

Violence and silence

**Some limits in the anthropological
understanding of Bali**

Originally presented at

A Symposium on

Violence as a social institution

St. Andrews, 4-6 January 1985

Let me start with two contrary representations:

Bali is an Oriental paradise: its people civilized, refined, artistic, where humble peasants learn its exquisite culture under benevolent local aristocrats and show the unbounded creativity of the human spirit when free.

Bali is an Oriental hell: its people dishonest, cruel, violent, where tyrants rule through treachery and fear and its people face 'continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'.

My aim in this paper is to explore some of the implications of this apparent paradox.¹ It requires rephrasing the conventional question 'what are violence and its causes?' as 'who represents violence and its causes as what?' So doing invites us to consider the more interesting question of how action is represented culturally, which I address with particular reference to how Balinese articulate violence and power.

The argument

Do we really need to ask such obvious questions? Despite the writings of Foucault (1977) and others, violence is still largely treated as an unproblematic positivity, which in turn is equated with physical – and often political – violence. So doing omits other less easily measurable kinds of actions that we might designate economic, emotional violence and so on.

Briefly, asking 'what is violence?' commits the essentialist error of assuming there to be such an entity with general properties demonstrable cross-culturally.² Anthropological method stresses the contextual frameworks within which violence is explained. Inevitably these presuppose a theory of human nature (or mind), society, power and agency. The issue of who represents violence as what to whom and under what conditions is itself one about power and knowledge. The convenient assumption that scholars' expertise renders them objective, neutral and culture-free is itself remarkable both for its lack of critical reflexivity and its implicit hegemony.

As to power, I shall suggest that, in Bali, which has a history of great violence (in our terms), the élite has gone to lengths to stress its mastery over violence, through the martial and political activities of princes and through the agency of gods, understanding of, and communion with, whom is exercised by high priests. Violence is removed from the mass of peasants who commit much of it and are its main victims, but are held to be unable to control it. So violence becomes a manifestation of the power of the élite as power, being abstract, requires interpretation of its forms. This is a visible aspect of power as force (*kakuasaan*).³ The classification of most Balinese as passive

¹ On the history of these contrary representations, see Vickers 1989.

² The same applies of course to terms like 'culture', 'Bali' and 'the Balinese'. I use the terms as loose labels. 'Balinese' refers to villagers and aristocracy in the area of Bali where I worked, although other sources are used as well. When I talk about the 'traditional' situation, in the pre-colonial or recent past, I am of course speaking of representations of this past, not of what actually happened, which, for the most part, we do not know.

³ As Koentjaraningrat noted in response to Anderson's celebrated piece on ideas of power in Java, Anderson, while claiming to have identified distinct ideas of power, remained caught up in European obsessions with physicality and so missed the importance of *kawibawan* (1980: 133-4), which is also central to Balinese thinking. It is difficult to translate, but might be glossed as something like inner authority, presence.

instruments, and their exclusion from discussion of power and violence, is its hidden implication.

As to knowledge, perhaps we should inquire how violence fits ideas of agency. Balinese have well developed accounts of mind and action, but are loth to use these to explain acts of violence, as against the existence of violence. What is at stake is how to explain action. I shall argue that Western accounts, which stress mind guided by reason as superior to, and so controlling, bodies and matter, are the product of a particular discursive tradition and that this has important epistemological implications.

What is violence?

What do we mean by violence? The Oxford English Dictionary shows the range of uses of ‘violence’ to be wide. They include ‘the exercise of physical force’, causing ‘bodily injury’, ‘forcibly interfering with personal freedom’, ‘to outrage or violate’, ‘undue constraint applied to some natural process, habit etc., so as to prevent its free development or exercise’, ‘perversion of meaning’, ‘great force, severity, or vehemence’, ‘vehemence of personal feeling’ and ‘passionate conduct or language’. These are only the positive aspects. Perhaps the most effective forms of violence are indicated by the absence of signs or representations (like the cultural constraint on choice of the unemployed or the elimination of those deemed unqualified – like students, or women – from taking part in certain activities). If violence is a useful notion, we need equally to consider silences and exclusions.

It is hard to find simple equivalents in Balinese to the variety of states and acts denoted by ‘violence’ in English. There is a plethora of terms that specify kinds of extremity. Of those that deal with force, *gemes* is used where we might ‘cruel’, ‘tough on’, ‘not disgusted by’. *Paksa*, which is often glossed as ‘force’, brings out the coercive, but not necessarily physical, aspects. Violence and brutality are, however, associated with a term with complex uses – *kasar*. Its antonym, *alus*, is used of people who are refined, controlled, well-mannered; *kasar* signifies the reverse, what is coarse, uncontrolled, brutish.

The implication of a lack of control, of ‘naturalness’, suggests a link with violence. Demons who stoke the fires of hell are portrayed as *kasar* and cruel. However we should be careful. The two terms are applied to styles as much as to the consequences of actions. Drawing on Javano-Balinese literature, princes were portrayed as being far deadlier in war, because of their self-command, than coarse and flailing peasants. However refined men have often invented refined tortures for their fellows. *Kasar* also suggests a certain simplicity and straightforwardness: more associated with unthinking brutishness than cruelty. Balinese incline to the view that the simple are, on the whole, honest; it is the clever who are responsible for the chicanery and for engineering much of the violence done by others. Whatever the details, Balinese do not have a general category of ‘violence’ but break the theme up into different aspects, which do not overlap with ours.

Should we start by problematizing our (whoever ‘our’ is) interest in violence? To state it is natural marginalizes cultural representation. And how neutral is academic inquiry? Bunuel’s film *The discreet charm of the bourgeoisie* brings out elegantly the embarrassment ‘proper’ people feel when faced with violence while they quietly

engage in it themselves under other guises. As Barthes noted (1973: 137-159) the bourgeoisie as a form of life tends not to trumpet, but to exnominated and naturalize, itself.⁴ Life and style of living become property to be owned and defended against competitors and intrusion.

