Violence

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Introduction

Cultures, Conflicts, and the Poetics of Violent Practice

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The last decade has seen a frightening increase in the use of violence as a means of political and cultural assertion, most notably in the context of postcolonial conflicts such as those in Bosnia, Sri Lanka, and Rwanda, as well as in contexts of "terrorist" actions, particularly suicide bombings. Moreover, consciousness of the persistent and prevalent nature of such violent cultural practices has come home to the United States with particular force through the "shock and awe" generated by the events of September 11, 2001, mimetically revenged in the 2003 bombing of Baghdad. In this context there has been an understandable explosion of commentary and analyses of "violence" and "terrorism," as well their supposed ideological and psychological bases, in popular terms most often thought to be "radical Islam." Likewise, anthropological theory has proved hesitant to try to understand the ferocity and forms of such violence, as well as the challenges to the practice of ethnography that violent cultural practices present. While various theoretical approaches to the anthropology of war have certainly emphasized the relevance of changing global conditions to the violent contestation of nationalism, ethnicity, and state control, the

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question of why such violence might take particular cultural forms—such as specific kinds of mutilation, "ethnic cleansing," or other modes of community terror—has not been adequately addressed.[1] This omission has meant that anthropology has been unable to effectively counter media and popular commentary that stresses only the "primitive" or tribal nature of many conflicts through repeated reference to the culturally opaque forms of violent practices being observed. These pseudo-anthropological attempts at explanation only serve to recapitulate colonial ideas about the inherent savagery of the non-Western world and so proffer no hope for better understanding. In policy terms, the failure to appreciate the links between cultural affirmation and violence leads to intractable political quagmires, such as those in Iraq or Afghanistan, where the violent insertion of Western models of political association only serves to induce even fiercer opposition through violent means, and, in part, this is why they hate us so (Whitehead 2002a).

"Culture and Conflict: The Poetics of Violent Practice," the School of American Research advanced seminar from which this volume derives, addressed a number of key questions that we felt might enable a better understanding of violence as a form of cultural expression. It was not the purpose of the meeting (held in May 2002) to tie our discussions only to the topics of the day, despite the immediacy of 9/11 and the pressing nature of the burgeoning "war on terrorism." Nevertheless, participants included those with expertise in and personal experience with "terrorism" in the Basque homeland, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland, while others brought the experience of long-term ethnographic engagement in contexts of state terror and death squads to our discussion. Likewise, several participants had worked in regions where radical Islam was an important cultural force. The point, however, was not to prejudge the agenda for a discussion of violence but rather to ensure that participants were broadly in sympathy with the notion that examining violence as cultural expression might be best achieved through some form of hermeneutic, rather than analytic, approach. In consequence, we were also aware of the way in which this approach necessarily committed us to moving away from an anthropology of identity, principally concerned with political, economic, and social phenomena and their transformations, toward an anthropology of experience in which individual meanings, emotive

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forces, and bodily practices become more central.[2] The idea that brought the participants together and provided the common focus from which discussion could develop was the recognition of the need to interpret violence as a discursive practice, whose symbols and rituals are as relevant to its enactment as its instrumental aspects. For an act of violence to be considered legitimate and credible, it needs not only to have the expected pragmatic consequences but also to be judged appropriate. How and when violence is culturally appropriate, why it is only appropriate for certain individuals, and the significance of those enabling ideas of cultural appropriateness to a given cultural tradition as a whole were therefore among the key questions to be addressed. In addition, it was necessary to ask how a reevaluation of violent cultural expression affects the concept of "culture" and to consider whether "violence" is itself a cross-cultural category. In answering such questions, it was also necessary to consider the ethical position of the ethnographer who is possibly a witness to violent acts. The conduct of "fieldwork under fire" (Nordstrom and Robben 1995) necessarily entails questions as to the wider nature of anthropological practice—particularly how local ideas of tradition and modernity, under conditions of increasing globalization, directly influence the construction of cultural ideals, the resulting assertion of collective and personal identity, and the role of violence in that process.

The topic of violence for anthropology is particularly important since it has often been subsumed under other research agendas. Violence as an aspect of multiple social relations—for example among genealogical units or as an elite expression of political or ritual power—has been relatively well theorized and studied by anthropology, but not violence as a cultural expression and performance. As Christopher C. Taylor (1999, this volume) points out, this does not mean that "culture," conceived of in a simplistic way as in Daniel Goldhagen's controversial analysis of the Nazi genocide, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1996), can simply be cited as a cause of violence. Moreover, even the most careful analyses of Western forms of violence, such as the Nazi genocide, are not necessarily relevant to the understanding of postcolonial ethnic violence, such as the genocide in Cambodia, precisely because "genocide" is here mediated through cultural forms with which we are often unfamiliar (Hinton 2002b, this volume). Rather, it

