

# *Rumour and Other Narratives of Political Violence in West Papua*

**Stuart Kirsch**

*Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan*

**Abstract** ■ This article addresses the neglected subject of political violence in the Indonesian province of Irian Jaya, known locally as West Papua. It asks how this regime of political violence is reproduced in and through representations of culture, gender and difference. It argues that rumours about state-sponsored violence contribute to both the experience and expression of terror. It examines how West Papuans understand, subvert and imagine alternatives to the political and symbolic forms of violence in which they are enmeshed. Finally, it compares rumour to ethnographic accounts and human rights reports, arguing that anthropologists have both political and ethnographic responsibilities to 'bear witness' to political violence and the mechanisms through which it is reproduced as terror.

**Keywords** ■ ethnography ■ human rights ■ 'lost tribes' ■ political violence ■ refugees ■ rumour ■ the 'primitive' ■ West Papua (Irian Jaya, Indonesia)

This article addresses the neglected subject of political violence in the Indonesian province of West Papua (Irian Jaya).<sup>1</sup> It is written in response to Indonesia's participation in overt forms of violence, including the expropriation of land and resources, forced relocation of indigenous communities, racial and ethnic discrimination, civil rights violations and human rights abuses, physical assault and torture, sexual violence and extrajudicial killings (Anti-Slavery Society, 1990; Budiardjo and Liong, 1988; Ondawame, 2000). It asks how this regime of political violence is reproduced in and through representations of culture and difference. It examines how state terror is shaped by primitivist representations, expressed in the language of epidemics and embodied in gendered oppositions between production and reproduction. How do these rumours contribute to both the experience and expression of terror? And how do the people of West Papua understand, subvert and imagine alternatives to the political and symbolic forms of violence in which they are enmeshed?

## Anthropological silence

Before addressing these concerns, however, it is necessary to confront the long-standing anthropological silence on political violence in West Papua.<sup>2</sup> There are several practical reasons for the lack of attention given to these problems. The Indonesian state deliberately restricts anthropological access to the western half of the island of New Guinea.<sup>3</sup> Whereas hundreds of anthropologists have conducted ethnographic research in Papua New Guinea, making it one of the most densely studied areas of the world, only a handful of their contemporaries have been permitted to work in West Papua since the 1960s. Furthermore, scholars with access to West Papua have been justifiably concerned that published accounts of political violence might endanger the subjects of their research.

West Papua has also become a kind of anthropological 'no-man's land' caught between the very different ethnographic traditions that converge on the divide between Southeast Asia and the Pacific (see Rutherford, 1996: 603, n. 3). Ethnologists working in Papua New Guinea typically adopt the role of lone culture hunters, retreating as far into the rain forest as they can travel. In contrast, Indonesianists tend to be drawn – *slametan-ing* and *gamelan-ing* – to the bright lights of courtly tradition, which has, to some extent, been appropriated by the state (Pemberton, 1994). Melanesianists have largely ignored the state, while Indonesianists, faced with centuries of empire and a more intrusive colonial history, recognize that neither rural society nor the state can be conceived of without the Other (Tsing, 1993). Whereas scholars working in Papua New Guinea frequently emulate the ethos of rugged individualism that prevails on their side of the border, many Indonesianists appear to have been seduced by *halus*, the Javanese etiquette of refinement that makes impolite truths difficult to utter.

Until recently, the state also displayed a repressive intolerance of criticism, which affected the anthropology of Indonesia, especially with regard to West Papua, much as totalitarian politics inhibited free speech in the former Soviet Union. This observation is not intended as an accusation, but rather as a critique of the disappointing limits of conventional scholarship, which is constrained by the agencies that provide funding and approve research permits, and of careers mortgaged by years of area studies and language training. Speaking out against political violence may jeopardize access to Indonesia for individual scholars and the other members of the institutions with which they are affiliated.<sup>4</sup> Anthropologists did not 'miss the revolution' in Indonesia, as Orin Starn (1992) reported for Peru, but relatively few have been willing to write about contemporary state-sponsored violence, especially in the outer islands.

A classic example of the marginalization of political violence in the anthropological literature of Indonesia comes from the oft-examined (e.g. Crapanzano, 1992; Roseberry, 1991) text of Clifford Geertz at the now-infamous Balinese cockfight:

In the midst of the third match, with hundreds of people . . . fused into a single body around the ring, a superorganism in the literal sense, a truck full of policemen armed with machine guns roared up. Amid great screeching cries of '*pulis! pulis!*' from the crowd, the policemen jumped out, and springing into the center of the ring, began to swing their guns around like gangsters in a motion picture, though not going so far as actually to fire them. . . . Everything was dust and panic. (1973a: 414–15).<sup>5</sup>

Rather than a moment of terror, however, Geertz depicts these events as pivotal to his establishment of rapport with the others caught in the ensuing melee. No one can blame Geertz for running away from the police, but ethnographically he also turns his back on the violence of the state, setting an important precedent for ethnographic research in the region. His cinematic simile suggests that violent encounters, like images on a movie screen, are of little consequence.<sup>6</sup> While treating the cockfight as a text about violence and its containment, Geertz ignores the mimetic relationship between the two scenes, one inscribed within the other: the police brandishing machine guns trained on the Balinese, the Balinese orchestrating a cockfight.<sup>7</sup>

I was reminded of Geertz's account of the Balinese cockfight by a comment made to me several years ago by a Papua New Guinean acquaintance about his visit to Merauke, a town on the southeast coast of West Papua, as the chaperone for a football team participating in a regional competition. Everywhere they went, the athletes were escorted by armed guards; when not on the playing field, they were locked inside their fenced hotel compound and prevented from walking the streets of the city. Summing up their experiences, he told me that 'the Indonesians treated us like chickens'. His remarks reveal an altogether different sensibility towards militarism and political violence in the region than that of Geertz.

Anthropologists working in Papua New Guinea are also vulnerable to criticism that they have downplayed the problems and consequences of political violence, for less compelling reasons.<sup>8</sup> In her discussion of the future of culture areas in an era of globalization, Rena Lederman (1998: 429) presents a spirited defence of Melanesian ethnography, acknowledging its contradictory status as 'vanguard, paradigm and anachronism'. She denies that its practitioners engage in 'exoticist involution', as some critics allege, arguing that they perpetuate a tradition of 'progressively more ethnographically nuanced and constrained – therefore less transparent, more difficult – translations' that advance the understanding of fundamental anthropological concerns (1998: 442).

Yet in her primarily backward-looking agenda for future scholarship, Lederman neglects many of the important developments in Melanesia in the 1990s: bloody, war-torn Bougainville, the scene of a decade of civil war prompted by separatist aims and environmentalist claims about the effects of Rio Tinto's copper mine, finally moving towards a peace agreement predicated on greater autonomy;<sup>9</sup> Papua New Guinea under siege by the

World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, vying for the opportunity to reorganize all relationships between people, land and things according to the interests of global capital; the Southeast Asian economic collapse and its consequences, including continued 'hard times' for Kairuru Island (Smith, 1994) and other rural enclaves that aspire to development; and conflict along the border between West Papua and Papua New Guinea. The most significant regional exchange system in New Guinea today is arguably not Trobriand *kula* or Motuan *hiri moale*, but the restricted exchange of Highlands marijuana for Australian arms carried out across the Torres Straits, organized in part by members of the OPM (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*) or Free Papua political movement (Daley, 2000).<sup>10</sup> The new millennium has thus far been anything but pacific, with armed coups in Fiji and the Solomon Islands (Finin and Wesley-Smith, 2000), tension between the government and the military in Papua New Guinea and clandestine Indonesian support for competing paramilitary organizations in West Papua, a tactic used in East Timor to provide the rationale for an eventual military response.

While anthropologists working in Melanesia should not abandon the ethnographic skills so rightly prized by Lederman, they must begin to reckon more fully with the forms and consequences of political violence. The alternative may be the marginalization of the discipline in a region where it has long monopolized representation. While this article focuses specifically on West Papua, its conclusions are relevant throughout the region.

### **Rumour and other narratives of political violence**

Writing about the political violence associated with the partition of India and Pakistan, Veena Das (1997: 8) eloquently observes that 'one must ask what this brutalization did to the experiences of self, community and nation. At the very least these scenes of violence constitute the (perhaps metaphysical) threshold within which the scenes of ordinary life are lived.' She describes how grief is articulated through the body in various mourning practices before it is finally given a home in language, helping to transform a world made strange by death into a place that is suitable for dwelling once more, without sacrificing the awareness of the losses that one has sustained. When suffering is expressed through language, Das suggests, it can be a path towards healing (1997: 68–9).

