

**COMMUNICATION IS WAR BY OTHER MEANS: A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON WAR AND  
COMMUNICATION IN THE THOUGHT OF TWENTIETH CENTURY SELECTED  
COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS**

by

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I Stefan Sonderling declare that

**Communication is war by other means: a new perspective on war and communication in the thought of twentieth century selected communication scholars** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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## **SUMMARY**

The September 11, 2001 Jihadists attack on the West and the subsequent wars on terrorism indicate that war may be a permanent condition of life in the contemporary world. This implies that to understand contemporary society, culture and communication requires an understanding of war because war could perhaps provide a perspective through which to understand the world. The aim of this study is to provide such a perspective and to critically explore the link between war and communication. However, in approaching a study of war one is confronted with a pervasive pacifist anti-war ideological bias. To overcome the bias the study adopts a critical strategy: firstly it deconstructs the taken for granted assumptions about the positive value of peace and then it reconstructs and traces the contours of a Western tradition of philosophical thought that considers war as being an integral and formative aspect of human identity and communication. Chapter 2 uncovers the limitations of the pacifists' discourse on war. Chapter 3 traces the Western tradition originating in Heraclitus that considers war as formative experience of being human. Chapter 4 traces war and killing as formative of language and communication. Using these insights a careful reading and interpretation of how war informs the thought and functions in the texts of selected social theorists of the twentieth century. Chapter 5 traces war as an agonistic structure in the works of Johan Huizinga on the role of play and in the political theory of Carl Schmitt. Chapter 6 explores the idea of war as a model of society in the works of Foucault. Chapter 7 investigates the central influence of real and imagined war on Marshall McLuhan's theory of the media. Chapter 8 explores the way war structures the thought of Lyotard on the postmodern condition. Chapter 9 concludes by drawing implications on how a perspective on war contributes to development of communication theory and understanding life in the postmodern condition.

**KEY WORDS:** War, battle, agonistic, killing, death, play, peace discourse, Huizinga, Schmitt, Foucault, McLuhan, Lyotard.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION:

## COMMUNICATION AS WAR BY OTHER MEANS

With war being connected to everything else and everything else being connected to war, explaining war and tracing its development in relation to human development in general almost amount to a theory and history of everything – Gat (2008:xi)

To understand war is thus to understand ourselves – Gelven (1994:18)

You have to understand war in order to understand our culture – Hallin (2008)

### 1.1 Background of the study

Throughout the entire recorded human history war has been a constant feature of life while there is also ample evidence to show that war existed even before humans could record and communicate their experience in language. As historian Michael Howard (2000:1) notes, all the documented evidence indicates that war has been the universal norm in human history. For the inhabitants of the ancient world war was experienced as a natural accompaniment of life. As societies evolved becoming democratised and military technology modernised, so wars intensified and were transformed from the small wars of princes and kings to wars of people and entire nations in the nineteenth century (cf. Howard 2000), and culminating in the twentieth century's *Total War* (Aron 1955), or as Bobbitt (2003) aptly names the last century the century of the "long war". The end of the *Cold War* in the 1990s did not lead to peace but was followed by multiple small wars in various parts of the world. And as was the experience of past epochs, the twenty-first century opened with the Jihadist terrorists attack on the West on 11 September 2001 (known as 9–11) and the subsequent wars against terror signifying that war may remain as an integral part of contemporary experience. Thus in the contemporary postmodern world characterised by global spread of communication, awareness and experience of real or media mediated wars is increasingly

acknowledged. Indeed, mass media reporting on war is the single most popular topic that attracts mass audiences to the extent that war may be considered as the indicator of the *health of the media* (cf. Hallin & Gitlin 1993). As the twenty-first century unfolds, war is "becoming a *permanent social relation*" and a kind of "general matrix" to describe social organisations and relations of power in the contemporary world (Hardt & Negri 2006:12-13). Media scholar Daniel Hallin (2008) observes that "we are in a time of war again" and predicts that

we are going to be in perpetual war for a long time. So it seems very obvious that the culture – our culture – is in some way a culture of war. You have to understand war in order to understand our culture (Hallin 2008:1).

Hallin's (2008) urging that a proper understanding of *culture* requires an understanding of *war* also implies that it is equally important that an understanding of war is imperative for an understanding of *communication*. This is so because culture and communication have an intimate relationship to the extent that culture cannot exist without communication, while culture itself is a form of communication (cf. Carey 1989). Moreover, as war may become perpetual it could be assumed that an understanding is urgently required in order to understand any and all aspects of the world. Indeed, as military historian Azar Gat (2008) acknowledges:

With war being connected to everything else and everything else being connected to war, explaining war and tracing its development in relation to human development in general almost amount to a theory and history of everything (Gat 2008:xi).

With the long historical legacy of warfare and the prospect of perpetual war in the present and the future, it is prudent to consider Gelven's (1994:18) contention that an understanding of war entails an understanding of ourselves.

Therefore, following the suggestions by Gat, Gelven and Hallin this study proposes to explore an understanding of war that will provide a new perspective

on culture and communication and their relationship with war. Moreover, such a new understanding of war may be urgently needed because of the limiting and distorting hegemony of anti-war bias and the assumed peace imperative that dominates the thinking of scholars and the mass media.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The aim of this study is to provide an understanding of war that will contribute a new perspective on culture and communication in the contemporary world. Such an understanding will be gained by tracing and uncovering the way war – as a reality and as a concept – is represented in and structures the thoughts of social theorists since the time of antiquity. This study will trace the relationship between war and communication in the writings of social theorists and philosophers and demonstrates how war provides the cultural (un)conscious in the thoughts and writings of selected theorists of the twentieth century.

## **1.3 Questions guiding the study**

The study is guided by questions about the link between war, culture and communication. The following questions seem central: Why and how a wide range of human activities are conceptualised in terms of war? Could war be considered as a universal model for thought, action and communication? Could communication be located in the practice of war? Could war be a form of communication and could communication be considered as war by other means?

## **1.4 Theoretical orientation of the study**

For most of the twentieth century, and increasingly in the postmodern age of globalisation the assumption that **peace** and **communication** are intimately interlinked has gained a hegemonic dominance in popular imagination and in mass media and scholarly discourses. As against the deification and idealisation of peace, **war** is typically represented as senseless violence, a manifestation of inhumanity and an irrational disturbance of the *normal* state of peace that is supposedly, essential for the social existence of rational and

enlightened human beings. Because peacefulness is presumed to be the defining characteristic of humanity, the violence of war is assumed as being beyond rational human understanding (cf. Sontag 2004), and war is condemned as meaningless and presumed to be “about nothing at all” (cf. Enzensberger 1994:30).

Central to both scholarly and public discourses is an explicit moral condemnation of war as an evil and an unquestioned consensus that praises peace as the ultimate moral good. There is also an unquestioned assumption that *communication* – popularly envisaged as an ideal polite *dialogue* – has the power to end war and restore humanity to its imagined pristine state of eternal peace. Thus communication – understood and defined as (a) transmission of messages, and (b) sharing of meaning – is assumed to be exclusively directed at attaining consensus, mutual understanding and thus as being the missing link between war and peace. Such a view is typically expressed by Habermas’s (1981:314) axiomatic claim that “our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus.”

If the natural aim of all communication is mutual understanding, then war, social strife and all forms of conflict – often described generically as *violence* – are assumed to be the result of breakdown of communication. Conversely, all communications are assumed to end when war begins. It is as if war and communication are mutually exclusive: on the one hand there is pure communication, dialogue and peace, while on the other, pure war, silence and no communication. Therefore it is assumed that improved channels of communication and an increase in the free flow and exchange of information and communication *ought* to lead to better understanding and peace. Such assumptions are based on the belief that all human beings share common values, but because of communication breakdowns the warring antagonists are unable to exchange information and to enlighten one another about their common humanity (cf. Hamelink 2008:78). Thus, to end war one must repair the communication breakdowns between individuals, groups, and societies (cf. Tidwell 1998:2), and repair the “communication breakdown in the global village”

(Hale 1999:143). Resolving all conflicts and ending wars is reduced to a mere technical “quick-fix communication-based solutions” (Putnis 1993:17). The solution seems simple because repairing the “communication failure” allows scholars to disregard all the substantive issues of the conflict and the complexity of the social context (cf. Hall & Hewitt 1970:19). Thus as Peters (1989:387) puts it: “Communication appeals to us because of the way the concept seems to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.”

The inventions of new electronic communication technologies and their global expansion were assumed to offer the ultimate means to end conflict and war. Expressing such optimism, McLuhan (1969:90) declares that the new computer technology has the ability to translate incompatible languages and offer “a Pentecostal of universal understanding and unity.” The belief in the pacifying power of communication grew stronger in the postmodern world because the spread of communication technologies raised new hope for better understanding among nations and cultures (cf. Tehranian 1994:77). The end of the Cold War stimulated the globalisation of commerce, and the spread of liberal-democracy making the world seem as a common fraternity – “a global village” or a single global “network society”. It is as if suddenly all human beings were brothers and there were no enemies to hate and to fight. Humanity was assumed to have reached the *end of ideology* (Bell 1962), the *end of politics* (Mouffe 1993) and the *end of history* (cf. Fukuyama 1992:311).

The end of history would mean the end of wars and bloody revolutions. Agreeing on ends, men would have no large causes for which to fight. They would satisfy their needs through economic activity, but they would no longer have to risk their lives in battle (Fukuyama 1992:311).

Therefore, scholars predict that “in the post-modern era war might be disinvented” (Coker 1992:189), and wars will finally have ceased to exist (cf. Mueller 2009:298).

Moreover, in the imagination of philosophers, media scholars, and journalists, reality was also banished because human beings were assumed to live in a symbolic universe, a communicational or discursive world of *hyperreality* and mass media *simulacra* (cf. Baudrillard 1983, 1994; Eco 1987). In such an imagined virtual world “real” wars and conflicts could not, and did not happen because they were supposedly fictional spectacles constructed by the mass media, by Hollywood war films or by computer-generated war games.

But against the hope of a unified humanity and imagined peaceful and warless world, the expansion of communication and commerce were paradoxically accompanied by an increase in warfare and social strife. A humorist writer aptly describes the end of the myth of global communication:

If you stick a Babel fish in your ear you can instantly understand anything said to you in any form of language ... the poor Babel fish, by effectively removing all barriers to communication between races and cultures, has caused more and bloodier wars than anything else in the history of creation (Adams 1979:50).

The return of war seems puzzling and incomprehensible because it does not fit within the predictions of social theories that assume that society is based on peace and consensus (cf. Mouffe 1993:1; Žižek 2002a:75). The lack of correspondence between reality and its imagined ideal representation in theoretical discourse is experienced as a crisis of understanding, as a puzzled scholar exclaims: “Peace or War? Utopia or nightmare? Global solidarity or tribal conflict?” (Hassner in Friedrichs 2001:478). Finally, the Islamists’ terror attack on the United State on 11 September 2001 was mostly incomprehensible, the distinction between war and peace seemed to have been “completely annulled” and all the concepts to make sense of the world seemed to have melted (cf. Beck 2003:255–256). The crisis of meaning is experienced

as if “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx in Berman 1983).<sup>1</sup> The result of such conceptual crisis was that rather than offering reality congruent social analysis “all imagined stupidities were said and written”, revealing the bankruptcy of contemporary critical cultural theories and affirming their lack of contact with reality (cf. Žižek 2002a:40, 51–53).

The lack of understanding of war exhibited by contemporary scholars is the result of acceptance of unquestioned assumptions about the negative and destructive nature of war. However, such a perspective that considers war as evil, entirely traumatic and destructive and without redeeming value is a result of social construction of meaning and product of cultural construction which begun after the First World War and reinforced since the Vietnam War by the ideological infusion of the anti-war peace discourse and has ultimately become the modern Western ruling myth of peace (Gray 2004:1). What negative approach ignores is that there is another cultural interpretation of war and a tradition that considers war as a positive phenomenon, and ascribes it as the central experience for construction of human sense of identity and meaning. Such a perspective has a long and respected intellectual tradition supported by almost all major philosophers dating back to ancient Greece (cf. Lomsky-Feder 2004:83).

If the return of war resulted in a conceptual meltdown and confusion, it was also a new enlightenment and signalled a “return to the Real” and attempts to regain a “firm ground in some ‘real reality’” (Žižek 2002a:19). The return of war and conflict signifies, according to Kagan (2008:3), that “the world has become normal again.” If the reality does not fit the theory then it is possible to suspect that our understanding of the relationship between war and peace are reversed and our assumptions about the pacific nature of communication are misguided.

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<sup>1</sup> Berman documents a similar experience of conceptual crisis with the advent of modernity at the end of the nineteenth century.

Indeed, as Hamelink (2008:78–79) notes, all the assumptions about the pacifying influence of communication and the hope that information will change human perceptions, end war and lead to peace are groundless and lack empirical support. War does not begin in human minds but in the real conflicts of interests between the antagonists. War and conflict are permanent aspects of human reality; conflict is the source of creativity and growth, therefore all the efforts to eradicate and prevent conflict may be counterproductive (cf. Hamelink 2008:78).

