Necessary but not Sufficient: Interweaving Oral and Written Sources in Compiling Torres Strait Islander Genealogies

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Introduction[1]

Despite their deficiencies, Torres Strait Islander genealogies are relevant to oral, family and local historians, linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists and native title practitioners.Kinship and the creation of individual and family connections ('roads') which are orally transmitted over the generations are fundamental to Islander culture and society. It is only through detailed genealogical research that the relationships between individuals, families, clans and place in Torres Strait can be discerned. These relationships continue to influence the history of the region and, more generally, Australia.

Although Islanders began to record genealogical information in notebooks and family bibles from the 1870s, the academic study of Islander genealogies began with W.H.R. Rivers of the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Strait. Rivers compiled family trees on Mer (Murray Island) and Mabuyag (Jervis Island). His original purpose was to trace psychological traits within families and so he compiled genealogies for every Islander 'as far back as could be remembered' (in effect, to the late eighteenth century).[2] His few inaccuracies are the result of transcription errors between his original manuscript and the final version, linguistic misunderstandings, immigrant influence, the widespread practice of unregistered adoption and reluctance of his interviewees to name adoptees' birth parents.

In this article, I argue that neither written nor oral sources are by themselves sufficient to compile accurate and comprehensive Torres Strait Islander genealogies. Instead, these sources are complementary: each is necessary, each informs the other and each requires contextual and cultural knowledge to assess reliability. The defects of written sources are well known. Some problems arise at the time of recording or during the transcription process – for example, the conscious or unconscious bias of the recorder, inaccurate or illegible transcriptions, the vagaries of English spelling conventions and linguistic misunderstandings. Other problems include a lack of understanding by subsequent researchers regarding: the circumstances under which the information was recorded; by whom and for what purpose information was recorded; the informant's relationship with the named individual. The defects of oral sources include unreliable or even contradictory memories, generational conflation, the use of alternative names for an individual and gaps in the early genealogical record (for reasons outlined below).

In 1980 I was awarded a post-doctoral sociolinguistic research fellowship by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (today AIATSIS). I was to devise a spelling system, grammar and dictionary for the regional *lingua franca* – now called Torres Strait Creole or Yumpla Tok – and document its history. I subsequently compiled over 1200 searchable family databases from the 1830s to the early 1940s (and, in some cases, beyond). Describing this unwritten language meant learning its two main dialects through conversations with as many people in as many communities as possible. Their interests centred on family, descent and land ownership. Anthropologists commonly acknowledge that, in Indigenous societies, 'knowledge is not a free good'. Instead, information remains a major bartering currency among Islanders, with each family guarding its own stories. Having (then) a good memory, I found the knowledge I had gained to be invaluable when arriving at new places and attempting to establish relationships of trust. Not only could I speak the language but I could often identify, solely from people's first names, their island of origin and the names of their grandparents. In addition, I could often recount a few anecdotes.

My fieldwork convinced me that conversation is essential for learning language, forging emotional connections, tracing movements and family links, and discovering the conscious and unconscious norms of Torres Strait society. I am now attempting to incorporate information about lives which have previously been little documented into the historical record. In Greg Dening's words, I am aiming to 'rescue the individual and identify personal signatures on life'.[3] Only by assembling fragments of individual lives can one fully assess the social, cultural and linguistic contribution made by nineteenth-century immigrants.

All Saints Anglican Church, Erub (Darnley Island, 1981). Courtesy Anna Shnukal photographic collection, AIATSIS.

These immigrants brought a variety of Pacific Pidgin English to the region and from it their children created a new language shaped by their new lifeways.

Unfortunately, commercial family tree computer programs have proved too rigid to capture the intricate generational interconnections of Islander descent, marriage and adoption. For example, traditional adoption practices meant that often adopted children were never told their biological parentage.[4] When extended families replaced the clan as primary affiliation, childless couples or single men and women adopted a male child who would take their adopted parent's name, thus preserving the new nexus between family and land. Mamai from Erub (Darnley Island) adopted Kangroo Solomon, who became Kangroo Mamai and, after Mamai's death, claimed his land. Willie Santo from Vanuatu adopted the son of Sam Lackon (another ni-Vanuatu), John Sam, who changed his surname to Santo. The early Rotuman and Samoan immigrants often sent a first-born child back to their original families. This unrecorded information was often retained only within families. As researchers, we must assess our informants' reliability, the extent of their knowledge, and their relationship to the individual in question. In Torres Strait everything is political, so we must seek out and compare multiple sources and continually check assumptions – and we rarely feel confident about the results.

Current sensitivities around native title restrict access to much relevant material, including the (sometimes inaccurate) genealogies held by the various native title agencies. Fortunately, I began my research when many *giz le* (elderly people with knowledge of the past, born only a generation after the beginning of sustained European contact) were eager to tell their stories. They told me that, although their young people were not interested at the time, one day they would be. At that time, relatively few Europeans were living or working in the Strait and most of us knew one

another. Thursday Island government and church officials kindly allowed me to consult registers which were later closed to outsiders for 100 years. I am deeply indebted to many people for allowing me to compare Islanders' stories with written accounts, in particular two Bishops of Carpentaria, the clerk of the Thursday Island Court of Petty Sessions, Thursday Island Catholic personnel and the Community and Personal Histories (CPH) section of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP).

This article focuses on difficulties inherent in attempts to identify individuals from multiple, sometimes conflicting, oral and written sources. I discuss how personal names reflect significant historical events. I also discuss name exchange and name taboo, nicknames (*pleinem*), name variations and the relevance of names to Islander kinship networks. I conclude by reflecting on the researcher's responsibilities and reasons for engaging in such research, and why research conducted by outsiders may be of use to Islanders.

A brief historical outline

Making sense of the available material requires some contextualised knowledge of the geography, legends and history of Torres Strait. The Islanders are not Aboriginal people, despite centuries of intermarriage between the southwestern Islanders and Cape York Aboriginal people. They were originally Melanesians from coastal New Guinea who belonged to an extensive trade and culture area.

