INTRODUCTION

IN LONDON in 1912 the Anglican Bishop of North Queensland, G.H. Frodsham, told the Colonial Institute that the system of bringing indentured Pacific Islanders to Queensland had ended in 1906, "when the last kanakas had disappeared ...".¹ This epitomizes the popular belief about the ending of this system of labour migration which had operated for over forty years. After March 1904 Pacific Islanders were no longer recruited for labour in Queensland's tropical agricultural industries and by 1908 most of the Islanders in Australia had been repatriated. Yet not all the Islanders were sent home. A small population remained and its vigorous increase ensured that today there are several thousand descendants of this remnant.

This thesis is a history of the Pacific Islander population in North Queensland between 1900 and 1940. The opportunity for such a study arises out of the state of historical research on related topics. Extensive research has been undertaken into the issues surrounding the recruitment of Pacific Islanders for Queensland's tropical agriculturalists. Work on the recruiting system in the south-west Pacific, popularly known as the labour trade, has demonstrated that every criticism and every defence of it were at once true: there was kidnapping ('blackbirding'), eager volunteering, and every possible permutation between these two extremes.² Research into the Queensland experiences of these migrants has similarly highlighted the difficulties in isolating a 'typical' situation. Early studies glossed over abuses, painting a rosy picture of the treatment and behaviour of

¹. NQR 15 Jul. 1912, p.36 (page numbers are only given for very large newspapers). The use of 'kanaka' (an Hawaiian word for man) is avoided in this thesis, since it is meaningless and was used by Europeans in a derogatory sense.

². See P. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation A History of Solomon Islands Labour Migration 1870-1914 (Carlton, Vic., 1973); D. Scarr, Fragments of Empire A History of the Western Pacific High Commission 1877-1914 (Canberra, 1967); D. Scarr, 'Recruits and Recruiters: a portrait of the labour trade', in J.W. Davidson and D. Scarr (eds), Pacific Islands Portraits (Canberra, 1973); D. Shineberg, They Came for Sandalwood: a study of the sandalwood trade in the South-West Pacific 1830-1865 (Melbourne, 1967).
Islanders in the colony. Later studies have been more critical of conditions of life and labour on the plantations and more perceptive regarding the political, social and economic ramifications of the 'kanaka' question. ¹

Recent and more specialized research has greatly extended our knowledge. Supplementing written with oral sources, Peter Corris has sensitively sketched the experiences of Solomon Island recruits as temporary migrants in Queensland, Fiji, New Caledonia and Samoa. ² Kay Saunders on the basis of extensive archival research has studied the racial attitudes of Europeans and their treatment of the indentured Islanders, comparing this with that meted out to Negro slaves in North America. ³ The importance of Pacific Islanders as a labour force and other economic issues arising from the development of the sugar industry


have been investigated by Ralph Shlomowitz and Adrian Graves. Clive Moore is engaged on a case-study of Malaitan migrants in Mackay, tracing them from their recruitment in the islands to their experiences in this prominent Queensland sugar district up to the 1920s. My own earlier work considered the racial attitudes of the colonists and the political history of the 'kanaka' question to 1892. In collaboration with Moore, I have described the lifestyle of the present day Islander communities in Australia. Since 1974 we have interviewed many of the descendants of the migrants who are living in coastal North Queensland, and our collection of this oral evidence has provided invaluable information on their historical experiences in this century.

This seeking out of the descendants of Pacific Island migrants in order to obtain their recollections owes its stimulus to the promotion of


regional history at the James Cook University of North Queensland. The History Department there has built on Geoffrey Bolton's pioneering history of the settlement of North Queensland up to 1920 by actively encouraging its honours and post-graduate students, as well as its staff, to undertake local research. The resultant doctoral and honours theses, articles and books have produced a regional historiography spanning such diverse subjects as the history of minority groups, race relations, women's history, the labour movement and the pastoral, mining and sugar industries. 11

In both this regional history and the history of Pacific Islanders in Queensland, the emphasis has been on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Research on Pacific Islanders in the State, with the exception of my work with Moore, does not go beyond 1908. 12 Twentieth century studies of North Queensland have been mainly limited to political history, the trade union movement, and two of the important minority groups, the Chinese and the Italians. 13 A history of the Pacific Islander population in North Queensland between 1908 and 1940 therefore contributes both to the history of this group and to that of the region.

This thesis tries not merely to study the actions and experiences of Pacific Islanders but also to consider their treatment as part of the wider non-European and non-Aboriginal population in 'white' Australia. In


locally commissioned histories Pacific Islanders and other non-European groups such as the Chinese and Indians have received scant attention. Most twentieth century 'white' North Queenslanders chose to ignore their presence. Yet from the 1900s to the late 1930s there was a vigorous campaign, principally by the labour movement, to exclude non-Europeans from all favoured occupations and civic privileges.

It will be seen that, despite the discrimination practised against them, Pacific Islanders in North Queensland managed to survive not only physically but economically, socially and culturally. By 1940 their adjustments had created a community which was not 'pure' Pacific Islander nor brown-skinned 'white' Australian. In this respect, the experiences of Pacific Islanders are most nearly comparable with those rural and semi-rural Aborigines who escaped institutionalization on the government and mission reserves: they also overcame threats to their physical survival, and developed into communities which could not be regarded as 'traditionally' Aboriginal but which displayed a distinctive lifestyle and identity setting them apart from the wider population.  

MY STUDY is focussed on North Queensland out of practical considerations: the collection of oral and local sources necessitated the limitation of the geographical area, and roughly half of the State's Islander population was in this region, principally in the coastal districts. North Queensland is defined as extending from the tip of Cape York down to Sarina and across to the Northern Territory border (see Map 1.2). It is also restricted to the first forty years of this century. 1900 provides a convenient starting-point, as the first year of the new century and federation and the beginning of the decade in which the 'White Australia' policy was enacted and the system of Pacific Island immigration was halted and reversed. However, to

provide the necessary background, much of the material contained in Chapter 1 refers to the nineteenth century. 1940 represents a watershed in the history of Pacific Islanders in North Queensland: in the 1940s World War II made its impact on the region and amongst the islanders a generation change occurred.

The sources for this thesis are multiple, diverse and in some cases unconventional. The three broad categories described below are outlined in greater detail in Appendix A. The first category contains conventional historical sources, such as manuscripts, newspapers, contemporary and recently published works, government publications and archives. The second is made up of records held locally: in coastal North Queensland's major towns there is an abundance of material contained in the records of the cemeteries, hospitals, churches, sugar mills and other organizations. The third category consists of oral sources. In Appendix A, the collection of these is discussed and the strengths and weaknesses of oral sources for historical evidence, which has been examined in detail elsewhere, is briefly considered.15

Both the second and third categories are still novel sources for historians and their use imparts a distinctive quality. However, all three kinds of sources are combined in the family history approach which underlines my study. The techniques of historical demography, which are discussed in Appendix B, are very useful for tracing the unexpected survival of the Islander population. Historical demography, in essence, involves the reconstruction from nominal sources (that is, those in which a person is named) of individual life-histories which span the vital events of a person's life such as birth, marriage and death. This has enabled me to track down the overwhelming majority of the individuals who made up the Islander population in North Queensland, and to construct quantitative data which is more reliable than that available from contemporary sources. The family history approach is also dependent on qualitative as well as quantitative material. In this regard, two recent and very different studies employing a family history

approach have been important models and sources of inspiration: these are Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* and Paul Thompson's *The Edwardians*. 16

OF SEVERAL thousand migrants who came to Queensland as indentured labourers, only about two to two and a half thousand, mainly single men, stayed on after 1908. The central theme in this study is the process by which this population survived, both in the physical and non-physical respects. In the sense that Pacific Islanders attempted as far as possible to create their own world within Australian society, there are parallels with studies of other small-scale societies. By 1940 the population was assured of demographic survival and had developed a distinctive identity and lifestyle.

The organization of the thesis is thematic but change over time is clearly indicated. Chapter 1 is an outline of the colonial experience of Pacific Island migrants, providing the necessary background to the twentieth century. Chapter 2 discusses the indications in the late 1890s and early 1900s that some of these men and women had begun to put down roots and to regard Queensland as their permanent home. Chapter 3 examines the processes by which the majority of Islanders were deported and a small number stayed on (legally or illegally) in Australia. Succeeding chapters are concerned with the period 1908 to 1940. In Chapter 4 the principal features and demographic patterns of the Islander population in North Queensland are discussed. Chapters 5 and 6 analyse the discriminatory attitudes and actions of Europeans and the labour movement in particular towards non-Europeans in general and non-European sugar workers specifically. The focus returns to the Islander population in the final three chapters. Here their survival is examined from an economic standpoint in Chapter 7 and the social and cultural perspectives in Chapters 8 and 9. In the Epilogue the chief features of the history of the population to 1940 are summarized and developments since then are briefly sketched.

CHAPTER 1
THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

THE FIRST Pacific Islanders brought to Queensland came in 1863. Apart from a brief interval in 1891, their recruitment continued for over forty years until 1904. In this chapter the colonial experience of the migrants is considered, as a necessary prelude to the examination of their twentieth century experiences.

A fully rounded history of Pacific Island immigration is not the objective. The focus is on the lives led by these men and women once in the colony. First, the numbers, origins and motives of the recruits and their 'mental baggage' are examined. Secondly, their numbers and distribution in the colony, the legal constraints imposed on them, the attitudes of Europeans and their treatment of the Islanders are briefly considered. Thirdly, there is a discussion of the adjustments to the colonial lifestyle made by the Islanders. Fourthly, the extent to which they preserved traditional beliefs and customs is dealt with. Finally, the attitudes of the Islanders themselves towards their host society and other non-European groups, and the changes in their self-perception, are discussed.

ACCORDING to a recent estimate, nearly 62,500 Islanders were brought to Queensland between 1863 and 1904. The actual number of persons was less than this, since many recruited more than once. In Table 1.1 the

1. The sources for this chapter are primarily secondary, but primary sources are used wherever references in secondary sources are lacking or scarce.

proportions supplied by different island groups over the years are given (see also Map 1.1). Nearly two-thirds of the recruits came from the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu) and just over one-quarter from the Solomon Islands, although between 1888 and 1904 the Solomons provided over half the recruits. The remainder of the total came largely from the Loyalty Islands (especially in the earliest years) and New Guinea (where recruiting was banned after 1884). Very small numbers were recruited from islands such as Lord Howe, Samoa, Tikopia and the Gilbert (now Kiribati) and Ellice (now Tuvalu) Islands. 

TABLE 1.1: Origins of Pacific Island Recruits to Queensland, 1863-1904

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IS. GROUP</th>
<th>1863-72 %</th>
<th>1873-87 %</th>
<th>1888-1904 %</th>
<th>TOTAL NO. OF RECRUITS</th>
<th>PROP. OF TOTAL NO. %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loyalties</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,123</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hebrides</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>39,931</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Cruz</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>17,756</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Guinea</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,808</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>62,475</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Including the islands of Lord Howe, Tikopia, Rotuma, Samoa, Nuie, Gilbert and Ellice and Ocean Island.

Source: Adapted from Price with Baker, 'Origins of Pacific Island Labourers in Queensland', pp.114-16, Table 2.

