

**Inner Weavings:**  
**Cultural Appropriateness for a Torres Strait Island**  
**Woman Artist of Today**

Exegesis of Visual Art submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Visual Art

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## **Abstract**

This exegesis examines the context of my studio work submitted for the degree of Doctor of Visual Art at Griffith University in 2004. My art practice reflects my identity, which is complex and many-stranded, but at its core is my identity as a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman of Torres Strait Islander descent. I also acknowledge multiple heritages and, like many of my contemporaries, I am a descendant of those two thirds of the Torres Strait population who now live on the Australian mainland. Having been born and brought up on the mainland also means that I am connected to, and have been affected by, wider Australian Indigenous issues, particularly those resulting from the alienation and dislocation which stem from colonialism. Therefore, as I draw from both traditional and contemporary modes and theory to explore the appropriateness of my art practice, this exegesis centres on the question: What constitutes culturally appropriate practice for me as a contemporary Torres Strait Island woman?

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## **Statement of Authorship**

This work has never been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the exegesis contains no material published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the exegesis itself.

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## **Introduction**

My art practice reflects who I am, my personal and cultural identity, which is complex and many-stranded. At its core is my identity as a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman of Torres Strait Islander descent. As cultural appropriateness and its application have become a consistent consideration in my personal life, as well as in my work as an artist, this exegesis therefore centres on the question: **What constitutes culturally appropriate practice for me as a contemporary Torres Strait Island woman?**

To determine what is appropriate, I must first acknowledge where I come from and, in relation to my identity as a Torres Strait Island person, those traditional cultural practices which have influenced me and on which I draw in my own work. Like many Torres Strait Islanders of my generation, I am of multi-ethnic descent, and I address this further in Chapter 1: Who I am and where I come from.

Torres Strait has been described as the most extensive, ecologically complex shelf in the world. This body of water, which lies between Papua New Guinea and Australia's Cape York Peninsula, stretches over an area of thirty five thousand square kilometres. It encompasses more than one hundred islands, only seventeen of which are permanently inhabited, and there is a great diversity of Indo-Pacific marine fauna in a multitude of niches and habitats. The islands are conventionally divided into the lower western, central, eastern and top western islands. The western islands, which include the Prince of Wales Group, Badu, Geba, Iama and Mabuiag, are high granite remnants of a land bridge, which once joined Australia and New Guinea. The top western islands of Boigu and Saibai were formed from a deposit of silt from the confluence of four Papua New Guinea Rivers. The

central islands of Aurid, Masig, Poruma, Tudu and Warraber, are low lying sand cays surrounded by coral reefs; and the eastern islands of Erub, Dauar, Mer, Ugar and Waier are what remain of Pleistocene volcanoes (McGrath 1998 p. 101).

Torres Strait was named for the first known European explorer in the region, Spanish navigator Luis Vaez de Torres, who sailed through the strait in 1606. Since that time, a European chronological and colonialist perspective has dominated Western thinking about the region and this is outlined further in Chapter 2. However, the fact that I was born and brought up on the mainland of Australia means that I am connected with, and have been affected by, wider Australian Indigenous issues, particularly those resulting from the alienation and dislocation which stem from colonialism. However, the terms ‘dislocation’ and ‘alienation’ in this exegesis apply specifically to dispossession from traditional lands, as opposed to the movement of non-Indigenous populations throughout the invasive colonialist history of imperialism. These factors, whilst impacting on Australian Indigenous identity, ultimately influence traditional and contemporary Indigenous artists and how our work is perceived. Colonisation, active in the Torres Strait from the arrival of the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.) in 1871, inevitably affects how Torres Strait Island people are represented, and even how we represent ourselves.

Like the Torres Strait urban artists and their works, which were exhibited in the first major Torres Strait art exhibition, *Ilan Pasin (this is our way) Torres Strait art*, curated by Tom Mosby with research and development by Brian Robinson, my artwork also evolves from an

individual consciousness, rather than a community consciousness, to express issues such as the search for identity and the effects of political, colonial and religious limitations [and convictions], on the lives of Torres Strait Islanders and other Indigenous people ((see Mosby

1998 p. 88). Torres Strait Art in Transition. In *Ilan Pasin Torres Strait Art* (2005). Accessed 23 June 2005: <http://www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au/ianpasin/Torres.html>).

Furthermore, I explore these issues as a descendent of those two thirds of the Torres Strait population who now live on the Australian mainland ((see Jose 1998 p. 143) Jose, E (1998). The Islanders. In *Ilan Pasin Torres Strait Art* (2005). Accessed 23 June 2005: <http://www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au/ianpasin/Torres.html>). Just as my artworks draw from, interweave, and juxtapose European and Torres Strait historical and cultural themes and perspectives, to explore my identity as a 21<sup>st</sup> century Torres Strait Island woman of multi-ethnic descent, discussion of my work in this exegesis inevitably involves writing about and revisiting history.

In her book entitled *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, contemporary Maori researcher Linda Tehiwai Smith, questions the value of theoretical writing to Indigenous peoples and asks whether history is important for them. She provides insights about how history is almost always concerned with power, and how the relationship between history and power has been and is used, through Western interpretations and views, to dominate others. This, in turn, perpetuates the disempowerment of Indigenous peoples and marginalizes Indigenous viewpoints in their efforts to transform history, to bring justice for past injustices. She argues that even a thousand accounts of the 'truth' do not alter the 'fact' that Indigenous peoples are still marginalised, and they do not possess the power to transform history into justice. She adds that this does not mean that we speak untruths, or employ multiple discourses, or act in 'incredibly contradictory ways' to exercise power ourselves; but she calls for Indigenous researchers to 'decolonise' their research methods, because Western research methods

counteract and reclaim control over Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Smith 2003 p. 39).

However, Smith concedes that the ‘unfinished business’ of knowing that we are still being colonized, and that we are still searching for justice, necessitates revisiting history, since ‘[c]oming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonisation’. One pedagogical implication arising from this position is that access to alternative knowledges can in turn form the basis of alternative ways of doing things; furthermore, ‘transforming colonised views of our own history (as written by the West) requires us to revisit our history under Western eyes’. This, Smith argues, ‘in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand, and then act upon history’ (Smith 2003 p. 34).

However, I sometimes feel that words such as ‘we’, us, ‘our’ or ‘I’, used in relation to Indigenous peoples around the world, exclude me. Even though I share commonalities with Smith’s ideals, they do not convey or resonate wholly with my experience as an urban Indigenous person of Torres Strait Islander descent (Smith 2003 p. 35). Furthermore, my identity, based on my experience of dislocation and alienation through mainstream living, is expressed through my artworks. Therefore, the issues that arise, or the historical sites that are revisited in this exegesis, engage with Western views, as this methodology informs the reader of how I ‘act upon my own history’ through my artworks. Smith aptly clarifies this further for me, in her understanding of what decolonising ‘does not’ or ‘has not’ meant

a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes (Smith 2003 p. 39).

Consequently, questions that arise from my attempts to come to understand art theory and research from my own perspective and for my own artistic purposes are:

- What constitutes cultural appropriateness for me as a contemporary Torres Strait Islander urban artist?
- How is/can cultural appropriateness be applied in my work in this present day era?
- How does cultural appropriateness influence how Indigenous peoples have been, and are, represented and hence misrepresented, in White society?

These questions both inform and arise from themes within the artworks which I produced for my Doctor of Visual Art degree. Each of these themes is explored in the following chapters. The themes are:

1. The survival of Indigenous Torres Strait culture in the face of colonising influences, and the continuity of Malo's Law (*Malora Gelar*) with its emphasis on reciprocity in Torres Strait Islander society.
2. A critique of colonialist anthropological notions and practices and the attribution of a lack of sophistication and complexity to Torres Strait culture.
3. The continuing changes to Torres Strait culture through adoption of a predominantly Western cash economy.

First, though, it is appropriate for me, as a Torres Strait Islander, to relate *Who I am and where I come from* through my family history in order to inform the reader about this relationship with my artworks. In the following chapter, I begin to frame, or determine, my identity, and what I take to be cultural appropriateness for me as a contemporary Torres Strait Islander urban artist.

## Chapter 1: Who I am and where I come from

The belief that Islanders' present is essentially discontinuous with their past, has both a general aspect and one particular to the historical situation which the people of power created in the [Torres Strait] Islands a century ago (Sharp 1980 pp. 12-13).

Sharp here is referring in part to the numberless migrations of peoples from many nations, who came to colonise, explore, exploit, or were brought in for labour, during the pearling era in Torres Strait. My own family's history has been directly affected by these population movements and, in the first section of this chapter, I attempt to answer the question *Who am I?* in relation to my artistic production.

### 1.1 Who I am

I was born in Mareeba, in the State of Queensland, Australia, to a Torres Strait Islander mother and a non-Indigenous Australian father. My father's heritage is Irish and English, but both his parents were Australian-born. My mother's Torres Strait heritage stems back many generations. My maternal family's known beginnings were on Erub (Darnley Island) in eastern Torres Strait. Relatives on Erub, as well as my mother, have nurtured and preserved our family history, and orally passed on what is known of this for our immediate family and the generations to come.

Our family traces its origins to the village of Isem, on the eastern side of Erub. My ancestors belonged to the Samsep tribe, whose totem is Green Turtle (*Nam*)<sup>1</sup> and our language is Meriam Mir. Our family is said to have begun with a man from Tudu, whose

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<sup>1</sup> According to Lawrie (1970 p. 291), there appear to have been four named patriclans at Erub: Peidu, Meuram, Saisireb and Samsep. Samsep is the name of 'the barnacle-like growth seen on logs and bamboo which drift down to the eastern islands of Torres Strait during the north-west season'.

partner was an Erub woman.<sup>2</sup> They conceived a son, whom they named Eti, and a daughter, Konai. Eti married Wagai, a Mer (Murray Island) woman, and Konai partnered a man believed to be from Sri Lanka (a ‘Cingalee’ man). It is not known how or why this man came to be in Torres Strait but, like many people brought there during that time, it was almost certainly connected with the pearling industry.<sup>3</sup> Konai and the Sri Lankan man had three daughters, my great grandmother, named Balo (her Christian name was Annie) being one of them. Our relations, the Pau, Kiwat and Reuben/Ruben families of Erub, are also descended from Eti and Wagai.

My mother’s mother, Annie Randolph (named Annie after her mother) was born on Nepean Island, a small island visible from Erub. This island was a copra (coconut), bêche-de-mer and pearl shelling station at the time of her birth in 1884. My grandmother’s mother, Balo, partnered Thomas Randolph, a Dane, who owned a pearling lugger named the *Pirate* and actively participated in the pearling industry.<sup>4</sup> In his *Head-Hunters – Black White and Brown*, the anthropologist, Alfred Cort Haddon, mentions Thomas Randolph, with whom he once stayed on Tudu (Warrior Island) in 1888:

Tom Randolph, a Dane, kindly lent me a small galvanised iron shed with a thatch roof; part of it was occupied by sacks of flour, rice, and miscellaneous stores. At the other end he put a couch for me, and two native mats formed a mattress, on which I was comfortable enough. The door of the shed was fastened with handcuffs, of which I kept the key, and so did not feel a prisoner. Randolph gave me some fowls, eggs, and a chunk of turtle-meat, which formed a pleasant change after a long course of tinned meats. He also allowed me to use his

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<sup>2</sup> Tudu is also known as Tutu or Tut Island. It was given the European name of Warrior Island by Captain Bligh on his return trip to the Torres Strait in 1791-93 (Haddon 1901 p.174; Mosby 1998 p.33).

<sup>3</sup> I give details of the pearling industry in the section on traditional exchange verses the cash economy in Chapter 3.6.

<sup>4</sup> The official spelling of the name in Australia was ‘Randolph’ but in some documents it is spelled ‘Randolf’ (see, e.g., Haddon 1901 p. 176).

fresh water, of which there is very scanty supply, there being only a very little brackish water on the island, which Europeans cannot use. The natives as well as the settlers procured their drinking water from the island of Yam, some fifteen miles away (Haddon 1901 p. 175).

Thomas Randolph and Balo had three daughters: Sophie, Annie and Fanny, as well as Harriet, whom Thomas Randolph may have fathered to a previous partner. My great grandmother, Balo, died giving birth to her third child, my mother's mother being the second-born. Thomas Randolph then kept his children in the care of Darnley Island kinfolk and remained in the pearling industry until his death in 1894. Knowing of his ill health, he took his children to Thursday Island, where he died of a heart attack on his lugger in Port Kennedy harbour. My grandmother was eleven years old at the time. Thomas Randolph had a Danish friend who lived on Thursday Island and, although this man and his wife had ten children, they took care of the four girls. The girls attended school with these children, until they were found work with Coloured people on Thursday Island. (The term 'Coloured' here is not meant in a derogatory sense, but is a self-referential term my mother used, and her mother also (see Shnukal 2004 p. 279). At that time, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples commonly used the term 'Coloured', when referencing mixed race people. It is an historical term, rarely used today, and was a legal category based on discredited notions of 'race' and enforced by government policies of discrimination and assimilation (see Ganter 2004 p. 220).<sup>5</sup> I expand upon this in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.5 Christianity and Malo's Law (*Malora Gelar*): *Bipotaim/Pastaim*).

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<sup>5</sup> In this context, assimilation or absorption, generally of a group of people, into mainstream society, can go so far as to cause the disappearance of the group – usually a minority – through the loss of biological and/or cultural distinctiveness.

My grandmother had three husbands. Her first marriage was to the Filipino seaman, Lopez Delacruz, who died after fathering five children. Her second husband was a ‘Malay’, Hadjie Salam, with whom she had three children; but, as an indentured man, after ten years in the labour force, he was returned to his home country.<sup>6</sup> My grandmother intended returning with him but decided against this. She was aware that he was a Muslim but not that he already had two wives in Malaysia.



**Fig. 1** Eva Stella Salam on Keriri (Hammond Island), c.1940.  
(Courtesy of Eva Stella Peacock).

My mother, Eva Stella Salam, was born on Waiben (Thursday Island) in 1924.<sup>7</sup> Her father, Batcho Mingo, came from Makasar, Sulawasi, Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> He was one of many

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<sup>6</sup> Many imported Asian workers were brought in for labour and sent back to their home countries after satisfying work demands (see Ganter 1998 p. 6).

<sup>7</sup> During my mother's early life she lived on Hammond (Keriri), Wednesday and Thursday Islands.

<sup>8</sup> Trading between Sulawasi people, mainland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders commenced long before colonisation (Ganter 1994 p. 121).

Indonesians brought to the Torres Strait by Reginald Hockings to work as pearl divers.<sup>9</sup> He is mentioned in a book entitled *Somebody Now* by Torres Strait Islander author, Ellie Gaffney (1989). My mother also mentions her father in the story of her life in *Navigating Boundaries* (Shnukal *et al.* 2004 pp. 278-281). He acted as a liaison interpreter along with Ellie Gaffney's Indonesian father Tommy Loban (formerly known as Simeon Sadir). According to family histories, both men served unofficially in the Royal Australian Navy to gain vital war information for the Australian government during World War I (Gaffney 1989 p. 5). He died at the age of 40 after a long illness possibly caused by the debilitating effects of the 'bends'.<sup>10</sup>

In 1940 my grandmother Annie Randolph (then Salam, the name she kept from her second marriage), my mother Eva, her younger brother, Thomas, and sister, May, all left Thursday Island to look for work in Darwin. Being 'Coloured' people and therefore excluded from the Aboriginal Protection Acts, they could leave without prior consent from government authorities. This was during World War II and before the threat of Japanese bombing had caused the evacuation of Thursday Island. On the 29 January 1942, the first contingent of 459 evacuees from the Torres Strait – 159 non-Islanders, 280 Coloured and 20 Chinese people – left Port Kennedy harbour (Osborne 1997 p. 22). 'Protected' Islanders were not evacuated but left to their own devices to fend for themselves (Singe 1989 p. 111).

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<sup>9</sup> Reginald Hockings was a pearl-sheller, a member of one of the twentieth century pearling dynasties (Singe 1989 p. 159). He also had holdings in the Dutch East Indies (Singe 1989 p. 171).

<sup>10</sup> The bends or diving sickness is caused through tiny bubbles of nitrogen being released into the bloodstream of divers during compression, and upon returning to the surface too quickly when deep diving. This causes cramping and eventual death if the diver is not taken back down into the ocean and brought back up slowly in stages. Also, deep diving over long periods of time can cause crippling and eventual death (Singe 1989 p. 155).

While my mother was in Darwin in 1940, she met my father, Jack (Uley John) Peacock, who was serving in the Australian army at the time. Born and raised in New South Wales, he was one of the many men taken to Darwin to defend the country, and was one of the gunners still in Darwin when the Japanese bombed in 1942. However, my mother and her family returned to Thursday Island in 1941, leaving again that year to live in Mossman in North Queensland.

My father had been transferred to Darwin partly because he was a good boxer. He boxed with men from other barracks, and also American army men in Australia during the war. After my mother left Darwin in 1941, my father kept in contact with her and they married four years later. I am the fifth child of eight children born from this union, four of whom, including myself, were born in Mareeba.



**Fig. 2** Eva Stella and Jack (Uley John) Peacock with first-born child John Robert, c.1946. (Courtesy of Eva Stella Peacock)

After my birth in 1955, my family moved to Redcliffe near Brisbane, and this signals a time that is very pertinent to my work. (I expand on this in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.1 Tradition and Family: *stands with boxing gloves; Between Scenes.*)

## 1.2 Where I come from

The second section of this chapter deals with *Where I come from*, in the sense of my artistic ‘journey of discovery’ \_

Every descendent of the Torres Strait who lives on the mainland needs to undertake a personal journey of discovery (Jose 1998 p. 145).

These words by Torres Strait Islander artist, Ellen Jose, became a reality for me in the new millennium year of 2000, when I was invited by one of my relations to visit *where I come from*, Erub (Darnley Island) for the first time. I first stayed with relations on Waiben (Thursday Island), my mother’s birthplace. Although my stay was short, this ‘journey of



**Fig. 3** Erub (Darnley Island) looking towards Mer (Murray Island), 2000. (Courtesy of the Author)

discovery’ holds particular significance for me in that my relatives accepted me so naturally, without fuss. That acceptance was mirrored by the way I was embraced and greeted even by unrelated elderly Erub women who told me: ‘*You belong, you’re blood.*’ So these acts of acceptance and love, replica of my own mother’s love, contributed to my own personal healing; and they assuaged fears associated with my displacement from traditional culture and lands, and replaced them with knowledge of ancestry.

This ‘journey of discovery’ experience also caused me to see how one must be constantly mindful not to erode the integrity of one’s heritage, as I believe culture to be an outward expression of the ‘spirit’ of a people, encompassing values and beliefs handed down from generation to generation. Hence, my spiritual awareness of my Torres Strait Island heritage, conceived (of) through being the descendant of Torres Strait Islanders –even though resident on the mainland – has in turn released me from the restrictions of externally-imposed definitions (see Lorde 1990 p. 285).

In openly acknowledging *all* parts of *who I am* (Lorde 1990 p. 285), I also draw upon a body of scholarly work describing the many complexities within Torres Strait Islander identity, and explaining how government legislation and policies of ‘protection’ were applied to Islanders from the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the detrimental effects this had upon those to whom the Aboriginal Protection Acts were applied.<sup>11</sup> Three ethnic communities were excluded from these oppressive Acts and discriminatory policies: the

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<sup>11</sup> The 1897 Protection of Aborigines and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was the first form of legal control over Aboriginal people, although the first Aboriginal reserve was established in 1871 (Donovan 2002 p. 95). This legislation empowered the Government to forcibly remove Aborigines to reserves and keep them there (Malezer 1979 p. 18).

inhabitants of St Paul's, Moa (Banks Island); Keriri (Hammond Island); and Waiben (Thursday Island). These inhabitants of mixed heritage, descended from Torres Strait Islanders (like my mother's family), were regarded, or regarded themselves, historically as 'Coloured people', neither Torres Strait Islanders nor Europeans. They were once referred to as *apkas* 'people of mixed descent', or, as confirmed by my Darnley Island relation, Kemuel Kiwat, as 'not true natives'. The outcome of the application of the Protection Acts and policies of discrimination sometimes resulted in resentment being felt by 'true' Islanders towards others, and this is still relevant today (Shnukal 1997). These outcomes and their relation to the extensive history of race relations in the Torres Strait pearling industry are expanded in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.6 Traditional Exchange versus the Cash Economy: *Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits*. They have been a major influence on my own identity and that of my family and inform my inner consciousness, which generates my artworks.

Upon my return home to Brisbane, after visiting my Torres Strait Island 'home', I wrote the following 'journey of discovery' poem, juxtaposing the well-known Torres Strait Islander singer and actor, Christine Anu, with 'me'; it is entitled *Christine Anu and Me*:

She sings about diving in the ocean. She knows her Island home. She speaks in her native language. Her Ancestors make her strong. Now she's moved into the city, away from her Island home. Now she's living in the Big Smoke, collaborating, and getting known.

