Present Primordialities: The Post-colonial Landscape in Arosi (Solomon Islands)

During my research on Makira, Arosi villagers repeatedly informed me: ‘We are all people who have come from elsewhere’. Yet, despite the overt consensus that all were newcomers to the coastal land, I soon discovered that many different lineages covertly claim to be the traditional matrilineal owners of the land in mutually exclusive ways. In this paper I trace the processes through which Arosi produce multiple, latent, and overlapping lineage territories, unseen but inscribed on land that is said to be devoid of customary lineage owners. Ethnographers and theorists of colonial contexts have observed that the advent of missionaries and modernity in colonial spaces can precipitate a perceived return to an imagined primordial condition. Building on this scholarship, I suggest that the contradictory post-colonial constructions of the landscape that I encountered in Arosi may be understood as a function of the persistence of two indigenous conceptual models and practical modes of primordiality.