

Jebens, Holger: *After the Cult. Perceptions of Other and Self in West New Britain* (Papua New Guinea). New York: Berghahn Books, 2010. 244 pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-674-0. Price: \$ 90.00

In 1954, soon after the anthropologist Ward Goodenough arrived in a West New Britain village with three of his students for fieldwork, he was visited by the leader of a cargo movement called the Kivung. As it happened, the Kivung had been started by the Catholic missionary in the area, Father Heinrich Berger, as a way to draw support away from another local movement, the Batari, that had been encouraging mass adultery, the destruction of food supplies, and resistance to the colonial administration. According to the tenets of the Batari cult, the deceased ancestors of the local Nakanai people had turned “white in skin colour” and were living in Rome, where they were producing shiploads of European wealth items (“cargo”) that the whites intercepted before these could reach their descendants. Berger’s Kivung, by contrast, would foster stable family life and economic industriousness, the latter by means of a company Berger helped form to enable the Nakanai people to sell their copra. The man Berger had appointed to lead the Kivung was named Lima; this was the man who visited Goodenough when he arrived in 1954. Seeing a perfect opportunity for the brightest of his students, Charles Valentine, to conduct fieldwork on an active cargo movement, Goodenough arranged for him to move to Lima’s home village, where for the next several months, Valentine made extensive inquiries about the Kivung and Berger’s role in it. Valentine returned to Lima’s village for two further periods of fieldwork. Curiously, however, apart from an unpublished report for the colonial administration, he produced no account of his findings. His dissertation barely mentioned the Kivung, and until his death in 1990 his research focused on other topics.

In “After the Cult,” Holger Jebens takes up this story of Valentine’s research on the Kivung movement, reanalyzing Valentine’s thousand pages of fieldnotes, including lengthy transcriptions of conversations and narrative speech rendered in a remarkable Tok Pisin shorthand devised by Valentine’s friend Ted Schwartz. Jebens also did a year of fieldwork in the area in the 1990s, and he uses the recollections that he elicited and the general insight he gained into the culture in order to shed light on Valentine’s enigmatic experiences. What emerges is a many-layered reflection on the history of the Kivung that weaves together rich reflexive ethnography, oral history, and the history of anthropology.

Among the book’s virtues is Jebens’ careful attention to the individuality of informants and the contexts in which they spoke. A social movement such as the Kivung lives in large part through talk, which is inseparable from the speaker’s (and audience’s) perspective as the latter turns and shifts. Perspectives are still shifting even today, as Nakanai people weave their recollections of the Kivung movement into their ongoing discussions of development, custom, and cargo. As Jebens brings out clearly, there is no decisive story of the movement that can be lifted out of the flux of shifting alignments and oppositions. Indeed, he

argues that the movement itself is constituted as clouded in uncertainty, ambivalence, and obscurity.

During his research, Valentine was repeatedly frustrated by his inability to get to the bottom of what people told him and find out the real truth about the movement. When his informants would talk about the Kivung in only allusive, indirect, opaque ways, his frustration would sometimes induce him to react with harangues. This was worse than quixotic: it prompted a vicious cycle, positing and then hardening an inaccessible secret behind all the talk, converting what was simply not said into a focus of disconnection and failed communication. As Jebens points out, this made a poignant counterpoint to the New Guineans’ own conviction that whites always kept from them a key piece of knowledge, the secret behind their wealth and cargo. In Valentine’s fieldwork, a real tragedy flowed from his inability to see people’s way of speaking as an aspect of their culture. He assumed instead that the secrecy that shrouded the Kivung movement was being enforced by an influential leader who had something to hide. He became convinced that that leader was Father Berger.

As presented in Valentine’s notes and report, Berger is a paranoid despot, rather like the famous character Kurtz in Conrad’s “The Heart of Darkness.” Installing himself as a white prophet in order to exploit the Nakanai economically, Berger maintains his hold over the gullible Kivung followers by telling them that he alone knows and will share with them “the true Secret of Cargo.” If this was so, could there be any doubt that he had reason to keep the Kivung hidden from Valentine, given that the policy of the Catholic Church he represented was to oppose cargo cults? Jebens doesn’t tell us whether Berger was really the authoritarian “organizing genius” Valentine portrays him as, or only an overreaching figure whose well-intended messages to his flock were misinterpreted cargoistically by them according to their cultural worldview as they were translated and retold – a common phenomenon in the cargo cults of this time.

Irregardless, Valentine resolved to break the priest’s power by denouncing him to the colonial authorities and to his Nakanai followers. This culminated in an impassioned speech Valentine gave to a large audience of villagers in Berger’s absence in which he accused Berger of deceitfully enriching himself by exploiting the people who joined the movement. He appealed to the villagers to reject “Berger’s way” and instead switch to his own way, pledging that he would generously help them and “enlighten” them. Just as Berger had prompted the Kivung movement with his efforts to rival the earlier Batari cult, here was Valentine trying to end what he saw as a cargo movement by effectively starting his own.

