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Chapter One


Their condition might be called the tragedy of the inarticulate. They could not make the intruder understand the injustice which had been inflicted upon them. They were left confused and hopeless. (Bleakley, 1961, p. 140)

This Chapter is a consideration of the political positions and experiences of first, my family, second, my time at the university, and third, my community in the Torres Strait. These three aspects of positioning and experience will then be contrasted to the view of the Islander position as recounted in the educational literature. This is not solely to point out omissions but to explain the non-representation of the political aspects of Islander lifeworlds at the intersection of non-Islander and Islander trajectories. This, in turn, will help set in place an alternate platform for re-theorising Islander positions as they stand in relation to non-Islander practices. A reading of the texts that position Islanders is central to this task as it illuminates the conditions that limit what can or can not be included as 'mainstream' historical knowledge.

The Political Position and Experiences of My Family

My mother is a Torres Strait Islander who grew up on Naghir Island in the Central Torres Strait region. Her grandfather was a prosperous and enterprising Samoan who owned a successful pearling fleet. He was educated in boyhood by the London Missionary Society at Upolo, Samoa, was widely travelled as a ship's bosun, and had spent time in both England and South
Africa before coming to the Torres Strait. Because he had wider knowledge of the world, when he married into the local population, he secured a lease over the family's islands. At the time he may have thought that this secured and legitimated his position, certainly, it prevented these islands being gazetted by the Queensland government as Reserves in 1912. Recent investigations (Peterson, 1996) into the lease arrangements show that he was charged far in excess of what European entrepreneurs who held leases in other parts of the Strait were required to pay.

As an 'intruder' himself, non-Islander analysis would, perhaps quite fairly, posit my great-grandfather as exploitative of the local population. But he was a non-European, inserted into a racial hierarchy just above the local 'natives' and viewed by the family as a man who used this position to gain as much advantage as he could for the community. He was remembered as speaking good English and he valued education enough to employ teachers for his children. Who these were, and to what standard is not remembered in detail but a visitor who stayed with the family in 1946 on Naghir Island referred to the extensive English vocabulary of his son, my grandfather (Raven-Hart, 1949). He also noted a high standard of English in the younger generation on this island.

When my great-grandfather died, his assets (which, according to the family, included £10,000) were left to his family. It was never recovered. Investigations into 'the official records' by Peterson (1996) revealed that although he had made good money over his lifetime he did not in fact possess very much at the time of his death. The family, having an historical understanding that there were assets and a view that the government had never been completely trustworthy when dealing with Islander finances, fail to be convinced by this investigation. At the time, the family of course felt that they had been robbed, but were not quite sure how it was done.
For my mother’s father, who became the next leader on Naghir Island, and
who was my grandfather and an influence on me throughout my life,
education, that is non-Islanders’ education, knowledge, and language
continued to be a matter of great importance. Education and English was
needed not just for the development of our own community, it was also
needed to understand and know the non-Islander people well so we could not
be robbed again. We needed to understand how it was that they did things
that seemed to advantage them but not us.

Because my grandfather was so keen for his children, including his daughters,
to receive the best education that they could, my mother and her twin sister
were sent away to board at the Convent School on Thursday Island in the
1930s, at the age of seven. My mother learned to read and write and do basic
maths and received an education to Year four standard. This was in the mid-
thirties, well before they were considered citizens, and the family funded their
education. My mother also learnt to boil up the nun’s habits and linen in the
copper, to mend, starch, iron and scrub, to prepare food, to wait on priests at
tables, to garden and milk goats, and so on. As a teenager she became,
without any training, the teacher at the small school on Naghir Island and
remained there until her marriage in the early fifties.

This school had been conceived, built, and paid for by her grandfather in
1904 (Lawrie, 1984). His only negotiation with the Queensland Government,
who held the primary responsibility to provide schools, was for a fully
qualified European teacher. One was appointed but she left the same year,
enrolments having fallen to a level that did not officially warrant a
government teacher. Unable to maintain enrolments by taking children from
nearby islands, my great-grandfather confined himself to the education of his
own community and employed his own teachers. Over the years, various
teachers, mostly Islander teachers, were employed, including older family
members such as my mother, or at other times the children were sent away to
other schools. Thus this family (and the story is repeated with variations in
other parts of the Strait, e.g. Masig Island) was actively pursuing education for its children, and responding to changing circumstances, in an independent manner.

Continuing the pursuit for the children to have a ‘better’ education and better life-chances, my grandfather made a momentous decision to abandon his Island in 1964. Anyone who understands the attachment Islanders have for land, sea, and island way of life could perhaps understand the incredible pain and pressure my grandfather had to confront. But World War II and the decline in the pearling industry changed a lot for Torres Strait Islanders, and the economic and educational opportunities were much better on Thursday Island, the administrative centre for the Strait (Beckett, 1987; Prideaux, 1988; Ganter, 1994). It was the younger generation, that is my generation, with which he was concerned.

When I struggle with academic work, I often think of my grandfather. I think of his generous nature, his intelligence, his bitterness and suppressed anger and confusion over the intrusions of non-Islander control into his community. I think of his efforts to build on his own father’s perceptions of the situation and the aspirations he held for his children and subsequent generations. And I think of the hopes he had for all his grandchildren that we could do ‘better’. And his sadness towards the end of his life in 1988 when he realised that despite some successes, despite the fact that, yes, things had changed and that we were able to go away to schools on the Australian mainland, that we had ‘more’ education and some of us eventually made it to tertiary level, that relatively speaking, vis a vis non-Islander people, we were not really in a much better position than we had been all those years ago. His biggest sadness, though, was the self doubts he had about giving up his island and his community for this other life, and what for?

To this day, the island remains abandoned. To this day, there is no such community of people. As a community our legal status remains questionable
because of the lease arrangements, because of relocation - the very decisions made by us to improve our position. Today, in our separate isolations, such a community of people only remains in our thoughts and memories. But we still remain optimistic about a ‘better’ future. We took risks and lived with the positive and negative outcomes that accrued from those decisions.

My own education occurred mainly on Thursday Island, the administrative centre of the Torres Strait, first at the Convent that my mother had attended and then at the State primary and secondary schools. This period between the early sixties and the early seventies was a period of change for Islanders. The pearling industry declined and as a consequence the government allowed Islanders more freedom of movement to find work in other regions. Islanders were allowed to reside on Thursday Island. The right to vote was granted. Desegregation of schools occurred and requests for secondary education were finally answered with the extension of schooling to Year 10 on Thursday Island. With the election of the Whitlam government in 1972, access to southern schools for Year 11 and 12 would soon be provided. My education occurred across this changing context.

We were taught the Queensland curriculum, taught by non-Islander teachers who probably did not know we existed until they found out they had a transfer to the region. There was no recognition that English was a second or third language to us. In those days Torres Strait Creole, our local language, was not considered to be a language. It was just bad English, broken English (Shnukal, 1988). As well as my mother, my Japanese father was very keen for us to have the best education that was possible. To this end, he always spoke English to us as best he could and encouraged us at every moment to speak and read it, even buying us the Encyclopedia Britannica. All that I know of the Japanese language was learnt from other Japanese people, not from my father. Both my parents worked to provide their eight children with the material means to participate and do well.
We were continually exhorted by our parents to do 'better.' My memories of school were always of trying, trying, trying, of never getting it quite right, of never knowing what it was that I did not quite get right, of never being able to make myself understood, of always knowing that I was not understood in the ways that I meant. However, on Thursday Island I was able to do relatively well. It was not until I attended school on the Australian mainland that I had a credible measure of my real position. I understood nothing in the classroom. I understood nothing of what the teacher was teaching. I understood nothing of what we were required to read, nor why. I began to understand nothing of myself, and felt nothing but confusion. This was probably the time when I first took up drugs, and later turned to spons as a 'survival strategy', yet academically it made no difference. At the end of Year 11, I disappointed my parents and gave school away for good. I worked for fifteen years before entering university.

I think that my family's history and my own experiences provide a sharp edge to my perceptions of the outside world and our position in it and I think, as I look back on it, that this edge was part of the reason that drove me to see our position as political, when I approached academic work. This historical trajectory shows a community, since at least the 1880s, actively engaging with the changing world around them, intent on working in their own interests but nevertheless in relation to larger forces. Despite being unable to satisfactorily bring those forces to account, particularly in relation to financial and legal matters, my family did not remain blind or indifferent to their differential treatment but absorbed their perceptions into a view that oriented them to the future rather than the past. Whilst some may mourn the loss of 'pure' lineage and tradition from former times, perhaps my forbears considered autonomy and independence more preferable to patronisation and dependence; perhaps tradition was seen to be transportable and transplantable whilst yielding independence was an intolerable and humiliating burden. Perhaps independence was our tradition.
It can be seen that the Islander lifeworld was always positioned at the interface with non-Islander institutions, knowledges and economies. Our lives were always grounded in our relationship to their many influences. This is not to say that daily life was not grounded in other relationships as well. But it is to make the point that Islander orientation to the outside world and economy was a very real organising structure in our lives. The degree to which success in relation to these factors was valued was firstly grounded in material necessity. Like parents everywhere, mine worked to provide the means of a chance at a reasonable life. Education was seen to be necessary for economic security, the bottom having fallen out of the marine industry and there being fewer prospects for work. Secondly, success was a measure of stature and indicated an understanding of the knowledge of that world outside of the Strait - an understanding that would enable us to improve our position in relation to it, which in turn would reduce the constant struggle.

My experiences as an Islander and the analyses and understandings I derived from these, my family’s, and the collective Torres Strait Islander experience have enabled me to hold one tenet central to my thesis. This is the idea that Islander experience and the analysis derived from that experience, however ‘ignorant’ of historical ‘fact’, or however ‘ignorant’ of an ‘informed’ understanding of the context of events, or however much it derived from just ‘popular memory’, is grounded in something that is significant to the ways that we have historically viewed our predicament and have enacted our lives. This continues to shape our ongoing responses to and uptake of changes brought on by non-Islander intervention. But as well, the ‘re-explaining’ of the Islanders predicament and their needs by ‘informed’ or ‘educated’ or ‘expert’ people from non-Islander communities, often contains within it a sometimes unintended but oftentimes insidious negation of, or denial of, or refusal to accommodate, our experience and understanding of our own position as we confront alienating practices and knowledges.
It was from this lifeworld that I emerged to confront the knowledges inscribed in Western institutions. Having failed my last engagement at the secondary level, having engaged with a supposedly more sensitive and appropriate educational bureaucracy through my job, I arrived at the university, already with a political but largely unarticulated view of my situation.

*My Political Position and Experiences at the University*

I struggled in the university to articulate what I thought people did not understand about the position of Islanders in relation to educational processes and institutions, indeed, in our relation to the wider Australian community, its institutions and its knowledges and practices. Even with an Honours degree in Education, I felt completely alienated and isolated within the walls of an inclusive and enlightened Academy because I could not articulate my position in relation to these issues in a way that others could understand.

To find fault with the academy which was outwardly supportive, encouraging, and generally understanding was self-defeating when it was the very institution that I had to engage with successfully if I was going to contribute to improving the position of Torres Strait Islanders in education. My position in the university seemed to mirror the position of all Torres Strait Islanders as they too attempt to articulate themselves to the external forces which shape their lifeworlds, and in ways that will serve their interests better. Indeed, it was our relationship with the wider Australian community and its institutions that drove Islanders in the pursuit of improved educational outcomes (Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee, 1985; The Aboriginal Education Task Force, 1988; & Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989).

Islanders have long understood their need to be educated in the ways of the non-Islander's world (Nakata, 1997a, & 1997b). Facility with the English language and understanding of non-Islander institutional knowledges and...
practices, have been recognised as the path to effectively negotiating our position with non-Islanders about the terms and conditions of our participation in a changing order brought on by non-Islander intervention in our lifeworlds (Nakata, 1994, 1995a, & 1995b). But in engaging with the education process there has always been a view to defending our own position whilst incorporating and making effective use of the new (Nakata, Jensen, & Nakata, 1995). In operating in institutions from an already disadvantaged position then, educating ourselves runs the risk of blindly taking on knowledges and practices that have served to keep us in a disadvantaged position (Nakata, 1991). As well, educating ourselves via these institutions to overcome our disadvantaged position runs the risk of submerging or erasing those elements of our own lifeworlds which define us as a distinct group, the Torres Strait Islanders (Nakata, 1993).

