In this subject we shall apply critical reflections on the problematic concepts of "identity" and "tradition"/"custom" to the elucidation of selected episodes and themes in the recent history of indigenous societies in Melanesia and Australia. We shall focus on a variety of meanings of these concepts - indigenous, colonial and academic - and their uses in particular contexts. This will involve a study of anthropological concepts of culture; of the dialectics of cultural creativity, continuity, rupture and change; of processes of construction and objectification of "traditional culture" in colonial and postcolonial contexts; of indigenous appropriation and domestication of novelties, such as Christianity; of the negotiation, contestation and deployment of concepts of custom and ethnicity as ideologies and symbols of identity and exclusion, to further local, regional, national, class, ethnic and gender purposes and interests.

The texts consulted will include: theoretical reflections and specific interpretations by historians and anthropologists; contemporary accounts by participants and observers; newspapers; documentary films. We shall engage in explicit critical reflection on the status of these texts: their politics; their relationships to wider discourses - academic, colonialist, anti- and postcolonialist, feminist, postmodernist; their authors' interests and intentions; our own politics of reading and interpretation. We shall pay particular attention to the words - the categories, concepts, labels and images - which they and we use to construct and communicate understandings.

**READING GUIDE**

**WEEK 1:** introduction

**Film:** Trobriand Cricket (1980).

**Workshop:** Introduction to the subject.

- problematics of "culture", "tradition" and "custom" lived and objectified. Read Linnekin carefully and think about her definitions and her and Thomas' discourses.
- note the concepts of "text" (= medium for representation: most of the texts used in this subject are written, but texts can also include stories told orally, memories, gestures, visual media such as paintings, sculptures, photographs and films, landscapes, buildings and objects); and "discourse" ( [< L. discurrere, to run to and fro] = a politically embedded, presently persuasive set of ideas, terms, images and practices, with its own logic, distinctive emphases, exclusions and silences. The ideas, terms and images which comprise texts can be seen to cluster in discourses; understanding a text's discursive context and components is indispensable to deciphering its meanings, politics and content. In any era and culture, prevailing dominant discourses broadly define the limits, in particular contexts, of the taken-for-granted, the proper, the sayable/do-able, the not entirely proper, the improper and the unsayable/undo-able; but there are always other discourses to contest and subvert the dominant, such as the submerged discourses of the dominated and the disposed, echoes of previous dominant discourses or precursors of future ones. Discourses, then, are multiple, unstable, not necessarily consistent and always contested).

Core Reading:


Recommended Reading:


WEEK 2:  "invention"/construction of tradition


Workshop:  Constructing traditions.

- what is the argument of Keesing's 1989 article? How convincing is it? Compare it with Jolly's and Trask's critiques. Compare the academic and "native" discourses.

I want you to start thinking critically about Keesing's insistence that Melanesian *kastom* and resistance were invariably (and only) oppositional, counterhegemonic reflexes ("the discourse of the dominant shapes and structures the discourse of the dominated" - 1994:41). Consider the usefulness (and the politics) of conceiving indigenous encounters with the novel and experiences of colonial domination in terms of creative appropriation, domestication and refashioning.

**Core Reading:**

Margaret Jolly  

Roger M. Keesing  

Haunani-Kay Trask  

Hugh Trevor-Roper  

**Recommended Reading:**

Alain Babadzan  

Roger M. Keesing  

Roger M. Keesing  

**WEEK 3: tradition and colonialism**

**Film:**  

**Lecture:**  
The Invention of Tradition literature.

**Workshop:**  
Inventing tradition in colonial Fiji.
who invented tradition(s) in colonial Fiji? How? Why? Whose "tradition(s)? What involvements did/do Fijians have in processes of invention?

- what are the implications for constructionist concepts of culture and tradition as mobile and discursive (constructed, contested, plural, changing, political) rather than as enduring entities (received, homogeneous, essential, abstract)?

