

Torres Strait and *Dawdhay*: Dimensions of Self and Otherness on Yam Island¹

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ABSTRACT

When Papua New Guinea attained independence two decades ago an **absolute** distinction was created between Papua New Guinea and the Torres Strait: Papuans were firmly placed in Papua New Guinea territory and Torres Strait Islanders in Australian territory. In constituting themselves as Torres Strait Islanders and more specifically as Australians, Yam Island people's contemporary expressions of their connection to, yet distance from, lowland Papua New Guinea can be best described as ambivalent, pulsing between identification and incorporation, distance and disavowal.

I argue that this ambivalence is not an artefact of the establishment of the border *per se*, but rather it was through the establishment of the border that a new layer was added to Self and Other constructions by Yam Island people in terms of how they see themselves and their Papuan neighbours. The sometimes fraught nature of this relationship can be understood in light of the continuing socio-political impacts of these international border lines on people who have recently combined a somewhat legalistic and political definition of themselves, and of Papuans, with perennial extra-legal definitions. I suggest it is in isolating and exploring domains of interaction that we can see the fluidity and dynamism of Self and Other definitions in operation, and in so doing better appreciate their essential imbrication.

The people used to live over at Tudu,² Warrior Island. That's where that old King Kebisu used to live. He was a great warrior you know, quite an unbeatable bloke... The canoes from Papua New Guinea came across trading ...or for other reasons. And everytime they came they lost their heads. He [Kebisu] collected all their heads and treasured them.

(Mr Getano Lui snr, pers. comm. 1980)

When Papua New Guinea attained independence from Australia in 1975 an international border was created, leading to a strict demarcation of spheres of influence and control between two nation states. Prior to this drawing of new lines on a map, Torres Strait Islanders and their Papuan neighbours were part of the same nation-state. The new international border, however, firmly placed Papuans in Papua New Guinean territory and Torres Strait Islanders in Australian territory, thereby having repercussions for the ways in which two groups of people resident within those countries constitute themselves and each other. In this paper I draw upon some examples from Yam, a small island community in the Torres Strait, anchored firmly within the borders of Australia, to show that with the emergence of Papua New Guinea as an independent state, an extra dimension or layer has been added to the ways in which they have come to perceive themselves and their Papuan neighbours. My argument is that the sometimes fraught nature of this relationship may be better understood in light of the continuing socio-political impacts of the international border line on people who have combined this somewhat legalistic, and political distinction of themselves from

Papuans, with perennial extra-legal definitions of their relationship. More specifically it is argued that this relationship may be better characterised as ambivalent, and that indeed this relationship may have always been ambivalent.

The quotation at the beginning of this paper beautifully articulates the ambivalence Yam Island people express about this Papuan connection. In extolling the virtues and indomitable power of Kebisu, the legendary nineteenth century Yam-Tudu leader, the speaker collapses the exchange and feuding relations between Tudu and *Dawdhay* (Papua) into equivalent and simultaneous occasions of trade and headhunting, with the taking of Papuan heads being posited as the inevitable outcome of each exchange encounter. This conflation of a complex set of relations which continue to obtain between Yam-Tudu Islanders and Papuan villagers, exemplifies an oscillating tension and ambivalence in which Papuan villagers are conceptualised by Yam Island people as being both friends and foe, Self and Other.³

In looking at the ways in which such ambivalence is typically expressed, I suggest that the boundaries between these Selves and Others, in this particular social context, are more suitably viewed as being both mutable and contextual. In examining the areas of overlap in social interaction from this perspective, we are better able to appreciate the fluid dynamic between cultural groups. Furthermore, it enables us to understand that conceptualising membership in one group or the other as being essentially dichotomous, misrepresents the fundamental dynamic of identity construction and negotiation. This is particularly the case at the level of close, social interactions. The work of Bhabha (1983; 1984) is especially enlightening for this topic in the manner in which he looks at the contradictory, transgressive, ambivalent, disturbing and confirmatory spaces and sites within which selves are constructed and deconstructed. His work allows us to shift our gaze from the unifying characteristics of self-realisation and construction, to the shifting and slippery dimensions which necessarily come into play.

