

books each adopt a style of encyclopedic or dictionary-like entries. They overlap in their attention in these works to Rotuman spirituality and connections with the landscape. They are in agreement on the basic information for categories of spirits and their relations to humanity, though each moves in directions not taken by the other even on shared topics. As such, the works complement one another and add to a growing literature on beliefs and practices of mid-to-late-twentieth-century Rotumans.

Given the pervasive language and culture shifts ongoing in Oceania and, in particular, the changes taking place among Rotumans both at home and abroad, these volumes are of special significance as repositories primarily outlining recent past practices, beliefs, and cultural geography, available for use as present interests may dictate.

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*Cargo Cult as Theater: Political Performance in the Pacific*, by Dorothy K Billings. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002. ISBN 0-7391-0238-9; x + 267 pages, maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$90.00.

One Melanesian cargo cult hit prime-time news in 1964. The 22 June issue of *Newsweek* breathlessly asked, “What Price LBJ?” The article went on to report that people on New Hanover, in Papua New Guinea’s Bismarck Archipelago, had raised money to “buy” President [Lyndon

Baines] Johnson, who would then rule the island—bringing with him, of course, cargoes of Hershey bars, cigarettes, and other luxuries. Before long, followers had given . . . \$987 to make an early purchase of LBJ.” This was, of course, four months before the November 1964 elections in which Johnson would wallop Barry Goldwater, the choice, not the echo. One senses underneath the cute story of befuddled Islanders trying first to vote for, and then to “buy” LBJ an early, oblique critique of Johnson’s “Great Society” that would treat poverty with welfare subsidies. Some years later, the Johnson cult also made it onto the cover of a trashier publication, *The Weekly World News*, its headline: “wacky tribe thinks that former prez LBJ” is their “big-eared god.”

Anthropologists, too, interested themselves in cargo cult. Dorothy Billings arrived in 1965 to check out the scene. But Australian administrators headquartered in Kavieng, New Ireland, refused to let her onto New Hanover. She set up shop instead in administratively approved Mangai village, about thirty miles down the road from Kavieng. Billings eventually received permission to go to New Hanover during a second fieldtrip, in 1967, and she returned to the region another seven times between then and 1998. She built these doubled field sites into a career, exploring stylistic contrasts between individualistic, competitive New Hanover and communitarian, egalitarian New Ireland.

Overviews of Melanesian cargo cults have commonly featured the Johnson cult, but this is the first comprehensive description of the movement. Billings combines the story of

thirty-five years of Johnson cult excitement with a retrospective of thirty-five years of her cult commentary, beginning with a 1972 dissertation, "Styles of Culture: New Ireland and New Hanover." Transcripts of Billings' 1967 interviews with cult supporters and opponents comprise much of the book. She also recounts in great detail how, when, and where she came by these interviews. Alongside the trials and tribulations of anthropological fieldwork, this blow-by-blow chronicle offers insight into colonial culture and the often eccentric administrative and mission personalities who inhabited the PNG hinterlands in the final decade of Australian rule.

The story began with a US military team of geodetic surveyors arriving on New Hanover in 1963. During what was then the height of the Cold War, military agents were poking their noses in distant places. On New Hanover, they climbed Mt Patibung, leaving behind mysterious cement markers. This American presence, along with the more sustained one during the Pacific War, encouraged about half the island's people to attempt to vote for LBJ during the first House of Assembly elections, held in February 1964. Official Australian frustration with this waylaid election result advanced to repression when many Johnson supporters next refused to pay head taxes or participate in census lineups. The administration arrested large numbers of Island men between 1964 and 1966. In October 1966, an American Catholic priest resident on New Hanover joined with Johnson supporters to found the Tutukuval Isukal (literally, "Stand Up Together to Plant") Association (TIA). This continues in busi-

ness today and, in addition to its economic enterprises, has enjoyed considerable political success electing candidates to Parliament. By the late 1980s, the association—like much of Melanesia—had been significantly influenced by evangelical Christianity. LBJ's original importance in the movement was symbolic and his failure to turn up and his eventual death did not much temper movement appeal. In return, New Hanover did not much strike home with Johnson. When Billings sent her first article to the ranch in Texas, he replied, "It was nice to know that America had such great support so far away."

Billings offers two main arguments. Her first is that cargo cults—or at least the Johnson cult—can be understood as a sort of "improvisational drama." In the book's central chapter, she writes up the cult as if it were a theater program, scripted into a sort of dramatic storyboard of three acts. Anthropologists have generated a lot of experimental ethnography during the past twenty years: ethnography as poetry, biography, autobiography, pastiche, photo-essay, dialog, novel, and more. This is the first example I can think of that attempts ethnography as dramatic script or screenplay. An author of deeper theoretical inclination, however, might have done better to situate this approach alongside various other well-known attempts to read life as drama, starting perhaps with Irving Goffman or Victor Turner.

Billings' second argument reflects the 1960s fixation on causation: just what, exactly, triggered cargo cults? She defaults to an eclectic set of partial causes ranging from administrative neglect, to oppression, deprivation,

and, in particular, local culture—all of which together Billings calls “plexus.” She summons up classic culture and personality theory to argue that “style” or the patterns of a culture explain why some folks become cultists while others do not. Unlike New Ireland, New Hanover was culturally predisposed to culting. This argument recalls Peter Lawrence’s contention that cults are “conservative,” expressing deep Melanesian cultural patterns (which Lawrence called cosmological and epistemological). Billings’ argument also recalls Peter Worsley’s celebrated premise that cults function to assemble larger political unities. Since folks on New Hanover are predisposed to individualism, the Johnson cult worked to pull them all together. Their already communitarian neighbors on New Ireland had no need for cargo culting for unity.

Billings looks back to her first experiences in the field and to the discursive contexts of the 1960s. The book rehearses much of what she has previously presented in earlier publications and is not much informed by recent commentary on Melanesian cargo or other sorts of cults. Still, she offers generous (discounting the book’s price) accounts of an infamous cargo cult and of her close and long-term engagement with it. Margaret Mead, whom Billings happened on in 1960s Port Moresby, insisted that “cargo cults are boring” (33). Forty years later, Billings proves Mead wrong.

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*Harvesting Development: The Construction of Fresh Food Markets in Papua New Guinea*, by Karl Benediktsson. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002. ISBN cloth, 0-472-09800-4; paper, 0-472-06800-8; xii + 308 pages, tables, maps, photos, figures, notes, glossary, botanical terms, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$57.50; paper, US\$23.95.

It is no easy matter, these days, to find a publisher for a PhD thesis written about a country as unfashionable as Papua New Guinea, especially when the subject is actually a community in Eastern Highlands Province looking for ways and means to sell their sweet potato in the national food market. So the Icelandic author should certainly be congratulated for his skillful use of the Viking “wantok system” to channel this work through the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies and into the bountiful arms of the University of Michigan Press. Perhaps, in doing so, he trod the same kind of path, and surmounted the same kind of obstacles, as the Eastern Highlanders who go to such lengths to fly huge bags of sweet potato down to Port Moresby and then fly back with a much smaller bag full of money.

Karl Benediktsson’s thesis, completed in 1997, was written under the supervision of Bryant Allen in the Department of Human Geography at the Australian National University. Its subject matter reflects a long-standing concern of Allen and his colleagues, in what is now called the PNG Land Management Group <<http://rspas.anu.edu.au/lmg>>, to show that one of Papua New Guinea’s best chances of “real development” (if there is any chance at all) is to be