



# The Australian Anthropological Society Newsletter

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## AAS Newsletter Contributions

The Newsletter is a vehicle for informing members of AAS matters and to provide brief commentaries on issues relevant to members. It may include such items as book reviews, notices of conferences, reports on research-in-progress, as well as short articles. If you wish to contribute an item for publication in the Newsletter, please contact either of the co-editors:

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Back issues of the Newsletter are available on the AAS website: <http://www.aas.asn.au>

## Introducing the Current AAS Office Bearers

**President:** Dr Thomas A Reuter, BA Hons. (University of Melbourne), PhD (ANU)



'In the field'

Thomas began his formal studies at the University of Melbourne in 1988, leading to a combined Honours degree in anthropology and social theory in 1991. An early interest in the cultures of Indonesia was explored further at the Australian National University's Centre for Advanced Studies (Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies), leading to a PhD in anthropology in 1996. This period included 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork among the indigenous highland people of Bali, Indonesia.

After two years of lecturing at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, Thomas returned to Melbourne in 1998, to accept a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship from the Australian Research Council, with the University of Melbourne as his host institution. In 2000 Thomas was awarded a prestigious Queen Elizabeth II Fellowship by the ARC, to fund his long-term research project 'Revivalism and Religious Conflict in Javanese Society: An ethnographic investigation of changing identities and political aspirations in contemporary Indonesia'. Current fieldwork is aiming to identify some of the social and historical conditions under which utopian movements may incite political conflict or, alternatively, serve a positive role in the creation or maintenance of a democratic society.

Theoretical interests include social organization, kinship, social change, social conflict, religion, revival movements, ethnicity, marginality, traditional architecture, cross-cultural epistemology, communication theory, political anthropology, the politics of representation, and the critique of culturally sanctioned injustice.

Recent publications:

Books:

TA Reuter (ed) 2003 *Inequality, crisis and social change in Indonesia: The muted worlds of Bali* London: Routledge-Curzon Press.

TA Reuter 2002 *The house of our ancestors: Precedence and dualism in highland Balinese Society* Leiden: KITLV Press.

TA Reuter 2002 *Custodians of the sacred mountains: culture and society in the highlands of Bali* Honolulu: Hawaii University Press.

Papers:

TA Reuter 2003 (In press). Reflections on the Response of Indonesian Muslims to the "War on Terrorism" in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Radical Society*. April 2003 issue.

TA Reuter 2003. The Bali Bombing: Understanding the Tragedy Beyond al-Qaeda and Bush's "War on Terror". *Inside Indonesia*, 73:4-5.

TA Reuter 2001 'Great expectations: Hindu revival movements in Java' *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12(3): 327-338.

TA Reuter 2000 'Der Umgang mit dem Fremden auf Bali: Betrachtungen zu den Auswirkungen der Globalisierung im Hinblick auf kulturspezifische Interpretationsmodelle' in B Hauser-Schaublin (ed) *Bali: Kultur - Tourismus - Umwelt* Hamburg Abera Verlag.

TA Reuter 'People of the mountains, people of the sea: Negotiating the local and foreign in Bali' in R Rubinstein & LH Connor (eds) *Staying local in the global village: Bali in the twentieth century* University of Hawaii Press.

TA Reuter 1999; 'Communicating through the invisible: the paradox of association and the logic of ritualised interaction on the island of Bali' *Anthropological Forum* 9 (1) 37-61.

TA Reuter 1998 'Houses and compounds in the mountains of Bali', in J Davison (ed) *Indonesian heritage: Architecture* Singapore Editions Didier Millet.

TA Reuter 1998 'The ritual domains of the mountain Balinese: Regional alliance and the idea of a shared origin' in JJ Fox (ed) *Indonesian heritage: religion and ritual* Singapore: Editions Didier Millet.

TA Reuter 1998 'The Banua of Pura Pucak Penulisan: A ritual domain in the highlands of Bali' *Review of Indonesian & Malaysian Affairs* 32(1) 55-109.

**Vice-President:** Dr Mandy Thomas BAppSc (Sydney) BA Hons, PhD (ANU)



Mandy Thomas took up the appointment of Deputy Director of the Centre for Cross Cultural Research at ANU 2002. Mandy has published widely on the anthropology of migration; the Vietnamese diaspora; social and political change in contemporary Vietnam; and globalisation in Asian urban societies. Prior to her

appointment at ANU, Mandy was research fellow and Deputy Director at the Institute for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney. She previously held an ARC postdoctoral research fellowship at UWS and has lectured in Anthropology at ANU.

