

## **Roots of War, Domination and Violence – Part I**

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How did domination and violence become part of human nature? Or, if it is not part of human nature, how did it become such a prominent feature of civilization? As the world political situation descends once again into a maelstrom of war and destruction, thoughtful people everywhere are asking themselves and each other these questions, even as activists and diplomats struggle to find means to end the mayhem. Media images crowd the mind: the grief-struck mother whose house has been bombed and whose children killed, asks “why – what did we do to them?” The military leader who ordered the high-tech precision bombing raids on civilian settlements, who says “we bombed because we had to – we had no choice”. Of course, reasons are always given, -- there are “strategic purposes”, the “defense of vital interests”, the “nation’s security”, “securing our borders”, “the other side started it.” For everyone of these reasons, there are always sober, reasonable voices who point out these purposes and interests could perhaps better be served by non-violent means, and that the path of violence usually (always?) ends up doing more harm than good to those very interests. There is a sense of some compulsion, addictive almost, some other hidden element we can’t quite discern that keeps pushing humanity into homicidal and suicidal madness. What is that hidden dynamic, that demonic obsession? Where does it come from? What does it mean? Can we ever overcome it? I wish to look at some legends and speculative histories for possible clues to this most agonizing dilemma. Before looking at some of the marginal, alternative, or even “far-fetched” opinions, let us review the more widely accepted beliefs and theories about the roots of war and violence.

### Psychological Roots of Violence

At the most basic level of individual development, most people would agree that violence, like other forms of behavior, is learned by imitation. It is widely accepted from social psychological studies of violent criminals that violence is a learned behavior. Adults who abuse others were abused themselves, and/or witnessed abuse in childhood. Statistical studies have shown that the rate of violent crime in a society goes up in war time, almost as if violence were a kind of contagious virus, spreading like an epidemic from one area to another. Furthermore, the contagion is readily magnified in a society in which entertainment media are saturated with images and stories that celebrate violence as heroic and glamorous. The question then becomes, how and where does the initial infection arise?

One of the most interesting of C.G. Jung's many interesting contributions to psychology in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is his concept of the *shadow*. a complex of unacceptable thoughts, feelings and images, that seems to work against our own better interests, countering our higher values, -- a kind of "enemy within". This shadow complex may appear symbolically in a dream of a monster; or it may be projected outward on our fellow humans, whom we then regard as an "enemy", or "evil". Jung argued that for psychological health or wholeness, we need to integrate this shadow complex, reconcile with this inner enemy. If we don't integrate these hidden parts of the psyche we are liable to be surprised by sudden and violent eruptions of rage, panic and violence. The shadow metaphor can be applied at the level of collective consciousness, -- we would say that war and genocidal violence are eruptions of unassimilated, unconscious mass-mind shadow images. The Christian *devil*, it could be said, is such a symbolic mass-mind enemy image

that has acquired a kind of autonomy and power over human beings, due to its being invested with belief over many centuries by many millions of the Christian faithful.

What is the origin of the “shadow” complex, and how does the feeling of being in a state of conflict arise in us in the first place? One possible source in child development is the phenomenon of sibling rivalry, the competition between brothers and sisters for the attention and approval of the parents and other adults. The competitive attitude may be maintained into adulthood and carried over into personal and work relationships with peers, and of course into politics, the media, the arts. Alternatively, the sibling rivalry may be internalized: then the person develops with a dual self-image – a good and bad self, or “top dog” and “under dog”, as Fritz Perls, the founder of gestalt therapy called this constellation. Religious mythology as well as folk tales and fairy tales are filled with stories of rival brothers and sisters, playing out the many variations of this theme.

Beyond the vagaries of child development, the field of *perinatal and prenatal psychology*, as it has developed in the past 20 years, offers a rich set of convincing observations on the roots of aggression and violence in the experience of the birth trauma and the details of fetal existence.

Transpersonal psychiatric researcher Stanislav Grof, whose theories are based on observations in LSD psychotherapy and holotropic breathwork, has shown that the reliving of birth trauma is typically and spontaneously associated with a variety of experiences from the collective unconscious portraying scenes of unimaginable violence, terror and aggression.

In the work of Lloyd DeMause and his psychohistory associates, who bring psychoanalytic insights to scholarly studies of historical events, using fantasy analysis of public speeches and political cartoons, the connections

between individual trauma and public violence has been made explicit. DeMause presents a vast body of evidence and historical documentation that the prenatal period (often further amplified and developed in the “family crucible” of early childhood) is rife with psychic dramas. If not worked through by the individual, these violent dramas of rage, sacrifice and humiliation may then be enacted on the world stage, by leaders carrying the projections of their followers. An example is the way Adolf Hitler used the image of the “Dolchstoss”, the “dagger in the back”, to symbolize the enormously burdensome and humiliating reparations that Germany was forced to pay by the winners in WW I; this image then provoked feelings of vengefulness and hatred in people, feelings that they knew from childhood experiences of abuse and injustice. DeMause concludes that wars are a kind of self-sacrificial blood-letting ritual that nations are drawn into, by leaders with unassimilated prenatal and childhood trauma. Such mass blood-letting rituals are designed to appease internalized authoritarian voices that demand dependence, sacrifice and obedience.

In considering the possible personal developmental origins of violence, terror and war, we are always still left with a nagging sense of incompleteness, a sense of deeper forces at work. Why do some individuals and some groups develop habits of domination and violence for dealing with differences with others, and why do others, exposed to similar perinatal and child-rearing practices, do not. Are there deeper forces, perhaps deeper unconscious genetic, familial, and ancestral patterns at work here?

*(Note: References to works cited will be given at the end of this five part series.)*