Neil L. Whitehead

Violence & the cultural order

Almost all theoretical and research approaches to violence begin with the assumption that, at its core, violence represents the breakdown of meaning, the advent of the irrational, and the commission of physical harm. Certainly the violence of language, representation, and the structures of everyday life are acknowledged as relevant examples of harm, but these are peripheral phenomena and dependent on the existence of bodily damage and vicious attack as a substrate to these more ethereal examples of violence. A similar ambiguity exists with regard to the way in which natural processes or zoological behaviors exhibit damage of a fleshy kind, but here the supposed reign of instinct and survival invites not only repugnance but also an absence of ethical evaluation.

This informal cartography of the idea of violence in modern Western thinking indicates that orthodox solutions or responses to the problem of violence can only envisage its suppression, as a behavior inappropriate or misjudged to its ends. But what if violence is considered ennobling, redeeming, and necessary to the continuance of life itself? In other words, the legitimacy of violent acts is part of how they are constituted in the minds of observers, victims, and the perpetrators of such acts; and matters of legitimacy are not at all separate from the way in which given acts and behaviors are themselves considered violent in the first place.

Consonant with the recognition that violence is not a natural fact but a moral one, current anthropological thinking has moved steadily away from the notion that it is a given category of human behavior, easily identified through its physical consequences and understood as emerging from the inadequacies of individual moral or social political systems of restraint, or from underlying genetic proclivities. In the light of not only encountering violence more frequently as part of ethnographic fieldwork, but also through more properly understanding the historical importance of colonialism and neocolonialism in establishing certain codes of violent practice, anthropology has now moved toward ideas that

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stress the centrality of bodily and emotive experiences of violence to the normal functioning of any given cultural order, including that of the West. The problem now is not how to end violence but to understand why it occurs in the ways it does. This involves recognition that violence is as much a part of meaningful and constructive human living as it is an imagination of the absence and destruction of all cultural and social order.

This essay is intended to outline the role violence can play as meaningful cultural expression, whatever its apparent senselessness and destructive potential. This exercise entails a questioning of assumptions as to the self-evident nature of 'violence.' It also involves asking how issues of legitimacy critically influence understandings of violent acts, and how such acts themselves are often complex social performances expressive of key cultural values. It also implies a critique of analyses that suggest historically transcendent biological and evolutionary homologies in human violence, as well as of Hobbesian analogies drawn between a 'primitive,' savage past and contemporary 'tribalism' and 'terrorism.'

In archaeology, controversy as to the origins of, and reasons for, human violence and warfare is intense. Some argue that the archaeological record shows endemic warfare going back indefinitely in time. However, the archaeological data to support such arguments appear to have been deliberately assembled to illustrate prehistoric violence, with the worst cases being given rhetorical prominence.[1] In fact, the overall distribution of the archaeological data, which are certainly punctuated through time with examples of organized killing, surprisingly reveals a starkly less violent record when contrasted to the bloody historical and ethnographic accounts of the past few centuries.

No one is suggesting that we cling to a Rousseau-like image of the peaceful, noble savage, but many others[2] who have carefully studied the archaeological record have come to a very different conclusion about the incidence of violence and war. Basically, they have concluded that war leaves archaeologically recoverable traces. And with few exceptions, the evidence is consistent with a relatively recent development of war as regular practice – after the transition to sedentary existence (though not necessarily to agriculture), or, to put a date and place on it, around 6000 BC in Turkish Anatolia. From then and there war developed in and spread from other locales, such that, by AD 1500, war was quite common around the world, in all kinds of societies. But with the important codicil that the intensity and lethality of warfare then spiked strongly as a direct consequence of European imperialism.[3]

Certainly then, archaeology can play a key role by focusing on the indicators of ancient violence. But it has no logical

1 See, for example, Lawrence H. Keeley, *War Before Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), or Steven A. LeBlanc and Katherine E. Register, *Constant Battles: The Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

2 See, for example, Debra Martin and David Frayer, *Troubled Times: Violence and Warfare in the Past* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1997), or Raymond C. Kelly, *Warless Societies and the Origin of War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

3 See R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *War in the Tribal Zone – Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1999).