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is the "generative schemes" (after Bourdieu 1977), the logical substrate of oppositions, analogies, and homologies upon which the cultural representations are based, that constitute a critical field of analysis that has largely been ignored. There have been few attempts to map how cultural conceptions of violence are used discursively to amplify and extend the cultural force of violent acts or how those violent acts themselves can generate a shared idiom of meaning for violent death—and this discursive amplification is precisely what is meant by the "poetics" of violent practice (Whitehead 2002b). The anthropology of war has tended to be principally concerned with the birth of war (Ferguson 2003a), the political economy of small-scale conflicts, or the general context of the encounter between tribal and colonial military traditions (Otterbein 1999); these issues certainly provide important material contexts for understanding the development of cultural forms of violence.[3] But the seminar discussions envisaged extending and complementing those kinds of approaches, as well as integrating some emergent domains of anthropological analysis—such as state violence and death squads, postcolonial ethnic conflicts, and revitalized forms of "traditional" killing, such as assault sorcery—in order to more fully conceptualize the variety in the discourse and practice of violence (see Whitehead 2000 for a summary and bibliography of these newer approaches).

In more general terms, such topics are rarely broached in anthropology, both because of the difficult and possibly deadly nature of the subject for ethnographic research, and because we ourselves are apt to elect more positive topics for research, fearing that to discuss violent cultural practices among our informants leads to a negative stereotyping of "others." This must be a risk in such research, but by building a more adequate theoretical framework for engaging such topics, we hope this vital issue can be better researched ethnographically; it certainly directly affects the lives of many peoples that anthropology studies. In this light, research on violence is an important part of anthropology's understanding of modernization and globalization, for it is in those economically and politically marginal spaces of the global ethnoscape that violence becomes a forceful, if not inevitable, form of cultural affirmation and expression of identity in the face of a loss of "tradition" and a dislocation of ethnicity. Violence is often engendered

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not simply by adherence to globalized ideologies, such as communism or Islam, but by the regional and subregional disputes whose origins are in the complexities of local political history and cultural practices; and this is even so where such global ideologies do come into play, since it is the local meaning of those ideologies that drives community and ethnic conflicts. Unless anthropology can develop the conceptual tools and ethnographically driven understanding of such violent contexts, it risks becoming intellectually marginal to both the subjects and consumers of its texts.

This is not a task that can wait—we face burgeoning ethnic and community violence on a global scale, occurring in many of the traditional field sites for anthropological analysis and becoming a fact of ethnographic research even in those locations that seemed to have already peacefully negotiated the economic and political conditions of postcolonial society. In tandem with this changing context for ethnographic research has been resurgent debate within anthropology itself as to the existence and meaning of "traditional" violence—as in recent academic and popular commentary on the "evidence" for Anasazi cannibalism, for example, or the search for a bio-psychological basis for violent behaviors using "tribal" societies as a cipher for our evolutionary past (Cronk, Chagnon, and Irons 2000). However, a growing body of ethnographic and historical work among a younger generation of scholars seeks to address these issues in a different light by developing aspects of cultural theory in a way that suggests a potential new domain for anthropological analysis. In particular, one might refer to the work of Africanists in examining the Rwandan/Burundian genocide and the destruction of Liberia (for example, Braeckman 1996; Brenot 1998; Ellis 1999; Lemarchand 1996; Malkki 1995; C. Taylor 1999); studies of the resurgence of "traditional witchcraft" as a political force in various global contexts (for example, Aigle, Brac de la Perrière, and Chaumeil 2000; Geschiere 1997; Stewart and Strathern 2004; Whitehead and Wright 2004); and studies of the discursive practice of violence in South and Southeast Asian contexts (for example, Daniel 1996; George 1996; Hoskins 1996; Kakar 1996; Ohnuki-Tierney 2002; Siegel 1998; Tambiah 1996), as well as materials concerning state terror from Central and South America (for example, Nelson 1999; Poole 1994; Taussig 1987; Warren 1993b) and more widely from Sluka (2000). Such studies

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and others (also discussed by Whitehead 2000) clearly illustrated the relevance and importance of theorizing violence in new ways and suggested the moment was right to bring together a group of scholars to compare ethnographic interpretations and to seek new principles for representing and studying violence as a cultural practice.

Thus, although much new ethnographic evidence has been gathered, its broader significance might better emerge through the kind of intensive discussion the advanced seminar format is designed to achieve. To shape and focus what could otherwise have been, given the breadth of our topic of violence, a diffuse and unsatisfactory discussion, participants were encouraged to consider three key areas of theoretical importance: (1) concepts of culture and the cultural poetics of particular forms of violent practice; (2) the nature of state terror and the resulting mimetic forms of "terrorist" resistance; and (3) the relevance of ideas of modernity, the local impact of globalization, and the consequent resurgence of "tradition" in the cultural form of violent practices. Our studies range from the Americas to Africa to Asia and include consideration of serial killers in the United States, genocidal practices in Cambodia and Rwanda, the role of state terror in Spain and the Basque Country, the rise of ethnic militias in Liberia, and aesthetic responses to community terror in Sri Lanka. The seminar discussion itself clustered around a number of key issues described here and then amplified and evidenced through specific contributions in the chapters that follow.

