

# **Round up the Usual Suspects**

**some radical implications of Indonesian and Euro-American  
media coverage of 'terrorist' attacks**

**In**

## **Media and Political Violence**

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The rule is: 10,000 deaths on another continent equal 1,000 deaths in another country equal 100 deaths in an outpost equal ten deaths in the centre of the capital equal one celebrity'(van Ginneken 1998: 23-24).

How, in a multi-centred media world, do we set about a critical understanding of coverage of violence? Is violence something that all right-thinking people anywhere instantly recognize and express concern over? Are those who fail to do so *ipso facto* barbarous, fanatic or depraved? When, and how, precisely does violence become 'political'? And what representations of violence come to be published or broadcast? After all, several times more people are murdered annually in the USA than were killed in 9/11.<sup>1</sup> And, elsewhere, tens of millions die every year from preventable causes, inexpensive to remedy, like dirty drinking water and lack of simple medicines. How is it that economic violence on such a scale is not considered political? So, is what counts as political violence simply a matter of it being spectacular, perpetrated by someone we do not like and happening to people like us? In what follows, I shall consider critically popular and professional assumptions about how violence is represented as political, by considering some of the media coverage of two spectacular acts of political violence: the attacks on the twin trade towers in New York and the bomb blasts in Bali thirteen months later. Such an inquiry suggests that the mythology that media scholars identify at work in the media industry holds at least as true of their own analyses.

Some western media professionals and media studies' specialists might be surprised that I argue we now live in a multi-centred media world. After all, does the whole world not depend on a handful of European and American satellite feeds, and accept the unquestioned superiority of western standards of news reporting, as exemplified for instance by the BBC? Considered from, say, India, China or Indonesia, with thriving media industries such comfortable assumptions look less hegemonic than parochial and quaintly dated. Leaving aside the emergence of news agencies in many countries, such an account assumes a facile essentialism and determinism – for example that video footage somehow predetermines not only how it will be presented by different channels and commented on, but how it will be appreciated by viewers. Coverage varies greatly. The world, as represented in Indonesian media for example, places Asia as central, with the Middle East important for its Islamic links. The status of America has become complicated. And these days, to the extent that Europe exists, like Latin America it is probably more for football than anything else.

Such diversity may be threatening to European and American media professionals and scholars not just because the loss of their taken-for-granted supremacy, but because it raises questions about what constitute the criteria for balanced and appropriate reporting.<sup>2</sup> If we let go of objectivity in reporting, the argument goes, then we have no standards by which to refute partisanship, bias, propaganda and downright lies. The spectre is relativism, often now with the added soubriquet of 'postmodernist'. As with other charges of relativism, the argument rests upon a false dichotomy. Either you accept absolute

<sup>1</sup> For 2002, 16,110 people were murdered in the USA according to *Murder in the UK* (<http://www.murderuk.com/misc/stats.htm>). Of course the figure neatly obscures the problems of how you determine murder from all the other possibilities of sudden unexpected death.

<sup>2</sup> I suspect this, in part, is behind the outrage expressed by many British and American print and television journalists at Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Iraq war of 2003. However many Al-Jazeera staff were trained at the BBC and are sensitive to the ethics of coverage.

standards of objectivity (as enunciated by a Euro-American élite) or there is total dystopia when callow deceit claims the same status as shining truth. If only matters were so simple. Unfortunately, what counts as objective, as what is authentic and what appropriate to talk about, varies historically and cross-culturally. As Fiske nicely put it

Objectivity is the ‘unauthored’ voice of the bourgeoisie (1987: 289).

As new bourgeoisies, different kinds of class, religious and status groups around the world seek representation, it becomes hard to defend absolutist claims to an objectivity that seems suspiciously white Anglo-Saxon, be it the BBC, CNN or even Fox News.

The alternative to imposing dubious and unacceptable Eurocentric standards is to rethink critically how we are to evaluate what is going on in a world of heterogeneous, labile audiences and broadcasters subject to diverse conflicting economic, political and professional pressures and agendas. This is not loony relativism. It is pragmatism, in the strict sense of a philosophical critique of practice, including the practices of those claiming to be knowing subjects. It starts with the recognition that criteria for discussing good practice and ideas like objectivity change with industrial practices and involve an unending argument between media practitioners, commentators and critical scholars that now embraces people right across the world. There is no unproblematic *terra firma* on which to stand. A critical understanding of media in the twenty-first century requires us to be firmly in between. In what follows, we shall see why adopting such a position is appropriate.

### **Indonesian coverage of the Trade Towers attack**

The idiosyncrasies of different countries’ broadcasting, not least news coverage, can create an uncomfortable, but revelatory, ‘media shock’, not unlike the culture shock that anthropologists experience going to and from fieldwork. Returning each year from working on Indonesian television, switching on British television is mostly a rather unpleasant experience of insularity and parochialism. I find myself wondering, for instance, how could the BBC’s supposedly ‘objective’ news coverage seem even more selective, narrow and biased than I remembered? How could anyone take it seriously? While there were moments when Indonesian and British news coverage appeared to refer to roughly the same world from different angles, at others they appeared to occupy worlds that barely overlapped. If this is indeed so, such moments of radical difference raise serious problems of cultural translation.

As this is a first foray, my evidence is not systematically accrued, but is merely suggestive. It includes part coverage of two events. The first is some Indonesian television and print coverage of the attacks on the twin trade towers on 11<sup>th</sup>. September 2001, together with Indonesian news producers’ commentary on that coverage. The second is some British television and print coverage of the bombs in Bali of 12<sup>th</sup>. October 2002 and a range of Indonesian print, television and electronic sources. Such lop-sided sources allow me at least to raise some questions about representing political violence.

Television in Indonesia is interesting, not least because of its key role in Suharto’s New Order régime. The apparently extravagant Third World gesture – the launching of the first Palapa satellite in 1976 and placing a television set in every village in the

archipelago<sup>3</sup> – was a brilliant stroke. It created a vast audience for re-imagining Indonesians no longer as Sukarno’s revolutionary masses, but as the audience as nation, as citizens to be developed, so neatly defining the masses as in need of guidance and so childlike (Kitley 2000: 81-91). Television became so central to the New Order’s self-articulation as the agent of development that it is hard to imagine the régime’s existence without it. So, after decades of tight control over the mass media, the shift to remarkably liberal policies after Suharto’s resignation marked a significant change. Thousands of permits were granted for newspapers, magazines and radio stations. There are now some twelve terrestrial television channels accessible in the most densely-populated regions of Java, Bali and the major cities elsewhere, and over 200 satellite channels are easily accessible and affordable to the middle classes. And community radio and TV are proliferating exponentially. Media freedom has become at once a litmus test of, and a battlefield for, Indonesia’s political future.