The Islanders' sea domain was first breached by European sailing ships in the 1830s, naval surveyors in the 1840s, and trepangers and traders in the 1860s. In 1870 pearlshellers arrived, followed by Christian missionaries in 1871. The Islanders' territory was annexed by colonial Queensland in 1879, whereupon the Islanders became British subjects and their islands became crown lands. Pearlshelling attracted thousands of men from all parts of the world, some of whom married local women, fathered local children, and/or settled permanently in the Strait. Their descendants now identify as Torres Strait Islanders. This genetic and cultural inheritance, together with the widespread practice of adoption, means that every Islander has at least one biological ancestor from Papua New Guinea, Cape York, the Pacific, Europe, Asia, America, Africa or the Caribbean. Sustained contact with others and pressure to join the new economic, religious and sociopolitical order has largely erased traditional linguistic and cultural divisions between the east and the rest and given rise to contemporary pan-Islander identity.[5]

Attempts to bring the Islanders under bureaucratic control were resisted by the first two government

residents who considered such 'protection' unnecessary. Mission schools commenced from 1873. Some islands were self-governing from 1878 with their own councils and police. The first government school opened in 1892. In 1912, under Queensland's *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* 1897 and amendments, Islanders were legally designated as 'Aboriginals' and their outer islands as 'Aboriginal reserves'. As state 'wards', their movements and wages were under state control and the category of 'assisted Islander' was not abolished until 1971.[6] By contrast, their kinfolk, the 'Malays/Thursday Islanders/Thursday Island half-castes' from Thursday and neighbouring islands, were 'non-Aboriginals' and not subject to state control.

From 1930, the Department of Native Affairs administered the profitable, community-owned 'company boats' that employed the majority of the male population. A series of mutinies and strikes led to the *Torres Strait Islanders Act* of 1939. This act legally recognised the Islanders as a separate people and gave their councils more authority. For all their failings, the Queensland government and the Anglican Church remain among the most important sources of community and personal documentation. Ironically, 'Malay' descendants now complain of the lack of departmental documentation about their ancestors, except in correspondence about the wives who were (or deemed to be) 'under the Act'.

World War I made little impact on Islanders but in 1942 residents of Thursday and neighbouring islands were evacuated and over 700 men joined the Australian defence forces. For the first time they interacted on relatively equal terms with soldiers sympathetic to their demands for improved services and conditions. After the war, former restrictions were relaxed and Islanders began to emigrate to the Australian mainland. Today, about one fifth of Islanders (some 6,000 people) live in Torres Strait, mostly on Thursday Island, but with others residing in 18 permanent settlements on 17 islands. 'Mainland Islanders' are particularly eager to uncover their family history, wider family connections and clan affiliations. This is the genealogist's task.

Some reflections on written genealogical sources

There exists a great deal of genealogical information contained *passim* in various publications and researchers are encouraged to consult bibliographies for possible sources.[7] However, almost all written sources contain inaccuracies in the details of incidents and spellings and dates. These inaccuracies arise from a dependence on informant knowledge, the use of any one of several personal names, non-standardised spelling and age estimation. London Missionary Society (LMS) records

of individual baptisms, marriages and burials from the 1870s through 1914 have not survived, although other church records are a rich source of information. Early travellers rarely name individuals and the few who are named can no longer be identified. Occasionally, one *can* identify an individual – for example, the Pacific Islander, Palen, living on Saibai in 1884, is almost certainly Farlane from Maré, New Caledonia, the apical ancestor of the Kawane family.[8] Recorded legal status, nationality and/or ethnicity 'may not correspond to lived experience'.[9] Any Thursday Island-born 'non-Aboriginal' was routinely called 'Malay' and, until the 1950s, Australian-born women who married immigrants assumed their husband's nationality, as did their children. For example, the 'Aboriginal' woman, Erub-born Louisa Caraballo who married Philippines-born Magno Lloren (rendered as 'Floren') is recorded as an 'Australian-born Filipino'.

Transcription errors occur because of illegibility, unfamiliarity with Islander names, idiosyncratic spellings, fatigue, carelessness or previous inaccurate transcriptions. There are also linguistic reasons for early spelling variants and inconsistent representations of names, which were not full standardised until the 1960s.[10] Sometimes the closest English name is recorded, such as Massey Satrick for Masiur Satrick, Morgan Elu for Mugai Elu, William Davis for Willem Dewis and George Morrison for George Morseu (with Morseu's son variously recorded as Sweeney (Suane) Morseu, George Sweeney and Sweeny George). Birthplaces are not always accurate. For example, according to family members, John and Norah Morrison were born not on Thursday Island but on Goods Island, where their father worked at the pilot station. The four children of Sam and Aiaka Savage, officially recorded as born variously at Adam and Poid on Mua (Banks Island) and Badu (Mulgrave Island), were born at Dabu, another Mua settlement. There are also discrepancies in recorded dates. Dan Mosby is estimated to have been born in 1872, 1878, 1880, 1881, 1882 and 1885, and Joseph Peter was not 113 but about 90 when he died in 1973.