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priority in understanding violence and war, since locating the temporal origins of such cultural patterns do not explain their persistence. There is, of course, a wider cultural meaning in this debate as the more strident advocates of a Hobbesian scenario are obsessively concerned to explode ideas of a 'noble savage' who 'lives in harmony with the natural world.' Their agenda relates more to a need to discover ourselves in the past, as a means to evade the hard questions about the persistence and increasing intensity of our own violence and warfare, than it does to the actual distributions of archaeological data.[4] However, this debate is without end and beyond resolution through archaeological evidence, since it is an attempt to limit the meanings of past violence to the political agendas of the present day.

In a similar way, recent speculations about humanity's warlike nature have been fueled by supposed observations of 'warfare' by chimpanzees and other primates.[5] These are indeed very influential views, reportedly even reaching into the White House.[6] But in fact, the chimpanzee comparison, and much other work on the comparative genetics and evolution of violence, is based on two defective premises: the first one, which I have already discussed, is that war has been continuously present throughout humanity's evolutionary and archaeological past; the second is that the record of recent ethnography is a valid reflection of that past level of violence. The latter premise does not hold when one considers the fact that local state expansion and imperial domination, especially in the last five hundred years, have been critical in intensifying patterns of tribal conflict – much as is true of the spread of high-tech weapons into contemporary regional conflicts with an 'ethnic' component, such as in the Horn of Africa.

Moreover, if primatologists clamor to have their insights applied to humanity, they must recognize that it is a two-way street: they, in turn, must consider anthropological theory on collective violence when interpreting chimpanzee violence. In just this vein, many primatologists[7] have argued that both ob-

4 Such presentations also miss the point that the presence of violence in the archaeological record is not the same as the presence of warfare. For example, recent attempts to 'prove' Anasazi cannibalism in the Southwest, as in Christy G. Turner II and Jacqueline Turner, *Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence in the Prehistoric American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), or Steven A. LeBlanc, *Prehistoric Warfare in the American Southwest* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1999), simply ignore the logical possibilities of many other kinds of violent behavior to produce the skeletal and coprolitic evidence trumpeted as demonstrations of cannibalism, and instead blithely assume a relation to expansive warfare. Likewise, claims as to the 'Caucasian' form of skeletal remains more than nine thousand years old found in the Northwest also exploit a persistent cultural need to barbarize and question the status of Native American culture; see David Hurst Thomas, *Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

5 See, for example, Michael Ghiglieri, *The Dark Side of Man: Tracing the Origins of Male Violence* (Reading, Mass.: Perseus Books, 1999), and Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

6 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

7 See Margaret Power, *The Egalitarians – Human and Chimpanzee: An Anthropological View of Social Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), or Frans B. M. de Waal, *Peacemaking Among Primates* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), and most recently, Christopher Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior*

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served collective violence and extreme hierarchical behavior among chimpanzees is a manifestation of change brought on by an intensifying human presence. Notably, those primatologists[8] who argue that lethal chimpanzee violence occurs in the absence of major human disruption have asked to have this characterization accepted on faith. But as with tribal warfare and with ethnic violence more widely, if these claims are to be taken seriously, their defenders must publish thorough descriptions of historical contexts illustrating an absence of exogenous stimulation of such violence.

Antedating but reinforced by primatologists' claims, sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists, and indeed Social Darwinists before them, claim that our evolutionary heritage has endowed or cursed us with an inherent tendency for in-group amity and out-group enmity. These tendencies – to cling to those close to us and to react with unreasoning hostility to those who are different – are then taken to explain 'ethnic violence' in the modern world.[9] These views, in reality, often propound naive caricatures of contemporary conflict, as with Michael Ghiglieri's suggestion of a three-way association among cultural difference, genetic distance, and proclivity to violence.