Our professional interest in violence relies more than is acknowledged on constitutive metaphors. For example, if society is an organism, or a language, violence becomes its pathological disorder or failure in communication. In any event, it emerges as a problem to be explained, which presupposes some ideal state where violence does not occur. We might reflect on how far the apparent interest in violence stems from the increased industrialization of means of destruction or from its increased representation in the mass media. Also our assumptions and classifications change. So we recognize new forms of violence from child abuse to economic exploitation, or create new ones from brainwashing to advertising and credit cards.

A hidden essentialism

Whatever one's theoretical predilections the difficulty in studying violence seems to be connected with the central role that reason plays in our accounts. Like most dichotomies it decentres and makes largely incoherent, or inexplicable, the category about which the taxonomy is not built. So the alternative to the Enlightenment values of reason, progress, science and understanding tends to be formulated negatively in terms of the place of unreason, desire and violence, which have kept people from Nietzsche to the post-structuralists in happy, if still marginal, defiance of the predominant view. For the difficulty of this counter-view is that, by inoculation (Barthes 1973: 150-1), it sanitizes the position it attacks and so is doomed to play the role of Loyal Opposition, or Iago to an enlightened Othello.

The presuppositions of immediate concern are our ideas of nature and human nature, of power, violence and agency. Otherwise we have to consider violence as *sui generis*. It is part of a view of the world: commonly a symptom of something deeper in terms of which it is to be 'understood', and so stood back from. Violence may be seen as chaos against the backdrop of nature and order (*cosmos*). Human violence is inextricable from a theory of human nature, whether as a constituent tendency or stemming from something external, usually society. Apart from invoking the tired dichotomy of 'individual versus society', such a view presupposes there is an essential human nature and essential characteristics of society as such. Once one has decided what natural, human and social features are essential, the rest of the analysis follows spuriously easily. The drawback is that our ideas of nature, humankind and society tend to change.

The difficulty emerges when looking at power. Like the search for the Holy Grail, the quest to grasp the nature of power consists more in the grunts of the disappointed hunters than in solid results. The reason may be simple. Power, like time, is abstract. Coming from an epistemological tradition that stresses a dichotomy of appearance and

⁴ On what grounds do scholars presume that their application of theory, or indeed theory itself, necessarily transcends the social conditions of knowledge and understanding? Incidentally my use of 'bourgeoisie' here is just a label, because its forms and constitutive arguments evidently vary.

essence, ideas and things,⁵ we require a tangible instantiation to give substance to the idea. So power is represented metaphorically: it is something one has, exercises, uses, seizes, but cannot ignore. Power is comprehended through its manifestations, such as force and violence. Rather obviously, however, power is neither force nor violence; and we are left with the awkward task of struggling through our own substantial metaphors to ponder on what ontology we must assume if power is to be ‘instantiated’ ‘manifested’ or, more vogueishly, ‘dramatized’. Power may be represented as coercion, potentiality or cause; but it is none of these. We are caught in defining it in terms of something else.

The malaise stems from our inclination to essentialize and hypostatize. Why must power (or violence) be essential and material? The argument that otherwise we could not explain phenomena like violence is circular. The difficulties of grappling with this Western Chimaera are summed up in Foucault’s last shifts of position. Recognizing that power tends to be represented catachretically, he deliberately mixed his metaphors, to break the hold of the familiar. Against the tendency to imagine some generic, if not Platonic, Power, he wrote instead of the different ‘powers’, available in different societies at different times. Faced with the difficulty of powers appearing as things, and conscious of the lurking positivism, he moved towards the exploration of what was unsayable and undoable, or even unthinkable.⁶

Lurking behind this is how to explain violent acts. It is commonplace in theories of mind to cope by proposing a destructive drive or predisposition (for example Freud’s recourse to *thanatos*). Such constructs cannot easily explain destructive actions without circularity. It accounts for destructive, or violent, tendencies by postulating such proclivities, the reality of which is shown by the violent behaviour!

To bridge the Cartesian divide between mind and body, something has to be posited like ‘intention’. Unfortunately most routine action is difficult to explain using intention. ‘Why’ questions and intentionality are designed to account for the abnormal. Instead of explaining it away, it might be refreshing to treat violence as simply happening. For it is far more prevalent than is suggested in pathological or bourgeois theories, which disguise or displace it onto others (the masses, foreigners etc.). Accounting for actions in terms of intentions, or the nature of mind, is fraught with difficulty. It is one thing to detail the circumstances under which people act, it is another to presume these conditions to be the causes of actions.⁷

Should I seem to be making matters unnecessarily complicated, consider the following questions. What do answers to ‘what is violence?’ actually tell us? What is

⁵ Either may be the privileged category, often at the expense of the other (and so the supposed dispute between Plato and Aristotle). Both accept the dichotomy in different ways however.

⁶ In any cultural translation which fails to engage with others’ presuppositions, academics in effect implement this unthinkability by over-interpreting. The more elegant and persuasive the interpretation to a Euro-American readership, the more successful the silencing.

⁷ Clifford Geertz, writing for example on the Balinese state (1980) is notably guilty of this confusion. Having laid out some Balinese symbols the analysis concludes, the implication being that, having given us the collective representations, he has somehow explained why the Balinese do what they do. I shall argue this is inadequate on two scores. It commits him *a priori* to the relation of ideas and actions. It also contravenes Balinese views. At the point that anthropologists prefer an account because it is elegant and fits their expectations, but ignores and contradicts how the people involved discuss and act upon a matter, they are in terminal trouble.

presupposed in a forensics of violent events anyway? In what sense can any explanation of ‘why did he (you) kill so-and-so?’ determine a person’s ultimate intentions independent of the particular purposes of inquiry? A study of violence involves us in murkier waters than might at first appear.