However, tombstone inscriptions are sometimes the only source of information about early unrecorded deaths. For example, Rebecca Sailor, wife of Robert Athow, buried on Erub in 1913 as Rebecca Robert, and Kitty, first wife of Lui Samoa, buried in 1901 at Badu. Written records can also be the only source of information about individuals who: died young, unmarried or without issue; permanently left their home islands and so gave up their land claims; were traditionally adopted or fostered; or whose non-Islander fathers left the region. However, in the past, adoptions were not officially registered. In many cases, oral accounts are the only way to trace family relationships, especially when the children were raised elsewhere. Simplicio Manantan, born in 1904 of Filipino-
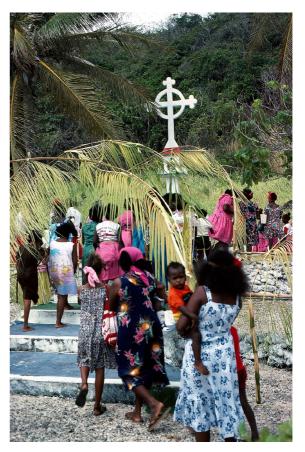
Aboriginal descent, was adopted by Sonny Lifu at St Paul's Mission, Mua where he was known as 'Semples'. He is recorded as both 'Sam Zitha Manantan' and 'Sam Zitha'. Gaps in written accounts reveal contemporary attitudes, such as the routine absence of Islander names and the names of biracial children in pre-war obituaries. For example, William Noelke's daughter, Polly, is not mentioned in Noelke's obituary in *The Parish Gazette* of 1 February 1939, although she and his grandchildren also lived on Thursday Island. Other examples include James Doyle's daughter, Nancy, and George Pearson's son, Olandi.

The child of a mother who died is sometimes recorded later as the child of the father's subsequent wife (traditionally the first wife's sister). The child may not even remember his or her birth mother. The very existence of a deceased mother and child can be forgotten. The descendants of the Filipino, Canuto Palancio, were not aware that his first wife was English and that she and their child had died – his recorded surname then was 'Platt'. He used the surname, 'Palancio' when he married again, his children first signing 'Palancio' and then 'Canuto'. Prior to World War II it was the practice to record as a surname of illegitimate children the name of the mother or maternal grandfather, e.g., Harriet Moka, the daughter of Moka Kudub, Telita Wrench, the granddaughter of Wrench Mills.

Torres Strait Islander personal names

Personal names are the basic units of genealogical investigation but one individual may have many names and several individuals may share a name. This can render problematic the identification of a particular individual. Names are personally and culturally significant – they symbolise connectedness and, to this day, are bestowed with great care. Gamalai Passi from Mer had eight names and most Islanders have at least three, including a traditional name (usually a grandparent's or clan-affiliated name), a European name and a *pleinem* 'nickname'. The *pleinem* is often conferred as a commentary on a person's physical appearance or moral character and is used when the traditional name is tabooed. Some individuals assumed a new name to mark a transitional life event. This practice continued until fairly recently, with a new name given at Christian conversion, adult baptism or confirmation. Any or all of these names may occur in the written record or in conversation. The examples below are drawn largely from conversations with descendants as well as educated linguistic and/or cultural guesswork.

Each watershed event in Torres Strait history has left a residue of personal names. The earliest nominal

Torres Strait Islanders in procession to Kemus, Darnley Island, to celebrate the 110th anniversary of The Coming of the Light, 1 July 1981. Courtesy Anna Shnukal photographic collection, AIATSIS.

substrate indicates New Guinea origin: Dabangai, Parama, Surum (female); Auda, Kebisu, Maino (male). Some traditional female names were anglicised: Anai (Annie), Dabangai (Debbie), Eded (Edith) and both variants are recorded for the same individual. The Pacific Islanders introduced names such as Talapasa, Tanu, Tupoa (male) and Penina, Sangul, Wasada (female). Biblical names taken at LMS baptisms include Asera (Ezra), Dawita (David), Satraika (Shadrach) and Rasella (Rachel), Sarai (Sarah) and Zipporah.[11]

The marine industries introduced names like Beimop, (Beam up), Bosun (Boatswain), Capsize, Captain, Faiud (Firewood), Jib, Kilarap (Keel-her-up), Lowatta (Low water), Luff, Mate, Pilot, Ropeyarn, Sailor, Salepapela (Charlie Propellor), Tipoti (Teapot) and Whaleboat (some of which became surnames) and, for women, Bigboat and Posel (Foresail).[12] The assumption of English names was not always 'entirely a matter of native choice'.[13] Employers replaced names they could not pronounce with English first names, which became surnames. Each of the four different Billy families, three Charlie families and two Harry families has different apical ancestors. Nonetheless, Islander agency should not be discounted. An old man from Mua in the 1840s was called 'Doughboy'. Having boarded a passing ship, he 'heard the sailors speaking about some doughboys they were having for dinner. When he heard it, he thought it was a very pretty name.

He said, "I am Doughboy" and he has always been called Doughboy on the island ever since.'[14] Females were named after boats (e.g., Woodbine for Udabai) and vice versa, especially during the interwar period – for example Lavinia, Lily, Nadine, Nancy, Petta, Rebecca, Sania, Teleai, Timena.

Although surnames did not become universal until the second half of the twentieth century, the Pacific Islander immigrants often adopted – or were assigned – surnames based on the English version of their island of origin. There are nine different families named Lifu, six named Tanna, six Ware (Ouvéa), five Gela (Nggela), five Motlap (Mota Lava), four Savage (Niue – others kept Niue or Newie) all with different apical ancestors. Some men are recorded with multiple surnames such as Tom Boota or Tom Solomon, Fusi Samoa or Peter Bee and Joe Rotumah or Joe Keripo. Local pronunciation obscures the origin of some surnames: 'Murray' derives from Murray Island (Mer), Maré (New Caledonia) or Maori (this family now signs 'Mari'). Prior relationships might be forgotten over time, as the grandchildren of Pacific Islander immigrants took their father's first name as surname. The Rotumans Sebasio and Kabiere (whose children signed 'Sebasio' and 'Harry' respectively) were full brothers, but there is no written record of that relationship. Descendants of each of the sons of Yalla from Tanna signed variously 'Neliman', 'Panuel' and 'Jakonia' while the children of Reuben Gela or Albert Reuben signed 'Reuben', obscuring the relationship with their father's brother (New Guinea missionary Richard Bourke).[15] Lui Samoa's children from his second marriage signed 'Lui' – a different family from the Lifouan-descended 'Lui' family. Tom Lowah's father, born at Lau Lagoon, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, is first recorded as Willie Solomon but he was persuaded by his countrymen to change his surname to Lawa (Lau), later regularised to Lowah.[16] Torres Strait Islanders began to copy the practice: Zaman ('Harry') from Yorke Island took the surname 'Yorke'; two families from Stephens Island took 'Stephen'; and Gamiga became Jimmy Dalrymple. Muslim 'Malays' introduced the surnames Ahmat (from Muhammad), Assan (from Hassan) and Doolah (from Abdullah) and Catholic Filipinos adopted the surnames Angeles, Blanco, Canendo, Canuto, Cubillo, Durante, Elarde, Guivarra, Lohado and Sabatino.