Valentine recorded that the audience reacted to this speech with “nearly half an hour in almost complete silence.” Over the following weeks, most of the people Valentine knew in the field ceased to visit him or even greet him. Lima, the Kivung leader who had made the original visit that led to Valentine’s fieldwork, must have experienced an acute sense of affront. After all, as Jebens observes, Valentine had been living all the while in a house that was “probably built on Lima’s land and at his be-

hest.” Since the Kivung movement was not just Berger’s but Lima’s as well, Valentine’s public attack must have seemed a shaming rebuke to his hospitality. In his notes Valentine wrote that Lima convened a series of meetings in different localities at which he reaffirmed his allegiance to Berger and asserted that the priest could be bested by “no other master” – apparently a reference to Valentine. Around this time, Valentine’s fieldnotes begin to convey “an impression of failure.” His intervention led Nakanai people to renew and redouble their support for his nemesis. His calls to have the priest disciplined or expelled from New Britain were dismissed by the colonial authorities. Finally, Valentine received a sharp letter from his doctoral supervisor Goodenough, who had left the field some months earlier, reproaching him for overstepping the bounds of appropriate conduct for an anthropological fieldworker. Overwhelmed by misgiving and stymied by his burnt bridges, Valentine eventually adopted a new supervisor and a new dissertation topic.

In telling this story, Jebens generously accords Valentine the respect due to one’s predecessor. However flawed it may be, Valentine’s view of the Kivung is infinitely more valuable to the project of retrospect than the silence we would have if Valentine had not recorded his experiences. But the connections Jebens traces between his own fieldwork and Valentine’s pale against the dramatic – and surely ethnographically significant – links that are evident between Valentine and the priest. Discounting as facile the explanation that they were both simply paranoid, how could these men have wound up behaving in such eerily similar ways? The conclusion Jebens draws is cautionary: they were both responding reflexively to expectations of whites that derived from Nakanai culture. The “construction of Other and Self” in the cultures we study is not just a matter for theory. Every fieldwork is potential ground for figures like the anthropologist Valentine and the priest Berger, who came to act out ideas of themselves as Other that they did not fully grasp. Ira Bashkow

Jenkins, Timothy: *The Life of Property. House, Family, and Inheritance in Béarn, South-West France.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2010. 181pp. ISBN 978-1-84545-667-2. (Methodology and History in Anthropology, 21) Price: £ 35.00

A number of high-profile attempts have recently been made to think “beyond” the local-global distinction, involving assemblages, a focus on interconnectedness and translocality, fractals and chaos theory, and other terms-of-art, with varying degrees of success. Timothy Jenkins’ new book accepts the challenge with characteristic subtlety. “The Life of Property” is no conventional ethnography of rural France, despite a former life as the Evans-Pritchard lectures at Oxford, and Jenkins’ acknowledgement of Evans-Pritchard’s own guiding influence. His aim is both to adumbrate central features of social life in a well-known rural region of South-West France, the Béarn, which borders the central Pyrenees; and notably, to analyse the multiple ways in which cultural practices in that region have influenced the broader national and interna-

tional cultural frame. It is an intriguing approach that, while remaining conceptually aligned on the “local-global” axis, brings a fresh set of perspectives that are all the more relevant to anthropologists for touching on one of the key thinkers of contemporary social science, himself a *Béarnais* by birth: Pierre Bourdieu.

Considering, to begin with, the structure and content of the volume, we are confronted with a composite arrangement, both in date of composition, and theme. Ostensibly, the book focuses on the nature of property in the French Pyrenees, its forms of ownership and transmission, along with continuities in these forms and their mutations. The proposition is that these forms effectively comprise a core cultural resource – “a key in our world to human being and order, to personality and politics, to extent and duration” – whose impact can be traced in a range of contexts, both at a local level, and of wider-ranging scope. In this regard, the first four chapters – the original Evans-Pritchard lectures – address the locality, although reflexivity is present from the start. Chapter 1 begins with the “discovery” of the Pyrenean family in the 19th century, exploring its manifestation as the “stem family” unit in sociological and anthropological theory, and its subsequent emergence in contemporary political debates concerning local social reform with regard to political, economic, and cultural issues. Chapter 2 moves on to examine the elements of local social life which underwrote this “discovery,” and reflexively analyses the sources that enabled historical continuity in the cultural forms themselves – notarial and legal records – and which thus, to a degree, facilitated this sociological conceptualisation. In this regard, it is already clear how a nuanced tracking between local contexts, wider social realities, and academic discourses, is immediately foregrounded in the text.

Chapter 3 is based on fieldwork, examining contemporary rural life, and how categories of property shape and influence it. Both continuities and ruptures are addressed, notably the significant influence of new agricultural technologies and the consolidation of land holdings, and particular attention is given to how the new is assimilated into the *longue durée* of social continuity. Chapter 4 then takes a wider view, discussing matters of local politics with regard to themes of authority, legitimacy, and power, in the context of land use and land sales. These four chapters, Jenkins argues, taken together, provide readings of the same phenomenon – property – from a variety of perspectives. The “life of property” consists precisely in these plural manifestations, interactions with wider frames, and a measured continuity over time, and such perspectivism draws attention, finally, to property’s own elusive nature. Rather than property’s “essence,” we are presented with overlapping strands of a mutable cultural form and their interaction, which underpin key social practices at different levels. One thinks while reading such a discussion, perhaps, of those well-known French historians who examined long-term cycles of economy and society – and whether mention of their work (and influences) might also be pertinent. But within the limits set, the ethnographic portrait developed is complex and multi-layered.