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A COCKTAIL OF KIN: KINDRED AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS ON YAM ISLAND

Well he's from [a distant island]....we don't know his mother or father. So I just call him by name. I probably do share some relatives with him [but I don't know who they are], so I just call him 'brother'. Anyway, I call him 'brother' because I heard my [own] brother call him that.

(A Yam Island woman's response to a question about the kinship label she applied to a Top Western man, Yam Island 1981)

In this chapter I explore the dimensions of kinship and community on Yam Island by looking at the ways in which people define themselves either as being close cognates or affines to one another, and the behaviours and role requirements associated with this classification. In the second half of this chapter I discuss the various social moments in which affiliation is celebrated and marked, and in describing such moments I use dance to exemplify the way in which this is achieved.

6.1. Relatedness

The kinship connection provides children and adults alike with a generally positive framework of interconnectedness, identity, sense of belonging, responsibility and obligation. In such a small community, positive face-to-face interaction is necessary, particularly as a means through which attempts are made to keep disputes at a minimum level. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 226) has stated that on Mabuiag while significant changes have taken place in the domains of marriage, residence rules, subsistence strategies, politics and ritual, a strong kinship ideology still continues to effect social organisation. Likewise Beckett (1963: 38-39) has noted
that while the larger ceremonially constituted agnatic groups (see Chapter 3) were undermined by the processes of colonization, the classificatory kinship system, rules of exogamy, the system of land tenure and the ideology concerning reciprocal rights and duties have persevered. A similar series of processes have occurred on Yam Island.

In effect, the whole of Yam Island society is punctuated by a clear differentiation between 'family' (actual and classificatory relatives) and 'in-laws', those people linked to oneself or one's cognates by the ties of marriage (see the discussion on marriage in this chapter). It is this classification of self and others into one or other of these categories which articulates the bulk of social action in the community. Not only does the web of 'blood' and affinal relations encapsulate social interaction during an individual's life, but it continues to play a predominant role in the social relations surrounding her or his death, burial and eventual tombstone opening (see Chapter 7).

Basically all Torres Strait Island societies are comprised of groups of cognates, or to use the local term 'family', that is, small kindreds generally three generations deep (Beckett 1983: 206). Despite recognition of both lines of descent, there is a strong tendency to give greater recognition to the patriline, although this has been modified since the early days of colonialism with children being born to non-Islander fathers and Islander mothers.

6.1.1. Kinship Terminology

In his journal of 1898 - 1899, Myers spoke of the kinship connectedness between Murray Island people and those of Yam and Stephen islands, and Rivers' discussion of kin terms shows the similarity of kinship terminologies between Tudu, Murray and Saibai islands (Haddon 1904: 139). In the latter the 'Iroquois' system of kin classification prevailed, whereas on Mabuiag both sets of cousins were addressed by a single term (Beckett 1963: 29).
The term a man used for his father's sister's children was different from the one used for his father's brother's children. However, to the best of my knowledge there is no such terminological distinction currently being made on Yam Island between cross-cousins and parallel-cousins, contrary to the situation reported for Tudu at the turn of the century (Rivers in Haddon 1904: 139). Today on Yam Island siblings and all matrilateral and patrilateral cousins of the same sex are currently addressed by ego with a single term: brothers and all male cousins are called bala or brother, and sisters and all female cousins are known as sisi or sister.

Traditionally on Tudu children were not only differentiated by sex but also by birth order. Rivers (in Haddon 1904: 132) gives the details provided to him by Haddon just before the turn of the century.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Order</th>
<th>Kinship Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eldest son</td>
<td>kwoikwoig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eldest daughter</td>
<td>kwoikwoig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second eldest son</td>
<td>sauergamuz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>second eldest daughter</td>
<td>ngungamuz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third eldest son</td>
<td>dadaig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>third eldest daughter</td>
<td>inungadadaig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fourth eldest son</td>
<td>wagelgamuz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fourth eldest daughter</td>
<td>inungangungamuz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifth eldest son</td>
<td>akutaig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fifth eldest daughter</td>
<td>inungangungamuz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sixth eldest son</td>
<td>mopakutaig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>youngest daughter</td>
<td>mopakutaig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The eldest child collectively called his or her younger brothers and sisters kutaig, and the youngest child called the older brothers and sisters kwoikwoig. Currently on Yam Island, in the first ascending generation the same English-derived kinship term, papa or dadi, is used for one's father and father's 'brothers'. Similarly, mama or mami is
FIGURE 11. Terms of Address Used for Cognates on Yam Island, 1980-1982

KEY:
A = sisi  B = bala
C = dadi  D = mami
E = anti  F = awa
G = athe  H = aka
I = gel  J = boy
K = ngep
the kinship term used for mother and mother's 'sisters'. Father's 'sisters' and mother's
'brothers' each have their own specific kinship terms, anti and awa (or awdhe\textsuperscript{1}),
respectively. In the second ascending generation kin are differentiated on the basis of
sex; both maternal and paternal grandmothers are called aka, and all grandfathers
are called athe. In the second descending generation there is no differentiation in either
terminology of reference or of address. Grandchildren, irrespective of their sex, are
referred to as ngep, although it is currently more common for their personal names to be
used without a prefacing kin term.

While siblings, cousins, children and grandchildren may be addressed without the
appropriate kin term, it is uncommon for older cousins and kin in the first and second
ascending generations to be addressed or referred to without prefacing their name with
the appropriate term. To do so is a mark of grave disrespect, and it draws immediate
comment and rebuke.

The use of kin terms not only facilitates appropriate interaction between community
members, but it also serves as a way of emphasising connection with others. The more
distant the kinship connection, the more likely it is that a kinship term will be
applied. For instance, it is uncommon for one's actual siblings to be continually called
sisi or bala. However, by calling cousins and more distant same -generation members,
'brother' or 'sister', attention is drawn to the fact that although they are not born of the
same parents, they are just like brothers and sisters, and that they have a very special

\textsuperscript{1} I am not certain if this is a term of reference and not a term of address. Haddon (1935:
384) defined it as being an older form of the term wadhwam, which both Beckett (1963:
31) and Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 209) noted as a term of reference.
However, Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 209, 213, 306) states that
awdhe is a reciprocal term of address between mother's brother and sister's child. The
question of why English-derived kin labels are applied to some categories of kin and
the traditional terms are applied to others, is yet to be addressed for Yam Island. Both
Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 316) and Beckett (1987b: 144) have noted
the dropping of some kin terms on Mabuiag and Mer. According to Fitzpatrick (1980a:
213) the only term to have been completely dropped on Mabuiag in the last 100 years is
that for father's sister.
relationship to ego because of this. In general, all kin terms 'connote definite social functions, specific duties, privileges, and restrictions on conduct...' (Rivers 1924: 63).

6.1.2. Adoption and Fostering

Most of the children born to single women today are adopted out as infants by the close relatives of their mothers (see Chapter 3; see also the report by Chester in 1870 on children being adopted on Tudu - QSA COL/ A151). Frequently the newborn is given to the actual mother's parents, and in such a way the mother of the child becomes its sister. The social ambiguity of how children born outside of marriage may be classified and how they in turn will classify and relate to others is resolved by this type of adoption (see Beckett 1961c, 1987b: 222). What is more, by being adopted into its mother's family, the child may be seen to fill the eventual vacancy in the family which will occur when its mother marries. Within the Melanesian context, Strathern (1984: 60) has referred to this replacement of the mother as a 'metaphor of substitution'.

While a baby may be adopted at birth, it is recognised to be in the best interests of the child in terms of health and growth, if it is breastfed for at least one month. Once the biological mother has abdicated parental responsibility for the child, she does not continue to breastfeed it. By giving away their children, young females maintain a measure of independence and autonomy from the task of being primary childrearers. They also help create families for their close cognates, which is especially important in a community in which the institution of marriage is regarded as validated with the arrival of children. In such a way adoption may be viewed as 'an auxilliary device' for strengthening kin ties (Beckett 1961c: 7). The occurrence of instant offspring is quite common: that is, immediately after marriage, a couple may adopt or foster a child.
Children may also be adopted by other close kin of the biological mother. When such kin live away from Yam Island, the actual mother of the child may grieve for her child, or be anxious about its well-being, particularly if she considers it is too small or not very robust. Sometimes a girl will give her child to her unmarried brother. Until he marries, the child is raised by the biological mother’s mother. This woman 'grows up' the child until such time as her son marries and formally becomes its father.

The 'growing up' of children differs from adoption in that the child is fostered by someone else until such time as its mother can care for it. If a woman (single or married) is pregnant and already has a small infant, she may give the infant to a close relative to grow for her, until after the birth of her new baby. This is particularly the case for unmarried women. If the infant is perceived to be sick or prone to crying, the belief is that by fostering out the child its best interests will be served. Because the child’s mother is carrying a foetus, it is believed that her infant will be invariably sick during the course of her pregnancy. Married couples may also adopt out or foster a child to close kin, especially if the other couple are childless, or if they only have children of the one sex.

Not all young women give up their children for adoption or even for fostering. Obviously, many young women are bonded with their babies and experience emotional strain at the prospect of adoption. Yet others, particularly those with other children, elect to keep their babies, and the availability of Supporting Parent’s Benefit enables this option to be pursued (see also Beckett 1961c, 1987b: 220; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a).

6.2. Affines

Affinal relationships are established upon marriage of oneself or one’s cognates, and
TABLE 3. Reciprocal Terms of Address Used between Affines, Yam Island 1980-1982

A. SAME GENERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Female - Same Sex</th>
<th>2. Male - Same Sex</th>
<th>3. Female - Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wuman (uman) - wuman (uman)</td>
<td>thauwi - thauwi</td>
<td>wuman (uman) - thauwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missis (blo...) - missis (blo...)</td>
<td>thauwin - thauwi</td>
<td>thauwin - thauwi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wuman (uman) - missis (blo)</td>
<td>man blo... man blo... thauwi - man (blo...)</td>
<td>wuman (uman) - man blo... missis (blo...) - thauwi missis - blo... man - blo...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. ASCENDING GENERATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Female - Same Sex</th>
<th>2. Male - Sex</th>
<th>3. Female-Male</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ol leydy - wuman (uman)</td>
<td>ol man - tľ</td>
<td>wuman (uman) - ol man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mami - wuman (uman)</td>
<td>ol man - m...</td>
<td>missis (blo...) - ol man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mami - missis (blo....)</td>
<td>dadi - thauwi</td>
<td>wuman (uman) - dadi missis (blo...) - dadi thauwi - ol leydy man blo - ol leydi man blo... - mami thauwi - mami</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dadi - man blo...</td>
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two of the prohibitions on in-laws are that firstly, they may not utter each other's names without penalty, and secondly, they may not touch one another. Affinal or in-law relationships are thus characteristically ones in which cross-sex familiarity is strongly discouraged via the cultural mechanisms of physical and name avoidance. On the other hand, in-laws may request material items or assistance from each other, and these requests must be met in good faith.

Ego calls her sister's husband *thauwi* or *man blo* (followed by the name of her sister). He reciprocates by calling her *wuman*, *missis*, *missis blo* (followed by the name of her husband), or *thauwi*. She calls her mother-in-law *ol leydy* or *mami*, and her father-in-law *ol man* or *dadi*, and they in turn reciprocate in calling their daughter-in-law *wuman* or *missis*. The latter term of address and reference is sometimes followed by possessive indicators to differentiate between daughters-in-law e.g. *missis blo* (followed by the name of their son).

Every one not only has at least two personal names, but also one or two additional names or 'play names' (nicknames). On Yam Island the nickname is predominantly contingent on the forename or personal name. Thus a person with the name Harry is invariably called 'Rey,' or someone called Maria is referred to as 'Maia'.

As affines may not utter any of the given names of one another (see also Rivers 1901b: 137; Rivers in Haddon 1904: 143; Beckett 1963: 36; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 210) they must be aware of all the names of all of their affines, as well as mindful never to refer to an affine by any of those names, nor refer to cognates who share any of those names by those particular names. When a person mistakenly calls the name of her or his in-law within their hearing, they usually make amends in the form of a gift. Until this gift is made, the offender cannot face her or his in-law without experiencing embarrassment, shame. In such cases where the offended in-law smokes, a packet of
cigarettes will be quickly thrown over to him or her, or else money may be passed over. Through this gift social order is quickly re-established with a minimum of social disruption. If the offender has nothing with which to re-establish the balance, they remove themselves from the social situation, and until appropriate reparation is made, keep her or his distance from that in-law.

Given that many people on Yam Island have the same names as one another, the play names perform a unique role in terms of in-law interaction. For example, ego may have a brother called Harry whose play name is 'Rey'. Let us imagine that her sister marries a man called Harry. Thus not only may ego not call the name of her sister's husband, but she may no longer call her brother by the name Harry. If he has another name which is not shared by any of her affines, she may use that term to refer to her brother, or she may use his play name, even though her sister's husband may also have the same play name. While in the company of others a person may refer to an affine with the same play name, but they cannot be directly addressed in such a way. The appropriate in-law terms described above are used in face-to-face interactions.

The relationship between same-sex affines is quite close. Typically such relatives of the same generational level spend a good deal of their time together, and they form close bonds. Quite often the in-law connection merely strengthens and reinforces an already existing strong relationship. Being sisters-in-law or brothers-in-law adds another qualitatively different dimension to a relationship between age-mates. One consistently sees same-sex affines going fishing or gardening together. There is an element of respect operating between such relatives, and recognition that they are joined as in-laws through a shared relationship with one other person, either as cognates of that person or as their spouse. The respect element is yet again reinforced in the observance of the name calling prohibition.
Bani (1988c) offers an interesting insight into the physical avoidance and name-calling prohibition obtaining between in-laws. He says that because male affines danced as spirits of the dead during the annual death dances, affinal touching is prohibited.

The only time a physical contact occurs is when someone dies and the in-law becomes the caretaker of the remains.....Most of us will recall that we cannot call our in-laws by names [and] vice versa. This is because the only time a name is called out is when the in-law becomes the MARKAI, mimic[s] the dead person and call[s] out the name to identify oneself.

(Bani 1988c)

In addition to the above instance, there are culturally legitimate occasions during which this strict adherence to the ideology of distance between affines lapses, and sexual joking and dancing occurs. This relaxation of the code on formal celebratory occasions, in which good-humoured joking occurs in the form of erotic dance and unabashed sexual repartée, publicly represents the connection between physical distance and sexual distance, something of which all Yam Island people are acutely aware. However, while Fitzpatrick states that on Mabuiag all affinal taboos are relaxed during feasting (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 281; 1981: 9), on Yam Island one may still not utter the names of one's affines on such occasions, although one may joke, touch or even burlesque with them.

For a woman, the man her sister marries is a member of a family and group with whom she also is eligible to establish marriage links. Likewise, a woman's husband's brothers also fall into a similar category. A woman's husband's brothers are socially equivalent to her husband, both as potential marriage partners and as fathers to her children. Her children use the same kinship term for their father as they do for their father's brothers. If her husband should die and she should wish to re-marry, these
same affines provide the best class of potential fathers for her children. Theoretically at least, they will accept her children as their own, as they are their brother's children. As the widow has already married into that family, these male affines also represent the most socially suitable class of potential husbands. Hence, so as to preserve the integrity of the marriage tie, the avoidance rule between affines, at the ideal level at least, attempts to minimise the threat of extra-marital liaisons, and the subsequent social and emotional discord which could result. Thus distance is observed as a measure of social control.

Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a) has analysed in detail the force of the relationship between affines in the Torres Strait by particularly focusing on death rites on Mabuiag. She has demonstrated that despite the erosion of the clans as the central organising units on that island, the relationship between in-laws continues to express or reflect the alliances which were originally created between the unilineal descent groups, and further, that the differentiation of community members into cognates and affines powerfully illustrates the change from agnatic to cognatic descent.

6.3. Clans and Totems

Clans, totems, totemic sites and shrines are discussed in Chapter 3, however in contemporary Yam Island idiom, the clan totem, awgadh, is said to have been the 'god' of the clan. Everything that people did was seen to have been achieved through the power of their respective totems. The extremely important awgadh of Sigay and Mayaw, and their associated rituals, played critical roles in the social organisation of Yam Island society.

