

Chapter 10

Visions of Terror

On the Use of Images in the Mass-Mediated Representations of the Bali Bombing

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When, days after September 11 2001, our gaze was transfixed by the images of the plane hitting one of the WTC towers, we were all forced to experience what the “compulsion to repeat” and *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle are: we wanted to see it again and again; the same shots were repeated *ad nauseum*, and the uncanny satisfaction we got from it was *jouissance* at its purist.

—Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*
(2002, pp. 11-12)

*I would like to thank the editors of this volume, as well as Mark Hobart, David Morgan, and my wife, Judith, for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this chapter. I also wish to acknowledge the constructive comments, questions, and discussion of the paper on which the chapter is based both at a recent conference at the University of Hawaii's East-West Center and at a special seminar at Gaja Mada University's Center for Cultural Studies (*Pusat Studi Kebudayaan*) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. I, of course, accept full responsibility for any mistakes or shortcomings in my analysis.

On 23 April 2003, the op-ed page of *The New York Times* carried an ad from the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC)—a nongovernment “environmental action organization”—showing a pair of belching smoke stacks silhouetted against a clear sky. The banner over the image read “We have enough to worry about without attacking our own land, water, and air” (see Figure 10.1).

In the ad’s soft-edged porthole photo, the billowing smoke is frozen, blowing to one side, with the two smokestacks both backlit and flanked by a third and seemingly inactive chimney. In both perspective and form, the image is strikingly similar to photographs that were taken of the smoking Trade Towers just before their collapse on September 11, 2001. The following morning, such images were published on front pages around the country (Finkel, 2001), and “the towers were established very quickly as the predominant visual marker of the events of September 11” (Zelizer, 2002, p. 58). Zelizer went on to point out that “Images of the towers appeared repeatedly over time, with the shot of the burning towers featured at year’s end as *Newsweek*’s cover photo of its special double issue (*Newsweek*, 2001-2). And, on December 31, 2001, the image topped a special *New York Times* section entitled “The year in pictures” (Zelizer, 2002, pp. 58-59).

Through its use of this image, the ad from the NRDC seemed to suggest that, with the now seemingly ubiquitous threat of terrorism, “We have enough to worry about” without the added troubles that will result from environmental irresponsibility. Yet, as much as I agree with the general concerns of the NRDC, I must admit that my first reaction on seeing the ad was

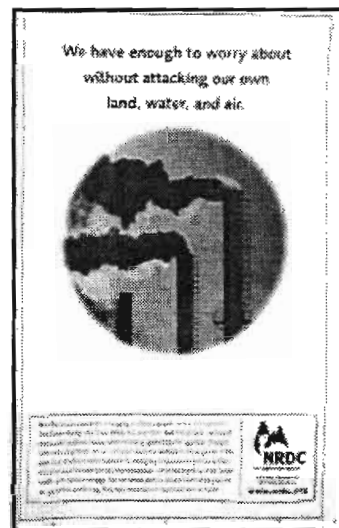


FIGURE 10.1. From *The New York Times* op-ed page. April 23, 2003. Reprinted with the permission of the NRDC.

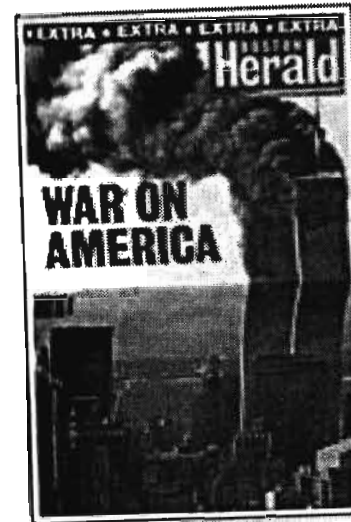


FIGURE 10.2. Front page of the *Boston Herald*, 12 September 2001. Reprinted with permission of the *Boston Herald*.

that it was exploitative, capitalizing both on popular fears of terrorism and on the memory of a national tragedy. It was, of course, not merely a *national* tragedy—as citizens of many countries died in the attack (to say nothing of those who have suffered as a result of the ensuing “war on terror”). But, if these first thoughts were admittedly trite (i.e., who cares! this was, after all, one of the more benign of many recent exploitations of 9/11), my next thought was—having been told that “We have enough to worry about”—*who are “we” anyhow?*

WHO ARE “WE”?

In her recent book on images of war, Susan Sontag (2003) suggested that “No we should be taken for granted when the subject is looking at other people’s pain.” Commenting on wartime photographs of the dead and injured, she asked “Who are the we at whom such shock-pictures are aimed?” Although the NRDC’s image of the smoking towers is not exactly a “shock picture” of the sort Sontag was addressing, “we” were nevertheless explicitly invoked. So under what conditions might “we” be susceptible to critical analysis?

Generally speaking, “we” figured prominently in post-9/11 America. Initially, following the attacks, “we” were cast retrospectively as the collective patient of an action perpetrated by shadowy agents (or, perhaps more precisely, *instruments*) of “evil.”¹ Subsequently, “we” emerged in both

scholarly and popular discourse as the collective agent of “bearing witness” (Zelizer, 2002), “recovering from trauma” (Sreberny, 2002), and showing the resolve to get on with life.² As Edward Said remarked in November 2001, just two months after the attacks:

There really is a feeling being manufactured by the media and the government that a collective “we” exists and that “we” all act and feel together, as witnessed by such perhaps unimportant surface phenomena as flag-flying and the use of the collective “we” by journalists in describing events all over the world in which the US is involved. We bombed, we said, we decided, we acted, we feel, we believe, etc., etc. Of course this has only marginally to do with the reality, which is far more complicated and far less reassuring. (Said, 2001, cited in Sreberny, 2002, p. 225)

For Said, this “reality” included—among other things—the silenced opposition from within “the collective” as “we” marched off to war. He went on to explain:

There is plenty of unrecorded or unregistered scepticism, even outspoken dissent, but it seems hidden by overt patriotism. So, American unity is being projected with such force as to allow very little questioning of US policy, which in many ways is heading towards a series of unexpected events in Afghanistan and elsewhere, the meaning of which many people will not realise until too late. (Said, 2001)

Although much of what occurred subsequently was not—at least to many—entirely “unexpected,” it is difficult to imagine a better example of disarticulation (Hobart, n.d.). Those of “us” who might have been skeptical of—or even outright opposed to—prevailing government policy were left little room to mount effective public opposition. In short, “we” do not dissent. When “we” eventually got around to invading Iraq, the antiwar demonstrations in various parts of the country—despite their record numbers—received scant coverage in mainstream American network and cable news. In line with the broader *with-us-or-against-us* swagger associated with “the war on terror,” consent was cast dominantly in terms of “supporting our troops”—a responsibility none of “us” could abrogate in good conscience. So who, then, are “we”?

In the first instance, I would argue that “we” are the outcome of an articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985)—a temporary suturing-over of the many antagonisms underpinning events that, as Said noted, were “far more complicated and far less reassuring.”³ But, more specifically, in the advertisement from the NRDC, I would suggest that “we” are Americans. As the

blurb in the lower part of the ad explains, “The Bush administration is staging an all-out assault on our environment,” and we must “help shore up our defenses at home.” Through the ad’s deployment of one of the administration’s own rhetorical strategies, “we” surface as a collectivity under threat—under threat from that very administration. In calling for the protection of “our own land, water, and air,” “we” emerge as responsible for “our own” natural resources. But, further, in juxtaposing the image of the smoking WTC/chimneys with this call to collective environmental responsibility, the ad also articulates “us” in a very particular state-ideological manner: its use of the first-person plural is parasitic on the “we” of “we will never forget,” “united we stand” and the many other invocations of post-9/11 patriotic unity. In short, “We” are a nation under threat, in fear, and in need of “defenses at home.”

This, however, is not an essay on American uses of 9/11. I began with the ad from the NRDC because it raises some rather important questions for critical media studies and, in particular, for the analysis of mass mediated images of terrorism and violence such as those linked to the coverage of the tragic bombings in Bali. If, for instance, the photograph of the smoking WTC/chimneys helped to articulate a particular kind of subject—in this case, an environmentally responsible (and implicitly patriotic) collectivity under threat—what kinds of subject do other images of terrorism articulate? The picture of backlit chimneys may reiterate a popular image of the smoking Towers, but how is one to account critically for such a reiteration? Using these questions as a point of departure, I shall examine in the following pages the use of photographs and other images in the coverage of the tragic bombings in Bali on 12 October 2002.