A group or an individual is simultaneously subjectively defined, as a Self, and as an Other comprised of external 'objective' definitions (Epstein 1978: 14). Such classifications are 'mutually determinative' (Errington & Gewertz 1995: 4). When we take into consideration the components of identity which the majority society attempts to impose on minority cultural groups in the nation-state, we can see how these external definitions all serve to impinge on and challenge a group's self-concepts and sense of identity. These external definitions may be taken on board, for instance, as a Looking Glass Self (Cooley 1902), in which people come to see themselves as others see them; they may be contested, or in still other instances they may be subverted. The predominantly ascribed identity defined by the Australian nation-state for Torres Strait Islanders and Papuans, and the emergence of Papua New Guinea as an independent nation, constitutes only one component of the backdrop against which Yam Islanders have constructed tropes of themselves and of Papuans.⁴

In this article I consider some of the subjective dimensions of the Yam Island self — at both the individual and group levels — and the domains within which these selves, these particular subjectivities are enacted. I illustrate how Yam Islanders' associations and self-definitions in relation to their Papuan neighbours, at the village, regional, national and international levels, pulse between degrees of inclusion and exclusion, incorporation and disavowal. For all human beings the forms and content of the Self and the Other are essentially variable and fluid: the Other 'expands as "us" contracts and contracts as "us" expands' (Carrier 1992: 207), and this can be seen to have been occurring for Yam Island people in the ways in which they have defined and imagined both themselves and Papuans.

Yam Island is situated in the Central administrative and cultural region of the Torres Strait, a mere 70km to the south of coastal Papua. This tiny island of 2km is currently home to some 250 residents, primarily descendants of the Kulkalgal of Tudu-Yam and Gebar. The original Yam Islanders were principally based on the nearby island of Tudu, but as part of their colonial history, were relocated permanently on Yam at the turn of the century. The

islands of Tudu, Gebar, Mukar and Zegey still constitute an essential component of the physical, social and historical universe of Yam Island people. Not only are these islands regularly exploited in subsistence activities, but they continue to occupy an integral place in the self-constructions of Yam Island people.

Traditionally the Kulkalgal of Tudu-Yam occupied an intermediary position in the Torres Strait, both geographically and culturally, and played a significant role in inter-island and island-Papuan exchange networks. They commanded fishing, shell-fishing and travel along the extensive Warrior Reefs (Haddon 1935: 75), and maintained their power base through the advantages of trade and involvement in endemic warring and the taking of heads. The patri-moiety based *Sigay-Mayaw* cult on Yam was dedicated to the pursuit of warfare.

Because of its central location, peoples from the Eastern and Western islands in the Torres Strait travelled to Tudu to trade (Beckett 1978), and Moresby (1876) attributed the power of the Kulkalgal to this prime location, and to their ownership of several large canoes originating in *Dawdhay* (Papua). Exchange networks criss-crossed the area, connecting Torres Strait Island peoples with each other, with Cape York peoples to the south, and with coastal Papuans to the north. So critical was the connection with Papua, that Beckett has claimed the regional Torres Strait economy was 'underwritten' by the Papuans (1987:26).

Exchange relations between lowland Papuan villages and Yam Island have a long, well established history (Landtman 1927; Haddon 1935, 1904; M. Kelly pers. comm. 1982; Laade 1968). Maino of Yam-Tudu, whose leadership spanned the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, told MacFarlane the association between *Dawdhay* and Tudu began when a Papuan villager travelled to Tudu in a canoe. There he was befriended by two brothers and subsequently fathered several children with one of their daughters. Eventually his Papuan son found him on Tudu, and the population further increased. The son returned to Papua and a few days later canoes from Tudu followed him, heralding the beginning of exchange relations between Tudu and *Dawdhay*. Meidha, the first Yam Islander, is credited with having forged these links between Yam-Tudu people and the villagers of Tureture, Old Mawat, and Mabaduan (W. MacFarlane 1928-1929). In 1893 Sir William MacGregor spoke of the close association between Tudu and Papua, noting that most of the Tudu Islanders' food came from these villages (White 1981; Haddon 1935: 74; Laade 1968: 152-53). These three remain the prime Papuan villages with which Yam Island people continue to interact in the 1990s.

Dramatic changes for Torres Strait Island people were heralded with the intermittent appearance of Europeans in their waters from the 1600s, and their more regular incursions in the 1840s. During the first few decades of sustained contact with outsiders, traditional power bases were fundamentally altered. Commercial fisheries in concert with missionary and government activity in the Torres Strait region since the late 1800s effected innumerable changes in the islands. Through the *bêche-de-mer* and pearl shelling industries alone, warfare was discouraged, Yam-Tudu social organisation was undermined, and the micro-environments of their tiny islands were badly damaged. They became increasingly sedentary and progressively men, women and children were forced into work schedules which not only interrupted their traditional schedules, but meant they now worked for a master. On Tudu there was an uneasy balance of truce and warfare between the Kulkalgal and the invaders. The establishment of *bêche-de-mer* and pearlshell fishing stations on the island in the 1860s fundamentally changed the nature of the interactions, with the infamous warrior Kebisu and his people agreeing to terms laid down by the station owner.

