

Muller argues that before knowledge is shared and made available to the mainstream, it must first be considered as to whether it is indeed appropriate for sharing. She notes that it is the misuse of knowledge that frequently alienates and divides Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Those skilled in both knowledges are considered assets of the collective body of knowledge-holders, provided they remain grounded and connected to community. Knowledge brings with it obligation, and it must always be shared appropriately, responsibly and respectfully. Misunderstandings surrounding knowledge often occur at the cultural interface. Tokenism and knowledge are inextricably entwined in the everyday lived experiences of Australia's first nations people, and are predominant, interlaced themes that run throughout Muller's research.

Muller's theory for Indigenous Australian health and human service work helps readers understand why tokenism and knowledge are both inherently problematic, but even more so when knowledge is constantly sought after, only to be then be disregarded, disrespected and misappropriated. Culture, identity, systems of law and knowledge are built on a platform of respect. It is the

breaking down of the systems of respect that have led to discrimination, which breeds dysfunction, disadvantage and poverty. By re-establishing respect for ourselves, and between others, Muller argues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can begin to recover from the effects of colonisation. Further, Muller argues that we must first begin by respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, mothers, women, men, children, and future generations. As Bonnie Robertson so concisely articulates in the preface, the concept of respect is an important one in the book, particularly for those with an interest in the principles of social inclusion, professional competency, social justice, spirituality, tradition, culture, reciprocity, and Indigenous heritage (preface, pp. vii–viii).

References

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Edward Koiki Mabo: His Life and Struggle for Land Rights

Noel Loos and Eddie Koiki Mabo

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Edward Koiki Mabo: His Life and Struggle for Land Rights was first published in 1996. This revised edition has new photographs, including scenes from the 2012 ABC tele-movie, *Mabo*, and a foreword by academic and writer Marcia Langton, who argues that this edition enables a new generation of Australians to understand Mabo's significant contributions. Readers are reminded that the struggle for justice is ongoing, not only in relation to native title claims, but with the challenge to negotiate a treaty between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

There has been an increasing interest in Indigenous histories over the previous decades. There has been much written and researched on the historic High Court of Australia decision on 3 June, 1992, *Mabo and Others v Queensland* (No. 2) (1992). That decision overturned the legal fiction of *terra nullius* (land belonging to no-one), a doctrine that failed to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' occupation of and connection with the land and that was used to dispossess the original inhabitants of the land. This book, however, is the personal story

behind Mabo, the name synonymous with this historic decision. Historian Noel Loos considered Mabo a close friend of 25 years, and began interviewing and recording him in 1984 to learn about his early life on Mer, his experiences with oppressive colonial governance and practices in the Torres Strait, and why he moved to mainland Australia. This move was not unique to Mabo. After World War II, Torres Strait Islanders migrated in large numbers to the mainland for education and employment opportunities, and now over two thirds of Islanders reside on the mainland, particularly in Cairns and Townsville.

The book has three parts. The first part, 'A personal perspective', is Loos' perspective on Mabo, a man who could see 'far into the future and far into the past' (p. 25). The second part, 'Koiki Mabo's story', is Mabo's perspective in his own words, with as little of Loos' own contribution as possible. In this section, Mabo discusses growing up on Mer, experiencing 'white-man culture', working in the Torres Strait and on the mainland, his experience of being black in North Queensland, and life with his wife, Netta

(Bonita). The third part, 'The final years', is Loos' reflection on Mabo's life, taken from diaries, personal papers and discussions with Mabo's wife, Bonita, and his daughter, Maleta. This section chronicles Mabo's activism and his final return to Mer after his death. Attwood and Magowan (2001, p. xiv) argue that 'indigenous narrators seldom represent their lives in terms of an "I" but rather of "we", and emphasise relationships with family, kin and others'. This book is, Loos writes, 'a love story between Koiki, Mer and the Meriam people which expands and embraces broader social and political issues' (p. 197) as well as the personal love story of Mabo and his wife, Bonita.

As Loos rightly states, this is Mabo's perspective, and there would be other perspectives, indeed a multiplicity of perspectives or truths. The Torres Strait is not a singular group, nor does it have a collective identity. There are geographic, cultural and linguistic differences. There are differences between islands, between different groups of Torres Strait Islanders, and between Islanders residing in the Torres Strait and on the mainland. Loos argues that while Torres Strait Islanders may have been accorded more consideration than Aboriginal peoples, this was, in effect, 'soft' control. Torres Strait Islanders were also geographically and therefore politically isolated, which meant leading activists in the 1960s were Aboriginal. Mabo agitated for greater recognition for Torres Strait Islanders, rather than being subsumed under the overarching term of Aboriginal peoples. However, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been constrained within a Western framework.