3. For a discussion of the shifting focus of the labour trade, see Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, pp.1-2, 24-32; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.332, 337.
MAP 1.1: Australia and the Pacific

MAP 1.2: North Queensland and the Islander population by census districts in 1881 and 1901
In Table 1.2 the origin of recruits by island and district in the New Hebrides and the Solomon Islands is shown (see also Maps 1.3 and 1.4). In the New Hebrides, Epi, Tanna, Aoba and Ambrym were the principal sources; Malekula, Espiritu Santo, Gaua, Pentecost and Efate were also important recruiting grounds. In the Solomons, recruits were drawn predominantly from Malaita, Guadalcanal and Nggela. Over half, the largest number from one island in both island groups, came from Malaita. While New Hebrideans formed the overwhelming majority of Islanders in Queensland, the number of Solomon Islanders (and especially Malaitans) increased dramatically from the late 1880s. 'Polynesian' was the inaccurate term applied to these migrants, while 'kanaka' (the Hawaiian word for 'man') was a popular and derogatory epithet. 4

Pacific Islanders were brought primarily to work on Queensland plantations. Since the Islanders were not regarded as permanent settlers, male recruits were preferred to women. After 1884 it was stipulated that women could only recruit if accompanied by their husbands; this severely limited the number of potential female recruits, since Melanesian men tended to marry at a comparatively late age. 5 The nature of Melanesian society also ensured that few women came to Queensland. Their work in the gardens and their value to their relatives in terms of the bride-price paid on marriage meant that young women fulfilled an important economic role, and therefore their recruitment was strongly opposed by their kinfolk. Nevertheless, there were some unmarried women in Queensland and many men and women seized the opportunity to elope by recruiting for the colony. 6

Until 1907, women were a tiny proportion of the total Islander population in Queensland: 6.2 per cent in 1881, 8.7 per cent in 1891 and

4. 'Melanesia' is taken to include the islands of the south-west Pacific to and including Fiji. There were tiny numbers from some Polynesian islands and therefore I refer to the migrants as Pacific Islanders except in instances where I am aware that an individual or individuals were indeed from Melanesia.

5. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.45.

6. See ibid., pp.45-46; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.338-39; J.A. Bennett, Cross-cultural influences on village relocation on the Weather Coast of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands c.1870-1953 (M.A. thesis, University of Hawaii, 1974), p.52 n14. See also Chapter 2, p.83. (Page numbers for cross-references are given where the reference would otherwise be too difficult to locate.)
MAP 1.3: The New Hebrides (Vanuatu)

MAP 1.4: The Solomon Islands
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEW HEBRIDES (by district)</th>
<th>NO. OF RECRUITS</th>
<th>% OF ALL RECRUITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tanna</td>
<td>4,244</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erromanga</td>
<td>1,174</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aneityum, Futuna and Aniwa</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epi</td>
<td>5,084</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>1,762</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emau and Emae</td>
<td>980</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongoa and Lamen</td>
<td>966</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nosow, Numa, Pele, Mataso, Tongariki and Other</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aoba</td>
<td>3,658</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambrym</td>
<td>3,464</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malekula</td>
<td>2,934</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Espiritu Santo</td>
<td>2,806</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecost</td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malo</td>
<td>1,375</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pama, Lopevi and Maewo</td>
<td>1,425</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaua</td>
<td>2,537</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valua and Vanua Lava</td>
<td>1,855</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hata Lava, Hato, Ureparapara and Merig</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toga, Lo, Tegua, Netoma and Hiu</td>
<td>1,108</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>39,931</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOLOMONS (by district)</th>
<th>NO. OF RECRUITS</th>
<th>% OF ALL RECRUITS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malaita</td>
<td>9,186</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guadalcanal</td>
<td>4,188</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nggela</td>
<td>2,069</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Cristobal, Savo, Ulawa, Ugi and Other</td>
<td>1,590</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Isabel, Choiseul and Other</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bougainville, Buka, Shortlands and Other</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>17,756</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRAND TOTAL</td>
<td>57,687</td>
<td>92.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3 per cent in 1901. There are no statistics on the islands of origin of these women, but it can be reasonably assumed that they came mainly from the New Hebrides. The regulations governing the labour trade were more strictly enforced in the years of heavy recruiting in the Solomon Islands. Very few women ever recruited from Malaita, Nggela and Guadalcanal.

The majority of recruits were unmarried males in their late teens or early twenties. Since the social and economic obligations of young men were relatively light until they married, they could often be spared from their villages. Relatives received trade goods from the recruiters and were less inclined to oppose the recruiting of single men. The inactivity and frustrations of this period in their lives predisposed young men to welcome this opportunity for travel and new experiences.

The example of those who had recruited and returned was a further stimulus; by the 1890s the experience of wage labour had become almost a ceremonial initiation into manhood. Recruiting also provided a means of escape for those whose lives were endangered by the breaking of a taboo or the endemic feuding between communities. Yet the primary reason for recruiting, initially and on subsequent occasions, was the desire for cash and material wealth, a desire created by European contact and which could not be fulfilled at home.

These economic and social pressures encouraged recruiting. There were always some who were 'blackbirded' but the majority went willingly. An understanding of the social organization of the New Hebridean and Solomon Islands societies from which over ninety per cent of recruits were drawn, is a necessary prerequisite to any consideration of the

7. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.46.

8. The recruitment of women was strongly opposed on these islands. Ibid., pp.45-46; Q 29 Dec.1906, p.8.

9. Regulations regarding age such as that stipulating that recruits must not be younger than sixteen were extensively evaded. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, pp.46-47; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.337-337A.


11. For a more detailed discussion of the motives behind recruiting, see ibid., pp.52-59; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.77.
migrants' colonial experience. Generalizations are difficult because of the great diversity and cultural dynamism of these islands. Physical, linguistic and cultural barriers served to perpetuate a small-scale, loosely structured political system in which single villages or small groupings of neighbouring hamlets were autonomous and virtually self-sufficient. The primary social unit was the hamlet or village.

Hereditary chieftainship may have existed on some islands such as North Malekula in the New Hebrides and parts of Malaita, New Georgia and Bougainville in the Solomons. Leadership for the most part, however, was meritocratic and often gerontocratic. Power and prestige were achieved rather than ascribed. A governing principle in this loose social organization was reciprocity. To maintain respect and power, a leader built up a complex system of indebtedness through the redistribution of his wealth. The ritual exchange of gifts involved an obligation to


13. In some of the New Hebrides prestige and renown was achieved by gradual ascendancy through the ranks of the public and secret graded societies; in the Solomons through pig money and the distribution of shell money and other forms of wealth.
reciprocate at some future date, and thus enabled ambitious 'big men' and groups to establish their superiority over rivals. Kinship formed the framework of the social order. Each individual had social obligations and duties: a 'good' man worked hard, helped clan members, observed the customs and taboos, respected and obeyed the elders, contributed to sacrifices and feasts and was suspicious of strangers.

Traditionally these were subsistence economies, based on gardening, fishing and hunting. There was no rigid division of labour, but women performed the more tedious work such as weeding the gardens, tending the pigs and preparing the daily meals, and men the more exciting tasks of fishing, hunting and fighting as well as the heavy work of clearing the garden, house building and canoe building. Descent and inheritance was matrilineal or patrilineal. Polygamy, while widely accepted, was in practice limited by the restrictions of finding the bride-price to the older, high-ranking men. Marriages were arranged and the choice of a spouse was subject to strict kinship rules.

Male-female antagonism was present everywhere in these islands but on some, such as Tanna, Espiritu Santo, Erromanga and North Malekula in the New Hebrides and Malaita in the Solomons it took on an obsessional quality. In these islands the bodily functions of women (as expressed in menstruation, childbirth, urine and faeces) were considered to be highly polluting to men. Accordingly, there were rigid taboos and segregation of the sexes. Amongst the Baegu of Malaita, for example, it was taboo for women to menstruate, give birth or relieve themselves other than in rigidly defined separate areas for these purposes. However, on other islands such as Pentecost, Aoba and those in the Banks group, the social, physical and ritual roles of men and women were not kept so strictly separate.14

Diversity and divisiveness were the principal features of social organization in the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands. Members of a district on the larger islands, such as the Nduindui of Aoba and the Fataleka of Malaita, were not politically united and even communities in close proximity were likely to be in a state of constant warfare with one another. The universal fear of sorcery isolated communities by fostering suspicion of strangers. Greater affinity in terms of linguistic,

14. For instance, there were avenues by which women could acquire rank and status, as through their own graded societies.
cultural and trade links often existed between communities on neighbouring islands rather than on the same island. Identification by island of origin and by island group was weak and broader identification as one 'race' was unknown. A 'countryman' (meaning a man from the same island) could conceivably be regarded traditionally as a greater enemy than a man from another island and even a different island group.

The world-view of Pacific Islanders was narrow. Their social and mental universe was confined to experience of their own and neighbouring territories, beyond which there was an unknown world in which the risk of physical and mental attack was high. Melanesian and European concepts of time and space were also fundamentally different. Their knowledge of space in the sense of distance between two places was vague by European standards and the European conception of time (since industrialization) as linear advancement without cyclical repetition was alien. Seasonal activities and the stages in an individual's life (such as puberty and marriage) were the important time-sequences, although a reckoning of the passage of time by lunar months ('moons') was kept.15 In the later years of the labour trade, comprehension of the length of an indenture and measurement of its passage became quite sophisticated by European standards, amongst both the labourers in Queensland and also their kinfolk at home.16

THE NUMBERS of Pacific Islanders in Queensland rose and fell over the years. From 1,543 in 1868, numbers increased rapidly to a peak of 11,443 in 1883, then declined sharply and only gradually increased again until there were 9,428, in 1891.17 In Map 1.2, the shifting distribution of


17. Parnaby, Britain and the Labor Trade, p.204, Table 2.
Pacific Islanders in North Queensland is shown. The overwhelming concentration was always in the coastal sugar districts, but the pattern underwent internal changes: in the early 1880s the sugar industry began to spread north and by the 1890s was concentrated in North Queensland. Within this region, the largest Islander populations were in the Mackay district, followed by the Herbert River (around Ingham), Cairns, Johnstone River (around Innisfail) and Port Douglas districts. In the other northern sugar districts, the Burdekin (around Ayr) and Proserpine, sugar-growing only took off in the 1890s. At Bowen, where there was a small but stable Islander population, there was little sugar-growing but this was an important port and a long-established settlement.

As a proportion of the total population, the Islanders were never significant: of the total (and also of the male population) in the colony, they were 2.99 per cent (and 4.78 per cent) in 1881 and 1.85 per cent (and 3.09 per cent) in 1901, respectively. In the sugar districts, however, they formed a much higher proportion of the population, especially in sparsely populated North Queensland. In Mackay in 1881, for example, Pacific Islanders constituted thirty-six per cent of the total population.\(^\text{18}\)

Until 1901 the legislative responsibility for Islanders in the colony was borne by the Queensland Government. They were subject, like other indentured labourers, to the harsh provisions of the Masters' and Servants' Act of 1861 which, for example, prohibited servants from collectively or individually attempting to better their conditions.\(^\text{19}\) From 1868 they were also the focus of special legislative measures. More strictly applied and effective controls over the recruitment of the Islanders and their treatment in the colony resulted from the Pacific Island Labourers Act of 1880 and its subsequent amendments (see Appendix C).

\(^{18}\) Ibid., pp.129, 130, 201; OPP II, 1902, p.956.

