I Kill, Therefore I Am: War and Killing as Structures of Human Spirit

Stefan Sonderling

University of South Africa

Department of Communication Science

stefansonderling@me.com

Abstract

This article uncovers the function of war and killing as the primary and primordial formative structure of human spirituality and religious experience. Tracing the representations of war in texts of philosophers and social thinkers from ancient Greece to the present, reveals a tradition of thought that considers war as the defining characteristic of humanity and as the foundation for constructing human and divine identities. While war is a social and collective activity, at its core are the actions of fighting and killing that are forms of interpersonal engagement. It is this interpersonal engagement that many thinkers imagine as being the source of human consciousness, identity and meaning; as Heraclitus put it: war creates both men and gods, making mortals immortal and immortals mortal.

Introduction: Towards a New Perspective on War or Rediscovery of Old Tradition

> To speak of the "origin" of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for "recognition." Without this fight to the death for pure prestige, there would never have been human beings on earth. (Kojève 1980, 11–12)

> This, O Muslim brothers, is who we are; we slay for our God, our God demands the slaying. I kill; therefore I am. (Murawiec 2008, 9)

For contemporary scholars war and killing are assumed as universally traumatic experiences, presumed as manifestations of the inhuman and deviation from what is assumed as the characteristic of a normal human being. However, such assumptions are the product of a social process for constructing meaning. The assumption that war can only be destructive and traumatic emerged after the First World War and was elaborated on since the Vietnam War.

However, such assumptions only see war as a negative and destructive activity and ignore an older Western tradition of thought that considers war as a positive force, and selective acts of killing as rites of passage enabling the warrior to construct a sense of spiritual identity (Bourke 1999; Lomsky-Feder 2004, 83–84). Ever since the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, identified war as the father of all things, almost all philosophers in every age and culture affirmed war as a generative force and a meaningful human activity. War is the central theme for the ancient Greek poets, Homer and Hesiod, while the first historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, considered war as a way of life and recorded its occurrences in great details (Havelock 1972, 21). For modern thinkers, from Machiavelli through to Hobbes and Hegel, the reality of war is a subject for philosophical thought. Such affirmation is expressed by Nietzsche's (1968, 33) statement that life is the consequence of war, and society is a means to war. In the twentieth century Emmanuel Levinas (1991, 23) contends that war is human reality and ultimately the human being manifests himself in war. In the twenty-first century a journalist, Chris Hedges (2003, 3–7), rediscovers that war remains a force that gives us meaning when peace has emptied all meaning from life in the postmodern world (Fukuyama 1992, 328–331; Gray 2003, 85; Hammond 2007, 11; Sonderling 2012).

Beyond the Myth of the Noble Savage

Most contemporary thinkers assume that the human being is characterised by a peaceful disposition for cooperation, empathy and understanding others, while violence and war are presumed as pathological manifestations of the inhuman. Underlying this view is the idea that human beings are a distinct species far removed from nature and the animal world. Humans are assumed as superior beings whose existence is imagined as a disembodied spirit alienated from animal corporality (Sheets-Johnstone 2007, 340). If the earthly origin of the human being must be acknowledged, it is assumed that man is a descendant of a primordial peaceful noble savage that was a friend of all and enemy of none, as imagined by J-J. Rousseau. From this perspective war and strife are pathologies resulting from the corrupting influence of civilisation. But this view confirms the pacifists' self-delusion for whom "it is far more comforting to claim decent from imaginary pacifists who live in our dreams of prehistoric peace" (Bigelow 1969, 156). Despite the fact that humanity is not removed from nature, the belief in human superiority persists (Gribbin and Gribbin 1998, 1) and the presumed peacefulness of human pre-history is the prevailing politically-correct orthodoxy enshrined in international declarations and legislated as if the scientific truth (Keeley 1997; Pinker 2003, 336).

Against the pacifists, Hobbes contends that the original state of nature was a perpetual "war of every one against every one" and life was solitary, brutal and short (Hobbes 1958, 110). Paradoxically, Hobbes attributes this brutal state of nature to a divine origin being the "art whereby God has made and governs the world" (Hobbes 1958, 23). While human life in Hobbes's divine state of nature was brutal, it was never solitary because human beings are by nature political animals, as noted by Aristotle (1964, 28). For Hobbes the permanent warfare is the result of primitive democratic equality: the ability of each man to kill. Presumably equal ability to kill transformed primordial human beings into constitutional lawyers who

signed a social contract to establish ordered social structure to avert the violent humanly created and divinely ordained chaos.

