



Reflections from Bali

After the Bomb

Can Collective Violence Be Prevented?

Contributed by Margret Rueffler, Ph.D. 1989

UK&U alumna **Margret Rueffler** earned her Ph.D. with a concentration in transpersonal psychology in 1989. She is a psychotherapist and acupuncturist committed to translating psychological principles of consciousness of joy, empowerment, choice, and self help into daily life and supporting others in this endeavor. For more than 20 years she has researched and developed the "Psychology of Nations," for individuals and organizations that work with multiethnic groups and other cultures in areas of tension, and the "Psychology of the Self," based on the recognition that a change of inner attitude is the basis of all that is new. She is founder of the PsychoPolitical Peace Institute and Foundation in New York and Staefa, Switzerland, which supports change and transformation of individual, social, organizational, and collective values.

For the past three years, Rueffler and affiliates of the PsychoPolitical Peace Foundation have been engaged in Bali, Indonesia, developing a pilot project to introduce new perspectives that draw upon the potential of human values and conscious choice to prevent an outbreak of collective civil violence due to dwindling employment, poverty, and ethnic and religious differences. In the immediate aftermath of the October 12 terrorist bombings that killed nearly 200, Rueffler spent an extended period in Bali, providing therapeutic care to local people, and she returns frequently to continue her work with a local university on long-term solutions to the quell what many fear is a greatly increased threat of collective violence. The following is one of the reflective pieces she wrote about her experience. —MARY BETH ORTH

The island of Bali is a very special place, and the Balinese are a very special people—inimitably graceful, practicing their very special brand of the Hindu religion. Therefore, the aftermath of the collective trauma caused by the bomb explosion is also being handled in a special way.

Every day, in many of the villages, purification blessing and healing ceremonies are formally conducted by the priests in the presence of the whole village—chanting, praying, and making offerings to the gods of the island. The leader of one village where we have several programs in a slum area, told me over and over, "The gods must have wanted it, otherwise it could not have happened. We are so embarrassed to have been unable to protect our guests and visitors." The bomb seemed to have hit each Balinese in the heart, leaving a deep wound, as if the bomb crater had torn into the heart of the island.

Walking toward the bomb site, the main street of Kuta was nearly empty. The area was cordoned off, with huge excavators on the street. I was allowed to enter the area to take a picture of the countless wreaths laid down on the sidewalk. I saw a white man, perhaps mourning a foreign tourist, carefully pull out a single wreath and straighten out the writing on a piece of fabric; it read, "Dear Laura, You will never be gone. We will meet you again in the other world. Mom and Pop."

The place had an eerie stillness about it, in spite of the huge excavator. Right next to it, a large group of Balinese in traditional ceremonial garb were holding a ceremony. According to tradition, the spirit of every Balinese is embedded in the *banjar*, the village unit of birth, even while living in the city or on another island. After death, the spirit is called back by the priest or Brahman to the birth village, where the person is cremated in a most elaborate ceremony. After the bomb, however, any bodies and body parts of Balinese victims that could be identified were packaged in bags and returned to their respective villages, but many remained missing. This left the villages with a great dilemma, because the Balinese believe that the entire body must be cremated to assure a proper reincarnation in a whole body. Some villages decided not to open the bags with the remains, to avoid confronting the issue. In other villages, missing parts were restructured with clay in order to allow the person a proper incarnation. On this day, a group of villagers have chosen to honor their missing and begin their own healing by holding the ceremony at the bomb site.

The attack touched everyone—survivors, their relatives, rescue workers, and every resident or tourist—while constant media reports fed the grow-