\(^{19}\) 25 Vic., No. 11. See ss. 2-6, 9, 13; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.395-96, 398, Table 10; Parnaby, Britain and the Labor Trade, p.141. This Act was only repealed in 1918 by the Labor Government of T.J. Ryan.
From the 1870s the 'kanaka' question was a very divisive issue in Queensland politics and a thorny problem for Liberal and Conservative/Nationalist administrations alike. The result was that a tight net of special legislation was gradually built up around the Islanders. There was a dual intention: to prevent abuses by extending the supervision of the recruiting trade, and to restrict the occupations in which Islanders could be employed.

Initially the Islanders were employed in roughly equal numbers on plantations (first cotton and then sugar) and pastoral stations. After 1876 their employment was restricted to tropical and semi-tropical agriculture (see Appendix C). The attitude adopted by succeeding administrations, and especially S.W. Griffith's Liberal Government, was that the Islanders were a 'necessary evil': while their services were essential for the development of tropical agriculture, their presence was to be closely restricted. Griffith sought, in the Pacific Island Labourers Act Amendment Act of 1884, to severely limit competition with European labour by confining the Islanders to fieldwork (unskilled labour in the fields) in tropical agriculture - work which Europeans would not or could not perform. Only a few hundred Islanders who received certificates of exemption under this Act were legally permitted to be engaged other than in fieldwork. Eventually, in Griffith's scheme, the


21. Parnaby, Britain and the Labor Trade, pp.125-26; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.220-21, Table 2.


23. To obtain a certificate of exemption an Islander had to demonstrate that he or she had been continuously resident in Queensland since September 1879 or earlier. The total number issued was 835: by 1892, 119 of these had been cancelled (the holders had died or left the colony) and by 1906 there were 691 still in Queensland. QVP I, 1892, p.20; QPP II, 1906 Appendix XVII, p.903.
planters and Islanders would be replaced by small farmers employing European labour only. In the Pacific Island Labourers Act Amendment Act of 1885 Griffith imposed a closing date of 31 December 1890 on the labour trade but economic exigencies and political considerations impelled him to re-open the labour trade indefinitely in 1892 (see Appendix C). 24

In practice, the restrictions on the Islanders' employment were extensively evaded, although there were more concerted efforts to enforce the law from the 1890s. 25 In particular the 'time-expired' men and women (the terms employed to describe those who had completed their initial indenture) were illegally employed in many occupations, such as cooks, domestic servants, store assistants, farm labourers and timbergetters. 26 A regulation gazetted in 1896 effectively reduced their ability to compete in the labour market, by stipulating that within one month of finishing an agreement an Islander must enter into a fresh engagement for six months or more, or return to his island. 27

The justice of imposing strict occupational restraints upon the Islanders was seldom questioned. 28 They were also subject to other

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26. Those who held certificates of exemption could have been legally employed in these occupations. MM 29 Apr. 1882, letter to Ed. by 'Franc-Tireur', 27 May 1886, Letter to Ed. by 'Justice'; MS 29 Jul. 1892, letter to Ed. by 'Fair Play's Bonnie Play': CMP 18 Aug. 1903; W 24 Sep. 1892, 7 Sep. 1895; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p. 86.


28. For exceptions to this, see CMP 18 Aug. 1903, 'Rambler'; BC 5 May 1892; Mercer, An Analysis of Racial Attitudes, esp. Chs. II, III and IV.
restrictions aimed at safeguarding the European population. Since 1868
the sale or supply of alcohol to Islanders had been banned and from 1884
the supply of firearms or ammunition was also prohibited. 29 It was also
an offence from 1891 to sell or supply opium to Pacific Islanders,
Aborigines and 'half-castes'. 30 Other legal constraints aimed at non-
Europeans in general also affected the Islanders. A Pacific Islander
could legally be party to a contract, marry and engage in business (insofar
as this did not contravene the Pacific Island Labourers Act Amendment Acts). 31
But he or she could not legally own land since an 'alien' (a person who was
not a natural-born or naturalized British subject) could acquire, hold and
dispose of personal property but could not hold real property. Few Pacific
Islanders were eligible for naturalization, and all 'aliens' were
disqualified from electoral privileges. 32
In comparison with Aborigines, Pacific Islanders were theoretically
well protected from abuse by employers. 33 Clothing, daily rations,

29. s.29, Polynesian Labourers Act of 1868; s.42, Pacific Island
Labourers Act of 1880; s.9, Pacific Island Labourers Act Amendment Act
of 1884. This ban on firearms had been imposed briefly in 1878, and was
re-stated in 1896 due to the frequency of evasions. OCC XXII, 1878, pp.69,
290, LXV, 1896, p.471; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, pp.37, 111-12.

30. s.13, Sale and Use of Poisons Act of 1891 (55 Vic., No.31); s.13,
Liquor Act of 1895 (59 Vic., No.29). A 'half-caste' was defined as
any person with an Aboriginal parent or grandparent and any person
of Aboriginal or Pacific Islander extraction who lived or associated
with Aborigines.


32. ss. 3, 4, 6 and 12, Aliens Act of 1867 (31 Vic., No.28); s.7,
Legislative Assembly Act of 1867 (31 Vic., No.21). Asians and Africans
were eligible for naturalization. Legislative restrictions are discussed
in detail in Chapter 5 and outlined in Appendices D and E.

33. N.A. Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations in North Queensland,
1864-1897 (Ph.D. thesis, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1976),
p.691. Contemporaries certainly believed this. See Smith, The Kanaka
Labour Question, p.20; MN 21 Sep. 1886, 12 May 1906; CMP 11 Mar. 1897;
H. St George Caulfeild, 'Native Labour in Ceylon and Queensland. Adventurous
Life of Henry Caulfeild, Late Inspector of Pacific Islanders', The Steering
Wheel and Society and Home 1 Jun. 1937, p.46.
accommodation, the minimum wage and free medical services were all supplied. Complaints about the terms or conditions of an agreement could be taken to the local inspector of Pacific Islanders. But such theoretical safeguards were totally dependent on their enforcement at the local level. In practice, the treatment of the labourers was directly related to variables such as the size of the farm or plantation, the character and energy of the local inspector, the degree of intimidation by employers, the attitude of the local bench of magistrates, the awareness amongst the Islanders of their legal rights and the extent of the language barrier. A vigilant inspector, for instance, might incur local and even official censure and even where Islanders had clearly justifiable complaints, these could be dismissed by a partial bench of magistrates. 34

Physical and mental violence, manifested in beatings, withdrawal of food, deprival of leisure time and separation of couples, were ever-present in the treatment of the Islanders. 35 Moreflagrant abuses such as the use of whips and chains also occurred but were rare after the early years. Usually Islanders on small farms were better fed, housed and treated, and the number of small farms increased markedly in the 1890s. It can be presumed, moreover, that planters and small farmers alike discovered that higher wages and bonuses were more effective than violence in inducing their labourers to work hard. 36 The Islanders themselves, it will be seen, could exact revenge for ill treatment by disrupting plantation life.

The local treatment of Pacific Islanders was segregationist and often depersonalizing. On the plantations and farms, they were fed and housed separately from both the European labour force and other non-

34. For some examples, see MM 29 Oct., 29 Nov. 1881, 24 Feb. 1886, NPC; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp. 399-403, 405, 408.


Europeans. There were special 'kanaka' hospitals in the major sugar centres and in the local hospitals elsewhere the Islanders were housed in 'kanaka wards' or in 'alien wards' with other non-Europeans. Even asylums for the mentally insane and the lazarets were segregated on 'racial' grounds.

On the railways, the Islanders and other non-Europeans shared carriages while other carriages were reserved for Europeans and upper-class Chinese and Japanese. In the sugar towns 'kanaka stores' run by Europeans specialised in cheap and usually shoddy goods for the Islanders: firearms (despite the prohibition), brightly coloured clothing, cheap musical instruments, pipes, tobacco and boxes ('bokis' in pidgin) for storing these possessions. In the Chinatowns which flourished in the sugar centres, Islanders patronised the stores, 'grog' shops, gambling houses, brothels and boarding houses. At the horse races, they were given a special cheaper rate of entry and carefully kept away from the European stands and refreshment booths.

Throughout these years, the Islanders took no part in general community social life - they did not attend the balls, church bazaars and concerts, nor were they members of the sports clubs, school of arts libraries or local farmers' associations. In the missions to the Islanders (discussed later), converts attended the mission schools and only went inside European churches on important occasions such as baptisms and confirmations. Educated wealthy Chinese were sometimes

37. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.83; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.196; T68sa:1; T78sb:1; T198sa:1-2.

38. On occasions Islanders were refused admission to local hospitals. MM 23 Oct. 1880; PDT 29 Jan. 1884; QVP IV, 1889, p.223, W.C. MacDonald; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.195, 196.


41. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.84.
regarded as 'honorary whites', but only one case of an Islander accepted into the European community during the nineteenth century has been found: this was William Seekis, from Lifou in the Loyalty Islands, who came to Mackay, married an English woman and raised a family; significantly, he thought of himself as 'white'.

Pacific Islanders were viewed as a temporary expedient rather than as permanent settlers. Since they could be taught to cultivate the soil, they were ranked above Aborigines in the 'racial' hierarchy devised by Europeans, but well below the more 'civilized races' such as the Chinese and Japanese. The alleged population decline in the islands brought about by the labour trade was deplored, yet perceived as the working out of the Darwinian principle of the 'survival of the fittest'. Those few colonists who felt a need to justify the disruption of Melanesian societies for the benefit of planters and small farmers in Queensland, stressed the benefits to be acquired from living in a Christian, civilized country.

Usually Pacific Islanders were characterized as good-tempered, humorous, well-behaved and loyal but child-like. Compared with the Chinese and other Asians, they did not threaten to flood the colony and were tractable and exploitable labourers who spent their wages in the colony. But this was a Janus-like portrait. The other side to this painted male Islanders as lustful, cunning, savage and uncontrollable.

Treatment of the Islanders varied according to which of these two attitudes prevailed. In a 'normal' climate, they were treated as a harmless people whose presence could be easily contained. But incidents such as the alleged murder of Europeans or sexual assaults on European women by Pacific Islanders, brought to the surface the underlying fear of the potential physical danger represented by large groups of predominantly single, male Islanders. Such that, in Mackay in 1877 a policy was instituted of


43. See MH 8 May 1914, 2 Jan. 1932, 5 May 1957.

44. The following discussion is based on Mercer, An Analysis of Racial Attitudes, esp. Ch. I; Mercer, 'Racial Attitudes Towards Melanesians'. 
disarming all Islanders of firearms and other dangerous weapons, and over
the years other districts followed suit.\footnote{MM 19 May, 26 May 1877, 25 May 1881, 29 May 1883; Wide Bay
and Burnett News 21 May 1881; SJTC 11, 15 Nov. 1893, p.258.} Intermittently the behaviour
of drunken, riotous Islanders in town provoked suggestions (usually not
implemented) of forbidding them to enter town without a written pass from
their employers or of imposing a curfew on the labourers.\footnote{See MM 13 Sep. 1884; MS 11 Jan., 12 Apr. 1889; Saunders,
Uncertain Bondage, pp. 353-54; CMP 11 Jan. 1901; Markus, Fear and Hatred,
p.193.}

The outstanding manifestation of the belief that the Islanders should
be treated as an 'antagonistic race' was the infamous Mackay Racecourse
Riot in 1883. A publican's refusal to supply an Islander with alcohol led
to a full-scale skirmish between the Islanders and armed, mounted European
racegoers, in which at least two Islanders were killed. In the aftermath,
the European community behaved hysterically, convinced (mistakenly) that an
uprising by Islanders had begun or would soon begin.\footnote{See MM and MS quoted in PDT 5 Jan. 1884; H. Finch-Hatton, Advance
Australia! An Account of Eight Years' Work, Wandering, and Amusement in
Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria (London, 1885), pp.165-68; C.R. Moore,
'The Mackay Racecourse Riot of 1883', Lectures on North Queensland History
Third series, pp.181-96.}

THE DISCUSSION of the Islanders' treatment and European attitudes towards
them provides the necessary backdrop for examining their lifestyle in
Queensland. Some fundamental adjustments were forced upon them, but in
many other ways the Islanders made their own adaptations to the new
environment.