Representing violence

Let us return to our initial puzzle. Perhaps the paradox comes from Euro-American frames of reference, which represent Balinese in alien terms? The argument has been advanced that Western accounts tell us more about their respective societies than they do about Balinese (cf. Boon 1977). Dutch reports represented Bali as a mysterious oriental Shangri-La, its wars more theatre than real, its people idyllic inhabitants of ‘the morning of the world’, in Nehru’s phrase. The paradox would then dissolve. Bali, as the West’s Eden, misrepresents the ‘real’ Bali, that Hobbesian world, which Cambridge and LSE anthropologists used to believe is how people everywhere actually are.

The drawback of the ‘critical anthropological’ view, which otherwise has much to recommend it, is that it tells us much about Western collective representations but very little about Balinese, or their representations. Does a ‘naïve realist’ position tell us more?⁸ It tells us less because it is based on assumptions about people and society, which owe more to commonsense versions of Realism or Utilitarianism than to what happens. There are puzzles that are irresolvable without taking account of Balinese metaphysical categories and their implications.⁹ In short one need some way into how Balinese represent what in English we call violence and power.

There are other seeming curiosities in the Balinese ethnography. For instance, the paintings in the old criminal court, the *Krta Gosa* in Klungkung, depict ingenious tortures in the afterworld for offences in life; yet the offences are mostly trivial – most grave ones go undepicted. Balinese have a theory of personal responsibility enshrined in the Hindu doctrine of *karma pala*, ‘the law of action and its consequences’, by which a person’s future is determined by their past actions (Hobart 1986). At the same time, one suffers by the same law for actions committed by family members, while Fate (*ganti*), magic (*pangiwa*) and rites offer recognized means of evading retribution. Balinese have a comprehensive theory of human agency yet, in many situations where Europeans would appeal to the psycho-dynamics of the self, they seem to prefer to leave the self largely alone and resort by way of explanation to extra-human agents to account for abnormal and violent behaviour. To understand what is at issue, I wish briefly to reflect on representations of power and violence in Bali. Then I conclude by looking at ideas of action, which may clarify some of the puzzles.

⁸ This is the intellectual stance, which would dismiss a scholar like Boon for introducing unnecessary complications into what is really a straightforward, bluff and manly business. There is no real need, on this argument, to question many accounts of events. The witnesses were reliable Europeans (all too often a synonym for drunkards). There is still less need to question reasons or motives for action. People act out of self-interest and there’s an end on it. The rest of the world behaves like the Dutch or British mythical shopkeeper.

⁹ On my use of the term metaphysics, see Hobart 2000.

Violence in Bali

In the past Balinese were Hindu-Buddhist and peasant farmers of irrigated rice, from which they produced a surplus sufficient to support an aristocratic élite in relative affluence and style. Balinese were famously warlike and ran much of the East Indonesian slave trade as well as prosecuting internal and colonial wars (for instance, over the Sasak of Lombok). In the later period, there were nine independent kingdoms under rulers who claimed Satriya status and maintained complex ties with Brahmana priests, who had a notional monopoly in matters of ritual and textual interpretation. The internal organization of kingdoms meant that the control of each ruler was dependent upon cadet lines and allies, which were farmed out to govern loose territorial areas and to combat the machinations of rival dynastic families. These local princes were often effectively independent lords and, in the frequent wars, alliances and intrigues reached a complexity surpassing Renaissance Italy.

Accounts of warfare in Bali, as elsewhere, were not primarily designed for subsequent dispassionate scholarly use.¹⁰ We may note certain general features however. Fighting was mainly on foot. Although there were horses, cavalry skills appear to have been limited. The aristocracy had no monopoly over the means of destruction, armies consisting largely of peasants who wielded the same kinds of swords, clubs and lances as their rulers. There were élite soldiers, presumably trained in *silat*, indigenous techniques of defense and attack, who might be used in confrontations between rival teams of champions.¹¹ Literary sources (such as the Pañji cycle, Malat, Vickers 1986, 2005) waxed lyric, indeed hyperbolic, about the military and sexual prowess of princes. However, as these accounts were written on the orders of royals, that is hardly surprising. It is possible that some princes were trained in fighting, dance and other forms of bodily self-mastery and so possessed greater skill than did villagers. It is more likely though that like the Duke of Plaza-Toro they led their armies from a safe distance behind battle lines. For example, the Babad Manggis, the history of the royal family of Gianyar in Southern Bali, not only refers to princes running away, but even stresses how their bitter rival, the prince of Ubud, Cokorda Gedé Sukawati, was unusually brave in that he would plunge personally into the heat of battle (Mahaudiana 1968: 83). Until there is strong evidence to the contrary, we should perhaps assume that such hagiographic accounts are mostly *ex post facto* and have more to do with representing rulers according to the conventions of Javano-Balinese literary canons than they do with historical accuracy.

You cannot describe something as it is independent of some frame of reference. It would not be surprising therefore were writers to draw upon existing conventions of representing war. It would be surprising if they did not. So victory in battle was not infrequently attributed in royal chronicles (*babad*) to the special powers, *sakti*, of

¹⁰ Keegan (1976) offers a neat critical analysis. He points out that whether a battle has occurred or not is open to interpretation. Also most of our accounts of war are quite implausible and come from people who could not see what was happening or were not there at all. The terror, confusion and human limitations conveniently disappear in almost all portrayals of what happened.

¹¹ Sometimes armies are supposed to have made use of suicide squads. These comprised young men, who were cremated in effigy before battle and so could not return alive. These were reputed to have been very intimidating to the enemy and effective. This practice predates the more famous Japanese military use of *kamikaze* and *banzai*.

princes, and their weapons.¹² Standard scenes depict the opposing rulers motionless behind their armies, locked in a confrontation of their – and their weapons’ – rival *sakti*. When one side retreated, the *sakti* of its leader was held to be at fault.