War as the *return of the real* disrupts the discourse of theory and challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions about the benevolence of peace. Indeed, Nietzsche already diagnosed such a reversal of values being the source of the crisis of Western civilisation. As Nietzsche puts it:

The valuation that today is applied to the different forms of society is entirely identical with that which assigns a higher value to peace than to war: but this judgement is anti-biological, is itself a fruit of the decadence of life. Life is a consequence of war, society itself a means to war (Nietzsche 1968:33).

War is a constant unchanging fact of human existence. Therefore following Nietzsche the emphasis could be reversed: not peace but war should be considered the solid ontological point of departure for theory. Rather than consider conflict and war as exclusively destructive, its positive value as a source creativity and change need to be accounted for while some negative and destructive elements of peace need to be investigated (cf. Cramer 2006a; Cramer 2006b). The value of peace is becoming questionable, as indeed it was already questioned by all major Western philosophers in the past. The hegemony of peace discourse and the pacification implemented as social policy in the contemporary postmodern world are beginning to reveal some dangerous consequences for freedom of political action, communication and social existence (cf. Baudrillard 2002b:92–93; Behnke 2008:513; Fukuyama



1992:328-331; Hammond 2007:11). This should raise the question as to whether *peace* and not war may pose the greater danger to human existence.

As against the imagined peaceful global postmodernity, an alternative perspective is offered by some scholars proposing that the contemporary world has come to resemble the Middle Ages (cf. Eco 1987), or it is experienced and understood as a move “back-to-the future” into a Neo-Medieval condition (cf. Kobrin 1998). According to Kaplan (2003:15), this implies that the world “is not ‘modern’ or ‘postmodern’, but only a continuation of the ‘ancient’” and human nature does not change. Thus a return to the ancient Greeks’ understanding of war as a way of life (cf. Havelock 1972; Nietzsche 1997; Sidebottom 2004), and understanding the central place of warfare and violence in the Middle Ages (cf. Huizinga 1972; Elias 1978) could provide insights for understanding the way war is the organising principle of the postmodern world (cf. Foucault 2003; Hardt & Negri 2006).

Therefore, to understand the postmodern world demands learning to live with conflict (cf. Gray 2004:104), and understanding the present demands a framework that allows us to enter “into the logic of conflictuality” (Eco 1987:84).

How can one enter such logic of *conflictuality*? The idea of *conflictuality* is elaborated by two intellectual perspectives: a modern and mainly Marxist social conflict theory tracing their origin to Marx, and a second perspective identified with Nietzsche, Clausewitz and a whole tradition of Western philosophy that locates its origin in Heraclitus's conception of the formative character of war. As this study is interested in the role of *war* as against the Marxist notion of abstract *social conflict* it positions itself within the Western tradition with Nietzsche and his followers. The present study is firmly rooted in materialist ontology and epistemology because it considers the primacy of the human action of fighting as the concrete historical basis on which all human thought and ideas arise as theorised by Marx. However, while the study accepts the evidence and assumption that war is a trans-historical phenomenon, it also notes the specific historical manifestation of war that become inscribed in

historically contemporary theories; in other words, using Hegelian language this means that philosophy is the reflection of its historical time in thought. Moreover while the study rejects idealism it traces and develops an alternative *conflictual* approach to that offered by the Marxist tradition. The main objection to the Marxists' claim to offer a materialist conception and historicisation of conflict is their location in economic determinism. Indeed, the young Marx already offered a strong critique of the economic determinism and realised that economic productive activities, human labour and collective actions are dependent on, and find their condition of possibility and condition for their existence in the primacy war-making ability (Marx in Lichtheim 1982:149; Marx in Bryant 1996:28). Following the primacy of war even Hegel's idealism is ultimately based in real historical condition of warfare. Kojève (1980:186) notes that Hegel's idea of dialectics is derived from real historical facts of fighting and work. While Marxists consider history as a totality and conflict as resulting from economic competition and perpetual class struggles, Marxist theorising remains abstract and distanced from the idea of war. Foucault takes issue with the Marxist generalisation and notes that "it's astonishing to see how easily and self-evident people talk of war-like relations of power or class struggle without ever making it clear whether some form of war is meant and if so what form" (Foucault 1980:119). Moreover, placed within historical context Marx's and Engels' conception of class warfare is not original but has been derived from the idea of a race war. Marx acknowledges in a letter to Engels: "You know very well where we found our idea of class struggle; we found it in the work of the French historians who talked about the race struggle" (Foucault 2003:79). As Foucault (2003:81) puts it: "Racism is, quite literally, revolutionary discourse in an inverted form". The converse is also true and racism is echoed in socialist thought when it proposes to murder its class enemies within the capitalist society (Foucault 2003:262).

Foucault (2003), following Nietzsche's insights contends that society could be best understood as war. This is so because a society is based on relations of power and such power relations are always war-like relations of force and

violence and can be understood in terms of “the binary schema of war and struggle” and “the clash between forces” (cf. Foucault 2003:18).

War as a source of meaning for human beings has been acknowledged throughout history. Ever since the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus identified *war as the father of all things*, all religious scripts have attested, major philosophers in all ages affirmed, and human history confirmed that war is a generative force of meaning. This is summarised by Nietzsche’s (1968:33) statement that *life is the consequence of war, and society is a means to war*, is affirmed again in the twentieth century by Emmanuel Levinas’ (1991:23) conclusion that war is human reality and the human being manifest himself and acquires meaning in war (Hillman 2005:2). In the twenty-first century, journalist Chris Hedges (2003:3–7) rediscovers that *war is a force that gives us meaning* when peace has emptied all meaning from life in the postmodern world (cf. Hammomd 2007:11; Fukuyama 1992:328–331).

War as a source of meaning implies that war may be a form of communication. Indeed, Nietzsche (2009:90) argues that if “war is the father of all good things; [then] war is also the father of good prose.” For Nietzsche the fact that war is the origin of communication can be confirmed by listening to the formative trace of war in human communication:

In the way men make assertions in present-day society, one often hears an echo of the times when they were better skilled in arms than in anything else; sometimes they handle assertions as poised archers their weapons; sometimes one thinks he hears the whir and clatter of blades; and with some men an assertion thunders down like heavy cudgel (Nietzsche 2004:183).

Karl von Clausewitz links war and discourse more directly:

Is not War merely another kind of writing and language for political thought? It has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself ... the Art of War in its highest point of view is

policy, but, no doubt, a policy which fights battles instead of writing notes (Clausewitz 1985: 402, 406).

Implied in both Nietzsche's and Clausewitz's (1985) statements is the suggestion that war provides the grounding for communication and is itself another kind of communication. Indeed, Mattelart's (1994) study of international communication notes that "communication serves first of all to make war ... War and its logics are essential components of the history of international communication and of its doctrine and theories, as well as its uses" (Mattelart 1994:xiii). Thus war is the frame of reference for development of communication technology and communication theories (Mattelart 1994:xiv).

War, fighting and conflict are the primary common experiences of humanity and influence the way people act, think and communicate. This way of conceptualising communication is based on an understanding that violence and war far from being mute forces that prevent communication, are themselves pure forms of communication and sources of meaning. Violence is always meaningful and opens channels of communication where there were none before. Both war and communication are institutional forms in which, and by which, humans relate to one another, and fighting is one such relationship.

The link between war and communication is suggested by Lyotard (1984). For Lyotard (1984:16, 59) the starting point for conceptualising communication is provided by Heraclitus' assertion that conflict is the father of all things. From this perspective communication is a mode of action and "to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts" that are subsumed within a general theory of agonistics (cf. Lyotard 1984:10). Communication is a form of action or a "language game" where each "speech act" is seen as a move in a game such as chess as (cf. Lyotard 1984:10, 16). All social games including communication are agonistic and competitive activities and their ultimate aim is winning (cf. Lyotard 1984:10). The *agonistic* characteristics of society and language and the link between play and fight could be better understood in terms of the Greek concepts of *agon* and the *polemos* as a cosmic war, as well

as human *warfare, agon, play, strife, completion, and contestations* – considered by Heidegger as the foundational principle for all human existence (cf. Fried 2000). The basic element of war is the fight or battle structured as a duel or fight between two wrestlers; war consists of such battles on an extended scale (cf. Clausewitz 1985). This hand-to-hand fight is a form of interaction and communication. The experience of fighting, battle and war is socially and culturally institutionalised thus providing a shared framework for action and thought that are internalised by individuals to form their mental conceptual system.

The *adversarial* social procedures are internalised by the individual thus the acts of human thinking and reasoning are the reflection of adversarial social procedures (cf. Hampshire 2000, 2002). The cognitive structure of human mind is not simply a form of consciousness but is a disposition of the body, and reflects real social relations of power (cf. Bourdieu 1998:54). The most primordial and universal human experience is fighting, conflict and war; these structured interactions in turn structure all other forms of social structures and this is confirmed by the historical studies of Tilly (1975, 1990).

What could be concluded from the above is that to understand communication and the way meaning is constructed requires understanding war. The common understanding of war within the discourse of contemporary scholarship is biased by the moral condemnations of war and the prevailing pacifist ideology, both are based on ignorance about the nature of war (cf. Davie 2003; Gelven 1994). War should be understood beyond the narrow moral evaluations of good and evil (cf. Baudrillard 2002a), thus war needs to be understood and evaluated *existentially* (cf. Gelven 1994; Schmitt 1976). An understanding of war and how it communicates meaning is the key to an understanding of all aspects of human life. Such an understanding is not merely a theoretical exercise in explicating ideas, but is crucial for understanding the contemporary postmodern world and ability to live in it.

To begin the exploration the first task is to confront existing theories and concepts, explore and describe their shortcoming because of their neglect to consider the agonist and polemical dimension. Thereafter, to uncover the origin of communication in war and show the way war becomes a source of meaning for individuals, society, culture and symbolic communicative activities.

### **1.5 Type of study, methodology and strategy**

This study is situated within the qualitative methodology, it is a descriptive and a critical exploration and interpretation. It offers a careful reading of interdisciplinary texts, explores theoretical approaches and endeavours to gain new understanding of the topic. The purpose is firstly to explore and contrast ideas, concepts and arguments regarding war, peace and communication across interdisciplinary fields and texts and to trace a tradition of positive consideration of war as formative of human identity and society. After having gained insights about the way war is represented in the thought of major philosophers throughout history, these insights will then inform a close reading of representative texts of selected communication theorists of the twentieth century to trace the way war is represented and functions in their thought and theories.

In approaching a study of war in the present intellectual environment one is confronted with a pervasiveness of anti-war ideological bias that has the effect of enforcing a restrictive politically correct consensus. To be able to examine war without preconception, a methodological precaution is required, guarding against the danger of succumbing to this "presentism" and attributing current ideological meanings to evaluation of wars of different historical periods whose combatants had different and positive sentiments towards war. Attaining such detachment demands a Nietzschean scepticism about the value of the present moral values and a suspicion that our values are inversions of their origin values. For this purpose a critical research strategy will be adopted. Critical research involves a two-step process methodology: deconstruction and reconstruction (Harvey 1990:19, 29–30). Deconstruction is an act of destruction

as it takes apart the old accepted ways of thinking, and challenges the taken-for-granted assumptions and unquestioned dominant ideas. Such challenge could uncover the shaky foundations to reveal as did Marx, that "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx in Berman 1983). After the destruction comes the process of reconstruction and tracing a new perspective. Reconstruction will be followed by a third movement which is that of interpretation consisting of case studies reading and explicating the way war operates in the thought and is represented in the texts of the following selected twentieth century theorists writing on communication: Huizinga, Schmitt, Foucault, McLuhan, and Lyotard.

## **1.6 Outline of the study**

**Chapter 2** begins the study by adopting a critical strategy. Because of the prevalence of pacifism and anti-war bias among scholars this chapter attempts to deconstruct these biases by questioning their taken-for-granted assumptions about the normative value of peace. The chapter will review and critique the literature of peace discourse and explore whether peace may not be potentially an oppressive regime and whether peace is not a disguise for conducting war by other means. The representations of peace will be evaluated and the methods used to propagate peace will be examined. After the deconstruction, and freed from bias, a reconstruction of war will begin in the following chapters.

**Chapter 3** begins a reconstruction of a tradition of thought that attribute positive value to war. It will offer a review of literature and reading of philosophical and multidisciplinary texts and will uncover a positive historical understanding of war and communication. It will trace the idea of war in Western tradition originating in Heraclitus and the ancient Greeks right through to the present and explore how war, conflict, sacrifice and killing are intrinsic experiences of being human and how they construct and structure the human identity.

**Chapter 4** continues the exploration that was begun in Chapter 2 and will focus the inquiry on tracing the role of war and killing as the formative forces of language and communication. It will investigate whether war and killing on the battlefield are the probable sources for language that develop as mean for

recording acts of war and transforming life, death and killing into poetic and aesthetic experience. After the reconstruction of a war perspective in this chapter and in the previous chapter the insights gained will provide a framework to be used for a case study carefully reading, tracing and interpreting how the idea of war operates and structures the thoughts and texts of selected social theorists of the twentieth century. (These will be discussed in the following Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.)

