

RIO, KNUT MIKJEL. *The power of perspective: social ontology and agency on Ambrym, Vanuatu*. xviii, 270 pp., maps, figs, illus., bibliogr. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. £47.00 (cloth)

Ambrym has been an argumentative anthropological arena since Deacon reported in 1927 that there existed in the island a six-section system. Lanes, Guiart, Löffler, Josselin de Jong, and Scheffler joined in heated discussions on the system. Patterson claims, however, that there is no such system on Ambrym, although her data on kinship terminology are almost the same as that of Deacon and her diagram of kinship terms is almost the same as the model of terminology proposed by Löffler for the six-section.

Knut Mikjel Rio, following Patterson, also denies the existence of the prescribed alliance among six groups, and yet presents almost the same terminological diagram as that of Löffler. The latter is constructed on the basis of the restricted exchange supposed to occur among three patrilineal terminological lines. The marriage of a male ego is to be made with his $FMBSD=FFZSD=MBDD=FZDD$. According to the diagram, two-thirds of marriages are within the same generation and one-third between adjacent generations. This diagram is inadequate for the terminology of a six-section system, because every marriage should be of an equivalent type in such a diagram, as Josselin de Jong has pointed out.

I instead propose a new diagram, also consisting of three patrilineal lines, which fits the rule that all marriages are to be made between adjacent generations. Thus male Ego is to marry his $FMBSD=FFZSD$, and Ego's $MBDD=FZDD$ is to marry his FF or SS who are in the same category with Ego. I trust that this diagram is better than those that have preceded it.

Rio criticizes Radcliffe-Brownian British social anthropology as seeing society as mere observable networks of relationship. He

proposes a new approach by adopting Sartre's concepts: 'third party' and 'totalization'. Sartre claims that by paying attention to the third party as a totalizer, the dialectical shifting of perspectives among relations can be grasped. Rio, following this idea, tries to analyse how the people create social orders and meanings around themselves.

He first searches for the third party in kinship relations and marriage practice. Rio's argument here is as follows: the marriage of a man's MBS 'will eventually produce for him a new "mother" who will be able to marry his son' (p. 72). The idea of producing a new mother is crucial in his argument because he tries to grasp kinship relations as a production system. There are, however, some serious misunderstandings in his arguments. He explains Ambrym kinship in terms of actual genealogical relations. As it is, the Ambrym system is based upon categories indicated by kinship terminology. This kind of confusion between genealogy and category had repeatedly been pointed out by Needham in 1960s. There is the fact that M, MBS, and SW are included in the category called *rahen*. Translating *rahen* just as 'mother', therefore, is a result of this kind of confusion. Another of Rio's misunderstandings is his assertion that a *mesong*'s ZD 'is carrying his blood, and is therefore an extension of himself' (p. 77). He limits the category *mesong* only to the genealogical MB, who is interpreted as the third party. Viewed from the categorical perspective, however, her *mesong* also indicates her MBSS and BDH. It is very unlikely that she carries the blood of these persons.

The latter part of this book covers ceremonies of marriage, birth, circumcision, and death and Rio analyses ceremonial exchanges in terms of the shift of perspective. Rather than the usual analysis of ceremonial exchange focusing on economic aspects, he claims a new approach to the anthropological theory of exchange. Looking at pig-killing regarded as a counter-gift, he insists that the counter-gift 'destroys the character of the previous gift and forces it into being reciprocity', meaning that 'ego denies the perspective of the gift' (p. 221) and makes the new perspective of reciprocity. This is a strange argument. Any anthropologist knows the ethnographic fact that any kind of gift creates a new cycle of reciprocity. A good example can be taken from North Raga (Pentecost, Vanuatu), where gift, counter-gift, loan, and refund are all related to each other and any of them can be regarded as an opening or a continuation of reciprocity called *mwemwearuana*.

Rio's intention to elucidate why a particular person is selected from among many in the same structural position may be admirable, but one finds quite a few arbitrary interpretations and affirmations which are not verified by his rather poor ethnographic data. It is regrettable to conclude that ethnographically and theoretically there are more confusions than contributions in this book.

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