There are several notable aspects of television coverage of 11<sup>th</sup>. September. Significantly for the country with the world’s largest Muslim population, reporting on all channels studiously avoided suggesting that Islam had anything to do with the attacks on the World Trade Centre. The perpetrators were described as Arab and the invited talking heads, as Middle-Eastern experts. This is the more interesting in that the capital, Jakarta, had been the target for bombs. *Laskar Jihad* and several other militias were generally thought to be at work in the Moluccas, Sulawesi and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The Trade Tower attacks were treated fairly matter-of-factly compared to European and American coverage. There were frequent comparisons to the US’s devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima; and extensive use of commentary from leading political figures around the world – many Asian – which framed the satellite feeds. Only three television stations actually broke schedules to cover the topic.

Why coverage should be relatively low-key is pertinent. Indonesia’s colonial and post-colonial heritage has left several potential social divisions that interested parties can call upon, notably religion, ethnicity, region, class, gender and age. The one much trumpeted among ‘ologists, foreign political commentators and sometimes Indonesians themselves is the polarization between Islamic and nationalist political agendas. The coherence of both tends to be exaggerated. The long history and sheer diversity of Islam in Indonesia makes generalization impossible. I leave it to someone else to determine when religion serves as an idiom for other ways of organizing or dividing people, or *vice versa*. So the dark intrigues promoted by experts in that oxymoron ‘Western Intelligence’ (as equally should Indonesian conspiracy theories) should be treated as ‘representations-as’. We need to inquire into their purposes. At the risk of generalizing, commentary on militant Islam in the press and television is taken as a serious issue but not a major threat, especially compared to concern at how the United States is involved behind the scenes in Indonesian politics, not least in view of its now-demonstrated role in orchestrating the massacres of ‘communists’ in the 1960s. Most secular liberal intellectuals I know are far more worried by certain elements of the armed forces than they are of Islamic terrorists.

<sup>3</sup> Originally these were black and white sets, which received state television (TVRI) and were powered in remoter places by rechargeable car batteries.

<sup>4</sup> I would like to express my thanks to my colleague, Richard Fox, who has specialized in coverage of violence in the media for his comments on the draft of this chapter. It was he who informed me at the time that *Laskar Jihad* had announced the temporary closure of its website on 12<sup>th</sup>. October, apparently a few hours before the bombs in Bali.

## The Media Indonesia Editorial

The themes of much coverage were summed up in an editorial, only hours after the attacks, in the daily newspaper, Media Indonesia, and broadcast on Metro TV, a station owned by the paper. The televised version was interesting because it revealed something of the complex relationship between image, text and soundtrack. The images were unexceptional—snippets from the limited footage available at that time by satellite feed—interestingly, to the soundtrack of *Schindler's List*.

### Media Indonesia Editorial 12 September 2002: America and Terrorists

The world is witnessing a great rivalry between two superpowers, the United States of America and terrorists. Last night the world saw the great power of the US collapse under the attack of those deemed to be terrorists.

The World Trade Center, one of the biggest business and office centres in the world, and a symbol of American economic power, easily collapsed, struck down by aeroplanes. At almost the same moment the Pentagon, the symbol of American military might, shattered under the impact of another plane. In the meantime, a string of explosions hit the Congress Building and State Department. Almost all the symbols of American strength were destroyed because of the event. People were in fear; government offices closed, business centres shut down. The US president George Bush and his staff were evacuated from the White House. The world condemned. Last night the US was like Japan surrendering to the Allies in World War II, struck down by the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

But we do not want to establish who won and lost in this tragedy in New York and Washington. What we wish to show is that this tragedy is the climax of a never-ending arrogant rivalry. America and these terrorists are long time enemies that never see eye to eye. The United States, which claims to be the champion of democracy, was tempted to use force when dealing with those it considers terrorists. When someone, or a group of people, is accused of being terrorists by the United States, *that* equals a death sentence. Such verdicts unfortunately breed fanaticism, arrogance and a never-ending search for revenge on the part of those called 'terrorists'. They – the United States and the terrorists – are fighting because of they suffer from a kind of 'split personality'. Both use the language of force, but in the name of peace and order.

We are deeply saddened for the hundreds, even thousands, buried under the rubble of the World Trade Center. What is certain is that our sorrow will become greater as, after not too long, as usual the US will retaliate in its own way. Without question, yet again innocent people will be the victims. Terrorism and Might both have a deadly arrogance. The US may claim to be the mightiest in all matters to do with the military and technology. Yet all that might succumbed at the hands of utterly single-minded people.

Therefore, for the sake of civilization, force in the name of – and for – anything cannot be justified. The world cannot be given another spectacle of death by arrogant and unthinking people.

<sup>5</sup> The Indonesian is *nékat*. It suggests determination to do something quite regardless of the costs. 'Unthinking' is one translation.

There were several interesting points in the editorial, reiterated in interviews with commentators. Not least was the juxtaposition of the United States with terrorist networks as matched super-powers. The editorial treated the attack on the States as double. Its two greatest symbols of power – military and economic – were destroyed (it was incorrect though about the attacks on the State Department and Congress.). More definitively though, last night the world *saw* the great power of the US collapse. Power depends on being seen to be effective and invincible. The implicit presupposition though was that the media wield great power in being able to show to the world how the mighty are fallen. And, without the protection of force, the invincible are shown to be frightened – with the President scurrying for safety. As is common with editorials, the authorial position is exnominated. The editorial speaks with general authority, bound neither by country, class, religion nor any other specific interest.

The editorial moved to argue the causes of such destruction: arrogance, *arogansi* (using the English-derived term four times to make the point unambiguous). The consequence was equally unambiguously stated: ‘Innocent people will be the victims yet again’. But how did the USA, the world’s last super-power, and a terrorist network come to be comparable? Unlike most Euro-American sources I have seen, which were at pains to hierarchize the attackers as members of small groups that were incomparable to the majesty and legitimacy of a super-power, the editorial compares the two forces. It is not just the scale of the damage, the nature of the targets and mode of attack, or the degree of fear and response it generated in America, but the ‘rivalry’, which stresses the inappropriateness of the mutual motives behind the enmity. The editorial rested upon an interesting presupposition. It is not technology, scale, global spread or even sheer damn-the-consequences determination that was responsible. The editorial could hardly state it more clearly: ‘Terrorism and might both have a deadly arrogance’, each feeding off the other.

The implicit countervailing theme, repeated in other commentaries and, significantly, in the *vox pops*, was that the attacks were ‘*tidak manusiawi*’. They were inhuman: beyond recognition as human. Arrogance and humanity are the antithetical terms that underpin the editorial’s analysis. By juxtaposition however, the humanity of the United States in its policy of aggressive domination was called into question. The editorial ended by simply contrasting force and the inflicting of death with civilization, so neatly pre-empting arrogant claims to use violence in the name of civilization.

