

on local government, and Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano on village governance each explore various tensions and contradictions in how governance issues and agendas are pursued in specific contexts. Tuimaleali'ifano's analysis also links specifically with other critical analyses of how traditional authority is wielded in contemporary politics to the detriment of genuinely participatory processes. Aspects of this theme are further explored in Asofou So'o's discussion of civil and political liberties which he explores through an examination of several court cases. Although these show that the courts are operating as they should to uphold civil and political rights, problems remain at the village level, where political action is tightly controlled. The final chapter by Mālama Meleiseā raises, very briefly, some of general issues surrounding the "politics of tradition" debate and, looking at Sāmoa, states (as others have before him) that "rural people see *fa'a Sāmoa* as another word for oppression." He concludes that defense of certain elements of traditional culture "has come to be seen as virtuous, and questioning them is seen as an attack on Samoans' integrity as a people." This attitude, he continues, "has retarded the evolution of a sense of citizenship, severely damaging governance in the country."

Two major critical themes run through the book. The first is very much focused on how institutions like the World Bank construct a certain meaning for "governance" and invest it with a normative bias that emphasizes rationality, efficiency, and, not least, the downsizing of the public sector to allow more private initiative

to weave its magic. It is highly appropriate to question such assumptions, especially in light of the many apposite critiques of the tendency for "western" experts and donors to impose their ethnocentrically laden values, beliefs, and practices on "nonwestern" people(s). On the other hand, the second major theme concerns the manipulations of traditional (or neotraditional) power and authority in situations where it seems to be increasingly anachronistic at best, and severely dysfunctional to "good governance" at worst, as Meleiseā's parting shot clearly states. How are these two themes to be reconciled or synthesized? By and large, the contributors have not taken up this challenge. Nonetheless, collectively they provide some interesting and stimulating insights into issues and problems of governance in Sāmoa and contribute to an important debate in the contemporary Pacific.

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Property Rights and Economic Development: Land and Natural Resources in Southeast Asia and Oceania, edited by Toon van Meijl and Franz von Benda-Beckmann. New York: Kegan Paul International, 1999. ISBN 0-7103-0641-5; 295 pages, tables, maps, notes, bibliography. US\$110.

A recent protest in Port Moresby ended tragically with the death of three students. The protestors were responding in part to government proposals for property reform, including the demarcation, registration, and

privatization of customary land. In Papua New Guinea, the fundamental inalienability of land and some measure of corporate control over land are popularly considered to express shared cultural values, provide a bulwark against poverty, and maintain limits on inequality. Consequently, property reforms have consistently been rejected, by activists in recent years, but also by politicians in the late colonial period, as Anton Ploeg describes.

These tensions are not unique to Papua New Guinea; neoliberal economic reforms that promote privatization are common requirements of structural adjustment loans and are often encouraged by other development programs. In his popular new book, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else*, the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto advocates reforms intended to facilitate the transformation of a wide range of resources into negotiable forms of capital (2000). De Soto argues that economic success in capitalist economies is contingent on formalizing land claims and standardizing the mechanisms of property appraisal, making it possible to mortgage land and houses to provide capital for new ventures. In the absence of the regulatory architecture required to convert resources into assets, other economic reforms are bound to fail; from this perspective, customary land tenure in Papua New Guinea and other parts of the Pacific poses a barrier to economic growth and reproduces the conditions responsible for poverty.

This is the type of argument that the editors and contributors to *Property Rights and Economic Develop-*

ment seek to refute. In ten detailed case studies and historical analyses, the authors show how the formalization and standardization of property rights do not necessarily lead to economic growth and development. They argue that reductive and homogenizing models of property neglect the wide-ranging practical, social, and cultural implications of different property regimes, including the organization of kin relations, subsistence production, the memorialization of history, and the coincidence of place and identity. The proposed reforms also increase the vulnerability of the poor by making their land potentially available to persons better situated to take advantage of economic liberalization, especially in the case of states that continue colonial policies of expanding state control over land and resources at the expense of rural populations, as Indira Simbolon argues about Indonesia.

This collection has a particular timeliness and significance given recent debates and widespread protests against globalization and privatization; it has important lessons not only for anthropologists, but also for development economists, planners, and other policymakers. In their contribution, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann argue for multidimensional analyses of property, taking into account not only its economic and political value, but also its importance to social relationships. Simbolon shows how Batak people living near Lake Toba in Sumatra are blamed for environmental degradation brought about by Dutch dynamite and Indonesian logging; the hegemonic power of the state explains why various land

reform initiatives have only further disadvantaged the Batak. Herman Slaats examines land registration projects in Thailand, showing that “instead of gaining an improved standard of living, many people end up in worse economic and social conditions, or are even impoverished by the loss of their land, whereas they may find themselves stripped of the security they used to have under the network of traditional social relations” (104). Furthermore, he argues that such reforms, had they been applied in Indonesia, would not likely have benefited small titleholders, given the biased interpretation and selective application of the law “in favour of the empowered establishment” (106).