If accounts of European battles were massively doctored (Keegan 1976), why should Balinese accounts somehow be unproblematic? They were not least representations, written on the orders of the aristocracy, as to what wars should be about. The recollections of old men in my village (who were remarkably accurate about other matters) and other local accounts suggest that wars were far bloodier than received accounts suggest. Butchery of defeated civilians, the abduction of women (were the population not just sold as slaves) and plunder of valuables were routine. Such a scale of violence is portrayed in Balinese paintings and literary accounts, which dwell on severed limbs, gushing arteries and screaming victims.

Violence was not the prerogative of princes. Balinese village law deals extensively with punishments for various forms of violence to others. Sanctions against fellow villagers for failing to comply with communal decisions included sending to Coventry, bricking up offenders’ houses and sentencing to death. During my fieldwork a thief in a nearby village was taken from armed police and torn limb from limb. In another a man who insulted the village during a meeting was promptly taken and killed by pinning him to his own grave with an agricultural hoe through his neck. Rival villages seem often to have engaged in fights of their own; and bloodshed between irrigation associations over water was still not uncommon in the 1960s. Whether rulers formally declared war, surreptitiously undermined rivals or stepped into conflicts between peasants, who knows? What we have depends on who got to write the narrative.

Less obvious forms of force abound too. Marriage by capture (*malegandang*, legitimated locally by reference to the abduction of Sita by Rawana), where a girl is carried off screaming by a band of armed men, was a recognized means of forging a union in the part of Bali where I worked, although it was both illegal and strongly disapproved by the young women concerned and their parents. (Its illegality and danger made it a suitable demonstration of one’s prowess.) Cock-fighting and animal sacrifice, both recognized as bloody, are frequent and a necessary part of many rites.

Balinese villagers had developed elaborate means of control through surveillance and discipline, by which people’s doings were subject to regulation. Almost all activities were done either in groups or under the critical gaze of others. The famed poise of Balinese is arguably as much a response to surveillance or the importance of self-command as it is any ‘natural’ grace. (At night it becomes another story, which is when most theft, violence and philandering goes on.) If we regard such surveillance and discipline as refined modes of coercion, the powers exercised in village society are considerable. Rulers also engaged in less direct surveillance. Palaces are dispersed among the population, as were political agents, to keep an eye on what was happening. There are fruitless arguments about how far princes actually ruled village society or

¹² *Sakti* is often translated as ‘mystical’ or ‘supernatural’ power, cf. Anderson 1972. Such a gloss however fails to illuminate the variety of explanations available, or when the term is used and when not. If an army of 100,000 defeated an army of 10,000, this was rarely attributed to the winning king’s *sakti*. If an army of 10,000 defeated an army of 100,000, appeal to *sakti* was more likely. In short, *sakti* seems to be invoked under circumstances of unusual efficacy, where more matter of fact explanations seem inadequate. That it now seems these ‘histories’ were mostly written long afterwards in the twentieth century (Adrian Vickers, personal communication) strengthens my argument.

how much it was a closed world in itself. The point here is that powers of various kinds proliferated and violence of different kinds was widespread.

Injury to other human beings was hardly the monopoly of the aristocracy. Natural events took a substantial toll. For a start, Bali is a precipitous volcanic island. Lava and earthquakes have always taken human lives, as have flood and famine. A mudflow in 1815 would appear to have claimed more lives (over 10,000 is reported) than the bloodiest dynastic massacres of rivals. Balinese do not, however, recognize a domain of nature separate from culture and such activities are ascribed to Divine, or other non-material kinds of, agency. Violence then was all around.

It is in this context that I wish to look at representation of power and violence. Such 'natural' disasters were deemed to be the working of inevitable retribution (*karma pala*), or direct intervention by the gods in response to the actions of rulers. The dynastic chronicle of the northern kingdom of Bulèlèng, the Babad Bulèlèng, interprets the mudflow mentioned as a divine response to the throne having been usurped by a princely family from the neighbouring state. It is not so much that particular princes took the blame for misfortune on themselves as that the aristocracy incorporated the entire range of possible violence and represented it as the unique outcome of their importance in the world.¹³

Something similar seems to have happened in the portrayal of wars. We know that most violence was carried out by commoners (for instance the massacre of the old royal dynasty of Bulèlèng at the orders of the usurping king), and that the aristocracy did not have the military technology, nor it seems the organization, to keep the populace subject by force of arms. It is interesting to look at the wars started by princes, and their subsequent representation in the light of competitive claims to mastery of violence. The argument is supported by the way Balinese interpret untoward events as the result of *sakti*. Where people die unexpectedly, odd events happen and so forth, one popular explanation is that this is due to the workings of human or divine *sakti* (witches appropriately are known as *manusa sakti*, *sakti* people). Princes are known to claim powers of this kind and some people study Tantric texts to further their abilities.¹⁴ I was originally puzzled as to why my local prince should go to lengths to claim responsibility for what looked like acts of witchcraft, until something of the royal concern over the monopoly of violence became clear to me.

We are some way to understanding my opening paradox. Royal representations embrace Bali both as a land of flowering civilization with princes at the helm; and as a violent place where they are masters and without whose grace life is vile. If violence is a manifestation of power, then those who obtain power need to demonstrate it through violence. Bloody slaughter seems not just to have been a way of getting rid of enemies, but of proving one's mastery of force. On this account, war was central to an aristocratic worldview. Extolling its magnificent, terrible, even evil, nature would make good sense. As Oscar Wilde remarked:

As long as war is regarded as wicked it will always have its fascinations. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular (Wilde 2006: 127).

¹³ Likewise they claimed mastery over anomalies, such as dwarfs, monsters and other unusual phenomena, which confirmed and added to evidence of their *sakti*.

¹⁴ Such claims are not restricted to Satriya. Brahmana and indeed ordinary people did, and do, as well.

