

# Theoretical Considerations and the Aim of the Exhibition

The lives of the Ambonwari people of Papua New Guinea in the Sepik and Murui people of Colombia in the Amazon are both defined and made possible by the rivers on which they live their days. This exhibition explores the idea of life on the river, and the understandings and relationship that we – JCU researchers – have forged with our collaborators and interlocutors in these places.

Both river basins, Sepik and Amazon, share unique but similar ecological features and cultural values. There are only a few studies, which in their comparative approach link the regions of Melanesia and Amazonia. Thomas Gregor and Donald Tuzin coined the term Melazonia, merging the two regions. In their edited book (2001), they compared egalitarian ethos of social organisation, kinship alliances, gift exchange, and men's cults in Melanesia and Amazonia. Joel Robbins et al (2014) focused on Christianity and transformation of the Self in Amazonia and Melanesia. They reached a common conclusion that commonalities between the two regions greatly outweighed differences. On the other hand, Bruce Knauft (1997), while writing on gender and modernity in Amazonia and Melanesia, emphasised the differences between two regions, rather than the similarities. Lastly, Alexandra Aikhenvald (2008) compared languages of the Vaupés (Northwest Amazonia) with those of the Sepik region in Papua New Guinea.

This exhibition shows commonalities and differences in more practical terms, through lived experience of life on the river. The themes include canoe making, fishing, hunting, and food preparation, showing how social and ecological domains of people's lives are tightly interwoven. Through joint collection of photographs, videos, collages, drawings, and personal objects, the exhibition presents our fieldwork experiences, research methods, and collaborative approaches, as well as engaging important ecological and social issues happening in the tropics.

Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2008. 'Language Contact along the Sepik River, Papua New Guinea.' *Anthropological Linguistics* 50 (1):1-66.

Gregor, Thomas A. and Donald Tuzin. 2001. *Gender in Amazonia and Melanesia: An Exploration of the Comparative Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Knauft, Bruce M. 1997. 'Gender Identity, Political Economy and Modernity in Melanesia and Amazonia.' *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3 (2):233-259.

Robbins, Joel, Bambi B. Schieffelin, and Aparecida Vilaça. 2014. 'Evangelical Conversion and the Transformation of the Self in Amazonia and Melanesia: Christianity and the Revival of Anthropological Comparison.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56 (3):559–590.