**Chapter 5** undertakes a case study by careful reading of the play theory of Johan Huizinga and his claims that play is the foundation of culture. The reading investigates whether Huizinga's conception of play may be described as sub species of war and that play and war are experienced as interchangeable. Huizinga's critique of Carl Schmitt's concept of the political will be evaluated and its similarity to Huizinga's idea of the agonistic play-fighting explored.

**Chapter 6** will offer a reading of Foucault's analytics of war that he considers as being a suitable model to describe society. Foucault's insights will also be valuable for a better understanding of Schmitt's view that war animates the political sphere (discussed in the previous Chapter 5). Foucault's idea of war as the ever-present structure of thought and social formations will be explored to evaluate whether it provides a model that is more informative than the linguistic model used for analysis of society and communication.

**Chapter 7** will trace the way war is reflected and shapes McLuhan's theory of the media. The chapter will demonstrate how the memory of the Second World War provides the initial background influence on McLuhan's theory and show how as the Vietnam War and the Cold War intensify the place of war gains prominence and centrality in his writing. The chapter will explore the relationship between war technology and media technology and how they constitute the human environment and how weapons and media format shape human consciousness and the social structure. McLuhan's views on communication media as forms of weapons will also be explored.



**Chapter 8** will explore and trace the role of war and fighting in the postmodern theory of Lyotard. Lyotard's view on communication as a form of a fight or agonistic language game will be read and interpreted for its implication for understanding the postmodern world. The possibility that Lyotard's agonistic conception of society and communication provides a new understanding of the contemporary world will be evaluated as possible criteria to judge incompatible language games and decide outcomes of battles in the postmodern agonistic world.

**Chapter 9** will conclude the study and consider the implication of war for communication theory. The contribution of a positive understanding of war for understanding culture in the postmodern world will be demonstrated.



## CHAPTER 2

# ETERNAL PEACE OF THE GRAVEYARD: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND CRITICAL READING OF PEACE DISCOURSE

In Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance; in Switzerland, they had brotherly love, they had five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did they produce? The cuckoo clock  
– Orson Wells in *The Third Man*

You should love peace as a means to new wars – and the short peace more than the long – Nietzsche (1969:74–75)

Just as the movement of the ocean prevents the corruption which would be the result of perpetual calm, so by war people escape the corruption which would be occasioned by a continues or eternal peace – Hegel (1996:331)

Peace becomes the postmodern label for war – Alliez & Negri (2003:112)

### 2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to begin an extensive literature review and critical reading of the literature of the peace discourse and its limitations so that a new perspective for understanding war and communication in the contemporary world could be constructed. Such critical review will uncover the assumptions of peace discourse, its topics and ideas, evaluate its claims and limitation, and raise questions about the values ascribed to peace in communication scholarship.

In order to provide a new perspective on war for social analysis there is a need to question some of the often taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the nature and value of peace currently dominating the discourses of the mass media and academic scholarship. It is suspected that the dominant understanding of peace and war is ideologically biased and such bias come to distort understanding of war.

## **2.2 Peace as a dominant ideological construction**

The idea of “peace” has gained a hegemonic place in the discourse of intellectuals and the mass media. For most of the twentieth century philosophers and intellectuals have promoted the idea of universal peace and were urged, for example by leading anthropologist such as Margaret Mead (1963:133), to produce “propaganda against warfare, documentation of its terrible cost in human suffering and social waste” in order to “prepare the ground by teaching people to feel that warfare is a defective social institution” (Mead 1963:133). From being a minor fashionable preoccupation, since the 1960s peace activism and peace research have become fast growing industries. The assumed need to end wars and violence by all means and to enforce peaceful existence on individuals, groups, societies and the entire world has been unquestionably accepted as self-evident truth. As a result international political associations have taken it upon themselves to proclaim scientific truths and criminalise heresy in issues of war and peace. Thus a UNESCO declaration proclaims that the primacy of peace must be accepted on faith and that “it is scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors” or “that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature” (Pinker 1999:46). Accepting such dubious claims many scholars have consciously and unconsciously distorted historical data in order to produce an image of an ideal peaceful origin of the world (Keeley 1997:vii, 23, 170; Pinker 2003:27). As Keeley (1997:170) puts it, “both laypersons and academics now prefer a vision of tribal peoples as lambs in Eden.”

Yet increasingly the belief in the ability to abolish war and eliminate conflict is being questioned. As Sontag (2004:4) notes, no one, not even the pacifists believe that it is possible to eliminate warfare. Even a committed peace scholar such as Hamelink (2008:78) notes that the idea of conflict prevention may be unrealistic and undesirable and is based on erroneous scientific assumptions. Thus if achieving peace is a chimera and enforcing peace counterproductive,

what are the motives, aims and consequences of all the peace studies and the practice of peace enforcement?

This chapter begins a critical interrogation of the idea of peace and the relationship of communication and peace. It uncovers the genealogy of the idea of peace, evaluates the relationships between peace and war. It also uncovers the strategy and tactics used by the peace discourse to manipulate language and the mass media. It concludes by evaluating the consequences and implications of enforcing peace. After having raised questions about peace in this chapter the way is opened for a read and recovery of another understanding of war and communication which will be conducted in Chapters 3 and 4.

### **2.3 Kant's joke of the eternal peace of the graveyard**

Throughout human history religious visionaries and sages have propagated a utopian vision of a world without enemies, imagining a time when men will be *beating swords into ploughshares* and all conflicts and wars would be banished. But such delusions were contradicted by the harsh reality of the human condition: war and conflict are central aspects of human existence. From the time of the Enlightenment the idea of peace gained inspiration from Immanuel Kant's ironic musing about inaugurating a *perpetual or eternal peace* among independent democratic states. However, while presenting his philosophical dream Kant acknowledges the irony that the idea of *eternal peace* was inspired by a picture of a graveyard. Thus Kant adds a note of caution warning that eternal peace may be a counterfactual utopia:

We can leave open the question whether this satirical caption to the picture of a graveyard, which was painted on the sign of a Dutch innkeeper, applies to human beings in general [or] to philosophers who dream the sweet dream of perpetual peace (Kant 2006:67).

Moreover, there is another irony here: Kant has taken the title “perpetual peace” and the model of peace from Abbé de Saint-Pierre who originally suggested that making peace among the European powers was a necessary condition to unite them for a crusade against the Turks (cf. Bell 2008:63, 76).

Kant is aware that peace is not a natural state for human beings and thus rightly suspects that *eternal peace* may turn out to be the peace of the graveyard (cf. Behnke 2008:514; Rasch 2000). Indeed, for Kant (2006:6) the natural characteristic of human beings is their antagonism and “unsociable sociability” that is the foundation for all social existence and the driving force behind all human development. Therefore, in a world without war and conflict

human beings would live the arcadian life of shepherds, in full harmony, contentment, and mutual love. But all human talent would thus lie eternally dormant, and human beings, as good-natured as the sheep that they put to pasture, would thus give their own lives hardly more worth than that of their domestic animals (Kant 2006:7).

In similar manner Kant muses about the possible necessity of war for evolution of humanity:

... war ... is an unintended attempt of human beings ... and yet deeply hidden *perhaps* purposeful attempt of supreme wisdom to prepare, if not found, legitimacy along with the freedom of states and thereby the unity of a morally justified system, *and* in spite of the most horrible tribulations which it imposes on mankind, and perhaps even bigger tribulations which the constant readiness for war imposes during times of peace, is one more driving force ... to develop all talents, which serve culture, to the highest degree (Kant in Krimmer 2010:24).

Moreover, Kant acknowledges that as a cultural force war may be a positive contributing value for the construction of the sublime. For Kant it is the model of

war, or the imagined war and its dangers that create the sublime because contemplation of war from a safe distance construct the sublime by fortifying reason and allowing it to control sensuality. Thus it is the imagination of danger that gives rise to the sublime feeling. However, Kant extends his analysis and claims that it is not only the imaginary war but "even war, if it is conducted in an orderly fashion and with respect for the sanctity of citizens' rights, has something sublime about it" (Kant in Krimmer 2010:23). Therefore for Kant, the more people are exposed to danger the greater becomes their sublime experience as against the debasement and degradation of mind caused by peace (Kant in Krimmer 2010:22–23). By the orderly conduct of war Kant seems to refer to the aesthetic beauty of orderly arrangement and the elegant manoeuvres of the troops on the parade ground which were transferred to the battlefields by the military leaders of the seventeenth century (cf. Bell 2008:38).

Kant is also very much aware that peace and prosperity are corruptive and decadent forces because without struggle human beings and societies would stagnate and die. For Kant war and conflict are the health of society, and as Hegel (1996) puts it: "Just as the movement of the ocean prevents the corruption which would be the result of perpetual calm, so by war people escape the corruption which would be occasioned by a continues or eternal peace" (Hegel 1996:331).

The idea of eternal peace seems as a utopian myth because the decisive process that shapes individuals and social life is the dynamics of power relations. And power relations are antagonistic and "warlike relations" (cf. Foucault 2003). Ever since ancient time the Greek philosopher Heraclitus proclaimed war as the father of all things, major social thinkers acknowledged war and conflict as being formative forces. Since the dawn of history human imagination, expressed in myths and literary discourse, attests to the fact that "the battlefield is symbolic of the field of life, where every creature lives on the death of another" (Campbell 1993:238). Life is experienced as a struggle for survival and the perpetuation of life depends on the ability to prevail and gain victory in warfare (cf. Tilly 1990). As Machiavelli (1968:96) suggests, it is safer

to be feared than to be loved. On the other hand, throughout history a peaceful and defenceless society invites others to make war on it.

But such facts are neglected by most twentieth century Western *peace fundamentalists* – intellectuals, the global media, religious and secular utopian social reformers – that have transformed Kant's joke of eternal peace into a quasi-religious dogma. Such an idyllic peaceful world is presented in Fukuyama's (1992:311) idea of the "end of history" whereby happiness is found in economic prosperity and politics is transformed into management of society (cf. Mouffe 2005:1). But as Fukuyama (1992) concedes, such a mundane life of peace and prosperity does not provide meaning for human beings. Human beings can gain a sense of their humanity by challenging life in war and thus a world without enemies is also a world without friends and hence it is no longer a human world (cf. Nietzsche 2004:194; Derrida 2005).

#### **2.4 Misconceptions about war and peace**

Having uncovered some different conception of peace and war in the previous section it may be possible to assume that contemporary popular and scholarly discourses about the positive value of peace and the evils of war are grounded in errors. Indeed, Davie (2003:v) explicitly notes that the common characteristics of most discourses about war is based on ignorance and Gelven (1994:xii) laments that most contemporary writers on war do not understand it.

For most contemporary thinkers war and conflict are assumed to be abnormal manifestations of archaic inhuman drives and signify some form of pathology and social illness because the natural state of human society is assumed to be based on altruistic peace and cooperation (cf. Cramer 2006). Thus war is assumed as evil and is ultimately associated with the ideas of *destruction* and *death* while peace is assumed as an absolute moral good.

However, such assumptions are contradicted by history and reality. As Nietzsche (1968:33) notes, to "assign a higher value to peace than to war" is an error that is contradicted by all historical and biological facts. The reality is that



“life is a consequence of war, society itself a means to war” (Nietzsche 1968:33).

From the time of antiquity war was always considered as being synonymous with life, strength, well being and expansion, while peace was associated with rest, stagnation and death. Indeed, that peace is the prerogative of the dead is aptly expressed by George Santayana’s (in Behnke 2008:515) observation that “only the dead are safe; only the dead have seen the end of war.”

Thus, against the misconception of the liberal ideology, war is not entirely a negative phenomenon, it is possible to assume that it can be productive and a functional source of social change and cultural and economic profit, and it is a means of communication and a form of social relations (cf. Cramer 2006:284).

## **2.5 The reality behind the peace consensus: peace kills**

If the positive value of peace is questionable then can peace be a benign social phenomenon? It is difficult to ask such question because of a prevalent intellectual consensus that assumes war is evil and peace is benevolent. Brown (1992:130) warns that the idealisation of peace and unchallenged consensus on its desirability in scholarly discourse should be a cause for suspicion because the over emphasis on the evil of war may conceal the oppressive nature of peace (cf. Brown 1992:131). Indeed, that peace may be more murderous than war is attested by the fact that

at least in the twentieth century, the killing of citizens by states has claimed vastly more lives than the killing of soldiers in combat ... four times as many people have died at the hands of their own governments than have been killed in battle combat (Cooney 1997:330).

John Gray notes that the construction of a peaceful society has always proved to be more deadly than any warfare: “The Soviet Union was an attempt to embody the Enlightenment ideal of a world without power or conflict. In pursuit of this ideal it killed and enslaved tens of millions of human beings” (Gray

2004:2). More ironic is the fact that natural disasters kill more people than wars. As Agamben (1998:114) notes, in times of peace life is exposed to violence in more banal ways than in war: “Our age is the one in which a holiday weekend produces more victims on Europe’s highways than a war campaign.” Thus to acknowledge such contradictions the American satirist P.J. O’Rourke appropriately titles his book: *Peace Kills* (O’Rourke 2004).

