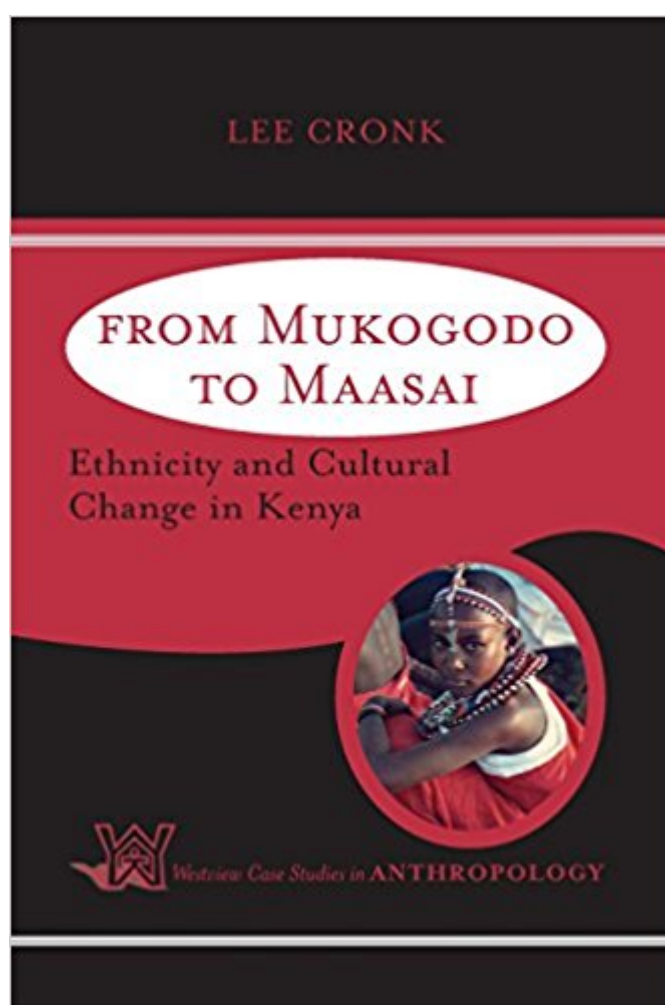


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From Mukogodo To Maasai: Ethnicity And Cultural Change In Kenya (Westview Case Studies In Anthropology)



Synopsis

Can one change one's ethnicity? Can an entire ethnic group change its ethnicity? This book focuses on the strategic manipulation of ethnic identity by the Mukogodo of Kenya. Until the 1920s and 1930s, the Mukogodo were Cushitic-speaking foragers (hunters, gatherers, and beekeepers). However, changes brought on by British colonial policies led them to move away from life as independent foragers and into the orbit of the high-status Maasai, whom they began to emulate. Today, the Mukogodo form the bottom rung of a regional socioeconomic ladder of Maa-speaking pastoralists. An interesting by-product of this sudden ethnic change has been to give Mukogodo women, who tend to marry up the ladder, better marital and reproductive prospects than Mukogodo men. Mukogodo parents have responded with an unusual pattern of favoring daughters over sons, though they emulate the Maasai by verbally expressing a preference for sons.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Lee Cronk is associate professor of anthropology at Rutgers University. He is the author of *That Complex Whole* (Westview Press, 1999).

Lee Cronk excels in weaving together the history of the Mukogodo with sound (biological) evolutionary theory. This combination make for an exceedingly rich account of the salience of our evolutionary heritage without falling pray to simple, "just-so-stories". Through his understanding of Mukogodo history and particularly the complexities of the colonial influences, Cronk is able to

elucidate not only current/recent behavior patterns, but the likely roots of these patterns. His examples allow us to understand the complex dynamic roles of cultural traits and how they sometimes work antagonistically and non-intuitively. I recommend it as an introductory text in undergraduate and graduate anthropology classes as well as for a compelling case study for scholars of anthropology, evolutionary biology, psychology, economics and other fields interested in human behavior. It is well written and easy to follow. It does a good job of explaining basic empirical field methods and the nature of fieldwork. Some caveats though. Cronk is muddled in his discussion of the adaptive nature of female-biased childhood sex ratio and genetics underlying behavioral traits.

1. Adaptive nature of female-biased sex ratio (pg 124). Cronk is correct that the female-biased sex ratio is not an individual feature, but one of the group. The more accurate question is whether the female-biased CARE is adaptive. The group selection argument is a red-herring (although group-selection should not be dismissed offhand in the way Cronk dismisses it - see work of David Sloan Wilson). Now, is female-biased CARE adaptive? Cronk has been building up to this case for most of the book, and then reaches the wrong conclusion. Just because a cost-benefit analysis (conscious or not) is put into giving less care to boys, and all else being equal parents would prefer to have their boys live as well, says virtually nothing about if the trait is an adaptation or not. Most all evolved traits represent trade-offs and maximizing fitness. Just because in this case little boys are suffering and dying does not mean this feature is not adaptive. Female-biased care is unlikely to be adaptive for the boy who is receiving less care (although it might be due to kin-selection). Cronk makes a strong case that it is adaptive for the parents..even if he dismisses his own case for dubious reasons.

2. Genetics of daughter favoritism (pg 125). Cronk is very likely correct that genetic differences do not underlie the daughter favoritism, but that instead this is a facultative trait. Given the rapid emergence of this trait and the interbreeding of Mukogodo with other groups that do not favor daughters, genetic differences are very unlikely to be important. However, his wholesale dismissal of a role for genes is folly. Genetically, Mukogodo are CERTAINLY different from you and me (despite Cronk's contention to the contrary). Yes, ~99.9% of genetic material is similar across all humans. However, with ~6 billion base pairs in a genome, ~0.1% represents a lot of potential differences. With genes often being scores of thousands of basepairs long, the potential for functional genetic polymorphisms is great. A mutation at a single base pair is capable of causing fatal diseases. Genetic polymorphisms have been associated with pair-bonding behaviors and feelings about having children. Additionally, tentative evidence of differential fitness based upon genetic polymorphisms associated with behavior have been found. While Cronk writes a strong book that I will consider assigning to undergraduates in future courses, it is disappointing to see him

make the fallacious statements outlined above. Cronk has assigned all Royalties from the book to the Mokogodo Fund, so your purchase of the book is a donation as well.

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