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Heroes from Hell

Representations of 'rascals' in a Papua New Guinean village

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Anyone who has lived in or visited Papua New Guinea knows that a prominent issue under continual discussion there is that of violent crimes committed by gangs of young men known as 'rascals'. Rascals are portrayed in everyday talk, mass media debates and government funded reports as a threat to the people, economy and political stability of the country. The rapes, murders, thefts and break-ins committed by these gangs have been directly responsible for the two states of emergency (in 1985 and 1991), each lasting several months, that the national government has proclaimed in the capital, Port Moresby, and other towns. Referring specifically to rascals, Papua New Guinea's then Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu asserted at a national crime summit in February 1991, that violent crime 'has the potential to do more lasting and more severe damage to our country and our future than the Bougainville crisis and the downturn in commodity prices together' (PIM 3/91:26).

Violent crimes committed by rascals are also damaging Papua New Guinea's reputation in the outside world. Lawlessness is arguably the most featured aspect of Papua New Guinea in the overseas media, and this representation is widely assumed to be hurting the country's economy. The tourist industry appears to be grinding to a total halt, and overseas businesses are either reluctant to invest or are pulling out.¹

A remarkable aspect of all this concern over crime is that it is practically absent from anthropological writings about Papua New Guinea. With only a handful of exceptions (Morauta 1986, Reay 1982, Harris 1988, Shiltz 1985, Standish 1991), anthropologists have not made rascals a topic for research or comment. If one read only anthropological works about Papua New Guinea, one could very easily miss the fact that rascalism is one of the most salient and talked about topics in the country.

There are certainly a number of reasons why anthropologists have been unwilling to discuss rascalism, but I think that Marc Schiltz put his finger on one of the major ones when he recently chastised anthropologists for looking upon rascalism as 'simply a nuisance or an obstacle to "true" anthropological research in a safe little village'. This attitude, he continues, 'seems to miss the point of what people's lived experience in PNG is about at present' (1992:25).

Schiltz's remarks about rascalism being a part of people's lived experience at present probably apply to most people now living in Papua New Guinea. Even though the vast majority of rascal crime occurs in the country's urban centres, it is well known that many individual members of rascal gangs, especially those that are active in towns other than Port Moresby, often escape the law by disappearing back into their natal villages after they have committed a crime in town. The movements of these young men can thus bring rascalism far out into the bush, in the form of stories and sometimes in the form of robberies perpetrated by these men against householders or the owners of local trade stores.

In this article, I want to concentrate on this rural

dimension of rascalism. I am not concerned here with how members of urban rascal gangs live when they return to their villages or what they do there. Rather, I am interested in exploring how rascals are represented by people living in villages that are far away from the towns, and consequently far away from most kinds of rascal crime. In 1986-87, and again in 1991, I conducted fieldwork in such a village. The village, called Gapun, is located roughly midway between the mouths of the Sepik and Ramu rivers, about 10 kilometres inland from the northern coast of Papua New Guinea. The 100 or so villagers who live in Gapun are largely self-supporting through a combination of sago-processing, swidden agriculture and hunting.

Until 1991, Gapun had been completely untouched by any kind of rascal activity. This isolation from rascal crime, did not, however, mean isolation from stories and rumours about rascalism, and it had long surprised me that everybody in the village knew and could recite any number of stories about rascals. Even before 1991, everybody in Gapun had opinions about rascals and very firm ideas about why and how rascals do what they do.

What changed in 1991 was that the villagers acquired brutal, first-hand experience of who rascals are and what they can do. In July of that year, rumours probably originating in villages along the Sepik river insisted that I had brought the equivalent of about \$40,000 US dollars into Gapun. These rumours prompted a group of six young men from other villages to enter Gapun in the middle of the night, attack and rob me, and fatally shoot a village man who made a move to protect me (this incident is described in detail in a letter to ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY, 1991, 7(5):21-22).