Several authors contribute valuable historical studies. Willem Wolters uses data from 1850 to 1930 in the Philippines to suggest that participation in different land reform schemes was directly correlated with the particular economic uses to which that land was put, such as rice, sugar cane, or mining. No single property regime can accommodate all potential forms of land use. Anton Ploeg examines the history of land tenure and agricultural reform in Papua New Guinea, illustrating the historical continuity of resistance to privatization. His evaluation of smallholder cash cropping finds no evidence to suggest that formalization of property rights will facilitate growth in the agricultural sector, which is determined by other factors, including local patterns of consumption and exchange, limited agricultural services, and the dominance of world markets. Van Meijl argues that in New Zealand compensation claims for expropriated land being adjudi-

cated by the Waitangi Tribunal are not likely to result in improved economic conditions for the Māori, eighty percent of whom live in urban areas and no longer have clear tribal affiliations. The benefits from land compensation schemes, van Meijl argues, will only accrue to the relatively small proportion of Māori still living on tribal land in rural areas.

Leontine Visser writes about *kain timor* cloth exchange and land in the Bird’s Head area of West Papua, emphasizing the double bind of obligatory social prestations, experienced as a form of “social bondage,” which nonetheless fosters the security of land tenure. Ad Borsboom and Eric Venbrux provide historical reviews of Aboriginal land rights in Australia. Borsboom stresses that despite recent progress in native title claims, “formal definition and recognition of interests in terms of Western law may recontextualize questions about relationships to the land rather dramatically” (224). Venbrux builds on Fred Myers’ insight that “land-ownership is not a special kind of property,” but a “form of objectifying social relationships of shared identity” (cited on p 244), showing that while Tiwi involvement with the tourist industry may not have brought hoped-for economic rewards, it has positively intensified local social relationships.

The contributors ask what is perhaps *the* burning question for the Asia-Pacific region, how to increase economic opportunity without sacrificing local knowledge and resources, safeguards against landlessness, and the diversity of local values embodied in different systems of customary land tenure. They advise caution rather

than invite reform. In this respect their essays constitute a potential resource for the students protesting in Port Moresby, Sumatrans living on the shores of Lake Toba, and Māori communities dispersed throughout New Zealand.

The contributors identify the hidden costs and risks of privatization and other schemes to simplify and homogenize property regimes, yet there is a need to go one step further, to explicitly address arguments for property reform, to promote debate by acknowledging dissenting points of view (all of the authors are in substantial accord here), and to provide more robust efforts to theorize (rather than simply describe and explain) key differences between property regimes. Perhaps in a sequel to this volume the authors might consider formulating concrete proposals for what might work, what mixed and partial strategies—rather than sweeping, one-size-fits-all reforms like that proposed by de Soto—might prove useful to Asian-Pacific communities in the face of economic transformation and globalization. Robust as the traditional property regimes they describe are, they are not necessarily sufficient for defending and promoting local interests today. Harmut Holzknicht and others acknowledge this point, noting that land registration can provide an important legal resource in the struggle to defend land rights. Holzknicht also stipulates that any such reforms must involve consultation, transparency, and representative proceedings. This volume provides a credible rebuttal of the claim that property reforms necessarily yield economic growth, but the critique is not sufficient; scholars must also con-

sider the implications of their research for the imagination of alternatives beyond the status quo.

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Dilemmas of Development: The Social and Economic Impact of the Porgera Gold Mine 1989–1994, edited by Colin Filer. Canberra: Asia Pacific Press (Asia Pacific School of Economics and Management, Australian National University) and Boroko: National Research Institute, 1999. ISBN paper 0-7315-3606-1; xiii + 319 pages, tables, figures, maps, notes, references, index. Paper, A\$20.

Papua New Guinea's Environmental Planning Act requires developers to fund social impact studies as a precondition for mining operations, and the minerals boom of the 1980s and 1990s has also been a boom for social research: for every new mining project, somebody will have written a social impact report. Despite the volume of consulting, however, little of this work has found its way into the mainstream literature. Some of this difficulty may rest with the traditional estrangement between academic and applied research, but much of it lies with the terms of consultancy agreements between researchers and their clients. Developers view consultants' reports as proprietary information and are reluctant to make them public, partly out of nervousness about publicity and partly out of habit: why, after all, should they give away something they spent shareholders' money on?