experience of the man (or less commonly, woman) involved and the level of commitment they give to the activity in terms of time and effort. Thus, men who earn the most in both crayfishing and trochus are often described as being especially hardworking and committed family members.

In their marine activities, men, particularly young unmarried men, are to some extent able to act as individual agents, and they continue to exercise a degree of autonomy over the disposal of their earnings. A proportion is often used for purchasing dinghy equipment, such as new engines and safety equipment. Dinghies and engines are usually purchased through paying instalments to Thursday Island retailers, and this also attracts a portion of many men’s funds. However, men also face important constraints in the use of their income; in particular, they are expected to be mindful of persons they are required to ‘look after’. And men are also pressured and/or persuaded by their spouses as to where their earnings are most needed. Children’s educational needs are one common target, with income also frequently directed toward large one-off expenses, such as funding travel to an inter-island event for their parents or wife’s parents. As a

result, much of the money earned in trochus gathering and crayfishing will ultimately be spent within their *pamle*.

For Warraber men then, as for women, the proceeds of marine-based productive activities are enmeshed with the moral demands of sociality, of *gud pasin* and in particular, notions of obligation and responsibility associated with the *pamle* network. Indeed, work itself is understood as embodying and reflecting moral ideas, as Beckett (1987:104) notes: “a belief that the workings of the economy were subject to the recognition of certain rights and obligations”. As the only source of income for one’s elderly parents is usually in the form of a government pension, they tend to request money from married or single children who are working to meet additional needs or sudden expenses. This is a burden that tends to fall mostly on men, as they possess the capacity to earn relatively large sums of money in the marine industries. If money is required to meet an unforeseen need in the near future, men try to engage intensively in marine *indastri* work.

Pensions do not provide adequate sources of money for travel to other islands for important religious festival occasions like funerals, tombstone openings or Christian fellowships. As elderly people are considered to be the heads of families (*mo big*, bigger, more important or senior), their attendance at major occasions, such as funerals, is more important than attendance by their adult children. Indeed, their attendance is expressed as representing their families (*stan up po pamle*, to represent one’s family). Elderly men and women are deemed too old to travel in dinghies, and a ten minute ride in a light aircraft is seen as infinitely preferable to a bumpy one to two hour dinghy ride to Poruma. In 2001, return plane travel to Poruma from Warraber was over \$200, certainly beyond the reach of elderly pensioners without the assistance of their children and/or children’s spouses. Thus, asking for money to fund their travel to large occasions is understood in obligatory terms. As a result, sharing practices frequently exist at the interface of Christianity and kinship relatedness.

### *Christianity and Sharing*

Christian collectivities are described through the discourse of kin, either as ‘God’s children’ (by Anglicans) or as ‘Jesus’ brothers and sisters’ (by AOG members). Christian collectivities are a family belonging to God. In this sense, the Christian

metaphor of sharing with one's *pamle* also extends to sharing with one's 'Christian family' on particular collective occasions. As a Christian practice, the pressure to 'share' (distribute food/money) with other kin extends to participation in collectively financing Christian occasions. These include lunches for local Church Days, days commemorating the institution of motherhood, revenue-raising sales and joint Christian fellowships. Women and men from each *pamle* network, and ideally individual households, are expected to contribute food and labour to such occasions. Unsolicited contributions to churches occur with less frequency than regular 'familial' offerings, including weekly donations, and those connected with individual birthdays. Donations are derived from both welfare and regular incomes as well as those arising from work in marine industries.

Some men directed a portion of their earnings from the sale of crayfish and trochus to their churches, Anglican or AOG. Described as an 'offering', these contributions were also actively solicited; one Anglican priest recommended to his congregation that a tithe of ten per cent would be considered adequate. He added that the more often men gave to the church from their marine incomes, the more likely their rewards in the future would be, i.e. continuing high returns from industry work. Warraber residents often described high returns through marine activities as not solely the result of hard work, but also as representing a reward or 'blessing' from God. Beckett (1971:29) notes that being a good Christian in the Torres Strait entails "right conduct and piety". At Warraber 'right conduct and piety' is invoked socially through critiques of others for not following a Christian way of life, which often centres upon perceptions of inadequate sharing of the products of marine activities (both fishing and *industria*).

Warraber residents note that in the pre-Christian past it was already necessary to share with others. Local stories about pre-conversion life frequently contain allusions to the importance of sharing. Both versions of the Mutiuk story in chapter 2, for example, featured the distribution of fish as a central feature of 'before time' life, albeit compelled by the moral authority of local sorcerers rather than priests. Nonetheless, as a contemporary practice, the discursive emphasis on food sharing is kinship obligation and Christian values rather than a continuation of 'before time' (pre-Christian) practice. The moral imperative to share is implicit in terms like *pamle* – the multiple households that are expected to distribute money and food to each other. For Warraber residents, the notion of 'looking after' (*lugaut*) ascending levels of kin forms the practical

enactment of Christian expectations of ‘sharing’ (*seya* or *sermaut*) with others (including food, money and labour). Not ‘sharing’ with extended kin is not only interpreted as anti-social, but as indicative of arrested spiritual growth in relation to Christianity.

Nevertheless, some younger married couples residing in their own houses may attempt to justify disregarding the expectation of ‘looking after’ elderly kin by arguing that their own ‘house’ (*aus*), i.e. nuclear family, requires their focused attention, an attitude that inevitably evokes censure from others as *bad pasin*. Warraber people understand an emphasis on one’s own nuclear family (spouse, children) as being in tension with the Christian values of ‘sharing’, particularly in failing to meet the expectation of looking after elderly relatives. An adherence to the latter practice is deemed a fundamental expression of *gud pasin*. In this sense, the notion of ‘greediness’ is also locally understood as being sinful, reflecting a flawed or even absent relationship with God. Informants frequently referred to such people in terms of ‘not knowing God’ (*no sabe God*) or ‘not knowing prayer’ (*no sabe preya*), in both instances suggesting an absence of Christian values.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter, together with the previous one, have sought to provide “a picture of the implications and the lived experience of relatedness in local contexts” (Carsten 2000:1). I have shown how the *pamle* comprises the main, though not the sole arena for social transactions through the medium of marine activity, in particular the fish caught by women, and the money generated by men’s sale of commercial marine products. Warraber residents envisage their everyday lives in terms of this active engagement with and productive use of the marine realm, allowing them to participate fully in local social life and in particular, meet key moral demands implicit in sociality through their contributions of labour, foodstuffs and income. As Warraber residents engage in marine activities, kin relations, friendship, residence and religious affiliation are inflected in their choice of companions. And the distribution of the products of these activities gives material substance to local understandings of relatedness, its responsibilities and obligations, that link productive activity with meaningful social relationships.

It is against this background that personal expressions of attachment to the sea can best be comprehended as a primary expression within Warraber identification. One informant described the feeling of loss he experienced during a period residing on mainland Australia without everyday access to the sea: ‘being away from the sea, such as when visiting the mainland, ... is akin to losing a wife’ (*wen yu stap lo melan, yu longwei pram ailan, yu no luk si blo ailan, ... i laik yu bin luse oman blo yu*). The implicit interconnection between self, kin relations and marine activities is vivid in the metaphoric equivalence he draws between spouse and sea. Other informants stated that the first thing men think of doing when returning to Warraber Island from an absence is going out in their dinghy either for marine industry work, turtle hunting, or subsistence fishing. For women, hand-line fishing is similarly a pivotal experience, shaping their sense of self. As women age, many do not adhere to the local expectation for them to rely on the labour of others; they continue to go fishing. Those women who are too old to continue fishing frequently reflect on their past activities while expressing a desire to feel strong enough to continue to fish as young people do.

As noted, marine activities – whether hand-line fishing or hunting turtle – can also offer residents opportunities for pleasure and respite from the immediacy of kin demands even as they provide a means to fulfil social expectations. Marine-focused activities involve regular opportunities to travel away from the intense sociality of the Warraber settlement and foster familiarity with and knowledge of wider island environments. The following chapter shifts focus from the practical implications of kin relatedness to examine in greater detail residents’ experiences of place. In so doing, further dimensions of *gud pasin* as a lived and emplaced practice become clear, as does the significance of local identification in terms of ‘belonging to’ Warraber.

## Chapter Six: Living-in-Place – identification and residence

### Introduction

In chapter 2 I highlighted differing emphases on ancestry within the Warraber population according to the distinction *neitiv* or *poren*. These differences create the potential for a fundamental division in how Warraberans think about local connection to Warraber Island as a location. The issue of ancestry also raises the potential for competing bases of ‘being Warraberan’ to emerge, in terms perhaps of more or less legitimate or authentic claims of local identification. Certainly the descendants of male *neitiv* ancestors have the ability to draw on the actions of precedent local figures in constructing a framework of personal connection to Warraber.

The descendants of in-migrating male ancestors invoke other dimensions of relation to place in order to assert local identification as Warraber people. Their emphasis tends to be on processes of emplacement, in particular local birth and long-term residence of themselves and their more recent ancestors in addition to being embedded in networks of kin and the obligations and responsibilities this involves. Such ideas are salient also among *neitiv* descendants, who themselves affirm that ‘belonging’ to Warraber as a distinct locale involves actions and relationships formed in place. This shared understanding precludes any notion that the descendants of male *neitiv* ancestors alone possess an attachment to Warraber Island that is sufficient to claim legitimate local identification.

In this chapter I focus on residents’ ideas about emplacement, in particular the understanding that birth, residence and local knowledge are integral features of ‘belonging’ to Warraber. I describe how Warraber *as place* is characterised by Warraber residents and the ways in which Warraber places are meaningful for the people who live there. As Casey (1996:18) observes “to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in.” The Warraber sense of being local or in their terms, ‘belonging to Warraber’, has been facilitated by decades of residence on the island and a mutual regard for each other as kinsmen. Alongside ancestral and religious distinctions, which may be mobilised to facilitate or restrict access to positions of

influence, place is also given meaning in terms of the social relationships that pervade it. Thus, *where* people live requires consideration alongside *with whom* people live. I discuss these ideas by teasing apart the threads of Warraber ‘belonging’, a local concept I have come to understand in terms of the island being envisioned as a home, containing personal places, individual place-based memory, and participation in the moral terms that pervade Warraberan conceptions of landscape.

### **The Morality of Place**

Residents’ characterisations of the Warraber landscape reflect moral ideas about habitation and sociality, and influence activities and movement. This is clearly illustrated by the local distinction between *bus* (bush) and *biliz* (village). The term ‘bush’ is used to refer to places at Warraber where vegetation grows wildly. These include small pockets of untended vegetation close to the village itself. Warraber people typify bush places as being *dak* (gloomy), an undesirable trait. In such areas, one’s view is hindered, allowing acts that might otherwise attract social censure to be potentially hidden. As a result, the bush is associated with illicit sexual liaisons and even with the practice of sorcery. Warraber people rarely visited *bus* areas and describe them as uninviting and uncomfortable environments.

By contrast, informants characterise village areas as being typically light, cleared of dense vegetative growth and easily surveyable. These all comprise valued attributes linked to the regular maintenance of inhabited places which provide the setting for everyday socially sanctioned activity. In contrast to dim, overgrown areas, cleared and light spaces are associated with human residence and sociality. These highly moral depictions echo the motif of the pre-Christian ‘darkness’ that residents suggest shrouded the Torres Strait before the arrival of the London Mission Society (see chapter 2). The associations of *bipo taim* appear to be transposed onto bush places as unfit places for contemporary people to live. The metaphoric shift of the community from an era of pre-Christian ‘darkness’ to the contemporary period of ‘light’ is reflected physically in the current cleared village areas – with the ‘Coming of the Light’ the space of life itself also became sunlit and clear. In a sense, the community moved from both spiritual and physical ‘darkness’ to a life maintained in the ‘light’.

Residents use these same metaphors when establishing distinctions between themselves and their neighbours to the north, Papua New Guineans. Fuary (2000:228) notes that at the levels of private and informal public discourse, Yam Islanders construct Papuans as 'uncivilised' and non-Christian and supernaturally powerful Other. Warraber people assert a similar set of difference between themselves and Papua New Guineans through comparisons of imagined living environments. Though no Warraber residents have actually visited PNG, its people are envisaged as residing *within* bush areas, and bush that is thought to be much more densely forested and dark than any existing on Warraber. This is taken as indicating Papuan social values. Papuans are represented as estranged from a Christian existence and therefore prone to a range of dishonest behaviours, such as stealing. For Warraberans, the connection between bush dwelling and un-Christian practices or being 'uncivilised' is understood as self-evident.<sup>1</sup> A person's conditions of habitation may be linked unproblematically to their level of moral advancement; the Torres Strait Islands were once in the dark but have separated itself from the darkness and embraced a Christian life, indicated by the clean and light villages in which Islanders live. Warraber informants regard this transformation – as noted, at once physical, temporal, as well as spiritual – as one that is not yet complete in Papua New Guinea.

### *Bush – Uninhabited, Unremembered*

Compared to other islands in the area such as Poruma, Warraber Island has large areas of *bus* (bush) (indicated in grey in map 3). But the areas are entirely devoid of routine human presence. Occasionally, men who wish to drink alcohol surreptitiously will secrete themselves in bush places, though always in company. Entering the bush was said to have once been a necessary, almost daily activity for women in order to collect

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<sup>1</sup> Among the definitions Shnukal (1988:120) offers for the Torres Strait Creole term *bus* is: “[that which is] raised outside the village and is therefore ‘wild’ or ‘uncivilised’ ”.

Warraberan interactions with Papuans are restricted to those from coastal villages like Mabadauan who regularly visit Warraber to sell locally made headdresses, woven pandanus leaf mats, shell and seed necklaces, pandanus leaf baskets, coconut brooms, and so on. Oddly perhaps, given the strength of the local Papuan stereotype on Warraber, the Papuans frequently sell Christian music cassettes (obtained in Daru).

Some Warraber people house Papuan visitors during their stay, having developed ongoing relations with particular families over successive generations. Despite these interspersed interactions, Warraber people continue to have ambivalent views regarding the way they imagine Papuans live.

firewood as fuel for cooking. Women who had done so in the past noted that they had always preferred to find wood at the periphery of bush areas wherever possible, though they were often forced to enter the bush to locate fallen branches. According to informants, this always took place in the company of others. Gas stoves and electricity have long since replaced the everyday need for firewood, eliminating this legitimate reason for regular human activity in (or around) *bus* areas.

While gardening is acknowledged as having occurred in bush areas in the (post-Christian) past, it is said to have occurred wherever possible on the periphery of more vegetated areas and during ‘big daylight’ hours, that is, some time following sunrise and before sunset. In short, when visibility was greatest. Though the hours around sunrise and sunset are recognised as far cooler for strenuous activity of any kind, including gardening, the bush is more shadowy at such times, the light dimmer, and visibility more constrained. People were also said to have preferred to garden in company, making bush gardens somewhat social places – a feature the *bus* now lacks. There are no cultivation sites in *bus* places today.

This is generally explained in terms of a general decline in gardening due to the increased availability of vegetables for purchase at the local store. Informants also suggested that gardening practices in the past were, in any case, somewhat patchy and certainly much less successful on Warraber than elsewhere. Local soil is said to be far less fertile than on other islands, especially in the Western and Eastern groups and on Yam Island to the north, a belief that reinforces Warraberan self-characterisation as a maritime people rather than horticulturalists.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, Warraber residents do consider locally grown produce as far superior to store purchased vegetables, and for this reason most households maintain small garden plots, especially in order to provide

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<sup>2</sup> Prior to the presence of missions and the marine industry in the region, the population of Warraber obtained garden foods through trade with others, such as the Kaurareg people, bottom Western Torres Strait (MacGillivray 1852; Harris 1979). According to Warraberans, subsistence relied on a marine-based economy and on preserving fish and local fruits, in particular, the *wongai* plum.

Warraber residents consider Yam Island as distinct from other Central Islands (apart from Nagi) because of its large hilly topography. It is said to possess better quality soil than Warraber that enables it to produce superior quality crops. Yam Island is especially renowned among Warraberans for producing mangoes in some quantity (though in this case, regarded as inferior to those from Eastern Islands such as Darnley). Any Warraber resident visiting Yam Island during mango season inevitably returns laden with boxes of mangoes for their *pamle* and others. Though this occurs with permission, Yam Islanders nevertheless sometimes complain that Warraber people consume all of their mangoes (Fuay pers.comm.).

a ready supply of cassava (*maniota spp.*), a food that is seen as an essential part of any social feasting event and which is relatively undemanding to cultivate. But these plots are all located in the village, adjacent to homes.<sup>3</sup> People cite the possible theft of garden produce as another deterrent to bush gardening, reinforcing the theme of the bush as a site of immoral and secretive conduct.

Appropriate areas for living are not just marked by the noisy and active presence of people, but a corollary of these features are enduring place-names, testifying to human experience of a locality and extant engagement. Though gardens in bush places once may have been sites of sociality, the fact they are marked now by a small number of place names as much as a lack of human activity adds to the atmosphere of an area being unfit for habitation, an area lacking any legitimate need to elicit a human presence. Informants state that the bush once contained many place names just as coastal and marine areas do today but most have been forgotten. Unnamed areas tend to be described as unknown places where people no longer go, so that names cannot be recalled. There are only three place-names that correspond to bush locales. The first is *Warthai*, which refers to an area of bush at the western end of the island (see map 3). *Warthai* is the term used for an eagle that makes its nests in large *wongai* trees in the area. A water dam built in its location was named after the adjacent area of bush (*Warthai dam*).<sup>4</sup> *Warthai* is the only named bush place at any distance from the village.

The second place-name is an elevated area stretching north – south along the eastern end of the island. This is called *Mauganilbup*, ‘bush belonging to Mau’. Mau is a native ancestor and, as the name implies, this land is thought to have belonged to him. Some remains vegetated while another section has been replaced with houses and by the Assemblies of God Church. The third named place relates to a previous area of bush long since replaced with houses. It is another slightly elevated setting located between the two *zogo* sites mentioned previously and the coastline, called *Kodal Thara*, locally

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<sup>3</sup> People also prefer to grow vegetables in their house gardens from cuttings obtained from neighbours, regarding the seeds of store varieties as bearing inferior crops in taste and in size. Other commonly grown plants include *tigras* (lemon grass), pumpkin, watermelon, bananas and sweet potato, some of which were introduced subsequent to the colonial presence.

<sup>4</sup> Prior to the dam’s construction, tank water was frequently infested with mosquito larvae, and during extended dry periods, tank supplies were often exhausted. Lobbying by the local council led to the construction of the dam by the Queensland State Government in 1994.

glossed as ‘people belonging to the high place’ – the ‘people’ concerned presumed to be sorcerers. This is a key characteristic of *bus* places on Warraber: they are regarded generally as having been the domain of sorcerers during *bipo taim*, separate to others residing at the island. As their portrayal in the Mutiuk story (chapter 2) suggests, sorcerers are thought to have dwelt in undisturbed bush areas practising their magic while using threats of sorcery to ensure that village residents provided them with food. Indeed, sorcerers regularly surveyed the village from a distance in order to ensure they were given an adequate share of fish caught or produce harvested.

Warraber residents continue to regard movement through bush areas as involving a high potential risk of being ensorcelled. While contemporary sorcerers are thought to reside in villages like other people, it is believed that they continue to visit or spend time in bush places to carry out ‘magic’ where they can’t be seen. People are most open to sorcery attack when alone and when walking at night. Residents dislike passing or entering bush places because of their still atmosphere, a character they explain as an experience or sensation of physical isolation from others on the island. The bush is said to be intensely quiet compared to the sounds of the settlement.

Given the absence of human activity in the *bus*, residents’ reactions to anyone seen entering bush areas (or rumoured to have done so) invariably comprise suspicions of nefarious or immoral activity such as sexual liaisons or sorcery. In 1997 one Warraber man was interrogated constantly by his wife about his movements to and from work. Responsible for the island’s water supply quality, he travelled to the *Warthai* water dam several times a day, including during periods of muted light such as early in the morning and in the late afternoon. On one occasion, when he seemed to have taken more time than necessary, his wife accused him of sexual infidelity with a woman hidden in the bush. Within local understandings, these suspicions were widely regarded as appropriate – there are few justifiable reasons to enter the bush at all, let alone for any length of time.

### *Village – Living a Christian Life*

The association of untended vegetation with darkness, darkness with immoral acts (sorcery, sex), and immoral acts with *satana* (un-Christian behaviour), lends a religious imperative to the maintenance of settled areas. A concern with light is a fundamental

aspect of this activity. Warraber people are troubled by 'dark' spots in house yards where outside lights are unable to reach. Outside sitting places are always flooded with light during evenings while people congregate to talk and eat, and external lights remain lit throughout the night at all Warraber houses, with fluorescent lights ideally penetrating all areas of the house yard. People who have insufficient outside lights to achieve this are encouraged by their neighbours to correct the situation. Trees are pruned and/or lights placed or moved to remove the dark or gloomy spaces from around a house. Light was said to repel dangers such as sorcerers as well as discourage illicit and immoral activities such as sexual liaisons or men peeking through windows at women.

As a resident of North Queensland for some years prior to my fieldwork in the Torres Strait, I had grown accustomed to turning off house-lights in the evening whenever possible, both to avoid a deluge of insects and to cool the house. My habit of sitting outside in the evenings to enjoy the cool dark air met with firm resistance on Warraber. It became evident that lights left on inside and outside the house was not just concerned with guarding against an uninvited person wandering too close, but also enables the presence and activities of house occupants to be seen from other houses. Being outside at night, absent from the casual view of my neighbours, encouraged suspicious musing about my activities and risked interpretation as inviting a sexual liaison. An Anglican Deacon on a visit to Warraber was popularly reputed to be seeking a girlfriend when his house was repeatedly left dark at night. He would also often sit outside in the evenings, and his intentions consequently became a favourite topic of conversation among nearby residents. In fact, young people did frequently seek out locations at night where they could meet without older people seeing them or seeking them out. Though acknowledging the risks of sorcery and censure, youth valued finding this space for socialising free from the surveillance of others, usually near a beach or in darker areas of village streets.