A striking feature of much Indonesian television and print coverage of 11<sup>th</sup> September, as of other world news is how they balance their own opinions with a recognition of hegemonic Euro-American narratives. (This is not to say, of course, that Indonesian media do not introduce their own forms of closure.) Writing about the role of gender in television reception, Mary Ellen Brown has argued that women have to learn a ‘double-voiced discourse’ (1987), what Bakhtin termed ‘heteroglossia’.<sup>6</sup> That is they have to be familiar with the largely male-oriented articulations of much television exemplified by news but also relate what they watch to their own lives. Showalter designated this a feminine discourse, which partly escapes control and so constitutes a ‘wild zone’ (1985). Without

<sup>6</sup> I prefer the Bakhtinian term with its recognition of the coexistence of distinct styles. Polyvocality suggests the existence of originary, authentic voices, with its ‘metaphysics of presence’ (cf. Morson & Emerson 1990: 139-145).

needing to essentialize a single discourse, the argument bears directly on the editorial above. Indonesians, here both viewers and producers, have to work with heteroglossia. They learn to appreciate the dominant discourse, here primarily American, beamed at them via satellite feeds into television stations, newspapers and middle-class homes, while relating both what is going on and its discursive closure to their lives. They must buy 'white news' not only of white goings-on, but also of their neighbours', as part of the politics of cultural translation (cf. Asad 1986). The image of the 'wild zone' is apposite. The 'surplus of meaning' (to use Laclau's phrase, 1990) that followed liberalization of censorship has led Indonesian conservatives to try to reintroduce censorship.<sup>7</sup>

### **Making the world safe for drunken tourists**

A full analysis of news coverage of the bombs in Bali would require a monograph. I wish here just to consider briefly how British television news channels attributed responsibility for the attacks. Such a review raises issues of nomination and exnomination, the agentive nature of mythologizing and lastly silencing.

The first day of news coverage is informative, because within hours a template, or chronotope, had been established that was largely common to all channels. I find Bakhtin's notion of chronotope (1981) very useful in understanding the conventions which determine how news events are portrayed. Particular assumptions about space, time, narrative, personhood, agency and causation are distinctive of different genres; and are combined in ways that, through reiteration, give a sense of naturalness and self-evident truth to what are carefully constructed and inherently mediated accounts.

The first news I recorded was the BBC 24 hours' news channel, which broke the story a few hours after the events on its programme at 2 am on 13<sup>th</sup>. October 2002. After the briefest of announcements that bombs had gone off in Bali, the voiceover proclaimed: 'The Australian Foreign Minister believes it was a terrorist attack aimed at Westerners'. Almost immediately the voiceover continued to footage of fires raging, 'The US Embassy had recently issued warnings of possible attacks by Islamic militants linked to Al-Qaeda'. The news item then introduced two themes that became standard later. The hospitals (and later 'the Indonesian authorities') were overwhelmed, could not cope and needed professional help from the Australians, British and Americans – precisely the countries whose casualties were foregrounded. People from the rest of Europe and the world, let alone Indonesians, were effectively made to vanish.

The studio anchor then turned to Richard Galpin, the BBC's correspondent in Jakarta to ask who did it:

Anchor: If it was in fact a coordinated terrorist attack, do we know who organized it?

Galpin: No. Not at all. Obviously it's far too early, but we've been speaking to the national police chief who, like us, is on his way to Bali, and he's saying that – he's described it as – an act of terror, but when asked who he thought was responsible, he said so far they don't know. They are still investigating. And of course no one has admitted responsibility.

<sup>7</sup> Lack of space prevents me including detailed discussions my colleague Patsy Widakuswara had with senior news journalists from three television channels about their coverage of events.

This introduced two more themes. British television staff were determined immediately to identify the perpetrators, while the Indonesians kept stressing the need for thorough investigation and reliable evidence before making judgements, an antagonism that persists in new form. Finally, the prescience of the big Western powers (they had known attacks were coming) had been thwarted by foreigners' – here Indonesians' – incompetence, carelessness or active connivance with the enemy.

By the time of the BBC's midday Sunday news and ITV's news at 1 pm, when it was possible to muster more accurate information and expert opinion how much had changed? In fact, not only had little changed, but if anything the cautious questions and qualified replies were congealing into foregone certainties. Peter Sissons, as anchorman, asked their World Affairs Correspondent (James Robbins) what was going on. To yet more shots of fires, Robbins began with a toll of the destruction and carnage, aided by eyewitness accounts (footage that was repeated on several channels), then

Robbins: As the island of Bali and the whole of Indonesia tried to cope with the country's worst terrorist attack, suspicion falls immediately on radical Islamic groups, possibly working with Al-Qaeda members. Washington says it has compelling evidence they've linked up to plan attacks, although at this stage nothing about this massacre is certain... Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world and the country has widely been regarded as the weak link in South East Asia's war on terrorism.

The singular mode of argument was clearer still in an opening statement by ITV's anchorman, Mark Austin.

Austin: It is not clear who was responsible, but groups linked to Al-Qaeda are being blamed.

A sentence that starts as ostensibly open-minded and impartial is promptly contradicted by a subsequent clause, which exnominates the authority on which an unsubstantiated claim relies: 'suspicion falls', classically by using the passive: 'are being blamed'. An argument that promptly blossomed as incontrovertible was built up of circumstantial evidence and *ad hoc* or unverified comments.

Set notionally within a discourse of reason and critical investigation, the news coverage ran the gamut of rhetoric devices. News people say among themselves that it is vital to capture and convey a complex situation in a neat image or phrase. The trope was already waiting. The TV anchor handed over to a titleless correspondent (Rob Smith), who was heard against yet more background of fire.

Smith: For a time this paradise island was hell on earth. And many of the pictures are simply too horrific to show you.

Over the next days, this simple polarity provided the framework for virtually every story. The antithesis of political violence is not just peaceful, but apolitical, epitomized in innocent, idyllic, beautiful Bali and its innocent, beautiful, apolitical and anonymized people, whose only desire is to make tourists happy.

The stern job of serious news reporting however is to investigate what lies behind. So Smith and then the London anchor repeat the same sleight of argument.



Smith: It is still too early to say who planted the bombs, but the sheer scale and coordination involved would suggest a well-organized terrorist group. The fact that westerners were so deliberately targeted has opened up the possibility that Al-Qaeda has struck again.

Back in the studio, Mark Austin continued.

Austin: With the finger of blame pointing at extremist groups linked to Al-Qaeda, our international editor, Bill Neely, assesses the evidence and looks at what it could mean for the war on terrorism.

