

After the cult: Perceptions of other and self in West New Britain (Papua New Guinea), by Holger Jebens. Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2010, x+244pp., maps, figures, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-1-84545-647-0 (hardback).

TUOMAS TAMMISTO
Social and Cultural Anthropology
University of Helsinki
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In *After the cult*, Holger Jebens sets out to study cultural differences and how cultural change extending from missionisation to so-called modernisation or globalisation is perceived by Melanesians and anthropologists alike. Indigenous and Western constructions of Self and Other are compared by analysing Melanesian notions of *kago* and *kastom*, on the one hand, and anthropological studies of these, on the other. Derived, but distinct, from the English terms 'cargo' and 'custom', *kago* refers to industrially produced goods that came to stand for the 'superior and initially secret power of the whites' (p. 1) as well as religiously based social movements, or cargo cults. Thus, *kago* can be seen as a cultural construction of the Other, whereas *kastom* refers to objectified notions of local traditional culture, and thus is a cultural construction of the Self. *Kago* and *kastom* have for a long time been classic themes of Melanesian anthropology and, thus, Western notions of Other and Self are articulated in the studies of these constructions.

The ethnographic context of Jebens's work is Koimumu village in the Hoskins Peninsula of West New Britain, where a cargo cult was active in the 1940s. While the cult itself had ended by the 1950s, the colonial administration and anthropologists assumed that its beliefs would continue in different forms. Jebens recounts the story of Ward Goodenough's student, Charles Valentine, who, in the 1950s, began studying a local religious and economic movement with the

assumption that it was a continuation of the previous cargo cult. Ultimately, this preconception led to conflict with a German missionary and to Valentine's isolation from his hosts and informants as well as his advisor, Goodenough. Against this backdrop, Jebens begins an analysis of constructions of cargo and custom as well as *kago* and *kastom*, by using Valentine's and Goodenough's fieldnotes, archival material and accounts of local informants collected during Jebens's fieldwork in Koimumu. From the material used emerges a complex and nuanced account of how anthropologists and the people whom they study influence each other, and how their accounts of each other are based on their own preconceptions and cultural models. Accounts of Self and Other are formed in relation to each other, as the former always refers to the latter and vice versa (p. 121). These oppositions are also never clear-cut, but ambivalent, and are used, depending on the case, to increase or decrease distance between Self and Other or to make moral evaluations. Indigenous and Western perceptions of Self and Other resemble each other, for example, in the focus on material culture: anthropologists and missionaries appropriated indigenous artifacts, while the Melanesians likewise articulated their conceptions about the Other through Western goods. Equally, both parties were concerned with secrecy of the Other: Valentine interpreted the silence of the villagers, a cultural expression of respect, as secrecy, whereas Melanesians assumed that Westerners were withholding their superior secret power from them (p. 155). On the other hand, differences may, according to Jebens, be more substantial, while the similarities may be due to transference, that is, anthropologists seeing what they assume they will see. Jebens notes also how, despite similarities in perceptions of Self and Other, anthropologists, himself included, attach importance to categories and substantial definitions thereof, while the people of Koimumu are, and were, more interested in practice and social relations (p. 158).

Jebens's concise, yet rich, book engages with a great variety of issues concerning Melanesian anthropology. As noted, *kago* and *kastom* are classic themes, the study of which Jebens has much to offer by way of comparing both the similarities and differences of local and Western interpretations. According to Jebens, it is precisely in the differences that the 'cultural Self' becomes apparent and can be made 'fruitful for a critique of Western culture itself, without on the other hand assuming that our hosts and informants share the same interest in the West as we do (pp. 161, 162). Along with the comparison of Western and indigenous notions of Self and Other, Jebens sets out to explore whether the concept of cultural memory, as explicated by the Egyptologist, Jan Assman, and literary scholar, Aleida Assman, can be of use in the study of *kago* and *kastom* (pp. 10, 159). According to Jebens, the concept of cultural memory as developed by the Assmans is about constructing collective identities by referring to the past, and by giving the group unity and uniqueness by creating a sharp boundary between members and non-members; or, as Jebens puts it, between Self and Other (p. 159). However, as Jebens's work demonstrates, such a sharp distinction between Self and Other, on the one hand, and a unity of the group, on the other, is not directly applicable in the case of Koimumu, where the villagers use accusations of *kago* against each other, and where the boundary between Self and Other is, as Jebens shows, much more permeable than the concept of cultural memory would allow. Thus Jebens also makes a contribution to the study of memory and recollection by exploring links between concepts developed for the study of antiquity in the West and Melanesian ethnography. In addition, *After the cult* recounts the story of Valentine and his work on cargo cults, thus shedding light on a forgotten topic and contributing to the history of Melanesian anthropology.

Finally, Jebens's work offers much in terms of conducting field research and the

production of anthropological knowledge. Jebens takes great care in introducing his hosts and informants (apparently with their permission) and showing how the information was gathered. Key texts by major informants are reproduced in the Appendices, both in English and Tok Pisin, and all interviews contributing to the study are listed in the references, with time, place and participants of each being noted. This unusual openness in the presentation of one's own material conforms to Jebens's call for greater self-reflexivity by anthropologists, in order to examine how the anthropologist influences the statements of his informants, by asking certain questions, for example. Presenting much primary material also shows the polyphony of local voices, on the one hand, and allows the reader to re-examine critically Jebens's conclusions, on the other. While identifying one's informants and presenting one's material so openly is probably not always possible, I find Jebens's choice exemplary, and hope it will be adopted in future ethnographies as well.

While *After the cult* will be of interest to Melanesianists in particular, Jebens's interesting conclusions regarding memory and recollection, the mutual influence of the anthropologist and the people who are studied, as well as the production of anthropological knowledge in general, merit a much wider readership.

The invisible empire: White discourse, tolerance and belonging, by Georgie Wemyss. Studies in Migration and Diaspora Series, Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington, 2009, xiv+200pp., series editor's preface, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7347-7 (hardback).

MYRNA TONKINSON
Anthropology and Sociology
The University of Western Australia
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