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Goemulgaw Lagal: Natural and Cultural Histories of the Island of Mabuyag, Torres Strait.

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Eight Decades on an Island

Judith FITZPATRICK

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Judith Fitzpatrick (formerly Judith Nietschmann) and Bernard Nietschmann undertook anthropological and geographical fieldwork on Mabuyag in 1976-1977. This chapter reproduces the anthropological section of a post-fieldwork seminar paper delivered at The Australian National University, Canberra, in August 1977, and provides an illuminating snapshot of Goemulgaw life in the 1970s.

□ *Mabuyag, Torres Strait, social life, kinship, history, economy*

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In 1976 the late Bernard ('Barney') Nietschmann, my then husband, our son Barney Jnr and I arrived at Mabuyag. Barney Nietschmann was a cultural geographer at the University of California, Berkeley, who had come to study the human ecology of turtle and dugong hunting by the Goemulgal. I was a doctoral student in Anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. I was to study local economic exchange and a unique secondary mortuary ceremony, the Tombstone Opening. My doctoral thesis, 'Another way of dying: social and cultural context of death in a Melanesian community' was completed in 1980, and I continued research in Torres Strait on this topic (Fitzpatrick-Nietschmann 1980; Fitzpatrick 1989, 1991a, 2000). The initial fieldwork was funded by Wenner-Gren Foundation and AIAS pre-doctoral Awards on this topic.

Preparations for our initial visit to Torres Strait took over two years of study and planning. Barney and I had previously worked in Central and South America; we were new to the Pacific Islands and Oceanic culture and the Australian federal and state Indigenous affairs bureaucracies. At the time, Torres Strait was under the effective control of the Queensland Government, through the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. Visitors like us were required to obtain permits and to arrange transport, accommodation, supplies, schooling, and health care on top of conducting research.

In 1976, Naseli Nona, then Island Council Chairman on Mabuyag, invited our research family to live on the island. Much of the mid 1970s social world and hunting activities included Badu Islanders and visitors from Papua New Guinea. In 1980, Chairman Miseron Whap granted permission for us to return for a shorter field period. In each case we were fortunate to be able to rent a house, from Alfred Hankin and Charlotte Hankin Nona.

While on the mainland of Australia, Barney and I presented three seminars – pre-, mid- and post-fieldwork – during visits to The Australian National University in Canberra (Nietschmann 1976, 1977a; Nietschmann & Nietschmann, 1977). The first part of the post-fieldwork seminar paper, authored by myself, is reproduced here with only minor corrections, as it provides an illuminating snapshot of Goemulgaw life in the 1970s. The second half of the seminar, by Barney, is not reproduced, being later published in the *National Geographic Research Reports* as 'Hunting and ecology of green turtle and dugong, Torres Strait, Australia' (Nietschmann, 1984).

During the 1976-1977 fieldwork, two papers were prepared for *Natural History* – Barney was a 'naturalist at large' for the magazine – and later published with full page colour photographs (Nietschmann, 1977b; Nietschmann & Nietschmann, 1981). The National Geographic Society, procured the photographic rights for all pictures taken by both of us as well as our son, Barney Jr, during the field periods 1976-1977 and 1980. Fieldwork notes and some photographs from the estate of Barney are now held by myself.

Partial funding for the research and photography was provided by National Geographic Society during the 1976-77 and 1980 fieldwork periods. Barney's photographs, fieldnotes, and maps became part of the Bernard Nietschmann Estate and were deposited at the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. I hold other joint materials including photographs and maps along with my own fieldnotes from work on Mabuyag from 1976-2004. These will be deposited at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. Over the past 35 years many photographic images and published papers have been provided to the Goemulgal. In progress are plans to deposit

additional materials to the Goemulgal library ('keeping place') on Mabuyag.

After the joint fieldwork on Mabuyag I continued work in the Torres Strait on public health (Fitzpatrick 1991b, 1993a, 1995); on fishing and land and sea rights (Fitzpatrick 1991c, 1991d, 1993b, 1996, 2001 and Smyth, Fitzpatrick & Kwan 2006); and on culture site documentation (Fitzpatrick, Cordell & McNiven 1998; McNiven, Fitzpatrick & Cordell 2004; McNiven, Fitzpatrick & David 2002; McNiven, David, Goemulgau Kod & Fitzpatrick 2009).