In contrast to all of these approaches, the recent work of cultural anthropologists can provide a markedly more sophisticated frame of reference, in which identity and violence are understood as being historically and culturally constructed. As is patent even to the casual observer, ethnic conflict emerges from complex and highly variable processes; it is anything but the eruption of some primitive and fixed group loyalty so beloved of the sociobiologists and their archaeologist supporters.

After the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib was revealed, many wondered whether individual psychopathology or systematic military policy was at fault. Few understood that the revelations also underlined the importance of understanding how violence works as part of our cultural order. Since the form of abuse practiced by the U.S. soldiers seemed to emphasize sexual humiliation and religious desecration rather than gross forms of physical injury, and since it is widely understood – including by the interrogators themselves – that torture is not an effective means of intelligence gathering, the purpose of such abuse clearly requires further thought. In particular, we need to examine the relationship of the abuse to the cultural meaning of the war in Iraq and to the place of the military in American society.[10] In this light, 'homeland security,' and preparedness for biological attack, is no less a part of a performance of our own violent sociocultural order than tanks, guns, and bombs are.

Unfortunately, the Western media, in automatically locating the bases for 'violence' and 'terrorism' in 'radical Islam' and other unfamiliar political ideologies,

(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999).

8 As in Wrangham and Peterson, *Demonic Males*, or Ghiglieri, *The Dark Side of Man*.

9 See, for example, Vernon Reynold, Vincent Falger, and Ian Vine, *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism: Evolutionary Dimensions of Xenophobia, Discrimination, Racism, and Nationalism* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), or R. Paul Shaw and Yuwa Wong, *Genetic Seeds of Warfare: Evolution, Nationalism, and Patriotism* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

10 See, for example, John Conroy, *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People* (New York: Knopf, 2000).

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has obscured this need to understand the role of violence in our own cultural order. The dominance of this commentary is part of the reason we consider only the violence perpetrated by liberal democracies as 'legitimate.' However, the Abu-Ghraib revelations destabilized these presumptions to some degree, leading to the broader questions of how and when does our society regard violence, or at least torture and prisoner abuse, justifiable.[11]

Anthropology offers the best method of exploring these questions. But understanding violence through anthropology's standard approach to human research – ethnography – is fraught with intellectual and personal risks. Witnessing violent acts is problematic in itself, to say nothing of the challenge presented by the fact that ethnography is a method of participant observation.[12]

And while various theoretical approaches to the anthropology of war have certainly emphasized the relevance of changing global conditions to the violent contestation of nationalism, ethnicity, and state control, the question of why such violence might take particular cultural forms – such as specific kinds of mutilation, 'ethnic cleansing,' or other modes of community terror – has not been adequately integrated into anthropological theory, despite the pioneering work of a few authors.

As a result, anthropology has been unable to counter the commentary of the popular media, which stresses the 'primitive' or 'tribal' nature of many of these conflicts by repeatedly referring to the culturally opaque violent practices observed in these clashes. These pseudoanthropological attempts at explanation only recapitulate colonial ideas about the inherent savagery of the non-Western world and, as such, proffer no hope for better understanding. In policy terms, the failure to appreciate the connection between cultural affirmation and violence often leads to intractable quagmires – such as in Iraq or Afghanistan, Ireland or Israel – where the violent insertion of external political 'solutions' has only served to induce even fiercer opposition. Of course, such resistance is then linked again to the discourse on tribalism and savagery by reference to the 'religious' (or antimodern) nature of the insurgents' motivations.

Understanding violence as a discursive practice – whose symbols and rituals are as relevant to its enactment as its instrumental aspects – is an indispensable aspect of being able to interpret, and not just condemn, violent acts. In order for an act of violence to be considered legiti-

11 See Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth : America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror* (New York : New York Review of Books, 2004).