I have limited my analysis here to the first few days of coverage for two related reasons. First, there is the complexity of the coverage itself. Representations of the Bali bombing have been anything but uniform, both through time and across the different regional media. As Zelizer pointed out in her analysis of “Photography, Journalism and Trauma,” photography was a central feature of commentary on 9/11 long after “the three- or four-day period of photographic documentation that has tended to characterize other traumatic events” (2002, p. 54). The Bali bombing also appears to have been an exception to this general tendency. So, in the first instance, this chapter is meant as a contribution to the analysis of how Euro-American and Indonesian media went about producing a coherent account of events in the aftermath of the Bali bombing. Second, there is the matter of what Jaap van Ginneken called the “primary definition” of a news story:

[T]hree major world news agencies, the major American, British and French news-gathering organizations [Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France-Presse], have a quasi monopoly in providing prime def-

initions of breaking news in the world periphery. Even if they are not actually the first on the spot, they are usually the first to inform the rest of the world. (1998, p. 114; bracketed addition mine)

And, once the story is framed, “there is a certain resistance to change. The Gestalt or configuration will tend to perpetuate itself” (1998, p. 113). So, I am interested specifically in the question of how visual representation figured in the broader process of making sense of the bombing. How, for example, did pictures and video footage figure in that initial process of “primary definition”? What regularities and disjunctures may be discerned in this respect between Indonesian and broadly Euro-American media? And how did their respective representations relate to broader configurations of conflict, power, and violence? In the course of trying to answer these questions, I shall argue that critical approaches to media and visual representation may end up telling us more about the assumptions of their proponents than they do about the events that they purport to explain.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING VISUAL

Show, don't tell.

—a journalistic adage

In the first newswire reports from Bali on the night of the bombings, it was not altogether clear what had happened. It seemed that a bomb had exploded near the U.S. Consulate in Renon, and a much larger explosion in Kuta was said to have destroyed several buildings, leaving numerous dead and many more seriously injured. There was an earlier report of a bombing at the Philippine Consulate in Manado, though it was uncertain whether it was linked in any way to the blasts in Kuta (Hakim, 2002). Although photographs did not accompany these earliest reports, their representation of the incident was not entirely nonvisual.⁴

Explosion in Kuta

The earliest news report of the Kuta bombing that I was able to find online came from the *Tempo* News Room in Jakarta, and was posted at midnight (Jakarta time)—approximately an hour and a half to two hours after the blast:

Explosion in Kuta killed approximately 10 people

13 Oct 2002 00:00:35, *Western Indonesian Time*

TEMPO Interactive, Jakarta: A bomb exploded in front of the Sari Club, on Jalan Legian, Kuta, Bali, Saturday (12/10), around 11:10 Central Indonesian Time. As a result of the explosion, no less than 10 visitors to the Sari Club died and approximately forty others were injured.

Tonight ambulance workers went back and forth transporting the injured to Sanglah Hospital, Denpasar. Their number cannot be estimated with any certainty. In addition to those who died, tens of buildings in the vicinity were seriously damaged, among others the Paddy's Club building and the White Rose Hotel.

There was great commotion at the location of the incident. The electricity in the area was out and the tourists who were staying in the vicinity of the blast were milling about. A tourist from Australia was seen bawling because her child, who was 17 years old, had been in the Sari Club. Balinese Regional Police Chief, Brigadier General Budi Setiawan immediately led his agency to the location to handle the case.

—Jalil Hakim – *Tempo* News Room⁵

The report begins with what might be considered “the facts” of the incident as they were known at the time: a bomb exploded in front of the Sari Club on Jalan Legian in Kuta around 11:10 leaving no less than ten dead, forty injured, and tens of buildings destroyed. Although the number of victims was woefully underestimated and the precise time of the explosions may or may not have been given accurately, the report does indicate some aspects of the scene that followed the blasts: tourists milling about and ambulances going to and from the hospital—presumably in the dark as a result of the electricity having gone out. One gets from reading these details a sense of the commotion around the bombsite; but it is worth noting that, despite the apparent carnage, the tone of the reporting seems rather matter-of-fact.

So soon after the bombing, it would not be terribly surprising if there were little in the way of visual detail available to the journalists working the night shift in the *Tempo* News Room in Jakarta, which is roughly an hour and a half from Bali by plane. A photograph did not accompany the report, though in this connection it should also be noted that the *Tempo Interaktif* Web site tends to be rather sparing with the use of photos. (The lead page, for instance, did not display a photograph associated with the bombing until the 16th—i.e., four days later.) Nevertheless, this initial report was not entirely devoid of visual representation.

At a stretch, the reference to specific buildings that were destroyed might be interpreted as representing a particular scene. For someone who had visited this part of Kuta, it could be argued that the description represented a specific and visually distinguishable object. But that sort of “imagery” would also require a particular kind of reader—one who had either *been there* or, at the very least, had perhaps seen a photograph of the buildings. Of course there is no saying what sort of image it might or might not evoke for that reader; and, what is more, this approach would also require a critical account of (visual) memory, which is anything but unproblematic.⁶

Looking more closely at the text of the report, the tourists “milling about” and the bawling Australian woman were both introduced with the word *tampak*—to appear, be visible or obvious, in sight and so forth—and, in the latter case, the woman was explicitly said to have been “seen” (*terlihat*). Without wishing to overinterpret what comes down to the use of just two words in a rather short article, I think it is safe to say that visual representation was fairly limited in this first report. But was the sparing use of the visual merely a result of time constraints and insufficient information? How, for instance, did this report compare in this respect with subsequent Indonesian-language reports on the bombing? And what about the earliest reports in the Anglophone media?

On the Scene

The earliest English-language report that I found online was posted to *TheJakartaPost.com* at 12:54 AM, Jakarta time—that is, less than an hour after the report from the *Tempo* News Room, and possibly as little as two and half hours after the explosions.⁷ The report was attributed to Reuters.

Three dead, 100 hurt in blasts on Indonesia’s Bali

10/13/2002 12:54:26 AM

JAKARTA: At least three people were killed and some 100 injured, including foreigners, in a series of explosions on Indonesia’s popular resort island of Bali, police and hospital officials said on Saturday.

One police officer who declined to be identified said the explosions had occurred simultaneously, one of them not far from the U.S. consulate on Bali. Police said there were two blasts.

“At this stage there are three dead. It could be up to 100 hurt,” said the officer as quoted by Reuters.

An official at a local hospital also said at least 100 people had been hurt, including Americans and Australians.

Eyewitnesses spoke of chaos in the area near one of the explosions, at the Sari nightclub around the famous Kuta beach strip, as foreign tourists were reveling on a typical Saturday night. The southern Indonesian island is a particularly popular holiday destination for Australians.

One witness said windows on shops had been blown out up to 500 meters (yards) away.

One witness reported hearing at least three explosions on the island in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim nation.

“I saw one man, who looked Indonesian, whose head had been blown off,” said the witness, a local photographer, Murdani Usman, speaking from the scene near a night club.—Reuters

Coming less than an hour after the report from the *Tempo* News Room, the details of the incident still seem to have been somewhat sketchy. There was a series of explosions—either two or possibly three blasts—that occurred on “Indonesia’s popular resort island of Bali.” Unlike the report from *Tempo*, there is no mention of a bomb—instead, the account simply referred to “explosions” and “blasts.” However, in addition to reporting a lower body count (as presumably based on an earlier—or perhaps simply different—estimation), the incident was also contextualized in a specific manner—namely, through reference to Indonesia as “the world’s most populous Muslim nation” and to Bali as a “particularly popular holiday destination for Australians” with its “famous Kuta strip.” In at least one respect, I presume such difference in the mode of contextualization may be explained through reference to the kinds of readers imagined for each of the two reports. (e.g., readers of *Tempo* would probably be expected to know that Bali is in Indonesia.)

One minute “foreign tourists were reveling on a typical Saturday night,” and the next there was “chaos.” As with the report from *Tempo*, there were no photographs to accompany this report. Yet over half the text is devoted to “eyewitness” accounts. These “eyewitnesses” appear to be cited on more or less equal footing with other sources of information. For instance, the police reported “two blasts,” and “One witness reported hearing at least three explosions.” In other words, at this early stage in the coverage, these two accounts appear to be juxtaposed without either being attributed with discernible privilege.