## **2.6 Review of representations of peace in the discourses of peace studies and activism**

Peace is promoted as the ultimate absolute good in the voluminous literature produced by scholars and peace activists. Yet in all that literature there is no clear definition of peace (cf. Mandelzis 2007:2), or a clear outline of how the ideal peaceful society could be. Mostly the peaceful society is defined negatively by what it is not rather than by any identifiable essential characteristics. The ideal peaceful society is claimed to be the opposite of the contemporary human society. Thus peace appears as an “empty signifier” that has no *signified* or meaningful content (cf. Laclau 2007:36). As Cubitt (2002:14) puts it: peace is a concept “that has no content” and “exists as hope, as that which is wished for.” But what is the peace wished for? A close reading of the peace literature reveals an image of peace that is not very flattering. Rather than the hoped for utopia, the conception of peace propagated by the peace discourse emerges as an illusion.

As if to *cure* humanity from the *scourge* of war scholars who promote the idea of *nonviolence*. According to Kurlansky (2007:182) the most promising way to eradicate war is by non-violent response and non participation in war, as suggested by French novelist Anatole France. According to Anatole France (in Kurlansky 2007:182),

war will disappear only when men shall take no part whatsoever in violence and shall be ready to suffer every persecution that their abstention will bring them.

In other words, this means that one should not oppose oppression and tyranny because it is the resistance that is the ultimate cause of violence and war. All kinds of social oppression and psychological repression must be suffered for the world to become a peaceful place.

The same suicidal passivity is recommended by Gandhi. During the Second World War Gandhi recommended to the British that they should not resist the German invasion but let themselves be slaughtered. To the Jews Gandhi gave the perverse advice that in order to appease the Nazi dictator it may be necessary that “hundreds, if not thousands” of Jews should be slaughtered to raise the world’s consciousness and awareness of their plight (cf. Harris 2006:202; Walzer 2006:332). But as Harris (2006:202) points out, arousing the consciousness of a world full of pacifists would require that all commit suicide to show their support for the victims rather than help them defend themselves. At face value Gandhi’s advice may seem naïve, but such conclusion may be misleading because of the political context of Gandhi’s advice. At the time of the Second World War India had already begun its struggle against colonialism and a suicide of the colonial master offered an easy road to freedom. Indeed, Gramsci (1986:106, 229) suggests that Gandhi’s concept of nonviolence is a strategy of the “passive revolution” and nonviolence is merely another name for a revolutionary “war of positions.” Today, even the Dalai Lama, a life-long champion of non-violence, concedes that non-violence is ineffective in the present war against terrorism and the intransigent power of dictators (cf. Times of India 2009). Indeed, liberation theologians have already condemned non-violence as an inappropriate response to a world ruled by power politics and have contended that the practice of non-violence exerts a high cost in human lives, perpetuates sufferings, paralyses social action and perpetuates slave-consciousness (cf. Appleby 2000:116–117).

In the discourses of social science the conception of non-violence and peace are closely interrelated with the idea of tyranny. Peace is synonymous with predictable social order that can be achieved by repressive law enforcement (cf. Chernus 1993:99). The origin of such view can be traced to the *Pax*

*Romana*, an exploitive internal order that disarms resistance and is imposed by military conquest. In other words, peace is the military pacification of a society. Such view is shared by the discourses of peace activism and social theories that assume that order must be maintained at all costs and should be imposed by hegemonic elites using powerful sociological techniques to maintain that order (cf. Chernus 1993:106). Ultimately the aim of peace is to search and destroy any sign of disorder because freedom is the ultimate sign of disorder; freedom manifests a deviation from peace and is a potential source of disorder and thus it is an enemy of peace (Chernus 1993:108). To attain peace is to win the battle against disorder and that implies an imposition of monotonous and oppressive uniformity. As Bryzzheva (2009:66) puts it, the battle against disorder is a battle against human nature and “winning the battle against disorder would turn a brilliantly complex *dialogic* living into a morbid monologue” (Bryzzheva 2009:66). Thus Foucault’s (2003:30) observation that “we all have some element of fascism inside our heads” aptly describes the state of mind of peace discourse intellectuals.

Cavin, Hale and Cavin (1997) demonstrate in their research that proponents of peace discourse present themselves as if they were gods possessing superior knowledge and are able to lead ignorant humanity towards eternal peace. Einstein, in an exchange of letters with Freud on the topic of curing the world of the menace of war, writes that global peace can be achieved only if the aggressive instinct of the majority of the world inhabitants is eradicated by having them submit to the rule of a minority group of benevolent intellectuals that has the interest of humanity at heart and every nation must unconditionally surrender its liberty and sovereignty and be ruled by the all powerful international body (cf. Peery 2009:22–23). Freud (2005) agrees that the ideal pacification would be achieved if a community of people repress their aggressive drives and accept to be ruled by “the dictatorship of reason” because such repression will lead to a “complete and robust unification of humanity” (Freud 2005:230). However, Freud realises that such psychological repression would also lead to the extinction of the human species because it will compromise their sex drive and ability to propagate. Nevertheless, Freud is

optimistic that the natural process of cultural evolution – or the long “civilisation process” as identified by Norbert Elias (1978; 1982) – will gradually result in the pacification and “domestication” of human beings (cf. Freud 2005:231–232).

According to Freud (2004) the aggressive and dangerous individual must be dominated by society, the individual’s mind must be controlled by a social authority that constantly “watch[es] over him, like a garrison in a conquered town” (Freud 2004:77). For Freud the idea of military conquest is a central metaphor that informs his construction of the image of the healthy and peaceful human mind. For Freud the mind is a battlefield of resistance and conquering armies; blockages in mental development are comparable to an army being held up by resisting counter force; regression is as if troops retreat in face of enemy attack and psychotherapy is “compared to intervention of a foreign ally in a civil war” (cf. Brown 1989:108).

Freud (2004) suggests that humans should emulate the ideal model of the peaceful societies of insects and termites that show no sign of cultural struggle. Thus for Freud

the bees, the ants, the termites – struggled for thousands of centuries until they evolved the state institutions, the distributions of functions, the restrictions on individuals, for which we admire them today (Freud 2004:76).

Freud seems to believe that human society is inferior to the peaceful and orderly society of insects. Freud of course presents a perverted view of evolution and has an idealised image of peaceful animal. However, contrary to Freud’s beliefs, the reality is that “in all carefully studied mammalian species, the rate at which their members kill conspecifics is *several thousand times* greater than the highest homicide rate measured in an American city” (Gottschall 2001:283). Ants in particular, habitually make war and their battles are *epic* in their proportions (cf. van der Dennen 1995). Thus “alongside ants, which conduct assassinations, skirmishes, and pitch battles as routine business, men are all but tranquilised pacifists” (Wilson in Thayer 2000:140).

Therefore, contrary to the common assumption that violence is abnormal the facts suggest that the idea of peaceful and non-violent society is not a normal condition but a sign of pathological abnormality. Indeed, pacifism is identified by some theorists as a pathological manifestation of inhumanity (Hardt & Negri 2006:363). This is evident where the pacifist

will submit to anything – cruelty, torture, insult, slavery, obscenity, ignobility, and defilement – just to live a few hour longer ... He would rather see his children raped, his family tortured, his culture eclipsed, his friends defiled, his own pacific religion destroyed, than lift a finger in violence against another (Gelven 1994:260).

The concern with prolonging biological life regardless of quality of human existence has become the common concern for most Western scholars. The result of such concern is according to Henryk Broder (in Belien 2006) that the European has lost all sense of pride and honour and believes that “it is sometimes better to let yourself be raped than to risk serious injuries while resisting ... it is sometimes better to avoid fighting than run the risk of death.” The desire to live in a risk-free society results in a paralysis of all actions. Thus Kant’s utopia of “eternal peace” becomes a graveyard for human society.

As against the inhuman and insane reaction of such a pacifist, rage and violent reaction against the threat of violence are the appropriate natural human responses. Not responding to violence is an indication of being dehumanised, as Arendt (1973:127) notes, under such conditions the “conspicuous absence” of rage and violence “is the closest sign of dehumanisation.” To prevent man from defending himself and express rage and violence by pretending that such pacification is done in order to “cure” man of aggression is “nothing less than to dehumanise or emasculate him” (Arendt 1973:127).

## **2.7 Linguistic cleansing: constructing the peace *newspeak***

For most of the twentieth century many scholars produced propaganda against warfare. Language and discourse have become central areas for intervention

and manipulation for peace activism and academic scholarship. Scholars have dedicated themselves to constructing a new “language of peace” and a “peace discourse”. Cavin, Hale and Cavin (1997:243) note that “the re-visioning of human communication systems toward the inclusion of progressive, cooperative, and peaceful effects has long been the focus of scholars from a variety of disciplines.” The aim of scholars attempting to construct a new discipline of “peace linguistics” (Friedrich 2007:72), or field of study of “peace discourse” is not limited to scholarly inquiry, but to engage in activism and actively construct an alternative to war discourse (cf. Bugarski 2000:140). According to Friedrich (2007:72) the task of peace linguistics is to develop a single universal language to unify the world. Such a universal language was presumably available to humanity in the mythical pre-Babel world where speaking a single language people understood each other perfectly well and “had an identical understanding of the world around them” (cf. Friedrich 2007:76). But as the task to develop a universal Esperanto is faced with difficulty, the immediate task for linguists is to purify the English language that has become the common language of the global village. This demands cleansing language of violence by removing the “masculine pronouns to encompass feminine beings” (Friedrich 2007:77), policing language to ensure that people use language responsibly and are “communicating peacefully” (Friedrich 2007:75), and developing tools to inculcate “non-confrontational manner” and “conflict avoidance” (Friedrich 2007:81). This will ensure that all can communicate successfully and harmoniously in their business dealing across the world (Friedrich 2007:81).

According to Bugarski (2000:140) it is not possible to define the essence of “peace discourse” except by defining it negatively as an inverse of war discourse. Thus for Bugarski (2000), peace discourse “should have the feel of ‘politically correct’ language” that should be characterised not by what may be said but rather by what may be prohibited and not said. The things that peace discourse should prohibit would ideally be dictated by an official banning list of objectionable expressions or by self-imposed censorship of a “highly selective avoidance list” of words and concepts (cf. Bugarski 2000:140). According to

Bugarski (2000:131) of utmost importance is to avoid any references that highlight differences of identity between social groups, and the use of the terms “us” and “them” that is central to any sense of identity should be criminalised as “hate speech”. In political speech personal pronouns such as “we” should be replaced by the singular pronoun “I”; “words such as *must, all, never, can’t, won’t*” should be dropped and replaced with “*may, some, sometimes, perhaps, [and] try*”; when answering a question “a tentative yes is often preferable to a decisive *no*, and the menacing link *either ... or* should make room for its friendlier alternative *both ... and*” (Bugarski 2000:141). Implicit in such prescription is the belief that deceptions and evasions should be the primary characteristics of peace discourse. Moreover, Bugarski (2000) suggests that “political and quasi-historical talk couched in past and perfect tense should shrink in favour of the future tense” in order to forget past history and increase concerns for the future (Bugarski 2000:142). Bugarski (2000) suggests that his strategy, drawn from Yugoslavia, could be applicable to any conflict situation. Behind such suggestion the real aim of such linguistic manipulation is the destruction of politics and negation of communal identification that ultimately will result in a world of atomised individuals without historical memory and a sense of real community. Bugarski’s (2000) authoritarian prescriptions closely resemble the linguistics manipulation of Orwell’s *Newspeak*. The aim of *Newspeak* was to make heretical thought unthinkable by restricting the vocabulary so that only precisely defined and authorised meanings could be expressed (Orwell 1990). A better solution is proposed by Swift who has Gulliver describe the practical language practice on the imaginary flying island of Laputa that had words abolished and replaced by things; the logic behind this was that “since words are only names for things, it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such things as were necessary to express a particular business they are to discourse on” (Farb 1974:32–33).

Ultimately it is the reduction of language to silence and practice of “living silence” that seems to be the essence of the language of peace (cf. Bryzzheva 2009:75). Indeed, McLuhan raises the doubt about the pacifying nature of



language. According to McLuhan (1969:90), it is possible to assume that the spread of global communication and

computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal of universal understanding and unity (McLuhan 1969:90).

Nevertheless, it would be an error to imagine that language as the basic means of communication can lead to universal understanding because language is a *technology* that mediates and also separates people as it provides the concepts and classification schemes to note differences. As Bourdieu (1992) points out, language provides the concepts for “vision” and di-vision” of the world. Therefore, according to McLuhan (1969:90), a universal consensus, whereby humanity could unite in a cosmic consciousness, universal understanding, and harmony could only be achieved by *bypassing language and communication technology* altogether, because it is “the condition of speechlessness that could confer perpetuity of collective harmony and peace” (McLuhan 1969:90). This raises the suspicion that *speechlessness* is a characteristic of the *dead* rather than any living human society; a silent society entirely at peace shows no signs of life.

