

Customs of Respect: The Traditional Basis of Fijian Communal Politics. By John Nation. The Australian National University, Canberra, 1978. xx, 168pp. Recommended price: \$A8.00.

Plantation to Politics: Studies on Fiji Indians. By Ahmed Ali. The University of the South Pacific and the Fiji Times and Herald Limited, Suva, 1980. viii, 224pp. Recommended price: \$F4.00.

Race Class and Rebellion in the South Pacific. By Alexander Mamak and Ahmed Ali, with Richard Bedford, Hugh Laracy, Daniel Lyons and Hannah Middleton. George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1979. 144pp. Recommended price: \$NZ7.95.

CUSTOMS OF RESPECT examines the nature of 'the Fijian Community', the unity of which is, the author argues, 'the central fact of political life in Fiji' (p.v). Nation begins with a description of the traditional polity in which he pays particular attention to relationships between chiefs and people and the way in which group identity and parochialism also make for a wider acceptance of common values and, therefore, for a sense of community. The discussion is based on standard accounts of Fijian society but the author maintains his independence from them all, drawing first from one, then another, and using his own experience and perceptions to justify his use and criticisms of them. He then explores the nature of this community in two contexts: in the Fijian Administration of the 1960s and 1970s, and in the national political arena.

In his description of the Fijian Administration, Nation discusses briefly the Sukuna reforms of the immediate post-war years and then its subsequent 'democratization' and the attempt to transform the Administration into more of a modern local government system. Here, the difficulties caused by the attempt to blend new institutions on to a modified traditional order are examined with special reference to the Provincial Councils of the Central Division. The discussion of national political activity is much broader and more impressionistic. The two elections of 1977 (the first of which saw the Alliance Party almost lose office) are set against the background of general elections in 1963, 1966 and 1972 in which most Fijian candidates backed by the Fijian Association were returned easily. But in March 1977 the Indian-dominated National Federation Party won half of all seats, largely because the Fijian vote was split by Sakeasi Butadroka's Fijian Nationalist Party ('Fiji for the Fijians'). In a subsequent general election six months later, divisiveness within the National Federation Party, and a reassertion of chiefly influence within the Fijian community, saw the Alliance comfortably back in power. Nation argues that a significant factor in the eclipse of Butadroka was his onslaught on Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and other political leaders of chiefly status and his failure, as a commoner, to convince electors of the legitimacy of his position of leadership. Very real grievances, especially in rural villages, were not sufficient to over-ride the 'Customs of Respect' upon which Fijian politics are based.

The thesis is well argued, although one might have wished to have seen it discussed in the light of increasing multi-racial trade union activity over the past two decades; Nation's argument will be well tested in the forthcoming (July 1982) general election when the position of the Alliance will be challenged not only by the Fijian Nationalist Party but also by the Western United Front which has a strong regional base and is led by a prominent chief, Ratu Osea Gavidi, who has

been an independent member of parliament since 1977.

Nation provides valuable insights into the Fijian community, and therefore into Fijian political life in general, but his work is a part of that academic pluralism that reflects the Fiji scene; he is concerned with only one community among many. The same is true, though less so, of Ahmed Ali's *Plantation to Politics*, a collection of his previously published studies revised and brought together in anticipation of the centenary of Indian migration to Fiji. Ali emphasises that this is not a history of the Fiji Indians but a series of essays that range over the period from 1879 to 1977. The collection has not only a unifying subject but all essays, to varying degrees, are focussed on that central issue of colonialism in Fiji—how to 'reconcile paramountcy for Fijians, over-representation of Europeans, and [the] promise of equality to Indians' (p.164). Where Nation shows us a community that maintains an essential unity despite fissures and strains caused by rivalry, the Ali essays, read together, leave the impression of a community divided by its regional and social origins, its religions, and the ambitions of its leaders, and united only occasionally by its insecurities, an abiding sense of injustice, and the pursuit of political equality and *izzat* (self-respect).

Both of these works are concerned with the realities and implications of colonialism in Fiji but neither seeks to pronounce upon the nature of colonialism in general; *Race Class and Rebellion* is a book of a different order. The principal authors argue that to view colonialism in terms of acculturation and assimilation is to obscure or ignore 'resistance, destruction, dispossession and discrimination' (p.138). Pacific peoples, we are told, 'are not a proletariat in the classical sense, but constitute a viable group of wage earners, plantation workers, dock hands and communal landowners who at various times have made up a single revolutionary class' (p.133). 'Peoples', in this context, is not defined; nor is 'viable'. There is no attempt to relate 'peoples' to traditional social groupings, to nations, to groups that have shown revolutionary inclinations, or even to those involved in the incidents and movements that are the subject of the five case studies presented—the 1975 Bougainville Copper Mineworkers' Strike, the 1920 strike by a group of Indian labourers in Fiji, Maasina Rule in the Solomon Islands in the 1940s and early 1950s, the Parihaka movement in New Zealand in the nineteenth century, and attempts by Gurindji Aborigines to repossess their land in the 1960s and 1970s. The specialist sociological terminology (the uncharitable might call it jargon) with which a few of the chapters abound, goes largely undefined ('There is agreement in the literature on the general usage of these terms', p.14) or is defined to meet the authors' purpose. Rebellion, for example, is defined in general terms as 'the course of action taken by oppressed peoples against their oppressors' and, for the purposes of the book as 'the willingness of a group of people to use, or threaten to use, force (in the sense of *political* struggle, not necessarily *armed* struggle) through collective mobilisation and action in order to counteract the effects of domination and exploitation' (p.13). Such definitions are necessary, perhaps, to encompass the widely disparate examples discussed in the book. Moreover, fundamental issues are skirted or ignored: inequalities within traditional societies are passed by in favour of assumptions of a common purpose (it is even stated that egalitarianism was a feature of Maori society); it is only in parenthesis that we are told that 'Of course' there can be 'class differences and class-based antagonisms' within ethnic groups (p.132); class identity (amongst groups defined by race or ethnicity) is assumed, not proven; the decolonization process and the post-colonial distribution of power

amongst Pacific Islanders are virtually ignored in any discussion of contemporary issues. One could go on. Structurally, and otherwise, this is an unsatisfactory book. One should point out, however, that these criticisms should be levelled primarily at the introduction and conclusion, and that some of the contributors seem unaware of the concern with race, class, rebellion, and 'qualitative and quantitative dimensions of black-white socio-economic differentials' (p.79) that appears elsewhere in the text.

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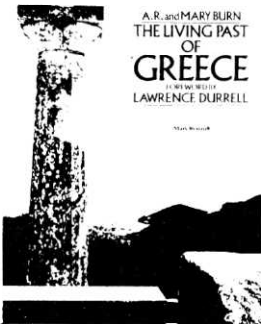
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