My mother gave birth to me, over the deep blue sea. I dived down deep in foreign oceans; mainland living is all I've known. I don't know my Island language. My Ancestors are my hope. I've learnt all the things I could about 'Islanders', in learn-how-to books.

I've just returned to my Island home. I've heard the language I should have known. I walked on my Ancestors land; I had a feeling that I belonged. Yet this feeling that I belonged, twiggled memories of my childhood home. This feeling was given from my mother, which she's past on to us since our birth.

Back down here on the mainland, we long for our Island home: while always being respectful, to those whose land this belongs. We're torn between two worlds, with policies that serve their own. The Island we are descendants of, is not spoken of or known. Our

mind seeks a place to find peace: a place to rest our soul. We find it with our family, and our memories of our Island home.

This poem is part of an installation of artworks entitled *Between Scenes*, which is one of two installations created during my Bachelor of Visual Arts with Honours in Fine Art degree (completed in 2000). I discuss this work further in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.1 Tradition and Family: *stands with boxing gloves; Between Scenes*.

## **Chapter 2: An outline history of Torres Strait and Torres Strait Islander ‘art’**

Chapter 1 is a discussion of my origins and ‘journey of discovery’ in relation to my identity. To clarify further, I must now address in outline the colonial history of Torres Strait. Without an historical framework, and some knowledge of how Torres Strait Islander art has maintained itself while at the same time affected by colonisation, the reader cannot fully understand my art practice.

Two hundred years ago, mainland Australian Aboriginal peoples experienced their first intrusion after at least 40,000 years of living in their land. This began the colonisation of mainland Australia. With the arrival of the first fleet of British convicts in 1778, a penal colony was established in Botany Bay in Sydney Harbour. Colonial governments enacted laws and policies which often impacted negatively on the Indigenous peoples, and dispossessed them from their lands, sometimes massacring the original owners (Sharp 1996 p. 3). Along with huge deathrates caused by introduced diseases and general dispossession came mass destruction of Aboriginal lifestyles, culture, and kinship ties.

Colonisation of Torres Strait Islanders differed in several ways from their Aboriginal brothers and sisters. For ideological, geographical, and cultural reasons, most Islander communities remained relatively intact. Only the Kaurareg (from the lower western Prince of Wales group of islands) were forcibly removed from their lands. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples suffered similar indignities in terms of racial discrimination and suppression of traditional beliefs and languages.

The first known European explorer to sail through Torres Strait was the Spanish navigator Luis Vaez de Torres in 1606 – after whom the strait was named.<sup>12</sup> According to Bayton (1971 p. 7), Torres landed twice, on Dauan Island, off the southwest coast of Papua, and on Nagir Island to the south, but the Franciscan friars on board the vessel made no attempt to evangelise the inhabitants. However, before Torres’ arrival, Chinese, Malay and Indonesians are likely to have explored the region (Wilson 1988 p. 10).

Over 160 years after Torres, British navigator and explorer, Captain James Cook, charted some of the islands, whilst ‘discovering’ the mainland in 1770. He was followed by Lieutenant William Bligh (on H.M.S. *Providence* in 1791–1793), who gave European names to several of the islands: Darnley Island (Erub), Stephens Island (Ugar), Yorke Island (Masig), Warrior Island (Tudu), (Turtle-backed Island (Iama), Two Brothers Island (Gegar), Mount Cornwallis Island (Dauan), Jervis Island (Mabuiag), Mulgrave Island (Badu) and Mount Ernest Island (Nagir) (Mosby 1998 p. 33). Matthew Flinders, who was serving as Bligh’s midshipman at the time, returned in 1801–1803 to chart safe sea routes through the Strait for further colonial expansion (Herle and Philp 2000 p. 155). Further exploration and soundings in the Torres Strait were carried out by Captains Blackwood of H.M.S. *Fly* and Owen Stanley of H.M.S. *Rattlesnake* during the years 1843–1845 (Haddon 1901 p. 11). These exploratory voyages were motivated by the strategic geographical and political significance of Torres Strait for the European empires of the time, despite the natural hazards of these waters. Attempts to colonise were also discouraged by lurid stories about cannibalism and headhunting: there were sensational

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<sup>12</sup> It is possible, however, that other navigators had preceded Torres. The anthropologist, Haddon, who first visited Torres Strait in 1888, notes that the Strait is shown on a map dated 1571 (Sharp 1984 p. 47).

reports about the fate of many shipwrecked passengers, notably those from the *Charles Eaton* in the 1830s (Bayton 1971 p. 8).

Nonetheless, by the early 1800s trade relationships were being established between Europeans and Islanders and the Torres Strait became a favoured sea route for merchant shipping (Donovan 2000 p. 86). From the 1840s traders came from Sydney, Singapore, Hong Kong and Port Essington in search of pearl, tortoise and trochus shell and these intermittent visits continued for the next two decades. By the 1860s several beche-de-mer shore stations had been established in the central and eastern islands and, from around 1870, Captain William Banner was pearling from his station on Tudu (Warrior Island). This marked a time of exploitation, with many documented abuses, including the forced labour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women to work in the fisheries, often without remuneration (Donovan 2000 pp. 86-87; Ganter 1994 pp. 19-21). I discuss this further in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.6 Traditional Exchange versus the Cash Economy: *Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits*.

It is difficult to compare Torres Strait contact history with that of mainland Australia. Although the overarching commercial, political, legislative, religious and educational institutions were established by Europeans, as was the case on the mainland, Torres Strait Islander post-contact history was subject to different influences. The Melanesian Islanders developed a unique social and cultural character, partly because European intervention was mediated primarily by South Sea Islander missionaries and immigrants (Shnukal 1995 pp. 55-56). The L.M.S. strategically chose South Sea Islanders to fill positions of power on the islands (Shnukal 1983 pp. 177-178). The cultural similarities between South Sea Islanders and Torres Strait Islanders also contributed to Torres Strait Islanders embracing

Christianity, despite the desecration by the missionaries of Islanders' sacred objects and the banning of traditional beliefs (Donovan 2000 p. 88).

The L.M.S. received orders from London, not from Queensland's colonial government in Brisbane, to remain separate from settler and administrative influences. This was to provide a long-term moral rationalization of the colonial enterprise as a whole, rather than the immediate self-interest of smaller groups (Beckett 1987 p. 39). The missionaries' arrival would eventually bring Christianity to all the islands in Torres Strait and begin the equation of Christianity with 'civilisation', L.M.S. – style, until the end of 1914, when they abandoned Torres Strait to the Church of England (Mosby, Revd T. 1998 pp. 64, 67). Thus, it can be argued that Christianity, in the form of the L.M.S., was the first significant colonial encounter in Torres Strait. Today, the arrival of the L.M.S. is known as 'The Coming of the Light' and is re-enacted and celebrated every year by all Torres Strait Islanders, wherever they live throughout Australia.



**Fig. 4** London Missionary Society commemorative plaque, Erub, 2000.  
(Courtesy of the Author)

However, unlike the name of the first missionary vessel - the *Surprise* - the arrival of the missionaries was, in fact, no surprise, but already anticipated (or prophesied) by an Erub clan leader (Mosby, Revd T. 1998 p. 64). Some Islanders perceived their arrival as confirmation of old beliefs, bringing a 'new God' to continue the religious tradition of the Eastern Islanders, Malo and Malo's Law (*Malora Gelar*) (Sharp 1993 p. 101).<sup>13</sup> Yet not all Islanders share this view and there are two distinct and conflicting viewpoints taken by contemporary Torres Strait Islander artists towards the debates that arise when addressing whether Christian and the new 'civilising' economic and political regimes put an end to pre-existing traditional life. Two separate artworks, by artists Ken Thaiday (Sr.) and Kathryn Norris, each entitled *The Coming of the Light*, relate to the arrival of the L.M.S. to Erub (Eglitis 2000 pp. 82-83, 118-119).

Thaiday's reproduced 1998 preliminary sketch of a series of proposed stained glass windows for the baptistery, St Monica's Cathedral, Cairns, depicts *The Coming of the Light* as a celebration. A Greek cross is centrally superimposed over an outlined figure of Christ. From Him, rays of light flow out to Torres Strait Islanders, 'who have begun to change from their darkness into the light'. This depiction illustrates how readily Torres Strait Islanders accepted the L.M.S. missionaries and the Christian Gospel. Thaiday sees Torres Strait Islanders, before the missionaries' arrival, as cannibals engaged in warfare with others. However, upon hearing the message of God, the people became Christians by accepting God's word, by turning from their wicked ways and repenting: 'For many this is an instant and welcome change'. In his sketch, he associates the symbol of the fish in his sketch with the Torres Strait Islander's dependence on the sea for a

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<sup>13</sup> Malo and Malo's Law (*Malora Gelar*) is further discussed in Chapter 3: *From Ailan to Alien(ation) Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.5 Christianity and Malo's Law (*Malora Gelar*): *Bipotaim/Pastaim*, and is mentioned throughout this exegesis.

**Fig. 5** Thaiday, Ken 1998  
*The Coming of the Light*  
pencil on cartridge paper 155cm x 210cm

**Fig. 6** Norris, Kathryn 1997  
*The Coming of the Light*  
pastel on paper 56cm x 76cm

living. This he sees as an affiliation between drawing Islanders to Christ and the disciples being ‘fishers of men’ (Eglitis 2000 p. 118).

Kathryn Norris’s painting, *The Coming of the Light*, is strikingly different from Ken Thaiday’s painting of the same name. Here, a Torres Strait Islander man, with a long sad face, downcast eyes, chained body and wearing a crown, dominates the painting (Eglitis 2000 p. 83). This crown is very significant, as it is a Torres Strait *dari*<sup>14</sup> but, because it is depicted in a cardboard-like form, it could also reference a certain time in Torres Strait Island history.<sup>15</sup> The crown could also reference the crown made of thorns worn by Jesus during his crucifixion, as a signifier of the destruction of Islander culture through the introduction of Christianity. The Islander’s stance as he stands limply, tight-mouthed and forlorn before a church with a cross in the background, contrasts sharply with Ken Thaiday’s sketch of Islanders reaching out to accept Christ and the word of God.

Norris’s statement as an artist also differs from Ken Thaiday’s in her reference to *The Coming of the Light* as a time when her ancestors were told what to do by the missionaries. She comments also on how little regard the missionaries had for the Islanders’ previous religious beliefs, culture and kinship ties. She concludes that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ and ‘there is more to life than history recorded by Europeans’ (2000 p. 82).

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<sup>14</sup> The *dari* (or *dhoeri* in the western islands) is a traditional head-dress still worn by Islanders in ceremony and dance. Bernard Namok chose the *dari* to represent traditional culture on the Torres Strait flag (Jonas and Langton 1994 p. 13). It is said that the *dari* was worn in warfare and represents the face of the wearer’s spirit (Crowe 2001).

<sup>15</sup> When the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition arrived in the Torres Strait in 1898, some twenty years later, its leader, A. C. Haddon, arranged for certain Islanders to make replicas of masks out of cardboard, as the originals had been taken away or destroyed by the missionaries (Moore 1984 p. 75).

Another new ‘civilising’ economic and political change began in 1877 with the transfer of the colonial settlement of Somerset, on mainland Cape York, to Waiben (Thursday Island) in the Torres Strait. The island then became a government reserve for public purposes and by 1879 all of the Torres Strait islands had been annexed to Queensland (Haddon 1901 p. 11). By this time, foreign intrusion had become widespread, as had a colonial assumption that Islanders had no socially or culturally relevant pre-colonial past, and that they could make no claim to an independent history from the time of the arrival of those who took on the role as their rulers (Sharp 1980 p. 12). As a result of British invasion and occupation, Eurocentric social and political standards have dominated the formation of the mainstream ‘Australian’ identity, which continues to reinvent itself.

Hence, the cultural diversity of all Indigenous Australians has generally not been understood or respected or given full recognition since colonisation. Despite this, Torres Strait art has played a significant role in Australian Indigenous cultural resistance to the dominant Western influence. Torres Strait art and craft, in its transformative adaptation to many outside influences, endures, and this was evident even in the days of the early Christian zealots, who made such efforts to destroy it (Herle and Philp 2000 pp. 155-157). However, although art was integral to Torres Strait Islander traditional life, there was no word for ‘art’ in Torres Strait traditional languages – and this is the case in most Oceanic vernaculars and other tribal languages around the world (Wilson 1988 p. 14). A primary function of ‘art’ in Torres Strait was to demonstrate one’s identity within a clan system, with a focus on connections with totems and clans/ancestry; and this practice continues within some contemporary Torres Strait art practice (Bani 2000 p. 164). (This point is also relevant to the discussion in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.1 Tradition and Family: *stands with boxing gloves; Between Scenes*.)

However, this does not constitute the basis of all traditional artistic expression. Other functions and forms within Torres Strait art include ‘woven objects such as baskets, fans and mats; dance objects and ornaments including musical instruments; figurative-sculptural expressions such as religious masks and composite effigies; and leisure objects such as spinning tops’. Two-dimensional decorative art elements were placed on three-dimensional objects, and the body was decorated by scarification and with body paint. Rock art is evidenced by drawings on boulders above Sigai Kup on Dauan Island (as well as on Moa and Keriri), but a more defined two-dimensional painting tradition emerged in the middle of the twentieth century (Mosby 1998 p. 89).

Today, Torres Strait masks are generally considered the most characteristic form of Torres Strait art. Traditionally these masks were made of turtle shell and wood and used in various mortuary, increase, initiation and cult practices (Mosby 1998 p. 89). I make particular reference to a traditional Erub mask in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.6 Traditional Exchange versus the Cash Economy: *Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits*, as this mask provided great inspiration for me in the creation of one of my artworks.

A striking example of how Islanders have creatively adapted to change can be found in the work of the Erub artist, Ken Thaiday (Sr.). Thaiday is a sculptor who possesses traditional knowledge and skills for making head-dresses (*dari*). His knowledge of choreography for dance performance led him to found the Darnley Island dance troupe, and to become the

**Fig. 7** Thaiday, Ken 1994  
*Beizam* (Hammerhead Shark) Dance Mask  
black bamboo, plywood, wire, string, plastic,  
resin, nails, paint 98 x 110 x 62cm

leader of the Loza dance troupe based in Cairns. Known primarily as a dance performer, he has refined additional skills to develop a contemporary style of creating masks, dance machines and head-dresses from media such as plywood, adding decorations made from feathers, black bamboo, lawyer cane, and other materials (Robinson 2000 pp. 171-174).

Many major Australian (and overseas) art galleries have acquired at least one of Thaiday's mask/dance machines (*lu*) or head-dress constructions. However, in previous years, limited information was provided about Torres Strait Islander culture, causing Thaiday's works, as well as many contemporary works produced by other Torres Strait Islander

artists, to be misinterpreted and viewed as ‘new’ in their development and hence not apparently connected to the rich and diverse tradition they come from (Bani 1999 p.126). Thaiday reassures us that his shark dance mask/head-dress, titled *Beizam* (Hammerhead Shark), is indeed connected to a rich tradition, as referenced and featured in *Gatherings*, a book about contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art (Demozay 2001 p.190). The importance of this type of mask, in its representation of a shark, ‘the most dangerous and feared creature in the ocean’, is that it signifies law and order; and its use in ceremonial dance is paramount. While his mask is a contemporary interpretation of a traditional mask, Thaiday sees it as necessary and appropriate for the maintenance and transmission of traditional culture to the youth of today. He also sees the ‘old’ law and order, associated with the shark in Torres Strait Island culture, as being fulfilled in the ‘new’ law and order ordained through Christianity (Thaiday 2003; see also Kleinert and Neale 2000 p. 713). Hence, ‘advancement’ or the acquisition of ‘civilisation’ during the early days of Christianity may not have been a conscious effort so much as a means of survival for Torres Strait Islanders: using traditional cultural principals, such as reciprocity and kinship relationships, they adapted to the ‘new’ by transforming or evolving out of what was already established in the ‘old’ (Sharp 1993 p. 7).

Reciprocity practised within kinship relations is paramount within Indigenous societies and is vital to recognise when making any distinctions or clarifications with regard to the ‘advancement’ of Indigenous people. Trade and cultural exchange was dependent upon reciprocal interrelations among Indigenous peoples for continuance and survival of their societies. In reciprocal exchange, the nature of the object(s) being exchanged is imbued with the cultural essence of its giver and receiver, which is therefore interwoven within the networks of the social fabric of that relationship (Sharp 1993 p. 7). Methods of trade and

exchange within the broader Melanesian culture area, i.e., among mainland Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders and New Guineans, and how these differ from Western cash exchange systems, in discussed in reference to my artworks in Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks: 3.6 Traditional Exchange versus the Cash Economy: *Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits*.

Pre-colonial trade networks and cultural similarities also indicate that Torres Strait Islanders have strong and long-standing genetic links and other connections with fellow Melanesians to the immediate north (Singe 1989 pp. 4, 19). These links have gradually been weakened since the establishment of Australia as a nation state and this artificially created separation between Australia and New Guinea has become a focus of debate among Torres Strait Islanders, wherever they live. The process of separation was a long one and is not yet settled. It began with the decision by the Queensland Colonial Government in 1879 to annexe all the Torres Strait islands to Queensland and thus create a (permeable) border between the islands and Papua New Guinea.<sup>16</sup> This decision was based on a number of reasons, among the most important of which was sea rights.<sup>17</sup> But this decision was mostly centred on securing government control and economic ties to mainland Australia for Torres Strait Islanders (Hulsbergen 1976 p. 28). Therefore, Papua New Guinea and Torres Strait Islander peoples reacted to this separation of contact

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<sup>16</sup> In 1879, Britain was initially reluctant to accede to Australia's suggestion that Britain should take possession of New Guinea. At that time neither the Torres Strait islands nor New Guinea had a formal government and the L.M.S. viewed the Torres Strait islands as a 'stepping stone' to New Guinea. In 1879 Britain allowed Queensland to take possession and control because of abuses in the developing pearling industry and the hazardous but important seaway. Five years later Britain established a protectorate over the southeast coast of New Guinea and, four years after that, Britain annexed Papua. It was after this that the relevancy of the political complexities impacted upon the boarder decision (Hulsbergen 1976 p. 28).

<sup>17</sup> Sea rights for Torres Strait Islanders have been an ongoing issue since the establishment of the border. Torres Strait Islanders at one time, when islands close to the Papua New Guinea mainland were being considered as possibly coming under Papua New Guinea's independent jurisdiction, sent a telegram to the Australian Prime Minister stating that the seabed of the ceded area had 'belonged to our ancestors for 30,000 years and they belong to our children to come' (Hulsbergen 1976 p. 28).

differently from mainland Aboriginal peoples (Bolger 1979 p. 170) to the point where Torres Strait Islanders have on several occasions called for independence from mainland Australia and a separate, autonomous region to be created under Islander control.

The winning of the Murray Island land rights claim to the High Court in 1992 greatly assisted the campaign for recognition of traditional land rights by mainland Aboriginal peoples (see Harris 1990 p. 861). However, an ongoing debate exists concerning Torres Strait Islanders resident in mainland Australia and what our place and rights are. The 1996 census found that out of the 30,000 Australians, who identified as Torres Strait Islanders, 24,000 lived on the mainland and 5,700 lived in Torres Strait. Taken together, they still represent only nine per cent of all Australian Indigenous peoples (National Secretariat of Torres Strait Islander Organizations Ltd. 2000 p. 6). Hence, Torres Strait Islanders are a minority within a minority.

Adding to the social and cultural complexities of the position of contemporary Torres Strait Islanders is the fact that very many of them claim Pacific Islander ancestry. As Susan Cochrane, Head of the Department of Contemporary Pacific Art and Director of Pacific-link Arts Consultancy in Noumea, New Caledonia (1997 p. 116) comments, 'of all the groups that make up Australia's multicultural society, Torres Strait Islanders and their contribution to the national culture is among the least known and appreciated'. One of the reasons she gives for this is that 'perhaps in Australia's history and in its people's consciousness, Torres Strait Islanders have been considered as Pacific Islanders rather than Indigenous Australians'.

Torres Strait artists today reflect their great diversity within their works, which stem from our family histories: whether born and raised in traditional island communities; or born on, or migrated to, the mainland. Those of us trained in Western art institutions are often the descendants of those who migrated to the mainland. This includes artists such as Ellen Jose, Clinton Nain and Lisa Martin. Some, like myself, have been raised in urban environments. Others, such as Andrew Williams, Alik Tipoti, Dennis Nona, Harry Nona, Joseph Dorante, Tatipai Barsa, Ceferino Sabatino and Brian Robinson, also produce works within the constructs of Western art theory. Their work explores issues of identity and they reference traditional histories as well as 19<sup>th</sup> century traditional objects. Then again, there are artists like Victor McGrath, Rosie Barkus and Edrick Tabuai, who have developed strong distinctive styles and yet have also benefited through their traditional knowledge (Mosby 1998 pp. 87-88).

