

zu empfehlen, u. a. weil in diesem Forschungsbereich noch viele Lücken vorherrschen.

Chirly dos Santos-Stubbe
(c.santos-stubbe@hs-mannheim.de)

Howes, Stephen, and Lekshmi N. Pillai (eds.): Papua New Guinea. Government, Economy, and Society. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2022. 262 pp. ISBN (print) 978-1-7604-6502-5; ISBN (online) 978-1-7604-6503-2 (free download <press.anu.edu.au>)

This edited volume with contributions by 19 scholars at the Australian National University (ANU) and the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) aims to compile the current state of research on Papua New Guinea, a developing country in the South Pacific, in the areas of government, the economy and society. The volume seeks to link up to the overviews by Ron May ("Policy Making and Implementation. Studies from Papua New Guinea," 2009) as well as Thomas Webster and Linda Duncan ("Papua New Guinea's Development Performance 1975–2009," 2010). It features seven chapters as well as an introduction in which the editors summarize the results.

Part I, "Politics and Governance," encompasses three chapters on the political system and the national parliamentary election, on the decentralisation of the structure of the state and on crime and corruption. The quality of the parliamentary election proves to be very poor in international comparison because of problems with the rolls, vote buying and violence. Including the 2022 election, only nine women have been elected to the parliament ("men's house") with its now 118 seats since 1975, which can be attributed to cultural factors of a patriarchal society, insufficient finance as well as violence and intimidation. Politics in PNG is based on local personal conditions and benefits that characterise the clientelistic, fragmented, and unstable character of the political sphere. Holding office is the most important path to power and prosperity. By contrast, national topics and political parties are largely irrelevant.

These characteristics are also the reasons for the decentralisation of the state structure, which is considered highly complex, "unique worldwide," incomplete, conflict-laden, and difficult to assess. Although PNG was a unitary state at independence, major reform projects of 1977, 1995, and 2014 established three additional tiers of government and administration besides the central government. They currently comprise 22 provinces, 96 districts, and 318 local-level governments (LLG). Because the governors of the provinces and the heads of the District Development Authorities are members of the national parliament and are not elected, in contrast to the presidents of the LLGs, this constitutes only indirect representation. The political rivalry in the nation-

al parliament indicates that opposing forces exist. They include the political dominance of the parliamentarians (MPs), the dominance of the district MPs over the provincial MPs, support for continuation of the autonomy of the provinces as well as the above-mentioned clientelistic nature of PNG politics. The establishment in 2014 of the district governments, which receive large annual financial allocations, has contributed to the weakening and delegitimisation of the provinces and the LLGs, the worsening of public services, and to corruption and insufficient accountability for public funds. The Autonomous Region Bougainville has better conditions regarding both decentralisation and the participation of women.

The last chapter of this part explores declining urban crime and endemic corruption, both of which are significant threats to the stability and prosperity of the country. However, the tribal conflicts in the Highlands, which are conducted with modern weapons, are increasing, which imply both a return to sorcery-related violence mostly against women and children and to forms of violent self-help, given the fact that the state is largely non-existent in the hinterland. The national justice system is considered the most professional part of the legal system.

The two chapters of the second part of the volume outline the country's economic development since independence as well as changes to the standard of living. A new body of data was compiled for this purpose to close previous gaps concerning important economic indicators (available at <devpolicy.org/pngeconomic>). Population development, economic activity, commodity exports, employment, the balance of payments, fiscal data, the financial sector, and monetary data are shown in 36 graphs. With an urban population of 13 per cent in 2020 (1975: 12 per cent), PNG is not only the most rural country in the world. It is also among the most resource-dependent nations on Earth, with resources accounting for 28 per cent of GDP in 2018 (1980: 10 per cent). The structure of the economy has seen massive transformation since independence. Although subsistence production has increased in line with population growth of 2.7 per cent (1980–2000), the agricultural sector now comprises just 10 per cent of exports, down from 50 per cent in 1975. Production of traditional cash crops for export is lower than at the time of independence. Exports of palm oil, tropical woods and marine products are the only ones to increase. By contrast, commodity exports (natural gas, crude oil, minerals) amount to 80 per cent of exports.