Within the Academy, there is a lot of sympathy for people in our position. Much has been written across the disciplines about the dilemma of marginalised people who need to articulate difficulties experienced at the margins by deploying the knowledges of the centre (e.g., Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989), and many attempts have been made by Aboriginal people at the margins (e.g., Bishop, 1996; Rigney, 1996) and by those at the centre to find ways around this perplexing problem (e.g., Weedon, 1988; Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn & Walkerdine, 1984). The implicit assumption in the requirement for me, an indigenous student, to proceed in accordance with the conventions of the academy, however, is that mastery of that knowledge system will bring me the means to articulate what I think others do not understand about the Islanders' position at the interface. Unfortunately for my position within the academy, every criticism of the position of Islanders as inscribed within the Western order of things was countered by a further calling in to the academic position to understand even more of what I did not know. It was like saying to the inmate, trust the warder, he knows you best and he will serve your needs whilst you redeem yourself.
But this process gave me confirmation of what I already knew. I would never be able to argue my position cogently and coherently until I understood my position. I would not understand my position until I accepted (instead of always standing in opposition) that this position was only and always in relation to the order of things in Western knowledge systems. My task was not simply to know my position, but to know how I was positioned in and by those knowledges, that is, how those knowledges created a position for Islanders through which both Islanders and non-Islanders come to view Islanders and their 'problems'. Only then could I, a Torres Strait Islander, understand the initial and ongoing refusal of my position. Only then could I understand in the discourses of Western knowledge formations, the refusal of my history, the refusal of my spirit, the refusal of my mind, the refusal of my politics, the denial of freedom - the denial of my position as political.

It was in the corpus of knowledges that passes for my lifeworld, that I began to see the acceptance and supremacy of my constituted position: via another history forged by non-Islander interventions into my world; interventions that reconstituted my soul in relation to other religions; that reconstituted my mind and mentality as measured to the standards of others; the imprisonment of my body at a particular historical moment by non-Islanders to serve their economy; and the subsequent denial of my position as political. And in these interventions I began to see the logical and rational pattern of these reconstitutions of Islanders in theories and methodologies viz., in the sciences deployed by non-Islanders and the knowledges and practices they produced.

To accept my position as thus produced has brought a sense of relief. It eases the tension that exists between what I experienced as the lifeworld of Islanders and that world that has been reconstructed by non-Islanders in their own knowledge systems. It provides a point of rupture from which I can begin to develop an analysis to overlay and explain those ontologies found in mainstream historical records rather than be caught endlessly challenging their every 'truth'.

10
The Political Position and Experiences of My Community

Torres Strait Islanders constitute one group of Australia’s indigenous minorities. All people of Torres Strait descent trace their origins back to the Islands of the Torres Strait. However, more Islanders now live on mainland Australia, than do in the Torres Strait. This shifting demographics is the result of migration by Islanders over the last thirty years to find better work and educational opportunities for themselves and their children.

The community of Islanders still in the Torres Strait is strong, proud, and diverse, united through a shared history. The history of religious and government administration of their lives has forged, from what was previously a collection of discrete but interconnected communities, a political unity that has pursued both participation in a new order and some independence from it. In pursuing this dual life within historically oppressive restraints and restrictions, Islanders have also developed a vibrant ‘Island custom’ (see Beckett, 1987) through an intelligent process of incorporating non-Islander practices into traditional meaning-making systems (see Sharp, 1993). Thus present day Islander cultures have been influenced by practices of non-Islanders who have brought new forms to the everyday life of Islanders, particularly since the increased intervention of non-Islanders after the commencement of commercial pearl-shelling in the 1860s (Bach, 1961; Beckett, 1977; Prideaux, 1988; Ganter, 1994). Distinctiveness as a group has been maintained, but the content of traditional custom has also changed as the forms and practices of intervention changed, currently seen in the embracing of Western technologies of communication, and popular culture.

The oppression of Islanders, from the 1860s, eventually forged their united political identity (as Torres Strait Islanders), but it was also from within this oppressive and restrictive administration that the institution of Islander politics was forged, in a form instituted by their administrators (Beckett, 1987). Although it has produced leadership within the Torres Strait community and a representation of our position as Islanders within the wider
Australian community, this was itself an imposed and compromising position for Islanders. It has been a political position of comparative weakness, where little more than formal and dignified posturing came to substitute for coherently articulating our position and negotiating our future. That Islander leaders have achieved so much for the Torres Strait community is an enormous credit to their perseverance and patience, their pride and dignity, their skills and intelligence, their faith and vision, and their deep love for their homeland and way of life. For they have done so without the benefit of a full and comparable education, and without the skills or knowledge of the outside world (Bleakley, 1961).

Islander leaders have always had to operate under the considerable constraints of their unequal position and thus have always in their basic list of demands prioritised the importance of education to the life-chances of Islanders and the improvement of the conditions of their lives (see Minutes of Councillors Conference at Masig on 19 August, 1944; Beckett, 1987). The restrictive controls on Islanders’ participation in the new order severely limited their level and quality of education (Sharp, 1993). However, in rebelling against the oppression of this order, in 1936, Islanders immediately renewed with emphasis their quest for better education (see Minutes of Councillors Conference at Masig on 19 August, 1944; Sharp, 1980). It was not until the 1970s that major reforms began to be taken seriously with regard to education in the Torres Strait. These reforms have been welcomed, have been positive, and Islanders have had a measured input to the process. Twenty years further on, Islanders are still facing enormous difficulties in the education process. Some progress has of course been made, reflected in the number of tertiary graduates. But at every level of education - primary, secondary and tertiary - Islander students fail to make commensurate progress with other groups within the community (The Aboriginal Education Task Force, 1988; Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 1997). Dropout rates continue to be higher than most and low literacy levels often limit upward mobility in the workplace (Nakara, Jensen, Nakata, 1995).
The current situation of Islanders is positive in that equality and access are recognised in national policy, and regional autonomy is politically accepted although not yet fully implemented by State and Federal Governments. However, these long awaited changes have occurred in times when the economic future of Islanders and their region is bleak. Unemployment, and the costs and effectiveness of basic services, are two of the biggest challenges currently facing the management of the region.

The current context in which Government intervention in the lives of Torres Strait Islanders occurs is the consultation and negotiation process. In this process Islanders often have their understandings and analyses 're-explained' in a way that suits the Government. Many Islanders struggle to maintain themselves in these encounters but, in the main, they absorb these explanations and at times come to recite them as their own. When this is not the case, and often when it is, Islanders continue to feel a sense of frustration and unease in their relation to non-Islander practices, knowledges, and their institutions. However, Islanders confused by these processes recognise the need to understand non-Islander knowledge systems as crucial to enhance their ability to negotiate and to bring forward Islander interests with more vigour (Lawrie, 1984; Sharp, 1993; Nakata, Jensen, Nakata, 1995).

The continuing difficulties that Islanders face in education thus have wide implications for our future. Islanders move closer to autonomy and self-government at a time when global technologies ensure that the effects of external factors will have more significance for us in the future than they ever have throughout the troubled history with the Queensland government. Islanders’ knowledge and understanding of their position in relation to all of these external factors is now all the more crucial to the ways they will determine the possibilities for their future. It is via an extremely complex web of practices and knowledges that Islanders will have to negotiate their way in an information age that is rapidly transforming life around the globe. And yet, in the 1990s, Torres Strait Islanders are still struggling with basic English
literacies, as educators including Torres Strait Islander educators fail to come to grips with how to teach these literacies to Torres Strait Islanders (Nakata, Jensen, Nakata, 1995).

*The Lifeworld at the Interface of Two Cultures*

In the three examples provided above there are clearly two elements that can be brought to the fore. There is an Islander position and there is a non-Islander position. But as these examples also suggest there is another dimension to the Islander position that is not so clearly understood. This is the dimension where the trajectories of two different histories come together to produce conditions that circumscribe the ways Islanders make sense of and enact their lives. At every moment these historical trajectories cross paths they provide conditions to the ways Islanders go about their daily lives. The lifeworld of the Islander people is constituted by the historical moment where different paths cross. It is a temporal space where disparate historical pressures come together with experiences and emotions and together they set conditions for what is and how we enact our lives with others. It is a political space because each and every one of these discursive elements sets conditions and possibilities. It is a place, a position, where Islanders shape and reshape their lives. It is the lifeworld of the Islanders.

This lifeworld, which is the intersection of two trajectories, is inherently a position of complexity. My argument in this thesis is that the complexity of the position of Islanders at this cultural interface is not understood, rarely captured, and not articulated in any satisfactory way. Rather, Islander lifeworlds are more often re-presented as the opposing half of non-Islander worlds and in this process as part of a simplistic duality between two separate domains of 'them' and 'us', that is, representations of Islanders as victims of the “fatal impact” (Howe cited in Williamson, 1997, p. 409) of colonial intrusion. To accept such representations of the Islander lifeworld at this interface excludes altogether any recognition of histories indigenous to the people, as revisionist historians have argued (Reynolds, 1981). Yet many
forms of representation, historically (e.g., Haddon, 1935; Raven-Hart, 1949;) and currently (e.g., Cunnington, 1984; Kale, 1987, 1988) unquestioningly inscribe Islanders simplistically as Other in the Western order of things. Whilst this may accurately reflect the secondary status of Islanders in relation to others, it also perpetuates a simplistic and partial understanding of the Islanders' position and the representation of this position. Such representations do not capture the lifeworld and the complexities of the Islander's position at this cultural interface. I would argue that the confluence, itself, of two different historical trajectories adds another element to the relation between Islanders and non-Islanders and constitutes one of the more fundamental aspects of the lifeworlds of a people and their experiences.

The difficulty non-Islanders have had in understanding the complexity of the Islanders' position at the cultural interface has resulted in an inability of many of them to understand that Islanders have experienced and managed their lives from this position at the interface, ever since European contact. It is this position that has been submerged in the many attempts to explain and remedy Islander problems. It is this position, I would argue, that is not given adequate representation in academic analyses.

But, how can this be so? Is not this lifeworld at the very intersection that gives rise to all the difficulties that Islanders experience as they face the non-Islander worlds and its systems of thinking? Is it not this lifeworld, this position of Islanders that non-Islanders are attempting to explain, clarify, and improve when they explicate the problems and propose solutions to address their relative disadvantage and the difficulties that accrue from that? Yes, it is. But, the critical issue does not lie here. The critical issue is how this position is and has been given form and representation to the experiences in these Islander lifeworlds.

All of the literature to varying degrees deals with the historical neglect and shortfalls of educational provisions for Islanders. Representation of Islanders has been made primarily by dichotomising differences between Islanders and the non-Islander forms of formal education. The purpose has been to develop a clearer picture from which to find ways to achieve more equitable outcomes for Islander students. All without exception deal with the 'Islander predicament' in schooling as a position of dissonance between different cultures, between different language groups, between different worldviews, and between different value systems. Out of this arises the many analyses and position statements of the mismatch between the school and the community, between the learner and the curriculum, between unique learning-styles and
inappropriate pedagogy of the institution of instruction and so on and so forth. In some way or another they point to some incongruence in the schooling process.

Some (e.g., Osborne 1979, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1989c; Lominga, 1987) report on innovative practices in classrooms where aspects of the children's culture and language are built into the schooling process. Some (e.g., Boxall & Duncan, 1979; Kale, 1987) provide critical statements on how biased the school system was and propose that the inclusion of perspectives, cultures and languages indigenous to this country is the way to improving educational outcomes for Islanders and Aborigines. Others (e.g., Osborne & Dawes, 1989; Nakata, Jensen, Nakata, 1995) concentrated on gathering empirical data in classrooms. The research focus nevertheless attends in similar ways to the problem of transition between two separate domains. All start with an acceptance that schooling is mono-cultural and thus biased towards the dominant White groups. A major part of the research thus focuses on the learner and his/her characteristics and her/his interaction with the school and its characteristics. It is argued typically (e.g., Lui, 1974; Gisu, 1986, 1987; Topping, 1987; Osborne, 1989) that knowledge of the learner and her/his characteristics will enable the school, as an institution, to respond, adapt and develop more appropriate and effective curriculum and pedagogy to aid the transition between two entirely separate cultures.

In the review and policy area of the educational literature, there have been many attempts (e.g., see Minutes of Councillors Conference at Masig on 19 August, 1944; Boxall & Duncan, 1979) at instating policy positions on Islander education for several decades. By the 1980s, many reviews sponsored by the Federal Government followed and these include an extensive review by Watts (1982), Aboriginal Futures: A review of Research and Developments and Related Policies in the Education of Aborigines; the First Report of the Working Party on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, Funding Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Education (Commonwealth Schools Commission & National Aboriginal Education Committee, 1984); An Evaluation of the Aboriginal Grants Scheme (Williams & Chambers, 1984); the Review of Delivery of Services for Aboriginal Students (Commonwealth Department of Education, 1985); the report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs (1985); as well as the Report of the House of Representative Select Committee on Aboriginal and Islander education, Aboriginal Education (1985). By 1988 an Aboriginal Task Force completed its Report on the status of all indigenous peoples and pointed to situations that warranted intervention by the National Government (The Aboriginal Education Task Force, 1988). From this, the first joint National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy Statement published by the Department of Employment Education and Training (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989) was produced. A formal agreement had been achieved with all States and Territories to join the Federal Government in a concerted effort to improve educational outcomes for indigenous peoples.

