

Represented communities: Fiji and world decolonization, by John D. Kelly & Martha Kaplan

Georgette Leah Burns

Australian School of Environmental Studies Griffith University

Represented communities: Fiji and world decolonization, by John D. Kelly & Martha Kaplan. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2001, xiv+243pp., preface, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-226-42990-3 (paperback).

Kelly and Kaplan's *Represented communities* is a collection of independent essays with the central aim of critiquing Benedict Anderson's reflections, in *Imagined communities* (1983, 1991), on the origin and spread of nationalism. Fiji is promised as a case study, and comparative material from Hawaii is also featured in the book. Each essay is internally very strong and can be read as a compact and complete entity. Both authors have a long and admirable history of research and publication on Pacific issues.

Chapter 1, entitled 'Nation and decolonization', traces the history of the term 'nation-state', describing when, where and how it has existed in practice, as opposed to more recent usages. An argument is made that the long-time lack of a label for nation-state was deliberately linked to a repression of imperial history. American history and its relationship to decolonisation and building of nation-states receive considerable attention, but since Fiji was a British colony, the relevance of this focus is not always clear.

Chapter 2 offers the most detailed critique of Anderson's work, tackling his classic definition, according to which the imagining of nation depends on its history, literature and other cultural discourses. Here, Anderson's misunderstanding of Benjamin, upon whose work much of his analysis depends, is demonstrated. Kelly and Kaplan are of course not the first to question Anderson's propositions of the homogeneity of imagined communities (e.g., see Bhabha 1990), or of nationalism as predominantly 'discourse' and/or 'imaginary' (Babadzan 2000, 132; Smith 1991).

Chapter 3 promises to 'reopen some old questions about the politics of blood and its power to create political limits' in thinking 'about the making and unmaking of political possibilities' (p. 64), drawing on ethnography and history from Fiji and Hawaii. The blood being discussed here is not simply a euphemism for descent, but also the blood shed through war and its connection to race and

identity. An argument is made for current scholarly 'identity fetishism' (p. 69) being pervasive, generalised and fatally flawed (p. 72).

Chapter 4 covers a historical ethnography of colonial communities in Fiji and offers suggestions on how to study community. The term 'represented communities' is introduced as a new approach to community and communalism; that is, those constituted by specifically imperial institutions of representation (p. 83). A useful summary of the book to this point is offered (p. 95), and Indo-Fijian history and the history of race in Fiji are chronologically traced throughout this chapter.

The penultimate chapter considers 'the ritual requirements of nationhood' (p. 121), focusing on two specific projects: the official national rituals of newly independent Fiji, and ritual conducted by an Indo-Fijian visionary mystic. That such rituals are practical in their nature, yet also powerful in political order and change, is emphasised throughout.

The final chapter is concerned with the choices behind, and fate of, the 1997 Fijian constitution, the 1999 election and the 2000 coup. The authors review a history of dialogues that constitute Fiji from four points of view, before going back in time to the 1870s deed of cession. Finally, discussion returns to the book's focus on the nation-state and social contracts.

After solidly setting the theoretical framework based on the discourse of nationalism and decolonisation in the two opening chapters, the authors skilfully weave material from case studies to illustrate key points. They leave the reader in no doubt about their opinions, or the strength of them—for example, 'I propose that we banish the very concept of identity from its current fetishized place in our scholarly vocabulary' (p. 74)—in their intensive study of the issues surrounding contemporary represented communities.

Some lack of consistency in writing style and logical progression between chapters makes parts of this book confusing. For example, in Chapter 1 the authors are referred to as 'we', whilst in Chapter 2 'I' is more prevalent, though 'we' is still used. At times, the style of convoluted sentence construction adopted by the authors makes the text difficult to follow and risks alienating the audience. Although not specifically aimed at students, this barrier to accessibility seems a shame as there is much here that would benefit such an audience; but this work is not for the academically faint-hearted.

References:

1. Babadzan, A. 2000. Anthropology, nationalism and the 'invention of tradition'. *Anthropological Forum* 10 (2): 131–55. Bhabha, Homi K., ed. 1990. *Nation and narration*. London: Routledge.
2. Smith, A. D. 1991. The nation: Invented, imagined or reconstructed? *Millennium* 20 (3): 353–68.