But, before taking the analysis further, for reasons that will become apparent, I would like to consider a second English-language report that was posted to CNN.com roughly an hour and three quarters later—that is to say, at least four hours after the explosions.⁸ Like the reports from both *Tempo* and Reuters/*Jakarta Post*, there were neither photographic nor other images to accompany the article.

Bali explosions: '12 dead'

Saturday, October 12, 2002 Posted: 3:39 PM EDT (1939 GMT)

JAKARTA, Indonesia (CNN)—At least twelve people have been killed and some 100 hurt, including American and Australian tourists, in a series of explosions on Indonesia's popular resort island of Bali, local media and hospital officials said.

The explosions came at Kuta Beach and Ubud on Saturday night. Bali is a popular holiday destination and particularly popular with Australians. Early reports say the explosion at Kuta Beach, which caused the greatest damage, was caused by a car bomb.

The Kuta Beach blast came at the Sari Club, a disco in the Kuta area of Bali. The other explosion occurred in downtown Denpasar, the capital of Bali. Lt. Col. Yatim Suyatno, a police spokesman, told The Associated Press.

One police officer who declined to be identified told Reuters that the explosions had occurred simultaneously, one of them not far from the U.S. consulate on Bali. Police said there were two blasts.

An official at a local hospital told Reuters that at least 100 people had been hurt, including Americans and Australians.

Eyewitnesses spoke of chaos in the area near one of the explosions at the Sari nightclub as foreign tourists were revelling on a typical Saturday night. One eyewitness said windows on shops had been blown out up to 500 metres away.

Another eyewitness reported hearing at least three explosions on the island in Indonesia, the world's most populous Moslem nation.

"I saw one man, who looked Indonesian, whose head had been blown off," a local photographer, Murdani Usman, told Reuters.

There had been warnings recently from the U.S. embassy in Jakarta of possible violence linked to extreme Muslim groups.

Some critics say Indonesia is the weakest link in the U.S.-led war on terror in Southeast Asia, partly because the government has concerns about cracking down on radical Muslim groups for fear of upsetting the vast moderate mainstream.

It was not clear whether the explosions in Bali were related to an earlier blast Saturday at a Philippine consulate on North Sulawesi Island that caused minor damage but no injuries.

An earlier blast Saturday on Indonesia's Sulawesi island broke three windows of the Philippine consulate in the city of Manado, said Suleman Munde, a security guard at the building, which was closed at the time of the explosion.

Police Lt. Col. Henjke Kuwara said the small explosive device had been planted at the fence of building.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Manado is a port city and a transit point to the southern Philippines, close to where the Islamic militant Abu Sayyaf group is active.

—CNN Producer Atika Shubert contributed to this report

The contributing CNN Producer, Atika Shubert, would later appear on CNN television news, reporting "live from Bali"; but this first report was filed from Jakarta. In examining the report, I would tentatively suggest that the prominence of "eyewitness" testimony is linked to a journalistic aesthetic of the visual ("show, don't tell"), as well as to a particular configuration of "on the scene" authority that is, in certain respects, not entirely unlike that of traditional ethnographic monographs. But, before pressing this line of inquiry further, I would first like to have a closer look at the report from CNN.

Comparing the syntax and diction from one paragraph to the next—for example, the repeated indefinite reference to "an earlier blast" in the third and fourth from the final paragraph—the article appears to have been put together rather quickly. Comparison with the report from Reuters also indicates that the CNN article incorporates—almost verbatim—practically the entire text of that earlier report.

A COMPARISON OF EXCERPTS FROM THE TWO ENGLISH-LANGUAGE REPORTS

Reuters (as posted to the *Jakarta Post* website) Posted 12:54, Jakarta Time (01:54 Bali Time; 17:54 GMT)

(A) JAKARTA: At least three people were killed and some 100 injured, including foreigners, in a series of explosions on Indonesia's popular resort island of Bali, police and hospital officials said on Saturday.

(B) One police officer who declined to be identified said the explosions had occurred simultaneously, one of them not far from the U.S. consulate on Bali. Police said there were two blasts.

(C) An official at a local hospital also said at least 100 people had been hurt, including Americans and Australians.

(D) Eyewitnesses spoke of chaos in the area near one of the explosions, at the Sari nightclub around the famous

CNN.com

Posted 15:39, US Eastern Daylight Time (03:39 Bali Time; 19:39 GMT)

JAKARTA, Indonesia (CNN)—At least twelve people have been killed and some 100 hurt, including American and Australian tourists, in a series of explosions on Indonesia's popular resort island of Bali, local media and hospital officials said.

One police officer who declined to be identified told Reuters that the explosions had occurred simultaneously, one of them not far from the U.S. consulate on Bali. Police said there were two blasts.

An official at a local hospital told Reuters that at least 100 people had been hurt, including Americans and Australians.

Eyewitnesses spoke of chaos in the area near one of the explosions at the Sari nightclub as foreign tourists were

Kuta beach strip, as foreign tourists were reveling on a typical Saturday night.

- (E) One witness said windows on shops had been blown out up to 500 meters (yards) away.
- (F) One witness reported hearing at least three explosions on the island in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim nation.
- (G) "I saw one man, who looked Indonesian, whose head had been blown off," said the witness, a local photographer, Murdani Usman, speaking from the scene near a night club.

reveling on a typical Saturday night.

One eyewitness said windows on shops had been blown out up to 500 metres away.

Another eyewitness reported hearing at least three explosions on the island in Indonesia, the world's most populous Moslem nation.

"I saw one man, who looked Indonesian, whose head had been blown off," a local photographer, Murdani Usman, told Reuters.

The same eyewitness accounts and contextual stock-phrases (e.g., Bali as "Indonesia's popular resort island of Bali," Indonesia as "the world's most populous Muslim nation") occur not only in both of these reports, but they are also found in numerous articles published in the days following the bombing. Permutations of the paragraph that I have labeled as (G) appeared, for instance, on the front page of the London editions of both *The Sunday Times* and *The Independent on Sunday*. Yet, despite being posted less than two hours after the Reuters report, the article from CNN is decidedly more complex. "The facts" of the incident remain fairly straightforward, if still a little sketchy. There were, as indicated in the title, "12 dead" as well as "some 100 hurt, including American and Australian tourists." There were either two or three blasts located in Kuta, Ubud, and downtown Denpasar "not far from the U.S. Consulate on Bali." Here it is worth noting that, in this earliest stage of the reporting, it was often less than clear how reference to places such as "downtown Denpasar" and "not far from the U.S. Consulate on Bali" were related. Although these two phrases occur in successive paragraphs (fourth and fifth) of the report from CNN, it is ambiguous whether the two sources cited were referring to the same place or not. It was unclear at this point whether the blasts were related to the bombing near the Philippine Consulate in Manado, North Sulawesi. (Later, it turned out to be a totally unrelated incident.) But "early reports" indicated that the destruction in Kuta was caused by a car bomb, blowing out windows "up to 500 meters away." And, perhaps most importantly—despite the seemingly innocent reference to Manado being "close to where the Islamic militant Abu Sayyaf group is active"—"There was no immediate claim of responsibility."

The initial article from Reuters went further than the *Tempo* report in trying to make sense of what had happened; and this report from CNN went further still in articulating the incident within the framework of a specific set of assumptions regarding Bali, Indonesia, Islam and "the US-led war on terror." As in the previous report, Bali, as the location of the bombing, was represented as "Indonesia's popular resort island," where "foreign tourists were reveling on a typical Saturday night." Although located in Indonesia, which is "the world's most populous Moslem nation," Bali was implicitly cordoned off as a "popular holiday destination." This distinction between Bali and Indonesia proceeds from a complex of longstanding caricatures of Oriental otherness: Bali as exotic paradise (see, e.g., Vickers, 1989), and Indonesia as Islamic threat—which are, in many ways, two sides of the same coin. And this distinction would become more pronounced in the coverage in the days to come.

The implicit framing of the story in terms of "the US-led war on terror," and Indonesia as its "weakest link," was introduced through reference to the U.S. embassy's alleged warning to Indonesia "of possible violence linked to extreme Muslim groups"—a perhaps rather less than subtle "we told you so"—and this was followed by the then seemingly natural reproach of the perceived Indonesian reticence to "[crack] down on radical Muslim groups for fear of upsetting the vast moderate mainstream." I should note, at this juncture, that I am not taking issue with the idea of there being a "vast moderate mainstream" in Indonesia, nor even necessarily with its perceived role in determining either governmental intervention or its absence. Rather, I am tracing the outlines of an emerging interpretive framework and drawing attention to a series of discursive figures that would grow both in prominence and seeming naturalness in the days to come.