I do not know how the village image of rascals has changed since 1991, because I left Gapun two days after the attack and I have not since returned. But regardless of how the villagers talk about rascals now, one of the conclusions I have reached since the attack is that it is valuable to know how Gapuners spoke about rascals before they had had any first-hand experience with them. This kind of knowledge is important because it can help us understand why young men in rural areas choose to become rascals and why villagers in these areas do in fact support these young men, who in Papua New Guinea's public rhetoric are commonly labelled 'uncontrollable, dangerous and [unable to] fit into the society' (Magistrate Andrew Maino, in Biles 1985:126). My goal here is to analyse the associations that the villagers evoke when they spoke to one another and to me about rascals. My point will be that despite frequent overt condemnation, rascals enjoy great support among the villagers, because the villagers see them as surrounded by an aura of adventure, education and power. Villagers believe that rascals are fighting a kind of protracted guerilla war against corrupt politicians, greedy businessmen and obstructionist missionaries. Furthermore, talk about rascals seems to provide the villagers with a discourse which they can legitimately use to express their dissatisfaction with and even resist-

ance to post-colonial, capitalist and Christian influences that are causing increasing disruption in their lives.

Rascal tales

One of the most common ways in which information and opinions about rascals are circulated in Gapun is through stories told about their exploits. Although everybody knows stories about rascals and sometimes tells them to one another during relaxed conversations, the stories most often enter the village with boys and young men between the ages of 9 and about 25. This is the group in the village which seems to find the stories most compelling, and I have listened as groups of these boys and young men have entertained themselves for hours, telling and retelling rascal tales.

The stories the boys tell have a fairly consistent pattern. They usually begin with a gang of rascals committing a robbery – of money from trade stores, of cars, of guns from police stations. This is followed by a confrontation with the police. These confrontations are inevitably won by the rascals, who usually kill all policemen with the help of magic which makes them invisible, invulnerable to bullets, and full of superhuman strength and speed. After more robberies and murders, the rascals are then usually confronted by the military forces (*ol dipens*) and/or by paramilitary law enforcement units known in the village as *ol skwat* (squads). In these confrontations, the rascals often become decimated and dispersed, and their leaders are often captured and jailed. Imprisonment is inevitably short-lived, however, because the leaders escape, again with the help of magic and often after a bloodbath in which the policemen and military units guarding the rascal are massacred. In virtually every rascal story that I have heard told in Gapun, the rascal leaders end up out of jail and poised to begin robbing and murdering once again.

Links with traditional 'great men'

There are a number of suggestive similarities between how rascal leaders are described and how Gapuners talk about now long-dead 'great men', who made reputations for themselves by being belligerent and audacious warriors. Like the great men of the past, successful rascal leaders 'have names' which are known to villagers over wide geographic areas. Two of the most talked about rascal leaders in Gapun are men named 'Mike Amo' and 'Moses Rome'. Leaders like these are absolutely fearless, and they will break into manned police stations or ambush battalions of soldiers with no concern for their own life. Rascal leaders are held to possess impressive amounts of stolen 'cargo' (*kago*), such as outboard motors, cartons of beer and large radios of the 'boombox' type. All this cargo is often stored in opulent corrugated iron hideaways deep inside the swamps. In addition to their ostentatious material wealth, rascal leaders, again like great men of the past, are said to have numerous wives. Mike Amo is reported by the villagers to have seven wives. Another known rascal from a nearby Adjora-speaking village to the east of Gapun is said to have between 5–13 wives.

A further characteristic which links rascal leaders to the warrior leaders of old is their possession of magic to aid them in battle. The two types of magic most frequently attributed to what we might as well call 'great rascals' are the power to cloak themselves in invisibility as they commit their crimes, and the power to evade the bullets fired at them by policemen or soldiers. The source of this magic varies. Sometimes it can be purchased by writing to mail-order catalogues. One

young man in his late teens, for example, once came to me for a piece of paper. He wanted to write a note to a mail order company and receive 'a thing' he called *Laki Boi* (i.e. 'Lucky Boy'). He wasn't sure what *Laki Boi* was exactly, but he had heard that it gave the person who possessed it 'power': 'If you hit someone he'll feel it as though lots of people hit him', was what he had heard from others.

Sometimes magic can be obtained from knowledgeable old witches and sorcerers, and some of the rascal stories that circulate in Gapun tell of young men being taught by such people. Stories like these are interesting because in them, the villagers articulate a direct link between traditional and modern forms and uses of magic. The stories are also interesting in that, in many of the ones I have heard, the agent of transmission is not a male – the sex which in Gapun is most often associated with magical knowledge and power – but a female: usually the rascal's mother or some other female relative.