Peace discourse assumes that by manipulating, distorting and directing language people will not be able to think about defending themselves against danger and thus ensure their own domination and be rewarded with a peaceful life. But such peaceful life is not one of comfort and affluence. According to Cubitt (2002:13) peace requires that the affluent West destroy its wealth because “the enemy of peace is wealth.” After destroying their wealth, individuals must surrender control over private property and their “private thoughts” (cf. Cubit 2002:17). Ultimately to attain world peace the West must unconditionally “surrender” itself to the non-European world (cf. Cubitt 2002:13). Implied in Cubit’s prescription is the assumption that it is only the West that is aggressive and needs self-pacification to fit into a presumed world inhabited by

good-hearted non-Western pacifists. Likewise, disciples of Gandhi's philosophy suggest that non-violence is ultimately not a "seizure of power" but a transformation of relationships that would lead to a "peaceful transfer of power" (cf. Juluri 2005:209). In other words, this is not a vision of power-sharing among egalitarian partners but a formation of new power relations and a new hierarchy of domination by peaceful means. It is simply a conquest by other means. The ultimate idea behind non-violence and peace discourse is the ability to gain easy victory against an enemy that offers no resistance. Indeed, as Sun Tzu (1995:23) notes, war is deception and the "supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."

If deception is the essence of victory in war then the language of peace is aimed at disarming defence and making defeat acceptable. Thus if language has already been distorted by peace linguistics the victory of the non-Western world could not be understood as a victory because the concept of victory has been eliminated and the public has become convinced that "peace depends not on victory but on surrender" (cf. Cubitt 2002:13). From such a perspective Cubitt (2002:17) suggests that the Taliban may invade America but on condition that they must be "prepared to listen" to the peace discourse. But the Taliban and al-Qaeda reply that they have no need to listen or for dialogue:

The confrontation that we are calling for does not know Socratic debates ... Platonic ideals ... nor Aristotelian diplomacy ... But it knows the dialogue of assassination, bombing and destruction ... Islamic governments have never and will never be established through peaceful solutions and cooperative councils. They are established as they have been: by pen and gun, by word and bullet (Al-Qaeda in Shultz & Beitler 2004:60).

To the Western mind indoctrinated by peace discourse and in the Eurocentric belief that there are no enemies, the clear and distinct language of al-Qaeda is incomprehensible.

The aim of contemporary peace discourse is similar to the aims of the peace movements of the Cold War era: both deny the reality of war, conceal the nature of the enemies and deny the fact that the West is facing dangerous enemies. Instead of acknowledging aggressive enemies the peace discourse portrays the enemies as victims of Western aggression and complains that the enemies are “demonised” by the mass media (cf. e.g. Ivie 1987:178–179; Steuter & Wills 2010).

More insidious is the promotion of the concepts “dialogue” and “conversation” as new means of creating peaceful egalitarian participation in political discourse. The concept of “dialogue” is used to destroy political participation and democratic decision-making. Instead of real political debate public “dialogue” is promoted as a “therapeutic language” demanding endless “self-disclosure” of personal feelings, enforcement of conformity to the standards of “good behaviour” and cooperation in conversation and elimination of all political contestations. The aim of this therapeutic dialogue is ultimately to destroy the democratic political process (cf. Tonn 2005:405). Indeed, Edelman (1964:44) already documented the insidious work of the “helping professions” – psychologists and social workers – that by re-classifying normal political behaviour as criminal pathology legitimate medical and police intervention to suppress political expression. The therapy culture has become all pervasive in contemporary Western societies (cf. Furedi 2004). The transfer of therapeutic methods into politics results in infantilisation of the citizens: the citizen is seen by their political representatives not as being in a political relationship, instead they are assumed to be in a parent-child relationship. The aim is to foster “good relationship” of family dialogue between the parent-politician who knows what is best for the child-citizen. The child-citizen is encouraged and urged to enter into polite dialogue to “tell mummy and daddy about our emotional inner lives” (Hammond 2007:116). Those refusing to enter this therapy dialogue by insisting on political discourse are classified as fundamentalists requiring police intervention to maintain the peace.

The same methods are also transferred into international relations, for example Kaldor (2001:148) proposes that “just as it is increasingly accepted that government can intervene in family affairs to stop domestic violence, so a similar principle would be applied on a global scale.” To keep the new world-order and peace Kaldor (2001:133–134) recommends that errand states should be colonised by an international police force and democracy and peace be imposed by the power of the gun. Kaldor’s and other cosmopolitan promoters of the fiction of “global community” claim that it is a universal duty to intervene in other peoples wars. But such claim is the West’s pretence to omnipotence and belief that it has a moral responsibility to every human being. According to Enzensberger (1994:59) such a claim is a sign that morality has become “the last refuge of Eurocentrism.” External intervention in other people’s war is not a duty but a hindrance: stopping war before it reaches a decisive conclusion only ensures that it will be fought again. As Ignatieff (1999:175) notes, outsiders have no credibility in other people’s wars and “ethnic war remains a family quarrel, a duel to the death between brothers and can only be resolved within the family” (Ignatieff 1999:7). Behind the pious language of peace it is possible to discern the insidious old ideology of colonial repression. The old ideology of nineteenth century colonialism assumed that it was the “white man’s burden” to “bring peace to warring tribes” (Churchill in Kaplan 2003:23). The neo-colonialism of peace deprives the natives of their freedom and humanity by defining them as “victims” of war and confining them, to “refugee camps” that are similar to the old totalitarian “concentration camps” where the “victims” are cared for by patronising humanitarian aid agencies (cf. Žižek 2002a:91).

Bawer (2007) suspects that peace studies and peace discourse of activism is essentially a “peace racket” and the proclaimed humanitarian and anti-war sentiments are disguises for promoting anti-Western Marxist inspired ideology. Indeed, as Rapoport (1985:22) notes, for the Marxists (and the contemporary “progressive” humanitarians) “peace is the continuation of struggle only by other means” which is no different from Clausewitz’s (1852) assertion that war is a continuation of politics by other. For the Marxists there is no distinction between war and peace, because these are phases in the uninterrupted class

war and struggle to replace capitalism with socialist world domination. Thus war is a total strategy that effectively makes use of the interchangeability of political and military weapons (cf. Fuller 1975:202). For most of the twentieth century Marxists revolutionaries masquerading as pacifists waged their battle against their Western capitalist class enemies under the guise of “peace offensive” (cf. Aron 1955; Scruton 2006). Indeed, as Bourke (1999:360) notes, it was not unusual to see “peace” demonstrators carrying banners supporting communist armed struggle. In the twenty-first century peace movements have adopted military strategies to declare “symbolic war” that includes the use of Molotov cocktails against the police (cf. Juris 2005:413). Peace activism finally demonstrated its absurd logic when “on 15 February 2003, about a million liberal-minded people marched through London to oppose the overthrow of a fascist regime” (cf. Cohen 2007:280).

Indeed such historical progression of the peace discourse is not surprising when the intellectual context within which it emerged is considered. From its beginning in the time of the ancient sages peace discourse gained more prominence. Modern tradition of peace discourse may be located in the medieval cleric Erasmus' condemnation of war that was provoked by the loss of his pupil Alexander, son of King James IX, both killed in the Battle of Flodden (cf. Howard 1978:14). Thus Erasmus' promotion of peace is motivated by a lamentation about the loss of his financial and political benefactor in battle. Promotion of peace was taken-up by idealist Enlightenment philosophers. In the post-World War II context various forces converged to promote the peace discourse: in USA the Democrats adopted the idea of internationalising Roosevelt's New Deal as beneficial to capitalist expansion and as excuse for political and military intervention to rescue “victims” of Russian aggression; in Europe former defeated German nationalists take the moral high-ground presenting themselves as new pacifists, while naive liberals and Western Marxists promote peace following dictates from the Soviet's that turned war discourse into a deceptive peace discourse.

The way in which both liberals and communists did come to agree about “peace” in the second half of the twentieth century is no coincidence. The social construction of peace is a dominant ideology in present social theory and gained this dominant position as the result of war. As Michael Mann (in Joas 2003:142–143) notes, military victories and defeats determine the course of social theory. The present pacifist’s theories usurped previous more war-centric ones:

unfortunately for the militarists, their armies lost. The Austrian Empire disintegrated; Russia was conquered by Marxism; Germany lost two wars and its militarist theories were outlawed from civilisation. Finally, the United States became a super-power and rediscovered the usefulness of British transnational *laissez faire* for its own global hegemony. As liberalism and Marxism divide up the geo-political and geo-economic world, they naturally dominate its sociology. Since 1945 the militarists have been forgotten, the waverers purged of their more violent side ... and the 'classic tradition' of liberal/Marxist pacific transnational sociology has been enshrined in pedagogy (Mann in Joas 2003:142–143).

The type of theory that becomes dominant is the result of legislation and inscription of power rather than pure scientific merit of the theory itself; social theory is re-written to accommodate the dominant world view. Thus peace discourse is another means of conducting war and gaining victory by deception. Such position is inadvertently expressed in the peace discourse, for example, Marsella (2005) notes that violence and war throughout human history have been the evolutionary forces promoting the survival of the fittest. Therefore Marsella (2005:652) concludes that there is “growing evidence that non-violence and peace may be equally compelling options for the survival of the fittest.” The fittest are the new warriors of humanitarian intervention and the peace enforcement troops that are waging “war against war”, and like all ancient warriors their success depends on their ability to gain victory by deception. As Foucault (2000a:378) puts it:

The success of history belongs to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them; controlling this complex mechanism, they will make it function so as to overcome the rulers through their own rules.

## **2.8 Social science police: media scholars and global surveillance**

The role of communication and the mass media is assumed to be central to conflict prevention and imposition of peace. Such assumption is enshrined in UNESCO's constitutions and other declarations proclaiming that "war begins in the minds of man" and thus ascribing to communication and the mass media positive peace-inducing properties (Becker 1982:227). It follows that war and conflict are assumed to be the result of breakdown of communication. Therefore, more and better communication is essential to prevent conflict because once people have more information about each other they will understand each other and end their conflicts.

However such assumptions may project unrealistic expectations about the power of the mass media and communication. Moreover, these assumptions are not supported by any scientific and empirical evidence (Hamelink 2008:78–79). These assumptions are merely signs of wishful thinking because while *idealists* naively believe that wars begin in peoples' mind and are caused by ideas and beliefs, *realists* correctly suggest that war is the cause of ideas and religious beliefs (cf. Richards 2006:651). Wars do not begin in people mind but are the result of real material conditions and the constant struggle for life (cf. Becker 1982:227; Hamelink 2008:78–79). This is evident in the emerging "clash of civilisations" (Huntington 1998) of the twenty-first century that is commonly, and erroneously, assumed to be caused by divergent religious belief. But as Richards (2006:651) notes:

If religious difference is a factor in modern conflicts it is because people with different basic collective interests come into contention

over those interests while expressing differences of organisation as differences of belief. War is not a product of clash of civilisations but clash of civilisations is a product of war.

Indeed, as Nietzsche (1969:74) perceptibly notes: contrary to the common belief that assumes that the good cause sanctifies war, the truth is that it is “the good war that hallows any cause.” War is the ultimate and efficient conflict resolution mechanism: removing or killing the opponent eliminates the conflict. Better and clear communication or free dialogic exchange do not resolve conflict and *successful* communication or rational discourse do not imply agreement and consensus. On the contrary, it is more likely that clear and honest communication is the source of conflicts. Peters explains that conflict is not a result of misunderstanding but of disagreement:

Communication sometimes masquerades as the great solution to human ills, and yet most of the problems that arise in human relations do not come from a failure to match signs with meanings. In most cases, situations and syntax make the sense of words perfectly clear; the basis of conflict is not a failure of communication but a difference of commitment. We generally understand each other's words quite well: we just don't agree (Peters 1989:397).

This is evident in the fact that the global increase in communication and social interaction that was believed to increase understanding and eliminate conflict resulted in increased disagreement and conflict (cf. Bauman 2001b:138; Huntington 1998:20; Ignatieff 1999:57; Therborn 1995:130; Žižek 2009:50). The reason for this is according Meyrowitz (1986:317), that people always interact better at a distance but “when people share the same environment, they often see more differences among themselves than when they are further apart.” Indeed, as Keeley (1997) notes, it is evident throughout history that social groups that regularly intermarry, and trade also more frequently wage war against one another.



But regardless of the lack of supporting scientific evidence for the assumption that communication and the mass media have pacifying power and can eliminate war, such beliefs persist and are propagated by powerful international political organisations. Removing communication breakdowns between individuals, groups, societies, and the “communication breakdown in the global village” (Hale 1999:143) has become the ideological commitment of most communication scholars. Thus scholars offer wholesale “quick-fix communication-based solutions to personal, social and economic problems” (Putnis 1993:17). Resolving conflict is considered as a simple technical problem: it does not matter that there are substantive issues for the conflict: all that is required to solve conflict or end war is to remove the communication *barriers*. Resolving conflict thus seems as simple act whereby the substantive issue of the conflict is transformed into a technical problem; the result is that the reality of the basic conflict is denied and repairing the “communication failure” becomes the central concern (cf. Hall & Hewitt 1970:19). Such obsession with communication is based on the assumption that communication is both the cause of many of our social problem as well as the solution for all our problems, as Peters (1989:387) puts it: “Communication appeals to us because of the way the concept seems to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.” The combination of beliefs and ideology among communication scholars has a dire result. As Morrison (2005:411–412) notes, “the problem that tends to afflict communication scholars in writing about war ... is ... the importation of sets of pacifist sentiment” and prevalence of self-righteous liberal ideology that results in vacuous sentimental texts that dispense platitudes and “read after the fashion of religious cults that use pseudo-scientific reasoning to promote a point by giving the appearance of scholarship where no scholarship exists.”

