

**Tim Anderson**

**Land and Livelihoods in Papua New Guinea**

*Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2015, 222pp.*

A central lesson from Tim Anderson's latest book is that the 'modernist' view of land as a commodity does not sit well with Melanesian cultures. Land is crucial for livelihood, most directly in subsistence agriculture and small-scale farming but, more generally, as a basis for food security, village cooperation and development strategies that are equitable and sustainable. By contrast, marketisation, 'land grabs' and the reorientation of land-uses to production of crops for export tend to exacerbate dependence and vulnerability to external sources of corporate power and market volatility.

The book provides a wealth of data on how livelihoods are actually constructed in PNG, often in 'hybrid' forms that combine farming products for local consumption with some cash-cropping, some work as roadside sellers and maybe factory employment too. Typical income levels associated with these activities are presented and the tensions carefully considered, including gender issues. The results of the author's own pilot surveys of family food consumption are also included.

This 'down to earth' view of the economic and social conditions can be compared with the stances taken by international agencies ostensibly concerned with 'development'. As Anderson notes, there has been a shift from an 'old' economics, seeing market economic growth (GDP) as the principal goal, to a 'new' economics that sees progress in terms of broader human development indicators (HDI). This seems to be a somewhat softer line. However, as he also points out, the emphasis in World Bank documents on 'modernisation' through land registration, property rights and land markets indicates continuing insensitivity to local needs in a Melanesian cultural context.

Anderson concludes the book by expressing the hope that it 'has managed to dispel a few myths' (p.173) and gives some examples of what is at stake. One is that that families are moving from the subsistence to the cash economy (no, they're usually productively engaged in both). Another is that customary land owners should 'mobilise their land' to assist development (no, they should protect their own family needs and community development). Then there is the claim that large scale monocultures are more productive than small farming

(no, the productivity of the latter has not been properly measured). These points underline the principal lessons arising from the analysis and sits well with the author's ambition to help PNG rural families 'to better understand these pressures and consider which forms of resistance are best to help them build strong and resilient neighbourhoods' (p.148).

### **Howard Sherman and Michael Meeropol**

#### **Principles of Macroeconomics: Activist vs. Austerity Politics**

*M.E. Sharpe, New York, 2013, 395pp.*

The seemingly indefatigable Howard Sherman has made numerous contributions to challenging economic orthodoxy and developing political economic alternatives. Perhaps best known for his textbook *Economics: an Introduction to Traditional and Radical Views* (first launched in 1972, initially co-authored with his colleague E.K.Hunt and later, in more recent editions, with Reynold Nesiba and Phil O'Hara too), he has produced a steady stream of books over more than four decades. Here he teams up with Michael Meeropol to provide a challenging alternative to mainstream macroeconomics textbooks. The main title of the book looks bland enough but its sub-title clearly signals the political economic intent. The aim is to introduce students to the subject in a way that gets them to see why the prevailing post-GFC 'politics of austerity' rests on shaky theoretical foundations and needs to be challenged by people seeking a less punitive and more egalitarian policy approach.

Sherman's well-honed, distinctive style of writing is boldly evident here. It is bright and breezy, sometimes mixing colloquial language with the more academic terminology. He and his co-author marshal up-to-date evidence to illustrate the trends in the key variables on which macroeconomics must focus – output and incomes, exports and imports, wage and profit shares, consumer and corporate credit, investment and government spending, interest rates, quantitative easing, etc. The information is presented in readily understandable formats.

The book's focus on US data and institutions probably limits its potential use as a textbook internationally. The categorisation of macroeconomic views as either Classical or Progressive (with Keynesian economics as contested terrain) may also not appeal to some heterodox economists