Over this same period, there were many initiatives made by the Islander people at the community level. In 1983 a group of Islanders met with Aboriginal groups in Goulburn NSW and began to direct funding priorities towards developing a position statement on educational priorities. By 1985, a manuscript outlining Islander priorities in education found its way to educational institutions and was to be a working guide for educational institutions who chose to adopt them (Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee, 1985). This was later presented with the educational priorities from Aboriginal communities throughout Northern Queensland and sent to the Queensland Government for consideration as a policy position (Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Committee, 1988).

All the aforementioned documents without exception proposed that the educational institutions had to respond in ways that incorporated forms of
schooling that were suited to indigenous people. This was the very same position that saw schooling issues in two separate domains: Western ideologies on the one hand and the indigenous peoples on the other. All, on this basis, proposed that making schools culturally appropriate to indigenous peoples was to be the key factor to improving educational outcomes.

As a subsequence, the current education agenda has been without question almost entirely focussed on the issue of ‘culture’ and the language and logic of this agenda is easily understood by Islanders. Islanders, according to this agenda, are to be viewed as culturally different, culturally distinct, and culturally unique. Islanders have welcomed this schema that frames how they and their predicaments in schools are to be viewed and articulated. It affirms their development as an independent and distinct group, it affirms their identity. It has brought reform. It appears as an ‘Islander’ discourse because cultural knowledge can be claimed as Islander knowledge. It is seen as an ‘empowering discourse’. It helps to explain difficulties experienced at the interface of converging cultures. However, a national review of the joint policy statement has since found that the concerted approach to improving educational outcomes to be more culturally appropriate was not achieving what it set out to do (Reference Group Overseeing the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1994). In particular, they pointed to confusion and uncertainty in implementing the cultural agenda as one of the key problems and subsequently proposed to bring about clearer guidelines to effect a more systematised approach to improving educational outcomes. The Torres Strait Islander Regional Education Committee also identified problems but they pointed instead to the bureaucratic arrangements of the Government Departments (Nakata, 1994c). A national forum held by a community organisation in Townsville for concerned Islanders living on the Australian mainland also identified problems but pointed more to the absence of any national initiative, program wise, to span the gulf between Policy and Practice (Nakata, 1997c).
The strategy to approach the situation of Islanders in schooling through the cultural schema has been productive in the sense that Islanders were able to see for the first time, and at the highest level, recognition of their unique position in this country. As stated earlier, this agenda has not been easy to implement. But, as the representation of Islanders’ educational problems in the literature clearly shows, the Islander domain and the non-Islander domain are considered as entirely separate entities. That is, the only form that is provided any priority in all the above representations is one of difference: different culture, different traditions, different learning-styles, different language, different needs, and so forth. In other words, although the intersection at the interface is recognised as leading to complex problems for Islanders, the theorising of the relationship between the two has been quite simplistically put as ‘different’; and this too has skewed the reform agenda. The two domains when seen as ‘culturally’ different require solutions that focus on transitional processes or ways to bridge two sets of understandings. Islanders, then, in accessing, for example, the non-Islander education system, need that system to recognise and understand and respond to their cultural situation. The school can only improve if it acquires enough knowledge about Islanders in order to understand the characteristics and the degree of difference, and respond to it effectively. In sum, improvements in educational outcomes rely heavily on a single form of a cultural ‘subject’ that has its history primarily situated in ‘difference’ – the whole approach is directed at the Islanders’ constituted form, as ‘different’, and not on how Islanders experience schooling.

The current cultural agenda emerged from a broader social analysis of the position of Islanders as a minority and disadvantaged group. This broader social analysis emerged in the decades following the Second World War out of the discourse of Human Rights. The Human Rights platform was part of the agenda of the United Nations and a direct response to the program of annihilation of European Jews carried out by Nazi Germany. The discourse of Human Rights, developing as it did in the international arena, increased
international scrutiny of Australia's policies towards its indigenous population. As a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Australia had a responsibility to observe this declaration. Whilst most Australians already shared these rights it was obvious that there were serious infringements regarding Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (Campbell, Cameron, Keats, Poulter & Poulter, 1958). Federal and State governments were slowly forced to review and reform their management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs.

Governments, institutions and pressure groups were influenced, in their need to understand people indigenous to this land, to find new approaches to the problems of all Australians. The analysis of the 'interface' position of Islanders as a place of dissonance and difference at the intersection of the Islander and non-Islander histories, by non-Islanders who were sympathetic to the position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, owes much to cultural anthropology. Historically, cultural anthropology had produced theories to describe and explain cultural diversity. In the eighteenth century cultural difference theories centred on the idea of 'progress' where the growth of 'reason' had led humans from a 'state of nature' to 'enlightened civilisation'. Cultural differences were attributed to different degrees of moral and intellectual progress achieved by different groups. During the nineteenth century the concept of 'cultural evolution' dominated theories of cultural difference. This was the idea that cultures moved through different stages ending with the pinnacle of 'advanced' cultures, such as found in Europe. Some theorists worked from a platform of stages such as savagery, barbarism and civilisation. But almost all of the various theories postulated that the evolution of human biological types and races was linked with this evolution in cultures. Thus not only was the European at the pinnacle of cultural progress but the European male in particular. This idea preceded Darwin's 1859 publication, *Origin of Species*, but his theory of natural selection greatly increased the popularity of the notion that cultural evolution depended on biological evolution. It became a common part of nineteenth century belief
that "an unbridgeable biological gulf separated [the European] from the rest of humanity" (Haller cited in Harris, 1985, p. 516).

The twentieth century brought challenges to this evolutionary schema. The schema was challenged on the grounds of insufficient empirical evidence and the theory of historical particularism emerged which emphasised the uniqueness of each culture and the need to understand its history in order to explain a particular culture. Out of this theory was borne the concept of cultural relativism which countered earlier evolutionary views by holding that there are no higher or lower forms of culture. With the denouncement of evolutionary theories as ethnocentric, cultural relativists emphasised the need for extensive ethnographic fieldwork amongst non-European peoples. There were other approaches in cultural anthropology during this first half of the twentieth century. One school of thought explained cultural difference as the result of human groups to imitate and borrow from each other, rather than arrived at through independent inventiveness. Another group pursued explanations of the functions of cultural differences rather than the origins of difference. For some of these the function of maintaining the system of social organisation became an even narrower focus for study. These theorists argued that living in and being immersed in the language, thinking and organisation of another culture would provide valid ethnographic descriptions and explanations of that culture from within.

Following World War 2 the field of cultural anthropology continued to diverge. Some theorists went back to re-examine evolutionary models, others brought in other disciplines to their approaches. Psychology was used to explain cultural characteristics as derivative of personality within group members. Ecology was used to link natural conditions with cultural differences. Marxism was employed to argue that the history of cultures is influenced by internal contradictions of socio-cultural systems. It was also deployed to study how material constraints, as separate from mental or creative constraints, produced similarities or differences between groups.
Some approaches focused on explaining similarities not differences and many anthropologists rejected in total generalised causal viewpoints to explain cultural differences and argued that cultures should be studied merely to record their elements for their own sake.

The idea of racial determinants as an explanation of cultural difference lost credence in anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century, as a result of the work of cultural relativists. Their studies uncovered the complexities of 'primitive' cultures and highlighted the gross under-estimations of the intelligence of non-European people. But the idea did not disappear, it swung off into other disciplines, like psychology and genetics. Largely disputed it nevertheless hung on in the form of biological (sometimes racial) explanations of behaviour, particularly in relation to intelligence and the ongoing hereditary-environment debates.

The concept of cultural difference, then, is not recent and has been conceptualised in different ways at different times. For Torres Strait Islanders the popular uptake of theories of cultural difference, by non-Islanders as a way to understand Islanders, has influenced the practices of non-Islander intervention into their lives, since contact. It would be simplistic to suggest that this is the only factor as many other interests also influenced the direction of intervention. But the theoretical principles that underpinned the way that Islanders were provided form as human subjects in the literature today owes much to the developing theories of cultural difference. Thus the current schema of cultural difference which is applied to educational reform in the Torres Strait is but a linear descendant of other theories of cultural difference which viewed Islanders as behind the European in a lower stage of cultural evolution.

Historically, then, educational policy and practice in the Torres Strait was rationalised through viewing the Islander in relation to Europeans as inferior both mentally and socially, and as a result politically unequal and in need of
only a limited education (Bleakley, 1961). Today policy and practice is rationalised through viewing the Islander as equal but different (e.g., National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy, 1989; Osborne, 1979, 1985, 1989). In both schemas the relation between the Islander and the non-Islander is dichotomised through the concept of difference which simplifies the relationship as ‘us’ and ‘them’. Further to this, because non-Islanders give form to the knowledges that theorise and give substance to this relation, Islanders appear as the ‘other’ of the non-Islanders. Islanders are viewed, not as themselves, but in relation to what is known by non-Islanders, and for Islanders, historically, this meant they stood in a devalued relation to the non-Islander and were often misunderstood. So today a popular common belief is not that there is an ‘unbridgeable, biological gulf’ separating Islanders from non-Islanders but a ‘cultural gulf’ that produces so-called ‘intractable problems’.

In this section, I have shown that non-Islanders, in their re-presentation of Islanders educational situation have recognised that Islanders operate at the intersection of two domains. I have also suggested that these representations have simplified the relationship between the domains as ‘us’ and ‘them’, and as ‘different’. I had previously argued that as historical trajectories come face to face they provide conditions that enable us to go about enacting our lives and that such historical moments constitute what can be seen as Islander lifeworlds. And, it is this lifeworld that we need to represent. I contend that lifeworlds at the interface of multiple cultural and historical trajectories require more rigorous forms of representation that address the complexity that results. In particular, the ways in which material conditions evolve and determine social and political possibilities.

Reconsidering the Problem
If it is the complexity of the Islanders’ position at the interface of two different historical trajectories that is difficult to capture, then in what ways can that complexity be uncovered and considered in the way that we
approach improving the representation of Islanders’ position at the interface? In what follows, I discuss other dynamics not easily visible in ‘us’ and ‘them’ modes of representations. In brief these dynamics involve: (1) an interpretation of the interface as a site of historical and ongoing intervention by non-Islanders; (2) an interpretation of how the Islander is viewed as subject; (3) an interpretation of the effects of (1) and (2) on the Islanders’ position i.e., how the position is experienced by Islanders and how the position of Islanders is understood and (4) what this position and understanding does to set the power relations between Islanders and non-Islanders.

Reconsidering the Interface as a Site of Intervention:

The ‘interface’ position of Islanders is produced by the acts of intervention by non-Islanders. It is these very acts of intervention that produce complexities that are difficult to capture and articulate in simplistic us/them analyses. At the simplest level, the intervention of non-Islanders can be recognised as arising from a singular mono-logic perspective and that when that intersects with the Islander lifeworld there are dynamics which arise out of the uptake of that worldview. Historically this process of intervention engendered a particular relationship between ‘them and us’ that worked against the interest of Islanders and in the interests of those who intervened. Thus Islanders’ experience of the intervention in their lifeworlds is political and produced an ongoing struggle in their relations to those who intervened. So the interface is not merely a site where the Islander is ‘culturally dissonant’ with the outside world. The non-Islander has intervened and in doing so has subjected the Islander to enact a particular relationship. Both the content and form of such intervention has become part of Islander history. It is kneaded into their lifeworld and is part of many Islander experiences. Generations of Islanders have lived at the interface and their understandings are derived from their experience of this position. Nonetheless, and against the odds, they have brought to their position a continuity with their pre-contact past, and this has maintained customary ways, it has maintained distinctiveness. But this
distinctiveness is also, in part, an expression of the relationship engendered by
the conditions imposed on Islanders by various historical acts of intervention
- conditions that were imposed precisely because Islanders were different.

Non-Islander intervention and how it appeared historically, then, is tied up to
the ways of thinking and the knowledges, institutions and practices of the
Western order of things. The dilemma then is that the Islander domain as
experienced historically by Islanders is difficult to re-present because the only
means of doing so is via the accounts of Western knowledge systems. Non-
Islanders have documented the history of this intervention from their
understanding of it but Islanders have been unable to do so. Islanders have
not had the skills to document their history and thus it appears as their history
has always appeared - in memories and consciousness - as a history that lacks
legitimacy for these very reasons and which now can only be validated by
relating it to what non-Islanders understand of the history of this experience.
Consequently the interface can only be conceptualised as a site of historical
and ongoing intervention. It is the only means of giving it valid
representation. Islander experience can no longer, I would argue, be
legitimately separated from such intervention - the two are inextricably linked.