By the time the London Missionary Society missionaries approached the Central Islands of the Torres Strait in the 1870s, the Kulkalgal had already been brought under a good deal of control by the use of colonial and individual force on the frontier. The missionaries were involved in banning particular cultural practices, the destruction of sites of significance, regulation of social life, the introduction of new material goods, training clergy,

creating new positions of leadership and influence, and introducing new ideas and new rituals, both secular and sacred (Fuary 1991). Unlike his successor Maino who availed himself of the new systems of authority, the leader Kebisu oscillated between appearing to accept the compounding authority and power of the shellers, government officials and missionaries, and resorting to direct violence and subterfuge (Fuary 1991).

The subsequent institutionalisation of Tudu-Yam people on a reserve at Yam Island under church and government control in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their nominal deinstitutionalisation with the abolition of reserve status in the 1980s, is especially significant in having produced contradictory notions of self and community. Yam Islanders have become increasingly incorporated into a politicoeconomic order in which they are fundamentally dependent on the state. Currently their interests are represented at the village and regional levels by elected councils responsible for negotiating the ever-changing parameters of State and Federal government. In comparison to the non-Torres Strait Islander Australian population, Yam Island people experience unacceptably high rates of morbidity and mortality, endemic unemployment, and relatively constrained educational opportunities.

Part of what has resulted from the colonial experience for the Kulkalgal of Yam-Tudu is the emergence of an identity signifying their lives as Yam Islanders, in which the distant pre-colonial past, the recent past, and the present radiate outwards to connect people with each other, with Yam Island, and with its territories. They engage in practices which actualise and signify their essential identity and difference from other Australians. These practices all denote who Yam Islanders are today and connect them with who they see themselves as having been, both prior to the invasion of their waters by Europeans, and since. Central to this Yam Island sense of self is a recognition of the long term processes of colonialism by which they acknowledge and celebrate their descent from a number of peoples: the fierce Tudu men and women; a variety of Pacific Islander, South East Asian and Caribbean men and women; women and men from other Torres Strait islands; and from specific Papuan villages. These great grandparents connect the Yam Island people of the 1990s to particular times and phases of the colonial process, and their children and grandchildren connect them to the recent past, present and future.

Yam Island people build their sense of in-group consciousness and being through the recurrent use of idiosyncratic salient images, through particular ways of relating and interacting with one another, and through specific ways of acting in a more general sense. They have their own stories, sites, culture heroes, kin, history, and styles of doing things. Their ways of speaking, dancing, singing, drumming, honouring the dead and utilising the environment are locally regarded as constituting unique variations on a common Torres Strait theme (Fuary 1991). The environment serves as a physical and social metaphor of belonging, association, and tradition: it constitutes a vehicle for symbolically expressing an historical and cultural identity unique to Yam Island people.⁵ They proudly represent themselves as descendants of the great warrior Kebisu, who have a special relationship with a supernatural being resident on the nearby island of Gebar. They also characterise themselves as having a propensity to be always late, as being great lovers of seafood, especially the dependable *zaram*, (a perch sp.) so easily caught in their lagoons; and as having been sustained over many generations by reciprocal exchange relations with certain Papuan villagers. In these relations they recognise the reciprocal provision of goods and services, an expression of equivalence between themselves and their exchange partners, while at the same time seeing themselves as having exerted power over unspecified Papuans, particularly in the regular taking of heads.

Yam Islanders not only see themselves as Islanders *per se*, but recognise themselves as being unique, in much the same way they know themselves to be people of the 1990s. To be a Yam Island person is to know how to inhabit a specific social and physical universe, and how to use and relate to it in culturally circumscribed ways. A number of Papuan villages and villagers with whom the cultural history of Yam Island is imbricated constitute part of

this social and physical universe. Yam is sometimes jokingly referred to as Small Mabaduan; the outstation, as it were, of Mabaduan village, and a significant proportion of its total population fluctuating between 200–250, comes from such coastal Papuan villages.