HOW RELEVANT IS THE IDEA OF CULTURE TO UNDERSTANDING VIOLENCE?

At one level it is perfectly obvious that culture is relevant to violence, since violence is part of human action. However, the idea that violent practice might be integral or fundamental to cultural practice and competency is more difficult to accept, for two reasons. First, we have tended to view violence as precisely the absence of order and meaning, a total negation of the very idea of culture and social association. Second, the concept of "culture" itself has been much overused and abused of late, with suggestions that some cultures—"African" or "Islamic" cultures, for example—are inherently prone to violence, much as Goldhagen suggested that the Nazis were part of core

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German culture and so ordinary Germans were "willing executioners." Certainly, violence is often systematic, always rule governed and replete with meanings for both victims and victimizers. So the culture concept, if it is serviceable at all (see Fox and King 2002), is still important to understanding the nature of violent behavior. Indeed, it is an insistence on the meaningful and rule-governed nature of violence that sets off the approaches taken in this volume from many approaches previously taken. However, it was not our purpose to reclaim the culture concept via a discussion of its salience to the understanding of violence, and there are other overarching concepts of meaning and motivation, such as Kapferer's (1988) use of the notion of "ontology," that might better fit the aim to move from an anthropology of identity to one of experience, already noted above as an important contrast in the interpretation of violence. George (this volume) takes up these issues in the context of the work of Clifford Geertz, asking the very salient question as to why, given the centrality of Geertz's work for those using the culture concept, Geertz so firmly excluded violence as part of that cultural order. Indeed, as George shows, the materials for a more substantive discussion of violence were overtly present in Geertz's seminal essay on the Balinese cockfight. This question is partly answered by noting the way in which violence certainly marks the limit of the cultural order. Moreover, this limit is a highly unstable border, beyond which the lack of meaning and the denial of sociality lurk constantly. At the same time, this very instability is the source of the cultural possibilities for violence to remake and redefine the cultural order itself, a point that will recur below.

Given that violence is both rule governed and meaningful, and notwithstanding how we may choose to model that fact, why might it also be termed "poetical"?[4] The issue here is not to competitively engage in theories of poetics (for example, see usages in Herzfeld 1985, 1997) but to call attention to the way in which violent actors may also be culturally authentic and significant rather than exemplars of the absence of such significance. Violent actions, no less than any other kind of behavioral expression, are deeply infused with cultural meaning and are the moment for individual agency within historically embedded patterns of behavior. Individual agency, utilizing extant cultural forms, symbols, and icons, may thus be considered "poetic" for

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the rule-governed substrate that underlies it, and for how this substrate is deployed, through which new meanings and forms of cultural expression emerge. At the same time, the poesis of violence can also lead to its broader legitimization, by linking violent acts to prevalent cultural values; how else are we to understand the pack of playing cards issued to identify wanted Iraqis, or the tentative attempts to establish a "futures market" in terrorist threat? The performance of violence cannot thus be amputated from that wider body of cultural performance, whose study has done so much to advance our interpretations of other aspects of human existence. Whitehead's chapter more fully discusses these issues in the context of the particular advances made in understanding Amazonian warfare and shamanic killing. A number of ethnographers have linked such violent practices to the cosmological foundations of the sociocultural order, making certain forms of violence not only individually meaningful but to a degree necessary for the very continuation of human life itself. Within a predatory or vengeful cosmos, violence against other people may thus preempt divine violence against oneself. In this context, violence is part of a highly meaningful relationship with divinity.

Nonetheless, the phrase "meaningless violence" comes readily to mind as we contemplate the mass civilian deaths of 9/11, the rocket attacks on Palestinian civilians, the suicide bombings of cafés and family parties in Israel, the chopping of Tutsi children and babies, the kneecapping of Irish teenagers, the mutilation of hands and legs of Liberian noncombatants, the execution with hammers of Bosnian Muslims, and so forth. However, such cultural forms of violence are in fact deeply meaningful, recalling the histories that shore up the conflicts in which antagonists are engaged and forcing the nightmares of the past into the waking realities of the present. Our moral rectitude in condemnation of such acts cannot stand in for the professional commitment to understanding all human behavior, no matter how challenging and repulsive to our personal sensibilities. Taylor fully takes up this challenge in his consideration of the recent genocide in Rwanda (this volume). As Taylor shows, both the history of colonial identity construction in Rwanda and the local forms of cosmology and ontology have to be referenced in trying to interpret the nature of the killing. Such local ideologies are partly accessed through the virulent

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media representations that were a key part of the mobilization of killers.