It may be noted that, in both the Reuters and CNN reports, almost every line is attributed to some source or another. (The CNN report even distances itself from the body count by placing it within inverted commas in the title: '12 dead.')

In contrast to the report from *Tempo*, which cited no sources apart from a concluding by-line, the CNN report cited "local media and hospital officials," newswire reports from AP and Reuters, nonspecified "early reports," a local photographer, both named and anonymous police officers, a security guard and—perhaps most importantly—several "eyewitnesses." Although the Indonesian report from *Tempo* did refer to the bawling Australian woman as having been "seen," there was nothing even approaching the degree of visual detail presented in the reports from Jakarta Post/Reuters and CNN. So the question is whether the comparatively sparing use of visual imagery in the *Tempo* report was merely due to a dearth of information or, alternatively, whether this might indicate a more significant disjuncture between the Indonesian and broadly Euro-American coverage of the bombing.

I Witness

In addition to noting the approximate times and locations of the explosions, the mainstream Indonesian-language reports that were posted online over the next twenty-four hours seemed primarily concerned with the number of victims and their countries of origin, the physical destruction—buildings, cars, and so forth—and the ongoing effort to get medical attention for those who were injured in the blasts. The arrival of the Australian foreign minister, as well as of medical (and the possibility of investigative) assistance, was also a prominent theme.

Several articles were devoted almost entirely to the comments made by governmental officials and others of similar stature, from both Indonesia and abroad. The question of “terrorism” was also an important (though contentious) issue, with several Indonesian officials weighing in on the related questions of who was responsible and how to prevent such an attack from happening again. However, whereas the CNN report cast the bombing clearly within the framework of “the U.S.-led war on terror” and a perceived “resurgence” of al-Qaeda, the Indonesian media—at least at the outset—seemed to be more concerned with the impact the event would have on internal stability and the image of Indonesia in the eyes of the rest of the world.

In comparison with the initial report from the *Tempo* News Room, visual imagery was somewhat more pronounced in the Indonesian reports that were published the morning after the blasts (13 October). Eyewitnesses (*saksi mata*) were occasionally cited; though, more often than not, their comments were addressed to the physical damage in Kuta. Having described the destruction of the Sari Club, for instance, an article published in the Jakarta-based daily newspaper, *Kompas*, went on to note:

Additionally, dozens of other buildings within a radius of ten to twenty meters sustained heavy damage. Meanwhile, shop windows as well as the windows in hotels and other places of entertainment that were within a radius of one kilometer were smashed. “I saw the windows in the Kuta Square shopping complex, smashed” said Dadi who was there in Kuta Square, approximately one kilometer from the bombsite.⁹

There were also descriptions of the “panic” (*kepanikan*) and commotion that followed the explosions as, for instance, in the opening lines of the lead article in Sunday morning’s (13 October) edition of the *Jawa Pos*:

There was extraordinary panic in Bali last night. Two bombs exploded almost simultaneously in Kuta and Renon, Denpasar, 20 kilometers away. The first explosion occurred near the United States Consulate in

Renon, and was followed by a truly massive explosion in a club for foreigners in the tourist center of Kuta.¹⁰ (*Kompas*, 2002)

Nevertheless, “eyewitness” accounts in the Indonesian coverage were comparatively rare and, almost without exception, they notably did not include explicit descriptions of bloodied victims, mutilated bodies, and the like.

By contrast, perhaps the most striking aspect of the early Anglophone coverage of the bombing was the sense of horror and chaos articulated through the eyewitness accounts of what might best be described as anecdotal gore—descriptions, for example, of dismembered bodies and other images of carnage. It may be recalled that the reports from both Reuters and CNN, for instance, reproduced three “eyewitness” accounts including that of “a local photographer” who described seeing “one man, who looked Indonesian, whose head had been blown off.” This very anecdote would be cited more or less verbatim among other places in front-page articles in *The Sunday Times* and *The Telegraph on Sunday* in London, and similar accounts could be found in many of the reports posted in the hours and days following the bombing.

Mr. Hawkins said he saw one man with his leg blown off and saw women and children screaming. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2002)

Australian flight attendant Kylie Denae . . . saw bodies being flung out of the open-air club. Body parts and glass were splattered everywhere and she witnessed a man’s leg being blown off right in front of her. (*Straits Times*, 2002)

New Zealander Lonny McDowell, 25, was at Paddy’s when the blast blew chairs and concrete through the bar. . . . He said he saw a man with no legs and another with a cable stuck through his stomach. (CNN, 2002b)

Very much as the earlier CNN article (2002a) reiterated verbatim the text from Reuters/*Jakarta Post* (2002), each of these “eyewitness” accounts were also reiterated in subsequent reports. In this connection, I would suggest that, if *The Washington Post*’s Philip Graham could call journalism “the first draft of history,” then this kind of *breaking news* appears to be the product of something like what R.G. Collingwood called the method of “scissors-and-paste”:

The method by which it proceeds is first to decide what we want to know about, and then to go in search of statements about it, oral or written, purporting to be made by actors in the events concerned, or by eyewitnesses of them, or by persons repeating what actors or eyewitnesses

nesses have told them, or have told their informants, or those who informed their informants, and so on. (1946, p. 257)

As Collingwood put it, “history for the scissors-and-paste historian means repeating statements that other people have made before him” (1946, p. 274). That is to say, it is not “historical” in any serious sense of the word.

Here it is interesting to note that the eyewitnesses are often identified by name, occupation, and/or place of residence, whereas (often by default) the people/bodies they describe are—without exception, I believe—anonymous. But why all the blood and guts? Why does there appear to be such a preponderance of graphic detail in the Anglophone media when there seems to be so little in their Indonesian counterparts? Is this simply an extension of their more generally divergent uses of visual imagery? And, if so, how is the disjuncture to be explained?

Eye Present

I suggested earlier that the prominence of “eyewitnesses” and, later, “on the scene” reporting in Euro-American coverage of the bombing suggests a journalistic aesthetic of the visual (“show, don’t tell”), as well as a particular configuration of “on the scene” authority that is, in certain respects, not entirely unlike that of traditional ethnographic tracts. In the editorial introduction to their now classic volume, on *Writing Culture*, Clifford and Marcus pointed out that “The predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant observation, data collection, and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside—looking at, objectifying, or, somewhat closer, reading a given reality” (Crapanzano, 1986, p. 11). As several contributors to the volume argued, such visual tropes for ethnographic knowledge tend to give a rather misleading sense of the kinds of practices in which one engages when “in the field.” In a related connection, Hobart noted that

... the visual metaphor of knowing creates a world of relatively stable states. . . . When you see something in the field, you usually have to go and ask someone what it is that you have just seen. We ask questions. The problem is how to get from shifting, intensely situated polylogues and dialogues to the timeless monologues of the professionals. (1996, p. 15)

The problem is that ethnographic authority tends to rest on a contradiction between the immediacy (hence authenticity) of ethnographic detail and the distance (hence objectivity) associated with a visualist epistemology (Fabian, 1983, pp. 105ff).

Returning to the news media’s deployment of “eyewitness” accounts, the personalized viewing subject and the anonymous object fit this traditional ethnographic mold rather nicely, and the affinity with ethnographic writing became more pronounced in subsequent coverage, when these eyewitness accounts—that is, often the *same* eyewitness accounts—shifted from their position as sources of information to their deployment in a more anecdotal fashion. As with Malinowski’s description of arriving in the Trobriand Islands or the Geertz’s arrival on Bali, and so forth (see Pratt, 1986), CNN’s reporting garners authenticity through various rituals of presence and vision: being “on the scene,” citing “eyewitnesses,” “live” coverage, and so on. But, as with traditional ethnographic writing, the pretense to *being there* is usually not what it appears. For, as van Ginneken noted, “Very often live coverage of an unexpected event is really live coverage of the *aftermath* of an unexpected event” (1998, p. 112).