Generalizations about the prior knowledge of European society held
by the recruits are difficult to make. Certainly by the 1880s there were
always old hands aboard the labour vessels, and many new chums had listened
to the stories of those who returned and admired their possessions.
Nevertheless, the voyage to Queensland took young Islanders outside their
mental and geographical universe. The length of the voyage, the inevitable
outbreak of diseases such as dysentery, the crowded accommodation shared
with strangers (and therefore enemies), were all profoundly disturbing
experiences.

In the colony, the recruits were transferred from the ports to the plantations by dray or train. Their astonishment at European society was condescendingly described by a few observers. Yet within a few months they were said to have adjusted to life in the colony. Certainly there were some initial and obvious adjustments. Trousers and shirts for the men and long-sleeved and full-skirted dresses for the women were provided; traditional decorations such as elaborate headdresses and hairstyles, penis sheaths and body paints were not permitted (see Plate 1.1). They also acquired new names. The most common were quasi-generic, in which a familiar English first name was affixed to a surname indicating island of origin - thus Sam Solomon, or Alice Santo. These 'Queensland names' were, however, only a superficial adjustment; friends and relatives addressed them by their real or 'island' names.

On the plantations the Islanders were housed in long wooden barracks or in grass huts of their own construction (see Plate 1.4). New Hebrideans and Solomon Islanders were usually kept apart. On the bigger estates, those from the one island or even the one district for some of the larger islands were housed together. But in their daily work they laboured with men from many different islands, clearing, hoeing, weeding, trashimg, cutting and carting cane under the supervision of gangers or overseers, who were mostly

51. Ibid., p. 352; DHR 8 Oct. 1902, 15 Feb. 1907; TBBSA:2. Europeans in the islands found that Melanesians were reluctant to give their personal names. Lvens, Melanesians of the Solomon Islands, p. 11; C. R. Moore, Malaitan Recruiting to Queensland (paper presented at ANZAS, Auckland, 22 Jan. 1979), p. 8.
52. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p. 83; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p. 196.
PLATE 1.1: Pacific Island labourers outside the manager's residence on Macknade plantation in the Herbert River district, c. 1880s.

PLATE 1.2: Caption - 'Kanakas Cutting Cane at Bingera Prior to Federation'. 
PLATE 1.3: Caption - 'A Merry Group of Slaves' c. 1890s. Note the traditional weapons and European musical instrument.

PLATE 1.4: An Islander family's house at Farleigh in the Mackay district, c. 1900.
Europeans but sometimes experienced Islanders (see Plate 1.2). While the work was not unfamiliar, it was monotonous and tiring. The Islanders became accustomed remarkably quickly to the workings of the plantation equipment and mill machinery, and despite the legal restrictions often worked in the mills.

The language barrier posed a serious obstacle to understanding what was expected of them. In Melanesia, linguistic diversity promoted the spread of a trading language between the Islanders and itinerant Europeans, and this pidgin developed rapidly on Queensland plantations owing to the need for the labourers to communicate with Europeans and with each other. It became common for planters, overseers, inspectors of Pacific Islanders, missionaries and others in close contact with the Islanders to speak to them in pidgin or more often a form of broken English - even if the Islanders themselves were fluent in English. Most new chums, like Tom Lammon from Lamen Island in the New Hebrides, spoke only "mai kantri langwish" when they arrived and were tutored in pidgin by the overseers and fellow Islanders. Usually only the more experienced of the time-expired Islanders understood and spoke pidgin well. Accordingly, most labourers


had only an imperfect understanding of what was required of them.

The language barrier was one reason why some did not adjust well to life in Queensland. Some newly arrived Islanders with little comprehension of the indenture system could not tolerate the unfamiliar restrictions, discipline and heavy work and deserted, often living for months or even years in the scrub before they were apprehended. In particular, recruits from islands which were only lightly tapped by recruiters, such as New Ireland and New Britain, Santa Cruz and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, found it difficult to adjust - mortality amongst them was very high, as also was the incidence of absconding. Recruiting was prohibited in New Guinean waters in 1884 and in the Gilbert and Ellice group in 1896.

Psychological disturbances amongst the labourers were manifested in cases of suicide and insanity. The incidence of suicide varied throughout Melanesia, but on Queensland plantations there were numerous suicides. The incidence of insanity amongst Islanders in Queensland was also striking. Islanders found to be insane, either on arrival in the colony or at a later stage, were usually returned to their islands but were sometimes committed to Queensland asylums. Often insanity only became obvious when an Islander


60. See NM 28 Jun. 1884, 25 Mar. 1891; Shepherd, The Herbert River Story, pp.97, 183, 288; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.418; Inquest No.512 of 1906, Sineka, JUS/N365, QSA. In some cases, suspicious circumstances suggested that alleged suicides may have been murders.

behaved violently.62

Even if a labourer adjusted readily to the plantation lifestyle and was in good mental health, he was unlikely to escape physical sickness. Most saw at least some of their friends or relatives die on the plantations. Queensland canefields, contended opponents of the labour trade, were manured by the dead 'kanakas' buried there; defenders countered this charge by pointing to the high rate of mortality in the islands themselves.63 But the many deaths amongst the labourers, predominantly young men in the prime of their life, was a glaring indictment of the indenture system. Mortality, though high in the mid- and late-1870s, peaked in the early 1880s: in 1883 the mortality rate amongst Islanders was five to six times higher than that amongst the whole European population.64 During the late 1880s and the 1890s the mortality rate declined noticeably (if irregularly) but was still much higher than that amongst Europeans.65

Adjustments to the work, diet, clothing, climate and other circumstances of their new life made the Islanders susceptible to illness and reduced their resistance. New chums were most at risk and were usually given lighter tasks and a shorter working day to ease the adjustment. From the 1880s most large plantations had their own dispensaries and


64. Scarr, 'Recruits and Recruiters', p.231.

Islander hospitals were established in the main sugar districts. The provision of medical care, however, never reached a high standard, and there were many deaths attributable to callous neglect by employers. Melanesians were highly susceptible to the epidemic diseases of Europeans, such as measles. Respiratory complaints, particularly tuberculosis, influenza, pneumonia and bronchitis, were common and dangerous. Dysentery was also often fatal, both on the plantations and the labour ships. According to European observers, there were also many occasions on which Islanders appeared to give up the will to live and died without any apparent cause; poor physical condition and the belief that they were victims of sorcery may have been predisposing factors in such fatalistic attitudes.

Those recruits who survived the rigours of plantation life for three years had the opportunity to become old hands, either by staying on in the colony or returning home and later re-engaging. These men and women displayed the greatest adjustments to European society. The time-expired men, for example, frequented Chinatown's 'grog' shops, gambling houses and brothels. They were well aware of the value of money and much harder to dupe or cheat than the inexperienced new chums. Indeed, the extent of their savings often astounded Europeans: one Solomon Islander who left Mackay in 1907, for instance, had sixty or seventy sovereigns in his possession.

The time-expired Islanders also displayed considerable awareness of their legal rights. They took complaints about their treatment or


67. New chums were easily misled, for instance by the value of the different coins. See MM 10 Jul. 1880, 25 Jul. 1905, 12 May 1906; T37Bsa:1; Ty3Rip.1; E. Foreman, *The History and Adventures of a Queensland Pioneer* (Brisbane, 1928), p.116.

68. MM 7 Feb. 1907. For other examples, see MM 12 May 1906; CHP 14 Jan. 1897; P38MK 12 Jan. 1906; Government Savings Bank, IPI 11/2, QSA; Ledger of Polynesian Labourers' Savings bank accounts, IPI 12/L1, QSA.
conditions of service to the inspectors of Pacific Islanders, and brought assault charges against heavy-handed or violent overseers and managers. They also took to court, although with limited success, fellow Islanders and even Europeans, who had cheated or assaulted them.

On the plantations, there were various methods by which aggrieved Islanders could disrupt plantation life. Absconding was one means, albeit not particularly successful, of attracting attention to abuses in treatment or conditions. Recalcitrant Islanders feigned sickness when roused in the morning and such malingering was particularly aggravating during the crushing season. Defiance was shown by refusing to obey or deliberately disobeying the orders of overseers or managers or by setting fire to the cane. Europeans who maltreated the Islanders ran the risk of their victims attacking them, as numerous assaults on overseers and others demonstrated. Only a small proportion of such incidents and insubordination reached the courts. The planters had their own methods of dealing with all but the inveterate 'troublemakers', and they removed the latter by arranging to cancel their agreements and send them back to their islands.


70. See MM 19 May 1880, 3 Nov. 1880, 10 Jan. 1885, 10 Jun. 1886, 10 Feb. 1906, MPC; NS 30 Jan. 1888, 7 Oct. 1891, MPC; CMP 13 Jan. 1906, Cairns Police Court.


Unemployed Islanders, who were known as 'walkabouts', were regarded as a nuisance and a danger, and there were attempts to prevent them from 'spelling up' and moving freely about the colony. Not only their mobility but also the time-expired Islanders' ability to demand and receive higher wages incensed Europeans. New chums received the minimum stipulated wage (£6 per annum and keep) or slightly more. But after this initial term of service an Islander could expect greater remuneration. The average wage of those who re-engaged for Queensland in the islands over the years 1883 to 1903 has been estimated at £10/9/2 per annum. Time-expired Islanders, who were also provided with keep, could demand more than this, since the new employer did not have to pay for the passage from the islands and obtained a labourer who was acclimatised and required little supervision. The wage rates for time-expired Islanders displayed great variation over the years and between different districts. Time-expired men in North Queensland in 1889, for example, were receiving wages ranging from £13 to £24 per annum. In the more northerly districts the greater demand for Islander labour tended to push wages higher than those in the more established districts


75. This has been calculated by Moore and Shlomowitz. See C.R. Moore, Oral Testimony and the Pacific Island Labour Trade to Queensland: Myth and Reality, Paper presented at the Oral History Association of Australia National Conference, Perth, 19 Aug. 1979, p.18, n56; Shlomowitz, The Profitability of Indentured Melanesian Labour in Queensland, p.39, Table IX.

such as Nackay. Experienced men working on short-term contracts for small farmers in the far north could command the highest wages.

Time-expired Islanders were determined wage-bargainers, employing such tactics as negotiating through agents or moving to other districts to secure higher wages. They were also prepared to use collective wage-bargaining. From the late 1880s, there were many reports of unions established by Islanders to agitate for better wages and conditions. The strike weapon to obtain higher wages was increasingly employed by Pacific Islanders in the 1890s and 1900s.

Employers reacted to such collective action by attempting to set ceilings on wages and by calling for tighter restrictions and enforcement of existing restrictions to confine the Islanders to fieldwork. Notwithstanding the Islanders' attempts at unionisation, which well preceded those by European sugar workers, the 'white' labour movement was not prepared to accept the Islanders within its ranks. The Islanders' unions and strikes were described derisively by the Labor press, and the Islanders

77. Wages for Islanders were highest in the Port Douglas district. Shlomowitz, Melanesian Labour and the Development of the Queensland Sugar Industry, 1863-1906, pp.38,39.