Confronting the Church

The most common way for rascal leaders to acquire magic, however, seems to be through the consumption of the corpse fluids of a black cat (for invisibility), of the liver of a dead human (for invulnerability against bullets) and/or through reading a comic book. A comic book is very frequently mentioned by villagers as the 'source' (*as*) of all rascal knowledge. 'Sometime in the past', I was told by many people on many different occasions, 'rascals bought a book from Australia. A comic book, they call it a comic book. Bought this book and they studied it, and from this the ways of the rascals emerged'.

It is very important to note that both comic books and the consumption of dead flesh are explicitly regarded as 'Satanic' by the villagers of Gapun. Indeed, the very word used to name the kind of magic generated through these means and possessed by rascals is the Tok Pisin word *blek*, which literally means 'black magic'. The associations between rascals and Satan are strong and continually reiterated in villagers' stories. Rascals are said to be doing 'the work of Satan', and they are believed to commune regularly with the Devil and worship him (see e.g. transcribed conversation on this topic in Kulick and Willson n.d.).

This kind of talk about Satan occurs in a village which has been at least nominally Roman Catholic since the late 1940s, and where the villagers devote a tremendous amount of time, energy and talk to trying to become 'good Christians'. The overriding motivation behind this goal is that the villagers believe that when they all become good Christians, the millennium will arrive, Christ will come to Papua New Guinea, turn all the people there white and reward them further with airplanes, factories, money, cars and corrugated iron houses (Kulick 1992). In this context, Satan, and all things associated with him are unequivocally negative and highly charged with feelings of fear and horror. To thus speak of rascalism as Satanic, and to classify it as an activity enacted together with black magic and cannibalism, is to classify it in a profoundly condemnatory manner.

This being the case, it surprised me very much to learn that even as they decry rascalism as the work of Satan, villagers in fact often express approval of rascal robberies and break-ins. Even more surprising, given the negative associations that the villagers elaborate between rascalism and satanism, was that villagers expressed this kind of approval even when the targets of

rascal crime were representatives of the Catholic church. In 1986, for example, news was brought to Gapun that the trade store owned and run by the priest who was responsible for the lower Sepik area had been broken into by rascals and stripped bare. This, it was made clear, was an economic catastrophe for the priest and his church work. But the news was greeted with sound approbation by everybody who heard it reported. 'That's really good', one senior man commented, summing up the opinions of others, 'he [i.e. the priest] was the one who was in the wrong. He was [by having a tradestore in the first place] acting like a businessman'.

This kind of attitude was even expressed by one of the most ardent Christians in Gapun, the village prayer leader. In 1987, this man had become deeply involved in a millenarian movement that was sweeping through Gapun and other villages in the lower Sepik and Ramu regions. At one point, rumours reached Gapun that the Church did not sanction the movement, and was even urging the police to prosecute the cult leaders. Hearing this, the prayer leader became angry. He declared that if the Church did not sanction the movement, he would gladly defy it and go to jail. Upon release, he would form a rascal gang. 'I myself will be the driving force behind the gang', he declaimed.

Confronting businessmen and storekeepers

Of course, it is not only priests and their property that get attacked by rascal gangs. Businessmen and the owners of trade stores are also known to suffer. No store, the villagers understand, is immune from being ransacked by rascals, and even the tiny trade stores that individual men in neighbouring villages occasionally try to run (often from their homes and with stocks that consist of nothing more than perhaps 25 kgs of rice, a few jars of instant coffee, several tins of mackerel in oil and a few packets of sweet crackers) inevitably fall prey to looting by young rural rascals. Whenever this kind of crime is spoken about in Gapun, it is done so with smug approval. Storekeepers and businessmen who are robbed, the villagers believe, always deserve it. It is their own fault, the villagers tell one another. Their greed has brought them down.