Keeping one's home lit at night then, is a practice of *gud pasin*, an enacted and visible recognition of social obligations and moral integrity. This extends to travelling away from the island, whether for short or long periods. Responsible householders would arrange for caretakers to turn house lights on and off at the appropriate times and to purchase new 'powercards' (pre-paid electricity credit) when existing credits expired.

Neighbours openly bemoan a house left 'dark' by absent occupants. Indeed, an elderly neighbour can feel justified in berating a returning owner whose house has been in darkness for a period. Long-term absence from the island also requires a house yard to be maintained by a caretaker. While a standard of orderliness similar to the everyday is not expected, people do become alarmed if tall weeds begin to engulf house gardens and undergrowth grows too abundantly due to heavy seasonal rain. A house and yard left untended, or in darkness, is considered as wasted on the persons who occupy it. Neighbours begin grumbling, remarking that it is a 'good house' and should be rented by other people in need of housing.<sup>5</sup>

Warraber residents spend considerable hours maintaining their house yards, churchyards, and streets, largely by raking fallen leaves and pruning branches from trees and shrubs. CDEP workers have quite literally taken the value of cleanliness to the streets.<sup>6</sup> Women rake the streets of accumulated rubbish and leaf litter and men load the debris into a Council truck to take to the dump on the other side of the island. During some periods of the year leaves are raked daily, such as when bush almond trees (*mekei*, *Terminalia catappa*) seasonally shed foliage. Other strategies of visible cleanliness include removing undergrowth around houses in the village. While village streets are usually kept clean by young women doing CDEP work, there is an expectation that house owners will maintain those parts of the streets which front their houses in the absence of CDEP workers.

*Klin* (clean) house yards, as with adequately lit houses, are viewed as a tangible commitment by the occupants to 'living the Christian life'. For men and women, this includes a commitment to cleanliness at home. The physical state of the home is implicitly analogous to one's relation with God. Houses are the locus of family sociality, thus both adherence to 'a Christian life' and the state of one's family life are reflected in the first instance by levels of attention given to the house. This discursive

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<sup>5</sup> All but two houses are government funded and built, and rent is paid to the local council, but the land continues to belong to an owner/s (whether the house occupants or others). Where an absent occupant is also the landowner, the council will not let other persons live in the house, even if the maintenance of yards and house lights is not of an appropriate standard. (See chapter 4 for a discussion of the centrality of households in Warraber social life).

<sup>6</sup> The Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) program is a scheme that requires those receiving an unemployment benefit to participate in nominated work activities. See also chapters 1 and 5.

affirmation of commitment to a Christian life is in frequent use at Warraber and it requires a range of other forms of self-regulation additional to maintaining yards. A Christian life is envisaged as involving such practices as attending church frequently, exhibiting generosity, and being dedicated to work and to family. More ideally, it also involves avoiding smoking, drinking, fighting or gambling.<sup>7</sup> A messy house and untended yard is an indication of ‘laziness’ (*leizi*), and implicitly of a degree of estrangement from God. For Warraber’s two denominations, any absence of commitment to (Christian) family life through cleanliness and work is linked to an absence or inadequate attention to Christianity itself.

### **Warraber ‘Belonging’**

Warraber residents commonly state that they ‘belong’ to Warraber (*ai blo Warraber*). The local expression *blo* has meanings that parallel those of its source word in English, ‘belong’ (Shnukal 1988:117). Thus the term can describe a relationship of possession or responsibility towards an object, portion of land, or another person, such as ‘belonging to/with’. But it is also employed as an expression of sentiment and attachment, as in ‘I belong here’. In this sense it is used to describe (or to ask) about a person’s attachment to particular places or home places, such as Warraber Island. Asking residents why they profess to ‘belong’ to Warraber tends to elicit several kinds of response. People will state ‘I was born here’, ‘I grew up here’, ‘I own land here’, ‘my family belongs here’ or ‘I live here’. Usually, they will offer more than one of these answers. Warraber as a place of belonging is meaningful as a repository of the lived and remembered

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<sup>7</sup> McDonald (2001:101) notes that Halls Creek Aboriginal people use the expression ‘following the Christian way’ as a style of life in which people eschew certain practices regarded as un-Christian. She suggests they have ‘reorganised’ evangelical Christianity’s catalogue of sins according to their own scale of values:

Some sins (tobacco chewing, smoking and card playing, for example) are considered to be relatively minor and are indulged in, to a greater or lesser degree, by AOG Christians and, more rarely, by UAM Christians. Sins such as drinking, swearing and fighting – which disrupt community life and produce consequences which resemble ‘Devil time’ – are considered to be more serious. It is not so much the purity of one’s ‘inner being’ which is at issue here, as the effects such behaviour can have on the social body and on the cosmos generally (McDonald 2001:101).

Warraber residents would also generally regard all the above behaviours as sinful. They differ in their levels of tolerance for specific behaviours. Both Warraber Anglicans and members of AOG would align card playing with drinking as equally serious examples of sinfulness.

experiences of one or more generations. For Warraberans it is a location where ‘history is congealed’ (Ingold 2000:150) – an intensely experienced terrain typified by relationships with others who live there or who have lived there.

The concept of ‘belonging’ is important for all Warraber residents in that the descendants of both *porena* and *neitiv* have resided in the same locations, have spent their working lives in marine industries, and participated together in shared ritual occasions and everyday life. While ancestral origins may find different emphases, there is also considerable overlap among individual genealogies. All residents have at least one *neitiv* ancestor. The children of the arriving Pacific and European *porena* born from either Torres Strait women or the daughters of Torres Strait women and other *poren* men, were all born at Warraber or Poruma. Like the descendants of *neitiv* men, *poren* descendants see themselves as born at Warraber and therefore belonging to that place. Continued residence at Warraber and collective participation in the multiple dimensions of social life serves to establish all residents as maintaining a connection to place that in most contexts eclipses *neitiv/poren* distinctions.

Residents emphasising their descent from Pacific Islander and European *porena* also envisage their connection to Warraber in part through their ownership of island land. This is something that they have in common with *neitiv* descendants, despite disparate emphases in ancestral origin. Some *poren* descendants maintain that Warraber was actually empty of people when their Vanuatuan ancestor Bubarei first arrived, suggesting that all Warraber’s residents at that time had moved to Nagi when Jimmy Mills started his pearlshelling station in the 1870s (see chapter 2). But this view is not shared among all residents, and is firmly rejected by *neitiv* descendants who assert that their ancestors maintained a continuous presence at Warraber throughout the early period of marine industries and beyond.

However, Warraberans as a whole agree that *poren* ancestors acquired their land from *neitiv* ancestors, the latter (as described in chapter 2) parcelling out gifts of land to Bubarei’s locally born male children. The bulk of Warraber land given to *porena* residents was located outside the settlement or ‘village’ (*biliz*) at that time, on the northeast corner of the island adjacent to the beach. Thus, much *porena* land occupied sites originally regarded as *bus pleis* (bush place). The descendants of *porena* who now own land in the village are described as comprising those who maintained a constant

presence at Warraber during the first half of the twentieth century, whether themselves or their sons, at a time when many other residents moved to Poruma for marine industry work (see below).

Although the allotting of Warraber land by *neitiv* to *porena* is represented today in terms of generosity and the moral value of sharing, *neitiv* ancestors appear to have retained the sites that were most valuable at that time, giving other less valuable portions to the *poren* ancestors. In particular, *neitiv* people reserved a large area of land at the eastern end of the island (*mauganilbup*) that carries the name of their ancestor, Mau.<sup>8</sup> Thus, today, the descendants of male *neitiv* ancestors continue to own much of the land at the eastern and western parts of the island, where Warraber village now stands. This land includes the two *zogo* places and the *kod*. *Neitiv* people also maintained ownership over the land containing functioning wells. The descendants of *porena* were forced to dig new wells in their own areas.

Like the descendants of *neitiv* males, the descendants of *porena* later distributed land to other families who moved to Warraber in 1955. Joseph, a great grandson of the Vanuatu ancestor, Bubarei, notes that his father, a foreigner descendant who had been given land, remained at Warraber Island when much of the population had moved to Poruma. On their return, he states that his father gave land to the few ‘Poruma families’ who returned with Warraber families in 1955 “to make gardens and houses, gave them rope, tools for house construction, plates, and saucepans.” It was Scott, the brother of Joseph’s paternal grandfather (i.e., another of Bubarei’s sons) who is reputed to have encouraged his and other families to ‘return home’ to Warraber. The extended period spent away from Warraber did not seem to have created problems with respect to land holding either for *neitiv* or *poren* Warraberans (compare Beckett 1987:226). For example, subsequent to their return, Scott and his descendants lived and continue to live on their land without issue. Indeed, he is said to have given the local Council the right to allocate certain portions of his land for others whose families were expanding or to accommodate other services.

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<sup>8</sup> In everyday speech ‘bush’ is usually expressed as *bus*. As with many place names, *mauganilbup* conjoins Kulkalgaw Ya and Torres Strait Creole. Informants suggested that ‘Mauganil’ means ‘belonging to Mau’ while ‘*bup*’ refers to ‘bush’ in this particular Creole expression. However, it is interesting to note that in one dictionary, *bup* is provided as a Kala Kawaw Ya (KKY, top western Torres Strait language) term for ‘bush’ (Ober and Kennedy 1992).

The details of land ownership, particularly the precise margins of owned land was an uncomfortable topic for many residents. This applied regardless of descent emphasis. Land tenure is considered a problematic topic because the exact boundaries of the sites held by ancestors are widely regarded as having been forgotten. The declining use of *bus* areas for gardening has contributed to the process of forgetting, as did the movement of Warraber populations to Poruma, where they resided for extended periods during the first half of this century. The division of land within village areas is generally recalled more definitively.

Men are seen as being ultimately responsible for this kind of knowledge, and freely cite a principle that land tenure is ideally patrilineally inherited.<sup>9</sup> But in the past, many men spent much of each year away from Warraber working in marine industries, and as a result, older men consider themselves far less familiar with the details of land ownership than previous generations. Their reticence in discussing the exact limits of parcels of land is tangible. I asked one elderly *porena* descendant how he knew where land boundaries were in relation to one particular site outside the village that he claimed to own, and if there were markers of some kind indicating where his land finished and another's began. He replied:

No, there are no marks for that place, but some places do have marks. Sometimes coconuts are planted to mark land boundaries. We asked Peter [a Chairman of Warraber in the 1970s] to make a map, to draw the land and the marks to illustrate where our land was. But he was too busy. But, I wanted to, if my father was alive, we could ask him, he really knew those places, and another man who knew those places was John [a descendant of *foreigner* man and *native* Poruma woman]. ...He had a good memory and knew every part, every name at Warraber; every small place had a name. He knew them, because he was born here and grew up here, before he became a man and went over to Poruma [for marine work]. All right.

The speaker was uncomfortable with the query; his final word 'all right' – pronounced in a clipped tone – signalled that he was closing this topic to further discussion, while at the same time communicating a degree of irritation and discomfort at having to broach such a matter in the first place. He clearly locates the source of land knowledge with older deceased men, and to knowledge that can no longer be accessed. Young men

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<sup>9</sup> For information regarding land tenure in the Torres Strait see Beckett (1994, 1987, 1983b), Davis (1998), Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a), Fuary (1991a), Haddon (1935, 1904), Scott and Mulrennan (1999), Wilkin (1904).

today similarly assert that older men have more complete information about these details than they do.

The absence of detailed knowledge regarding land ownership – whether forgotten or never learned – can create genuine difficulties for Warraber residents whose families claim to own land in areas now considered bush (e.g. former gardens), but do not know its parameters or the names of exact locations. This includes most residents. Men continue to displace the burden of absent knowledge by referring to land ownership as being controlled by their fathers and grandfathers. Thus, the details of land-tenure belong to their ancestors who failed to adequately inform their male descendants about its details. By temporally distancing themselves from knowledge of land ownership in this way they both displace responsibility for missing details but also create a space for negotiation in the practice of land-use.

### *Named Places*

In contrast to unknown place names in Warraber’s ‘bush’, there are many named places on the coastline and on Warraber’s reef, which residents suggest date back to early, pre-Christian times. These names appear in table 5 below, while coastline place-names can be viewed on map 3.

Table 5: Named Places on Warraber’s Coastline and Reef<sup>10</sup>

<i>Bilangur</i>	<i>Ngur</i> means point. A coral formation, tentatively suggested by informants as named after an unknown man (Kulkalgaw Ya).
<i>Botaumoi</i>	<i>Bot</i> means boat and <i>moi</i> means lagoon. A lagoon where pearling and trochus boats were anchored. (Torres Strait Creole, KY)
<i>Dual Pad</i>	<i>Pad</i> means high place or hill. This place is outside the eastern end of the reef where there is shallow water, or where there is a rise in the sea floor. (KY)

<sup>10</sup> \* indicates a name used in everyday speech. # indicates a coastline feature. All other names appear on the reef.

Lawrie (1970:268) also records a few place names for Warraber, including *Kiaugud*, *Dual Pad*, and *Iamul Kula*.

<i>Garazilnga</i>	<i>Garaz</i> was said to resemble a fence and can be used to refer to fish traps. In this instance it is a coral formation that partially blocks an inner reef passage of water to the outer reef at low tide and also prevents some fish from moving off the reef. It is a place where men spear fish on an outgoing tide. (KY)
<i>Gawanilwakad</i> <sup>#</sup>	Unknown (KY)
<i>Gibutal pad</i>	<i>Gibutal</i> unknown meaning. The location of an ‘old village’ where people used to live before the beach was eroded by tides. (KY)
<i>Gud</i> (1) <sup>*</sup>	Can mean either mouth or corner; in this instance refers to a coastline feature. (KY)
<i>Gud</i> (2)	<i>Gud</i> means mouth. A low part of the reef edge allowing access to the outer sea.
<i>Kabayan</i> <sup>#</sup>	Unknown (KY)
<i>Kodal thara</i>	<i>Thara</i> means high place in this context and <i>Kodal</i> refers to men of the <i>kod</i> . This place is slightly elevated and stretches from the <i>big zogo</i> to the place called <i>gud</i> on the coastline. From this place the residing sorcerers could survey the villagers’ activities at <i>Gibutal pad</i> and see any incoming vessels from the north.
<i>Kiaugud</i> <sup>#</sup>	Precise meaning unknown but <i>gud</i> generally means mouth or corner. (KY)
<i>Mabauyei</i>	<i>Mabau</i> refers to the act of walking and <i>yei</i> is a general term for sandbank. People follow this sandbank on foot when going to the edge of the reef to fish. (KY)
<i>Malungud</i>	<i>Malu</i> is one of the mythical Four Brothers who travelled throughout the Torres Strait ( <i>Malu</i> was a shark) settling independently on the islands of Yam, Masig, Aurid and Mer. His canoe is said to have made the place <i>Malungud</i> indicated by two impressions in Warraber’s reef edge.
<i>Mathaiaumoi</i>	<i>Mathai</i> is the Golden Trevally and <i>moi</i> is a generic term for lagoon. The place is known as a fishing place for catching <i>mathai</i> and for netting mullet and Golden-lined spinefoot. (KY)
<i>Palelei ston</i>	A coral formation ( <i>ston</i> ) outside Warraber’s reef edge named after a woman (Palelei) who used to fish there. (TSC, KY)
<i>Smol Warraber</i> <sup>#*</sup>	Small Warraber (Torres Strait Creole). A popular picnicking place on the western end of Warraber and adjacent to good fishing places.
<i>Taparaumoi</i>	Lagoon where there are big <i>ston</i> . <i>Tapar</i> is said to be a large coral formation. (KY)

	large coral formation. (KY)
<i>Tatanbutu</i> <sup>#</sup>	Unknown (KY)
<i>Tugulngur</i> <sup>#</sup>	<i>Ngur</i> means point. Locally translated as ‘outrigger point’. (KY)
<i>Zangil thaiwa</i>	<i>Thaiwa</i> means broken dead coral. <i>Zangil</i> is a species of mangrove that used to grow in this location. (KY)

Though I was able to elicit coastline and reef place-names for the purpose of recording them, these names have a limited presence in everyday speech. They are referred to as *prapa neim* (‘proper names’), that is, highly formal names, defined as such by their Kulkalgaw Ya form and regarded as very old – the place-names used by ancestors and ancient residents. Torres Strait Creole (TSC) began to be used as a first language among Warraber and Poruma residents by the 1930s, and now forms the contemporary lingua franca of the Central Islands (Shnukal 1988:5; see orthographic note). Kulkalgaw Ya (henceforth KY) is spoken and/or understood to differing degrees by Warraber residents, but its fluent use is restricted to the elderly. Some young adults and middle-aged people have a rudimentary comprehension of KY speech, while others understand only a scattering of words or phrases. Competence in KY is partly influenced by the level of childhood and adult contact with KY speakers. There were differing perspectives on the subject of transmission of Kulkalgaw Ya at Warraber. Some elderly people professed that younger people were too *leizi* (lazy) to learn KY. However, some young people claimed that older speakers never taught them KY and preferred to keep it a *sikret* (secret) language. Certainly elderly people restrict their use of KY to specific contexts that are often strategic. They sometimes, for example, switch to KY in order to speak privately to one another in the company of younger people.

Younger people also risk being teased if they attempt to speak KY, likely being accused of wanting to *stail* (styling or showing off, to attract others attention by self-important posturing).<sup>11</sup> However, many KY or KY-derived terms are in everyday use as part of Torres Strait Creole (alongside English and English-derived words). These KY words

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<sup>11</sup> In a house I shared with four unmarried related women across three generations, the two eldest women almost always spoke KY to each other. A younger woman who was living in the same house could speak some KY, but like other younger people said it was *sem* (embarrassing) to do so and generally refrained. Her occasional use of KY among her household kin occurred deliberately in contexts of joking, which reduced the possibility of corrections, criticism or teasing by the others.

are used frequently by young and old speakers alike. Such words predominantly denote species of fish, marine topography, trees and kinship terms of address. Despite this, there is a general reluctance to use KY names for places, because these *prapa* (proper) place names are viewed as indexing or demonstrating knowledge about important aspects of Warraber received from earlier generations.

In this sense these names have a similar import to larger narratives of *bipo taim* (such as the Mutiuk story discussed in Chapter Two). Place names are good to know because they can be used to implicitly demonstrate that a person *sabi samting* (possesses knowledge). And in this respect, older people are generally regarded as being far more knowledgeable than younger people. For all elderly people, possessing knowledge of KY place names is a significant means to demonstrate ‘knowing’ (to *sabe*) or being familiar with the place in which one lives. This confers status, in contrast to younger residents who are often said to *no sabe nating* (have no knowledge). Thus while younger people are keen to absorb place-names they are seldom used in everyday speech contexts, which has the effect of perpetuating the exclusivity and value of the terms.

Instead of using the valued *prapa* or formal names, the same places are often referred to by reference to their general location (e.g. ‘adjacent to the airstrip’), by a shortened version of the place names, or by a general description of their location. For example, someone who has been fishing from the coastline at *Kabayan* will explain to others that they were fishing “*de lo airstrip*” (near the airstrip). Or someone fishing at *Mathaiaumoi* will say they were fishing “*de nadasaid*”, that is, on the other side of the island, in relation to the northerly aspect of the village. Someone fishing on the easterly side of *Zangil Thaiwa* may say they were fishing “*de pran*” (at the front or north of the village) at the “*namba tri thaiwa*” (the third mound of broken coral). *Mabauyei* is the “*sanbaink de pran*” (the sandbank at the front). *Tugulngur* has been replaced by referring to the *warp* (jetty) that has been constructed at that location. The place on the coastline called *Gud* is either referred to using this name or by *kona* (corner, a TSC version of the KY term *gud*). In this way, many named places can be replaced in everyday speech by Torres Strait Creole words or phrases. To the list of ‘proper’ place-names provided above, then, another list could be added which denotes place-names in everyday speech, many of which denote associations with particular functions: the

‘jetty’, ‘airstrip’, ‘airstrip waiting house’, ‘store’, ‘school’, ‘sport ground’, and so forth (indicated on map 3).

## **Freedom of Movement**

People’s notion of Warraber as their home place, a location to which they ‘belong’ is strongly linked with feelings of familiarity and ease. Even if *bus* places are generally avoided, they are nonetheless known. Residents describe Warraber as being *om* (home) because it is the place where they feel most comfortable. Freedom of movement is crucial to this idea – home is that place where one can move without hindrance. Warraber people do not consider themselves able to move about freely while at other islands in the Torres Strait. This derives from two primary concerns. The first is personal safety – other islands are relatively unknown, filled with potentially dangerous locations unrecognised by an outsider. While particular sites may be considered dangerous at home (e.g. in terms of sorcery) awareness of this enables local people to decrease their personal risk through avoiding these places. These areas may not be recognized on other islands. The second concern involves demonstrating *rispek* (respect) for the local status of populations on other islands by not presuming a right to unrestricted movement.

