

Book Reviews

General

Clammer, John [ed.]. *The New Economic Anthropology*. XIII-260 pp. London 1978. Macmillan Press. Price: £ 12.

In his introductory essay to this collection of readings John Clammer, the editor, claims that although the new economic anthropology does not yet represent a specific school of thought, its focus is on development studies and political economy. He attributes this trend to the 'rediscovery' and 'rethinking' of Marxism and notes (as do other contributors) the influence of Althusser on the explanatory and methodological shift toward structuralism in economic anthropology. Unfortunately, even though there are many pages devoted to critiques and reviews of the French School of economic anthropology, the volume does not have a single contribution by a French scholar. While the omission is said to be partly deliberate, it is a weak argument that is put forth in defense of the choice. One would rather have an article by Terray, Meillassoux, or Godelier than to read others' interpretations of their ideas.

Keeping in line with the theme of development and picking up on the ideas of Wallerstein and Frank, among others, John Weeks ("Fundamental Economic Concepts and their Application to Social Phenomena"), John Clammer ("Concepts and Objects in Economic Anthropology"), Robert G. Cooper ("Dynamic Tension: Symbiosis and Contradiction in Hmong Social Relations"), and Aidan Foster-Carter ("Can We Articulate 'Articulation?'"") argue for the need to consider development and the problems of underdevelopment within the framework of wider boundaries and a larger 'world' system. No one can deny the importance of this approach, but is it new?! And to suggest that social anthropologists learn more formal economic theory is negating the strength of anthropological theory and method in understanding and studying economies and change. Do political anthropologists need to have an in-depth knowledge of law and political science? The argument is spurious. Clammer correctly notes that the subfield of economic anthropology is often relegated to a service role "somewhere well below kinship, below the other 'special' anthropologies, but a bit above 'material culture.'" But the answer to this is not in reifying economics. Perhaps Clammer and Cooper would be well advised to read some of Marshall Sahlins' more recent work. In *Culture and Practical Reason* (1976) Sahlins makes it clear that one of the problems facing social sciences today is that the economy itself has become a totem, creating a bourgeois mentality and restricting theoretical refinement and inquiry. Foster-Carter in his provocative essay on the articulation of modes of production sees the possibilities and the consequences of this in reminding the reader not to neglect the political, kinship, and ideological aspects of the social system and to be wary of grandiose theories riddled with jargon (for a beginning student in economic anthropology the jargon in this book can indeed be difficult).

The infamous formalist-substantivist controversy is rightfully acknowledged by several authors to have been an albatross within the field, creating problems and solving