12 See accounts of such entanglements with witchcraft and sorcery by Paul Stoller, *In Sorcery's Shadow : A Memoir of Apprenticeship Among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1989), or Neil L. Whitehead, *Dark Shamans : Kanaimà and the Poetics of Violent Death* (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press, 2002), as well as Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius C. G. M. Robben, eds., *Fieldwork Under Fire : Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1995). In more general terms, such topics are a difficult and possibly deadly subject for ethnographic research. Moreover, cultural anthropologists are apt to elect more positive topics for research, justly fearing that to discuss violent cultural practices with our informants can lead to a negative and deadly stereotyping, as was clearly demonstrated by the recent controversy over ethnographic practices in Amazonia. See Patrick Tierney, *Darkness in El Dorado : How Scientists and Journalists Devastated the Amazon* (New York : Norton, 2000), and Robert Borofsky and Bruce Albert, *Yanomami : The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn from It* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2005).

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mate, it needs not only to have the expected pragmatic consequences but also to be judged appropriate. Therefore, among the key questions we must address are how and when violence is culturally appropriate, why it is only appropriate for certain individuals, and the significance of those enabling ideas of appropriateness to a cultural tradition as a whole. In addition, it is necessary to ask how a reevaluation of violent cultural expression affects the concept of 'culture' and to consider whether 'violence' is itself a cross-cultural category.[13]

We therefore need to pay more attention to the generative schemes for culturally appropriate behavior – as well as the historically constituted matrix of symbolic and ideational forms upon which cultural representations, expressions, and performances are based. This critical field of analysis has largely been ignored. As a result, there have been few attempts to map how cultural conceptions of violence are used discursively to amplify the cultural force of violent acts, or how those acts themselves can produce a shared idiom for violent death. (This discursive amplification is precisely what is meant by the 'poetics' of violent practice.)[14]

Instead, the study of violence has tended to focus on the political and economic conditions under which it is generated, the suffering of victims, and the psychology of its interpersonal dynamics. Such work has vastly improved our conceptualizations of violence, but it ignores the role of perpetrators, their motivations, and the social conditions under which they are able to operate. However, this imbalance in theorizing victims rather than perpetrators is just beginning to receive better attention from both anthropologists and others working on humanistic approaches to violence.[15]

Also, until recently, the anthropology of violence was principally concerned with the birth of war, the political economy of small-scale conflicts, or with the general context of the encounter between tribal and colonial military traditions. This approach certainly provides an important material context for understanding the development of cultural forms of violence. But new domains of anthropological analysis – state violence and death squads, postcolonial ethnic conflicts, serial killings, and revitalized forms of 'traditional' killing, such as assault sorcery and witchcraft – have required a much closer consideration of the symbolic, ritual, and performative qualities of violent acts in order to conceptualize cultural variety in the discursive practice of violence more fully.

13 As Christopher Taylor points out in his 1999 study of the Rwandan genocide, *Sacrifice as Terror: The Rwandan Genocide of 1994* (New York: Berg, 1999), this does not mean that 'culture,' conceived of in a simplistic way as in Daniel Goldhagen's controversial analysis of the Nazi genocide, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), can simply be cited as a cause of violence. Moreover, even the most careful analyses of Western forms of violence, such as of the Nazi genocide, are not necessarily relevant to the understanding of postcolonial ethnic violence, such as the genocide in Cambodia, precisely because 'genocide' is here mediated through cultural forms with which we are often unfamiliar. See Alexander Laban Hinton, *Why Did They Kill? Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

14 See Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*, and Neil L. Whitehead, ed., *Violence* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2004).

15 The website for the *Legacies of Violence* research circle at the University of Wisconsin-Madison illustrates many of these approaches, http://www.internationalresearch.wisc.edu/LOV/.