The bestowal of a name establishes a 'road', which 'goes both ways' – it entails reciprocal respect and obligation and symbolises a person's incorporation into a family, clan or new sociopolitical order. The missionary couple at Saibai won over the previously hostile chief, Zawai, by naming their newborn baby after him: 'The old man felt flattered. I have often seen him caressing the child most tenderly.'[17] Many of the Masig (Yorke Island) men took English names to symbolise their incorporation into the new economic order – for example Johnson (Apelu), Charlie (Bedhe), Jack (Giwe), Gilbert (Ikul), and Harry (Zaman). Japanese skippers bestowed Japanese names on young crew members such as Koiki Mabo, Kosaka Tamwoy, Kura Newie and Sobo Lowah.

After World War II, when Islanders were permitted to reside on Thursday Island and attend its segregated cinema, names from popular culture such as Spencer Tracy Billy, Bogart Barry Nona and Elvis Terrington Warusam became fashionable. Today, Black America is an important source, for example, Latoya, Tahjee, Tallisha, Kantesha for girls and Jamestyn and Tré for boys. There are, in addition, new coinings, such as Nakoa for the granddaughter of a man named Nako and the Zimbabwean name, Jondayah, to honour a man, John, who was to adopt the baby. This baby's second name, Hilisha, is constructed from syllables in the mother's three sisters' names. While it is still unusual to innovate in this way, Mauare Eseli, born in 1917, told me that her name was a combination of her grandparents' names, Mawe and Ari.[18] It remains to be seen whether these new constructions will be passed on.

Names reflect not only historical, family and life events but also spiritual relationships. Islanders gave their children the names of LMS missionary teachers (such as Aragu Bob, Elia Ware, Tamate Alfred (from Revd James Chalmers or 'Tamate') and teachers' wives (for example Orepa Peter, Penina Charlie, Seluia Gizu) whom they respected and whose admired qualities would thereby be transmitted to the child. Later, they chose the names of Anglican priests (MacFarlane Lowatta, Guy Henry Darke Garnier, Poey Baira) or government officials (such as Jardine Kiwat, William Lee Bryce Kebisu, Oleary William, Edith Lowatta, Ethel Hosea, Stella Warrior).[19] Naming a child after a person not only honours that individual but forges a spiritual and emotional connection. In Bamaga in the 1980s I was struck by the resemblance of a young girl – her mannerisms and temperament rather than physical appearance – to the grandmother of my family on Erub. On meeting her for the first time, she immediately put her arm through mine in a gesture entirely reminiscent of that grandmother. I remarked on the gestural similarity and learned from her mother that, indeed, she bore that same name.

To my knowledge, the traditional practice of name exchange no longer exists but was another way of creating 'roads' with outsiders, or honouring someone, or marking significant events. MacGillivray ceremonially exchanged names with Siwai of Erub in 1845 and Joe Tongatabu exchanged names with Noedhai of Dauan in the 1860s. By this means 'a connecting link – a bond of friendship between our Tongan friend and his Papuan brother' – was formed.[20] Haddon found the custom widely followed on Mabuyag in 1888, for

George Mye (in traditional hat) at the dedication and blessing of the new primary school at Erub (Darnley Island, 13 August 1982). Anglican priest, Father Stanley Waigana at left. Courtesy Anna Shnukal photographic collection, AIATSIS.

example, 'Nagu now Wairu of Badu' and 'Kanai, now Gizu, the chief of Badu'.[21] It had, he believed, 'a purely friendly significance' and 'a name was never changed more than once'. The Mabuyag mamoose, Ned Warria, and his wife, Uruba, exchanged names with American Ned Mosby and his wife, Kudin, from Masig.[22] Kudin was baptised as 'Uruba' in 1917 and buried as 'Uruba' in 1938. This reciprocal act not only established a connection between the couples but also indicated the similar position each occupied at the summit of their islands' hierarchies. To complicate things further, sometimes the men's wives and sons also exchanged names.[23] Moreover, fictive kin relationships were established through the customary practice of calling one's countrymen or close workmates 'brother' and naming children after one's new friends. The men's descendants now claim a biological connection, especially since some personal names are restricted to, and thus diagnostic of, family membership.[24] A custom among the Pacific Islanders was to name children after deceased single countrymen without issue: at his father's request, Harry Kiwat, son of a Rotuman diver, named his first son 'Setareke' after Cedric Rotumah, a great friend of his father's.[25]

Various coinages are employed to avoid name taboo, which is the still-practised prohibition on saying the name of an in-law or any word which resembles the name. Failure to observe this causes offence and requires some recompense 'to cover the shame'. In 1845 MacGillivray observed that 'a man must carefully avoid speaking to or even mentioning the name of his mother-in-law, and his wife acts similarly with regard to her father-in-law. Thus the mother of a person called Nuki – which means water – is obliged to call water by another name.'[26] In the 1930s, the penalty was having to give the person wronged 'the best thing you have in the house' or, in lieu, to 'make a feast at which he or she is the honoured guest'.[27]

Lalawa is the name of the tallest hill on Erub and it is still forbidden to say its name when an in-law named Lala is within hearing. The creole has coined *amagel/atheboi* to allow an affine to address or refer to a girl or boy named respectively for a grandmother or grandfather. Such coinages must be kept in mind in order to keep track of people being discussed. A subset of this custom is the prohibition on using one's own name as an address term. I still find it difficult to address another 'Anna' by name, preferring either *nasem* or *natham* 'namesake', depending on the dialect.

