Section iii Fishing and its social significance on Yam Island

by Maureen M. Fuary*

Dedicated to the memory and knowledge of the late Pryce Silbador Harry and Maino Kelly, without whom little of this chapter could have been written.

Although geographically part of the low, sandy Central Islands, Yam, like the nearby uninhabited Gebar and Mukar Islands, is basaltic. The reef flat is largely covered with coral rubble and does not appear to be as productive of seafood as the reefs of the other inhabited Central Islands.

Yam was once the main garden island and source of fresh water for the inhabitants of nearby Tudu Island. However the London Missionary Society persuaded the Tudu people to shift their permanent residences to Yam in the 1890s (Haddon, 1889). The population living on the island over the last eight years has fluctuated from 150 to 200 people[1].

The Yam–Tudu people have strong traditional trading links with the coastal Papuan people of Mabaduan and Tureture. By 1985 about half of the population of Yam — some 15 households — had come within recent decades from these villages, having built up their numbers on a foundation of immigrants who had obtained Australian citizenship or permanent residence status. As a result of these links, Yam Island also plays host to more temporary Papuan visitors than do the other inhabited islands in Central Torres Strait. As elsewhere in the strait, they come to trade, to socialise and, more recently, to participate in the commercial crayfishery[2].

Despite such population shifts, Yam and the islands of Mukar, Gebar, Tudu, Zegey and Awridh constitute an enduring eco-cultural complex. The surrounding sea, offshore sandbanks and reefs of these continental, coral and mangrove

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1 The official population in 1987 was 205 (Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs, unpub.)

2 Because of the much higher prices obtained for crayfish in Torres Strait than in Papua New Guinea, Papuan fishermen and their families began to visit Yam in such large numbers in 1983 that the Island Council finally decided to prohibit these visits. But the prohibition was not enforced; the visits continued unabated.

islands have not only provided the inhabitants with an abundance of sea foods, but also set significant social and cultural parameters for them (see also Fuary, in press b). This is further reflected in their predominantly marine clan totems: crocodile, eel, dugong, hammerhead shark, stingray, turtle, frigate bird and dog (Haddon, 1904).

Today the sea's resources continue to provide more than just physical sustenance. The harvesting of certain marine resources and their subsequent use provides Yam Island people with a continuing connection with their past and tradition, and is associated with important rites of passage. For example, no respectable feast commemorating a funeral, wedding or tombstone unveiling can be staged without "meat", including turtle, and occasionally dugong. Fishing may also be considered as a relaxing, picnic-type activity, and a temporary respite from the dynamics and constraints of village life.

Yam Islanders often allude to two signifying features of their island: abundant parrotfish, ***bila***, and extensive mounds of dead coral, ***thaywa***, in the lagoons on the western side of the island. They identify strongly, as a unique group of people, with these environmental attributes. When other Islanders meet Yam Islanders they invariably comment and joke about parrot fish and coral mounds. These two symbols of Yam Island, linking the physical with the social environment, are universally recognised in Torres Strait households throughout Australia.

Exploitation of the sea's resources involves both sexes, all ages, a wide variety of techniques, spans 24 hours in the day and extends throughout all seasons of the year. Early morning risers may often see a child or adult returning from a dawn hunt on the exposed home reef with a catch of octopus to be steamed or boiled for breakfast. And from after sunset until the early hours of the morning, women and girls fish the incoming tide for yellow-tailed perch or venture to the reef (with or without male companions) in search of crayfish or octopus.

Fishing methods

Fishing may involve the use of nylon lines, three different types of bamboo spears plus a crayfishing spear and a harpoon spear. The construction of these spears and harpoons is described in Fuary (in press a). (Yam fishing grounds are shown in Fig. 11 in Section i of this chapter).

Dropline Fishing. Fishing with nylon handlines is very common, particularly among women and girls. Lines are thrown from the shore in the calm lagoon waters, over the edge of the home reef, or from a dinghy anchored in deep water. The women sit, except when fishing from the edge of the reef, to minimise their visibility to the fish.

The most common species caught on handlines near the shore are parrotfish, stripey, yellow-tailed perch, snapper, coral cod, Moses perch, garfish, and coral

trout. Line fishing from dinghies also yields longtoms, black-spot tusk fish and trevallies.