Michael Taussig (1992: 10) notes that the challenges posed by political violence require new ways to think about questions of order and experience. A key starting point for West Papua is John Pemberton's (1994) influential analysis of how the dominant image of order in Suharto's Indonesia was reproduced through the ritualistic treatment of politics. If the state is held together by political rituals which convey an image of order and

stability at its centre, how do these discourses and practices cast their shadow on Indonesia's outer islands? I suggest that the margins of the Indonesian state are defined largely in terms of their capacity to destabilize the whole, establishing expectations that allow state-sponsored violence to be represented as orderly and necessary.<sup>11</sup>

The legitimacy of what Pemberton calls the Indonesian 'state of culture' was 'cultivated through an idiom of shared values, emphasizing consent, stasis and acquiescence – an ideal condition, in other words, in which "nothing happens"' (Steadly, 1999: 443). Anna Tsing (1993: 29) argues that Indonesian political symbolism emphasizes internal coherence at the expense of creative and contradictory responses from the margins. Mary Steedly (1993: 238), for example, contrasts official histories of the state which seek to 'silence that which is unspeakable' with alternative histories of postcolonial Karoland, 'stories of personal experience that emerge discordantly from the orderly flow of generic representation to suggest other, partial realities, other mappings of the social terrain' that occupy these empty spaces.<sup>12</sup>

This article also focuses on the tensions between state and local representations, examining rumour and other narratives about political violence in West Papua. These accounts express local concerns about political violence by transforming what is always present, although often unseen, into tangible form through language. Through rumour people both concretely *experience* the threat of political violence and *express* their concerns about it. Yet these rumours may also be exploited by the state, exacerbating local fears. The resulting narratives have a property that is worth noting in advance: even though they constitute a reaction to terror, they may also generate or amplify it in their wake. These rumours both reflect and reproduce the political violence that defines the margins of the Indonesian state and they are an important vehicle through which West Papuans and Indonesians apprehend the other.

The political properties of rumour have been the subject of recent anthropological attention, especially in Africa and Latin America. Writing about Nigeria, Elisha Renne (1993) explains that rumour is an apt and potent form of political commentary because it is unofficial, important in regimes where the official bears little resemblance to experience; because it is anonymous, which provides protection from a repressive regime; and because it is ephemeral, and thus can change with the circumstances. She examines how rumours about snatched or stolen genitals are linked to concerns about money and instability through an analogy between production and reproduction. Louise White (1997) describes rumours about the traffic of heads in Zimbabwe, revealing continuity in the violent contradictions of colonial and postcolonial society. Adeline Masquelier (2000: 88) describes rumours in which 'the powerlessness of labor migrants [from Niger] is translated in bodily idioms of consumption and decapitation'. Money, commodification and desire released from social constraints figure significantly

in these African rumours, although their embodied form also suggests threats to the person through poverty, violence and other forms of uncertainty. Similarly, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992: 267) argues that Brazilian rumours about the organ trade reflect 'anxious, ontological insecurity' and fears of 'separation, loss, [and] disappearance'. Poverty and political violence share a common target, the bodies of those less powerful.

In this article, I draw on material from long-term field research with political refugees from West Papua who live beside the border in Papua New Guinea. I also consider several rumours which operate on a larger scale, circulating both in West Papua and internationally. Two of these rumours, separated by more than a decade, express concerns about state-sponsored violence through the introduction of epidemic disease. Several other rumours are even more complex, transforming local myths about cannibal women into media accounts of 'lost tribes' which impede state plans for economic development. These narratives, along with recent human rights reports, raise the question why political violence in West Papua is disproportionately enacted on the bodies of women.

A final pair of encounters with West Papuan refugees reveals local efforts to imagine alternatives to the current regime of political violence and provides the *raison d'être* of this article, the anthropological responsibility to 'bear witness' to the problems of political violence. The rumours considered here are symptoms of the political violence that affects West Papua and contribute to local experience of terror. In the conclusions to this article, I argue that ethnography should 'bear witness' to the experiences of persons subjected to political violence and its terrifying consequences.

### **Border crossing**

Since 1986 I have worked with people divided by the border between Papua New Guinea and West Papua, known as the Muyu to the west and the Yonggom in the east.<sup>13</sup> Their territory spans two of the great river systems of the island of New Guinea, the Digul and the Fly. A continuous colonial presence came rather late to the interior relative to the coast, with Dutch missionaries and colonial officers arriving in the 1930s and their Australian counterparts a decade later. The precise location of the border was not fixed until the 1960s, although almost from the outset both colonial regimes attempted to limit movement between Dutch New Guinea and the Australian Trust Territory of Papua (Veur, 1966).

The Yonggom/Muyu speak a number of mutually intelligible dialects of a Lowland Ok language, supplemented by Hiri Motu, English and Tok Pisin to the east of the border, and Bahasa Indonesia to the west.<sup>14</sup> In rural areas, sago from the *Metroxylon* palm and bananas are their primary staples, although they also depend on hunting and gathering in their extensive rain

forest holdings. The Yonggom/Muyu are more mobile than many of their neighbours and there are significant communities living in urban areas, including Jayapura, Merauke, Mindiptanah and Kiunga (Kaipman, 1974; King, 1983). While the majority of the Yonggom/Muyu reside in rural villages and practise subsistence agriculture, many others have found employment in a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs. The economic engine and the largest source of employment in the region is the Ok Tedi mine, located in the Star Mountains of Papua New Guinea, which has caused severe environmental problems downstream (Kirsch, 1997a). Virtually all of the Yonggom/Muyu belong to either the Catholic Church or one of several Protestant churches.

In 1989, I walked with Bandep to the deserted village that his family was forced to abandon in the early 1960s, when a joint Australian-Indonesian patrol placed a concrete pylon demarcating the border in its centre (Veur, 1966).<sup>15</sup> Bandep came east to live beside the Ok Tedi River in what became the independent nation of Papua New Guinea in 1975, while most of his neighbours and family members settled elsewhere within what became the Indonesian territory of Irian Jaya after the much-criticized United Nations-sponsored 'Act of Free Choice' in 1969. Many of the residents from Bandep's village later followed his journey east during the exodus of 1984 (Kirsch, 1989, 1996).

More than 10,000 refugees crossed the border that May, about half of them Muyu (International Commission of Jurists, 1985; see also May, 1986). Their departure was politically motivated.<sup>16</sup> Coordinated by the OPM in response to the violent military assault on a political protest and flag-raising in Jayapura (Bell et al., 1986: 540–1), the refugees hoped to attract international attention and support for their struggle for self-determination and independence. In the intervening years, only a small proportion of the refugees have renounced this objective and returned home, despite considerable hardship and intermittent conflict with their hosts. The international aid agencies which initially provided food and medical care, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children, left the border area in the late 1980s, although the Montfort Catholic Mission continues to provide substantial humanitarian and educational assistance. Most of the Muyu refugees still live in crowded settlements within walking distance of the border, while others have relocated to the government resettlement centre at Iowara, east of the Strickland River (Glazebrook, 2001; Sands, 1991).<sup>17</sup>

### **Stories from the margins**

Many of the stories told by the refugees about their predicament share an uneasy conjuncture of broad humour and pathos characteristic of an earlier generation of tales describing their encounters with Australian

colonial officers (Kirsch, 1991: 42–4). In the camps along the border, rumours about the encroachment of Indonesian soldiers often panic the refugees, prompting them to flee in fear. Cross-border incursions of military troops occur periodically and have resulted in refugee casualties.

In one story, told as comedy but reverberating as terror, a refugee woman carries a large metal basin down a steep hill to collect water for her family. Barely able to balance the heavy container of water on her head, she struggles to make her way back up the hill. Approaching her house on the ridge, she sees a group of people agitatedly milling about. Indonesian soldiers have been seen on patrol, heading in their direction. She overturns the pot, spilling out the water that it contains, and frantically packs her belongings inside, preparing to flee to safety along with the other refugees. Shortly afterwards the rumour is dispelled and the poor woman trudges back down the hill for water.

The story does not end here, however, because the Yonggom/Muyu employ the *Rashomon*-like practice of telling and re-telling their stories, moving in a circle until everyone has the opportunity to present the tale from their own point of view. Told over and over again, the actions repeat like a video clip on a loop: the woman climbs the hill bearing her heavy load, only to empty the pot when she hears the rumour that Indonesian soldiers are approaching the village. When the panic abates, she must begin her labour anew. With each iteration of the story, terror becomes folly but can never be completely overcome.