According to Hamelink (2008) even though elimination of conflict from human life may be wishful thinking, counterproductive and based on faulty assumptions about the power of the mass media, nevertheless, communication scholars could still have gainful employment as members of a new global social science police. Hamelink (2008) envisages police squads of mass media analysts serving as *watchdogs* over the mass media. Scholars should engage in

continuous surveillance of media content and document all signs of *warmongering thoughts* in mass media reports. Thus Hamelink (2008:82) proposes to that

an International Media Alert System (IMAS) is needed to monitor media contents in areas of conflict. This system would provide an 'early warning' where and when media set the climate for crimes against humanity and begin to motivate people to kill others (Hamelink 2008:82).

When such signs of political activity have been identified the offending media will be reported to international judicial tribunals for punishment and "military intervention by democratic paratroopers" will be called in to suppress local political activities (cf. Badiou 2005:78).

In the name of abstract compassion for "distant suffering" (cf. Sontag 2004; Höijer 2004) demands are made for military humanitarian intervention to eliminate all those that dare to disturb the peace. As a journalist puts it: if non intervention to stop war means that people are being killed, "a measure of enforcement is going to be necessary" even if the use of such force results in new causalities, because such intervention is justified because its aim is to stop the war (cf. Lloyd 2004:175). It seems that for journalists and peace activists ending war is the only thing that matters, therefore despite the fact that external military intervention will kill innocent people; the killing is justified because it will end war once and for all. In other words, this is another way to say that human beings are the threat to peace, and only people could be eliminated then peace will be guaranteed.

An example of external military and "information intervention" to promote peace, democracy and free speech was undertaken in the Bosnian conflict (cf. Hammond 2003:87). A Bosnian Serb broadcasting station satirised the occupying NATO peacekeeping forces and broadcasted critical commentary claiming that the UN International Tribunal to prosecute alleged war crime was a political instrument and was prejudiced against the Serbs. The UN demanded

an apology and re-transmission of the information without editorial comment and the broadcasters obliged.

This compliance was ignored, however, and Nato troops seized control of the broadcaster's transmitters. Following this show of force, the High Representative drew up new rules for Bosnian Serb broadcasting, re-wrote the organisation's editorial charter, vetted its executive, and appointed a new transitional director (Hammond 2003:87).

Later Bosnian transmission was suspended again for broadcasting old Second World War films and for supposedly carrying "intense Serbian cultural programming" (Hammond 2003:87). Such totalitarian censorship was justified by the *peace-mongers* as a boost for free speech and justified by the claim that "the media have not done enough to promote freedom of expression and reconciliation" (cf. Hammond 2003:87). As Hammond (2003:87) ironically comments: "As if the surest route to free expression was to hand the power of censorship to an unelected foreigner," and using such criteria "perhaps someone should shut down the BBC, an incorrigible purveyor of 'intense British cultural programming', including incessant wartime films and dramas."

Hidden behind the scholars' peace discourse may be a desire for social domination, to pacify society and to reshape it according to the normative *counterfactual* utopian model. In this venture the mass media assume a central role. In order to promote the establishment of a relative state of peace throughout the world a form of "new guerrilla journalism" that has the illusive name of "peace journalism" is being actively propagated (cf. Morrison 2005:411–412). The same motives are found behind the propagation of global ethics for the mass media (cf. Sonderling 2008). Thus the pious claims represent the desires of *peace fundamentalist* or "militants for peace" (cf. Appleby 2000:121). The *humanitarian military intervention* and *peace building* are euphemism for war by other means (cf. Rieff 2002). It seems likely that real aim of peace enforcement is to outlaw politics, to criminalise politics and

replace politics with the authoritarian rule by unelected global government. Liberalism is the prime example of an anti-politics movement. For the liberal politics is essentially deliberation and debate. By transforming politics into a peaceful deliberation or into Habermas' *rational discourse* politics becomes a polite conversation. As Carl Schmitt (2005) notes, deliberations and liberal chatter are aimed at avoiding political decisions. Likewise, Habermas' idea of rational discourse is an imagined counterfactual "ideal speech community" and not suitable for political action. Politics is not based exclusively on the rational discussion but on practical process of votes counting and arriving at a decision. Moreover, to arrive at rational consensus according to Habermas' criteria may take infinite time as against the need for decisiveness of action in political contingencies. Nor can Habermas' rational discourse allow for democratic participation because it excludes those participants that promote their own political interests.

The peace vocabulary conceals the fact that peace is a "continuous police action exercised on the global *polis*"; peacekeeping is a perpetual war and peace is a continuation of war by other means (cf. Alliez and Negri 2003:110–111). According to Alliez and Negri (2003:112) peace has become the postmodern label for war.

## **2.9 From *polis* to *polizie*: constructing the global humanitarian concentration camp**

A close reading of peace discourse reveals that the dream of an ideal peaceful society is an illusion. In the Western liberal democratic societies the "pacification of existence" and elimination of war and competition between individuals and groups and the enforcement of *tolerance* and *consensus* have become new forms of violent physiological repression and social oppression. As Baudrillard (2002b) contends:

It is because our society no longer allows space for real violence, historical or class violence, that it generates a virtual, reactive violence ... More subtle than the violence of aggression: a violence

of deterrence, pacification, neutralisation, control – a violence of quiet extermination, a genetic, communicational violence – the violence of consensus and conviviality which tends to abolish – through drugs, disease prevention, psychical and media regulation – the very roots of evil and hence of all radicality. The violence of a system which roots out any form of negativity and singularity (including the ultimate form of singularity – death itself). The violence of a society in which negativity is virtually prohibited, conflict is prohibited, death is prohibited. A violence which, in a way, puts an end to violence itself (Baudrillard 2002b:92–93).

In the name of toleration and consensus no one is allowed to criticise an opposing point of view nor is allowed to say something important or controversial. According to Žižek (2008:1) intolerance is presented as tolerance and one is not allowed to express strong ideas that can upset the status quo; only “weak ideas” that have no consequence are allowed to be expressed. Ultimately a culture of anti-politics is constructed: political demands are either criminalised or medicalised and political opponents are declared to be insane and incarcerated in mental institutions because they dare to oppose the system (cf. Žižek 2008). According to Baudrillard (2002b:93) such a process of pacification leads to death of the social because over-protection leads to a loss of defences and immunity. In Western society an understanding of war and peace is deformed, as Bloom (1987:228) puts it: “Nietzsche sought with his value philosophy to restore the harsh conflicts for which men were willing to die, to restore the tragic sense of life.” However as the ideologues of pacifism believe that conflict is an evil they have deformed Nietzsche’s philosophy to make it conform to the pacifist vision and thus “conflict, the condition of creativity for Nietzsche, is for us a cry for therapy” (Bloom 1987:228–229). Ultimately the ideal peaceful world resembles a totalitarian state as Agamben (1998:123, 166) notes, the model or paradigm for the modern pacifist liberal society is the old concentration camp.

## 2.10 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to challenge the taken-for-granted assumption that peace is entirely a positive condition. A review of the peace literature and a reading of the discourse of scholars and peace activists show that peace may not be an absolute moral good. On the contrary, peace can be oppressive and lead to tyranny. The oppression and tyranny result from the equation of peace with order, predictability and conformity and condemnation of freedom as a disturbance of the peace and ultimately the imposition of peace leads to suppression of freedom and elimination of opposing political views. As Mouffe (2005:1–2) notes, uncritical acceptance of the idea of peace as bureaucratically ordered society leads to destruction of democracy because struggles, contentions and agonistic confrontations are the driving forces of a vibrant democracy. Moreover, in many instances, peace is a disguise to conduct war by other means. Thus rather than encouraging communication, peace demands and imposes silence. An absolute warless world is either utopia or madness, a world where war and conflict are outlawed is no longer a real world but a world dominated by tyrants and allows no dissent (Schall 2004). Thus as Van Creveld concludes (1991:221–222):

The only way to bring about perpetual peace would be to somehow eradicate man's willingness, even eagerness, to take risks of any kind up to, and including, death ... probably it can be exercised only by turning people into zombies ... Robots would have to control men, men themselves turned into robots ... So monstrous is the vision as to make even war look like a blessing.

There is nothing natural behind the belief in the idea that peace has a primacy in human life. As was seen in this chapter peace is a human invention, and indeed this was well put by Sir Henry Maine: "War appears to be as old as mankind, but peace is a human invention" (Howard 2001). And such invention over the centuries has become the dominant Liberal tradition as documented by Howard (1978). While Kant acknowledged that peace may be a utopian dream

and realised that it may be the peace of the graveyard, modern and contemporary writers have taken the utopian dream seriously. This raises the suspicion that earlier generations of philosophers' propagation of peace was tempered by their experience of war, their vision of the tragic sense of life and possession of a sense of irony about the unreality of the utopian dream of peace. Such sensibilities are lacking among modern and contemporary thinkers. This raises the question as to why some modern philosophers and social theorists have taken Kant's joke of eternal peace seriously. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to deal with this issue in depth, nevertheless some answers may be suggested. In the first instance modern peace discourse is shaped by the prevalent perceptions of war and influenced by the outcome of war as already suggested by Mann (in Joas 2003:142–143). Being influenced by the outcome of war implies, according to Schivelbusch (2004:18–19), that the losers of the war attempt to justify their defeat by taking the moral high ground to explain their miserable situation. Thus having been pacified they now claim a universal moral status for pacification and demonise the victors. Another reason for the promotion of pacifism is the relative lack of power of the intellectuals. Many of the contemporary promoters of peace have developed a sense of self-importance and promote themselves as practical policy adviser rather than critical intellectual thinkers. And as intellectual work is increasingly funded by state and international institutions and infused by dominant ideologies, these will be reflected and perpetuated in the intellectual knowledge production that conforms to political correctness. The anti-war bias of the intellectuals is also strengthened by their lack of personal experience of war because war has become the prerogative of professional soldiers and has been relegated to the periphery of modern societies. Indeed, Sidebottom (1993:242) uncovers a similar situation among the Greek philosophers living in the Roman Empire. While philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle living in the Classical and Hellenistic ages had personal experience of warfare, such experience was lacking in latter generations because war has become a distant reality. Thus not having knowledge about the role of warfare in ensuring the safe existence of

their society they could flirt with pacifism and condemn war (cf. Sidebottom 1993:250, 262).

What the review in this chapter uncovered is that the assumed social primacy of peace is a social construction and represents a dominant ideology. Such ideological bias has a negative effect on development of social theory because as Mann (2004:4) argues it results in social theory being written as "a happy, progressive, moral tale." The ultimate result is that the contemporary student does not have much knowledge of war or of history because, as Denitch (in Campbell 1998:55) discovers, historical facts are unfashionable in academic circles. The worst victim of Western ignorance of history and ideological bias against war is the African continent where the misrepresentations of warfare and enforcement of peace lead to promotion of disastrous policies and misdirected research (cf. Mbembe 2001:4–7; Pottier 2002:64; Rieff 2002). Thus, an unbiased understanding of war and its formative characters can greatly contribute to an understanding of peace.

The next chapter will begin a recovery of ideas of war by reading representative interdisciplinary texts. It will review, read and interpret the literature of major philosophers and social thinkers, ranging from the ancient Greeks to contemporary, mainly Western theorists and reconstruct their vision of war. It is hoped that such an extensive review will provide a new perspective to understand war and communication.



## CHAPTER 3

# HOMO POLEMOS: I KILL, THEREFORE I AM

## HOW WAR AND KILLING CONFER HUMAN IDENTITY

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.)

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)

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)

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)

### 3.1 Introduction

Following from the previous chapter where the self-evident assumptions about the primacy of peace were questioned, the aim of this chapter is to begin a reconstruction of a different understanding of war. This chapter offers a reading and traces the representation of war expressed in interdisciplinary texts of philosophers and social thinkers beginning in ancient Greece. Such a reading hopes to reveal a Western tradition of thought that considers war as more valuable and as being a defining characteristic of humanity and as the foundation for conferring identity for individuals and societies. From this perspective war can be assumed as both the *individualising* and *collectivising* human institution. While war is a social and collective activity at its core is the action of fighting and the act of killing that require interpersonal engagement. It is this engagement that the ancient thinkers assumed as being the source of identity and meaning for human existence.