Torres Strait Islanders have shown themselves to be the ‘masters of the situation’, through their responses to change and their adaptation of multiple influences. They have faced a new century and conceived a new era, and this is reflected in their art (Mosby 1998 p. 47).

As an artist, descended from Islander migrants to the mainland and trained in Western art institutions, my responses to ‘change and adaptation of multiple influences’ include drawing on traditional Torres Strait Islander cultural and spiritual principles and practices, to express my identity as a 21<sup>st</sup> century urban woman of Torres Strait Islander descent. How I have done this is discussed more fully in the following chapter.

### **Chapter 3: From *Ailan* to Alien(ation) *Kastom* – My Artworks**

Chapter 3 begins with a discussion about two installations of artworks entitled *stands with boxing gloves* and *Between Scenes*, both of which were produced as part of a Bachelor of Visual Arts with Honours in Fine Art degree, which I completed in 2000. It is necessary for me to discuss these installations, because they are fundamental to the artworks which I produced during my Doctor of Visual Art degree course.

#### **3.1 Tradition and Family: *stands with boxing gloves*; *Between Scenes***

‘Some people develop their cultural identity through their mother’s milk; others have to embark on a long journey to discover their cultural roots’ (Jose 1998 p. 143).

In Chapter 1: Who I am and where I come from, I began to frame, or determine, what I consider to be cultural appropriateness for me as a contemporary Torres Strait Island urban artist. It also gave some information about the production of my artworks. The poem/story, *Christine Anu and Me*, formed part of an installation entitled *Between Scenes*, which I discuss further in this section. This story clarifies my urban cultural identity, which I perceive to be ‘my cultural identity [passed on to me] through my mother’s milk’. My ‘journey to discover my cultural roots’ became my ‘spiritual awareness of my Torres Strait Islander heritage, conceived (of) through being the descendant of Torres Strait Islanders – even though resident on the mainland’. This has in turn released me from the restrictions of externally imposed definitions, in acknowledging *all* parts of *who I am*, openly (Lorde 1990 p. 285).

In the *Who I am* section of Chapter 1, I mentioned how, soon after my birth, my family moved from Mareeba to Redcliffe: a time, which is very pertinent to my work.

The following story entitled *Dislocation and Me* depicts this time.

On my first day of school they told me I was black. I wasn't sure what that meant. But I learnt that it was bad to be black. They chased me for three years because of that. The only person that I called my friend would steal my gold bangle. My mum would make me get it back. I'd scream and clutch the high wire fence when my sister Chris would leave me in the infants' school. The big kids school was next door. That's where my sisters and brother were.

My Dad brought us to Brisbane to get us away from the blacks. We'd visit them in Mossman near Cairns. They lived in homes on the beach, all together, all my cousins. My Dad thought moving would provide a better life for us. So we moved to Brisbane when I was a baby. My sister Chris told me that she remembers wondering why they were leaving. She couldn't understand. She liked being up there.

I never knew my Grandmother. She was black. She died after we moved away. I've got photos of her. Photos of her with my cousins, dressed in grass skirts and frangipani necklaces. When we went to visit them we'd all bath in the same water. They didn't have hot water from a tap. They had to boil water in a big copper. It was fun bathing in the same bath as my cousins. But the water got pretty dirty.

We'd visit my cousins in Sydney too. I always felt odd in my homemade dresses. They would tell people we came from Queensland. I'd walk to the park and to the beach at Coogee with my Grandfather. He'd let me play on the thing that went round and round. We didn't have them in Queensland. So our lives were divided between North and South. We lived somewhere in between.

We went up north when I was much older. We went for our family reunion. We paid respect to our Grandmother. We had what's called a 'tombstone opening'. That's what Torres Strait Islander's celebrate when someone dies, but they celebrate some time later. Time enough to let their spirit return to their home. There were two hundred of us. We were all descendents from that one woman. You could write a book about her life.

We made decorations out of coconut palm leaves. And we had a 'kup mari'. That's the T.S.I. name for a ground oven. We had fish, and crabs, and pork. They killed the pig, and they walked out on the mud flats and speared the crabs. We sat and talked and played guitar and sang songs for the whole weekend. It was nice to be with the blacks up north. It is good to be black.

I have explained that my father was a boxing champion during World War II. After marrying my mother, he trained Indigenous and non-Indigenous young men in boxing; later he trained my younger brother, and I agreed to be his sparring partner. This time sets



**Fig. 8** Peacock, Janice 2001  
*stands with boxing gloves* (installation)  
 one photograph approx. 1.5 x .5 metres  
 five head-dresses: *Dad and Me*, *Marriage and Me*, *Domestics and Me*, *Sex and Me*,  
*Dislocation and Me* (dimensions vary): wire, balsa wood, paint, rope, raffia, shells,  
 feathers, silk, material, leather, ribbon, chux cloths, wooden spears, found objects;  
 five diaries each 21 x 15 cm

the stage for the installation entitled *stands with boxing gloves*, and encapsulates my urban beginnings; it is portrayed in the story entitled *Dad and Me*.

*Dad and Me* and *Dislocation and Me* belong to a set of five stories, hand-written in hand-made diaries, and accompanied by five head-dresses. These began as wire-framed caps accessorised with natural and man-made materials and found objects. An eagle's feather is featured on two of the head-dresses, recognising its significance to Native Americans (see discussion of the film, *Dances with Wolves*, below) and the *zogo le* (shaman) of the eastern islands (Moss 1996 p. 6). These artworks, which include a life-size photo of the

*stands with boxing gloves* character, form the installation. This was my first installation of three-dimensional artworks produced during my Bachelor degree and these artworks begin my resolution of the question: how is/can cultural appropriateness be applied in my artistic work, in this present-day era, to express my identity as a 21<sup>st</sup> century woman of Torres Strait Islander descent?

The *stands with boxing gloves* installation personifies a woman, and gives voice to her identity, referred to as 'Me'. Her voice is heard in the stories she tells. The story *Dad and Me* is the first of these stories. By revisiting her past, she becomes a child again. Now she has grown older and there are battles in her life she must fight. She remembers the days when her dad taught her to box, to keep up her guard, to stand up for herself. Strength grows as she remembers her stance. Dance machines, head-dresses and display instruments (discussed below) depict my Torres Strait Islander heritage and inspire the art works. These items, traditionally used in ceremony and dance, celebrate essential elements in the dance and the story they have to tell. Stories and dance reinforce the relationship Islanders have with their environment and I draw from them to express my artistic relationship with my urban environment.

The *stands with boxing gloves* persona here draws parallels with, and uses as a ploy, the female character, Stands with a Fist, from the Hollywood film, *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1991). The film portrays the adventures of an American Civil War hero, Lieutenant John Dunbar (played by Costner), who is assigned to an abandoned army post, during which he develops a unique relationship with the neighbouring Sioux Indian people. Members of the Sioux tribe give Dunbar his tribal name of Dances with Wolves, after they see him playing with a wolf. Stands with a Fist is a white woman, found as a child by a Sioux medicine man (shaman) named Kicking Bird after her family is killed by

members of a Pawnee Indian tribe, and who is brought up as one of Kicking Bird's family. Stands with a Fist is given her tribal name after she defends herself as a child against the harassments of a Sioux Indian woman. Concerned about the future movements of the white military, Kicking Bird negotiates meetings between himself and Dances with Wolves, with Stands with a Fist as interpreter. A special relationship then develops between Dances with Wolves and Sioux tribal members, resulting in Dances with Wolves becoming Stands with a Fist's partner and Kicking Bird's trusted friend, after Dunbar saves Sioux members whilst under attack from Pawnee Indians. With the seasonal change and the Sioux's imminent migration, Dunbar returns to his deserted army post to gather his personal diary; but finds the post occupied by returned soldiers. Captured and taunted by the soldiers for becoming like an Indian, he slaughters them and escapes with the help of his Indian friends. The conclusion has Dunbar leaving his Sioux friends to live in isolation and in fear of revenge attacks with his wife, Stands with a Fist.

This film's content unleashed for me my childhood memories of 'cowboys and Indians' in Western films, which depict dominant stereotypical representations of racial minority groups.<sup>18</sup> They typify a time when America glamorously took centre stage, but untruthfully represented its Indigenous peoples and denigrated cultural differences. Americans were fed racist and sexist propaganda, which taught them to despise Indians as a matter of course, to respect only white women, to admire and fear only white men; and which justified discriminatory racial stereotypes already operative within U.S. (and Australian) society (Walker 1993 p. 17). The misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples within these films provided fertile ground for me to cogitate on, and evaluate, my own

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<sup>18</sup> The observations of Edward Said are pertinent here: 'One significant contemporary debate about the residue of imperialism – the matter of how 'natives' are represented in the Western media – illustrates the persistence of such interdependence and overlapping, not only in the debate's content but in its form, not only in what is said but also in how it is said, by whom, where, and for whom' (Said 1994 p. 22).

Indigenous identity and heritage. On the one hand, *Dances with Wolves* seeks to undermine ‘primitivist’ tropes, and stereotypical understandings of colonial histories from within a contemporary perspective; on the other, however, and far more subtly, it reinforces the anthropological project of legislating ‘authenticity’, which, according to Thomas (1994 p. 179), is that ‘others are acceptable in so far as they conform to their “proper” natures, but are degenerate and improper in “acculturated” or “hybridised” forms’. This ideological ambiguity ultimately influences the making of my artworks (see my subsection 3.4 on colonialist stereotyping).

It is now necessary to discuss why I chose to create head-dresses for the *stands with boxing gloves* installation, and why I continue to use head-dresses in my current work. Head-dresses are used metaphorically in the former installation to make a statement with regards to myself as a Torres Strait Island woman living in a contemporary urban environment. Hence, my third initial introductory question, ‘how does cultural appropriateness influence how Indigenous peoples have been, and are, represented and hence misrepresented, in white society?’, informs the production of this work. As only men traditionally made and wore head-dresses in the Torres Strait – for ceremony, dance and warfare - my making of head-dresses could be construed as misrepresentation of traditional culture and protocol.

Torres Strait Kulkalgal artist, Rion Crowe, when exhibiting his traditional *dhoeri* head-dresses at Fire-Works Gallery in Brisbane, explains that ‘the traditional head-dress is worn to represent the face of its wearer’s spirit’ (Crowe n.d.). Crowe acknowledges that his

**Fig. 9** Crowe, Rion (n.d.)  
*Dhoeri* Traditional Head-dress  
exhibition invitation

cultural practice has not been handed down through generations of his own family, but claims that the detrimental impact of colonisation motivates him to make headdresses; and he sees this as preserving his culture - an act of self-fortification and self-determination.

In my case, as a Torres Strait Islander woman, the making of head-dresses signifies, and gives strength to, my reclaiming of identity and family history. It also raises the question of the role of Torres Strait Islander women since colonisation. The anthropologist Haddon, found evidence which indicated that a matriarchal rather than a patriarchal system was active in pre-colonial Torres Strait (1901 p. 161). A maternal uncle, for example, was far more important in the raising of a child than his paternal relatives; and it was well known that women, not men, initiated marriage to their chosen partners.<sup>19</sup> Since it is against protocol for a woman to make traditional head-dresses, unless given permission, my making of head-dresses raises questions about the effect of European influences upon traditional art practice.

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<sup>19</sup> See Haddon 1901 p. 176, also Haddon 1935 vol. 1 p.317 and additional references in section 'The regulation and social effects of marriage' beginning on page 316.

It was therefore necessary to discuss my intention to make head-dresses with my relative and Torres Strait Islander elder, Thaiday (Ted) Ruben. He (and later, the celebrated head-dress/mask-maker, Ken Thaiday) advised me against making traditional head-dresses but supported my making contemporary head-dresses, on the condition that they remain solely as ‘artworks’ and were not worn in public. This reveals something about the ‘place’ given by Islanders to non-traditional artworks inspired by Indigenous tradition but clearly differentiated, both functionally and formally, from the original context. It may also influence how contemporary Indigenous ‘artworks’, unlike traditional ‘artworks’, are understood as being created rather as a commodity, to be displayed in non-Islander settings and insulated from traditional life and cultural transmission. Also relevant here is the following comment, made by Cuban-born performance artist, Coco Fusco: ‘black authority was and still is characterised by knowledge of vernacular (i.e., “authenticity”) and adherence to a moral code that is organised around a proprietary relationship to the black body and, by extension, its image’ (Fusco 2001 p. 12).

Hence my making of my contemporary head-dress ‘artworks’, in their juxtaposition of traditional Torres Strait Islander ‘art’ practices with contemporary Western concepts of art, raises the above issues, while at the same time underlining my alienation and dislocation as an urban, mainland-born person. These issues are discussed further in subsection 3.3: *Critique of Eurocentric Anthropology*.

The making and contemporary use of head-dresses to wear in dance and ceremony is still mainly the preserve of men, and I am very aware that my crossing of cultural gender boundaries might raise contentious issues to do with ‘imperialism’s dehumanising

imperatives' and their relation to cultural appropriateness discussed by Smith (2003 p. 26). Nevertheless, I have on a number of occasions witnessed Eastern Islander women wearing head-dresses. In Canberra in 2001, for example, a group of young women made traditional head-dresses and wore them while performing traditional dances; and in Brisbane in 2002, during The Coming of the Light celebrations, women also made and wore traditional head-dresses.

With the arrival of Christianity in Torres Strait, the knowledge and skill required in the making of traditional ritual objects was largely suppressed. Ritual was often replaced with dance, which, according to Robinson (2005), has become the pre-eminent Torres Strait Islander cultural practice. As the making and use of traditional head-dresses in ceremony and dance is linked to stories, I also link my personal urban stories (in a diary) to the head-dresses that I make, thus relating them to their traditional purpose.

However, my main artistic inspiration in creating head-dresses for the *stands with boxing gloves* installation was the ingenuity and originality of dance machines, dance ornaments, and traditional masks made by Torres Strait Islanders – particularly 'aircraft' head-dresses (see Wilson 1993 p. 118). Dance machines are a specific type of sculptural form unique to the Torres Strait islands and used in inter-island cultural dance performance activities. Dance paraphernalia, along with costumes, percussion instruments and voices, are an integral part of Islander dance, which itself is an integral part of contemporary religious practice, used as a vehicle for expressing transcendent meanings, and playing a highly significant role in contemporary *ailan kastom* (Mosby 2000 p. 172; Mabo and Beckett

2000 p. 165; Robinson 2005).<sup>20</sup> Men form the majority of dance machine makers, their dominance being based on access and knowledge of tools. Dance machines are both communal and individual objects, consisting of hand-held dance accessories, head-dresses, and masks. The machines predate colonisation and continue to be made, constantly evolving in form in response to external influences and cultural maintenance needs within a contemporary Australian and global community (Mosby 2000 p. 172-173).

**Fig. 10** Eseli, James 1988  
*WWII bomber dance head-dress*  
wood, paint, adhesive resin, aluminium, nails  
57.5 x 67 x 34.5cm

The contemporary aircraft or aeroplane head-dresses, in their dance context, were inspired by the Islanders' experience of aircraft movements during World War II, as

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<sup>20</sup> *Ailan kastom* is a Torres Strait Creole phrase meaning 'island (cultural) custom' (Wilson 1993 p. 24). In the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989* the phrase refers to 'the body of custom, tradition, observances and beliefs of some of or all the Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area, and includes any such customs, traditions, observances and beliefs relating to particular persons, areas, objects or relationships'. According to Bani (1999 p. 12), this illustrates how 'Islander' identity becomes stereotyped and takes precedence over urban Islander identity, as the definition fails to recognise the Islander population that reside on the mainland.

well as aircraft travel by Torres Strait Islanders who migrated to the mainland from the late 1940s (Wilson 1993 p. 118). Each head-dress in my *stands with boxing gloves* installation is accessorized by a boxing ring, found objects, and a hand-written story in a diary. The boxing rings act as a visual metaphor for the fight and struggle to find identity; the other objects express ‘transcendent meanings’ associated with my family’s migration, and the effects of dislocation and alienation. Said’s observations are again relevant here:

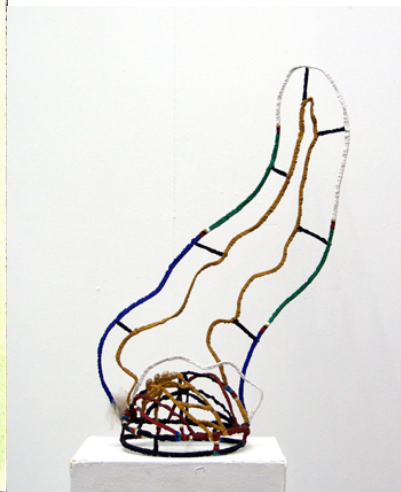
As the twentieth century moves to a close, there has been a gathering awareness nearly everywhere of the lines *between* cultures, the divisions and differences that not only allow us to discriminate one culture from another, but also enable us to see the extent to which cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote (Said 1994 p.15).

An installation entitled *Between Scenes* (which incorporates the story *Christine Anu and Me* – see Chapter 1) accentuates the chasm (or lines) *between* cultures, as does the *stands with boxing gloves* character and the accompanying diary stories. In *Between Scenes* the performance elements within Torres Strait dance are juxtaposed with Western theatrical performance as a pointed analogy of my multi-racial Indigenous identity. The invented characters express my interest in how performance artists such as Coco Fusco employ ‘masquerade to dramatize how social forces project racial meaning onto bodies’, and the politicised consciousness of dominance that operates within popular culture in industrial societies (Fusco 2001 p. 13; Fiske 1989 p. 20). The fragility of social control and how it is resented (Fiske 1989 p. 20), transfused into the stories created for *Between Scenes*, identify these forces of domination, and give me an opportunity to speak against them by ‘making do with what the system provides’ (Fiske 1989 pp. 20, 25). Through my artworks I am able to explore and create my own diverse meanings as to social identities and my own socio-cultural circumstances.

Four head-dresses are each accompanied by a 'theatrical postcard' that draws from familiar and/or stereotypical characters, juxtaposed with invented characters based on aspects of my Indigenous identity. Each postcard began as a small watercolour painting, which reproduces an image of the original character. On to each character I superimpose my own head (wearing a related head-dress) and, on the back, is printed a sincere personal story, satirically linked to the original character.



**Fig. 11** Peacock, Janice 2000  
*Christine Anu and Me*  
(theatrical postcard)  
watercolour on watercolour paper  
reproduced on card 13 x 9cm



**Fig. 12** Peacock, Janice 2000  
*Christine Anu and Me*  
(head-dress) wire,  
shells, paint, feathers  
32 x 50 x 27cm

I chose the medium of theatrical postcards because they provide a visual record of theatrical characters, actors, costume and changes in the world of entertainment from as early as 1889. These postcards contain messages, as well as personal titbits, from well-known personalities or celebrities from the circus, music halls and pantomimes of the day. Collecting theatrical postcards first became a fad in the early 1900s, when their art nouveau style made them appealing; their popularity then declined for thirty years before being revived in the 1960s (Bonyng 1988 p. 7).



**Fig. 13** Peacock, Janice 2000

*Between Scenes* (installation)

four head-dresses: *My Fair Lady and Me*, *Bathsheba and Me*, *Eve and Me*, *Christine Anu and Me* (dimensions vary): wire, string, feathers, shells, paint;  
four theatrical postcards each 13 x 9cm

My theatrical postcards and head-dresses are entitled *My Fair Lady and Me*, *Bathsheba* (a character in the Bible) *and Me*, *Eve* (from the story of Adam and Eve) *and Me*, and *Christine Anu* (a Torres Strait Islander singer and actor) *and Me*. The cards 'appropriate'

images of each of these personas, two of them, Bathsheba and Eve, being from paintings by Rembrandt, a master of the Western canon. I do this to suggest the sense of juxtapositional living often felt by contemporary Indigenous peoples living in a world long colonised by Europeans.

In the making of this second series of head-dresses, the simpler and more abstract sculptural forms seemed to lend themselves to the weaving process, which was not a highlighted feature in the more elaborate first series *stands with boxing gloves* (my first solo exhibition). The woven ‘wrapping’ of the wire used to shape the head-dresses signifies the importance placed upon women’s traditional and contemporary weaving practice. According to Wilson (1993 p. 18-19), women, both before and after colonisation, contributed to material culture and gained social and cultural status by creating functional and decorative woven ware and crafting mats, baskets and clothing (which later included embroidery, crochet and appliqué).<sup>21</sup>

### **3.2 The Survival of Torres Strait Culture: *Culture Cullt Clan 2001***

Both of the installations discussed above address issues to do with colonisation and assimilation in Torres Strait and their effects upon my identity; and these issues continue to motivate the artworks I created for my Doctor of Visual Art. I have also foreshadowed in my comments on mask making, weaving and dance, how much of Torres Strait Islander traditional culture has survived and how deeply it influences contemporary Torres Strait Islander artists’ sensibility and practice. My own art practice has been strongly influenced

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<sup>21</sup> During the absence of their menfolk in the fisheries, women also became competent in activities previously confined to males, such as working wood and sheet-metal, as well as hand-making furniture and cordage (Wilson 1993 p. 18-19).

by the performance art of Coco Fusco and film/ photographic artist Tracey Moffat; and Torres Strait Islander visual/performance artists like Destiny Deacon, Clinton Nain and Ken Thaiday Sr (all originating from Erub) and Ellen Jose. Each has elaborated those aspects of Indigenous identity and culture which speak most personally to them and their particular talents.