Trevallies are said to bite particularly well around three days before new moon (Pryce Harry, pers. comm.). To reduce the vigorous dashes of hooked trevally, tobacco is often rubbed along a taut line, which is then played into the water to render the fish "drunk". Sharks are often attracted by the commotion made by a hooked trevally. To chase them off, people bang loudly on the sides and bottom of the dinghy while a trevally is being landed. Nevertheless these fish are regularly landed minus their tails. Such fish may be thrown back, or a portion of "contaminated" flesh bitten by the shark is cut away.

Most local species of spinefoot cannot usually be caught at Yam Island on a handline, but they are regularly hooked at Puruma, Warraber and Thursday Island (Missa Samuel, pers. comm.). On Thursday Island dough is used as bait, while meat of a trochus-like rough-shelled gastropod is used at Puruma and Warraber. This type of trochus is not found at Yam.

The most common bait are the small crabs found under coral rocks in the intertidal zone. The pincers of the crab are broken off, its carapace and legs discarded, and the body broken into four pieces. Each piece has about two pincer openings through which a hook can be conveniently pushed into the flesh. A piece or two may be held in the mouth of the fisherwoman, ready for immediate rebaiting. It is said that if these crabs are difficult to find, the fish will bite exceptionally well. If a fisherwoman runs out of crab bait while the fish are biting well, she may use a piece of the fish she has just caught.

A particularly good bait, but much harder to catch, is the ghost crab. A jam tin filled with food scraps is placed in the sand near several crab holes, and the sand is moulded around the tin so that the lip is flush with the sand slope. Several tins may be placed along a stretch of sand on the front beach of Yam, and left overnight to trap the crabs during their nocturnal forays.

With the expansion of the crayfishing industry, flesh from discarded crayfish heads is now often used as bait. Small sand crabs, hermit crabs, the meat of various molluscs, and the fillets of a number of damselfish species are convenient substitutes when the preferred baits are not immediately available. Flour dough or food scraps are the prime bait for yellowtail perch and garfish.

Trolling. Trolling for mackerel is regarded as a skilled male activity. It is generally carried out from dinghies in the waters near Yam or while on the way to other islands. Garfish or lures may be used as bait. Barracuda and trevally are also often caught while trolling.

Spearfishing. Men and boys spearfish in and around reefs, mangroves and sandbars, using single-pronged spears and wearing face masks (but seldom fins or snorkles). These spears are also used to locate buried turtle eggs and to spear octopus and crayfish. Some of the older men spear fish without the assistance of a

propulsion rubber, maintaining that the "thung" noise it generates when released frightens the fish. Speared fish may be killed by biting them on the head before tossing them into an anchored dinghy.

Multi-pronged spears are used for spearing fish in lagoons. The distance between the prongs of the spear is adjusted according to the size of the target. Young boys spend countless hours practising at throwing these spears.

Women and older girls sometimes use single or multi-pronged spears borrowed from their brothers or husbands. The spears are made from trimmed lengths of bamboo, which are straightened by applying presssure after heating the shafts over burning coconut husks. The joints are smoothed with a rasp. One end is tapered, hollowed out to the first joint and split. One or several pieces of sharpened, heavy-gauge wire are inserted into this end with a packing of rag and Aquadhere glue. Light-gauge wire is then wound tightly around this end so as to bind the split sections firmly around the spear tip.

Very occasionally, young adult males make bamboo bows and arrows, using them instead of spears for shooting fish in the lagoons. Miniscule bows and arrows are also made, and small boys and girls use them often in the calm shallows to shoot tiny mudskippers and mullet as food for pet terns, noddies and gulls.

On moonless nights people may go to the edge of the home reef to "show a light for fish". Today the traditional leaf torches have been replaced with kerosene pressure lamps. The best times for this kind of fishing are on the three nights around the new moon and during the hours of darkness early on the three nights after full moon (Lizzie Lui, pers. comm.). As the tide starts to come in, people are able to spear golden-lined spinefoot, netted sweetlips, crayfish, small green turtle and octopus on the reef edge. When the moon appears, the fishers abandon the hunting and head back to the village.

On Yam, ***parsa***, the much-savoured golden-lined spinefoot *Siganus lineatus* are speared at Mududan, Silen Garaz and Zagwan in the mangroves and around lagoon bommies as they come in to feed on rising tides. Men also spear them in and around the mangroves of Mukar, Gebar and Sasi and at a sandbank, Uruyi, between the islands of Sasi and Puruma, to the southeast of Yam. At Massig, Puruma, Warraber, Sasi and Bara the species is particularly abundant and is caught in gill nets.

