

make 'falls' become something normal. Tragedy cannot happen when routine has become good deed.

And as mentioned above, charisma will also be unknown. Saints, holy men, superheroes—those who bear charisma—are figures from extraordinary situations, not from routine. Max Weber (who the experts always quote when they talk about charismatic leadership) saw that under charismatic leadership there are no rules that operate for all, anywhere, at all times. 'The "objective" law of a charismatic leader flows from a highly personal experience.' For the leader is considered to have obtained divine mercy or heroic strength. Especially at the moments when society thirsts for hope.

Charisma does not stand alone, of course. It is welcomed and acclaimed by the masses that become followers. This welcome and acclaim in turn forms one body with the leader; they fuse. The Javanese describe this as *manunggaling kawula lan gusti* or fusing of people and lord, something which in political life is actually a totalitarian condition. And when the leader breaks out and severs rational rules, yet he will still appear without accusation of wrongdoing—for he has already fused with the 'People' who can do no wrong. And so a kind of double purification is going on: the leader and his people are freed from any kind of accusation, including despotism.

Here tragedy readies itself. Victims certainly fall. And at a certain point the leader wants to carry on. He has to maintain his position of infallibility. At the same time he can't let go from the masses that praise him. He climbs steadily up to the highest places. And way up there at the summit, falling is not merely a shift from an ordinary position. The falling of people who have never been thought wrong is a kind of revolution—a quake, a transformation, and as in many Shakespearean tragedies, a process to discover precise questions about power and wrong, about what life and truth are.

Infallibilitas. TEMPO, 4 March 2001

K.W.: 1466-1468

THE BELIEVER

WHY do you reject communism? These days, this question can be answered fluently, easily and safely. But twenty years ago—in the years leading up to 1965 circumstances were very different. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was still strong. Almost every official, bureaucrat, politician, journalist and so-called intellectual would try as hard as possible not to make an issue of 'rejecting communism'—especially in front of more than two or three other people. They were afraid.

But fear is only part of the explanation. It was not only fear that was at the heart of it, but the preoccupation with learning a different dogma, the dogma of revolution. There were those who were genuinely impressed, and who would scorn those who they thought did not understand. There were those who were just like coffee-grinding machines: they could not think for themselves, but just ground up and refined any ideas poured into their heads. And their heads were ninety per cent empty.

I remember Amir, for example. I think he was one of those coffee-grinder types. He was not a communist, but when the PKI campaigned for confrontation with Malaysia, he joined in. When the PKI attacked those who formulated the Cultural Manifesto, he joined in. When the PKI thrashed the group that was established by anti-communist newspapers to defend Soekarnoist ideology, he again was in full support.

Now in 1985, twenty years after the PKI became cursed, Amir is of course quite different. Now he can speak at length about the danger of communism, about how *Pancasila* must be safeguarded and how we should be 'wary' of 'issues'. He tries to find out if, for example, I am aware of the need to be on the lookout against any extreme leftist ideology. More astounding is the fact that Amir can even suspect my friend Arifin. The reason: Arifin has discussed the

gap between rich and poor.

No, Amir is not like he used to be—and yet I feel that basically he has not changed at all. I can remember the day—around July 1965 when the two of us were walking down Kramat Street and walked past the central office of the PKI. On top of the building—which was being extended at the time—was a huge emblem of the hammer and sickle.

There were red banners with some message that I cannot recall. But I do remember that I turned to Amir and asked him something that had often bothered me: 'If the PKI wins, what will happen then?'

Amir kept on walking and laughed. 'One thing is for certain. The counter-revolutionaries will be wiped out. People just like you.'

I was silent. I had to admit that this prospect was indeed frightening—and twenty years ago, it did not seem to be improbable. But then I just smiled (sourly, most probably) as I in turn asked, 'And as for people like you?'

Amir's expression was serious. 'I am different from you, brother. I stand in the ranks of the committed. You don't. You are never able to distinguish between friend and enemy. That is subversive, brother. You suffer from communist phobia. You must know that.'