Considerations of war and violence are largely absent from the images of man in the discourses of Western science and philosophy. There are two dominant images claiming to represent the primary essence of human nature: Man as a *Homo Sapiens,* which is the image of a disembodied spiritual solitary thinking individual who affirms his humanity by declaring, a la Descartes: "I think, therefore I am." The other image presents the human being as a *Homo Faber*: man as the toolmaker and a proud craftsman or the manufacturer of goods motivated by rational economic calculation. An extension of the economic image is the *Homo Laborans*: man as the soulless labourer of the capitalist economy (Agamben 1998, 3). From this perspective man is defined by his labour and work and proclaims his humanity by declaring: "I labour, therefore I am."

It is possible to propose an alternative to both the idealist and materialist conceptions of man: the disembodied thinking *Homo sapiens* and the labouring *homo faber*, a new realist image of man as a warrior: the *homo polemos*. As Bigelow (1969, 43) suggests, man should not be "defined as the toolmaker, but rather as the war maker." Thus the ancient warrior, and the modern day warriors such as founders of nations, gangsters, radical Christians, Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists, become human beings by proclaiming: "I kill, therefore I am" (Murawiec 2008, 9).

The Primacy of War in Human Existence

The image of the human warrior claims primacy over the two traditional images of man, because thinking and production are not primary characteristics of man. As Aristotle (1964, 32) contends: "Life is action not production." In other words, the human condition is characterised by three fundamental human spheres of labour, work and action. Action has a primacy because it is the only activity that goes on directly between men without mediation by things or matter (Arendt 1998, 7). Ultimately human action is the foundation for work and human thought. What is the nature of human action? Huizinga (1971, 19–21) proposes that the action of play is the foundation for civilisation (Huizinga 1971, 23). However, play is a manifestation of a more primary activity of contestation (or *agon*). Play and fighting form a single and indivisible field of human action (Huizinga 1971, 60–61, 95, 110), thus even when play is deadly it still remains play (Huizinga 1971, 61, 69). Such unity is expressed in most languages; "ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game" (Huizinga 1971, 110). War as play is coeval with speech, as recorded in Homer's characterisation of Achilles as the "doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words" (Arendt 1998, 25). However, the act of fighting has primacy over speech because it provides the theme for the wordsmith to immortalise in words.

War is the foundation of social life because it brings people into a military unit that ultimately becomes a political community: it is as if war makes society and society makes war (Tilly 1975). Marx (1972, 115–116) considers war for conquest of territory as the driving

force of history and the foundation for division of labour and social hierarchy. For the ancient Greeks labour can be synonymous with the noble work of fighting and killing—whether in war or hunting—performed by the aristocratic master, and differentiated from the mundane labour of slaves. In the ancient world and in primitive societies a nobleman was defined by the ability to use leisure, and in turn war is the ultimate leisure expressing freedom, while slaves and women were tasked with cooking and agricultural production (Davie 2003, 25). Moreover, the life and work of the slave is entirely dependent on the master nobleman's action of fighting. According to Aristotle (1964, 40) "it is part of nature's plan that the art of war, of which hunting is part, should be a way of acquiring property." As Schmitt (quoted in Ulmen 1996) explains the priorities; territory and goods are firstly acquired through conquest, then divided and distributed among the warrior fraternity and only then used for production. To the extent that labour may claim primacy, it is directly related to the labour of war as is evident in Homer's use of the word "work" to designate what is done in battle: the hard work of killing (Coker 2007, 29). Similarly, Marx perceptively notes in the *Grundrisse*: "War is therefore among the oldest labours" (Marx in Lichtheim 1982, 151). For Marx "war attains complete development before peace" and labour and commercial relations "developed at an earlier date through war and in armies" (McLellan 1973, 54). Hegel acknowledges that the human "Work" is always interrelated with the primary activity of fighting. For Hegel, human history consists "of war and of work" or "the Action of Fighting and of Work" (Kojève 1980, 38, 43, 185). Human history is inaugurated by the master and slave dialectic and it is the primary war-action of the master that sets history in motion. As Kojève (1980, 52) comments: "To be sure, without the Master, there would have been no History; but only because without him there would have been no Slave and hence no Work." For Hegel, fighting and work are the only true criteria to evaluate human life (Kojève 1980, 186). Ultimately, war expresses the way of life of a society and it "is always an expression of culture, often the determinant of cultural forms" and "in some societies the culture itself" (Keegan 2004, 12).