Clan membership has long ceased to provide the primary dynamic upon which Yam Island social organisation rests. As happened on other islands, the missionary
prohibition on clan ceremonies, and the shift of people away from their clan territories to a central village, all served to undermine the role of agnatic descent groups (see also Beckett 1963: 38-39; 1987b; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a). The clans and moieties of Yam and Tudu had served as structures within which critical social, economic, political and religious events were articulated. Membership of a clan conferred on individuals rights to specific tracts of land and sea. Adult membership of a clan and a moiety was formally conferred on men in two major ritual events celebrated annually, and clan exogamy effected alliances between groups. In 1898 Haddon and Rivers (Haddon 1904) observed that the role of clans was decreasing in significance, and a similar process has occurred on Mabuiag.

Today most individuals are cognizant of their augud, or totem, but the once all encompassing clan groupings are remembered as territorial divisions. Individuals now interact with fellow villagers and outsiders in terms of behavior norms and social etiquette defined within their classificatory kinship categories of relationship.

(Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1981: 3)

When a woman marries she retains her own clan membership and clan totem. However, her children may choose between her totem, that of their father or those of both. Today land is inherited through both one's father and mother. Although a strong ideology of patrilineality remains and is expressed as the cultural ideal, it has been modified for pragmatic reasons. For example, the presence of non-Torres Strait Islander men fathering children with Islander women and the phenomenon of single mothers have necessitated a change in practice (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 201, 213, 267). The result has been an increased acknowledgement of the matriline in property disposal, especially in the case of land, and also in rights to use land, particularly when there are no male siblings or if these siblings live elsewhere. While
cognatic descent is now the norm, in practice there is a tendency for the patriline to be favoured. Residence is largely unilocal, with a strong patrivirilocal ideology.

Originally, each person had one formal name, however by at least the turn of the century individuals became known by two formal names. Patronymy was formalised on Yar Island by the teacher Mrs Smallwood in the late 1910s or the early 1920s (Mr Missa Samuel pers. comm. 1987; cf Beckett 1987b: 123). People then took surnames from the first of their father's two formal names. Thus for example the children of Mareko Maino adopted the surname Mareko, and their children have retained this as their surname.

6.4. Obligations and Responsibilities

Reciprocal kin terms indicate reciprocal relationships and transactions, including the transfer of property (e.g. see also Rivers 1924: 65). While there is reciprocal equivalence between 'siblings', the relationship between the mother's brother and in particular his sister's son is one of equivalence tempered with the benevolent authority exercised by the maternal uncle at specific life-crisis points (see Rivers 1901a; Beckett 1961b: 46; 1987b: 152; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 208-210, 223-224, 247, 301, 304).

The mother's bother has more authority in the raising of his sister's children than their father. That is, to use a local Yam Island phrase, 'awa mo big we dadi' (the uncle is bigger, i.e. more important, than the father).

......in Torres Straits, where descent, inheritance and succession are definitely patrilineal, the mother's brother has more authority over the child than its father. A child who refuses to obey its father will at once respond to the slightest wish of its maternal uncle. Moreover...the sister's son...[has] the privilege, theoretically at any rate, of taking any possession of his uncle which he chooses.

(Rivers 1924: 93)
Maternal uncles are accorded a specific status and respect, and a number of major life events still require the approval of these men. They have the major roles to play in the first cutting of a child's hair, a boy's first shave, first feasting for the first marine mammal hunted by a young man, and giving their approval for engagement and marriage of their sisters' sons. First feasting constitutes repayment to the maternal uncle of the young man who has just hunted his first dugong or turtle. In return for his having taught his sister's son the necessary hunting skills, the preferred cuts of the animal are ideally reserved for him, and up until recently he was entitled to enter the house of his nephew's parents (his sister's house) to avail himself of any material items he desired.

6.4.1. Reciprocal Exchange and Redistribution

Yam Island is a small community in which kin ties predominate, and as such everyday social order and integration are maintained through balanced and generalised reciprocity. People help each other with food and other material items, as well as by giving physical and emotional support. This assistance is couched in a kinship idiom on the one hand, and in a Christian idiom on the other. The values of sharing, mutual assistance, honesty, respect, hard work, care for others, restraint and discretion are all emphasised in Yam Islanders' model of correct social behaviour. Conversely, the customary prohibitions against theft, taking something without the owner's permission, gossip, talking to excess, swearing out of context and sexual association with particular categories of kin (see also Haddon 1904: 273) still play a significant role in the regulation of Yam Island social relations.

Yam-Tudu males were traditionally initiated into manhood at the onset of each Wet season. During their period of seclusion they were instructed by their maternal uncles in
the ethic of sharing. Maino reported the general thrust of this instruction to Haddon (1904: 210):

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.

This ethic of sharing remains strong on Yam Island. As the sharing and redistribution of preferred or 'first order' food (fish, clam, octopus, crab, crayfish, dugong, turtle, cassava, sweet potato and yam) cements social relationships, care must be taken to minimise offence, through, for example, taking care not to give poor cuts of turtle or dugong meat to particular people. Despite the caution, some people publicly air their disappointment, especially when they receive lean meat, and disputes regularly erupt over the perceived failure of someone to fulfill their kinship obligations to someone else.

People assist because they are related to a person in a particular way (see Beckett 1963: 35), or because they like someone (Beckett 1987b: 144), but they also assist because it is the proper thing to do, both in terms of custom and the Christian ethic of 'helping one another'. In encouraging appropriate behaviour, that is for people to 'akt gud wey', both overlapping sets of values are referred to as justification for the validity of set behaviour. Thus the configurations of ideal behaviours are alternatively characterised as the proper, customary or Christian ways to act.

This may be expressed in another way. One of the most significant codes governing behaviour on Yam Island is that one should never openly refuse a request from another person, irrespective of whether the person be family or a stranger. Not to assist a
kinsperson is to risk invoking community rebuke for not respecting and fulfilling kinship obligations, and not to assist anyone else is to make oneself and one's family vulnerable to external attack. This relates to an ever present attempt by Yam Island people to avoid invoking the emotion of jealousy (and thus anger) in others, particularly via the display of wealth or extraordinary skill in any area of life. On occasion, individuals may curtail their abilities in dance, drumming or song, in order to prevent arousing the envy of others.² Thus the ideology of social relations and theory for social action strongly advocates the observance of kinship and sharing obligations (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; Beckett 1987b) and gives pre-eminence to the importance of group cohesion as the norm, as opposed to either encouraging or rewarding individualism and individuation. While obvious tension does exist between these two positions of obligation to kin vs. obligation to oneself, nevertheless: 'Kinship as a moral code for behavior continues to regulate social relations in Mabuiag society' (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 214). This is particularly so given that while there has been increased social stratification in Islander communities, the kinship system still operates as a levelling mechanism whereby increased claims now can be made on wealthy and powerful families (Beckett 1987b: 149).

6.5. Community and Individual Occasions for Celebration

There is a broad spectrum of community and individual occasions which are publicly celebrated and ratified with a feast. Like the occasions they commemorate, feasts vary remarkably and may range from a 'small tea' of biscuits, cordial and tea, to a large scale event which spans a number of days. Irrespective of their size, all feasting occasions formally mark an event and may be seen as both celebrations and affirmations of identity (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 249-255, 1980b).

2. Refer to Young (1983: 222) for a similar observation on Goodenough Island in Papua New Guinea.
At the minor feasts, which are usually held to celebrate such events as a birthday, baptism or the blessing of a dinghy, community games are held instead of a dance. The games vary but may include one of the following team sports: volleyball, soccer, football or basketball. The team games of idha, markay (a version of 'tiggy') and way are also popular. Stoney pley ('hide and seek') is a gender based game, planned in secret by members of one sex and then sprung on the members of the opposite sex. The organisers hide all manner of foodstuffs around the village, ring the village bell and loudly sing the song associated with the game. At that point the members of the opposite sex leave what they are doing and gleefully begin the task of locating the items. The organisers give clues in their song in which places on the island are mentioned. When the others find any items, they emit whoops of delight and playfully taunt the hiders with their finds. All the goods are placed in one spot and then used in a small feast, which is usually held the following day.

The commemorations of July 1, Christmas and New Year, or the blessing of a house, are occasions in which medium-sized feasts are held and various games and / or dances are performed. The 'Coming of the Light' celebrations occur annually on the 1st of July. They commemorate the arrival of the London Missionary Society (LMS) teacher-missionaries on Darnley on this date, 1st July 1871. The celebrations were subsequently introduced into the Strait by the Anglican Church (Beckett 1987b: 87). Today, local community members wholeheartedly enjoy the role-play which occurs after a special Church service, and the festivities are brought to an end with a celebratory feast and dance. During the Christmas festivities, clusters of households sponsor their own feasts, and their respective dance teams visit the other feasting clusters on the island to compete in dance. For one week over the New Year period, 'rubbing play' occurs between in-laws, and alag (see Plate 20 in Chapter 7) appear in the village to terrorise those people unwise enough to be in the streets (see also Lowah 1988). The major celebrated events on the island for which the largest feasts are held,
however, occur during the rites of passage and exchange associated with marriage and death.

While the customary initiation ceremonies are no longer practised, girls and boys continue to be transformed into Christians and social beings through baptism, into adult women and men through the processes of Christian marriage, and by the first-feasting ritual for boys. Christian burial and the later tombstone opening complete the cycle of life and death (see also Chapter 7). Beckett (1987b) has stated that within 30 years of the arrival of L.M.S. missionaries in the Strait, traditional ceremonies had been synthesised with the Christian religious calendar: viz, the celebration of Christmas corresponded with the turtle season, Lent with food scarcity, Easter with the ripening of crops, and July 1 with the yam harvest.

6.5.1. Baptism

Babies assume a social and religious identity through being baptised into the Anglican Church. Through this ceremony they publicly assume their names, as well as an additional three guardians in the guise of godparents. Interestingly, Fitzpatrick has noted that because most babies are born in the Thursday Island Hospital, their subsequent baptisms on their islands of origin serve as a means by which their identification with their home islands is formally established, maintained and fostered (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980b: 5).

The parents of a baby girl choose two godmothers and one godfather, and a baby boy is likewise assigned two godfathers and one godmother. This is in keeping with a 17th century Anglican tradition (Rev M. McGregor pers.comm. 1985). Frequently, godmothers of a baby girl are sisters to the mother of the child, and in the case of a boy the godfathers are more often than not brothers to the baby's father. A mother's brother to
a baby girl may also be chosen as godfather, especially when the mother is unmarried. Unfortunately, I do not have enough material on the frequency of choice of paternal and maternal aunts and uncles as godparents to make further statements on this.

Godparents (mami god and dadi god) play important roles in the lives of Yam Island people, and they take their roles seriously. No doubt these feelings of responsibility for their godchild are compounded by their actual or classificatory kin relationship to the child. Both godmothers and godfathers become 'parents' to their charge. If the godmother would not normally have been referred to as 'mother' in a cognatic sense, then the term is now used for her, and any other prior kinship relationship with the child is superceded.

An extra-special reciprocal relationship obtains between godparents and their godchildren. As the child grows, he or she is increasingly called upon to assist a godparent. For example, a girl may regularly assist her godmother in gardening work. Likewise, godparents never seem to fail to recognise when their godchildren's birthdays draw near, and they are instrumental, in consultation with the parents, in organising some form of celebration to mark the day. As children mature it is increasingly common that not all their godparents are resident on Yam Island. Should this be the case, other adults will be called upon to stand in for the missing godparent/godparents, when a large celebration is planned for someone's birthday.

6.5.2. Engagement and Marriage

Marriage for men and women alike serves as a formal mechanism for sanctioning and stabilising sexual relationships, clearly demarcating gender statuses and roles appropriate for those involved in the monogamous reproductive unit, regulating rights in children and property, and creating an alliance between two families. Monogamous
marriage has long since replaced the practice of polygyny common amongst the more powerful of the Kulkalgal men prior to colonisation (see Chapter 3). Indeed, by the end of the 19th century, Torres Strait Islanders in general expressed shame at the customary practice of polygyny (Haddon 1904: 273).

The contemporary cultural ideal surrounding sustained heterosexual relationships now hinges on formal, Anglican Church marriage. That is not to say, however, that all couples marry, or indeed that all children are born and reared within the bounds of marriage. The availability of Supporting Parents' Benefits provides some assistance for unmarried women to raise their children with a measure of financial security. Some couples also refuse to capitulate to the demands of their cognates, the Council or the Church authorities to marry formally, and may live together in a joint household. Nevertheless, the pressure to marry is constantly applied and because of the size of the community, is keenly felt. Living together is formally frowned upon, and although tolerated to varying degrees and lengths of time, every opportunity is taken publicly and privately to urge couples to marry. If a girl has borne more than one child to the same partner, she is encouraged to marry him, dependent on approval from her kin and the kin of her boyfriend. The underlying notion is that to live together unmarried is wrong in the eyes of God, and that children of such unions are placed in a state of social ambiguity, as are the man and woman. Without the clear demarcation of the couple and all their respective kindred into cognates and affines, social interaction becomes less predictable and satisfactory, and on occasions, embarrassing.

The ideology about who one can and cannot have sexual relations with is still strong, however the practicalities of avoiding sexual interaction with certain kin on a very small island with a low population is almost impossible. Family arguments may arise over younger members of the community not properly observing these cultural restrictions. One of the most clearly articulated values about marriage stated on Yam
Island today is that which continues to uphold the customary prohibition against marrying your 'own blood', that is, one should not marry a cognate (see Beckett 1961b: 23; 1963: 33-35; Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 200-201, 203-204). Cousins and even adoptive classificatory cousins are considered too socially and physically close for a person to be involved with in a relationship other than as cognates, and as such 'hanging about' with patrilateral and matrilateral cousins of the opposite sex is not locally perceived as a problematic cross-sex association.

Prior to marriage, females and males are referred to as gel and boy, irrespective of their ages, or whether or not they have children of their own. Upon marriage they are automatically referred to and expected to become, (w)uman and man. These categories are imbued with a host of contingent role expectations. As such marriage effectively operates as a contemporary rite of passage.

Engagement

Haddon (1901: 160) was told by Maino that both the boy and the girl informed their respective parents of their desire to marry, whereupon the girl's family semi-seriously fought the boy's family, because 'girl more big' (i.e. the girl is more important). At least until the 1940s on Yam Island it was common for the engaged girl to be taken to her future parents-in-law's house every Sunday to have lunch and supper with them, and then to be returned to her parent's house later in the evening.

Currently when a young man wishes to marry, he approaches his mother and father, who in turn advise him to consult his maternal uncle. If the uncle agrees on the boy's

3. Fitzpatrick corroborates this principal (although not the terminology) for Mabuiag (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 241, 1980b: 5).
choice, the uncle approaches the parents of the girl (see also Haddon 1904). If all parties are in agreement to the match, an engagement will normally occur. If the couple already have several children, the formal engagement may be dispensed with, and a marriage arranged.

At the engagement both intending marriage partners are openly asked by their respective maternal uncles to affirm verbally their love for each other. This is done in front of their two families, and it is a semi-private occasion. The couple also take it in turn to ask each other, three times, if they love each other. The engagement ceremony is brought to a close with those in attendance filing past the couple and shaking their respective hands. A feast organised by the boy’s family then begins. At one engagement ceremony I attended in Mackay, the mother of the engaged man performed a comic dance (see also section 6.6.1 below).

If significant kin do not agree to the match, the intending couple may bow to the pressure to refrain from the relationship. Alternatively, they may obstinately continue without the result of ever having their relationship socially sanctioned. However, if things should go wrong later in their relationship, then the lack of social approval may well be regarded as an indicator that the relationship was destined to flounder.