As some participants at the seminar pointed out, however, there is a danger of prurience here. Just as with the cannibal controversies,[5] the representation of violence, its production as an object of contemplation, may seem at best tasteless and at worst "pornographic," and certainly the images reproduced here are challenging to contemplate (see Taylor this volume). The counter-danger is that by refusing to critically engage with the fleshy detail of violent acts, we remove them from that very context that makes them meaningful to others, if not ourselves. This temptation to abstract violent acts from their wider field of meaning and significance suggests that it is precisely the cultural contextualization of violent acts that is the theoretical prerequisite for their interpretation. A hermeneutic for violence thus starts by questioning the very category itself as a useful concept for either interpretation or comparison. It is the tendency to lump together multiple acts with differing histories and contexts that leads to a cultural decontextualization that indeed verges on the voyeuristic. Unfortunately, certain ethnographic practices in the representation of violence (Chagnon 1983; Tierney 2000) have made this danger more than a remote possibility, even if it does not (as some suggest) reflect the inevitable nature of anthropological representation of the weak by the powerful. Such considerations lead inevitably to the next issue that preoccupied our seminar discussion.

CAN/SHOULD VIOLENCE BE DEFINED AND THEORIZED?

Participants agreed that developing definitions of violence was far less relevant than trying to adequately conceptualize what might evidently be seen as violent acts. Although this approach might disappoint a general expectation for a volume such as this, in fact it serves to underline the fact that part of what has hampered attempts to understand violence is the presumption that all acts that might be termed "violent" share some typological characteristic, whereas often the contested nature of what should count as "violent" (with the connotations of illegitimacy the term carries) is at the heart of the very conflicts that give rise to those violent behaviors. After all, some are

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incensed at the suggestion that the violence of the terrorist might be equated with or somehow equivalent to the violence of U.S. economic and political policies abroad. For these reasons, some participants saw attempts to define violence as inherently self-defeating given the necessarily disruptive character of violence. Others emphasized that even to say this much is to begin the process of definition, since one necessarily operates with a form of delineation, however inadequate that might be for theoretical interrogation. Difficult though it may be, coherent discussion requires at least minimal delineation of the kind of violence under consideration rather than the blithe assumption that violence is a self-evident category of behavior. One way of doing this that does not lead straight back to typological exercises is to ask how and when the notion of violence is invoked, and to consider the position of the researcher or observer in that context as much as that of the victim or perpetrator. In addition, it is important that any delineations attempt to grapple with local idioms, since otherwise there may be a tendency to underwrite governmental interest in suppressing certain kinds of political action or cultural assertion. Once again, the culturally relative nature of the legitimization of violence indicates a need to proceed with real caution.

However, within the seminar itself, it proved impossible to resolve the question of whether "theory" should be attempted or whether only "narrative" could be meaningfully produced with regard to violence. The issue here is fundamental and references the wider debates within anthropology over the last decade concerning its "scientific" or "humanistic" status. Attempts to make progress on this issue unfortunately ran counter to consideration of violence itself. Theorizing rather than narrating others' suffering may well be a way of mediating our own complicity in such events and inevitably ignores the subjectivities of the victims of violence. By the same token, the subjectivities of killers and torturers are no less relevant to interpreting violent acts than the sufferings of victims, but the only way that point can be established is through the kind of theorizing that otherwise obscures the human tragedy of injury and death. This logical constraint on the forms of interpretation is certainly an impasse, and one for which the only exit lies in decisions as to the forms of anthropological practice one wishes to employ. However, it is also clear from our discussions that

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both kinds of intellectual practice prove illuminating in different cases and for different audiences. The real failure would be to assume that adoption of one or the other practice signals deeper political prejudices, and to thereby deny creative intellectual engagement, substituting "knowledge politics" in its place. It is certainly possible, as my own experience was used to demonstrate (Whitehead 2002b), that the subjectivity of observers is no less disrupted by witnessing violent acts and that observers may also become both victims and perpetrators. These linkages between observers, perpetrators, and victims, moreover, are a fundamental issue in any ethnographic engagement with violent or violated persons.

KILLERS, TORTURERS, AND SUBJECTIVITIES

These issues of subjectivity and observation were particularly evident in considering torture and in asking for a clearer picture of the motivations and self-understandings of killers and torturers. The chapter by Hinton discusses these topics extensively. Participants noted that torture has become a much more routine aspect of government control, not just "elsewhere" but also to some degree among the liberal democracies themselves (Conroy 2000). Torture is well suited to these ends since it invades the subjectivities of both those who suffer it and those who anticipate suffering it. It also rebounds on torturers themselves (see Dassin 1998). The anticipation of torture and violence is as much part of state terror as the torture cells themselves. Uncertainty is then reinforced not by the scene of torture itself[6] but by the routine alienation from one's body that torture produces. Part of the power of narration over analysis in thinking about violence is the way in which such narration may allow the reoccupation of the body, or indeed any other landscapes to which notions of self and identity adhere (see also Malkki 1995). In this light, roadblocks, random identity checks, manuals for identifying the "enemy," and other forms of "security" screening actually induce further insecurity and so generalize state violence or the threat of it. Thus torture produces terror, and the political climate then itself necessitates torture and other special actions. Participants very much agreed that this process was a classic "cultural loop" for the perpetual production of violence, a means by which violence reinforces further violence. Participants also noted that this process is not