Nevertheless, it is perhaps difficult to overstate the importance of presence—and the visual—in the broadly Western coverage of the bombing. As the CNN anchor asked Atika Shubert, the correspondent in Bali, on the night of the bombing: “Atika, you’ve been to the hospital, you’ve been to the scene, what can you tell us?” But, this association of representational authenticity with presence and vision is anything but fortuitous. Rather, it situates EurAm news media well within the more generally logocentric framework of Western thought. Unfortunately, the critical implications of logocentrism are understood perhaps somewhat less frequently than the term itself is actually used. Although in use, albeit in a more limited sense, earlier in the twentieth century (the OED cites uses back to the late 1930s), “logocentrism” is better known as the term Jacques Derrida deployed in his early work to characterize the broadly Western *metaphysics of presence*. The term was glossed with unusual clarity in the following translator’s note to Derrida’s *Dissemination*:

“Logocentric”—that which is “centered” on the “Logos” (= speech, logic, reason, the Word of God)—is the term used by Derrida to characterize any signifying system governed by the notion of the self-presence of meaning; i.e. any system structured by a valorization of speech over writing, immediacy over distance, identity over difference, and (self-) presence over all forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity. (Derrida, 1981, p. 4, n.1)

In this sense, the practices of mainstream EurAm news media are unambiguously logocentric. The question is how this emphasis on presence is linked—if at all—to the preponderance of graphic imagery and the more general framing of the Bali bombing in terms of “the war on terror.”

A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPPLEMENT?

Not everybody trusts paintings
but people believe photographs.

—Ansel Adams

I noted that eyewitnesses were at first cited as sources of information, but were subsequently redeployed in a more anecdotal capacity. In other words, as time passed, the eyewitness accounts came to provide a sense of a “scene” that was caused by forces that could be explained not by the eyewitnesses themselves, but instead by police, “experts,” and government officials who gradually came center stage. Concurrent with this shift in authority was the growing prominence of photographs and other images.

Shock, Awe, and a Few Questions

On Thursday, October 17—that is, five days after the blast—*The New York Times* published a photographic survey of “Front-Page Headlines in Australian Newspapers after a Bombing Attack in Bali.” From the small composite image that appeared in the *Times*, it is impossible to distinguish their respective dates of publication; but the headlines were large and clear enough to discern some general themes: TERRORISM STRIKES HOME (*The Sydney Morning Herald*), TERROR BLAST (*The Canberra Times*), TERROR HITS HOME (*The Australian*), VICTIMS OF WAR and THEIR ONLY CRIME WAS TO GO ON HOLIDAY (*The Daily Telegraph*), EVIL (*Herald Sun*), TERRORISM ON OUR DOORSTEP (*The Advertiser*).

The lead photographs depict scenes of conflagration, images of destruction that might best be described as “the day after” and a collage of portraits—presumably of the victims. Many of these same images would appear in several different publications. In *The New York Times*’ composite alone, the photographs on the front pages of *The Australian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, and *The Advertiser* all appear to be taken from the same original, albeit cropped to varying degrees. As it happens, the British *Daily Telegraph* also ran this photo on the front page of the October 14th edition, under the headline “Al-Qa’eda Link to Club Bombing” (see Figure 10.4, p. 236).

More generally speaking, similar images (actually, often images taken from what appear to be the same photographs) appeared on other front pages in Britain and the United States. Although on the morning after the blast *The New York Times* did not carry a photograph associated with the bombing on the front page, a front-page story entitled “Bombing at an Indonesian Resort Leaves at Least 58 People Dead” was continued onto the sixth page, where it was accompanied by a black-and-white photo of a street

strewn with debris and burning cars. What appears to be the same photograph of the burning cars appeared in color on the CNN Web site, among other places, and the use of this image was very much in line with the more general preponderance of scenes of destruction and conflagration that also dominated both British and American television coverage.

In addition to the “breaking news” updates and news segments on the bombing shown as part of regular programming, news magazine programs such as MSNBC’s *Hardball with Chris Matthews* cast the bombing as their main story for discussion. While the “experts” were questioned on the probability of al-Qaeda involvement in the bombing, the camera would frequently cut to prerecorded footage of cars and buildings ablaze, victims being shuttled to the hospital, and other images “from the scene.” Often the same twenty-second clip would run over and over, on tape-loop, as the pundits speculated on the apparent “resurgence” of al-Qaeda. To a surprising degree, the same footage was used across all major United States network and cable news stations. More generally speaking, the replication of press photographs (and footage) is a well-documented aspect of the industry (see van Ginneken, 1998, p. 114); and, institutionally speaking, it can often be explained by the fact that a small number of photographic services tend to provide the images for the vast majority of mainstream news media producers. But there is still the question: why *these* images?

Having examined the coverage of the bombing in both online and hard-copy print editions for several mainstream Indonesian-language publications, there seems to be much less emphasis on—for lack of a better phrase—shock and awe. Whereas any number of horrific scenes may be found in the mainstream Anglophone press, similar images were few and far between in the mainstream Indonesian media. On the morning of the 13th, the *Jawa Pos* ran an article accompanied by a picture of flaming buildings, with people standing in the foreground—notably, not looking either injured or particularly panicked. A gallery of images at the *Kompas* Web site included a couple of photographs of charred remains; and the *Bali Post* updated its lead page that same morning with three small pictures: two of buildings ablaze and one of a partially visible corpse covered by a straw mat. (The latter photographs, though unattributed, appear elsewhere with attribution to AP and Reuters.) These exceptions aside, most of the photographs published in the Indonesian press seemed to depict the physical destruction—burnt-out buildings and so forth—as photographed “the morning after.” This disjuncture between the Indonesian and broadly Western coverage was evident in the photo galleries posted the day after the bombing to the Web sites for *Kompas* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, respectively. The *Kompas* gallery was dominated by images associated with the aftermath of the bombing; almost half the images in the latter displayed scenes of conflagration and what might best be described as terror-in-progress.

Some Provisional Labels

Before going on to address how this disjuncture played out, it is helpful to have a few provisional labels to characterize the different kinds of images that were used in the coverage. I felt there was adequate overlap between the Indonesian and broadly Euro-American materials to justify treating them together. However, suggesting that “the same pictures” were used by both, while accurate in one sense, is misleading in another. I would argue, ultimately, that the photographs cannot be analyzed (or even labeled) in isolation from the particular occasions of their deployment. In this sense, the labels are not *pre-analytic*, but rather they are the product of a first step in the analysis of use.

1. Horror and conflagration: Burning buildings and vehicles, as well as bloodied victims and others either looking on from a distance or, occasionally, picking their way through the rubble.
2. Rescue and hospital: Transport and treatment of victims, both on the night of the bombing and subsequently; many of these images might equally well be considered under “horror and conflagration”; also photos of people looking through lists of known and anonymous victims.
3. Damage and aftermath: Photographs taken the following morning, or afterward, including pictures of victims who survived the explosions, as well as those who did not. (The latter range from corpses that are more or less intact to piles of burned and only vaguely recognizable body parts.)
A prominent subset of these photographs might more aptly be labeled pictures of “the morning after,” as they depict from various perspectives (in among the rubble, from the air, etc.) the physical destruction of Kuta, including burnt-out buildings and the smoking remains of cars and other vehicles that were destroyed in the blast.
4. Security and investigation: Members of the police, security, and investigation teams from both Indonesia and abroad engaged in various kinds of activity.
5. Evacuation: Images either of planes on the runway (often probably taken at an earlier date) or of people waiting in queues or in the departure lounge preparing to leave Bali.
6. Homecoming: People in varying degrees of health arriving home—usually at the airport, and often appear to be met by friends or family.
7. Official intervention: Images of governmental officials, often labeled as taken from photos “on file” (i.e., not necessarily current).

8. Mourning: Images of people praying, lighting candles, attending vigils etc.
9. In memory of . . . : Pictures of victims, usually a portrait or sometimes a picture of someone engaged in an activity cited as something they loved to do (football, horseback riding, etc.); unlike victims photographed in “horror and conflagration,” “rescue and hospital,” and so forth the subjects are almost always named.
10. Maps: Maps indicating the location of Kuta in Bali, Bali in Indonesia, Indonesia in Southeast Asia, and so forth; often indicating sites of recent terrorist attacks or religion-related violence; also more elaborate maps with reconstructions of the events surrounding the bombing.
11. *The suspicious* at large: Not “suspects” proper (Amrozi, Imam Samudra, et al.), but photos of well-known “militants” such as Abu Bakar Ba’asyir and Ja’far Umar Thalib emerge in some of the earliest reporting; these pictures, like those of political leaders, are often taken from collections of photos taken at an earlier date and on file.
12. Composite images: These images generally bring together photographs with maps and other images at the heading of an article or web page.