The traces of my smile disappeared from my face. I knew that Amir was half confusing and half judging me. He was accusing me with his sacred lore: a stock phrase quoted from the holy writ of the Revolution—and this is what made so many people unable to think for themselves any more. This indeed was the first sign of communism's success: the ability to hypnotise, to bewitch thought and to shackle it into categories: friends and enemies, revolution and counter-revolution, etc., etc.

A few years later I was reading the memoirs of Nadezhda Mandelstam, the widow of Osip Mandelstam, a revolutionary Russian poet who like many others of the intelligentsia was captured, exiled and murdered by Stalin. She describes what took place at that time in the Soviet Union, something similar to what happened in Indonesia just before 1965: the word 'revolution' made the entire population so submissive, acquiescent, obedient 'that it was a wonder that our authorities still needed prisons and the death penalty'.

But not the entire population was submissive, in fact. There always people like Mandelstam. There are always poets. For poetry is indeed bewitched by a different spell, no matter how amazing is the hypnotic power of the sign 'revolution'—the spell of beauty, and of wonder perhaps, which beckons from the reality that surrounds us. That reality trembles, is richer, more alive, more unpredictable in its colours, and is so recalcitrant that it refuses to be caught by a trap of any ideology at all. It is not surprising that communist parties everywhere have failed in controlling the poets.

So, if I am asked why I reject communism, I will probably quote an experience such as this. And Amir's answer? It would be different, perhaps. For he, as before (although then standing in a different line), is clever only with categories. He doesn't know that communism is now bankrupt everywhere just because it only memorises categories—just like him, both then and now.

PKI. TEMPO, 5 October 1985

K.W: 584-585

C.P. II: 74-76

liberation. But Solzhenitsyn did not explain where the boundaries of these 'closed cultures' lie. One cannot infer from him whether everyone within those cultural boundaries must or should be assumed to be the same. What happens when someone wishes to diverge from the cultural precepts within which one was raised?

Maybe Solzhenitsyn should have read Indonesian novels of the 1920s. *Siti Nurbaya* is about a young woman oppressed by a 'closed culture'. Kartini's letters in the early twentieth century desired emancipation. Abdullah bin Abdulkadir Munsyi's records of the Malay people in Singapore in the nineteenth century tell how something local, something enmeshed with custom, identifiable with the roots of a place—that which Solzhenitsyn calls 'organic character'—can be incredibly oppressive. On the other hand, modernity can bring with it violence, but it can also liberate.

When the Republic of Indonesia was established, like too the republics of India, China, Algeria and others, it actually was aiming for a modernity like this. It could indeed let loose dark forces within itself, spill blood, and slaughter. But finally, like the Terror of the French Revolution, it acted in the name of Reason and Enlightenment, and therefore will be held to account by Reason and Enlightenment. It cannot escape. For the republic, a modernity with all its faults, does not see itself as coming from heaven. It is not sacred, its speech ended. It is not yet closed. It cannot possibly be closed forever.

Republik. TEMPO, 31 March 2002

TERRITORIUM

HISTORY has not ended, geography is not yet dead. Or at least, it is not easy to determine these things. Endings or death are never a single full stop, and they never appear unexpectedly.

The old map of the world is indeed no longer valid: some of the huge unions (Yugoslavia, The Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia) have split apart and almost dispersed. Seeing the way that capital is amassed and circulated every second via the hyper-busy cyber highways, no longer controlled by any customs office anywhere at all, people clamour about the 'world without borders'. Now, since September 11, 2001, it is as though the 'world without borders' has declared itself in a series of violence: all sorts of countries banding together to confront a terrorist... what? organisation? formless organisation? which has its base in no capital city, and is citizen of no country.

But before saying that geography is over, and a 'global village' has replaced the old map, people should come to the Rockefeller Plaza, in downtown Manhattan, New York.

Prior to September 11 2001, on this block measuring about twelve by twenty metres square, there stood a row of flagpoles flying all kinds of patterns and colours from various countries. But since the World Trade Center was destroyed by two hijacked planes, Americans have suddenly felt attacked, and the Stars and Stripes is flying everywhere, from short pants to tall buildings. And in that famous block of Manhattan island, there is now no longer any symbol other than the Stars and Stripes, Stars and Stripes ...

Americans don't like to be called 'nationalist'; they are proud to be called 'patriotic'. But to me, what is happening now is the upsurge of American nationalism which, like nationalism everywhere, is full of fervour, often narrow-minded, and worrying.

