

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**VERED AMIT (ed).** *Realizing Community: Concepts, Social Relationships, and Sentiments.* New York: Routledge, 2002, x + 173 p., US \$80 cloth/US \$27.95 paper.

This is a small book, small in size, and fewer than 200 pages. Yet its concepts are huge. *Realizing Community* attempts to elucidate the over-used concept of 'community,' both in everyday language, as well as in scholarly work. It also attempts to challenge some conventional wisdom on the concept of community. Amit has collected six ethnographic cases, which explore different communities on different terrains; he invites us to explore the concept of community through these narratives, which demonstrate how communities are 'realized' by the individuals in these six intriguing and dynamic case studies. The result is compelling, stimulating, and successful.

*Realizing Community* starts with an introductory chapter by the editor, which lays out the theoretical development on community in the last half of a century. She offers a thorough review on different key elements explored by various scholars, such as culture, identity, boundary, place, ideologies of solidarity and so on. On one hand, she praises powerful contributions of previous scholarly studies on communities, such as "imagined communities" put forth by Benedict Anderson, and furthers the debate between primordial and instrumental approaches to the understanding of communities. On the other hand, she agrees with Rapport (Chapter 8) and questions whether approaches that are strongly influenced by the traditional western notion of science. Is a reduction to either truth-or-false dichotomy at a decontextualized and/or abstract level able to provide full meaning of any vibrant community existing in a rapid changing globalized world? She uses the narratives of six ethnographic cases as evidence to argue that we must understand of how individuals realize their communities in actual social relations. These social relations help them maintain, continue to experience, and make sense out of the ways in which people organize specific aspects of their lives.

The introduction itself is already illuminating. The six ethnographic cases are equally exciting and colorful. Instead of supporting whether a community is a primordial or an instrumental entity, the authors demonstrate under what conditions a particular community emerges, and how its members realize the idea of the community with the ways in which they practise such idea or concept. The idea of a community can emerge out of a set of shared experience such as aging (Chapter 2) or parenting

through children's participation in extra-curriculum activity, such as sport (Chapter 6). The idea of community can also emerge out of variable historical depths. The localism developed among the Catholics and Lutherans in Cieszyn Silesia is a result of long struggle in demographic, political, and economic changes in more than half of a century (Chapter 4). This contrasts sharply with adoptive families (Chapter 5) in contemporary Norway which are episodic and partial in nature. Some communities consist more of a primordial sentiment (Chapter 3), based a long traditional culture of ram raising which has strong symbolic value of place. In contrast, the purpose of communities in the Norwegian adoptive families and parents in sport clubs is more instrumental in nature. Another dynamic aspect involves the Caribbean community (Chapter 7) with both primordial and instrument sentiments. In this particular study, the two narrators come from different social and cultural backgrounds in the Caribbean. Their different understanding and practice of their ethnic culture led them to form very different cultural identities.

One of the major contributions of these studies is to challenge some previous scholarly approaches to the effect of communality that has tended to "feature two extreme positions that have rendered 'true' community as either exceptional or inexplicable" (p.17). However, Amit argues that communities cannot be realized unless we explore "the visceral nature of community, that these are not coldly calculated contracts, but embodied, sensual and emotionally charged affiliations" (p.16).

The gem of this small book is in Chapter 8, which is a conceptual discussion rather than field work. Rapport, its author, offers several invaluable points of departure for the future study of community, and the practice of ethnographic approach to community that bears a vital implication in morality. His focus on self-consciousness echoes with the narrators in these other case studies. They have the freedom and consciousness to believe in and practise a diversity of identities which they continuously create and live in it simultaneously. Anthropologists as well as other social sciences, I would argue, have the freedom to engage themselves in process of collecting and reinterpreting of these life experiences and identity. These exercises, according to Rapport, are endemic. Ironically, using Rapport's concept (p.150), Cohen's epilogue illustrates the book itself is a community which disseminates narratives. Therefore, Rapport urges scholars to take a moral stand in academic studies to protect the conditions of its taking place, which is the freedom of all humankind.

This is an excellent book, one that is also vital to all students in different disciplines interested in the study of community. The case studies here are vibrant, colorful, and dynamic. All the chapters are evenly well-written. *Realizing Community* is particularly suitable to upper-level courses. Yet with help of instructors, I do not see why lower-level students cannot benefit from this engaging book. Students and scholars alike must ponder the often take-it-for-granted foundation in traditional social science disciplines. We claim to be experts in finding the truth in our social world.

But what is that truth? Is our so-called truth in social sciences so eternal? How true and how meaningful is our truth, if it is so detached from our everyday experience, if it does not take the constant movements in our human reality into consideration?

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