**Marriage**

Since the 1840s enormous changes have occurred in marriage forms. While Beckett (1961b: 50) demonstrated that marriage payments increased as a result of a missionary prohibition on brother-sister exchange, Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 207; 1980b) has introduced the notion of considering marriage as an economic liability in
contemporary Mabuaig society. More recently Beckett (1987b) has addressed the spiralling costs associated with marriage and the delay of marriage as Torres Strait Islanders became increasingly involved in the cash economy during the 19th century. Maino told Haddon (1890a: 342) in the late 1800s that he had paid one camphor chest full both of customary and European trade items in bride-wealth for one of his Papuan wives. Included in the chest were the following items:

- 7 bolts of cloth
- 12 pairs of trousers
- 1 lb (500 gm) of tobacco
- 12 fishing hooks
- 12 shirts
- 12 handkerchiefs
- 24 tomahawks
- 12 singlets
- 1 long fishing spear
- 2 fishing lines
- 2 pearshells

Contemporary marriages on Yam Island cost in the order of several thousand dollars, except for those marriages held in the Magistrate's Office on Thursday Island, which because of their 'quietness' do not require major financial outlay for clothing or for sponsoring a feast.

Because of the restrictions as to who constitutes suitable marriage partners, it was traditionally quite common for several sisters (including classificatory sisters) in one family to draw their partners from among several brothers (including classificatory brothers) from another family. According to Maino it was common practice for the family of the groom to present the bride's family with one of its daughters as a marriage partner for one of the bride's brothers. 'This 'swapping' of 'sisters' was the

4. At the 1980 Australian Anthropological Society Conference in Brisbane, Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980b) explored the high financial costs of Mabuaig weddings, and suggested a) that Mabuaig Islanders were not marrying; b) that this incurred a social cost of people not becoming affiliated with others, and c) that the practice of secondary mortuary rituals (viz. tombstone openings) was ipso facto under threat. However, as one does not acquire affines simply through one's own marriage, enough affines may be acquired through the marriages (however limited) of one's cognates.
usual method of getting a wife' (Haddon 1901: 160).

It continues to be recognised that marriage involves the conjoining of two families, as well as two individuals (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a). In other words, it is families which are married via the actions of two social members. On such an occasion of formal marriage, a great deal of competitiveness and antagonism may be evident between both the bride's and the groom's respective kin. The continuing corporate aspect of marriage is demonstrated by an ideology of patrivirilocal residence 5 the payment of bride-wealth, and the symbolic departure of the bride from her own family to join that of her husband, as well as the continuing salience of the levirate ideal: viz, a widow is better off marrying one of her deceased husband's brothers, as he will care for her children as his own.

When it is decided that a boy and gel will marry on Yam Island, a date is set and the news is spread to their respective cognates. In these arrangements consideration is given to the ability of significant family members to attend the wedding, travelling not only from the neighbouring islands but also from Thursday Island, and occasionally making the journey from the Australian mainland. When marriage involves a resident Papuan family, consideration must also be given to their kin living in the coastal Papuan villages, particularly those of Mabaduan and Tureture. Once the date has been decided, Yam Islanders spend a period of time discussing whether they will align themselves with the side of the bride or that of the groom. Obviously in some

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5. According to Haddon (1901: 90; 1904: 212) however, the customary residence rule was for the man to live with his wife's kin. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 201-203) dealt with similar seemingly contradictory data on residence concerning Mabuiag and has argued that 'traditionally' post-marital residence would have been fluid so as to be responsive to environmental factors. Uxorilocality may have been common during the early years of marriage, and bilocality increased after European contact. Beckett (1987b: 30, 116) has also come across ambiguity regarding residence. He says that while the residence ideal was patrivirilocal, it was basically up to the couple themselves as to where they lived.
situations as with the primary cognates either of the bride or the groom, there is no need for such dialogue, as it is perfectly obvious as to where their closest kinship connection lies.

However, the more distant the relationship between ego and either the bride or the groom, the more discussion there is as to whether ego will recognise kinship ties as being stronger to the bride or stronger to the groom. In such a cognatic kinship system as operates on Yam Island, people faced with this dilemma describe themselves as being 'right in the middle' of the couple. That is, they can trace equivalent kinship links to both, as their kindreds overlap. This is problematic because they generally need to relate to one of the couple as 'family' and to the other as 'in-law'.

Sometimes a decision as to whether a person is gel sayd or boy sayd is made for them by either the groom or the bride, who will ask them to stand with her or him (as family), to be on their side. However, this period between the finalisation of the date and the actual wedding may involve debate and dialogue amongst small groups of people, all discussing their respective kinship affiliations with the bride and the groom. Sometimes an individual makes a decision considered inappropriate by their own close cognates, and the family's anger may be vented either privately or even against the individual on the day of the wedding itself.

The decision as to whom ego aligns herself or himself with on the wedding day signifies how she or he will continue to relate to the bride and groom after their wedding and constitutes the basis upon which future mortuary rites and obligations may be conducted and met (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 243). Thus, in a situation in which equivalent kinship links may be traced both to the bride and groom, and where there is no dissent about ego's decision, she or he may be involved with both gel sayd and boy sayd activities, and after the wedding will recognise both parties as
cognates. On the other hand, when a person aligns her/himself clearly with one side, he or she clearly demonstrates that their links to one supercede those to the other. After the wedding, this person will thereafter relate to one of the party as 'family' and to the other as an 'in-law'.

There must be adequate time between the announcement of the impending wedding and the actual day for both the groom's and bride's family to organise things. Some weeks prior to the wedding discussions are held within each of the groups. It is at these meetings that final decisions are reached about how the preparations are to be made and how the event is to be conducted. The most crucial question to be addressed is whether the groom's kin can mobilise enough labour and capital for the wedding. Unlike European weddings, the bulk of the financial costs are shouldered by the groom and his family. They must pay for all the wedding clothes, hire transport for the groom's kin if necessary, sponsor a large nuptial feast and make payments in foodstuffs and money to the chief representatives of the bride's family. The nuptial feast proper should be more impressive and substantial than the minor feast the bride's family have with her on the morning of her wedding. Dress fitting trips have to be made to Thursday Island, and the wedding cake ordered. With improved, more regular air contact between the island and the mainland, in the late 1980s cakes were increasingly purchased from Cairns, and formal suits were hired. The cost of one wedding in the early 1980s exceeded $2000.00, and no doubt the expenses involved in more recent weddings have eclipsed that figure.

A few days prior to the wedding, guests arrive on the island. Preparations which may have begun weeks earlier are now accelerated. Dry wood is collected and stacked in readiness for use in cooking; the groom's kindred cut several lengths of bamboo and acquire several sheets of galvanised iron for the construction of the ceremonial dzar dzar under cover of which the nuptial feast will be held; earth ovens are dug; an
outside cooking area is established; 44 gallon drums are arranged near the cooking area and filled with water; men from the groom's kindred go hunting for turtle or dugong; and at least one pig is purchased, if the groom's family do not already own one.

Wedding preparations reach fever pitch the night preceding the wedding, with the groom's kindred in particular working through to daybreak. They may be involved in the varied tasks of catching a rogue pig, cooking cakes and tarts, or sewing dancing costumes for the celebratory dance.

On the morning of the wedding, a wedding breakfast is held for the bride, and as the time for the marriage nears the now emotional bride is surrounded by all her cognates, and formally escorted to the house of the groom's relatives. En route, her relatives may halt the procession and break into dance, and after she has been transferred formally into the care of her parents-in-law, dancers from both the woman's and man's kindred may compete for dancing honours. Meanwhile, food has been prepared and placed in the earth ovens in readiness for the large feast sponsored by the man's family, which follows the wedding ceremony. The bride is taken into the house by her husband's female cognates and dressed in the clothes which they have purchased. Later, the same women escort her to the local church.

After the Anglican marriage ceremony, the couple emerge from the Church and are greeted by teams of dancers comprised of the man's cognates, who celebrate their acquisition of the woman. As the wedding party make their way toward the feasting place, the procession is again interrupted with spontaneous displays of dance. When the procession arrives, the new husband and wife (plus their attendants) are seated and required to sit quietly (sometimes for hours) until the feast is ready.

After the wedding feast there is an evening of celebratory dance. The ceremonial exchange of goods, in which the couple are presented with money and other gifts in
order to help them make a start on their new life together, usually takes place on the following day. This exchange is called *sibwanan* and is preceded by 'talk', *wakaywian*. *Wakaywian* is comprised of instructions given to the couple by the groom's father, especially as to the couple's new roles and responsibilities in life. The following is an edited translation of one such instructive speech given by Getano Belford Lui (snr) in 1982:

In the morning when you rise daughter-in-law, you begin work.... This basket symbolises that everything belonging to your family goes into it. It is your role to look after everything, money or anything belonging to the two of you. You have control of that basket.

Do you see this? It's burnt wood; it represents how you belong to the hearth. It is your job to ensure that no-one goes hungry....

This is a tomahawk...for cutting firewood and the like. It is yours. That is why I am handing all these things over to you tonight.....

This knife symbolises the garden place. Use this garden knife as you see fit. This knife represents whatever you want to do for your family.

This is water, cold water. It means that whatever you do, you cannot do without water. For example, if you go gardening, you must have water to drink. Regardless, everyone must have water provided by you.

I have given you these things; this is our traditional custom. Tomorrow you will begin work.... as a married woman... What you can do for your family, for your relatives, and your husband's relatives, rests solely with you. Remember the basket and take good care of it. If you are careless the basket will be empty..... That is life; you take care of the basket irrespective of how your husband works. It is bad if you are careless with the basket. This is our traditional Torres Strait way..... The two of you must respond when people turn to you for help. You have eyes. Half of the population of Yam went to your wedding. Don't forget that...give that help back. You must do whatever good you can.
Then to the accompaniment of hymns dedicated for such a presentation, all participants at the ceremony go forward with their gift for the couple, kiss each of them and return to their places. Later a celebratory dance is held to mark this final stage in the marriage ceremonies.

When a husband and wife both come from the same island, they usually establish their home on that island. In those cases in which the spouses come from different islands, it is considered correct for the new couple to live on the husband's island. However, if the husband has been resident for some time on the woman's home island, it is unlikely they will change residence on marriage. In such an instance however, it is customary for the newly married couple to make a trip to the husband's island after the wedding festivities. This trip may last for anything from just a couple of days to a few weeks, after which the couple return to what will become their usual domicile.

Once married, it is considered inappropriate for the woman and man to associate with their respective single age-mates. To continue the association necessitates acting or being like their single friends, something which must be discouraged initially, if the notion of marriage is to remain culturally consistent and coherent on the island. Ideally, there should be a relatively sudden transformation in their behaviours, reinforced by the expectations of them that the rest of the community holds. When the transformation from boy to man and gel to (w)uman is not as smooth as the sudden change in linguistic denotation, the erring couple are tutored and sometimes berated, until their self-images and behaviours conform more closely to the society's image of what it is to be man and (w)uman on Yam Island. The couple have to know what the roles and duties of a married man and woman are, so that they will act appropriately. By marrying, women and men become full social adults. They have adhered to the strong ideology to marry, and through their formal alignment and commitment to each other and to their respective families, their relationship is publicly acknowledged and
sanctioned. The newly married couple are seen to have acted correctly. Although 'quiet weddings' in the Magistrate's Office are frowned upon, they still create an alliance between two sets of cognates, so that differentiation into affines and cognates is clarified. Nevertheless, these marriages are regarded as less stable because of the diminished role played by the two sets of families, and in particular the absence of formal exchange.

On marriage, the husband assumes a role and position of authority as 'boss' over his wife, and this is given added impact with the indissolubility of marriage introduced by both the Church and the State (Beckett 1987b: 43, 119). The concept of boss is a salient and recurrent theme in the everyday lives of Yam Islanders, and it provides not only the rationale and charter for appropriate action, but it also constitutes the mechanism through which breaches of behaviour may be socially censured. Positions of authority are held by the government, the local council, the Chairman of the council, older close kin and one's husband. A boss attempts to set the limits of another person's behaviour, and therefore there is little tolerance for individuals who are not in the category of boss if they assume such an authority role. In such situations an indignant person will proclaim: 'Yu no boss' (You're not the boss), or 'Yu no may boss' or 'Yu no boss blo mi' (You're not my boss).

Ideally a married woman should be fully occupied with the welfare of her husband, their children and his immediate family. She is perceived to have left her family of origin, and to have joined her husband's family. Under the direction of her husband's mother, her day revolves around doing the bulk of cooking, cleaning and washing for the family. If she has joined a large household, she will be assisted by her husband's sisters, or the wives of her husband's brothers. Subsistence fishing and gardening with other women is also carried out, and if she has children her parents-in-law, or even her
own parents will babysit. Before marriage, a woman works both her father's and her mother's land, however, after marriage she predominantly gardens on her husband's land.

Changes also occur with respect to a woman's dress. While the wearing of shorts by unmarried women on Yam Island was tolerated during the early 1980s, any attempts by married women to appear publicly in such garb was seen as scandalous. Nevertheless, some younger married women withstood public pressure and continued to wear shorts, particularly during sports activities. Short skirts falling just above the knee were also similarly frowned upon.

On marriage a woman also automatically becomes a 'mother'. That is, the right to become a member of the adult women's society of the Anglican Mother's Union, is conferred on her, irrespective of whether or not she has children. Her change in status and respective role requirements is further signalled by her symbolic journey from the Girl's Friendly Society (GFS) to the Mother's Union. Through her inclusion in this group, other women socialise her into her new roles as wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and mother. They advise her on appropriate behaviour and censure her on the occasions on which she is seen to be not upholding her gender role. As a member of the Mother's Union, a woman is regarded as the pastoral guardian of her husband, her children and by extension, of other members of the community.

A newly married man is urged to spend less time with his unmarried mates and is expected to provide economically for his new family, either in the form of a regular income or with a regular supply of fish, turtle and dugong. His household duties include the digging of wells, building garden fences and carrying larger vessels of water from wells to the house. These tasks are performed by the women of the household in the absence of men, and while industriousness is expected of both men and women, men
are accorded a greater degree of flexibility.

Both men and women are expected to publically carry out their respective duties independently of one another. Although it is certainly recognised that the couple constitute a unit, there is little tolerance for a newly married couple accompanying each other everywhere. The following censorial statement, made by an elderly Yam Island woman, is indicative of this attitude, as well as demonstrative of the particular style and humour with which such issues are addressed on the island:

*We man wagbawt, no pollo bi'ayn. Libbe em - em man.*

Where your husband goes, don't follow him. Leave him be, he's a man.

*No waze dem pipil ya - kettel ane sorspan.*

Don't be like some of these married couples here, who follow each other around like a kettle and a saucepan.

Separation and divorce are not condoned on Yam Island, although the reality is that some people do live apart for legitimate social reasons. These may include visiting relatives and staying away for a long period of time, or living apart for reasons of finding employment. That is not to imply that all such cases of these separations are indicative of marital discord. However, in some instances these legitimate absences do provide the people concerned with the breathing space they may need from a partner.

Despite the strong family and community pressure to marry, many couples do not marry. The fact that many younger people choose to live together on the island provides a constant source of frustration for older Yam Island people. No doubt the changed Australian attitude toward de-facto relationships, the lessening of the State Government's power in exerting control over people's relationships, and the
availability of Unemployment and Supporting Parents Benefits have enabled many younger people to pursue this option. Those who choose to *klip* (live together) have a greater degree of mobility and personal independence, as also do the small number of unmarried women who have a number of children. The availability of Social Security payments enables women in this situation to support their offspring without marrying. The role of father is regularly taken on by the woman's brothers, whom her children address as *dadi*, instead of *awa*.

With marriage a number of things are achieved: the sexual relationship between two people is recognised and socially regulated in that kinship and affinal relationships are clearly defined. As such the roles and statuses of the respective families are clearly defined, the statuses and roles of the marriage partners are clearly stipulated, rights to the productive and reproductive labour of each spouse are established, the status of the children of a union are clearly defined, rights over children and property are regulated and the Christian ethic of marriage is also upheld. Consequently, a combination of Christian ethic and traditional kinship and descent principles provide the framework and social structure within which marriage is emphasised and managed. Through marriage a formal initiation process of transforming boys and girls into adult women and men, is achieved. Marriage, as it were, now provides the formal, public avenue into adulthood for Yam Island people.