The question of numbers of Papuans resident on Yam Island is a complicated one. Marriages have occurred between Yam Islanders and Papuans for hundreds of years, and continue to take place in the 1990s. Of those extended families who steadfastly identify as Yam Island people, most contain at least one member who has a Papuan parent, grandparent or great-grandparent, a Papuan spouse, or a child to a Papuan. These families do not consider themselves Papuan; in fact, they regularly downplay these genealogical ties. In terms of self-definition they are Yam Island people, but they may be externally defined by others, particularly bureaucrats or short-term visitors, as Papuan. Thus, as controlling subjects, such Yam Island people do not identify as Papuans, yet as controlled subjects they are defined by outsiders (the controlling subjects in this instance), as Papuan.

On the other hand, there is a significant, distinct, floating population in addition to a long-term residential population of people, who are identified both subjectively and objectively, as Papuans. In 1980 for instance, there were five core Papuan households on Yam Island. Of the adult males consistently resident on Yam Island during 1980, 11 out of the 39 were themselves either born in the Western Province of Papua New Guinea or both their parents had been born there. Likewise, 13 of the 49 adult females were from Papua New Guinea. By 1985 about half the population of Yam, which then comprised some 15 households, had come from the villages of Mabaduan and Tureture within recent decades. These people built their numbers on a foundation of immigrants who had obtained Australian citizenship or permanent residence status since the 1970s, with the attainment of Papua New Guinea's independence. One Papuan family in particular has had an association with Yam Island spanning four generations. All heads of these families have been adopted into Island families thereby acquiring Islander names and honorary Islander status. In most local and particularly in formal, public interactions these immigrants are accorded Islander status, however at the informal, private level, the 'Papuan-ness' of these people is regularly noted and discussed.

Since the late 1980s and into the 1990s there has been an exponential increase in the number of Papuan households, resulting from reproduction and through younger family members having established their own households as married adults. Yam also plays host to many temporary Papuan visitors who come to trade, socialise and participate in the commercial crayfishing industry. Some visitors have attached themselves to already established Papuan households, attracted by the more affluent lifestyle of Yam Island compared to village life in coastal Papua, and by the better prices paid in Australia for crayfish.

Trading relations between Yam Islanders and their Papuan neighbours continue to be maintained, celebrated and staunchly defended. Canoes and dinghies from Mabaduan, and to a lesser extent Tureture, regularly visit Yam Island. In the 1980s when quarantine regulations were introduced prohibiting the movement of foodstuffs between Papua and the islands, Yam Islanders stressed that the esteemed bush foods of taro, yams and bananas had always been crucially important exchange items, and had sustained them for generations. They were incredulous at the suggestion of disease being brought into the Torres Strait via such highly valued foods, and one resident Papuan commented poignantly that 'it's white man's food which kills people' (the late Mrs Zipporah David pers. comm. 1980). Yam Island people's continuing physical and cultural well-being and growth was seen to be predicated on the nurturing properties of food grown in the Papuan bush, exemplified by the following statement by another elderly Yam Island woman: 'We grew on that food' (the late Mrs Cessa Harry pers. comm. 1981).

When Papuan canoes and dinghies arrive on Yam the exchange is both formal and informal, material and non-material (Fuary 1991). The non-material cultural interchange includes dancing displays, healing practices, adoption, the consolidation of old relationships

and the establishment of new ones. Many exchange transactions between Papuans and Yam Islanders do not occur as reciprocal exchange *per se*. Most families have established, clearly stipulated and often inherited links of friendship and exchange with specific Papuan individuals, and Papuan gifts of food, mats, baskets and drums symbolise the continuing significance of these relationships. In exchange, the Yam Island family provides meals, cigarettes, accommodation, household items, clothing and foodstuffs, before the Papuans are dispatched to work in the gardens to clear, or to erect fences to keep pigs away from crops. At a superficial level, Yam Island people may be seen to be playing a very powerful role in these interactions by putting Papuan visitors to work. Yet, Papuan visitors willingly engage in this labour. Their 'being at home' in the bush gardens adds to a generalised Yam Island uncertainty about what they may or may not do there. This no doubt reinforces the non-material and non-physical power Papuans are seen to exert in the Yam Island context.