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In any case, violence is becoming an unavoidable fact of anthropological research. We face burgeoning ethnic and community violence in many of the traditional field sites for anthropological analysis, even in those locations that seemed to have already peacefully negotiated their postcolonial economic and political conditions. Research on violence has also become an important part of anthropology's understanding of globalization. In the economically and politically marginal spaces of the global ethnoscape, violence has become a forceful, if not inevitable, form of cultural affirmation in the face of a loss of 'tradition' and a dislocation of ethnicity. Violence here is often engendered not simply by adherence to globalized ideologies, such as communism or Islam, but also by the complexities of local political history and cultural practices. This is true even where global ideologies do come into play, since it is the local meaning of those ideologies that drives conflicts.

In tandem with this changing context for ethnographic research is the resurgent debate within anthropology as to the existence and meaning of 'traditional' violence, which cannot be characterized simply as a 'return to barbarity.' A growing body of ethnographic and historical work is seeking to develop aspects of cultural theory in a way that overcomes these problems: work examining the Rwandan/Burundian genocide and the destruction of Liberia; studies of the resurgence of 'traditional witchcraft' as a political force in various global contexts; studies of the discursive practice of violence in the South and Southeast Asian contexts; or material concerning state terror from Central and South America. Such studies, and others, clearly suggest that the moment is right to compare ethnographic interpretations and seek new principles for representing and studying violence as a cultural practice.

Violent acts embody complex aspects of symbolism that relate to both order and disorder in a given social context. Because of these symbolic aspects, violence has many potential cultural meanings. This is particularly important to remember when we consider the violent acts committed in the name of a particular religion, or in a belief that these acts conform to a set of 'moral' or 'patriotic' teachings directly linked to specific ideologies.

When an atrocity or murder takes place, it feeds into the world of the iconic imagination. Imagination transcends reality and its rational articulation, but in doing so it can bring more violent realities into being. We should not underestimate the significance of this phenomenon. Under early modern European regimes, simply showing torture instruments to a prisoner was often sufficient to produce the required confession of heresy or apostasy from him or her. So, today, simply seeing the aftermath of terrorism is enough to induce each citizen to rehearse complex political commitments to 'freedom' and 'democracy.' These pledges, in turn, sustain those political regimes that locate the terrorist threat at the very gates of society.

In many popular presentations of indigenous, or 'tribal,' ways of life, the message is usually that the lives being portrayed are subject to the kinds of arbitrary violence that Western liberal democracy has banished from everyday existence. Accordingly, we are repeatedly exposed to the notion that these societies face the pervasive threat of the Hobbesian condition, a war of all men against all men – with the inevitable consequence that the lives of most men

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are nasty, brutish, and short. This mode of representation, and the imagination of others' subjectivities it entails, is particularly evident in the treatment of topics such as sorcery and witchcraft, and in the televisual dioramas of 'traditional' violent rituals, such as initiation ceremonies, mystical practices of self-mutilation or pain endurance, and so forth.[16]

What such portrayals neglect in their urgent concern to convince us of the degree to which such lives are immured in superstition and fear is that we, too, live in a state of constant fear, kept active in the public consciousness by such devices as government-issued threat levels, civic exercises in disaster preparedness, and the nightly news bulletins and television dramas. For these measures imply that, even if we are somewhat defended against the terrorist of yesterday, the potential for similar violent disruptions always exists.[17]

These representations overlook not only the way in which states of terror and acts of violence are entangled with the social and political order, but also how those apparently undesirable conditions are nonetheless valorized as the contexts for the expression of desirable cultural values – be they heroism and self-sacrifice, or physical endurance and indifference to pain.

Moreover, the televisual contrasts between savage, violent others and our pacific, sophisticated selves are not just implicit endorsements of 'Western' culture. They also efface our own capacities for, and institutions of, violence, with a resulting enfeeblement of the individual in the face of, or prospect of, the exercise of violence. We sit entranced by the sights and sounds of 'terrorist violence' – the twisted piles of metal and rubble, the wailing of women, the shouting of men, and the telltale pools of blood – which confirm the overriding importance of this kind of violence as a token of the perpetrators' barbarity and an occasion for our condemnation. Implicitly, we are invited to infer the relative insignificance of our own counter-violence, which is rarely itself so starkly presented, in defeating the monstrous perpetrators of such acts. We also learn that we are dependent on the professionals of violence to achieve that end.