Reconsidering the Islander Subject

The complexity of the Islanders' position at the interface is produced as well
by the way that Islanders' view themselves in relation to these non-Islander
histories. This is a difficult notion to articulate precisely because little has
been recorded of Islander history as experienced by Islanders. However, two
non-Islander historians (Beckett 1987; Sharp, 1993) through their interviews
with older Islanders, have provided glimpses into this history that gives
substance to the idea that Islanders did hold and maintain a view of
themselves that conditioned their responses to non-Islander forms of
intervention in a particular way. At the time of European contact Islanders
were on a particular historical trajectory. That is, their world had been
proceeding along a path and that path took a turn at the point of contact.
Although the intervention that followed was constituted by the non-Islander view of Islanders as 'primitive' and 'native', and although Islander lives came to be regulated by non-Islanders this did not mean that Islanders altered their view of themselves to match that of non-Islanders. That is, Islanders could view themselves outside of the position that they found themselves in. Nor did the rupture to Islanders' historical trajectory by the intervention of non-Islanders necessarily mean that the uptake of Western knowledges and practices by Islanders would logically mean to them that they would lose control of their historical trajectory. Much of the cooperation and participation of Islanders in the new order rested on a notion that they were capable and equal. Much of their embracing of new ways was to equalise the relations between them and non-Islanders, not to erase their distinctiveness nor to discontinue their connections to their own historical path (Beckett, 1987; Sharp, 1993).

Thus Islanders' historical trajectory did not end, it continued. In the ways that Islanders dealt with intervention they developed their identity and sense of themselves into something new, something changing, but also something that was continuous with how they had always viewed themselves. They did not in their own eyes reconstitute their identity to conform to the position that non-Islander understandings produced for them. Even though Islanders did indeed lose control over their lives, and did reconstitute their identity, they maintained a view of themselves that was continuous with their own historical trajectory. And this enabled them to continue the quest to overcome these difficulties, to continue their struggle for independence and control over their affairs. They were aided in maintaining a continuous view of themselves, by their cohesiveness as a society, that is, they were not subject to the physical fragmentation of their society, or physical loss of their land by the intervention process as, for example, Aboriginal groups were. In today's context, this enables Islanders to deal with the contradictions between their acceptance of their constitution as 'culturally different' subjects by an intellectual schema and their own view of themselves as not limited to a
'cultural' essence. This enables Islanders to take up and continue to incorporate non-Islander forms such as 'popular culture' representations and other aspects of identity, drawn from non-Islander institutions and practices and still maintain their view of themselves as Torres Strait Islanders.

In short, two factors that produce additional aspects of the interface are, first, that the non-Islander domain is not separate from Islanders and their history but appears in their history and their lifeworld as an intervention. Second, Islanders' ability not to limit their view of themselves to the position that has been constituted for them in the knowledges of non-Islanders has kept them on a path towards regaining their independence from the control of non-Islanders, even whilst cooperating with the forces of subjection. These two critical aspects of Islanders' lifeworld at the interface are not well understood. Islanders have maintained some sense of being on their own trajectory, even whilst recognising that they are embedded in another. This is not merely cultural continuity forged in the face of emerging cultural discontinuities but as well involves a struggle to maintain a sense of continuity in the face of political negation by non-Islanders who managed Islanders' affairs. An understanding of these two factors can lead to a re-theorisation of the interface position as not simply an intersection of two separate domains and a re-theorisation of Islanders not simply as 'culturally different' subjects.

Reconsidering Positioning

As stated earlier, the current cultural schematising of Islanders’ predicament appears as a welcome change because it is based on a premise of Islanders as equal but different, rather than the earlier premise that Islanders were inferior to Europeans. But this schematising is constrained by the same epistemological framework of earlier understandings of Islanders as subject. This current cultural schematising fails to capture the complexities of historical intervention and response to that intervention. The earlier brief consideration of how the current cultural schema emerged to frame the policy and practice of educational intervention in the 1990s provided an example to
illustrate how both the history of intervention and the conceptualisation of the Islander as subject conditions the possibilities at the current interface position. That is, the problem does not lie in humanity or the lack their of, but in the system of knowledges that constrain and condition the possibilities at the interface.

Logically speaking when Islanders today adhere to a view of themselves as ‘cultural’ subjects, in essence they take up a position that has been produced for them in the knowledges of non-Islanders and inadvertently they reify the very relationship that rendered them inferior and which continues to categorise them as subjects of a different order. As discussed earlier, Islanders do not limit themselves to this constitution, but nevertheless the fact that this knowledge constructs such a position ensures that Islanders engage with this constituted subjectivity and are conditioned in the ways that they view, discuss and articulate their predicament and respond to reform. That is, in constructing positions for Islanders in relation to these non-Islander knowledges, such knowledges go on to position Islanders in particular ways as they respond to non-Islander institutional policy and practices that emerge from such knowledges.

Reconsidering Power relations

The way that historical relations of power between non-Islanders and Islanders are embedded in the knowledges of the non-Islander is also overlooked or oversimplified in many non-Islander analyses. Like Islanders’ position at the interface, these relations are not entirely neglected but are understood as embedded in, for example, the history of colonial exploitation, or the dominance of the non-Islander culture and its institutions. These explanations (e.g., Boxall & Duncan) often overlook the complicity of Islanders who, in the intervention process, are positioned in a particular way by non-Islander knowledges, institutions and practices and who often uphold them when they embrace them because they are unclear about how these
knowledges work to produce a position for Islanders that reflects the historical relations of power (Williamson, 1990, 1997; Osborne, 1989c).

Historically Islanders were allowed a limited and highly regulated participation in the new order of things. This involved degrees of cooperation with authorities, degrees of surrender to the new order, and degrees of non-compliance and resistance. These acts varied from time to time, from community to community, from family to family, from individual to individual. Responses by Islanders to the new order were thus sometimes collective, sometimes disputed, occasionally united, sometimes entrenched, sometimes deceptive, sometimes momentary, and often shifting and contradictory. As alluded to above, Islanders went about this process in a positive, often pragmatic way in order to gain some measure of control over their position in this new order, although force of circumstances prevented them from achieving this. In their responses, however, Islanders often inadvertently assisted in their own oppression, even as they crafted a continuing positive identity for themselves and continued their struggle for control.

This aspect of the interface position, as experienced historically by Islanders as a site where both the positive and negative aspects of power emerged in ways that were both positive and negative for Islanders, helps reveal the complexities of this position as experienced by Islanders on a daily ongoing basis. As historically was the case, so in the current context, relations of power are weighted in favour of those in charge of knowledges, institutions and practice. These non-Islander knowledges, institutions and practices thus condition islanders' understanding of their position. The inscription of Islanders into non-Islander schemas according to non-Islander knowledges denotes, I would argue, a notion of power as knowledge inscribed — that is as expressed in power/knowledge relations by Foucault (1972/1980).
These additional complexities that are produced when Islanders immerse themselves, or find themselves immersed in and conditioned by non-Islander knowledges and practices are not easily apparent to Islanders or non-Islanders, though Islanders experience their material effects. However, understanding them, I would argue, is crucial for Islanders’ understanding of their position. There is a positioning effect in the knowledges and practices of non-Islanders. Without an understanding of this, and without a way of working against this, Islanders will continue to risk complicity in their own disadvantage without understanding their own position in it. This is particularly important in the current context when Islanders are being given the opportunity to manage their own affairs but where the institutions, knowledges and practices they deploy continue to come from the non-Islanders.

Restating the Problem

I have argued that the re-presentation of the complexities of the Islanders’ position at the interface has been difficult for non-Islanders to capture and for Islanders to articulate. In the educational literature, non-Islanders have theorised the Islander domain as separate from but intersecting with the non-Islander domain. They have theorised the Islander subject as culturally different. Where relations of power have been theorised, power has been viewed as either benign (by governments) or in a negative way as enacted by the dominant non-Islander institutions (by intellectuals). Non-Islanders have written the histories of Islanders oblivious to the history of their own intervention. The understanding of Islanders’ position at the interface are thus limited and, in effect, constrains current possibilities for understanding Islander positions at the interface - for both non-Islanders and Islanders alike.

I have suggested an alternative theorisation of the interface position that argues that the interface is a site of historical and ongoing intervention into Islander lifeworlds. This intervention process has produced a historical position for Islanders at the intersection of two different historical
trajectories. I have also theorised that Islanders have viewed themselves in ways that go beyond their constitution by non-Islander schemas and that this has in part conditioned their responses to interventions in their lifeworlds. Further, Islanders have to rely on non-Islander knowledges to understand their position. This is because their own experiential analyses embedded in 'popular memory' and collective consciousness are easily invalidated – but mostly because they have not been written in any 'formal way' and thus cannot be sourced to any 'valid' references. The complexities that emerge from such a dilemma make it both difficult for Islanders to articulate their position at the interface as well as for non-Islanders to understand their predicament. These complexities revolve around the positioning effects of knowledges which often inscribe Islanders into non-Islander ways of understanding in a way that makes it difficult to see whether, in their uptake of these knowledges and practices, they uphold or submerge their own interests.

A Countervailing Hypothesis

An alternate view of the current educational literature is that unresolved problems experienced in the 1990s can not be a simple case of a lack of basic infrastructures to support policy positions. Nor can the problem be seen as a simple case of appropriating a 'different agenda' for people of another culture. In order to improve educational outcomes, Islander positions in schooling need to be considered as a dynamic lifeworld of a complex interplay between what is known as history by Islanders and what non-Islanders know as history. And we will not be able to fully realise what that lifeworld is about until we understand more about the epistemological constraints in historical practices that have served to constitute Islander positions in terms of 'them and us' relations. It is, I would argue, because non-Islanders have reified these positions between 'them and us' as if these are the ways things are and always have been. In their many documentations of Islanders in these ways, they have institutionalised a modus operandi which, in turn, has served not only to limit what can or can not be seen as positions and experiences in
schools but also how schooling situations for Islanders can be improved. A
countervailing hypothesis then is that the 'them and us' schema in histories,
and its reification across the many documentations of Islanders over the past
Century has set the conditions as well as the limits that constrain how we are
to intervene in Islander education. By investigating the documentation that
gives witness to what non-Islanders have done when they have intervened in
Islander lifeworlds, and by investigating the knowledges produced on
Islanders by non-Islanders we will gain a much clearer understanding of the
position of Islanders and the way non-Islander intervention has conditioned
our lifeworld. From this position, a clearer understanding of the limits of
current educational reform trends can be gained. And following on from this,
it may then be possible to begin to construct an alternative foundation from
which to view the educational issues which concern Islanders.

Sites for Study
The three main areas of interests for me in the corpus of writing on Islanders
include early missionary activity, scientific studies, government administration,
and the cultural agenda in the educational sphere. These sites have been
chosen to explore what happens at the interface of Islander experiences and
Western knowledge systems, and particular documents have been selected for
the investigation.

Rev. S. McFarlane's (1888) Amongst the Cannibals is one of the earliest texts
on the London Missionary Society's time in the Torres Strait. However,
McFarlane's text was selected foremostly to investigate how Islanders are
inscribed into a Western order of things and to illustrate particularly how the
texts of Western knowledge systems are political.

The six volumes of materials on Islanders produced by academic researchers
from Cambridge University in England after their expedition to the Torres
Strait in 1898 were also selected. This team of researchers was skilled in a
range of disciplines including linguistics, experimental psychology, zoology,
anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, and music. The team was led by A. C. Haddon a zoologist who, by the time of the expedition, had shifted his interest to ethnology. The texts produced by the Cambridge team serve as an important discursive site to explore and chart in more detail the range of subjectivities that is made possible by Western histories and sciences.

The story of early colonial administration in the Torres Strait, as recounted by several authors, was selected to show what is made possible by such knowledge systems that continue to produce texts and subjectivities using the Western order of things as the only standard. The interface of Islander experience and the Western order of things as they emerged in the form of government control over the years will help to demonstrate the material effects of Western knowledge systems in Islander communities. This will also help to reassert the position that all texts are political. And, whilst they have allowed particular benefits to non-Islanders they also constituted in Islander discourses a relationship with non-Islanders that has served to delimit, indeed prefigure, how Islanders can enact their presence in public lifeworlds.

The knowledge formations in our relationship with non-Islanders that have been developed to articulate what is possible between ‘us’ and ‘them’ will help to demonstrate my hypothesis that the tension this causes Islanders not only limits who we can be in Western societies but fails to appear in any theorisation of Islanders as subject.

The cultural themes as they are presented in educational spheres in the 1990s will serve as a final example of what happens at the interface of Islander experience and Western knowledge systems. By using the historical trajectory of Western texts and practices of subjectification enacted on Islanders over the past Century and the resultant submergence of constitutive forms that has delimited who and what Islanders can be in Western societies, and by exposing the failure to theorise Islander tensions and experiences with such
practices, I hope to demonstrate how this constrains educational practices in new times.

