
REVIEWS

Robert J. Gordon and Mervyn J. Meggitt, *Law and Order in the New Guinea Highlands: Encounters with Enga*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1985. Pp. 295, illustrated. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Richard Scaglione, University of Pittsburgh

The collaboration of Gordon and Meggitt has produced a volume that is truly superior on a number of levels. These authors have had considerable and complementary experience in Papua New Guinea, and their fortunate collaboration reflects both the breadth and depth of their expertise. The volume is a penetrating analysis of the "law and order" problem in Enga Province. It is grounded in solid, long-term ethnographic fieldwork and placed in a broad comparative framework. The knowledgeable reader will recognize a unique understanding of the Enga people and their social milieu, an intimate familiarity with both Australian and Papua New Guinea public services, an ability to synthesize complex theories of law, and a sensitivity to applied contemporary problems. In a word, this book is excellent.

It is also a pleasure to read. References abound, yet the text sparkles with interesting insights and ideas for further thought. For example, the reader is treated to an analysis of the patrol as both a rite of passage and as a sacred pilgrimage (p. 68), an exploration of the importance of ceremonialism in government (pp. 177-178), the idea that limited popular access to justice in the form of the *kiap* (field officer) may have been a good thing (p. 186), and the suspicion that the rather late pacification of Enga, which occurred during the decline of the *kiap*, may have con-

tributed to the law and order problem (chap. 5). The authors are straightforward in dealing with the “sacred cows” of anthropological research in Papua New Guinea. Phrases like “the decline of administrative capacity in Enga” (p. 60), the “general scarcity of competent office staff” in local councils (p. 121), “rich and powerful nationals and expatriates” (p. 244), “Indonesian encroachment” (p. 242), and the “murky activities of multinational companies” (p. 244) are examples of their candor. I confess to a wry amusement on reading how “local people can expect to wait for attention while officers read the latest *Post-Courier* ‘Phantom’ comic strip” (p. 60), having had the experience myself.

Yet this is not merely a collection of unsubstantiated witticisms. On the contrary, the complexities of the administrative and judicial structure in Papua New Guinea are carefully documented. The work contains solid historical research with useful reviews of the decline of the *kiap* system, the judicial functions of the administration, and other matters of general interest.

The book is divided into three parts. The first section analyzes the current situation in Enga together with its historical roots. The decline of the field officer, the rise of specialist magistrates and legal formalists, and recent government attempts to control group violence through enlarging the police force and stiffening penalties are all described. Part two examines the Enga interpretation of and response to these changes. The third part assesses some of the approaches used at the national level to cope with law and order problems, including the “customary law” option and the use of village courts. In a conclusion that will be applauded by knowledgeable anthropological fieldworkers, the authors observe that “village courts have greater potential for dealing with the law-and-order problem than any of the other options considered” (pp. 15-16).

In light of such a fine effort, criticisms seem rather petty. My main caution derives from the regrettable delay that frequently occurs between the preparation of a final manuscript and its ultimate publication. In this case, chapters that are “historically complete” have not suffered, but chapters assessing current situations (such as the customary law option and the village courts) have minor inaccuracies if the reader assumes that the use of the present tense refers to 1985, the volume’s publication date. For example, amendments to the Village Court Act and procedural changes instituted by the Village Courts Secretariat have modified a few of the facts reported concerning village courts. Also, the authors have not adequately considered recent developments in contemporary studies such as the Enga Law and Order Project and

the Customary Law Development Project of the Law Reform Commission. These shortcomings are minor, however, and if the reader assumes that the ethnographic present is about 1980, they are of little consequence. In fact, subsequent events have only strengthened their arguments. For example, in discussing the Law Reform Commission's 1977 report on the underlying law, they state, "In 1980 Parliament still had not acted on this report . . ." (p. 190). Years later, they *still* have not.

In sum, this volume should be required reading for all those interested in applied problems in Papua New Guinea. It will also be of considerable value to researchers in comparative law. It presents a well-documented case study of the breakdown of law and order in a Pacific society.