Both Yam Islanders and Papuans rely on these reciprocal and market exchange transactions. Much of what is obtained from the Papuans is considered customary Islander goods and services. In return Islanders provide their Papuan exchange partners with material items, some of which can be used to raise school fees for their children's education. Through these visits the historico-cultural interconnectedness between coastal Papuans and Yam Islanders is reaffirmed and publicly recognised, and the fluctuating states of being, oscillating between varying degrees of perceived powerfulness and powerlessness, continue to be experienced and expressed.

At these island-village levels of interaction, Yam Islanders as Australians (and thus as members of the *ex-colonising nation in Papua New Guinea*), may see themselves as more politically powerful than Papuans. By virtue of their incorporation into the state they have access to wealth through wages and Social Service payments, goods and services (such as education and health) which their Papuan exchange partners do not have but so obviously desire. And yet through their incorporation, Yam Islanders have become increasingly dependent on the state (cf. Carter 1988).

In order for the coastal Papuans to retain their independence, and to acquire the material goods they desire, they engage in more 'customary' action which feeds into Yam Islander conceptualizations of them as materially poor yet culturally very powerful. This expresses itself in an *ambivalent relationship based on disavowal yet incorporation between Yam Islanders and Papuan villagers*, also expressed in Yam Islanders alternately seeing themselves as being in control and yet being controlled. For example with visitors who over-stay their welcome, Yam Islanders are generally cautious about engaging in any direct confrontation which could be regarded as provocative. Because of the perceived power of Papuans, as Other, Yam Islanders speculate about the range of possible institutional strategies by which to repatriate Papuans rather than by employing more obvious and direct means. The everyday manifestation of this view of Torres Strait Islanders as Self and Papuans as Other was highlighted elsewhere in the Torres Strait in 1996 with one group of Islanders calling for the imposition of an official evening curfew on Papuan visitors (*Cairns Post* 1996:7).

Yam Islanders also engage with Papua New Guineans at the national and international levels. In these arenas they are impressed with the authority and power of black men and women running their own country and negotiating directly with powerful others. Getano Lui (jnr), the current Chairman of the regional Island Co-ordinating Council, previous Chair of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, and continuing Chairman of Yam Island Community Council, is a leading political figure who in recent years has been involved in direct negotiations between the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments over such concerns as wastes from the Ok Tedi gold and copper mine washing into Torres Strait. In this international arena, Torres Strait politicians, as minority members of the Australian nation-state are drawn into direct negotiation with Papua New Guinean politicians, as leaders of their own sovereign state. The vastly different negotiating powers held by Torres Strait politicians and Papua New Guinean politicians is powerfully signalled in political events such as these.

Nevertheless, Torres Strait politicians do engage in direct discussions and negotiations with the Australian and State governments. The location of the Torres Strait on the most northerly frontier of Australia, in addition to both governments' perennial anxieties about diseases, drugs and illegal immigrants flooding into Queensland and Australia undetected, combine to produce a powerful political cocktail. Not surprisingly, it is the border with Papua New Guinea that is seen as problematic, and by extension, the uncontrolled flow of Papuans in and out of Torres Strait. The border, those outside it, and those crossing it, are the loci of many fears and dangers: illegal entry, exploitation of local resources, drug and weapons smuggling, disease, and threats to animal and plant health (see *Torres News* February to June 1999).

Whenever this situation becomes intolerable for Torres Strait Islanders, government fears are skillfully translated into political and social capital by local politicians. Strong pressure is placed on government to improve funding and regional infrastructure, and to take seriously Torres Strait calls for increased autonomy; should this not be forthcoming, suggestions are made that the border and customs surveillance, and the provision of health services to Papuans in need, may require re-assessment. The playing of this trump card was most recently exemplified in April 1999 with the influx of distressed Papuans escaping the floods in Western Province. The outcries from Getano Lui (jnr) of the Island Co-ordinating Council and John Abednego of the Torres Strait Regional Authority focussed on the drain on already limited local health services, and called for adequate funding so that costs were borne by the government and not by individual Torres Strait communities (see *Torres News* 30 April-6 May 1999: 2).

Such calls are seriously treated by both State and Federal governments who cannot afford to lose too much support from Torres Strait Island politicians. Given that in early to mid 1999 there were several incidents of people being smuggled into various places in Far North Queensland, New South Wales, and Western Australia, the political significance of Torres Strait Islanders continuing to perform a *de facto* role of being the 'eyes and ears' of government (*Torres News* 12-18 March; 28 May-3 June; 18-24 June 1999), cannot be under-estimated. For in the Torres Strait it is they who keep at bay 'the Other' in all its manifestations.