In this thesis, and from these texts, I will attempt to show how the tension of such constitutive forms in our relationship allowed many facets of Islander life to be documented in History without any of the Islanders’ experience of being positioned as a secondary Other. And in doing so, I hope to show a part of Islander histories that we have hitherto failed to theorise as a crucial historical element in what makes an Islander in the current order of things.

These texts were also chosen to investigate forms of intervention across a broad range of disciplines and topics to show that no matter how diverse the different modes of representation, there is a particular consistency to the intervention process.

**Methodology**

The key areas that I want to chart in the documentation of Islanders by non-Islanders are:

1. Their consideration of the position of Islanders in the context of historical events;
2. Their view to the state of affairs of Islanders as they are re-positioned into the new order of things;
3. Their project of intervention on behalf of the Islanders;
4. What their intervention made possible; and,
5. What power/knowledge relations their projects constituted between Islanders and non-Islanders.

It is in these ways that I hope to provide a re-reading of how non-Islanders have intervened in the lives of Islanders for over a century.
Focus of Study

I have deliberately chosen not to approach the task by attempting to uncover and document Islanders' historical and ongoing experience at the interface. This is not because I do not think that attempts to retrieve this historical experience are necessary or worthwhile. To the contrary, they remain to be done. However, having argued the interface is a site of non-Islander intervention that has conditioned Islanders' historical experience, it is the forms of knowledges and their conditions that this has imposed on Islanders, that I wish to investigate. This stems from a desire to reach beyond simplistic black/white, us/them, you/me paradigms and to understand, perhaps more fully, historical processes in our current relations with non-Islanders. Further, I want to investigate how this holds implications for current understandings and for Islanders' ongoing responses. So the aim of this thesis is not to retrieve 'untold' histories of Islanders, to write in all the omissions, to counter biases, or make a counter claim to 'truths'. My argument here is that it is premature to reconstruct alternative knowledge of 'us', the Islanders, or an alternative history of our experience, before we understand the ways in which our experience has been circumscribed by non-Islanders, how 'they' have constituted 'us' in their knowledges, and how that emerges in practice. The task is to show how these things come to occur, how it is that they told Islanders' lives in the way that they did, and how that telling still constrains the options available to Islanders today. If we are to understand our position fully then having insight into the history of the relation between 'them' and 'us' and how that history is implicated in current interventions will assist us in understanding what yet needs to be done.

In this way I hope to avoid the trap of taking up a counter position that is, in effect, a(n) (op)position to the historical conditioning of the position of Islanders by non-Islanders, their knowledges, institutions and practices. I do not want to risk also reifying the historical relation between 'us' and 'them'. The task here is not to denounce non-Islanders for their acts of intervention. It is not to denounce their histories of Islanders as 'wrong'. It is not to
denounce their sciences that constructed knowledge on Islanders as ‘wrong’. It is not to say that individuals involved in the process were ‘good’ or ‘bad’. It is not to establish a position from which to reject or condemn the use of non-Islander knowledges. The task is to take a measure of these knowledges and their formation and what that means for Islanders.

This approach is recognition that Islanders will always stand in a particular, although changing relation, to non-Islander knowledges, institutions and their practices. The aim is to highlight how in non-Islander accounts, the failure to theorise the interface as more than an intersection of two discontinuous domains results in more than just absence, or omission of the Islander people and their experiences. By theorising Islanders as subjects according to particular non-Islander schemas, it results as well in a refusal of Islanders as political, independent subjects, a refusal of their view of their historical experience and it enabled historically the refusal of their humanity. My argument is that understanding these processes will enable Islanders to give better expression to the elements of their experience that non-Islanders cannot get to from their current methods of theorising our predicament at the interface. In turn, this will enable Islanders to position themselves more effectively and powerfully in relation to ongoing forms of intervention which are currently deployed via the uptake of non-Islander knowledges, institutions and their practices.

This approach is also recognition that as an Islander, I cannot fully understand my position in relation to the non-Islander knowledges I am required to employ unless I have an insight into the forms and processes of these knowledges as they have historically constructed and still construct the ways to understand Islanders. This is a search for knowledge about knowledges, that is, epistemological understanding. My argument here is that this kind of understanding of non-Islander knowledges needs to prefigure further research into Islanders’ educational problems.
Limits to the Study

However, the task of examining the forms and processes of non-Islander knowledges as they were deployed in the acts of historical intervention into Islander lifeworlds is enormous. There were for example many interests that converged to influence the context and direction of intervention into the affairs of Islanders. These included the colonial expansion of European interests and all the subsections of that expansion such as economic interests, commercial and trade interests, the interests of competing European powers, systems of labour management, capital expansion, industrial manufacturing expansion etc. Then there were internal interests of Queensland and Australia such as capitalising on private commercial activity, regulating immigration, extending and controlling of territorial waters, financing of government activity etc. There were as well all the intellectual disciplines that provided the basis for European understanding of the world - their scientific knowledges, their knowledge of history, religious knowledges, social knowledges such as their understandings of notions of family and community, child-rearing, theories on the development of the races etc. It is beyond the scope of this thesis and this study to provide a comprehensive history of how these conditioned the acts of interventions into the lives of Islanders.

This study seeks only to understand the ways Islanders have been inscribed into histories in order to gain a better understanding of the epistemological relations between 'them and us' that, in effect, constrain the possibilities for intervening in Islander education today.
Chapter Two


We can understand you captains, you come and trade with us, and then return to your own country to sell what you get; but who are these missionaries? Have they done something in their country, that they dare not return? (A Lifuan of the Loyalty Islands cited in McFarlane, 1888, p. 41)

After many thousands of years negotiating our ways in the islands of Torres Strait as well as with the people of mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea, it seemed necessary by 1871 that the souls of our people needed to be rescued by missionaries. In this Chapter, I will attempt to chart a particular missionary’s rationalisation of his presence in the region and his founding principle in order to gain a broader understanding of the basic discursive relations that were established to justify intervening in other peoples’ lives. However, this is neither to find out who was responsible for the missions in the 1870s nor to evaluate the impact the missionaries have had on Islander communities retrospectively. The aim here is to explore and chart, in particular, how the Islander was transformed into both subject and object of early religious discourse, and provided with a ‘soul’ that needed to be rescued.

The Mission

McFarlane (1888), in his book Among the Cannibals, the first major publication of the London Missionary Society’s activity in the Torres Strait, provided an interesting account of endeavours to evangelise New Guinea. At the time, the
islands of the Torres Strait had not been annexed by the Queensland Government and McFarlane considered them as being part of New Guinea. After receiving orders from the secretary of the London Missionary Society (hereafter LMS) in 1870, and after twelve years of evangelising the South Sea Islands, McFarlane was asked to relieve his position at Lifu in the Loyalty Islands and to establish what came to be known as the New Guinea Mission. At the time of these orders, not much was known about the region to which they were embarking and McFarlane sought “at once to collect information and mature plans... to spy out the land” (pp. 12-13).

After recruiting a fellow missionary, Mr Murray, who was enroute from the mission in Samoa to the Loyalty Islands, four ‘native’ pastors and their wives, McFarlane departed Lifu in 1871 for the southern coast of Papua New Guinea.

It would be difficult to describe our feelings as we sailed towards that great land of cannibals, a land which, viewed from a scientific, political, commercial, or religious point of view, possesses an interest peculiarly its own. Whilst empires have risen, flourished, and decayed; whilst Christianity, science, and philosophy have been transforming nations, and travellers have been crossing polar seas and African deserts, and astonishing the world by their discoveries, New Guinea has remained the same... where the natives may be seen in the cocoanut [sic] groves mending their bows and poisoning their arrows, making their bamboo knives and spears, and revelling in war and cannibalism as they have been doing for ages” (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 14-5).

As they hastened towards the world of the ‘cannibals’, McFarlane presumed many things and, amongst them, the view that after many thousands of years, in this part of the world, people had ‘remained the same’. It will also be seen in the following Chapters, that one of the initial moves when intervening into other peoples lives was that the ‘unknown’ first needed to be posited in relation to what was ‘known’ of the outside world. For instance, it appeared to McFarlane in the aforementioned quote that, in light of the developments
in 'civilised' worlds, there had been no progress made towards 'civilisation' in this part of the world. Whilst this appeared as 'commonsense' because it provided a rationale for non-Islanders to conceptualise what was being described in another part of the world, what was not so evident was that such views of 'progress' also served as the rationale for ignoring what actually existed of indigenous histories.

On July 1st, 1871, McFarlane and his crew arrived at Darnley Island in the Torres Strait. Having sailed directly to Darnley Island from Lifu, McFarlane tells us why he chose this island in the Torres Strait:

A consideration of the known, as well as the unknown and probable difficulties, led me to select Darnley Island as the most safe, central, and in every way the most suitable place at which to commence our mission. For such a work as we were beginning, we required a central station, which we might make our sanatorium, city of refuge, and educational centre. As a Scotchman, I remembered Iona and its history in connection with the evangelization [sic] of Scotland, and hoped that Darnley would prove the Iona of New Guinea. (McFarlane, 1888, p. 28)

It may well be clear to McFarlane why he chose to land on Darnley Island. But what was not so clear was why and how McFarlane came to choose this island over the many islands that lay off the southern coastline of Papua New Guinea - islands that also can be considered central to the communities on the coastline. It is interesting to note here that Macgillivray who was appointed as the naturalist on the HMS Rattlesnake's expedition to survey the waters of the Torres Strait and who deliberated on the advantages of a settlement on Cape York 20 years earlier also favoured the settlements to the east on Darnley (Erub to the Islanders) and Murray Islands (Mer to the Islanders). These were some of Macgillivray's deliberations in 1852:

In a military point of view the importance of such a post [on Cape York] has been urged upon the ground, that in the event of war, a single enemy's ship stationed in the
neighbourhood, if previously unoccupied, could completely command the whole of our commerce passing through the Strait.

5th. From what more central point could operations be conducted with the view of extending our knowledge of the interior of New Guinea by ascending some of the large rivers of that country, disemboguing on the shores of the Great Bight?

6th and lastly. But on this point I would advance my opinion with much diffidence - I believe that were a settlement to be established at Cape York, missionary enterprise [sic], judiciously conducted, might find a useful field for its labours in Torres Strait, beginning with the Murray and Darnley Islanders, people of a much higher intellectual standard... and consequently more likely to appreciate any humanizing [sic] influence which might be exercised for their benefit. (Macgillivray, 1852, p. 320)

It would be helpful here to understand that the narrow waterway, Torres Strait, between Australian and Papua New Guinea is less than 200 kilometres wide and is a bottle neck between two great oceans: the Arafura Sea to the west and the Coral Sea to the east. It is considered a narrow bottleneck because of the many islands dotted throughout its waterway, the maze of coral reefs that span the length and breadth of the Strait, the shallow waters, and the dangerous tidal surges and currents that run between them. The scores of ships that lay wrecked on reefs in the Strait are testimony to the difficulties in manoeuvring through the narrow passages. Added to the danger, of course, are the many stories of sailors surviving shipwrecks only to be attacked and ‘eaten by natives’ in these waters. One in particular needs to be mentioned as it appears to have had the most currency in documentations made by travellers and voyagers in the 1800s.

Wemyss (1837), for example, in his narrative of the gruesome fate of the surviving members of the shipwreck Charles Eaton in the Torres Strait Islands provided a sickening story of intrepid sailors and travellers who were “massacred... by natives addicted to thieving” (p. 36) and “addicted to
cannibalism” (p. 24). In this recount, four responses to the massacre were contemplated and thereby another aspect of the missionary’s intervention was invented:

1. To send a suitable force from India and New South Wales to seize these islands, to exterminate their inhabitants, and to take possession of them in the British name, so as to form settlements or colonies, in which the shipwrecked mariner may in future find a secure refuge.

2. To invade the islands as before, and without exterminating, to expatriate the natives, by landing them on the coast of New Holland, leaving them to find their own way in that vast continent.

3. To subdue the islands, and to preserve the inhabitants, making them tributary, and using such efforts to civilise and improve them, as would render them less formidable to all who might visit them.