Two Boeing planes owned by American airline companies

crashed into two tall towers in Manhattan, and over three thousand people were killed. People usually say that this was the first time that America had been attacked on its own territory. But this is clearly not so. In 1993 there was an attempt to blow up the World Trade Center by Mahmud Abouhalima and friends, and then there was the unforgettable attack in Oklahoma City that killed one hundred and sixty eight people including children, and wounded five hundred others, when a federal government building was bombed with almost two thousand kilograms of explosives. That was in 1995.

I think the idea that the September 11 was the 'first attack against America on its own territory' comes from the memory of 1941, when Pearl Harbor in Hawaii was bombed by planes from the empire of Japan. It is as though the photos and films about that day are on replay. There are planes. There is the clear open sky. There is an explosion. And there are 'foreigners'—meaning those who do not hold American passports. The attempt to blow up the World Trade Center in 1993, apart from being considered a failure that killed only six people, was directed by a New York taxi driver born in Egypt. And as for the attack in Oklahoma City in 1995—Timothy MacVeigh was born in America, white, with an army-style crew cut.

In other words, what is used here is a definition from the old boundaries of nationalism—with the old yells. And all at once we witness not a United States that feels it is an integral part of the world which—like Sri Lanka, India, Algiers, Pakistan, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Nicaragua, or Indonesia—constantly puts up with bombs and terrorist guns. Rather, what we witness is a United States closing itself off, while at the same time asking the world outside to view it with sympathy or dread. Nationalism and narcissism are interrelated. The United States, which has long viewed the United Nations with contempt, which refuses to participate in agreements on global warming, which has no interest in the idea of an international criminal court, and whose contribution to foreign aid is only 0.1 percent of GNP (lower than Japan at 0.35 per cent, and France at 0.39 per cent, not to mention Denmark at 1.01 per cent)—yes, in other words the United States, whose overseas aid can be said to equal the money spent by people in that country on

their pet dogs and cats—this is the United States that is now building a long fortified wall. The idea to try those people considered foreign terrorists (before proven 'terrorists,' but already proven 'foreign') in a military court like Indonesia's New Order military trials after 1965, is the most striking example of a solid national barrier brought into operation in matters of justice. And this is not counting the surveillance of foreign students, or the tightening up of visas ...

But the United States is not alone in this territorial frenzy. Israel is taking the Palestinians' land, India and Pakistan are fighting over Kashmir, Australia is refusing hapless boat people from Afghanistan, and Indonesia strives—with blood and iron, if necessary—for Aceh and Papua not to 'break away'. Truly, geography has not ended.

It even still has dark magic. Also to Osama bin Laden, who used to wander, but has now disappeared. And he arose because of territorial awareness. When Iraq attacked Kuwait, and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia was worried that Saddam Hussein would cross the border, Osama was close to the royal family. When the Saudi rulers invited in the US army and let them to stay in Dhahran, Osama left the palace, denouncing it. To him, when the 'infidels' stayed in the 'holy land', this had to be opposed, as though it was not only Mecca and Medina that are sacred, but the entire Saudi peninsula.

The sacralisation of territory can indeed be awe-inspiring, but more often than not goes too far. I remember the song of praise for a country called Indonesia which the teacher taught us when I was still in primary school: ... 'Your earth is sacred, your firmament holy'.

Territorium. TEMPO, 13 January 2002

OSAMA

OSAMA bin Laden, born in Riyadh around 1975, university graduate with computer expertise, business millionaire many-times-over, a Saudi who could have lived close to the royal family, ended up choosing, when he was around forty, to live in the cold caves of Afghanistan. He leads a terrorist movement that is widespread and secret. Now he is Enemy Number One in the 'first war of the twenty-first century'. Clearly, he is someone with something extraordinary about him. Faith? Islam? Anger?

I am not the one to answer this. But maybe all three are there in Osama's history. Faith is something that can only be partially explained, but we read of how people who spent an extravagant youth find their place in Islam.

But that faith and Islam did not grow in isolation. Something large has been going on since the end of the last century: when religion became a sign of group identity, a kind of uniform, with religion a symbol giving communal meaning.

