more uniformly dense and extensive among the Pokot, reflecting a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and a widespread sharing of foods and access to resources. Whereas among the Himba, there is a substantial proportion of marginal players who depend heavily on senior kin as their patrons at the nodes of a more loosely integrated network. This is characterised by loans rather than free exchange and it restricts the widespread sharing of resources. Correspondingly, intermarriage is between wholly unrelated families among the Pokot, whereas it is ideally between close kin among the Himba.

The most impressive aspect of this work is the mass of detail that the author systematically brings to bear on his subject, drawing tables and illustrations from a wide range of sources. This is essential for any work that seeks to raise economic anthropology above the level of generalization and anecdote, and it is no mean task. By examining the management of risk in these two marginal economies from so many points of view, the book deserves to become a standard reference work for future research on this topic.

By selecting two very different and unrelated types of pastoral society, the author is in a position to highlight some of the similarities that appear to have a more general significance. However, the choice of comparing these two particular peoples appears to have been due to chance rather than design, presumably because the opportunity to switch his research from Pokot to Himba presented itself. In anthropology, there is a widespread practice of comparing pastoral societies within the same region and culture complex, and this has been very fruitful in raising local insights to a higher level. Age/generation systems in East Africa (Pokot) on the one hand and matrilineal systems elsewhere (Himba) have each posed paradoxes and dilemmas that lend themselves to comparative resolution. In as much as the analysis of risk has an institutional dimension (11), one would have liked to probe further into the ramifications of these examples through more comparison with their near neighbours. The Pokot and Himba are too far apart in too many ways, and this lessens the value of comparison, except at this very general level.

Again, the collation of tables in this work relies on material that is available, and this is valuable in itself. But it also points to limitations of this material. Thus, demographic data have a clear relevance in the analysis of risk, but the quality of what is available from these remoter parts is rather uneven. Polygyny, for instance, has a vital bearing on strategies for family development and growth, but the estimate that the Pokot have a rate of 2.6 wives per elder while the Himba have only 1.5 and frequent divorce is too crude. How do these rates vary with age and with wealth? Do the figures relate to current, serial, or terminal polygyny – and, of course, how were they collected? Again, factual details of the workings of the Pokot age-generation system are sparse, whereas restrictions on marriage with age and generation in this region have a critical bearing on resource management, and this raises more questions than are answered here.

Finally, we should all be grateful for the immense care that the author has taken in collating data from a wide variety of sources as a gift for future research. However, his references frequently omit the actual page of a cited work, leaving any quizzical reader with the unrealistic task of searching through a whole article or even book to pursue some obscure reference. Thus in his concluding chapter, which ranges widely over the literature, I counted 160 references of which only 37 actually cited the relevant pages. This loose usage is very common in anthropological publications, although it would be regarded as bad practice in any doctoral dissertation and unheard of among historians. Rather than castigate the author for this lapse, I would just note with sadness that it diminishes the value of the effort that he has put into this volume for the very readers that it is primarily intended. Paul Spencer

Boyer, Dominic: Spirit and System. Media, Intellectuals, and the Dialectic in Modern German Culture. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005. 323 pp. ISBN 0-226-06891-9. Price: $ 22.00

As the title suggests, this is an ambitious and complex book, but also very unconventional. Dominic Boyer, assistant professor of anthropology at Cornell University, begins his study of German dialectics and journalism with a highly theoretical chapter on the conceptualization and formation of dialectical social knowledge. This very cerebral, but also problematic chapter is followed by three others, of a more analytical and historical nature, examining first the *Bildungsbürgertum* and the "Dialectics of Germanness" in the nineteenth century and proceeding to a discussion of the "Dialectical Politics of Cultural Redemption in the Third Reich and the GDR," before focusing on "Self, System, and Other in Eastern Germany after 1989." The book's final chapter seeks to combine a theoretical section with a series of case studies on "Dialectical Knowledges of the Contemporary."

My understanding of the study was severely hampered by two problems: (1) The author's language is very specialized and/or rich in Americanisms. Much of his diction was incomprehensible to me, despite having been a British resident for almost forty years. Here just one example: "With 'dialectical social knowledge,' I mean specifically knowledges of social dynamics, relations, and forms that center on perceived ontological tensions between the temporality of potentiality and actuality and between the spatiality of interiority and exteriority" (10). If the source were not known, one might be forgiven for believing this to be a spoof on a George Bush speech. (2) Boyer employs terms which deviate significantly from their traditional use in history and philosophy. He maintains that both "dialectical social knowledge" and *System* "inhere" in theory and philosophy and that they are very much at home in German epistemological thought, "a speciality (or an obsession) within German intellectual culture" (12). For Boyer a *System* is "an apt metaphor for social totality in a variety of informal speech contexts"; he observes that these terms, when employed by Habermas and Luhmann, appear in "a different, more formal and elite register, in the

systems-theoretical imagination of modern society" (8). His deployment of "dialecticism" is even more controversial. Maintaining that dialectical social knowledge "is by no means either intrinsically abstract, technical, or the province of some inscrutable (German) philosophical 'Other'," his own conception of the term suggests that it channels "a popular spirit 'within' into a more perfect social order 'without'" (11). Boyer jettisons the triadic structure of Hegelian dialectics in favour of a bipolar approach to an incredibly vast and diffuse subject-matter. His distinction between a positive and a negative dialectics is somewhat removed from the manner in which it was applied by Adorno and the Frankfurt School, introducing instead value judgements which are insufficiently substantiated.

