

otorgó la libertad de concurrir a rituales de otros paleros. (Me pregunto si a la autora no se le hizo una escarificación en la frente – el denominado “rayamiento” – para no asustarla o si hubo otros motivos. Quizás la afirmación que el muerto entra en el cuerpo del iniciando por las incisiones [87] quizás sea la clave para entender esta iniciación anómala: El palero iniciante partía de la suposición que la inicianda jamás tendría una *nganga* y mucho menos haría un pacto con un muerto?).

Como es habitual en las corrientes religiosas que no plasmaron sus convicciones en un texto canónico, existe una relativa ausencia de formalismo litúrgico. Se puede devenir palero en una noche, en oposición a la santería. Cada palero puede ensamblar un universo espiritual propio, lo cual se expresa en dos capítulos (VIII y IX) dedicados a sendos practicantes, iniciados por el mismo palero. En la ambientación de su cuarto de consulta y en sus prácticas rituales hay diferencias notorias: uno modesto y austero, el otro con pinturas murales de paisajes de selva y montañas, más elaborado estéticamente. También sus prácticas rituales difieren en parte.

La autora se pregunta en dos ocasiones si en el palo monte los mitos congo fueron olvidados, y se inclina por una respuesta afirmativa (véanse 126, 136.) Cabe preguntarse, sin embargo, si previamente existieron mitos que fueron olvidados con el paso del tiempo. En mi opinión, es muy probable que el acentuado pragmatismo del palo monte y la esencialidad de la relación entre el practicante y un muerto, hicieron desde un principio que los mitos fundadores de la práctica fueran innecesarios. De hecho, más importantes que Nsambi, el dios creador, que se menciona *en passant* en los rituales, son los espíritus de africanos poderosos (*mpungus*).

El hecho que en la *nganga* se hallen fragmentos óseos de un muerto, y el papel de los empleados de los cementerios en su comercialización, es un secreto a voces en la sociedad cubana. Nunca he escuchado que exista un interés de las autoridades por perseguir o incluso verbalizar este hecho, lo cual armoniza con la absoluta libertad religiosa que reina hace unas dos o tres décadas en Cuba, luego de otras tantas décadas en las que existían prejuicios con respecto a los fenómenos religiosos.

En resumen, el hecho de que la investigación se extendiera por un considerable lapso temporal, y la empatía que se desprende del texto, le permitió a Kerestetzi acceder a situaciones rarísima vez observada por otros autores, por ej. presenciar la fabricación y montaje de una *nganga* (203). La película realizada en colaboración (Kerestetzi y Fornal 2007), las numerosas citas textuales de los practicantes, que fundamentan e iluminan el texto y las más de cincuenta fotos que forman parte de la obra, hace de ésta una consulta ineludible para esta corriente de la religiosidad cubana. Su acercamiento primariamente etnográfico, con una menuda citación de testimonios orales, es poco común en los estudios sobre religiosidad afrocubana e inscribe esta obra en el de obras fuertemente basadas en trabajos de campo, como L. Cabrera (1979) y J. Fuentes Guerra y A. Schwegler (Lengua y ritos del Palo Monte Mayombe. Dioses cubanos y sus fuentes africanas. Madrid 2005).

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Lambek, Michael: *The Ethical Condition. Essays on Action, Person, and Value.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 2015. 361 pp. ISBN 978-0-226-29224-3. Price: \$ 30.00

The “new anthropology of ethics” has reinvigorated the discipline’s longstanding interest in morality (harking back to Durkheim and developing further Mauss’s famous distinction between the “sense of the self” and the “moral person”). Two prominent schools of thought have emerged in recent years: The first school is primarily concerned with how people draw upon rules and explicit categories – sometimes derived from texts (such as the Quran) – in order to reflect upon ways of being and interacting. At the heart of this approach lies a Foucauldian interest in the ethical “care of the self” and processes of conscious and embodied “self-formation.” The second school commands attending to “practice” and “everyday life” – where explicit rules are often circumvented or ignored. Michael Lambek – together with Veena Das – is one of the key voices of the latter. Drawing upon the ordinary language philosophy of Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin (who promoted field work in philosophy), Lambek wants to study “ordinary” ethics, which is said to be “relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself.”

The volume “The Ethical Condition. Essays on Action, Person, and Value” republishes fourteen of Lambek’s essays on ethics from different time periods. In the preface, Lambek sets up the book’s aim as distinct from philosophy: “If philosophers and proponents of religion sometimes prefer to explore the ideal and the extraordinary, it is the province of anthropologists to consider the real and the ordinary” (ix). At the same time, Lambek casts the nub of the book’s argument as this: “*The human condition is an ethical condition*” (x; his emphasis). In other words, “the ethical is intrinsic to human action, to meaning what one says and does, and to living according to the criteria thereby established” (264). These statements reveal philosophical ambitions. The meandering prose of the fourteen essays often ventures away from anthropology and deep into philosophy – i.e., into making rather sweeping statements about humans (“we ...”) without consistent reference to empirical ethnographic evidence. Some would see this as stepping out of the discipline, as, for many anthropologists, “theory” should not have a life disconnected from ethnography. Maurice Bloch has ironically remarked that Lambek’s frequent citing of Aristotle has the primary effect of intimidating fellow anthropologists who have not read him (xii, fn. 2).