One of the main reasons why villagers believe this is that they do not understand how storekeepers and businessmen decide on what prices to charge for their goods and services. The villagers only observe that items they wish to buy cost more than they did a few years ago, and much more than they did during colonial times, which ended in 1975. Since they have no way of knowing about any of the other factors that influence pricing, they can only explain price rises in terms of businessmen's and shopkeepers' greed. They are especially outraged when they note that prices of items like tinned mackerel and rice go up the further away from town one gets. This is completely the opposite of what they believe should occur: as one brings storebought goods further out into the bush, they reason, the prices should go down, because one should 'feel sorry for' (*sore long*) and wish to 'help' (*helpim*) one's friends and relatives. That men in other villages who try to run trade stores actually *raise* the prices of their goods and make the people in the villages pay more than they themselves paid for them in town is a flagrant advertisement of personal avarice and a public denial of social relations. In the eyes of the villagers of Gapun, these men themselves thus provoke the situation that inevitably leads to their downfall. The rascals who break into their stores and strip them bare are doing

nothing more serious than reminding the owners of their own social lapses.

Confronting the government

The third category of people who are regularly attacked in the rascal tales the villagers tell one another are politicians. Again, in every case I have heard, these attacks are greeted with approval. And again, this approval is generated by feelings that the villagers have about the government and the politicians that make up that government.

Gapuners fairly often engage in talk in which they find reason to contrast the Australian colonial government with the post-colonial government run by Papua New Guineans. Almost invariably, the post-colonial government is portrayed in a very negative light. 'Australia', the villagers tell one another, 'took care of/looked after us' (*lukautim mipela*). The Papua New Guinean government, by contrast, ignores the villagers and blocks their access to money and goods by 'hiding' knowledge from them (Kulick 1992). Politicians are 'rubbish men' who do nothing except *grisim* (i.e. butter up, deceive with false promises) villagers around election time so the villagers will elect them to become 'members'.

And indeed, if their recent experiences with representatives of the government are anything to go by, Gapuners have every reason to be deeply dissatisfied. Politicians have come to Gapun exactly twice since the beginning of the 1980s. Both times, they arrived during election balloting periods, and both times, they left the village after having cheated the villagers and tricked them into voting for them. In the 1982 elections, the villagers told me that a candidate for the East Coast regional seat in the provincial government displayed three checks totalling 900 Kina (1 PNG Kina = roughly 1 US dollar) for the villagers who had come to vote. The candidate declared that if the villagers voted for him, he would go to the provincial capital and cash the checks, returning with 300 Kina for each of the three villages that had assembled to vote. This man won the seat, but neither he nor the promised money was ever seen again.

What happened during the 1987 elections was even worse. After having been fooled in the previous election, the villagers were adamant that they would not vote to reelect the man who had promised them 300 Kina for their votes. Indeed, many villagers had declared that they would refuse to vote at all, as a protest to the government. 'Let the ones who get services from the government vote', village men were telling one another in the weeks before balloting, 'what have we ever got from the government that we should vote and make people members?'

On the day that polling officials came to the area to collect votes, however, one of the registered contenders for a seat in the National Parliament arrived in the village. This man sat in the men's house and managed to convince the village men that he owned a 'bank'. If they voted for him and gave him all their money, this man told the villagers, he would deposit the money in his bank and see to it that it 'got big'. With the money he would purchase a large number of outboard motors, and in a few months he would be back in Gapun to distribute the motors among the villagers. Because this man was a smooth talker, and because he had been preceded by impressive rumours, the villagers gave him their votes and all their money (about 200 Kina). Needless to say, this man left the village with the Gapuners' votes and their money and has not been heard from

The fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted in 1986-87, and in 1991. I thank the Swedish research foundations HSFR and SAREC for funding the first field-trip, and the Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University for funding the second. I also thank Bambi Schieffelin, the Editors and an anonymous reviewer for their comments on an earlier draft.