Indeed war was constitutive of the aristocratic vision of the world. Were it not for the supposed protection they offered their subjects from the appalling consequences of violence (of which the ruling class claimed command), ordinary people might have wondered quite what use they were.

Violence and silence

Power then is represented, in part at least, as manifest by mastering violence. For how, otherwise, is one to know who has power? This is not to suggest that other means of control and domination did not exist. We need to be careful not to get caught in a residual positivism and must look briefly at what was not said or done. Foucault has outlined some of the ways in which discourse underwrites what can be said and what is made unsayable (Foucault 1981). These include social procedures of exclusion, internal constraints on expression and the conditions of communication. I consider each in turn.

In certain contexts, Foucault argued, some topics are prohibited from discussion. For Balinese these included questioning the caste hierarchy or the existence of Divinity in its various forms.¹⁵ Some people were ruled to be outside, and so unable to contribute to, normal social discourse like madmen, children, women and, in other contexts, all low castes. Finally what constitutes truth and so socially approved objects of knowledge completed the circumscription.

Discourses also ‘exercise their own control; procedures which function rather as principles of classification, of ordering, of distribution’ (Foucault 1981: 56). First, there are privileged commentaries.

[T]here is scarcely a society without its major narratives, which are recounted, repeated, and varied; formulae, texts, and ritualized sets of discourses which are recited in well-defined circumstances; things said once and preserved because it is suspected that behind them there is a secret or a treasure (1981: 56).

In Bali there is a vast literature, ritual, literary and casual, as well as prescriptive practices, which frame what ought, may be, and should not be said and done.

Finally there is the question of who may speak about what. For

not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are largely forbidden..., while others seem to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject, without prior restrictions (1981: 62).

Roles like priest or traditional healer in Bali limit those who may properly hold forth on questions of ritual or medicine. Less formally, skill at oratory and the intricacies of language levels reduce the number who are able to speak and articulate argument on public occasions. The more notions of education as a scarce resource circulated, the greater the circumscription, which left priests and aristocrats relatively freer than peasants, who are ignorant by definition. As Mark Twain remarked:

¹⁵ That did not mean indirect discussion or oblique challenge did not occur. That caste conflict should burst into the open shortly after the Dutch conquest of Bali (Bagus 1996) highlights the degree to which such attempts at hegemonic articulation are precarious. The New Order government’s mythologizing of the past founded upon a stable and unchanging hierarchy might suggest an attempt to re-assert hegemony, however nostalgic. This was so *ad hoc* and contradictory, it may equally be understood as the commodification of Bali for the international tourist market.

Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run. Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education.

If we wish to retain a word like violence, should such prohibitions and exclusions perhaps not be regarded as the epitome of a subtle violence?

Violence and action

The ascription of responsibility for violence to Balinese princes is not, however, quite so simple. The relationship of agent and action may differ from European everyday views of people determining their deeds through the intentions produced by reasoning minds. The difficulty of this commonsense account may be put in two different ways. First, Quine's argument (1960) that facts are under-determined by theory holds equally for the under-determination of actions by reasons. As there are always alternative intentions that would explain the same actions, how are we to ascribe determinate causes or reasons? Second, the analytical philosophers of action have shown how difficult, or even meaningless, it is to try to pin down why people do what they do (see White 1968). Arguably it is impossible to establish intentions, let alone show them to be the necessary and sufficient conditions of action, for normal activities (Anscombe 1957). So I would like to consider briefly how Balinese handle the notion of violence in the light of their ideas about action.

Certain Indian philosophical notions have quite wide currency in Bali, not least because they have been disseminated through popular theatre.¹⁶ *Inter alia*, people invoke two such schemes in daily life as explanatory frameworks about action. The first, from Sāṃkhya, distinguishes three constituents, dispositions or tendencies of both the human psyche and the world, the *triguna*, which are in a continuous process of transformation. These are *sattwa*, reflective discernment and discrimination; *raja(h)*, spontaneous desire, longing or passion; and *tamas*, opacity, inertia, objectification. These may be linked to the three main goals of human life, the *triwarga*: *dharma*, the disposition to do good; *artha*, the pursuit of wealth and pleasure; and *kama*, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure (cf. Hobart 1986). When desire and passion meet obstacles to their fulfillment, violence tends to happen.

What is significant about these explanatory frameworks is that they not only assume human dispositions to be endlessly changing, but also that they are inherently conflictual. It is not just humans, but all matter, in which the struggle of this tripartite process goes on. Balinese presuppose conflict or opposition (*ngalawan*) to be the way the world is. So metaphors of fighting (*miegan*) are used to describe many kinds of relationship and process. Contradictory ideas are said to war with one another; male and female in marriage are in relations of *miegan*; as are analogic extensions of the genders such as slit gongs or paired instruments in orchestras. If Europeans seem to hanker after coherence, consistency or Pythagorean harmony, Balinese build their world about opposition and conflict.

Although the language is available, in many circumstances Balinese desist from using these models of mind to explain particular actions. This is not because they are

¹⁶ At least up to the early 1980s in the more rural areas, the impact of religious education, driven by the provincial government, remained limited. And priests were traditionally ritual technicians rather than intellectuals, a role which fell to actors and *dalang*, shadow-puppeteers.

alien to villagers, who make use of them when necessary. To understand what is going on, we must turn to the attribution of intentionality.

Let us look briefly at how responsibility for violence is adjudged in dynastic chronicles, where it emerges as an important theme. An example is a passage from the Babad Bulèlèng, a text which has the not-unusual task of justifying the rise to power of an ambitious upstart through murder and mayhem. When the young prince-to-be, Ki Gusti Ngurah Panji *Sakti*, is playing in a field, a voice suddenly speaks to him:

Hey Barak Panji! Don't be alarmed by your great-grandfather (here his sword, Ki Semang, is speaking itself – note the generational kinship idiom, which implies close sympathy and near equality)...for he has in his point a *pasupati-astra* (a mythically powerful force), which is the means of your becoming a ruler of the world and enjoying the affection of the people of the world. Look now to your great-grandfather's excellence. Remain here now. You have an enemy, called Ki Pungakan Gendis, who rules over the *sima* of Gendis. It is right that you should kill him. Don't be anxious in your mind. Simply point your great-grandfather at him. I will see to his death (Worsley 1972: 141, my parentheses).