6.53. First-feasting

Spirits rise as word filters through the community that a young man is bringing back his first dugong. A gleeful aunty may momentarily dispense with typical decorum and jump joyfully up and down on a beached dugong or frolic in the sea.

Traditionally, all the maternal uncles of the new hunter could enter the house of their
sister and her husband (the mother and father of the young man) and help themselves to anything which took their fancy. Theoretically, there was no limit to the value of the material items they might take, and the owners of the house could not protest. This practice has been greatly modified in the last 25 years or so, due to the exponential increase in the quantity of expensive material items (especially kerosene and gas operated appliances, in addition to electronic goods), found in Islander households. The expense of replacing large material items such as beds, generators, dinghies and outboard motors was deemed to be phenomenal, so when Getano Lui snr was Chairman of the island, he phased out the practice (G.B.Lui snr pers.comm.). Since that time many householders have come to own washing machines, cassette decks, televisions and video recorders.

The eldest maternal uncle of the boy is accorded the responsibility of butchering the animal and supervising the redistribution of its meat. As recognised head of the family, he gets the choicest cuts of meat, namely the head and the tail (Maino Kelly snr pers. comm. 1982). After the dugong has been fully butchered, a feast is held to commemorate the young man's attainment of the status of hunter. This ritual occurs for whichever the young man first spears, turtle or dugong. As far as I was able to ascertain, there are not two different rituals; that is, one for first turtle and one for first dugong.

6.6. Dance

Traditional dances were comprised of quite different forms and components from contemporary dance (see Chapter 3). Some dances were done in imitation of animal

6. There may well have been a joint Island Councils decision for the whole of the Torres Strait to ban this ritual, as Lowah (1988) mentions the expense of the ritual and its having been prohibited for the same reasons as mentioned by Lui.
species so as to ensure success in the hunt. For example, during the late 1800s Maino described how a large stone surrounded by skulls was related to catching turtle and, was cleaned and painted red after which a dancer imitated the movements of a sucker-fish (Haddon 1904: 335).

Chester observed sheets of iron and dugong bones being used as drums on Tudu in October 1870 (QSA COL/A151). In February 1871, Moresby (1876: 31-32) witnessed a dance performance on Tudu after the manager of the shelling station insisted the people perform. Older men and women in a crouching position chanted, and kept the beat by clapping their hands and drumming. They encircled the dancers who, painted and adorned with armlets and cassowary feather headdresses, performed a war dance in which they drew their bows and launched their missiles. They also danced daily scenes which ranged from harpooning dugong and fishing to making love. The pièce de résistance was the final dance which illustrated the coming of the north-west monsoon, and the consequent planting of yams, taro, and sweet potatoes - a poem in a dance. Nothing more perfectly graceful could be seen than their movements, as, rapidly gliding round the fire with swaying bodies and inflected limbs, they showed how the ground was turned up and the seed sown, and ended with a joyous dance.

(Moresby 1876: 32)

Some 17 years later Haddon witnessed similar dances on Tudu, although he also remarked on the negative effects of Christianity on traditional dance forms and occasions for performance. Dances had been discouraged or prohibited, and because of the men's involvement in the fisheries, little attention had been given to the maintenance of traditional dance. He observed that the younger Tudu people either experienced shame at performing the customary dances, or they were unsure as to the
appropriate movements. The older women danced what Haddon has suggested was part of a war-dance, and they obviously took great pleasure in their performance of a kab kar (Haddon 1901: 72, 1912: 293).

After a little persuasion we induced them to get up a koppa-koppa [sic-kab kar]...... 2 men and about 8 women and girls danced- we had great difficulty in getting them to take off their respective garbs of civilisation-wh[ich] we know to be (mistakenly) donned in our honour.....amid much chatting & laughing they substituted a coloured girdle and a wrap-around the chest for the long gown- or one piece of calico served the double purpose. At least one woman put on a grass petticoat beneath......The chief Maino played the drum & he was surrounded by his wife, children & other women & children who joined in a kind of chant & who encouraged the others. A largess of tobacco closed the proceedings.

(Haddon 1888-1889: 10-11 in 1888-1929)

The garig kap was traditionally performed when certain fruits were ripe, or when yams and sweet potatoes were ready to eat. The dance lasted throughout one night and was performed by masked men (Haddon 1904: 346;1935: 75, 369). On Tudu the time to perform the ceremony was marked by the appearance of the kerhereki star in the night sky (Ray and Haddon 1897: 164).

Every Wet season when boys were initiated into the kod of Sigay-Mayaw on Yam Island, intermittent dancing took place each night of their seclusion. Performances began as night fell, occurred again two or three times during the night and ended finally as dawn broke (Haddon 1904: 376; see also Chapter 3). The men sang the song associated with their respective totem or awgadh: thus some sang the song for Sigay, and the others sang for Mayaw. The words of these two songs may be found in Haddon (1904: 66). The singing of these songs ensured fine weather, as well as good fortune in
When singing to invoke fine weather the men held their arms out from their bodies, with their palms up, and they moved them from side to side.

When the desired intention of the song was to effect fortune in war, the *waus kap* was performed. In 1888 Maino of Yam-Tudu described the *waus kap*, which was performed by warriors prior to departing for battle. Any man who dozed off during the dancing was awakened immediately, as it was maintained that for every man who fell asleep at the *waus kap*, another man was killed in battle (1904: 377). Three lines of men, fully dressed for war (see Haddon 1912: 52, 56), danced in the kod on Yam in their respective lines of affiliation: one for Sigay, one for Mayaw and a smaller line for ger (see Chapter 3). The white-feathered headdress (*deri*) and black-brown cassowary feather headdress were worn alternately by the two main lines of warriors (Haddon 1904: 376).

What are now stylised dancing headdresses may perhaps have operated as protective masks traditionally. Tobin in 1792 described finding masks in a canoe, and suggested they protected the warriors' faces in battle (Tobin in Haddon 1935: 73). The *deri* of Tudu were made of white heron and cassowary feathers, cut and placed on a cane frame (1912: Plate VI, Fig 1), and according to Haddon (1912: 38) they symbolically represented a human face.

Dances also occurred annually during *naygay* (see Table 3) in which the spirits of the deceased were emulated (Haddon 1904: 257-259; see also Chapters 3 and 7). These death dances were taught to the Tudu people by the culture hero Naga, who brought the practice from Papua (Haddon 1935: 70). After these dances, the *mawa* ceremonies were performed to ensure the continued abundance of wongay (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.7; see also Haddon 1904: 348-349).
Contemporary Dance Styles

In every style of contemporary dance on Yam Island, people of all age ranges dance together. The dance forms performed include Island dance (known throughout the region as 'play'), disco, a combination of play and disco, and the not so common gabudan drayg (waltzing). According to Beckett (1987b: 97) the latter was introduced into the islands after World War 2, and initially caused some problems in that members of the opposite sex were required to physically touch while dancing. The emergence of rock and roll in the 1960s alleviated the problem.

Island dancing as distinct from either modern 'disco' or the frequent mix of both Island and disco dancing, takes place on a number of festive occasions stimulated by a variety of reasons which range from the celebration of weddings, Christian calendrical events, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, farewell feasts and house openings, to the celebrations accompanying tombstone openings. There are two basic forms of 'island dancing' performed on Yam Island today: stand-up dancing ('play') and sit-down dancing. Such forms of dance are the means by which Yam Islanders express and signal happiness and general feelings of well being. Dancing is synonymously referred to as 'making happiness', meyke api.

'Play'

When the customary dances were prohibited by the early missionaries to the strait, experimentation with new dance forms began. Taibobo was essentially a Rotuman style of dance, which had been adopted by Torres Strait Islanders from Pacific Islanders working and living in the region (Haddon 1935: 219), and it has since been gradually replaced with another style. Contemporary Island dance or 'play' has its origins in a fortnight long dance workshop held on Mabuiag Island some 70 years ago, when a
number of luggers from Moa, Mer, Badu and Yam were forced to take shelter from bad weather. Over a period of two weeks the crew combined the older style of *kab kar* with the more recent Taibobo form of dance (Mabo 1984: 34). This resulted in the dance form now recognised as 'island dance' or 'play'. Beckett (1987b) has located the full development of this dance form within the context of increasing power given to Islanders in their own communities:

> Now feasting and dancing flourished, officially approved as the proper way to celebrate secular and religious holidays, as well as weddings, tombstone openings, departures and home-comings. After a period of flirtation with various South Sea styles of singing and dancing, the Islanders had begun to develop their own, synthetic style which now became dominant throughout the Strait....

(1987b: 56)

'Play', or stand-up dancing, occurs more frequently on the island than sit-down dance. Although dance plays a central role in men's and women's lives, it is the men who are the more regular dancers in stand-up dancing. This is in contrast to the fierce dancing competition between women and men in the Western islands (Fitzpatrick pers. comm.)

On Yam Island the action of dancing is far more central to male lives, with male toddlers being taught dance movement and rhythm and increasingly being actively and positively encouraged to dance with older men, as they mature.

When men and boys dance they wear a uniform of red dancing sarong (*kaliku* or *labalaba*), white cotton anklets (*makmak*), over-skirt of soft palm fronds (*dzazi*), white singlet (usually), and a colourful towelling washcloth or scarf (*sweta*) tied around the head (see Plate 19). At least some of the dance team carry seed rattles (*guwa*). Other objects may be carried depending on the dance: some dances require the

7. Seed rattles are made from the seeds of the matchbox bean, tied together in a cluster on either a rope handle or one made from plastic hose. They are shaken rhythmically in the air, or against the other hand or thigh, in accompaniment to the beat.
PLATE 19. The cognates of the groom dancing on the occasion of the marriage of Anna Harry (Yam) to Wrench Larry jnr (Warraber), Yam Island, October 1980. Note the woman to the left play acting and wearing a shopping bag on her head (photograph: M. Fuary).
use of *kubar* (half coconut shells) clapped together to punctuate the dance, *marap* (bamboo clapper) or an apparatus constructed from wood or tin to symbolise the sun, a star, windmills, sea foam, gardening hoes, or *tuguma*. Haddon (1912: 295, Pl. xxxiii; see also Figure 10) referred to similar hand-held objects being used on Tudu in 1888.

Today dance couplets are the norm. In each couplet there is a slow form (*umanha*) which is the first performed, and then a fast form. Each of these forms has its respective song and choreography. The same words or completely different words may be used in each version, but the tune is different. On the rare occasion in which a slow form has not been composed, dancers may dance unaccompanied except for drum. This is a style referred to as *yagia* (Lizzie Lui pers. comm 1989), and it is followed by the fast version. When other Island groups perform Yam Island songs and dances, and inappropriately combine two unrelated ones into a couplet, Yam Island people feel embarrassed at their mistake.

Incorporated within the athletic movements (*ginar*) of men's dance is the continual hitching up or retying of the dancing sarong. Men and boys skillfully achieve this without interrupting the flow of the dance. As the men dance they sing the song belonging to that dance, and they are accompanied by a group of women singers and drummers, as well as the audience. Usually a woman plays the hour-glass drum (*badara* or *warup*) which is traded down from Papua (see also Haddon 1894: 42-43). A woman or a girl always plays the kerosene tin drum, which has replaced the large cylindrical lengths of bamboo. The rhythm beat out on the tin with bamboo or stick batons is fast and complex compared to the regular, slower beat struck on the hour-glass drum. Some male dancers punctuate their performance with shrill whistles at specific points in the movements, while members of the audience may also yell encouragement, or demonstrate their appreciation and pride by emitting loud, shrill whistles. Audience appreciation and delight is further emphasised by women and girls walking systematically along the lines of dancers, pouring talcum powder or spraying perfume.
on their backs and sometimes legs and ankles. Extra perfume and powder is lavished on certain kin. Dancers who suffer from asthma or bronchial conditions warn the women and girls against spraying them.

Dances are predominantly concerned with working on boats, gardening, the seasons, the tides, and places to which people have been. In the early 1950s O'Leary (1951: 11) commented that the deeds of Kebisu, and in particular his raids against ships and other islands, were being performed in dance. There are only a few people, usually men, credited with being composers of songs, and a certain limited number of other people regarded as choreographers. Dances and their songs are resurrected from the relatively recent past, and may be in vogue for a number of months, before being replaced with other favourites. The following song composed by the late Maza Samuel, was regularly sung and danced on Yam Island during 1982. The song was originally performed when Yam Island boys arrived home on their annual furlough from working on the pearling and trochus boats (Mrs Luisa Samuel pers. camm. 1982).

Kazil ayawal
Children, you come, come
Ngay ama
I'm mother
Ngay apu
I'm mother
Nithamunia
For you
Seygi bawal
You stay there, in the bow of the sea
Seygi imi
Sapun agu ban palgiminh
That sea and wind
Kedha tonar nur nguzu geth
In that time, my hand will cut
Dhadhi aparan
It in the middle
Although there are definitely times in which female stand-up dancing predominates, or in which there is a fairly equal division into female and male dance teams, these occasions by no means represent the norm. Commonly the nature of female involvement in stand-up dancing can be classified in the following manner:

a) females drum and sing for the male dancers;
b) females are members of a mixed-sex team;
c) females cavort exaggeratedly (kaythian) and in good humour in front of their male affines;
d) females perform spontaneous comic dances, either alone or by suddenly appearing in a male dance;
e) females spontaneously run in and either dance beside a close kinsman (such as a son or a brother), or hold a light beside him to draw the audience's attention to his performance;
f) females do their own dances.

I will not discuss in any detail a) and b) above, however it is worth some additional discussion on the other patterns.

c) Kaythian

Typically a woman will appear for a brief period of time on the dance ground, place
herself in close physical proximity to a male in-law and dance erotically. Most
frequently she will do this to the husband of her sister, and with such behaviour the
avoidance and physical restraint which obtains between cross-sex affines in everyday
life is temporarily allowed to disintegrate. In such situations where a woman runs in to
join the dancing, irrespective of what she does, the men keep dancing, as if she were not
there. The man to whom such ridiculous attention is being addressed, fails to
acknowledge his in-law's presence and attempts to continue his dancing unhindered, by
not attending to her gross familiarity. Sometimes this becomes exceptionally difficult,
and the dancer has to dance skillfully around her, without accidentally knocking into
her, or falling over her. So great was the skylarking of one man's sister-in-law that he
literally bolted from the dance ground, to the great amusement of the woman and the
audience. On yet another occasion I observed, a woman's brother-in-law retained his
composure until the point at which his two sisters-in-law began to drag him physically
from the dance ground. At this point he joined the audience in delighted laughter,
while the rest of the dancers continued their performance. He reappeared a few
seconds later and joined the dance as if nothing had happened.

This kind of sexual joking between affines is common in stand-up dance. There is a fine
line drawn however between appropriate joking, or kaythian, and taking it to
extremes. On some occasions, older people remonstrate a person who may be seen to be
going overboard. More than once I heard such a declaration:

No mo kaythian. Yupla meyke dati wata

Don't join in, doing comic sexual dance. You people make the water
dirty (i.e. you spoil the dancing).

Female sexual play in such dances is both frequent and transitory, and it is done in the
spirit of good fun. Each event only lasts a few minutes and concludes when the woman
involved runs laughing off the dance ground. The men dance on, seemingly oblivious to
the temporary upheaval of the most significant avoidance relationship in Yam Island
society, and also seemingly oblivious to the continuing laughter for the next few minutes
from the appreciative audience. The men mask their reactions to the familiarity and
continue dancing, unhindered.

d) Comics

To be anticipated at almost every Island dance is the sudden appearance of a comic in
the midst of the male dancers. Usually the comic is female, although on one occasion I
observed a male comic. Sometimes they appear on their own on the dance ground during
breaks between dance sets, and once again these are more often females than males. On
two occasions, however, the comics concerned were a female-male pair: one was a
sibling set, and the other a husband-wife team.

