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Rape in Gapun: talk, violence and innovation in a Papua New Guinea village

Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Tuesday 6 October 2015, 4.00 – 5.30pm

Speaker

Professor Don Kulick, Uppsala University

HRC Conference Rm 128, A.D. Hope Bldg 14, ANU



Anyone who knows anything at all about contemporary Papua New Guinea knows that sexual violence against women occurs at staggering rates. Research has highlighted this violence from a number of perspectives, and explored some possible causes of what is widely perceived to be ever-increasing levels of violence throughout the country. One dimension of sexual violence, though, that has not been considered so much is the interactional structure and meaning of talk about rape. Non-Papua New Guineans are encouraged to assume that talk about rape in PNG proceeds pretty much along the same lines as it would proceed in a place like Australia – foregrounding outrage, redress and the need for justice. But is that, in fact, what actually happens? How is something like rape talked about in casual conversation among rural villagers? What social messages are communicated when people tell each other stories about rape?

This seminar will present material from a small, isolated Sepik village called Gapun, where I have been conducting fieldwork for the past thirty years. I will play audio recordings of how women tell each other stories about gang rapes of both women and men. I will use those stories to discuss local concepts of “rape” and “domestic violence”, and I will try to contextualize the sexual violence that occurs in Gapun in relation to child socialization, local understandings of violence and agency, conflict incitement and resolution, and the shifting shape of rural gender roles.

Don Kulick is Distinguished University Professor of Anthropology at Uppsala University Sweden. His books include *Language Shift and Cultural Reproduction: socialization, self and syncretism in a Papua New Guinea village* (1992); *Travesti: sex, gender and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes* (1998); and *Loneliness and its Opposite: sex, disability and the ethics of engagement* (2015, with Jens Rydström).

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