This is partly why the visual materials emanating from Abu Ghraib were so shocking to, and incommensurable with, our understanding of the violence we deploy. Although American cultural values were overtly shaping the forms of violence – all of the torturers wore plastic gloves, focused on sexual humiliation, and generally gave off the impression that this was merely a frat party or hazing – the automatic responses of analysts were either that the individual offenders were psychopathic or that the higher authority was aberrant (albeit understandably so, since the aim of defeating terror is far more important). Even liberal-inspired commentary sought to validate the U.S. government and the nation's body-politic by suggesting that free journalistic inquiry, and a Freedom of Information Act that would help journalists uncover the 'truth' of such abuse, balances out the 'mistakes' of Abu Ghraib. Presumably, then, the detainees at Guantánamo Bay are doing just fine.[18]

16 A recent series of programs on such topics, made for the U.S. Discovery Channel, was thus entitled "Culture Shock Week."

17 Carolyn Nordstrom has aptly named this "the tomorrow of violence"; see her chapter in Whitehead, ed., *Violence*.

18 See the review of Mark Danner's *Torture and Truth* by Andrew Sullivan in the *New York Sunday Book Review*, January 23, 2005.

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Of course, the latest terrorist pandemonium is in many ways just a reinscription of the pervasive threats that were earlier evident during the cold war. 'Weapons of mass destruction' are back in vogue, again suggesting the imminent possibility of another terrorist catastrophe in the vein of the September 11 attacks, if not the emergence of a cold war–style stand off with North Korea or Iran.[19]

In the imagination of terror and violence, there is no limitation on how far such discourses can travel, or at least on the mediums in which they are expressed.[20] Such discourses, however, often proliferate locally through gossip to constitute a cultural imaginary, suggesting a useful comparison between the discourses surrounding sorcery and witchcraft and our current conceptions of terrorism.[21]

In the contemporary West, the figure of the suicide bomber has replaced that of the sorcerer in our cultural imaginary. The suicide bomber evokes the image of an irrational violence whose motivations are buried in the obscurity of religious cultism. It is important to note that the 'suicide bomber' is a formulation of the Western media. For the perpetrators, martyrdom and self-sacrifice, or 'fighting to the death,' are much closer renderings of the ideas that motivate them. Moreover, recent studies are beginning to reveal the multiple cultural imaginaries from which such acts actually emerge.[22] In Japan, Iraq, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, and Palestine, such acts acquire meaning from quite distinct ethical traditions and practices of violence. Just as was the case for an older idea of exotic terror, cannibalism, the apparent behavioral similarity of these acts belies their distinct cultural meanings and trajectories.[23]

19 Clearly, though, certain forms of violent 'terrorist' action cannot serve this cultural purpose, as shown by the way in which responses to Timothy McVeigh's bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma have been noted but not introduced into the wider public discourse on the 'war on terror.' This precisely highlights the difference between personal safety and national security as relating to different realms of political thinking and priority. Security is the politico-military prerogative of government while safety remains a culturally diverse and individualized idea. 'Safety' in this sense can only be realized by the occupation of a different kind of space to that of threat and terror. Perhaps a nostalgic retreat, as in the sudden popularity of American folk music and the movie *O Brother Where Art Thou?* in the immediate wake of September 11, or the current vogue for remaking and recycling movie/TV formats from, or about, the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

20 My own discussions in *Dark Shamans* of a regional form of terror, the *kanaimà*, underscores this delocation, since, despite regional use of the idea in Brazilian and Venezuelan film and literature, it has not connected with a global discourse of terror in the way that other local imaginings, such as vampires, zombies, or werewolves, have done; see also Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in East and Central Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