Nicknames (*pleinem*) are based on personal or physical characteristics or, as in Polynesia, memorialise a significant person or life event. Examples include Apan (a woman who lost a finger while diving and had only 'half a hand'), Kantok (a man who was rendered speechless after drinking strong *tuba*) and Wandana (a woman who used to go from house to house to gossip, just as the boat *Wandana* delivered cargo from island to island). Many names have conventional equivalents that are used in conversation but rarely officially recorded: James (Aki), Daniel (Danto), Jacob (Duke or Zuk), John (Kusa), Mathias (Mandi), Fred (Mislam), Sam (Nita), Richard (Saiki), George (Sios or Seahorse), Frank (Tarau), Celestino (Tinoi) and Wilson (Yapoi); Charlotte (Buri) and Angela (Mana).

Islanders do not share the Aboriginal taboo on speaking the name of the dead and the next-born child of the same sex was often given the name of a deceased child. Vera Eileen Lui was born in 1925 but died in 1926 and the next daughter, born in 1927, was also named Vera Eileen. Robert John Mye, born in 1931, died in 1932, was followed by two female siblings before the next Robert John Mye, born in 1938. In some families these early deaths were not mentioned or recorded and could be forgotten.

I have my own story about the emotional significance of personal names. On my way to Erub to begin my research, I was stranded on Masig, where I regularly attended Anglican church. A few days before I was to leave, Revd Langley Warria asked me to visit him and his wife, Akabu. He asked me my age and whether I was an Anglican, to which I replied truthfully that I had gone to Anglican scripture at high school and been confirmed an Anglican. He and his wife worried that I would have no kin, no 'road' to anybody on Erub, but their son, Jeremiah, had married an Erub woman and they offered to 'adopt' me. I was to go to my 'brother' and explain and make sure I called his wife *oman* 'sister-in-law', since affinal names are taboo. Although flattered and willing to take on the material responsibilities of kinship, I took it less seriously than I should have. It was only many years later that I discovered that my adoptive parents had had a daughter, Anna, born in 1940, who died in 1947.

Conclusion

I take seriously my debt to the *giz le* and see it as my responsibility to respond to all requests for genealogical information from Islanders and related Aboriginal people. In return, I have been privileged to receive stories, written family genealogies, copies of birth and marriage records, newspaper cuttings, family bible entries, photographs of tombstone inscriptions and memorial booklets. Genealogy is a collaborative endeavour and my work has depended crucially on the support and collaboration of hundreds of Islanders from every island and mainland community. These exchanges are based on the foundational Islander principles of respect, reciprocity and connection.

Why undertake such detailed and problematic research? And should outsiders assist in compiling Islander genealogies? Naturally, I do see a role for the impartial, empathetic, respectful and intellectually engaged genealogist who takes care to emphasise she can always be wrong. Viewing the signature, photograph or name of an ancestor in an old record can be an emotional experience. Christine Anu wept on seeing the name and signature of her grandfather, Nadi, in seamen's registers, while filming an episode of SBS *Who Do You Think You Are* in the QSA.

Many Islanders are unaware of their biological heritage and it is probably impossible to trace it now without DNA evidence. Contemporary Murray Islanders vaunt their absence of Pacific Islander ancestry but, according to the long-time Mer schoolmaster in 1908, 'You can hardly say that there is a pure Murray Islander on the island, because in former days when the bêche-de-mer fishers came here there was a mixing with South Sea Island men and others.'[28] An Islander once asked me to identify his great-great-grandfather, one of the many Pacific Islanders who worked on a central island pearling station in the 1870s. I could not and his family tree contained no indication of that ancestry, since the information was passed down orally. The child was 'custom' adopted either by the mother's family or a relative: 'You can adopt', I was told, 'provided you got the blood.'

New discoveries can heal family rifts, such as when two 'different' wives are revealed to be one woman whose two names were recorded in different contexts, or when the true 'line' of an ancestor is revealed through conversation with members of the original family (on a different island), bringing new connections and answering longstanding puzzles. However, the findings are not always welcome. A family may not wish to acknowledge New Guinean connections which may compromise native land title claims. Or an ancestor may be demonstrated to belong to a less prestigious lineage than was believed. On the other hand, one can occasionally uncover written corroboration of an oral account. Reverend Waiaka Zawai told me indignantly about a woman from his Saibai family being 'stolen' by a Pacific Islander, who had taken her to Mabuyag.[29] Traditionally, a man could not marry without a sister to exchange for a wife. If he had no sister, he could borrow or steal one but this disadvantaged newcomers, who resorted to taking women either by force or persuasion. Because no bride price was paid, both were characterised as 'stealing'. Gill recounts how, sometime before 1872, Zawai's eldest daughter 'was stolen by a party of [armed] pearl-divers, who also robbed the plantations in open day.'[30] This woman went on to have six children with her husband but her descendants were unaware of this story. *Their* version was that their grandfather had met the sister (not daughter) of Zawai on Saibai while he was working pearlshell and she went willingly. When I have passed on a previously-unknown story kept within the birth family, with supporting documentation, people generally accept it but say 'Oh well, that's *theirs*.'

I generally restrict myself to Australian records but the fact that every Islander has at least one biological ancestor from elsewhere can suggest novel sources of information, such as the Latin records of French-speaking Catholic priests on Thursday Island or legal proceedings from German New Guinea. Nineteenth-century birth register entries led me to New Zealand in 1994 to complete the family tree of an extended Maori family of nineteenth century pearlers. In 2006 I visited the Catholic archives in Issoudun, France, for Filipino-descended Islanders in New Guinea and the Quiberon registers for information about Jérémie Garnier. This information was read at his daughter's tombstone opening in 2012. Also productive have been research trips to Norfolk Island, Vanuatu and New Caledonia, where a Lifouan archives employee recognised two men who died in Torres Strait in 1887 as his grandfather's missing brothers. In 2017 I interpreted for two friends searching (successfully) to connect with relatives in Noumea, Ouvéa and Maré. It is a great privilege to work with Torres Strait Islanders and, despite the setbacks and disappointments, I continue to be buoyed by the intellectual challenge, a desire to be useful and the support of many, many families.