The background video switched to what looked like a (pretty peaceful) demonstration by women wearing scarves. What was visible on the placards they were carrying seemed to have as much to do with support of human rights as anything else.<sup>8</sup>

Neely: No one is claiming responsibility, but Australia's support for the war against Al-Qaeda and the presence of many radical Islamic groups in Indonesia has fingers pointing towards Osama bin Laden and his supporters... Many in Indonesia hate the West and want to see the world's most populous Muslim country become a fundamentalist Islamic state. It's the weakest link in the fight against bin Laden. Many experts have no doubt that Al-Qaeda is behind this bombing.

While the media professionals like to emphasize the difference in styles between their coverage, their narratives and reasoning reiterate a single paradigm, as Channel 4 news at 19.00 demonstrated. After a brief résumé, the unnamed anchorman started promisingly, only to be contradicted by the reporter in the field, who reverted to type.

Anchor: The immediate assumption was that Al-Qaeda had carried out the bombings, but should we be so swift to jump to that conclusion? Here's Peter Morgan.

Morgan: It bears all the hallmarks of Al-Qaeda and its allies. The latest in a series of attacks linked to the terror network. Al-Qaeda is thought to have secret cells in over sixty countries. And Indonesia with 220 million people spread over 300 islands is a perfect hiding place. Prime suspects for last night's terror attacks are the radical Islamic groups who want to turn Indonesia's secular republic into an Islamic state.

He then went on to list (inaccurately) the prime suspects ending with Jemaah Islamiyah, on which, conveniently, they had footage as a Channel 4 reporter some time before had interviewed Abu Bakar Ba'asir, whom many western news sources were claiming to be its leader, despite his denials.<sup>9</sup> A friend of mine in the seventies used to argue that the reason

<sup>8</sup> My colleague, Richard Fox, found a beautiful photograph in an article entitled 'Radical Islam gains a seductive new voice', in *The New York Times*, 26 October 2003, section 4, page 1, showing several placard-bearing Indonesians. The caption presumably derives from one placard reads in English 'Ugly and bad American. Go to hell!' However the others, all in Indonesian, explicitly eschew terrorism and any claims that Islam justifies it. Foreign languages presumably do not merit translation. The viability of much foreign news depends on not understanding the language.

<sup>9</sup> An analysis of the role of 'experts' would be fascinating. Several were briefly paraded. Most solemnly opined that this was indubitably the work of Al-Qaeda or associates. As many, like Morgan, also stressed the secrecy of these groups, how they could be so certain was quietly ignored. There were moments when a quite different scenario threatened to unfold. On the Channel 4 programme, as when Dr Kirsten Schulze from the LSE raised strong grounds for questioning the role of Al-Qaeda and the pre-emptive judgement against Islamist militants. Citing the British Ambassador to Indonesia, she pointed out that extremist groups

the food in all Indian restaurants in London looked and tasted the same was that it all came from one vast kitchen somewhere under the centre of the city. One could perhaps be forgiven for thinking that all British news is concocted of canned ingredients from one deeply buried soup kitchen. For

These stories are pre-written, they ‘write’ the journalists, and their meanings are already in circulation (Fiske 1987: 296)

### **(P)re-told tales**

The general starting point for coverage is that the ‘Third World’ is unstable

Third World countries are, for example, conventionally represented in western news as places of famines and natural disaster, of social revolution, and of political corruption. These events are not seen as disrupting *their* social norms, but as confirming ours, confirming our dominant sense that western democracies provide the basics of life for everyone, are stable, and fairly and honestly governed. When deviations from these norms occur in our own countries they are represented as precisely that, deviations from the norm: in Third World countries, however, such occurrences are represented as *their* norms which differ markedly from ours. For the western news media, the Third World is a place of natural and political disasters and not much else (Fiske 1987: 284-5).

The interesting question is in what circumstances, ‘Third World’ countries find themselves reiterating such stereotypes in their own news.

The first problem that arose in news coverage was where – or to whom – did this tourist island with luxury hotels belong? There was inimitable footage of Australian tourists furious about ‘how could they do this to our Bali?’ The shock was when Bali ceased for a moment to be the object of Western (and Asian) projections but became part of Indonesia and so the ‘Third World’, with its stereotypical volatility, instability, incompetence and bureaucracy. And when such countries fail to conform – as when, at the time of writing, Indonesians conduct peaceful, largely fair, democratic elections that show support for radical Islam to be marginal – the solution is to declare them non-events, not needing coverage. Silence is the default mode of news coverage.

Many other features of the reporting are boilerplate. We are invited to identify with relatives of the missing and with confused and frightened eyewitnesses, who are not too confused to forget to carry a handycam (or, like a fireman from Watford, make sure to be videoed on the way to help) and sell the footage. The chronotope demands heroes to domesticate the foreignness of foreign places. One Australian GP seems just to have gone along to the hospital to help if he could, only to be transmogrified in one news item into a saviour, by bringing white man’s rationality and discipline to the incompetent natives.

Others are familiar themes but in a new form. A great deal of coverage was given to rugby clubs out on binges, which had lost members – a neatly over-determined image. At

were small and deeply resented by the overwhelming majority of Indonesians, who were very moderate and tolerant. However the stereotype of Indonesians as extremist had captured the imagination of the media. That threatened to puncture the whole balloon and the interview was terminated; just as one with the Indonesian Chargé d’affaires in London was cut off in mid-sentence when he questioned the wisdom of judging prior to evidence.

once it underlined how wild out there really is, contrasted ‘fair’ with unfair conflict, so sport with politics, as if the latter were wrong – the wrong way to deal with difference or at least to be kept away from decent folk, like the many other bombings of civilian targets in Indonesia. Sport aestheticizes and so depoliticizes.

Similarly ‘clawback’ (how news media domesticate disruptive events) works neatly through the hierarchical imposition of ‘meaning’ by studio anchors over field reporters and experts, without losing authenticity. The full passage from Fiske, cited above, reads:

This authenticity guarantees the ‘truth’ of the interpretation that this mediating involves and thus allows, paradoxically, that which has been interpreted to present itself as objective. Objectivity is the ‘unauthored’ voice of the bourgeoisie (Fiske 1987: 289)

Within 12 hours however, television and print journalists had found the trope that would condense the whole experience into two words: *Paradise Lost*. At a stroke, Islam, the transcendental agent of the outrage, had destroyed a Hindu-Buddhist heaven (on which see Adrian Vickers 1989), so confirming the unity of all other religions in face of the aggressor. Quite why a Christian, indeed Miltonian, image should be imposed on Balinese was never asked. Nor did anyone seem to notice that this brilliant encapsulation of the catastrophe reiterated a history of pre-interpretation of Bali that dates back over 400 years to the fantasies of a prelapsarian world fanned into life by Cornelis de Houtman’s ‘discovery’ of the island in 1597. On the evidence from themes repeatedly endlessly in subsequent days, some rather scary lineaments of the chronotope of political violence as imagined in British television news start to emerge.<sup>10</sup>

Terrorism has revealed the underlying clash of civilizations, exemplified in political violence as a savagely destructive act against English-speaking people, carried out deliberately by fanatics, hell-bent on creating an anti-society or a dystopia (epitomized in the endless scenes of flames). It is political, in the sense of abnormal and against the natural order of things, which is people – or, rather, people rich enough to fly to Bali – being entitled to do whatever their wealth inclines them to. Such violence is made possible either because of a failure of proper government, because the general population is too lax, lethargic and incompetent to do anything about it, or because they harbour vicious feelings towards these normal English-speaking people, who only came to have a good time, notably parading half-naked and getting drunk. As the Daily Telegraph put it: *Their only crime was to go on holiday* (cited in Fox n.d.: 18).