I dedicate this paper to the memory of Simon Kawri Kruni, who was murdered by rascals in

1. A recent Australian parliamentary enquiry into relations with Papua New Guinea concluded that: 'From the perspectives of Australians and others seeking to invest in Papua New Guinea, the extent and unpredictability of violence in Papua New Guinea society has a dampening effect. The Committee heard a great deal of evidence about the extent of violence in Papua New Guinea and the effect it had on investment. The perception universally was one of a deteriorating situation, and one that had a negative effect on business investment'. (1991:70).
2. There is certainly some truth to at least some of these stories. In 1988, Bruce Harris pointed out in his report on rascalism that 'although it is not generally known, politicians have already begun to use rascals for their own purposes. Rascals are paid by politicians, as well as by businessmen, to exact "paybacks" from their enemies or from people who have thwarted them in some way. Rascals are hired to cause trouble for other candidates in elections. Rascals are hired to rob or damage shops or offices of business rivals. The use of rascals for these purposes is increasing and will continue to do so' (1988: 48-49). By the beginning of the 90s, Harris's predictions seem to have come true, perhaps most notably in the case of Bruce Samban, the former premier of the East Sepik province (the province in which Gapun is located). In April 1992, Samban was sentenced to five years imprisonment with hard labour for having paid members of rascal gangs to burn down the provincial government offices while he was under investigation for

since.

With experiences like this to relate to, it is perhaps not difficult to understand why villagers take great pleasure in hearing and passing on any stories about how rascals beat, murder and rob 'the government'.

Rascals, education, and the police

Two final associations that the villagers elaborate about rascals are important to mention. The first of these is the link that the villagers see between rascals and education. Gapuners believe not only that all rascals, or at least all rascal leaders, are secondary and tertiary school leavers or *drop aps*, as one senior man, who hadn't quite gotten the idiom right, used to put it; they also believe that rascals learn much of their trade, such as how to assemble and use guns and how to study the comic book, in high school and university. The villagers maintain this even as they know that high schools and universities are in fact run by the government. This being the case, one might wonder why the government would want to provide students with the very skills that are subsequently used to challenge and attack it?

The answer to this for the villagers of Gapun appears to be that the government and the rascals very often are the same people, or are interchangeable. In addition to the stories which circulate in Gapun about rascals attacking politicians and looting government offices, there are also stories about how politicians recruit rascals and reward them, with money and with 'live bands' (i.e. with instruments and equipment which the rascals can use to form a live band)². There are also stories about how government officials become rascals, and vice versa. In many rascal stories, the difference between police and rascals is uncertain and blurred. The paramilitary 'squads' that villagers discuss among themselves, for example, are believed to punish people – as rascals in some stories are said to do – by making them eat corpses. In some stories, the only real difference between rascals and police is that the latter wear uniforms, and even this difference is not always upheld – Moses Rome's rascal gang, for example, is held to have special rascal uniforms. I once arrived in the middle of a story about someone who, I assumed, as I listened to the story, was an archetypal rascal leader. This man, who was from somewhere in the 'upper Sepik', had been taught how to make himself invisible by his mother, a *sangguma* witch who used to murder people and eat their liver. The story told of how this man rescued his friend from an Indonesian jail by slipping invisibly past the guards and telling his friend to walk out behind him, putting his footsteps exactly where he himself stepped. It turned out that the story was not about a rascal leader at all – by the end it had become clear that the story was about the head of the Papua New Guinea's Defence Force. In a similar twist, another story told of how a rascal, who had just robbed a man in his house, minutes later jumped to the same man's rescue and killed seven rascals who tried to break into the man's house.

Police and rascals thus seem not all that different from one another in the villagers' eyes, and rascalism seems to be not so much an identity as it is specific categories of activity conducted by individuals who have the same kinds of skills, education and power as those officials who uphold the law and the government. Gapuners even believe that police and rascals do the same kind of work and sometimes cooperate with one another. In 1986, for example, the headmaster of the local government-run primary school tried to intimidate

the villagers by telling them that if they didn't start sending their children to school more regularly, he would travel to the town of Angoram and return with policemen who would beat the parents up. And if that didn't work, the headmaster continued darkly, the police would go back to Angoram and 'tell the rascals', who, it was understood, would invade the village and take up with the disobedient parents where the police had left off. This threat was completely believed by the villagers, who spent many days afterwards discussing it among themselves.

