

State terrorism

Approximately one million innocent Indonesians were killed by their fellow nationals, neighbours and kin at the height of an anti-communist campaign in the mid-1960s. University of Melbourne academic Ariel Heryanto (below), a Senior Lecturer in the Melbourne Institute of Asian Languages and Societies, investigates the profound political consequences of these mass killings on public life in Indonesia in a new book: *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging*. He highlights here for UniNews some of the issues dealt with in the book, which will be launched at the University of Melbourne Bookshop later this month.

By Ariel Heryanto

Contrary to the general notion, state terrorism is a common, persistent and basic mode of rule in the 21st century with a diversity in scope, intensity, duration and style. In many societies today it is close to having the status of a standard rather than aberrant mode of state rule. It has, at least on the surface, some modern and rational elements, and it often proves to be a highly effective force for enhancing – not undermining – social ‘order’ and ‘stability’.

Also contrary to the general view, state terrorism is not an exclusive characteristic of the Communist, Fascist and Islamic regimes. In no less significant ways it also characterises the so-called “liberal democratic” nation-states of the West. Many authors in the West have made separate but similar arguments to the effect that Western states, especially the USA, have been the most important terrorist states in the world since 1980, if not before. Anti-state and non-state terrorism is no more common or dangerous than state terrorism itself.

State terrorism is defined not merely by its perpetrating subject agents. It also distinguishes itself from other forms of terrorism that can be attributed to any uncontrolled accident or sporadic and ad hoc non-statist ones. Its violence is differentiated from violence the primary motives, targets or effects of which are the physical harm or material destruction of the victims.

Where political violence is deliberately designed to invoke state terrorism, agents of the state select the victims either randomly or individually. Selection of victims may be based on more than one criterion, but the victims always represent the ultimate target population of the terror (for example, communism or Islam). Their representativeness may or may not conform either to objective reality or to the victims’ subjective worldview. What counts is that they appear to fit into the dominant discourse. The selected victims are not necessarily prominent members of the target group. As a result, any ordinary member of the target group can identify her/himself with the victims and conceive of the possibility of her/himself being the next victim. State terrorism often victimises vulnerable or even compliant individuals.

It is as important to distinguish between terrorism and political violence as to acknowledge their connections. Terror, as conceptualised in this book, refers to the severe and often long-lasting fear that may emanate from major and spectacular violence. Major political violence hit New York and Bali and killed many innocent civilians. Each of these incidents terrorised a far greater number of people, including those who had never set foot in either place.

Terror has a lot more to do not only with the related mental suffering of those immediately or directly affected and in site, but with a greater number of people through mediated messages or images at very different places and times. It would be ridiculous to deny the links between mental and physical suffering, but the distinction between the two is fundamental in a study of terrorism.

Not every incidence of large-scale or sustained violence with a high death toll resulted in terror. Conversely, terror may prevail without constant and widespread violence on a major scale. Under Indonesia’s New Order regime (1966–1998) terror was kept alive by some knowledge of major violence in the past, and regular displays in the present of selected memories of that past hinting to the general population of its potential recurrence in the present. As evident in several other countries during the Cold War, and again after September 11, 2001, terror in New Order Indonesia was maintained and facilitated by vigorous martial law enforcement in largely non-war situations.

It has not been easy for many foreign observers to appreciate the level of mental suffering among Indonesians under the New Order, because most of the time these Indonesians appeared – in direct encounter, in postcards, or in the mass media – to be quiet and contented with their ordinary lives, not to speak of the comfortable material life and economic growth during that period. The smiling faces of powerless and terrorised subjects

across the nation easily misled sympathetic but poorly informed foreign tourists and observers.

Approximately one million innocent Indonesians were killed by their fellow nationals, neighbours and kin at the height of an anti-communist campaign in the mid-1960s. Profound political consequences followed these mass killings, affecting Indonesian public life in subsequent decades. *State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging* highlights the historical specificities of the violence and comparable incidents of identity politics in more recent times. It seeks to examine where, if at all, there is any space for the largely repressed public to negotiate, avoid, or resist the suffocating political environment – decades after the actual killings in 1965–66.

I take issue with the general tendency to see the periodic anti-communist witch-hunts as nothing but a political tool in the hand of a powerful military elite and the authoritarian government of the New Order to repress political dissent, discredit potential enemies, or attempt to legitimise its responsibility for past killings. And I argue that elements of what began as an anti-communist campaign took on a life of their own, increasingly (though never totally) operating independently of the 1965–66 violence and of the individual subjects who appeared to be manipulating the campaign in the 1980s and 1990s.

New Order state terrorism is not unique, although its particularities are of great interest. Neither is its operation isolated or independent from unequal inter-state power relations. Its global dimension is seriously considered in the concluding chapter of this book.



State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging, by Ariel Heryanto (University of Melbourne), Routledge (September 2005), will be launched by Dr Robert Cribb (ANU) in the University of Melbourne Bookshop, Tuesday 18 October 2005 (5–7pm).

Celebrating Melbourne University Sports As

As UniNews goes to press some 450 University of Melbourne athletes are in Brisbane to contest the 2005 Australian University Games (25–30 September). The team – which fields more athletes than competed for Australia at the Athens Olympics in 2004 – is seen as one of the strongest lineups yet to represent Melbourne at an AUG. Topping the medal tally this year would give Melbourne its first ‘back to back’ national Games titles – having taken the AUG ‘title’ in 2004. The University’s Games record also includes winning the medal tally in 1997. The AUG was established in 1993. This year’s team sets off to the Games fresh from celebrating the centenary of the first ‘Blues’ to be awarded by the Melbourne University Sports Association (MUSA). Blues are a traditional recognition for achievement in inter-varsity sporting competition. Media Officer Matthew Johnston interviewed University Director of Sport, Mark Lockie, on the historical significance of sport to the ‘Melbourne Experience’ for this celebration of University athletes and their achievements.

By Matthew Johnston



Team performance will have provided a powerful drive for athletes competing at this year’s Australian University Games in Brisbane, but the recognition accorded outstanding individual achievement in premier inter-varsity competition – the University Blue – is still as highly sought at the University of Melbourne as when the first one was awarded 100 years ago.

Back then anyone who competed in inter-varsity competition automatically won a Blue, but as the University’s sporting associations grew this changed, and the award now stands as a prestigious symbol of athletic prowess.

The inception of the Blue in 1905 was an important part of creating a more ‘professional’ edge to the University of Melbourne’s sporting structure in the early 20th century.

Organised sport had already come a long way from humble beginnings almost 50 years earlier when a

collection of gentlemen sauntered onto Emerald Hill cricket ground to play the first ever game of sport for the University of Melbourne.

Back then the most optimistic report of the game could only note that “at one point of the innings it seemed as if they (the University of Melbourne cricketers) might succeed” in making runs.

In 1905, however, a University sports union was in its second year, and the University Football Club was readying for its first foray into the Victorian Football League – the forerunner of today’s Australian Football League.

As the next century of sport progressed, a collection of Olympic Gold Medalists arrived and passed through the University. A professional and formal system of sports and recreation was established and, as a result, athletes were afforded the facilities and training they needed to excel.

Olympic Gold Medalists to have run, swum, ridden or jumped in the University’s grounds include cyclist