Inhuman is Human, and Human is Inhuman: Learning to Understand War from the Ancients

Nietzsche (1997) argues that our understanding of the meaning of human and inhuman are hopelessly reversed. The primacy of war in human life negates the belief in peace as primary characteristics of the human being. As Nietzsche (1968, 33) puts it:

> The valuation that today is applied to the different form of society is entirely identical with that which assigns a higher value to peace than to war: but this judgment is anti-biological, is itself a fruit of the decadence of life. Life is a consequence of war, society itself a means to war.

The inversion of values is the product of Christian religion's distortion of reality. Machiavelli's (1970, 277–278) notes that Christianity holds the real world in contempt and "glorifies humble and contemplative men, rather than acknowledge men of action," as did the ancients who prudently "did not beautify men unless they were replete with worldly glory." And worldly glory in ancient Greece was primarily gained in warfare, where a "man was a fighting animal, or he was no man" (Havelock 1972, 25). Nietzsche, following Hobbes and

Machiavelli, accepts the primordial state of perpetual war of all against all and proposes to make it the constitutive principle of human life, because one should be "able to derive a moral code for life from the *bellum contra omnes* and the privileges of stronger individuals" (Nietzsche in Safranski 2003, 113). Such genealogy explains why our understanding of human and inhuman is reversed:

> When one speaks of humanity, the basic concept implies that this is meant to be what differentiates and distinguishes mankind from nature. But such a difference does not exist in reality: "natural" attributes and those that are called truly "human" have grown inseparably into one another. Man, in the highest and noblest of his strengths, is wholly Nature, and carries her uncanny dual character within him. His terrible capacities that are deemed inhuman may even be that fertile ground out of which alone all of humanity can grow forth in emotion, deeds, and accomplishments. (Nietzsche 1997, 35)

Thus what is considered inhuman is perfectly all too human, as is demonstrated by the ancient Greeks, who were the most humane people of antiquity and their humanness was characterised by healthy cruelty and a "tiger-like pleasure in destruction" (Nietzsche 1997, 35). For the Greeks, "struggle signifies well-being and salvation; the cruelty of victory is the peak of life's glories" and culture develops from murder, blood revenge and overcoming adversity (Nietzsche 1997, 37). Indeed, such understanding is confirmed in modernity's experience of the Second World War that refuted the Freudian inspired belief that when man destroys he becomes an animal because he negates his humanity; however the converse is true: the satisfaction man has in destroying is a particularly human trait, or it is devilish because no animal manifests such a trait (Gray 1998, 54–55).

The ancient Greeks' experience of life as war leads the poet Hesiod (1976) to assume the existence of two war goddesses on earth: the one, Eris, is the cruel goddess of War, while the other is the good goddess of Strife (Nietzsche 1997, 37). According to Hesiod (1976, 59) while the one cruel deity of war is not loved by humans, nevertheless, because of the necessity of war humans respect and endure her cruel demands (Hesiod 1976, 59). The other, Eris, is the good goddess of productive strife because "she urges even lazy men to work" and makes "neighbour vies with neighbour in the rush for wealth," and productive competition makes that "potter hates potter, carpenters compete, and beggar strives with beggar, bard with bard" (Hesiod 1976, 59).