Unfortunately, there still persists a general belief among some Europeans, based on now discredited anthropological notions of 'race' and the 'racial hierarchy' that Indigenous cultures are 'primitive' and doomed to extinction. Even some contemporary scholars appear to hold such views, one being the anthropologist Roger Sandall, whose book *The Culture Cult Designer Tribalism and Other Essays* was published in 2001:

The division is deep - there is a Big Ditch between the tribal world and modernity. Until around 1970 governments in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand accepted this fact, and they saw their duty as helping indigenes to cross the divide. For that reason they concentrated on better health, education, and housing, and let the chips of traditional culture fall where they may. That was how Western civilisation had dealt with its own traditions, creatively destroying those that would not change. Creative destruction is the law of historical advance (Sandall 2001 p. 3).

An insightful account of how Sandall's 'creative destruction' played out in Torres Strait is found in Sharp (1980 p. 12). In fact, Sharp demonstrates that this was not so much creative destruction as attempted 'historical and cultural genocide'. This subsection uses themes pertinent to my work to critique Sandall's position: my reaction to his statements motivated me to create my first series of installation artworks for the Doctor of Visual Art degree.

Sandall's pronouncements about the 'primitive' character of Indigenous peoples first came to my notice in a newspaper article by Rothwell (2001). Sandall uses 'the Big Ditch' to

describe what he sees as the separation between modern democratic societies and the tribal worlds of Native Americans, Maori and Aborigines. He claims that views and proposals held by academics and anthropologists over the past thirty years belong to what he terms a 'culture cult' or 'designer tribalism'. Their views are to him 'romantic dreams running deep through the fabric of modern philosophy, social criticism and political thought', and suggests that 'you have to have an 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment view and an anti-romantic temperament like his' to deal with the Big Ditch 'problem'.

If your traditional way of life has no alphabet, no writing, no books, and no libraries, and yet you are continually told that you have a culture which is 'rich', 'complex', and 'sophisticated', how can you realistically see your place in the scheme of things? If all such hyperbole were true, who would need books or writing? Why not hang up a 'Gone Fishing' sign and head for the beach? (Sandall 2001 p. 4)

Sandall sees the current 'scheme of things' as justified by the possession and maintenance of an alphabet, books and libraries and that these are the measure of the worth of a culture/society. Those without such attributes are apparently unworthy of existence, have no place. In an interview on ABC classical radio he discussed the term 'civilisation' with Margaret Throsby. For Sandall, 'civilisation' or 'civil society' is the 'proper conduct amongst equal citizens who set aside cultural difference': he gives us, as an example, a Sydney beach being occupied peaceably by people of many nationalities. This, he suggests, is 'part of the entire story of civilisation'. He concludes that, to reach 'civilisation', Indigenous peoples need to cross the divide, his 'Big Ditch', which separates them from the modern world. This can be done through 'assimilation' and the 'acquisition of the rules of civil society' (Throsby 2001).

Sandall's view is that governments around the world saw it as their 'duty' to help Indigenous people to cross the 'Big Ditch', supposedly, to 'advance' them. In my view,

this attribution of 'creative destruction' is paternalistic in that it generates a philanthropic view of how 'colonisers' operated upon first 'settlement' in previously inhabited lands. Sandall's view would imply that Government Acts and policies such as the White Australia Policy (Sharp 1976: L31, L36) and various State assimilation legislation were introduced to *improve* Indigenous well-being. 'Historical advance' in Sandall's terms, is measured by a history that denies its true origins, as has now been made clear in such reports as 'Beyond the Act', which was written and researched solely by Australian Indigenous people. One section, entitled 'Undeclared War', provides many examples of a bloody war waged between the original inhabitants and the invaders, and the atrocious events that took place during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Malezer 1979 pp. 9-11).

Reports like these indicate the failure of most written accounts to give an accurate picture of early European 'settlement' in Queensland. John Harris, in his revisionist history of Australian missions, *One Blood*, argues that 'civilisation' was constructed 'as a deadly force in itself' (1990 p. 70). Harris gives examples of how 'civilisation' was implemented by colonisers who did their utmost forcibly to remove Indigenous inhabitants from their lands, without any remorse, concern or consideration towards them. He points out that authorities stole the land; they massacred, destroyed, and dismantled everything of value, to keep Indigenous people in jeopardy. Those who survived each bloody encounter were constituted (or 'imprisoned') as British subjects (1990 pp. 72-73). Declaring war would mean recognising Aborigines as an invaded people rather than, as they were legally defined, 'British subjects', whose resistance against the British system of law became logically a 'Criminal Act' and the resisters automatically 'outlaws' (Malezer 1979 p. 9).

Because British civilisation was deemed to be Christian civilisation, to be 'British' was to be a 'Christian' (Harris 1990 p. 45). Therefore, 'civil life' was enforced as a means to 'Christianise' Indigenous people and make them 'abhor' their origins (1990 pp. 44-45). Thus, contrary to Sandall's view, rather than be 'advanced', Australia's Indigenous peoples had to struggle to 'survive' beyond the brutalities that were forced upon them by settlers and colonisers.

According to Sandall, Western civilisation operates by '*creatively* destroying those that would not change'; moreover, he regards this 'creative destruction' as the law of historical '*advance*'. He uses these terms because he supposes that 'primitive' societies have nothing to offer modern or 'civil' society. In the introduction to his book, he states that 'most traditional cultures feature repression, economic backwardness, endemic disease, religious fanaticism, and severe artistic constraints'. He holds certain academic and media circles -- which he claims give voice to the 'Culture Cult' -- as responsible for promoting 'noble savage' interpretations with regards to Indigenous people, and claims that 'they (the Culture Cult) haven't a clue what they are getting themselves into' (Sandall 2001 pp. viii-ix).

From an Indigenous viewpoint, however, both Sandall's views and the views he opposes are flawed. Moreover, it could be argued that Westerners' attempts to identify themselves with the plight of Indigenous peoples perpetuate conflicting but equally patronising and romantic views of Sandall's 'creative destruction'. Attempting to reconcile all of these viewpoints (and thinking that Sandall, too, could not see what he was 'getting [himself] into'), I was prompted to produce the installation entitled *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* (spelled *Cullt* as in 'culled' (killed off)).

This installation comprises four separate glass cabinets, each containing a head-dress with corresponding items. Each is accompanied by an ‘anthropological’ document featuring a family member wearing a head-dress or armband, and a metal plaque engraved with a quote from Sandall’s book. Use of these quotes does not imply that Sandall is representative of all anthropological thought and practice, but it does draw attention to the fact that the publication of Sandall’s book in 2001, with its stereotypical Indigenous



**Fig. 14** Peacock, Janice 2002

*Culture Cullt Clan 2001* (installation)

*Satellite Dish* series: head-dress; armbands; dance rattle (dimensions vary),  
A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm

*Laptop Computer* series: head-dress; armband; dance rattle (dimensions vary),  
A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm

*Gone Fishing* series: head-dress; armband; dance rattle (dimensions vary),  
A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm

*Movie Camera* series: head-dress; film cartridge; dance rattle (dimensions vary),  
A4 Document, engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm

inferences and references and influenced by paternalistic patterns and 18<sup>th</sup> century enlightenment views, are still actively circulating today. Thus, the installation represents my satirical responses to Sandall's work.

These satirical responses are the main focus of the work, which is centred on 'urban identity', as shown by the title *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*. This reference 'fragmentation' of Indigenous societies as a consequence of imperialism and colonisation - disconnection from our languages, histories, landscapes, social relations and our very way of thinking and interacting with the world. Museums have for centuries embodied that fragmentation, which is also why I place my work within that context (Smith 2003 p. 28). By doing this, I seek to explore how cultural items, and the people who created them, become 'objects': hence alienated and dislocated when placed in a Western context. The need to consider an artefact within its cultural context, i.e., within its own Indigenous classificatory system, is vital for those items to retain their own cultural history and hence 'sovereignty'. So I present my culturally contemporary items within the present day relationship to which they belong, by placing them with photos of family members (taken in 2001), and an accompanying anthropological document with comments that respond to Sandall's quotes. Furthermore, putting them within a museum context (Lawrence 1994 p. 337) stresses the themes of 'alienation' and 'dislocation', which are the products of 'Imperialism's dehumanising imperatives' (2003 p. 26).

One glass cabinet in the installation series contains a 'satellite dish' head-dress, two 'scarification' armbands and a 'source stirrer' dance rattle. Placed with these items is a metal plaque engraved with Sandall's earlier quote and a parody of an anthropological

document featuring a photograph of my mother, wearing my contemporary adaptation of a Torres Strait Islander armband as a response to Sandall's quote. The satellite dish head-dress represents Torres Strait Islanders' sea life and recognition of vast star systems, which ultimately signal back to those living on the mainland in 'satellite' communities who are highly involved in the promotion of their culture (Bani 2000 p. 163). The spiral used in the centre of the satellite dish head-dress and accompanying armbands symbolises renewal of life, from the old to the new, and the changing of the seasons (Sharp 1993 p. 6).



**Fig. 15** Peacock, Janice 2002

*Satellite dish* (installation component) series in *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*

*satellite dish* head-dress: wire, string, wool, feathers, seagrass, embroidery cotton

43 x 50 x 43cm

*scarification* armbands: wire, string, wool, seagrass, embroidery cotton

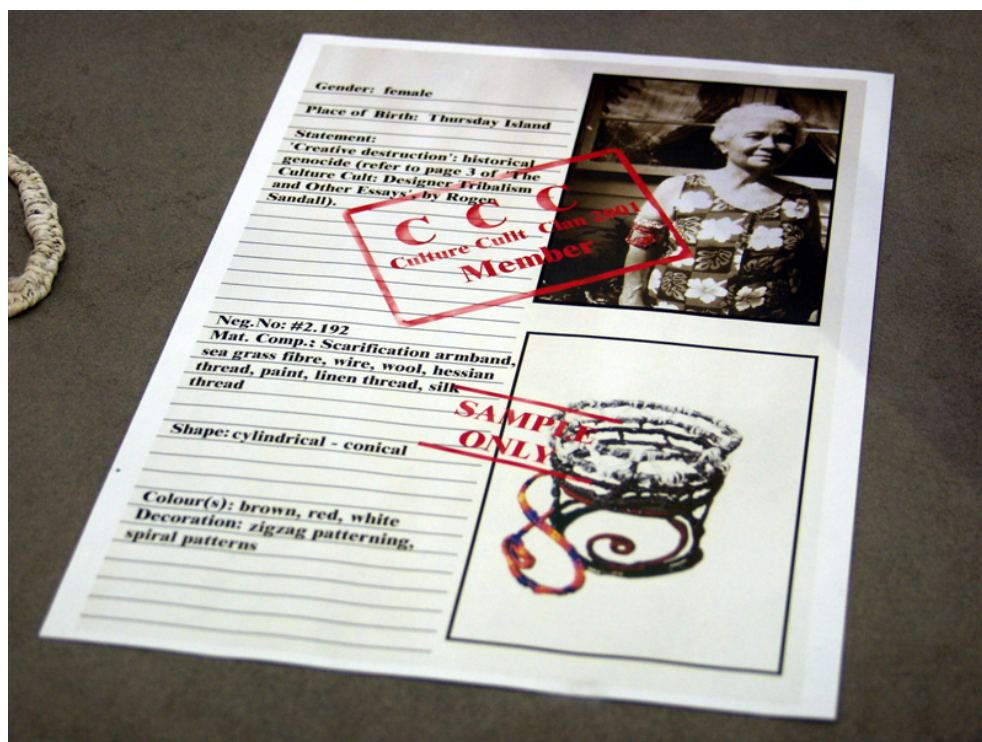
13 x 9 x 9cm; 10.5 x 9.5 x 10cm

*source stirrer's* dance rattle: sauce stirrer, string, wool, feathers, seeds, seagrass

33 x 9 x 9cm

engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm; A4 size document.

I use the photo of my mother in the ‘anthropological’ document, along with the words ‘creative destruction: historical genocide’, to give recognition to my family’s history, and our alienation from our Erub connection as a result of colonial intervention. However, through the creation of my artworks, which stems from a desire to reclaim my Torres Strait Islander identity and history, ‘creative destruction’ is transformed into ‘creative adaptation’.



**Fig. 16** Peacock, Janice 2002  
*Creative destruction: historical genocide* digitally enhanced A4 size document in *Satellite dish* series, *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* (installation)

Hence my argument in this installation component and this chapter overall is that the attempt by colonial government powers to destroy Australian Indigenous peoples’ histories and cultures through ‘creative destruction’ could be termed ‘historical genocide’; and that any ‘historical advance’ gained by Torres Strait Islanders was achieved not by

White imperialist destruction but by Islanders' constant 'creative adaptation' through resistance to Western influences.

That Islanders would come to reflect the social make-up of their overseers was the hope of colonisers. Several decades later, the failure of Islanders to become replicas of those who appointed themselves to remould them baffled their rulers and interpreters alike (Sharp 1980 p. 69). The failure stemmed from continuity within kinship ties (which I will expand on in subsequent discussion) and a strong cultural desire to 'survive' and 'advance' by continuing to 'own' their identity as Torres Strait Island people. My *Cult Cullt Clan 2001* installation series satirises Sandall's view that assimilation and the 'acquisition of the rules of civil society' result in societal 'advance'.

Sandall, of course, is not necessarily representative of the majority of anthropologists. Claude Levi-Strauss, a leading figure of structuralist anthropology, holds that *differences* between cultures 'are extremely fecund'. He believes that 'it is only through differences that progress has been made' and that 'in order for a culture to be really itself and to produce something, the culture and its members must be convinced of their originality'. Sandall's 'simplistic' ideal of 'setting cultural difference aside' ignores or dismisses the complexities that Levi-Strauss observes, which arise when living in a modern multicultural society.

This is a view very consonant with that of possibly a majority of Torres Strait people. For example, Auntie Flo Kennedy, a revered Torres Strait Island elder, is intensely aware that 'people who know their own ways can get on with other people who know theirs' (Sharp 1993 p. 90). She apprehends how the originality of our cultures and, ultimately, what is

‘culturally appropriate’ for us, is essential to our being and our ways of relating to one another. She concludes that ‘knowing who we are and where we come from is the essence of reciprocal interrelations between cultures’ (Sharp 1993 p. 90). As Indigenous people, we understand that reciprocal relationships are the essential basis for living with others. Auntie Flo Kennedy’s acceptance and recognition of a culturally diverse paradigm is borne out by the cultural diversity found in many contemporary Indigenous families (Sharp 1993 p. 90). Because ‘knowing who I am and where I come from’ is considered within Indigenous communities to be essential for reciprocal responses to others, reclaiming my ‘being’ through ‘knowing’ my family’s *ailan* history is for me the first step towards an appropriate art practice.

This, however, is not without its difficulties. Torres Strait curator, Tom Mosby, defines categories of ‘otherness’ in the section *Art is an Act of Bringing Truth into Being - The New Consciousness: But I would like to show you how good it is to be human – otherness or affinity?* (Mosby 1998 p. 79). He describes a scene from the science fiction television series *Star Trek Deep Space Nine*, in which the non- issue of human skin colour and negation of a black-white inferiority-superiority dichotomy is transformed in the script to become a human versus non-human dichotomy. Mosby then makes an analogy with what happens when Torres Strait Islander art is addressed within the concepts of Western art. He states that

on the one hand, there is a concerted attempt to bring Indigenous art into the realm of the ‘enlightened’ Western art industry. Instead of looking at the differences, a search for affinity is attempted, in particular the search for a ‘global stylistic pluralism’.

This is otherwise described by Levi-Strauss as the ‘over-communication of modern technology’, which he fears brings with it ‘the prospect of our being only consumers’ of other cultures’ and thus ‘losing all originality’ (Sharp 1993 p. 90). This line of thought

informs my later discussion about the distinction between Indigenous exchange systems and the Western cash economy.

Given that Western colonialist ideologies continue to distort Indigenous representations, history and art, even where current attempts are made to counteract past discrepancies, my reclamation of my own personal history from an Indigenous viewpoint must contest past non-acknowledgement, exclusion or misrepresentations exemplified by Sandall's '18<sup>th</sup> Century Enlightenment view'. Issues that emerge from these debates inform all my artworks and my argument throughout this exegesis. Thus, the exegesis can be considered both a 'reclaiming of my being' as explained above and a 'reciprocal' response to the Eurocentric notions present in Sandall's book. My place within a web of familial connections and ideological disconnections motivates my work as an artist and my thinking as an urban Indigenous (Torres Strait Islander) person.

### **3.3 Critique of Eurocentric Anthropology: *Culture Cultt Clan 2001***

While acknowledging that there is a great variety of anthropological views on Indigenous societies and cultures, critiquing certain anthropological ideas and practices provides fertile material for, and is implicit within, my artworks. The origins of anthropology as a discipline began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Age of Enlightenment, when Europeans believed themselves to be emerging from centuries of darkness and ignorance into an age of 'enlightened' reason, science, and an increased respect for humanity (not necessarily followed in practice). Political philosophies, based on an abiding faith in the power of human reason, were proclaimed to be 'normal' humanitarian thought. The new discoveries in science accompanied the rise of imperialism (political and economic control over foreign lands) and industrialization in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This in turn brought a wave of

new information about foreign peoples encountered at new colonial frontiers. As a result, European scientific explanations and justifications for European dominance were sought. It was during this time that our first amateur anthropologists formed societies, which eventually led to the profession of anthropology.

The naturalist, Charles Darwin, published his *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, in which he argued that animal and plant species had evolved and changed through a process he termed 'natural selection'. The social philosopher, Herbert Spencer, influenced many anthropologists to claim that 'Darwinian' theory, based on variations within species, justified Europe's apparent global dominance: he called it 'survival of the fittest'. These theories then became a 'scientifically proven' justification for believing Europeans to be biologically and culturally superior to all other peoples (Haller 1970).

Such theories also relate to my previous discussions about 'creative destruction' and colonisation in the Torres Strait. The arrival of the L.M.S. at Erub in 1871 was instrumental, not only in outlawing traditional customs and items of traditional worship but also in the dispersal of artefacts from the islands into overseas institutions. Between 1871 and 1910 missionaries bought and commissioned artefacts which were purchased by the British Museum, Museum fuer Volkerkunde, Dresden, and the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh (Herle and Philp 2000 p. 157). But the best-known collections of 19<sup>th</sup> century Torres Strait material remain those made by Haddon, which were distributed to Cambridge University and the British Museum, with smaller collections allocated to the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, and the Queensland Museum, Brisbane. Haddon's own views on art are interesting in this context. The connection between European materialism and social science is pointed out by Sharp:

‘Generally speaking, the societies, which have moulded the consciousness of the social scientist, are those in which commodity production is universal’ (Sharp 1980 p. 14).

So it was with the arrival in Torres Strait of A. C. Haddon, first in 1888,<sup>22</sup> and ten years later in 1898 as leader of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition<sup>23</sup> that ‘the chips of [Torres Strait Islanders’] traditional culture’ would consequently ‘fall where they may’, that is into anthropological hands (Sandall 2001 p.3). The expedition would prove to be a turning point in Torres Strait history and the history of British anthropology, setting a local precedent for a strange (to Islanders) scientific world of documentation, objectivity and the absolute.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of Haddon’s work cannot be underestimated, in terms of his handling of the multidisciplinary team he had chosen, who devised and developed new techniques for extracting, recording and analysing the anthropological and ethnographical information they gathered.<sup>25</sup> His team members had remarkably friendly interactions with the Torres Strait Islanders. Moore (1984 p. 12) states that ‘Haddon was distinguished from any of his predecessors, as allying a strong belief in the importance of scientifically based field-work

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<sup>22</sup> Haddon was then Professor of Zoology at the Royal College of Science, Dublin. He visited the Torres Strait to study the marine biology of the reef systems there. Working mostly with the local inhabitants, he became fascinated with the people and ended up spending as much time collecting traditional artefacts as he did working on reef biology (Moore 1984 pp. 10-11).