Fish drives. Fish drives are carefully orchestrated during neap tides regularly throughout the year. Partially moveable stone weirs, ***garaz***, are used. Because of changing shoreline and lagoon depths, at least eight stone weirs are no longer used. Four remain in regular use.

The fish drive begins with women, men and older children wading out to the chosen weir through thigh-deep water on the ebbing tide, carrying multi-pronged bamboo spears. Before the tide begins to turn, long, sharpened mangrove stakes with leaves tied to the top may be stuck into the sea bed at regular

intervals along and outside the stone fence line. It is said that these leaves blow in the wind as a welcome to the fish[3]. Whereas a chant was once spoken to beckon fish as the stakes were put in, today a prayer is said.

As the tide recedes the fish attempt to leave the lagoon for deeper water, and people position themselves between the mangrove stakes. They hit the water, sea bed or stone wall with the tips of their spears to prevent the fish from swimming over the tops of the weir walls. It is said that the fish are also confused by the wooden stakes, which they mistake for people. As the water recedes further, the bow waves of the milling, disoriented fish can be clearly seen. No fish are speared before the tide has fully receded so as not to cause a "stampede" of fish from the trap.

When the water is about 30 cm deep, and the tops of the weir walls are above water, the exposed layers of stone are rearranged to allow the fish to swim down a narrow corridor into a smaller weir. They are then systematically speared. Oil may be released on the water to enhance visibility.

There are a multitude of beliefs connected with the staging of fish drives, and many prescribed behaviours must be observed to ensure success. The cooperative nature of the event is reinforced by the belief that all participants must go to the weir together.

Sometimes ***sazi***, derris, is used in these fish drives. A length of the vine is crushed and the milky stupefacient is released under coral mounds where the fish seek shelter. Disoriented fish swimming at odd angles near the surface fall easy prey to multi-pronged spears. Because fishing will be poor in the area for a few days after this vine is used, it is used only occasionally.

At the end of the drive, thanks are once again spoken for the fish. Ideally all fish are shared equally between participants, irrespective of individual performance. If stakes are used (which is rare today), they are brought back to the village for future use. Very occasionally a nylon net may be used in a drive.

Crayfishing and crabbing. To obtain crayfish to sell, men dive along the edge of the home reef, or work in pairs from dinghies around more distant reefs near Mukar, Gebar and Tudu. A speared cray is removed from the tip of the spear as quickly as possible so as not to attract sharks with its noisily flapping tail.

Crayfish for home consumption are also speared on the home reef. Not only the tail is eaten, but also the richer-flavoured contents of the head, after it is stuffed with flour dough and boiled or steamed. Mud crabs *Scylla serrata* are sought by men and women among the mangroves, especially during spring low tides. In June, July and August when the leaves of the ***kem*** tree in the mangroves are red, Yam Islanders say these crabs are gravid.

Shellfishing. A variety of species of gastropods and bivalves is collected on the

3 In recent years the traditional dried banana leaf banners have been replaced with dried coconut leaves — testimony perhaps to the decline of bush gardening.

home reef. Men and women also engage in shellfishing when travelling to other islands, and when on specific gathering and fishing expeditions to the nearby islands of Tudu, Gebar and Mukar. Often the women and girls scan the reef edge for shellfish while their male companions swim along the edge of the reef, spearing fish as they go.

Most clam meat comes from lagoons near other islands, such as Tudu, Gebar and Mukar. Males may take clam meat while spearfishing, or it may be harvested by women and girls wading through shallow water armed with a knife. Oil, from chewed coconut meat, rendered pork fat, butter or cooking oil, may be spat onto the water surface to increase visibility while they searching for shells.

Small edible bivalves called ***silel*** *(Mesodesma striata),* are found in the intertidal zone in wettish sand, particularly on the southern side of Yam Island. They are boiled, and the juice is thought to be therapeutic for people suffering from a cold or influenza. Another bivalve, ***mudu*** (*Gafrarium* sp. or *Anadara* sp.), is found on silty mud-flats of the tidal lagoons or in sandy–muddy lagoons littered with dead coral, in and around seagrass beds. Buried ***mudu*** present two telltale slits on the seabed, and are easily spotted by shellfish collectors scanning the shallow water.

Spider shells, strombs, and trochus are collected in the lagoons or on the exposed reef edges from the southeast to the northern sides of Yam. The bivalve ***akul*** is found in black mangrove mud on the northwest, north and northeastern sides of the island.