4. But, as all efforts to civilise, by merely introducing the arts of life, have proved either very tedious or absolutely ineffectual, there remains only another plan, and that is, to introduce the Gospel among them by means of missionaries, and by translating the Scriptures into their language. (Wemyss, 1837, p. 34)

The first two responses were repulsive and inhumane within the framework of Christian beliefs whilst the latter two pointed towards achievements of the London Missionary Society in reforming Polynesia. Wemyss (1837) proposed the notion that communities “destitute of the light of the Gospel” (p. 39) can be reformed but that such intervention was “the proper province of missionary exertion” (p. 39). Whatever motivated these early concerns with the souls of Islanders, it was essentially the need to find a safe passage through the Strait, from countries to the West to the eastern seaboard of Australia that brought them into contact. According to the missionaries however they had their own orders from the Secretary of the London Missionary Society in London to evangelise New Guinea and to claim it for Christ.
Although McFarlane (1888) acknowledged that 'relatively little was known' about the region and the people who lived there, he expressed great anticipation and excitement about establishing the mission. As he explained, "[i]t was this terra incognita that we were approaching, with its primeval forests and mineral wealth and savage inhabitants" (p. 15), and that it comes with a sense of relief to visit a country really new, about which little is known, a country of bona fide cannibals and genuine savages, where the pioneer missionary and explorer truly carries his life in his hand. A land of promise, capable of sustaining millions of people, in which however the natives live on yams, bananas, and cocoa-nuts. A land of mighty cedars and giant trees, where notwithstanding the native huts are made of sticks, and roofed with palm leaves. A land consisting of millions of acres of glorious grass, capable of fattening multitudes of cattle, where however neither flocks nor herds are known. A land of splendid mountains, magnificent forests, and mighty rivers, but to us a land of heathen darkness, cruelty, cannibalism, and death. We were going to plant the gospel standard on this, the largest island in the world, and win it for Christ. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 15-16)

So much was anticipated and yet so little was known, as they later found to the detriment of McFarlane's colleagues. Illness and ailments claimed approximately half of their South Sea Islander recruits, especially in western areas of New Guinea where it was low and swampy - what McFarlane (1888) later described as the "sickly country" (p. 160). It took a while, but after some of their South Sea Islander recruits and missionaries suffered and died in the initial attempts to evangelise New Guinea, McFarlane eventually resolved to train Islanders in the Torres Strait as missionaries. These Islanders were thought to be more resistant to ailments in New Guinea and were also more akin to the people of its coastline communities than the Lifuan recruits from the Loyalty Islands. He thus moved to establish the Papuan Institute on Mer in 1880 as the central training ground and not Erub where he first landed nine years prior. As far as McFarlane was concerned, Mer was just that bit further off the main route yet still central to the New Guinea communities. Most
importantly to 'the mission', Torres Strait Islanders could be recruited from other islands and brought to Mer so that they were far enough away from both “their evil surroundings” (p. 81), and explorers, travellers, and traders. That way there was little chance to stall their efforts to 'win it for Christ'.

The Cannibal

What did the missionaries know of the people in the Torres Strait? Over the previous three centuries, prior to the arrival of the missionaries, there had been many recorded visits to the Torres Strait Islands by explorers from the West, for instance, Torres in 1606, Carstensz in 1623, Abel Tasman in 1644, Cook in 1770, Bligh in 1789, Edwards in 1791, Bampton and Alt in 1793, Flinders in 1802, King in 1819, Wilson in 1822, and there are many others (see Haddon, 1935, pp. 3-13). Moore (1978) claims that some of these journals recorded “a number of early reports of sightings of 'Indians' on the islands” (p. 1). Some of the later authors wrote of Islanders who armed themselves with bows and arrows as Indians and who were unlike the Aborigines on the Australian mainland who used spears and throwing sticks (see King, 1837, p. 801; Wemyss, 1837, footnotes on p. 45; Macgillivray, 1852b, p. 18; Ireland, 1854, Captain James Cook’s Journal cited in Wharton, 1893, pp. 311-12; Captain Mathew Flinders’ Journal cited in Haddon, 1935, p. 7; McInnes, 1983, p. 37). However, it was not until the 1870s when the missionaries arrived that the term ‘cannibal’ gained significance.

The great land of 'bona fide cannibals', as McFarlane (1888) chose to describe Islanders, marked a significant shift from other writings at the time on Torres Strait Islanders. On checking the aforementioned publications of voyages and expeditions to the Torres Strait and on Torres Strait Islanders even just a few decades prior to McFarlane's publication, one is hard pressed to find the word 'cannibal' used to describe Islanders. In several recounts of the ill-fated ship Charles Eaton and her crew by Lewis (1837), Brockett (1836), Wemyss (1837), McInnes (1983), and Ireland (1854), who was one of the two surviving members of the ill-fated ship, Islanders are referred to as Indians, savages, and
natives. As well, in the four large volumes of materials, containing narratives of two naturalists, J. Beete Jukes (1847a, 1847b) and John Macgillivray (1852a, 1852b) - whilst on major hydrographical surveys throughout the Torres Strait on the *HMS Fly* and the *HMS Rattlesnake* - no reference is made to Islanders as cannibals. In these accounts, Islanders are referred to as natives, people, person, men, husbands, fellows, women, wives, children, child, girls, boys, infants, inhabitants, blacks, Islanders, Torres Strait Islanders, old friends, and to a lesser extent than former writings, as savages. However, there are, in some of these earlier writings (see for example, Jukes, 1847a, p. 277 on Eastern Islanders; Macgillivray, 1852b, p. 5-7; 1852a, Chp. VIII, on Western Islanders), a few references to, and descriptions of, Islanders engaging in ‘savage’ warfare and gruesome behaviours like cutting off the heads of their enemies and using them as trophies or for spiritual purposes. References to Islanders as “addicted to cannibalism” (Wemyss, 1837, p. 24) are isolated but no Islanders are referred to directly as cannibals. And quite notably, there are even fewer accounts of Islanders consuming parts of the human body. In fact, citations relating to this practice come from a single source, namely from the recollection of one survivor from the shipwreck *Charles Eaton* in 1834 (see Ireland, 1854).

William E. Brockett (1836), who interviewed the survivor, John Ireland, on the 18th June 1836, at the time of his rescue at Mer, about his ordeal with the ‘savages’ on Boydan Island provided the earliest recount of the event. On reaching this Island with several other members of the Charles Eaton by two makeshift rafts,

[w]orn out with fatigue and want of sleep, and having nothing either to eat or drink.... the treacherous and brutal savages appeared to be disposed to act in a friendly manner, and accompanied them under the pretence of obtaining water and provisions for them. No sooner, however, had the shipwrecked wanderers fallen into a sound sleep, then the inexorable brutes fell upon their helpless victims, and massacred them with spears, knives,
and clubs; after which they cut off their heads, and danced and shouted over their bodies. (Brockett, 1836, p. 17)

Ireland himself is then stated to have said that,

the savages on Boydany [Boydan] Island eat the eyes and cheeks of the shipwrecked people belonging to the Charles Eaton. This they were induced to do from a peculiar notion which they entertain, that such conduct will increase their desire after the blood of white men. (Brockett, 1836, p. 21)

In a recent recount, McInnes (1983), who has a high reputation as a historian, especially in the North Australian Maritime field and who considered all relevant recordings of the event, continues to repeat this version of events thus demonstrating the endurance of the 1836 interpretation of this encounter:

[the shipwrecked survivors] plodded around the island in search of food and water but were so exhausted by fatigue and hunger they could scarcely crawl and fell to the ground in despair. At this time the peaceful attitude of the natives changed alarmingly. The natives stood grinning and laughing in the most hideous manner and it soon became evident that they were exulting in anticipation of their murder. (McInnes, 1983, pp. 36-7)

To this, McInnes (1983) adds another of Ireland’s statement,

at a short distance off, making the most hideous yells, the other savages were dancing round a large fire before which were placed in a row the heads of their victims; whilst their decapitated bodies were washing in the surf on the beach, from which they soon disappeared. (McInnes, 1983, p. 37)

In 1852, Macgillivray, the naturalist on the HMS Rattlesnake, who wrote of an entirely different event, of warfare in the Western islands of the Torres Strait, also used a snippet from Ireland’s experience on Boydan Island to characterise the behaviour of Islanders in a community over many many nautical miles to the West, as having the same demeanour:
The Kowraregas returned to their island [after a raiding party to another community] with much exultation, announcing their approach by great shouting and blowing conchs. The heads were placed on an oven and partially cooked, when the eyes were scooped out and eaten with portions of flesh cut from the cheek; † only those, however, who had been present at the murder were allowed to partake of this; the morsel was supposed to make them more brave. A dance was then commenced, during which the heads were kicked along the ground, and the savage excitement of the dancers almost amounted to frenzy. The skulls were ultimately hung up on two cross sticks near the camp, and allowed to remain there undisturbed. (Macgillivray, 1852, pp. 6-7)

The † symbol refers to a citation of King’s (1837) account of the events of the shipwreck Charles Eaton, and as indicated in the above statement by Macgillivray, writers of the day saw some currency in describing the Kowraregas in similar ways. And, it is interesting to note in Macgillivray’s (or King’s) descriptions that changes have been made to heighten the survivor’s earliest reference to the eyes and the cheeks being eaten. The event is subsequently described more graphically as the eyes of the survivors being “scooped out and eaten with portions of flesh cut from the cheeks” (Macgillivray, 1852, p, 6). If the earlier reference says anything at all about cannibalism, it would be that it was a very isolated practice, and not as prevalent as supposed by the missionaries.

Beyond their reference to ‘savage’ behaviours, and the single incident of eating human parts recollected by the survivor, Ireland, there is little documented on the people of the Torres Strait to validate calling Islanders ‘cannibals’. What we have in the early missionary’s account of the Islanders being ‘bona fide cannibals’ then comes out of McFarlane’s (1888) references to: reports of cannibal practices in the “West India Islands” (p. 100); a story told by St. Jerome about the Scots eating human flesh and preferring “a ham of the herdsman or a piece of female breast” (p. 100); general observations of travellers to other parts of the globe, and from particular travellers who noted
Aborigines in New Zealand as “systematic feeders” (p. 101) of human flesh; from the story of “the Princess Lamballe in the French Revolution” (p. 101) who had her heart roasted in a restaurant and eaten, and from cannibal tales of the practice in Fiji, all supported by his “own experience of cannibal tribes” (p. 103).

Nowhere, however, in his publication does McFarlane cite one observation of eating human flesh witnessed by him in the islands. Indeed, as already mentioned, what people who spent some time in the region, portrayed in the early writings about Islanders, was quite different. For example, once known, according to Jukes (1847a, 1847b) and Macgillivray (1852a, 1852b), Islanders were found to be mostly hospitable and helpful to the early voyagers. They welcomed them. They willingly shared their water and food supplies. And they were found to be experienced traders by all who encountered them. All attributes which McFarlane was later to include as characteristics of the ‘noble savage’.

*The Noble Savage*

The view to the ‘noble savage’ was tied up with, and contingent on, what McFarlane (1888) considered and defined as the ideal “social state” (p. 129). Being a missionary, he contended that “[t]here must be some goal, [a view to] some state of perfection which we may never reach, but to which all true progress must bring us nearer” (pp. 129-30). He turned thus to the accepted position that,

it is a state of individual freedom and self-government, rendered possible by the equal development and just balance of the intellectual, moral, and physical parts of our nature - a state in which we shall each be so perfectly fitted for social existence by knowing what is right, and at the same time feeling an irresistible impulse to do what we know to be right, that all laws and all punishments shall be unnecessary. In such a state every man [sic] would have a sufficiently well-balanced intellectual organization [sic] to understand the moral law in all its details, and would
require no other motive but the free impulses of his own nature to obey that law. (McFarlane, 1888, p. 130)

Such a state of affairs closely resembled what was more commonly known as utopia – a state of perfection that is not of place but of imagination. McFarlane’s view of Islanders as ‘savages’ is curiously related to the accepted standpoint of the ideal state of humanity. An interesting position is posed by McFarlane (1888) about the proximity of the savage to his notion of the ideal social state. In his view,

the ‘noble savage’... in New Guinea [and the Torres Strait], where the natives are found in their primitive simplicity, the undisputed lords of the soil, displaying a proud independence, their lives void of care, and with little to excite either ambition or jealousy, as they see every one around them sharing the same lot, enduring the same hardships, feeding on the same food, and arrayed in the same rude garments. They have no laws or law courts (so far as we know), but the public opinion of the village freely expressed. Each man [sic] respects the rights of his fellows, and any infraction of those rights very rarely takes place. In these communities all are nearly equal. There are none of those wide distinctions of education and ignorance, wealth and poverty, master and servant, which are the product of our civilization [sic]. There is none of that widespread division of labour, which, while it increases wealth, produces also conflicting interests. There is not that severe competition and struggle for existence, or for wealth, which the dense population of civilized [sic] countries inevitably creates. All excitements to great crimes are thus wanting, and petty ones are suppressed, partly by the influence of public opinion, but chiefly by that natural sense of justice and of his [sic] neighbours’ rights which seems to be in some degree inherent in every race of man [sic]. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 131-2)

This was a very generous description afforded to Islanders and New Guineans. An almost utopian society uncontaminated by the evil of civilised worlds - a pristine wilderness - was seen by McFarlane (1888) to be free of want, enterprise, or care for possessing anything. Instead of competition and
division, he contended, there was sharing, equity, and a 'natural' sense of justice. There were no social foundations for any 'distinctions' to be made on the basis of wealth, status, education, or work. And this of course required no competing interests, no conflicts, indeed no 'excitement to great crimes'. The state of a utopian society thus needed no regulatory devices such as laws or law courts.