Many friends and family on Mabuyag have provided support and guidance during my visits over the years, which is greatly acknowledged. Sadly, most of the elders from the 1970s are gone but our grandchildren and great grandchildren always provide generously of their time and knowledge.

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Eight Decades on an Island: Social and Ecological Relationships in the Torres Strait on an Island

Bernard NIETSCHMANN & Judith NIETSCHMANN

RETURN TO MABUIAG

We went to the Torres Strait to do two independent research projects; one on the ecology of dugongs, sea turtles, seagrasses, and hunting; the other on social and economic relationships. That these interests broadened during the course of the research and led us into wider consideration of the cultural, economic and research history of the area is largely the result of two things: A.C. Haddon's Reports of the *Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits* (1901-1935); and the island and people of Mabuiag.

It soon became apparent to us that the past was the key to understanding much of the present despite massive changes that had occurred on the island and in the Torres Strait during the eight decades after the Cambridge Expedition. The *Reports* provide a detailed historical perspective on Mabuiag as it and Murray (Mer) were the two islands that Haddon and his colleagues decided to study intensively. Descendants of Haddon's informants helped us with our research and together we went through the volumes of the *Reports*. For us and the islanders the *Reports* served as a springboard for our mutual interests in cultural change and continuity. Our sole research luxury was to live on the island that had received so much attention in the *Reports*.

In 1888, 'tired of lecturing about things I have never seen', Haddon left Dublin, where he was professor of zoology, for the Torres

Strait. He selected Mabuiag island for his research on coral and marine fauna. He soon became more interested in the people than in the coral reefs. As Quiggin and Fegan (1940: 98) wrote, 'marine biology, less susceptible to the disintegrating influence of trader or missionary, could wait'.

Ten years later Haddon was able to return to the Torres Strait, this time as the head of an anthropological research project from Cambridge. With him came W.H.R. Rivers, C.G. Seligmann, C.S. Myers, William McDougall, S.H. Ray, and Anthony Wilkin. The Cambridge Expedition was the first scientifically planned and executed interdisciplinary study of a traditional people. During the research Rivers developed the genealogical method and the first ethnographic film was made, a four minute-long film of the *Malu* ceremonies on Murray Island. With characteristic British understatement, Sir Arthur Keith in his address to the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1916, called the Cambridge Expedition, 'the most progressive and profitable movement in the whole history of British Anthropology' (quoted in Quiggin & Fegan, 1940: 98).

In November, 1898, Haddon left the Torres Strait. He wrote in his diary:

We slowly steamed away from Thursday Island and the Straits. You can imagine that it was with mixed feelings that I watched the familiar islands disappearing from view. So much of my life has been bound up

in the Straits that I felt as if parting from a personal friend whom I shall probably never see again. Never again do I expect to see the islands or the islanders' (quoted in Quiggin, 1942: 105).

Nevertheless, Haddon envisioned and campaigned for another expedition to the Torres Strait, the proposed one much more elaborate than the last.

He had elaborated a scheme of intensive work in special areas by chosen individuals. There was first to be a steady and comfortable steamer with a permanent staff consisting of director, doctor, photographers and typists; investigators would be dropped at suitable spots with the necessary food, trade goods, etc. and collected later when photographers, typists, etc, would assist in making a complete and illustrated record of all available information (Quiggin, 1942: 107).

Haddon was ahead of his time and available financing; the type of project he proposed has yet to be done anywhere in the world. In short, he wanted to float the equivalent of the faculty and staff of the Research School of Pacific Studies.

Sixty years passed before the next detailed anthropological study of the Torres Strait which was done by Jeremy Beckett (1963). Other ANU scholars later went to the Torres Strait to do field research in subsequent years: Robert Bustard (1972), Helen Duncan (1974), and David Harris (1975). Ours was the next ANU field project to the Torres Strait and the first long-term study of Mabuiag and environs since the Cambridge Expedition. Instead of a comfortable steamer, typists, and photographers, we brought a borrowed inflatable dinghy, a typewriter, several cameras, and a set of the Haddon *Reports*.

ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL HISTORY

The 'Coming of the Light' occurred 100 years ago but it still symbolises the transition from old to new for present-day islanders. Arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1871 abruptly affected Island life and subsequently contributed to the alteration of many cultural features. It was not, however, the *sine qua non* factor in change, but merely an arm of colonialism, concomitant with economic and political interests in the area.