Representation as resistance

As a liberal Western anthropologist acutely aware of the proletarianization and impoverishment that awaits the villagers of Gapun if present social and economic trends continue in Papua New Guinea, it has long disturbed me that nothing the villagers seemed to do or say could legitimately be interpreted as constituting opposition to the Western-derived discourses and economic forces that so fundamentally influence their lives, and that are unambiguously leading towards increasing disempowerment and loss of self-respect. Even in examining the villagers' millenarian rhetoric (e.g. in Kulick 1992, Kulick and Willson 1992), I have felt that I would be grossly misrepresenting the villagers' idioms and goals if I argued, as is often done in similar cases (e.g. Worsley 1957, Lattas 1992), that the rhetoric is an explicit or even covert critique of colonialism and capitalism. I remain convinced that the millenarian rhetoric and beliefs that exist in Gapun not only do not challenge the ideas and processes that will, in the end, very probably be the village's undoing; but they instead very effectively reinforce and entrench them.

As I began systematizing and analysing the stories that the villagers tell one another about rascals, however, it occurred to me that what those stories seem to be about, quite explicitly, is dissatisfaction with and even resistance to the general socio-economic situation that the villagers find themselves in today. The most striking dimension of the villagers' talk about rascals is that in it, accepted and well-worn associations and values are stood on their head. The minions of the Christian God, in rascal stories, are bad; the representatives of Satan are good. Their 'black magic' is acquired from women, not men, and it is a positive force that helps them to steal from the rich (and, it is often implied, give to the poor). Their overdetermined Christian names (like 'Moses Rome') do not pay homage to the Church, they mock it. They are modern youths who behave like traditional 'great men'. Their education is used to challenge the government, not assist it. And their literature and literacy skills are linked to the Devil, not to the Church (cf. Kulick and Stroud 1990). I particularly want to stress the inversion of Christian symbolism and the challenge to Church authority that I read from these stories, partly because I believe such a challenge to be unique to this particular discourse in Gapun, and partly because the challenge that talk about rascals seems to pose to Christianity has gone unnoticed in past accounts of rascalism. Even Marie Reay, whose account of rascalism in the New Guinea highlands contains a description of 'a classic Black Mass' (1982:626) conducted by rascals, does not pursue the shockingly powerful symbolism involved here (such as buckets of animal blood and oaths of allegiance being offered to Satan).³

The kinds of symbolic inversion evidenced in rascal stories occur nowhere else in village talk or actions. It is as though rascalism provides the villagers with the

corruption. The estimated cost of the damage incurred was K2 million.

3. Here I would also register disagreement with Schiltz's assertion that '[r]ascals' quest for the good things in modern life stands in sharp contrast to similar quests by cargo cultists of earlier generations' (1985: 159). Support for rascals in Gapun hinges directly on the fact that the villagers believe that the Church, government and businessmen are 'hiding' knowledge, money and power from them. That is, the villagers approve of much of what they hear about rascals for exactly the same reasons they supported, and continue to support, cargo cult leaders. Indeed, if I had space, I would argue that the profiles that villagers give of important rascal leaders are remarkably similar to the profiles they give of charismatic cargo cult leaders. I would also argue that in this kind of context, those young village men who engage in rascal activities while visiting towns are very likely to see their activities in a complementary relation to millenarianism. Certainly one of the most important cultural 'push' factors compelling young village men to leave Gapun and dabble in rascalism is a continuing commitment to millenarian beliefs and the failure of past millenarian cults to produce the cargo.
4. There are a few stories circulating in Gapun about rascal women (*ol raskol-meri*). These women are portrayed as active gang members who assist their male companions by luring potential victims into unprotected places so that they can be attacked and robbed. In yet another example of the way in which the

only discourse they possess to express some kind of opposition to their current socio-economic position in the modern state of Papua New Guinea. It is a discourse of great subtlety: by condemning rascalism in general terms (as Satanic), even as they express support for rascal activities in virtually every specific instance, the villagers are having their cake and eating it too. But the discourse of rascalism is also a discourse of some power – by talking about and expressing approval of rascal attacks on the government, businesses and the church, villagers are keeping open for themselves the possibility that there are concrete and effective ways for rural people like themselves to counter encroachments and bring about improvements in their lives.

The allure of rascalism

The discourse of rascalism in Gapun is also subtle and powerful because it has the certainly unintended effect of making rascalism seem a very attractive option for the young men⁴ in the village. Indeed, judging from how young men in Gapun talk about rascals, it seems very likely that increasing numbers of them may drift off into the towns or into villages near the towns where Gapuners have affinal ties and where rascals are known to have strongholds, and become members of rascal gangs.