Although petrol drums, water tanks and aluminium pots and pans have mainly replaced shells of assorted molluscs as storage vessels (see Chapter 1), shells of the large giant clam still provide feeding troughs for domestic pigs.

Dugong and turtle hunting. Dugongs are accorded a respect by Yam Island people that is unmatched by any other animal. They are regarded as being very much like humans, and despite relishing their flavour, Islanders sometimes express regret at their capture.

As elsewhere among the Torres Strait Islands, turtle and dugong hunting is considered by Yam Islanders to be the ultimate physical and cultural experience for males. Prowess in hunting is recognised as a significant male achievement; by bringing back "meat", men and boys provide not only for the needs of their immediate family, but for those of extended kin, friends and the community as a whole. A young man spearing his first turtle or dugong calls for an island-wide celebration. About a hundred turtles are taken annually. Yam hunters are quite selective in their turtle hunting, sometimes drifting for half an hour among groups of turtles before choosing the fattest female to harpoon.

Several times a year green turtles apparently become disoriented in the maze of coral-fringed passages on the edge of Yam and strand themselves near the beach on a falling tide. When this happens the turtle may be stoned and beaten to death.

Turtle eggs are usually collected from the beaches of nearby Mukar.

In recent years Yam Islanders, who say they have noticed a decline in dugong numbers in nearby waters, have taken between one and four dugong a year.

Birding. Although sea birds are not often eaten, their eggs and feathers are collected. Attempts (usually unsuccessful) may be made to shoot frigate birds when they appear about August, and potshots are taken at pelicans as they swarm over Yam Island in the hundreds during September when they nest on nearby Tudu Island.

During periodic foraging trips at this time, several hundred tern eggs may be collected from nests in the long grass on Mukar's sandspit. The eggs are boiled and eaten with rice. Chicks may be taken home for children to raise as pets.

Although reef herons are not killed for their meat, their feathers in their white phase are used in dancing headdresses and other dancing paraphernalia. Chicken feathers may be used as a substitute.

Seasons and fishing

Variations in availability of various seafoods are predicted by observing and reading environmental cues, which provide a continuous discussion point for the Yam community.

Outsiders are liable to underestimate the importance of weather and tides in determining fishing strategies (see also Chapter 1).

A setting red moon or a pinkish red sunset are said to indicate fine weather the following day. During very fine and calm weather it is hard to catch fish; it is also hard when the water is cloudy because of rough weather or strong tides. The best conditions are when a light breeze is blowing and the sea is a little choppy (***yamiz***).

After a heavy rain during the southeast monsoon, fish can be found stranded in large numbers in lagoons on the northwestern end of Yam Island. Predominant among these stranded fish are black spinefoot, golden-lined spinefoot, blue-barred orange parrotfish and surf parrotfish.

During the Wet season when the northwesterlies blow and the tides are highest during the day, people cast lines on the southwest side of Yam Island. Around March low-lying areas of the village are often inundated with seawater during the "last big blow" of the season and seagrass litters the beaches. When the wind swings around to south to southwest, people shift their fishing activities to the opposite side of the island.

The arrival of the northward-bound rainbow bee eaters around March/April signifies a change in wind direction to southeasterly, and the west and northwestern sides of the island are fished. From about December through to May the tides are highest at night (Fig. 2, Chapter 1). Heavy rains usually fall during July, and the weather oscillates between being calm and extremely windy, providing the last squalls for several months.

The onset of a very dry period of about two months before the beginning of the Wet is marked by the reappearance of rainbow bee eaters heading south to breed. When the wind blows from the north to northeast, the southern bays and lagoons are exploited for fish. The weather becomes very hot and generally calm. Octopus are particularly easy to find at this time, as they sit almost motionless in the lagoons. The yellow flowering of the ***kubilgim*** tree beginning around October signals the beginning of the green turtles' mating season.

Seafood prohibitions and taboos

Knowledge of the behaviour of fishes and other marine food species and its relationships to tides, seasons and weather are obviously important prerequisites for successful fishing. But other factors are also believed to be involved.

Should a villager wish someone "bad luck" at fishing, that person will be unsuccessful. Furthermore, if anyone should speak badly about someone who is fishing, goes through his or her belongings, asks where he or she is, or argues with members of his or her family, that person will return with few fish. Lack of success at fishing may also be attributed to a death in the family, or a whimpering child left behind in the village.