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taking place just at the level of imagery and ideas but is also fostered by the material economics of the markets in instruments of repression and torture. Penal hardware, no less than military weaponry, is in fact a global market in which certain countries, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, are leading beneficiaries. The presence of this kind of internal cultural feedback and external goading of commercial interest in the production of local violence was seen to be present in all the particular contexts discussed.

A distressing irony of this recognition is that even the best-intentioned attempts to violently suppress terrorism seem doomed to failure—distressing not just because the use of violence is deemed preferable but also because violence is currently the only policy option being deployed by the U.S. and other governments entangled in the "infinite justice" of the "war on terrorism." The infinite and limitless nature of this policy, clearly marked as such by Western leaders, is therefore productive of unending violent response.[7] Whatever else might be said about the necessity for U.S. engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, no one suggests that it will be over any time soon.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE STATE?

Seminar participants were in firm agreement that the state was a looming and baleful influence on the cultural production of violence. This influence was seen as occurring both through the violence of the elites and sectional interests that might utilize the state apparatus of economic power, political dominance, and military or police institutions to further their particular interests, and, paradoxically, through the collapse or absence of such centralized state power and institutions. In this context, the juridical nature of the state needs to be distinguished from questions of its legitimacy.[8]

Although classic Weberian views of the state picture it as monopolizing violence,[9] the situation in many countries that have experienced decades of state terror is such that the state seems largely to exist in the absence or abeyance of its "normal" functions such as ensuring security and basic health for its citizens. Despite this absence of state functioning, it may nevertheless be important for local actors to capture and control whatever institutional presence remains. This presence is often the police and military, consistent with Marxist-Leninist theoriz-

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ing on this issue. The legitimacy of such governments is then directly affected by the global context, especially the United Nations, and a government's violence toward its own citizenry may be considered legitimate, as with Israel in Palestine, Russia in Chechnya, or Britain in Ireland, or illegitimate, as with Iraq, Afghanistan, or Liberia. Alternatively, the global community may, through "doing nothing," license genocide anyway, as in Rwanda. In other words, our influence on these violent contexts may be far more than our political leaders are willing to acknowledge, and the historical example of the Western colonial state may be more important to local idioms than we care to contemplate. As Ellis (this volume) argues with regard to West Africa, the violence and secrecy of the colonial state itself signaled the relevance of local traditions of masking and power, and this point rings true globally for the way in which the resurgence of occult traditions has accompanied the rise of many postcolonial regimes.

The term *states of exception* was used to characterize these kinds of contexts in which violence has undermined state legitimacy but in which whatever legitimacy is left is guaranteed by the exercise of violence. Violence and the anticipation of violence thus come to regulate and dis-order society, allowing the reconstitution of patterns of sociality through the exercise and suffering of violence. The Hobbesian Leviathan now cannibalizes its own citizenry, and the "magic" of the state consists no longer in its manipulation of the marvels of modernity but in its mutilation, destruction, and display of human bodies—left in ditches, strung from lampposts, or scattered across the sidewalk. Death squads, special action units, and lone assassins thus can come to represent the magical and cosmological forces of death and destiny, invading subjectivities and re-creating ontologies (Kapferer 1997; Taussig 1997; Vidal and Whitehead 2004). But these violent scripts are uncertain and ambiguous, subject to the poesis of individual actors—a roadblock passed without trouble in the morning may become the scene of killing in the afternoon. This ambiguity itself leads to a doubling of the violence, as Aretxaga (this volume) carefully shows in her consideration of a killing in the Basque Country. Such violence then becomes both legitimate force and an illegitimate violation, enabling a cultural looping or the further production of violence.

Our discussion noted in particular that under these conditions,

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"child soldiering," notorious in West Africa, seems to develop exponentially. Many postcolonial states have progressively undermined and supplanted the family through the perpetual practice of war and violence, and the resulting "state of exception" then has no role for youths except as actors in its own violent script for society. Equally, even established and economically viable liberal democracies, such as the United Kingdom in Ireland, Spain in the Basque Country (Aretxaga, this volume), or Israel in Palestine, have so effectively neutralized local forms of governmentality that they have established, through the abeyance of most government functions other than the repression of terrorism, precisely the kinds of "cultural loops" for the perpetual production of violence discussed in the previous section. Moreover, as we consider youth gang culture in the United States, along with the recent emergence of the child-killer or school shooter, it becomes evident that this relation between the decline of the family and the emergence of a violent social script for youth is not simply a problem in Liberia or Sierra Leone but is a problem throughout the West as well. If "youth" are fascinated by violent practices, then both our history and our continuing cultural practices in film and other media are part of the production of that fascination. It is no accident that films like *Rambo* or *The Terminator* are just as avidly watched by the heavily armed youths of West Africa as by teenagers in the West. The violent scripts and fantasies of masculinity from Hollywood thus find a partial expression in the poetics of violence elsewhere, in which context children are then socialized as killers. The production of Liberia and Sierra Leone as contemporary versions of that African hell of colonial imagination itself played off the conjunction of the exotic with these familiar markers. However, as Ellis (this volume) points out, the number of deaths in Liberia has often been exaggerated through bureaucratic errors, and in fact looting is more prevalent than killing.

