The Torres Strait Islanders are a seafaring people who made voyages across Torres Strait for warfare and gift exchange to the Papua New Guinea coast and the Cape York mainland in double outrigger canoes. They are fisherfolk and many Islanders are gardeners. Unlike the Aboriginal people of the Australian mainland the indigenous inhabitants of Torres Strait, a people with tight, frizzy hair, were of Melanesian origin.

Since late last century they began to participate in a new marine industry often as family or clan owners of pearling luggers. Since the 1960's some of them have worked on the North Queensland canefields, large numbers becoming railway workers as far away as Western Australia.

Today Islanders share a way of life which they call 'Island custom'. The shaping of Island custom and collective identity over the five generations of the colonial era is the central motif of Jeremy Beckett's book.

He asks the question: Why do a people 'who are Australian citizens and Christians' identify with those who inhabited Torres Strait when Europeans first came there'. The answer 'is by no means self-evident', he replies; because the colonial period has wrought such vast changes in Islanders' beliefs and practices. In Beckett's eyes Islanders do not resemble those who came 'before': 'Culturally, the latter day Islander has changed almost out of recognition.'

The colonial experience helped both to bind Islanders together and to pull them apart. The book distinguishes two phases; the 'old colonial dispensation' lasting until the 1960's; the period of 'welfare colonialism' that followed. In the former Islanders were sequestered on their own lands, 'a race apart', as the Chief Protector described their situation; twenty years ago they began to emigrate to towns like Townsville and Cairns. Island custom was 'strong enough to survive not only a succession of changes in its original environment, but also transplanting, from the Strait itself. A reminder of the roots and branches of the slave cultures of America and the Caribbean.

The colonial era began for Islanders in 1879 with annexation of the islands. Beckett records how pearlers and trepangers invaded the Strait from the 1850's; on 1 July 1871 LMS evangelists arrived at Darnley Island, an event celebrated by Islanders as 'the coming of the Light'. Newcomers included Pacific Islanders, who were absorbed through marriage into the Island community, together with their customs.

Like the Papuans they were left in occupation of their lands. An innovation 'without parallel in Australian colonial practice anywhere', writes Beckett, was the establishment in the 1880's of 'a system of elected councils'.

A feature of special significance in the shaping of Islander consciousness not developed in the book, is the establishment of government schools before 1900; among them State School Number 774 at Mer, equal to any in the state, until it was deregistered in 1903, an act of 'white Australia'. Having taken the opportunity to learn the colonizer's custom, Islanders were prepared to meet the Administration on its own ground: in 1936, they moved to break free in an inter-island maritime strike against Protection, regaining ground lost by the elected Councils after 1904.

The book opens with a description of a typical 'tombstone opening', a practice forming 'the centrepiece of Island custom'. On this occasion on Mer at Christmas 1976, where the tomb, draped with yards of cloth, was surrounded by a fence from which they hung shredded palm leaves and Christmas decorations. An Anglican priest conducted the ceremony which was followed by feasting and dancing.

Citing the work of a colleague, Beckett observes that the structures underlying this custom are those of the pre-colonial mortuary rites prohibited by the missionaries. But the book does not explore these underlying continuities. The missionaries forced Islanders to bury their dead in cemetaries. Now they 'make a home' for the departed soul, as Islanders explain. The tombstone unveiling is a second-stage rite in which the family of the deceased return gifts to the in-laws, who arranged the burial, so balancing the relations between kinsfolk and relatives by marriage: a gift-exchange of key cultural significance. This custom sprang up unannounced in the 1930's, a time of great adversity for Islanders when disciplinary control reached its peak. An expression of internal strengthening.

Islanders contrasted their own law and custom with those of Europeans: Don't trespass on others' land, follow in the footsteps of forebears, plant in this fashion following the stages of the moon and tides. At Mer, they follow Malo's Law, derived from the myth of the culture heroes Malo and Bomai. Local identity and custom, founded upon traditional land ownership and use, is grounded in the reciprocities between persons and groups. They put together the new with the old within their cultural idiom of giving and receiving, a process that leads to the unity of diverse family groups, clans and island communities: we are different, yet we are one.

Even when Islanders were subjected to night curfews and restrictions on inter-island travel in the 1930's they were not isolated communities but associated through networks invisible to outsiders. Innovative inter-island action broken through the imposed barriers in January 1936 when the message calling for a general maritime strike was carried from Murray Island to every other island by the Badu skipper of the Government's cargo boat.
The seagoing habit runs deeply within the modern Torres Strait Islander: as Beckett notes, Islanders now run a thriving crayfishing industry centred on Badu.