At that time, small and large-scale migrations became more numerous, more widespread, and almost everywhere people were meeting others who were not family, not of the same town. Suddenly difference was experienced directly. What was different became 'odd', 'unusual'. The twentieth century is the century of unease and surprise.

To Moslems, who for the most part live in poor countries and leave to seek lives in America, Europe, Australia, Japan—this narrative of unease and surprise is also a narrative of open opportunity and painful defeat. Taking off at the airport, buying jam or a jumbo jet, enjoying the piano or a porno film, we Moslems know: those 'non-Moslem' countries have not only been richer for centuries, they also (to use Marx's words about the bourgeoisie) shape the face of the world to follow their image. Sometimes

through natural attraction, sometimes with 'blood and iron', and sometimes through buying-and-selling. And we, the others? We keep on asking ourselves: how can this be? How can this be opposed, contested, ended?

And then we make all kinds of grand narratives so as to answer. Nationalism. Capitalism. Socialism ... And we try all kinds of forms as therapy: parliamentary democracies, authoritarian bureaucratic regimes, traditional monarchies, untraditional monarchies, proletarian dictatorships, whatever-kind dictatorships. None of them can assuage the sense of 'defeat' that has gone on for years.

In the Arab world, more than in other Moslem lands, this failure is almost total bitterness. Israel arose, with 'Western' assistance (especially from the United States), and the Palestinians were largely pushed out. And so 'Jews' come face to face with 'Arabs'. In this fragile situation, 'Arab' identity became a grand canopy for millions of people there, although we quickly understood that 'Arab nationalism' was an ideal heated by a distant flame. Both Baath and Nasser-type nationalism shone for a few decades, inspiring Qadhafi and who knows whom else, but the end result was authoritarian power. The further from the flame, the greater the frustration. People are still in the grip of poverty, social instability and subjugation. Palestine remains dark.

Anger rises. When the war against Israel ended only in defeat; when the wealth brought by the 'oil-economy' turned out to be insufficient to heal wounds, then that anger got even stronger, and terror more frequently the pattern of acts of liberation. Islam as such was not itself the actor in this violence. The path of terror chosen by the Palestinians was not started by those carrying the banner of Islam like Hamas and Al-Qaeda, but rather by George Habbas, a Christian, and Arafat, a Moslem, who did not choose to translate that conflict into the language of religion. It was only in the early 1970s that Islam came with violence—when anger could find no outlet, and when people longed for a different grand narrative.

With wide-reaching cultural roots, with a history that can give a sense of pride, it is understandable that 'Islam' waves at the place where the Ka'bah stands. This religion is considered able to solve all

of life's problems, personal or social: an 'ideology', but also a call capable of uniting people from Kundhus to Kudus, from Amman to Ambon.

Osama bin Laden is a Middle Eastern phenomenon that goes on, yet also changes: the Islamisation of regional conflict. In this transformation, the limited becomes expansive, the profane becomes sacred, the 'worldly' becomes 'holy'. This is so with the war against America, which has only over the past thirty years, since the Iranian revolution, been termed the '*Great Satan*'. In this process, 'the West' becomes synonymous with 'Christian' (forgetting that 'Western' civilisation has been influenced by Islam) and 'Israel' becomes 'Jewish' (forgetting that there are Jewish religious groups who oppose the establishment of the state of Israel).

This sacralisation carries its own assumptions and consequences. Various examples of extraordinary sacrifice appear ascetic life in caves: death in America; dying in Afghanistan; imprisonment in Egypt. But sacralisation can also bring absolute action: having no sense of responsibility to law within human collectivity, something that develops into civilisation. God and purpose then sanctify all means.

The problem then, is exactly how we see life in this world: an angry path to heaven? Or a blessing, although forever blemished?

Osamah. TEMPO, 9 December 2001

BOMBS

WHOEVER is disillusioned with imperfection will be disillusioned with democracy. A number of bombs exploded almost simultaneously in several churches in Indonesia on Christmas Eve, 2000, and around twenty people were killed. We know why: there are those who believe that murder, even the slaughter of children, can be sanctioned. There are those who believe that the dead are victims required to bring about a certain effect. And there are even some who believe that the dead had wronged: they (attending Christmas Mass or merely standing near the church), deliberately or not, had ignored something fundamental, namely the absoluteness of enmity. Enmity towards Christians, perhaps. Enmity towards Indonesia as an idea of fraternity. Or enmity towards the need to protect one another and stimulate one other's participation in life.