While at other islands, Warraber people (especially women) will not walk alone, particularly away from a village area and/or out of sight of others. Informants point to the possibility of dangerous wild dogs, or of locally owned dogs that may be aggressive toward strangers. However, more privately they suggest that persons wandering alone, especially at night, are susceptible to unknown sorcerers. Advice given to me by older people concerning visits to other islands in the region included not leaving any clothing hanging outside overnight (particularly undergarments) as sorcerers may interfere with them, causing the owner to suffer various illnesses including sexually transmitted diseases. Other personal items such as shoes were also considered best brought inside overnight. Sorcerers were viewed as able to penetrate the body with objects entering through the soles of the feet from ensorcelled shoes, once again causing a range of illnesses.

This conduct applies generally to islands other than Warraber, despite some nearby islands being considered somewhat familiar. Warraber residents travel to Poruma, to Yam and to a lesser extent, to Masig islands most often since these locations are where the majority of relatives outside Warraber reside. Poruma is visited especially regularly, with most people travelling to the island at least two or three times each year. Many of Warraber's elderly residents lived at Poruma before the 1950s (see chapter 2) resulting in a greater ease among these individuals concerning this island and a sense that the landscape and the people there are known. They have encouraged their children and grandchildren to maintain links to Poruma and visits are made for a range of life-cycle occasions as well as for school sports, multi-denominational church fellowships, shopping and food exchanges, or as a break from home-island life.

Nonetheless, Warraber people remain cautious in their behaviour to some degree even when visiting Poruma, and certainly still seek permission and advice from relatives on the island regarding their own movements. While visiting, Warraberans tend to stay close to the house where they are staying, or to where an event is taking place, and they also stay close to the local people whom they know best. When travelling with Warraber residents to other islands in the central group, it was always firmly impressed on me that I needed to be mindful in my movements and interactions. Affinal considerations are another important influence in this regard. In common with other Torres Strait Islanders, Warraberans practice restrictions on cross-sex and same-sex affinal relationships. As explained in chapter 4, this involves social distancing and modifying forms of address. When travelling to another island, Warraber people maintain a concerned awareness of those they can speak freely with and the identities of others towards whom some modification or even avoidance is required. As a result, they inevitably spend some time obtaining information about recent births and marriages immediately upon arriving in order to acquaint themselves afresh with the people they should consider relatives and affines. This is especially important at less frequently visited islands such as those in the eastern and western groups.

The use of streets and paths is a good illustration of the relation between home and movement. Both vehicles and pedestrians use *stirit* (streets); these constitute the main public thoroughfares and can be used without restraint. By contrast paths, known as *rod* (road or path), are less frequented and generally narrower routes that provide short cuts

through bush areas and between houses. On Warraber, people know exactly where they can walk freely and where it is appropriate to travel by *strit* or by *rod*. On their home island, Warraber residents generally choose to use the shortest route for movement. The village at Warraber has a number of criss-crossing streets with roughly four to six houses in a block. Smaller paths lying between houses are primarily used by people who reside in nearby houses or are closely related to or familiar with the house owners. These paths often pass close to the rear yards of houses which are regarded as intimate areas where close family and friends can sit and talk, and where food preparation often takes place. Fences are rare. Visitors familiar to the owner will routinely use paths to access the back door and call out to those inside, or directly enter. Less regular visitors always stand outside on the street facing sides of the house and call out (sometimes from the street), waiting for the owner to appear. Residents are especially careful in this way when entering their affines' houses.

When Warraber people visit other islands, movement tends to be restricted to public areas and to a few intimately known house sites and their owners. There are less *rod* shortcuts available to them due to a less intimate knowledge of place and familiarity with inhabitants. As a result, their movements are usually restricted to the main streets, even when this makes a journey longer. The use of specific smaller paths may be considered acceptable if a house owner insists that their Warraber guest do so, for example as a quick route from a house to a public event. Under these circumstances, Warraber visitors take particular care as they pass other houses adjoining a path to quickly inform visible residents of the name of the person with whom they are staying and their immediate destination. It may be that the requirement of permission (whether tacit or direct) defines the local notion of a *rod*, which is applied also to the sea-routes used by men in marine activities when they travel away from their island.<sup>12</sup> What is recognised (and affirmed) through permission is the value of giving due *rispek* to those whose relation with a place is more profound than one's own. Again, even on islands like Yam and Poruma, where most adult residents tend to be familiar, Warraberans use

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<sup>12</sup> The more familiar the user of a *rod* is to the 'owners' of that *rod*, the less necessary it is to seek permission in a more formal way. Between people who are closely related or familiar, permission is often assumed. This is particularly the case in terms of the roads that extend in marine areas, since actually making a formal approach to local people for permission is clearly often impractical. Hence routes at sea become quite established, in effect following established 'lines' of assumed or tacit permission that allows movement through the marine territories associated with other island populations.

few small paths and most often choose to remain on streets. Informants explain this is because their relationships with local residents are not as intimate as with people on their home island.

As a salient feature of the notion of home, knowledge of place can be endangered by a long period of absence. Warraber informants maintain that too extended a period away from the island may create a loss of familiarity with that place. All contemporary Warraber residents have spent either considerable periods, or their entire lives to date, living on the island.<sup>13</sup> The island and the reefs surrounding it constitute the most familiar and enduring places known to them. There has been no large-scale migration to the mainland, as has occurred for example in the case of Murray Islanders (Beckett 1987:72). Since people's return to Warraber from Poruma in the 1950s, more localised movement has concentrated on participation in marine industries – in recent decades, crayfishing and trochus fishing (described in chapter 5). This has resulted in fewer extended periods spent away from Warraber. Currently, such periods last from a few days to at most a few weeks. As noted, there are many opportunities for visiting other islands and mainland towns, including church fellowships, funerals, marriages, tombstone openings, trips for purchasing household goods, or shopping for food to sustain the intense collective feasting period over Christmas and New Year. But these all require relatively short trips away from the island.

The general attitude on Warraber is that people should avoid spending lengthy periods away from the island, and those who do attract the notice of others. Warraber residents inevitably tease individuals who spend extended time at Cairns or on another island, referring to them for example as a 'Cairns boy' or a 'Yam Island woman'. This constitutes a form of mild but tangible reproof, suggesting they must be careful not to spend too long away from Warraber as well as reminding the person of the importance of their Warraber identity. At times this may also involve a subtle insinuation that the individual concerned is not amenable to life at Warraber, indicating relationship problems of some kind. Wives are encouraged to accompany their husbands on trips to other places, as time apart is thought to encourage emotional distance from spouses and

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<sup>13</sup> In-marrying women present a slightly different case in that they usually describe an enduring attachment of some kind to the place where they 'grew up' and 'where their family lives' or where their ancestors resided.

extra-marital affairs, again suggesting that ties to people, and to socially approved behaviour, may be weakened by distance from place. This intermingling of personal presence, social relationships and home place is a feature of belonging to Warraber.

## **Personal Place**

Warraber people are able to point out numerous places that are closely associated with the actions of particular known individuals. The activities of people infuse places with an experiential sense of memory, as Feld suggests (1996:113): “ultimately, it is processes of experienced activity ... that invests places with memorable depths”. Places embedded in regular everyday activity can become personalised for those carrying out that activity and/or by the persons who remember them. The event of a relative’s death is an especially poignant circumstance that reveals the subtle but powerful associations formed between the actions of an individual in a place and the interpersonal relationships that constitute home as an experience of emplaced social memory.

The repercussions of death in the Torres Strait Islands and the ceremonies performed in relation to death have received widespread discussion (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; Beckett 1987; Fuary 1991a). In the hours immediately following the death of a person on Warraber, the deceased’s closest relatives gather wherever the body is held prior to its being flown to Thursday Island (where the medical causes of death will be formally certified). This initial gathering may take place at a dwelling or at the local health clinic if the death followed rapidly on a sudden grave illness, such as a stroke. It is an especially intense and emotional phase of mourning. Following the removal of the body, relatives will gather in a house for a few days in order to mourn together and to prevent those closest to the deceased dwelling on their loss. Affines labour to provide for the grieving relatives which may continue some weeks after the funeral. Too much ‘thinking’ about a dead relative is prevented by continually accompanying the prime mourner/s throughout the day and night. Lamentation is appropriate but too lengthy a focus on the dead is considered unhealthy and people are gently encouraged to continue with living.

The mourners will spend evenings together and sleep in the same house for mutual comfort, but also to safeguard each other from potential visits by the deceased relative

(see Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:169, 174). For Warraberans, as for other Torres Strait Islanders, a death does not represent an absolute parting, as the spirit of the deceased is regarded as remaining close to one's home (to Warraber) and to the people who live there. "There is a transition period when the deceased is neither alive nor completely dead. The deceased is between two worlds and this affects both the living and the dead" (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:30). This liminal state directly affects Warraberans through ideas about the wanderings of the deceased. By returning to important places and people, the newly dead are trying to maintain their connection with the living world. They are said to be mourning the loss of their life-world and thus, seek it out immediately after dying. They are still trying to be in place with others. As Warraber people often say, home is where one's family lives (*mai hom I de lo pamle blo mi*).

I heard several stories about people being visited by their dead relatives during the first night post-death or burial on the island. People say that the deceased usually returns to their close kin. One woman told me that on the first night following the death of her younger sister, no one in the family could sleep until very late. While everyone was finally sleeping, she had a vision of her deceased sister floating above her. She maintains that despite initially thinking she was dreaming, she realised that in fact she was awake and became terrified of what the apparition might do. However, the woman was transfixed and unable to move or speak. After some time, her sister disappeared and she was then able to wake her companions to tell them what had happened.

On one occasion a man died during a tombstone opening ceremony after taking a break from the dancing.<sup>14</sup> His sister was in the hospital on Thursday Island at the time and as I had planned to travel there the next day, I was asked to inform her of the death despite not being the ideal person to do so (compare Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:166-7). On my arrival at 5pm I told her that the body had been airlifted to Thursday Island hospital prior to being returned to Warraber for burial. On realising the body of her brother was in the building, she urged me to stay with her in case he came to find her. I stayed with her until the end of visiting hours at 10pm. She was hardly able to sleep that night for fear that her brother would seek her out before making the journey back to Warraber

where his other relatives were living. The woman in the hospital considered herself *as representing home* to her deceased brother. Living-in-place is often typified among Warraber residents in the first instance by way of the social relationships that are manifest in thinking about home. The importance of these people-place connections is clearly reflected in the activities of the deceased.

The significance of birthplaces is similarly invoked in local explanations of the paths taken by the wandering deceased. The death of an elderly man named John, who had been born at Warraber, was not immediately known to people on the island. He had lived much of his adult married life on Poruma Island and had died in hospital at Thursday Island. The local preference is for *bad nuz* (literally, bad news – a death) to be communicated at a public meeting where all residents attend. In this case, a public meeting was not held until the day after the death. Nonetheless, several Warraber residents later remarked that on the actual evening of John's death they had heard dogs barking on the village outskirts. This was interpreted as revealing the presence of the dead man walking about the edges of the village. He was said to have walked across the rear of people's house yards adjacent to the bush. As he walked, *aus dog* (pet dogs) were roused to barking.

One elderly Warraber resident named Joshua, who was distantly related to the dead man, later claimed to have had a more direct experience of the dead man's presence at Warraber that night. Joshua said that he became suspicious on hearing the noise made by the disturbed dogs. The following paraphrases his account of what occurred next:

Joshua got up and stood just outside his front door on the veranda. He saw a man walking along the street in front of his house. It was John, the man who had died. John stopped and was addressed by Joshua standing on his veranda who strained to identify the man in the street through the evening gloom. Joshua asked him to identify himself. The dead man didn't answer and his face was turned away but Joshua had by then recognised him by his *nadh* [i.e. body posture and movements]. The dead man seemed uncomfortable at being spoken to as he avoided looking directly at Joshua. His head was turned toward the direction in which he wanted to travel. John said firmly "I know who you are. Go away, there's nothing here for you." The man walked on, but soon after the dogs ceased their barking. Joshua took this as a sign that the dead man had left the island.

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<sup>14</sup> He was believed to have been ensorcelled by someone among the guests from elsewhere in the Torres Strait.

I asked Joshua how he had known that his relative John was dead, as at that time, no one had been informed of the death. Joshua said that he knew the figure in the street was dead as his feet were not touching the ground. The deceased man was slightly elevated. Joshua also said that when he recognised the dead man, he remembered that he had been born at Warraber, not far from where Joshua's own house was. Though old, the dead man was not ready to accept his death, which is why he was wandering in this manner. Though the dead man possessed many relatives at Warraber, his closest relatives resided at Poruma. The dead man was trying to return to his birthplace.

Places of birth constitute significant personalised place markers. Indeed, familiarity with place can be said to be intertwined with knowledge about individual local births. Joshua emphasised that others did not remember the dead man had been born at Warraber and evinced some pride that his knowledge of this crucial event offered the key to explaining the deceased's presence and movements that night. Although Joshua had not thought for some time about the deceased being born at Warraber, the death of the old man reanimated this particular feature of place. In so doing it also reinvigorated the particular relationship Joshua has with Warraber through his own memories.

Over the last few decades, Warraber women have been giving birth at the hospital on Thursday Island, arriving a few weeks before full term and staying in hostels or hospital accommodation until the delivery. Nearly all younger Warraber people then, have not been born locally. However, informants maintain that if an individual's birth-place is not actually the site where they or their nearest relatives reside (for example, the Thursday Island hospital), then the deceased will return to the location of its closest relatives, and not that of its birth.

In addition to birthplaces and close relatives, explanations regarding the paths taken by the deceased's wanderings may also emphasise the places they inhabited pre-death. The everyday activities of individuals comprise a significant component of people's sense of being emplaced. And the locations where individuals regularly spent time at Warraber become inscribed with their actions in the period following their death. The initial post-death period is a time when the physical and social loss created by a death is anticipated, keenly felt, and directly addressed in a memorialising dimension within the mourning process. Mourners ameliorate the new absence by reflecting on aspects of the deceased's life, their social relationships, achievements and personality traits. These are

all framed in positive terms: 'they were kind', 'they were my favourite uncle', 'they taught me how to spear a dugong', 'they told me stories when I was a girl'. The past actions of the deceased are also discussed, centring on personal idiosyncrasies and habits, the people they regularly interacted with and the places they frequented.

The period of mourning is characterised by individuals sharing memories linking themselves to the deceased and linking the deceased with place. What emerges is a collection of place-people memories that mourners have in relation to the deceased. The places formerly inhabited by deceased persons as a result become somewhat concretised in personal and collective memory. This memorialising style of lamentation could be said to take the form of an 'itinerary' (Feld 1996) linked to the deceased that reinforces the emplaced dimension of their former activities and highlights the extent to which people-place connections are significant features of 'belonging' to Warraber. As relatives of the deceased begin to move around the village again after the period of mourning, they often describe passing by particular places that strongly evoke memories of the deceased person.

A young Warraber man, Frank, was killed when his girlfriend's *balla* (a cousin) stabbed him in the chest during a drunken argument. They and several other young people had been consuming alcohol that evening at a beach on the outskirts of the village, out of the view of houses and more senior adult relatives. After being stabbed, Frank walked away in the direction of the settlement before dying at the base of a coconut tree. Frank was in his twenties. After his death, Frank was reputed to be wandering about the village for an extended period. Long after his body was interred, residents continued to comment on his activities. One young woman, Frank's MZD Mary, was especially distraught by Frank's death and remained disturbed for some time afterwards. She was also drinking that night, and felt that as his elder 'sister', she should have more closely monitored Frank activities.

Over a period of several months following his burial, Mary and others claimed to hear pop music occasionally playing at the beach though no other people were present. Discussing the origin of this music, Mary laughed affectionately and also cried as she recounted how Frank cherished his tape player and carried it everywhere, even to the point of annoying others. For her, this was an endearing memory of Frank. The place where the music was heard was that part of the beach where he often listened to his tape

player. For Mary, that particular site at the beach was inscribed with the memory of Frank's habitual actions. She strongly associated that place, especially at night, with his evening activities – drinking and socialising with other young people. The unfortunate circumstances in which he died were considered responsible for Frank's extended activity after death. He was young and wanted revenge as well as being reluctant to leave his relatives at Warraber.

Different individuals clearly have different place-linked memories marked by the activities of others close to them. Place memory is often latent and reactivated at particular occasions, such as the death of relatives, and these place memories vary among individuals. For Joshua, it included the birthplace of his relative, John. For Mary, the previous actions of Frank constituted a particular emphasis within her experience of Warraber, for a period truncating the past and the present. Basso (1996:55) notes that:

Place-based thoughts about the self lead commonly to thoughts of other things – other places, other people, other times, whole networks of associations that ramify unaccountably within the expanding spheres of awareness that they themselves engender.

Warraber people's notions of place are created according to networks of association including the everyday actions of people. Thus, 'living-in-place' in Warraber produces emotional and experiential notions of place, generated by the emplaced activities of those who live there. These emerge powerfully and consciously at particular moments and periods in people's lives, such as the heightened states following the death of a relative. Among those for whom Warraber is not home, such a level of existential engagement with place is unlikely to be present. Warraber people implicitly reflect on this during the heightened sociality of mourning periods, where the obligations of 'being-with' are directly elicited as a critical and perhaps defining aspect of 'belonging' at Warraber.

## **Conclusion**

Warraber is constituted *as place* by the social relationships that characterise people's daily lives. Warraber is meaningful as a home place by residents' familiarity with it and by the social relationships people have in place. These:

give both sedimented and emergent structure and feeling to the sense of sharing and belonging. Experiential layerings – from one’s birthplace to other places lived in and actively travelled – map place into identity, conjoining temporal motion and spatial projection, reinscribing past in present, creating biography as itinerary (Feld 1996:113).

Warraber notions of place are as much about topography and moral inscription as they are about the biography that informs knowledge of Warraber’s past through the actions of relatives who inhabited it (Basso 1996:84). Living-in-place is made meaningful by the relationships people have. In this way, social relatedness informs people’s understanding of and lends intimate significance to the experience of Warraber as a home-place. The infusion of relatedness, topography and individual action integral to Warraber notions of place and place memory, lends an historical immediacy to the experiences and interpretations of place that render Warraber a distinctive location that invites attachment.

The desire of the dead to return to Warraber and to remain among the living highlights the critical terms through which Warraber is envisioned and experienced as a home place, exerting power to attract those who are meaningfully attached to it. The longing of the dead is explained by way of social relationships as well as by significant locations (such as birth-places). People are integral components of the notion of home place. When deceased persons move about, like the living they move according to the social relationships they participated in and helped to generate. The dead may wander, but their movements are purposeful and ordered, occurring in relation to the places where they and their relatives lived and are living.

The discussion in this chapter has often had to expand on relatively intangible, emotive aspects of Warraber life, and even on local beliefs about the capacities of the dead, in order to convey the strength and vividness of largely unstated but nevertheless important experiential dimensions of ‘belonging’ to Warraber. For those who consider Warraber their home, and represent themselves in terms of being Warraberan, little explanation is necessary – this forms an obvious, taken-for-granted part of their lives, as substantial as the existence of kin and favoured fishing spots, and as powerful as the ability to evoke the presence of the dead. Abstract and fixed geometrical perspectives of landscape are far less important in a day-to-day sense on Warraber than the practice of *gud pasin* as a part of emplaced sociality. This is not to suggest that knowledge of family and individual land-holdings are unimportant, but rather that engaging in an

approach to land that reifies ownership as distinct or separate from social relations is rarely a pressing local concern. However, the recent advent of state-sanctioned regulatory processes by which indigenous land tenure can be formally (and collectively) recognised has presented a range of new challenges to Warraberans. Residents came under pressure to clarify their relation to each other, to the past, and to Warraber Island. The next chapter tracks local responses to one such process which was completed in 1998.

## Chapter Seven: The Gau Clan Claim.

### Introduction

The Queensland *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* establishes procedures by which Torres Strait Islanders can make application to the state government to claim land. From 1996 to 1998 Warraber and Poruma residents pursued a joint claim over five uninhabited nearby islands under this legislation. An entity known as the Gau Clan formed the claimant group. The Gau Clan appears to derive its local coherence from visions of the male ancestor figure Bubarei as someone to whom all residents of Warraber and Poruma possess traceable genealogical links.

But several aspects of the Gau Clan render it more complex. It is not a ‘clan’ in the classic anthropological sense; membership is not limited to descent but can be asserted on the basis of an affinal connection to any of Bubarei’s descendants; it takes its name from a totem (*augad*) though totems have limited local import; and the male ancestor, Bubarei, is acknowledged as being an outsider or foreigner – he is considered to be from Vanuatu, not the Torres Strait.

This chapter explores the Gau Clan as an expression of Warraber-Poruma collective identification. I focus on two significant events in the claim process. The first is a formal meeting in 1997 where the nature of the Gau Clan is discussed by a number of Warraber people. The second is a ceremony on Warraber in 1998 marking the success of the Gau Clan claim in the Queensland government’s official handover of the five islands to the claimant group.

Identification with the Gau Clan collectivity is complicated by the small number of Warraber and Poruma residents who stress their descent from male *neitiv* (ie local) ancestors rather than the Vanuatuan outsider Bubarei (see chapter 2). These individuals depict their attachment to their island communities in terms of ancestors who preceded Bubarei and from whom they inherited knowledge regarding *zogo* sites, locations linked to *bipo taim* activities. Other members of the Gau Clan are reluctant to privilege *neitiv*

attachment (and the minority of residents this represents) but are also concerned to embrace these persons within its fold.