Shattering the belief in the illusions of original peaceful human nature, Levinas (1991) contends that war is human reality and man shows himself in war:

> We do not need obscure fragments of Heraclitus to prove that being reveals itself in war to philosophical thought, that war does not only affect it as the most patent fact, but as the very patency, or the truth, of the real ... Harsh reality ... harsh object-lesson, at the very moment of its fulguration when the drapings of illusion burn war … is produced as the pure experience of pure being ... The trial by force is the test of the real. (Levinas 1991, 21)

War is human reality because the central activity in war is to kill and to inflict pain (Scarry 1985, 4, 7). This implies that to have pain is the only certainty a human being can experience

as real, thus to have pain is to have certainty, because "physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of incontestable reality" (Scarry 1985, 27).

Creating Gods and Men: War as the Structure of Divine and Human Spirit

Many people escape from the harsh reality of violence and war, and attempt to find salvation in religion. However, as Burkert (1983, 1–2) and Girard (1977) note, the person escaping to religion is immediately "confronted with murder" and death at the very core of religion. The holy texts of major religions tell stories of cosmic wars, bloody battles, massacres and torture. It is as Heraclitus predicated: everything comes into being and passes away through strife, and war is the father and king of all, it makes some gods and some men (Heraclitus in Kahn 1979, 67). In other words, the idea of God is born in, and through war. Freud suggests that God was born from a primal act of murder, from "the killing of the primal father of the primitive horde, whose image in memory was later transfigured into a deity" (Vance 1980, 378). In ancient Greece a mortal could distinguish himself in war and be transformed into an immortal god by being posthumously honoured with a cult (Chaniotis 2005, 36). The ancient Greeks constructed their gods thus:

> God was created in man's image ... The whole of the heroic society was reproduced on Olympus in its complexities and its shading. The world of the gods was a social world in every respect, with a past and a present, with a history. (Finley 1972, 154)

It is no coincidence that in religious texts the gods are represented as reflecting the characteristics of the human group claiming ownership of such gods. As creator of men and gods, war is of divine origin. According to De Maistre (2009, 89–91) war is divine in itself because it is the law of the world; it is beneficial for human existence and it is a great privilege to die in battle; war is surrounded by mysterious glory, it provides protection to great leaders and is a quest for justice and revenge for inequality; and ultimately God is always found on the winning side.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* presents the god Krishna as a charioteer and war counsellor to princes on the battlefield, which is described as "the field of sacred duty" (*Bhagavad-Gita* 2004, 32). The Qur'an proclaims war as a divinely ordained duty for Muslim men (Malik 1992, 38): "War is prescribed for you and ye dislike it but it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not" (Koran 2, 216). Malik (1992, 50) notes that: "In Islam, a war is fought for the cause of Allah" and it is clear that "a Muslim's cause of war is just, noble, righteous and humanitarian. A victory in Islam is a victory for the cause of Islam." This self-affirming logic is a fundamental axiom of many ancient religions (Ruthven 2004, 62). This is so because in the ancient world, "winning as such is, for the archaic mind, proof of truth and rightness" (Huizinga 1971, 103). Every war is a just war and the proof of its justness is in the victory, because victory proves that the war was fought for a just cause. Affirming this tradition, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* exhorts the good value of wars: "You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I tell you: it is the good war that hallows every cause" (Nietzsche 1969, 74).

Contrary to the common assumption that religion is an expression of piety and peaceful spirituality, the act of piety is grounded in, and emerges from, the bloodshed of sacrificial killing, as Burkert (1983) puts it:

> The worshiper experiences the god most powerfully not just in pious conduct or in prayer, song, and dance, but in the deadly blow of the axe, the gush of blood and the burning of thigh-pieces. The realm of the gods is sacred, but the "sacred" act done at the "sacred" place by the "consecrating" actor consists of slaughtering sacrificial animals. (Burkert 1983, 2)

The original meaning of the Greek verb "to act" is to make an offering to the gods or "to sacrifice," and the ancients considered sacrifice as "sacrificial killing" of a human victim: in ancient Hebrew and Hittite the verb "to do" means "to sacrifice" (Burkert 1983, 3). According to Burkert (1983, 3) the sacrificial killing constructs the human being: the human animal becomes human because he is a *Homo Necans*; it is the act of sacrificial killing of other humans that makes man a *Homo Sapiens*. The human sacrifice predates animal sacrifice: animal sacrifice replaced earlier cannibalism (Burkert 1983, 8, 43). Evidence for substitution of the human for an animal is the example of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son—and at the last moment by divine intervention was persuaded to exchange him for an animal.