Mandy's 1999 book, *Dreams in the Shadows: Vietnamese-Australian Lives in Transition* (Allen and Unwin) was based on her PhD research, undertaken at ANU. Her research on youth in western Sydney has formed the basis of a documentary film screened on SBS. She has also developed numerous exhibitions in collaboration with art galleries, cultural institutions and museums in Australia. She has an on-going research interest in the artistic expression, performance and popular cultural activities of migrant communities. She had a major role in the development of the 2002 exhibition *VIETPOP: the popular culture of Vietnamese youth*, at the Liverpool Museum in Sydney. Her latest publication, *Moving Landscapes: National Parks and the Vietnamese experience* (2002 Pluto Press) was the result of a collaborative project with National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Vietnamese Community Organisation.

As Vice President of the AAS Mandy's main role this year is in chairing a sub-committee to revise the AAS Code of Ethics in order to ensure that it is relevant and reflective of the working circumstances of Australian anthropologists. She is also involved in: actively implementing the strategic plan of the AAS; attempting to increase the AAS membership to ensure AAS is relevant to the needs of the next generation of anthropologists; increasing our international linkages and in planning future collaborations with other anthropological societies outside Australia.

**Office Administrator:** Liz Bell



Hi! I've been at the AAS office at ANU, Canberra for just over a year.

I'm usually here on Monday and Wednesday between 9.30am and 2.30pm, but it can vary according to how much work I have to do here, and my other jobs.

They include doing the bookkeeping for a Chinese bilingual childcare centre on Fridays, bookkeeping for some small businesses from my home, taxiing two of my sons to various sporting commitments, and running a home and garden, and a selection of animals.

In my spare time (what spare time?) I love to read, garden, and embroider.



**AAS Secretary: Toni Bauman**

Toni Bauman is an anthropologist with over twenty years experience in a wide range of Indigenous matters including land claims and native title, facilitating meetings, conducting social impact studies and feasibility studies for Indigenous cultural centres. She has worked for a range of Indigenous organisations such as Land Councils, ATSIC and the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in Darwin. In 1979, she established Mimi Aboriginal Arts and Crafts in Katherine, Northern Territory.

Toni is an accredited LEADR mediator, an Aboriginal Adult Educator and has worked as the editor of the Indigenous law Bulletin in the Faculty of Law at the University of New South Wales. She is also a Director of Dodson, Bauman & Associates, legal and Anthropological Consultants.

Recently, she has been working on an AIATSIS publication which is a guide to sites of importance to Aboriginal people in Darwin in the past and the present and a kind of alternative social history. The publication is the third in a series following similar publications about Sydney and Melbourne.

Toni is currently a Visiting Research Fellow in the Native Title Research Unit at the Australia Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

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**Research in Progress**

**Thesis on Fanatical Political Commitment**

Michael Roberts

*Adjunct Associate Professor, University of Adelaide*

The bombing outrages committed in recent times by

activists inspired by religious fundamentalism and/or nationalism highlights the difficulties encountered by those in the West in comprehending the inspirations behind such forces. Popular Western prejudices are immediately seen in letters to the press that depict Islamic beliefs as “austere” and “primitive” (*Australian*, Oct. 2002). While this opinion may seem to be an expression of uninformed prejudice, it may well share common ground with learned academic treatises that castigate the “objectification,” “essentialism” and “primordialism” of other scholars as well as nationalist ideologues.

It is my hypothesis that both lines of response are rooted in the individualist epistemology that is now embedded within the secularised Christian West. The latter phrase, “secularised Christian West,” is a considered one. Christianity may be muted in its influence on the dominant values of Western society and its political practices, but it is far from dormant. Its fallen are sent on their final way with bagpipes playing “Amazing Grace.” Its celebration of heroes has a cast that places a value on the individual who has sacrificed self or braved danger to self in the cause of others who are considered part of that individual’s collective. So, one has Hero-as-Mate as in the figure of the Anzac or Hero-as-brave-and-quick as in the case of Andrew Boast at Monash University, or those men celebrated by Rupert Brooke. Whatever the shades of emphasis, the Western Hero tends to be an individual whose act of selflessness is the work of a distinct unit within the whole.

It is my hypothesis that this Western hero-figure differs from the Hero-as-Martyr promoted in some other settings in the past century or so. I am interested in comparing information on the Japanese *kamikaze* soldiers/pilots inspired by the Bushido cult, the Islamic *jihadists* serving as suicide bombers in the last decade and Tamils in southern India and Sri Lanka who have over the past 50 years immolated or mutilated themselves or become ‘smart bombs’ in furtherance of specific causes. With this thesis in mind I propose to explore each of these contexts and the ideologies associated with them in comparative ways.