21 See Andrew Strathern, Pamela Stewart, and Neil L. Whitehead, eds., *Terror and Violence: Imagination and the Unimaginable* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pluto, 2005), and Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

22 See Christoph Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon: A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, trans. Helena Ragg-Kirkby (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Nasser Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

23 This is very strikingly born out by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's study of Japanese *kamikaze*, whose motivations were more the result of an admiring contemplation of Western modernity than a remnant of anachronistic and traditional *samurai* ethics; see Emiko Ohnuki-Tier-

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The figure of the suicide bomber also makes dramatically overt the identification of the human body with the body-politic: through the social order our bodies are shaped. The body is also joined to locations and landscapes, such that the destruction of sites of civic identity are felt as bodily invasions, from which the invader must be repelled, purged, cleansed. So, too, in the absence of specific kinds of bodies – suspects, offenders, terrorists – or physically distinguishing features for such categories, the site of a war on 'terror' or other kinds of 'enemies within' must become internalized as an aspect of 'mind' and 'attitude.' It is obvious now that acts of violence are acted out necessarily, and sometimes only, in the imagination.

Earlier colonial commentators on sorcery were no less aware of the significance of the imaginative order in understanding sorcery's cultural influence.[24] Just as the modern-day expansion of global media can fill many more minds with a conviction of the reality of present terror, an elaborate theater of public punishment and execution imbued people in the colonial era with the belief that the destruction of the bodies of the condemned was integral to the reproduction of society – paradoxically achieving the incorporation of society through the exclusion of its victims.

It is significant then that colonial depictions of other rituals of public bodily destruction, particularly cannibalistic human sacrifice, put great stress on the collective-participation aspect of the victim's destruction – both commentators and illustrators would repeatedly allude to the participation of women and children in the cannibal moment – as a way of emphasizing the barbarity of the ritual exercise of cannibalism. It is striking that this community participation in the incorporating cannibal moment, not its cruelties and torments, shocked the early modern Europeans.

By contrast, an exclusion, not inclusion, of the victim is envisaged in the European tradition of torture and execution as an adjunct to judicial process. Such is now the fate of detainees at Guantánamo, whose marked bodies and tortured minds leave them in a limbo of nonbeing, excluded from the society of human rights and law. British anthropologist Sir Edmund Leach noted in response to the IRA terrorist campaigns nearly thirty years ago:

> We see ourselves as threatened . . . by lawless terrorists of all kinds . . . . [W]e feel ourselves to be in the position of the European Christians after the withdrawal of the Mongol hordes rather than in the position of the unfortunate Caribs . . . at the hands of the Spanish invaders . . . . We now know that the dog-headed cannibals against whom Pope Gregory IX preached his crusade were representatives of a far more sophisticated civilization than anything that existed in Europe at the time . . . . However incomprehensible the acts of terrorism may seem to be, our judges, our policemen, and our politicians must never be allowed to forget that terrorism is an activity of fellow human beings and not of dog-headed cannibals.[25]

Control over bodies – both alive and dead, imaginatively and physically – is a way of engendering political power. And

ney, *Kamikaze, Cherry Blossoms, and Nationalisms: The Militarization of Aesthetics in Japanese History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

24 See Whitehead, *Dark Shamans*.

25 In Edmund Ronald Leach, *Custom, Law and Terrorist Violence* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1977), 36.

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of all the modes of controlling bodies the violence of physical assault is an irresistible mode of domination. But even as we contemplate the shock and awe of attacks on terrorist hideaways, or the systems of secret CIA prisons and torture camps that have most recently surfaced in the nightly news, we are reminded that a war on terror of all kinds should also confront our own deep traditions of violence, which persist as part of a quasi-mystical and deeply imaginative search for the final triumph of democratic progress over the terror, violence, and barbarity of others.

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