Annual real GDP growth per capita averaged 1.1 per cent during the period 1983–2019, excluding the resource sector just 0.4 per cent. With population increasing from 3 million in 1975 to 9 million in 2020, the employment/population ratio has declined from 6 per cent just after

independence to 4.5 per cent today. The share of formal employment in the resource sector is only 7 per cent. Historically, there have been four periods of economic activity: the years 1975 to 1988 with slow but stable growth; 1989 to 2003 as a period of instability; the resource boom of 2004 to 2013; and an economic crisis from 2014 to 2019. The state's ability to generate revenue from resource production has been declining despite the resource boom, resulting in high current account deficits and relatively high levels of debt.

With respect to poverty and the population's standard of living, a positive dynamic can hardly be assumed for the past two decades. The analysis is based on demographic and household surveys from 1996, 2006 as well as 2016 to 2018. Although more households have water tanks, more children attend school and child mortality has decreased, the baselines for these improvements were at very low levels. The share of males without education has declined to 32 per cent, that of females to 40 per cent. Worsening governance, which has brought about poorer delivery of public services despite economic growth, is an area of regress. Moreover, the labour market and the status of women have hardly improved. The share of non-agricultural jobs has stagnated since 2006. It seems even more important that there is little sign of the structural transformation needed for sustained and successful development. The responsibility for this situation lies largely in the realm of politics. Polygamy has increased in PNG.

Chapter 7 in Part III outlines the distinctly uneven development in urban and rural areas and its consequences for livelihoods. Living standards prove to be hardly better in urban than in rural areas because costs are high and living conditions are difficult. People migrate from regions decoupled from development and with difficult environmental conditions to areas with resource projects that promise jobs. Whereas inequality has become exacerbated in PNG, the government has used the natural gas boom to upgrade the capital Port Moresby as a regional metropolis. The purchase of luxury Maserati cars on the occasion of the APEC meeting in 2018 is a prime example. The final chapter provides an overview of communication and the media. One-third of the population still has no access to mobile networks. Access to the internet is much worse.

In summary, the section of the book on the economy refers to a 1997 statement by geographer John Connell: "neither consistent growth nor sustainable development have been achieved" (12) since independence. Accordingly, the past 25 years have been lost for the country's development despite the resource boom and the economic growth based on it. Better conditions are hardly to be expected in the foreseeable future in light of the parliamentarians' decentralisation policy. The book is a compelling volume whose focus on politics, corruption,

decentralisation, development paths, living standards, and uneven development are highly relevant not least in light of the coming 50th anniversary of independence in 2025. The partnership of the ANU Crawford School of Public Policy with the DevPolicy Blog and the UPNG School of Business and Public Policy, which has brought about an unprecedented rise in the number of participating researchers from the two countries as well as increasing publications, also deserves recognition.

Roland Seib
(rseib@t-online.de)

Jackson, Peter A.: *Capitalism Magic Thailand. Modernity with Enchantment.* Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2022. 381 pp. ISBN 978-981-4951-09-8. Price: € 57,10

Classical varieties of modernization theory in the social and political sciences assumed that as a society becomes modern its religious institutions are subject to progressive privatization and decline. Over the past thirty years, this thesis with regard to modernity's "disenchantment" has been the subject of extensive critique and empirical refutation, including by sociologists like the late Peter L. Berger, who in his early career had been one of the leading formulators of the classical secularization model. Although today most sociologists and anthropologists of religion are keenly aware that religions across the world have "gone public" (to use Jose Casanova's phrase), unreformed secularization narratives continue to exercise a hegemonic influence in policy circles. Indeed, as Peter A. Jackson demonstrates in this theoretically savvy, engagingly written, and comprehensive account of religious change in late-modern Thailand, secularization viewpoints remain the default perspective in many political studies of contemporary Thailand.

Jackson is an emeritus professor of Thai history at the Australian National University. He has long been regarded as one of the most prolific and original analysts of religion, politics, and sexuality in this richly complex Southeast Asian country. In this new book, he draws on his own years of research into Buddhist reformism and popular cults of prosperity under the circumstances of neoliberal capitalism to present what he describes as "a corrective to the dominance of Buddhism in many histories and political studies of modern Thailand" (15). Jackson rightly notes that, "Western religious studies has at times taken the colonial-era construct of Buddhism as being equivalent to Thai religion as a sociological fact" (32). One reason Western scholars subscribe to this reductionist view is that, during the early decades of its development, the discipline of religious studies in the Western academy adopted a monotheistic and Abrahamic approach to the category of religion. The latter prioritized canonical texts as well