

BOOK REVIEWS

Imtiaz Ahmad (ed.), *Understanding Terrorism. Beyond Statist Discourses* (Delhi: Manohar, 2006), 418 pp.

This is the first part of a two-volume study on ‘Terrorism in South Asia’ promoted by the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo (<http://www.rcss.org>), sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Contributors respond to a growing request for academic literature on terrorism within an international project on ‘Understanding and Combating Terrorism in South Asia under Regional Collaborative Research Initiatives on Non-Traditional Security in South Asia’.

This long-awaited contribution in the sociology of terrorism, international relations and politics is aimed at postgraduate students and researchers. The editor’s introduction (pp. 11–46) discusses problems in the global understanding of terrorism, providing a critical methodology for rebuilding the study of localised terrors. While Derridian deconstructionism is utilised, this reviewer finds the analytical classification of terrorism and violence through the lenses of Gramsci’s sociology and subaltern studies more convincing.

Focussing on South Asia, *Understanding Terrorism* offers a valuable detailed overview of regional realities otherwise ignored or at best misunderstood. The redefinition of a technical terminology for the study of ‘terrorism’ and the contextualisation of violence in South Asia are top priorities in the ambitious research agenda of this project. Since 9/11, perceptions of ‘terrorism’ gained global resonance. But can terrorism be visualised as a uniform phenomenon? Indeed, the biggest challenge is understanding cultural patterns of variation in defining terror. Events like the Madrid bombings (11 March 2004), followed by London (7 July 2005) and Mumbai (11 July 2006) contributed to enhancing a common idea of terror, establishing a paradigm. Nevertheless, as carefully explained, such common understanding tends to reflect mainly the agenda of the United States Department of Defence, which includes gaining international support for the US-led war on terrorism, consensus on embargo and sanctions policies to isolate and weaken a growing number of ‘rogue states’, or opposing the ‘axis of evil’.

Contributions include a chapter on ‘Colonial State, Terror, and Law’ by Ranabir Samaddar (chapter one, pp. 47–92) and two chapters on ‘The State and the Limits of

Counter-Terrorism', covering the experience of Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Rubina Saigol, chapter two, pp. 93–152), and India and Bangladesh (Shahedul Anam Khan, chapter three, pp. 153–201). Imtiaz Ahmad and Farid A. Bhuiyan write on 'Weapons Technology and the Reconceptualization of Terrorism' (chapter four, pp. 203–51). Three chapters on terrorism and subalternity focus on the misgovernance syndrome in Sri Lanka (Jehan Pereira, chapter five, pp. 253–86), the marginalisation syndrome in Nepal (Dhruba Kumar, chapter six, pp. 287–344) and sub-nationalist movements in Mizoram and Bagaland (Sanjoy Hazarika, chapter seven, pp. 345–70). Chapter eight by Nira Wickramasinghe (pp. 371–410) discusses 'Unthinking the Terrorism—Globalization Nexus'.

A major strength of this collection is the concerted effort to study terrorist scenarios on the periphery of the capitalist world economy, gaining critical insight into the respective cultural context while calibrating the effects of globalisation. The studies thus offer an external overview of a geographically itinerant international crisis, promoting a fruitful global dialogue. The 'other' is valued as a critical thinker; a much-needed methodological approach. The resulting work appears polemicised, especially regarding the status quo imposed by the current US government and many of its allies, reflected in the confusion between 'terrorism' and 'resistance' introduced by Samaddar. Yet, by shifting the object of study, violence, from that of other cultures to that of their own, contributors fill a gap in the social study of terrorism.

The rise of policies and strategies of terror in South Asia is analysed focusing on ethnicity, religion, territorialism, language(s), colonial and post-colonial studies. Terrorism in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka as well as reported acts of violence in the subcontinent under the British Raj are carefully discussed, offering an 'in-motion' anthropological and historical perspective. Further, Hazarika's analysis of the violence undermining two Indian federal states, Mizoram and Nagaland in chapter seven, proves the existence of a growing and much-needed interest in South Asian tribes. By removing tribal people from their previous status of physical and juridical non-existence, scholars like Hazarika set the basis for international recognition of human rights violations through endemic actions of state terror (including systematic murder, rape, deportation, cultural domestication and economic exploitation) and the search for a solution to tribal armed resistance.

