

## Culture



**Peter RIGBY, *Persistent Pastoralists: Nomadic Societies in Transition*, London, Zed Books, 1985. 198 pages. \$11.95 (paper)**

Bonnie Kettel

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Peter RIGBY, *Persistent Pastoralists: Nomadic Societies in Transition*, London, Zed Books, 1985. 198 pages. \$11.95 (paper).

By Bonnie Kettel  
University of Toronto

Some visions of the cultural universe are touched, more than others, by the sense of wonder that calls the willing to the ethnographic experience. Here in *Persistent Pastoralists* are the Ilparakuyo of Tanzania, men and women who reveal the substance and the richness of their lives through their own willing encounters with an insightful and persistent ethnographer. The result is a series of essays that displays their common search for meaning in their own lives, and in each other.

Like the human spirit, the whole is more interesting than the sum of its parts, a critical, reflexive vision that transcends the confines of a narrow, and somewhat inappropriate title. *Persistent Pastoralists* is an important addition to the specialist literature on East African pastoralism, and pre-capitalist social formations. It is also a lively discourse on the learning process that ensues from a sense of wonder, a willingness to spend cold nights on hard ground, and a keen awareness of trends and portents in ethnographic research.

In this encounter the reader also has a task and is called upon to follow the author across a conceptual domain that leads from Lévi-Strauss to the *Grundrisse*. Read, as it should be, from the Preface, the work reveals Rigby's search for a *problématique*, for a perspective that will illuminate the inner mysteries of Ilparakuyo life. Three of these seven essays were published previously, and in the earliest of these, "Olpul and Entorj: the Economy of Sharing", structuralism is still an "indispensable" element in Rigby's analysis (p. 49). However, the work as a whole is set in a historical materialist frame, and the integration of these approaches is occasionally difficult. Nevertheless, the task is not pointless.

"History and Time" offers a clear indication of a conceptual leap in its attempt to "develop a notion of Ilparakuyo consciousness and apprehension of history" (p. 82). The author draws on an eclectic reading of Lévy-Bruhl, Evans-Pritchard, Leach and Mbiti (amongst others) to arrive at an Althusserian of "historical time". Time in Rigby's new vision emerges out of the essential rhythms of Ilparakuyo life, out of their movements and actions through the days, the seasons, and the years. Their time is not conservative, but creative, an intrinsic ingredient in

the "pastoral praxis" which is fundamental to the Ilparakuyo.

The concept of pastoral praxis is established in "Pastors and Pastoralists". In this essay Rigby draws on the work of Pierre Bonte, and in particular on Bonte's use of the "Germanic mode of production". Rigby is concerned specifically with the articulation of forces and relations of production within the Germanic mode, and with the dominance of the ideological in the reproduction of these social formations. He pays particular attention to the significance of the basic means of production in pastoral economies, and argues that these directly material issues do lead to differences between pastoral and agropastoral societies as Germanic modes of production. As a result the ideological context of social reproduction also differs in pastoral social formations, and it is this particular quality which Rigby attempts to capture in his notion of pastoral praxis (pp. 100-102).

In another essay, "Pastoral Production and Socialist Transformation", Rigby argues further that pastoral social formations do have unique characteristics, and that these are crucial factors in their articulation with capitalism and in attempts at socialist transformation. However, this is not an attempt to reify "pastoral modes of production". Instead Rigby suggests that pastoral praxis is not economically "determined", but is ultimately a consequence of "conscious choice" (p. 154). It is a choice of a way of life, spiritual and material, which brings people into contact with one another in a universe which is culturally shaped and encountered. It is this aspect of pastoral life in East Africa which P.T.W. Baxter referred to as "God's peace" (p. 101). God's peace amongst the Ilparakuyo is challenged and threatened by cultivation and commoditization, and by attempts on the part of the Tanzanian government to make them into pastoral peasants.

As the author indicates, this vision is experimental and preliminary (p. 17). Most of all, these essays evoke Rigby's sense of wonder at the "richness of human beings... who happen to be Ilparakuyo" (p. 28). They also mark an illuminating conceptual path, and raise the hope of a future work that will reveal more of the praxis that is Ilparakuyo.