Typically the comic is dressed in an absurd caricature of reality, for example:

(1) A woman with a shopping bag on her head walked brusquely and
(seemingly) nonchalantly through the lines of male dancers at a wedding
feast and then just as quickly disappeared (see Plate 19);

(2) Two girls dressed in khaki shirts and long trousers with their faces
painted white and wearing ridiculously large Mexican style hats, suddenly
appeared and pranced in a contorted manner in front of a group of male
dancers;

(3) Two cross-sex siblings burlesqued with buckets, moving yet again
irregularly and contorting their faces so as to appear ridiculous and bizarre;
(4) A man wearing a raffia hula skirt and carrying an opened black umbrella over his head paraded in front of a line of male dancers;

(5) A married couple appeared on the dance ground dressed as caricatures of Saibai Island dancers, with the woman dressed as a man and vice versa, while parodying Saibai dancing; and

(6) A woman and a girl dressed in long pants with their lower stomachs protruding through unfastened zips, wearing bras, hats and their faces powdered white, one carrying an umbrella, appeared and performed stilted movements so as to make themselves look grotesque.

In all comic appearances there is always an element of role reversal, not only along the gender dimension, but also in terms of colour. Further, the comics always retain straight faces, appearing ignorant of the absurdity of their action, and consequently appearing even funnier and more ridiculous to the audience. In such a way the seriousness of the dance is relieved, with the audience being reduced to peals of uncontrollable laughter at the antics of the comic(s). Chester (QSA COL/A151) made note of Pacific Islanders running on to the dance ground at Tudu in 1870, and buffoons traditionally performed at the annual death dances (see Chapter 7; see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; 1981: 7).

(e) Dancing with male kin

When women or girls join in with male dancers they perform basically the same steps as the males, but with noticeably less vigour and less body displacement on both the vertical and horizontal planes. Thus in some dances in which the men are required to execute a series of jumps and then lie prostrate on the ground, all the while dancing, the
accompanying female dancers do less exaggerated jumps and remain standing, while performing the same hand and upper body actions as the males.

This type of female participation in male dances is spontaneous and non-corporate in that the women concerned do not file onto the dance ground as part of the team [as in type (b)], but rather jump up when the men begin dancing, join in and then return to the audience as soon as that particular dance, or perhaps a whole dance set, has finished. On such occasions a woman will dance close to her brother(s) or son(s). Sometimes she will not dance, but will stand close to her kinsman and hold a lantern or a torch nearby, so as to draw the audience's attention to his performance, of which she as kinswoman is immensely proud.

f) Women's Dance

Women's stand-up dance is divided into ngarpudan and hula. The first style is typically performed by older women together with younger women under their instruction. It is named for the intricate hopping movements central to its performance. The performers wear the same colour dancing dresses (kathalsod or Island dress), white cotton anklets (makmak) and an overskirt made from soft coconut fronds (dzazi). Their dances may involve the use of bamboo clappers (marap), a wooden hoe (payaga), or a matchbox-bean seed rattle (guwa), and a variety of head decorations may be chosen. As with male dancing however, the concept of 'one mark', or of everyone wearing the same uniform, is crucial for a successful performance.

Hula teams are largely comprised of young, single women. Dance team members wear Island dresses with a multi-coloured raffia over-skirt around their waists, and with their heads fully decorated with real or artificial flower arrangements. Whistles and yells of appreciation and encouragement from the audience accompany their
Competition with oneself and in association with others comprises a fundamental element of dance. In addition, competition occurs between teams of family groupings, along a division into cognatic versus affinal lines, or between dancers representing different islands. The inter-island competition and rivalry is keen throughout the Torres Strait, and it is consistently demonstrated in the seemingly good natured competition between groups, in the area of dance (as well as in sport) at festive inter-island gatherings (see also Beckett 1987b: 211). To dance well is to be admired, and a good dancer feels tremendous pride in exercising his or her skill. However, a good dancer attracts attention, and this may create tension and jealousy between couples. In his journal for 1898-1899, Myers spoke of Murray Island women finding agile dancers with good physiques irresistible, and Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1981: 6) and Beckett (1987b) both address this aspect of dance. Haddon (1912: 28) reported that Yam and Mabuiag men regularly cut 'long feather-like' designs on their calves, specifically to draw women's attention to their legs.

The borrowing and performance of songs from other islands has a well established tradition in the Torres Strait. Myers documented five secular songs he recorded at Murray Island. Three of the songs had been directly borrowed from Tudu, one was from either Awriddh or Masig, and the other had been borrowed from Puruma people who had adopted it from Tudu (Myers in Haddon 1912: 241; Myers 1899). Likewise music and dance forms continue to be adopted from places outside the Torres Strait. The advent of radio, cassette players, television, video, Islander bands, Islander disc jockeys, a regional Torres Strait Islander media network and Torres Strait adolescents attending High Schools away from home, has meant that the variety of music styles and contemporary dance forms in the region continue to proliferate. Nevertheless, there remains a strong interest and pride in local Torres Strait music. Tapes purchased
at Daru which feature Polynesian and Melanesian music are popular, reggae influences are strong, as is the music from Black Americans in the United States. The popular music of the day is followed and danced to in much the same way as it is followed on the mainland, but often with more style and skill.

6.7. Conclusions

People of all ages and both sexes dance, and in dancing minor or major social events are celebrated. In dance, the sense of community, kinship and friendship is affirmed and enjoyed. Whereas in 'disco' people dance with their peers for pure enjoyment, in Island dance these factors are overshadowed by the notion that you dance for others and for your island, e.g. at a wedding or tombstone opening you dance for the people being commemorated. It is through the medium of dance that Yam Island people publicly demonstrate a number of dimensions of their social lives. The dancers themselves, in performing to the best of their abilities, show the importance which the event that is being celebrated holds for them. Likewise the singers and drummers, whose full-bodied involvement is critical to the dancing, indicate the significance of the celebrations by performing well. To sing well, that is loudly and powerfully, as well as with the ability to shift octaves and harmonise, is also publicly admired and encouraged. In the interactions between the dancers and members of the audience, male-female relations are also brought into focus. This occurs both in terms of a woman drawing attention to a dancer and her relationship to him (either as mother, sister, grandmother or sister-in-law), and also in the comic parodies in which cross-sex dressing is central.

Not only is one's identity as a Yam Islander signified in dance, but one's kinship and sexual identities are also unequivocally demonstrated. In dance, the overlapping dimensions of an individual's identity (such as age, gender, place of origin, marital status and kinship position) coalesce. The audience is aware of the dancers' kin-based
relationships to each other and to the people being honoured by the dance, and it is this recognition of kinship which gives the dance its extra impact and ultimate meaning. As the kinship idiom is 'a convenient language in which to talk about' social relations (Maddock 1989: 149), dance on Yam Island constitutes one form of language in which this idiom may be signified and expressed.
CHAPTER 7

NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS: DEATH AND MOURNING

In this chapter I describe my understanding of the social relations of death involving a number of specific rites of passage as they occurred on Yam Island in the 1980s (see also Fuary 1985b). In particular, I focus on the respective roles assumed by two major categories of people, namely the bereaved family (cognates) and the affines (in-laws) of the deceased, and the ways in which the loss of a member of Yam Island society is handled and worked out. Warner (1959) has described universal rites of passage as marking the movement of a man through his lifetime, from a fixed placental placement within his mother's womb to his death and ultimate fixed point of his tombstone and final containment in his grave as a dead organism - punctuated by a number of critical moments of transition which all societies ritualize and publicly mark with suitable observances to impress the significance of the individual and the group on living members of the community.

(1959: 303)

While the occasional experience of death and grief is a universal human phenomenon, it is a particularly common one for Yam Island people. Between 1980 and 1982 nine deaths occurred. The combination of a small tightly knit community living on a tiny island and a generally high mortality rate means that death figures in everyone's consciousness. Literally from the time of their own birth until their own death, funeral, and secondary mortuary rites, death continues to play a significant role in people's daily lives. With the passing of loved ones, more distant cognates and affines, people are reminded of their own mortality.
7.1. Current Beliefs

Yam Island people maintain that death typically visits them at the conclusion and beginning of calendar years, and that it inevitably follows a time of celebration and rejoicing. This *yin-yang* like concept of good and bad, with sadness ensuing happiness, is well recognised on the island. Sometimes a sense of foreboding is expressed by one or several members of the community during a period of celebration. People prepare themselves for unhappiness in reminding themselves of the transience of happiness: happiness is, as it were, a 'limited good' (Foster 1965).

Death may also be regarded as a form of retribution for the perceived non-observance of Christian behavioural codes, or for inappropriate social behaviour in general (see Chapter 6). Most if not all deaths on Yam, are either preceded by or associated with a sense of foreboding by one or several individuals on the island. Such foreboding is discussed with others at the time of the experience, or kept to oneself and expressed at an appropriate time after hearing the news of a death. Foreknowing usually occurs in dreams, visions or reading environmental cues, or through contact with the supernatural. Children and babies are regarded as being particularly susceptible to receiving spirits; they are said to be aware of the presence of spirits, being able to see and hear them when adults cannot.

The passing of an individual usually comes as a dreadful shock to everyone in the community. There is a well developed local aetiology for explaining and locating each individual death in a socio-cultural framework. Firstly, death is not regarded as a random event. Generally, the vicissitudes of death, illness, accident, misfortune or failure are explained by a more comprehensive belief system. As the details of this belief system are not publicly discussed, it would be irresponsible of me to elaborate here. However, it is via this mechanism that such aforementioned events are perceived as involving the essential element of human control. This is in stark
contrast to attributing misfortune to the vagaries of germs or to the caprices of the undirected supernatural. Consequently, this belief system allows for post-hoc predictability of misfortune, and as such provides people with an excellent and effective coping mechanism for grief. Not only does this belief system provide a means of assigning cause to events which result in emotional and potential social upheaval, but it also provides people with a daily code of action. This is crucial in a small-scale society. By adhering to the major tenets and propositions of this code, Yam Island people feel relatively confident at being able to sidestep misfortune, illness and death by behaving in certain culturally appropriate ways. When deaths occur discussions are held about how the individual became sick and about his or her possible transgressions of appropriate codes of behaviour (see also Chapter 6).

7.2. Handling Death

When a death has occurred, the close relatives and friends of the deceased are given social support at both the practical and emotional levels. Those individuals most likely to bear the brunt of grief are not informed of the death until they are brought together with others in one place. The sad news is formally announced by an in-law of the deceased, the local priest or the Chairman of the community. This is an effective means of social incorporation by which the individual is relieved of the stress of bearing the pain of sorrow alone, and in social isolation; i.e. the suffering is shared in communal outpourings of grief. In such a manner the individual's responses to the

1. Tonkinson (1984: 239) makes reference to a similar process occurring in the Western Desert Aboriginal community of Jigalong.

2. Thus in the classic manner in which rites of passage and rites of intensification have been analysed (Van Gennep in Turner (1979), the short-term marginality of the person is reduced by this social aggregation. The death rituals are rites of passage for the deceased, and rites of intensification and passage for the bereaved. In the long-term the reincorporation of the bereaved and the marigeth [affines to the deceased], occurs after the tombstone opening. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1981: 9) also speaks of the tombstone opening as a rite of integration.
trauma of death are cushioned. The grief-stricken are not alienated in their own private grief as is common practice in Anglo and Celtic Australian society.

As the main responsibility for announcing death falls in the first instance on the shoulders of the Chairman, and then on the two major in-laws of the deceased, members of the community quickly become aware of the impending announcement of sad news, nyuz, as well as to whom it relates. While close family may suspect the death of a loved one, and certainly experience the associated anxiety, they nevertheless manage to appear to contain their grief until the formal, public announcement of death occurs. Through allocating a central place in which everyone gathers to lessen nyuz (hear bad news), the close relatives of those kin most affected by the death are relieved of the painful experience of having to be the bearers of bad tidings. This constitutes the first stage of the 'tripartite' process of death rites in the islands (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 136).

A social and ritual division of labour occurs with the categorisation and mobilisation of people into blood kin (cognates) and in-laws (affines) of the deceased. It is at the point of being summoned, as well as during their involvement in moving from household to household asking members to gather at a nominated place, that the in-laws are transformed into marigeth (spirit's hand) of the deceased. They will continue to be identified as such, and will perform the appropriate role behaviours as ritual specialists until the final secondary mortuary rites take place several years hence. It is upon this temporary social group that the burden falls for funeral arrangements,

3. According to Rivers (1901b: 137) the role of announcing a man's death, signalling the time to cry, and the responsibility of feeding the bereaved fell on the man's wife's brother (wb), or if she did not have a brother, on her father. In very rare cases, the role was performed by the deceased's wife's sister. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 166; 1981: 4) has discussed the role played by the deceased's brother-in-law in announcing a death on Mabuiag. She also describes an incident in which she relayed the news of a death to someone, and that person denied the news until it was formally announced in the customary manner (1980a: 167).
preparation of the body, cooking and working for the deceased's family both up to and including the day of burial, and for those days leading up to and including the tombstone opening (see Figures 12 & 13, and Plate 21).

The role transformation from happy person to bereaved person is ameliorated through the roles adopted by the marigeth. Traditionally specific dress and behavioural restrictions signalled the state of mourning to others; for example, Haddon (1912: 30) mentions that cutting one's hair was a sign of mourning throughout the Torres Strait. On Tudu mourners plastered their bodies with a greyish mud and a crushed coral paste (Ray and Haddon 1897: 122; see also Appendix 1 regarding Miak wiping whitish-grey mangrove mud on his cheeks to indicate his having killed a man). Widows on Tudu observed the customary year-long mourning period by covering their bodies in white mud and wearing an apron-like necklet of frayed sago palm, dyed red. One fringe fell down their back and the other covered the front of their bodies. The same palm material was used in leglets and armlets. At the close of the mourning period with the performance of the annual death dances, these symbols of mourning were discarded (Haddon 1904: 262).

7.2.1. Caring for the Kin

After death, a person still retains their living spirit, or mari, and consequently the relatives of the deceased are obligated to it in the same ways they were when the deceased was alive (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1981: 5). It is through mourning procedure, burial, and the secondary mortuary ritual that the spirit of the deceased and the relationships of the living to the deceased are transformed. The mari is released into the spirit world as a fully fledged member and as such is no longer tempted to hover in the world of the living (1980a: 282).
Figure 12. Main Stages and Actors in the Death Cycle

DEATH → MOURNING → FUNERAL → BURIAL TEA

AFFINES

COGNATES

MOBILISATION OF MONEY

PURCHASE OF TOMBSTONE

SETTING DATE

ERECTION OF TOMBSTONE

PURCHASING & MAKING MATERIAL WEALTH

RELEASE OF SPIRIT

FEAST & CELEBRATION

UNVEILING TOMBSTONE

VEILING TOMBSTONE

FUNERAL
Preparations for meeting the needs of the closest consanguineal kin of the deceased are set into motion after the formal announcement of death. The responsibility for conveying and acting upon the wishes of the family lies with the affines of the deceased, that is his or her in-laws. In other words, it is the close family members of the bereaved spouse or children who assume the nurturant role for their own kin, as well as for their affines (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1980b: 8,12). The affines are, as it were, a bridge between some close kin. This category of people, now known as marigeth, feed and care for the cognates of the deceased until after disposal of the body. In such a way, the close relatives of the deceased are freed from all social obligations. That is, they are given both the time and the energy to mourn. They are in a state of liminality, 'betwixt and between' two normal states of being (Turner 1979).

During this stage of mourning Fitzpatrick argues that there is a definite correspondence between the following three elements: the actual physical state of the body, the emotional state of the kin and the location and state of the deceased's spirit, as all three are in a state of transition (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 181-182; 1981: 4). In her analysis of Maori death ritual, Sinclair (1990: 221) makes a similar observation.