Symbolic remnants of human sacrifice and cannibalism can be found in Christianity: the death of God's son is an example of perfect human sacrifice and it is re-enacted in the celebrations of the Lord's Supper whereby "the body of Christ" is eaten, and wine, as if blood, is drunk in the ritual of the Eucharist and hymns about blood and battle are sung (Burkert 1983, 8; Juergensmeyer 2003, 162). Moreover, the ancient myths show that the preferable victim for sacrifice was a human being, and much later animal meat was substituted for human flesh as a meal fit for the gods (Ehrenreich 1998). The biblical myth of Cain and Abel confirms God's preference for a meal of meat: Cain, the farmer, had his sacrificial offering of vegetables rejected, while Abel, the herdsman, had his offering of meat accepted by the deity. Indeed, in the ancient world it was assumed that gods ate meat.

> The Aztec gods ate people. They ate human hearts and they drank human blood. And the declared function of the Aztec priesthood was to provide fresh human hearts and human blood in order to prevent the remorseless deities from becoming angry and crippling, sickening, withering, and burning the whole world. (Harris 1978, 99)

Enemy prisoners were brought from the battlefield to be killed in order to fulfil the required daily quota of killing demanded by the tribal or national gods (Burkert 1983; Harris 1978, 100; Ehrenreich 1998; Todorov 1992, 143–144).

The ferocity of the gods is evident in the names given to them and their characteristics narrated in religious texts: the gods are conquerors, their names are "the destroyer," "the avenger" and "god of battles" (Davie 2003, 113). In monotheistic religions the emphasis is on the god of war (Lang 2002), for example the Hebrew Bible acknowledged that "God is a warrior" (Longman and Reid 1995). God, as a warlord, fights on behalf of his people or

stands in the ranks fighting side by side against common enemies (Niditch 1993, 28). Early religions assumed that war was also conducted by the gods in the heavens, and the priests and shamans were considered "spiritual warriors" doing battle on behalf of their group in the world of the spirits (Boyd 1997).

Thus, killing and the ritual of human sacrifice are considered as acts of communication: dispatching a human messenger to the ghostly world of the gods (Davie 2003, 131). The traditional assumption that the sacrifice—giving a gift of flesh to the gods—establishes a communion with the gods may be erroneous because the preference for meat indicates that the original deity may have been a carnivore (Ehrenreich 1998, 31, 34). Therefore, it is hard to imagine that one could have a communion with such a beast. Evans-Pritchard (1954, 23) argues that the sacrifice is made against the gods: because the sacrifice is made in times of trouble, the purpose of such being as described below:

> … sacrifice is to establish communication with God rather in order to keep him away or get rid of him than establish communion or fellowship with him ... the trouble comes from God and is evidence of his intervention in human affairs. Sacrifice is made to persuade him to turn away from men and not to trouble them anymore. It is made to separate God and man, not to unite them. In a sense they are already in contact in the sickness or other trouble. (Evans-Pritchard 1954, 23–24)

The divine power is ultimately expressed in war and the major religions owe their existence to success in war. Christianity expanded when it was co-opted by Roman emperors while its pacifism was, in part, responsible for the demise of the Roman Empire (Santosuosso 2004). The early Christian church realised that pacifism would prevent expansion (Seaton 2005, 74). During the Middle Ages the church successfully acquired property because its popes, cardinals and monks became formidable warlords (Chambers 2006, 1). Indeed, success in battle was the original guarantee of success for all religions (Chambers 2006, 90). Christianity was successful in the wars against Muslim invaders and later embarked on its own crusades into Jerusalem, as well as aggressive expansion in Africa and the Americas (Chambers 2006). As Chambers (2006, 1) puts it: "Blessed are the peacemakers. But blessed, too, have been the warmongers throughout the Christian centuries." The crusades conceptualised as holy wars were in part inspired by the Muslim practice of Jihad. The vocabulary of Jihad is discernible in St Bernard's imploring the French knights to embark on a holy crusade:

