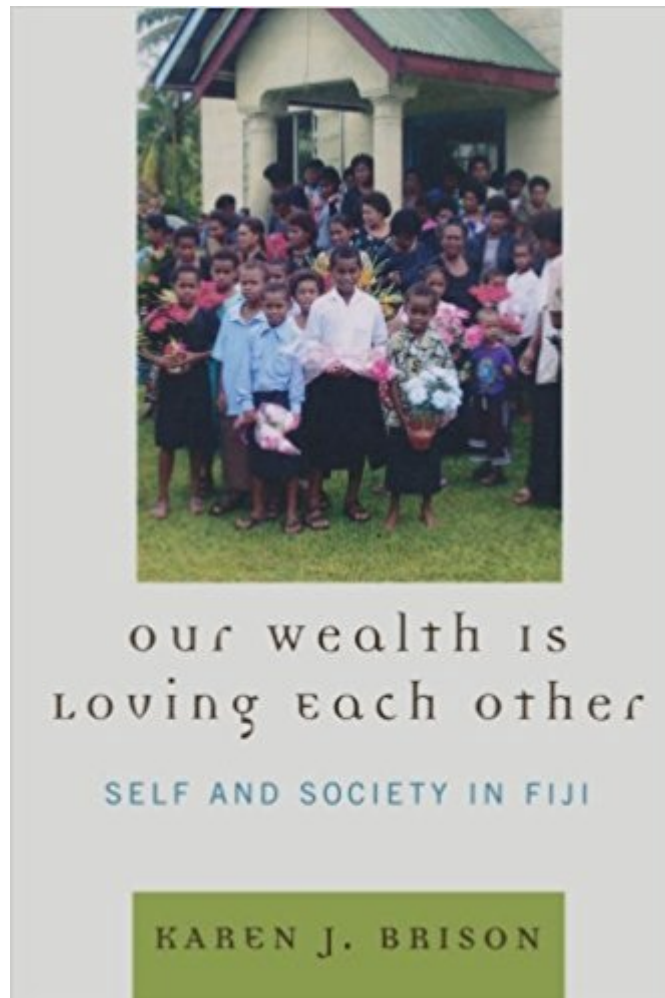




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Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other: Self And Society In Fiji



Synopsis

Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other explores the fluid and context-bound nature of cultural and personal identity among indigenous Fijians. While national identity in Fiji is often defined in opposition to the West through reference to a romanticized pre-modern tradition, individual Fijians are often more concerned with defining their identity vis-à-vis other villagers and other groups within Fiji. When people craft self accounts to justify their position within the indigenous Fijian community they question and redefine both tradition and modernity. Modernity on the margins is an experience of anxiety provoking contradictions between competing ideologies, and between international ideologies and local experiences. Indigenous Fijians have been exposed to international ideologies and government programs extolling the virtues of 'pre-modern' communities that place communal good and time honored tradition over individual gain. But other waves of policy and rhetoric have stressed individual achievement and the need to 'shake' individuals out of community bonds to foster economic development. Individuals feel contradictory pressures to be autonomous, achieving individuals and to subordinate self to community and tradition. Brison examines traditional kava ceremonies, evangelical church rhetoric, and individual life history narratives, to show how individuals draw on a repertoire of narratives from local and international culture to define their identity and sense of self. Our Wealth Is Loving Each Other is appropriate for upper level students and anyone with an interest in Fiji or anthropology.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Brison has written a fine book that vividly captures the challenges faced by indigenous people in Fiji

as they work at self fashioning in a changing world dominated by contradictory systems of values. Showing us how individuals and communities navigate between the pulls of communal and individualist models of selfhood, she gives us a rich, person-centered view of what the global era looks like to those living at its margins. Engagingly written, this is a book that succeeds in bringing theory and ethnography together seamlessly. It deserves to be widely read by people interested in the conjunction of culture and selfhood in the global era. (Joel Robbins, University of California-San Diego)

Karen Brison explores a dimension of social change until now neglected by studies of the indigenous Fijians. This book is enriched by interview data that vividly convey the strivings and dilemmas experienced by her informants in contexts of change and new opportunities. This volume is a compelling study of the dialectics of mind, self and society in contexts of rapid and perplexing social change. Her account of the mutability and multiplicity of self-identities within Fijian communities and beyond them raises questions for future research on the extent to which these changes in imagining the self are influenced by inter-ethnic relations, and on the impact that changing conceptions of self might in turn have on directions of change in ethnic relations. (Robert Norton Journal of Pacific History, July 2009)

Karen Brison has written a lucid account of Fijian life that probes many of the tensions and contradictions found in globalizing societies today. Most importantly, the reader encounters these predicaments through the voices of a diverse range of Fijians: men, women, and children, who provide eloquent testimony about being indigenous in a (post)modern world. This is one of those rare volumes that advances anthropological debates while giving us a book that also makes for an excellent introduction to contemporary Oceania. (Geoffrey White, University of Hawai'i)

Karen J. Brison is associate professor of Anthropology at Union College.

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