Core Reading:


Recommended Reading:


WEEK 4:  colonial inventions of Aboriginality in Australia


Workshop:  Constructions of Aboriginality in colonial Australia.

- what elements of constraint and choice are there in Jack McPhee's recollections of his early years in the Pilbara? What traces are there in his narrative of the power of colonial discourses of Aboriginality and of variety and change in indigenous experiences of identity? - Beckett's "public"/"private ethnicity".

- who invented "Aborigines" in Australia? Why? How, when and in what practical contexts did discourses of Aboriginality emerge, change and help shape the actions of the colonisers? e.g., see Morris' concept of the colonial "culture of terror" as both inflicted on Aborigines and as inspired by (colonial perceptions) of Aboriginal actions.
Core Reading:


WEEK 5:  "custom" and anticolonialism


Workshop:  The Maasina Rule Movement in the Solomon Islands.

- what label(s) best describe Maasina Rule?  What were its objectives and strategies as expressed by its leaders at the time and later?  How did they vary in place and time? between Christians and pagans?

- what was the varied and changing significance of *kastom* in Maasina Rule, as behaviour/code/ideology?  What were its relationships to regionally diverse precolonial practices? to colonial hegemony?

Core Reading:


R.M. Keesing (ed.)  'Elota's Story: the Life and Times of a Solomon Islands Big Man' (St Lucia 1978), 155-64, 182-85.

**Recommended Reading:**

Jonathan Fifi'i  

Roger M. Keesing  

**WEEK 6: *kastom* lived and objectified**

**Video:** *The Lau of Malaita.* (1987).

**Workshop:** Meanings and experience of *kastom* for traditionalists in Melanesia.

- what were the meanings, content and uses of *kastom* for the modern traditionalists variously described by Fifi'i, Jolly and Keesing? How did their concepts of *kastom* relate to their changing lived experience, gender and identities?

- in what ways was *kastom* a political ideology, a counterhegemonic discourse to those of Christianity, colonialism and nationalism? What else was it?

- what are the anthropological agenda at stake?

**Core Reading:**

Jonathan Fifi'i  
*From Pig-Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds* (Honiara 1989), 91-150.

Margaret Jolly  

Roger M. Keesing  

**Recommended Reading:**

Roger M. Keesing  

Roger M. Keesing  

WEEK 7: kastom and Christianity


Workshop: Kastom and Christianity in Malaita.

- what were the varied and changing meanings and relationships of kastom/tradition and Christianity in the identity constructions of Kwara-ae Christians, as described by Burt?

- compare kastom as lived, conceived and deployed by Kwaio traditionalists and the traditionalist women's conceptions (and experiences) of Christianity and Christians recorded by Keesing.

- should Christians in Melanesia be seen as passive recipients/victims of dominant alien discourses or as actively engaged in the construction and manipulation of indigenous Christian cultures, ideologies and identities? What are the implications for the concepts of "culture" and "conversion"?

Core Reading:


Recommended Reading:

Martha Kaplan "Christianity, People of the Land, and Chiefs in Fiji", in John Barker (ed.), Christianity in Oceania: Ethnographic Perspectives(Lanham 1990), 127-47.


**WEEK 8: women and "custom"**

**Video:** *The Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea* (1990).

**Workshops** Women and "custom" in Melanesia.

- what were the varied images in the texts of the status and agency of women in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts in Melanesia? Why?

- compare the varied significance of "custom" for village women and educated urban women in modern societies in Melanesia? Cf. gender and class? What seem to be the changing meanings to them of Western feminism?

- what are the politics of representation and self-representation involved?

**Core Reading:**


Vanuatu Nasonal Kaonsel Blong Ol Woman  *Who Will Carry the Bag?* (Port Vila 1990), 12-13, 18-19, 23, 34, 38, 40-4, 47-8, 50-1.


Roger M. Keesing  "Ta'a geni: Women's Perspectives on Kwaio Society", in Marilyn Strathern (ed.), *Dealing with Inequality: Analysing Gender Relations in Melanesia and Beyond* (Cambridge 1987), 33-62.