Like the news broadcasts I have discussed, my summary contains a distinct element of caricature, one sadly borne out by a close scrutiny of news coverage. My general point is less tongue-in-cheek. Representations of political violence paint not just a dystopia, but a distinctly Christian dystopia with all the incongruities and plain lack of taste that come with imposing a contrary Utopia on a Hindu society. Perhaps to the surprise of some of its practitioners, British news enshrines a distinctly Christian worldview (quite how does that square with the BBC World Service’s charter?). More seriously, even the brief extracts above make clear the extent to which news coverage – like some defences of the existence of Divinity – is teleological. In other words, the conclusion anticipates and determines the reasoning that will inevitably arrive at it. Opportunities and attempts to inquire into what

<sup>10</sup> While certain features seem on initial examination to be fairly common to other European and North American chronotopes, there are evidently also differences, which only a much more detailed analysis could address.

might be happening are casually or ruthlessly swept aside, not followed up. Such moments of inquiry are however necessary. Like inoculations, they inject a little of something dangerous, something that the industrial processes of news production are only too familiar at dealing with. What British news lacks in any objectivity deriving from attempts at impartial critical inquiry, it more than makes up in objectivity as predestined certainty. Coincidentally, such predestined certainty is precisely what the broadcasters decry about those they label fanatics.

Over subsequent days' coverage there was little attempt to question the egregious logic by which Al-Qaeda or their acolytes had been proven guilty, still less to pay attention to Indonesian sources, which were pointing to all sorts of complexities. One significant change did occur however. The images of a country full of fanatical Islamists gave way to what appeared to be clips from militants' training tapes accompanied by the increasingly standardized disavowal that most Indonesians had a reputation for moderation and tolerance. The conclusion correspondents and anchors usually drew was that, under the circumstances, the Indonesian authorities were responsible because of their incompetence and failure to do anything about the massive infiltration of their society by extremists, compounded by their blinkered (or downright collusive) refusal unconditionally to accept the verdict of the British reporters.

Why should we be surprised? After all

the idea of neutrality is certainly sympathetic, but it implies that one is really willing and able to put oneself in the shoes of all others. Very often, this is simply not feasible. Western media organizations active on a global scale will first of all cater to Western media audiences and their values. Rich clients such as the Japanese may be taken into account on occasion, but poorer clients from the Second and Third Worlds are obviously of marginal concern, particularly if their sensibilities clash with those of clients from the First World (van Ginneken 1998: 44).

The economics of news coverage encourages parachute and pack journalism (van Ginneken 1998: 135-37). If news is 'the conventionalization of the real', the vital work of reasserting the vision of social and political equilibrium of a particular class or interest groups (aka 'the bourgeoisie' in media studies) in the face of threats, then avoiding – not engaging with – cultural translation becomes an imperative. And newsrooms, that most functionally vital of culture industries, have perfected the art.

Does it matter? After all, even if some details were fuzzy, in the grand scheme of things did British television news not get it broadly right? Has Al-Qaeda not proven a major source of global violence? Following Goodman (1968), representations are acts: you always represent something *as* something else – to someone on an occasion for a purpose. You cannot represent something as complex as Islam in Indonesia as it is, no more than you can something as shrouded in uncertainty and secrecy as the organization of political violence. As a pragmatist philosopher, Goodman's point was that representations have consequences. In all sorts of ways, ratings-chasing hyperbole about Al-Qaeda may well prove a self-fulfilling prophecy. Insofar as such representations transform what they purport to describe or reiterate prejudice, they themselves are part of the field of political violence.

## Whodunit?

The determination of most non-Indonesian television and print coverage to pre-attribute responsibility stands in stark contrast to the concern in much of the Indonesian press. In part as a response to the international media's feeding frenzy, a key issue that emerged was the need to gather reliable evidence as to what had actually happened, who the perpetrators were and what lay behind the attacks.<sup>11</sup> Granted Indonesia's complex history of political violence and abuse of proper legal procedures, the questions were widely appreciated as forensic not foregone. For example, the Balinese police officer placed in charge of the investigation, General I Madé Mangku Pastika, stated at the start that there were three separate questions: who had carried out the attack, who had supplied and funded it, and who had authorized it? It took the full weight of the world's media to ignore the point.

So what is at issue in this determination to find out whodunit? If the concern were really with establishing responsibility forensically and juridically, then the media were going about it in the worst possible way. Apart from the more obvious motives, the issue may be partly grammatical.<sup>12</sup> There are simple problems of consistently treating a network as a coherent subject of predication, which encourages its transformation into something more graspable, such as a unitary political agent. Theoretically, networks are rather awkward customers. This makes them at once both ideal and poor as subjects of media coverage. Being by definition uncentred, amorphous and hard to pin down, they are perfect as objects of unfettered projection and association. In the absence of evidence, speculation becomes respectable. For the Bali bombings even chronomancy was pulled into play – it must be Al-Qaeda because it is so many days/weeks/months since X. By the same token, you cannot predicate thinking, deciding or acting of networks as you can a unitary subject. This does not stop reporters from doing so, of course.<sup>13</sup>

Another aspect to the identification of perpetrators is that naming and using the active mood about a chosen grammatical subject has the effect of making it appear as the agent that disrupts the natural order. The contrary process, which Barthes called exnomination, has the effect of masking agents.<sup>14</sup> In this instance exnomination did further work. For

<sup>11</sup> The picture was, of course, not uniform. For example, the broadsheet, *Republika*, associated with ICMI, the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals, included several articles that took the line that foreigners, notably the USA through the CIA, was involved. Others took quite different stances. Unfortunately I do not have sufficient Indonesian television from the time to draw a strict comparison. However British print news coverage, with a few exceptions, as it so often does reiterated television coverage. So the comparison is not entirely vacuous.