The marigeth work until after the funeral feast ('burial tea'). Not only do the mechanics of the funeral arrangements fall on their shoulders (after consultation with the cognates and the husband or wife of the deceased), but they are also held responsible for the ever constant preparation of food, cleaning up, washing and preparation of the funeral feast (see Figure 13). In order to discharge their responsibilities, the marigeth are directed as a team by the two senior in-laws of the deceased. They work late into the night and rise in the early hours of the morning. Because of both emotional tension and the long hours involved, disputes may occur over

4. Sergei (1986:195) provides an interesting example of this 'suspension' of kin from the 'mundane activities' of life in his discussion of funeral rites among the Tlingit of the southern Alaskan coast, and Sinclair (1990: 221) describes an equivalent process occurring in Maori burial ritual.
Figure 13. Main Responsibilities of Cognates and Affines with Regard to Death

- Cognates
  - Make Funeral Arrangements
  - Convey News Elsewhere
  - Prepare Burial Tea
  - Escort New Arrivals to the Bereaved
  - Take Care of Cognates
  - Donate Money
  - Mourn

- Affines
  - Give Advice
  - Convey News Elsewhere
  - Prepare Burial Tea
  - Take Care of Cognates
  - Escort New Arrivals to the Bereaved
the general planning and organisation of the work.

During this period the relatives of the deceased grieve for their loved one. As the sad news spreads to others in both the Torres Strait and the mainland of Australia, a steady stream of mourners arrives on the Island. People travel by air and sea, and on landing are led to the house where the close family of the deceased are gathered. After crying together with the bereaved, the new arrivals drink tea and eat some food. They then organise themselves according to whether they are 'family' to the deceased, or marigeth. When there are not enough people to carry out all the duties assigned to the marigeth, 'family' (but rarely the very close cognates) of the deceased will assist in the funeral and feasting preparations.

During the period between formal announcement of death and until a few days after the funeral, household composition on Yam Island undergoes a substantial change (cf. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann on Mabuiag, 1980a: 226, 228). Not only do the close relatives of the deceased prefer to stay together in one household, but people on the outer perimeters of the village sleep at the more centrally located houses of their kin. At night the village is clustered into a tight supportive nucleus. When dawn breaks people make their way home and extinguish the lamps left burning inside and outside their houses the previous night.

7.3. New Spirits

According to Rosenblatt et al (1976: 52) belief in ghosts is almost universal. Although on Yam Island all people are regarded as having an essence, 'soul' or spirit (mari), which may leave the physical body during sleep and return before waking, the spirits of the dead are generally feared. On death a person's spirit is want to visit most of its
relatives. Some danger may surround members of the deceased's closest family and in-laws, especially small children, for the lonely spirit may approach in a desperate bid to take them with it on its unhappy, lonely journey to the 'other world'. According to Fitzpatrick a similar attitude is held on Mabuiag and spirits need to be 'appeased' (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1981: 5).

On Yam Island a generalised fear exists in the community at this stage, and sightings of the spirit or feeling its presence are quite common. Unaccompanied trips to the bush or reef may be avoided for up to several weeks after a death. There are a number of strategies that people employ as a means of keeping spirits at a distance from the living. They may be kept at bay by:

a) Always keeping lights burning at night;

b) Never going anywhere after dark without the accompanying light of a torch or lamp;

c) Placing a glass of water or a stick at the entrance to one's house; or
d) Constructing a fence of salt around a dwelling.

Some people explained that the new spirit is angry at its own death and roams the village from dusk until the early hours of the morning. This may happen for at least three nights and may even continue until the next full moon, whereupon some say the spirit is chased and caught by all other spirits. It is at this point that the spirit becomes properly transformed into a real spirit or debul (devil). This nicely corroborates the information given to Haddon (1904: 354) by a Mabuiag man in 1898, namely that the mari of the deceased was killed by markay on the first night of the

5. See also Tonkinson's (1984: 238) discussion of a similar belief system in Western Australia, and Rosenblatt et al (1976: 56) for a description of spirit perceptions in Fiji: people avoid being alone or in the dark, and they articulated their fears of the real potential for a child's soul to be carried away by a deceased parent.
new moon after death, and consequently, was reborn as a markay. This time lag between death and the recognition of the transformation of the deceased into a spirit allows the bereaved time to adjust to the death of their loved one. It is a period of liminality (see again Turner 1979) for both the spirit and its kin.

Traditionally the dead were either buried or their bodies were dried on a platform. Immediate burial occurred when the skull was not required. Some skulls of close relatives were retained (Haddon 1935: 70) and could be used in divination rituals to ensure success in marine hunting, or kept as mementoes. Haddon (1904: 258-259; 1935: 321) has described the funeral customs on Nagi and in particular the ways in which the skull was removed, cleaned and decorated; he also considered the concept of the spirit and the role of the marigeth on Nagi, and discussed burial on Tudu and Nagi (1904: 212; 1935: 321). Chester (QSA COL/A151) also described death rites, mentioning in particular the initial drying and final burial of bodies, and the placement of dugong ribs, tusks, turtle skulls, human skulls and stone carvings on some burial mounds.

In the 1920s Yam Islanders explained to W. MacFarlane that the supernatural killer of a man was discovered by placing the man's body outside his house. While some people sat quietly inside the house, two men kept watch. Eventually the mari left the man's body, journeyed to the house of his killer and returned with the mari of that person. The two men reported the event to the others, the body was taken inside, and revenge was planned. Alternatively, seed rattles strung between trees outside the deceased's house functioned to entrap the killer's spirit (W. MacFarlane to Haddon 1888-1929). The late Mr Maino Kelly (pers. comm.1982 ) explained that people previously divined the killer of a person by stringing up kulap (seed rattles) in front of a mirror. The

6. Although MacFarlane does not provide information on the relationship of these men to the deceased, I presume they were his brothers-in-law (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 141).
inquisitive person then hid in the dark so the ghost could not see them, and behind the ghost followed the spirit of its killer.

In the case of burial, Maino informed MacFarlane that on the fifth day after interment the brothers-in-law of the deceased went to where he was buried. One brother-in-law crawled on his hands and knees, and as he neared the place where the head was positioned, he suddenly hit the sandy ground heavily with a piece of wood. The impact of the blow caused the head to be dislodged. Then that brother-in-law, followed by all the other men, took the head to the sea. The men pretended to be asleep on the sand and the head was placed in the water. The direction towards which it floated indicated the place from where the sorcerer came, and as soon as possible, a revenge expedition was organised (W.H. MacFarlane 1919-1928 in Haddon 1888-1929; Haddon 1904: 257; 1935: 77-78).

Maino and others also gave MacFarlane information concerning the Kukan death ceremony of Tudu. The body of the deceased was placed on a low platform, and small wooden balls attached to coconut fibre ropes at the end of mangrove poles were simultaneously stretched and then released by a number of men. As the balls clashed they produced a loud noise. The men fell to the ground and searched the sky for evidence of a dark cloud. Until such a cloud appeared, they kept up the procedure. The cloud signified that the deceased's spirit had left the body. After this ceremony the body was then buried (MacFarlane 1919-1928 in Haddon 1888-1929). Given that traditionally people were not buried until four days after their death (1935: 321), the release of the spirit in the above ceremony corresponds with the present-day notion that after the spirit of the deceased has roamed the village for three days, it is captured by the inhabitants of the supernatural world.

According to Haddon's (1904: 174; 1935: 77) documentation, annual death rituals were
Figure 14. Drawing of an ipika markai, drawn by Maino of Yam Island for Haddon in the late 1800s (from Haddon 1904: 257).
held to commemorate the transformation of the deceased into **markay**. However, they were only held on Tudu and not on Yam. These ceremonies were introduced from Daru to Tudu, Nagi, Moa, Badu and Mabuiag islands (1935: 52), and according to Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 138) they were held during the Dry season and normally preceded the male initiation rites. In the first stage of the ceremony the ghosts of the deceased were represented by men covered from head to toe in the new shoots of coconut leaves (Haddon 1904: 257; see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 154), and in 1888 Maino dressed himself in such a costume for the benefit of Haddon. Each of the participating men's faces was concealed behind a leaf mask decorated with loops of leaves, and topped with a 'plume' of the same material. The fresh, cream coloured leaves were also tied as bands around the men's legs, below their knees and also on their ankles, and palm fronds were carried in each hand. Variations were added to this basic costume depending on whether women's or men's spirits were being represented. Women's spirits (**ipika markay**) were represented by these men wearing a woman's long skirt, a head-dress of 'feathered sticks', and carrying brooms in a similar manner to which the Mabuiag dancers represented such spirits (Haddon 1894: 28; 1904: 257). Maino drew two such spirits for Haddon (1894: 28; 1904: 257, 258), reproduced here as Figures 14 and 15.

The **turkiam markay** was dressed in fresh coconut leaves, a cassowary feather head-dress, a breastplate of the same leaves, a belt with croton leaves inserted at the back, armlets, an arm guard, leaves inserted into the armlets, and he carried a bow and arrow (Haddon 1904: 257-258). During the evening, men hid behind houses and blew bamboo whistles to terrify the women and children (1904: 258). One man called out: 'All these whitefish belong to deep water' (Maino in Haddon 1904: 258).

7. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1981) has comprehensively analysed the elements of continuity between customary and contemporary Mabuiag Island death ritual.
Figure 15. Turkiam markai drawn by Maino of Yam Island for Haddon in the late 1800s (from Haddon 1904: 258).
On both Nagi and Muralag, two turkiam markay danced on either side of an ipika markay, and a buffoon danced behind them (Haddon 1935: 67-68; 1904: 258-60). On Nagi after the three men had danced twice, a lone dancer representing the spirit appeared. As it danced, the loose pieces of wood attached to its legs clattered. Before a feast could take place, the cleaned and decorated skull of the deceased was placed on a mat, and food was presented by the cognates of the deceased to the marigeth. The skull was formally handed over to the deceased's father and was kept covered for three nights. During this time they slept beside it, until it was placed in a basket (Haddon 1904: 258-259). The skull presentation represents the final separation of the spirit...from the physical world of the living. The decorated skull signals the dissolution of the body substance and the spirit's success in reaching...the land of the dead. With the transformation of the mari into a markai, the final celebration surrounding death may take place. (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 154)

In addition to seeing the spirit of a newly deceased person through the death dances, it could also be seen if an individual dressed up as an alag. A body mask of coconut leaves pinned together with the spines of the leaves was worn. If the mask was removed the ghost disappeared because it saw a person (the late Mr Maino Kelly, pers. comm. 1982). Currently on Yam Island there is a period of one week at New Year during which boys and /or men may dress up as alag (see Plate 20). For this period people take care and exercise caution in moving around the village. The alag are dressed in coconut leaves and may chase anyone they choose. The only way to escape an alag is to lock oneself in the house, run into the sea or unmask him. If you are caught by an alag he may beat you mercilessly however, on the one occasion I observed alag in 1987 no-one was seriously hurt (see Plate 20). The power of the alag is associated with his being masked (see Tonkin 1979 for a discussion on masks and power). Although on Yam Island there was
PLATE 20. Alag photographed on Yam Island during early January 1987. The bamboo and coconut frond sticks are used by the alag to hit anyone he manages to catch. The attachment of seed rattles to his ankles and one wrist allows his arrival to be anticipated and for precautionary measures to be taken (photograph: M. Fuary).
never any statement made that alag represented the spirits of the deceased, a general observation by Lowah suggests an association in the Torres Strait between alag and markay:

Another sport was the fearsome Alag. These Alags were supposed to be devils who went about eating people. That is exactly what the person, or persons, would do when acting as Alags.

(Lawah 1988: 136)

During this same period of the year, 'rubbing play' is carried out between affines. People related by marriage may chase each other and rub a variety of powdered or wet materials over their affines, ranging from dry flour to all manner of substances mixed together. The element of surprise is a critical ingredient in the game, and good humour generally prevails. Perhaps 'rubbing-play' and alag together are contemporary expressions of the older death dances in which the association between affines and the deceased's spirit was played out, allowing normal social relations to resume with the release of the spirit at the beginning of a new year.

7.4. Contemporary Burial

On the day of the funeral the body is laid in its coffin, and the coffin is placed on a mat in the house. The lid is lifted by the main affines, and the consanguineal and classificatory kin file into the room to see the face of the deceased. Children are lovingly and enthusiastically encouraged to view the face of their relative for the last time. The shock and stark reality of the death of a kinsperson erupts in spontaneous wailing and keening by the kin. The affines eventually seal the coffin and proceed with the family of the deceased to the local Anglican Church for the funeral service. As this procession begins, an eerie silence descends on the village, broken only by the tolling of the church bell. The other affines remain at the house to continue their
preparations for the post-burial feast.

After the Church service, the body is taken to where it is to be buried. This may be in the cemetery, or in a plot near the deceased's family home. Yet again, save for the ringing of bells, silence prevails. An Anglican burial service is then conducted at the gravesite. Before the coffin is lowered, the mat on which it rested in the house prior to the Church service, is placed on the floor of the grave. A sheet is placed on top of the mat, and the coffin is lowered by ropes to its final resting place. These ropes and the decorative coconut leaflets (dhadhabeugay) bordering the inside of the grave, are thrown on top of the coffin. Sometimes another sheet is placed on top of the coffin before the earth and sand is shovelled in. Everyone present picks up a handful of soil and throws it into the grave. A rectangular frame and a cross with wooden plaque are put in place, and the grave sand is smoothed, levelled and topped with a few loads of clean white beach sand. Women and girls then place plastic and natural flower tributes on the grave, and when this has been completed everyone files past, momentarily stopping to take hold of and kiss the cross. During this farewell, scarves and beads are often tied to the cross, and cuttings of plants (particularly crotons and bougainvillea) may be planted around the grave. Sometimes articles closely associated with the individual are also placed on the grave.

On their way home many people stop to wash their arms and legs in the sea as a precaution against the spirit following them back to the village. Because the spirit is still unaccustomed to the 'life' of death, it is believed it may desperately feel the need to be with its loved ones. Everyone who attended the funeral service then retires to their respective homes, quietly awaiting the signal to proceed to the burial feast,

8. See Done's (1987: 59) comment about Islanders in general burying the mats on which the deceased had slept, and placing them both above and below the coffin in the grave in a similar way as described above for Yam Island.
which the affines have been preparing since the previous evening.

7.4.1. Burial Tea

When a funeral feast is held to commemorate the burial of someone on Yam Island, all the food is cooked and prepared by the marigeth. Usually there are three formal sittings at this feast, and the affines have the job of nominating those close cognates who are to sit at the 'first table'. The second sitting consists of more distant cognates, and friends, and the final sitting is comprised of in-laws to the deceased.

During the feasting, a plate of food and a cup of tea or coffee is unobtrusively taken to the grave by a couple of the marigeth. This constitutes the deceased's last meal (las kaikai) and signifies that the deceased still belongs to the world of the living, in a way similar to that described by Hertz (1960: 36) for Indonesian burial rituals and Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 30) for Mabuiag. The following morning the crockery and cutlery is collected, washed and replaced empty on the grave.

As befitting such a sad occasion, the atmosphere is sombre at the burial tea, colloquially referred to as a 'quiet' feast. After the formalities of people having eaten, and the public reading aloud of telegrams and sympathy cards by one of the marigeth, the burial tea is brought to a close. The excess food is redistributed amongst the affines, and some time later all the cognates make a monetary contribution to compensate the affines for their labour, which has been continuous since the death announcement was made.

Smaller scale burial teas are held when a person has died and been buried elsewhere. If possible, the feast is held on the day of the funeral, and members of each household cook and bring their contributions to a centrally located feast. Like all burial feasts
however, the work of orchestrating it falls on the marigeth. Funeral feasts are 'just the beginning' of things, culminating a few years hence in the joyous, final farewell to the deceased at his or her ceremonial tombstone unveiling (Mr A. Kebisu pers. comm. 1980).

7.4.2. Tending the Grave

Especially after recent burial, the grave of a loved one is regularly tended. It may be visited once a week for many months, and when any major decisions are made in the family, a member will go to the grave, explain it to the deceased and in so doing, ask for her or his good-will, assistance or co-operation. It is maintained that the newly deceased can get angry with their living kin either if they are not informed of family matters, or if their graves are neglected. In their ire they may cause misfortune. However they can be placated by someone visiting or weeding the gravesite, or consulting them over family matters.