The recurring image is a Melanesian composite of Sisyphus and Tantalus in hell: the Corinthian King condemned to push a heavy rock up a hill, only to have it roll down over him before he reaches the summit, and Tantalus, cursed with a terrible thirst and chained to a rock in the middle of a stream, yet unable to drink because the water disappears every time he leans forward. Black comedy and terror, conjoined in perpetual motion, the story aptly conveys the liminal status of political refugees in Papua New Guinea, who are loathe to return home before achieving their political objectives, but plagued by rumours of political violence while living in exile.

### **The epidemiology of terror**

While Indonesian military incursions across the border into Papua New Guinea are regularly reported by the national news media, local reactions to these events are rarely documented. Political discourse about regional security obscures local experience of political violence (Kirsch, 1996). Other narratives about political violence circulate more widely throughout West Papua and even reach an international audience through the Internet. For example, a message distributed in March, 1999 by the newsgroup Kabar-Irian quoted an anonymous source which claimed that Jakarta had sent 'prostitutes infected with [the] AIDS virus to purposely infect the local



people [of West Papua]'.<sup>18</sup> Despite its relatively small population, West Papua has the largest number of documented cases of HIV/AIDS of any province in Indonesia (Kabar-Irian, 1999c).<sup>19</sup> The Indonesian government, the military, the fishing industry and the Freeport mine are the primary vectors for the introduction of sexually transmitted disease in West Papua, including HIV/AIDS.<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Clark (1997: 204) reports that for the Huli of Papua New Guinea, sexually transmitted diseases are a 'bodily metaphor for the experience of postcolonial power/knowledge'. The Huli attribute responsibility for what they perceive to be the decline of their own social order to 'modern' forms of sexuality, including prostitution, which they cannot control (1997: 200; see also Hammar, 1998). The rumour about prostitutes infected with HIV/AIDS is doubly threatening, for not only does it prey on insecurities regarding these new forms of sexuality, which are inextricably linked to the political bodies that oppress them, but it also signals the penetration of political violence into the most private and intimate areas of life. Although the rumour singles out men as targets for exposure to disease, it also reveals a connection between the violence of development and its consequences for women, a problem to which I will return below.

While I was unable to track the response of West Papuans to the rumour about the prostitutes with HIV/AIDS sent by Jakarta, it follows the same epidemiological pathway as an earlier scare among Muyu refugees regarding their possible exposure to cysticercosis, a parasite with potentially lethal consequences. That rumour began in 1988, following the publication of a newspaper editorial about the introduction of the tapeworm *Taenia solium* into the highlands of West Papua. It reported anthropologist David Hyndman's (1987) contention that domesticated pigs raised by West Papuan refugees were host to the parasite, which causes cysticercosis in human populations. Tapeworm larvae invade the human body, lodging in subcutaneous tissue, including the muscles, the eyes, the liver and the brain. Cysts which form in the brain cause epileptic seizures, psychosis and death; there is no treatment for cerebral cysticercosis (1987: 9).

Cysticercosis was first reported in 1971 in the Paniai Lakes region of the highlands of West Papua, the territory occupied by the Ekari (or Me) people. A World Health Organization expedition concluded that the parasites were introduced into West Papua from pigs brought from Bali (Desowitz, 1981). Serological tests taken in 1978 indicated that 25 percent of the people tested from the immediate area, both children and adults, have been exposed to cysticercosis. The risk of contracting cysticercosis is much greater in West Papua than in the inner islands of Indonesia, where transmission is limited by stricter standards of hygiene and, for the majority of the Indonesian population, the Muslim taboo on the consumption of pork. Hyndman accuses the Indonesian government of sponsoring a genocidal programme of biological warfare against the indigenous people of New Guinea. He points out that the pigs were brought into the highlands

of West Papua by Indonesian troops sent to exert control over the Paniai Lakes district at the time of the disputed UN vote that endorsed Indonesian authority over the territory. Desowitz suggests that 'Indonesia's President Suharto softened the military action by sending a gift of pigs' from Bali, home to some of the soldiers involved (1981: 41 cited in Hyndman, 1987: 11). Hyndman, however, notes that Paniai was one of the centres of resistance to the Indonesian regime; he argues that the pigs were not meant to compensate for military action, but rather to weaken the opposition:

The Indonesian military is certainly not admitting that it introduced cysticercosis as a diabolical form of biological warfare, but I cannot accept that the cysticercosis epidemic is no more than a tragically unforeseen consequence of a beneficent military gift. One small batch of infected pigs proved to be an insidiously simple counterinsurgency tactic to decimate and demoralize the enemy. (Hyndman, 1987: 11)

Refugee concerns about being exposed to cysticercosis were expressed during a post-mortem divination (*awon monbe*) held during an outbreak of influenza in the camps along the border in 1988. In these divinations, the Yunggom/Muyu evaluate competing explanations for recent deaths, which are ordinarily attributed to sorcery. The scenarios considered during this particular divination ceremony were of a different order than usual, however, focusing on a range of threats to which the refugees were exposed as a result of their liminal political status. Here *awon monbe* can be seen to divine the nature and the intentions of the Indonesian state.

Residents of the refugee camp gathered in a loose circle in front of a house that belonged to one of the men who died during the epidemic. A pig with a stripe of red clay painted on its snout was brought to the centre of the group. After being shot with an arrow, the pig avoided the crowd and ran directly under the house, circling several of the house posts and marking them with blood. Several sticks were inserted into the ground, indicating the direction of the pig's gaze.

A small cluster of men stood beside the fallen animal, assessing evidence from the divination. The arrow landed with the concave side of its bamboo blade facing down, suggesting that family members of the deceased may have been involved in his death. That the pig ran under the house, avoiding the assembled crowd, implied that the spirit of the deceased may have been too ashamed to identify his killer. Alternatively, it could mean that someone living with him had been involved in the death. (It is not unusual for the clues provided by these divinations to be ambiguous or contradictory.)

A man leaned down to grasp one of the pig's eyelids, giving it a sharp tug. He called out to the deceased, telling him to direct the pig's response to what he had to say. He then described several plausible explanations for the death, including the rumour initiated by Hyndman's essay: 'Did [the deceased] eat a pig that was poisoned by the Indonesians, causing his death? If this is true, then wake up the pig and show us a sign'.

Hyndman's claim that pigs raised by the refugees are affected by the tapeworm that causes cysticercosis has not been substantiated. Neither serological study (Fritzsche, 1988) nor clinical examination has produced any clinical evidence that the refugees have been exposed to *T. solium*.<sup>21</sup> Not one case of cysticercosis has been identified in Papua New Guinea in the decade since Hyndman's essay was published.<sup>22</sup>

The crowd had already dispersed by the time that the men finished addressing their queries to the dead pig. At the conclusion of the ritual, the speaker acknowledged:

We don't know, perhaps he just got a sickness that killed him. We'll finish here and we'll make *hop-mirim* [vengeance sorcery] and wait to see who dies. If we don't find the person responsible for his death, then perhaps it was [only] illness that killed him.

These divinations, as I describe elsewhere (Kirsch, 1996), ordinarily address problems in exchange that may have motivated the act of sorcery. In the divination examined here, however, much larger stakes were involved, including rumours about Indonesian state-sponsored violence which had been reported in the Papua New Guinea media. The refugees have no means to establish whether or not they are at risk from cysticercosis; pigs which are ordinary in appearance may in fact bear the invisible seeds of their destruction.

The uncertainty regarding whether their pigs have been poisoned, like the rumour about the prostitutes infected with HIV/AIDS, exemplifies the vulnerability of West Papuans and the difficulty that they have in assessing the threats posed to them by the Indonesian state. These epidemiological concerns are also a potent manifestation of the invasion of political violence into the body politic through what Taussig (1991) calls the *Nervous System*. New health threats are the consequences of political dis-ease. Terror moves silently beneath the skin, embodying the violence of the state.