While Lambek claims *not* to develop a systematic theory of ethics (xx), readers of the volume are left with the feeling of having been offered just that. Lambek advances a core framework: Aristotelian virtue ethics provides the first pillar. Aristotle’s ideas of action, practice, and *phronesis* – ongoing ethical “judgement” inherent to “practice” and drawing upon “criteria” – are deployed to defy those who argue for attending to people’s “self-distancing” and “reflective consciousness” in the empirical study of ethics. The second pillar is a “theory of perfor-

mance” (though Judith Butler is only mentioned in passing). This is where ordinary language philosophy comes in: Wittgenstein’s interest in language games and Austin’s idea that human beings *do* things with words when interacting with each other lays out the ground for a study of ethics that is claimed to be “immanent” to action. Finally, Rappaport’s reflections on the performance of ritual is invoked to bridge all this with anthropology. For Rappaport, the point of ritual is to “substitute public clarity for private obscurity or ambiguity, that is, to establish beyond question the relevant criteria” (249) according to which human acts are evaluated. Lambek takes this understanding of ritual and applies to all ordinary social interaction. Everything seems to become ethics and ethics is everything (except indifference, p. 257) – following the philosopher Stanley Cavell (290).

The essays brought together in this volume cover several decades. This takes the reader on a journey through anthropological debates of the past – e.g., on women’s agency and social norms (chap. 2); on the link between taboo and personhood (chap. 3); on remembering and morality (chap. 4); anger and justice (chap. 6); irony and the art of living with spirits (chap. 7); or sacrifice and myth (chap. 9). Every essay is introduced with a paragraph laying out the context in which it was published and briefly explaining what the debates were at the time. This gives a rare insight into the backstage dynamics of anthropological publishing.

The anthropological strengths of the book lie in the instances where Lambek draws upon ethnography. In chapter 2, Lambek discusses virgin marriage in Mayotte and argues – long before Saba Mahmood – that subjecting oneself to established norms can be a sort of agency, whereby one can shape social constellations in one’s own favour. Virgin marriage cannot be grasped in terms of submission to social rules that are followed “blindly.” It rather needs to be understood as an “act” involving gifts, payments, and obligations between the parent of the groom and the bride (46). There are complex links between female defloration and the general respect for social order. In this vein, women are said to deploy the value of their own sexuality in order to gain a certain social power. The argument that moral orders can also enable a certain degree of autonomy is nowadays widely accepted.

On an analytical level, the insight that ethics must be studied in *situated context* (ix) is perhaps the strongest point. The episode of the granary collapsing on top of a trader in Mayotte (291 f. – described at length in Lambek’s famous ethnography “Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte”) illustrates this most convincingly. Having survived the incident, the trader first casts the event in terms of Islamic discourse, “declaring the narrow escape and rescue as signs of God’s grace.” Talking to the community members, he mentions that he was weeping – as this is an accepted sign of Islamic piety. When his daughter unexpectedly dies, people of the community frame the same incidence differently. The weeping becomes interpreted as a sign of unmanliness, which can invert the moral order and bring about disaster. Finally, people adduce narratives of spirit possession to make sense of events. Anthro-

pologists should accept that different moral orders can be incommensurable to each other and that people can live well without reconciling them.

The weakness of the book lies in Lambek’s ambiguity with regards to the question whether the anthropology of ethics is a normative project (manifesting a hitherto “repressed moralism” as Bruce Kapferer and Marina Gold have argued) or an undertaking to enhance the discipline’s analytical horizon with a view to the empirical study of what it means to become good at something and to take on a given role in a given context – which can include becoming a good torturer in a warzone prison or a respected drug dealer. Lambek thinks that “the ethical is not in the first instance what it done right or what ought to be done, but the conceptual possibility of doing right and of discriminating right from wrong, or better from worse” (7). On the other hand, he seems tempted by the desire of philosophically clarifying matters of the “good” writ-large (x, xiii, xvi, xvii). Casting the study of ethics in such normative terms – as a general inclination towards “the good” –, inevitably limits the approach’s analytical and empirical potential. After all, “bad” people have ethics too.

This book is for anthropologists flirting with philosophy – as well as for people with a special interest in Mayotte and Madagascar. The essays hardly serve the purpose of introducing readers to the anthropology of ethics, but they do offer bridges between ethics and other anthropological debates. The essay “Value and Virtue” beautifully illustrates how the anthropology of ethics can enhance more situated ethnographic studies of the tension between the calculable and the incalculable – or economy and morality.

Emanuel Schaeublin

Lipset, David: *Yabar. The Alienations of Murik Men in a Papua New Guinea Modernity*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. 253 pp. ISBN 973-3-319-51075-0. Price: € 96,29

Yabar is a Murik term that appears in precontact times referred to the mightiest of ancestor spirits. They were respected and feared for their abilities to change people and the rest of the world. Nowadays Europeans and middle-class Papua New Guineans are called children of Yabar. People well connected to so-called modernity are said to live in Yabar. Lipset informs us that this is spoken in both admiration and moral critique of perceived effortless wealth, in contrast to traditional subsistence life. Murik men feel they cannot access this life of ease, and as such feel themselves alienated from the promise of a capitalist economy. Yet, Lipset observes, their use of a concept from archaic Murik tradition to label this condition of modernity indicates that they also feel alienated from the power of traditional life. They are in a double-bind.

By *alienation* Lipset means wanting without being able to get. He explores the ways in which Murik men feel this toward both their precontact culture and modernities. He uses the plural to underline cultural variation in a broader pattern. For Lipset, modernity is not a time marker, it is a constellation of cultural traits that take somewhat different forms in different cultural settings and