The world of civilised people by contrast was, according to McFarlane (1888), corrupt and, as we will see, corrupting. Civilisation, he argued, when seen in line with theories of evolution based on development, emerged out of "a state of primitive barbarism and savage existence" (p. 96). Christians in the civilised world then, according to McFarlane's view, emerged out of a corrupt and violent state whereas life in the 'noble savages' world emerged out of an ideal state that was essentially moral and egalitarian.

Take our country [England] for example. We are the richest nation in the world, and yet one twentieth of our population are parish paupers, and one thirtieth known criminals. Add to these the criminals who escape detention, and the poor who live mainly on private charity - which, according to Dr. Hawkesley, expends £7,000,000 sterling annually in London alone, - and we may be sure that more than one tenth of our population are actually paupers or criminals. Each criminals costs us annually in our prisons more than the wages of an honest agricultural labourer. We allow over 100,000 persons known to have no means of subsistence but crime to remain at large, and prey upon the community. Yet we like to boast of our rapid increase in wealth, of our enormous commerce and gigantic manufactures, of our mechanical skill and scientific knowledge, of our high civilization [sic] and Christianity, although perhaps it might be more justly termed a state of social barbarism. (McFarlane, 1888, p. 133).

Here begins a form of contrast emerging between people of the ideal state and the civilised worlds as well as a critique of the implicit social barbarism of progress. McFarlane (1888) posed here the view that people in civilised worlds seek only to produce and consume resources to create excess material
wealth. And in its continued development, in McFarlane's terms, civilisation was destined to be forever a state of conflict as well as destined to repeat its barbaric nature, poverty, and criminals that require costly regulatory devices. McFarlane was resolute in his stance on development and progress.

By contrast, he was clearly affected by a sense of Islander peoples as having emerged out of an 'ideal state':

In war they never stand up in orderly ranks and shoot at each other; according to their notions that would be the height of folly. Their favourite tactics are rather of the surprise and skirmishing order. I remember one of the chiefs questioning me about our mode of warfare, and his look of amazement when I described the rows of men placed opposite each other and firing at one another with guns. He eagerly inquired whether the men were within range, and when I replied in the affirmative he exclaimed: "then you are great fools. We thought you were wise men, but it seems you are fools." Then he asked where the chief stood. "Oh," I said, "he remains at home and sends his men to fight." At which there was a burst of laughter, the chief remarking proudly that New Guinea chiefs not only accompanied the fighting men, but kept in front. And it occurred to me that if we were to adopt a similar custom our wars would probably be less sanguinary" (McFarlane, 1888, p. 115).

There are tribal wars, as in civilized [sic] countries, although the natives do not yet understand the art of wholesale slaughter as we do, and moreover the man who makes the quarrel has to lead in the fight. Still they consider it perfectly right to plunder and kill the enemy. (p. 132)

The juxtaposition here of the different approaches to warfare entertained McFarlane somewhat. But his point was to highlight some of the hypocrisy associated with societies that emerged out of what he termed social barbarism.

However, in order for McFarlane to consider the Islander as a noble savage, he convinced himself that a state of utopia once existed in the Strait. The
balance that was achieved in such lifeworlds in the development of the 'intellectual, moral, and the physical parts of our nature' was seen by McFarlane to produce 'well-balanced' individuals who could self-regulate themselves according to moral laws. A society of people who have 'free impulses' to govern themselves achieved a lifestyle where there was individual freedom. And as far as McFarlane was concerned, the very essence, or the soul of the people in this part of the world, "in their low state of civilization" [sic] (p. 130), indicated that they were "approaching nearer that ideal social state" (p. 130). And, in this sense, it then appeared that ultimate care and protection was crucial to the survival of this state of being.

*The Lost Soul*

If the missionaries thought everything was so pristine in this secluded region of the world, and if the very souls of the people were in tune with the ideal state, why then were they there? The 'soul' is accepted by most as something special to a spiritual presence. However, it is also very much tied to the language that speaks of it. In order to bring out what is made of the soul, in the language that argues the soul is precious, under threat, and needs to be rescued, the first task then is to chart McFarlane's theoretical schema, in particular, his views on the state of things in the Islands and New Guinea, as he found it.

The founding elements in McFarlane's schema were, as we have just seen, (1) that the people of New Guinea and the Islands hailed from an ideal social state, and (2) that by contrast the civilised life of Christendom "begins in despotism" (p. 136) and hails "from a state of primitive barbarism and savage existence" (p. 96). To advance his perspective of the state of things in the savages' world, McFarlane had to provide a link between what was known at the time of 'development' in civilised worlds and what was relatively unknown in the Islands and New Guinea. McFarlane presented a very particular view of the way the region was affected by the West:
Now let us consider that the first empires which arose in the world were formed by descendants of Ham Nimrud, the grandson of Ham, who went into Assyria and founded Nineveh, and the city which he built and the empire he founded continued for ages to overshadow all western Asia. Mizraim, the son of Ham, founded the Egyptian monarchy and the Philistian commonwealth. Canaan, the fourth son of Ham, settled in Palestine, and his descendants founded first the Cannanitish kingdoms, then Tyre, and subsequently Carthage. These were for a very long time the leading nations of the world; they possessed its highest civilization (sic), and held all but a monopoly of its commerce. These young monarchies no doubt sent forth strong and vigorous colonies, which took possession of the Asiatic archipelago, Australia, New Guinea, and Western Polynesia. From the Asiatic archipelago they appear to have been driven out by a succeeding and superior race, who also in time being similarly treated by Malays, passed on to occupy the islands in Eastern Polynesia, fighting and mingling with the Papuans on their way; in some cases succeeding in driving them into the interior, and forming settlements on the coast, as on the southeast peninsula of New Guinea and some of the large islands in the South Sea. This pre-Malay or Polynesian race have left mementoes of their passage in the Polynesian names of various places, and in outlying remnants of their own race on scattered points of the Papuan archipelago. Perhaps the last and best confirmed attempt of these Polynesian names by which these islands and places in them are called even now by their Papuan inhabitants argues a permanence of residence that cannot be well disputed. The large infusion of Polynesian vocables in the Fijian language, and the mixture of the two races, especially in the south-eastern part of the group, indicate a protracted sojourn and an intercourse of peace as well as of war. I think the foregoing considerations plainly indicate the part of the world from which the people of New Guinea and Western Polynesia have migrated. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 98-9)

McFarlane's historical account here began with his underlining of development in the civilised world. He put the view that the first empires of the world were set up by descendants of Ham Nimrud in Syria, Egypt, and Palestine and it was they who extended their domain to the east and "took possession of the Asiatic archipelago, Australia, New Guinea, and Western
Polynesia" (p. 98). In the Asiatic archipelago, according to McFarlane, the colonists were challenged and driven out by another group of people. And, the people who succeeded the colonists from the Middle-East were later thrown out by the Malays and were said to have then travelled down the Asiatic countries, along the northern coastline of Papua New Guinea (known as Papua at the time), and settled in the eastern region of the Pacific we have come to know as Polynesia. McFarlane referred to them, in the preceding passage, as pre-Malays and subsequently as Polynesians. Whatever the 'truth' to this pattern of migration, the importance of this account was that it helped to establish the idea of the presence of corrupt influences (see McFarlane, 1888, pp. 130-1) from countries to the West. Indeed, this enabled McFarlane to explain that the civilising influence not only adversely affected the Melanesian people of Papua New Guinea along the way but drove them southwards into the interior, taking with them corrupt influences of Western civilisation all the way through to the coastline facing the Torres Strait. Likewise, this was how he explained why eastern areas of the Pacific (Polynesia) were more corrupt than the western areas (Melanesia).

I can testify to the possession of many noble qualities by the [Melanesian] cannibals. They are not deficient in courage, manliness, and even humanity, as some people foolishly declare them to be; and they are even distinguished for their hospitality. Indeed they are as a rule a good-tempered, liberal people - greatly superior in these qualities to their lighter coloured neighbours [pre-Malayans or Polynesians] who look down upon them....

The fact is, that the cannibal tribes make better houses, better canoes, better weapons, and better drums - and keep a better table, they would say - than their neighbours; indeed, they exhibit great skill and taste in carving; and any one who has visited both tribes will at once notice the good-natured hospitality of the cannibals, compared with the selfishness and greed of their neighbours, who are incorrigible beggars. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 103-4)

The migratory element in McFarlane's account helped to appropriate not only a new history to the people in this part of the world, but also the different
degrees of civilising influences in this part of the world and more importantly for him, it helped to explain his idea of the "retrograding" (p. 96) of a group of people in New Guinea and the Torres Strait from the ideal state (see next quote). Indeed, Islanders and New Guineans were now to be seen and understood as declining from the ideal state. And to promote his idea of retrogression further, he considered the languages of the region and the daily habits of people influenced by the march of civilisation across the globe.

McFarlane argued that if the 'development' theory is accepted communities would be progressing and becoming more refined. But, he continued, these people currently live as heathens and violent cannibals in a state of anarchy. If there is a view to evolution as developing out of barbarism, "where is the evidence that they are advancing in civilization [sic], intelligence, morality, or happiness?" (McFarlane, 1888, p. 96). To the contrary, he argued, "there is abundant evidence that both races [in New Guinea and the South Seas] are retrograding, and none whatever that they are advancing, except from influences from without" (p. 96). Languages found in these very 'primitive communities' he contended are fully formed and pronounced. He went on. The grammatical structure of the language and poetry can be likened to Hebrew. The practice of cremation and circumcision practised in these parts compared with those of ancient Greece. The stitching used in fishing nets were the same used in England. The worshipping of stone gods and the use
of charms can be related to the Shiva cult in India. And, the singing was of the kind that “Laban wished to send away Jacob” (p. 98).

The most logical answer, to McFarlane, was that the people of this region who now live in despotic lifeworlds must have once emerged out of a ‘higher civilisation’ but were now in the process of retrogression, and were declining into a barbaric state because of the early influences from countries to the West. McFarlane’s (1888) view of the state of affairs as he found them then, led him to a fundamental part of his theoretical schema that, “these natives have fallen from a higher civilization [sic], [and] that their progress [was] downwards, and that they [were] merely the remnant of a worn-out race” (p. 98). Indeed, he now had ‘savages’ who were not so noble, who had lost their souls, and were in the process of losing the very essence of the ultimate state of peace and goodwill, and who now required missionary intervention.

Missionary Intervention: From Darkness to Light
Intervention in missionary terms thus relies on the theoretical schema outlined above. Intervening was not easy, argued McFarlane (1888), as these were no ordinary ‘savages’ in the Islands and New Guinea. On his arrival in the region, he found that the people had already been affected by civilising influences from the West. They were now living in primitive conditions, dirty huts, and filth. They were going about their daily habits mostly naked except for some body ornaments. Where McFarlane supposed there was once a natural sense of justice and respect for individual rights, there was now no order and everyone did as they pleased. Where there was once sharing, equity, and no competition for resources, there was now greed, unrest, and tension in the community, which inevitably led to daily conflict. Children were now being neglected and families were troubled. If he found this state of things on his arrival, one can only wonder where he witnessed the exemplar communities of a utopian society. But, he was adamant that people in this part of the world were not like what was known of ‘savages’ in European countries. He contended, “[m]any people form their opinion of
savagedom from the miserable hordes of natives that hang on the skirts of European settlements” (p. 130). As civilised communities formed and took over their lands, they turned natives in Europe into degraded beings. As McFarlane recalled, these degraded beings who live outside the walls of these European settlements have been exposed to,

a thousand superfluous wants, leading to selfishness, covetousness, and arousing the basest passions of the soul. They become drunken, indolent, feeble, thievish, and pusillanimous.... in the face of civilization [sic] they feel keenly their numerous wants and repine in hopeless poverty, which, like a canker of the mind, corrodes their spirits and blights the free and noble qualities of their nature. Like vagrants they loiter about the settlements, once their happy hunting grounds, now covered with spacious dwellings replete with elaborate comforts, which only render them sensible of the comparative wretchedness of their own condition. Luxury spreads its ample board before their eyes, but they are excluded from the banquet. Plenty revels over the fields, but they are starving in the midst of its abundance. The whole wilderness has blossomed into a garden, but they feel as reptiles that infest it. (1888, pp. 130-1).