I argue that the Gau Clan utilizes locally salient notions of relatedness rooted in Christianity and kinship (see chapter 6 and 4 respectively) to appeal to and incorporate *neitiv* persons. The effect is to delineate an inclusive and seamless group of landholders, undifferentiated by local *neitiv-poren* distinctions. Gau Clan representations of Warraber and Poruma as communities of co-residents, with equal needs for access to land, is given coherence and moral content through residents' collective identification as Christians. Nevertheless, muted tensions surrounding the ambivalent status of *neitiv* identification and the *bipo taim* power of *neitiv* ancestors was revived by the nature of the claim process, in particular its explicit focus on the historical processes of land ownership and inheritance.

As a consequence, the Gau Clan was also required to integrate recognition of the particular and more exclusive mode of local belonging claimed by Warraber *neitiv*, and did so by allocating a representative of the *neitiv* a special role in the hand-over ceremony. This formed a public affirmation of *neitiv* status, attesting to their historical authority at the same time as it (re)positioned the *zogo* site, again not without a degree of ambivalence, as an important motif of local distinctiveness rather than a *bipo taim* source of extant power. The result was a strengthening of the Gau Clan's position as a meaningful vehicle through which all residents could express a collective sentiment of Warraber belonging.

It is important to stress that it is not my intention to question the contemporary indigenous status of Warraberans who valorize *poren* ancestors. Within the notional terms of the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991*, a 'Torres Strait Islander' is defined as "a person who is a descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of the Torres Strait Islands" (s7), where 'descendent' is said to be defined by 'Island Custom'. All the residents of Warraber (and Poruma) certainly have at least one *neitiv* ancestor, whether from Warraber or elsewhere in the region. Those who emphasise their descent from Bubarei, for example, also acknowledge descent from his spouse, Wawa, who is regarded as a *neitiv* figure from the western islands of the Strait. Further, principles of relatedness and inclusivity are important moral values within Warraberan *gud pasin* – the local equivalent to the discourse of 'Island Custom', the content of which is

summarized by the expression *ol wan pamle*. The dynamic nature of relatedness and belonging on Warraber belie conservative assumptions of inherited, archaically emplaced autochthony (a 'biological clan'), as local identification on Warraber finds collective expression, not without strains and moments of unease, through the vehicle of the Gau Clan.

## **Torres Strait Islander Land Act**

Under the *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991 Qld* (hereafter TSILA) a Torres Strait Islander individual or group may make a claim for 'transferable land'. Forty islands in the Torres Strait are designated as being transferable. This includes Deed Of Grant In Trust (DOGIT) land, reserve land, and available crown land (i.e. designated as transferable).<sup>1</sup> In 1996 an application for the transfer of five islands under TSILA was made by a Warraber man in the name of the 'Gau Clan'. The five islands were *Yarpar* (Roberts), *Ullu* (Saddle), *Bara* (Bet), *Guiya* (Poll) and *Aurid* (recorded by Haddon (1935) as *Yaywad*) (see map 2).<sup>2</sup> Both *Bara* and *Guiya* were part of the Warraber Island DOGIT while *Aurid*, *Ullu* and *Yarpar* were all Reserves. These islands were regularly visited by Warraber and Poruma people, but none had permanent residents. In the past some of these islands had also been used in intermittent gardening and camping, largely linked to movement in marine industries (see chapter 5).

The claim itself takes the form of an application of transfer, essentially an administrative (rather than judicial) process that necessitates an investigation by the Department of Natural Resources aided by a consultant employed by the applicant/s. Its focus concerns the identity of the persons making the application and the grounds on

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<sup>1</sup> See Malbon (1996:17) and Brennan (1991:10) for a discussion of the status of DOGIT lands, particularly in relation to TSILA. Other land may also be claimable, including transferred land not already listed as claimable, and crown land declared as claimable and having only crown interests, but within the Torres Strait, as defined by the Torres Strait Treaty (State of Queensland 2000, TSILA 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Additional Torres Strait Islanders made claims to islands under TSILA following a gathering of Torres Strait Islanders at a 'Native Title Workshop' on Darnley Island in 1996. The workshop involved a range of presentations, including a representative from the Native Title Tribunal who discussed the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* (see chapter 8), while a representative of the Queensland Government outlined the processes for claiming transferable land under TSILA as an alternative to Native Title claims (Murphy 1997). Early TSILA claims were for uninhabited islands, which are the simplest and most immediately achievable; compared to settled islands, there are far fewer impediments to transfer.

which the application is being made. Consultation takes place with those people designated as “particularly concerned with the land” subject to the transfer claim. Under the Act, this includes people who are connected to the land by ‘Island Custom’; who live on or use the land; or live on or use neighbouring land (State of Queensland 2000:2). Once these consultations are complete, a Land Tribunal established under TSILA arrives at a decision and makes a recommendation to the relevant Queensland Minister. The Minister must grant approval for a transfer to occur.

TSILA provides for claims to be made using one or more of three grounds. If the claim is established either on the basis of ‘customary affiliation’ or ‘historical association’, the result is a ‘fee simple’ grant.<sup>3</sup> A claim established on the basis of ‘economic or cultural viability’ results in the grant of a lease in perpetuity or for a specified term of years, on specified terms and conditions (TSILA s50-57). In this instance, the claim over the five islands was lodged on grounds of customary affiliation. The legislative terms delineating this basis for establishing a land claim state that the Land Tribunal assessing the claim must be:

satisfied that the Torres Strait Islander has a connection, or that members of the group have a common connection, with the land based on spiritual or other associations with, rights in relation to, and responsibilities for, the area of land under Island Custom. (TSILA s50.(1) ).

Clearly, this approach to customary affiliation is quite broad in scope. Particular core terms (for example ‘connection’, ‘associations’, ‘responsibilities’) are not specifically defined. Instead, there is repeated recourse to a (non-defined) notion of ‘Island custom’, which is presumed *a priori* to elucidate such ideas. The TSILA offers the following definition of Island custom:

Island custom, known in the Torres Strait as Ailan Kastom, is the body of customs, traditions, observances and beliefs of Torres Strait Islanders generally or of a particular group of Torres Strait Islanders, and includes any such customs, traditions, observances and beliefs relating to particular persons, areas, objects or relationships (s8.)

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<sup>3</sup> This is freehold title under Queensland law, but with certain conditions that do not apply to other freehold lands in Queensland. Firstly, the claimed land can never be sold. Secondly, the land cannot be leased to a non-Torres Strait Islander person for longer than ten years without the approval of the Minister for Natural Resources (with the exception of the spouse of a Torres Strait Islander person). Finally, unlike other freehold owners, Torres Strait Islander grantees do not have to pay local government rates on their land (State of Queensland 2000).

As a result the terms of TSILA have an inclusive tenor, and this seems to have been the policy intention of the government of the day. For example, the phrase 'spiritual or other associations' in the definition above originally read 'spiritual *and* other associations' (as it does in the equivalent Queensland *Aboriginal Land Act 1991*). The change was explained in parliament in 1991 by the then Queensland Minister for Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs:

The *Torres Strait Islander Land Act* will also be amended to ensure that the basis upon which land is claimed in the Torres Strait appropriately reflects islander relationships with land. I am advised that the principles of traditional affiliation with land in accordance with Torres Strait Islander custom may not necessarily include a notion of spiritual association with land. This, of course, differs from Aboriginal relations with land. Consequently, the definition of traditional affiliation will permit but not require a claimant to demonstrate a spiritual relationship with the land (Warner 1991 in Neate 1997:14).

## **The Claim Meeting**

The majority of Warraberans knew few details of the TSILA claim prior to a March 1997 meeting at Warraber. Residents maintained that the key individual generating the claim initially disseminated no information to them. Nonetheless residents were broadly supportive of the idea of a land claim. They pointed out that certain individuals and families had long been regarded as owning garden plots on the islands. Where available, stones had been used to mark boundaries that in some cases remained visible. More recently, sites on the islands were regularly visited for camping or 'picnicking' as part of fishing trips, while other less-frequent activities included planting coconut trees and harvesting wild tubers. Residents felt that their knowledge of and interactions with the islands did form a legitimate basis for claiming community ownership. The general location of the islands was also understood as highly relevant. Four are visible from Warraber and/or Poruma and form part of the locale of greatest familiarity to Warraber and Poruma people. Residents expressed the sense that they lived in the area of these islands and knew them intimately.

Warraber residents had their first substantial input into the claim process when a public meeting was held on 17 March 1997 at Warraber by a consultant contracted to research

the claim.<sup>4</sup> As the application was made on behalf of the Gau Clan, the meeting's main purpose was to document local understandings of what was meant by this expression. The consultant was introduced to people assembled at the Public Hall. This is the preferred venue and method for formal visits, with officials explaining their reason for visiting the community, particularly when the issue concerns the Warraber population as a whole. Most adults were present, seated in rows, and as at other meetings men sat close to the front with women taking up rows to the rear. Twelve Poruma residents also attended the meeting. It opened and closed with hymns and prayers from an AOG Pastor and an Anglican Priest, a practice that marks all formal events on the island.

Older men made most contributions to the discussion, while no women spoke – a typical pattern in Warraber public meetings. Although some older women are regarded as repositories of knowledge, especially about the past, they rarely speak at meetings, especially where there are *waitman* (white people) present. Age is an important factor in community prominence or status, but it is modified by other factors, particularly recognised personal achievements. Men have much more opportunity to develop notable skill in marine work, or by becoming a teacher, a councilor, or Christian official. An accomplishment of this kind is usually necessary in order to generate respect from others as a knowledgeable and senior community figure, able to take a leading role at formal meetings. In dominating positions in the Church and the Council, men also have the most experience in dealing with official visitors to the island. On this occasion, some younger men who aspired to prominence also made contributions.

After introductions by a local Council representative, an elderly Poruma man who was a close friend of the individual who initiated the claim, began the discussion. Acting as his proxy, Peter was abreast of recent developments, but more importantly, he was regarded as a person of status. He had also established a relationship with the consultant when the latter visited Poruma before coming to Warraber. Peter announced to the gathered residents that the consultant needed to know the meaning of Gau – what it was and why it was important. Warraber people responded by explaining the Gau Clan in

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<sup>4</sup> The claim research coincided with my main period of fieldwork at Warraber. The consultant conducted field research for the claim during March 1997 and later prepared a report (Gorecki 1997). After a few days research at Poruma with a range of family representatives regarded locally as the eldest persons holding each family surname, he then carried out research was then carried out at Warraber, over a similar period.

much the same manner as I had heard on previous, less formal occasions. They said that *gau* is the name of a bird, categorised as an *augad uroi*, a phrase literally meaning a bird (*uroi*) that is a totem (*augad*). In quick succession they then tried to add further detail to this somewhat standardised local explanation.

One man stated that the bird's call in the islands constitutes a message that the arrival of *pamle* (in this sense, cognatic kin) is imminent. Another senior Warraber man, the Anglican Priest, agreed, saying that the bird lets people know of any *bad nuz* (bad news, i.e. a death) that will take place or that has already occurred elsewhere. The priest mentioned a story well known among Warraber and Poruma people involving a *Gau* bird that was said to have dropped from the sky next to a house, signalling to other residents that its owner had died in hospital on Thursday Island. The same story had been used to explain to me the role of *Gau* as a totem for local residents. The priest added that the *Gau* is thought of as "our god".<sup>5</sup> At this point, one young man announced that it was "a symbol, a sign". The remark was ignored, due both to the speaker's lack of seniority and his use of the term 'symbol', one not generally in use or readily applied in describing a totem. The Priest continued: "all Torres Strait families have an *augad*". As an example, he said that Mabuiag people had told him about their totems, such as *kadal* (crocodile) and *kaigas* (shovel nosed ray). These totems all have their particular *sain* (sign) by which they make people aware of a range of imminent events. The *Gau* bird itself was not identified by anyone present. One person explained that it was something like an egret, but brown with a white chest.

The consultant then asked about *Gau* Clan 'ownership' of islands, including islands outside the present claim. People began to list islands and reefs they viewed as belonging to themselves. This included the islands subject to the claim: *Bara*, *Ullu*, *Yarpar*, *Aurid* and *Guiya*.<sup>6</sup> Peter then moved the discussion to 'island laws' concerning gardens (*lo blo gaden*), noting that the consultant had interviewed him about such

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the term *augad* is used interchangeably at Warraber to mean either (the Christian) God or a totem. In the late nineteenth century, Ray (1907:169) also found this dual use of the term at Saibai and found that in the Mabuiag Gospels, this word is replaced by the English word, God. At Warraber where Anglicans sing Christian hymns in Kulkalgaw Ya, they use the word *augad* in place of God.

<sup>6</sup> Islands additional to these five that were also viewed as exclusively 'owned' by Warraber and Poruma people were listed. Additional islands were not covered in this claim, as they were not transferable under the terms of TSILA. These islands that were seen as belonging to the *Gau* Clan were all claimed later under the *Native Title Act*, as outlined in chapter 8.

matters at Poruma. Again, only senior men spoke, and tended to focus on the question of land ownership and rights to established gardens. For example, one senior man mentioned a case of land being transferred by a descendant of Bubarei, a Vanuatuan ancestor, to another *poren* ancestor, Mari.

The discussion moved on to discuss gardening rights. An individual could establish a garden on their own land, but not on land owned by others. When the original planter dies, their children assume ownership; no one else was allowed to do so (*ausaid man no lau po meke gaden*). Lines of heaped stone called *teterpem* can mark boundaries of land ownership. Fruit trees planted in gardens can be declared off limits, *gelar*, either to requests for fruit or direct harvesting by tying a coconut leaf around the trunk.<sup>7</sup> Certain trees could also confer/signify ownership of the planting-site to the individual who planted them, and garden boundaries were also sometimes marked by these trees, such as coconut, *wongai* (*Manilkara kauki*), *meke* (beach almond) and *uzu* (*Syzygium*). A man named Samuel, who had not previously spoken, emphasised coconut trees as the most common marker of garden ownership because of a lack of rocks on Warraber.

Abruptly, Samuel then shifted to an emotive personal declaration. He proclaimed that his own relation to Warraber was rooted in locally emplaced male ancestry linked to responsibility for a Warraber zogo site:

the *zogo* and the *kod* [male initiation place] belonged to my great grandfather, Gagabe, and Gagabe's son Ausa. This is his place [i.e. Warraber]. David, Matthew, Donald and myself are the only one's responsible for the *zogo* hook. Gagabe's other son, Auda told *athe* Nari [Samuel's grandfather] the magic words that make the *zogo* work. Then, he taught me. We are the real 'natives' of Warraber [*“mipla prapa neitiv blo dis pleis”*]. Before *athe* Bubarei arrived, our grandfathers were living here [*“mipla greit-granpada bin stap ya”*]. Bubarei is an outsider [*“pram ausaid”*]. *Athe* Mari [a Maori ancestor] is an outsider. That Gagabe was born here ... before Mari and Bubarei arrived. [*“Dat athe Gagabe – em bon ya ... Bipo athe Mari, athe Bubarei bin kam.”*]

Samuel continued his speech stating that his ancestor Gagabe travelled around the Central Islands to find a wife, first taking a wife at Yam Island, and after her death, marrying again, this time to a Masig woman. Gagabe had children with both women.

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<sup>7</sup> Both *teterpem* and *gelar* derive from the Eastern Islands language, Meriam Mir.

One of his children, Auda, returned to Warraber at his father's insistence that he marry there, as it was 'his place'.

This speech was greeted with uncomfortable silence. Samuel's behaviour was unusual – he rarely spoke at public forums, and never with such intensity. The local Council arranges Warraber meetings irregularly, usually coinciding with visiting government officials. Most are subdued; people may ask questions, but for the most part they are quiet affairs with the most intense discussions occurring after the meetings. At the Gau Clan meeting, Samuel's interjection was both abrupt and assertive, altering the mood and the spirit of the discussions. The proclamation of his own *neitiv* status, drawn in contrast with the outsider status of Bubarei – the ancestor figure that is central to the Gau Clan – shocked others at the meeting because such talk was *tu stret* (too straight), i.e. too forceful and direct. For the most part, Warraber residents avoid being drawn into verbal arguments or confrontations. They regard themselves as people who mask negative views towards others, preferring to avoid them or veil their speech in casual pleasantries.<sup>8</sup> Any public disputes that I witnessed at Warraber were generally diffused rapidly through the intervention of senior kinsmen (though private antagonism might continue for months thereafter). This was often framed in terms of Christian obligation, but a fear of attracting sorcery or being accused of ensorcelling others was a clear subtext.<sup>9</sup> In naming the same two *poren* ancestors that the priest had earlier mentioned, and framing them as late arrivals to Warraber, his speech seemed in part directed at the priest.

But Samuel's words likely also evoked this response because they undermined representations of the Gau Clan as a cohesive vision of Warraberan social collectivity, rooted in shared co-residence and an enveloping Christian religiosity. Though there were undoubtedly members of the audience who disagreed with this sudden emphasis

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<sup>8</sup> This behaviour forms a local point of contrast with other Islanders. They regard Murray Islanders for example as 'straight speaking', meaning that they are prone to speak their thoughts even when this may create overt discord.

<sup>9</sup> Some residents are disinclined to speak their true feelings to individuals for fear of being ensorcelled (indicated by illness and death) or of being accused of practicing sorcery if the person they fought with becomes ill or dies. This is particularly apparent among Anglicans who scrutinise recent or longstanding disputes or ill feeling between persons to locate the source of an illness or death. The AOG actually provides a forum for public testimonials within their services aimed at resolving disputes and Anglican church officials regularly urge people to 'love one another' and insist that people avoid disputes or once started, work to resolve them quickly.

instead on historical issues of precedence and male ancestral origins, it would have been quite extraordinary for a public dispute to occur in front of a visitor to the island. So the hall fell silent and nobody responded to Samuel's statement. The consultant finally broke the silence by speaking briefly about the claim process. The meeting ended shortly thereafter. Over the next two days, the consultant remained at Warraber interviewing particular persons including Samuel, before leaving and compiling a report.

### **Land, Authority and Power**

Samuel's sudden declaration at the Gau Clan meeting also surprised me, though his words were familiar from an interview I had conducted with him months earlier. I knew that Samuel regarded himself as having a particular relationship with Warraber Island, one that emphasised the native status of his ancestors. As the eldest male in his *pamle*, he claimed hereditary responsibility for the *zogo* place, previously maintained and utilised by his male ancestors. In this sense, he regards himself as the chief *zogo* custodian. Later, in eliciting accounts of the *zogo* site from others in the village, it emerged that most residents were fully aware Samuel's family asserted responsibility for the site. Indeed, informants frequently named precisely the same ancestor figures cited by Samuel as being the *bipo taim* people with responsibility for the *zogo* place.

Samuel stated he had been told by his father to stay silent about their ancestral connections to Warraber and 'not make a fuss' by accentuating his status as a *neitiv* whose male ancestors preceded those of much of the population. He endorsed this advice, and has avoided fostering in public a sense that his family sought to distinguish or separate themselves from others on Warraber. In the context of the discursive emphasis on sameness and shared identity I regularly encountered on Warraber, his father's request, and Samuel's usual reticence, made sense. Yet this was clearly undermined by his assertive public declaration at the Gau Clan meeting. His short speech involved three themes. Firstly, the affirmation of his family's ancestors as precursive to those associated with the Gau Clan. Secondly, that this status is linked to responsibility for the *zogo* site and inherited knowledge of the magical power associated with the site. Thirdly, he situated Gagabe as a powerful source of moral authority, one who was entitled to punish those refusing to 'share fish', i.e. violate the local moral

terms of sociality. These three closely linked ideas – precursor, (magical) power, (moral) authority – come together in the term *neitiv*.

In this regard, his use of the expression ‘*prapa neitiv*’ needs careful explication. *Prapa* is a multivalent term deriving from the English ‘proper’ and can act as an intensifier (as with the English word ‘very’) as well as conveying such meanings as ‘real’, ‘true’, ‘correct’ and ‘authentic’ (Snukal 1992:186). My sense of Samuel’s intent was that he sought primarily to emphasise his greater ancestral localness rather than assert absolute difference to those Warraberans with male *porena* ancestors. His claim was not one of invoking authenticity against the inauthentic, of contrasting valid or genuine claims to localness with invalid or non-genuine ones. Rather, Samuel was highlighting his more profoundly local status in terms which he went on to enunciate clearly; tracing descent through male ancestors (the ideal or ‘*prapa*’ form of descent-reckoning), he is able to demonstrate ancestral precedence over others, a status that requires community recognition not least because it recalls the fact that it was his personal ancestor Mau (the son of Gagabe) who gave land to the *poren* male ancestors whose descendants now form the majority of the contemporary population.

It is significant that Samuel chose to assert this status in a public way during the Gau Clan meeting and at the point when discussions began to most explicitly address issues of garden rights, inheritance and land ownership. Not long after this meeting, Samuel said to me:

You notice at meetings, you don’t see me speaking. Sometimes I talk, but only occasionally [*wan wan ai tok*], not all the time. Joseph thinks I over-reacted [*em tink ai zamp ova da mun*] because I spoke up at the [Gau Clan] meeting.

So, I’m just going to leave it. I think as long as my family knows that this is our place, our grandfather’s place. ...

In this sense, Samuel’s statement intimates a concern that the generalised narrative of the Gau Clan as sole land-holding social group in Warraber threatens to submerge the specificity of his own *neitiv* origins. His aim then, was not to challenge the right of others to ‘own’ land on Warraber, or assert a personal or familial entitlement to land within the TSILA claim that exceeded those whose *poren* ancestors had been given land by his own *neitiv* ancestors. Rather, he sought a recognition and acknowledgement of the precedence and historical authority of his male *neitiv* ancestors as comprising the original source of all contemporary territorial holdings on the island.