Biography

Anna Shnukal began a Post-doctoral Fellowship in Sociolinguistics in Torres Strait in 1980. Now retired, she has been a Senior Policy Officer, Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy; ARC Australian Research Fellow, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland; Senior Lecturer in Linguistics, University of Queensland; and is currently an Honorary Associate, Queensland Museum. She was a writer/researcher for SBS TV *Who Do You Think You Are? Christine Anu* (2008) and ABC TV *Blue Water Empire* (2019) and has authored or edited almost 100 publications on aspects

of Torres Strait language, ethnography, culture and history.

Endnotes

1   This article began life as 'Some practicalities and pitfalls in compiling Torres Strait Islander genealogies', delivered in May 2019 at the Waves in Time Family and Local History Conference at Lake Kawana, Queensland. A short extract was published, with the organisers' permission, as 'Compiling Torres Strait Islander genealogies', *Traces* no. 7, 2019, pp. 40–41.

2   Rivers also popularised the use of some common genealogical conventions including capital letters for males, males to the left of a marriage dyad, island of origin and clan affiliation.

3   G. Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land Marquesas 1774-1880,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1980, p. 93.

4   A.C. Haddon, *Head-hunters: Black, White, and Brown*, Methuen, London, 1901, p. 124.

5   A. Shnukal, 'Language Diversity and Torres Strait National Identity', in R. Davis (ed.), *Woven Histories, Dancing Lives: Torres Strait Islander Identity, Culture and History,* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, pp. 107–123.

6   L. Ryan, 'Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders', in A. Patience (ed.), *The Bjelke-Petersen Premiership 1968-1983: Issues in Public Policy*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1985, p. 120.

7   See, for example A. Shnukal, *Bibliography of Torres Strait, Ngulaig* no. 20, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 2004, with 3,000 bibliographies, theses, books, pamphlets and articles arranged chronologically by subject category (1862-2005) online as (www.uq.edu.au/ATSIS/tsbibliography/index.html   http://www.uq.edu.au/ATSIS/docs/ngulaig-20.pdf).   Genealogical information is, for example, available in J.J.E. Done, *Wings Across the Sea*, Boolarong Press, Bowen Hills, Queensland.; the diaries and newspaper articles of Reverend W.H. MacFarlane ('C. Coral'); in P. Eseli, *Eseli's Notebook, Translated from Kala Lagaw Ya into English, edited and Annotated by Anna Shnukal and Rod Mitchell,* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Research Report Series no. 3, Brisbane, 1998; J. Devanny, *By Tropic Sea and Jungle: Adventures in North Queensland*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1944; P. Hetherington, (ed.), *The Diaries of Donald Friend*, vols 2 & 3, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 2003 & 2005; G. Ohshima (ed.), *Toresu Kaikyo no Hitobito: People of the Torres Strait*, Kokon Shoin, Tokyo, 1983; J. Hodes, 'Torres Strait Islander Migration to Cairns Before World War II', Master of Letters in History thesis, Central Queensland University, 1998; and recent memoirs, beginning with T. Lowah, *Eded Mer (my life)*, Rams Skull Press, Kuranda, Queensland, 1988; and E. Gaffney, *Somebody Now: The Autobiography of Ellie Gaffney, a Woman of Torres Strait*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1989. A.C. Haddon's Torres Strait diaries have now been transcribed and edited and will be published in 2019 by Sydney University Press.

8   J. Strachan, *Explorations and Adventures in New Guinea*, Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, London, 1888, pp. 21, 27.

9   N. Berkovic, 'The Donor Parent Trap', *Weekend Australian* 22–23 June 2019, p. 17.

10 Pacific Islander English, influenced by Austronesian languages, dropped 'h', used 'r' and 'l' interchangeably, substituted 's' for 'sh/ch' and stops for most fricatives, devoiced stops and rejected consonant clusters; thus Lepeka for Rebecca, Littia and Ritia for Lydia, Salat for Charlotte; Uruga for Olga; and Aretika for Harry Tiga, Maratta for Malaita, Palen for Farlane and Satareke for Cedric. The pidgin and early creole incorporated some of these features, e.g., pronouncing the surnames Bond, Bon and Bourne as 'Bon'. Or, having had the differences drilled in school, older Islanders would hypercorrect and pronounce and write Neavu for Neabu, Djawai for Zawai, Sefa for Sepa. The vagaries of English spelling, the result of changes in pronunciation during its long written history, are reflected in, for example, Gemai, Gemi and Gimai, Mooka and Muka. The Torres Strait 'o', midway between English 'o' and 'u', led to both being recorded: Elo and Elu, Largod and Largud, Luata and Lowatta, Olai and Ulai (though Ulai is a man's name; Olai a woman's name). Recopying from the handwritten Somerset registers has produced multiple errors in the online version: Amu for Aviu, Apues for Agnes, Cimma for Emma, Ledu for Nedu, Lepa for Sepa, Lola for Lota, Manga for Mauga, Mosepa for Mesepa, Nadana for Madua, Nukem for Newcamp, Paula for Pauna, Relben for Reuben, Repu for Kepu, Sauia for Sania, Tailee for Taita, Tetom for Titom, Timura for Timena, Waind for Waina, Wud for Ulud.

11 Other examples of New Guinean names are Gur, Mackipilly, Mawat, Mogor, Neabu, Siai, (female); Maira, Uria (male). Other anglicisations include Olai (Ella), Luzai (Louisa or Lucy), Muguzi (Maggie), Nazir (Nazareth), Pagai (Peggy); and other biblical names are Aviu (Abihu), Elia (Elijah), Enoka (Enoch), Ione (John), Mareko (Mark), Ubram (Abraham); and Atalia, Seba (Sheba), Zillah.