Pregnancy is also deemed to affect fishing. A pregnant woman fishing alone is predicted to be particularly successful. Should she walk near where others are fishing, however, it is believed that they will have difficulty catching anything. Likewise, should a pregnant woman's lover or husband go spearfishing with a group and spear the first fish, his companions will miss everything at which they take aim. Haddon (1935, p. 158) cites MacFarlane's observation of the general belief in Torres Strait that a turtle couldn't be caught if it saw a pregnant woman or her partner. Pregnant women cannot participate in fish drives because it is said no fish would be speared if they did.

If a man or woman decides to go fishing while a drive is in progress, she or he must head off in the opposite direction to where it is being staged (Lizzie Lui, pers. comm. 1987). According to custom, all other villagers should remain in the village, taking care not to visit a grave or cemetery for the duration of the drive.

The greatest number of traditional prohibitions pertained to the seafood animals of greatest cultural significance — the dugong and the turtle — and some of these prohibitions are still in force today. Villagers may not run, make a lot of noise or dance while a hunt is underway on the home reef at Tura or Zagwan. Turtle or dugong should also not be mentioned while a hunt is in progress or they will elude the hunter.

Traditionally, girls being initiated at menarche were forbidden to eat turtle caught during the mating season (Haddon 1904) or to eat any turtle meat at all whenever they were menstruating or pregnant. Young Tudu males, on the other hand, could not eat the fat of either turtle or dugong until they had earned themselves a place as warriors by killing a man (Haddon 1935).

There is a belief that eating turtle eggs from about September until the end of the mango season (between January and March) results in mango trees dropping their fruit prematurely. Since the green turtle nests during this period, there are regular complaints in the village that the mango crop is being spoiled through some ignorant person eating turtle eggs.

A particularly tasty fish, the Maori wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*), is reserved for older people to eat. Should a girl eat this fish her breasts will bend, it is said. A large spotted trevally is said to be "like a man", and should not be killed with a small spear; to do so is equivalent to killing a member of one's family. One of these fish appearing to a fisherman or woman may auger bad luck or the imminent death of a loved one.

Dangerous marine animals

Yam Islanders are very conscious of the dangers of sharks, stonefish, stingrays and, especially on Sasi Island, crocodiles. During the Wet season saltwater crocodiles are also seen at Gebar.

Tiger sharks and hammerheads are feared. During daytime high tides during the Wet season, tiger sharks may sometimes be seen cruising in the lagoon near the village. Children are severely reprimanded when caught swimming in the lagoon at this time, and are also forbidden to swim in this lagoon after the waste of recently butchered turtles has been disposed of in it.

When the less dangerous black-tipped reef sharks *Carcharhinus melanopterus* are encountered in the lagoon they are scornfully scared off by people making a percussive "whoo" sound, by forcefully expelling air from their mouths[4].

Many Yam Islanders bear scars on their insteps, testimony to the fact that encounters with stonefish are relatively common. The Islanders take great care to avoid these fish, and are particularly careful around July. The fruiting of the ***wangai*** tree (*Mimusops* sp.) serves as a visible reminder of the abundance of stonefish at this time, during which the belly of the fish is said to change in colour from brown to orange.

There are a number of local remedies for stonefish stings. The wound may be cut (causing blood to flow) and urinated on. The belly of the stonefish can also be cut open, the bile sac removed and its liquid placed on the wound. A similar treatment is prescribed for spinefoot stings[5]. Back in the village the afflicted limb is immersed in boiling water to which baking powder may be added. The application of considerable heat to stonefish wounds has been found to reduce the effects of the venom (Halstead, 1978). As elsewhere in the strait, the sap of

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4 Palau Islanders in Micronesia scare off this species with the identical sound; R. E. Johannes, pers. comm.

5 This widespread remedy for fish stings in the tropical Pacific Islands deserves clinical investigation (Johannes, 1981).

frangipani (plumeria) leaves may also be used to ease the pain of such wounds, ease the swelling and hasten healing (e.g. Anon, 1984).

Stingray barb injuries appear to have more debilitating effects than those from stonefish, and western medical advice is usually sought. The afflicted foot of a stingray victim is, however, sometimes bathed in an infusion prepared from the fibre scraped from the roots of a grass called ***ipie*** (Kabay, 1984). Infection from the barb may persist for months. Because of the associated pain, the victim cannot go into the sea for as much as a year after the accident.