Mabo's experience in Longreach, Queensland, sleeping on the railway station platform in winter with his wife and two children because publicans would not give them a room was a catalyst for him 'to get political' (p. 142). While he was politically minded when he left the Torres Strait, such as with concerns over Torres Strait Islanders being exploited as cheap labour in the pearling industry, it was at Longreach where he learnt the importance of organising people. In the 1960s, Mabo forged links with the trade union movement, which was committed to Indigenous advancement. The trade union movement supported a seminar Mabo initiated in 1967: 'We the Australian: What is to Follow the Referendum?' While not a member himself, Mabo knew members of the Communist Party, the first non-Indigenous party that supported Indigenous peoples' fight for justice. He was also involved in various Indigenous organisations, which gave him national prominence and led to his involvement in national advisory bodies.

Education was a significant focus for Mabo. He reminisced about how Islanders and non-Islanders were segregated in separate schools in the Torres Strait. Islanders were taught to read and write, while non-Islanders were taught subjects such as science and geography. However, Mabo spoke of how one teacher instilled a vision of a positive future for Torres Strait Islanders, and how his English

language skills improved under this teacher's friendship and tutelage. He recalled: 'My lifetime on Murray [Mer], I think, was the best time of my life I ever spent; growing up on Murray [Mer] and having an opportunity to learn both the white-man way of life from my schoolteacher, Robert Miles, and my traditional heritage as well.' The two main languages spoken in the Torres Strait are Kala Lagaw Ya and Meriam Mir. Torres Strait Creole, an admixture of both Torres Strait languages and English, and English are also spoken throughout the Torres Strait. English is important for many Torres Strait Islanders, not only for its educational benefits, but also to understand Western political and economic contexts. Torres Strait Islander history and knowledges were not taught when Mabo was living in the Torres Strait. He recalled: 'That is what made me think that maybe if I was a captain of the ship, I would direct it in a different direction' (p. 148). This was the impetus to establish, with his friend Burnum Burnum, the Black Community School in Townsville in 1973. The school remained open for 12 years with Mabo as Director.

Mabo's relationship with Islanders on Mer was 'often unsettling, even turbulent, and sometimes very stormy indeed' and he was regarded by some in the Torres Strait as 'an intruder, and an anti-government radical' (p. 178). Further, he was often opposed or rejected because he was a mainlander. There are inter-island politics and differences and tensions between the Islanders and between Torres Strait and mainland Islanders. Tensions include who has the rights to the land in the Torres Strait. Mabo also encountered opposition on the mainland because of his involvement with Indigenous organisations. For example, the Inter-Racial seminar that Mabo organised was subjected to police scrutiny, and the Black Community School was subjected to constant attack from the media, the Queensland Education Department and some local politicians.

Implicit in the book is the steadying influence of his wife Bonita in his life. Mabo had an active and rich mind, always envisioning new ideas and schemes, and these were supported by Bonita. Even in his final years as he battled cancer, he was planning new projects. Within the book are anecdotes of working on luggers fishing in the Torres Strait for trochus shell, and working at various jobs on the mainland. It was when he worked as a gardener and groundsman at the now James Cook University that he discovered that Mer was Crown land and therefore he did not have legal title to his own land, which led him on the long, arduous and at times contentious journey that would culminate in the High Court decision. To commemorate this achievement, the Eddie Koiki Mabo Library of Townsville's James Cook University was opened in 2008.

Mabo, the 'quintessential political activist' (p. 189), did not live to witness the triumph of the High Court decision. Although exiled for 12 months from Mer as a teenager and prevented from returning a number of times as an

adult because of Mer politics, after his tombstone was desecrated in Townsville, Mabo's body finally returned home to his village, Las, on Mer in 1995. Mabo Day is now an official holiday in the Torres Strait and is also celebrated on the mainland. This is a narrative worth reading, of a determined, optimistic, confident and courageous man. As Marcia Langton exhorts, all Australians should read the book to learn how Mabo 'laid the foundations for

coexistence of settlers with Australia's Indigenous peoples' (p. xvii).

References

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