It is my further speculation that each of these three ‘extreme cases’ shares one dimension that marks them off from the Western Hero. In all three I suspect that the individual immolator/suicide bomber has a form of selflessness that nullifies the self and/or merges self with cause in ways that absorb the individual-as-atom. This is not to say that they can be transposed unto each other. It is likely that the relationship between Islamic *jihadist* becoming suicide bomber and his specific Islamic collective differs from that associated with, say, Chinnasami who immolated himself in public at Tiruchirallapalli in 1964 as a protest against the disempowerment of his beloved Tamil language; and that both differ from the Japanese *kamikaze* pilots. My focus, then, is in the forms of personhood fostered in these differing cultural settings and the manner in which they, individually and severally, differ from those implanted now as a dominant (but not blanket) form within the

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West.

By probing each universe-of-being and by exploring their differences/similarities comparatively I hope to develop insights into each of these ideological settings. In doing so, the study will not only be informative, but also serve as a foundation for self-examination – that is, as a basis for reflections on the taken-for-granted values of the Western world. For the fact remains that liberal humanism, the dominant ideology of the Western academic corridors, has found it difficult to engage with nationalist extremism and religious fundamentalism.

Nurtured in Sri Lanka, but exposed to the Western world, I perceive these failures ‘everyday.’ It is not a question of ethnic background. Asian scholars subsumed by the Western liberal values also stand outside the citadel of, say, Hindu chauvinists in India or Sinhala zealots in Sri Lanka not only as opponents, but as secularised, non-comprehending opponents. It is an instance of the twain never meeting. So I ask: “without understanding one’s oppositional Other, can one undermine or defeat the Other within the realm of mobilisational politics?” My exercise, therefore, is politically driven, but seeks to do so without total submersion in liberal values. Indeed, one of the objects is to bring these values into relief.

In this investigation I will be utilising several bodies of data. Firstly, as a subsidiary, a collection of newspaper and pictorial material on “communal violence” in India by Hindu activists that I accumulated several years back, but have not sorted out as yet; a collection that will be supplemented by secondary works (e.g. Hansen 2001). Secondly, my principal body of primary data will be the enormous stock of material on expressions of Sinhala nationalism from the late nineteenth century to the present day that I have accumulated over a lifetime’s research.

The latter work embraces detailed studies of the diaries maintained by an ascetic propagandist, Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933). Dharmapala was a global activist who attended the World Congress of Religions from the 1890s, spent time in Japan and drew inspiration from Japanese society. His expansive missionary activities for “Humanity” – a term he borrowed from late 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian spiritualists or rationalists of ecumenical disposition – were combined with virulent expressions of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (Roberts 1997). Note this illustrative example. Dharmapala was in San Francisco in 1903 when a letter from Sri Lanka informed him about a religious riot at the sacred city of Anuradhapura. His immediate response in his diary was as follows: “There has been a riot in Anuradhapura. The RC church was burnt down. May the Buddhists gain strength in their noblework ... ‘Fight on; die for the holy religion’ ...” (22 July 1903). As this note indicates, his endeavours and rhetoric have affinities (as well as significant differences) with that of Abu Bakar Bashir.

Significantly, Dharmapala became a kind of patron saint for the Sinhala nationalist resurgence in the 1950s-and-beyond. The exclusive policies of these forces in their turn spawned a Tamil liberation movement that has led to the rise of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, who have

perfected the use of the suicide-bomber-as-smart bomb, while asking their key personnel to carry a cyanide capsule. Several fighters for their cause have in fact committed suicide by cyanide when captured. The early popularity of the LTTE during the exigent circumstances of the SL Tamil people in the 1980s was partly because such commitment drew admiration from the Tamil peoples.

Though the Sinhalese and Tamils share a belief in *karmic* law and rebirth, the Sinhala stream of consciousness in modern times has not inspired acts of self-mutilation, immolation and suicide-bomber assassinations in the style of the Tamilians in Sri Lanka and southern India (Roberts 1996). This remains a puzzle calling for further investigation.

The puzzle calls for further complexity, and thus insight, by contrasting it with the Mahayanist versions of selflessness sponsored by various streams of ideology, notably Zen Buddhism, in Japan, a selflessness that then became the basis of the Bushido cult sponsoring *kamikaze* actions by Japanese military men (Victoria 1997). Victoria’s presence in Adelaide will enable me to engage in a dialogue in ways that can only be fruitful, while also leading me to other Japanese material. This, then, will be my third body of material.