As Worsley makes clear, the responsibility for the murder of what has been up till then a perfectly innocent, indeed just, official but one who happens to stand in the young hero's way of becoming ruler, falls upon the sword not upon the murderer, to whom no blame attaches in this account.¹⁷

Another text also sheds an interesting light on the attribution of responsibility for violent deeds. The *Śiwarātrikalpa* (originally composed in Java, but known now only in Bali where it is elaborated in ritual and painting) is a famous poem which explains how a good-for-nothing hunter, who happens to spend the entire night awake up a tree near a shrine to Siwa, and on death is rescued from hell on Siwa's orders. For anyone who has kept a vigil on that night in the right manner is freed from all his past sins, no matter how repugnant and, as a killer of animals and ne'er-do-well, the hunter is a pretty low fellow. Much of the text is taken up with exceptionally detailed accounts of butchery as the demons of hell fight with the emissaries of Siwa. The translators' commentary is particularly interesting when they remark on the violence.

Another compulsory feature of almost all *kakawin* (poems) is the elaborate, and to our taste exaggerated, descriptions of wars and battles between armies of heroes and demons...The fantastic weapons and gruesome methods of warfare which the poet's imagination conjures up are almost equal to what our modern society has actually achieved.'(Teeuw et al. 1969: 31-32)

Violence and absolution from responsibility, or even intention, seem to go hand in hand.

Such trends are not only found in literature. If a villager runs amuck, *amok*, and assaults or kills people, it is questionable if the blame is theirs. Villagers and priests were generally agreed this condition was attributable to *karangsukang kala* and the person's responsibility for subsequent actions was effectively suspended. Now *karangsukang* is the passive form of a root which is used to mean 'enter', 'under the

¹⁷ The Babad Bulèlèng draws on a rich history of literary representation of royal power and its acquisition. There are obvious parallels for instance with the Pararaton, which depicts the similarly questionable rise of Ken Arok, the founder of the East Javanese kingdom of Singhasari. The issue of the efficacy attributed to objects like weapons needs revisiting in the light of cultural ideas of agency, instrumentality and patiency.

sway of', but the glosses are weak, because it is one of a series of terms by which Balinese express the relationship between the invisible world of gods and thoughts, and the visible one of humans and the world. *Kala* is often rendered as 'demon', or more rarely 'Time', although some idea of more general destructive forces might be more apt. Now, where I worked, there were at least two schools of thought as to what *karangsukang kala* referred. The village priests (*pamangku*) were inclined to the view that such a person is entered by an invisible superhuman agency. Villagers on the whole took the view that *kala* was simply energy in the body which got out of hand. They, if anyone, were more sceptical about claims that one could waive responsibility for actions.

These pointers are linked, I think, with the disinclination of Balinese in daily and juridical matters to inquire into intentionality. Although some legal treatises draw a distinction between intended and unintended actions, to villagers it was the act – of, say, running over a child on a motorbike – not the state of mind of the perpetrator, which was at issue. Balinese often give this as a reason for the care they take in their movements and for developing a keen sense of vision. Foucault (1984) argued that, in contemporary European notions of sexuality, control has moved from monitoring external behaviour to determining what one may think and policing what is supposed to be going on inside people's heads. By contrast Balinese are inclined where possible to leave intention and motivation as the private sphere of individuals and beyond the proper business of others to inquire into. This is not just my inference: some Balinese say so explicitly. They may indicate the conditions under which they acted (for instance that they felt angry, sad, tired at the time), but they are usually careful not to suggest that the one was the reason for, or cause of, the other. This caution exemplifies a subtlety in recognizing the complexities of the relationship between intention and action from which anthropologists might well to learn.¹⁸

So Balinese may be disinclined to explain the causes, or reasons, behind specific actions – as against describing the conditions under which they occurred (which is not the same thing). More generally they tend to regard normal activities as outside the range of explanation. It is rather like asking us what our intention is in breathing or eating. One is responsible for one's normal acts because one did them, but not because one intended them. Extraordinary acts definitely require accounting for but, as we saw, these involve the further distancing of intentionality from the perpetrator.

We come to the crunch. Balinese and popular Western views of the relationship of agent and action differ in crucial ways. Presupposition the agent to be master of his or her actions by virtue of a knowing, reasoning mind is an epistemological assertion which itself is a political act. It makes the agent answerable, and open to inspection and control, in a way Balinese refuse to accept. The argument assumes a naïve sense of agency, which takes no account for the fact that humans, and indeed groups, who engage in action, may do so as agents, instruments, subjects or objects ('patients' in Collingwood's (1942) terms of being the recipients of the orders or actions of others).

¹⁸ The problematic relationship of action and intention is a staple in Anglo-Saxon analytical and continental philosophy. However, considering how the discipline consists in working between societies with different ontologies and epistemologies, anthropologists are remarkable for their failure seriously to engage with what is at issue. It is not just post-structuralists that anthropologists seem to regard as intellectual vampires, ready to suck out their treasured commonsense (on the relationship between good sense and commonsense, see Gramsci 1971: 323-33, 419-25).

A soldier in a firing squad is an instrument, not an agent, insofar as he is liable to be shot for refusing the order to shoot. The distinctions between agency, instrumentality and patiency are analytic not substantive. Attribution of agency, as the attribution of violence, itself involves a potent, but self-concealing, form of agency, namely the power to articulate, to represent something as something.¹⁹

In other words, cultural presuppositions about intentionality are central to any analysis of action. Theories of attributable intentionality are often an excuse for (what my colleague Ron Inden has appositely described as ‘the thought police’, whether) psychiatrists, teachers, family members, or the law to intervene. So it becomes questionable whether one can really ascribe responsibility to the agent *tout court* any more than, say, most witches are aware of flying out at night to kill others. Intentionality is, I submit, the equivalent of others’ witch beliefs and involves as much violence to those under scrutiny. Theories of mind, or human nature, are not neutral; they are the power aspects of knowledge.