### 3.2 Towards a new perspective on war and rediscovery of old tradition

For most contemporary scholars, killing and war are instinctively assumed to be universally traumatic experiences because war and killing are presumed to be foreign to the *normal* meaning of being human. However, this perspective overlooks the fact that the meaning of war as destructive traumatic experience is a cultural product of cultural construction which began in earnest after the First World War and elaborated and reinforced since the Vietnam war (cf. Lomsky-Feder 2004:84). Moreover, this condemnatory perspective that only sees war as being negative and destructive ignores the fact that there exists another Western tradition of thought, with a supporting strong historical genealogy, that considers war as positive force whereby fighting and killing are rites of passage and enable the warrior to construct a sense of identity and to actualise the supreme value of human existence (Bourke 1999; Lomsky-Feder 2004:83–84). Moreover, not only Western tradition but numerous non-western traditions consider war, strife, conflict and contest as a source of meaning. Ever since the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus identified *war as the father of all things*, almost all religious scripts have attested, and major philosophers of all ages affirmed, and human history confirmed the fact that war is a generative force of meaning in human life. War is the central theme for Greek poets Homer and Hesiod; first historians Herodotus and Thucydides recorded wars in great detail and following their example in the Roman world, it is guiding reference for Cicero's studies. For modern thought, beginning with Machiavelli, Hobbes and Hegel the reality of war is affirmed as a subject for philosophical thought. This affirmation expressed by Nietzsche's (1968:33) statement that *life is the consequence of war, and society is a means to war* is affirmed again in the twentieth century by Emmanuel Levinas' (1991:23) suspicion that war is human reality and the human being manifests himself and acquires meaning in, and through war. For Levinas (1991:21) the reality of war seems to challenge his preoccupation with the ethics of peace and contemplating the war experiences of the twentieth century he wonders "whether we are not duped by morality" because when confronted by reality of war morality seems artificial and abstract.

What Levinas indicates by the suspicion is that morality deals with abstract notions – it may lead to self-delusion. This seems to express an affinity with Nietzsche’s suspicion that morality and moral discourse are fictions whereby the imagined world and the idealised human action have no reference in reality. This emphasis on *ought* to be and the neglect of what *is*, becomes seductive and in turn self destructive. Such an understanding was already evident to Machiavelli and shared by Nietzsche (cf. Sonderling 2008). The idealisation of moral fiction can become a vice and be more dangerous and murderous than any war, as noted by writers such as Arendt (1998b), Glenn Gray (1998), John Gray (2003) and Ignatieff (2001). They all point out that the essence of moral thinking are abstract notions that have corresponding inhuman abstract emotions. Abstract notions and abstract emotions pose a danger because they may be inappropriate for concrete occasions and lead to murderous self-righteousness and inhumanity that can surpass the assumed inhumanity ascribed to war.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the naked truth of war is the only reality check against delusion of false morality (cf. Arendt 1998b:viii; Glenn Gray 1998; John Gray 2003:85; Ignatieff 2001:214). Thus in the twenty-first century, journalist Chris Hedges (2003:3–7) rediscovers that only *war is a force that gives us meaning* when peace has emptied all meaning from life in the postmodern world (cf. Hammond 2007:11; Fukuyama 1992:328–331).

### **3.3 Beyond the myth of the noble savage**

Most contemporary thinkers assume that the *human being* is characterised by peaceful cooperation, empathy and understanding, while violence and war are presumed to be pathological and entirely *inhuman*. In other words, war is supposedly an “upsurge of *the archaic*” (Mouffe 1993:1). This assumed dichotomy between *human* and *inhuman* is based on the idea that human beings are a distinct species and removed from the animal world (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2007:340). Gribbin and Gribbin (1998:1) note that “the idea that humankind is special is so deeply ingrained that even people whose training

ought to have opened their eyes can fall prey to the cosy assumption of human superiority.”

The human being is imagined as standing beyond nature and whose primary mode of existence is presumed as being a disembodied spirit with no relation to other animals (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2007:340). And if the earthly origin of the human being must be acknowledged, the idealism still persists and it is assumed that man must be 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 and the result of corruption brought by civilisation. Such view tends to confirm the pacifists’ self-delusion because "it is far more contorting to claim decent from imaginary pacifists who live in our dreams of prehistoric peace" (Bigelow 1969:156).

Against the pacifist view of human nature, Hobbes (Foucault 2003:89) assumes that the original state of nature was a condition of permanent war of every man against every man and life was solitary, brutal and short. While Hobbes may be right about the state of war and human life may have been brutal, nevertheless, life was never solitary because human beings are by nature social or political animals, as Aristotle (1964:28) already discovered. Indeed, Hobbes (1958) acknowledges that his vision of the state of nature as being a condition of war where every man fights against every man is imaginary and may have never existed anywhere. Moreover, Hobbes (1958) acknowledges that the state of nature more appropriately describes the condition of social groups ruled by

kings and persons of sovereign authority because of their independency, are in continual jealousies and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing and their eyes fixed on one another – that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbors – which is a posture of war (Hobbes 1958:108).

Thus Hobbes seems to acknowledge that man in his natural state never had a solitary life but it is only a metaphoric expression to denote the condition of

social groups that are in a permanent state of war-like disposition or are engaged in actual war (cf. Hobbes 1958:108).

For Hobbes' imagined state of permanent primitive warfare is the result of primitive democracy: equal ability of each man to kill. This equal ability to kill persuaded primordial human beings to become constitutional experts and sign a social contract to establish an ordered social structure governed by a centralised monarchy in order to avert the terrible violent chaos of the state of nature. While Hobbes alludes to a bloody and violent state of nature, this is only an imagined state that is always deferred but never existed because of the primordial social contact, thus as Foucault (2003:92) notes: Hobbes presents a theatre. Ultimately, Hobbes' view seems to converge with the peaceful idealism of Rousseau: the one assumes a peaceful origin of man and the other imagines *a priori* civilised social arrangement that prevents a return to a state of nature. Thus even the view of Hobbes is pacified and made to fit within the dominant pacifist ideology.

This presumed peaceful human nature has become the current politically-correct orthodoxy enshrined in international declarations and legislated as if it were the sole scientific truth (cf. Keeley 1997; Pinker 1999:45–46; Pinker 2003:336; van Ham 2010). As Keeley (1997) documents, the pacifist ideology is so prevalent that it has become an epidemic in the social sciences to attribute an imagined peacefulness to pre-historical epochs. The assumed peaceful origin of human beings has become a dogma and is upheld by the wilful distortion of all historical data that contradicts such an assumption. With the prevalence of a pacifist ideology among intellectual elites the central role of war is mostly absent from social theories (cf. Brown 1992; Joas 2003). It is as if modernity comes into existence without violence and war (cf. Joas 2003:30–31).

Consideration of war is also absent from the images of *man* (or the 'human being') that dominate the discourses of Western social science and communication scholarship. Two dominant images claim to represent the

primary essence of human nature: Man as a *Homo Sapiens*, an image of a spiritual human being conjured by Descartes. Thus it is as if this disembodied and solitary rational thinking individual affirms his humanity by declaring “*I think, therefore I am.*”

The other image presents the human being as a *Homo Faber*, or *Homo Economicus*, man as the toolmaker, craftsman or manufacturer of goods motivated by rational economic calculation. An extension of the economic image is the *Homo Laborans*<sup>2</sup>, man as the *soulless labourer* of the capitalist economy (cf. Cramer 2002:1845). This material image considers man as being dependent on skills and labour for survival. Thus while Hegel emphasised the primacy of the human spirit, he also sees man as “the working animal” who is able to conquer nature and by his labour transform it to his desire. Extending on Hegel, Marx sees labour as the primary means for survival and also as a form self-alienation (cf. Ferrarin 2000:291). From this perspective man is defined by his labour and production of goods and attains his humanity by declaring: “*I labour, therefore I am.*”

These two images of man reflect the old dichotomy that considers the human beings as consisting of a *body* and a *soul*. These also represent the two dominant ideologies of *idealism* and *materialism* while both are grounded in the Western ideological bias of *individualism*. The idealism is derived from the religious conception of the divine origin of man as spirit, while materialism is derived from the secular-religion of the Enlightenment and Karl Marx’s materialism. Descartes’ disembodied thinker is a reflection of man as a product of divine creation, as if the human is a “Spirit” that descended from heaven.

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<sup>2</sup> The *Homo Faber* could be characterised as a craftsman exhibiting a certain joy and pride in creating objects, such as the blacksmith in Homer’s *Iliad* producing weapons in ancient society, while the *Homo Laborans* is a soulless labourer concerned merely with necessity of maintaining the basic functions of “bare life” of the living body (cf. Agamben 1998:3).

Man as a labourer is Marx's materialist inversion of Hegel's idealism and considers man as responding to earthly needs of physical survival by self-reliance and redemption through labour.

But even Marx's materialism does not escape the taint of idealism evident in his pronouncement that: "In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven" (Marx 1972:118). Unfortunately, in their haste to construct peaceful heavenly utopias, neither the idealists nor the materialists spend enough time on earth to observe reality.<sup>3</sup> Thus both philosophies share an *immaculate perception* of man that assumes an *Immaculate Conception* as the origin of man.<sup>4</sup> The imagined paradise is dominant in contemporary vision of postmodernist philosophies' negation of reality and a retreat into the *virtual world* or *hyperreality*. As if humans do not live in a real world but only exist in an imagined symbolic universe of language and discourse. Ultimately *hyperreality* is a secular reinterpretation of the religious vision whereby the pearly gates of heaven are transformed to the *pearly gates of cyberspace* (cf. Wertheim 2000). This is as if to confirm Carl Schmitt's (2005) contention that most of social theory's concepts and conceptions are borrowed from theology.

As against the idealist conception of man as disembodied thinker the *Homo sapiens*, and against the materialist conceptions of man as the labouring *homo faber*, a realist image of man is to present him as a warrior: the *homo polemos*. Following such line of thought Bigelow (1969:43) contends that indicative of the human characteristic is that "man should not be defined as the *toolmaker*, but rather as the *warmaker*." Thus against the claim to be human by proclaiming /

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<sup>3</sup> Before Marx settled on the economic determinism he had a more realistic and excellent understanding of the central importance of war in human and social life, as will be seen below.

<sup>4</sup> The concepts "immaculate perception" and "Immaculate Conception" was used to discuss how the Afrikaner developed a sense of pure racial identity (cf. Sonderling 1998b:342).

*think, therefore I am*, it is possible to imagine that man became a human being when he proclaimed: *I kill, therefore I am*.

### **3.4 The primacy of war in human existence**

The problem with the two dominant images of man – as a thinker and a worker – is that these are not primary characteristics of a human being. This is Aristotle's (1964:32) conclusion when he contends that human "life is action not production." To put it more clearly, the *human condition* is characterised by three fundamental human activities of *labour*, *work* and *action*. But it is human *action* that has a primacy over the others because it is the only activity that goes on directly between men without mediation by things or matter (Arendt 1998a:7). Moreover, as will be seen further on and in the next chapter, human action is the foundation for human thought.

Huizinga (1971:19–21) considers the activity of *play* as the primordial and primary form of human action that provides the foundation for development of human society and civilisation (cf. Huizinga 1971:23). However, Huizinga's conception of man as a *Homo Ludens* – man as player – reveals that the play is a manifestation of *contest* and *agon* and is intertwined with, and indistinguishable from the activity of *fighting* and *war*. Indeed, it is Huizinga's contention that *play* and *fighting* forms a single and indivisible field of human action (cf. Huizinga 1971:60–61; Huizinga is examined in more detail in Chapter 5 in this study). Such a unity of play and fighting is evident everywhere in antiquity:

We have to feel our way into the archaic sphere of thought, were serious combat with weapons and all kinds of contests ranging from the most trifling games to bloody and mortal strife were comprised, together with play proper, in the singular fundamental idea of a struggle with fate ... Seen in this way, the application of the word 'play' to battle can hardly be called conscious metaphor. Play is battle and battle is play (Huizinga 1971:60–61).



Even if the play is deadly it still remains play (Huizinga 1971:61, 69). Thus “there is no transition from ‘battle to play’... nor from play to battle” because they are indivisible (cf. Huizinga 1971:95). According to Huizinga (1971:110) the unity of “fighting and play” and “war and game” blend absolutely together.

Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game... Language everywhere must have expressed matters in that way from the moment words for combat and play existed (Huizinga 1971:110).

War and play are also directly interlinked and are coeval with speech, as is evident from the primary exemplar of the figure of Homer’s Achilles characterised as “doer of great deed and the speaker of great words” (Arendt 1998a:25). In Homer’s text it is evident that war has a primacy over speech because it is the action that is immortalised by words (The link between fighting and words will be examined in the next chapter).

War is also assumed as the foundation of social life as it brings people into a military unit that ultimately becomes the foundation for a political community: it is as if war makes society and society makes war (Tilly 1975). More extensively Marx (1972:115–116) considers war and conquest of territory as the driving forces of history. As Marx (1972:115-116) acknowledges:

This whole interpretation of history appears to be contradicted by the fact of conquest: Up till now violence, war, pillage, murder and robbery, etc. have been accepted as the driving force of history.

War lays the foundation for human division of labour and constructs a social hierarchy. For the ancient Greeks the division of labour is between the noble work of fighting and killing – whether in war or hunting – as against the mundane labour of production performed by the slaves. In the ancient world and in primitive societies the occupation of the respectable man was hunting and war or more precisely, noble free man was defined by his ability to use leisure and war was the ultimate leisure; in contrast the woman was tasked with

cooking and agricultural production (cf. Davie 2003:25). The woman and the slave mostly share a common status, because both were acquired as captives in war.

