

LAW AND ORDER IN A WEAK STATE: Crime and Politics in Papua New Guinea. *By Sinclair Dinnen.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 248 pp. (Maps, B&W photographs.) ISBN 0-8248-2280-3.

Since gaining independence from Australia in 1975, Papua New Guinea has become an increasingly dangerous place. Port Moresby, the capital and point of entry for most visitors, resembles an armed camp with businesses and residences barricaded behind armed guards, razor wire, electronic gates and other lines of security meant to lock out roving urban gang members, known in Neo-Melanesian as *raskols*. Traffic on the Highlands highway is frequently disrupted by outbreaks of tribal warfare in which automatic rifles are steadily replacing spears and arrows as the weapons of choice. Many families now refuse to allow their daughters to attend residential schools and universities where attacks upon women, including gang rapes, have periodically reached epidemic proportions. Meanwhile, local landowners across the country routinely threaten businesses and government workers alike with violence unless they ante up "compensation" for the local resources they use and exploit. The government of the country has heavily invested its scarce funds in beefing up the police and army in a mostly vain attempt to bring the situation under control. Its impotence is perhaps best displayed in its inability to end the protracted civil war in the North Solomons Province that broke out in 1989.

Law and Order in a Weak State is the most ambitious attempt so far to describe and account for the nature and degree of violence and crime in Papua New Guinea. The study draws primarily upon fieldwork and archival research undertaken by Sinclair Dinnen between 1991 and 1994 when he was a senior researcher in the Crime Division of the National Research Institute in Port Moresby. Dinnen opens the book with a superbly crafted overview of the cultural and historical roots of the contemporary situation. The overview clearly demonstrates the need for a

multidimensional approach to understanding crime in Papua New Guinea. This Dinnen supplies in the following chapter, outlining three sets of perspectives – “materialist, culturalist, and institutionalist” (page 8) – that provide complementary lenses for viewing the interactions between the state and the public order. The remainder of the book focuses upon three case studies: urban *rakolism*, mining security and election-related violence. In each of these chapters, Dinnen first provides background followed with an analysis in terms of the three perspectives.

While a bit mechanistic at times, Dinnen’s approach has the merit of revealing several dimensions of the problems of law and crime in the country. At the heart of Papua New Guinea’s dilemma is the reality that the country is a “weak state” whose diverse communities exercise considerable autonomy from national legal and political institutions. As in other Third World nations, crime has increased in tandem with various “modernizing” trends – the growing gap between economic classes, mass migration to the cities, and so forth. The instruments of state power also shape the nature and opportunities for crime. But the weakness of the state leaves considerable space for the working of cultural factors that give the Papua New Guinean experience its peculiar shape and tenacity. Urban gang members, to take one example, are driven by economic deprivation and encouraged by the fact that their chances of being caught by the police are next to nil. But at the same time, they tend to perceive themselves in terms of a cultural matrix that includes the figures of warriors, big men and a gift-based morality. Dinnen convincingly argues that solutions to violence will depend on addressing all three of these determinants.

Dinnen has presented a bold, sophisticated and compelling analysis of the developing situation of crime and social order in Papua New Guinea. This is a significant contribution that deserves the widest readership.

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