Finally let me clear up any remaining puzzles. What can be said about the punishments of hell that are depicted on the walls of the Krta Gosa, the Brahmanical criminal court? The scenes are taken in part from the story of Bima Swarga, where the Pandawa hero Bima descends to hell to find and rescue his father (Hinzler 1981: 198-224). Scenes show people in various torments: having burning brands shoved up the anus for farting, being put upside down in a mortar and having one’s backside pummeled by large vicious demons, forced to suckle a hairy caterpillar for being barren, but nothing for treason, murder (except butchery of animals), or other forms of violence.²⁰ First, are these part of Brahmanical representations of their power to control, explicate and (as they were the judges) emulate in a small way the majesty of divine violence? To what extent are such articulations part of a high caste *élite*’s attempts, not so much to inquire into the mind, as to gain command over persons as a whole? Balinese whom I asked took the view that the crimes depicted were so common and everyday that there would be no room left in hell! In any event, the paintings in the criminal court stand as a beautiful example of the kinds of violence over which the Balinese aristocracy claimed mastery, if not always responsibility.

Conclusion

Asking ‘what is violence?’ is essentialist and misguided. It removes actions from the contexts both of their implementation and their representation in social life. It is not what violence really is, but how violence is articulated and who gets to do so and as what, which are of interest. Balinese rulers seem to have set out to portray themselves as masters of violence as an aspect of their claims to transcendental power. If we

¹⁹ That the mass media are in the business of cheerfully attributing agency with gay abandon should be enough to arouse suspicions that things are not quite what they seem. Consider what is involved in the distinctive American metaphysics by which the ordinary man can become a hero in Hollywood films and, by synecdoche, dwarf the power of armies and corporations. This attribution of agency reaches its nadir when CEOs of multinationals are invested with exclusive agency for the corporations’ success or failure.

²⁰ An obvious criticism can be made that the reasons for the omission of some offences is contingent on what happened to get remembered in the text, for what there was room on the wall of the Krta Gosa and so on. Even if this be so, we still need to account for the popularity of these representations and the ability of the Balinese to recite the punishable offences.

interpret Balinese ideas in terms of the Western commonsense notions of action popular in anthropology however, the result is paradox, confusion and hegemony. These models of action take for granted the particular cultural vision of the knowing subject guided by mind, which is threatened by violence as the epitome of unreason. They presuppose an ideal image of domination (of reason over passion; ego or superego over id; mind over body). Externally this permits the exercise of power over persons by endorsing inquiry into postulated inner states, legitimizing judgement for the failure of proper control and underwriting punishment.

By contrast Balinese have a different account of subjecthood as inextricably part of an endlessly transforming tripartite process. It is not that they draw a veil over intentionality and leave the 'inner' person wrapped in silence.²¹ It is that anthropologists are so deeply caught up in their own cultural categories that they are still struggling to formulate coherent questions about how to approach Balinese practices surrounding the human subject.²² Any study of violence is grossly lacking if it limits itself to the positive representations of violence and ignores the myriad ways in which knowledge, discussion and action are inhibited or wreathed in the silence of unthinkability. Part of the lure is that the consequences of physical violence are often as dramatic, moving, recordable, photogenic and as seemingly universalizable as their sources and cultural inflection are seemingly opaque. This easy route to false comparison has serious implications. Anthropologists, while appearing to represent 'the native point of view', make themselves complicit in reiterating cultural hegemony.²³ How often do we recognize that this silencing of our subjects of study is violence?

Afterword

This piece was originally written in 1984 for a symposium on *Violence as a social institution* at the University of St. Andrews, subsequently published as *The anthropology of violence* (Riches 1986). The positivist tone and relatively uncritical focus on physical violence of the proposed collection left me uncomfortable so, with others, I withdrew my paper from publication.

To bring the paper up to date would have required writing an entirely new article. So it seemed best to let the original stand as a sort of historical curiosity. If it has any contemporary relevance, that is probably less foresight on my part than the glacial pace of change in anthropological thinking.

²¹ Indeed, they eschew the spatial metaphor of interiority applied to human subjects, who are not separate from the world in the way that modern individuals are held to be. For an elegant analysis of how the Euro-American subject became unified and spatialized, see Taylor 1985.

²² For this reason I find difficulties with analyses such as those of Geertz (1973) and Howe (1984) where Balinese terms and institutions are interpreted using current anthropological criteria without considering how Balinese engage with, understand, use, question and criticize their own practices. By contrast, Duff-Cooper's use of Wittgenstein's 'forms of life' (e.g. 1985) has the merit of focusing on Balinese usage.

²³ Many anthropologists may protest that their whole lives are devoted to explicating the native point of view. This confuses the use of local terms and collective representations as articulated by anthropologists with the articulations and counter-articulations – in short the discourse full of contradictions and incoherencies – in which people engage. Appreciation of the latter involves a study of the cultural styles of argument, persuasion and evasion through which people assert, deny and question their own 'culture' and the circumstances under which they do so. Explicating this discourse into the acceptable language of academia is a far more demanding act of cultural translation than is often recognized.

Little had been written by the early 1980s on violence in Indonesia. In the aftermath of 1965, that Indonesians under the New Order régime should keep quiet is understandable. That supposedly independent scholars avoided a topic so manifestly central to Indonesian history and contemporary society is harder to justify.