<sup>12</sup> This point is different from, but related to, the singular usage of English in news (e.g. Fowler 1991). The issue of language use is not trivial. As Keith Waterhouse remarked 'You cannot fight a war against an abstract noun.' The issue as Terry Jones noted, in *The Observer* 23<sup>rd</sup>. February 2003, is 'How do you know when you've won? When you've got it removed from the Oxford English Dictionary?' For the Pentagon, the ineffability offers even more scope than the Cold War, as effectively they get to decide.

<sup>13</sup> The chronotope of American, and increasingly European, media (here print, television and film partly coalesce) works by a process of identification – hence the necessity for heroes and villains. So networks, even groups, are unsuitable subjects and must be transformed into person-functions. Osama bin Laden is a narrative necessity.

<sup>14</sup> Fiske (1989: 296-301) uses a story on Australian Channel Nine News to make the point about how reporting striking power workers in the active mood and management in the passive mood nominates the former and makes them seem unreasonable and exnominates the latter, so naturalizing their position. Fiske draws on Barthes's analysis of the bourgeoisie as a class that avoids being named.

whatever reason – perhaps habit from New Order times or a fine sense of the political realities – the Indonesian mass media tended to be fairly circumspect in naming what, popularly, was mooted as a key suspect behind the violence, namely those elements in the Indonesian armed forces, thought to be loyal to the former President, Suharto.

I wish to raise just two issues. First, to what extent does this double exnomination ('The West' aka the bourgeoisie and parts of Indonesia's army) enable an identification of interests? Put another way, how happy would the Australians be if their government were involved in training and funding precisely the people who turned out to have been behind the killing of Australians in the Sari nightclub? Second, why should the agent many Indonesians suspect as behind the attacks in Bali be so widely overlooked even in the serious international and Indonesian press?

One of the few exceptions in the British press<sup>15</sup> was John Aglionby's article in *The Guardian* on 16th. October, in a piece which, as far as I know, was never followed up, under the headline:

**The secret role of the army in sowing the seeds of religious strife:  
Military aid was key element of groups' success**

It contains the interesting paragraph:

"If you scratch below the surface of any radical Islamic group in Indonesia you will find the hand of the military at work," said Sidney Jones, the head of the Jakarta office of the International Crisis Group. "And with many of them you don't really have to go beneath the surface".

One consequence of the news coverage of the Bali bombs was to strengthen the repeated calls for Indonesia to get tough on terrorists, with scant concern as to whom exactly these terrorists were and what they were up to. The implications could not be more serious to reform-minded Indonesians concerned, after 32 years of quasi-military rule, to bring about a modern democratic society governed by the rule of law. To them, there was a real danger that 'get tough on terrorism' would translate as 'strengthen the army and stop worrying about human rights, democratization or systemic corruption'. The media coverage of the bombings served to maintain an illusion of order and a threat of disorder that, conveniently, articulated with the political interests of the USA, but not of most Indonesians.

## Myth-making

I would suggest however that there are other reasons for the extraordinary speed with which closure occurred over responsibility for the bombings in Bali. In order to

As a political fact, the bourgeoisie has some difficulty in acknowledging itself: there are no 'bourgeois' parties in the Chamber. As an ideological fact, it completely disappears: the bourgeoisie has obliterated its name in passing from reality to representation, from economic man to mental man. It comes to an agreement with the facts, but does not compromise about values, it makes its status undergo a real *ex-nominating* operation: the bourgeoisie is defined as *the social class which does not want to be named* (1973: 138, italics in the original).

By a process of condensation is this exnominated class Christian, so creating problems for the rest of the world's middle class people?

<sup>15</sup> To gain a sense of how far the British television and print media had painted themselves into a corner, there is a good overview of the available range of critical investigative journalism in Indonesia and internationally, see <http://www.berubah.org/BaliBombing/Tragedy1.htm>.

understand these, it is useful to consider the television news coverage as myth. By this I am not suggesting that the news is myth *tout court*. Indeed myth in the popular sense is not myth. As anthropologists use the term, it is analytical, not substantive. It is used to distinguish as an object of critical examination those narratives that do not make sense according to conventional canons of scholarly rationality and require quite different styles of analysis. So Lévi-Strauss, for example, argued that mythological analysis is singularly important in revealing the paradigms that underlie all narratives. And Barthes drew upon this in his account of *Myth today* (1973), where he distinguished seven figures of contemporary bourgeois myth. Do they shed any light on news coverage of the Balinese and 9/11 bombings? The figures are:

1. *Inoculation*: ‘One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil’ (Barthes 1973: 150). Whereas Indonesian coverage of the attacks in both New York and Bali were at pains to recognize failings and fault on all sides, the possibility that the governments or citizens of the USA, Europe or Australia could have contributed in any way to the bombs in Bali was excluded from television coverage and emerged only in commentaries in print from a handful of critics. Instead reification, projection and dichotomy were deployed. Radical Islam is a disease that it is too late to inoculate against, as it has broken out in Bali. So it is imperative for the rest of the world’s health that the Indonesian government eradicate the cause, no matter what the cost. With a rigid dualism that, ironically, news broadcasters attributed to the Islamist ‘fanatics’, evil could only lie ‘out there’.
2. *Privation of history/culture*: ‘Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all History’ (1973: 151). Mass media coverage domesticates history and culture. Islam has no history, no culture. Bali was timeless, eternal and unchanging up to 12<sup>th</sup> October 2002.<sup>16</sup> It existed to serve up an ‘exotic festivity’ for tourists. Its history and culture have become a world brand, a commodity which consumers have the absolute right of enjoying. That the behaviour of many tourists in Kuta, the site of the main bombs, is offensive to many Balinese, as well as devout Muslims, is scrupulously ignored. Indeed the island no longer belongs to the inhabitants or to Indonesia, as it is now ‘our Bali’. And the reported setback to the economy becomes inseparable from the tourists’ loss.
3. *Identification*:

The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself...because the Other is a scandal which threatens his essence (1973: 151).

From the moment reporting begins, the scene must be interpreted through the eyes of ordinary people like ‘us’, now eternalized by videocams. So the bombings become the narrative of the married couples (who escaped, who died), the Watford fireman, the Melbourne GP who are made to stand between us and the Indonesians, whose loss can only be acknowledged through a narrative of innocence tragically ended.

<sup>16</sup> Amusingly, it is not just news coverage which seeks to eliminate history. So do the writings of a celebrated American scholar, Clifford Geertz, whose vision was not only of a place where nothing much changed over hundreds of years (1980: 134), but where the natives went to great lengths to deny temporality altogether (1966).