80. See Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp.424-25; Markus, 'Divided We Fall', p.8; Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p.250; Shepherd, The Herbert River Story, p.236; J. Harris, 'The Struggle against Pacific Island Labour 1868-1902', Labour History No.15, Nov. 1968, pp.41, 42. Those who returned to the islands also employed these tactics. See Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons, pp.260-61, 388; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.139.

were excluded from membership of the unions formed amongst manual workers
such as the Amalgamated Workers' Union (AWU) and the Australian Sugar
Workers' Union. 82

Europeans were reluctant to be employed in fieldwork in the sugar
industry in the nineteenth century, not only because of reasons of status
but more importantly because of the very poor wages and conditions which
applied. 83 Only the Aborigines were below the Pacific Islanders in the
wage scale; Asian labourers such as the Chinese and Cinghalese usually
earned more. The wages of those Europeans who did engage in fieldwork in
the sugar industry, or in similar manual labour, were considerably higher
than those paid to time-expired Islanders. 84

Apart from planters, farmers, inspectors of Pacific Islanders and
doctors, the Europeans with whom the Islanders were most likely to come
into contact were of two kinds. The first were the local enforcers of
the law. As a rule, the Islander population was peaceable and law-abiding.
Rarely were they convicted of offences against property, such as larceny
and robbery with violence; rather were their crimes those of 'temper'
(assaults and murders) and were usually provoked by alcoholic over-
indulgence and disputes among themselves. 85

82. Other non-Europeans, with the exception of Aborigines, were
similarly excluded. Q 30 Jan. 1886; W 26 Nov. 1892; CMP 10 Feb. 1900;
Harris, 'The Struggle against Pacific Island Labour', pp.41, 42; Markus,
'Divided We Fall', pp.7-8; D. Hunt, 'Exclusivism and Unionism: Europeans
in the Queensland Sugar Industry 1900-1910', in A. Curthoys and A. Markus
(eds), Who Are Our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class
(Sydney, 1978), pp.80, 93; A. Markus, 'Talka longa mouth ...' Aborigines
and the labour movement, 1890-1970', in Curthoys and Markus (eds), Who
Are Our Enemies?, p.139. The exclusion of non-Europeans from the various
unions in the twentieth century is discussed in Chapter 5.


84. This is even allowing for the fact that keep was not provided.
May, The Chinese in Cairns and District, pp.364-65; Moore, Oral Testimony
and the Pacific Island Labour Trade, n59.

85. See QPD LXXIV, 1895, pp.1614, 1655; Return showing Offences and
Convictions of Polynesians in the Colony of Queensland during the ten years
ending 31st December 1895, 70/165, PRI/8, QSA; Crimes Committed by Kanakas
and Male Whites in Queensland during Ten years ending 31st December 1900,
PRE/88, QSA; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.358, Table X.
The hand of the law fell heavily on those Islanders who did transgress. Even for minor crimes - drunkenness, disorderly or dangerous behaviour, obscene language and obstructing the police - they were harshly punished. Conditions in the law courts strongly favoured Europeans over non-Europeans. It was not until 1884 that the evidence of witnesses believed to be incapable of understanding an oath became legally admissible. Free legal defence was provided for Islander defendants and inspectors of Pacific Islanders were expected to attend trials and ensure that the accused understood the charges against them. In practice, it is clear that Islanders generally did not understand the charges against them or legal procedure, and that good and impartial interpreters were seldom available. Those accused of violent or sexual crimes were very often insane. Nor was trial by jury, in the prevalent racial climate, likely to ensure an impartial judgement, especially for those charged with crimes of violence against Europeans.

The consumption of alcohol was considered to be the root cause of most offences committed by Islanders - it was said to strip off the veneer of civilization and reveal their essentially savage nature.

86. See MM 13 Aug. 1880, 7 Jan. 1885, 22 Jun. 1886; MS 14 Apr. 1887, 30 May 1888; Cooktown Courier 19 Feb. 1889; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.90.

87. Oaths Act Amendment Act of 1884 (48 Vic., No.19); Police Commissioner to Insps., Sep. 1887, Circular No.106, POL/J1, QSA; W.R. Johnston, A Study of the Relationship between the Law, the State and the Community in Colonial Queensland (M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1965), pp.183, 184. Under the Oaths Act Amendment Act of 1876 (40 Vic., No.10), those unable to take an oath could make a declaration but this was found to be unworkable in practice. QPD XXXXIII, 1884, p.311.

88. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.91; Cooktown Courier 25 Nov. 1888; Johnston, A Study in the Relationship between the Law, the State and the Community, p.182.

89. See Regina vs Billy, 89/51, EXE/5/18, QSA; Regina vs Tui Tonga, 92/43, EXE/6, QSA; Herberton Advertiser 21 Oct. 1892 (reference supplied by N. Loos).

Especially in town on Saturday night, groups of drunken Islanders were responsible for much offensive or dangerous behaviour. A high correlation between alcohol and violence was predictable for a group such as the Islanders to whom alcohol was a cultural novelty and an important release; moreover, the example of Europeans in this regard was not edifying.

Despite intermittent police crusades to apprehend sly 'grog' suppliers, the supply of alcohol to the Islanders was not cut off. Non-Europeans, especially Chinese, were held to be chiefly responsible, but European publicans were usually willing to serve Islander customers 'under the counter'.

A double standard applied in regard to more serious crimes such as assault and murder. An Islander who killed another could expect to be charged with manslaughter, and often the judge was lenient on the grounds that such offences would not have constituted crimes in their own societies. But if a European was the victim, the charge was murder and the death penalty was usually paid by those convicted. Similarly, charges of sexual assaults on Islander women were dismissed or only lightly punished, whereas assaults on European women were


94. MM 14 Nov. 1885, MPC; MS 23 Apr. 1890, 26 Oct. 1892, MPC; Regina vs Pollybogomena (Jacky), Lombo (Bob) and Bollo, 89/96, EXE/5, QSA; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.91.

95. See ibid., pp.90-91; Record of Death Sentences, Brisbane, 1880-1922, PRI/19, QSA.
considered an outrage and harshly punished. In fact the number of sexual assaults on European women committed by Pacific Islanders was never high, but in the 1890s and 1900s the incidence of such crimes rose, and this was an added factor in the objections beginning to be heard against the Islanders' presence.

The other Europeans with whom the Islanders had close contact were those who sought to convert them to Christianity. Until the early 1880s mission work was restricted to the efforts of a few concerned individuals. The attitude of the general European population towards such mission work was largely indifferent and sometimes actively hostile. Before considering the impact of attempts to convert the Islanders, the extent of mission work in North Queensland will be outlined.

In 1906 Bishop Frodsham proudly proclaimed that there were classes for 'South Sea Islanders' in every part of the North Queensland diocese. In fact, there were substantial Anglican missions to the Islanders only in the Mackay, Herbert River and Johnstone River districts. In Proserpine, Bowen, Cairns and Port Douglas, efforts to convert the Islanders were


100. OPP II, 1906, p.852.
sporadic and relatively ineffectual, while in the Burdekin district some serious work in the early 1900s fell away after 1905. 101

The first Anglican mission, and also the best known and most successful, was the Selwyn Mission in Mackay, established in 1882 by Mary Goodwin Robinson. 102 Between 1878 and 1907 well over 1,000 Islander adults and children in the district received an Anglican baptism. 103 With the assistance of local clergy, Robinson ran the mission until she retired in 1904 and was replaced by Charles Sage (later a missionary on Malaita in the Solomons). 104 A feature of Selwyn was that it attracted large numbers of Solomon Islanders and particularly Malaitans; Alec Sayven and Luke Logomier were prominent amongst the several Malaitans on the mission staff. 105

In the Herbert River district, a mission was established in 1894 at Gairloch by F.D. Pritt, an English priest of independent means. After his death in 1904 the mission was maintained by his widow and two


102. Her husband was the manager of Tekowai Mill. Known initially as the Robinson Mission, it was situated on land donated by Meadowlands plantation opposite the Racecourse Mill. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.93.

103. In the baptism registers there are over 500 baptisms up to 1907 but there are gaps. Up to July 1901 there were said to have been 798 baptised, and in the registers from then till the end of 1907 there are a further 226 baptisms. BC 12 Oct. 1901, Mackay correspondent to The Times; ABR, Mackay, 1878-1907.


New Hebridean catechists, Jack Oba and Tom Lammon, until a European chaplain was finally appointed late in 1906. 106 Since the Pritt Mission had begun later and the Islander population here was much smaller, its success was more modest than Selwyn's: between 1888 and 1907, just over 100 Islander adults and children were baptised. 107 The only other vigorous Anglican mission was in the Johnstone River district. From the late 1890s, well-attended classes were conducted by the local clergy. This mission mainly attracted New Hebrideans. 108

The only significant Presbyterian mission was conducted at Walkerston in the Mackay district from 1888 by a specially ordained missionary, John McLean McIntyre, with the assistance of his wife, church elders such as A.H. Tidemann and later a second missionary. McIntyre held services on the plantations and in a Kanaka Mission Hall erected at Walkerston in 1890. In the ten years to 1898 there were said to have been 447 baptisms performed at Walkerston. 109 Those who attended the mission were largely New Hebrideans, and indeed efforts were directed especially at this island group. 110 Outside Mackay the only other Presbyterian missions were in the Bowen and Burdekin districts

106. NC 7 Dec. 1904, 1 Sep. 1906, 1 Feb. 1928; AYB, 1898-99, p.10, 1904-5, pp.77, 81; Shepherd, The Herbert River Story, pp.157, 158, 221; Church of England in Australia and Tasmania, Self-Denial Effort of 1894 Leaflet No. IV, South Sea Islanders in Queensland (Hobart, 1894), p.3.

107. ABR, Ingham, 1888-1907. Island of origin was not given consistently, but amongst those for whom it was given New Hebrideans predominated.

108. NC 7 Apr. 1905, 12 May 1906, 1 Jan. 1907; AYB, 1905-6, pp.75, 77; C.W. Tomkins, Easter Letter 1905 (St Alban's, Innisfail); OPP II, 1906, p.795, C.W. Tomkins. The number baptised cannot be calculated, since Pacific Islanders were not always identified as such in the baptism registers.

109. The baptism registers for this period have not survived. BC 11 May 1889, 6 May 1896, 5 May 1898, Presbyterian General Assembly; NN 23 Nov. 1886; Rardon, The Centenary History, pp.45, 47; A. Asboe (compiler), History of Presbyterianism in Walkerston and District (Mackay, 1932), p.3; Smith, The Kanaka Labour Question, pp. 10, 11, 25.

110. MS 3 Aug. 1892; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.94. The intention was to assist the work of Presbyterian missionaries in the New Hebrides.
and were of limited duration and success. 111

The Queensland Kanaka Mission conducted the other important mission work. An undenominational evangelical mission dependent on private individuals for its support, this was founded in the Bundaberg district in 1882 by Florence Young, whose brothers owned Fairymead plantation. Its activities were only extended to North Queensland in 1899. 112 In Mackay, the Burdekin and Herbert River districts, the Queensland Kanaka Mission had limited success. Its best results were in the far north— in the Johnstone River, Cairns and Port Douglas districts— where mission activity by the established churches was virtually non-existent or late in establishment. 113

The only other mission work amongst the Islanders was conducted by the Salvation Army in the Mackay, Burdekin, Johnstone River and Cairns districts and by the Methodists in Cairns. 114

To recapitulate, the most extensive mission activity was performed in the Mackay district by the Anglican and Presbyterian churches. Outside Mackay such activity was on a much smaller scale, being mainly performed by the Anglican missions in the Herbert River and Johnstone River districts and by the Queensland Kanaka Mission in the far north.