SELFHOOD AND OTHERNESS

The construction of any one identity at any point in time in any given context is essentially fluid and impossible to encapsulate. The kaleidoscopic nature of identity is a necessary attribute of the fluctuating contingencies of self-construction. Identity is by its very nature discursive. In constituting their selves people engage in multiple discourses with themselves and with others about themselves.⁶ They are reflexively engaged in the reciprocal constitution of their selves; by evaluating their places in the world *vis-à-vis* others, and acting upon those evaluations, these automatic, negotiated selves are enabled to act in the world.

At both the group and individual levels the identification of Self with 'like others' in opposition to 'unlike Others' is contingent, dialectical, dialogical and processual. It relates to degrees of knowing and not knowing based on familiarity and strangeness, liking and antipathy, association and separation, distance and intimacy. Contrasts are established between Self, in the forms of 'I', 'We' and 'Us' and Other, in the shape of 'You', 'They' and 'Them' (Said 1978). At one end of the continuum the relationship between Self and Other may be viewed as an interpenetration of subjects, while at the opposite end it approaches a relationship between subject and object. Within these two end points is a vast array of possible permutations. In a recent work, Said (1993) explored the overlap between people, places, and notions of selves, and in so doing orchestrated a move away from the dichotomous construction of Self and Other to a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamic and effects of shared experiences. Self and Other only make sense in their contrapuntal and dialectical relationship with each other. They are not discreet nor indeed undif-

ferentiated categories let alone modes of being: to be, in effect, is to be in motion. To be a Yam Islander for instance, is to be also engaged with Papuan villages in the fluctuating contingencies of their lives, to be connected but disconnected, to be similar yet different, to have common origins yet distinct cultural trajectories and identities.

On Yam Island the construction and practice of Self and personhood is predicated on levels of inclusion and exclusion fanning out from the individual and from the group. The overlapping and shifting domains in which the self is negotiated and constituted, range from the intimate domain of a small group of people who are known and loved (which includes friends, partners and close relatives), to the household, the village, other islands, the Torres Strait region, the national, and the international domains. Each of these categories and domains is comprised of its own dimensions with its own dynamic. The Other which is posited and reflected on by the 'controlling subject' within each of these domains becomes increasingly ascribed and fixed as the social distance from the individual and/or the group increases. This is especially obvious at the national and international levels wherein the externally defined Other is less able to represent itself as the degrees of intimacy and dialogue decrease. While this Other is voiceless (Torgovnick 1990) in the informal, private reflections of Yam Islanders, it has a strong and controlling voice in the formal, political contexts of international negotiation, in which the private reflections of Yam Islanders about such peoples fades into insignificance.

The intimate domain of Yam Island people is comprised of Islanders and non-Islanders such as Anglo or Celtic Australians, European Australians, Asian Australians and others. Self-definitions by Yam Islanders within this domain are predominantly constructed on gender, the Yam Island base, and family; components of identity grounded in everyday, personal interactions. In the more encompassing and increasingly heterogeneous domains in which cultural, regional, national and international identities are negotiated, the Yam Island base continues to constitute a significant component of Self and a decreasingly significant component of Otherness.

The Self in these domains is constituted by an increasing collective identification (as Islanders, as Australians, or as Indigenous peoples) and by an increasing collective differentiation from recognized and/or imagined Others. Others in these regional, national and international domains include Papuans, Japanese, Filipinos, Malaysians, Chinese, Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal Australians, Thursday Islanders of mixed parentage, blacks and whites. The others then, in this context, are comprised of people of the same cultural mix associated with the intimate domain, who are not members of the 'in-group', the intimate domain. Social relations between Yam Island people and these 'others' are carried out across the dichotomous boundaries (Barth 1969: 10) of cultural identity between the in-group and the out-group. Thus as social and emotional distance increases with a movement away from intimacy (wherein like subjects are engaged in like action and interaction), into more public and formal settings, the identification of the Self with in-group, in opposition to Others of the out-group, is reinforced and gains currency.

Yam Island people's self-representation then, fuses family, Yam Island, gender, origin (especially when some ancestors may have come from other islands or countries), the Torres Strait region, skin colour and Australia. The point at which one or several of these elements of identity are given primacy is contingent on the domains and forms of sociality in which they are being expressed. The prominence or suppression of any one symbolic element is associated with the nature of the interaction, the type of information being conveyed and the composition of the group, especially in terms of inclusiveness or exclusiveness. The degree of relatedness of participants is crucial: for example, during in-group interactions the affiliations and shared obligations based on gender, age, kinship and shared backgrounds are primary,⁷ whereas when Yam Islanders interact with members of the majority society, non-kinship based elements are given prominence (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980: 311). This reflects the varying degrees of ascription in the form of external definition, and self-definition.