<sup>23</sup> The expedition included scholars in the fields of ethnology, psychology, medicine and linguistics and also had expertise in music, art and photography. Its members spent approximately seven months in Torres Strait, with further comparative research in Cape York and New Guinea before returning to England (Herle 1998 p. 114). Haddon also returned to the Torres Strait in 1914.

<sup>24</sup> I use the term ‘absolute’ here to refer to the knowledge obtained by White occupiers, in this case by the anthropologists, being seen as the ‘only’ truth (Smith 1999 p. 67).

<sup>25</sup> Haddon’s definition of ethnography was as ‘a branch of anthropology concerned with the scientific description of a human society’ (Saunders 2001 p. 59). The first use of moving film in Australia as an aid to ethnographical field work was Haddon’s filming of a re-enactment (proposed by Haddon) of a Malo ceremonial dance by Murray Islanders in 1898 (Saunders 2001 p. 59). This motivated me to create a ‘movie camera’ head-dress, with accompanying items, in one component of the *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation series.

and possessing a deep humanity and total lack of condescension towards his fellow men'. A certain sentimentality can be found in Haddon's 1898 diary entries: on leaving Thursday Island for what he thought would be the last time, he writes that it is 'as if parting from a close personal friend whom I shall never see again' (Moore 1984 p. 12). Unexpectedly, he did return in 1914 and, after leaving again, remained in contact with his Torres Strait Islander friends for the remainder of his life. In similar vein, the Islanders whom Haddon studied and befriended displayed their own 'deep humanity' by their reciprocal response and respect for him. Here is an unusual instance (for the time) of how the coloniser and the colonised (in Fanon's words) '[knew] each other well' (Smith 2003 pp. 25-26).

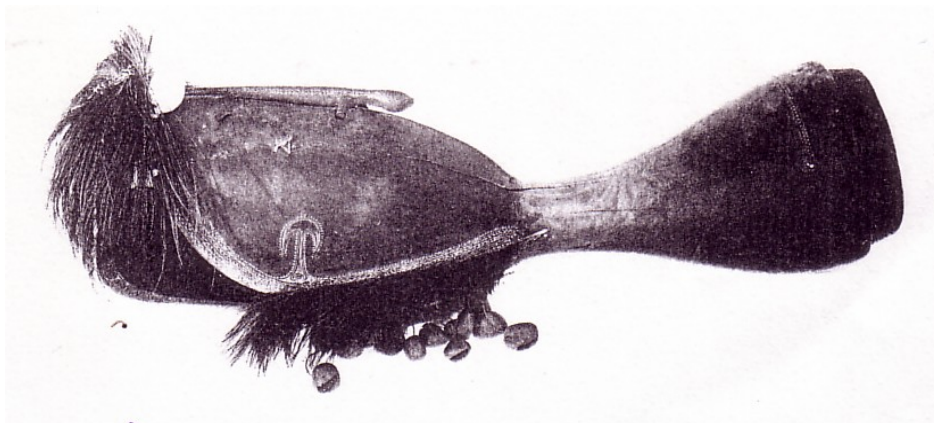
Since colonial invasion and settlement, the 'right' of the social scientist to study the people of pre-modern societies has remained part of a power situation (Sharp 1980 p. 16).

As Sharp observes

it is usually inconceivable that the object of study will be free to say 'no'. Where his or her work is tied to a form of policy science whereby the social scientist acting as social engineer chooses a set of procedures in order to determine the instrumentally best course of action necessary to implement a decision, the consequences are likely to be fateful for the society which is studied. For the decisions to be made are part of the unfolding of that reality which has been created for the objects of study. Under these conditions a so-called value-free study becomes continuous and enmeshed with the social situation of capture and control (Sharp 1980 p. 16).

Westerners' obsession with collecting authentic objects to be preserved for the future is tied up with nationalist politics, the national project and national identity formation (Stocking 1985 p. 238). Whilst this ensured their preservation for over one hundred years, it also ensured their disconnection from the communities which created them. The vast documentation of Islanders' traditional life and customs and the over 1,000 artefacts collected by the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition served as evidence of Westerners' 'historical advance' over 'primitive' races (Herle and Philp 2000 p.157). The resulting six

volumes of the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits* are used extensively for reference throughout this exegesis. A descriptive catalogue of the artefacts collected, published by David Moore in 1984, made previously unphotographed and inaccessible material available to Torres Strait Islanders themselves (see example Fig. 17). Moore noted that Islanders were attempting to reconstruct their own culture in order to clarify and consolidate their identity as a people (1984 p. 7). Moore's catalogue is also used extensively throughout this exegesis, as is the extensive catalogue of Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary artworks from the first major Torres Strait art exhibition, *Ilan Pasin (this is our way) Torres Strait Art*. This exhibition contained major artefacts from the Cambridge Collection and included one of a series of my artworks, *Recreating the Last Paradise*.<sup>26</sup>

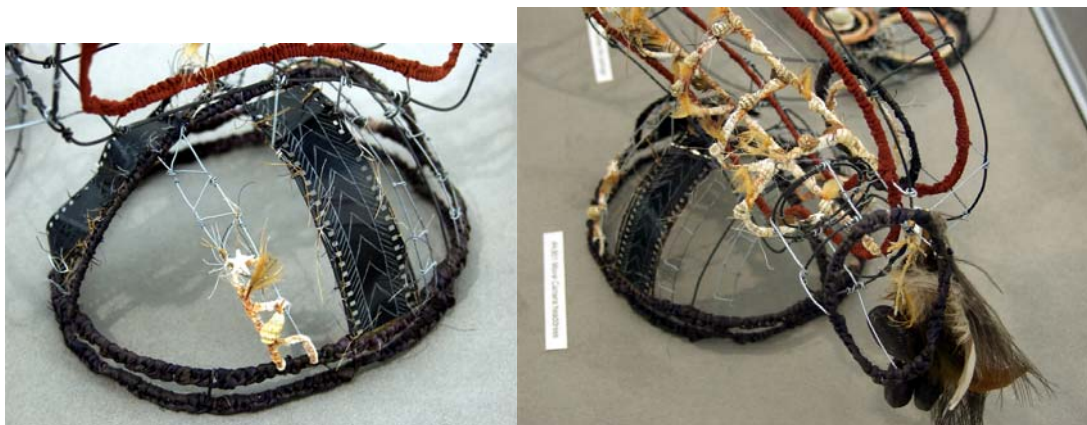


**Fig. 17** Artist Unknown  
*Warup* (Drum) Tutu 1888  
wood, lime, seeds, feathers, skin  
95 x 25 x 10cm (Moore 1984, p. 55, no.155: plate 18)

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<sup>26</sup> An image of my artwork, *Recreating the Last Paradise*, can be found in the *Ilan Pasin* catalogue under my previous married name of Janice Pillsworth (Fuary 1998 p. 125) and also in Demozay (2001 p. 164).

We have seen how items of material culture (sometimes gained exploitatively)<sup>27</sup> were taken away from Torres Strait to become part of the education system of imperialist European societies and not shared with Islanders. The past restriction on access by Torres Strait Islanders to these records and artefacts (see Fuary 1998 p. 123; McGrath 1998 p. 104) is part of the project of ‘creative destruction’, or, more accurately, ‘historical genocide’, that brought a new and different kind of law and order to Islanders in order to further the West’s own ‘historical advance’. However, it is through records obtained from these major collections that contemporary Torres Strait Islanders have had access to traditional items and information today (see Fuary 2000 p. 124). I myself drew upon the Haddon archival collections for inspiration in the production of my artworks, in particular for those artworks in the *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation series.<sup>28</sup>



**Fig. 18** Peacock, Janice 2002  
*Movie Camera* head-dress (detail) 45 x 60 x 18.5cm  
*Movie Camera* (installation component) series in *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*  
 wire, string, paint, seagrass, raffia, shells, feathers, seeds, film

<sup>27</sup> An example of an incident involving a member of the anthropological team and the unwilling surrender of an artefact by a Torres Strait Islander is given in Haddon (1901 p 34.)

<sup>28</sup> My great-grandfather, Thomas Randolph, who met Haddon in 1888, was part of that colonial history. Their meeting demonstrates in a small way the diversity of relationships and encounters within ‘historical colonialism’ and illustrates how Torres Strait historical events are juxtaposed with our own personal histories. I am reminded of Auntie Flo Kennedy’s words concerning the acceptance of cultural diversity and the importance of ‘knowing who we are and where we come from’.

This inevitably raises the question of what would have happened if Haddon and his anthropological team had not extensively collected and documented those artefacts. Today's Torres Strait Islanders can be thankful that many artefacts were preserved, even more so since negotiations began for them to be returned to the Torres Strait.<sup>29</sup>

Serious negotiations for the artefacts to be returned to Torres Strait and their owners have been held since 1998, the year of the exhibition, *Ilan Pasin (this is our way)* (Bani 1998 pp. 127-130). A previous attempt to regain cultural items can be seen in the documentary film made by Frances Calvert in 1997, *Cracks in the Mask*. Ephraim Bani, a Mabuiag man from the western islands, travelled to Europe with his wife in the hope of bringing artefacts back to those families whose ancestors had made them, including their own. His efforts at the time were in vain but, with the opening of the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island in 2004, the return of items to Torres Strait Islanders is now within sight.<sup>30</sup> The centre is the result of intense negotiation over recent years to establish a much-needed cultural centre in the Torres Strait and it is the first public keeping place for historical and cultural artefacts and art, both modern and traditional. It was hoped that the new centre could be an incentive for Cambridge University and other museums to restore items to Torres Strait Islander people (Bani 1998 p. 132). However their return has been delayed, partly due to concerns for appropriate and secure housing.

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<sup>29</sup> The Cape York Aboriginal collections by W. C. Roth, the Northern Protector at that time, are the only other Australian Indigenous collections which can compare to Haddon's in scope and documentation. These two collections are amongst the most complete and fully documented amongst Indigenous peoples in any part of the world (Moore 1984 p. 39).

<sup>30</sup> The expression *gab titui* 'journey of the stars' combines words from both eastern and western languages of the Torres Strait. The Cultural Centre was officially opened on 16 April 2004 (Armistead and Southey 2004).

In 2002, an exhibition entitled *Past Time: Torres Strait Islander Material from the Haddon Collection, 1888-1905* exhibited sixty artefacts at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. This was the first time artefacts from the Haddon collections had been returned to Australia since their original collection. They later toured to Cairns Regional Gallery from June to September of the same year. Terry Waia, then chairman of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, clarified how extremely important these artefacts are to Torres Strait Islanders as they represent our ancestors, our identity, who we are and where we come from as a people (Waia n.d.).<sup>31</sup>

I have further concerns about how the continued possession of artefact collections is weighted more towards satisfying a possessive Western ‘self’ (Stocking 1985 p. 238). [Hurley, Ron 2002 *Eulogy for Ron Hurley*. Unpublished pamphlet. Copy held by author.] According to Aboriginal artist, Ron Hurley (2002), the purpose of museum ethnographic collecting was

to satisfy a morbid curiosity, and an insatiable hunger for things exotic (the noble savage syndrome). These vast public and private collections of plunder sat in musty museums, juxtaposed against white man’s technology and cultural icons, in order to demonstrate the order of man, the superiority of the colonisers.

Further concerns lie with whether the Haddon Collection has been transformed to comply with Westerners’ desire for ‘meaning’ and ‘possession’. Both traditional and contemporary cultural artefacts and collections continue to be motivated by the same act of possession; by being ‘selected’, ‘ordered,’ and ‘classified in hierarchies’ – to become a ‘good’ collection, thereby betraying its origins in the reciprocal belief systems and cultural

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<sup>31</sup> Torres Strait Islander artist, Victor McGrath (1998 p. 104), refers to his respect for the nameless makers of ‘the rare and beautiful Torres Strait treasures’ he was privileged to be able to view and handle, which were taken away and housed in museums in Britain and the United States. Fuary (1998 p. 123) similarly refers to Yam Islanders’ feelings of not having had access to past photographs and objects and their responses when given the opportunity to do so.

lore of the peoples the artefacts are extracted (or bought) from. Cultural objects continue to be viewed as 'personal treasures' and are portrayed as representative of our 'authenticated' cultural survival, made public according to Western art concepts. Consequently, I agree with Stocking (1985 pp. 238-239) that, when artefacts are placed in a modern museum or art gallery, a distorted 'meaning' is created by virtue of their isolation from their traditional context and this destroys their true social and cultural relations.

The colonial principle of 'order' is perpetuated in the activities of Western science, encoded and legitimised through imperialist practices. As a result, 'fragments' of Indigenous societies can be found as bones, mummies and skulls taken from our Indigenous worlds, placed in museums for public viewing and 'consumption', given monetary value and immortalised by art galleries and private collectors. They can be found, too, in the dismantling of our languages now preserved by linguists; and in our 'customs', systematically documented by anthropologists and ethnographers; and, finally, in our spiritual beliefs and behaviours, appropriated by psychologists and used to promote their own view of the world we live in. The 'fragmentation' of Indigenous societies is not purely a modern-day phenomenon, but the consequence of imperialist rule and its dedication to appropriating Indigenous societies' lifestyles to satisfy its own possessive 'self' (Smith 2003 pp. 27-28).

Multicultural 'extravagances', portraying Indigenous people as 'exotic', 'authentic' or 'traditional' or as 'Aboriginal samples' for scientific analysis and museum public displays, were used for European aesthetic contemplation as well as 'spectacle' entertainment in taverns, theatres, gardens, zoos, circuses and world fairs, and for freak shows. Many

examples of these ‘spectacles’ are listed in performance artist Coco Fusco’s book, *English Is Broken Here* (1995 pp. 41-43), in which she discusses how ‘intercultural performance’ was used as a form of public ‘education’ and contributed to the ‘noble savage’ syndrome. The original ethnographic ‘performance’ exhibitions, depicting ‘primitive’ people performing ‘ritualistic’ or ‘animalistic’ tasks, spawned misrepresentations of cultural identity, thus ultimately denying the right of Indigenous people to be considered ‘human’. The ‘aborigines’ put on display served to prove that European civilisation was superior, and scientific rationalisation justified European government of Indigenous peoples through paternalistic patriotism.

Coco Fusco’s use of ‘reverse ethnography’ in her art performance in 1992 entitled *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit ...* encapsulates residual elements resulting from the early 1900s colonialist era and reflects the ‘scheme of things’ today. Her fictitious self-portrayal

**Fig. 19** Fusco, Coco 1994  
*Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Buenos Aires*

as an ‘undiscovered Amerindian’, inside a golden cage and wearing ‘traditional native garb’, together with collaborator, Guillermo Gómez-Pena, elicits and comments on

audience responses when caught ‘off guard’ (1995 p. 40).<sup>32</sup> Responses varied from country to country, but what consistently surfaced was the regurgitation of stereotypical examples of racial classification, instilled in the minds of all races of people through the propaganda that rationalised colonialist discourse. The stereotypical images, which serve this discourse well, stem from myths of colonial dominion, ritually reinforced through the consumption of popular culture, reconstructed in comics, movies and cartoons. The illusion of ‘authenticity’ is still perpetuated today in contemporary tourist exhibitions and cultural ministries of various countries around the world (Fusco 1995 p. 37).

The processes involved in Coco Fusco’s art performances have been a major influence on the content and production of my own artworks since 2000: my personified art experimentation was initially inspired by Fusco’s sardonic commentaries on Western concepts of the exotic and the primitive Other (Fusco 1998 p. 363). Interestingly, Coco Fusco’s audience responses resemble comments made about my installations of head-dresses. People were confused as to whether the artworks were produced to please; or as exotic ‘objects’; or whether they were ‘authentic’ and hence ‘appropriate’. When the authenticity of the head-dresses and accompanying items was not questioned, they were objectified; hence, the political and ethical satirical content of the work, emphasised by the use of an ‘anthropological’ document featuring an ‘ethnographic’ photograph of a family member, was overlooked or deemed unnecessary.

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<sup>32</sup> This recalls the indignities suffered by Australian Indigenous women and men documented by Poignant, for whom their removal and ‘transformation into show-people was part of the larger process of emptying the land’ (2004 p. 39). Probably the most famous example was Saartjie, a woman of the African Khoi-San (‘Hottentot’) tribe, born in bondage to parents forced into slavery. In 1810, at the age of 20, she was enticed into what she thought might be her ‘freedom’. However, she was placed on public display in Piccadilly Circus in London, and paraded semi-naked in an animal cage on a platform. She was paraded before the French scientific community, also appearing at French private viewings and society balls as a ‘party trick’. These displays continued until her death five years later, in 1815. Within hours of her death, her genitals and brain were removed and kept to provide useful reference for anyone studying ‘primitive’ races. Her skeletal remains were placed in a glass cabinet and displayed in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris until 1974 (Venage 2002).

Fanon's insight that the 'settler' and the 'colonised' are mutual constructions of colonialism (Smith 2003 pp. 25-26) and how this might affect Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' contemporary lives is addressed by my artwork, *Giom – the Barbara Thompson story*. Early in 2003 I was invited, along with fashion designers from around Australia and overseas, to create an artwork for the *Echo* fashion exhibition to be held that year.<sup>33</sup> While examining old clothes and items, made available for inspiration, a small parasol captured my attention. It eventually led to the creation of the *Giom* head-dress based on the Barbara Thompson story. I found it ideally suited to address colonial history from an Indigenous perspective and also to illustrate issues to do with identity, appropriation, and fashion in relation to traditional *kastom*.<sup>34</sup> However, much of the reasoning behind the creation of this installation revolved around Fanon's comments. These contradictory elements of 'acceptance' and 'resistance' are manifested in the layers of my work.

### 3.4 Critique of Colonialist Stereotyping: *Giom – The Barbara Thompson Story*

There are numerous historical accounts of people being shipwrecked in Torres Strait from its initial 'discovery' in 1606, which remained a well-kept trade secret for the Spanish trade with ports in Mexico, Chile, and the Philippines, providing a short cut for merchant ships travelling to Europe and ensuring one-upmanship on trade rivals. How many

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<sup>33</sup> The exhibition was held in conjunction with the University of Queensland Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies conference, *Making an Appearance: Fashion, Dress and Consumption*, held in July 2003. Other conference participants were the Queensland University of Technology and the Queensland College of Art. Images of some of the head-dresses from my *stands with boxing gloves* series are available on the University of Queensland website: <http://www.arts.uq.edu/cccs/events/fashion/index.php>.

<sup>34</sup> I produced and presented a PowerPoint presentation (including images of the *Giom* Installation) for a lecture given specifically to address these issues, which is available for viewing.

Spanish ships sailed through the Torres Strait is not known; however, stories from the eastern islands of the Strait (Mer, Erub and Ugar) mention shipwrecks and Spanish coins and artefacts being found (Byron 1964 pp. 172-174). These accounts have contributed to Western speculation about cannibalism, savagery and headhunting in the Torres Strait. One of these shipwreck narratives is recounted in a famous book by Ion L. Idriess, entitled *Drums of Mer* (1944). This book is based on characters taken from historical accounts,<sup>35</sup> but is enhanced by the author's romanticised exaggeration of events. However, the book's 'authenticity' helped ensure its success, as did the author's skilful appropriation of Islander beliefs and cultural practices, as told to him by Revd W.H. MacFarlane.<sup>36</sup> It also met the demands of marketable fictional narrative writing at that time.

The female character, Eyes of the Sea, is based on a young Scottish woman, Barbara Thompson, who survived a shipwreck in Torres Strait (Sharp 1980 p. 50). Found clinging onto wreckage, she was rescued by the Kaurareg people of the lower western group.<sup>37</sup> She and her husband, William, and six crew members, sailed from England to Torres Strait in 1843 in search of sunken casks of whale oil. They believed a fortune was awaiting them, but the voyage soon came to a sudden end. Losing their bearings in unpredictable waters and undermined by suspicions of treachery, all eventually were lost, except Barbara.

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<sup>35</sup> On Mer (Murray Island) a tradition persists that a village called Las was occupied by shipwrecked Spaniards centuries before Cook's arrival. Even in the late nineteenth century, lighter skinned people from this village were identified as belonging to this group. It is suggested that characters in Idriess's novel, *Drums of Mer*, may have contributed to these claims or, in retrospect, that they may have contributed to Idriess's novel (Singe 1989 p. 15).

<sup>36</sup> In his author's note, Idriess refers to his 'good timing' in meeting 'Island historians' through the Church of England priest, Revd W. H. MacFarlane. He was extremely fortunate to have met MacFarlane, who was a confidant of many of the 'old keepers of secrets' (1944 p. ix).

<sup>37</sup> The islands in the Torres Strait closest to Cape York on the Australian mainland were the home islands of the nomadic Kaurareg (Kauralgai, Kawalgai or Kowreragas). Originally Melanesians, they are also closely related to Cape York Aboriginal people (Singe pp. 164-165).