In this portion of the paper we briefly discuss the major themes of the economic and social history of the Torres Strait with particular emphasis on Mabuiag, one of the Western Island group and the focus of the Cambridge Reports. The historical record is divided into three eras: pre-1860, pre-World War II, and Post World War II¹.

CULTURE ORIGINS: PRE-1860

Most researchers agree that the Torres Strait population was originally some combination of Papuans and Australians (Beckett, 1963, 1972; Haddon, 1935; Vanderwal, 1973). Culturally and physically the Islanders had close affinities with Papuans, while the Western Island language, Mabuiag [aka Kala Lagaw Ya], was distinctively Australian, as were elements of social organization and mythology (Ray, 1907).

The peoples of the Torres Strait were not united politically and through intricate trade networks had as much contact with Papuans and Australians as they did between their various island groups. Furthermore, each of these groups maintained specialised subsistence strategies suited to local land and sea environments.

Mabuiag was the centre of intensive marine exploitations with specialised techniques for dugong and turtle hunting. Food gathering, fishing, and reef and bush collecting, in

addition to some horticulture, were practiced. The population was divided into at least five clan localities. Marriage and ceremonial exchange and intra-island trading united the Mabuiag communities for warfare, raiding and head-hunting on other islands (Haddon, 1904).

Various explorers and observers, including Torres 1606; Cook 1770; Bligh 1789 and 1792; and Jukes, Macgillivray, and Brierly, 1840s passed through the Torres Strait. But not until the 1870s do we have any valuable accounts for Mabuiag.

FROM 'SAVAGE' TO 'CIVILISED': PRE-WWII

When Haddon and his group arrived at Mabuiag, Islander social and economic life had already become rearranged due to the intensification of *bêche-de-mer* (trepan) exploitation, trochus shell collecting, and the discovery of rich vast beds of pearl shell by Asians and Europeans before 1870. The introduction of South Sea labour into the area along with the cash-based economic transactions altered subsistence patterns, trading networks, marriage exchanges, language, and precluded new desires and aspirations. Pearl-shelling stations and small trading stores run by whites had been established. South Sea men intermarried with Islander women. Islander men were hired to crew on the vessels exploiting shell in many of the home reefs.

Haddon's second visit to Mabuiag was in 1898, during which time he observed that

The advent of the white man has upset former economic conditions on Mabuiag. The men now spend all their time "swimming diving" as it is called, that is, they go in parties in sailing boats, and dive by swimming for pearl-shell in shallow water. Some natives own their own boats,

and make up crews on a system of sharing; others hire themselves out to white men. They generally start out on Monday and return on Friday or Saturday...as they are away from home so much, they cannot "make" their gardens. ... [Thus] it comes about that agriculture, as well as fishing, is greatly neglected, and a considerable portion — and in some cases the bulk — of their food has to be bought from the stores. Should the supply of pearl-shell fall off, or the price be lowered, the natives would suffer greatly; and if the storekeepers left the island, the people would practically starve. As it is many are considerably in debt to the traders, and often the traders have to advance supplies of flour and food to ward off starvation. With all their apparent prosperity, the people are really in a false economic condition, and their future may yet be temporarily deplorable (Haddon 1901: 121-122).

In 1872 the London Missionary Society (LMS) placed two South Sea men on Mabuiag to begin conversion of the 'heathen' society. Infrequently, the European clergy (W. Gill, S. McFarlane, and A. Murray) visited the Western Islands. By 1883 there were 12 preachers, 6 church members, 280 adherents, and 150 scholars with only one LMS teacher on Mabuiag (McFarlane, 1869-89). Notwithstanding missionary zeal in reporting their success, it seems that a very rigorous pacification program had been implemented. Much of the success of the mission in the area was a direct result of the unjust treatment of the Islanders by foreigners involved in marine resource exploitation.