[T]he complex nature of 'otherness' of the other ...stands apart from the self of any given actor and yet, by this apparent separateness, becomes the organizing processual field of each self- the ground upon which, within social process, the self is experientially constituted. From this perspective, social relationships can be seen as engaging the actor's perspective on an outside other that implies a perception of the other's perspective on the self. (Munn 1986: 15-16)

In societies which have experienced the long term effects of colonisation, their identity typically provides them with a model of their society and of themselves which integrates their perceptions of their past with perceptions of their present. In general, Yam Islanders represent their present and past as a continuous multilinear and multilateral association of ideas and events; selected aspects of the past are brought forward and incorporated within the value system of the present (cf. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980: 333-334; Trigger 1986; Beckett 1988; Howard 1990). The past, as it were, functions as a type of 'currency' (Jordan 1988: 115), allowing people to actively participate in different worlds. The perceived behaviour and constituent norms and values of the past, framed as tradition, are continually reinterpreted to meet the needs of a community and its individuals.

For generations now Yam Island people have existed in and contributed to a rapidly changing social and political world. They operate in a modern world of political representation and neo-colonialism, and are continually pressed to respond to pressures for the creation of effective local economic and political infrastructure. The transformation of Yam Island people from a majority group to a minority group through the processes of colonialism (cf. Bennett 1975; Deschamps 1982; Linnekin and Poyer 1990) has provided the context and impetus for the development and maintenance of their contemporary expressions of cultural identity. While they regularly display an ambivalent reluctance to be perceived as 'old fashioned' or traditionalist, the identity which they have constructed is theirs alone. Just as colonisation has been an on-going process, so too is Yam Island identity processual. The juggling of traditionalist and modernist perspectives and ways of acting reflect the nature, course and impact of social change in the area since the last century. Similarly, as Self and Other are implicated in each other, the past and the present operate as overlapping domains along a continuum: there is an absence of sharp and clear-cut discontinuities between one era and another. For instance the pre-colonial, pre-Christian past locally referred to as *bipo taym* cannot be absolutely differentiated from the beginning of the Christian era: what is often imagined as a dichotomy is in essence a blurred boundary.

Just as there has not been a distinct moment or event during which everything or everyone familiar changed, the diffuse images of time in particular, allow for the development of an identity which comfortably reflects the long-term processes of retention, incorporation, invention, creativity, synthesis and the reworking of received ideas and practices. It is this tacking between the past and the present, and between Yam Island, the rest of Torres Strait and the Papuan mainland, which provides Yam Island people with the dynamic of their identity (Fuary 1991; 1993). On the basis of shared cultural, historical and environmental factors, this identity is achieved with the establishment of self-definitional boundaries in relation to the past and to others, and provides a base from which Yam Islanders encounter and act in the world. They experience a great cultural pride and strength in knowing from where, and from whom, they have come. People draw their confidence and feelings of belonging from the past, and from their identity as Yam Island people. It is from this sense of belonging, which is continually asserted and reaffirmed, that they can evaluate and comment upon the direction of their own lives. As I have argued elsewhere (Fuary 1991; 1993), Yam Islanders engage in dialectical shifting between the past and present, between traditionalism and modernism, and their leaders act as brokers between these two frames of reference as well as between Islanders and non-Islanders (see also Beckett 1987). In this sense, the links between the past and present are critical to the ways and means by which selfhood

is negotiated. By dipping into the 'collective memory' (Lattas 1992), Yam Island people can push away external definitions of their selves, as controlled subjects and Other, by countering them with their own definitions. The Self thus continues to be established in opposition to a panoply of fantasized Others, while also being established through identification with those Others, especially through a fantasized union with the Past (Fuery 1997). Bhabha (1983) refigures our apprehension of Otherness, by arguing that not only are fixed stereotypes an essential discursive feature of colonialism, but that they are triggered and maintained by ambivalence of the powerful.

Fixity...connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder..... Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.(Bhabha 1983: 18)

As we have seen from this exploration of the Yam Island constitution of Self and Other, particularly as it relates to their imbrication with *Dawdhay* (Papua), the mere repetition of fixed stereotypes, fails to adequately articulate the dynamic relationship and fluidity of interaction between Torres Strait Islander and Papuan peoples living in this region.