4. *Tautology*: ‘Tautology creates a dead, a motionless world’ (1973: 153). The identification of the way the world should be with Euro-American bourgeois society and Christianity creaks and groans so badly that it is no surprise that the bombers have endlessly to be equated with Islam and as so self-evidently and essentially evil that there is no possibility of dialogue; no question of inquiring into the internal arguments within Islam between generations, traditions, countries; no point in asking the putative subjects what their concerns and objections are.
5. *Neither-norism*: ‘This mythological figure...consists in stating two opposites and balancing the one by the other so as to reject them both’ (1973: 153). A frequently reiterated theme in news coverage was that Indonesia was desperately trapped between two appalling dangers. Either it would succumb to fundamentalism and become a new medieval Caliphate or the archipelago would disintegrate with unimaginable consequences. Faced with such grim alternatives, even at the cost of some human rights’ infractions supporting firm military action against any possible suspects appears a welcome solution. News is, and presumably sometimes is intended to be, agentive. That is its descriptions frame events so as to anticipate and imply the need for appropriate future action.
6. *Quantification of quality*: ‘By reducing any quality to quantity, myth economizes intelligence: it understands reality more cheaply’ (1973: 153). Every broadcast in the first days started by listing the numbers of dead, injured or missing foreigners. Even before the very limited repertoire of suitable adjectives to describe a singular event became over-repetitive, lists started to appear: of previous Al-Qaeda attacks, of extremist Muslim groups, of islands where they were active, or might be hiding. It did not take many months after the bombings for a new quantity to emerge. A major selling point became the drop in the cost of package tours to enjoy Bali’s unique culture.
7. *The statement of fact*: This figure enshrines ‘universalism, the refusal of any explanation, an unalterable hierarchy of the world’ (1973: 154). The trend was perhaps most blatant in the repeated trope of Paradise Lost. However coverage depended on an endless parading of facts – about Bali, about Islam, about Indonesia, about its government – that could only make sense for people who knew little or nothing about the country.

### **Is news the same everywhere?**

How should we set about understanding the tight suturing of British television coverage of the bombings in Bali? And how does this differ from Indonesian coverage of the attacks in New York? Neither space nor my materials permit a definitive answer.

The obvious starting point is the economic determinants of coverage: for example the search for circulation or ratings, and the need to ‘cater to Western media audiences’ (van Ginneken 1998: 44). The former may offer an account of how many people are supposed to have read or watched and so indicate to producers the likely success of future coverage. The latter, in alluding to what ‘catering to’ and ‘audiences’ presuppose, threatens to open



several cans of worms. Both may indicate something of how producers imagine the links between news content, audiences and markets. Driven ultimately by industrialists' short-term concern with profit, such narratives are explanatorily primitive and leave most of the interesting questions unanswered. For a start, they tell us little of what people made of what they read or watched. Purporting to be stern, realistic and masculine, such narratives inhabit a world of largely unfalsifiable generalities. They have to hover suitably detached from the actual daily practices of production, as these tell more confused stories of meeting deadlines, muddling through and so on. And, in a beautiful demonstration of the quantification of quality, the myriad ways that readers and viewers engage, or fail to engage, with the news is magically converted into numerical ratings. Myth applies as much to the inner rationality of media industries as it does to how they imagine the world.

Can sociological approaches do better? For example, the dichotomizing of 'us' and 'them', the depiction of outsiders, the projection of evil are standard sociological fare. Certainly such explanations seem relevant. There are problems however. As Mary Douglas recognized over thirty years ago (1970), not all societies draw clear boundaries between themselves and others, or treat outsiders as dangerous. And a part of the world famous for fuzzy categories and multiple overlapping taxonomies is South East Asia, exemplified perhaps above all by Javanese, the dominant ethnic group in Indonesia. Although it probably does not worry most of them too much, apart from the usual pre- and over-interpretative practices that are their trade, almost all American and European news correspondents also tend engage in a systematic taxonomic slippage when describing what is going on in Indonesia.

But what are the presuppositions behind Indonesian news coverage? Provisionally I would suggest, for particular historical reasons, there is currently an unusual degree of openness and uncertainty. Under Suharto, domestic news coverage especially was so tightly constrained that it often resembled theatrical tableaux.<sup>17</sup> The wide-ranging relaxation of censorship since 1998 and reaction against previous regimentation has left Indonesian reporters both fairly free and searching for new ways of thinking, among the different various models now on offer.

More specifically, in reporting 11<sup>th</sup>. September, commentators deployed a range of rhetorical figures, but these had much to do with how to articulate, or how to avoiding articulating, Islam and the military and other banned topics. The *Media Indonesia* editorial and the producers' comments suggest heteroglossia: that producers were working with different, often non-commensurate, frames of reference at the same time.

Some aspects of the Indonesian producers' presuppositions are worth noting. Human subjects are not unitary or stable. They have conflicting predispositions. For example, arrogance exemplifies itself in ignoring other people's interests in determined pursuit of your own, regardless of the consequences to others. Arrogance leads to violence and, *in extremis*, the ultimate violation of ceasing to be human, *manusiawi*, to the point of such benightedness that you become incapable of appreciating it.<sup>18</sup> Realizing benightedness has carried you away is a major theme in Indonesian television drama, film and theatre. What is involved in the repeated comparison of 11<sup>th</sup>. September to American detonation of

<sup>17</sup> The history and changes of Indonesian television has been well documented by Philip Kitley, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> My favourite example from the argument over the proprieties and legality of engaging in war against Iraq in 2003 is the American self-righteous descriptions of the French as 'Cheese-eating Surrender-Monkeys'.

atomic bombs over Japan in 1945? The excessive force the US inflicted has brought inevitable retribution. There is an ineluctable link between action and reaction (in Indonesian Hindu-Buddhist terms, the law of *karma pala*).<sup>19</sup>

If the veracity of news is significantly a function of it instantiating viewers' expectations and prejudices, then Indonesia has its own tropes. The train of events of which 11<sup>th</sup>. September was part had long been prefigured. Indonesians are familiar with giants of mind-boggling size and power throwing their weight around and trampling arrogantly upon the weak, secure in the belief of their invincibility. It is part of the paradigm of Javanese and Balinese shadow theatre performances from the Mahabharata, Ramayana and other stories. And, however long these gargantuan *raksasa* may lord it over and terrify others diegetically, they are always brought low in the end, often by the very traits that gave them power. So, were Indonesians watching on their screens a new episode of an ancient saga brought to them not by a puppeteer, but by CNN?

The image is as seductive and frequently invoked as it is problematic. The question is: whose image is it? Theatre is popular as a totalizing image for Indonesia (e.g. Geertz 1980), not least since it removes agency from Indonesians onto something else. Ever since the Dutch, shadow theatre has been used as a portmanteau image that provides the key to the Javanese mind. And it has been seized upon as avidly by scholars in America as a synecdoche for Javanese culture (e.g. Anderson 1965; Geertz 1973) as by foreign correspondents and commentators (fictionally portrayed in *The Year of Living Dangerously*).