What proportion of the Islanders came under the influence of the missions? In the Mackay district, perhaps the majority received mission

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teaching: in 1906 Sage and McIntyre each claimed to have 500 Islanders connected with their missions, yet there were only 950 Islanders in the district! Elsewhere converts were definitely a minority: in Innisfail in 1906, for example, the Anglican mission was said to represent 120 Islanders, or just under one-third of the district's population. Apart from the fact that the most energetic mission activity was conducted in Mackay, the high proportion of converts in this well-established district can probably also be related to the tendency for converts to come from those long resident in the colony and those who had attended mission schools in the islands.

An unsubstantiated and undoubtedly exaggerated claim that nearly seventy-five per cent of all Islanders in Queensland had received some religious instruction was made in 1892 by the Rev. A.C. Smith, the convenor of the Queensland Presbyterian Foreign Missions Committee. According to the Queensland census of 1901, some forty per cent of Islanders belonged to a Christian denomination; the proportion who received some degree of religious teaching would have been somewhat higher.

The method of religious teaching, throughout the different missions, was to impart simple religious instruction and a basic education through the medium of pidgin or broken English, and to teach Christian hymns. Emphasis in the services was placed on simple stirring addresses and hymn-singing. The Queensland Kanaka Mission was particularly attractive

115. QPP II, 1906, p.438, Appendix XVIII, p.634, J. McIntyre; NC 8 May 1905; AYB, 1905-6, p.76.


118. Smith was intent on refuting claims of ill treatment and neglect of these labourers. Smith, The Kanaka Labour Question, p.17. Corris accepted this figure. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.96.

119. QPP II, 1902, p.196.

to the Islanders, due to its extensive use of pidgin, its simple message, open-air hymn-singing meetings and mass adult baptisms in the rivers. 121

The strength of the desire amongst the Islanders to obtain religious instruction often drew comment. Converts were noted for the sincerity of their devotion, their zeal to proselytise and their financial generosity. 122 They would walk several miles to attend services, and only sickness or the long working hours in the crushing season kept them away from classes. 123 In the running of the missions the Islanders and particularly the lay teachers played an active part - keeping up classes and services in the missionaries' absence, inducing other Islanders to attend classes and assisting in the preparation of candidates for baptism. 124

Why did the Islanders flock to the missions? While a spiritual motivation may not have been insignificant, there were other reasons for their attraction. 125 In an alien and often hostile environment, they responded eagerly to the only positive gestures made towards them by

121. Young, Pearls from the Pacific, p.136; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.95; BC 2 Dec. 1891, 5 May 1892, Presbyterian General Assembly; NC 7 Nov. 1904; Jones, Hurricane Lamps, p.283.


123. If necessary, they would move to another plantation or district to attend classes. NC 9 Oct. 1905, 8 Jan. 1906; MM 11 Jun. 1906; BC 4 May 1901, Rev. A.E. Eustace, 12 Oct. 1901, Mackay correspondent to The Times; Church of England, Self-Denial Effort, pp.2, 3; AYB, 1905-6, p.76; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.369.


125. For discussion of these motives, see Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.95; Hilliard, 'The South Sea Evangelical Mission', p.44; W.N. Gunson, Messengers of Grace Evangelical Missionaries in the South Seas, 1797-1860 (Melbourne, 1978), pp.220-21.
Europeans. Pressure to attend was applied by those already converted, who used both moral and physical forms of persuasion. Classes and services offered a regular social outlet which may have partially made up for the loss of the close community interaction of their village societies. In Mackay, the highlights of the year were the annual 'tea meetings' held by both the Anglican and Presbyterian missions for their adherents, at which prizes were distributed and there was supper and entertainment. In the Queensland Kanaka Mission, there were opportunities for enthusiastic participation with other Islanders in the open-air services and baptisms.

Involvement in the missions presented one of the few avenues for leadership. A lay teacher was a man of prestige and influence amongst the Islanders. Oratorical skills, an important leadership quality in Melanesia, could be displayed at classes, services and prayer meetings; the moving and allegedly spontaneous addresses given by converts often impressed Europeans.

The aim of the missionaries was to convert and to civilize. Any unacceptable beliefs and practices, such as adultery, nudity, cannibalism and spirit-worship, must be eliminated. For example, the Presbyterian Mission at Walkerston would not baptise children whose parents were only married in the 'custom' way. 'Womanly' habits such as sewing and cooking were encouraged among the few Islander women. Above all, the 'vices' of European society such as gambling, drinking and fighting were strictly prohibited.


127. See ibid., p.26; BC 4 May 1901; Bardon, The Centenary History, p.47.

128. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.95; Gunson, Messengers of Grace, pp.196-97, 201.

Converts were noticeably more sober and peaceable than their 'heathen' countrymen, and in Mackay at least the incidence of feuding between different groups of Islanders declined very considerably as the missions grew. The missions were indeed an effective means of social control. The planters, initially hostile, became their warmest supporters. Significantly, the missions, which were always bordering on financial difficulties, were heavily dependent on the planters and, in later years, on the Queensland Government for financial support.

A further incentive to join the missions was the opportunity to gain an education. Literacy was the key to a full understanding of their new world. Like American Negro slaves, the Islanders were keen to learn to read and write. The importance they attached to a European education was revealed in a comment by an Islander in 1906 that the 'bad old days' of abuse and neglect on the plantations had only ended because the Islanders "have been to school" and learnt to stand up for their rights. The missions provided a basic education as well as religious instruction: in Mackay, for instance, McIntyre taught reading.


writing and arithmetic to those who attended his evening classes. 134

Schooling opportunities outside the missions were restricted to classes run by a few interested individuals. In one case, on Oakenden plantation near Mackay in 1884, the manager's daughter ran a school for Islanders, teaching them secular, moral and religious subjects. 135 Overall, few Islanders acquired an education and very few were fully literate. 136 Very often converts could only read the Bible by rote, having memorised large passages. 137

The combination of an education and a position on the mission staff made such men as Alec Sayven and Luke Logomier in Mackay and Jack Oba and Tom Lammon in the Herbert River very powerful figures in their local Islander populations. The impressive attendance at the funerals of Islander lay teachers illustrated the respect they commanded. 138 In Queensland new avenues to power were more important than traditional methods of gaining prestige and renown. Apart from prominence in the missions, there were other secular avenues for leadership. Time-expired men through their knowledge of conditions in the colony commanded influence and authority over the less experienced. On the plantations, these men could assert themselves by physical intimidation or the distribution of favours such as better

134. Smith, The Kanaka Labour Question, p.10; BC 11 May 1889, Presbyterian General Assembly. For other examples, see NC 8 Jun. 1905; Teale, Easter Letter 1902; Young, Pearls from the Pacific, p.40.

135. The Illustrated Australian News (Melbourne), 1 Oct. 1884, p.152. For other examples, see Banks, Memories of Pioneer Days, pp.46-47; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.370.

136. According to the census in 1901, just over fifteen per cent of Islanders could read, or read and write. QPP II, 1902, pp.1099-1100. The educational standards of the children are discussed in Chapter 2.

137. See Thbasa:1; Thbasa:1; Thbas:1; NC 7 Jan. 1905; QWP LV, 1889, p.319; Caulfeild, 'Adventurous Life of Henry Caulfeild', 1 Jun. 1937, p.45.

food or lighter work. In the early 1900s, the campaign against deportation provided enterprising Islanders with an opportunity to extend their influence by acting as spokesmen for their fellow men and women.

It has been suggested by Bolton that the stay in Queensland affected Pacific Islanders no more deeply than the time spent in Egypt or France by Australian ex-servicemen. The analogy is hardly apt, even for those Islanders who did not remain beyond the initial three years. For those who became long-term residents, life in a white man's country forced some fundamental adjustments, and other changes were made voluntarily.

PACIFIC Island migrants were subjected to many new influences, notably the efforts of the missions to Christianize and civilize them. Yet simultaneously they maintained some of their own customs and practices, if in a restrained and sometimes secretive manner. The evidence for this, since ethnocentric Europeans were blind to all but the obvious cultural preservations, is both scanty and tantalizing.

One obvious trait was the Islanders' preference for living in grass houses like those in the islands (see Plate 1.4). These housed men from the same island or even the same district and very often were arranged in clusters, thus reproducing something of the sense of community through geographical propinquity. In one of


140. See Chapter 3.


the few sensitive portraits of the Islander population, Michael Davitt (an Irish MP who visited Queensland in the late 1890s) noted that the exteriors of these houses were decorated with drawings of men and animals. Mission buildings were decorated on special occasions with palms and flowers. Carving and the construction of weapons were other customary arts which were maintained.143

The Islanders' delight in acquiring and displaying material possessions was another customary trait noted patronizingly by Europeans. Both men and women displayed ostentation in attire, wearing brightly coloured dresses, shirts and scarves, and in choice of possessions such as watches and chains, clocks, parasols and umbrellas, pipes and hats. To be photographed in their best costumes and with some of their possessions was highly desirable (see Plates 1.5 and 1.6).144 No migrant was willing to leave the colony until he or she had amassed such symbols of wealth.145

In leisure pursuits a predilection for customary pastimes also amused European contemporaries. Fishing or hunting in groups was a popular activity.146 In the fields, they often sang their 'custom' songs and at night they gathered together to sing and dance, using reed mouth-

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143. Davitt, Life and Progress in Australasia, p.274; MM 1 Jan. 1908; Blake, 'The Kanaka', p.84; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.97; Kerr, Pioneer Pageant, p.84.


PLATE 1.5: Caption - 'Dressed for Deportation', Mackay, c. 1906. Note the watchchains, flowers

PLATE 1.6: A young Islander woman at Mackay, c. 1900. Note the full European costume.
organs and wooden drums as well as European instruments such as jews' harps and concertinas (see Plate 1.3). Songs and dances were exchanged by different groups: at one well-attended gathering on Airdmillan plantation near Mackay in 1881, for instance, each island group performed their dances on a smooth piece of ground prepared near their huts.

Such singing and dancing was often accompanied by a feast. In Melanesia public hospitality was the means by which an individual and his group extended their prestige and built up a network of obligations, as well as an occasion for cementing social bonds between different groups. The evidence of feast-giving in the colony says little about the purpose and production of the feast - as, for example, who gave it and for whom. Sometimes feasts were restricted to those from the one island, but there were also feasts in which those from different islands and island groups participated. In Melanesia feasts were given for special occasions such as burials or harvests, but in Queensland they were more likely to occur at the twice-yearly payment of their wages. Sometimes these feasts ended with verbal or physical conflict between the groups. Such friction (as in Melanesia) may often have


150. See MM 3 Aug. 1881; Boomerang 7 Apr. 1888; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.360; Easterby, The Queensland Sugar Industry, p.13; K. Saunders, 'The Black Scourge', p.204. For parallels on the plantations in the islands, see Panoff, 'An Experiment in Inter-Tribal Contacts', p.113.

151. See QVP 1, 1900, p.233; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.360; Paton, The Kanaka Labour Traffic, p.5.
been provoked by sorcery accusations.