For subsequent coverage, I would also include (13) composite sketches (of the suspects), (14) suspects in custody, (15) diagrams of various processes associated with the bombing (building the bomb, detonation, etc.) and, finally, (16) photographs of the re-enactment. For the time being, I shall leave aside the images deployed in the coverage of the trials.

First, a question: how might these kinds of photographs be related to the events they represent? Are the images ideologically charged, like the smokestacks in the NRDC ad? One might argue that the series of provisional labels that I have listed above parallel a natural progression from chaos, horror, and conflagration through the various processes (rescue, investigation, etc.) that would eventually culminate in the restoration of order, the delivery of justice and so forth. The “restoration of order,” however, has long been a set piece for cultural and media studies’ analyses of how the news articulates an ideological version of prevailing social relations (see, e.g., Fiske 1987, pp. 281ff; Hartley, 1982, pp. 63ff). Jaap van Ginneken succinctly summarized the “overarching logic” of the news as “twofold; on the one hand a vivid evocation of new threats to convention, normality and order; on the other hand their labeling, categorization and neutralization” (1998, p. 188). Paralleling classical myths of cosmogony, segments on the evening news generally begin with chaos and end with the restoration of (white, male, and upper-middle-class) order.

As Fiske (1987, p. 281) pointed out, the news often ends with “something for the ladies.” That is to say, once (masculine) order is restored, the world is safe for a little “human interest,” perhaps demonstrating that life, indeed, can now go on. It is also worth noting that chaos tends to happen to Others (usually of the exotic variety). In the United States, the contrast between the shock-and-awe of the Bali bombing coverage and the almost clinical sterility of the images displayed in coverage of the “DC sniper” case lined up very nicely with cultural and media studies’ accounts of the way in which the news articulates domestic order in opposition to the chaotic danger occurring somewhere “out there.” Yet, despite these generic mechanisms, achieving closure is no easy task, as events in the world are not always amenable to the expectations and constraints of news production. According to Fiske, “The real is too multifaceted, too contradictory, to submit easily to the control of the news conventions. There is simply too much reality for it to be contained” (1987, p. 302).

Setting such invocations of “reality” aside for the moment, the use of photographs and other images were an important aspect of the push toward interpretive closure in coverage of the Bali bombings. Various degrees and kinds of pre-interpretation may be discerned in the composite images and maps published in the days and weeks following the blasts. The two come together nicely in a CNN montage of the notorious OBL looming behind a map of the Indonesian archipelago, flanked by smaller images of Hambali, Abu Bakar Ba’asyir, and others (see Figure 10.3).

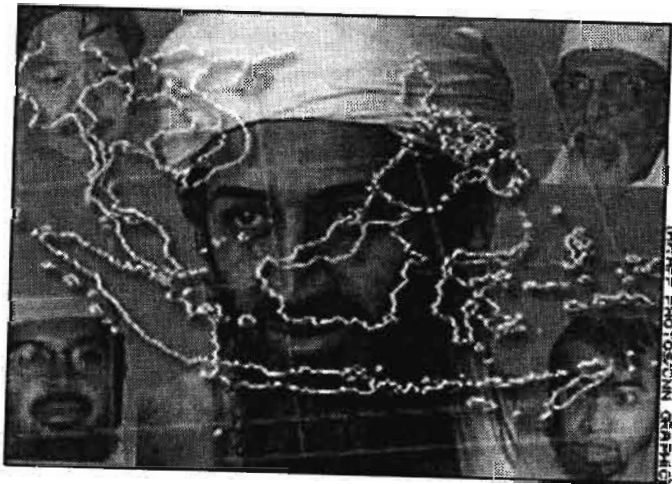


FIGURE 10.3. “War Against Terror: Southeast Asia Front” CNN Web site, downloaded 13 Oct 2002.

Through simple juxtaposition, this image links Osama bin Laden with four now-infamous regional “militants”—and, together, they appear to be quite literally *behind* (recent events in) Indonesia. Deconstructing such an image may not be terribly difficult. But what about the pictures of burning buildings, bloodied victims, and the like? These are the images that seem to mark the most pronounced point of disjuncture between the Indonesian and broadly Euro-American visual coverage of the bombing. So, from a critical perspective, what can be said about these images? Like most of the people/bodies described by eyewitnesses, the victims depicted in these photographs are usually anonymous while the viewing subject is, in at least one sense, particular. But how are these photographs related to other aspects of the coverage? Are they anecdotal, like many of the eyewitness reports? Perhaps illustrative? Demonstrative? Or even evocative?

The Innocence of Smokestacks (and the Bloody Ground of the Visual)

In one of his earliest essays on photography, Roland Barthes set out to lay the groundwork for a structural analysis of “the photographic message.” Offering a permutation of the default sender/receiver model of communication (i.e., following Shannon & Weaver; 1998 [1949]),¹¹ he suggested that

the photograph is not simply a product or a channel but also an object endowed with a structural autonomy. Without in any way intending to divorce this object from its use, it is necessary to provide for a specific method prior to sociological analysis [i.e., of its transmission and eventual reception] and which can only be the immanent analysis of the unique structure that a photograph constitutes. (1977, p. 16; bracketed addition mine)

However, Barthes had already begun to shy away from this “structural autonomy” of the photograph on the very next page, noting that “even from the perspective of a purely immanent analysis, the structure of the photograph is not an isolated structure; it is in communication with at least one other structure, namely the text—title, caption or article—accompanying every press photograph” (1977, p. 16). He suggested that, with the rise to prominence of “the press photograph” as a mode of visual communication, the traditional relationship between image and text was inverted: “it is not the image which comes to elucidate or realize the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image” (1977 [1961], p. 25). In other words, “Formerly, the image illustrated the text (made it clearer); today, the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination” (1977, p. 25).

Barthes may have been painting with a fairly broad brush, but as usual he was onto an important problem: namely, the critical-ontological implications of the relationship between text and image. I noted, at the outset, that the advertisement for the NRDC works on a mutually constitutive interplay between its text and photograph to articulate a particular kind of collective subject: one under threat, in fear—perhaps patriotic—and definitely in need of “defenses at home.” In Barthes’ terms, “the photographic message” is “loaded” through association with the call to collective environmental responsibility (“We have enough to worry about . . .”), while, simultaneously, the invocation of collective responsibility gains a very particular charge through its juxtaposition with the image of the burning WTC/chimneys. Neither text nor image could have done the job on its own. Rallying “us” to defend against a threat to “our” environment required both text and image. So, returning to the news media coverage of the Bali bombing, what is one to make of the interplay between the front-page photos depicting scenes of conflagration and the headlines that read “TERRORISM STRIKES HOME,” “EVIL” and so on?

For Barthes, at least in this particular essay, the question was how to separate out the *denotative* “structural autonomy” of the photograph from its *connotative*, or “cultural,” associations. Returning again briefly to the ad from the NRDC, the picture of smoking WTC/chimneys would have been comparatively inert prior to the events of 9/11. So, do pictures of bloodied victims have an “imminent” message? Or are the images themselves innocent (like smokestacks), relying instead on connotative association?

By the end of the essay, having addressed various modes of connotation (i.e., ways of imposing a “second meaning on the photographic message proper”), Barthes had more or less abandoned the possibility of pure denotation. He concluded, in short, that “connotation goes a long way” (1977, p. 30). However, he continued:

Is this to say that a pure denotation, a this-side of language, is impossible? If such a denotation exists, it is perhaps not at the level of what ordinary languages calls the insignificant, the neutral, the objective, but on the contrary, at the level of absolutely traumatic images. (1977, p. 30)

Barthes suggested that, perhaps, if denotation was to be found anywhere, it was in photographs of “fires, shipwrecks, catastrophes, violent deaths, all captured ‘from life as lived’”—it is “the photograph about which there is nothing to say” (1977, pp. 30-31). So might there have been such a photograph in the media coverage of the bombing; an image that, to use Barthes’ phrase (1977, p. 18), “completely fills its substance and leaves no place for the development of a second-order message”? Recalling the journalistic rit-

uals of presence—eyewitnesses, “on the scene” and “live” coverage and so forth—Barthes qualified his invocation of the traumatic rather tellingly:

Truly traumatic photographs are rare, for in photography the trauma is wholly dependent on the certainty that the scene “really” happened: *the photographer has to be there* (the mythical definition of denotation). (1977, p. 30; significantly, the emphasis is in the original; cf. Hall, 1972, p. 84)

Insofar as they depict fires, violent deaths and so forth apparently “from life as lived,” I believe that in one sense many of the images from the Bali bombing coverage (especially those I labeled “horror and conflagration”) might qualify as truly traumatic. However, there remains the question of whether there is nothing to say about these images.