Absolute enmity: a situation that does not allow for a single moment of discussion. A fight to the bitter end, because those annihilated are not in a state of war, and can even be children at play. An enmity that is absolute, because all things have been relegated beneath an embittered view stretching in all directions, creating a panorama that is total.

The drive to form this total panorama is the drive for perfection. What is ignored is the reality that perfection is impossible. The world always rejects perfection, for a country or community is not an artistic work of architecture. There will always be the odd, the ill-fitting, the error. There is always someone who complains, who questions, or writes. The world is always open, or disturbed, because different texts, millions of writings, will always come. Each writing is a jotting on a sheet of blank paper, an interruption of one-colouredness. Each writing is an ever unpredictable presence on an even surface. Each writing

can introduce a meaning that cannot be entirely encapsulated in a design. In short, and I am paraphrasing here, each writing is an attack on architecture. Each writing is a thousand subversions on the panorama claiming itself to be perfect.

Democracy was born through the decapitation of the paradigm of perfection. It was born through decapitating the sovereign. Claude Lefort presents democracy through viewing the French Revolution: an absolute monarchy was toppled through cutting off the king's head. All that previously was, ended on that day. Formerly the king was two-bodied: he was at once the incarnation of secular power and of God; he was mortal but also eternal. He was the summit and the foundation stone of social order. Thus, when the French Revolution cut off his head, the built-up architecture crumbled. Since then, there has been a cavity in the body of politics.

The order then constructed was order with power as 'an empty place' (*un lieu vide*). It was no longer filled by anyone who could be claimed as power incarnated in this world. And therefore, in democracy the source of power—that empty place—is attained through competition, and its time is limited.

But that 'empty place' brings with it another emptiness: democracy is a system whose basis is that there is no base. After the eternal was cut off from the body of politics, the existing base could only be considered temporary, and could forever be challenged. In other words: it is actually no base at all, for the base is absent. Therefore, whoever is anxious about life without foundation, will also be anxious with democracy.

This feeling of anxiety sometimes causes people to search for something that can be a firm and everlasting foundation. In Jakarta, in July 1945, a preparatory committee that established the Republic of Indonesia felt it was not sufficient to draw up a Constitution. One of the members, Radjiman Widiyodiningrat, who had been influenced by the philosophy of Kant and Hegel, asked for the Constitution to have a basis. His proposal was agreed to, and so the Five Principles or *Pancasila* were formulated. We know from historical records that the *Pancasila* was actually

one formulation made from no more than five sentences, a suggestion made by Bung Karno at a closed meeting—an idea agreed to by not even fifty members of the committee for the preparation for independence. And this all took place in a July full of uncertainty. In other words, this 'basis' was actually tentative, and closely aligned to an historical incident. But it was that anxiety about living without a basis that eventually made the formulation magically or supernaturally powerful.

But is there anything magical? No. There is nothing magical about an explanation, even by the saints about the revelation of God. Democracy is born precisely because the heads considered to be incarnations of The Eternal can in fact be cut off, and cannot be replaced. Those who feel that they can replace it, and become the representative of The Eternal, will be inclined to feel justified in chopping off the heads of others. Or exploding with bombs the bodies of our children.

Bom. TEMPO, 14 January 2001

K.W.: 1453-1454

C.P. V: 24-26

MEMORY

FAR on the other side of revenge and peace, lies memory. Like an ocean. There you select the conch that you wish to pick out of the deep, past-storing sea, and the one you wish to toss away. Memory is never complete. The past is never one. There is reminiscence that chooses peace. There is the past that pushes you to scream: 'We want revenge'. There is the politics of memory, and the politics of forgetting. Both regard 'history' as a kind of photocopy of stored experience. But is it?

Anyone who 're-views' cannot completely 'return'. I am not talking about Ambon in these times, but about somewhere else that also underwent trauma: Rwanda, in 1994, where in one hundred days around eight hundred thousand Tutsis were killed by Hutus because of a bitterly-sensed history.