European observers stressed the honesty, veracity and generosity of Pacific Islanders. These traits were in fact integral to their value system. The ritual exchange of gifts was the means by which a complex system of indebtedness was constructed. Possessions were willingly given to or exchanged with other Islanders, and those unable to find work were supported by friends who were employed. In Mackay in the early 1900s Islanders leasing farms often borrowed from their countrymen to purchase equipment such as ploughs, drays and horses. The recipients of any such assistance were obliged to repay (eventually) their debts in full.

Certain cultural retentions were either strongly opposed by Europeans or would have been if brought to their attention. Cannibalistic acts were rare but evoked the horror of European colonists. Homosexuality was sanctioned, even institutionalised, in many Melanesian societies. Given the predominantly male Islander population in Queensland, it can be expected that homosexual relationships did develop; the near-absence of evidence on this may only demonstrate colonial attitudes.


One practice which could not be ignored was feuding amongst the Islanders, described by Europeans as 'inter-tribal fighting'. In Melanesia warfare was endemic, the principal causes being land disputes, adultery, elopement, theft and sorcery allegations. The ritual component in such hostilities was extremely important and fatalities were the exception rather than the rule.156

In Queensland, since each migrant was surrounded by strangers, the potential for conflict was always high. In these 'inter-tribal fights', a new loyalty (discussed later) operated in that men from the same island or even island group tended to be allies. Identification by island and island group was fostered by Europeans. Various islands were given different reputations: Ambrymese were said to be hostile and treacherous, while the Malaitans and Tannese were considered to be natural enemies and both the best fighters and the best workers.157 Europeans took advantage of animosities between different islands and island groups to obtain the best work from their labourers and to allow the displacement of tensions through fighting which might otherwise have been directed against them.158 Constant, unchecked feuding was not, however, in the planters' interests, since Europeans might be accidentally injured or their property damaged, and their investment in an Islander lost wholly or partly if he were killed or wounded. Therefore fights were forcibly prevented or broken up, and stiff penalties imposed on the ringleaders.159

156. See Adams, A Culture Contact History of Tanna, pp.78-79; Humphreys, The Southern New Hebrides, pp.59-60, 149; Layard, Stone Men of Malekula, pp.594-95, 597, 600-1; Cuppy, The Solomon Islands, p.75; Keesing, 'Elota's Story, p.63.

157. See Bernays, Queensland Politics During Sixty Years, p.65; Davitt, Life and Progress in Australasia, p.276; Rockhampton Morning Bulletin 19 Nov. 1884; QVP IV, 1889, p.313, T.P. McHugh; NM 22 Aug. 1883; BC 6 Mar. 1895, 4 May 1901, Rev. A.E. Eustace; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.89.

158. For examples of this, see Hope, In Quest of Coolies, p.113; BC 28 Nov. 1881; Saunders, 'The Black Scourge', pp.203-4.

159. MS 20 Jan. 1890, 5 Mar. 1890, 17 Jul. 1891, 26 Aug. 1891, HPC; NM 17 Aug. 1886; Rockhampton Morning Bulletin 19 Nov. 1884. Saunders argues that this feuding was used by Europeans as a crude mechanism of social control. Uncertain Bondage, p.361.
Generally Tannese or Aobans were ranged against Malaitans, or else New Hebrideans against Solomon Islanders, in these fights. Their long working hours dictated that fights usually occurred at night or on Sunday. The ritual component of confrontations, expressed in the very gradual narrowing of the physical distance between two forces and the hurling of verbal abuse, was marked. But serious injuries and fatalities were not uncommon, especially in the 1890s and 1900s with greater numbers of the more belligerent Malaitans, and were due to the use of European firearms, knives and axes in addition to spears, clubs and bows and arrows (see Plate 1.3). As in Melanesia, other methods of fighting were also employed, such as individual murders or surprise attacks on men sleeping in their huts. Fighting most often arose over Islander women. Revenge for a real or imagined grievance was another important motivation, while sorcery accusations undoubtedly would have been another.

Another source of conflict was the unwitting or deliberate transgression of taboos, the important social prohibitions which governed


161. Europeans were convinced these were 'sham' fights. See Blake, 'The Kanaka', pp. 84-85; Easterby, The Queensland Sugar Industry, p. 13; MM 17 Aug. 1886, 12 Apr. 1903; Queensland Figaro 12 May 1883; The Coloured Labour Question, Vol. II, newspaper unknown, n.d., letter by 'Dogspike'.


163.  See MM 12 May, 29 Jun. 1886.

164.  See MM 10 Jun., 26 Jun. 1886, 21 Jan. 1902, 28 Mar. 1907; MS 21 Sep. 1892; Rockhampton Morning Bulletin 19 Nov. 1884; Regina vs Pollybogomena (Jacky), Lomba (Bob) and Bolla, 89/96, EXE/5, QSA: Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p. 360.
village life. The strength and nature of taboos varied from community to community but the most important concerned the polluting nature of women. Malaitans rigidly observed these taboos, both at home and away from home. Thus trouble amongst the Malaitans was inevitable if a woman gave birth below deck on a labour ship or inside a hut on the plantations, since childbirth must take place out of doors and away from men, or even if a hospital nurse leant over them, since it was taboo for a woman ever to be physically above a man.  

This persistence of tradition is further demonstrated in the sphere of religion and magic. Until recently it was believed that the inhibitions of living in a white man's country had prevented the practice of indigenous religion and magic. Drawing on interviews with the descendants of the migrants, I have shown (with Moore) that such practices existed in North Queensland as late as World War II and that community belief in their efficacy was (and in some quarters still is) strong. The incidence and social purpose of such practices may have been quite different in the plantation era. Information from oral sources on sorcery in the nineteenth century is very limited, since the oldest of our informants were very young children in the 1890s or 1900s (see Appendix A). Tantalizing fragments are available from written sources and through comparisons with the behaviour of Pacific Islanders on plantations in other colonies.

165. See also Chapter 9, pp.433-34.

166. See Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.96; CMP 11 Jan. 1899; Molesworth, Kanaka Labour in Queensland, p.90 n1; Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons, p.290; Ross, Baegu, p.56.

167. This was the opinion of Corris and Saunders accepted this. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, pp.96-97; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.373.

While many migrants were converted to Christianity, they were by no means the majority, especially in North Queensland. Even in Mackay many and especially Malaitans were outside the sphere of influence of the missions. Unrepentant pagans were hostile to the missions, attempting to dissuade others from attending the classes and occasionally attacking or threatening the Islander lay teachers and even the European missionaries.\textsuperscript{169}

There were some high-ranking men and women amongst the migrants. The sons of a 'chief', as any powerful Melanesian leader was described by Europeans, came voluntarily or were sent to the colony to acquire an education and an understanding of European society.\textsuperscript{170} Although new concepts of leadership applied, such men could still command respect and authority. John Fatnowna from the Fataleka district on Malaita, for example, was the son of a custom priest and the respect in which he was held was attested by the attendance at his funeral in 1906 of over 250 of his countrymen.\textsuperscript{171}

Conceivably such men would have had the necessary knowledge to perform sorcery in Queensland but Fatnowna, like others, was a 'mission boy'.\textsuperscript{172} While few recruits would have been religious or magical specialists, no doubt they exchanged some magical spells with other

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\textsuperscript{169.} BC 2 Dec. 1891, 5 May 1898, Presbyterian General Assembly; NG 7 Apr. 1905; ANB, 1900-1, p.15; MS 21 Sep. 1891, 24 Oct. 1892; Smith, The Kanska Labour Question, pp.28-29; Q 29 May 1926, p.7; Norman, Life's Varied Scenes, p.74.

\textsuperscript{170.} See BC 4 May 1901; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.66.

\textsuperscript{171.} NM 28 Mar. 1906; Johnnie Fatnowna, Mackay CR, 26 Mar. 1906; T12Bsa:1. For other examples of high-ranking migrants in Queensland, see Allen, The Nduindui, p.12; NM 7 Mar. 1903; Caulfeild, 'Adventurous Life of Henry Caulfeild', 2 Aug. 1937, pp.56-57; T12Bsa:1; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.373.

\textsuperscript{172.} For other examples, see Hope, In Quest of Coolies, pp.114-15; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.373.
migrants. They may also have kept up certain religious observances. Malaitans, for example, carried on what they called 'small worship': they brought some small item endowed with religious significance as a protection against sorcery and hid this on their person or in the huts or nearby scrub. Other groups may have done likewise.

There may have been sorcerers on some plantations and certainly most Islanders knew some magical spells. Others may have been acquired from local Aborigines. Those with sorcery powers could command considerable influence: on Macknade plantation an Islander known as Captain Jack was held in awe by the other labourers for both his magical abilities and physical strength. On a Maryborough plantation a Tannese woman, who carried objects for sorcery in a cavity in her hair, was suspected of having poisoned several Islanders who had died mysteriously.

In most of Melanesia sorcery is generally believed to come from outside, in the sense that the perpetrator of such mystical attacks will be a man (or less commonly, a woman) from another village or community. In Queensland the sense of an in-group, as will be seen, was transferred to those who shared the same island of origin. Thus a Tannese might direct sorcery at a man from another island (such as Malaita), or attack


174. T47Bsb:3; Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons, pp.278-79.

175. One European saw graves on plantations marked with rudely scratched 'heathen' burial sticks and on a plantation near Yeppoon in Central Queensland, a group was said to have erected a wooden statue of their 'god'. Coloured Labour Question, Vol. 1, newspaper unknown, n.d. [1901?]; Information supplied by R. Tan to C.R. Moore.

176. Quarterly Jottings from the New Hebrides 1922 (reference supplied by J.A. Bennett).

such a man on suspicion of sorcery. In Mackay on Pioneer Estate in 1904 an Islander with a reputation as a troublemaker was killed in a fight which broke out when another Islander refused to eat food he had cooked, on the grounds that "you might put something longa tucker and we die".

Not only the pagans but also the Christians apparently accepted the efficacy of magical practices. This is well illustrated by the steps taken by Malaitan converts to protect Mrs Robinson of Selwyn Mission against the wrath of other Islanders whom she had disarmed. They inscribed signs (clearly magical) on her gate threatening the most awful death to anyone who harmed her.

No migrant group can transfer its cultural heritage intact and unaltered. Pacific Islanders had not attempted to do so; they had accepted and also had thrust upon them important adjustments to their new environment. Yet many traditional beliefs and values persisted. Certain larger groups, notably the Malaitans and Tannese, clung most tenaciously to their 'custom' ways. The more important of these traditional persistences escaped the notice of European contemporaries. Undoubtedly the Islanders recognized the need to maintain secrecy in regard to practices of which Europeans would have disapproved, such as sorcery. Life on the plantations had a dimension which was unknown to the European colonists.

178. There is little documentary evidence to support this, but certainly this occurred on plantations in New Guinea. B. Gammage, 'The Rabaul Strike, 1929', Oral History Vol. VIII, No. 2, Feb. 1975, pp. 75-76.

179. MM 13 Oct. 1904, NPC. In the Solomons there were cases of Queensland returns taking back arsenic to use in sorcery. Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p.115.

180. Norman, Life's Varied Scenes, pp.74-75.

181. These two groups were noted for their clannishness in the islands. See Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons, p.274; Ross, Baegu, pp. 56, 69; Quarterly Jottings from the New Hebrides No. 95, Jan. 1917, p.2; Speiser, Two Years with the Natives, p.270.
THIS FINAL section considers the attitudes of Pacific Islanders to Europeans and to other non-European groups, and then examines the changes which occurred in their self-identification. According to the colonists, Pacific Islanders were loyal servants, eager to please, faithful to employers who treated them kindly and considerately and ready to defend staunchly their employers' wives and property from attacks by Aborigines or 'low whites'.