The book presents a few weaknesses. First, since much of the discourse on terrorism and the reasons behind it remain perceived as a consequence of disruptive or unresolved socio-economic processes, analysis of violence in South Asia in the light of commodity fetishism and strategies of the market would have been useful. Second, relevant regional and internal manifestations of terrors (for example, those related to the Punjab and 1980s Sikh separatism, culminating with Operation Blue Star), remain unmentioned, for reasons unclear to this reviewer. The arguments presented are otherwise cogent and well-structured. A quotation by Albert Camus is repeated twice, almost verbatim (p. 35 and again pp. 235–6). Chapter four presents useful tables, a

technique which should have been used in other chapters to highlight terrorism-related figures in colonial and post-colonial South Asia. The brief index is unfortunately of no help whatsoever.

Books like this should find their way far beyond the usual English readership, through a more capillary distribution, including translations in both European and at least South Asian national languages.

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Amarjit Kaur and Ian Metcalfe (eds.), *Mobility, Labour Migration and Border Controls in Asia* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), xix +322 pp.

The fact that international labour migration occupies a critical position in global economic, social and governance agendas is apparent from the preoccupation of policy-makers with cross-border control, security issues and regulatory frameworks, often to the detriment of labour migrants. The authors in this volume explore the forces that shape international migration and examine the policy responses to the challenges inherent in the process. This is a rare and useful study, providing a wide range of insights, mainly focused on Asia, but offering no easy recipes for solutions.

Referring to the border-control regimes that existed prior to and after the Cold War, Morris-Suzuki criticises the tendency of governments to devise innovative ways of keeping migrants out of their territories. She calls for 'democratising the border' (p. 21) in a bid to improve international co-operation and ensure safe cross-border movements by people. Kaur traces the significant labour transformations in Southeast Asia since the 1970s and examines the growth of migration, border control and immigration policies at different stages of economic transition of the region. Given that this region has witnessed labour flows in terms of skilled, unskilled, semi-skilled and undocumented and 'gendered' (p. 34) migrants, regulatory mechanisms have been geared to safeguard the interests of both the receiving states and migrant populations in specific contexts.

Manning and Bhatnagar underline trends in international labour movement and policy measures for coping with increasing mobility. While transition of skilled migrants has been organised in Southeast Asia, the process for undocumented/illegal migrants, who lacked legal protection, was fraught with difficulties. In this backdrop, host countries introduced unilateral and sometimes bilateral arrangements to restrict the movement of undocumented migrants. Firdausy's work reveals that despite problems faced by Indonesian labour migrants associated with recruitment procedures, costs and workplace treatment, they were still willing to work abroad. The prospect of earning higher wages abroad sidelined all other considerations, including personal safety.

Hugo provides a women-specific analysis of international migration. He notes that while migration can indeed enhance women's well-being, inadequate and ineffective policy measures continue to expose women migrants to abuse and exploitation. Examining the dynamics of labour export from the Philippines during 1973–2004, Ball, too, confirms that feminisation of international labour migration often results in women migrants being subjected to sexual and physical violence. Nevertheless, the growth of overseas employment has transformed Filipino families' perception of national and household survival, now firmly pinned on labour export. Drawing from the Bangladeshi experience, Shamim argues that imposing bans on female migration is counterproductive in that it increases undocumented movements, which in turn, raise women's vulnerability to trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation. She calls for balanced, flexible and comprehensive migration policies which would effectively diffuse 'tensions between states and between employers and female migrants' (p. 170).