History sensed as something bitter—even here, people cannot fully re-view. The world outside can indeed say that in this 'pre-modern' country, the roots of revenge between the two ethnic groups had been planted over centuries. But Philip Gourevitch's story in *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, a gripping book about violence in this African country, shows that the roots of this enmity have a different timeframe and shape: a fusion between socio-economic realities and a myth of recent circulation.

'Rwandan history is dangerous', Gourevitch writes. There is no tradition of historiography, no surviving alphabet; the narratives handed down are oral stories. What the university researchers reconstruct is always guesswork. So, there is no one who really knows whether it is the Tutsi or the Hutu who is the more 'original'. It is not clear who came first to the area previously occupied by the Twa people, now marginalised.

In fact, the two groups use the same language, share the same

religion (the majority, sixty-five per cent are Catholic, seventeen per cent practice ancestor-worship, the remainder are Protestants and Moslems), and there has been such crossing between the two ethnicities that an ethnographer concluded that actually the two cannot be called two clearly-differentiated ethnic groups.

But there is something that makes them choose different politics of memory. Particularly because the Tutsi generally live as farmers, while the Hutus are cultivators, and the former are associated with a higher status, the latter more common. In the history of the old Rwandan kingdom, the vestiges of which, they say, extended to the end of the fourteenth century with a king called the 'Mwami', the Tutsi indeed held political and military rank, whereas the Hutu were subordinate. Conflict once broke out in 1959 when a Hutu political activist was attacked by Tutsi and reported dead. Immediately, a 'social revolution' broke out. Tutsi were attacked, their houses burned—while the Belgian soldiers, the colonial representatives there, did nothing to protect them.

In the process, the difference between the Hutu and Tutsi came to be defined more by their relations with state power. To strengthen their position, they each developed a culture that became increasingly differentiated negatively: whatever was 'Hutu' was only apparent when displayed as 'non Tutsi', and vice versa. Memory of difference was more and more reinforced, including things to do with the body: the Hutu are generally of stockier build and rounder-faced, while the Tutsi are lean and narrow-faced; the Hutu are dark-skinned, the Tutsi less dark. Even though there are many exceptions, this difference was finally validated by an expansive force from the outside with scientific pretensions: the Europeans. They came among the African tribes, wrote ethnographies, measured the length of their noses, and chose memory for them so as to define them.

In 1863, an Englishman named John Henning Spike came to this area, and went back home with a theory that actually reiterated 'Western' prejudices: that civilisation in Central Africa was thanks to the people with taller bodies, slimmer in shape, those resembling the Europeans, namely the tribe that came from Ethiopia, descendants of David in the Bible. They—like the Tutsi, for

example—were definitely superior to the 'Negroid' race of the indigenous natives.

In his work, *Journal of the Discovery of the Source of the Nile*, Speke even had a miraculous reference: the story in Genesis about Canaan, the son of Ham, who was cursed by Noah to father slaves as descendants. To Speke, as to many Europeans of his time, this curse of Noah was the beginning of the Negroid people's fate. It was only civilisation from outside that could save them. He was speaking, of course, about European civilisation. But he also mentioned the role of the Tutsi, for instance, who he regarded as, to quote Gourevitch 'the lost Christians'.

This is clearly a fantasy of colonialism. But colonialism imprints deep wounds in the memory of those who have been colonised. In 1992, Leon Mangesera, the spokesperson for the Hutu rule, proclaimed that the Tutsi should 'return' to Ethiopia, along the Nyabarongo River. When they did not return, the slaughter began. In April 1994, Gourevitch writes, 'The river was choked with dead Tutsis, and tens of thousands of bodies washed up on the shores of Lake Victoria'.

We don't know whether revenge was also washed away. For, on the far side of massacre or greetings of peace, lurks memory, which never stands whole, clean, alone.