12 See also G.H. Darke, 'Torres Strait Names', *The Carpentarian*, vol. 34, no. 136, 1934, pp. 592–594; MacFarlane, 'Names', pp. 622-624; J. Singe, *The Torres Strait: People and History*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1989, p. 62.

13 W.H. MacFarlane, 'Names in the Torres Straits', *The Carpentarian*, vol. 34, no. 137, 1935, p. 622.

14 D.R. Moore, *Islanders and Aborigines at Cape York: An Ethnographic Reconstruction Based on the 1848-1850 Rattlesnake Journals of O.W. Brierly and Information he Obtained from Barbara Thompson*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1979, pp. 162–163.

15 Done, *Wings Across the Sea*, p. 12. In '"The bridegroom cometh": The Lives and Deaths of Queensland Melanesians in New Guinea, 1893-1956', *Pacific Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1989, p. 78, D. Wetherell (a meticulous scholar) assumes that Reuben's surname must therefore be 'Bourke'. This illustrates the pervasiveness of Eurocentric assumptions.

16 Lowah, *Eded Mer*, p. 12.

17 W.W. Gill, *Life in the Southern Isles; Or, Scenes and Incidents in the South Pacific and New Guinea*, Religious Tract Society, 1876, p. 209.

18 Mauare Eseli, interviewed by author, April 1995, transcript held by author.

19 Other examples include Kapua Gutchen (from Kaupua and Guceng), Samuel Mosby (from Samuela), Yatamo Gela (from Iotamo), Pabai Banu (from Fa'avae), Sweeney Morseu (from Siwene), Tomkins Billy (from Revd Oliver Fellows Tomkins).

20 J. MacGillivray, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Rattlesnake, Commanded by the Late Captain Owen Stanley, R.N., F.R.S. During the Years 1846-1850*, vol. 2, Boone, London, 1852, p. 44; A.W. Murray and S. McFarlane, 'Report of a Missionary Voyage to New Guinea', 1871, LMS Papua journals, reel M11, p. 42.

21 A.C. Haddon, 'The Ethnography of the Western Tribe of Torres Straits', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1890, p. 405.

22 .G. Ohshima (ed.), *Toresu Kaikyo no Hitobito: People of the Torres Strait*, Kokon Shoin, Tokyo, 1983, p. 75.

23 A.C. Haddon, *Sociology, Magic and Religion of the Western Islanders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1904, p. 125.

24 Examples are Ettie, Getano, Jomen, Kalemu, Kemuel, Mislam, Olandi (males); Bakoi, Dalassa, Genua, Gimai, Saimo, Wasie (females).

25 Wasie Kiwat Tardent to author, September 2015, notes held by author.

26 MacGillivray, *Narrative of the Voyage of H.M.S. Rattlesnake*, pp. 10–11.

27 J.W. Schomberg, 'Christian names in the Torres Strait', *The Carpentarian*, vol. 35, no. 139, 1935, p. 651.

28 J.S. Bruce, *Report of Queensland Pearl-shell and Beche-de-mer Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Pearl-shell and Beche-de-mer Industries ...*, Government Printer, Brisbane, 1908, p. 211.

29 Revd Waiaka Zawai, interviewed by author, October 1981, transcript held by author.

30 Gill, *Life in the Southern Isle*, p. 209.

Appendix I: Written sources for Torres Strait Islander genealogies

Institutional digitisation of records has revolutionised genealogical practice but not everything is available online. The following Australian institutions hold material relevant to compilers of Torres Strait Islander genealogies:

<u>National Library of Australia</u>: early naval surveyors' and travellers' reports from the 1820s; microfilmed LMS reports and correspondence, *The Chronicle of the L.M.S.* (1872-1927) and *Torres Straits Pearler* (early 1900s); numerous histories of the LMS New Guinea Mission; Annual Reports on British New Guinea (1886-1906) and Papua (1906-1940); diaries of notable residents and visitors to Torres Strait, notably Benjamin Butcher, Donald Friend, Lawrence Hargrave, Frank Hurley and Colin Simpson; recently indexed photographic collections and *Bamaga High School Magazine* (1973-1974). For a guide to Australian Indigenous source materials, including manuscripts, pictorial collections and oral history records, see aiatsis.gov.au/collection, an online index to digitised newspapers and other material.

<u>National Archives of Australia</u> digitised and indexed records of immigrant founders of Islander families: arrival dates, indenture agreements, departures, exemptions from dictation test, naturalisations, and 1917 alien registrations with birthdate, place of origin, physical description, two photographs and current address; also enlistment records for every Islander member of the Australian armed forces.

<u>Australian War Museum</u> individual Islander servicemen's records indexed and online but containing numerous errors: inaccurate names and birthdates, often hastily recorded by servicemen unfamiliar with Islander names and Islander English; does not include World War II members of the US Army Small Ships Section.

<u>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</u> (aiatsis.gov.au/collection): major deposit library for Indigenous material, much of it restricted; has digitised the 1898 Cambridge Anthropological Expedition reports with Rivers' genealogies; holds John Stewart Bruce's Register of Births, Marriages, and Deaths at Murray Island, 1891[-1928] (also available at QSA as microfilm Z1627), although entries are often made either the following day or two days later, according to family bible entries; Wolfgang Laade's western island genealogies (1964-1970); Peter Gillan's field notebooks from Masig (Yorke Island) (1980-1981); Alick Jackomos's Aboriginal genealogies; Richard Lauriston Sharp's genealogies and field data (1933-1935); and Philip MacFarlane's transcription of parts of his father's diaries – Revd W.H. MacFarlane served as Anglican Torres Strait Mission priest 1917-1933; also issues of *Koori Mail* (now online), *Torres Dribbler* and other Indigenous-themed newsletters and newspapers.