The history of Christian missions in the Torres Strait is of great importance in any study of the area. Beckett (in press [1978]) suggested that, in addition to drastic alterations in

the magico-religious realm of the society, the social world was also overwhelmingly affected. Ascribed social statuses within the church hierarchy became esteemed roles for males; dancing and much feasting were curtailed; subsistence patterns altered; and Island sexual mores changed, among other factors. On Mabuiag all of the villages were consolidated and the population was moved to a previously uninhabited location. Clan territories and residence patterns were based upon intricate and specialised skills and resource acquisition. The formation of one large homogenous community was for religious instruction, and the chosen site also provided the best anchorage for the pearling vessels and facilitated political and economic control.

The Queensland Government took an active interest in the Islands and the area was annexed officially in stages in 1872 and 1879. Formal political status made Mabuiag part of a large colonial outpost which eventually became an Aboriginal Reserve. The Government Resident on Thursday Island, the newly created commercial and political centre for the region, appointed Island men as 'chiefs'. Their job was to keep order and enforce the new white man's law². Later, a police squad and courts were established in an attempt to further prohibit traditional ways of life. With this came more status roles into the existing social structure.

For the islanders, new economic enterprises, the devout religious order and introduced political structure were all one and the same. Life was changing – resident men spent less time hunting, inter-island and mainland trading disappeared, warfare stopped, and elaborate ceremonials and feasting were discouraged. In effect the socio-economic system had entered a new phase.

In 1914 the Church of England took over from the London Missionary Society in the Torres

Strait. Soon the Queensland Government policy was also undergoing change and permanent Protectors of Aborigines were established on Thursday Island to look after the interests of the 'natives'. Mabuiag was becoming a tightly controlled insular community. The pearl shelling stations and stores disappeared as State and Church gained more control by discouraging interaction between Islanders and foreigners. The Papuan Industries Board formally established by LMS on Badu³, a nearby island, was taken over by the government in 1930 and renamed the Islander Industries Board (IIB). In early days Islanders received dry goods, tobacco, cloth, etc. in return for marine products and script money. The government encouraged this economic arrangement which discouraged Islanders from travelling to Thursday Island. Beckett (1963) provides a thorough analysis of this era by discussing the development of government-sponsored Islander shelling enterprises, relations between the Queensland government and Anglican church, policy towards Islanders, and the 1936 cessation of work in the pearling industry.

In 1939 previous legislation concerning Islanders was repealed with the Torres Strait Islander Act. This proved to be as prohibitive as the earlier Aboriginal Acts. Most ordinary rights of citizenship were denied⁴ and exclusion from enumeration in the census and public franchise continued (for more details see Campbell *et al.*, 1958).

MODERN DAY: POST WWII

The Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion included some 600 Island men who were called upon to leave their home islands and defend Australia in the Pacific War. To Mabuiag men this experience and participation in Australian life is one of their fondest memories. From their perspective it was a decisive turning point in Islander life.

There is no doubt that in the last thirty-five years there have been many changes. Today's population on Mabuiag essentially receives services and benefits much as other Australians and are allowed to emigrate to the mainland; however, the continued reserve status of the islands and government economic regulation maintain the aura of early twentieth century paternalism.

Torres Strait Islanders today lead a comfortable but sheltered existence. All households on Mabuiag receive various welfare monies: unemployment, child-endowment, supporting mother's benefit, old-age and invalid pension, and repatriation. In addition, there are several salaried jobs on the island: school teacher, store manager and assistant, policeman, nurse, janitor, councillors and until recently turtle farmers. Furthermore, other federal and state monies enter the community through development grants for road building and community development. Many young men between fifteen and thirty-five participate in wage labour activities on Thursday Island and the mainland. Allotments are extracted from their wages and returned to relatives on the home island.

The economic system is regulated and primed by radio messages. Little actual cash is used in the village. Most economic transactions involve charges made against a passbook kept at the IIB Branch Store. Social benefits and money from relatives are sent by radio from Thursday Island and entered into an individual's passbook. Store purchases, cash withdrawals, and monetary exchanges between people are debited and credited against the passbook account.

The present-day educational system is attempting to meet the needs of the inhabitants but the curriculum and structure are similar to that in other parts of Queensland. White teachers are placed on some islands and

receive higher wages than trained Islanders. Upon completion of seventh grade children must leave their home island and attend secondary school on Thursday Island or at a government settlement, Bamaga, on Cape York Peninsula. For numerous reasons few young people complete the program, or rarely are placed in jobs for which they are trained.