During the months of July and August, fishers wading through the lagoons also keep a lookout for the toadfish *Arothron hispidus*. It is said this fish (which has two very large front teeth) is not averse to biting large chunks out of the backs of waders' ankles.

Seafood preparation

In addition to a kitchen, all households have an outside cooking area with a grate placed over an open fire. Here fish can be roasted on hot coals, or crayfish and mudcrabs boiled in flour tins. This area is also well used on feasting occasions (see below).

Small fish are preferred, as their meat is considered especially sweet. Fish may be left unscaled and roasted (a favourite method, especially on weekend fishing picnics); rolled in soya sauce and flour and deep-fried in oil; boiled with onion and lemon; boiled in coconut milk; or marinated. Rice, damper, or deep-fried dumplings are the usual accompaniments. The stomachs of mackerel may be removed, cleaned, and stuffed with fish, garlic, ginger, curry powder and onion, and boiled. The flesh of mackerel and some other species may be finely sliced for ***namas*** — fish marinated in onion, vinegar, soy sauce, water, lemon juice and chillies.

Turtle is steamed whole in a ground oven, butchered and fried, barbecued, or made into a stew. Although only female turtles are taken during the mating season today, traditionally both females and males were caught. Whereas the female was cooked and eaten fresh, pieces of meat from the male turtle were dried and skewered on mangrove branchlets. These were then tied atop *Terminalia* trees, to keep both flies and the smell at a distance. The meat became almost rock hard. Towards the end of the Dry Season, the meat was taken down, pulverised with small stones taken from the northeast side of the island, and then soaked in water. Coconut milk and, in more recent times, curry powder, was then added. The dried meat was eaten before the rains came. Turtle meat was prepared this way until at least the 1920s (Pryce Harry, pers. comm.).

Dugong are cooked in the ground, barbecued or fried. Dugong ribs, dusted with salt and roasted over coals, are a favourite food.

The adductor muscle of the giant clam *Tridacna* is sometimes eaten raw on fishing trips. Later, at home, the remains of this shellfish are finely cut and

cooked in coconut milk, often with the addition of curry powder. Gastropods are roasted, boiled, or boiled and then marinated in a vinegar sauce.

Seafood distribution

Spirits rise as word of a young man bringing in his first dugong or turtle spreads, because it calls for a feast to celebrate his attainment of the status of a hunter. The responsibility for butchering the animal and distributing the meat falls to the oldest maternal uncle of the boy. Traditionally any of the boy's maternal uncles could enter his sister's and brother-in-law's house (the mother and father of the boy), taking anything they wanted. There was no limit to the value of the material items that might be taken, and the parents of the boy could not protest. As the number of expensive material items in Islander households has increased in recent decades, this tradition has waned.

The catching of the first turtle of the season was once also laden with celebratory ritual. Haddon described the procedure: the turtle was dragged onto the beach at Tudu and water from a green coconut was poured into its mouth and over its back to the accompaniment of women singing. This particular turtle could not be eaten. Its head had to be removed without damaging the windpipe or vertebrae (otherwise all turtles would be forewarned of hunters) and its body was fastened to a pole on the beach (Haddon, 1935).

Today when a turtle or dugong is brought in, word is sent to representatives of each household to come to the beach to receive their share of meat. The skin of a dugong to be butchered should be lightly marked with a knife, and the head removed only after the whole animal has been filleted. The favourite cut of meat is from the belly region because of its fatness (see Chapter 3).

Because sharing food cements social relationships, care is taken not to give poor cuts of meat to particular people. Nonetheless, some people privately express disappointment, especially when they receive very lean meat.

Yam–Tudu[6] males were once ritually initiated at the beginning of each Wet season. During their period of seclusion they were instructed by their maternal uncles in this ethic of sharing. Maino of Tudu reported the thrust of this instruction to Haddon (1904): "You work hard to get plenty fish, and dugong, and turtle . . . s'pose you get plenty fish you give mother and father before you give to brother . . . look after mother and father; never mind if you and your wife have to go without. Give half of all your fish to your parents . . . Mind your uncles too and cousins."

Fishing is thus not an individual activity; it provides a host of links between the fisherman, the physical environment and the community. Fishing among

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6 As noted earlier, most Central Islanders once lived on the now uninhabited Tudu Island.

Yam Islanders, therefore, is not just to provide food. Through the complex environmental knowledge and social behaviour it entails, fishing provides a means by which the Islanders regularly reaffirm and embrace their identity.

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