> Clothe yourself with your impenetrable bucklers; the din of arms, the dangers, the labours, the fatigues of war are the penances God now imposes on you. Hasten then to expiate your sins by victory over the infidels, and let the deliverance of the holy places be the reward of your repentance ... Let a holy rage animate you in the fights; and let the Christian world resound with the words of the prophet: "Cursed be he who does not stain his sword with blood." (Turner 1958, 11)

Military vocabulary is central to religious discourse and the "model of warfare" is the underlying inspiration for the religious model. For example, the Christian way of life is described as being at war and should be joined by zealot believers (Juergensmeyer 2003,

160–161). There is a symbiotic interrelationship between war and religion, which implies that:

> …a society's military ethics and its dominant religious mythology constitute a single, unified structure of meaning. A society's *Kriegethik*—its preferred style of collective raping, looting, burning, and killing—is often "dialectically" or "reflexively" interrelated with its prevailing religious mythology. (Aho 1981, 3)

Religion gives strength to the warriors by promising the strongest warriors on earth their rightful heavenly rewards.

The Gift of Death is a Gift of Life: War and Killing as Sources of Meaning

Participation in war creates religious experiences out of the intense feeling of fear and ecstasy of battle and victory, and in turn such intense feeling are recreated by the ritual sacrifice. In other words, for the ancients the acts of killing in ritual and in battle justified life (Burkert 1983, 40). Killing gives meaning to death by elevating a common, meaningless, natural event to the level of primary significance. For the warrior, war provides the opportunity to prove one's courage by defying death in battle and surviving victoriously, and this is seen in the fact that most combatants describe their participation in war as the most rewarding experience of their lives (Bourke 1999, 364; Holmes 2004, 380; Van Creveld 1991).

For various religions death in battle is meaningful as it guarantees martyrdom and eternal life. Christianity is a religious cult created by death: by death Christ was elevated to immortality. The rituals of remembrance, performed by disciples, keep his memory alive and inspire the faithful by reminding them of their eternal fraternity even after death. Death is important for a warrior, as Plato observed: "Life measured solely by its length falls short, but a life shortened by honour reaches its fullest measure" (Gelven 1994, xii). As Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* advises the warrior: "Thus live your life of obedience and war! What good is long life? What warrior wants to be spared?" (Nietzsche 1969, 75). This is also the spirit of the Samurai warrior: he accepts death a-priori and becomes invincible in battle (Nitobe 2006; Yamamoto 2001). In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (2004, 37) Lord Krishna advises the warrior-king, Arjuna, that once you are forced by enemies to do battle, it becomes a sacred duty to fight to the death without fear because to refuse fighting will bring dishonour that is worse than death. Krishna opines that one has nothing to lose: "If you are killed, you win heaven; if you triumph, you enjoy the earth."

Killing the enemy is also infused with meaning, as is the self-sacrifice that gives life to the community. As Derrida (1995, 17) notes, life depends on the gift of death: "I put my enemy to death and I give my own life in sacrificing myself 'for my country'." Through the gift of death the ancient Greeks constructed their political life in the polis extracting "life from death, from the relation to death, from the awareness of death" (Virilio 1997, 135).

I Kill, therefore I Am: Killing as Source of Consciousness and Self-Consciousness

Most contemporary scholars assume that war is synonymous with self-annihilation. This is a mistaken assumption because "the characteristic act of men at war is not dying but killing" (Bourke 1999, xiii). The idea of self-annihilation was popularised by Freud's claim that war is an act of suicide expressing a biologically programmed "death drive" (Freud 2004, 70). For Freud, the "goal of life is death" and the tendency of all living matter is to return to the peaceful immobility of inorganic matter (Levin 1951, 257). But Freud's assumption is absurd because death is not an instinct and the aim of all organic life is to survive death. Indeed, even Freud contradicts himself and denies the existence of such suicidal drive:

> We have shown the unmistakable tendency to push death aside, to eliminate it from life ... Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and however often we try to imagine it, we realise that we are actually still present as onlookers. Thus, the psychoanalytic school could venture to say: fundamentally no one believes in his own death or, which comes to the same thing: in the unconscious each of us is convinced of his immortality. (Freud 2005, 183)

Disregarding the possibility of one's own death, the human being ensures his existence because of the ability to kill. De Maistre (2009, 89) contends that life is a manifestation of killing, and the world is a divinely ordained permanent carnage:

> You feel it already in the vegetable kingdom: from the immense catalpa to the humblest herb, how many plants *die*, and how many are *killed*! As soon as you enter the animal kingdom, the law suddenly becomes frighteningly obvious. A power at once hidden and palpable shows itself continually occupied in demonstrating the principle of life by violent means. (De Maistre 2009, 86)

Killing is central to human existence, because in order to exist, man has to kill:

> He kills to nourish himself, he kills to clothe himself, he kills to adorn himself, he kills to attack, he kills to defend himself, he kills to instruct himself, he kills to amuse himself, he kills to kill. (De Maistre 2009, 86)

Killing is not entirely destructive, and since antiquity it has been acknowledged as the original foundation of the social bond. According to Hannah Arendt (1990) every act of establishing a society is an act of violence:

> That such a beginning must be intimately connected with violence seems to be vouched for by the legendary beginnings of our history as both biblical and classical antiquity report it: Cain slew Abel, and Romulus slew Remus; violence was the beginning and by the same token, no beginning could be made without using violence, without violating. The first recorded deeds in our biblical and our secular tradition, whether known to be legendary or believed in as historical tradition, have travelled through the centuries with the force which human thought achieves in the rare instances when it produces cogent metaphors or universal applicable tales. The tale spoke clearly: whatever brotherhood human beings may be capable of has grown out of fratricide; whatever political organisation men may have achieved has its origin in crime. (Arendt 1990, 20)

Such genealogy shows that killing is not always a crime. The belief that killing is a crime emerged from misunderstanding the biblical commandment "Thou salt not kill" and the injunction to love your neighbour. However, the biblical prohibition is against "murder" and

not "killing." Prohibition against murder is a form of social control operating within a kinship group, but it does not apply to external non-members. Killing a member of the clan is a crime because it demands revenge, but killing a stranger is a virtue and demonstrates courage (Davie 2003, 18). But even within a kinship group, the most enjoyable fighting is to fight an enemy one knows well (Enzensberger 1994, 11). This joy is recorded throughout history, as St Augustine reports: "neighbours, brothers, fathers and sons ... divided into two factions and armed with stones, fought annually at a certain season of the year for several days continually, everyone killing whomsoever he could" (St Augustine in Salazar 2009, 33). According to Cramer (2006, 283–284), civil war is not irrational but makes perfect sense because one knows whom to love and whom to hate and "no-one makes mistakes about choosing which side to be on" (Sciascia in Cramer 2006, 1).

The common types of killing within a kinship group are patricide and fratricide. Patricide is a social succession process, narrated by the myth of Oedipus where the son or a band of brothers kill the father and take his position of power. Fratricide is a power struggle among brothers, which eventually establishes a social hierarchy. The nation-state can be considered as being in a permanent state of warfare: "The state is nothing more than the way that the war between the two groups ... continues to be waged in apparently peaceful forms" (Foucault 2003, 88). The fight brings the opposing groups together because they have a vested interest in the object over which they fight. Moreover, the appearance of a common enemy suspends the internal fighting and unites the parties against the common external enemy.

War brings two collective bodies of men into conflict; and killing in battle constructs a sense of individuality. From the moment these two bodies of anonymous warriors collide, the action becomes individualised: each man enters into a hand-to-hand battle making the individual stand out from the crowd. According to Connor (1988, 14), "the transformation of collective anonymous combat into hand-to-hand fights with sword or dagger" means that the "anonymous, narrativeless combat is suddenly turned into a replica of the Homeric battle scene." Moreover "the dramatic change at the moment trope—the shift from collective to individual fighting—reappears at the end of the battle through the censure of those who left the expedition at some point and through awards to those who distinguished themselves in courage" (Connor 1988, 17). This is the foundation of individual distinction and the basis for constructing social hierarchy. The way a social group fights is a mark of distinction establishing its singular identity (Sidebottom 2004, 20).