<u>Queensland State Archives</u> (QSA): Somerset letterbooks (also in Sydney's Mitchell Library, along with Revd Butcher's LMS marriage consent forms for minors), Colonial Secretary's correspondence, Queensland Governor's despatches, reports and correspondence from Queensland Premier's Department, Home Secretary's Department, Treasury, Northern Protector of Aboriginals, Department of Native Affairs, of Harbours and Marine Fisheries, of Health, of Mines, of Public Instruction and of Public Lands as well as old Torres Strait maps and photograph albums, lease files, inquests, indigence files, school registers, court transcripts, the 1915 Indigenous war census, men-in-charge and discharge registers for boat crews. Also available is Paul Mackett's name index from various registers, letterbooks and other QSA documents, e.g., register of Aboriginal deaths 1910-1928 cifhs.com/qldrecords/A58973_Qld_Deaths_1910_1928.html, the Cooktown Hospital and Normanton registers of patients discharged, and removal records cifhs.com/qldrecords/removal.html, and copies of Tindale's Yarrabah, Cherbourg and Palm Island genealogies. QSA is increasingly putting early fragile material on line, including the Colonial Secretary correspondence and Cook electoral rolls.

<u>State Library of Queensland</u> early naval surveyors' and travellers' reports; microfilmed copies of LMS reports and correspondence, the Margaret Lawrie collection of genealogies, biographies, photographs, interviews, biographies and research notes. About two-thirds of Lawrie's collection was removed

without outside consultation in the mistaken belief that photocopied material could easily be obtained elsewhere. SLQ also holds letters from Hon. John Douglas, Government Resident of Thursday Island 1885-1904, as well as an imperfect microfilmed run of *Torres Straits Pilot and New Guinea* Gazette (1888-1942) and issues of *The Islander* (1936-1938), *Torres News* (1957-present), *The Sentinel* (1977-1978), *Torres Strait Islander* (1981-1984), *Cape Times* (1983-1984) and *TSIMA Newsletter* (1984-1992), a large photographic collection and Colin Sheehan's three-volume 'Torres Strait names index' compiled in 2010. Like the NLA it has an excellent collection of books on north Queensland and Papua New Guinea and valuable MSS, including the digitised diary of Jessie Scott (1880-1881). Relevant published annual reports, some digitised, include those of the Police Magistrate, Thursday Island; Government Resident, Thursday Island; Chief Protector of Aboriginals (1904-1920); Aboriginals Department (1921-1938); Department of Native Affairs (1939-1965); Director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs (1966-1974); Director of Aboriginal and Islanders Advancement (1976-1983); Department of Harbours and Marine; and Department of Public Instruction. Other useful Queensland sources available at SLQ are *AIA News*, *Blue Book, Government Gazette*, *Monthly Bulletin of the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Islanders*, *Pacific Islands Yearbook, Post Office Directory*, *Pugh's Official Almanac Directory and Gazetteer* (now online), *Police Gazette, Thursday Island Business and Community Directory* and *TSRA News*.

Church records: Roman Catholic Church baptisms from 1886 (with birthdates, parents and godparents) and burials (deaths sometimes unrecorded elsewhere) held in its Sydney archives; Church of England Diocese of Carpentaria registers of baptisms (sometimes with birthdates), confirmations (sometimes with original names), marriages and burials from 1900; the bishop's correspondence (1915-1920) held in its Townsville archives (microfiche copies in Brisbane archive); publications such as *The Carpentarian* (1901-1951), *Missionary Notes* (1906-1910), *Parish Gazette* (1913-1941), *Year Book of the Diocese of Carpentaria* (1927-1966) and *A.B.M. Review* (1910-1974). Presbyterian (now Uniting) Church records are held in the Mitchell Library, the papers of Revd JRB Love, Mapoon Mission superintendent 1919-1927 in the State Library of South Australia.

Community and Personal Histories Section, DATSIP: the most comprehensive source of 20th century Torres Strait genealogical material, although not all of it is accurate and not everyone who now identifies as a Torres Strait Islander came under departmental control; has digitised Indigenous-related Colonial Secretary and Home Office correspondence and Justice Department inquests and the registers of incoming and outgoing correspondence but some material was lost or destroyed before deposit; holds DNA correspondence and personal history cards and genealogies for most Queensland Indigenous families.

Menzies Library, Australian National University: university theses and, in its Noel Butlin Archive Centre, Burns Philp & Company records from the 1880s; Fryer Library, University of Queensland: university theses; microfilmed letters (1890-1904) to Haddon from informants, Revd J. Chalmers, Revd W.H. MacFarlane and R. Bruce, a photograph album from the 1931 Home Secretary's tour, Murray Island Fisheries Ltd records; Cairns TAFE library: extensive collection of Torres Strait material: essays by Islander students containing genealogical information; published indexes to the material.

Australian National Maritime Museum: diary of William Benjamin Norgate, lighthouse keeper on Goods and Booby Islands (1893-1929); Australian Museum: Alan McCulloch's Torres Strait diary (1907); Queensland Museum: log book of Captain John Thomas Bebrouth of Burns, Philp & Coy Ltd; South Australian Museum: Norman Tindale genealogies and photographs (1930s-1950s); Royal Historical Society of Queensland: Somerset Water Police Log (1871-1876), Thursday Island Federal Hotel Register (1901-c.1956), historical photographs; Thursday Island Historical Museum: Thursday Island General Hospital Visitors Book (1894-1978), photographs and other ephemera. Biographical material can also be found in local history society collections and the bulletins of the Cairns, Mulgrave Shire, Royal Historical Society of Queensland and Torres Strait Historical Societies.

Queensland Registrar of Births, Deaths, Marriages began systematic recording of Islanders in 1917. Comparatively little was officially recorded before the arrival of European teachers in the early 1900s and, on some of the less-populated islands, before the 1940s; now online from but beware of multiple transcription errors.

Mainland cemetery records often now online; tombstones inscriptions from Brisbane, Broome, Cairns, Darwin, Townsville and each island cemetery. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* is increasing its Indigenous entries, as are other Australian biographical dictionaries.