

Andrew Strathern, Pamela Stewart, Neil Whitehead(Eds).
Terror and Violence
(London: Pluto Press, 2006, 250pp.)

The editors, Andrew Strathern and Pamela Stewart, set out the aim of this collection of essays. “We are concerned with the concept of terror, which is a universal and global condition that many people live with on a day-to-day basis.” They go on to define ‘terror’, ‘terrorism’ and ‘terrorist’. “Whereas ‘terror’ is a term that refers to an emotional response, even though its more specific components, manifestations, and triggers may vary culturally and historically, ‘terrorism’ at once evokes political rhetoric...the application of the term ‘terrorist’ is relative and situational.”

There are three essays which deal with terrorism in a political setting: Joyce Pettigrew on the Sikh demands for independence of the Indian state of Punjab; Susanna Trnka on the violence between Indo-Fijians and indigenous Fijians at the time of the May 2000 coup effort of George Speight; and Strathern and Stewart’s account of tensions within Northern Ireland and their relations to groups in the Republic of Ireland.

The Sikh study is the clearest in terms of a calculated use of violence to create a sense of terror — a policy to render people more anxious and vulnerable with political aims: the creation of an independent country on the part of independence-minded Sikhs, the destruction of the independence movement on the part of the police and security forces many of whom were also Sikhs.

The first Sikh Guru Nanak was born in 1469 and developed a reform movement hoping to be a bridge between Hinduism and Islam. The reform movement gathered followers but was rejected by the religious authorities of both Hinduism and Islam. It became a separate religion. After an early period during which people were converted to Sikhism, the religion closed in on itself, and there were relatively few new members. Marriage was nearly always within the Sikh community so that today we can speak of the Sikh as an ‘ethnic group’. People consider themselves as Sikh even if they reject the religious dogmas. Many of the Sikh lived in the Punjab.

At the time of Indian Independence in 1947, the Punjab province was divided between Pakistan — many of the Punjabis being Muslims — and India. Many of the Sikhs living in Pakistan returned to Indian Punjab where they tried to buy land from the dominant Hindu farming families. As there was little land for sale, Sikhs left to try to find work in other parts of India. Others joined the Indian Army — Sikhs having a history as good soldiers. Some Sikhs left for England, Canada, and the USA.

Although the Punjab was important in using improved farming methods — the Green Revolution — some Punjabis, especially Sikhs, felt that they were not given the political importance that their role as the Indian ‘bread basket’ deserved. Movements for political independence grew up. These movements were financed in part by Sikhs living abroad, many of whom had become financially successful. Moreover, Punjab political factions were manipulated from New Delhi as pawns in national politics. One of the Sikh political factions took refuge with arms in the Golden Temple of Amritsar — the most sacred of the Sikh temples. The Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, ordered an attack on the Golden Temple which to the Sikh faithful desecrated it. The army attack took place on a religious

holiday when the Temple was filled with families. Many thousands of people were killed, but no official figures were published. Indira Gandhi's Sikh bodyguards killed her in revenge. This led to popular killings of Sikhs in Delhi followed by a massive police and military presence in Punjab. This set the scene for the pattern of police terrorism analysed by Pettigrew. "Collective terror on the part of the state preceded the many acts of individual terror visited on families by the various police agencies...Sudden killings, abductions and abrupt disappearances were part of a policy to subdue the local areas."

There is a certain world-wide sameness to police terrorism "abduction; detention without trial; no records kept of arrest or detention; torture and extrajudicial execution, the latter covering both deaths in custody and killings in false encounter...These cases show that terror was essentially about having no redress either through the courts or through persons occupying positions of influence...Its implementation required considerable thought, planning and organization with the entire state machinery devoted to rupturing the society they believed had spawned separatism...State terror was not just directed against armed groupings favouring independent rule. It is also against civilians among whom these armed individuals moved or were alleged to move, in other words, the entire population of the rural areas. Its victims were ordinary civilians, uninvolved in armed or even political conflict."

The second set of essays comes closer to the subtitle "Imagination and the Unimaginable" which would have been better as 'Imagination and the only partly imaginable'. These essays concern the intervention of the sacred — as demonology or witchcraft — in the lives of people in Guyana and Bali. The Bali analysis, Michele Stephen "Imaginary Violence and the Terrible Mother: the Imagery of Balinese Witchcraft" is a rich combination of analysis based on the school of psychoanalysis of Melanie Klein with an anthropological study on the role of women considered to be witches. In Bali, the culture is a mixture of Hinduism and older cultural forms in which the presence of spirits or spiritual force is a daily reality. Hinduism has given a certain structure through written texts and individual gods/goddesses such as the Goddess Durga which is the terrible form taken by the creator Goddess Uma the eternal mother and destroyer images which are separate in Bali but are combined in Kali in India. Women are devotees of Durga either by initiation or unconsciously — the consciousness of a person can leave the body during sleep to commit actions of which the person is unaware when awake. The devotee — a 'leyak' — is usually a woman. "According to the myth, human women were granted powers directly by the Goddess Durga to inflict disease and death...Women are said to have a special proclivity to become leyak as they are more greedy, more ambitious and more concerned with material things than men." As in other forms of witchcraft, a leyah can destroy especially persons who are in direct contact and have family links: husband, mother-in-law, children. Thus, family relations which could induce trust are always in danger.

In periods of tension or rapid change, witchcraft accusations are more common, although rarely spoken of in public. Terror is always in the background as the spiritual can always break through into ordinary life, especially as the leyak is only one among several types who can manipulate spiritual energy. Michele Stephen makes a distinction between witchcraft and sorcery. A witch can act unconsciously, while a sorcerer has higher knowledge and acts consciously. A witch is always destructive, a sorcerer can use spiritual energy both positively to heal and negatively to destroy.

For Michele Stephen as for Melanie Klein, the image of the destructive female comes from subconscious images related to early childhood (prior to six months) experience of the child with the mother. It may also be that the Goddess and the spirits exist, but the image is only partly reproducible by those who come into contact.

One of the themes of Melanie Klein's work is that of reparation. There is in the child-mother relation both a desire to destroy and a desire for reparation for the damage done to loved ones. One of the aspects of 'reparation' in Bali social life are rituals by which destructive forces can be returned to their creative forms — the cosmos always moving between phases of creation and destruction. The ritual serves to halt the process downward toward destruction and return the dangerous and destructive forces generated back to their divine source so that a new pure phase of creation can begin again. These rituals called 'caru' are aimed at the absorption of negative spiritual energy so as to return them to their pure form — the absorption of the multiplicity of the course material world back into an undifferentiated spiritual unity.

One example of these caru rituals in a political context is described by Stephen. "When on 12 October 2002 terrorist bombs killed over 200 people in Kuta, a tourist district in Bali, the Balinese response was not to seek revenge or to give way to despair. Instead, after an appropriate interval, Balinese performed a series of caru rituals. Such rituals (of which there are many levels) are directed to transforming the dangerous and disruptive forces in the world generated by the goddess Durga and her spouse, Kala Rudra, back to their pure and benign forms...for the Balinese who had experienced the horror, the rituals served an important psychological need, preventing an escalation of paranoid fears and helping people to begin the difficult psychic process of restoring their good inner objects and rebuilding their inner world through making reparation."

It is unfortunate that the Americans had no caru rituals after 9/11.