Certainly some Islanders did develop a strong affection for and affinity with their employers and their families. Contemporaries also stressed the respect and awe with which the Islanders regarded all those in authority.

While many Islanders were loyal and law-abiding servants, it was an identity which they could assume and also discard. Other aspects of their behaviour illustrated very different feelings, such as their attitude to the terms used to describe them. They themselves preferred to be addressed as 'Pacific Islanders' or 'South Sea Islanders'; 'kanaka' was disliked because of its connotations of an ignorant, enslaved people.

Increasingly over the years the Islanders displayed an independent outlook and an unwillingness to accept their inferior position. They resented, for example, the readiness with which suspicion of guilt


185. See NM 14 May, 4 Jun. 1906, Pacific Islander Association meetings; NC 7 Jan. 1905.
centred on them for any cases of assault, murder or rape. Their awareness that they were regarded as outsiders also stimulated strong resentment of the new income tax charges which were levied on them in the 1900s.\textsuperscript{186} Wariness and suspicion conditioned their dealings with Europeans. In the 1890s and 1900s the Islanders increasingly neglected to seek, or disregarded, the advice of Europeans such as the inspectors of Pacific Islanders and missionaries.\textsuperscript{187} Bitterness and resentment of their European masters was a strong motif in the memories of Queensland amongst those who returned, and sometimes led to retaliation against Europeans in the islands.\textsuperscript{188}

From the 1890s the Islanders displayed their resentment of economic restrictions on them, as wage-bargaining and strikes illustrated. In Cairns in 1896 a Solomon Islander who had been told to discontinue his illegal employment as a firewood-cutting contractor, threatened to leave the colony with several hundred others.\textsuperscript{189} Some felt that they should be able to work without restriction and receive the same wages

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{186} QPP II, 1906, p.622, J. Lunny; Caulfeild, 'Adventurous Life of Henry Caulfeild', 1 Jul. 1937, p.41; Trinity Times quoted in CMP 3 Jul. 1903, 18 Aug. 1903, Atherton Notes. In 1903 those on their first indentures were exempted from the tax, and the minimum level of non-taxable income was raised. BC 16 Feb. 1903; QPD XCI, 1903, pp.1072, 1078-79; Brenan to Inspector of Pacific Islanders, Maryborough, 23 Feb. 1903, Circular No. 205, IP1 3/35, QSA.
\item \textsuperscript{187} See Brenan to Under Chief Sec., 2 May 1906, 02010, 2372 of 1906, mf 167(a), RSPS-PSEAH; QPP II, 1906, pp.625-26, F.C. Hornbrook, p.852, G.W. Frodsham, p.885, J. O'N. Brenan, p.887, C. Neilson; BC 5 May 1892, Presbyterian General Assembly; MM 14 May 1906, Pacific Islander Association meeting. However, they liked and trusted migrants from Western Europe who were 'new chums' like themselves. See Ole Natsen, Unpublished Diaries, Diary I, n.p. (reference supplied by C.R. Moore).
\item \textsuperscript{189} CMP 5 Mar. 1896. For similar resentment, see QPP II, 1906, p.751, W.P. Wilson.
\end{itemize}
as Europeans. As one Islander declared in 1906:

We want to be free labourers, and do any work we can get. We don't want contract. We say that as we do the same work that Hindoos and white men do we should get the same wages as them.190

The Islanders were by no means all loyal, obedient servants. Increasingly they resented their disadvantaged position in the colony, and were suspicious of the intentions of Europeans. Their interaction with other non-Melanesians was similarly marked by hostility or at least a lack of cordiality. There was no bond between these groups, though all bore the brunt of European exploitation and discrimination.

Amongst the Asian groups the Islanders had sustained contact only with the Chinese. In the far north, Islanders were extensively employed by Chinese banana and sugar farmers. Such practices as paying them lower wages than Chinese labourers and providing rations on credit did not endear Chinese employers to the Islanders.191 Their resentment of the economic domination of the Chinese was exacerbated by their dependence on services offered by the Chinese - whether as hawkers on the plantations, suppliers of opium, or the proprietors of the stores, 'grog' shops, gambling houses and brothels in Chinatown.192 Aware that the Chinese looked down on them, the Islanders were physically aggressive, destroying Chinese property, assaulting and robbing defenceless Chinese.

190. Ibid., p.735, Ackar. See also Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p.251.


Conflicts were likely on those plantations where both Islanders and Chinese were employed. However, other Asian groups such as the Malays and Cinghalese were more often the instigators than the victims of violent confrontations with the Islanders.

As the only group below Pacific Islanders in the social scale, it is understandable that the Islanders looked down upon and affected to despise Aborigines. There are accounts of groups of Islanders attacking and killing Aborigines, and even stories of Europeans involving Islander employees in massacres of Aborigines. Aborigines strongly resisted European settlement in North Queensland and in this frontier war Islander employees were as much the enemy as the settlers - as the number of attacks and even killings of 'kanaka' shepherds in the 1870s testifies. Islander and Aboriginal men also fought over women. With so few Islander women in the colony, Aboriginal women were an obvious alternative. Pacific Islander men took women from the camps, usually forcibly, and there were cases of employers providing them with Aboriginal women as part-remuneration.


194. CMP 9 Nov. 1898, 14 Feb. 1902; PDT 28 Dec. 1906. The exception to this were the Indians, who were terrified of the Islanders. CMP 24 Apr. 1903.


197. Loos, Aboriginal-European Relations, pp.415-16; Shepherd, The Herbert River Story, p.238; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.344.
Yet there was another side to relations with Aborigines. Many Islander men and Aboriginal women, as will be shown in Chapter 2, formed long-lasting and affectionate unions. From local Aborigines the Islanders learnt to fish and find food in the bush and acquired a knowledge of flora with medicinal properties. A few even gained the respect and confidence of Aborigines. 198

Life in Queensland also involved interaction with other Islanders. Although these men and women came from many different groups, the experience of living in a strange country forced changes in their self-perception. Traditionally loyalties were restricted to the community of origin. Often a group would recruit together, usually under the leadership of a man who had recruited before. Within the colony they maintained an informal network of communications and at the end of their indenture or of any subsequent engagements they would come together to decide whether to stay or return. 199

On Sundays the Islanders liked to visit friends or relatives on neighbouring plantations. 200 Many had at least one relative in the colony. Despite the isolation of long distances, they kept up contact with relatives and friends in other districts and 'spelled' between engagements in order to visit them. 201 Through transfers or re-

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199. Brenan to Under Chief Sec., 2 May 1906, O2010, 2372 of 1906, mf 167(a), RSPS-PSEAH; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, pp. 347-48; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p. 87. For examples of this, see Charlie Diss Motlap to Dick Motlap, 12 Nov. 1906, p. 339, CPS 12E/G2, QSA; Henry Histabro Haio to Polynesian inspector, 14 Nov. 1906, p. 337, ibid.; Jimmy Weelara Buka Buka to Tom Buka Buka, p. 342, ibid.; Oscar Galea to Andrew Tewas, p. 394, ibid.

200. Blake, 'The Kanaka', p. 82; Hope, In Quest of Coolies, p. 114; Forbes, 'The Kanaka in Queensland', p. 646; Corris, Passage, Port and Plantation, p. 84.

engagements both the new chums and the time-expired could move closer to their kin. There was also a two-way exchange between Queensland and the islands: through oral and written messages the labourers and people in the islands maintained contact. 202

While customary loyalty remained paramount, the close contact with other groups reduced insularity and promoted a wider identification. 203 The development of pidgin allowed migrants from not only different islands but also the same island to communicate, and thus to discover the values and beliefs which they held in common. Christianity also strengthened this sense of unity: those who were joined together in Christ were enjoined to lead a peaceful and harmonious life together. 204

This wider identification had a dual expression. First, the island of origin and island group took on a new significance. Those from the one island regarded each other as countrymen and women, a category of little relevance in Melanesia. Social relationships were formed on this basis, and the out-group became all those from other islands. 205 As shown, Europeans fostered this identification by emphasizing cultural differences between different islands and also island groups. Thus it became important in some circumstances - as in 'inter-tribal fights' - to be recognized as a New Hebridean or Solomon


203. As on plantations in the islands. Bennett, Wealth of the Solomons, pp.295-96; Panoff, 'An Experiment in Inter-Tribal Contacts', p.113.


205. For examples, see BC 28 Nov. 1881; Kennedy, Four Years in Queensland, p.195; Bundaberg Star quoted in BC 15 May 1895; Saunders, Uncertain Bondage, p.348. This helps to explain the motivation of those Islanders who betrayed the interests of other Islanders by assisting the authorities. See MM 27 Mar. 1880, 21 May 1884, 4 Apr. 1885, 15 Jul. 1886, NPC; Inspector to Police Commissioner, 28 Jun. 1897, POL/J1, QSA; OPP 11, 1906, p.751, W.P. Wilson.
Islander. In Mackay this division was promoted by the concentration of the Selwyn Mission amongst Solomon Islanders and the Walkerston Mission amongst the New Hebrideans.

There was also a growing number of occasions on which the migrants began to think of themselves as racially united - as 'Pacific Islanders'. This category, which had no historical foundation, was fostered by European ethnocentric treatment of the Islanders as one 'race'. Despite European beliefs that cultural differences would prevent them from ever uniting, Pacific Islanders not only came to have an awareness of themselves as one people but also displayed this in their actions. Their attempts to form unions and to strike for better wages and conditions was one such manifestation. The levying of the income tax was an injustice which they resented and protested against in unison. It was, however, the threat of deportation which provided the greatest catalyst to concerted action: as Chapter 3 will show, the Islanders banded together in the early 1900s to campaign against their proposed expulsion from Australia.

The sense of identity felt and acted upon by Pacific Islanders can thus be compared to a series of concentric circles. First, there was an innermost circle based on customary loyalties in which members of a community were inter-dependent. Secondly, there were larger circles in which island of origin and island group were the important terms of reference. Finally, there was the widest circle in which the migrants perceived themselves as members of a Pacific Islander population. Their colonial experiences had reduced, though not eliminated, their traditional insularity.

PACIFIC Island migrants were drawn predominantly from the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides and were principally young, unmarried males. Those

men and women who spent years in the colony underwent important social
and cultural changes. In Australia individual enterprise was lauded
and obligations to kinfolk were few. This contrasted with the
communalism and co-operation emphasized in Melanesian societies,
although individualism was by no means absent there. They were exposed
to new ideas about individual rights, new codes of conduct and behaviour,
new concepts of authority and prestige. Yet their adaptations were
tempered by some maintenance of traditional customs and convictions.

Only Aborigines were regarded by Europeans as lower in the social
scale than Pacific Islanders. Usually the migrants were treated with
condescension, although on occasions they were regarded as an antagonistic
'race'. As indentured labourers their treatment varied very considerably
over the years and between different employers. Their relative
tractability and willingness to work hard for low remuneration explained
their popularity as a labour force, although in the 1890s and 1900s
this attractiveness declined in the face of determined efforts by many
Islanders to improve their conditions and increase their wages.

European ethnocentrism and contact with other Islanders acted to
break down the insularity and village-centred outlook of the migrants.
While Pacific Islanders were by no means a homogeneous group with
common goals, there were occasions on which they began to think of
themselves as one people. This sense of unity was most prevalent amongst
those who had put down roots in the colony, and it is these men and
women, and their activities and aspirations, who are discussed in the next
chapter.