Meetings concerning the need for additional house-sites and other intra-community land issues had featured previously in irregularly convened council meetings. The Gau Clan was the first meeting to explicitly discuss the character of land-holding on Warraber in its totality. In another interview, Samuel noted that he does not speak at “those kind of meetings [ie land-related]. I just sit quiet. Now I think its time for me to talk”. He described his ancestor Gagabe once again as the ‘chief’ of Warraber whose son Nari (Samuel’s grandfather) was ‘mamoose’, another perceived position of authority.<sup>10</sup> According to Samuel, it is Nari who divided Warraber into four equal shares, allotted to himself and his brother Mau as well as to the newly arriving outsiders Bubarei and Mari. Once again, this time even more explicitly, Samuel’s claim was not simply that his male *neitiv* ancestors were prior occupants of Warraber, but that they held local authority over land – they were the original land-holders who made the newcomers welcome and incorporated them into the community, effectively accepting them as Warraberans.

In another interview some time later, I discussed with Samuel the subject of totems and the meaning of the Gau Clan. He said:

People who live at Warraber today belong to one family. When Bubarei [the Gau Clan ancestor from Vanuatu] came here, he married and had many children. So today, there are many families at Warraber. But we [*neitiv* descendants] have a big family too, Auda family. But we don’t talk about that. My family doesn’t speak up. We’re not like that. We don’t talk [*mipla dis pamle mipla no sabe tok*]. You’ve noticed that I don’t speak up. I’m not like Joseph [the initial advocate of the Gau Clan claim at Warraber].

JL: can you explain to me what the Gau Clan is? Are you a member of it?

Yes, I’m a member [*insaid*] of the Gau Clan. But that’s why I don’t speak up much about it because I think it’s incorrect. I don’t know. Some young people, including my son, ask me why the Gau Clan is making the claim. I don’t really know what the Gau Clan is, what it really means. The *Gau*, that’s just a bird that hangs around here. In our language we call it an *augad uroi* [totem bird]. That brown bird follows boats. Before when a boat was due to arrive, the bird would sing out. That Gau Clan might be referring to that bird. I really don’t understand it.

Samuel emphasises here that he is ‘inside’ the Gau Clan and also that Warraber people ‘belong to one family’, by which he means that everyone is interrelated through a network of cognatic and affinal relationships. This perspective is regularly asserted by

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 2 for meanings attributed to the term ‘mamoose’.

other Gau Clan members and underpins their representation of the Gau Clan as an all-embracing collectivity. In this regard it is notable that Samuel used the respectful kin-term *athe* when he referred to Bubarei and Mari at the meeting.

Despite regarding himself as a member of the Gau Clan, it is an entity that Samuel does not comprehend primarily in terms of totems. Instead, it reflects the interconnectedness of Warraber people. Though the Gau Clan is not a primary form of identification for Samuel, he accepts it as a vehicle that is able to express his connection to other Warraber residents whose male ancestors were not *neitiv*. His casual dismissal of the idea as a primary source of personal identity does not represent an attempt to challenge the fundamental legitimacy of those who do, or of their rights to land (whether in principle or under the terms of TSILA). Rather, his emphasis was that his own sense of Warraber identification is entirely meaningful without recourse to this idea, once again affirming his descent through male *neitiv* ancestors and the original generosity of these ancestors to the outsiders.

While Samuel and his family claim a totem of their own, the *womer* (frigate bird), they do not use this to designate themselves as a distinct clan. The position of a minority of Poruma residents is similar, also regarding themselves as the descendents of *neitiv* rather than outsiders. The man who initiated discussions at the meeting, Peter, is the most senior *neitiv* of Poruma, and he also claims inherited responsibilities in regard to Poruma's own *zogo* place. Peter has his own totem, the cassowary, but like Samuel, was supportive of the Gau Clan claim in terms of its ability to represent the links that exist among all the families of Poruma and Warraber.

Totems and totemic creatures are not a part of everyday discourse either at Warraber or Poruma. Totems (*augad*) are generally associated with the pre-Christian period, and can carry an association with sorcery. Sugimoto (1983:92) describes Poruma residents as reluctant to discuss links between families and totemic clans because such matters "related to sorcery". Nonetheless *augad* can appear in contemporary contexts as a trope for thinking about collective relations. Warraber people have known for decades that other Islanders use both totems and 'clans' as identificatory categories and that they are associated with specific territorial interests. Therefore the discourse of 'clan' constitutes a well-established mode of communicating (and to an extent perhaps, also legitimating)

the experience of broadly emplaced relatedness that is a feature of Warraber sociality and self-representation.

### **Totems and the *Gau***

As noted, the *augad* Gau takes its name from a seabird, but one that is relatively unfamiliar to local residents. Nominally described as a kind of egret, though brown and white, no other name was offered. Despite some success in using illustrated field-guides with informants to identify locally-named fish and many other birds, this did not help in identifying the Gau. The land claim consultant was also unable to link the name to a bird despite visiting both Warraber and Poruma, but suggested it was perhaps a type of heron or egret (Gorecki pers. comm.). The terms *gaut* (Boigu Island) and *gauti* (Badu Island) refer to the Mangrove Heron in the western Torres Strait (Johannes & MacFarlane 1991:213) and Ingram (1976:71) observed Mangrove Herons at Warraber. This bird belongs to the family *Ardeidae* that includes herons, bitterns and egrets (Simpson & Day 1993:303).<sup>11</sup> Another member of this family, somewhat similar in size and shape is the Rufous or Nankeen Night Heron (*Nycticorax caledonicus*) (Slater et al 1989:55). Ingram's phonetic rendering of the Meriam Mir term for the Rufous Night Heron is 'cow' (1976:71) while Ray (1907:147) recorded *kau* as the Meriam term for 'a heron'. Warraber and Poruma people use many Meriam Mir language words, often modified from their eastern islands' form.

The Rufous Night Heron are known to range widely about the Australian coast and up to New Guinea and have been described as "a common nomad found throughout the Torres Strait" (Hanna et al 1996:258). Ingram (1976) records seeing the species on Horn Island (in addition to Waier, Dauar and Mer) and breeding colonies have been noted on Ker and Deliverance islands in addition to the west coast of Cape York (Hanna et al 1996).<sup>12</sup> It seems likely that the eastern islands *kau*, along with the western islands

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<sup>11</sup> Also known as the Striated Heron and the Green-backed and Little Green Heron, its taxonomic classification has been reformed in recent decades. Johannes & MacFarlane (1991:213) give the scientific name *Butorides striatus* as does Ingram (1976:71). However, both Simpson and Day (1993:52) and Slater et al (1989:55) provide the more current *Ardeola striata*.

<sup>12</sup> The presence of the Rufous Night heron in the Torres Strait has been a focus of interest for the Australian Quarantine inspection service and epidemiological researchers as a possible source of Japanese Encephalitis (JE) virus, following an outbreak of the disease on Badu Island in 1995. The particular strain

*gau* and *gauti* are all cognates of the Warraber *gau* and refer ubiquitously to medium-sized coastal herons. The bird associated with the Gau Clan on Warraber is most probably the Rufous Night Heron. While the Mangrove Heron has blue-grey plumage the Rufous Night Heron is a dark red-brown on the back and wings with contrasting pale cinnamon underparts, much closer to local descriptions of the Gau bird. Additionally, as its name suggests, the Rufous Night Heron is mainly active nocturnally. This could help explain why residents were not readily able to point the bird out and also why it seemed little known. During daylight hours, the bird roosts in trees close to water (Simpson and Day 1993:52) and when disturbed will fly about in small flocks and “usually gives a loud ‘skeowk’” (Slater et al 1989:55). The noisy engine and/or physical proximity of a returning boat might well disturb roosting birds, shedding light on their association with arrivals.

Sugimoto (1983:92) conducted brief fieldwork at Warraber in the 1970s and suggests seven ‘totem clans’ existed in the past on Warraber.<sup>13</sup> In a section entitled “disappearing tradition” Sugimoto (1983:92) notes that “the totem clans seem to have played an important role in village life before the advent of Christianity, but they are hardly functioning now”. The suggestion of what function remained, if any at all, is ambiguous. Intent on linking patronyms to particular totemic clans, he describes

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of the JE virus found in the Torres Strait was found to be related to those circulating in Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. The closely related Black-Crowned Night Heron (*N. nycticorax*) is a principal bird species implicated in the JE virus bird-mosquito cycle in Asia (see Hanna et al 1996:258).

<sup>13</sup> Haddon (1904:155) listed six animals as ‘totems’ at Warraber: *dangal* (dugong), *ger* (marine snake), *kodal* (crocodile), *surlal* (copulating turtle), *tabu* (snake) and *womer* (frigate-bird) and two at Poruma: *dangal* and *tabu*. Sugimoto (1983) who conducted fieldwork in central Torres Strait Islands suggests seven: *kadal* (crocodile), *kuzi* (eagle), *baidam* (shark), *umai* (dog), *wamer* (frigate), and *samu/emu* (emu and/or cassowary), in addition to *gau*. For Poruma he provides *samu*, *kadal*, *baidam* and *gau*. The discrepancies between the two lists are obvious – they overlap in just two instances: *kodal/kadal* and *womer/wamer*. But unlike Sugimoto (1983) Haddon did not gather data first-hand on Warraber and Poruma, raising the real possibility of errors in his account. It is noteworthy too that with the exception of *kuzi* and *gau* the terms listed by Sugimoto (1983) appear among the totemic creatures Haddon lists in association with other islands.

*Kuzi* refers to a medium-sized brown raptor (likely a Whistling Kite, *Milvus sphenurus*) and is among the Meriam terms recorded by Ray (1907:177) in the eastern islands as meaning “a hawk”. As noted, *gau* likely refers to a reef heron. While *Kuzi* and *Gau* do not appear in Haddon’s survey of Torres Strait totems, there are numerous examples of totems that are unique to particular islands. Importantly, these are rarely an entirely different category of creature, but tend instead to be specific types of a category that appears more widely. Birds and fishes are the most common and diverse. The fact there may have been two bird totems specific to Warraber and Poruma is then, not especially remarkable. Indeed, among the totemic animals Haddon lists as unique to a single island are very similar kinds of birds to the *gau* and *kuzi*, such as *Karbai* (reef egret – Saibai Island) and *Aubu* (a kind of raptor – Muralug).

Warraber “clan members” as occasionally picnicking on nearby small islands, which he suggests, “might be connected to the old practices”. But he adds “they do not always go together”, presumably reflecting the fact picnicking groups did not routinely include all of those who shared a patronym (and perhaps some who did not). Such outings likely drew much more on family (or *pamle*) connections, as they do today, rather than reflecting patronymic or totemic affiliation. It is also unclear if each of the seven totems he mentions continued to provide a source of identification for living residents, as against simply being recalled (and if the latter, how generally)? Certainly just two *augad* are cited by Warraber people today – Womer and Gau. Interestingly, Sugimoto (1983) does not give particular emphasis to *gau*. How this particular *augad* managed to attain its contemporary prominence is difficult to address; explanations must rely on a certain amount of speculation rather than extant local knowledge.

Undoubtedly, *augad* (totems) were a vital part of social life on Warraber in the past. Equally, relations surrounding *augad* were subject to change. Haddon (1904:170) observed that for the Western Islands, “the relative importance of various clans, both in numbers and influence, would undergo considerable fluctuations. Once-important clans may become insignificant or extinct, while others might increase in importance” even in the space of a few generations. Haddon described a number of clans as ‘extinct’ – still recalled, but no longer having living members (e.g. Haddon 1904:154, 162, 169). In this regard he tended to emphasise the patrilineal character of clans: a lack of male descendants could end a clan.

One explanation of the two *augad* situation on Warraber could be offered in these terms. Over numerous decades the vagaries of human reproduction, alongside population mortality and movement, has led to just two *augad* with surviving descendants. Local informants lend strength to this possibility in noting a tendency towards large families among Pacific ancestor figures such as Bubarei and his descendants, especially by comparison to *neitiv* families at Warraber and Poruma. The descendants of Bubarei and Wawa may simply have become the most numerous of any ancestor-figure on Warraber.

However, Haddon is somewhat elusive with respect to the dynamics of *augad* identification. He describes primary totems indexed to clan membership as patrilineal, but other totemic affiliations were also present (including that of one’s mother) and

clearly retained social importance (Haddon 1904:160). A degree of flexibility seemed to have existed in *augad* affiliation, increasing perhaps with shifts in the significance of totemic symbols in response to colonial and missionary interventions. There may have been positive advantages in emphasising connections to certain totemic groups at particular times, even at the expense of other affiliations. If one group was emerging as especially powerful, a process of this kind could well have been exaggerated. Certainly the Gau affiliation has a strong association with *poren* people, i.e. the descendants of Pacific Islanders, and specifically with Bubarei, though his spouse Wawa is sometimes also included.<sup>14</sup> Warraber people are generally hesitant to link the Gau totem definitively to either figure, preferring to suggest simply that one or the other would have been Gau.

For his part, Haddon does allude to the importance of social factors in shaping clan and totemic relations, noting several times that the significance of totems in the Torres Strait was in a general process of decline as early as the mid to late nineteenth century (Haddon 1904:159). For example, he writes: “the connection between clan and locality has now ceased, and at present time members of different clans may even live in the same house” (Haddon 1904:160). Haddon later observes “the regulation of marriage forms one of the most important aspects of totemism ... [but] throughout the Western islands, marriage is at the present time regulated more by kinship than by clanship” (Haddon 1904:160-1). These remarks identify two thematic areas of transformation resulting from the broad effects of colonial, missionary and marine industry activities; relations to kin were supplanting the importance of clans, and the link between clan and locality was being changed. It is interesting that on 1970s Mabuiag, clan identities were not being referred to by totem classification but rather by the name of the district in which clan ancestors resided prior to 1872 (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:200).

Haddon’s view was that such changes were inevitable, part of a discernable social evolutionary flavour in his writing, with references to the “totemic stage” (1908:254) likely betraying the influence of nineteenth century thinkers such as Edward Tylor and William Smith (see also Urry 1982). Clearly the advent of the European and Pacific

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<sup>14</sup> Bubarei’s spouse is said to be from Moa. Haddon does not record *gau* among the *augad* at that location or for that matter at Muralag which Haddon suggests shares a majority of its *augad* with Moa (Haddon 1904:154).

Islander presence – administrative, religious and commercial – made transformations unavoidable, but their character and direction need not be considered in preconceived and unilineal terms (Barker 1992:153). As noted in previous chapters, recent research into Christianities in the Pacific attests to an evident lack of uniformity in the outcomes of interaction or “entanglement” (Errington & Gewertz 1995:3) of Christian and local ideas and has highlighted the relevance of local socio-political contexts.

Beckett (1978a:214) suggests in the Torres Strait “men acquired prestige through success in head-hunting, and gained respect through the control of physical and supernatural powers”. As practices like head-taking and sorcery faced increasing opposition and delimitation, local leaders sometimes adapted to the new force in their society and looked to alternative sources of moral authority and power (e.g. Burt 1994). Keesing (1992:187) notes:

in Melanesia as everywhere else, political processes were characterised by flexibility and opportunism ... modes of leadership and arenas for power were historically constituted, and changing. Leaders seized on the resources and opportunities at hand to build power, extend influence, and forge alliances across societal boundaries.

In some instances, Christianity became integral to developing expanded forms of sociality and relatedness. Certainly in the central islands, the discourse of an embracing familial-like sameness became dominant. As noted throughout this thesis, the notion of Christian inclusivity as one family (even extended to Poruma and certain Masig residents) prevails, despite varying expressions in terms of each religious collective: Anglican (as children of God) and Assemblies of God (as brothers and sisters of Jesus).<sup>15</sup> Other local forms of relatedness and sociality are present, some of which are descent-based. For example, domestic collectivities, *pamle*, and possession of common ancestors, are all important in particular contexts (see chapters 2 and 5). Nevertheless residents are generally concerned to elide differentiation within their community. Christianity allows them to achieve this when people focus on Christianity as a form of common identification positing similar moral forms of everyday sociality.

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<sup>15</sup> Burt (1994:234) also notes that as the Kwara’ae (Solomon Islands) have become Christians, local ways of configuring relationships have changed. Since becoming Christians, people consider themselves to be all “brothers” for although, “God is no-one’s ancestor ..., God is ... everyone’s ‘father’”.

In a contemporary context this sentiment has a definite role in *augad* affiliation, such that it stretches beyond what would usually be described by anthropologists as ‘clans’. Nearly all Warraber residents strongly assert general membership of the Gau Clan on the basis that everyone on Warraber and Poruma is able to trace some form of cognatic kin link to Bubarei and/or his wife Wawa and/or their descendants. Another common claim is to suggest that the affiliation was inherited from one’s parents, without placing stress on either father or mother. The emphasis is on inclusion, a sentiment the Gau Clan has come to represent – certainly far more than the specificities of genealogy or descent.

The ‘rules’ of Gau Clan membership then are extremely flexible – certainly not limited to patrilineality. Its consistent *raison d’être* is to include everyone living on Warraber and Poruma (and by extension Nagi). Both Warraber and Poruma *neitiv* families have relatives through marriage to people who are Gau. A few can even claim Gau Clan ancestors. Samuel himself, while seeking recognition of his *neitiv* status, also accepts that he is a member of the Gau Clan and Gau Clan people agree he gained membership through his (now deceased) wife who was Gau (*po oman blo em*). In the same way, Gau Clan members claim that the descendants of *neitiv* from Nagi are also members of the clan. Sorogo, the main *neitiv* ancestor from Nagi, and his descendants, are said to be ‘inside’ the Gau Clan because he married the daughter of the *porena* ancestor, Bubarei.

For their part, Warraber *neitiv* informants view themselves as having inherited the *augad* of *Womer* – in Samuel’s case from his father. Samuel traces his *Womer* affiliation patrilineally to the *neitiv* ancestor, Gagabe, who is unhesitatingly described as *Womer* also. However, Samuel also describes his FFBDD children as being *Womer*, rather than Gau like their father (in fact, they are able to claim both). *Womer* then, as with Gau, constitutes an expression of inclusivity, in this case referring to those Samuel considers *pamle*, in addition to indexing a claim to *neitiv* status. And it also forms a discourse of exclusive identification not available to non-*neitiv* Warraberans. The two expressions – *Womer* and *neitiv* – are practically synonymous. Indeed, *neitiv* has become more important than *Womer*; as noted above, *neitiv* residents do not actually describe themselves in terms of being a ‘clan’ in the manner of the members of the Gau Clan, and only rarely identify in terms of *augad*. It is as if the Gau Clan in its dominance has sought to monopolise the discursive space of clan and *augad*

identification, rendering other local forms of *augad* affiliation, such as that claimed by *neitiv* families, diminished.

It is striking that the term *gau* is the only one listed by Sugimoto (1983) that does not refer to a readily identifiable contemporary animal. Effectively, the term lacks a clear referent, and this makes it unique among the creatures Sugimoto (1983) describes as Warraber totems. All of the other terms are known as ‘language words’ (Kulkalgaw Ya) that refer to particular animals and most remain in use, though some have been largely replaced by their English equivalents (e.g. *umai* by ‘dog’).<sup>16</sup> As a distinguishing characteristic, this may also help explain the contemporary importance of Gau. Its lack of a concrete referent elevates the notion of the *gau* bird into a quasi-mystical realm (much as the Christian ‘dove’ does not draw its meaning from a specific species of white pigeon). It retains a spiritual aspect but becomes a more abstract and hence mutable symbol.

One of the “probable relics of totemism” Haddon (1908:257) points to is the *lamar ebur*. A Meriam expression, (*lamar* – a ghost; *ebur* an animal, bird) it refers to the ghost of a recently deceased person appearing to surviving relatives in the form of an appropriate animal, often as a death omen, ‘appropriate’ in this instance meaning the individual’s totem. While Warraber people did not refer to *lamar ebur*, the ominous role described was certainly strongly associated with the mysterious *gau* bird and was cited by many informants as linked to its significance as the animal associated with the Gau Clan. In the narrative cited earlier, the Gau bird was said to have fallen from the sky onto the ground outside the home of a man who had just died in hospital on Thursday Island. Unhurt, it then took to the sky once again, flying in the direction of this island. The narrative is interpreted as a signal to the community both of the death and its location.

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<sup>16</sup> This does not appear to be a generalised process – *kadal*, for example, is ubiquitous, while its equivalent ‘crocodile’ is rarely used – a phenomenon that future linguists and sociolinguists may wish to explore in more detail.

### *The Appeal of the Gau Clan*

As we have seen, inclusivity and pan-relatedness are key elements underpinning local representations of the Gau Clan. As should be clear from earlier chapters, these themes closely parallel the discourse of Christian identity on Warraber. Despite areas of contestation between the Anglican and AOG denominations (such as interpreting *ailan dans*), representations of Christianity stress common values within an embracing religiosity. Warraber Christians of both denominations often state that they ‘share the same God’ (*mipla ol preya lo wan god*); both celebrate the historical arrival of Christianity, both utilise the same temporal descriptives of *bipo taim* and the ‘coming of the light’, both advocate the moral and spiritual imperative of ‘living the Christian life’ and *gud pasin*.

The inclusivity of the Gau Clan seems to reflect these Christian ideals. An assertion often associated with the Gau Clan is that Warraber residents are ‘all one family’ (*ol wan pamle*). The phrase not only signifies the homogenizing preferences of proponents of the Gau Clan but also highlights its mutually reinforcing relation with the discourse of Warraber Christianity. This positions ‘family’ as the centerpiece of Christian life and envisages Warraber Christians as forming a single large collectivity marked by moral relations akin to those of family life – sharing (especially with those in need) and love (especially in the sense of an absence of conflict). The Gau Clan echoes local Christianity then in offering a conception of an idealised form of Warraber sociality. Its focus on inclusivity sidesteps issues of ancestral origins, of patronymic groups, patrilineality or even consanguinity. The Gau Clan is attractive in rendering everyone the same.