SERIAL KILLERS, MEDIA, AND AESTHETICS

Violence, as opposed to, say, physical force, is inherently illegitimate, for this is why we denote human actions by this term. But the issue of how legitimate violence is produced and how that legitimacy may be contested is particularly important in considering violence cross-culturally. Our judgments as to the violence of others are neces-

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sarily tied to our conceptions of what constitutes legitimate or illegitimate force. How the media of journalism, film, literature, and art contribute to that cultural project, and how they stand in relation to the power structures of society, were therefore critical issues for the seminar and are explicitly considered in the chapters by Jeganathan and Seltzer.

Whatever we may think or feel about the kinds of violence the news media represent to us each night, it remains the case that it is our own society that has made the serial killer an icon and hero, representative of that central American value of redemptive violence (Slotkin 1973). Hannibal Lecter, affectionately dubbed "Hannibal the Cannibal," and Freddy, Jason, and other less cinematically successful serial killers are then culturally powerful on account of their virtuality rather than their lack of reality. Indeed, the notion of the "serial killer" may itself be questioned as an empirical category (Tithecott 1997), it having emerged as much from changing forms of police practice and the political task of securing agency funding as from the emergence of a particularly modern kind of murder and death. A consideration of the history and cross-cultural appearance of the category of "serial killer" is then part of this critical exercise.

The significance of such individuals to our debates is the way in which they illustrate both the cultural centrality of violence in American culture and its link to the presence of developed and commercially profitable media. As Seltzer (this volume) suggests, serial killing is actually a phenomenon linked to the way in which images and stories of killers are circulated. The spectacle of violence in contemporary American media, just as with theaters of European punishment (Foucault 1977), Amazonian ritual killing (Whitehead 2002b), or Christian divine redemption (Graziano 1992), signals the centrality of violent ritual of social incorporation (Bloch 1986; Hamerton-Kelly 1987). However, just as Foucault noted the significance of the end of public punishment, so the hidden nature of the spectacle of media violence, which the media then uncover/investigate, lends a peculiarly intimate character to the representation of that violence. Here, Aretxaga's discussion of the killing by a young Basque, Mikel Otegi, of two Spanish policemen takes on the same logics of media representation that Seltzer shows us for serial killings in the United States. The

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murder is produced through its investigation, but the investigation of the investigation is what actually preoccupies that media response. It is not the violence of the killing that provides the spectacle but the forensics of the investigation and the torn bodies that are its material basis. In turn, the full aesthetic realization of the moment occurs only with the production of the documentary, the inside account or its reflection in cinematic art.

The unstable and uncertain nature of "law and order" is itself implied by the instabilities unleashed through the crime. Such persistent instabilities are what eventually produce those states of exception in which violence itself is the only credible social script for public performance. As Seltzer argues, this hyper-production of instability implies and refers to notions of "normalcy," such that normalcy becomes but a surface representation whose own evanescence entails that violence appears as ever-present but hidden by the multiplicity of images of normalcy. Media representations of extreme and unsettling violence are thus framed not just by the reassurance of forensic procedure but by the profligate circulation of images of normalcy—the commercial breaks, the weather reports, sports scores, and so forth. The eruptive possibility for violence is thus anticipated in the ordinary, and it is the very normalcy of serial killers that becomes the source of their cultural potency, expressing and embodying (literally) these contradictions through the detailed poetics of their violent practices, directed to the formation of sociality not to its denial.

The question as to the antiquity and cross-cultural nature of serial killing was also raised, since it has often been discussed as a peculiarly modern and very American style of crime. Seltzer suggested that the kind of "wound culture" productive of the spectacles of violence and the contexts for the meaningful practice of serial killing is not just recent. Certainly, Jack the Ripper, though English, anticipates the modern moment for the way in which media representation and reportage of the day formed a cultural loop for the Ripper's violent assaults. The arguments above on the relevance of considering subjectivities show us that the links between the subjectivities of killer, victim, and observer are all present in the spectacular violence of serial murder. In this way we can come to see how representations are part of violence, not just "about" it.

