

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

APARNA RAO, MICHAEL BOLLIG, and MONIKA BÖCK (Eds.) *The Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, 399 p. + index.

These sound, scholarly anthropological papers on war will be of interest to specialists in conflict and various area studies. A few will also attract general readers who want to understand the news of the day. Most conspicuous among this latter category are two articles independently describing Lashkar-e Taiba (the Army of the Pure), the jihadist Pakistani organization that perpetrated the massacre in Mumbai in late 2008.

Mariam Abou Zahab's contribution shows that the wider movement began as a nationalist holy war between the Muslims of Kashmir and the Indian state, but has expanded since the 1990s, becoming a jihad between Muslims world-wide and those Hindus in league with other enemies of Islam – Jews, and the secular and Christian West. (This trend would seem to explain why Westerners staying in elite hotels and an Orthodox Jewish community centre were the chief targets of the Mumbai attack.) Zahab explains in remarkable detail the process of recruitment and training of Pakistani teenagers who join the Lashkar-e Taiba movement. The author sees it as a “safety valve” for these young aspirants to martyrdom who cannot afford to migrate to the West. (The pay is good.) However, many of the martyrs in the sample had joined Lashkar-e Taiba after marrying and finding a stable job. Thus their joining must fill quite a different void, lending their lives a sense of purpose.

The second article about this jihadist movement is by Yoginder Sikand, who emphasizes the Islamist opposition of Lashkar-e Taiba against the popular Sufi tradition in Kashmir. The jihadist group is the military wing of the Markaz movement, which belongs to the doctrinaire Ahl-e Hadith school of Islam. It was originally assisted by a close associate of Osama bin Laden and funded by Pakistan's secret services agency, the Inter Services Intelligence. Sikand points out that in 2001, Markaz sought to avoid embarrassing Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf by stopping Lashkar-e Taiba's jihadist activities in other parts of the world and confining it to Kashmir. Musharraf claimed to be preventing their entry into Kashmir, but in fact they continued doing so and, as recent events have shown, even attacked Mumbai after Musharraf was replaced as president. Most observers agree that in the aftermath of that event, the tension between India and Pakistan, both possessing nuclear weapons, constitutes the most dangerous problem on the planet.

It is worth mentioning a third article that also deals with Kashmir, though from a different perspective. This deals with the “virtual discourse” in Cyberspace about

that troubled region. It is one of four papers constituting a section of the book that analyzes the portrayal of conflicts in films or through Internet discussions. These on-line disputes include e-mail lists discussing Chiapas, Mexico; and contested Internet depictions of various Palestinian groups, who have been known to deface each other's web pages.

If these articles discuss small but world-famous current wars, a few other articles cover violent movements that are comprehensible from a traditional anthropological perspective. There are, for example, four papers dealing with tribal conflicts in Africa, all of which are being exacerbated by the burgeoning trade in small arms, including of course Kalashnikovs. To me, the most fascinating of these articles, by Jan-Bart Gewald, describes the enduring effects of the genocidal Herero-German War of 1904 in Namibia. After the Germans were defeated in 1915, some of the Herero survived – especially those who had been connected with the German army – and formed a social support paramilitary organization copying its structure. They carried rank, wore German uniforms, drilled with sticks, and adorned themselves with medals and ostrich feathers. Although the Herero constitute only seven percent of Namibia's total population today, their history is iconic in travel brochures, and they maintain an identity that remains centered on the war.

This book concludes with a chapter by John Darby offering a composite overview of “peace processes” in general. It sees these processes as often interrupted by violence, and classifies these outbreaks as originating in three types of former fighters: the “zealots,” the “opportunists” and the “mavericks.” I am not sure how useful this typology is in depicting peace processes generally, but Darby does supply illustrations, drawn from such conflicts as those among the Basques, Northern Irish, Sri Lankans, and Palestinians. The book is well done.

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