Collectivities like the Gau Clan then, are appealing to both Gau Clan people and *neitiv* people because Warraber residents are amenable to general Christian relatedness. Its attractiveness lies in its appropriation of local tropes of relatedness: Clans and Christian brotherhood. Linking these tropes to a non-autochthonous ancestor allows the Gau Clan collectivity to distance itself both temporally and morally from ‘before time’ and to legitimate their collective claim to land as residents.

## The Gau Clan Handover, 1998

The successful outcome of the TSILA process resulted in a ceremonial transfer of the five claimed islands to the Gau Clan custodians in August 1998, an event known locally as the ‘handover’. All residents and visitors assembled initially outside the Public Hall adjacent to the Council Offices. Warraber and Poruma religious officials, both AOG and Anglican began the proceedings with prayers. Four adult male dancers then performed a single dance, repeated three times. As they danced, the men moved toward the big *zogo* place with all others following behind. The site had been prepared for the handover ceremony. Undergrowth had been cleared, offering a clear street-side view of the main arrangement of shells, coral and wooden hook. Pandanus mats lined the dirt floor of the *zogo*, a practice also used on other formal occasions (including Church) and in people’s homes to often demarcate areas where formal proceedings occur.<sup>17</sup> Behind the *zogo* place was a screen of plaited coconut leaves obscuring the usual view through the foliage of the houses beyond.

After everyone had assembled at the *big zogo* place, the dancers stood two abreast in front of the *zogo* place. Samuel, as the most senior *zogo* custodian, stood alone inside the site. The dancers then asked his permission to enter using Kulkalgaw Ya (and not the lingua franca Torres Strait Creole). On receiving an affirmative response, they stepped inside the site and remained there in formation for the duration of the ceremony. The *zogo* custodian stepped back to the rear of the site alongside around twenty individuals who were designated as ‘grantees’ under the TSILA. Each ‘grantee’ represented their *pamle*, designated by their patronym.

The main crowd stood in the street outside the site, spreading out into the adjacent house yard to find shady places from which to observe the proceedings. Several speeches followed, including one by the Attorney General and Minister for Justice and the Arts for the State of Queensland. Other speeches were given by Council Chairman of Warraber, and a ‘Gau Clan spokesperson’, a previous Warraber Chairman. A plaque to one side of the *zogo* site was then unveiled, flanked by Torres Strait, Queensland and

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<sup>17</sup> Pandanus mats are purchased or received as gifts from members of PNG coastal villages, like Mabudauan and Sigabaduru who visit Warraber annually to sell these and other products over a few days. See Lawrence (1994) for a detailed examination of exchange between Islanders and Coastal PNG residents.

Australian flags, after which prayers and hymns were sung to close the proceedings. A 'feast' took place in the early evening, and two (Anglican) men gave a short impromptu performance of *ailan dans* before the evening concluded.

### *The incorporation/recognition of neitiv*

For Samuel, this public role in the handover ceremony constituted the community recognition that he had sought one year previously at the Gau Clan claim meeting. He appeared satisfied with his prominent place, granting permission for the male dancers to enter the *zogo* place, which effectively began the formal proceedings. He later reflected that this affirmed his role as custodian of the site, as no-one could enter and the ceremony couldn't begin without his approval. Throughout proceedings he stood in the centre of the line of 'trustees' within the *zogo* place. The symbolism of Samuel's action requires careful attention.

Samuel was dressed quite distinctively. Other participants wore formal clothes, women in 'island dress' and men in collared shirts and trousers or 'calico' (*labalaba*; cotton sarong with crocheted edging). By contrast Samuel had a bare upper body with leaves on his upper arms along with a *dari* headdress. Another aspect of his appearance was an (imitation) shell disk hung across his chest. This attire is significant in that it parallels the costumes worn by those who play the role of 'natives' during annual 'July One' or 'Coming of the Light' reenactments. Quite distinct from the male singlet costumes worn as part of *ailan dans* occasions, this attire signifies the *bipo taim*, pre-Christian state of the 'natives', who meet the 'missionaries' with threatening gestures but are subdued by the power of God's word. There is always an element of playful caricature in the role of pre-Christian native. Actors usually express some amusement at themselves and their dress and spectators also sometimes laugh at the primitive fierceness of these *bipo taim* figures, all of which serves to positively endorse their current situation, living in the light of Christianity. It is important to note that the term 'native' in this context is not directly equated with *neitiv* as a discourse of local origins/ancestral precedence, but neither are they wholly distinct. *Neitiv* and *poren* people on Warraber refer equally to their personal *bipo taim* ancestors as pre-Christian, despite the possibility that Bubarei, arriving at the time of the marine industries, may have already been a Christian. This

point remains equivocal, and people do not represent either Bubarei or the Gau Clan he gave rise to in terms of being Christian.

By dressing as a ‘native’ at the handover ceremony, Samuel was emphasising his personal connection to the *zogo* place and publicly affirming his personal connection to its archaic custodians – his powerful *bipo taim* ancestors. As an onlooker, it seemed to me that there was an element of reclamation also present. The *neitiv*, far from being an object of gentle derision and moral distancing, here appeared a solemn figure of power and authority. In addition, the role of the dancers was as additional ‘native’ figures rather than the *ailan dans* performers more usual for visiting dignitaries, further invoking the spirit of ‘July One’ occasions. But in this case, what was being reenacted was not the arrival of Christianity. The entry of the Gau Clan trustees into the *zogo* site after seeking and gaining *neitiv* (Samuel) permission did suggest an arrival, but of outsiders not missionaries. Samuel was effectively reenacting the acceptance by his local ancestors of the outsiders and in doing so, reaffirming the original generosity of the *neitiv* and their ultimate act of *gud pasin*: their acceptance of outsiders through giving land.

In the line of ‘grantees’ Samuel was joined by two of his adult sons. They stood among more than twenty others deemed representatives of all Warraber and Poruma families, including those of both *neitiv* and *poren* descent. Some of the trustees were either past or current residents of Masig Island, another of the central islands. These individuals were related (distantly) to Poruma and Warraber families, mostly through marriages from previous generations. Some were individuals with links to *neitiv* ancestors and all had their own distinct totems. One Masig woman also claimed a connection to the island of Aurid, one of the five islands being transferred.<sup>18</sup> The inclusion of some Masig residents as Gau Clan members was framed as recognition of their connection to Gau Clan families and their past and continuing use of the island, Aurid, and its reef. In the spirit of familial inclusivity, some of the trustees were also drawn from individuals connected to Warraber and Poruma families who resided elsewhere. One man listed as a

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<sup>18</sup> Her grandmother had lived at Aurid in the early twentieth century while married to a *poren* man who was engaged in the beche-de-mer industry. Warraberans recognise individual interests in places through ancestral connections. Aurid lies roughly equidistant from both Poruma and Masig. The island Aurid, continues to be visited on a roughly monthly basis by Poruma and Masig fishermen, and to a lesser extent, by Warraber fishermen.

trustee represented a Nagi family; another was from Hammond Island, adjacent to Thursday Island. Both are able to trace links of descent to the Gau Clan's apical ancestor, Bubarei.

The sweeping breadth of incorporation into the Gau Clan was widely considered an act of *gud pasin*, morally correct behaviour. The description validates the goals of the Gau Clan as both morally coherent and defensible: a generous, inclusive entity that gives credence to family links both between Warraber and Poruma and to relatives on other islands, however tenuously connected ('looking after family'). The Gau Clan then may be concerned with incorporating local *neitiv* interests but does so in the context of embracing a range of other more attenuated interests. In doing so, the collectivity was able to profess that the fundamental motivation behind the land claim was itself *gud pasin*, the project of claiming land for 'every family' through recognising a diverse range of interests, condensed within the rubric of 'Gau Clan'.

Nonetheless, as a vehicle for manifesting the social ideal of unity through relatedness and shared morality, the Gau Clan did not completely override extant terms of local diversity. The compromise represented by the special recognition of Samuel's *neitiv* status in the handover ceremony served to reinforce the visibility and importance of the *zogo* site, which in turn invites the operation of other contestations and differences, in this instance among Warraber Christianities and their reactions to motifs of the *bipo taim* period.

### *The zogo site: enduring ambiguity*

As noted, the Gau Clan includes the entire populations both of Warraber and Poruma Islands. It was significant, then, that the handover ceremony was held at Warraber and its big *zogo* place, rather than at Poruma which also has a *zogo* site. In part, aesthetic sensibilities and practical considerations were involved. The Warraber *zogo* is regarded as better maintained, and as a result is considered more spectacular (*plas*, flash). In addition, the Poruma *zogo* is too far for some elderly people to reach unless transport is arranged and it has other features that are seen as detracting from its appeal. The Poruma *zogo* lies to one side of a blustery airstrip – any planes landing there would have posed a noisy and windy disruption to the ceremony. At Warraber large *wongai* trees retained at the *zogo* place make it a cool, shady location. The Warraber *big zogo*

was also kept clean and mostly free of weeds by *zogo* custodians and is centrally located in the Warraber settlement.

Another factor concerns the importance of birthplace as an aspect of local theories of emplacement. Warraber is considered the birthplace of all of Bubarei's ten children. After marriage they resided variously at Warraber, Poruma and Nagi islands.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the families who moved from Poruma to settle at Warraber in the 1950s described it as returning to their 'home' or 'our place' (see chapter 6). Others who have continued to reside at Poruma also referred to Warraber as the home of the Gau Clan, or as the place where the Gau Clan began, as the birthplace of the ten children. The emphasis is not on ancestral origin (and thus the status of Bubarei as a Vanuatuan and outsider) but on Warraber as the birth locale of his children. Warraber is understood as the place 'where it all began' (*dat klan i bin stat ya lo Warraber*) that is, where Bubarei's children were born and from where they moved to other islands, Nagi and Poruma, for marriage and work, and therefore the most suitable location for the handover.

As noted, the 'handover' ceremony was heavily inflected with Christian ideas. Prayer and hymns framed the proceedings while Islander speakers, including the Chairman of Warraber, explicitly 'thanked God' that the day of the handover had come. The occasion was widely described as the result of God looking favorably on the Warraber and Poruma populations as Christian communities. While the main focus of the Attorney General's speech was with overturning "falsehoods of the past" (Lucashenko 1998), i.e. the failure to recognise indigenous land-holdings – an idea that was also amenable to local residents – their own speeches tended to defer to God and Jesus as facilitating the positive outcome of the claim.

Despite these views, AOG participation in the 'handover' was mixed because of the central role played by the *zogo* site. The AOG church views the *zogo* place in unequivocally negative terms due to its enduring association with immoral *bipo taim* practices. They often describe such sites as *satana* (un-Christian). Samuel's adult daughter was a principal member of the AOG church, occasionally leading an entire service. Her father's role as chief custodian of the *zogo* and her own community

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<sup>19</sup> While a few children married into local (*neitiv*) populations on these islands, the majority married other outsiders (*poren* people) or their children.

prominence as a Christian required that she play some visible part in such an important public event. She unveiled the monument by cutting a ribbon and removing a covering piece of fabric, but did not cross the threshold into the *zogo* site, though many others did.<sup>20</sup> This demonstrated her personal disaffection from the site and hence her adherence to the perspectives of the AOG, while still acknowledging the important *neitiv* ancestors she shares with her father and siblings. Other actions by ordinary AOG members suggest that the church's interpretation of the *zogo* site is not completely hegemonic amongst its own congregation. Certainly there were AOG members among the trustees standing inside the *zogo* site alongside its chief custodian. They were few, reflecting the trend of older residents tending to remain Anglican. But their willingness to do so demonstrated the untidiness inherent in processes of identification. A much greater range of meaning inheres in the *zogo* as local symbol than the interpretations offered by Warraber Christianities, even among AOG adherents.

The large *zogo* in particular constitutes a distinctive local icon differentiating Warraber from other Torres Strait islands. In terms of *zogo* locations generally, Warraber's large *zogo* is a spectacular example, with its large pile of white shells and its centrally standing wooden *tudi* hook. Warraber's two *zogo* sites are also quite conspicuous, clearly visible within settlement areas. The small *zogo* lies along a direct route from the airstrip to the Council Office, and the big *zogo* is adjacent to the Guest House erected to accommodate visitors. Warraberans note that when 'white' visitors come to the island, they are usually fascinated by the *zogo* sites. Visitors to the island must call at the Council Office, and inevitably stop to peer at and often photograph the small *zogo* nearby (figure 2).<sup>21</sup> Later, while moving about the village, they also frequently visit the big *zogo*. Residents explain visitors are attracted to their *zogo* places because they are spectacular (*plas*) examples of such sites and, being in the village, they are readily accessible. At other islands, such sites are usually within 'bush' areas at a distance from settlements.

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<sup>20</sup> Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann (1980a:187) states that during tombstone openings at Mabuiag Island, a prominent Christian woman also cuts the ribbon.

<sup>21</sup> A photograph of the *smol zogo* can also be seen in *The Torres Strait Islander* (1983) and the *big zogo* in Teske (1991).

The choice of the *zogo* site as the location for staging the handover ceremony likely points to resident awareness of the 'white' visitors to their island and the inclinations of the white gaze. Importantly this aspect does not clash with their desire to perform the ceremony for themselves and the communal incorporation of Samuel's more particularized *neitiv* status. In some respects, it could even be said to facilitate it. Recent scholars in the Pacific have noted that contemporary indigenous representations are often defined in relation to their colonial experience. Thomas (1992a:65) suggests that "indigenous reification of culture ... derives from the oppositional dynamics of the colonial encounter. ... [T]he history of colonialism has been crucial to the recognition of culture and elaboration of difference". The presence of white visitors of high official position could be said to bear witness not just to the attractiveness of Warraber and its 'flash' sites but also to the distinctiveness of Warraber and its people.

The *zogo* site is connected to a further key motif of Warraber in local terms, that of having especially plentiful *wongai* fruit, a phenomenon believed to be the result of *bipo taim* activities that centred on the *zogo*. *Zogo* places are generally associated with the magical practices of *bipo taim* ancestors. At Warraber, the big *zogo* is located at the base of a large *wongai* tree (figure 1) and was regarded as having been specifically used to magically increase the size, sweetness and quantity of fruit on Warraber's *wongai* trees, according to a few informants, by 'feeding' it with heads taken by warriors. Despite the ambiguity regarding the cessation of sorcery practices following Christian conversion, 'increase practices' at the *zogo* place are generally assumed to have ceased long ago at Warraber. Nonetheless, Warraberans remain strongly disinclined to cut down *wongai* trees or allow others to do so. This restriction is firmly espoused by older residents as *wongai* trees are regarded as *kaikai* (food). Warraberans continue to harvest seasonal *wongai* fruit for use in particular feasting dishes.

But the significance of the *wongai* for residents also has nostalgic resonances. Residents maintain that prior to the store being established at Warraber and other Central Islands, people 'survived' by eating dried fish and dry *wongai* fruit during difficult seasons. The reluctance to destroy any *wongai* trees rests on this image, of *wongai* trees providing food that was vital to people's survival both in the distant past (*bipo taim*) and up until recent decades. For residents, the *wongai* is symbolic of Warraber as a place rich in resources (water and local food), on which they survived independently of outside assistance in the form of store sold food and government benefits. Thus while in one

sense, the *zogo* sites are associated with *bipo taim* activity of dubious standing, they are also directly associated with a symbol of locally derived strength and prosperity.



Figure 10: *Zogo tudi* t-shirt (back view)

Sporting teams from every island in the Torres Strait utilize graphic motifs associated with the island from which they come. The dominant images for Warraber are consistently the *zogo* places (big and small), used predominantly on t-shirt designs.<sup>22</sup> Warraber youth wear team t-shirts for inter-island volleyball and basketball matches adorned with representations of both trumpet shells (featured in both *zogo* sites) and the wooden hook (*tudi*) from the big *zogo* place (see figures 10 and 11). Indeed, the men's volleyball team is called 'Tudi Warriors', an overt reference to *bipo taim* power and a

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<sup>22</sup> An exception is the Warraber Island council vehicles which have an image of a trumpet shell (*bu*) on the car doors.

hint at the head taking that is thought to have been a part of increase ritual at the *big zogo* site. The use of representations of *bipo taim* male fighting prowess also occurs among other Torres Strait Islanders. For example, the Yam Island rugby league football team calls themselves ‘Magun Warriors’, a reference to their power as warriors, *bipo taim*, and their use of the main current *Magan*, in their canoe travels (see Mareko Maino in Lawrie 1970). The choice of sporting symbols is modified by gender. The image of the warrior is one that appeals primarily to young Warraber men. Warraber women’s sporting groups are called the Mawan Team which is the name of a sought-after fish caught by women hand-line fishers (see chapter 5). On occasion, women may include images of the *zogo* site on sporting attire alongside the *mawan* fish (see figure 12), but this is explained in terms of Warraber’s plentiful *wongai* fruit rather than the power of *bipo taim* warriors.



Figure 11: *Zogo tudi* t-shirt (front view)

Commemorative t-shirts were designed and screen-printed locally for the Gau Clan handover. One of the t-shirts designs includes the name ‘Gau Clan’, the date, and an image of a black hand shaking a white one (see figure 13). Alongside this image is another featuring *wongai* fruit and *bu* shells. It is notable that illustrations of *gau* birds

do not appear. In a Warraber context, the *wongai* and *zogo* have become emblems of Warraber and its people, differentiating them from *waitman* ('whiteman'), as well as situating them as possessing symbols understandable within Islander contexts but distinctive from those of other islands. The enduring significance of the *wongai* and *zogo*, particularly juxtaposed against the dwindling importance of totemic animals, reinforces the quandary of externalisations of local culture in the colonial context – to what degree are they qualitatively different from pre-colonial constructions? For White (1991:3) this must remain an open and perhaps unanswerable question “especially in a region as acutely aware of microcultural differences as Melanesia”.<sup>23</sup> In any case, the salience of the *wongai* and *zogo* provide evidence of residents’ “essentialized constructs of selves and others within which particular customs and practices are emblematic” (Thomas 1992a:82) while remaining capable of forming a repository of meaning that can be revisited and reworked to reflect further dynamics of change.



Figure 12: *Mawan* team t-shirt

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<sup>23</sup> White (1991:3) responds to invention of tradition literature and the view that self-conscious construction of local traditions is formed in opposition to colonial experience by questioning the extent to which we can compare local views and traditions in the pre-colonial past and thereafter.

The 'handover' ceremony then, was a performance that was mindful of a range of interests, including 'white' visitors to the island, where the importance of the dancers and the *zogo* place were instrumental in making the transfer ceremony 'flash'. Through the 'handover' ceremony they were able to impress the visitors with their sites, and later feed them *wongai* dishes linked to the *big zogo* place, the increase site that magically attracted great quantities of the fruit from other islands to Warraber's trees. Visitors are told that once they have tasted the Warraber's *wongai* fruit (as opposed to that of other islands), they will always return to the place. This is common local saying that is told to all visitors, Islander or 'white', and is often used by Councillors to instill a sense of obligation to visiting Government representatives.



Figure 13: Gau Clan t-shirt

## Conclusion

Despite its distance from totemic symbols and lineage-based clans, the Gau Clan on Warraber continues the discourse of the ‘clan’ envisaged as a form of social organization capable of signifying local distinctiveness, land-holding entitlement and communal relatedness. The Gau Clan could be construed as subsuming other forms of local identification such as that of *neitiv*. But as seen in the handover, this distinctive status was given a degree of recognition through being afforded a position of prominence and authority at the *zogo* site. The *zogo* custodian was (em)placed *in* the *zogo* area, despite the ambiguous associations the site carries and its potential to signify a different, earlier source of power to that now represented by the Gau Clan. However, the site and its *neitiv* custodian were as a result also incorporated into an overall Gau Clan event and thereby to an extent attest to the ultimate inclusivity of the Gau Clan as expression of Warraber collectivity.

In essence, the TSILA-based land transfer to the Gau Clan was salient in local terms. In embracing all residents it affirmed valued Christian principles of relatedness, which demand inclusivity and generosity – *gud pasin*. But it was also able to symbolise the distinctiveness of locality and this was consistent with the prominence given to the *zogo* site. The handover allowed the *zogo* place to momentarily assume multiple meanings including a locale symbolising a strong ‘before time’ past and the origin of plentiful *wongai* fruit, another symbol of Warraber’s distinctiveness within the Torres Strait.

In an everyday sense, everyone at Warraber (and Poruma) refer to each other through kinship terms, and are indeed all affines or cognates, reflecting a closely interwoven social and genealogical history. The Gau Clan was able to both harness and express these existing sentiments of relatedness and collective identification among Warraber and Poruma residents, a distinguishing feature of those islands in relation to other Central Islands and the Torres Strait in general. The handover ceremony allowed for multiple views on emplacement and identity to be made manifest while simultaneously affirming a strong sense of shared Christian identity as ‘one family, ‘same God’.

TSILA and its partner legislation the *Aboriginal Land Act* has certainly attracted criticism, citing the lack of indigenous consultation in its development, continuing paternalism in its processes of adjudication and its limited scope of application,

particularly a lack of recognition of traditional ties to land outside DOGIT areas (see Cribb 1991, Brennan 1991). Notwithstanding these issues, the TSILA legislation offers several advantages over land claims under the *Native Title Act*. In particular, a TSILA claim involves demonstrating a much shorter connection with the claimed land, while the requirement under Native Title to establish proofs of continuity in customs or cultural traditions are avoided (Stephenson 1993:113).