**OR**


**WEEK 9: women and Aboriginality**
**Video:** Essie Coffey's *My Survival as an Aboriginal* (1978).

**Workshop:** Women and Aboriginality in Australia.

- what are the common/unshared elements in these women's accounts of their experiences, and their varied and changing sense of being Aboriginal, taking account of different discourses, times, places and contexts?

- what suggestions are there of effective female agency? In what ways did they see themselves as enabled/constrained? What strategies did they adopt and how useful were they? Did they see themselves as victims? Should we?

- how appropriate to their discourses are white feminist agenda, and intersections of race, gender and class (see Pettman)?

**Core Reading:**

Oodgeroo


Chandra Talpade Mohanty


Jan Pettman


**AND THREE OF**

Ruby Langford Ginibi

*Don't Take Your Love to Town* (Penguin 1988), chs. 3-6, 15, 21, 22.

Sally Morgan

*My Place* (Freemantle 1987), chs 15, 16, 21 + Daisy Corunna's Story.

Margaret Tucker


Ruby de Satge

"I Was Born on the Banks of the Georgina River", in Bill Rosser, *Dreamtime Nightmares: Biographies of Aborigines under the Queensland Aborigines Act* (Canberra 1985)

**WEEK 10:** the "Melanesian Way" and regional ethnicity
**Lecture:** Politics of Aboriginality in Australia.


**Workshop:** The "Melanesian Way", regional ethnicity and the power of ambiguous symbols

- what did Walter Lini mean by the "Melanesian Way"? What uses have Melanesian political leaders made of the concept?

- what relationships were described between kastom and nationalism in Vanuatu, between national kastom, local kastoms, the lived kastom of traditionalists and precolonial cultures and behaviour?

- compare and contrast the abstract, international/national-level politicians' discourse of the "Melanesian Way" with the explicitly racist, reciprocal discourses of ethnicity reported with reference to Bougainville by Nash and Ogan.

**Core Reading:**

Walter Lini  Independence Address to the Nation, 30 July 1980 (Lini was Prime Minister of Vanuatu).


**Recommended Reading:**


**WEEK 11:** experiences, constructions and deconstructions of Aboriginality
**Video:**  *Black Man's Houses* (1992).

**Workshop:** Dispossession and the politics of identity.

- what are the various discourses of identity and Aboriginality in the texts? Whose are they? How are they constructed and contested?

- in what ways do Aborigines "poach" on Western discourses in constructing Aboriginality? What are the politics of debates over the morality of biological metaphors, resistance and "oppositional culture"? Where are these politics located?

- what are the similarities to and differences from Melanesian conceptions and uses of custom/tradition and identity encountered in this subject?

**Core Reading:**


**WEEK 12:**  "inventing" culture and the limits of liberal humanism

**Video:**  *The Fantastic Invasion.*

**Workshop:** Constructing culture; universal values and the abortion debate on Guam.
- try to disentangle the various discourses in the contest over the anti-abortion bill in Guam.

- how were the concepts of culture, identity, Catholic, self-determination, female agency, rights, citizen and liberty variously deployed in the actual debate and in the texts? Consider the politics and moralities of tension between humanism/cultural relativism.

- whose culture? When and for what? Is "authenticity" an issue? For whom?

Core Reading:

Vicente Diaz  "Pious Sites: Chamorro Culture at the Crossroads of Spanish Catholicism and American Liberalism", in Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (ed.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham 1993), 312-39.


Recommended Reading:


WEEK 13: reprise and reflections


Workshop: Concepts rehearsed and reconsidered.

- identify and analyse critically the various meanings and uses we have encountered of the concepts "culture", "custom", "tradition", *kastom*, "identity": as lived; deployed politically as symbol and ideology; as counterhegemonic; as poached from other discourses; invoked as an analytic construct.

- what are the discourses involved?