## Gendered rumours

The link between development and violence against women recurs in the following set of rumours, Indonesian media accounts that focus on 'lost tribes' (see Kirsch, 1997b).<sup>23</sup> These reports are highly sexualized in contrast to the normally conservative nature of state-run news media.<sup>24</sup> I present three examples, the first of which was initially reported by ANTARA, a state-run news outlet, and subsequently distributed by Agence France-Presses (1999). It describes a tribe of cannibal women who roam naked through the rain forest, armed with bows and arrows and accompanied by dogs. The women are said to capture men from surrounding communities with whom they mate and sire offspring, although they kill the men afterwards. I reproduce the entire account to convey the nuances of the genre:

JAKARTA, April 21 (AFP) – Indonesian authorities will try to establish whether a tribe of cannibalistic women exist deep in the jungles of the remote province of Irian Jaya, a report said Wednesday. The head of the Irian Jaya social affairs' office, Dorteis Asmuruf was quoted by the state Antara news agency as saying his office will soon send a team to the jungle-clad Mamberano area of the province to investigate the reports. Asmuruf said tales about the 'Bok tribe' in the almost inaccessible jungles of Mamberano had been circulating for years and that one team from his office had already tried but failed to find them. 'The existence of this tribe was reported to me by one Emes Kogoya, who besides telling me of them, has also expressed his readiness to take me to the location of the tribe', Lieutenant Colonel Tejo, a military battalion commander in the provincial capital of Jayapura said, quoted by Antara. Kogoya had told him the tribe consisted of some 20 big-bodied women who roamed the jungle of Mamberano naked, accompanied by a pack of dogs and armed with spears and arrows. He added the Boks, who reportedly still eat human flesh, had highly developed olfactory senses and were difficult to approach as they were deeply suspicious of strangers. The vast mountainous province of Irian Jaya, which borders on independent Papua New Guinea, is home to many stone-age tribes, some of which have only been discovered in the latter half of this century. (Agence France-Presses, 1999; spelling corrected)

An earlier example of this genre was reported by the *Jakarta Post* in 1991. Here the 'lost tribe' was physically located and the rumours discredited:

Korowai Tribe in Irian Jaya not all Female.  
Jayapura, Irian Jaya (JP): Rumours about an all-female tribe in Irian Jaya turn out to be false – although the tribe does exist, it is fully equipped with a supply of males. A team from the Social Ministry recently discovered the Korowai tribe, numbering around 1000, in Dairam Kabur Village in the Citak Mitak district of the Meruake regency. The rumours claimed the tribe comprised females only and captured males from other tribes for reproductive purposes. The captured males would later be killed. The tribe also killed all male babies at birth. As it turns out, the tribe is just one of dozens of other isolated tribes in the province. . . . 'I am relieved that I have discovered the tribe', the head of local social affairs office F.K.T. Poana said. (*Jakarta Post*, 1991; spelling corrected)

Finally, this report was circulated anonymously by the email newsgroup Kabar-Irian in 1999:

The story of the cave people living in the Foja mountains has been around for a long time among the people of Papsena, Sikari and Kwerba. The Kwerba people have a name for them, Wamir. At any rate, a helicopter survey of the area including a search of the area where the people have supposedly been living in caves turned up nothing except another story. The people in the remote Baso Dua village report having travelled by foot through to the north coast. En route they reportedly encountered a wild village of savage women who attack men and have sex with them all night long. No one seems to want to check this story out further. (Kabar-Irian 1999b; punctuation modified)

Like the rumour about the prostitutes with AIDS/HIV, these stories describe the dangers attributed to the unrestrained sexuality of women.

The threat is apparently taken seriously by the state, given that government and/or military expeditions prompted all three accounts. The first story describes the military team being assembled to carry out the investigation, the second reports on a successful encounter and the third describes the failure of a helicopter survey team to locate the community in question.

These accounts appear to be based in part on local myths that have been separated from their original context.<sup>25</sup> In the Star Mountains of Papua New Guinea, for example, the people of Telefolmin tell stories about a group of women known as Kundunang, fierce cannibals who, like the Amazons of Greek legend, are adept with bow and arrow and have but one breast. They mate with male wild dogs and give birth to four varieties of offspring: sons, daughters, male dogs and bitches. To reproduce these relationships, they consume the male children and female dogs (Jorgensen, 1981: 83–4).

The stories have another dimension as well, however, which highlights how Indonesians represent uncontrolled female sexuality as a threat to both production and orderly reproduction. Each of these so-called 'lost tribes' are located in places that, prior to the Southeast Asian economic collapse and the subsequent demise of Suharto's New Order Indonesia, were targeted for major development projects. Korowai land has been gazetted for a large logging project (Hallet, 1994; see Kirsch, 1997c). The other two groups live adjacent to Mamberano, the site chosen by Habibie while Suharto's Minister for Research and Technology for one of the most ambitious – and potentially disastrous – development projects of the new century. The proposed agro-industrial complex would require clearing 7 million hectares of rain forest for steel mills, copper smelters, dams and hydroelectric power plants, pulp mills, paper factories and 1 million hectares of rice (Carr, 1998). Standing squarely in the path to modernity, to be introduced in the form of rapacious development projects, is the 'primitive', represented by the image of cannibal women whose unrestrained sexuality must be brought under state control.

The misogyny of these tales does not stand alone; it is replicated in the systematic use of violence against West Papuan women by the Indonesian military (Coomaraswamy, 1999; Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights, 1999). The following examples will suffice (Coomaraswamy, 1999):

100. According to reports in February 1996 troops from all over Indonesia came to the Mapnduma area. It was alleged that the soldiers raped women there indiscriminately; girls as young as 12 were victims, as were mute, mentally retarded and pregnant women.

101. In July 1998, on the anniversary of the 1961 proclamation of independence, a series of pro-independence demonstrations were organized by the OPM. The Indonesian army apparently used heavy armed tactics to disrupt the demonstration. It is alleged that women were taken out to sea on Indonesian navy ships, where they were raped, sexually mutilated and thrown overboard.

Women's corpses reportedly washed up on the Biak coast. Some of them showed signs of sexual mutilation; breasts had been removed. The Indonesian army claims that the corpses were related to the tidal waves that hit Papua New Guinea and they completely deny the incident . . .

102. Before May 1988 sexual violence by the Indonesian security forces in Irian Jaya appeared to be taken for granted, both by the authorities and the local population. The Special Rapporteur heard the following testimonies, among others.

103. A is from Jila village. She was raped by a soldier from the Indonesian military while she was working in the fields in 1987. She has a child as a result of the rape. She returned home and told her parents what had happened. They were extremely angry and went to the military post to demand justice. Her parents were beaten up by the soldiers. Her two brothers, one of whom is a priest and the other a village chief, went to the military post; they were also beaten up by the military. The perpetrator was moved out of the area. In 1988, A had a child as a result of the rape. . . . It is alleged that soldiers raped many women in that area. Women were afraid that, if they resisted, their families would be attacked. There are many children as a result of the rapes. (Case interview, Jakarta, November 1998.)

105. In October 1994, Indonesian soldiers from Paniai battalion 752, stationed in the town of Timika, detained and tortured A and M, along with three male Amungme civilians. On 9 October 1995, in the middle of the night, A was arrested by six soldiers. She was not allowed to get dressed properly. There were many soldiers outside the house. She was forced into the back of a Freeport truck and taken to the district command post. She was accused of having a relationship with . . . [an OPM leader]. A stated: 'I and another woman were taken to a room which was knee deep in water and human excrement. We were detained there for one month and two days. The room was full of flies. The guards would throw food into the room for us as they could not bear to enter due to the stench. We had to clean the food of excrement before we ate it. At times we thought we were going to die from the smell.'

The Robert F. Kennedy (1999) report calls for 'a thorough and impartial investigation of rape as a method of torture and intimidation by the military', noting that the 'perpetrators have not been brought to trial, victims and their children have not been compensated and human rights abuses continue to occur even under the new regime'.

As Coronil and Skurski (1991: 290) argue:

In the crisis of meaning that violence conceives, the territoriality of nations and the corporeality of people become privileged mediums for reorganising the body politic and for forcibly controlling the movement of persons and ideas within the nation's material and cultural space. Statements to the collectivity are indelibly inscribed upon and made through the body, as it becomes a medium for searing assertions of power.

In order to understand how political violence becomes explicitly gendered, Das (1997) examines the investment of sexuality in the project of nationalism, drawing on its depiction in literature. Indonesian rumours

about marauding all-female 'lost tribes' provide comparable insights into the misogyny and violence of the neo-colonial state.