Conceiving indigeneity and relations to place through the lens of Native Title could allow a level of entitlement to be projected onto *neitiv* Warraberans that exaggerates terms of difference within the island's population, perhaps even envisaging greater or more substantive rights and interests in land among the *neitiv* segment of the island's population. Such a perspective would be ill-considered, in effect disregarding the Warraber community's own ultimate preference for stressing inclusiveness, particularly when representing themselves to outsiders. In this respect, Pearson (Malbon 1996:18) notes the danger of Native Title lawyers seeking to advance the specific claims of individual members of a community through adopting an adversarial approach that undermines historical balances achieved within indigenous communities. It is important to resist the temptation of interpolating our own established cultural metaphors of tradition, authenticity and primordality onto the Warraber categories of *neitiv* and *porena*. In this sense, the terms of 'customary affiliation' under TSILA were well-suited to Warraberan's own view of their situation. But TSILA fails to allow the Warraber and Poruma communities to secure their islands or surrounding marine territories. At the time of writing, land and sea claims under the *Native Title Act* (rather than TSILA) had commenced in the central islands, including Warraber and Poruma, for this purpose. As a conclusion to this thesis, the following chapter reflects on the repercussions of this still unfolding process.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion – Warraber and Native Title

Somewhere in the partial and ultimately irreconcilable demands on anthropologists involved in research with indigenous Australians lies the practical and workable, if fractious and untidy, occupation of today's anthropology of and for Native Title (Weiner 2000:130).

This thesis has explored dynamics of sociality and local identification on Warraber Island. I have argued that Warraber residents' representation of themselves as a distinctive collectivity in the Torres Strait needs to be understood through local conceptions of relatedness and difference and with reference to moral representations of communal life, in particular a striving towards a valorised ideal of social relations known as *gud pasin*. This value is informed by shared identification as a Christian community and by the dense network of cognatic connections that exist between Warraber residents and encapsulated in the local discourse of “*ol wan pamle*” (all one family). Moreover, residence on Warraber Island itself emerges as an important context for common experiences and intense attachments to that are communicated in local notions of 'belonging' to place.

Given the ongoing but unresolved importance of native title processes in the central islands, it is more useful to provide a discussion of the impact to date of native title in Warraber, and reflect on the nature of the concept itself, than to offer an extended summation of the themes and findings of this thesis. In effect, this serves as a reminder that the process of ethnographic representation involves no moment of definitive closure, whatever the demands made by narrative conventions.

In the previous chapter I described how the locally self-evident nature of a shared and emplaced Warraber identity was subjected to scrutiny through the process of transferring several uninhabited islands to indigenous control under the Queensland *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* (TSILA). This gave prominence both to the Gau Clan and, in a more equivocal fashion, those residents who assert a more particularised local status as the descendants of male *neitiv* figures. More recently, Warraber residents became involved in asserting possession of Warraber itself in addition other nearby islands, this time under the rubric of 'native title'. Again, such action demanded demonstration of emplaced social identity, in this instance subjected to much more

sharply delimited terms of authenticity and legitimacy in relation to the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* (NTA). The native title process communicates a regime of value that valorises notions of continuity with the pre-colonial past.

Several areas of difficulty emerged for Warraberans in engaging with the shift from TSILA to the demands of NTA. Issues arose about local emphases on ancestry, in particular male ancestors over female ancestors regardless of origins, details of land ownership and the nature of male knowledge. The outcome in terms of local representation reveals both the constraints of native title and the extent to which it is must be seen fundamentally as an intercultural product, emerging from a discursive and representational zone that reflects the interaction of multiple points of reference and forms of understanding (which are not equally influential or weighted in terms of ultimate outcomes). In the context of the demands placed on their community by native title, the Gau Clan was marginalised as an expression of collective relation to place, and another term has emerged – that of *Warraberalgal*. Meeting the new state-sanctioned regime of value, Warraber people were ultimately successful in pursuing their aim to gain recognition of their substantial and enduring relation to Warraber and nearby islands. They did so in terms that were at core both wholly meaningful and locally important – that Warraber and the nearby islands under claim belonged to them (*dis ailan i blo mipla*).

## **Native Title**

The decision of the High Court of Australia in *Mabo vs Queensland (No. 2) 1992*, or simply ‘Mabo’ as it has come to be known, is justly celebrated as putting to rest the patent fiction of *terra nullius* – Australia as a land belonging to no-one before the arrival of Europeans (Attorney-Generals Department (AGD) 1994:C1). Native title overtly acknowledges the historical reality of indigenous relations to territory which incorporate systems of tenure and predate those of settler Australia. The fact that this recognition takes the form of envisaging an indigenous proprietary right to land is usually viewed as a fundamental part of the victory Mabo represents. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' relation to territory emerges in terms of universalist theories of property (eg Rigsby 1998) which provide a basis for equality with existing Western

values and therefore, equal treatment: “native title ... is at core an ordinary, non-exotic, property interest in land”(Wood 1999:6).

Earlier land rights legislation such as the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* was based on the conceptualisation of indigenous ties to land as being quite distinct from western property rights. As such they required specific beneficial statutes to embed this relation within Australian law in the form of a land grant by the state (Merlan 1995:65). The Queensland *Torres Strait Islander Land Act 1991* is in this mould, offering a transfer of land ownership (as explained in chapter 7). The Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* was innovative in the sense that it asserted indigenous relations with, and entitlement to land, as constituting a form of ‘title’ stemming from prior occupation that is comparable in common law with non-indigenous forms of property right (Merlan 1995:65).

Implicit in the celebration of a ‘native title’ understood in these terms is that it constitutes a retrospective acknowledgment of the inequity of the original act of colonial dispossession. That is, indigenous populations owned the land that was taken from them in as meaningful a sense as non-indigenous people are seen to own land today. Mabo was hailed as a “compelling moral and historical statement of truth that can be denied no longer, [that] provides the strongest justification yet for the claims of those who remain dispossessed” (Pearson 1993:89). The act of conferring this ownership to indigenous populations within contemporary Australian law then is not an act of state beneficence or patronage but rather one of recognising an extant right at common law. Further, this potentially lays a foundation for further acts of restorative justice in the form of restitution and even, perhaps, a renegotiation of sovereignty in the Australian nation-state, such as a treaty or other pact between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

Nevertheless, in practice, the earlier ‘beneficial’ approach to indigenous territorial relations and the contemporary ‘native title’ approach have much in common. Both ultimately act to confirm the sovereignty of the Australian nation-state and both incorporate sets of precursive assumptions that act to delimit access to official recognition of indigenous relations to territory. For Pearson (1993:83), the recognition that the territory of Australia belonged to indigenous people in the pre-colonial period is tantamount to a validation of an original indigenous sovereignty. He notes that “it is

questionable whether this original sovereignty was validly extinguished. The municipal law of Australia can only *assume* that it has". This critical and foundational assumption is not challenged or problematised by Mabo. Indeed the Crown's acquisition of sovereignty and radical title over Australian territory is confirmed in the decision, which upheld a range of conditions extinguishing native title and specifically rejected any possibility of compensation for that extinguishment (Brennan 1993:43; Attorney-General's Department 1994:C5).

The legislation the Mabo decision has given rise to, specifically the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* and its 1998 amendments, continues to exercise the power that defines sovereignty – the arrogation of authority to set the ultimate terms of inclusion and exclusion, recognition and invisibility (Agamben 1998). In this case, indigeneity itself is not a sufficient condition to receive recognition of native title (or compensation for its loss), but rather any 'pre-existing right' is vested by the state solely in certain modes of being indigenous. The key provision of the Native Title legislation is that in order to qualify for 'native title', indigenous people must first be able to establish some form of bounded group identity and crucially, must prove to the state that this group has "maintained their connection with the area" (Attorney-General's Department 1994:C7) i.e. exhibit a continuity of 'traditional connection' to a claimed territory.

These requirements, as one commentator suggests, effectively displace the burden of history from the fact of expropriation to the character of the expropriated (Wolfe 1999:202). Keen (1999:2) highlights the contradiction this creates:

To pick out aspects of Aboriginal ways of life as 'native title' in the first instance is to begin with interpretive concepts, in this case 'title' and a concept of indigeneity. Moreover in spite of the doctrine that Aboriginal relations to country are *sui generis* the courts and parliament have gone further to specify the character of native title *a priori*.

In practical terms, the law demands that it be demonstrated how current relations to country are grounded in past relations (Keen 1999:6). An inherent risk in conceiving of cultural tradition as necessarily relying on some level of stability through time is, in the first instance, an uncritical acceptance of historical texts as a base-line of tradition: "conformity is expressed with respect to the codifications found in previous writings rather than in terms of the model found in the legislation" (Pannell 1998:232). The potential for reification is noted by Kondos & Cowlshaw (1995:13): "no theory of culture today would deny the dynamic and responsive nature of cultural phenomena to

historical circumstances, yet [under native title] native custom must refer to an authenticating past if it is to be recognised”.

Certainly considerable potential exists for the regimentation of customary practice (Merlan 1995) and for a stress on systematicity at the expense of contingency and reflexivity (Weiner 2000). Such concerns nourish the idea that native title, far from marking a revolution in indigenous-settler relations, institutes a form of “repressive authenticity”, the latest version in a series of shifting regimes of value and projection that Australians have sought to impose on indigenous people (Wolfe 1999:165,179). In this case the regime’s principal function is paradoxically as much to provide grounds for delimiting indigenous relations to land as for their recognition (Wolfe 1999:203). To accept the framing of native title is to accept the terms of its extinguishment and the radical assumption of sovereignty upon which both are based.

At the same time the absolute parameters of native title remain unresolved in government as much as among legal practitioners and anthropologists (Wood 1999:5). This applies no less to specific dimensions, such as the condition of continuity: “legally and anthropologically, the issue of *continuity* is subject to great subjective variation and the Native Title Act does not, unfortunately, define ‘continuity’ adequately for either legal or social science purposes” (Weiner 2002:10). These concepts are still developing, certainly in legal terms, as the body of native title case law increases. As a result, it may be unnecessary to passively adopt the existing demands of native title processes as “yet another template for the regimentation of customary practice” (Pannell & Vachon 2001:243). There may be sufficient space in the interstices and ambiguities characterising native title law to explore issues of continuity and the meaning of territory in more complex ways. Pannell & Vachon (2001:243) for example suggest recent court findings point to occupation by indigenous people as potentially more important than their particular way of life, or the existence of specific kinds of rules governing the relations of community members to territory.

Kondos & Cowlshaw (1995) make a plea for anthropologists to be active in their engagement with native title processes. Rather than asking what evidence is needed to demonstrate the existence of native title, they suggest anthropologists need to “expound the fundamentally different meaning of land and of relationships with land that exist in Aboriginal Australia, and also the incommensurability between introduced and

indigenous law” (Kondos & Cowlshaw 1995:12). However, this need not constitute a permanent impasse. If the legal conception, and perhaps also the political expression of native title are indeed evolving, anthropologists frequently find themselves as both mediators and participants in such a process. They occupy a fraught position marking an intersection of courts, Native Title Representative Bodies and indigenous expressions of sociality and relations to place. Wood (1999:3-4) suggests an approach for overcoming existing ‘incommensurability’ in urging anthropologists in this situation to play an educative role: “Aboriginal law cannot be made part of the law of Australia if at every point we are afraid to use words that convey Aboriginal meanings and realities of customary practice, and substitute European ones”.

More recently, Pearson (1997:154) has described native title as neither a common law title nor an Aboriginal law title but a “space between the two systems, where there is recognition...the recognition space between the common law and Aboriginal law” (quoted in Merlan 1998). This ‘space’ has also been described in terms of Sahlins’ dialectical notion of ‘structures of conjuncture’, a historical field where “the laws, practices and customs of both the nation state and indigenous people embedded in it, are developing and evolving out of each other” (Weiner 2000:125). While the Native Title Act states that native title cannot be revived for purposes of recognition at common law after it is extinguished or abandoned, the Act itself constitutes a source of social and cultural impetus, potentially stimulating revival and re-culturation (Weiner 2002:5). Native title evidence may not involve recovering aspects of culture that have “somehow survived intact all along” but it may be that the Native Title Act does not require “immortality and immutability of practice” (Weiner 2002:10):

The Native Title Act itself and in quite particular forms undoubtedly has stimulated attempts to reconstruct these histories and these practices to adduce evidence in support of continuities of various kinds. Only a *naïf* would think that this was an adventitious and unpredictable effect of the Native Title Act and its procedural and bureaucratic architecture – the land councils, ATSIC, the Indigenous Land Corporation and so forth.

Any traditionalising constraints of ‘continuity’ contained in native title are in this way necessarily problematised.

Merlan (1998:180) expresses a parallel idea somewhat differently in observing that “the hooking in of formerly peripheral peoples to a world system of material and representational flows has enabled them to adapt these flows to reproduction of what

remains their own cultures”. A similar point is also made by Beckett (1995:30) when he refers to the “relativistic view” of their own culture by the Meriam, in the context of discussing indigenous capacity for cultural reflexivity and objectification. He maintains that if the rediscovery of aspects of the Malu-Bomai cult by the Meriam occurred via their reading of Haddon, it would not render their proclamation of it inauthentic: “the [rekindled] interest would have been ephemeral had it not resonated with contemporary Meriam experience” (Beckett 1995:30). In other words, existing representations of indigeneity may be engaged by indigenous people themselves to produce images that partake of the past but also yield definitively new products and representations (Merlan 1998:180). Kondos & Cowlshaw (1995:13) suggest that change is in itself a legitimate cultural process, and far from raising the spectre of inauthenticity, highlights truth itself as a product of power and history: “perhaps these emerging truths ... will have to be asserted more strongly before the Tribunal and the courts”.

Rather than “the precepts and traditions by which Meriam sometimes represent themselves and their culture”, the most salient aspect of Meriam experience for Beckett is their occupation of Mer, the “sensuous everyday experience of being there” (1995:30). I would concur with Beckett’s view in the context of Warraber. Certainly through the Queensland TSILA process the Gau Clan enjoyed a prominence that was more marked than I had witnessed before (as chapter 7 describes). But unlike aspects of Meriam totemic symbols, the Gau and Womer birds were not revived on Warraber. And despite a degree of self-assertion by a *neitiv* figure, it was the *zogo* site as a location integral with the Warraber landscape rather than *neitiv* status per se that enjoyed reinvigorated attention. I would make an additional observation that communities of Torres Strait Islanders on the Australian mainland continue to grow, even remaining permanently absent from the islands or returning for occasional ceremonial occasions. In these circumstances, a more diasporic, ideational connection with an imagined place may assume as much importance to social identification and cultural practice as the aesthetic experience of place itself.

The resulting separation of indigeneity from emplacement, as Ingold (2000) and Weiner (2002) note, raises a host of other questions.<sup>1</sup> It would run counter to deeply held assumptions of unambiguously discrete, relatively static indigenous groups occupying unproblematically bounded territories prior to colonial periods, a motif that overlaps significantly with folk theories of race, ethnicity and nation that map the world into a series of discrete, territorialized cultures (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:3):

“... [L]ike the nation, culture has for long been conceived as something existing in ‘soil’. Terms like ‘native’, ‘indigenous’, and ‘autochthonous’ have all served to root cultures in soils; and it is, of course, a well-worn observation that the concept of ‘culture’ derives from the Latin for ‘cultivation’” (Mallki 1997:58).

Warraber, as with other Torres Strait islands, indirectly benefits from such preconceptions due to the specific colonial circumstances of that area that saw Islanders’ occupation of territory continuing throughout the colonial period (with the exception of a number of bottom western islands) (Beckett 1995:17). The local importance of cultivation on many islands, particularly in the Eastern group, and the propensity of this activity to generate boundary disputes also allowed for a more straightforward recognition of indigenous territoriality by a society that valued agricultural practice itself, albeit in a different form and scale. Of course, the population

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<sup>1</sup> In considering international definitions of indigenous peoples, in particular that contained in the UN charter, Ingold (2000:132) asks:

the very idea that originality can be passed on by descent, along chains of genealogical connection, seems to imply that it is a property of persons that can be transmitted, rather like a legacy or endowment, independently of their habitation of the land. On the other hand, this very habitation is claimed as the root source of aboriginal identity. How, then, can an identity that lies in people’s belonging to the land reappear as a property that belongs to them?

Ingold’s project is to reinvigorate a form of cultural ecology, particularly in the context of the not wholly unproblematic category of ‘hunter-gatherer’ societies, in order to erase the epistemological dichotomy of materialism and idealism through attention to the adaptive interaction of the human and non-human.

Weiner (2002:7) approves and, in conjunction with “reclaiming materialist explanations in native title anthropology”, suggests “this version of ecological anthropology will help us reconcile what appear as incommensurate accounts of Indigenous attachment to country in Australia – a task that the Native Title Act and the courts have so far been unable to accomplish from a purely legal perspective”.

He is suggesting in effect that a group possessing distinctive cultural traits of some form could argue that in the context of hunter-gatherer forebears, these practices were fashioned through the intrinsically emplaced intimacy of dwelling. Therefore, even in the absence of occupation, a legitimate basis for claims of continuity of connection to territory could be maintained. “the discursive construction of connection to land illuminates and historicizes the material occupation of it, and the material use of land in turn embodies its discursive manifestation. The challenge of the native Title Act is to reflect this underlying reality of Indigenous life today” (Weiner 2002:11).

of Warraber – as with other central islands – could not be described in simple terms as sedentary. Central islanders were highly mobile. But neither were they displaced en masse, either permanently or temporarily, by colonial conditions. Indeed, the populations of Warraber, Poruma and Aureed remained present in the extended territory they regard as their own throughout the colonial period.

It may be that more phenomenological dimensions of human life and interactions with place will find space in the future mechanics of native title. Perhaps ‘native title’ itself – with its overbearing focus on proprietary rights – will come to be seen as having offered a crudely legalistic and economic vehicle through which to appreciate the complexity of human relations to place or repair the historical injustice of colonisation. It is important to recall that the participants shaping the evolution of native title are hardly equivalent in their ability to influence the ultimate outcomes. Native title is a contemporary intercultural construction, not something that survives from pre-colonial times, but it is also the product of unequal social relations (Merlan 1998:176,181).

### ***Warraberalgal and Connection***

Warraber Island people were aware of the 1992 Mabo decision and approved of the idea that this involved the state recognising Islander possession of Torres Strait islands. However, they were confused about the differences between the Queensland TSILA process (described in chapter 7) and that of native title. Residents generally considered the 1998 ‘hand-over’ ceremony under TSILA as akin to the Mabo outcome; different, but equivalent in the sense that it resulted in government recognition of local territorial possessions, precluding the need for any other procedure. Indeed, this view underpinned the excitement and celebration surrounding the hand-over. The event marked their own Mabo-like success. This understanding was partly influenced by government officials and islanders who advocated TSILA as superior to the Native Title Act in various ways – easier, quicker, and not involving courts. The view was readily adopted on Warraber largely because of residents’ familiarity in dealing with State government representatives as opposed to the federal government. From an islander perspective, the latter seemed significantly more remote from their concerns, unknown and therefore unpredictable. In addition, courts were associated almost exclusively with criminal proceedings and their uncomfortable consequences.

As a result of their success with the TSILA process, organised by QLD government (through the Department of Natural Resources) Warraber residents did not initially feel any need to enter a native title related process. In 1996 a Native Title Office (NTO) was established in the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA). The NTO formed following the appointment of the TSRA as the Native Title Representative Body in the Torres Strait by the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. It was charged, among other duties, with “producing materials and providing information on native title to people and organisations in the Torres Strait” as well as “detailing opportunities and resources available to Torres Strait Islanders in the Torres Strait and on the mainland in regard to native title”.<sup>2</sup> The critical factor that created interest in pursuing a native title claim among Warraber people was the gradual realisation that the TSILA land transfer did not actually include Warraber Island, but focused on surrounding, uninhabited islands. While some residents already knew this, some did not, until it was raised in information provided by the NTO.

The native title process is a complex one, the more so following the Liberal government’s July 1998 amendments to the *Native Title Act 1993* (see Phillips 2002). It begins with a claim being registered with the Federal Court by a native title representative body, in this case, the TSRA. The Federal Court forwards a copy of the claim to the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) which applies a registration test. On passing the test the claim is registered with the NNTT, which notifies a range of interested parties, in particular the relevant State government. After notification, the Federal Court makes an order referring the claim to mediation, which is a compulsory stage in the process. The mediation can lead to an agreement between the parties and the applicant group that is then formally determined by the Federal Court and registered with the NNTT without recourse to adversarial litigation. If a negotiated agreement of some form is not reached, the claim will be listed for trial. The stated object of the NTA amendments are to help parties reach agreement rather than to litigate (Phillips 2002:4). In the Warraber case, mediation was successful and an agreement was reached between Warraber people and a range of interested parties (known as ‘respondents’), including

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tsra.gov.au/Nativetitle.htm>

Once recognised, NTRBs receive funding from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to perform their role. Phillips (2002:11) notes that the functions of NTRBs have been altered in NTA amendments.

the State of Queensland.<sup>3</sup> This became a Native Title Determination (order by consent) in the Federal Court in July 2000.

In Queensland both Liberal and Labor governments have adopted the view that mediation between native title applicants and respondent parties will not proceed without prior production and assessment of a Connection Report (Finlayson 2001:3). The Connection Report (henceforth CR) “is aimed at establishing that the applicant groups are the traditional owners of the land or waters claimed” (Department of Premier and Cabinet 1999:3). The CR is distinct from the information provided for the NNTT Registration Test though there is overlap in the kinds of requirements supplied for registration. The form that a CR takes and its evidentiary threshold varies from State to State (Finlayson 2001:3-6). In Queensland it is certainly heavily influenced by the evolving body of native title law, in particular the need to demonstrate connection and continuity, in the terms discussed above. The three elements the Queensland State Government deems essential are:

- (a) Identification of claimant group
- (b) Demonstration of continuous connection, ie between claimant group and claimed area from a time before annexation
- (c) Rights and interests in the territory claimed, which must derive from traditional law and custom.