Moving away from the 'need and demonisation' (p. 172) aspect of international migration, Butcher examines how Australian white-collar expatriates have harmonised their values, practices and home-life with local culture through social networks. Arguably, these adaptations indicate the strength of 'place-making' (p. 189) by transnational professionals who have created for themselves a blended identity with both Singaporean and Australian rudiments. In examining the role of Indian skilled labour in Singapore's 'globalisation strategy' (p. 193) which focuses *inter alia* on foreign labour, Gaur finds that Singapore's demographic constraints and consequent need for qualified professionals have been successfully complemented by India's relative advantage of supplying the requisite human resources at competitive costs. This process, it is argued, has concurrently helped Singapore to develop a knowledge-based economy and India to lessen structural unemployment, a win-win scenario.

Wong acknowledges that the policing of boundaries of both labour market and local society have altered the terms of entry and stay of migrants in Malaysia. Ford describes the Malaysian government's attempts in early 2000 to 'manage' Indonesian labour migrant flows by controlling and deporting not only new arrivals but also undocumented foreigners already working there. The use of this strategy culminated in strained relations between the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia and resource constraints in local provinces where there had been mass influx of deportees. These observations foreshadow what would happen in places like London if all undocumented or irregular migrants were to be deported, as appears to be still debated. In Asia, the Thai migration policies have been critiqued for their *ad hocism* and absence of focus on irregular migrants. The regulatory framework consisted of 'incoherent, selective, and impractical measures' (p. 258) that lacked an adequate grounding of the factors influencing migrant labour flows, the role of employers and brokers, costs and benefits. Wongboonsin proposes a shift from the supply side to the demand side of labour migration to enable Thailand to compete effectively in the knowledge-based economy. These are familiar thoughts also elsewhere in the world.

Jackson's account of cash flows from Bangladeshi labour migrants reveals how remittances, apart from material improvements, have also induced qualitative changes in the socio-cultural environment of local communities. While the government is keen on increasing and controlling remittance flows, it has shied away from regulating the recruitment and treatment of labour migrants, leaving it to private operators that often manipulate and exploit unwitting migrants. Piper flags up the importance of the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers in protecting labour migrants and informing national legislation. Reluctance by some states to ratify the instrument stems from intra- and inter-state political tensions, misconceptions about the effects of ratifying and anti-immigrant public sentiment (p. 306). Indeed, national security concerns very often undermine the 'human side of migration' (p. 295), thereby escalating labour migrants' vulnerability to abuse and exploitation in foreign countries.

Whereas military actions affecting national sovereignty traditionally constituted security discourses, global developments indicate that migrant populations are increasingly being viewed as a non-traditional security threat by receiving countries. Apart from apprehensions that labour migrants divest local people of their jobs, there are also latent feelings that they incite crime and social disorder. Despite tangible contributions to trade, labour and investment, migrant workers continue to be marginalised in national policy formulations, their potential ignored, and their rights often unprotected.

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Vasudha Dhagamwar, *Role and Image of Law in India: The Tribal Experience* (New Delhi and London: Sage, 2006), 414 pp.

Academic literature on the tribes of the subcontinent is still poorly represented, especially compared to studies of other South Asian societies. Although researchers in humanities and social sciences increasingly focus on South Asian tribes, such efforts are still limited. Dhagamwar's book, mainly intended for anthropologists and sociologists of law, is therefore welcome and clearly explains the current position and conditions of India's tribal people, offering invaluable sources for further enquiries.

Dhagamwar derives her rich experience from scrupulous archival research and extensive fieldwork. A legal activist and founder-director of Multiple Action Research Group (MARG, <http://www.ngo-marg.org>), New Delhi (1985–2005), she shows her sympathy for the cause, traces the history of tribal exploitation in India and its rationale and suggests possible solutions to a never-ending crisis. Where passion, bold academic methodology and strong evidence are bound together, the result is strong academic literature.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach, the research takes a diachronic perspective and confidently combines ethnography, language issues, history, social anthropology, law and subaltern studies without losing focus. After a significant first chapter on the tribes of ancient and medieval India (pp. 19–37), the book focuses in two major parts on tribes in British India (pp. 47–215) and independent India (pp. 221–345). Although the discourse can be extended to many tribal realities in India and beyond, as discussed in the conclusion (pp. 366–80), the study focuses on three tribal groups: the Bhils from north-west Maharashtra, the Santals of Santal Parganas and the Pahadiyas of the Rajmahal Hills, both in Jharkhand (formerly Bihar). The exploitative processes suffered by these tribes are coherently outlined. Historical and anthropological theories, the backbone of the book, provide through a quasi-dialogical structure an aetiology of the tribal experience of law.