CONCLUSION

An extra dimension was added to the ways in which Yam Islanders constitute Papuans as Other with the emergence of Papua New Guinea as an independent nation. With the establishment of an international boundary between Australia and Papua New Guinea, an absolute distinction between Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait was created. At the private and informal public levels, the Papuan Other is constructed as 'uncivilised', supernaturally powerful, black, 'primitive', and non-Christian. At the same time within the national and international domains, Papua New Guinea is praised for its independence, its educated elite, the ability of black men and women to make decisions on behalf of their population. This is in contrast to the frustrations Islanders sometimes feel at the ways in which their voices may be stifled within the State and Federal political scene in Australia. However, as we have seen, their essential role in surveillance of the border is regularly utilised as a means of pressuring governments to increase essential services to their region, and to back their calls for autonomy.

Many Yam Islanders express an ambivalence toward Papua New Guinea. While their tiny island is in many ways regarded as something of a Papuan 'outpost', Yam Island people are trying to come to grips with their 'Papuan-ness' in relation to their 'Torres Strait Islander-ness'. On the one hand they recognise that as a people they have always relied on certain Papuan families from particular villages to constitute themselves. Their society was created by Papuans and they continue to rely on and desire goods and services from Papua. This sets them apart from other Australians and paradoxically gives them their specific identity. On the other hand, there is a desire to distance themselves as Torres Strait Islanders and as Australians from their Papuan connections; to constitute themselves firmly as Torres Strait Islanders as opposed to Islanders connected to Papua. In this context a strong emphasis is placed on the 'Torres Strait Islander-ness' and therefore 'Australian-ness' and 'Queenslander-ness' of Islanders, and a de-emphasis on their 'Papuan-ness'. According to their legal status they are firmly Australians as opposed to Torres Strait Islanders with a Papuan base.

This ambivalence needs to be understood within the contexts of colonialism, internal colonialism and neo-colonialism. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Fuery 1991), the institutionalisation of Torres Strait Islanders on reserves under church and government control, is especially significant in having produced contradictory notions of self and community. The

Self construct is an ambiguous and ambivalent project because of its very contextuality and because of the dialectic between Self and Other. It necessarily shifts between incorporation and disavowal. What I am suggesting here is that the ambivalence expressed toward Papua New Guineans is not an artefact of the establishment of an international border, but rather that the border has added another dimension or layer to Self and Other constructions on Yam Island. But perhaps it is also by virtue of Yam Islanders' geographical position, as people between Australia and Papua New Guinea, in a passive sense, and as people separating Australia and Papua New Guinea, in an active sense, that this ambivalence could be further addressed.

NOTES

1. A very early version of this article was presented at the Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference, Canberra 1992 in the session 'Australia and New Guinea Connections and Comparisons'.
2. The descendants of the Yam-Tudu people have not been living on Tudu since the turn of this century (see Fuary 1991; 1993).
3. See Harrison's (1993) work on the role of violence in Manambu sociality and polity.
4. For discussions of how this applies to Aboriginal Australia see Beckett 1988; Carter 1988; Jordan 1988; Ariss 1988; Cowlshaw 1988.
5. See Howard's (1990) discussion of the force of identity in Oceania based on recognition of relationship to each other, to a set of ancestors and spirits, and to a specific physical environment. Their identity is forged through knowing how to interact with each other, the physical environment and the supernatural domain.
6. Jordan (1985) has demonstrated in her work with Aboriginal Australians that when Aboriginal people do not self-classify as 'Aboriginal' it is either because they are using their own positively valued and self-attributed locality-based or language-based identifiers, or because they are actively rejecting the negative value associated with being 'Aboriginal' in mainstream Australian society. Refer to Carter (1988) and Morris (1988) for discussion of the ways in which 'negative ascriptions' are also actively adopted or resisted.
7. Both in Oceanic and Aboriginal Australian societies, the kinship connection constitutes the foundation of cultural identity (Linnekin and Poyer 1990; Barwick 1985; Tonkinson 1990; Sansom 1980, 1988). Shared experiences and genealogical connections have always taken precedence in Aboriginal societies over the ascribed Anglo and Celtic Australian 'blood' definitions of Aboriginality (see Carter 1988; Cowlshaw 1988; Jacobs 1988; Jordan 1986, 1988; Sansom 1988; Tonkinson 1990).

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