

districts and propagandize against the UC's moderate leftism. Le Borgne also puts the political struggle in New Caledonia in regional context and makes important references to what was happening in Algeria, which had considerable impact on the minds of local settlers and military men and directly inspired the anti-UC riots of June 1958. There was even talk of bringing in thousands of emigrant settlers from Algeria to New Caledonia in 1962, for the very same reason that France encouraged immigration during the early 1970s nickel boom (ie, to make the separatists a minority), but the idea was successfully delayed by the UC until that later influx was beyond its control. It is ironic that one of the Gaullists' greatest fears in the 1960s was that the UC would allow INCO, the giant Canadian nickel mining firm, to start up a processing plant in New Caledonia in competition with the Société Le Nickel, which had a monopoly and was owned by the Rothschild Bank, where de Gaulle's premier, Georges Pompidou, worked whenever he was not helping the general. Today, INCO is trying again to build a processing plant in a more autonomous New Caledonia (thanks to the bloodshed of the 1980s), but now with the blessing of local Gaullists, who enjoy a political majority. As Munholland shows regarding Bogart and Rains in *Casablanca*, there is always more to the public image than meets the eye. Both of these books help us to see behind the mask of French cooperation and benevolence in the Pacific.

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*The Power of Perspective: Social Ontology and Agency on Ambrym, Vanuatu*, by Knut Mikjel Rio. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007. ISBN 978-1-84545-293-3, xviii + 270 pages, figures, maps, photographs, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. US\$80.00.

Vanuatu's Ambrym Island was a hot-spot for early British anthropologists hunting obscure kinship structure. W H R Rivers, in 1914, recorded an initial version of the West Ambrym kin term system that he collected from William Temar who was training to be a Presbyterian teacher at the Tangoa Training Institute, on Tangoa Island, off Espiritu Santo. The terminological system presented a puzzle in that Ambrymese apply the same kin terms to relatives of different generations such that men's wives might, sometimes, also be considered their sister's son's daughters, their mother's brother's daughter's daughter, their mother's sister's daughter's son's daughter, and so forth. T T Barnard and Bernard Deacon, Rivers's students, visited Ambrym in the 1920s to confirm and augment his analysis. They, along with Anthony Radcliffe-Brown, reinterpreted Ambrym Island kinship to be a "six-section system" (rather than residual evidence of gerontocracy, as Rivers had proposed) in which two moieties, comprising three patrilineal groups each, spiral women across generations. Harold Scheffler, who had a look at the system in the 1960s, figured it was an anomalously patrilineal Crow type that merges agnatic kin of different generations (eg, one's father's father is also a classificatory brother; one's mother is also one's son's wife).

Unlike bilateral systems (which are more common in Melanesia, where marital and other exchange links two families, villages, sides, or moieties), Ambrym social structure is trilateral.

In the 1960s, Ambrym kinship puzzles found their way into an even more rarified arena when they served as anecdotal evidence in arguments between Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss. When Deacon visited Ambrym in 1926, a local man had graphed for him the island's tripartite kinship and marriage system by drawing this in the sand, arranging illustrative stones that represented one's own family, one's mother-givers, and one's sister-takers. Lévi-Strauss offered this diagram as evidence of universal abstract thought (a given in human nature), while Sartre, in a structural-Marxist phase, argued that thought must rather reflect practice.

Knut Mikjel Rio, who traveled to Ambrym in the late 1990s, takes up the anthropological obligation to describe Ambrym in its own terms, and according to local interests, rather than as mere grist for the mills of kinship analysis or French philosophizing. Rio proposes that Ambrym ethnographic fact might not just prove, or disprove, ruling kinship theory, or standing models of sociability, but may instead provide comparative understanding that will lead anthropologists, and even philosophers, to rethink our increasingly tattered notions of "person" and "society" and of the ways in which each of these terms implicates the other. This is an ambitious project that brings Rio to locate his Ambrym data both within middle-level comparative Melanesian ethnology and within more elevated

theoretical arguments about the constitution of human sociability itself (hence the discussion of Sartre and the use of the term *ontology* in the book's subtitle).

Rio conducted his field research in and around Ranon village in North Ambrym. He was partly drawn to this region because families there own rights to carve large slit drums, one of which Rio commissioned for the Bergen Museum. While Ambrym's prominence within twentieth-century kinship and philosophy debate no doubt encouraged Rio's own investigations into kinship structure and ceremonial exchange, such investigation was also driven by the enduring importance of exchange on Ambrym today. The book covers Ambrym kinship and marriage practice (the patterns of which Rio nicely reflects off local customs of sand drawing), yam gardening, the basis of leadership, the island's (now defunct) grade-taking ceremonies, gift-giving, and a series of life-cycle exchanges that celebrate marriage, birth, circumcision, and death.

Rio does remark on the impact of modernity on Ambrym, including considerable population decline and movement during the last century that concentrated Islanders in coastal villages such as Ranon; evolving marriage practice in which people often have to recalculate their kinship relationships to straighten out anomalous unions; the economic and ceremonial importance of cash, which people today earn by carving suitcase-sized slit drums and other artifacts for the tourist market, selling kava, and drying copra when the world price is favorable; the strong commitment

of Ambrymese to a variety of Christian churches; the impact of alcohol consumption; and so forth. Nonetheless, Rio's own perspective finds that the Ambrymese are remarkably traditionalist in many ways: There is "a certain persistence in the model of the maintenance of traditional means of exchange" (211). The past, on Ambrym, is present; the traditional Pacific is the contemporary Pacific—or perhaps an alternative modernity.

Rio's analyses cleverly echo Ambrym trilateralism itself. There is typically a "third" party in Ambrym ceremony, for example, mothers' brothers who watch over sisters' sons' marriages, since daughters born from such unions will eventually marry back into those uncle's own lines. Ambrym philosophy "builds on the notion that reciprocity between two parties always conceals the agency of a third and totalising party" (133). Rio suggests that this triangular model helps us understand not just Ambrym social structure but gives new perspective on social life everywhere: "Thirdness is the viewpoint from where society is enabled to take a look at itself" (19). Sometimes the third party is a sand drawer (who turns a story, as drawn, into another when drawing is completed); sometimes he is a powerful, successful local leader who acquires agency by locating himself above and beyond social action where, from this perspective, he calculates, pulls together, and totalizes this, making it make sense to those involved; and always there is the hidden "third" of social life—the patterns and purpose that are "not necessarily visible from the perspective of the action itself" (130).

Rio playfully sets himself up as third party to the British anthropologists who previously tackled puzzles of Ambrym social structure, and relations between society and individual in general. His perspective perhaps encompasses and totalizes theirs, but he competes here with another perspective that is mostly missing in the action of the book but somehow seems to hover above it. This is the American anthropological notion of "culture," which Rio wrestles with but hardly ever names. Isn't culture that "intersubjective realm of imagined relations, always in the process of *becoming* real" (2-3)? Or a sort of "third" that stands between yet embraces individual and society? Clifford Geertz long ago totalized culture as "model of/model for"—the "realm of imagined totalities outside of our immediate selves" that Rio takes as the absent, yet always present, totalizing third (3).

It is a pity that Berghahn Books did not employ a good copy editor. Despite its powerful price, there are scattered typos throughout the text, and the author's English, although very good, could occasionally use a tweak (as when he uses "endogamous" for endogenous, "socialisation" for sociability, and "economy" for exchange). Still, these are small complaints, and Rio's ethnography effectively documents Vanuatu's enduring abundance of culture and the power of its perspective—the uses of looking at our world through Islander eyes.

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