Such is the wrath of a civilisation that begins in despotism. McFarlane (1888) reminded us that “it is not amongst this class that we must look for the ‘noble savage’” (p. 131). Neither, he says, can we find it in the class of savages who lived within the walls of newly formed civilised societies:

[T]hose of us who have been behind the scene in the South Sea Islands, New Guinea, and in some of the large cities in this country [England], know very well there are thousands of persons (and some of them well educated) who hate civilization [sic], with all its restraints, with a hatred which is incurable by any fear, or any reward, or any kind of inspection. They are not criminals, as a rule, any more than the wild tribes are; but they are savages, loving above all things to live lives untrammelled by the infinite series of minute restraints and obligations which go to make up civilization [sic]. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 133-4)
Nor can the savages of the Islands and New Guinea be compared with a society of people that developed out of a barbaric state:

I believe that in every civilized [sic] community there is a considerable percentage of both men and women, to whom the first condition of external civilization [sic], the incessant taking of minute trouble, is utterly hateful, and who, if left to themselves, would not take it, but would prefer a condition of pure savagery. The rich, of course, seldom reveal this disposition, because others take the trouble for them; but unskilled labourers in this country, who earn possibly twelve shillings a week, who know nothing, and are pressed to throw off the burden of respectability, abandon furniture, give up the small decencies and formalities of life, and camp in a room on straw, as uncleanly and nearly as free as savages would be. They live from hand to mouth, shift from room to room, are beyond prosecution for money, drink if they have the cash, smoke somehow whether they have it or not, and are perfectly indifferent to the opinion of society - are, in fact, savages. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 134-5)

McFarlane's (1888) point here was that a clear view was needed as to what kind of savage he was faced with in the Islands and New Guinea. They were unlike the savages 'back home'. Savages in the Strait have not been affected to the same degree as natives in Europe. Neither are they like the savages within civilised societies who have been confined within the walls of a new morality and regulated by strange laws. He is resolute in his stance on Islanders and New Guineans, and because of the relatively little civilising influence in these parts of the world, he has "no hesitation in pronouncing the savages of Christendom infinitely worse than those of heathendom, and infinitely more difficult to improve" (p. 134). Islanders, to McFarlane, were closer to the ideal state and residual elements of the ideal state could still be found in the community. He was as determined about his view of the honourable position the people held in the Islands as he was with his form of intervention. Consequently the following proposition was made to preserve lifeworlds of a people who were not so distant from the ideal state.
Now I can conceive but one remedy for this savagery wherever it exists, and that is religion - a pure simple, elevating religion, like that of Jesus Christ. You cannot elevate savage tribes in heathendom by giving them tomahawks and tobacco, beads and blankets; for they will soon sell these, and even their food, for brandy. Nor can you elevate the savages of Christendom by putting them in good houses and providing them with honest work, for very soon your model houses would be like styes [sic], and the honest work abandoned. My contention is however that, supposing both classes of savages to embrace the gospel, those of heathendom find themselves nearer the goal which civilization [sic] has been aiming at and striving for during many centuries. What we are pleased to term civilization [sic] generally begins in despotism, or, I might even say, in murder and plunder. A country is seized, the land appropriated, and the natives subdued, and placed under laws. Then, as education advances, and the subdued begin to feel their power, the struggle begins, and goes on for ages, between radicals and conservatives; the one trying to regain the rights and liberties of their fathers, and the other trying to retain what was gained by conquest. All I can say is, that I devoutly hope that New Guinea [and the islands] may be preserved from such civilising influences. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 135-6)

The missionary intervention thus came to operate on two basic premises. The first was the need to inculcate Islanders into a moral world through what McFarlane termed ‘a pure simple religion’ and the second was the need to insulate them from any encroachment from the ‘civilised’ worlds. McFarlane (1888) was convinced that he was on a mission to rescue “the multitude of souls who have lost the image of God” (p. 24). Indeed, for these ‘lost souls’, he believed that the gospel was not “only the best civilizer [sic], the best reformer, and the best handmaid to science, but that it [was] the only way to eternal life” (p. 24). It was the only means of preventing the natives from being overcome by ‘human progress and civilisation’.

The intervention that ensued was described by McFarlane (1888) to be particular to the communities in the region and appropriate to the Islander people and their languages. The missionaries established sixty mission
Training institutions for native evangelists were also established at Mer (Murray Island) and Port Moresby to assist in the mission to 'rescue the lost souls'. And, after a few short years of their occupation in these parts, the missionaries documented six languages or dialects (McFarlane was not able to distinguish in his text which was a language and which was a dialect) whereupon they moved to produce from them local readings of the New Testament, hymn books, catechism, and curriculum materials for teaching the natives. In triumphalist terms, McFarlane noted the following:

In our mission work in New Guinea we have had to contend with difficulties quite peculiar to the place. We have had to sail in unknown and dangerous waters in order to reach the natives. We have had to contend with savages and cannibals, who regard strangers generally as enemies to be killed, cooked, and eaten. We have had to pass through sickly swamps and be exposed to deadly fevers in planting and superintending our mission stations. We have had to reduce the languages to writing, and translate portions of the Scriptures, school books, and hymn books into them. We have had to battle with the evil influences of abandoned sailors, although we have been helped rather than otherwise by many of the visitors and travellers who have come to New Guinea. We have had to guide the natives in making and administering laws, in developing the resources of their country, in building houses, making roads, and, in fact, in everything connected with their material as well as their spiritual progress. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 184-5)

Because communities were seen to be easily corrupted by the civilising influences from countries to the West, McFarlane and others persisted in their mission despite suffering and hardship in one of the most isolated regions of the globe. Their goal was to bring the gospel to the people, rescue the lost souls, and put them back on the right path towards the ideal state. Given that McFarlane also held the view that the people had no worthwhile laws left, it seemed an obvious need to make new ones. The missionaries regarded this as a justifiable act because laws needed to be established to gain some order to
things so that communal life could be restored and religious teachings take place. However, despite McFarlane's professed reverence for the 'noble' savage's ideal state it was not that condition that informed the formation of laws. Instead the missionaries saw it fit to appropriate remedies and reforms that worked in civilised societies in Europe. Indeed, what they achieved through their intervention was strikingly similar to the reforms made to societies in Christendom that hailed from the aggressive state. Armed only with intervention strategies based in countries in the West, the reforms inevitably led the Islander society back down the path of the West's own despotic beginnings. But, as McFarlane indicates below, the reforms were done under the guidance of the gospel, as well as by the peoples' revelation of God. The missionaries intended the reforms to be well ordered and without the divisions witnessed in civilised communities in Europe. And they were proud of their achievements:

Let the present appearance and condition of some of the towns and villages where we have mission stations be compared with what they were fifteen years ago, and the difference is truly wonderful. Instead of the war song, the cannibal feast, and the night dance, churches and schools and family worship are established. Instead of the wild-looking appearance of the people, dressed in feathers and shells and paint, they are now respectably clothed, and ashamed of their former appearance and habits. Instead of dirt huts, lazy and cruel husbands, and neglected children, there are now well built houses, industrious and kind husbands, and bright and intelligent children. Instead of every man doing as he liked, which led to village quarrels, plunder, and war, there are now laws established, magistrates and policemen appointed, and law and order prevail.... Instead of heathenism and cannibalism, there is springing up a growing education and a thriving trade. Side by side with the preaching of the gospel goes the social improvement of the natives. (McFarlane, 1888, pp. 188-9)

In other terms, there was no longer a view of returning the people in these parts of the world to the 'ideal state' but a view to making them civil people and "furnish[ing] [them] with the useful appliances of civilized [sic] life
(McFarlane, 1888, p. 189). But, as the missionaries noted, it was done without corrupting them with the evil influences of civilised countries of the West. The mission’s approach to the rescuing of lost souls, according to McFarlane, was the only thing that could help them out of their evil ways and insulate them from the evils of the West.

our primary project in going there was not that we might render it safe to land upon its shores... it was not that we might render life and property secure whilst the miner digs for coal, iron, and gold, which are known to exist there... although we are fully persuaded that the introduction of Christianity will do this more effectually than anything else: it was not the treasures of the country, but the inhabitants that we sought. (McFarlane, 1888, p. 24)

The missionaries cast the role of Christianity in a positive way. At the same time, however, the process of the exploitation of people and the appropriation of their natural resources was in full swing. What the missionaries proposed was that they provided a more effective transition for indigenous peoples in times of the development of civilisation. Indeed, there was a case that progress, influenced by the West was inevitable. It would appear obvious then that the shielding of Islanders from the ravages of a world developing out of a barbaric state was a noble act by the missionaries.

Summary

McFarlane’s mission, undertaken under the auspices of the London Missionary Society, rested on a romantic view about the past ‘ideal state’ of the Islanders and a view that in the future they could be ‘saved’ from a further fall by Christian guidance. However, all McFarlane’s points of reference for interpretation and action in relation to the mission’s goal in the Torres Strait and New Guinea came quite clearly from the missionary’s own worldview. They came from his own critique of civilisation, his own view of the savage, from his resolute belief in the transformative power of the gospel, and a belief that missionary intervention could stem the influence of creeping civilisation.
McFarlane’s schema was not his alone and was not founded only in religious knowledge. It was also founded in understandings of cultural diversity that were current at that time. McFarlane’s understanding was dearly derived from nineteenth century evolutionism which dominated theories of culture in that century. According to this schema, cultures were understood to ‘progress’ through stages of development - the pinnacle being European culture. Though different scholars theorised the stages in different ways, one of the most influential schemas was that of Lewis Henry Morgan who divided the evolution of culture into three stages of savagery, barbarism and civilisation. Although this was a cultural schema, most nineteenth century scholars (excluding Marx) adhered as well to a theory of biological evolutionism which postulated that cultures evolved in conjunction with the evolution of human biological types and races.

Adhering to this schema, McFarlane posited Islanders as people who had not progressed but who had ‘remained the same’, and further on, as people who had fallen from a higher state. This allowed him to instate his view that Islander people once came from noble backgrounds and were thus capable of having their souls restored. This schema also enabled him to locate Islanders at a particular stage in development. This provided him a particular view of Islanders’ (then) current predicament in the face of encroachment, from not just ‘civilisation’ but in particular the more ‘barbaric’ elements of the civilised world. It was McFarlane’s use of this schema, his descriptions of a perceived encounter between utopia and social barbarism that posited Islanders and New Guineans as heathens living in darkness, and living under the evils of idolatry. By inserting his view (also part of a wider historical schema) of the migration of races across to this part of the world, he ascribed to the Islanders a new history. This was a history that was relatively untouched by ‘civilisation’ yet corrupted from a previous ‘higher’ state by the contact with a migrating pre-Malay group of people.
What this achieved was a particular view to the predicament of the people. He had the necessary historical schema to name the problem and name the solution as he saw fit. Once incorporated into a world contaminated by aspects of civilisation from countries of the West, McFarlane enabled us to see people who were self-interested, dirty, indolent, cruel, and living in a state of anarchy. Once configured and inscribed in history as destitute, the missionaries then deemed it necessary to rescue the souls of the people from the labyrinth of a once noble society that was deemed to be in a state of retrogression. Comparisons were made to Christendom in Europe, in particular, that societies in heathendom were not like theirs ‘back home’, but that, having been influenced by aspects of civilisation, required the same intervention and remedies that worked so well in civilised societies. All rested on a single principle and that was that the people of Torres Strait hailed from an ideal state. But, where were the exemplar communities that could demonstrate that Islanders hailed from such backgrounds?

What the missionary view did not include was the lived reality of Islanders in all its complexity, its own history, and its own goals. The Islander that is represented in the missionary’s text is not the Islander as he would have described himself and his world, other than the fleeting glimpses recorded in responses of Islanders as illustrated in the opening quote of this chapter. Instead, we have an Islander whose own understanding of history was not included and who was thus re-configured in relation to European religious and historical knowledge. We have the presentation of the Islanders’ humanity characterised as the noble savage who lived in heathendom in relation to the European savage who lives in Christendom. That is, we have the Islander characterised in relation to European scientific knowledge. We have the Islander’s then current position presented as the lost soul that needed to be rescued and an intervention followed that went on to re-order the Islander world in relation to the order in the ‘civilised’ or European world.
McFarlane's text provides an exemplar of the beginning of a systematic way of thinking about and for understanding the Islander – who the Islander is and what sort of intervention the Islander requires in the light of this. In this case, McFarlane’s written account and the pursuit of his goals for the mission project drew from a particular and narrow positioning of Islanders as needing to be rescued and remade. In his descriptions of Islanders outlined above as cannibal, as noble savage, as lost soul, he builds a logical argument that missionary intervention was a good and worthy project.

My aim in this chapter was to show that the relationship between Islanders and Europeans that was established in this missionary intervention, was not merely a consequential or material outcome of missionaries' practical and actual re-organisation of Islander society. It was constituted in a schema which was itself embedded in the religious and scientific knowledges of the European world through which McFarlane articulated and rationalised his mission's goals and which thus pre-ordered Islander lives and their relationships with Europeans.

McFarlane's text represents less the position of Islanders and more the missionary's position derived from his own understandings of developmental theory through which he comes to an understanding of Islanders.