The problem is, as the distinguished Indonesian scholar, Koentjaraningrat, remarked, it is hard to generalize about the best part of a hundred million people who have barely been researched and a minority of whom, by most reckoning, have ever watched such theatre. After more than a century of such articulations, it does not mean though that Indonesians may not employ such images with one another.<sup>20</sup> Shadow theatre however was not usually invoked for its mythology, but for the useful image of the puppeteer who, unseen, manipulates the puppets from behind a screen. An example was the headline in *Republika* the day after the bombs. Referring to conflicting claims about who was responsible, it read: *America and Al-Qaida are accused of being masterminds (dalang) behind the bombings in Bali*.<sup>21</sup>

Even were Indonesians obligingly to structure their imagery of political violence solely according to these grand epics, it would not help much. Interpretive freedom is paradigmatic. And on almost any exegesis, such violence cannot be reduced to a simple confrontation of good and evil, as in the British television coverage. For example, two common exegetical devices are *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and *Rwa Bhineda*. The former, which is also the Indonesian national motto, from the fourteenth century *kawi* poem Sutasoma, is usually glossed: 'Unity in Diversity'. Another translation however goes:

<sup>19</sup> The complex ways that Hindu and Buddhist thinking has intertwined in Indonesia, and that both coexist with Islam in Java in particular, exemplifies the overlap of taxonomies in practice mentioned above.

<sup>20</sup> Ruth McVey, for instance, offers a thoughtful analysis of why, at his tribunal, Sudisman, one of the leaders of the Indonesian Communist Party should have invoked the feudal image of the Pandawa brothers to refer to the leadership (1986).

<sup>21</sup> *Amerika dan Al-Qaida Dituduh Dalang Pemboman di Bali*. *Republika* 13<sup>th</sup>. October 2002, accessed online on 13<sup>th</sup>. October 2002.

‘Although in pieces, yet One’. *Rwa Bhineda* is nigh impossible to translate. Crudely ‘The two that are opposed’ points to difference necessarily implying disjuncture and opposition, but equally complementarity and mutual dependence.<sup>22</sup> The philosophical nuances that Indonesians have grown up with get rather lost in hyperbolic reportage of irreconcilable difference, disintegration and menace lurking throughout the archipelago. Parachute and pack journalism as a set of industrial practices is perfectly designed to prevent much possibility of cultural translation.

A problem with frequent-flyer journalists is that they have short memories. In 1965-66 Indonesia was the site of an act of post-war violence on an almost unimaginable, and certainly unrecorded, scale. Something in the order of a million people were executed as the Indonesian army under Suharto, advised and directed by the USA, UK and Australia as it subsequently turned out, in retaliation for a supposed attempt at a communist coup. It is difficult to understand Indonesians’ responses to events in the last years without appreciating the absolute ban on any discussion that did not conform to the régime’s master narrative. In an elegant analysis of the New Order régime’s success in staying in power, against assertions of the monolithic nature of power and its narratives Heryanto has argued that

Even at the height of the New Order’s authoritarianism, its fabric of power was far from being efficient and comprehensive. It was full of contradictions, anomalies, ironies and convivial misunderstanding. These did not necessarily make New Order authoritarianism less effective. The contrary is more tenable (1999: 148).

Heryanto nicely argued that people were obliged to deal with the dilemmas they faced by adopting the practices of ‘hyper-obedience’, which could, of course, turn out to be anything but. Several implications are germane. After more than thirty years’ subjection to judgements from on high, based on convenient, but changeable, master narratives, is it any surprise sensible Indonesians are cautious about attributing responsibility and wish to see proper legal process instituted? A close examination of the practices of attempting to institute myth, let alone subvert it, shows they take sinuous paths. And how are foreign correspondents to understand answers to even the simplest questions when hyper-obedient ‘yesses’ may mean ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘maybe’, ‘if you had any idea what is at issue, I might try to answer’ or many other possibilities? At this point many Western reporters retreat to the nearest bar.

The point of this discussion is that there are at least two major problems that both media correspondents and media scholars run into. The first is to do with history and local practice. Practices of production and reception anywhere in the world have particular histories. The export of Euro-American conventions of news production should not blind scholars to the fact that imported ideals rarely translate simply into practice. What is remarkable for an ostensibly empirically-oriented discipline, is how rarely its practitioners have engaged in the kind of detailed research into actual newsroom practices that would provide evidence for their sweeping assertions. Audiences are more intractable. The problems of doing much more than counting heads or expressed opinions is little excuse for wishing readers, audiences or viewers away. If media scholars boggle at the problems of establishing what the subjects of mass media make of what is going on, they attempt a total bypass at the fairly obvious point that readers and viewers do not approach something

<sup>22</sup> Both expressions have been used hegemonically, but in changing ways, in post-Independence Indonesia, which raises interesting questions about what work they have been doing.

as *tabula rasa*, but come with distinctive histories of reading, viewing and commenting on what they read. If media practitioners do not come off very well, media scholars scarcely fare better.

There is a second set of problems. The point of this chapter is that news coverage may not be of the kind that, on the optimistic enlightenment scenario, can be addressed rationally by urging reporters and news channels to be more balanced, better informed and self-critical. If news reporting can instructively be represented as mythologizing, then we are dealing with opposed ways of imagining the world that are irreconcilable (which is what Lévi-Strauss was arguing with his distinction of bricolage and engineering, 1966). The idea that myth occurs where rationality has failed or not yet applied (Sperber 1975) fails to learn from *Rwa Bhineda* that opposition is at once constitutive and complementary. If we wish to change reporting practices, perhaps we should try to recognize at first what may be at issue. For all these reasons, news could never be the same everywhere.

My argument raises some awkward questions for media scholars. How are they positioned relative to what they talk about? Analyses of news rarely bother to indicate whose news practices are being discussed; it being taken for granted that Anglo-American news is the paradigm, from which others, if even recognized, are merely deviations. The rest of the world is so irrelevant as barely to be worth inoculation. What are the critical procedures they employ to avoid the mythological and ideological traps they accuse others of falling into? In a fine act of exnomination, we are rarely told. Barthes's modern mythology, on closer scrutiny, applies as much to media scholars as to media practitioners. More worrying, neither group seems to recognize or be much concerned that there is a difficulty. Were this not so, presumably the overriding priority would be careful, linguistically and culturally-informed research of non-Western media. It would be a massive research programme but one, I would argue, that is vital to prevent globalization being a synonym for the continuation of cultural mistranslation by other means. Until something changes, sadly reporters and academics alike will continue to round up the usual suspects.

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