Myths about the sexual practices of cannibal women are widely circulated in promotion of state interests, invoking a particular image of the 'primitive'. These 'lost tribes' reportedly reside in the remote areas of the province. On closer inspection, however, these areas have already been designated by the state for development. The rumours provide a rationale for the taking of local land, even though legally the state requires no such justification given that it already claims all land that is not regularly under cultivation. Yet, by consuming West Papuan resources without redistributing the benefits that result from production, the Indonesian state is the structural equivalent of the mythical cannibal women who reproduce themselves at the expense of their male consorts and offspring. While sexuality is not the only idiom through which the contrast between the 'primitive' and the 'civilized' can be framed, it is a common medium for the expression of state power (Jolly and Manderson, 1997). By representing West Papuan women as cannibals whose unrestrained sexuality – like the prostitutes with HIV/AIDS – poses a threat to men and modernity, the state claims legitimacy for its violence against women while attempting to conceal the violence of development.<sup>26</sup>

### **Imagining alternatives and 'bearing witness'**

In the final section of this article, I return to the refugee camps along the border to consider how the refugees imagine alternatives to the status quo. I also discuss their request that anthropologists 'bear witness' to political violence and its consequences.

Pascalus, a refugee from Kawangtut village in West Papua, invited me to his house several years ago, where he showed me a number of handwritten documents, including a map labelled: 'Founding ancestors of the Republic of West Papua'.<sup>27</sup> The page was divided horizontally, the upper half covered by a map of West Papua that identified the places where Jesus was crucified and buried and a synthetic *axis mundi* described as the location of the 'creation of the world, the palace where God resides, the birthplace of Jesus' and 'the open gate on top of the world'.<sup>28</sup> Lines emanating from West Papua were drawn down the page, pointing to each of the continents in a map of the world. Pascalus explained:

[The village of] Woropko is the origin place for all people, who went from there to the other countries of the world. The Muyu [or Yonggom] were first and the Europeans followed; you are our younger brothers. Jesus was crucified here and resurrected three days later, after which all the peoples of the world were granted independence, except for West Papuans.

His exegesis brings together myths from the Yonggom/Muyu men's cult

about the origins of cultural and linguistic difference (Kirsch, 1991), Christianity as the prime mover of postcolonial politics of self-determination and his own separatist desires.

When Pascalus asked for my help in their struggle for independence, however, the meeting became uncomfortable. I explained that I did not know how to assist them. Suddenly his wife Justina began to tremble and started to speak in another voice. I was surprised and puzzled by the strangeness of her demeanour and speech, which mimicked the cadence and phonology of Dutch. She took my hand and shook it rapidly with exaggerated force. The languages we knew had failed us, so she spoke in tongues, haranguing me in an improvised version of the vernacular of colonial authority, a language of power that neither of us controlled.<sup>29</sup>

Pascalus showed me two more documents that afternoon. One traced the paths between his natal village in West Papua and the refugee camps east of the border, depicting the route they followed to Papua New Guinea in 1984. It identified all of the members of Pascalus's lineage (*ambip kin*), living and dead. The final document listed all of the sacred sites (*ketbon*) located on his land. Finally, Pascalus asked me whether his two sons, both of whom had died several years before their departure from their village, would be able to rejoin the family in Papua New Guinea. He explained that his sons were trying to cross the border, but their path was blocked, forestalling the family reunion. Again I was left without an adequate reply, prompting Justina to resume speaking in tongues.

Das (1997: 78) describes how the act of witnessing can convert negative silences into speech. One of the refugees once explained that I had initially been mistaken for a spy. The term that he used was the Muyu/Yonggom *indop-indop*, the reduplicated and intensified form of *indop*, or 'eye', locally translated into the English noun 'spy'.<sup>30</sup> I subsequently heard the expression *indop-indop* used in another context, this time meaning 'to witness'. Reduplication moves the private sight of the individual eye to the public status of observer. To 'bear witness' is to confirm the truth of something observed or experienced. In contrast, spying involves deception and the intent to communicate information to a hostile party. While the refugees took a risk in sharing their experiences with me, they sought to impress upon me that there is no neutral act of observation, that I could either report on the truth or spy for their enemies.<sup>31</sup>

It is here that I find my missing response to Pascalus's request, the need for anthropologists to 'bear witness' to the experiences of people from West Papua: of Bandep, displaced from his land by the border patrol, and his relatives who made the wrong choice in the Russian roulette of Melanesian nationalism; of the refugee woman carrying water up the hill, frightened by rumours about the encroachment of Indonesian soldiers; of the Papua New Guinea football players caged like chickens during their visit to Merauke; and finally of Pascalus mapping new futures and Justina searching for the language of freedom. Only by ending the silence on political



violence in West Papua can anthropologists fulfil the responsibility that links observation to 'bearing witness'.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusions

West Papuans know many facets of the Indonesian state, from its blunt instruments of governmentality, to the brutality of its armed forces and the duplicity with which it supports local militias in order to justify its own violent excess. The state also makes itself known through its expropriation of land, environmental degradation promoted by giving free reign to extractive industry and inequality borne of its refusal to share with indigenous landowners the benefits that accrue from the exploitation of their natural resources. West Papuans also come to know the state through rumours which describe its capabilities, motivations and intentions.

At the same time, these rumours make explicit local fears and concerns about political violence. By making these experiences tangible through language, they become partially amenable to local forms of address, as the divinations of the Muyu refugees illustrate. Steedly (1993) and Das (1997) describe the capacity of language to make grief public, acknowledge loss and provide meaningful alternatives to silence. Expression is not without risk, however, as rumours which communicate local concerns may inadvertently increase the effects of state-sponsored violence in the form of terror.

Rumour can provide historical readings of power and its abuses (White, 1997), critique inequality and exploitation (Masquelier, 2000), and act as a 'classic "weapon of the weak"' (Scheper-Hughes, 2000: 202). The contribution of rumour to political action has been described for the French Revolution as well as peasant insurgency in colonial India (Guha, 1983: 251–77). Other scholars have focused on the dual nature of rumour, including Ann Stoler's (1992: 182) observation that rumour can be both 'damning and enabling'. Jonathan Spencer (2000: 122) describes how rumours fueled sectarian violence in Sri Lanka, having the 'effect of making fleeing, terrified citizens appear to their attackers as aggressive terrorists'. He observed that:

The world of rumor was not, as far as I can tell, produced by the powers-that-be, and it certainly was not controlled by them. Nevertheless, it would take a mighty, and misguided, hermeneutic effort for me to rework the rumors of July 1983 into the reassuring language of 'revolt and resistance' favored by some recent writers on rumor. In Sri Lanka in that week in July 1983, the world of rumor served to restore a sense of moral order in terms of a set of propositions about the Sinhala people and their place in the world, *shared by powerful and powerless alike* (within the Sinhala population), even as it created the possibility of more acts of violence that would appear to undermine or compromise that sense of order. (2000: 123)

Like Spencer, I am interested in the relationship between rumour and

violence, whether of rumours which promote acts of violence or vice versa. Consequently, I have tried to show how particular rumours emerge in response to political violence and the experience of terror that such rumours evoke.

Examination of these rumours shows how political violence is reproduced in and through particular constructions of culture, gender and difference. As accounts of political violence circulate, they may merge with local myth, uprooted from its context and deployed by the state to conceal or legitimize its actions. In West Papua, these rumours are organized in part by the opposition between primitive and modern, with the people of West Papua represented as obstacles to development. A striking instance of this is the caricature of the 'lost tribe', which is treated not only as the anti-thesis of the modern, but also as an impediment to its achievement. This particular image of the primitive also obscures the presence of local critique or resistance, suggesting that isolation rather than political opposition is the chief threat to the Indonesian occupation of West Papua. Once located, these 'lost tribes' will lose their capacity to delay the progress of the state, for their special status dissolves on contact (see Kirsch, 1997b: 65 n. 11).

Other rumours refer to previously unknown medical conditions which serve as both metaphors and examples of the terrors visited on West Papuan bodies. Women have been singled out as threats to men and modernity as well as targeted for violence by the armed forces of Indonesia. Production and reproduction are treated as analogous in rumours which stigmatize West Papuan women on the basis of mythological representations of cannibalism and unnatural modes of reproduction, while attempting to conceal the problems posed to nature by state-sponsored production.

As texts which circulate publicly, these rumours might be compared to other accounts of political violence, including ethnography and human rights reports. There are several critical differences between rumour and ethnographic texts, which support the call for anthropologists to 'bear witness' to local experience of political violence. Because rumour is continually refashioned as it circulates, it is more collective, organic and subjective than anthropological texts.<sup>33</sup> Stoler (1992: 153) points to the changeable mixture of truth and fictions contained within rumour, but also notes the fragmentary (and refractory) truths which are often embedded in political rumours. While these rumours might be seen to 'bear witness' to local experience, they are particularly vulnerable to appropriation or manipulation by the state, as the examples presented here suggest. Moreover, such rumours tend to exacerbate rather than ameliorate the problems of political violence. Much as violence often begets violence, rumours about political violence seem to reproduce rather than critique existing power relations.