Since Suharto's resignation, a spate of publications has retrospectively reinterpreted Indonesian history and societies as marked by, or formed through, physical violence (Colombijn & Lindblad 2002; Hüsken & de Jonge 2002; Sidel 2007; Siegel 1998). Less has been said though about other kinds of what we, and many Indonesians, might consider violence. For Bali, Henk Schulte-Nordholt has illuminated the long history of gangsters as political enforcers (2007). Although it remains in the interests of the tourist industry, as well as successive provincial and national governments, to perpetuate the myth of Bali as inherently harmonious, this has been irrevocably undermined by Geoffrey Robinson's scholarly analysis (1995). How do these works affect what I wrote? On my reading, they tend to confirm my impression that physical violence has been a 'normal' part of Balinese society from way back; while Robinson indicates the political motivation behind the continuing romanticizing of Balinese society (1995: 275-312).

The pertinence of these recent accounts permits the uncritical reader to continue regarding violence as just political and physical. We need to turn to literature for a subtler treatment. In her analysis of how women were represented in Javanese and Balinese *kakawin*, Creese notes that forcible abduction was the norm (2004: 102-10). And poetic accounts of consummation are what Europeans would call rape (2004: 172-77). In his study of Malat (2005), Vickers highlights how violence of different kinds is celebrated and naturalized, as in the sexual treatment of women. We are offered a world where the lower classes exist largely as types or caricatures, and are not represented as differentiated human beings. If refusal to recognize the humanity of others does not constitute a kind of violence, what does? Lest we assume all this is safely in the past, just look at how the working classes and poor are represented in contemporary television in democratic Indonesia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, B.R.O'G. 1972. The idea of power in Javanese culture. In *Culture and politics in Indonesia*. eds. C. Holt, B.R.O'G. Anderson & J. Siegel, London: Cornell Univ. Press.
- Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957. *Intention*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bagus, G.N. 1996. The play 'Woman's fidelity': literature and caste conflict in Bali. trans. H. Geertz. in *Being modern in Bali: image and change*. ed. A. Vickers, Yale Southeast Asia Series Monograph 43, New Haven: Yale Univ., 92-114.
- Barthes, R. 1973. Myth today. In *Mythologies*. trans. A. Lavers, London: Paladin.
- Boon, J.A. 1977. *The anthropological romance of Bali*. Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Collingwood, R.G. 1942. *The new Leviathan or man, society, civilization and barbarism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Colombijn, F. & Lindblad, J.T. eds. 2002. *Roots of violence in Indonesia: contemporary violence in historical perspective*. Leiden: KITLV.
- Creese, H. 2004. *Women of the kakawin world: marriage and sexuality in the Indic courts of Java and Bali*. London: M.E. Sharpe.
- Duff-Cooper, A. 1985. An account of the Balinese 'person' from Western Lombok. *Bijdragen tot Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 141, 1: 67-102.
- Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and punish*. Harmondsworth: Allen Lane.
- 1981. 'The order of discourse.' in *Untying the text*. ed. R. Young, London: Routledge Kegan Paul.
- Foucault, M. 1984. *The history of sexuality I*. trans. R. Hurley, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Geertz, C. 1973. Person, time, and conduct in Bali. In *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- 1980. *Negara: the theatre state in nineteenth century Bali*. Princeton: Univ. Press.
- Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. eds. & trans. Q. Hoare & G. Nowell Smith, London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Hinzler, H. 1981. *Bima Swarga in Balinese wayang*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Hobart, M. 1986. Thinker, thespian, soldier, slave? assumptions about human nature in the study of Balinese society. In *Context, meaning, and power in Southeast Asia*. eds. M. Hobart & R.H. Taylor, Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 131-56; original version accessible online at www.criticalia.org.
- 2000. Introduction. *After culture. anthropology as radical metaphysical critique*. Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana Press; accessible online at <http://www.criticalia.org/Books.htm>.

- Hüsken, F. & de Jonge, H. eds. 2002. *Violence and vengeance: discontent and conflict in New Order Indonesia*. Nijmegen: NICCOS.
- Keegan, J. 1976. *The face of battle*. Harmondsworth: Allen Lane.
- Koentjaraningrat, R.M. 1980. Javanese terms for god and supernatural beings and the idea of power. In *Man, meaning and history: essays in honour of H. G. Schulte Nordholt*. eds. R. Schefold, J. W. School and J. Tennekes, Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 89, The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Mahaudiana. 1968. *Manggis Gianyar*. Gianyar, Bali: A.A. Gedé Thamrin.
- Quine, W.V.O. 1960. *Word and object*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press.
- Riches, D. ed. 1986. *The anthropology of violence*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Robinson, G. 1995. *The dark side of paradise: political violence in Bali*. London: Cornell Univ. Press.
- Schulte-Nordholt, H. 2007. *Bali: an open fortress 1995-2005*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Sidel, J.T. 2007. *Riots, pogroms, jihad: religious violence in Indonesia*. Singapore: NUS Press.
- Siegel, J.T. 1998. *A new criminal type in Jakarta: counter-revolution today*. London: Duke Univ. Press.
- Taylor, C. 1985. The person. In *The category of the person: anthropology, philosophy, history*. eds. M. Carrithers, S. Collins & S. Lukes, Cambridge: Univ. Press.
- Teeuw, A. et al. 1969. *Siwaratrikalpa of Mpu Tanakun*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- White, A.R. 1968. 'Introduction' to *The philosophy of action*. Oxford: Univ. Press.
- Vickers, A. 1986. *The desiring prince; a study of the Kidung Malat as text*. Ph.D. Univ. of Sydney.
- 1989. *Bali: a paradise created*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin.
- 2005. *Journeys of desire: a study of the Balinese text Malat*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 217, Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Wilde, O. 2006 [1891]. The critic as artist – with some remarks upon the importance of discussing everything. *Intentions*. Charleston, SC.: Bibliobazaar.
- Worsley, P.J. 1972. *Babad Bulèlèng: a Balinese dynastic genealogy*. The Hague: Nijhoff.