



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*The Pastoral Son and the Spirit of Patriarchy: Religion, Society, and Person among East African Stock Keepers* by Michael E. Meeker

Ivan Karp

*Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 4. (Oct., 1992), pp. 200-201.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0003-5491%28199210%2965%3A4%3C200%3ATPSATS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>

*Anthropological Quarterly* is currently published by The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ifer.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

*The Pastoral Son and the Spirit of Patriarchy: Religion, Society, and Person among East African Stock Keepers.* MICHAEL E. MEEKER. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989; 191 pp. \$37.50 (cloth), \$18.25 (paper).

Reviewed by IVAN KARP  
National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution

*The pastoral son and the spirit of patriarchy* is a broad-ranging comparative study of domestic authority, social organization, and forms of expressive culture among stock-keeping peoples. The book's primary data are the classic studies of the linguistically related and neighboring Nilotic-speaking Nuer and Dinka of the Southern Sudan by Francis Deng, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, and Godfrey Lienhardt. The book compares the Nilotic-speaking peoples with pastoralists among the highly stratified interlacustrine Bantu further south on the African continent. The Northern Somali provide a second level of comparison, based again on the ethnography of I.M. Lewis and the excellent study of Somali oral literature by Said Samatar. Meeker then uses his conclusions to reexamine Dumézil's famous division of early Indo-European ideology into priestly, warrior, and producer roles and activities.

The book's most important aspect is its use of studies of oral literature as source materials for analysis and comparison. Meeker shows that the last twenty years have produced a body of studies that go beyond descriptions of ritual, symbolism, cosmology, and social organization, and that they can be used for comparative purposes. By examining images of personhood and attitudes towards authority presented in oral literature, Meeker opens up anthropological analysis by broadening the conventional sense of what constitutes data. Moreover, he does so not with field-collected material, but with data often collected for very different purposes. This is a signal achievement in and of itself, and, whatever its flaws, this study provides a challenge to anthropologists interested in the same topics.

Meeker's argument is relatively simple. Stock-keeping "archaic societies" (a category he uses but does not justify) have to mediate a recurring conflict. Stock-keeping requires cooperation and coordination but it generates conflict and individualism. Meeker relates this conflict (why not contradiction?) to the demands of pastoral ecologies and the nature of stock as wealth. Although coordination

beyond the local group is required for food production, the partible nature of stock herds generates conflict over rights—especially between fathers and sons. Because pastoral societies locate conflict in male relationships and domains, pastoralists exhibit a high degree of concern for masculine identity and present themselves as male oriented.

Nonetheless, there are significant differences among pastoral societies, and Meeker relates these differences to how pastoralists resolve the conflict between authority and individualism. Meeker first contrasts the Dinka and Nuer peoples. Dinka resolve their conflicts in favor of paternal authority, while the Nuer stress individualism to a greater degree. These contrasting cultural emphases color their oral literature, their religious practices, and their cosmology. Much of the book is given over to insightful contrasts between Dinka and Nuer. Where "historical and ecological factors" prevent the resolution of conflict in favor of authority, he argues, segmentary forms of organization arise and the segmentary principle flourishes. Where authority predominates, expressive and religious culture then generates a problematic sense of self (as among the Dinka, who worry about how to maintain autonomy while subordinating themselves to authority). Where individualism is the norm (as among the Nuer), the segmentary nature of culture and social organization generates a sense of self that stresses overall "oneness." Antagonism and opposition create a need for cohesiveness within groups that leads the Nuer to emphasize identity within relatively large-scale groups. Meeker argues that solutions endemic to conflict generate cultural attitudes that are themselves attempts to mediate the personal dilemmas produced by the unequal distribution or dispersion of power in relationships.

In shorter chapters Meeker goes on to show how state institutions resolve the same basic conflicts in Bantu-speaking cattle keepers in Africa and how, among the Somali, the introduction of the horse complicated the solution to the basic conflict. Finally, he reexamines Dumézil's tripartite model of Indo-European stock keepers.

Meeker's approach is self-consciously Weberian. He seeks to understand how an ideological complex can resolve problems of interaction and express senses of self. He shows how cultural institutions have developed in order to solve problems of meaning, questions of identity and fate, justification of authority, and compensations for the type of experiences characteristic of certain cultural formations.

In some ways, however, Meeker's approach seems more Durkeimian than Weberian. He derives patterns of social organization from ecological adaptations and then emphasizes that types of social integration resolve patterns of conflict. His stress on the conflict between cooperation and individualism echoes Durkheim's distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity, and his evolutionary perspective is reminiscent of the later Parson's version of Durkheim. Also problematic is the way Meeker avoids fully discussing competing interpretations. Bonte's argument that Nuer society exports conflict to its periphery is very similar to Meeker's interpretation, but is much less strictly ecological and more concerned with the full range of social relationships. Meeker uses pastoral ecology to explain the elaboration of the segmentary principle in Nuer age sets, but veers from Karp and Maynard's similar argument. Nor does he account for apparent similarities between the age sets of the Nuer and Dinka. More seriously, Meeker ar-

gues that the segmentary principle entails large-scale cooperation among the Nuer in conflict situations. The notion that Nuer act *en masse* is totally unsupported by the ethnography and a serious misinterpretation of Evans-Pritchard's analysis.

Meeker's study is far too slim for its global ambitions. His snapshot ethnographies ignore critical negative evidence, often give short shrift to other work, and uncritically examine sources. How can Meeker be so confident, for example, that pastoral societies are so overwhelmingly masculine in self-image when the available evidence is derived primarily from men and public situations? Moreover, the basic conflict situations he describes have been described for African agricultural societies as well. For example, Fortes argues that Tallensi ancestor worship "tames the dangerous egotism of youth" in a situation in which land, not stock, is the chief focus of conflict and cooperation. By limiting his evidence and cases Meeker weakens his argument. I suspect that his ecological determinism often conflates culturally specific formations and universal cultural categories, as when Meeker describes conflicts between fathers and sons as "individualism," rather than examining the psychological process of *individuation* between fathers and sons. While his specific case studies are interesting and useful, his explanations are unconvincing.

*Life Among Indian Tribes; The Autobiography of an Anthropologist.* CHRISTOPH von FURER-HAIMENDORF. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990; 186 pp. Rs. 190.

Reviewed by F.G. BAILEY  
University of California, San Diego

This small book captures a time that has passed and an academic life-style that probably could nowhere now be followed, certainly not in South Asia. Furer-Haimendorf, born in Austria in 1909, has combined, more or less continuously in his long life, the avocations of explorer, administrator, writer, and academic.

His training in anthropology began in Vienna, where he attended lectures by Schebesta, Frobenius, Heine-Geldern, Wilhelm Schmidt, Koppers, and Robert Heine-Geldern, and continued, as a postdoctoral scholar, in the very different anthropological circle of Malinowski's seminar in London. His field research, begun in 1935, has been entirely

in South Asia, most of it among tribal peoples, as they were then called: Nagas on the eastern frontier, in a region at that time barely administered; Chenchus, Raj Gonds, and hill Reddis in central India, an area and peoples already ripe for exploitation by outsiders; Apa Tanis and others in northeastern India, then beyond the writ of government; and the Sherpa peoples of Nepal during the period after the Second World War when that country was first opened to visitors from outside. He has published books on all these peoples, as well as *The tribes of India: The struggle for survival* (Delhi, 1985), a remarkable account of the successes of tribal development in northeastern India