Ethnographic accounts of political violence and the experience of

terror extend beyond what human rights reports, notwithstanding their considerable significance, are capable of describing. The consequences of the regime of political violence in West Papua is much greater than the persons dispossessed, injured and killed. It begins with these acts and continues in the terror that subsequently engulfs entire communities. The conventions which organize human rights reports are determined by universal definitions of human rights. They are generally presented in formal and legalistic language (e.g., 'it is reported', 'it is alleged') that is alien to local experience. In contrast, ethnography has the capacity to recontextualize these accounts of violence, considering their effects on the society at large and identifying the particular ideologies which shape their enactment.

Consider an event like the killings and torture which followed the 1998 protest in Biak, during which women were taken offshore, sexually mutilated and murdered. When their bodies later washed ashore, the government sought to naturalize their deaths by claiming that they were victims of a *tsunami* which struck the north coast of New Guinea near Vanimo, several hundred kilometres to the east (Rutherford, 1999). These acts of mutilation inscribe the power of the state on the bodies of its victims, conveying its message to all those swept up in the ensuing wave of terror. Political violence cannot be measured solely in terms of case studies and the accounting of injuries and violence, for its ultimate object is to inspire terror.

Anthropologists have both a political and an ethnographic responsibility to 'bear witness' to political violence, the physical acts themselves and how they reverberate as terror. No description of life in West Papua is adequate without taking into account how this regime of violence intrudes into the most personal and private spaces, even at a distance from the physical presence of the state. By contextualizing political violence and examining the reactions that it provokes, especially in terms of the larger human costs, anthropologists can also provide support for local political expression, bringing the resources of the discipline and the moral weight of the academy to bear on these problems, acknowledging their responsibilities rather than contributing to the unfortunate silence which permits political violence to continue unchallenged.

## Notes

Research for this project was supported by the Goldsmiths College/Royal Anthropological Institute Fellowship in Urgent Anthropology. This article was initially presented as the introduction to the session 'Political violence and the symbolic economy of terror in Irian Jaya', which I organized for the 1998 annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, DC, and subsequently in the colloquium series of the Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Michigan. I would like to thank Aletta Biersack and Mary Steedly, who served as discussants for the Washington session, the other contributors to that session and both audiences for their encouraging and thoughtful responses. Elisha

Renne kindly gave her permission to cite her unpublished paper. I also thank Lorraine Arragon, Leslie Butt, Jennifer Gaynor, Diane Glazebrook, Lawrence Hammar, Eric Hirsch, Webb Keane and the editors of *Critique of Anthropology* for their comments on this paper, although I take full responsibility for its shortcomings. Finally, I wish to thank Pascalus for pushing me to write this article and the other Myyu refugees for trusting me with their stories.

- 1 The western half of the island of New Guinea has been known by many names, including Dutch New Guinea as a colonial territory (see Anderson, 1995: 176–8). As an Indonesian province, it has been called Irian Barat (West Irian) and Irian Jaya, although the government recently indicated its support for changing the name to Papua. My use of West Papua in this article follows the long-standing preference of the indigenous population of the territory.
- 2 A noticeable change is occurring among the current generation of scholars working with West Papuans, including Leslie Butt (1999), Diana Glazebrook (2001), Danilyn Rutherford (1996, 1999) and Rupert Stasch (2001).
- 3 Until recently, the Indonesian state impeded the flow of virtually *all* information about West Papua, as John MacDougall (1987: 103) described:

The official blackout is *more* effective than the one for East Timor. The Indonesian press remains under tight strictures not to become curious about, much less report, anything about armed conflict, casualties, or even detentions in Irian Jaya. Consequently, the low-level war in Irian Jaya is as unknown to most Indonesians as it is to most foreigners.

The Internet has made such information much more accessible, although Mary Steedly (1999: 446, 445) suggests caution with respect to the 'partiality of our electronically enhanced consciousness', which 'can obscure the ordinary aspects of life – things that go on even in a state of emergency'. Nonetheless, she suggests that:

The alternative to essentializing or to culturalizing violence is not to disregard it but rather to localize it. By this I mean exploring the full particularity of its multifarious occasions: how it is produced in certain circumstances; how it is deployed, represented, limited, imagined, ignored, or instigated; how it is identified, disciplined, interrogated, and of course, punished. (1999: 445–6)

- 4 See, for example, Anderson's (1996) explanation of why he was banned from conducting research in Indonesia.
- 5 The events described by Geertz took place in 1958, prior to the violent confrontations of 1965–6 and Suharto's rise to power. Elsewhere Geertz (1973b: 281–2) described the cyclical nature of conflict in Indonesia: 'spasmodic violence has alternated with a frantic search for political panaceas. Abortive coups, misfired assassination attempts, and unsuccessful insurrections have followed one after the other, punctuated by a wealth of ideological and institutional experiments . . . .' Note the difference in authorial perspective between this account and his description of the Balinese cockfight.
- 6 In his account of the 1982 general election in Solo, Pemberton (1986: 18–19) questions anthropological treatment of political encounters as rituals which are (always) peacefully resolved.
- 7 In *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*, historian Geoffrey Robinson (1995: 3) suggests that this is a general tendency of scholarship on Bali, arguing that:

The urge to write the conflict and violence out of Balinese history is part of a much larger problem in the field of Bali studies: the tendency to leave history itself, and particularly modern political history, out of the picture altogether.

- 8 An exception is the recent collection *Reflections on Violence in Melanesia*, edited by Sinclair Dinnen and Allison Ley (2000). In the epilogue, Jolly (2000: 305) directs readers' attention to 'violence in that part of the Southwest Pacific long called "Melanesia" – bodies battered in public and domestic wars, of the fear of state violence and of *raskol* gangs, of women's experience of rape and sexual violence' and 'the gruesome events of the war on Bougainville . . . [and] state terror by the Indonesian government against West Papuans . . .'
- 9 The imaginary black submarines of new Fly River myths described by Michael Wood (1998) echo the all-too-real helicopter gunships once poised to strike the recalcitrant citizens of Bougainville.
- 10 On the history of the OPM and its armed resistance against the Indonesian state, see Osbourne (1985). Note that the acronym used by the Indonesian government for the OPM and other groups that resist or challenge state power is GPK (*Gerombolan Pengacau Keamanan*), their Orwellian designation for 'Security Disruption Group'.
- 11 This relationship figured significantly in Indonesia's violent response to the independence of East Timor. The terror unleashed by Kopassus forces and aligned militias against those who rejected the state had a purpose beyond revenge, which was to ensure that no other pleas for freedom will be acknowledged by international audiences; the West is not likely to risk its troops in Aceh, Ambon or West Papua. By demonstrating that Indonesia's capacity for violence remains undiminished despite political reforms, the military sought to ensure that East Timor remains a special case (see Abrash, 2000; Aditjondro, 2000).
- 12 In a related context, Taussig (1992: 26–7) notes that: 'This is more than the production of silence. It is silencing, which is quite different. For now the not said acquires significance and a specific confusion befalls the spaces of the public sphere, which is where the action is.'
- 13 See Schoolr (1993: 181–7) for discussion of Muyu experience of colonial violence under Dutch rule prior to 1950.
- 14 Bahasa Indonesia is known locally by the colonial name Melayu or Bahasa Melayu, a distinction which is political, i.e. in opposition to the language of the state, rather than linguistic (Glazebrook, personal communication 2000).
- 15 I have substituted pseudonyms for personal names throughout this article.
- 16 Elsewhere (Kirsch, 1996) I have examined the politics of representation of the 1984 refugee movement.
- 17 Changes in the Indonesian government and Papua New Guinea's plans to normalize the residency status of the refugees living in the resettlement centre at Iowara prompted more than 700 of its occupants to return home to West Papua in 1999 (Diana Glazebrook, personal communication 2000).
- 18 The anonymous administrator of the email news group Kabar-Irian reported that this message came from a 'reliable source' involved in health care in West Papua, describing him/her as being 'very knowledgeable and not given to flights of fancy or silly rumor mongering/conspiracy theorizing' (Kabar-Irian, 1999a, emphasis in the original).
- 19 A report from the Ministry of Health released on 31 August 1999 indicated that there were 246 reported cases of HIV/AIDS in Irian Jaya, compared to