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The media does not cause people to kill, but it certainly suggests the poetics by which killing can be made meaningful to an audience. In this way, serial killers are a perfect example of this particular cultural loop for violence. It is their very normalcy that makes them potent and frightening figures. But such "normalcy" then indicates just how close serial killers also are to some of our key cultural values, especially a belief in the redemptive power of violence. We may not share Hannibal's gustatory proclivities, but we do cheer him on as his appetites are configured to just ends, and we applaud the aesthetic qualities of his obsessions—he is, after all, otherwise the perfect gentleman.

What then is the significance of this and other aesthetic representations of violence? Firstly, that such aesthetics feed the poesis of individual actors, the construction of victimhood, and the interpretations of observers (Ohnuki-Tierney 2002). But secondly, as was argued in the seminar (see Jeganathan this volume), it is perhaps necessary to juxtapose "art" and "violence" to understand some of the cultural work violence does, because depictions of violence create a space for the contemplation of violence but also show us the centrality of such images to notions of violence, as Taylor so vividly demonstrates in his chapter on Rwanda. In this way, the interpretation of violence—as monstrous, mad, barbaric, and so forth—is too facile. Although such interpretations satisfy our moral outrage and despair and enable acts of vengeance and justice in response, they also occlude violence's disruptive force and subjective meanings. This process may well be desired by society, which must contain and narrate such eruptive forces, but it does not create an anthropological understanding. In this light, art may therefore be a better (that is, more shocking and so more "true") way of engaging intellectually with violent acts. Forensics turns torn bodies into information. Aesthetics turns such bodies into art.

As Jeganathan notes with regard to Sri Lanka, the challenges presented by the suffering, or forced observation, of violence devastate notions of normalcy and the ordinary so that the problem becomes one of reoccupying that devastated normalcy, the disrupted and violated subjectivity. The space for that project can be partly created through the emotive distance that aesthetics draws over raw experience. However, aesthetic images do not relate to categorical knowing, so they cannot be used in relation to any particular field of knowledge. This

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fact highlights the differences in approaches to violence that result from the particular positioning of the thinker, and such differences are not necessarily resolvable within a neat theoretical formulation. Indeed, this idea prompted the comment that it is not trying to understand violence that intellectually divides participants. It is the nature of the topic itself, in which observation and participation are sharply differentiated experientially, that creates this kind of division, which, as discussed above, makes violence an inherently problematic ethnographic issue to engage.

CONCLUSIONS, COMMENTARIES, ADDENDA

The seminar discussion also benefited from the presence of two discussants, Veena Das and Kay Warren. Das's and Warren's oral remarks are very much worth emphasizing here, as they relate strongly to all the matters discussed so far.

Warren stressed the need to situate and make intelligible our sometimes unorthodox approaches to violence, for there is no doubt that terming violence "meaningful," for example, is apt to create the impression that it is somehow justified. Ontologies, subjectivities, and media representations were also flagged as key points in our unfolding debates and for further research, since these concepts all relate to the practice of violence in ways that are not necessarily evident in strictly sociopolitical terms. In turn, reliance on these kinds of concepts requires attention to multiple voices and, if a decontextualized and so prurient thanatography is to be avoided, an awareness of the relevance of our own representations, including those of professional anthropology, to the exercise of violence. Das certainly endorsed such priorities but also went on to suggest that two paradigms were operating—one searching for overarching and holistic understanding, the other concerned with the partial and sketchy nature of the experience of violence and how that might play into the practice of anthropology. The point of commonality for these paradigms, at least within the seminar itself, was the focus on the phenomenology and ontology of violent acts—how they emerge and are marked as "violence." For Das, the culture concept, after Huntington (1998) and others, is beyond reclamation, so bodies become the more relevant site for an understanding of violence. These are not the fleshy vehicles of Cartesian minds, but

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cultural bodies, both marked and materially inscribed by physical harm but also sentient and articulate, searching for a way to reoccupy themselves. In this context, aspects of what is subsumed under the culture concept become evident in the collective shaping of experience in suffering, which critically occurs in the narration of the victim. This stabilization of the experience, and through that the creation of a stable site to occupy in the world, is often denied through the counter-narratives of the state that demonizes and devalues a barbarous and rebellious enemy and so places it beyond the empathy that those narratives otherwise might create.

Our seminar thus involved critically evaluating diverse aspects of the cultural representation and practice of violence with the aim of demonstrating ways in which close attention to cultural forms improves our interpretation of shocking and troubling instances of conflict and killing, and highlighting the way in which those interpretations may themselves contribute or be mimetically linked to the way in which violence is performed on the bodies and minds of others. In these ways one hopes that, through more adequate attention to the cultural genesis and dynamics of violence, the possibility for greater human security, in the face of what often appears as unpredictable and uncontrollable individual and community violence, will be improved. Emphasis on the cultural facets of violence will allow anthropological models for examining violent contexts and behaviors to be extended into realms, such as the criminal, educational, and familial, that have often been the province of other academic disciplines, such as psychology and sociology. If the findings of our discussions are any indication, then the failure of other disciplines to take into account the kind of cultural factors discussed here has been, in no small part, responsible for the almost total professional incoherence on such violent performers as gangbangers, school shooters, and wife beaters. But recognition of this fact is no cause for professional gloating on our part, since, as we have seen, the interpretation of violence may also become a means for critically evaluating and improving anthropological models. At the same time, intellectual emphasis on performance and meaning, as shown in this volume, brings to the general discussion of violence, warfare, and aggression a much-needed focus on the cultural motivations of violent actors and the cultural construction of