As elsewhere in the Pacific, the Islanders at first took Europeans to be dead relatives returned, and referred to them by the words for ghosts (Beckett 1998 p. 35; Moore 1979 pp. 143, 146). *Sarup* was the name given by Torres Strait Islanders to anyone cast ashore from a wreck; *sarup* were 'salt-water men'. Torres Strait Islanders would claim only castaways whom they 'recognised' as either family or friends; others were recognised as the spirits of deceased people and taken in by their 'families'. Otherwise *sarup* were killed, and usually beheaded, but their bodies were never eaten. Pasi, a Murray Island leader, told Revd MacFarlane that anyone who came from the salt water (and had consequently swallowed it) was treated suspiciously, for it was known they may not be in their full senses. The Islanders were afraid that they might cause trouble or make *puripuri* (harmful magic), because 'the salt water spoils his face and eyes, the sun blisters him so his face comes different, his head comes another way'. These 'salt-water' people were considered to be dangerous and could kill people or do harm while in such an irresponsible state, which is why Islanders would kill them (Haddon 1935 (Vol. 1) p. 349).<sup>38</sup>

Barbara Thompson was fortunate to be found by a Kaurareg man who believed her to be the *markai* (returned spirit) of his deceased daughter. Hence she was spared, honoured and renamed 'Giom' after the dead woman. Giom slowly acquired island ways and language, which the Kaurareg believed to have passed from her memory after her death (Toohey 2000 p. 8). She remained with the Islanders for nearly five years but always longed to return to her own people. She made her escape when the H. M. S. *Rattlesnake* anchored

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<sup>38</sup> Auntie Flo Kennedy clarified this custom for me by explaining that it was a way of exercising the 'rule of justice' to uphold 'family business' and 'kinship'. She relates it to Islanders acknowledging traditional ownership and Malo's Law. When Malo came to the eastern Torres Strait people, he did not come to an 'uncivilised' place, because the people had their own 'lore' (law) and were landowners (Flo Kennedy, pers. comm., 4 September 2000).

close by and secretly canoed her way there to join it. No doubt she surprised them in her sunburnt nakedness and her claims (at first disbelieved) of being a White woman and a Christian.<sup>39</sup> She was eventually reunited with her family in Sydney, remarried and lived to the age of 84 (Toohey 2000 p. 9).



**Fig. 20** Peacock, Janice 2003  
*Giom* – the Barbara Thompson story (installation)  
parasol; *parasol* head-dress: 50 x 50 x 55cm  
*Giom* poster 70 x 477 cm

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<sup>39</sup> Singe (1989 p. 167) gives a different account of Barbara Thompson's departure: she was with an Aboriginal friend and approached sailors from the *Rattlesnake*, who were washing clothes near a creek in the Cape York region. Her friend, Thomagugu, who had helped rescue her four years earlier, had promised to help her get back to her own people. Remembering some English, she told the sailors she was a Christian and that she was ashamed of her appearance (she was sunburnt and wore only a grass skirt). She was taken on board the ship, but after numerous attempts by the Kaurareg to get her to stay, she remained on board and left two days later.

Compelled to confront issues which perpetuate stereotypical Indigenous representations, based on Western obsessions with sorcery, magic, cannibalism, savagery and headhunting among Indigenous peoples, I created an installation based on Barbara Thompson's character and titled it *Giom*. In seeking to challenge issues particular to the history of the Torres Strait, I realised that the Barbara Thompson story provided the perfect catalyst and inspiration for me – along with the parcel of clothes containing a parasol, which inspired the creation of a 'parasol' head-dress.

One of the issues relates to headhunting. Headhunting (for skulls to use in barter) prevailed in neighbouring New Guinea, Melanesia and Indonesia (Haddon 1935 p. 347) for various reasons.<sup>40</sup> Headhunting also took place in the Torres Strait but it is fair to say that Western interpretations, such as are found in *Drums of Mer*, emphasise savagery to pander to stereotypical representations of 'savages' and 'natives' for a Western audience (Rony 1996 p. 10). Similarly, the notion of a chiefly order, contrary to Idriess's representation, cannot be sustained. Chiefs were absent or products of colonial encounter (Sharp 1993 p. 8; Singe 1989 pp. 65, 81, 99).<sup>41</sup>

I have already mentioned that the *dari* (Torres Strait head-dress) represents the face of its wearer's spirit. Hence the parasol head-dress in my installation combines both face and spirit of Barbara Thompson and *Giom*. Here we see Fanon's 'coloniser' and 'colonised'

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<sup>40</sup> In *Head-Hunters Black, White and Brown* reference is made to keeping the head of a dead person as a means of keeping the memory -- like a photo (Haddon 1901 pp. 182 -183). Taking heads of enemies was done for totally different reasons, but also associated with the spirit of the person (Haddon 1935 p. 347).

<sup>41</sup> In *Drums of Mer*, Idriess characterises an important character, Kebisu, as 'Mamoose and the chief of Island nations' (Idriess 1944 p. 46). He is based on the real-life character, Kebisu of Tutu (Warrior Island, one of the central islands), who was believed to possess great strength and strategic ability, upon which his people depended (Singe 1989 p. 32). The sacred order of Malo-Bomai in the Eastern Islands, and the 'Cult of Brethren' in the western and central islands exerted a powerful influence upon Islanders; however, corporate political structures in the form of hereditary chiefdoms were absent (Sharp 1993 p. 8).



**Fig. 21** Peacock, Janice 2003  
*Giom* – the Barbara Thompson story (installation)  
parasol; *parasol* head-dress: 50 x 50 x 55cm  
*Giom* poster 70 x 477 cm

who ‘know each other well’ and this is further suggested by including a poster to portray Barbara Thompson’s spirit.

I also use a photograph of my daughter wearing a period dress and the parasol head-dress, to summon up the experience and spirit of Barbara Thompson as well as serve as a reminder of imperialist or colonialist persistence. Moreover, this portrayal of Barbara Thompson, standing forlornly on the shoreline between ‘savagery’ and ‘civilisation’, highlights the historical, cultural and emotive elements arising from a holistically ‘human’ perspective of the events (Smith 2003 p. 47). The skeletal appearance and the use of gloves in the head-dress signify Torres Strait Islanders’ traditional cultural practice of mummifying the bodies of their dead. The skin of the palms of hands and soles of feet were kept as ‘special memories’ of the deceased, similar in concept to Westerners’ use of a photograph (Haddon 1935 p. 322) and hung from an elaborate mourning costume worn by the closest of kin (Moore 1984 p. 33).<sup>42</sup> Hence, the addition of the gloves in the head-dress not only gives us a sense of the helplessness and isolation that Barbara Thompson surely experienced, but also suggests the love that the Kaurareg had for her.

For, in defiance of colonially perpetuated ‘savage’ stereotypes, we find that during her five-year stay Barbara Thompson was treated by the Kaurareg as an equal and ‘one of the family’. Ironically, the most serious threat to her came from a White man named Wini, who lived on Badu. This man is said to have organised a murderous raid upon the Kaurareg in an unsuccessful attempt to capture Barbara for his wife (Singe 1989 p. 166).

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<sup>42</sup> This cultural practice is expanded upon in Haddon (1935 p. 332). Many references to Torres Strait Islanders’ mummification practices, which exactly mirrored those in Egypt, assume that this practice in Torres Strait evidences belief in an afterlife (Haddon 1935 pp. 326 *ff.*)

Barbara Thompson also gives an account of the entire neighbouring Kulkalgal community of Nagir who visited the Kaurareg over an eight-week period, when each group



**Fig. 22** Peacock, Janice 2003  
*Giom* – the Barbara Thompson story  
(installation), *parasol* head-dress (detail)  
wire, cane, string, crochet cotton, raffia,  
shells, feathers, paint, ink, shellac, twig,  
old satin gloves

extensively supplied, shared and traded various material and cultural items (Singe 1989 p. 191). This interaction gives expression to the great diversity which is expressed in Auntie Flo Kennedy's statement regarding Indigenous 'family business' and kinship relations<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 'Family business' acknowledges pre-colonial rivalry and war between Islanders, which continued even after colonisation. Trade exchange, which included beheading knives, bows and arrows, clubs, spears, and warrior head-dress and costume, is represented today in the survival of Torres Strait secular dance. Pre-

The placing of rocks beneath the head-dress when first exhibited also has significance. These represent certain stones, which were often associated with, and used to enhance, natural powers (or ‘natural energy’ as in Lewin (1998 p. 21)). The use of these ‘stones of power’, whether natural or carved, was common amongst eastern Islanders (Haddon 1935 p. 360) and the stones used in this artwork are symbolic. In the making of the parasol head-dress I used contemporary materials such as wire, cane, string, crochet cotton, raffia, paint, ink, shellac and found objects to create the impression of ancestral spirits, history, of ancestral spirits, history, natural affinity, familiarity, function and love. The exposed spiral of wire invokes early Torres Strait Islanders’ intense desire for metal and their willingness to barter valued objects for it. All of this reinforces how I seek to bring to the viewer a contemporary Indigenous art interpretation, based on a Western representation. I also seek to expose misinterpretations based on Western theories about ‘savages’ or the ‘tribal world’ and in doing so highlight their racial bias. This art piece also seeks to define and represent those miraculous connections which occurred in the history of the Torres Strait and also in my family’s history.

### 3.5 Christianity and Malo’s Law (*Malora Gelar*): *Bipotaim/Pastaim*

The experimental artworks, which I produced in Banff, Alberta, Canada, for a residency programme are based on the theme: *Communion and Other Conversations: A Thematic Residency 1: Indigenous Artists on Christianity and Colonisation*. They comprise six watercolour paper size prints, four combining a layering of printmaking techniques: dry

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colonial inter-island war tradition is expressed today in competition dances between islands and in the use of dance machines and the wearing of head-dresses and costume (Mosby 2000 p. 172).

point, line and photo based etchings, plexiglass scratching, chine colle print and



**Fig. 23** Peacock, Janice 2003

*Bipotaim/Pastaim*

four multi-layered prints: print 1; print 2; print 3; print 4, on watercolour paper each  
76 x 56cm

collagraph images, as well as two photo-based works enhanced by digital Photoshop techniques. All these works are based on the Torres Strait tombstone opening and are entitled *Bipotaim/Pastaim*.<sup>44</sup> This is a contemporary Torres Strait Islander cultural practice of great significance, which stems from traditional belief in the afterlife. Traditional Islander *kastom* was predominantly to mummify the bodies of their dead; it was 'family business'. However, the Christian missionaries could not incorporate the practice within their Western conceptual understanding and instead enforced the burial of bodies.

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<sup>44</sup> These are words from Torres Strait Creole and were originally borrowed from English 'before time' and 'past time', respectively. In general terms, *bipotaim* refers to the traditional epoch before the Coming of the Light; *pastaim* to the period following the arrival of Christianity but still distant from the present. (Shnukal 1988 pp. 116, 178).

I reflect on these Christian influences and the changes to *kastom* brought by Christianity with the images used in the etched prints, appropriating the same etched Biblical image of Adam and Eve by Rembrandt (see Fig. 25) depicted in *The Fall (Rembrandt the Old Testament* 1996 p. 12), which was used in my *Between Scenes* installation of *Eve and Me*, discussed in subsection 3.1. The large stencilled cross in each print symbolises Christianity and life as it was before and after (or the passage from old life to new) in Torres Strait. In 'From pagan to priesthood', his chapter in *The Gospel is not Western: black theologies from the South West Pacific*, the Murray Islander, Fr David Passi, discusses how at the time he saw the Anglican Church as the fulfilment of the previous traditional belief in *Malora Gelar* (Malo's Law). The author is now a Bishop of the Church of the Torres Strait but, at the time the article was written, he was a Torres Strait Anglican priest. This is because of the ritualistic approach that this church takes in the ordination of its priests and its practice of Christian teaching (Passi 1987 p. 46) and the nature of priestly succession. His own role of priest was orally and hereditarily passed on to him from his father, and was held by his grandfather before that. He also discusses how his father gave up his traditional role as a *zogo le* ('priest' of Malo-Bomai) to become a Christian priest. Traditional priests, known as *zogoga*, belonged to a priestly order that possessed special powers and preserved sacred 'psalms of worship', which aided in personal protection and in the growing and gathering of food. These special powers, he believes, were hereditarily passed on to him and he sees them as being preserved and fulfilled by his role as an Anglican priest. For Passi, references labelling former *kastom* traditions and beliefs as 'superstition' are an insult (1987 pp. 45-46). Malo's Law extends past impositions placed by colonisers to outlaw its practice. A prime example of this is the



**Fig. 24** (above: print 4) **Fig. 25** (below: print 2)  
 Peacock, Janice 2003  
*Bipotaim/Pastaim*  
 multi-layered print on watercolour paper  
 76 x 56cm

High Court's decision on the Murray Island land claim case which was won, according to Sharp (1996 pp. xii, 153), because of the continuance of Malo's Law.

Whilst I rejoice in these connections between old and new beliefs, my artworks also express a sense of mourning for the loss of the old. I use the etched images of grass skirts, hands and feet to represent mourning (see Fig. 26), as I did in my *Giom* head-dress and the Barbara Thompson story. This sense of mourning is captured in Norris's comments about the arrival of Christianity as 'a time when her ancestors were told what to do by missionaries, who had little regard for the previous beliefs, culture or kinship ties' (Eglitis 2000 p. 82). Although Passi, on balance, celebrates the arrival of Christianity, he also evinces some regret over the passing of the old ways, explaining how his grandfather gave up his old ways and 'was not impressed' with the arrival of the original L.M.S. missionaries. He acknowledges that he cannot understand why his grandfather gave up all his traditional authority and power to become a Christian, and laments the loss of those traditions, although thankful that some have been retained (1987 p. 46).

With Christianity came the enforced wearing of clothing made out of calico.<sup>45</sup> This is symbolised in my *Ailan Dress* made from calico, depicting island flowers painted with watercolour pastels, combined with turpentine-released images of the etchings in the prints. A black dress used in a digital image, *Sacred of the Heart, Heart of the Sacred*, also reflects colonial intervention. The black dress is part of the same parcel of clothes from which the parasol – used in the making of the parasol head-dress for the Barbara Thompson story – is taken. In Western society, a black dress also symbolises mourning

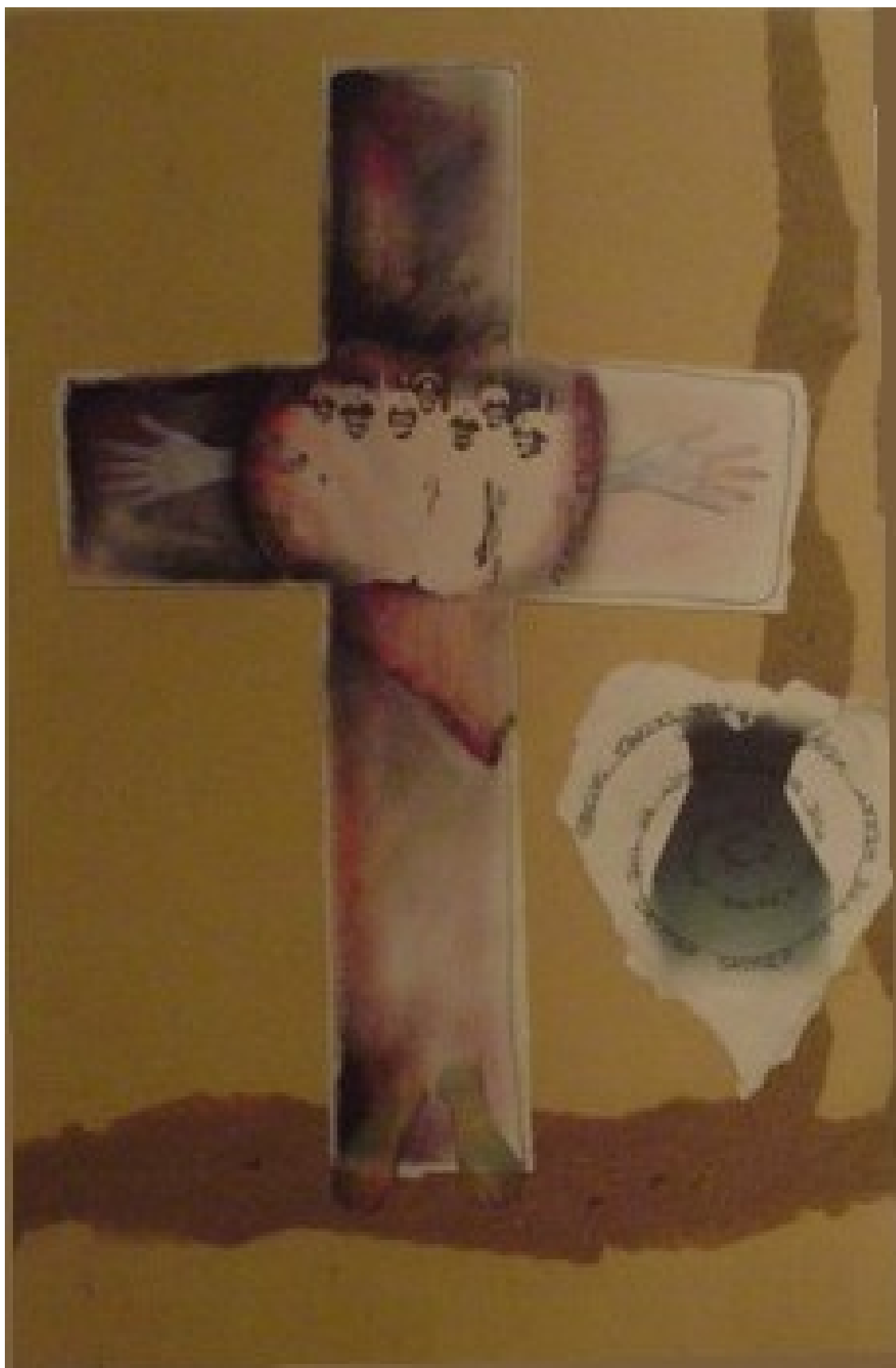
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<sup>45</sup> Calico became a valued European trade item among island traders after these first initial colonial contacts were made (Lawrence 1994 p. 331). In Western societies of the time, calico was associated with the 'lower classes' (see Bartlett 1999).

and, in this case, domestic labour, for which the Torres Strait Islander girls in the photograph within the heart were trained.

This photograph, taken by my mother, is of girls whom she knew and grew up with on Thursday Island. Since 1877 Thursday Island has been the administrative and commercial centre of Torres Strait. During the years of the enforcement of the Aboriginals Protection Act (which after 1904 was extended to include Islanders), the Protector of Aboriginals was stationed at Thursday Island with authority to make decisions on behalf of the Queensland Government with regard to all matters to do with 'Aboriginals'. Islanders living on reserves were designated as Aboriginals and placed under a succession of 'Protection' Acts and regulations. They could not control their earnings, which were administered by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs and doled out to them according to the whim of local officials. They were subject to a curfew and were allowed to visit Thursday Island only during the day, supposedly to save them from exploitation. Not until after World War II were Islanders allowed to settle on Thursday Island (Singe 1989 p. 100).

The girls in the photograph were living in the convent of the Sacred Heart Catholic Mission on Thursday Island at that time. The convent was subsidised by the Queensland government and the Sacred Heart sisters acted in accordance with the wishes of the Protector (Ganter 1998 p. 7). My mother was one of the girls of the Mission and trained by the nuns to perform domestic duties. Education at that time was limited to fifth grade for Coloured children: they were told that they 'did not have the brains to go further' and, while young boys were sent to work in the fisheries, young girls were encouraged to seek employment as domestic labour (Osborne 1997 p. 17).



**Fig. 26** Peacock, Janice 2003  
*Sacred of the Heart, Heart of the Sacred*  
digital image on watercolour paper  
76 x 56cm

The term 'domestic' itself derives from the long history of assimilation and exemplifies the social engineering inherent in the cultural rituals of White Australian society -- Indigenous women being the foremost targets. The process was enacted and legitimised by White middle-class women, who trained Indigenous women to become domestics. Their enforcement of White behaviours to do with 'acceptability' created biases through racial differences (Bartlett 1999 p. 10).

