

INTRODUCTION

This issue of the journal was broadly conceived around the notion of violence. It is the thread which links a number of disparate issues from discussions of the state and elections in Papua New Guinea, to controlling hate crime, and the ideology of consent in cases of sexual assault. Violence has a seemingly simple commonsense meaning which relates to the use of physical force. Yet that commonsense notion can be deceptive. It may disguise the nature of certain activities as much as provide illumination.

As Sinclair Dinnen argues in his paper, social and cultural definitions are crucial in the decision as to whether particular behaviour will be perceived as violent or not. The application of the concept of “violence” to particular social behaviour can be, and is, regularly contested. This contestability is also in essence an essential part of the paper by Liz de Rome and I on “hate crime”. An important part of what we are arguing is that the myriad forms of racist violence, homophobic violence and other forms of hate crime are accorded the definition of constituting serious forms violence in our society. The according of such a status is in essence also a political activity.

Again the politics of definition goes to the core of Sheila Jeffreys’ paper on “consent”. It is the deconstruction of the notion of “consent” through its implication in maintaining male supremacy, that allows an understanding of why consent is such a flawed concept for delineating the content of violence in sexual relations.

Perhaps the concept of violence is not as immediately apparent in the work of Brian and Cheryl Simpson on the use of curfews for juveniles. I do not suggest that they saw the notion of violence as integral to their paper. However I was keen to include this particular discussion in the current issue because it draws attention, as do the other papers, to the issues of social and political power. It seems to me that the *threat of violence* against property and persons by juveniles has been used as a justification for the imposition of curfews. Yet as the paper draws out in its conclusion, the social and economic conditions facing young people in Australia are rarely considered as themselves being criminogenic and violence-provoking. As the authors succinctly state, curfews sidestep the issue of market forces.

The question of violence and sexuality can also be found in two of the Contemporary Comment papers. Teya Dusseldorp tackles Hollywood and the meanings which are attributed to women, criminality, sexuality and violence in current popular film. Dusseldorp notes that the violence directed towards women is a frightening feature of many of the films that deal with deviant and criminal women. Stephen Thomsen analyses the changes in the way police authorities have been dealing with issues of anti-gay and

lesbian violence and the implications of police liaison strategies. Thomsen notes the way views of interpersonal violence and homicide have tended to ignore the frequency of homophobic violence. Until recently this form of violence was simply not “seen”. Now that there has been some recognition, there are a range of further contradictions which are generated around the politics of “victimhood”.

Finally, two further contributions to Contemporary Comment pick up on specific issues. Judge Shillington briefly explains the “Sentence Indication” scheme in New South Wales. Doug Greaves and Susan Pinto reply to an earlier paper by Phil Dickie and Paul Wilson around the issue of defining organised crime.

*Chris Cunneen**

* Senior Lecturer in Criminology, Sydney University Law School