When the close family of the newly deceased depart the Island for either a short or lengthy period, they visit the grave and explain they are leaving her or him behind. The sorrow of the deceased being deserted, even if only for a few days, may manifest itself in such seemingly natural events as light rain falling on the day of their kin's departure. On their return, the kin go to the gravesite to greet their relative and give them the news of their journey.

The first year following a death is particularly hard for the immediate family. The calendrical cycle, marked by such events as New Year, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, July 1st, All Soul's Day and Christmas, all serve as painful reminders to these kin that one of their members is unable to be with them. On such occasions special visits are made to the grave. After attending a church service on All Soul's Day (2nd November), most villagers place flowers on the graves of their close kin: viz, children,
siblings, parents, spouses, grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews. It is generally held that all graves and the cemetery should be tidied (that is, weeded and covered with clean white sand) on this day. The cemetery is referred to as the 'village' of the dead, and the tombstones are spoken of as their 'houses'.

According to Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1981: 5) the actual state of the grave and the degree of soil subsidence serve as visible indicators of the state of the corpse and by implication, the state of the deceased's soul. Graves are usually treated with the utmost respect: when people pass the cemetery they call out in greeting to everyone interred there, and on their return journey they bid them farewell. Often an explanation is also conveyed as to where people are going and for what purpose.

Theoretically at least, as pointed out above, people cleanse themselves in seawater after visiting the cemetery or a grave. Spirits are kept at bay through this cleansing, and as such babies and small children are seen to be given protection from illness which could arise from their contact with other people who have associated with the dead.

7.5. Tombstone Opening

Yam Island people have retained many aspects of their world view. Today a successful syncretism of customary and Christian belief systems is witnessed throughout the Torres Strait in the domains of weddings, funerals and tombstone openings (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1980b, 1981; Beckett 1987a, 1987b). The latter are the most significant social and ritual activities engaged in by Torres Strait Islanders today, serving the function of releasing the cognates of the deceased from all obligations to both the deceased and to the affines of the deceased (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; Fuary 1985b). They are also a means by which Torres Strait Islanders strongly reaffirm their identity (see Chapter 6; also
Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1980b, 1981; Fuary 1985b; Beckett 1987a, 1987b; Lui 1988). Fitzpatrick has clearly demonstrated the synthesis and intensification of the older markay ceremonies with more customary Christian burial practice in contemporary Torres Strait tombstone openings. Tombstone openings allow the spirit to reach the land of the dead in much the same way as the presentation of the deceased's skull to its close relatives and the exchange of food permitted this journey to be completed prior to Torres Strait Islanders' conversion to Christianity (1980a,1981).

A tombstone opening 9 takes place at least one year after burial, and both family and in-laws to the deceased have specific roles to play. The headstone is decorated with items of wealth, and after a brief Christian service at the gravesite, the headstone is 'opened' (i.e. ceremonially unveiled) by appointed individuals. The unveiling is an emotion charged event, and is followed by an impressive feast and celebratory dancing which lasts into the early hours of the next morning. It is a time of great happiness and rejoicing.

Until the tombstone of a person has been erected and opened, close cognates are conscious of an ever-present sense of grief, obligation and duty. For example, in the case of a deceased adult pressure is brought to bear on his or her grown children to find employment and save money in order to facilitate the tombstone opening within two to three years of burial. Because of both conflicting emotional and financial considerations, ideally all other expensive outlays, including weddings, should be deferred until enough wealth has been mobilised in order to unveil a stone (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1981: 6).

9. The procedure for all formal openings or unveilings on Yam Island is similar. For example, at the official opening of the Torres Strait Telephone Network on Yam Island in 1980, a fence was built around the telephone box. The 'gate' was 'closed' with a white satin ribbon, and ceremonially cut with scissors.
In contrast to the situation on Mabuiag, the cost of a tombstone opening on Yam Island is incurred by the consanguineal kin of the deceased. The cost of the tombstone, the decorative materials and the feast is borne by the family of the deceased, and by her or his spouse. On Mabuiag, however, the cost of the tombstone itself and most of the feast is borne by the deceased's spouse and her or his relatives: that is the affines (marigeth) to the deceased (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 175, 283, 289; 1981: 5, 6).

The whole event costs in the order of several thousand dollars, and in the intervening years between burial and the opening, the requirement to mobilise wealth for the event is constantly on everyone's minds. Because of the costs involved, some graves may not have tombstones erected and unveiled for many, many years. Sometimes, struggling families unveil several of their family tombstones in a joint ceremony and stage a small tea afterwards (see also 1980a; 1980b).

The next major step in staging a tombstone opening is the purchase of a headstone, usually from Townsville and Cairns. Once this has been done, a date for the opening can be set. Formal invitations to attend the tombstone opening are extended to all family and marigeth by the immediate family of the deceased, in contrast to the marigeth performing this duty on Mabuiag (cf. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1981: 6). The setting of the date allows the marigeth to organise their lives in such a way so that they may 'run' the feast at the tombstone opening. The date setting also enables the female kin in particular to start work in earnest, buying and making items of material wealth. Older girls and women spend their spare moments sewing and then

10. In 1990 an advertisement was placed in the *Torres News* (9-15 November) announcing the establishment on Thursday Island of an agency for a Townsville firm of stonemasons. The agents are a Yam Island woman resident on Thursday Island and her partner. Lui (1988) provides excellent material on the processes and choices involved in selecting a stone on the mainland.

11. Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; 1981: 5) has stated that on Mabuiag the spouse of the deceased and the in-laws of the deceased (i.e. the family of the widow or widower) are also responsible for the purchase or accumulation of food, clothing and the requisite decorations.
crotcheting the hems of men's undershorts, men's dancing sarongs and cotton handkerchiefs. When completed they are put aside with lengths of colourful cloth and handtowels, until just before the day of the opening.

When the inscribed tombstone arrives on the Island by boat or dinghy, arrangements are made to have it cemented in place. The stones are commonly cemented and then covered with ceramic bath tiles. The cognates of the deceased assemble at the grave, and everyone helps with the placement of the stone, although the bulk of the task falls on the male marigeth and cognates. Once erected, the stone is covered in old cloth or plastic and a small feast is sponsored by the deceased's closest relatives.

Nowadays most openings are held in the school holidays, thereby enabling geographically dispersed kin to attend. Arrangements have to be finalised for the provision of transport where necessary and to obtain the enormous quantities of food required for the celebratory feast. In the weeks leading up to the appointed day, dance practice is held during most evenings, and special costumes and dance paraphernalia are prepared. The general level of excitement in the village increases, as more and more relatives and friends arrive on the island.

Preparations for the feast get under way a few days prior to the appointed date. Ceremonial shades (dzar dzar) are built, a bamboo or light wooden fence is constructed around the tomb, firewood collection parties go to and fro between the village and the bush, and all foodstuffs and decorative materials are assembled in one place. If the immediate family of the kin do not already own a pig (fattened especially for this feast), one or two pigs are purchased.

The day prior to the opening men are sent out in dinghies to hunt turtle and/or dugong, and preparations for the feast begin that evening. The men butcher the pig(s) and other
meats, the women prepare the vegetable foods, and men and women assist each other in
the preparation of damper. In the early hours of the morning all these foods are placed
in newly dug earth ovens where vegetables and meats are cooked separately. The
marigeth also have the task of communally feeding the kin who have travelled from
elsewhere for the opening. An atmosphere of camaraderie and bon homie prevails (see

When all the final preparations for the opening are in full swing, the island is a hive
of consistent activity and good-natured co-operation. In addition to decorating the
feasting place with coconut leaflets (dhadhabeugay), balloons, crêpe paper and tinsel,
a number of the close family and in-laws of the deceased decorate the tomb and
headstone. All the material wealth items, several hundred dollars donated by the kin
of the deceased, and several bags of freshly collected shell grit, are taken to the grave
by the immediate kin. They greet the deceased and explain that today is the day her
or his 'house' is to be opened.

A couple of the closest family members remove the temporary cover which has been in
place since the stone was erected. It is an emotional moment, as the headstone, its
inscription and perhaps accompanying photograph of the deceased, have been
concealed until now. Coconut leaflets, or multi-cloured raffia sewn onto strips of
material, are tied onto the white painted fence. The tomb is carefully dusted clean and
shell grit is spread around it. Several layers of colourful cloth are draped around the
headstone, with as much as $100.00 in all denominations being pinned to each layer.
The material items which the women have both purchased and made, are then
carefully positioned on the tomb so as to conceal it totally. New vases of flowers are
put in place, and a white satin ribbon with a pair of scissors attached, is tied across the
'gate' of the fence. The fence as a symbolic residual component of the old death
platform (sara), has been discussed by Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a:
PLATE 21. Female and male marigeth unveiling the tombstone of Mr Pryce Silbador Harry, Yam Island, 19 December 1982. Note the enclosure, the bundle of straightened bamboo for spears, mats and crocheted goods (photograph: M. Fuary).
Lui (1988: 46-47) has noted it also serves as a means of defining and separating general participants in the ritual from the main actors.

While this decoration is underway, the rest of the population ready themselves for the brief church service which precedes the actual opening. From the local church a procession makes its way to the gravesite, led by the priest and local altar boys. Special tombstone opening hymns are sung during this service. After the Anglican priest concludes his part of the ceremony, the head marigeth cuts the ribbon and the immediate family of the deceased file into the enclosed area to position themselves around the tomb. Accompanied by hymns, the in-laws then enter the area and systematically unveil the stone (see Plate 21). This is of course, an emotion-charged event for the family. The materials decorating the stone are packed into plastic disposal bags and when the marigeth have finished, the inscription is read out to the congregation. The head marigeth delivers a short speech and the feast is announced. Photographs are then taken of the family posing beside the unveiled stone.

Much merriment occurs from this point until the following day. People spontaneously break into song and dance on their way back to the village, and the huge feast is a far from solemn event. The close family (cognates) of the deceased eat first, and then after everyone has eaten the tables are cleared. Once the last pots and pans have been washed, the dancing begins. Such is the nature of the celebration that this dancing usually continues until dawn the following day (see Chapter 6; see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a; Beckett 1987b).

All the goods and money which had decorated the tomb are subsequently redistributed among the affines at a meeting they hold after the opening. This is their 'payment' from the family of the deceased, in appreciation for all their 'hard work' both at the time of death, and subsequently in relation to their duties surrounding the opening.
itself. Some time after the staging of a tombstone opening, when all responsibilities have been fulfilled and there has been time to bear the brunt of the emotions of grief and to come to terms with the loss, the belongings of the deceased may be redistributed by the immediate kin to the relatives and friends of the deceased. Lui (1988) described the procedure which occurred after one opening in Cairns, and how through the redistribution of the deceased's clothing, the smell of the deceased was dissipated throughout his relatives’ houses. The continued concentration of his spiritual and corporeal presence in his own house would have eventually brought sickness to his wife and children (Lui 1988: 85).

Yam Island people maintain that tombstone openings became common after the Second World War, and that initially Mabuiag people showed them what to do and how to stage one (the late Mr Missa Samuel pers.comm. 1987). All the rules emanated from Mabuiag, and the first opening on Yam was held in about 1947 by the Samuel family. Originally the marigeth (particularly the brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law and sons-in law) were responsible for laying the feasting table, preparing the food and giving it to the family of the deceased, some of whom are also their own close cognates. During these original openings on Yam the headstones were not decorated with items of value, as food was the valuable then exchanged. The main responsibility for this organisation and work fell on the youngest of the marigeth. This procedure has changed on Yam Island. Now the family recompenses the marigeth with valuables, and the organisational responsibility is shouldered by the oldest affine to the deceased (Mr Missa Samuel pers. comm. 1987). Although the current ideology is that the work surrounding an opening is performed by the marigeth, sometimes the cognates of the deceased also help.

12. Sergei (1986:197) has described the potlatch redistribution of Tlingit people of the southern Alaskan coast as a similar mechanism whereby the carers of the bereaved are given gifts by the mourners at the conclusion of funeral rites in which the deceased is settled into a new dwelling place.
Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 276, 289, 295; 1981: 8) has raised the significant point that with emergent class structures in the Torres Strait, and the decreasing significance of clans, one finds increased flexibility in the definition and selection of marigeth accorded the role of 'running' the opening and officially unveiling the stone. Increasingly on Mabuiag, 'prominent people' are selected as marigeth, and the display of wealth associated with openings (see also Beckett 1987b: 221) means that for the disadvantaged, they are becoming increasingly problematic to sponsor. This has resulted in several stones being opened together, which mirrors the customary practice of the markay ceremonies of the proto-colonial period (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a).

7.6. Conclusions

The tombstone opening is the most important ritual engaged in by Torres Strait Island people, and it expresses a multiplicity of values (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 314). It provides a common thread which is woven through the fabric of everybody's lives. When the headstone is unveiled, the mourning phase which was set into motion several years earlier is brought to a close. The spirit of the deceased is released, thereby freeing her or his relatives emotionally and financially. Affines cease to be marigeth, spouses are now permitted to re-marry if they so wish, and the grown children of the deceased are relieved of any further obligations to their deceased parent (see also Beckett 1987b: 1). In essence the bereaved have resumed the status of the non-bereaved (cf. Rosenblatt et al 1976: 8; Sinclair 1990).

Death does not confine itself to ending the visible bodily life of an individual; it also destroys the social being grafted upon the physical individual and to whom the collective consciousness attributed great dignity and importance.

(Hertz 1960: 77)
These rituals allow for and organise the expression of heartfelt grief, and by their very structure they publicly highlight and reaffirm kinship relatedness and social roles. Not only does death bring into focus the clear-cut division between cognates and affines, which plays such a vital role in the everyday lives of Yam Island people (see Chapter 6), but it also serves as a means whereby ties and connections with estranged relatives living on the mainland or far distant islands may be renewed and maintained. As Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 256) has said for Mabuiag, 'The dead tie the living to the island' (see also Beckett 1987b: 228). Participation in the ritual to honour the memory of the dead is perhaps the most significant role that any Island person fulfills in a lifetime (cf. Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a, 1980b). At such a time everyone's position and role in the cultural complex that is Yam Island becomes abundantly clear, reinforcing in all participants a strong and resilient identity, irrespective of where in the Torres Strait or the mainland they may reside. They make 'explicit existing social relations and rules, and...[reinforce] cultural beliefs and values' (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1981: 9). Tombstone openings provide Islanders with a connection to their past, and symbolically represent the incorporation of Christianity and a cash economy into Torres Strait Islanders' lives since the end of the 19th century (1980a; 1981: 10). In such a way the particular values and the dominant ethos of Europeans continue to be 'domesticated' by Islanders (Beckett 1987b).

Through the tombstone opening ritual the dysjunction between physical and social self is finally closed. The spirit is content that all kin and affinal duties towards her or him have been fulfilled. The kin are happy in that they have 'opened the house' of their loved one, who is now fully incorporated into the village of the dead. The ritual performers and the community as a whole are satisfied because all social obligations have been fulfilled, thereby inspiring confidence in everyone that upon their own death the rituals will be enacted; their passing will be mourned appropriately, and their own spirit will be freed through the actions of their family and in-laws (cf.
When there is a death in the family, it is possible to see in a microcosm of social and economic relations, the cultural history of the area and the islands, and the persistence and change that have passed since the Islanders' first prolonged contact with Europeans. A death provides the opportunity to keep alive 'Island Custom'......

it means that kin will be returning, social and economic obligations have been met, and the deceased in the church graveyard is about to become an ancestor [in the form of a spirit]......

(Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1981: 5, 9)
CHAPTER 8

THE PAST WITHIN THE PRESENT, THE PRESENT WITHIN THE PAST:
CONTINUITIES AND CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis the dual themes of the practice of anthropology and local expressions of cultural identity on Yam Island have been explored. Through bringing together diverse data ranging from field notes, transcripts of interviews, written anthropological material, archival and historical materials on the Yam-Tudu experience, I have provided a loose 're-construction' of Tudu-Yam society during the proto-colonial era, and have explored the ways in which the adoption of new ideas and practices, and the retention of others has occurred.