- 243 cases in Java, despite the vast difference in population size (Kabar-Irian, 1999c).
- 20 Butt (personal communication 2000). See Kabar-Irian (1999d) for information on HIV/AIDS and the fishing industry.
- 21 Dr George Nurse (personal communication 1989).
- 22 Dr Stephen Flew (personal communication 1996).
- 23 The term used by the Indonesian government for these communities is *suku suku terasing*, 'isolated communities' or descent groups (Ondawame, 2000: 279).
- 24 Leslie Butt (personal communication 2000).
- 25 I am grateful to Dan Jorgensen for this suggestion.
- 26 Bruce Knauft (1997: 250) describes the tensions between the sexes in contemporary Melanesia in the following terms:

Male prestige is increasingly dependent on the acquisition of cash and commodities; conversely, it is less directly dependent on the efficacy of local corporate or collective male activities. The survival of communities is at least as dependent on women as it was in the past, but, relative to men's economic pursuits, women's labour and fertility are often afforded less value and prestige than they were. . . . Male insecurity, opposition to women, and the desire for male collectivity have been reinstated in new guises at the same time that they have disengaged from customary institutions such as the male cult, the men's house, or the warrior society.

Writing about domestic violence in Melanesia, Margaret Jolly (2000: 312) also decries an 'embattled masculinity confronting modernity', although she questions the antecedents of these sentiments, noting that the 'intimate connection between indigenous warfare and hostile, violent gender relations was never universal' (2000: 317).

- 27 The text read: '*Republik Wes Papua barat dasar sisila [silsila?] moyang bangga [bangsa?] Papua*' (translated by Lisa Klopfer, 1998).
- 28 The text read: '*peciptaan dunia istana kediaman Allah dan kelahiran Jesus*' and '*pintu terpisah bingga diatasdunia*' (translated by Lisa Klopfer, 1998).
- 29 Another variety of rumour which is very important to the people of West Papua addresses impending transformations in the political order, often predicting the precise time of independence. James Scott (1990: 147) asks:

Why is it that oppressed groups so often read in rumors promises of their imminent liberation? A powerful and suppressed desire for relief from the burdens of subordination seems not only to infuse the autonomous religious life of the oppressed, but also to strongly color their interpretation of events.

He suggests that:

By phrasing their liberation in such terms, vulnerable groups express their hidden aspirations in public in a way that both enables them to avoid individual responsibility and aligns them with some higher power whose express commands they are merely following. (1990: 148).

Scott suggests that these movements attest to the incompleteness of hegemony and the perduring capacity to imagine the conditions of liberation. Given the importance of rumours about political transformation in the West Papuan imagination, it is unfortunate that I am unable to address them here, as they are in many ways the mirror image of the rumours about political violence that is the main focus of this article.

- 30 The Indonesian noun 'spy' (*mata-mata*) is also the reduplicated form of the word for 'eye' (*mata*). I owe this observation to Jennifer Gaynor.
- 31 In his analysis of political violence in Sri Lanka, Val Daniel (1996) argues that violence cannot be reduced to narrow ethnographic concerns; in a comparable sense, what I mean by 'bearing witness' differs from what Geertz (1988) characterizes as the Malinowskian 'I-witnessing approach to the construction of cultural description' and its self-implicating limits on the production of ethnographic knowledge.
- 32 Catherine Lutz and Donald Nonini (1999: 103) make a similar claim with regard to globalization and the intertwining of violence and economic interests:
- Anthropology's contemporary role as witness to the struggle for life in what are often capital's 'refuse regions' has and can even more be the discipline's moral underpinning and the source of insight into the potential sources for even a modicum of increase in the prospects for justice and peace.
- 33 Scott (1990: 145) describes how rumour is transformed by its purveyors: 'As a rumor travels it is altered in a fashion that brings it more closely into line with the hopes, fears and worldview of those who hear it and retell it.'

## References

- Abrash, Abigail (2000) 'Papua: Another East Timor?', *Foreign Policy in Focus* 5(37): 1–4. Available at: <http://www.foreignpolicy-infocus.org/briefs/vol5/v5n37/papua.html>
- Agence France-Presses (1999) 'Indonesia to Probe Report of Irian Jaya Amazon Cannibal Tribe', Jakarta, 21 April.
- Aditjondro, George J. (2000) 'Ninjas, Nanggalas, Monuments, and Mossad Manuals: An Anthropology of Indonesian State Terror in East Timor', in Jeffrey A. Sluka (ed.) *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, pp. 158–88. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Anderson, Benedict (1995) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and expanded edn. New York: Verso.
- Anderson, Benedict (1996) 'Scholarship on Indonesia and *Raison d'État*: Personal Experience', *Indonesia* 62: 1–18.
- Anti-Slavery Society (1990) *West Papua: Plunder in Paradise*. London: Anti-Slavery Society, Indigenous Peoples and Development Series, Report No. 6.
- Bell, Ian, Herb Feith and Ron Hatley (1986) 'The West Papuan Challenge to Indonesian Authority in Irian Jaya: Old Problems, New Possibilities', *Asian Survey* 26(5): 539–56.
- Budiardjo, Carmel and Liem Soei Liong (1988) *West Papua: The Obliteration of a People*, 3rd edn. London: TAPOL.
- Butt, Leslie (1999) 'Medicine, Morality and the Politics of "Normal" Infant Growth', *Journal of Medical Humanities* 20(2): 81–100.
- Carr, Frances (1998) 'Mamberamo Madness', *Inside Indonesia*. Available at: <http://insideindonesia.org/edit55/mamb.htm>.
- Clark, Jeffrey (1997) 'State of Desire: Transformations in Huli Sexuality', in Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly (eds) *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, pp. 191–211. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Coomaraswamy, Radhika (1999) 'Mission to Indonesia and East Timor on the Issue

- of Violence against Women, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences', United Nations Economic and Social Council, E/CN.4/1999/68/Add.3, 21 January.
- Coronil, Fernando and Julie Skurski (1991) 'Dismembering and Remembering the Nation: The Semantics of Political Violence in Venezuela', *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* 33(2): 288–337.
- Crapanzano, Vincent (1992) 'Hermes' Dilemma', *Hermes' Dilemma and Hamlet's Desire: On the Epistemology of Interpretation*, pp. 43–69. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Daley, Paul (2000) 'Australians in PNG Guns-for-Drugs Deals', *Sydney Morning Herald*. Available at: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/0009/09/text/world1.html>
- Daniel, E. Valentine (1996) *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Das, Veena (1997) 'Language and the Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain', in Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (eds) *Social Suffering*, pp. 67–91. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Desowitz, Robert (1981) *New Guinea Tapeworms and Jewish Grandmothers: Tales of Parasites and People*. London: W.W. Norton.
- Dinnen, Sinclair and Allison Ley (eds) (2000) *Reflections on Violence in Melanesia*. Anandara, NSW and Canberra: Hawkins Press and Asia Pacific Press.
- Finin, Gerard A. and Terence A. Wesley-Smith (2000) 'Coups, Conflicts and Crises: The New Pacific Way?', East-West Center Working Papers, Pacific Islands Development Series, No. 13. Honolulu: East-West Center.
- Fritzsche, Marcus (1988) *Serological Survey on Human Cysticercosis in Irianese Refugee Camps, Papua New Guinea*. Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der Medizinischen Fakultät der Universität Zurich. Institut für Parasitologie der Universität Zurich.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973a) 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight', *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 412–54. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973b) 'The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States', *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 255–310. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, Clifford (1988) 'I-witnessing: Malinowski's Children', *Works as Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*, pp. 73–101. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Glazebrook, Diana (2001) 'Dwelling in Exile, Perceiving Return: West Papuan Refugees from Irian Jaya Living at East Awin in Western Province, Papua New Guinea', unpublished PhD thesis, The Australian National University.
- Guha, Ranajit (1983) *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hallet, Judith (producer) (1994) *Lords of the Garden* (film). New York: Arts & Entertainment Television Networks (Hearst Entertainment) and Paris: Tele-Image.
- Hammar, Lawrence (1998) 'Aids, STDs and Sex Work in Papua New Guinea', in Laura Zimmer-Tamakoshi (ed.) *Modern Papua New Guinea*, pp. 257–96. Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press.
- Hyndman, David (1987) 'How the West (Papua) Was Won: Cysticercosis and Indonesian Counter-Insurgency in a Continuing Fourth World War', *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 11(4): 8–13.
- International Commission of Jurists, Australian Section (1985) *The Status of Border Crossers from Irian Jaya to Papua New Guinea*. Sydney: Australia Section of the International Commission of Jurists.