The health-care system is plagued with problems which most isolated rural areas seem never to solve. Each island is equipped with a nursing aid station but supplies are often unavailable and personnel seem always to be quitting, en route, or visiting on another island. Emergency cases, expectant mothers (before seventh month), and the chronically ill must travel to the Thursday Island hospital. Geriatric patients are encouraged by Thursday Island doctors to move into a hospital ward – leaving their families, home, and island. The more severe medical problems on Mabuiag include diabetes mellitus (approximately 25% of the population), venereal disease, thiamine and other vitamin B deficiencies, and various endemic skin disorders (Dr. Pat Duffy, Thursday Island Hospital, personal communication; Winterbotham, 1961). Caldwell (1975) provides a statistical account of prevalent diseases and the morbidity rates for all Torres Strait Islands.

Allowed to migrate to the mainland after the war, many Mabuiag people have moved to Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane, as well as Bamaga and Thursday Island. Employment is the major motivating factor in addition to high aspirations for children raised on the mainland.

The Islanders' present-day situation is primarily the result of adapting to the colonial period since the mid-nineteenth century and to the changing ecological and socio-economic environment. The adjustment of

subsistence patterns and social relationships and participation in extra-island political and economic transactions have altered much of what the Cambridge group found and reported. And yet the society is not culturally sterile. Beneath the veneer of imported material goods and social benefits, much of Islander culture survives.

KINSHIP, STATUS, AND SOCIAL LIFE

The single overriding principal in the Mabuiag social world is kinship reckoning. Meat distribution, dancing practice and performance, fishing parties, birthday teas, hunting trips, grog drinking, wedding presents and funeral ceremonial duties are all organised and regulated in terms of how individuals are related to one another. We found it impossible as visitors in the small community to be on an equivalent social basis with sixty or so adults. Whether a male or female, one becomes a classificatory *tukiop*⁵ with someone and this reciprocal term of address forever determines all other relationships, and in most cases behaviour, with the rest of the population. The social world is partitioned into various degrees of status and kinship relationships and associated polarized behaviour: joking or avoidance, respectful or intimate, teacher or pupil. Rules of behaviour and interaction, designated through kin categories and terms of address, continue to dominate the Mabuiag social world just as they did eight decades ago.

The data collected by Rivers and Haddon on kinship terminology, roles and behaviour, and the genealogical record—supplemented by our work on the same themes—provide an excellent opportunity to investigate in depth the process of change in kinship organisation⁶. Furthermore, available demographic material will make it possible to analyse the resiliency of the kinship

system over a one-hundred year period of population fluctuations.

Mabuiag today is made up of 126 residents, 67 females and 59 males. Total village population fluctuated considerably during our field period, largely due to circular migration. Individuals between 13 and 17 years of age attend school on the mainland or attempt to gain employment on Thursday Island only returning on holidays. Individuals between 18 and 35, mostly males, participate in seasonal and short-term wage labour pursuits away from their home island. They return during off seasons or after terminating employment.

Over the past twenty-five years at least 50% of the home population has emigrated permanently. However, from our observations and informant's accounts, few of the individuals departed with the intention of migrating to a new home. Intended temporary migration is often initiated by family feuding and later develops into permanent residence away from the home island. A tentative hypothesis which needs more analysis for substantiation is that intra-island and inter-island mobility are closely associated to interpersonal and intra-family stress. Departure is easier than confrontation.

There are 22 households in the community but household size varies from day-to-day⁷. A majority of the houses have been supplied by the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Advancement and parcelled out by elected Island Councillors to their kin. There are always a few of these vacant yet some households contain 10 to 12 individuals on a regular basis, combining nuclear family groupings with unmarried siblings and/or single parents.

Age of marriage is relatively late among Islanders. This is particularly the case for males. Preliminary figures suggest the mean age of first marriage on Mabuiag for males is

29 and for females 25. Unwed mothers make up approximately 60% of unmarried women and 21% of these are past reproductive age which indicates that a fairly high proportion of women have not and probably will not marry. The sex ratio is 37 females to 22 males for all unmarried individuals above 13 years of age (including widow and widowers). A majority of these individuals are considered *babat* or classificatory 'brother' or 'sister' and therefore are unable to marry if they so chose. A proportionately high rate of widowry exists in the small community: eight widows and six widowers. There are nine married couples in the village and in six of these unions the women are past reproductive age (50+).