Rascalism offers these young men great adventure. Rascals travel to towns far away from their villages and they live exciting lives there. In some respects, the life of a rascal is similar to the life of those respected senior men in Gapun who up until the 1960s signed on and went away to distant islands to work as plantation labourers for several years at a time. Contracted labour provided, and rascalism now seems able to provide, young men with opportunities to get out of their villages for awhile and see other places. Young men in Gapun and other rural villages have grown up hearing romantic stories about far away places from the senior men, and it distresses them that there seems to be no way for them to experience that kind of travel and adventure themselves. One young man in his early twenties expressed this attitude explicitly to me on one occasion when an old man was talking about his experiences on a plantation in the distant East New Britain province. The youth turned to me and remarked with some bitterness that 'Before all the senior men went around everywhere. Now there's no way. Now you have to have money to travel'.

Another reason why young men find rascalism attractive is that it seems to offer them various kinds of power – deriving from weapons and material goods, but also from exciting magic that they would not otherwise have access to. Rascalism also provides a means for the young men to use and, it would seem, according to the stories, augment their education. As I have noted in other work, the 4-6 years of education that the villagers receive in the local government-run primary school serve no other purpose than to make them dissatisfied with their lives in the village (Kulick 1992:175-80). The associations that the villagers articulate between rascalism and education imply that rascals are rather highly educated. Anyone belonging to a rascal gang, no matter what else he might be, is certainly not an illiterate *bus kanaka* (country bumpkin). It is also of interest here to note that whenever young men sit musing about what they would like to work as, if they could choose, they virtually unanimously tell one another that they would like to work as policemen or military servicemen. Of course, the similarities and interchangeability that the villagers see between rascals and pre-

cisely these professions allow these boys to imagine that they can, despite their lack of requisite education, actually realize their dream of being a policeman or a serviceman – by becoming a rascal.

Representations of rascals and the future of Papua New Guinea

The kinds of representations of rascals that I have documented here are a problem for the government of Papua New Guinea because they are complex and they are becoming increasingly deeply rooted in the consciousnesses of the villagers. If similar representations exist, as I suspect they do, in places other than the lower Sepik basin, then I believe that it will become increasingly difficult for the government to prevent large numbers of rural youths from travelling to the towns and swelling the ranks of the rascal gangs. It will also become virtually impossible, if it isn't impossible already, for law enforcement units to be able to count on the support of rural people in their searches for rascals who escape back to their villages. The situation even has the potential to develop as far as what Bruce Harris, in his study of urban rascals in Port Moresby has called 'the social protest and revolution scenario' (1988:46), in which rascal groups became the basis of social protest movements.

The basic problem, from the point of view of the villagers of Gapun, is that they receive absolutely nothing from the government. Indeed, they are even brazenly lied to and robbed by people who they identify as representatives of the government. Under such circumstances, the villagers ask themselves, why should they support or care about the government? In stark contrast to this situation, some people in Gapun have in recent years received articles of clothing, batteries, or the loan of a large radio from friends and relatives in other villages who they know stole these things from some town. 'Cargo' such as this isn't much, but it is enough to sway opinions about who is on their side.

Of course, the murder of one of their own people, in July 1991, at the hands of a masked man with a sawn-off shotgun, has certainly alerted the villagers of Gapun to the fact that rascal gangs are not in fact the altruistic superheroes that they are usually portrayed as being. In order for this kind of experience to have any lasting effect on the way Gapuners think about rascalism, however, the local police force would have to have handled the case efficiently and competently. Regrettably, this does not appear to have happened. Not only did the police, as far as I am aware, not capture most of the men who attacked the village, but the 'squad' sent to find the criminals apparently bashed and humiliated totally innocent people in the lower Sepik villages from which the rascals reportedly came. This action had no effect other than to greatly antagonize these larger villages. It led them to regard Gapun as the source of police brutality, and harsh threats were relayed to the Gapuners, who, terrified anew that another attack was in the offing, abandoned their village and dispersed into the rainforest for several months. The message conveyed to the villagers thus seems to have been that any cooperation with the police is useless and dangerous (cf. similar points made in Clifford et. al. 1984: 191-92, Harris 1988:14-17, Dorney 1992:291-306). Police actions in this case must also have further underscored the similarities that the villagers already see between the police force and rascals.