I was engaged by TSRA to compile a CR as part of the Warraber native title application which covered the terrestrial areas of Warraber, Bara, Guiya, Buboi, Ullu, Ugain, Miggi Maituin, and Dugong and the Poruma native title application concerning Poruma Island only (see map 2). The NTO acknowledged that the CR criteria and associated research activities were limited in scope and/or complexity, certainly falling short of anthropological-style explanation. Nevertheless, they sought to address the requirements as fully as possible for the purposes of pursuing a negotiated settlement on behalf of the claimants in the most straightforward manner. To this end, the TSRA research brief followed the preferred structure and guidelines provided by the Queensland Government. Some elaboration and interpretations of native title case law

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<sup>3</sup> Others included the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Telstra Corporation Limited and Ergon Energy Corporation Limited, all of which possessed installations of various kinds occupying land in the claimed areas, such as a mast and equipment shelter (Telstra) and a small power station (Ergon). I was not involved in mediation procedures concerning respondents other than the State of Queensland, and therefore cannot comprehensively address them here.

were also offered as additional thematic foci in the research task. These included: the existence of principles of group membership, genealogical information linking the claimant group to people who possessed the area before annexation, and with respect particularly to the criteria of rights and interests, any “coherent social structure” and “cultural logic” deriving from sources independent of relations with the colonial regime. There was an awareness also that the CR could be called into evidence were this or other related claims to be contested in court at a future time.

In many respects, the CR was relatively straightforward. As is apparent in earlier chapters, Warraber residents (who comprised the claimant group) are the descendants of Torres Strait Islander ancestors. They have continued to maintain and exercise relations to Warraber Island even during periods when they lived at Poruma Island (in order to be closer to pearlshelling and trochus boats). There were identifiable land-owners who regularly engaged in local negotiations over the use of their own and others’ land, and many of the documented practices in which their ancestors were engaged (e.g. gathering marine resources, specific funerary customs) remain in evidence in the contemporary period. By definition, they comprised a set of Torres Strait Islanders who continued to assert ownership and an ongoing connection to Warraber that could be traced to the time of annexation in 1872. However, even under the circumstances of being faced with ample and evident material directly relevant to the most potentially restrictive aspects of native title, three problematic areas emerged for Warraberans in compiling the CR that reflect issues discussed in earlier chapters.

The first area of difficulty concerned Warraber residents’ orientation to group identification and ancestry. The Queensland guide explains that it is necessary to “establish the claimants as the relevant descendants of the traditional owners of the specifically claimed land and/or water who exercised full native title over those lands and/or waters prior to the establishment of British sovereignty” (Department of Premier and Cabinet 1999:12). In Queensland, there are two dates for establishment of British Sovereignty over areas of the Torres Strait: the 1872 annexation took in areas within 60 miles of the Queensland coast while the 1879 annexation of further islands to the north

and east<sup>4</sup> (Lumb 1990:160, 162-3). The Queensland guide (Department of Premier and Cabinet 1999:13) also notes that “emphasis should be given to the contemporary definition of the claimant group. In local terms, this required that Warraber residents demonstrate descent not just from *bipo taim* (i.e. pre-colonial) ancestors, but also from *neitiv* figures.

As previously discussed, the majority of Warraber residents emphasise their descent from male ancestors. For the majority of residents, their earliest male ancestor was the *porena* Bubarei. On the basis of Bubarei’s Torres Strait Islander spouse Wawa, this segment of Warraber’s population certainly qualifies as being indigenous to the Torres Strait under the terms of the NTA (as they did under TSILA). However, both ancestor figures are locally recognised as not being from Warraber Island, a fact that rendered the Gau Clan irrelevant in terms of native title. As noted in chapter 2, Wawa is said to have resided on Warraber, though Bubarei did not, and the timing of her arrival to the island remains uncertain. The pair were generally considered to have arrived around the time of annexation – if not before – so the possibility remained that the Gau Clan could have addressed the ‘identification of claimant group requirement’ via Wawa. Nonetheless, native title’s focus on clear genealogical connections to pre-annexation resident ancestors shifted attention from the Gau Clan with its ‘primary’ apical ancestor, the *poren* figure Bubarei.

In effect, the demands of native title offered recognition to only one set of Warraber ancestors, those who were *neitiv*. In the context of the claim these were necessarily given elevated value over *poren* ancestors. The genealogical links that were documented among Warraber’s residents (and others living elsewhere) were to a range of largely female *neitiv* ancestors. The claimant group thus defined emerged as being just as embracing and inclusive as the Gau Clan had been, which was satisfying to local

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<sup>4</sup> Lumb (1990:162-3) describes the geographical limits set out in the 1878 Letters Patent authorising the 1879 annexation including:

all islands included with a line drawn from Sandy Cape northward to the southeastern limit of the Barrier Reef, then following the line of the Great Barrier Reefs to their northeastern extremity in the latitude of 9’ degrees south, then in a northwesterly direction embracing East Anchor and Bramble Cays. The line then extended in a southwest direction to sweep across the coast of Papua embracing all islands in the region, ending at Deliverance Island near the meridian of 138 degrees of east longitude.

people, who understood what brought this shift about. But it is fair to state that as a point of personal or collective identification, this basis of group boundedness was far less intuitively meaningful. In creole I asked residents how they would refer to such a group, thus defined. The consistent response was ‘*Warraber man*’ or ‘*Warraber pipol*’ both of which mean ‘Warraber people’. I then asked how this would be expressed in *prapa tok* or *langus* (ie Kulkalgaw Ya). The answer was *Warraberalgal* meaning ‘people belonging to Warraber’. This became the name of the native title claimant group. Elicited from Warraber people themselves, the term is an apt illustration of the importance of place within local representations of collective identification, but clearly a marked shift from the Gau Clan, with its emphasis on particular ancestors esteemed by the bulk of Warraber’s residents. It also marks an instance of native title as intercultural production – an expression that occupies a discursive middle ground where a regime of value imposed by the nation-state intersects with the existing reality of an indigenous population. In this sense it belongs wholly to neither, but is inseparable from both.

The repercussions of this shift from Gau Clan to Warraberalgal raises the second problematic area, involving elements of local perspectives on gender. As noted, Warraber residents readily acknowledge their descent from both ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ ancestors. It is male ancestors that tend to be accorded particular worth or eminence, especially in the sense of being regarded as active agents in history, exerting influence and shaping events. That many of these figures were locally powerful Pacific Islanders serves to reinforce this outlook, which likely also has roots in pre-colonial organisation of cult-based religious activity. As a result, female ancestors are usually overlooked in favour of their husbands when people reflect on personal ancestry whether or not a female ancestor is *neitiv* and her husband an in-marrying *porena*. Male and female informants on Warraber struggled to reconcile their sentiment of male ancestral value with the State’s valorising of a specific definition of continuity and connection that marginalised many of these same figures. Again, they understood the requirement being presented, but those with ‘foreign’ male ancestors in particular were disgruntled that they were required to shift the existing local emphasis in matters of descent in order to secure native title to an island they already occupied and considered theirs. It especially rankled that the State of Queensland had already transferred other islands to them in the

previous year as the Gau Clan, a collectivity that was successful without recourse to female ancestors.

Neither did deferring to female ancestry wholly concur with Warraber representations of the dynamics of land ownership. As with the Meriam in the Mabo case, Warraber people consider land to be primarily inherited patrilineally. The new emphasis on female *neitiv* ancestors in native title did little to explain in local terms how the descendants of foreigners came to be landowners today. As explained in earlier chapters, residents believe land was bestowed by Warraber *neitiv* men on *poren* male ancestors rather than inherited through female native ancestors. The wife of Bubarei is considered *neitiv*, but from elsewhere in the Torres Strait, and therefore had no avenue through which to inherit land from Warraber ancestors. In this respect the demands of native title simply overrode residents' existing identificatory preferences. For the state, a conception of 'native title' that relies very much on precursive cultural assumptions concerning authentic indigeneity requires descent-based continuity of physical occupation. For most Warraberans, a valorised identification with male ancestors takes preference over visions of absolute ancestral emplacement.

A third area of difficulty concerns the nature of men's knowledge on Warraber. As explained, the native title application focused on terrestrial areas. It did not take account of marine areas. As I described in chapter 6, Warraber men's eagerness to speak about their experiences and knowledge of trochus and pearlshell work contrasts strongly with their disinclination to discuss issues about land, including tenure and local place-names. Older Warraber men's lives had consisted of spending considerable periods working away from their island, increasing their knowledge of marine work and marine topography and resources. However, to some degree these experiences were gained at the expense of knowledge about their islands of origin. In the native title research process they were confronted with numerous questions about land and relatively few about their participation in marine industries.<sup>5</sup> Men were clearly uncomfortable when forced to acknowledge that they were unaware of the precise location of their landholdings, or its boundaries in relation to land belonging to others. The issue of place-names was also an awkward one; men were only too aware that their senior (now

deceased) relatives had likely known many more names than they themselves did, and were discomforted by the need to explain this.

Some men located the problem with their own fathers, who they suggested failed to inform them of precise details. They expressed reluctance to speak definitively about land matters because, they suggested, while working on boats with their fathers the issue was rarely if ever raised or relevant. A few men maintained that they had been told in the past but had since forgotten and didn't think to write it down. None suggested I investigate these issues with women, who might know more about these things because they had rarely left the island. This is not surprising given the dynamics of gender, age and knowledge on Warraber; women and younger men looked to older men as authoritative sources of knowledge.

This general issue was relevant also in the Saibai native title claim. Davis (1998:169) describes a process of 'forgetting' among Saibaians, fostered by a series of dislocations initially influenced by missionisation, and later marine and army work, in addition to migration. In the context of pursuing a native title claim, the combined effect of movement away from garden lands and regular movement away from Saibai for marine and army work engendered a Saibaiian sense of loss in relation to local knowledge about land matters. At the same time "shared experiences in these two industries have resulted in boat and army memories becoming important masculine memory locales" (Davis 1998:157). The value placed on men's detailed understanding of marine work was called into question by a self-perceived lack of knowledge regarding Saibai itself:

Where tradition (*kastom*) intersected with the state, in the form of a land claim, men's identity was challenged. Boat memories were of little use in establishing enduring use, association and ownership to Saibaiian land and seas, and men were faced with a more uncertain relationship to a past increasingly defined by tradition (Davis 1998:169)

The issue of forgetting raised poignant issues concerning gendered knowledge for Saibaiian men who located the most important sources of knowledge within their own domain.<sup>6</sup> Problems of absence and forgetting resonate with the experience of Warraber

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<sup>5</sup> Some exceptions included the relation of marine industry participation to ongoing subsistence activities like turtle hunting, the role of kinship in marine work, and relationships with other Torres Strait Islanders.

<sup>6</sup> This perspective was directly challenged in the Saibai land claim process. Women maintained their links to Saibai garden land through tending gardens while men were working on boats or in the army. Hence

men. It was particularly difficult for older men to realise that in relation to native title, the esteem usually accorded their domains of experience and knowledge was not shared by the government.

### *Belonging*

That the term ‘native’ featured in the expression ‘native title’ was not lost on some residents. Initially, those persons who regarded themselves as *neitiv* asked me privately if the territorial claim related specifically to them; that is, if they were the ‘natives’ being referred to in ‘native title’. However, as the importance of female *neitiv* ancestors for *poren* descendants to the claim became widely apparent, those regarding themselves as having male *neitiv* ancestors did not advance their suspicions that native title may have referred only to them. It became locally understood as involving every resident possessing either male or female *neitiv* ancestors. In any case, as this thesis describes, those identifying as *neitiv* envisaged the descendants of foreign male ancestors (*poren*) to be legitimately of Warraber. ‘Foreign’ ancestors, or their offspring, had legitimately acquired land from *neitiv* figures and thus ‘belonged’ to Warraber. In addition, they regarded each other as kin, sharing their lives, religious practices and work interests for over a century. In this sense, Warraber thinking diverged sharply from the constraints and preconceptions of native title.

The first Warraber and Poruma Native Title determinations occurred on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 2000 with a special local session of the Federal Court of Australia, presided over by Justice Drummond. Poruma was chosen as the location for the event as Warraber had hosted the Gau Clan transfer ceremony. Unlike the Gau Clan event, local control over the proceedings was more limited. Though aware they were to host a Federal Court sitting, the physical requirements of the court surprised local people. In particular, the fact that Justice Drummond insisted on being literally elevated to a height above that of audience seating subverted a local expectation that the procedure would occur as a ‘sit-down’ event, with all participants sitting on chairs or mats. As a result, a three-tiered arrangement emerged, with Justice Drummond seated at a table on a raised platform,

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women gained a new social prominence in relation to a newly valorised source of knowledge (see Davis 1998 for a full discussion).

the white Barristers and other court officials on chairs, with Warraber and Poruma residents sitting on mats on the ground (alongside some white visitors from a range of agencies). For my part, I found it hard to discern in this demonstration of State power that what was actually occurring was the (belated) recognition of something already said to exist.

Though their inability to influence seating (and in particular the elevation of the judge) rankled some of the Islanders attending the event, it may be that the arrangements served to reinforce the fundamental commonality of the claimant group. In the context of contact with state protocol, any points of difference or contestation in the community are subsumed by a disregard of 'indigenous' preferences. While my opportunities for research after the event have been limited, there were signs that many residents of both islands were tending to ignore the specific framing of the native title claim while embracing the general recognition of shared emplacement it offered. Residents – both *neitiv* and *poren* – have tended to refer to the event and to native title itself as affirming the earlier Gau Clan claim, rather than acting in any way to distinguish residents along lines of ancestral emphasis.

Outstanding claims, in particular involving the extension of the native title process to marine areas affecting Warraber and Poruma will continue to maintain residents' engagement with issues of continuity, knowledge, experience and identification. While at times clearly frustrated and wearied by the questioning this involves, Warraber people remain attentive to potential outcomes. The ownership of marine areas and their resources is an issue close to the heart of Warraberans, perhaps even more so than land as de facto control over the latter was already being practised before either TSILA or the NTA. By contrast, the local sea is a site of competing interests, both in terms of government regulation of access to resources and due to direct competition with substantial outsider commercial interests. As a corollary, the nature of Warraberan relations to marine areas will likely come under intense scrutiny and far greater contestation than did their claims over land. But this is also a domain in which Warraber males are inherently at home, possess considerable knowledge, and are keenly interested.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored the lived experience of relatedness at Warraber, focusing on contours of local identification characterised by expressions of sociality and difference. I have examined a diversity of modes in which Warraberans consider themselves an emplaced community, sharing a history of engaging in marine-based activity and possessing extensive intra-community links. Discursively, this outlook is often expressed through the terminology of kin – the result of over a century of co-residence and inter-marriage. The daily exchange of labour and food between residents both as *pamle* members and as cognates or affines provide a tangible daily expression of (gendered) social obligations that merge at numerous points with the unifying Christian values of *gud pasin*. Such practices comprise an ongoing demonstration of collective identification as Warraber Islanders but with continuing connections to Poruma Island and particularised links to the Central Island group (*Kulkaikal*).

At the same time I have explored local understandings of continuity and discontinuity in envisioning Warraber sociality. In representing themselves as a Christian people, Warraberans are concerned with envisioning the past through ideas of temporal rupture indexed to the arrival of Christianity in the region, linked to the cessation of particular practices or, as is the case with *ailan dans*, their transformation. This forms a reference point in local thinking about ancestors. Nonetheless I have described how the unifying motif of Christian identification – ‘*ol wan pamle*’ – incorporates varied interpretations concerning these very matters, particularly in themes of morality and precedence. These differences are generally muted, but remain capable of fostering tangible social tensions.

*Zogo* sites provide an illustration of such dynamics – a symbol of the ambiguity of *bipo taim* power and morality manifest in the present pointing also to the special status of a segment of Warraber’s population, but serving simultaneously as a shared icon of Warraber uniqueness and shared belonging. While *zogo* sites were recalled as a source of subsistence and abundance, it became clear that other more mundane named locations continue to highlight the importance of place as a source of materials (fish, crayfish) transformed by human activity into the ‘currency’ of relatedness and of

difference. Sharing (and not sharing), involvement in *indastri* and feasting, are shaped by moral values that inflect the landscape and the terms of sociality.

Shared residence and common experiences, alongside concomitants including knowledge and familiarity with Warraber Island locales and local birth have been highlighted as generating profound attachments to Warraber Island, communicated in local notions of 'belonging' to place. This forms a key element underpinning the population's self-regard as a distinctively emplaced community within the diversity of Torres Strait populations. In this context, the marine realm continues to be a central component within Warraber collective identification and notions of local distinctiveness.

To the extent that the process of claiming native title over sea areas is ongoing, the emphasis of this concluding chapter has necessarily been forward-looking and open-ended rather than one of closure. This is also the character of social life and of anthropological research. I have no doubt that Warraberan conceptualisations of relatedness, difference and identification will continue to change, both through interaction with the Australian nation-state, and from a variety of yet unforeseen local and outside factors. Equally, I am certain that ideas of the past, and Warraber Island as place (whether lived or imagined), will continue to play a critical part in the lives of Warraber people.

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## Appendix 1: Fish Species Captured by Women and Men

The following list represents the most common fish caught by Warraber men and women. In identifying each species, I utilized a number of resources including two posters, "Fish of the Coral Sea, Great Barrier Reef, Australia" and "Fishes of the Coral Reefs, Great Barrier Reef, Australia", "Grant's Guide to Fishes" (Grant 1997) and less so, "The Marine Fishes of North-Western Australia" (Allen & Swainston 1993). For comparative nomenclature from other Torres Strait Islanders see Bird (1996:221-223) and Johannes and MacFarlane (1991:211-226).

Local Name (KLY or Creole)	Scientific and Common Name
<i>bila</i>	Blue Tuskfish ( <i>Choerodon cyanodus</i> )
<i>blak peleth</i>	Red-flushed Rockcod ( <i>Aethaloperca rogaa</i> )
<i>duboi</i>	Narrow-Barred Spanish Mackerel ( <i>Scomberomorus commerson</i> )
<i>gaigai bulzi</i>	Giant Trevally ( <i>Caranx ignobilis</i> or <i>C.melampygius</i> )
<i>ibai</i>	Ringtailed Surgeonfish ( <i>Acanthurus lineatus</i> )
<i>kabar</i>	general term for Queenfish sp (most commonly caught: Talang Queenfish, <i>Scomberoides lysan</i> )
<i>kal</i>	Surf Parrotfish ( <i>Scarus rivulatus</i> )
<i>kurbim</i>	Smudgefoot Spinefoot ( <i>Siganus canaliculatus</i> )
<i>kurup</i>	Estuary Cod ( <i>Epinephelus suillus</i> )
<i>kwikumak</i>	Gold-Spotted Sweetlips ( <i>Plectorhynchus flavomaculatus</i> )
<i>maerwapi</i>	Low-Finned Drummer ( <i>Kyphosus vaigiensis</i> )
<i>mathai / waitpis</i>	Golden Trevally ( <i>Gnathanodon speciosus</i> )
<i>mathakoi</i>	robust garfish ( <i>Hemirhamphus robustus</i> )
<i>mawan</i>	Bluefin Trevally ( <i>Caranx melampygius</i> )
<i>murugudlai</i>	Diamond-scale Mullet ( <i>Liza vaigiensis</i> )
<i>nguris</i>	Sweetlip Emperor ( <i>Lethrinus miniatus</i> )
<i>parsa</i>	Golden-Lined Spinefoot ( <i>Siganus lineatus</i> )
<i>peleth</i>	Black-Tipped Cod ( <i>Epinephelus fasciatus</i> )
<i>peok</i>	Minstrel Sweetlips ( <i>Plectorhynchus schotaf</i> )
<i>peokudum</i>	Painted Sweetlips ( <i>Plectorhynchus pictus</i> )

<i>silba malet</i>	Blue-tail Mullet ( <i>Valamugil buchanani</i> )
<i>snapa</i>	Spangled Emperor ( <i>Lethrinus nebulosus</i> )
<i>takai kurup</i>	Black-tipped cod ( <i>Epinephelus faciatus</i> )
<i>takam</i>	Honeycomb Cod ( <i>Epinephelus merra</i> )
<i>takai koi</i>	Flowrey Cod ( <i>Epinephelus fuscoguttatus</i> )
<i>tanab</i>	Stripey Seaperch ( <i>Lutjanus carponotatus</i> )
<i>tanik</i>	Black-spot Seaperch ( <i>Lutjanus fulviflamma</i> )
<i>tup</i>	Ogilby's hardyhead ( <i>Pranesus ogilbyi</i> )
<i>udum</i>	Blue-Barred Parrotfish ( <i>Scarus ghobban</i> ), Green-Finned Parrotfish ( <i>Scarus sordidus</i> )
<i>wanakuboi</i>	Blackspot Tuskfish ( <i>Choerodon schoenleinii</i> )
<i>withi</i>	Coral Trout sp. (most commonly <i>Plectropomus maculates</i> , less commonly <i>P.leopardus</i> , <i>P.areolatus</i> )
<i>zaber</i>	Garfish sp. (Mostly Barred Longtom, <i>Ablennes hians</i> , but other garfish species also referred to as <i>zaber</i> )