The age and sex structure of the Mabuiag population reflects instability. The population vacillates on a seasonal basis, household size and composition can alter from day-to-day, the mating pool is extremely limited, and a high proportion of resident females are past reproductive age.

Some important socio-cultural factors relating to the present-day population structure and instability include: household organisation, adoption, bridewealth and marital status.

Variation in household structure is extreme for such a small community. Rough categorisations of the 22 domestic units indicate four nuclear family household groupings; six units of single parents and children; and the remaining 12 are some variation of compound organisation. There was only one true extended household. Some factors perhaps contributing to fluctuations in size and composition of households are emigration, circular and short-term migration, feuding, and economic considerations.

Out of the 22 domestic units in the village, 18 have adopted one or more children. Only

four households have not participated in child transfer in the very recent past. There were 48 cases of child transfer with 18 males and 30 females involved (either female labour is at a premium or biological mothers do not want to transfer male children). In only two of the cases were the children unrelated to their adoptive parents.

There seems to be a high rate of barrenness and/or sterility among Mabuiag individuals and adoptions place children in childless homes. A range of preferences and possibilities exist for exactly where the child should or will be placed. The biological mother most often gave her child to a sibling (ten cases to a sister and nine cases to a brother). Next in preference and occurrence is the transfer of children to the biological mother's parents (16 cases). Matrilineal kin received eight child transfers and patrilineal kin three. Unwed mothers who stay on the island usually keep their children while mothers who leave to marry elsewhere transfer their children to other households (their parents most often).

Rivers (in Haddon, 1904) mentions adoption on Mabuiag but dismisses it as not very prevalent. There are two options for interpreting the present-day incidence of child transfer. Population fluctuations, mobility of young people, and variations in household size and composition are encouraging the transfer of children from one domestic group to another. On the other hand, Rivers may have overlooked some cultural features of the importance of adoption prior to the 1900s. Descendants of Rivers' Mabuiag informants indicate that until very recently all adoptions were kept secret. Adopted individuals were told only if severe problems arose in choosing marriage partners. Furthermore, informants indicated that past marriage practices and adoptions were tied together in an intricate system of maintaining optimum numbers in the

various clans on the island. Another factor influencing adoptions is the high proportion of infertility⁸.

Traditional marriage practices involved a multitude of rules (clan exogamy, sister exchange, bridewealth, etc.) and obligations by kindred of both the bride and groom. Today, the groom's family gives a payment to the bride's maternal relatives. The payment may be as high as \$250. The groom's relatives also are responsible for all transport, food, and grog involved in the ceremony and feast. High expenses may be partly responsible for the late age of marriage among Islanders.

A male or female is not considered a 'man' or 'woman' until they are married. Through marriage an individual attains adult and social status. No matter how old they are all unmarried males and females are referred to as teenage 'boys' (*kaokuik*) and 'girls' (*nooka*). For example, a 61-year old woman with three sons is called *nooka* (teenage girl) and a 45 year-old man is referred to as *kaokuik* (teenage boy). Social behavior toward unmarried adults is different than it is to married adults. Marital status determines many roles and obligations in households and feasts, and delimits entrance into church and political positions within the village.

Society is segmented into groups determined by sex and age. Avoidance behaviour and joking relationships between the sexes are quite pervasive. Relations between all affines are restrictive but particularly with those of the opposite sex. An intricate system of personal name avoidance operates within the society with very severe sanctions for affines. Every individual has a nickname, sometimes chosen because of a physical characteristic or childhood behavioral trait, or associated with a chosen Christian name that has been used in numerous ascending generations. Kinship address terms and nicknames are used in the majority of face-to-face relationships.

Sexual antagonism is far too strong a term for the behavior between the sexes. It is better described as mutual avoidance, especially in the public sphere. The exceptions to this avoidance are the kin category of *babat*, and that of parent and young child. At the same time, sexual innuendos and joking permeate the apparent division of the sexes in public places.

A rule of gerontocracy is absent. Elderly people have no special political leadership status just because they are old. However, elders are respected because of their knowledge regarding cultural traditions, genealogies, and 'deep language' (traditional language). Also a rule of primogeniture is still in operation within the conjugal family.