With the arrival of indentured Asian men to work in the fishing industries of Torres Strait, their relations with Indigenous women became a 'phenomenon' and an administrative and ethical 'problem' for the patriarchal Queensland state. Anti-Asian sentiment was rife at the time: one of the aims of the 1897 Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act was to prevent Chinese supplying charcoal opium to Aboriginal people and limit their association with Indigenous women. Mixed race relations were termed 'pernicious associations', which threatened the Black/White boundaries set in place by the Act. Passage of the many varied amendments to this Act after 1901 perpetuated the notion of 'Coloured' women as 'immoral' (Ganter 1998 p. 1).<sup>46</sup>

As a result of prevailing attitudes, buttressed by legislation and Government control, feelings of shame and insecurity were instilled in most 'Coloured' women, including my mother; and I felt that my white father consciously and unconsciously reinforced this in

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<sup>46</sup> The 1901 Act amendment to the original 1897 Act reflected particular Government concerns about the 'undesirable' half-caste population. The existence of these people was regarded as a serious problem because they were, by White standards, entitled to take a different place on the social scale from full-blood Aboriginal people. There was much resentment against the half-caste population (Ganter 1998 p. 4; Malezer 1979 p. 28).

their marriage.<sup>47</sup> This imbalance in the marriage became more pronounced, or so it seemed to me, when my mother decided to relocate with him to Brisbane after my birth, away from her Black relations, supposedly for our benefit. It was not so much that my mother aspired to be White, nor that she focussed necessarily on gaining acceptance. Rather, she sought acknowledgement that she was as good as White people (if not better) through her consistent and quiet confirmation to her children that we belonged here and were 'Indigenous Australians'. She worked through her feelings of isolation and displacement from her own people through her absolute devotion to her husband and the strong Torres Strait Islander values displayed in how she nurtured and raised her children. The large cross with the sacred heart in this digital image symbolises all of this and the concepts are further reinforced by the images of my own feet and hands overlaid on the cross.

Another digital print, depicting my uncle's *Tombstone Opening*, is a vibrantly coloured image of the decorated tombstone, contrasted against a black and white cemetery background. I was privileged in being chosen to decorate the tombstone area, accompanied by my Erub relation and elder, Thaiday Ruben. This image is a celebration of *ailan kastom*, as this cultural practice continues to be passed down through the generations. For me, the image sums up the whole series of prints which I produced for *Bipotaim/Pastaim*. The mastery and use of different mediums and multi-layering print-making techniques – combining etching, plexiglass background images, photography and digital new media – express not only the concepts behind *Bipotaim/Pastaim* but also exemplify Torres Strait Islanders' 'creative adaptation'. Piled rocks depict traditional fish

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<sup>47</sup> Within the 'educational' model of assimilation, men and women's roles as parents were clearly defined and certain expectations were required to be fulfilled to be accepted and seen as being a 'good' mother and wife (Bartlett 1999 p. 24).



**Fig. 27** Peacock, Janice 2003  
*Tombstone Opening*  
 digital image on watercolour paper  
 76 x 56cm

traps,<sup>48</sup> evidence of Torres Strait Islanders' sovereignty, which also underline the significance of Malo's Law (Sharp 1996 p. 7). Torres Strait Islanders 'claim to sovereignty over their land was confirmed by the Murray Island (Mabo) land claim case won in the Australian High Court in 1992. This case, which took ten years to go through the court, was the first to formally recognise native title under Australian common law.

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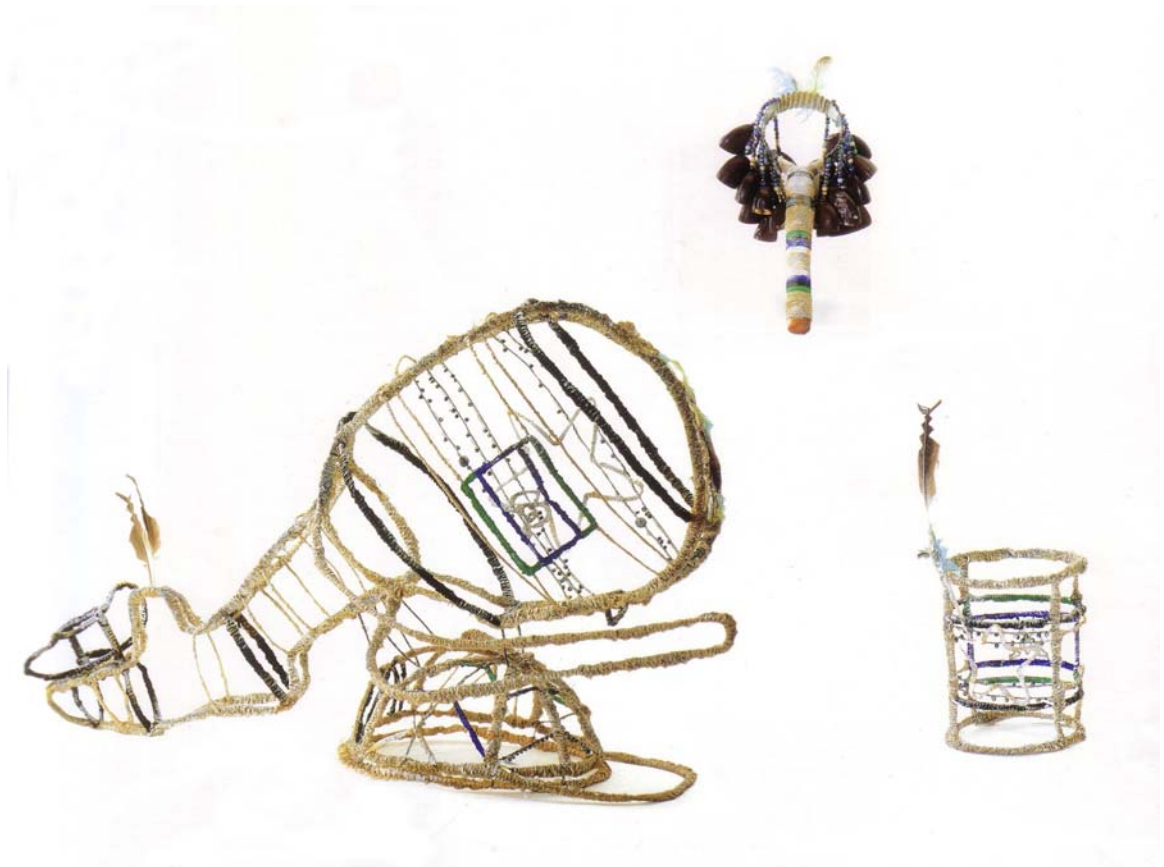
<sup>48</sup> Fish traps are part of a layered system of ownership of residential land, foreshore and reef: ownership is 'anchored' by kinship, family and lineage within a clan division (Sharp 1996 p. 7).

### 3.6 Traditional Exchange versus the Cash Economy: *Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits*

‘Why not hang up a “Gone Fishing” sign and head for the beach?’ (Sandall 2001 p. 4)

*Gone Fishing* is the title of a component of work, which is part of the *Culture Culled Clan 2001* installation. An ‘outboard motor’ head-dress, ‘gone fishing’ armband and ‘fish scaler’ dance rattle are my artistic response to Sandall’s comments:

If your traditional way of life has not alphabet, no writing, no books, and no libraries, and yet you are continually told that you have a culture which is ‘rich’, ‘complex’, and ‘sophisticated’, how can you realistically see your place in the scheme of things? If all such hyperbole were true, who would need books or writing? Why not hang up a ‘Gone Fishing’ sign and head for the beach? (Sandall 2001 p. 4).



**Fig. 28** Peacock, Janice 2002

*Gone fishing* (installation component) series

*outboard motor* headdress: wire, string, paint, fishing lure, fishing line, fishing beads, sinkers, shells, feathers 37 x 61 x 25cm

*fish-scaler* dance rattle: fish-scaler, fishing line, fishing beads, seeds, string, paint, feathers 26 x 18 x 3cm

*gone fishing* armband: wire, string, paint, feather 28 x 12.5 x 14cm  
engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm; A4 size document

This quote is included with the artworks inscribed on a metal plaque and again my take on it is essentially satirical. The outboard motor is typical of those owned by almost every Torres Strait family: on one side is the Torres Strait flag and on the other is a large white star interwoven with fishing line and fishing beads and sinkers representing the stars and planets, respectively. The Torres Strait flag has at its centre a white *dari* (traditional head-dress) with a white star in the middle. This five-pointed star represents the five divisions of islands in the Torres Strait: eastern, western, central, and the Port Kennedy and Northern Peninsula area. The blue, green and black colours of the flag represent the sea, land and people, respectively (Jonas and Langton 1994 p. 13). An ‘anthropological’ document with a photo of my brother wearing the outboard motor head-dress states that he has ‘Gone Fishing’.

This statement is a response and a challenge to Sandall’s views: it makes the point that cultures having no alphabet, books and libraries can indeed belong to ‘rich’, ‘complex’ and ‘sophisticated’ societies and are definitely in the ‘scheme of things’.<sup>49</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures are so rich, complex and sophisticated in the organization and perpetuation of their cultures and belief systems that there may be no need for change. Our alphabet, books and libraries exist metaphorically within a spiritual heritage shaped by star patterns, land, sea and creation/kin stories built on truths, which lie suspended since time began (Cowan 1992 p. 3). This chapter outlines just some of those rich, complex and sophisticated Torres Strait beliefs and practices, which were in place before

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<sup>49</sup> In this context it is interesting to note that the first unassisted Melanesian literary effort was produced by a Torres Strait Island elder and descendant of the *zogo le* (lead keeper of Malo’s Law), during the Haddon Anthropological Expedition in 1898 (Sharp 1993 p. 79).

colonisation, and highlights the source of prejudices contained within Sandall's comments, which perpetuate neo-colonial thought and classifications.

The perpetuation of traditional forms of sociality and meaning, and the improvisation of new forms, can be understood as a means by which people without power attempt to exert some control over their lives, even if it is only to choose to do what they have to do anyway (Beckett 1987 p. 9). Again we see evidence of Islanders' 'creative adaptation' to 'historical advance' mentioned earlier. Through the enforcement of Christian beliefs, Islanders' own 'historical advance' and 'creative adaptation' were not only a means of survival, but also examples of their resistance to what was forced on them by their invaders. Perpetuating traditional forms of sociality and meaning are, to my mind, seen most powerfully in Islander culture in the *kastom* of the 'tombstone opening'. Beliefs associated with this practice have been transformed from an age-old way of dealing with death. Belief in the afterlife was, and is still, held as a major part of a person's departure from 'the known' (Haddon 1935 p. 343).

Auntie Flo Kennedy (pers. comm., 4 September 2000) states that the practice of the 'tombstone opening' evolved as a perpetuation of Malo's Law.<sup>50</sup> This existed before White people enforced their own laws upon Torres Strait Islanders and it was based on kinship/reciprocal relationships. To quote Auntie Flo: 'It's a family business. I mean, well, everything is family. Kinship extends to so many, ah, as long as the blood is there'. Hence, traditional law/lore resonates through Islanders' kinship interrelations with one another and this continues to be reinforced in contemporary daily living.

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<sup>50</sup> I interviewed Auntie Flo Kennedy, a respected Torres Strait Islander elder and relative, in her home on Thursday Island. That interview is discussed at length in my Honours dissertation, *Revelation and Torres Strait Art*. The highlight of my Honours year was the opportunity to travel to Torres Strait. My trip was funded by ABSTUDY (a federal government Indigenous study initiative) after my application to do research associated with my dissertation topic on Christianity and its connection with traditional Torres Strait beliefs was accepted. This was the first time I had travelled to Torres Strait.

This form of tradition extends to trade and trade relations and was continued regardless of colonial intervention. Since most of the material forms of this tradition were removed by anthropologists and Christian missionaries, I would argue that the medium through which Malo's Law has been perpetuated - how it was handed down through generations - depended on 'genetic memory'. That is, it was not written but transmitted orally and hence rich, complex and sophisticated in its origin (Sharp 1993 p. 80).

European forms of exchange, however, have threatened these traditions since the arrival of Europeans in the strait. Islanders conducted their initial economic dealings with Europeans through the barter of food, tortoise shell and artefacts, including weapons, masks, totemic images and increase objects used in magic. These were exchanged for iron implements, cloth, flour and tobacco - although, as Beckett (1998 p.35) points out, this exchange of material goods was not matched by the exchange of meanings. As Islanders began to be hired as fisheries labourers, they were at first paid in trade goods and only gradually and partially integrated into the cash economy.

Even before the arrival of the L.M.S. in 1871, Torres Strait Islanders experienced violent interactions between themselves and boat crews of South Sea Islanders and Europeans. During this time Torres Strait Islanders suffered grievously if they tried to defend themselves from theft, destruction and the abduction of their women by these foreigners (Singe 1989 p. 57). This time marked the beginning of the fishing industries, the most significant of which was the pearling industry.

It is not entirely clear when pearl shell was discovered in the Torres Strait. Various European accounts tell of Islanders wearing pearl shell ornaments as well as pearl shells being an important item in trade exchanges (Ganter 1994 p. 129; Moore 1984 p. 36.). There are several species of pearl shell throughout the world, but it is gold lip and silver lip mother-of-pearl shells from the Torres Strait and southeast Papuan coast where the largest (and most commercially valuable) species are found. However, according to Ganter (1994 p. 121-122), the pearling industry was established largely through South Pacific trading influences and deeply infiltrated by colonial models of human and natural resource raiding techniques.

For hundreds of years before sustained European contact, Torres Strait Islanders, New Guineans and Cape York Aboriginal peoples had established highly complex trading relationships and exchange networks, within which pearl shell and trochus shell were highly regarded. Trochus fishers from Sulawesi in the Celebes Islands (now part of Indonesia) were included in this exchange network until relatively recently. However, the territorial boundaries of nation states have fundamentally changed these peaceable trading relationships. Swift detections by Australian naval patrols since the 1990s have resulted in Indonesian trochus fishers visiting Australian waters being jailed, charged, fined, and repatriated, and their boats confiscated and burned (Ganter 1994 p. 2).

Initial acts of intervention in the Torres Strait by South Sea Islanders were a westward extension of the Pacific beche-de-mer fishery and continued traditional Melanesian trade relations further into Melanesian Torres Strait. South Sea Islanders were brought into the strait by European pearlery and the prevailing method of taking of pearl shell can be characterised 'resource raiding'. In 1868 Captain William Banner established a beche-de-

mer station on Tudu (Warrior Island), which was to become the first pearl shell station in around 1870 after the discovery of commercial quantities of shell (Donovan 2002 p. 87).

The Torres Strait pearl shell industry flourished, supplying ready markets in London and New York through Sydney-based firms and attracting labour from every quarter of the Pacific (Singe 1989 pp. 31-33).<sup>51</sup> The industry, being based on a mass production paradigm, rapidly attracted outside European economic/capitalist interests, which from that time began to dominate and shape the Indigenous history of the region along social Darwinian principles (Ganter 1991 p. 74).

At this point, we can again refer to Sandall's statement regarding 'creative destruction' as the law of 'historical advance'. An example of this can be found in the pearling industry, where, ignoring the Islanders' intimate knowledge of local conditions in the area, local Indigenous labour was valued only as a cheap resource, (Sharp 1976 p. 12). 'Creative destruction' enabled the pearling industry to advance by its application of the tactics of 'cultural and historical genocide', forcing local Indigenous people to conform to the policy of assimilation. This was also perpetuated by local White traders who preferred to employ imported indentured workers with no custodianship over the resources being exploited (Ganter 1991 p. 18).

During the early period of the industry, boat owners were almost always Europeans or White Australians and seldom went to sea themselves. These men were entrepreneurs, who organised the collection of pearl-shell, trochus shell and bêche-de-mer, individually,

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<sup>51</sup> Mother-of-pearl was exported unprocessed, mostly for the button industry in Europe and America (Beckett 1987 p. 34).

or in partnerships, or as company managers (Ganter 1994 p. 121).<sup>52</sup> The first group of boat skippers employed by them came from the Loyalty Islands, Samoa, Niue and Rotuma. Later, experienced workers from Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Japan were imported. However, the Japanese, who outworked and undercut everyone else, became subject to special legislation restricting their employment, because it was feared they would take over the industry (Beckett 1987 p. 36). During this time Europeans often unfavourably compared Torres Strait Islanders employed in the industry with other 'races' and labelled them as lazy. This resulted in differences in payment, as the system of payment was rated according to productivity (Beckett 1987 p. 106).

Aboriginal men and boys employed in the industry worked mainly in the beche-de-mer fishery. Of the 500 men and boys employed on Murray, Darnley and Yorke Islands in 1884, half of them were mainland Aborigines, most of them kidnapped. Conditions were so atrocious that two thirds of the young boys who had spent a season on the luggers died within six months after they returned home. The *Sydney Daily Herald* reported Aborigines as being herded up like cattle by police and sent in chains to work in the industry (Ganter 1994 p. 333-334). Because of the paternalistic legislative and petty regulations placed upon them, Aboriginal workers had less power to improve their conditions than did Torres Strait Islanders, for whom the positions of tenders and divers represented prestige (Ganter 1994 pp. 339-340). From the beginning of colonial rule, a 'racial hierarchy', based on Social Darwinian principles, was widely agreed upon, with Aboriginal people deemed 'inferior' to Torres Strait Islanders. Because of their supposed 'superiority', Islanders were not originally subject to the Aboriginal Protection Acts:

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<sup>52</sup> The Australian pearl shell industry was not developed through the harvesting of pearls but gained its profits predominantly from the mother of pearl found inside the shell. Pearls are also sometimes found in trochus shells.

instead, clan leaders were appointed 'Mamooses' with powers to administer the islands under the ultimate control of the Queensland government. However, after John Douglas's death in 1904 officials sought to include Torres Strait Islanders under the same controlling conditions as Aboriginal people for reasons of bureaucratic expediency and economic exploitation (Beckett 1987 p.106). Each ethnic group employed in the pearling industry was subject to particular restrictive and protective policies and legislation, which fostered ethnic group divisions. Social Darwinism was thus used to justify and entrench White political, economic and cultural dominance.

However, at the turn of the century, a push for a 'White' Australia ended in legislation excluding all cheap Coloured labour (Beckett 1987 p 36). European colonisers had by this time consolidated racial divisions between Blacks and Whites and caused Islanders to be economically, politically and culturally dependent on them for the benefits of 'civilisation' (Beckett 1987 pp. 108-109). This imported transactional mode contrasts sharply with pre-colonial relations when Islanders were similarly dependent on their Papuan neighbours, mainly for hulls for canoes. The important difference was that these previous relations were based on the principle of balanced reciprocity, and framed within hereditary 'friend' networks of gift trade exchange. What we see here is an example of 'the radical separation between gift-based and market-based exchange regimes' discussed by Thomas (1994 pp. 38 - 82) among others.

The pre-colonial system highlights Torres Strait Islanders' two-way genetic and cultural links to the Indigenous peoples of mainland Australia and New Guinea. The eastern island traditional language, Meriam Mir, is a member of the eastern Papua New Guinean

language family, whereas the language spoken in the central and western islands, while it includes Melanesian elements, is in its basis structure an Aboriginal mainland language (Beckett 1987 p. 25).<sup>53</sup> The linguist, Anna Shnukal, was told that the Murray Islanders migrated from the Fly River area of New Guinea and gradually spread to the neighbouring islands. She was told of differences between the dialects of Mer and Erub, and states that Erub Islanders had a reputation as being outward-looking people and the innovators of the Torres Strait, in contrast with the more conservative Mer Islanders.<sup>54</sup> Erub Island people were the middlemen in the canoe trade between Eastern Islanders and New Guinea and in contacts with Central Islanders (Shnukal 1983 p. 180).

Beckett states that some trade did occur between mainland Cape York Aborigines but that in material culture Papua New Guinea was much more important than Australia in the provision of essential materials, in particular for timber used for dugouts with which Torres Strait Islanders made their canoes. These ocean-going canoes were up to twenty metres in length and enabled Torres Strait Islanders to gain a much wider range of resources than either Papuans or Aborigines. Lawrence (1994 p. 329) also notes that Western Islanders had regular trade relations with Cape York Aboriginal people before colonisation but that this was profoundly affected by European settlement on Cape York after 1864 and on Thursday Island after 1877. The former exchanges were replaced by European trade store goods and a cash economy. Enforced re-settlement and missionisation of Cape York Aboriginal people also disrupted previous exchange activity. Lawrence (1994 p. 331) extensively documents the diversity of these exchanges, stressing

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<sup>53</sup> On the top western island of Saibai the language is called Kalaw Kawaw Ya; in mid-western Mabuyag (formerly Mabuiag) it is called Kala Lagaw Ya (Beckett 1987 p. 25).

<sup>54</sup> Shnukal attributes this to the fact that Erub Islanders had a longer period of contact with foreigners and that Europeans and Pacific Islanders had lived with them peaceably for some twenty years before the missionaries arrived (1983 p. 180).

the importance of *Conus* shells as an item of exchange. The shells were exchanged for canoes and canoe hulls and were regarded as the most significant exchange items across the whole of the Torres Strait and Fly estuary region; they were also used in the making of utensils and ornamental items.

Pre-colonial customary exchanges enabled peoples of both mainlands and the Torres Strait islands to balance unequal resources of both material and non-material items. However, these exchanges and their resources operated within regional, cultural and ‘production’ divisions, which recognised and respected each group’s singular entity, regardless of geographical region or ethnic group (Lawrence 1994 p. 331). According to Lawrence (1994 p. 241), misconceptions, based on Haddon (1890, 1901-1935), McCarthy (1939) and Moore (1939), that customary exchanges were fixed and formalised, arose from reliance on historical records. He found through collecting oral histories from the people involved, Torres Strait Islanders and coastal Papuans, that customary exchanges were diverse, flexible and open, and relied on the social, political and cultural factors operating within economic system. Sharp (1976), in her paper ‘Millenarian Movements: their meaning in Melanesia’, confirms Lawrence’s findings. She examines references to Melanesian societies from the late 1950s and early 1960s as being ‘non-adaptive, attenuated and stationary’ and claims that these ethnocentric ‘primitivism’ beliefs justified ‘paternalistic gradualism’.