Economic theories are prominently utilised, but a Marxist approach is neither strictly followed nor used as the main methodological criterion. As an experienced legal activist, Dhagamwar explores the relations between the hegemonic forces of Hindu kingdoms, Moghul rulers and the British Raj and subaltern tribal cultures, paying close attention to economic coercion and power relations. Ethnicity and dominance are discussed within a historical perspective, attempting to reconcile ethnography with history. The emerging events are symbols of an epic of the subaltern. The tribal experience of law is marked by chronic and endemic exploitation, showing India still far from recognising violations of tribal human rights. These communities, though given the official status of ‘Scheduled Tribes’ by the Indian Government, still suffer multiple discriminations. Dhagamwar also notes that the UN Charter of Human Rights fails to address tribal issues and that there is still no Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

This situation affects many aspects of South Asian culture and, quite disturbingly, of South Asian Studies. Even most recent volumes on South Asian religions fail to mention tribal religions. Anthologies of South Asian literature largely ignore tribal poets; tribal artists are scarcely represented and are relegated to folklore. Tribals continue to live in a shadowy juridical state, their rights existing only in theory. A major issue raised by Dhagamwar is that tribal people still suffer isolation in all respects, which would make it interesting to compare them with other exploited groups, such as the Dalits or the Hijras, to remain in India, who have gained worldwide attention.

The book discusses patterns of social division such as ethnicity, language, religion, cultural organisation, economic structure and environmental habitat, but what is significantly missing are insider perspectives. How do tribals see their own isolation? Why do they assume to be objects of exploitation? How do they experience forced migration, violence and alienation? Ultimately, what is their understanding and image of law?

Chapter 10 investigates the custom of *bitlaha*, a judicial system practised by the Santals aimed at outcasting those guilty of sexual misbehaviour. While the author

shows the difficulties arising from the presence of alternative courts and legal systems deriving from different cultural patterns, Santali perspectives are not discussed. Thus the reader is not given enough insight into tribal understandings of law and the Indian legal system and how these affect clans and individuals.

The book presents two further problems. Firstly, the lack of a gender-centred discourse is clearly acknowledged. Secondly, little is said about integrated (or 'successful') members of Indian tribes. Exploring both issues would have provided a clearer understanding of the dynamics of Indian tribal experiences of law. The overwhelming majority of Indian tribals still live at the margins with minimal resources, subject to multiple exploitations. The state legal system offers little help and is perceived as a foreign and inaccessible entity. Though Dhagamwar makes this clear, she does not enquire specifically into the consequences of this dramatic predicament for women, often the most vulnerable individuals. As for 'successful' tribals, as theorised by Gramsci, every social group has its own stratum of intellectuals, or tends to form one. We thus find tribal journalists, politicians, academics, artists and activists. Indeed a small minority, they have evidently not yet realised an organic programme for the recognition of their human rights, but are a promising resource, certainly worthy of further investigation.

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Malashri Lal and Sukrita Paul Kumar (eds.), *Interpreting Homes in South Asian Literature* (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2007), 279 pp.

This collection of essays focuses uniquely on narratives of 'home' in works by South Asian writers in India and abroad, encompassing memory, protest, belonging and loss. Eight out of the 18 essays in the volume deal with diaspora authors writing in English, such as Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Bharati Mukherjee, while two essays (by Debali Mookerjee-Leonard and Sukrita Paul Kumar) examine the loss of home in Partition literature. Other essays offer general surveys of the theme in Indian and Pakistani literature (Pradyumna Chauhan and Muneza Shamsie), some a close reading of poems and a play in Hindi (Lucy Rosenstein and Pamela Lothspeich). Sri Lankan literature is also included (Sharanya Jayawickrama and Charles Sarvan), while two of the most interesting and original essays take up the actual experience and spatial arrangements of Punjabi refugees in Lucknow (Anjali Gera Roy) and the evolution of the middle class drawing room in colonial Bengal (Rosinka Chaudhuri). All in all, while the individual essays are quite short and a few overlap, the volume will serve as a useful reference for critical readings of literary works and theoretical perspectives on this crucial theme.

"Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of

coherence and safety'. Several contributors to the volume quote this definition by Martin and Talpade Mohanty, though only a few of the essays on diaspora literature address the rest of their quotation, 'an illusion... based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself'. Thus, while the Hindi women poets of Rosenstein's essay muse on the difference between *ghar* and *makān*, 'home' and 'house', and view *ghar* either as a prison trapping the female self, or else as a *makān* full of objects and obligations among which the self does not feel at home, the diasporic women writers and critics evoke that 'illusion of coherence' with intense nostalgia.

Viewed collectively, three things strike this reviewer about this volume. First, the close identification (in Mridula Nath Chakrabarty's case a real self-narrativisation) between the diasporic critics, authors and characters; clearly, we are witnesses to a process by which writing crystallises the critics' own experience. Second, with the exception of A.K. Ramanujan and Sujata Bhatt, the emphasis of diasporic writers and critics is exclusively on loss, investing the experience of multilocation with great pathos and invoking, if not the term itself, the whole conceptualisation around the term 'exile' that has developed in post-colonial studies. Third, unlike the Hindi women poets and the bleak poems by Jayanta Mahapatra, the diasporic writers' evocation of home is almost unequivocally suffused with a happy glow of tight relationships, belonging and food.

Food, or rather 'mouthwork', is the topic of an impressive essay by Sneja Gunew, which goes a long way to explaining the apparent obsession of diasporic writers with memories of food. The multilingual diasporic writers, she argues, often displace upon the body, and in particular upon the zone around the mouth, their sense of migration, as when Sujata Bhatt dreams of losing her (mother) tongue. Unpacking the supposed rivalry between food and language of psychoanalytic discourse (with language and the symbolic order replacing the 'oral object of food' according to Julia Kristeva), Gunew suggests that specific foods work as *parole* of the language that one carries, to evoke Meena Alexander's image, under the second skin of English. Synaesthesia (smell, touch and hearing) characterises the evocation of that experience of food/language, visible in those untranslatable words, 'morsels of a foreign language strategically embedded in a text' (Gunew).

Two more essays move away from the necessary, but nonetheless somewhat tired, equation between home, body and nation. Anjali Gera Roy's remarkable essay on the Punjabi refugees resettled during Partition in the Chowk and the Alambagh outpost of Lucknow, in the colony of Aadarsh Nagar (Ideal Town) juxtaposes the familiar elite discourse of the cultural, physical and economic 'decline of the city' and resentment towards the 'brash Punjabis' with the experiences of the refugees themselves. Sympathetically, she traces their shifting patterns of employment and dwelling and remarks that the two-room tenements literalised for the refugees the meaning of home as shelter, while they tried to remould the compulsions of refugee open living into familiar

patterns from rustic Punjab through 'space acts' which included charpoy and rooftops and gender sensitivity to semi-private, semi-public spaces. At almost the opposite end of the social spectrum, Rosinka Chaudhuri not only traces the shift among the middle class in colonial Bengal from the all-male, semi-public *baithak-khāna* to the family-oriented drawing room, she also makes a suggestive argument about its particular aesthetic, a combination of *Swadeshi* ethnic materials, fabrics and objects with international touches (like Japanese flower arrangements), which became a wider paragon of modern taste. Interestingly, such aesthetic is not enough, however, to turn that room into a place of belonging for the woman in Jyotsna Milan's poem 'Search'. Complimented for her good taste ('Your house/really/feels like home'), she wanders astonished from room to room looking for home and finding only 'beds, mats, appliances'. As in the (male) princely-colonial narrative of Amar Singh's diary (Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph), privacy and control over oneself seem to be the missing elements.

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