Ingatan. TEMPO, 24 February 2002

THE SACRIFICED

A MESSAGE, in a text reported found as instructions for the September 11 hijackers, and maybe read a few hours before the two Boeing 767s attacked the twin towers of the World Trade Center: 'make your knife sharp, and do not discomfort your sacrifice during the slaughter'. It reminds me of part of my childhood, when I was taught to kill a chicken. I recall that the butchers on the Day of Sacrifice also make their blades extra sharp, and slit the neck of the goat or cow with the direction: read in the name of God the All Merciful and Loving, and do not let the animal long suffer when you take its life. For if you do, the sacrifice will not be acceptable to God.

The sacrificial victim in ritual is the product of an odd violence. One day, all those thousands of unrecorded years ago, Abraham was told he had to kill his own son to prove his obedience to God. On another day, thousands of years ago too, a Hindu king was also asked to kill, and a horse had to be slaughtered for the gods in the *yajña* ceremony. The rituals that happened subsequently show that the 'object' killed or hurt takes on another quality. People say that this is the first sign of the end of what is called 'natural'—the kind of violence and death of a python gobbling a rat, or a parasite strangling an *ara* tree—and that after this, culture takes a role.

Culture: the chosen sacrifice is given special preparation before its neck is cut: in this way it is considered part of the sacred, and through this, a family, a group, a village, or a country is redeemed; death has come and brought new life. Cruelty takes on meaning. The sacrificial victim, to use the words of René Girard, is a 'transcendental signifier'.

But was it this that happened when the south-Manhattan sky suddenly turned into a show, and a spectacular and blood-curdling performance took place as two buildings, ten million feet square and towering high, were attacked? Quickly appearing that morning:

billowing smoke, fire like a huge jungle, shock from all quarters, horror around New York, and a scene that will continue to terrorise our dreams of those bodies of people falling from the hundred and somethingth floor. None of this constructed a high altar. Nothing holy had been placed around the performance. If all that was a gigantic sacrificial ceremony, we have no idea, either, what community was being saved that day: Islam? Palestine? The Third World? The United States itself?

Mohammad Atta and his friends killed almost five thousand people by crashing two planes into the two World Trade Center buildings. God was evoked with serenity or rage. But can sacrifices be offered as in times past, like the ritual begun by Abraham, when religion demanded—and condoned—violence?

What is certain is that on that day there was an opposition, a terror, a courage, and a ruthlessness. But there was no war. War has bookkeeping. War is the maker of two columns. Negative data is carefully listed in one place, and positive data in another; a kind of scale of profit and loss, a kind of jotting about income and expenditure. Logistics, arms, and personnel are translated into figures and placed side-by-side with the number of the sacrificed and the quantity of loss. Both are noted, both are given place.

Even the performance-indicators can be neat. In the Vietnam War, the Pentagon introduced a precise, albeit brutal, term: *body counts*. Decades before this, Hitler exterminated around six million people listed as 'Jews' and 'non-Aryans' in the gas chambers, and the hairs on our neck stand on end when we hear what Adorno termed 'administrative murder'.

In this kind of bookkeeping, the attempt is to turn even violence into a necessity, no longer an inevitability. Sacrifices become clear and cold digital forms, like phosphorescence in a dark glass. But I cannot say that an 'administrative murder' took place that day in New York, Washington D.C and Philadelphia.

Certainly, horror that day was not a ritual. But at the same time, those two buildings like twin beacons in Manhattan, even the people who died, in their destruction became a kind of 'transcendental signifier' too. They were not just forms and bodies

representing nothing. Like the lambs slaughtered on the Day of Sacrifice, they were substitutes. To their murderers, they were replacements for something else—maybe capitalism, maybe America, maybe sin and filth. They were not just loss annihilated through tallying figures with quotas, and then closing the book. Cruelty was still an inevitability, not just a necessity. After all, we know that the killers also died at the same time as those they killed.

And we, in the end, are left still gasping to understand how the sacrifices that day should be defined. It is as though life is just an impulse. The tragedy occurred in New York, but the most tragic is that while nearly five thousand innocent people died, there were hundreds of thousands of other people applauding, in the Arab world, in Pakistan, in Indonesia: the sound of the applause of the poor, the joy of the oppressed, and the pride of the defeated. Perhaps justice is a kind of silent god, angry, unattainable, and for this god, the crowd builds a fire and burns anything at all as offerings.

Korban. TEMPO, 11 september 1993

C.P. V: 145-146