- Jakarta Post* (1991) 'Korowai Tribe in Irian Jaya not all Female', 20 March.
- Jolly, Margaret (2000) 'Epilogue: Further Reflections on Violence in Melanesia', in Sinclair Dinnen and Allison Ley (eds) *Reflections on Violence in Melanesia*, pp. 305–21. Anandale, NSW and Canberra: Hawkins Press and Asia Pacific Press.
- Jolly, Margaret and Lenore Manderson (1997) 'Introduction', in Lenore Manderson and Margaret Jolly (eds) *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, pp. 1–26. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jorgensen, Daniel (1981) 'Taro and Arrows: Order, Entropy and Religion among the Telefolmin', unpublished PhD dissertation, Vancouver: University of British Columbia.
- Kabar-Irian (Irian News) (1999a) 'Aids in Timika', 11 May email newsgroup, distributed by IRJA.org.Inc. Available at: <http://www.kabar-irian.com>
- Kabar-Irian (1999b) 'People Survey', 2 September. (dated 22 April), email newsgroup, distributed by IRJA.org. Inc. Available at: <http://kabar-irian.com>
- Kabar-Irian (1999c) 'Governor Concerned by HIV in Province', 28 September, email newsgroup, distributed by IRJA.org. Inc. Available at: <http://kabar-irian.com>
- Kabar-Irian (1999d) 'AIDS Suspected in Thai's death', 5 September, email newsgroup, distributed by IRJA.org. Inc. Originally from the *Jakarta Post*. Available at: <http://kabar-irian.com>
- Kaipman, Paskalis (1974) 'Some Notes about the Muyu People in Jayapura', *Irian: Bulletin of Irian Jaya Development* 3(1): 21–5.
- King, David (1983) 'Kiunga Revisited: 1983 Census of Kiunga', Research paper in geography, no. 8. University of Papua New Guinea. Waigani: Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research.
- Kirsch, Stuart (1989) 'The Yonggom, the Refugee Camps along the Border, and the Impact of the Ok Tedi Mine', *Research in Melanesia* 12: 30–61.
- Kirsch, Stuart (1991) 'The Yonggom of New Guinea: An Ethnography of Sorcery, Magic and Ritual', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Kirsch, Stuart (1996) 'Refugees and Representation: Politics, Critical Discourse and Ethnography along the New Guinea Border', in M. Morgan and S. Leggett (eds) *Mainstream(s) and Margins: Cultural Politics in the 90s*, pp. 222–36. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Kirsch, Stuart (1997a) 'Is Ok Tedi a Precedent? Implications of the Settlement', in Glenn Banks and Chris Ballard (eds) *The Ok Tedi Settlement: Issues, Outcomes and Implications*, pp. 118–40. Pacific Policy Paper 27. Canberra: Resource Management in Asia-Pacific and National Center for Development Studies.
- Kirsch, Stuart (1997b) 'Lost Tribes: Indigenous People and the Social Imaginary', *Anthropological Quarterly* 70(2): 58–67.
- Kirsch, Stuart (1997c) 'Cannibal Tales', Film review essay of *Lords of the Garden*, produced by Judith Hallet for Hearst Entertainment (New York: Arts & Entertainment Television Networks and Paris: Tele-Image, 1994). *Pacific Studies* 20(2): 170–9.
- Knauff, Bruce (1997) 'Gender Identity, Political Economy and Modernity in Melanesia and Amazonia', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (n.s.) 3: 233–59.
- Lederman, Rena (1998) 'Globalization and the Future of Culture Areas: Melanesianist Anthropology in Transition', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 427–49.
- Lutz, Catherine and Donald Nonini (1999) 'The Economies of Violence and the Violence of Economies', in Henrietta L. Moore (ed.) *Anthropological Theory Today*, pp. 73–114. Malden: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers.

- MacDougall, John A. (1987) 'Review of Robin Osbourne, *Indonesia's Secret War*', *Indonesia* 43: 101-4.
- Masquelier, Adeline (2000) 'Of Headhunters and Cannibals: Migrancy, Labor, and Consumption in the Mawri Imagination', *Cultural Anthropology* 15(1): 84-126.
- May, R.J. (1986) *Between Two Nations: The Indonesia-Papua New Guinea Border and West Papuan Nationalism*. Barthurst, New South Wales: Robert Brown.
- Ondawame, Otto (2000) 'Indonesian State Terrorism: The Case of West Papua', in S. Dinnen and A. Ley (eds) *Reflections on Violence in Melanesia*, pp. 277-89. Leichhardt, NSW and Canberra: Hawkins Press and Asia Pacific Press.
- Osbourne, Robin (1985) *Indonesia's Secret War: The Guerilla Struggle in Irian Jaya*. Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin.
- Pemberton, John (1986) 'Notes on the 1982 General Election in Solo', *Indonesia* 41: 1-22.
- Pemberton, John (1994) *On the Subject of 'Java'*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Renne, Elisha P. (1993) 'The Stolen Pregnancy and Other Rumours of Reproduction', paper presented at the annual meetings of the African Studies Association, Boston, MA.
- Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights and the Institute for Human Rights Studies and Advocacy (1999) *Rape and Other Human Rights Abuses by the Indonesian Military in Irian Jaya (West Papua), Indonesia*. Also available at: [http://www.rfkmemorial.org/center/vaw\\_report.htm](http://www.rfkmemorial.org/center/vaw_report.htm)
- Robinson, Geoffrey (1995) *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Roseberry, William (1991) 'Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology', *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy*, pp. 17-29. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Rutherford, Danilyn (1996) 'Of Birds and Gifts: Reviving Tradition on an Indonesian Frontier', *Cultural Anthropology* 11(4): 577-616.
- Rutherford, Danilyn (1999) 'Waiting for the End in Biak: Violence, Order, and a Flag-Raising', *Indonesia* 67: 39-59.
- Sands, Susan (1991) 'The Situation of West Papuan Refugees in Papua New Guinea', *Research in Melanesia* 15(2): 95-120.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1992) *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (2000) 'The Global Traffic in Human Organs', *Current Anthropology* 41(2): 191-224.
- Schoorl, J.W. (1993) *Culture and Change among the Muyu*. KITLV Translation Series 23. Originally published 1957. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Scott, James C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Smith, Michael French (1994) *Hard Times on Kairiru Island: Poverty, Development and Morality in a Papua New Guinea Village*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Spencer, Jonathan (2000) 'On Not Becoming a "Terrorist": Problems of Memory, Agency, and Community in the Sri Lankan Conflict', in V. Das, A. Kleinman, M. Ramphela and P. Reynolds (eds) *Violence and Subjectivity*, pp. 120-40. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Starn, Orin (1992) 'Missing the Revolution: Anthropologists and the War in Peru', in George Marcus (ed.) *Rereading Cultural Anthropology*, pp. 152-80. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stasch, Rupert (2001) 'Giving up Homicide: Korowai Experience of Witches and Police (West Papua)', *Oceania* 72(1): 33-52.

- Steedly, Mary Margaret (1993) *Hanging without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland*. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Steedly, Mary Margaret (1999) 'The State of Culture Theory in the Anthropology of Southeast Asia', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28: 431–54.
- Stoler, Ann Laura (1992) '“In Cold Blood”: Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives', *Representations* (Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories) 37: 151–89.
- Taussig, Michael (1992) 'Terror as Usual: Walter Benjamin's Theory of History as State of Siege', *The Nervous System*, pp. 11–36. New York: Routledge.
- Tsing, Anna L. (1993) *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Veur, Paul W. van der (1966) *Search for New Guinea's Boundaries: From Torres Strait to the Pacific*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.
- White, Louise (1997) 'The Traffic in Heads: Bodies, Borders and the Articulation of Regional Histories', *Journal of South African Studies* 23(2): 325–38.
- Wood, Michael (1998) 'Logging, Women and Submarines: Some Changes in Kamula Men's Access to Transformative Power', *Oceania* 68: 228–47.

■ **Stuart Kirsch** is a Visiting Assistant Professor in anthropology at the University of Michigan. His published work examines political ecology, indigenous social movements and cultural property rights in the Pacific. *Address*: Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109, USA.  
[email: skirsch@umich.edu]

---