Imag(In)ing al-Qaeda

In the first instance, were the pictures *in themselves* adequate to the task of representation, there would have been no need for headlines—in fact, no need for articles at all, let alone captions. But the “photographic message” is notoriously unreliable, as Sontag recently noted:

[A]ll photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions. During the fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings. Alter the caption, and the children’s deaths could be used and reused. (2003, p. 10)

And, indeed, the morning after the bombing, the images in themselves were not adequate to the task of representing the bombing. The headlines almost seemed to shout: TERROR HITS HOME, VICTIMS OF WAR and so forth. (Perhaps as Barthes suggested, “today, the text loads the image.”) But, if images are not adequate in themselves, is the converse also the case—that, were words adequate in themselves, there would be no need for pictures?

In the ad for the NRDC, I suggested that the “We” of “We have enough to worry about” was parasitic on the image of the smoking chimneys/WTC. In other words, the image supplemented the text. Without that image, the “We” would not have been the same. So what about the photographs and other images used in media coverage of the Bali bombing? Were they in some way supplemental? Or perhaps supplemented? Both, or neither? If we return to the photograph published on the front page of London edition of

The Daily Telegraph on the morning of the 14th, we see a bloodied and shirtless young man picking his way through the rubble with a woman of similar age, against the backdrop of a flaming car, and the whole scene is framed by the dark of night. It is, at least to my eye, a dramatic picture (Figure 10.4).

There is a wooden post in the foreground, broken off perhaps by the blast, with a cable of some sort attached, sagging and leading out of frame to the left. I mention this only in passing, as the picture is composed beautifully. As Reed Johnson (2002) recently noted in an opinion piece for the *LA Times*, “But war is also beautiful.” The young man’s face is dirty, and the two are depicted stepping cautiously as they clutch one another, with their eyes turned down toward the ground. (And, again, they are anonymous.) The headline simply reads “Al-Qa’eda Link to Club Bombing,” and the caption beneath the picture explains: “Injured victims of the Bali terrorist attack stagger past burning cars on their way to safety after two nightclubs were destroyed on Saturday night. Al-Qa’eda is thought to be responsible.”

Examining the overall layout, the caption seems to articulate the headline and image (see Hall, 1972, p. 53), bringing together the two dominant elements of the front page: “injured victims” and “al-Qa’eda.” Recalling the



FIGURE 10.4. Headline: Al-Qa’eda Link to Club Bombing *The Daily Telegraph* (14 Oct. 2002). Reprinted with permission of *The Daily Telegraph* and Gamma

anonymity of the people/bodies described in eyewitness accounts, a similar observation may be made with respect to photographs of what I would call victimhood-in-progress. The images of victims who are still in the fray are rarely if ever named, nor are they often depicted looking into the camera. It seems that victims are usually only *personalized* after the fact—either as a specialized form of eyewitness or in memory. (Pictures *in memoriam*, for instance, were often portraits.) “Horror and conflagration,” “rescue” and so forth appear as a backdrop for the viewing of anonymous victims by particular personalized subjects. But where does al-Qaeda fit in?

In representing the subjects of the photograph as “injured victims of the Bali terrorist attack,” one might argue that—like Sontag’s photograph of Serb/Croat children killed in the shelling—the *Daily Telegraph* caption pins down an otherwise unreliable photo. (They could be anyone, anywhere.) But, recalling the ad for the NRDC, is it possible that it is the image that is required to underwrite the caption? In other words, might the invocation of al-Qaeda be somehow parasitic on the image of anonymous “injured victims”? Perhaps significantly, although victims are discussed at some length in the article, there is only brief—and decidedly inconclusive—mention of al-Qaeda:

No group claimed responsibility. But the attacks heightened concerns that the al-Qa’eda network had regrouped after the war in Afghanistan and was behind them.

The killing of American troops in Kuwait and the Philippines this month and a suicide attack against a French oil tanker have indicated that the network has launched a global offensive against “crusader” targets, a code for those linked to America and its allies. (Spillius & Dutter, 2002)

As in this brief excerpt, the incidents in Kuwait, Yemen, and the Philippines were widely deployed in the Anglophone media as evidence of “a global offensive,” thereby implicitly articulating the Bali bombing in terms of “the war on terror” through little more than simple juxtaposition.

As it happens, the article to which the headline most closely corresponds—a piece citing Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Laskar Jihad as possible suspects (headline: “Finger points to the men with al-Qa’eda links”)—may be found back on the fourth page, above an aerial shot of “morning after” destruction in Kuta. The article suggests that the “prime suspects are from a hardline Indonesian Islamist group with links to al-Qa’eda.” Yet the actual “links” that are cited in the article—previous accusations against JI, non-committal comments from a “terrorism expert” and so forth—are rather tenuous. But if the article is a little short on fact, it is also accompanied by a chronological survey entitled “The list of terror attacks.”

The List of Terror Attacks

These are the suspected Islamic militant terrorist attacks since September 11:

Dec 22, 2001: Attempt by British Muslim Richard Reid to blow up American Airlines flight with shoe bomb.

Jan 22: Four Indian police killed in Calcutta when armed men open fire on US Centre.

Jan 23: American journalist Daniel Pearl kidnapped and later killed in Karachi.

March 17: Five killed in grenade attack on Protestant church in Islamabad.

April 11: Nineteen people killed by lorry bomb outside Tunisian synagogue.

May 8: Fourteen people killed in suicide car bomb attack on bus in Karachi.

June 14: Twelve Pakistanis killed in car bomb attack on US consulate, Karachi.

Aug 5: Six Pakistanis killed in armed attack on Christian church in Muree.

August 25: Two hurt in blast near UN flats in Kabul.

Oct 6: One crewman dies when small boat blows up French oil tanker off Yemen.

Oct 8: US marine killed when two gunmen open fire during exercise in Kuwait.

(*The Daily Telegraph*, 2003)

Although not on the list itself, the Bali bombing implicitly emerges from the juxtaposition as the latest of many “Islamic militant terrorist attacks since September 11.” The implications of this representation are perhaps best approached through a comparison with a similar list published that same morning in the Semarang-based Indonesian daily paper, *Suara Merdeka*. The latter list—a “List of 2001-2002 BOMBINGS”—came at the end of an article entitled “Bomb goes off, Bali cries” (*Bomb meledak, Bali menangis*).

List of 2001-2002 bombings

31-07-01 18.30 Church of Bethel Tabernakel Kristus Alfa Omega, Gajahmada Street, 114-118, Jakarta.

23-08-01 10.30 Plaza Atrium Senen, Central Jakarta

12-10-01 13.00 Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) Makassar Shopping Complex.

01-01-02 Type K-75 grenade, Bulungan Jakarta 1 Killed.

18-01-02 A fishing bomb exploded in a guardhouse at the State Electricity Enterprise complex in Cawang, East Jakarta.

13-02-02 21.18 Ambon post-Malino. Outskirts of Desa Batumerah 21.23 - Mardika, Kecamatan Sirimau.

09-06-02 A minor bomb exploded in the parking lot of the Hotel Jayakarta, Tamansari Jakarta, 3 seriously injured and 3 cars destroyed.

09-06-02 Two bombs were found in the parking lot of the Sarinah shopping center in Central Jakarta. The bomb was defused.

01-07-02 A large firecracker exploded in the Graha Cijantung shopping center in Central Jakarta, 1 seriously injured, 6 injured lightly.

17-08-02 10.00 Bomb exploded at Blang Padang Field in Aceh prior to the celebration of the Indonesian Republic's 57th year, 20 people were injured.

