

Roots of War, Domination and Violence – Part II

Ralph Metzner

Ancestral and Tribal Roots

No one can deny that the collective human manifestations of war and violence have horrifyingly long historical and pre-historical antecedents in the age-old, long-continuing struggles between tribes and societies for territory and economic survival. Many believe, that all war is basically war over resources. In historical times it was most commonly land for farming, herding animals, and the extraction of valuable minerals and metals; in the petroleum age the key resource being fought over are the biosphere's stored carbon deposits, both as oil and as lumber. Contemporary indications are that water may turn out to be the most bitterly fought over resource in the era of global fever-heat and climate-change into which we are moving. The cut-throat competition of the *haves* and the *have-nots* seems to be a deeply ingrained factor in the consciousness of the human race. Just how deeply ingrained is a question of intense debate among anthropologists, historians and archaeologists. Can we transform territorial and economic competition into peaceful and cooperative co-existence? Have we ever? Is there any evidence that peaceful societies have ever existed, which would give us hope that it can be done?

Here the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas on the matricentric, peaceful, goddess-worshipping cultures of Old Europe, in the 8th to 6th millennia BCE, is of great importance. Although her work is controversial because it goes far beyond the accepted academic paradigms in prehistory and archaeology, I am among those who find the massive accumulation of detailed evidence in her work to be convincing in a revelatory way. Gimbutas' work shows convincingly that the Kurgan peoples' practice of invading the rich farming communities along river valleys and taking what they wanted by force of arms, was not a form of culture that could have evolved naturally out of those peaceful, artistic cultures of Old Europe. It was imposed by violence and war at first, then by forced assimilation and intermarriage, giving rise to mixed cultures, in which there was a ruling class or caste of patriarchal warrior chiefs and kings. Remnants of the older cultural traditions were suppressed, but survived underground. Hybrid mythologies wove

together the histories and religious cosmologies of the two kinds of cultures. In Nordic-Germanic mythology as related in *The Edda*, the deities of the Old Europeans, called *Vanir*, were all associated with the land, fertility, peace and wealth, including mineral wealth. The sky and warrior deities, called *Aesir*, were naturally the protector gods of nomadic herders, highly dependent on sun and weather changes; they parallel the Olympian patriarchal god families of the ancient Greeks.

It is believed that the Kurgans, with their sky and warrior gods and weapons, started emigrating from their homeland presumably in reaction to spreading drought conditions in Central Asia, (for which there is independent evidence). The *Edda* poems say that war came to mankind by extension from the resource wars of the *Aesir* and *Vanir*. These myths are religious stories that tell the histories of the people's involved. The invaders and conquerors tell their justification stories – “they stole from us”, “they started the fighting”, “our supreme god told us do this”. The conquered also tell their stories – of initial resistance and retaliation, but also of peace-making and reconciliation rituals– like the Mysteries of Eleusis, and the story of the Mead of Inspiration.

Certainly it is not difficult to see how the attitude of conquering robbers and pirates, who take the resources they want from militarily less powerful populations, using violence or the threat of violence, can be seen in the history of colonialism and industrial capitalism, with its “conquistadors”, its “robber barons” and “titans of industry”, and its further extension in the financial and market manipulations of multinational corporations in our own time. Industrial corporations were originally created as legal mechanisms to organize and facilitate the production and distribution of goods and services in an economy. But they suffer from an inherent design flaw, namely that the explicit and exclusive purpose of their operations is the generating of profit. The purpose of a business, we are told in textbooks, is to make money; whereas actually the purpose should be seen (and perhaps was originally) as the making of shoes, or bread, or the provision of services, such as transportation or construction.

The exclusive focus on the bottom line of profitability has turned the corporations into rogue machine monsters, hierarchical systems of organized greed, called “capital accumulation”. These machine monsters have escaped the control of their makers, and are systematically, at ever increasing speed, devouring all of the planet's biosphere

elements, originally kept as “common wealth”, but increasingly designated as “resources”: these include land, water, forests, ocean fisheries, minerals and metals, carbon deposits and even the electro-magnetic spectrum, used for radio and other forms of communication. This catastrophic process is driving countless plant and animal species to irreversible extinction by habitat destruction, and represents an unprecedented diminishment and deterioration of the wealth and health of the biosphere.

But why exactly do some societies evolve a market ideology based on profit (greed), rather than on meeting all human needs and Earth’s needs first? Is it not possible to imagine that groups (tribes, nations) inhabiting a particular area, and confronted with a situation of scarce resources, would choose to equitably share what they have, thus avoiding conflict? Certainly we know that this kind of sustainability with peaceful co-existence and the equitable meeting of human needs, as well as a respecting of ecosystem limits, has existed on a small scale, at various times in history and various locations on Earth. Why has it become so difficult, so politically “unrealistic”, or “socialist”, or “utopian”, to even envision or propose such a system at the global level? Why has the founding vision of the United Nations, “to eliminate forever the scourge of war from human affairs”, been so elusive to attain, despite the sincere and good efforts and skills of numerous peacemakers? Is there something else, are there some deeper forces at work that we can’t discern?

Note: References will be given at the end of this five-part series.