

## **Between the Town and the Cattle Camp: Paravets in Lakes State, Southern Sudan**

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Primary animal health care for the large cattle herds in Lakes State is carried out by a network of para-professional veterinarians. These ‘para-vets’ are non-literate cattle keepers who have received basic training in western veterinary care in NGO animal health projects. They currently provide the only veterinary services in this predominantly rural area and report to the Directorate of Animal Resources. This paper is based on interview data with ‘para-vets’ and cattle keepers in Lakes State in 2010. It uses animal health workers as a lens to explore the nature and meaning of induction into urban cultures and it maps how the self is re-imagined in light of exposure to scientific knowledge and the formal institutions of the state. Veterinary work entails frequent movement between urban centres and cattle camps and ultimately transforms those involved into ‘townese’. ‘Para-vets’ become oriented towards town and many take up permanent or semi-permanent residence there. Yet – while veterinary work involves moving out of the rural community – it does not mean a simple rupture with it. ‘Para-vets’ continue to keep their own cattle in camps. And because of their close connection with the health of cattle, veterinary services are instrumental in building and restoring the social and economic basis of the cattle-camp. The problems of occupying this liminal space can be seen in the ambivalent relation of the local community to them. Exploring the roles and relations of ‘para-vets’ can help us to challenge the notion of a fixed border between the state and society.