Division of labour amplifies the sex, age and status divisions in the community. Household chores and duties within the domestic groupings are performed by women and determined by age and status. Work parties for community projects are divided into groups of young and old, male and female, and married and unmarried. For feasts, groupings of women determined by age and status provide all the labour for food preparation whereas men are responsible for securing and butchering dugongs and turtles. Males and females only work together in preparing an earth oven, during which time raucous laughter and insulting jokes are exchanged. The cooperative effort ends quickly and the separate groups then disperse to their working and social areas.

Gardening and collecting activities have diminished considerably since the Cambridge group conducted their survey. Much time is still spent on fishing and hunting. Foodstuffs purchased at the government-run IIB store make up approximately 80% of the diet. Hunting and fishing provide the majority of protein consumed in the village.

Gardens do not provide daily subsistence. Gardens are for feasts. Sweet potatoes, yams, manioc, and bananas are cultivated by men and women to be used at feasts and 'teas'. Gardens usually are located within household boundaries and are generally small plots. Collecting from reefs and the bush is done during trips by foot to fishing areas around the island and yields berries, fruits, coconuts, wild yams, and shell fish. Women fish daily with handlines off the sand beach at high tide or on the reefs at low tide, while the young men use spears in the same zones. Some open water fishing occurs in conjunction with marine hunting trips. The hunt, butchering and meat distribution are exclusively male activities.

The local cash economy is largely controlled by government funding and social benefits but also includes money earned from Islander operated pearl-shelling enterprises, wage labour activities outside of the Torres Strait, and from selling crayfish. Crayfish exploitation is seasonal but provides a high monetary return for low capital investment. Most males in the village participate. Division of money earned from crayfishing depends as much on social factors as on the amounts caught by each person.

Food has social and economic value. Exchange of garden produce and fresh meat is a social transaction, dependent upon kinship ties and independent of cash wealth. Purchase of food is reserved to store foods and purchasing ability is dependent upon household income. Traditional foods are exchanged between households; introduced foods are purchased and normally consumed within the separate households.

The composition of a household is as dependent on economic ties as social ones. Distant kin reside in households and contribute income to the domestic group. All 22 households have access to cash

through social benefits, augmented by salaried positions in the village, local cash-earning activities, and allotments received from relatives involved in migratory wage labour. Households have differential access to traditional foods depending on social relationships in the village. Therefore, receipt and distribution of traditional foods are variable from household to household, while the receipt of store-bought foods is more equal. The most desired foods cannot be purchased: meat and garden produce are given. Dugong and turtle meat are acquired through kinship and social networks. Flour, rice, and tinned goods are obtained from the government store with government money.

Fluctuating population, differential income, and outside political and economic influences are filtered through traditional kinship relationships and social networks, producing Islander solutions to an inherited foreign system. Economic dependency and continuation of 'Island custom' are not a contradiction in terms on Mabuiag and in the Torres Strait.

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□ ENDNOTES

1. These time periods are very broad and deserve more detailed analysis than presented in this report.
2. Genealogical and Island court records indicate, however, that the new sanctions and later laws were openly and continually transgressed by many members of the community.
3. Badu was a long-time ally with Mabuiaig for warfare, raiding and head-hunting. Rivers' genealogies indicate a marriage exchange system existed between Badu and Mabuiaig. There is also some suggestion that the Badu population resulted from a segmented clan originating from Mabuiaig.
4. For example migration to the mainland was prohibited, travel and residence on Thursday Island was still restricted, and all marriages had to be sanctioned by the Protector.
5. *Tukiop* is a reciprocal term of reference and address for women who are 'sisters' and men who are 'brothers' in the classificatory sense.
6. Murdock (1949) in describing kinship organisation as a system suggested that when residence pattern changes, the form of kinship groups change and subsequently change in descent occurs which finally leads to a change in behaviour and kinship terms. The latter may however lag behind (Barnes, 1971; Keesing, 1975).
7. This makes the analysis of the domestic group and household structure exceedingly difficult. For instance, within the village numerous individuals changed their sleeping and eating locales on a weekly, and sometimes nightly, basis. Standard census questionnaires are useless in such situations and for our work it proved most expedient to keep records on the intra- and inter-island movements of the villagers.
8. In recent times this could be partially a result of the high incidence of venereal disease among Torres Strait Islanders (personal communication with Dr. Peter Holt, Superintendent, Thursday Island Hospital).