Islanders have moved from the fringe of Australian consciousness into the public arena. In the 1970's they gave a loud 'no' to a proposal to move the border with Papua New Guinea, which would have chopped the inter-island community in two. In the 1980's they refused the fifty-year leases offered them by the Queensland Government demanding inalienable freehold title to their islands. Ex-servicemen campaigned successfully for back pay due to them as members of the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion.

Beckett's book contributes towards an understanding of a little-known indigenous people, who provide a bridge, both geographically and ethnically, with our closest neighbours in the island of New Guinea.

HENDERSON, Lyn 'Black Voices': Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education, James Cook University.

Black Voices is a journal published by the Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education at James Cook University to provide a forum not only for students and graduates of that university but also for black writers throughout Australia.

Three volumes of Black Voices have been published. The last issue, volume 3, number 1, has a maturity and sophistication that was somewhat lacking in the first two volumes.

One of the increasing strengths of Black Voices is its contribution to black oral history. Articles which place the author's family history in the context of European colonisation not only have great impact but are academically significant. If the subsequent articles exploring the methodology of Aboriginal oral history are as thought provoking as the first by Kevin Carmody, Aboriginal Oral History: Some Problems in Methodology, then the quality of Black Voices is assured.

Contributions are no longer "in house" to James Cook University. The journal is becoming recognised and sought after as a worthy contribution to black oral history. Articles which place the author's family history in the context of European colonisation not only have great impact but are academically significant. If the subsequent articles exploring the methodology of Aboriginal oral history are as thought provoking as the first by Kevin Carmody, Aboriginal Oral History: Some Problems in Methodology, then the quality of Black Voices is assured.

Some of the poems in Black Voices have a powerful simplicity that haunts the reader. Carol Fisher's Jesus is Black is one such poem. Others are also "worthwhile examples of young black poets coming to grips with anger, bitterness, sorrow, and loss as well as the deep hurts inflicted by racism. A number of poems express the love, warmth and joys in life thus giving the collection a roundness and realistic expression of the totality of black experiences.

Many of the short stories are entertaining reminiscences. Others show the harsher realities of Aboriginal and Islander life but, in comparison with the poetry, these aspects are not the major focus in the short stories.

The section containing comments on topics of current concern are informative and varied, ranging from an examination of the music of the Torres Straits, to problems of alcoholism, to land rights, to education.

For the Aboriginal and Islander students at James Cook University, Black Voices is a source of pride. The urgency of their voices is clear, particularly in the poetry. The variety and scope of the topics and genres together with the academic discussion combine to make the journal an important contemporary comment on black experiences and black academia.

THESIS ABSTRACTS

This section publishes abstracts from theses in education from Australian tertiary institutions. Abstract information for future editions are welcome. Contributors should forward a copy of their abstract, together with relevant biographic and institutional information, to: The Editor, 'Queensland Researcher', Research Services Branch, Queensland Department of Education, P.O. Box 33, North Quay Q 4002.

An understanding of Torres Strait Islander culture is essential for white Australians to be able to teach effectively. An understanding of the culture does not refer only to traditional or pre-European contact culture but incorporates an understanding of culture change. This thesis makes an outstanding contribution to such understanding.

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<th>Title:</th>
<th>Springs of Originality Among the Torres Strait Islanders</th>
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<tr>
<td>Author:</td>
<td>Nonie Sharp</td>
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<td>Degree:</td>
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<td>Institution:</td>
<td>La Trobe University</td>
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This thesis concerns cultural possibility among the Islanders of the Torres Strait. It is set within their changing world in a period of encroachment and invasion. In indicating a deep contrast between reciprocal and commodity cultures several intellectual traditions are drawn upon: marxism, structuralism, and critical phenomenology in the field of comparative religion. The thesis owes a special debt to Paul Radin. The argument begins from Levi-Strauss' perception of the manner in which Mauss conceived the totality of the gift as
foliated on many planes.

The first part of the thesis presents a case study of Miriam speakers of the Eastern Islands before sustained intrusion. Miriam life cycles have a movement which follows the cosmic cycles of the seasons. From the place of origin the foliation process moves outwards. Sacred rites are seen as 'foliating events' joining human and cosmic planes. The second part traces the way reciprocal foliation continued, creating new levels of integration among Islanders despite the antithetical tendency of commodity relations to dissolve reciprocal exchange. Meanings of originality as a double movement of changing and continuing are explored through narratives from each side of the frontier of contact. Oral histories given by Islanders who have lived both the old and the new are set within a discussion of the changing social-historical context of Island life. The study modifies some conclusions of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition of 1898: for example, meanings of the Malo-Bomai myth for the existence and identity of Eastern Islanders and the cultural possibilities Malo-Bomai foreshadowed. The thesis weaves together threads of the life-world of the Islanders making visible both the overall pattern and the separate strands of a culture often presumed to have been destroyed.