(*Suara Merdeka*, 2002)

Interestingly, although they were published on the very same morning, there is not a single incident that is common to the two lists. The *Daily Telegraph* list includes various attacks (in numerous countries) that have been widely covered in the Euro-American press in connection with “the war on terror,” whereas the *Suara Merdeka* list includes a string of bombings that occurred in Indonesia during 2001 and 2002 (and which, incidentally, received little if any attention in mainstream Euro-American media). The *Suara Merdeka* article also refers to the attacks of 9/11, but the link is made through the similarity in consequence—“lives needlessly cut short”—and not through the suspected perpetrators.

Perhaps the point to be taken from this apparent disjuncture was that the nature of the link between the Bali bombing and other recent high-profile “terrorist attacks” was not only somewhat less than taken-for-granted in much of Indonesia. But the entire edifice—“the global offensive” and even al-Qaeda itself as a coherent organization and something for ordinary people to be afraid of—is critically unstable. In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, there were isolated commentators in Europe and the United States—John Pilger and Jeffery Winters come to mind—who explicitly questioned the ease and rapidity with which the attack was made to make sense within the prefigured framework of “the war on terror.” And, at the time these early news reports were published, there was no publicly available evidence whatsoever for a connection to al-Qaeda or even, to my knowledge, to international terrorism more generally. (In this connection, what happened subsequently is, strictly speaking, irrelevant.) What there was, however, were pictures. Lots of them. Pictures of victims and conflagration. Pictures of flaming cars, burned-out buildings, and charred corpses. An al-Qaeda affiliate/look-alike/whatever may have been behind the bombings. But there was absolutely no way to know one way or another at the time these stories went to press.

Really?

In the first days after the bombing, Indonesian media displayed neither the preponderance of graphic images nor the strong articulation of al-Qaeda responsibility—two more or less ubiquitous aspects of the mainstream Euro-American coverage. With regard to the latter, I would like to propose that the initial articulation of the bombing in terms of “the war on terror” was perhaps more than a little parasitic on images of what I called “horror and conflagration.” The speculations about al-Qaeda involvement were repeatedly set against the backdrop of flaming cars, burned-out buildings, and bloodied victims. If the former lacked substance, might the latter have filled the gap? Recalling the ad from the NRDC, perhaps the heavily charged photo was required precisely because “we” did not register without it. That is to say, the strong articulation of a collectivity under threat might in fact have been indicative of its absence. But, could a similar argument be made for the images of “horror and conflagration” in Bali?

It may be recalled that Barthes retained “the traumatic” as being the only object even possibly capable of effecting pure photographic denotation (cf. Sontag, 2003, p. 7). I believe this to be of interest not for what it says about photography, nor even about trauma, but rather for its indication of a very particular *desire* for the real. In the editorial introduction to their volume on *Journalism after September 11*, Zelizer and Allan noted that “If the coverage, especially the repetition of images showing the towers being hit was too much to handle for some viewers, for others it somehow authenticated their experience” (2002, p. 4). There is, I believe, an interesting relationship between this sense of authenticity, absence, and the compulsion to repeat. It was in a not entirely dissimilar connection (philosophically, at least), that Judith Butler commented on the relationship between performativity and materiality in the articulation of sexual difference:

“Sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize “sex” and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. That this reiteration is necessary is a sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. (1993, p. 2)

So what might absence and repetition have to do with the collapse of the twin towers and the images that were used to represent the bombing in Bali? In his reflections on 9/11, Zizek described a distinctly Western and late twentieth- to early twenty-first century hankering after unmediated reality

(which, in the end, “culminates in the thrill of the Real as the ultimate ‘effect’”). It is in this respect that I would argue that Barthes’ retention of trauma was not indicative of anything essential about photography or even human suffering. Rather, I would suggest that it was perhaps symptomatic of something historical—something about images, presence, and violence in a particular period of Western history. Might this not be why, following 9/11, there was a sense that “we wanted to see it again and again”?

APPENDIX

The following is the original text for the earliest online report (Hakim, 2002) I was able to find on the Bali bombing.

Ledakan di Kuta Menewaskan Sekitar 10 Orang

13 Oct 2002 0:0:35 WIB

TEMPO Interaktif, Jakarta: Sebuah bom meledak di depan Sari Klub, Jl. Legian, Kuta, Bali, Sabtu (12/10), sekitar pukul 11.10 Wita. Akibat ledakan ini, tak kurang dari 10 orang pengunjung Sari Klub meninggal dan sekitar 40 lainnya luka-luka.

Hingga malam ini, petugas ambulans mondar mandir mengangkut korban yang luka-luka ke Rumah Sakit Sanglah, Denpasar. Jumlahnya, belum bisa diperkirakan secara pasti. Selain korban meninggal, puluhan bangunan yang berada di sekitar lokasi, rusak parah, beberapa di antaranya bangunan Padis Club dan Hotel White Rose.

Suasana di lokasi kejadian sangat hiruk pikuk. Sebab, listrik di sekitar lokasi padam dan para turis yang sedang berada di sekitar area ledakan tampak lalu lalang. Tampak seorang turis asal Australia terlihat merang-raung karena anaknya, yang berumur 17 tahun, berada di Sari Club. Kapolda Bali Brigjen Pol. Budi Setiawan langsung memimpin aparatnya di lokasi untuk menangani kasus ini. (Jalil Hakim-Tempo News Room; *Tempo*, 2002)

NOTES

1. Here, I have used the term “patient” in the sense of “A person or thing that undergoes some action, or to whom or which something is done; that which receives impressions from external agents (J.), as correlative to agent, and distinguished from instrument; a recipient” (*Oxford English Dictionary*; see Hobart, 1990).

2. "The media" have frequently been invoked by scholars and other commentators as instrumental in the process of collective recovery from the "trauma" of 9/11. The implicit functionalism underpinning this way of imagining the post-9/11 American community is an adequately complex and important subject as to require a separate study.
3. In this connection, it is worth emphasizing the extent to which Laclau and Mouffe differ from Hall (e.g., 1996) in their account of articulatory practices (Hobart, n.d.). For Hall, "the social" precedes, in the strongest sense, the practices through which it is known (e.g., in Hall's account, language is ultimately superstructural, an epiphenomenon that obscures the "real" workings of social relations). This leaves the rather serious (and, to my knowledge, un-addressed) problem of how Hall and his acolytes are able to know "the social" extra-discursively—in other words, independently of any and all epistemological conditions (Fox, 2002, pp. 20-23).
4. My analysis is based on a unique archive of media materials that includes over 300 digital television recordings and some 45,000 articles, in both Indonesian and English, from sources in Australia, Indonesia, Singapore, the UK, and United States. Compiled on a systematic basis since the 12 October 2002, the collection is focused on the Bali bombing, but also includes a wide range of materials related more generally to representations of religion, violence, and "the war on terror." It is, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive archive of its kind.
5. The full Indonesian text is given in the Appendix.
6. On the complex genealogies for contemporary theories of memory, see Hacking (1998).
7. See appendix.
8. The posting time listed here is equivalent to Sunday, October 13, 2002; 02:39 AM Western Indonesian Time. I should note that I have also seen other posting times for the same article (e.g., 19:06 GMT), but they are all within about 40 minutes of one another.
9. The original text read as follows:
Selain itu puluhan bangunan lainnya dalam radius 10 sampai 20-an meter rusak berat. Sedangkan kaca-kaca toko, hotel maupun tempat hiburan lainnya yang berada dalam radius satu kilometer, pecah. 'Saya melihat kaca-kaca di kompleks pertokoan Kuta Square, pecah,' tutur Dadi yang berada di Kuta Square, sekitar satu kilometer dari tempat ledakan (*Kompas* 2002).
10. The original text read as follows:
Kepanikan luar biasa terjadi di Bali tadi malam. Dua bom meledak hampir bersamaan di Kuta dan Renon, Denpasar, yang berjarak 20 km. Ledakan pertama terjadi di dekat Konsulat Amerika Serikat di Renon, disusul kemudian ledakan sangat dahsyat di klub orang asing di sentra wisata Kuta (*Jawa Pos*, 2002).
11. Barthes began the essay as follows: "The press photograph is a message. Considered overall this message is formed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission and a point of reception" and so forth (1977 [1964], p. 15). Relying heavily on Barthes, Hall proposed a similar model of communication in his early essay on news photography (1972), which, incidentally, would later provide the basis for his oft-cited model of encoding/decoding (1980). The latter rode on a

series of presuppositions that—with minor (and philosophically inconsequential) alterations—has underpinned the vast majority of subsequent work in cultural and media studies.

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