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violent acts, not just the broader social and political factors that provide the opportunity for violent cultural expression. These latter structuring and historical factors cannot be ignored, but without trying to bring in the experience of violence, the explanation remains incomplete.

Moreover, a theoretical emphasis on violent acts and their immediate contexts, as was often the emphasis in the seminar, is certainly not meant to occlude the way in which the legacies of such violent acts are themselves capable of generating further violence, precisely becoming part of those generative schemes that give form and legitimation to future acts of violence. For this reason it seems appropriate to include two further papers, not read at the seminar but that both perfectly illustrate the relevance of the legacies of violence to the "tomorrow" of violence, as Carolyn Nordstrom (this volume) nicely terms it. Thus, Leigh A. Payne in turn carefully unpacks the performative aspects of perpetrators' testimonies to "truth and reconciliation" forums in South Africa. Her close analysis of this process shows clearly the way in which such legacies are potentially part of violent tomorrows.

The wider relevance of a research program encompassing these kinds of priorities is demonstrated by the way popular and media representation of external violence relies heavily on the representation of non-Western cultures as primitive or subject to historically intractable legacies of conflict. At the same time, these ideas about the genesis of violence in other cultures interact with cultural understandings of the violence of "youth" or "serial killers" in the West. By developing a cross-cultural framework for understanding the genesis and dynamics of both the collective violence of others and the cultural expression of violence among ourselves, more adequate policy responses may emerge. The need for such policy alternatives seems clear, as school and workplace shootings, internal and external terrorism, the hunt for serial killers and random snipers, and continuing foreign policy conflicts have all prompted urgent calls from many quarters for a better cultural understanding of violence. We believe that our discussions and the supporting case studies below will be relevant to those aims through their attempt to seek new interpretive strategies for providing precisely those answers.

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Notes

1. See Ferguson (2003b), Ferguson and Whitehead ([1992] 1999), Friedman (2003), and Reyna and Downs (1999) on nationalism, ethnicity, and the state. For pioneering approaches to cultural form and community terror, see, for example, Appadurai (1998), Daniel (1996), Kleinman, Das, and Lock (1997), and Tambiah (1996).

2. Such an approach has already proved very important with regard to the notion of the "victim" and the nature of "suffering" (see Kleinman, Das, and Lock 1997). Part of the reason for the seminar, therefore, was to extend such insights into the realm of the victimizers and the broader cultural construction of violence.

3. However, participants disagreed as to the relevance of writing histories of anthropology, not least since they may become a way of enforcing certain classifications of violence and are apt to be exclusionary, being largely orientated to the emergence of anthropological thinking in Europe and North America.

4. The related issues of how violence might it be affected by aesthetic ideas and how representational practices with regard to violence arise are considered here and in the chapter by Jeganathan.

5. Like "terrorism," Amazonian "cannibalism" has stood as evidence of the barbarity and intractability of others. But just as we have come in some cultural contexts to better understand the political dynamics of such charges, and in turn the place they have in the cultural meaning of others (Conklin 2001; Viveiros de Castro 1992), so we now need to employ that same critical tradition in contemplating the "terrorists" and what we view as illegitimate violence.

6. The Spanish Inquisition, which became very refined and professional in the use of torture, would give the victim an opportunity to confess/recant after the mere sight of the instruments of torment, a ploy often used in medieval juridical torture.

7. "Infinite Justice" was the name first given to operations to find and kill those responsible for the destruction of the World Trade Center, but the name was almost immediately dropped since this phrase is also used to name God in Islamic thought.

8. Participants were of course aware of the many conceptual difficulties in using the notion of the "state" (see Ferguson 2003, for example), but, as with discussion around the culture concept, our purpose was not to rehabilitate that notion per se. Thus, in distinguishing juridical questions from those of legitimacy, we were at least able to hold these problems of definition in abeyance.

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9. However, this view itself may misinterpret Weber, as his original formulation used the terms *macht* or *kraft*, not *gewalt*, the latter term carrying an implication of violence. Thus, as in English, there is in German an analytical distinction between "force" and "violence" (see also Ellis this volume), and Weber's phrase is usually translated as "legitimate force," not "violence," although this is often the gloss given in secondary comments based on translated versions of Weber's original German text, such as *Politics as a Vocation* (1946). See also Stewart and Strathern (2002) and Ferguson (2003b).

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