By combining these views and perspectives I have been able to present an image of how the Kulkalgal of Yam-Tudu islands managed the forces of colonial expansion and consolidation in their region. As reflected in the organisation of this thesis, I demonstrate how the Kulkalgal shifted in their self-identifications from being Tudu Islanders and warriors, clan members and cult members, to Yam Islanders whose places in their physical and social worlds are negotiated as kin or affines, males or females, the living or the dead. As Yam Island became the locus of their existence, people came to see themselves as Yam Islanders as opposed to Kulkalgal who lived predominantly on the island of Tudu. Their self-constructions shifted from being fierce fighters, clan and moiety members, to sedentary Christian villagers with links to Tudu, and more particularly with affiliations to people such as Maino who facilitated their incorporation into the new order. After the Second World War, 'Australian-ness' became a new component of Yam Island people's identity. Throughout the last century, kinship and gender have comprised two critical dimensions along which particular Yam Island identities have been constructed and negotiated, and in chapters 6 and 7 I show their significance in contemporary Yam Island social life.
The ways in which I understand Yam Islanders to perceive their past, and to consider certain moments to have been more significant, and the ways in which these self-reflections are transformed into contemporary affirmations of self-hood, constitute the crux of this thesis. In essence, the identity they chose to portray to myself as the anthropologist (see Chapter 1), is what has been described and discussed herein.

Despite the multiple impacts of colonisation on Yam Island people and their marginal integration into the Australian political economy, some continuity between the past and the present has been maintained by the telling of stories concerning important events and people, and illustrated by their reference to particular sites or objects. Their continuing use of areas and reworking of old stories are reliable indicators of the salience of meaning implicit in these places and narratives. Although people do not express a desire to return to the lifestyle of the proto-colonial period, they experience a great cultural pride and strength associated with knowing from where, and from whom, they have come. 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 general culturally circumscribed ways in the manner in which I have demonstrated.

Like people everywhere Yam Island people have their own stories, their own sites, their own culture heroes, their own kin, their own history and their own ways of doing things. Ways of speaking, dancing, singing, drumming, unveiling tombstones and utilising the environment are all locally regarded as constituting unique variations on a common Torres Strait theme. While the specific expressions of identity on Yam Island itself may vary from the specific expressions of identity by Yam Island people resident elsewhere, the overall texture of their identities is very similar. This confirms Barth’s statement (1969: 9) that a general characteristic of ethnic groups and boundaries is that 'boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them'.
Prior to colonisation of the region by the British, the Kulkalgal of Tudu-Yam islands engaged in marine hunting and fishing, some gardening, in addition to long distance trade and head-taking raids and warfare against non-allied Torres Strait Island people, mainland Australians and Papuans (see Chapter 3). This socio-economic base was subsequently undermined and indeed suppressed when the British, in conjunction with Pacific Islander evangelist teachers, established a strong presence in the region in the 1870s, and then pressured the Kulkalgal to establish a permanent settlement on Yam Island (see Chapter 4).

The effects of government sanctioned punitive raids, the introduction of a variety of diseases, the adoption of new goods and values, the activities of bêche-de-mer fishermen and pearlishellers, the deliberate desecration of significant sites and objects, resettlement in villages, pauperisation, enforced and coincidental changes in politics and power bases, and alteration of subsistence strategies, all had dramatic and multifaceted impacts on the lives and societies of the Kulkalgal (see Chapters 4 & 5). This transformation of Tudu Island people in particular, from a majority group to a minority group, from Kulkalgal of Tudu to Yam Islanders, via the processes of colonisation (cf. Bennett 1975; Deschamps 1982; Epstein 1978; Kallen 1982; Linnekin and Poyer 1990; Spoonley 1988), has provided the context and impetus for the development and maintenance of Yam Islander contemporary expressions of cultural identity. Yam Island people are 'self-conscious' in the sociological sense, of the historical and social boundaries between themselves and others.

A collective identity, or sense of group self-consciousness and being, has been constructed by Yam Island people in a number of ways: through the recurrent use of culturally idiosyncratic, salient images; through particular ways of relating and interacting with one another; and through specific ways of acting in a more general sense. Through this process selected aspects and perceptions of the past have been brought forward and
incorporated within the value system of the present (see also Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980a: 333-334; Kottak 1980; Trigger 1986; Howard 1990; Sinclair 1990). It is from this strong sense of belonging, which is continually asserted and reaffirmed, that Yam Island people as a minority group have encountered and embraced the contemporary world.

For Yam Island individuals today, 'collective representation of self' (Dirks 1975) constitutes a fusion of the significant elements of family, Yam Island, Tudu, gender, origin (especially when some ancestors may have come from other islands or countries), the Torres Strait region, Christianity, skin colour, Australia and Papua New Guinea. The point at which one or several of these elements, or 'indicia', 'diacritica' or 'identials' (Horowitz 1976: 119; Barth 1969: 131; Jordan 1988), of identity are given primacy depends on the context of social interaction in which they are being expressed. The prominence or suppression of any one of these symbolic elements at a given point in time is associated with the nature of the interaction, the type of information being conveyed and the composition of the group, especially with regards to the extent of inclusiveness or exclusiveness. The degree of relatedness of participants in any social interaction is a crucial factor: in situations of interaction between Yam Island people as a minority group and members of the majority society, different elements of identity are given prominence as opposed to those made most salient during in-group interactions.  

This reflects the varying degrees of ascription (external) and self-definition of identity. However, during in-group interactions the affiliations and shared obligations based on kinship and shared backgrounds are what constitute the

1. Refer to Deschamps (1982) for a discussion on the correlation between objective and subjective social identities within the context of ethnicity. Likewise, Eidheim’s (1969) study of 'Lapp' identity in Norway clearly showed that in the 'public spheres' of interaction, Samé people followed the rules of the dominant Norwegian society, whereas in the 'private spheres' founded on close kin and neighbourhood relationships, Samé identity was clearly expressed and obvious in that Samé itself was used as the language and code of interaction (1969: 46-49).
foundations of cultural identity.

Yam Island people engage in a 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 such as Papuans, Japanese, Filipinos, Malaysians, Chinese, Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal Australians, Thursday Islanders of mixed parentage, blacks and whites. Very important social relations which obtain between Yam Island people and these 'others' are carried out across the boundaries of identity, and as elsewhere throughout the world, 'are... based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic status' (Barth 1969: 10) between the in-group and the out-group. These levels of identity are expressed at different levels of inclusion or exclusion depending on the particular context of the moment. It is only within specific contexts that meaning may be attributed to any one classification of another person as either an insider or an outsider, a self or an other.

On Yam Island, people make serious as well as joking reflections on their cultural or historical past, and in so doing they reaffirm its essence and importance in modern society. The role of the physical environment as metaphor cannot be underestimated: the dialectic between person and place is made salient in multiple ways. The environment serves as a physical and social metaphor of belonging, association, and custom: it constitutes a handy vehicle for expressing symbolically an historical and cultural identity unique to Yam Island people.

Anderson's (1980: 80-82) notion of the 'humanised landscape' for Aboriginal people in Cape York can be applied to the ways in which Yam Island people both perceive and relate to their environment. There are areas of the Yam Island physical environment which are 'safe' areas, and yet others which are 'dangerous'. The safest areas are those closest to people's houses, although even places nearby to one's domicile may
become fraught with danger after sunset. Personal safety is ensured by the avoidance of spiritually strong areas, by never venturing alone to the reef or the bush, by carrying a light after dark, or by observing particular practices to ensure that the spirit of a place is not angered. The dangerous elements relate to a number of supernatural elements such as the spirits of the deceased, sorcerers, or malevolent supernatural beings. Being a Yam Islander involves being connected with both ‘safe’ and ‘dangerous’ places, as well as being able to manage both types of areas in a culturally competent and confident way.  

Yam Islanders consistently make reference to two signifying features of their island; a notable unique geographical feature, and the prevalence of a particular fish species. These are the extensive mounds of dead coral (thaywa) heaped in the lagoons on the western side of the island, and the blue tusk fish (bila) which is regularly caught and consumed. Yam Island people identify strongly with these environmental attributes in constituting themselves as a distinctive group of Torres Strait Island people. When other Islanders meet up with a Yam Island person, they invariably make comment and joke about tusk fish and coral mounds. These two symbols of Yam, which effectively link the physical with the social environment, are universally recognised in Torres Strait households throughout Australia, as ‘symbols of being’ for a Yam Islander.  

Sometimes a second fish species, yellow tailed perch (zaram), is included. As recently as June 1989 in the Island of Origin football competition held on

2. See Howard’s (1990) discussion of cultural identity in Oceania, and in particular his discussion of the force of identity which emerges from the recognition that members of a cultural group are related to each other, are related to a specific physical environment and are related to a specific set of ancestors and spirits. In other words, their identity is forged through their knowing how to interact with each other, the physical environment and the supernatural domain.

3. Haddon (1935: 55) speaks of Mabuiag people as being named after the rock cod. Fitzpatrick (pers. comm.) notes that on Mabuiag zaram and zaber (garfish) are the respective symbols for female and male.
Thursday Island, the winning Yam Island team was officially known as Thaywa. Later, in the months of October to November 1989, the ballgame competition between Puruma and Yam Island was won by the Yam team, also called Thaywa. In fact, it is the seemingly good natured but serious competition witnessed in sports fixtures between differing island teams, which publicly demonstrates the continuing significance of home island self-identification in the Torres Strait.

On yet another level, particular Yam Island sayings used as commentary on certain behaviour draw their meaning from specific environmental phenomena and conditions. For example, the phrase ‘Zagwan dray’ (‘the tide still hasn’t come in at Zagwan’) is used to complain about people being late. On Yam Island, Zagwan lagoon (see Map 2) is the last reef lagoon to be filled on in-coming tides.

In stories about the more distant past and concerning culture heroes, their exploits and the initial colonisation of the region, the themes of power, tradition and a certain cultural personality constitute dominant elements. Corporeal imagery abounds concerning the 'bigness' of key individuals imbued with political and magical power. 4 The heroes, Kebisu, Awsa and a host of others (all reputed to be very large, tall men) give vent to anger and exert control over their own lives and those of others, through the techniques and processes of war, headhunting, sorcery and execution (see Chapter 3).

4. See Clark (1989) for an analysis of the concepts of 'bigness' and 'shrinking' in the cosmology of a Southern Highlands people of Papua New Guinea. As a consequence of the impacts of Christianity, externally inflicted notions of dependency and inferiority, coupled with internally adopted self-concepts of powerlessness, 'Wiru men...felt emasculated in relation to the colonial authorities' (1989: 136), and this has been 'expressed through the metaphor of the body' (1989: 120). Similarly, Morris (1988: 76) has described the body and associated images of size as a metonym of the social conditions' of a people at a given point in time.
Images of time, such as bipo taym or ol passin taym, are set in juxtaposition to images of light ('darkness time', 'darkness people', 'coming of the light'), images of place ('bush people') and 'civilisation'. During this period, the culture heroes as 'bosses' are eventually overwhelmed by the new 'bosses' in the form of government officials, Christian missionaries and white people in general. Other characters, but never the 'big fighting men', appear as naive comics (such as Gawlay; see Appendix 13) parodying their being overwhelmed by Church and State. In addition, some obstinate individuals feature and are perceived as providing evidence of a presumed continuing historical and cultural belligerence of certain Yam families with ancestral connections to select component islands.

Older Yam Island adults frequently reminisce about events in the more recent past which occurred during their youth, i.e. their gel taym, boy taym or yang deyz. Most personal recollections are about childhood, adolescence, marriage, labour, sickness and death, World War II and its impact, and the administrative activities of the Queensland Government. The concept of the strictness of rules and of the vigilance of elders, kin and the local council in carefully and consistently circumscribing behaviour (particularly of the young) is one which is constantly emphasised in these reminiscences. The tales they share with peers or recount to younger people are stories which amuse, delight, frighten or highlight a certain moral point. Even when performing the latter function, such tales are usually found amusing by the narrator and audience alike. Good natured laughing at the antics of oneself and others is common practice and forms the basis of many a good yarn, with some parts of the story being embellished and given exaggerated emphasis for added humorous effect.

This period is generally portrayed as a time when there was no ambiguity in life. The social system and its associated social controls are represented as clear-cut, with everyone being well aware of the rules of behaviour. Implicit in this is the notion that
the job of older people today would be made far easier if the youth of Yam Island conformed to a similar set of strictures. This period is imagined as a time when clear-cut notions about right and wrong would appear to have been held by everyone. However, in reality, not quite everyone it would seem, as the point to many a story is that the narrator misbehaved and was duly punished. People portray their elders as being hard working and culturally competent; they are alleged to have known a lot of stories, to have spoken their language, and to have done things in the customary way (big passin or ol passin), as well as to have excelled in dance. However, they frequently assert that even should young people of today want to learn language and how to act properly, they would be incapable of learning.

When reminiscing about their childhood, older Yam Island people describe their parents, what life was like as they were growing up, the domestic duties they were required to perform, the punishment meted out to them for not obeying parental directives, and the experience of going to school. One's relationship with parents and other close kin during childhood is usually portrayed as being secure yet counterpointed by episodes of quick tempered disciplinary acts.

The central themes of stories about adolescence revolve around courting, dances, subsistence activities, visits to other islands, smoking twist tobacco and becoming parents. The many hours spent fishing, gardening, washing clothes, gathering firewood and carrying well water over long distances are portrayed as nevertheless happy times, during which peers worked hard, but managed to enjoy themselves in spite of their elders.

5. Beckett (1987a) has referred to this general Torres Strait ethic of industriousness as the 'moral economy' of work.
When people yarn, reminisce or talk about the distant and not so distant pasts, certain points are being made and significant values emphasised. Particular recurrent images provide the vehicles by which stress points between individuals and society (cf. Jackson 1977), or society versus society are brought forward and publicly highlighted.

For generations now Yam Island people have existed in and contributed to a rapidly changing social and political world. While they regularly display an ambivalent reluctance to be perceived as 'old fashioned' or traditionalist (mainly because they have to operate in a modern world of political representation and neo-colonialism, and respond to pressures for the creation of an effective local economic infrastructure), the identity which they have constructed from a synthesis of the past and the present, is theirs alone. Just as colonisation has been an on-going process, so too is Yam Island identity processual (see Arens 1978 on this aspect of cultural identity). The past and the present are represented as overlapping domains along a continuum: there is an absence of sharp and clear-cut discontinuities. Even the bipo taym - 'Coming of the Light' dichotomy is a blurred boundary. There is really no one point in time in which everything familiar changed.

The essential power Yam Islanders' ancestors exerted in the distant past has been replaced with powerful beliefs and stories about the past which continue to affect and inform the present. The significance of the past for the present and future (see Epstein 1978; Young 1983) is enhanced by the fact that while Yam Island people were moved from Tudu, they were fortunate in never having been forcibly removed from their traditional territory. The juggling of traditionalist and modernist perspectives and ways of acting reflects the nature, course and impact of social change in the area in the last century. Just as there has not been a distinct moment or event during which everything familiar changed, the diffuse images of time in particular have allowed for the development of an identity which comfortably reflects the long-term processes
of retention, incorporation, synthesis and reworking of ideas and practices. On the basis of shared cultural, historical and environmental factors, this identity remains essentially inaccessible to others and as such provides a base from which Yam Islanders encounter and act in the world. This has been achieved by the establishment of self-definitional boundaries in relation to the past and to others.

These perceptions and images continue to provide a yardstick by which Yam Island people can evaluate, measure and comment upon the direction of their own lives. This is especially so in the manner in which they represented their selves to the anthropologist, and their requirement that these representations constitute the predominant focus of the thesis. As the quotation from Geertz (preceding Chapter 1) anticipates, the production of a text which responds to a multitude of voices from within and without the academy is a challenging feat, particularly if one attends to queries about ethics and the practice of anthropology. This thesis, as text, represents my response to the majority of voices on Yam Island, and to the voices from within the academy which reflect on the anthropological experience, address issues of fieldwork and the production of texts, and showcase the essential connection between practice and ethics, self and other.