References:

Hansen, T.B. 2001. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*. Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks.

Roberts, M. 1996. Filial devotion and the Tiger cult of suicide, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 30: 245-72.

Roberts, M. 1997. For Humanity. For the Sinhalese. Dharmapala as bosat crusader, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 56: 1006-1032.

Victoria, Brian. 1997. *Zen at War*. New York: Weatherhill.

### Native Title Conference

The AIATSIS NTRU conference website has now been updated to include information about the next Native Title Conference, to be held in Alice Springs from June 2-5. The conference information is posted at:

[http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/rsrch/ntru/ntru\\_conferences.htm](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/rsrch/ntru/ntru_conferences.htm)

Please note that the Call for Papers deadline has now been extended to 28 March 2003.

**Some observations on the perils of participant observation from Cassandra Green, who has just embarked on fieldwork in highland Bali. Cass is a PhD student in the Anthropology program (SAGES) at the University of Melbourne.**

From the perspective of a novice anthropologist like myself, the whole of undergraduate anthropology appears

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to be a preparation for the mysterious rite of passage termed 'fieldwork'; a mystery which looms from a future of postgraduate study. To the earnest (and common) undergraduate question 'but how do you really do fieldwork?' experienced anthropologists tend to answer something to the effect of 'well, every time a new anthropologist enters the field, they reinvent the wheel, but not quite...'

Thus armed with wise colloquialisms, the novice postgrad heads off to a specific region of the world which they have chosen to study. They know that for the next 12-18 months they will forget much of the theory they have read, a necessary step towards contributing something new to the discipline. However, this lofty enterprise can easily be obscured and downright torn asunder by the intensity of 'culture shock'. Lurking behind all the initial pragmatic stresses is the constant consciousness that this deluge of new impressions must evolve into something called 'data', and that data must be collated in order to support an argument, the amalgam of which constitutes a thesis, the culmination of the fieldwork enterprise. I have stepped into this future mystery recently. Indeed, I write this from the field.

I am living in a village called Buahan, which is one of five villages located around Lake Batur in highland Bali. Hugged by mountains and surrounded by lava fields sprawling from a towering volcano, this field site is visually spectacular. I left Australia on February 4th 2003, and herein offer you a taste of what is probably a typical experience of the first level of initiation in this anthropological rite of passage, namely, establishing oneself in a fieldsite.

First I went to Jakarta, where I had to engage in strange official rituals involving many pieces of paper and many stamps, in order to get my research permit. I began to broach the language barrier little by little, while doing my best to cope with a general and total lack of redundancy in all things practical. The strain became apparent when on the third day I caught myself staring at my toothbrush wondering how to connect the object with its function...

A few nights later in Bali I felt like I had landed in a miniature abandoned Disneyland. Through my taxi window Kuta swept by, a maze of tense locals enclosed in the absence of tourists. The site of the Bali Bombing was curiously silent, that is, except for whispered assurances that Bali is still aman, safe.

After enduring another bout of confusing bureaucratic processes in Denpasar, I headed for the mountains. I was not sure which village I wanted to live in. First I went to Songan, an ancient no-frills kind of place. I was eager to please, and so agreed to rent a little concrete room for a year that I actually did not want. It is most likely a typical weakness of a first time fieldworker, a weakness symptomatic of trying to do too many things at once. Trying to follow subtle semantic nuances in conversations conducted in a foreign language, trying to read body language indicative of culturally relative intentions, all the while battling all the bodily stresses of living in a new place - it all takes its toll on the reasoning faculty. The

next day I realised the absurdity of my decision to live for a year in place that I did not like in order to avoid the momentary discomfort of refusing something that is offered. I rang my host to be after planning carefully how I would let!

him down gently, but he did not really care if I lived there or not.

In a subsequent chain of serendipitous events, I found myself in the quieter, smaller village of Buahan. This place comes with all of the advantages and disadvantages of village life. Living in a small community I cannot so much as cough without somebody noticing and immediately passing the news onto someone else, a situation ripe for paranoia; are they laughing at me again, or at the fisherman over yonder who nearly fell out of his boat? If I glance at a male my own age, there are rumours of my impending marriage to a local boy.