The more analytical chapters 2–4 are less complex. The chapter on the *Bildungsbürger* places Herder and Fichte in their correct environment, somewhat exceptional for Anglo-American critics who far too often relate these philosophers to a protofascist tradition. Unfortunately, the author omits any reference to the German reception of the French Revolution, which would have further strengthened his argument. Too much is made of Blackbourn's definition of nineteenth-century German history as the "long" century; indeed, Boyer expands the period even further by going back to the 1740s and forward towards the end of the Weimar Republic. The important change from a court culture to one based on Germany's many universities is overlooked and some of the German terminology is blurred: reference to both "Bildungsbürger" and "Gebildeten" may well confuse anyone unfamiliar with the German terms.

The comparison of the political systems of Nazi Germany and the GDR is problematic, despite the fact that it is restricted here to an examination of party structures and the organisation of the media. This third chapter opens with a discussion of "Dialectic of Enlightenment," distinguishing between a "negative dialectical knowledge in its portrait of a progressive 'disenchantment of the world'" and "a positive dialectics of intellectual agency" (100), a distinction which oversimplifies the process of dialectical thought and is little more than a fig leaf for the anecdotal observations which fill much of the remainder of this chapter. The sections dealing with Third Reich propaganda and journalistic practices in the GDR are well informed, though the author should have reminded his readers that GDR media policies were "imported" from the Soviet Union and implemented in a period of general Cold War propaganda. Other aspects are, however, irritating: Boyer employs the term *Volk* when referring to GDR society and although this usage seems to be supported by quotations, a differentiation between *Volk* and *Gesellschaft* or between *Volksgemeinschaft* and *sozialistische Gesellschaft* is essential. Given the strict control of all political, social, and economic aspects of GDR life, it is misleading to maintain that "in principle, the *Volk* could thus become the unmediated master of its own dialectical progression" (119). This leads to yet another misconception which – though explained in a different context – should have been resolved: the author does not explain that the GDR system had its origin in the Marxist-Leninist ideology as developed in the Soviet Union, rather than being rooted in a German tradition (cf. p. 128). The passage on "The Institutionalization of Satire" is most refreshing; it would have benefited from a more conceptual discussion of *Agitprop* and from a comparison with dissident literature.

The chapter on "Eastern Germany after 1989" consists largely of field studies, too reliant on personal anecdotes and insufficiently based on background knowledge of the legacy of GDR journalism and its political culture. Reported conversations in restaurants make for lighter reading, but they do no more than perpetuate cheap stereotypes of "Ossis" and "Wessis." In general, Boyer's approach is far too descriptive, lacking in analytical rigour. The last chapter contrasts "German system theorists" Habermas, Luhmann, and Kittler, "who have moved an analytics of System to the center of their paradigms of modern sociality and history" with Berlin *Stammtisch* journalists, "whose lively, open-ended discussions of current affairs … provide compelling comparisons and arresting contrasts to the technical rigour of academic theory" (231). The author finds these conversations so compelling that twenty-eight of the forty pages of this chapter are "reserved" for the *Stammtisch*.

In his "Conclusion," Boyer offers his case studies as examples of how "dialectical tropes and intuitions saturate knowledges" (272), inviting us to read this section "as a reflexive exploration of reflexivity" (273). Readers may not be quite so "saturated" with knowledge when, on the concluding page, they discover that Hegel is referred to as a "theologian" and compared in a bizarre manner to the relatively unknown Miroslav Holub, "a scientist … who was driven to poetry" (280). Perhaps the author of this book should decide whether to devote himself entirely to the *Stammtisch*? H. J. Hahn

Cabrera, Lydia: Afro-Cuban Tales – Cuentos negros de Cuba. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 169 pp. ISBN 0-8032-6438-0. Price: $ 12.95

This collection of folk tales is the result of ethnographic fieldwork by well-known Cuban ethnographer and author Lydia Cabrera. While records of Cabrera's work have been published extensively, what makes this particular edition special is that it is the first English translation of Cabrera's significant contributions to the study of African culture in the Americas. Thus, this volume makes Cabrera accessible to a wider audience than ever before. Lydia Cabrera, it is stated in the introduction, dedicated her entire life's work to the research and investigation of the black Cuban race, also known as "Afro-Cubans." Afro-Cubans, like all other Cuban immigrants to the island, had ancestral origins in another country. However, the arrival of Africans and their descendants was, for the most part, as involuntary slave labor to work on Cuban plantations. Because of their low social and class status, African slaves and their descendants were viewed by Whites as not only ignorant and uneducable, but also as lacking any true history and culture of their