It is the great cultural gap between traditional exchange, which took place within the framework of a dynamic Melanesian customary exchange system, and monetary transactions, which occur within the framework of a capitalist economy, that I address symbolically in three *ailan* style artworks/sculptures made from shopping trolleys. Created

as the practical component of my Doctor of Visual Arts degree, the trolleys are also a contribution to the current debate about the practice of displaying and exhibiting (as well as purchasing and selling) Indigenous art/craft today, and its past and present ramifications. I see this debate as also contributing to the reconciliation processes now taking place between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

I use three shopping trolleys as a metaphor for our modern-day commercial, consumerist lifestyle, where money is exchanged for goods and is part of our ‘normal’ human experience.<sup>55</sup> *Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits* is a satirical installation combining the three trolley sculptures to explore themes of pre-colonial exchange routes; racially-based exploitation within the pearling industry; and South Sea Islander cultural dominance in the



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<sup>55</sup> The installation was acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2005.

**Fig. 29** Peacock, Janice 2004

*Ailan Crates and Traits in the Straits* (installation)

*Crocodile crate* (shopping trolley sculpture) 135 x 78 x 110cm

*South sea ailan holiday crate* (shopping trolley sculpture) 145 x 234 x 110cm

*PearlsHell lugger crate with not so flash bottom* (shopping trolley sculpture)  
360 x 78 x 110cm

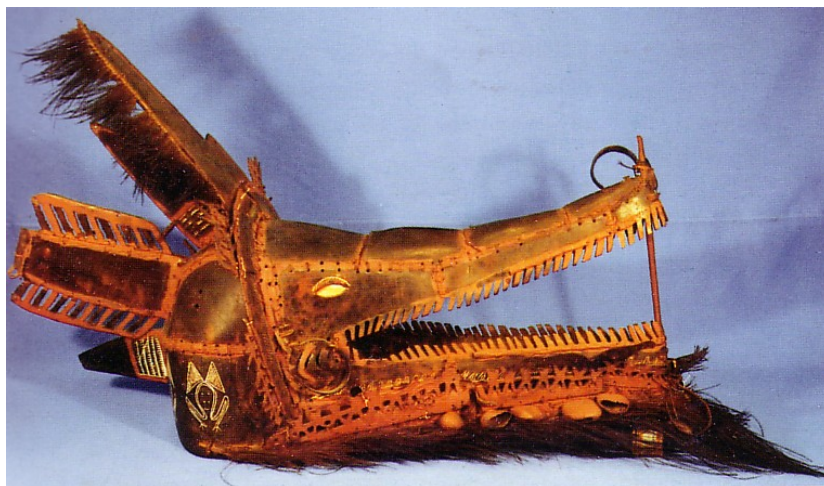
early years of colonisation. *PearlsHell Lugger Crate with not so flash bottom* symbolises the exploitation and destruction of Torres Strait Islanders' pre-colonial lifestyles by colonists during the pearling time. I have created a desolate ocean bottom scene in the base of the trolley and placed shells with pearl buttons inside them. The title comes from a quote by a Badu Islander diver: the term 'flash bottom' is an Islander expression referring to certain places at the bottom of the ocean that are so entrancing that divers may linger too long there, even to the point of death (Beckett 1987 p. 107).



**Fig. 30** Peacock, Janice 2004

*PearlsHell lugger crate with not so flash bottom* (shopping trolley sculpture)  
rope, raffia, string, calico cloth, wood, paint, shellac, ink, plastic bags, shells,  
feathers, plastic aquarium plants, pearlshells, buttons, fishing line, fishing tackle,  
fishing hooks, rocks, sand, seagrass. 360 x 78 x 110cm  
(detail: pearlshell with buttons on lugger deck)

Crocodile Crate references pre-colonial exchange routes linking the peoples of Torres Strait, New Guinea and Cape York. In the base of the trolley I placed a linocut of a map (which invited family members and friends assisted me in cutting) and it shows a version of these exchange routes. The sculptural shape of the trolley reminded me of a crocodile mask from the Haddon Collection (Mosby 1998 p. 89). I was inspired by the colours and materials used in this elaborate traditional turtle shell mask or headpiece, hence my use of cut-up coloured plastic shopping bags, as well as natural products: seagrass, raffia, seed pods from Erub, emu feathers, and a wooden New Guinea spear. Also relevant to my choice of the crocodile is that it is common to all the areas of trade and is a powerful and highly adaptable amphibious reptile. Thus, I have drawn from tradition (the old) to create something new (Singe 1989 pp. 134, 135, 136).



**Fig. 31** Artist Unknown

*Turtle-shell mask (Crocodile head)*

c. 1850-1885, acquired 1885

turtle-shell, cassowary feathers, shells, seeds, clay, ochre

63 x 149 x 38cm  
Museum of Victoria



**Fig. 32** Peacock, Janice 2004  
*Crocodile crate shopping trolley sculpture*  
raffia, seagrass, rope, string, feathers, shells, seeds, paint, wooden  
New Guinea spear, cane skewers, plastic bags, lino, ink  
135 x 78 x 110cm

*South Sea Ailan Holiday Crate* comments on the social and cultural influence South Sea Islanders have had in Torres Strait. A major contributing factor was European attitudes towards South Sea Islanders, whom they considered more ‘civilised’ than Torres Strait Islanders. Discussing the origins of Torres Strait Creole, now the regional *lingua franca* (common language),<sup>56</sup> Shnukal states that many of the South Sea Islanders could read and

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<sup>56</sup> South Sea Islanders introduced the precursor to this language to the Torres Strait through their varieties of Pacific Pidgin English, which they learned through their interaction with Europeans. By 1910 the pidgin had become the first language spoken by the children on Erub, Ugar and at St. Paul’s Mission, Moa (Banks Island), i.e., it had creolised and, by definition, become a full language. These islands were numerically dominated by South Sea Islanders, who used the pidgin to communicate with speakers of other languages. Murray Islanders referred to this language as *Kole Mir* (‘White man’s talk’) and Torres Strait Islanders were

write, having lived amongst Whites for years (some being world travellers) and were all seen as belonging to the same 'tribe' – which reinforced the South Sea Islanders' solidarity in Torres Strait. Torres Strait Islanders, who were encouraged by their families to learn White ways, sought this through South Sea Islanders, who had status amongst White people and as pearlers, missionaries and teachers. South Sea Islanders influenced and changed Torres Strait Islanders' traditional dances, songs, material culture and art production, for example, the weaving practices of woven carry baskets (see Mosby 1998 p. 92; Wilson 1993 p. 54). They were the interpreters of European ways and are still regarded in the Torres Strait as the bringers of 'civilisation' (Shnukal 1983 pp. 178-183).



**Fig. 33** Peacock, Janice 2004  
*South sea ailan holiday crate shopping trolley sculpture*

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encouraged to abandon their traditional language in preference to what was until recently believed to be English (Shnukal 1983 pp. 178-183).

raffia, plastic bags, electrical wire, paint, found objects, cane, shells, string, seagrass  
145 x 234 x 110cm

The aeroplane shape of the trolley gives a 'touristy' inflection of the South Sea island holiday, coupled with Western influences, to the character of *South Sea Ailan Holiday Crate*. This is reinforced by my use of cut-up coloured plastic shopping bags, combined with natural fibres such as raffia and sea grass, in the weaving used to cover the wire, in order to create an idyllic *ailan* scene on the side of the trolley. Weaving and basketry practices have been more important in Torres Strait daily life than any other art form, according to Mosby (1998 p. 92). I highlight how, with the arrival of South Sea influences, Torres Strait Islanders' 'shopping' has changed significantly as a result of the union between these two seafaring peoples (Wilson 1993 p. 54). Their union was initially encouraged by Christianity and colonisation, which used the cultural similarities between them to the colonisers' advantage. These are the main reasons for the South Sea Islanders' dominance of pearling industry labour and their integration throughout Torres Strait.

## **Conclusion: Reciprocity and Community**

We ourselves have to lift the level of our community, take the standards of our community to a higher level, make our own society beautiful so that we will be satisfied; we've got to change our own minds about each other. We have to see each other with new eyes; we have to come together with warmth (Malcolm X, as cited in Thompson 2001).

This exegesis has addressed the idea of appropriateness for a female contemporary urban Torres Strait Islander artist and discussed the themes I see as vital for an understanding of my art practice. It has touched on my obligations in terms of reciprocity and kinship and expressed my need to expose past political injustices and continuing oppression by colonialist attitudes as they are reflected in my artwork. It has also explained the sources of inspiration for my imagery and provided information about why I have chosen particular mediums, techniques and materials. What has emerged as most important to my work as an artist in search of my identity - knowing who I am and where I come from - is my continuing interaction and involvement with my family and with the wider Indigenous community. I began this exegesis by explaining the importance of my family to my work; in this concluding chapter, I outline my involvement with various Indigenous organizations and groups.

Owing to my dissatisfaction with my experience as an artist in the advertising industry and a longing to explore and affirm my identity, I enrolled in an Associate Diploma in Creative Arts at the North Brisbane College of Advanced Education, Brisbane, in 1982. During this time I produced a series of etchings based on Torres Strait Islander traditional stories but I have never exhibited these due to cultural protocol issues. It began to be clear

to me that Torres Strait cultural traditions had been able to adapt and offer resistance to the various pressures placed on them today, just as they have throughout the whole period of colonisation.

In 1990 I was employed by Murriimage Community Video and Film Service<sup>57</sup> in Brisbane, and my participation as a committee member in various local community organizations such as the Indigenous Information Service Association Inc.<sup>58</sup> and Uniikup Productions during the past nine years has also enabled me to contribute to the wider Indigenous community.

After Murriimage moved to Gympie in 1991, I worked as a teacher-aide for The Autistic Children's Association until 1996. Part of my role there was to organise and lead children's art workshops and this began my on-going association with children's art. In 1997 I began a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art degree at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. This course initiated collaborations between students and members of the Campfire Group and Fire-Works Gallery, Brisbane.<sup>59</sup> During the course I began to participate in and contribute to community public

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<sup>57</sup> Murriimage Community Video and Film Service was established in 1985 by my sister, Christine Peacock, and her partner Carl Fisher, a descendant of Burri-Gubba and Gubbi-Gubbi tribes in the north and south east of Queensland. Murriimage was formed to participate in and support the development of Indigenous television and film media (Murriimage p.3). In 1987 Christine and Carl gained an overseas study award and toured Indigenous film and television developments in Brazil, Cuba, Canada and the UK and in Australia. An Indigenous Media Report (1987-88) and film titled *Makin' Tracks* resulted from this tour and is available for viewing (Murriimage p.4). In 1995-1996 Murriimage upgraded to broadcast -quality non-linear video editing equipment and began to produce entirely in-house. Murriimage is focusing on how and where to obtain production financing for Indigenous producers for television broadcast and education outlets as well as furthering development in the area of financing skills for higher budget production through Uniikup Productions Ltd. (Murriimage 1997 p. 12).

<sup>58</sup> The Murriimage Community Video and Film Service was incorporated in 1990 as part of the Indigenous Information Service Association Inc. Murriimage had been part of the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association, Radio 4AAA, prior to this time (Murriimage 1997 – back cover page).

<sup>59</sup> Fire-Works Gallery was established in 1993 to promote the contemporary edges of Aboriginal art. The director is the non-Indigenous artist, Michael Eather, who in 1990 had co-founded the Campfire group, a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists who work on contemporary art projects and commissions (Eather 2003; Neale 2000 p. 274).

art projects and events, which I acknowledge to be an important part of Indigenous lifestyle and a necessary means for supporting and sourcing kinship relationships. Even after my graduation in 1999, I continued to participate in community projects while doing a Bachelor of Visual Arts in Fine Art with Honours, in 2000.

During my Honours degree, I began to be involved more formally in children's community art projects. The first of these, *Meeting of the Waters*, was held at Karalee State Primary School in an outer northwestern suburb of Brisbane. This involved collaboration between two non-Indigenous teachers and students and Campfire group Indigenous artist Laurie Nelson and myself. An area was designated for this culturally diverse project within the school grounds and the project was based on a series of workshops to explore and represent the natural elements of earth, wind/air and water. I held workshops based on the theme of water, during which I invited my relative and elder, Thaiday Ruben, to discuss how water/sea is significant for eastern Torres Strait Islanders. Over a period of weeks, the students incorporated draft artworks from the three elemental workshops into carved concrete sculptures and poles.



**Fig. 34** *Meeting of the waters* public art project – opening night 2001  
Karalee State Primary School, Karalee, Brisbane.  
(Courtesy of the Author)

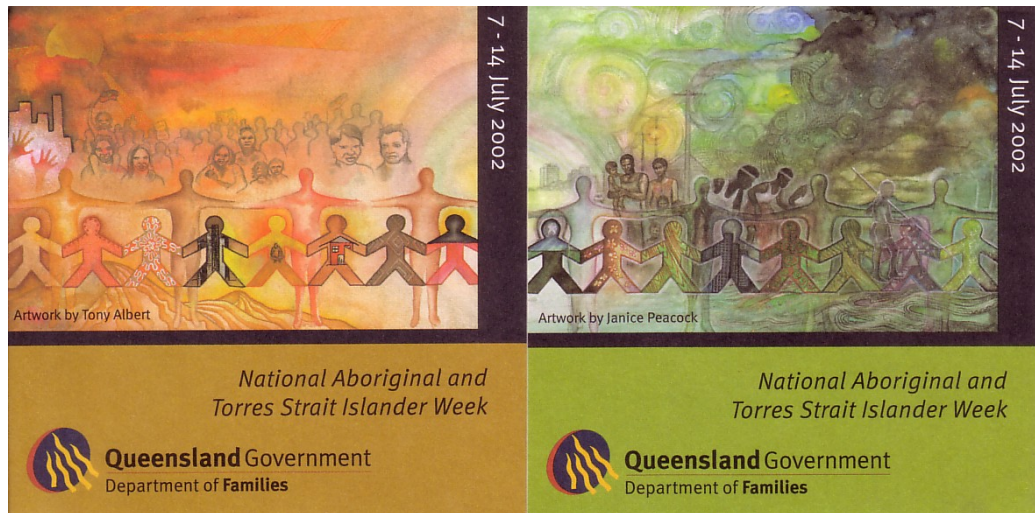
In the same year (2000) I worked for Access Arts in liaison with Indigenous arts worker, Bianca Beetson. We provided art workshops for intellectually handicapped Indigenous people to make clay tiles for a mural project which was displayed at the community centre in Inala, an outer western suburb of Brisbane.

In 2001 I became a committee member, and later secretary, of the *Au Karem Le* Torres Strait Islanders Corporation for Logan and West Morton,<sup>60</sup> which has greatly contributed to my integration and participation in, and contribution to, the local Torres Strait Islander community. I was invited by the Queensland Government Department of Families to design and produce a poster in collaboration with Aboriginal artist, Tony Albert. The

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<sup>60</sup> *Au Karem Le* Torres Strait Islanders Corporation of Logan and West Moreton was regularly funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to organise the Coming of the Light and Mabo Day celebrations. *Au Karem Le* comes from Meriam Mir, the traditional language of the Eastern Islanders. These words mean ‘deep water people’, whose territories include the stretch of water between Erub and Mer, commonly known as ‘the Darnley deeps’.

poster was used to promote the department during the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day Observance Committee (N.A.I.D.O.C.)



**Fig. 35** Albert, Tony and Peacock, Janice 2001  
Queensland Government Department of Families posters each 50 x 50cm

week that year. Later that year I conducted a series of workshops in a one-day Multicultural Festival held at St Margaret's Girls School, Brisbane. This festival sought to promote an understanding of the diversity of world cultures. Once again I invited Thaiday Ruben, who spoke about Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols and accompanied me during these workshops.

In October 2001 I participated in the eleventh national Torres Strait Islander seminar workshops on holistic health, held by the National Secretariat of Torres Strait Islander Organizations Ltd. (N.S.T.S.I.O.L) in Canberra. This week-long seminar addressed issues arising from the 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy (N.A.T.S.I.H.S.) and sought to provide input into the identified need to develop a national mainland Torres Strait Islanders health strategy (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council 2000). This was an exciting time for me, as I met Islanders from

all over mainland Australia, came to know my extended kinfolk and was privileged to participate in a number of Islander cultural events.

In 2002 I was commissioned by a government-subsidised organization, *Hands On Art*, to organise and conduct children's art workshops at their South Bank premises, Brisbane. These were held in conjunction with the *Hands on Art Riverkids Festival*, which is held annually with the *Riverside Festival*. Being coordinator and artistic director of the Indigenous component of this public art project, I followed established protocols, advising the organisers to consult with local traditional owners as an act of respect. I invited participation from three young emerging local Indigenous artists, Tony Albert, Andrea



**Fig. 36** Albert, Tony; Fisher, Andrea; Lund, Alvina and Peacock, Janice 2002  
*Hands On Art Riverkids Festival*  
stenciled artworks on the Goodwill Bridge, South Bank, Brisbane  
(Courtesy of the Author)

Fisher and Alvina Lund, and together we created a series of sculptures and artworks which were displayed on the Goodwill Bridge. Torres Strait Islander elders, Auntie Jianna Richardson and Uncle Thaiday Ruben, and arts workers, Auntie Betha Stewart and her daughter, were also participants. Auntie Jianna Richardson opened the event and the Brisbane Torres Strait Islander dance group, *Kalmel Buai*, performed at the opening.

My involvement with artists in the Campfire group at Fire-Works Gallery became more active during my residency at the gallery in November 2002. The residency also allowed me to contribute as a mentor to the *New Flames* artist residency programme and I valued meeting and interacting with the Indigenous artists who participated. During this time I was accepted as a contributing artist in the 20<sup>th</sup> Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award<sup>61</sup> and the Kate Challis RAKA Award.<sup>62</sup> My *Gone Fishing* installation component series from the *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation were chosen



**Fig. 37** Peacock, Janice 2002  
*Culture Cullt Clan 2001* (installation components)  
*Places that name us* – Kate Challis RAKA Award exhibition 2003  
 The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne

for exhibition in the Telstra Award 2003, and the other three components from the same installation were included in the *Places that name us* – Kate Challis RAKA Award 2003

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<sup>61</sup> The Telstra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award is a highly competitive and prestigious yearly event, with the winning entry being awarded \$40,000. One hundred and twenty Indigenous artists' works are selected for entry and exhibition in the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory (M.A.G.N.T.) and are judged in various categories. A selection of 40 works are toured during the following two years.

<sup>62</sup> The Kate Challis RAKA Award is another prestigious Indigenous arts award held every five years. In 2003 thirteen entrants were accepted for a \$10,000 art prize and their works exhibited in the Ian Potter Museum of Art at Melbourne University, followed by a two-year touring exhibition.

exhibition. Also in 2003, I was awarded an artist residency scholarship at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada.<sup>63</sup> This residency was held from 19 October to 6 December and was based on the theme: *Communion and Other Conversations: A Thematic Residency 1 Indigenous Artists on Christianity and Colonisation*. This provided me with an extraordinary opportunity to meet and interact – artistically, culturally and socially – with the 34 Indigenous other artists chosen from around the world for the same residency program.<sup>64</sup>



**Fig. 38** Indigenous artists (and teachers) 2003  
*Communion and Other Conversations: A Thematic Residency 1*  
*Indigenous Artists on Christianity and Colonisation*, 2003  
 The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta, Canada  
 (Courtesy of The Banff Centre)

In every instance, participating in and contributing to each of these organizations, community projects and residencies has revitalised and strengthened my sense of ‘kinship’. Hence, my search to know who I am and where I come has been an artistic and spiritual journey in which respecting cultural protocols has become a natural and integral part. As Indigenous artists, acknowledging who we are and where we come from underlines the significance of kinship as fundamental to Indigenous ways of being.

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<sup>63</sup> The Banff Centre is dedicated to excellence in the arts, leadership development, and mountain culture. (The Banff Centre Arts Programs 2003).

<sup>64</sup> I produced and presented a PowerPoint presentation with images of my artworks during the residency, which specifically addresses Christianity and colonisation and is available for viewing. I also wrote a 3,300-word report to do with the work produced and day-to-day activities within this residency programme on my return to Australia.

Contrary to Sandall's comments, I would argue that these ways of being are fully 'civilised'. My own journey to know who I am and where I come is intricately interwoven with my artworks and with what is appropriate for me as a female Torres Strait Islander artist of today.

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