On the other hand, someone always wants to help me with whatever it is that I am doing. Although this can be suffocating, at times this help is wisely offered. My obvious inability to navigate the steep mountain roads on my second-hand motorbike inspires (mainly middle-aged) men to take over and demote me to passenger. The other day I was attempting to negotiate a particularly steep bit of road and I spun out of control, my bike fell over and I jumped clear. I shamefacedly heaved the offending vehicle off the ground to a chorus of laughing kids shouting that a tourist had fallen over. A few hours later in my home village, I accepted an offer of a lift home on a motorbike, but ignorantly sat side-saddle with my legs to the right instead of the left - a posture apparently most unladylike. This time I corrected my error to a chorus of women laughing.

These are minor blunders, it is the inter-personal ones that matter. It is impossible to remain entirely neutral in relation to pre-existing village factions. Indeed, if it is possible at all, to do so would be to yield to a strange type of anthropology conducted entirely from an observer perspective. My desire to interact with as many people as possible probably meant that I stepped on a few toes, which meant that at times I could almost hear some new fieldwork contacts say to potential contacts 'she's my anthropologist...' One of the many tasks to learn early is how to be a better diplomat than any currently in office in the Australian political scene.

The general lack of anonymity is recreated in my new living quarters. The women of the family living behind my room constantly want to feed me. I have inferred that they believe if I am not eating all the time I am unhappy. The upside is that they are excellent chefs. Just about everybody that I have encountered here has shown this type of generosity in some form or another, especially in terms of patience. The residents of Buahan have been willing to answer my persistent questions that must appear ignorant in the extreme given that they pertain to aspects of daily life the significance of which (if there is any) is taken for granted as self-evident. Lets hope this generosity lasts.

Even a limited experience of fieldwork teaches you about humiliation, and how to begin to translate that feeling into humility. It also teaches you how to cope with the emotional dialectic of wishing you could be at home where it is comfortable, while knowing that you are privileged to be where you are, and that you will be forever indebted to that community for the intangible gifts that they give you, even though at times you do not feel like receiving them.

As it stands, my methodology consists of hanging around the *warung* (local coffee house) hoping that someone will talk to me. It works - I have a few resultant little kinship diagrams to prove it. Every time I lay eyes on a temple offering I ask about it, and studiously write the answer down. I have learned how to cook rice, and I bathe and wash my clothes in the lake with everybody else. I am learning to live differently, and document it at the same time. In other words, I am starting to reinvent the wheel, but not quite...

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### **AAS Annual Conference 2003**

The AAS Annual Conference 2003 will be hosted by the University of Sydney. The Conference Committee consists of Neil MacLean, Gaynor MacDonald, and Jeremy Beckett.

Further details on the Conference will be published in the next Newsletter and updated in due course on the AAS web page: <http://www.aas.asn.au>

### **Australian Anthropological Society Annual Conference 1 - 3 October 2003, University of Sydney**

The conference theme is:

#### **Anthropology and Pragmatism**

The conference theme has a dual reference - it evokes a relationship between the current circumstances under which anthropologists work and undertake research, and a dominant pragmatic interpretive trend in anthropological writing itself:

*And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought-distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve - what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reaction we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all. [James W. Lecture 2: What Pragmatism Means']*

**Call for sessions:** Those proposing to organise a conference session are asked to:

(a) develop a session title and abstract of 100-200 words;

(b) advertise this information on AAS Net [AasNet@anu.edu.au](mailto:AasNet@anu.edu.au) with a call for papers in the session; and

(c) provide the information to the conference organiser below; This is important to allow for session details to be progressively uploaded to this website.

**Session organisers should note that it is our intention to limit individual sessions to one day in length (approximately 9 papers). We would like people to be able to follow individual sessions through without cutting out too much of the rest of the conference. If a major overflow of papers looks likely we ask session organisers to contact the conference organisers as early as possible.**

#### **Deadlines:**

**Session titles and abstracts must be submitted to the conference organiser no later than June 1st:**

**Paper titles and abstracts for each session must be submitted by each session organiser no later than August 1st.**

**Please note that these are absolute deadlines. The earlier session titles are advertised, the earlier people can offer papers and apply for conference funding and the earlier we can map out the structure of the conference. If you become concerned that the paper you want to present will not fit the advertised sessions please send title and abstract directly to the conference organisers.**

**Conference organiser:** The interim conference organiser is:

Neil Maclean

Department of Anthropology,

Mills Building A 26

University of Sydney, NSW 2006

Ph: (02) 9351 2931; Fax: (02) 9351 3046

Email: [aasconf2003@arts.usyd.edu.au](mailto:aasconf2003@arts.usyd.edu.au) [Email address should be operative by **April 2<sup>nd</sup>**]

Further conference details, including conference venue, organiser and administrative details will shortly be advised on this site, and in the forthcoming AAS Newsletter.