Until now, the major efforts to combat and neutralize rascalism in Papua New Guinea have quite understandably been directed towards the urban centres of

symbolism surrounding rascals inverts normal associations, a detail always mentioned in any story involving a *raskol-meri* is that she wears *longpela trausis*, i.e. long trousers – a symbol *par excellence* of maleness that no woman would normally ever wear. This gender-bending dimension of the *raskol-meri* is regarded by the villagers as excessively deviant and extreme, and it seems to inhibit female identification with these women. So while adolescent girls and women in Gapun happily entertain one another with stories in which *raskol-meri* figure, and while they even seem to regard *raskol-meri* with a kind of awe, *raskol-meri* do not appear to have the same pull on the imaginations of the young village women as their male counterparts have on the young village men.

the country. My own research indicates, however, that serious attention also needs to be given to the law and order situation in rural areas. It is, after all, from these areas that a large number of the urban rascals are recruited, and it is here where many new gangs that have the power to terrorize rural villagers seem now to be in the process of consolidating themselves. The Papua New Guinea government has in recent years received a number of reports on the law and order situation in the country (e.g. Clifford et. al. 1984, articles in Morauta 1986 and Toft 1985). One can only hope that many of the recommendations and insights of those reports will begin to be implemented, and that the economy of the country will improve so that goods and services, at least, will begin to reach neglected areas like the lower Sepik. In the meantime, we all need to consider the consequences that may stem from the fact that rural populations like Gapun are losing much of their self-respect and are deeply dissatisfied with many aspects of their lives. What anthropologists can do is use their knowledge of village life to help villagers articulate and publicize that dissatisfaction, and to elucidate, so that they might be discussed and ameliorated, the kinds of social and cultural conditions that seem to encourage some villagers to pursue violent criminal activities. □

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New lamps for old

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Occasionally we hear the title of exactly the book we'd most like to read and savour. That was how *Anthropology and Photography* sounded to me. My naive imagination conjured up from those words some kind of bumper anthology from the archives of the world, whose illuminating chronological parade would be accompanied by a magisterial thesis drawing insights from the plates as it proceeded towards thought-provoking conclusions.

But my conjectured book belongs to flabbier times whose lack of specialist rigour was compensated for by a generous amplitude. Political Correctness (PC) which leaves us so few words with which to say anything, and Post Structuralism (PS) which gives us a few words with which to talk about everything, have put a stop to all that. Neither of course is altogether foolish and each in its way puts its finger on the dialectical anxiety that lies at the heart of current studies; yet one is a timorous creature and the other a bullying beast, and neither has a fun-loving aspect. The fact that prejudice against the prejudices of the past leads to frightful tautologies of exegesis, and that scholarship at the end of this century has tended to become a medium which threatens to be its own message, makes this volume much drier fare than I had envisaged: ethnography minceur.

Elizabeth Edwards as editor has put together an odd

Festschrift-like work whose proper dedicatee is perhaps the astonishing photographic collection of the RAI, as richly stocked as it is poorly funded. In a slightly bathetic structure, five essays of substantial length are followed by a clutch of short case-studies which range from the searching to the perfunctory. In contrast to her own absorbing article on E.H. Man and the Andamanese, Edwards' introductory essay can only be hacked through by taking a machete to everything in brackets, for she takes no step without two or three acknowledgements nor makes even the most uncontentious point without citing a handful of authorities. This sort of thing can be entertaining, in the manner of Beachcomber's list of Huntingdonshire Cabmen, especially when names like Linnaeus Tripe crop up, yet it creates an awful lot of undergrowth, particularly when, for what would be, without photographs, a nine-page essay, there are appended three triple-columned pages of acknowledgements and references. This sort of over-dressed and overendorsed platitude is too much:

Yet photographs are not totally passive. They suggest meaning through the way in which they are structured, for representational form makes an image accessible and comprehensible to the mind, informing and informed by a whole hidden corpus of knowledge that is called on through the signifiers in the image (Barthes 1977: 36-7;

1. *Anthropology and Photography 1860-1920*, Yale U.P. in association with the RAI, 1992. £19.95.