

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

HUNTERS, PASTORALISTS AND RANCHERS

Madam, faced with such gross abuse of the reviewer's privilege as in Ian Whitaker's review of my book, *Hunters, pastoralists and ranchers* which appeared in the January 1981 issue of *Polar Record* (Vol 20, No 127, p 378–79), the author has unfortunately no alternative but to respond in kind. To begin, Whitaker suggests that others will question my argument that the transition from hunting to pastoralism involves an imbalance 'which is manifested by particular modifications through the "social relations of production"'. I certainly hope that others will respond critically to the argument I present in the book, but Whitaker's representation of this argument, cited above, is not only incomprehensible, but bears no resemblance to anything I have ever written. Ignoring my assertion, in the prologue to the book, that its purpose lies in the construction of theory, Whitaker proceeds to criticize the book as though it were an interpretation of ethnography, by focusing on the validity of the data which I use. This turns into an exhaustive review not of the book, but of the bibliography.

He chides me for the omission of one work in German on the Nentsy, who do not in fact figure prominently in my argument at all, whilst failing to mention the work of Popov on the Nganasan, another Samoyed group, which is available in English translation and to which I attach crucial significance. Nor is this the only source of primary ethnographic material on the Eurasian north in the English language. Apart from well-known studies of the Chukchi, Lapps and Yakut, which Whitaker gives as 'exceptions', there are classic sources on the northern Tungus, the Koryak, the Yukaghir and the Sel'kups, all of which I discuss, sometimes at length, and all based on original field work. Moreover, Whitaker completely omits to observe that a large part of the book deals with peoples of the North American Arctic and sub-Arctic, on which there is a mass of primary ethnographic material available, nearly all of it in English. The exclusively 'Eurasian' (and indeed 'Scandinavian') orientation to his review gives a most misleading impression of the scope of the book. Whitaker further objects to the lack of references to technical literature on reindeer management in Scandinavian languages. If he had looked more carefully, he would have found cited a good deal of material of this kind by Scandinavian authors, who are accustomed to having to present their findings both in their native languages for a domestic readership, and in scholarly journals in English for the international scientific community. Where the alternative exists, I have cited the English-language version, since this would be more accessible to the majority of readers of my book. Quite why Whitaker expects me to cite the complete works of every author who has written on the subject of reindeer management, whether germane to my argument or not, escapes me. The bibliography would then be at least as long as the book itself.

Having done with the bibliography, Whitaker then suggests that I might have been better to write a book about socio-economic transitions among the Skolt Lapps. I have already written such a book, and see no point in writing it all over again. I use my material on the Skolts to document an important part of my argument, concerning the transition to ranching. But since many of the processes that I examine never occurred among the Skolts, it would be patently absurd to attempt to document them with Skolt material, as Whitaker recommends. Be that as it may, an author can surely expect a reviewer to review the book he has written, rather than one he has not. Tacked on the end of Whitaker's review is the following remark: 'Space precludes my discussion of the rest of his theoretical apparatus, which includes a trendy crypto-Marxism that I believe will rapidly date'. In fact there is nothing about my 'theoretical apparatus' in the entire review. Since the book is explicitly theoretical, it follows that Whitaker has not reviewed it. I do agree that trendy crypto-Marxism will rapidly date. However, there is nothing remotely 'crypto' nor 'Marxist' about my book. I can only suppose Whitaker to be under the delusion that to draw inspiration from Marx is equivalent to professing the Marxist creed. No wonder he finds its expression cryptic! It is saddening to see such blinkered prejudice coming from a scholar for whose ethnographic work I have much respect.

Yours faithfully

TIM INGOLD

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