The way an individual's identity and spiritual existence are established by violence and killing, is described by Hegel's story of the primordial battle to the death between two (not yet complete) human beings. Their human identity is formed through their mutually pressing demands on one another to be recognised as human beings. For Hegel, it is the ability of a man to risk his life for pure prestige that distinguishes the human being from animals that merely struggle for survival. Human beings give meaning to their lives by spiritualising the struggle for survival and transforming it to a struggle for recognition. According to Hegel:

> To speak of the "origin" of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for "recognition." Without this fight to the death for pure prestige, there would never have been human beings on earth ... The "first" anthropogenetic action necessarily takes the form of a fight: a fight to the death between two beings that claim to be men, a fight for pure prestige carried on for the sake of "recognition" by the adversary. (Kojève 1980, 11–12)

War is "coeval with the moment of becoming human ... because the transition from animal to human required the willingness to risk life, to transcend the survival instinct and set immaterial values above material ones" (Margot Norris in Krimmer 2010, 3–4). The battle for recognition is re-enacted throughout history, and in the contemporary world is evident in African decolonisation. Following on Hegel's description of the battle for recognition, Fanon (1973) and Sartre (1973) contend that violence and killing are the ways the colonised man can prove that he is a human being. Initially the European oppressor attained a sense of humanity through the violence of colonial conquest; and in turn the oppressed natives rose in violent revolt. The liberation armed struggle confirms a sense of humanity. This is so because, in the words of Sartre (1973): The "rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity" and for the colonised a life of freedom, as expressed by Fanon "can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler" (Fanon 1973, 73). The act of liberation comes from killing, as Sartre argues: "To shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppressed at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man" (Sartre 1973, 19).

The ancient experience of spiritual pleasure associated with killing is well documented in modern Western warfare (Bourke 1999, 358; Ferguson 1999, 360–364, 447). Despite war becoming instrumental and killing becoming mechanised and impersonal, the modern soldier imagines himself as a warrior and attempts to disregard alienation by insisting on asserting his own active agency and demanding to take responsibility for killing, as if it were an intimate act. As Bourke (1999, xviii, 360) documents, because modern military technology prevents the combatants from seeing the effects of their weapons on the enemy, they imagine these as if they were face-to-face encounters, and for many participants killing is a personal and intimate dialogue that makes the experience "a lovely war" (Bourke 1999, 364). Such a personal engagement in killing negates the prevalent assumption among academics that social identities are imagined communities constructed by national language and literary narratives (Anderson 1983). However, the social bond is constructed from a real bond of blood and corporal sacrifice:

> Not by accident, ceremonies of nationalism are about death and not literature, though literature may remodel blood sacrifice. When armies assemble as fighting forces, their members are deployed in loyal, close-knit groups. Effective armies are not faceless bureaucracies in which soldiers apprehend their comrades at the distance of the written word, but countless small bodies of men and women tightly bound in mutual comradeship. A textual community does not fight. An army is not a textual community, but an organisation of hunting groups. (Marvin and Ingle 1999, 27)

A social group's or a nation's identity is not simply constructed by imagination and linguistic abstraction, but is based on embodied face-to-face encounter that "connects language to ... a community of bodies" (Marvin and Ingle 1996, 773; Marvin and Ingle 1999, 26–27). War

and blood sacrifice construct the community and the liturgical texts of identity—whereas war is the theme of religious and secular literature (Brosman 1992, 95; Bartlett 1994; Bryant 1996; Tilly 1990). Throughout, history was and remains the context against which the everyday is lived (Cuomo 1996, 42; Favret 2005).

Conclusion

From the time of the ancient Greeks, war has been the model for human life and the foundation for communication, culture and religion. Since the Islamist terror attack on the West on 11 September 2002, war emerged again as a key principle for organising societies (Alliez and Negri 2003; Hardt and Negri 2006, 12; Montgomery 2005, 149; Foucault 2003). For contemporary society, as it was for the ancient Greeks, "warfare constitutes the chosen framework within which all other activities of men are placed, and to which they relate" (Havelock 1972, 21; Sidebottom 2004, 16). An understanding of war is important in the postmodern global world, because as Kaplan (2003, 15) contends: the world is not "modern" or "postmodern," but only a continuation of the "ancient." It is thus not surprising that the image of ancient warriors once again provides a suitable model for living (Bryant 1996, 28). To live in the postmodern world, the West will need to rediscover its own warrior spirit.

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