Moreover, the life and work of the slave is entirely dependent on the noble action of fighting of the master who belongs to the warrior class. In a more fundamental way work, production and maintaining human life demand territory and non-human material and these are acquired primarily by war. 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." The property so acquired refers to territory, slaves and women, all are assumed as essential for reproduction of life. According to Schmitt (Ulmen 1996), the territory and goods are firstly acquired by conquest then these are distributed among the warriors and only then can be used for production.

To the extent that labour could claim primacy, it is directly related to the labour of war. This is evident in Homer's use of the word "work" to describe what is done in battle: the hard work of battle is the act of killing (cf. Coker 2007:29). Marx perceptively notes in the *Grundrisse*: "War is therefore among the oldest labours" (Marx in Lichtheim 1982:151). Hegel acknowledges that the human labour or *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). Marx agrees with Hegel and concludes that the oldest form of human labour is the labour of fighting and war:

War is therefore the greatest communal task, the greatest joint effort required to occupy the objective conditions of living existence, or to guard and perpetuate their occupation. Hence the community, composed of families, originally has a warlike, military, organisation, and this is one of the conditions of its proprietorship (Marx in Lichtheim 1982:149; Marx in Bryant 1996).

War is the greatest communal task demanding the free labour of all members of the community to guarantee communal survival (cf. Marx in Lichtheim

1982:149, 151). Therefore, human history is inaugurated by the master and slave dialectic and it is the primary war-action of the master that set history in motion.

The social hierarchy of master and slave is, according to Hegel, the outcome of the primordial battle to the death for recognition; the willingness to risk death and ability to kill defines a human being as against the natural fear of death shared by animals and coward slaves. 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). Thus for Hegel truth is not a divine revelation but ascertained from real war and social conflict:

Hegel does not need a God who would reveal the truth to him. And to find the truth, he does not need to hold dialogues with "the men in the city," or even to have a "discussion" with himself or to "meditate" *a la Descartes*. (Besides, no purely verbal discussion, no solitary meditation, can lead to the truth, of which Fighting and Work are the only "criteria.") He can find it alone ... But all this is possible only because there *have been* cities in which men had discussions against a background of fighting and work, while they worked and fought for and because of their opinions (Kojève 1980:186).

Marx notes that "war attains complete development before peace" and that it is an error to imagine that the economic phenomena of wage labour, productive forces and commercial relations have developed in social peace. According to Marx they have "developed at an earlier date through war and in armies" rather "than within bourgeois society" (cf. McLellan 1973:54). In similar manner McLuhan (1969) concludes that in the Roman world the main labour force was the military.

The reversal of primacy of war and labour suggests a different view of history. Therefore according to Ehrenreich (1998:143) contrary to the Marxists<sup>5</sup> belief in economic determinism, "it is not only the *means of production* that shape human societies, but *the means of destruction*." As such war is assumed as a universal phenomenon, it is trans-historical and trans-social, practiced at all time and places (Hillman 2005:22; Keegan 2004a:48; Gilpin 1987). As Ehrenreich (1998:232) puts it:

Analyse any war-making society and, sure enough, you will find the practice of war apparently embedded in and dependent upon that society's economy, culture, system of gender relations, and so forth. But change that economy and culture – as in going from hunting-gathering to an agricultural way of life, or from agriculture to industry – and war will, most likely, be found to persist.

Kaldor (in Shaw 1988) suggests that it is appropriate to acknowledge the importance of the "mode of warfare" alongside the Marxist conception of the "mode of production" that determines a society. According to Toffler and Toffler (1995:35) the way a society makes war reflects the way that society works and produces wealth. Ultimately, war expresses the way a society lives and its culture. This means according to military historian John Keegan (2004a:12) that war "is always an expression of culture, often the determinant of cultural forms, (and) in some societies the culture itself." Or simply stated: war is "the perpetuation of culture by its own means" (Keegan 2004a:46).

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<sup>5</sup> Ehrenreich's contention is that it is "contrary to Marx's belief" but such claim is an error because the primacy of war is clearly acknowledged by Marx and Engels. However, no such understanding is shown by latter *pacifist* Marxists that place the emphasis on the primacy of economic determination.

### 3.5 Inhuman is human and human is inhuman: learning to understand war from the ancients

The discussion in the previous section revealed a different understanding of war as against the contemporary understanding informed by pacifist interpretation. To understand war it is useful to pursue further the way the ancient's cultures understood it.

Machiavelli (1970:277–278) proposes that our image of the peaceful human being as a divine creation is a reversal of reality. From Machiavelli's (1970:277–278) understanding, Christianity holds the real world in contempt and only “glorifies humble and contemplative men, rather than acknowledge men of action”, as did the ancient pagans whose realist understanding “did not beautify men unless they were replete with worldly glory.” And for the ancients, worldly glory was primarily gained in warfare. For the ancient Greeks “man was a fighting animal, or he was no man” (Havelock 1972:25). Machiavelli's condemnation of Christian pacifism is a little misguided because he is well aware of the warrior Popes and the military capabilities of the Church during his own life time (cf. Chambers 2006:109–111).

Following on Machiavelli's insight and the ancient Greek philosophers' recognition of war as primary factor in human life, Nietzsche (1997) concludes that our ideas about what it means to be human and inhuman are hopelessly reversed. The primacy of war in all social relations contradicts all the belief in some *primordial peace* that existed in an imagined paradise that modern thinkers assume to have been the origin of humanity. Therefore, to ascribe primacy to peace is to misunderstand the human condition, 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.

Nietzsche (1968) acknowledges the biological necessity of war but also realises that while biology and genetics '*made*' the human being, this does not mean that man is entirely '*determined*' by biology and genetics. Indeed, as Nietzsche shows in subsequent studies on morality and values, human beings construct fictional worlds and fiction moral values that can be self-defeating and can endanger human existence because these values are not congruent with reality (cf. Sonderling 2008). Indeed, Machiavelli already warned about the danger of such moral self-delusion, as he puts it:

The gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done learns the way to self-destruction rather than self-preservation (Machiavelli 1968:91).

For Machiavelli human beings have become deluded and live in an imagined reality constructed by morality. But as Levinas contends, 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. In war reality rends the words and images that dissimulate it, to obtrude its nudity and its harshness. Harsh reality ... harsh object-lesson, at the very moment of its fulguration when the drappings 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).

Levinas refers to the wars of the twentieth century but universalises this to be the entire lesson of human history. The reality of war is proved by the fact that the central activity of war is to killing and to inflicting pain. For as Scarry (1985:4, 7) notes, to have pain is the only reality a human being can experience as real. To have pain is to have certainty because the "physical pain is so

incontestably real that it seems to confer it quality of 'incontestable reality' on that power that has brought it into being" (Scarry 1985:27).

Human life, like all life, is a *struggle for survival* and ultimately has no particular meaning. What gives meaning to the world is the unending repetitive contest for power and domination, as Nietzsche (1968:550) concludes: "This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!" However, human beings attempt to overcome the meaninglessness and nothingness of their existence and give meaning to their lives and deaths. Human beings give meaning to their lives by considering the struggle for survival and spiritualise it as a struggle for recognition that is conferred when one defies death. Thus 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).

Nietzsche, following Hobbes, accepts the assumption of the primordial war of all against all and suggests that it is the constitutive principle of human life. According to Nietzsche one should be "able to derive a moral code for life from the *bellum omnius contra omnes* and the privileges of stronger individuals" (Nietzsche in Safranski 2003:113). For Nietzsche all this demonstrates that our understanding of the meaning of human and inhuman are reversed. What is at present presumed as a sign of being *inhuman* is in fact the proper characteristic of being *human*.

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).

The things that are considered *inhuman* are perfectly *all too human* as attested by the ancient Greeks. Nietzsche (1997:35) points out that the ancient Greeks 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 and blood revenge and from overcoming adversity (cf. Nietzsche 1997:37). Indeed, this reversal of understanding is confirmed by Glenn Gray’s (1998:54) experiences during the Second World War, According to Gray (1998:54–55) contrary to the accepted Freudian understanding that when man destroys he is an animal because his humanity is proven by conservation, the converse is true: the satisfaction man has in destroying is a particularly human trait, or it is *devilish* which animal can never have.

The ancient Greeks' experience of life as war leads the poet Hesiod (1976) to assume the existence of two (or twins) war goddesses on earth: the one *Eris* is a goddess of War while the other is the goddess of Strife (cf. Nietzsche 1997:37). According to Hesiod (1976:59) the one Eris is the cruel deity of war, while she is not loved by humans, nevertheless, because of the necessity of war humans must endure her cruel demands and pay her respect (Hesiod 1976:59). The other Eris is the goddess of strife and contest. This Eris is much appreciated because she motivates human beings to compete and strive for greater achievements. The Eris of strife is good because “she urges even lazy men to work” and “So neighbour vies with neighbour in the rush for wealth.” The strife is good because the “potter hates potter, carpenters compete, and beggar strives with beggar, bard with bard” (Hesiod 1976:59).

These insights provided by the ancients exposes the error in the way the concepts war and peace are commonly understood within the contemporary consensus of social theory. In popular conception the notion of “war” and



“peace” are respectively associated with “life” and “death”. Thus “war” is intimately associated with “death” because it is assumed as being solely a destructive force leading to death. On the other hand, the notion of “peace” seems to be inseparable from the idea of “life” whereby peace is supposedly the guarantee of life. But these popular notions are contradicted by philosophy and history. In the first instance the definition of war as conflict and struggle indicates clear attributes and providing a positive definition of war. In the instance of peace, peace is defined negatively, as the absence of war and strife and such definition is an abstraction that does not have any positive essence attributed to peace. Almost all major philosophers since the ancient Greeks considered – some freely and others begrudgingly – war as the essence of human existence, and as an indication of human and social vitality. Peace was associated with non-being, with death, stagnation and decline.

The idea of peace, pacifism and avoidance of all acts of war is not representative of the true nature of the human being. As Hegel observes, to be recognised as a human being man must risk his life in a battle to the death in order to distinguish himself from animals. According to Hegel (Kojève 1980:158–159), avoidance of the risk is cowardice. In the light of Hegel’s observation it is possible to doubt the pacifists’ claim that war is *inhuman* and that the true characteristic of *humanity* is peacefulness and non-violence. It is as Gelven (1994) suspects: the pacifist may turn out to be less than human. (This was already reviewed in Chapter 2).

A realist understanding of war in relation to human beings has been gaining insights from evolutionary biology (cf. Sheets-Johnstone 2007:340). However, such an understanding of man was already available to the ancient Greeks.

### **3.6 Back to the future: a view of from Darwin to Aristotle**

Darwin’s idea of evolution points to a biological foundation of human existence and expands contemporary understanding that is still largely grounded in theological concepts (cf. Thayer 2000:125). It shows, as Pinker (2003)

contends, human nature is an unchanging biological inheritance and not a “blank slate” that can be entirely manipulated and programmed by any ideology.

Such an understanding of the human being already existed among the ancient Greeks (cf. Thayer 2000:124). As a scholar contends:

For political philosophy, a new "naturalism" points to a return to the Aristotelian view that values or standards of judgment have rationally intelligible foundations, thereby challenging the relativist or nihilistic orientation that has characterised most contemporary thought (Masters 1990:195).

It is not the intention of this chapter to expand on the biological foundation of human nature and its relation to war as these have been reviewed by numerous scholars (cf. Ong 1989; Thayer 2000; Masters 1990; Wilson 1998; Pinker 2003; Ignatow 2007; Sheets-Johnstone 2007). However, the infusion of socio-biological information provides a reality check against the excess of theological and metaphysical speculations about war and human nature prevalent among contemporary social theorists (cf. Masters 1990; Thayer 2000; Willhoite 1976).

The lesson from socio-biology also seems to confirm Nietzsche's (1968:550) contention that the world is a *will to power* and that the essence of human society is homologous with that of societies of baboons. The human “primate heritage” is manifest in eternal struggle for domination in which individuals compete against each others. In this sense human “politics” is not unique; “primate politics” is well established among the apes (cf. Schubert 1986). War described as “intergroup coalitional killing” (cf. Wrangham 1999:1), occurs regularly among other species (cf. Ong 1989). Thus war can be considered as being older than human beings and is not uniquely a human phenomenon. For human beings war is organised killing with a purpose and “is simply an inextricable part of being human” (Bell 2007:317). Therefore, it can be considered as a *normal* state of affairs of human life (cf. Hillman 2005:22). In light of all the evidence war is considered as a universal phenomenon, it is

trans-historical and trans-social, and practiced at all time and places (cf. Keegan 2004a:48; Gilpin 1987).

Considering war as being an unbroken link between the modern world and the ancient Greeks, Havelock (1972:19–20) contends that Darwin's idea of evolution confirms that we are doubly linked to the ancient Greeks. We are firstly linked by common parentage we share with baboons, and secondly we are linked by cultural tradition of “warrior virtues” and the ancient Greeks' understanding of “war as a way of life” (cf. Havelock 1972:21). Thus both biologically and culturally the phenomenon of war is in the unconscious of every human being (cf. Brosman 1992:95; Bartlett 1994; Bryant 1996; Tilly 1975, 1990, 1997). It is evident throughout history that war was always, and still is, the context against which everyday life was experienced (cf. Favret 2005; Cuomo 1996:42). It could be concluded that

the imagery of war can reasonably be used this way because the war experience is, even during the long period of peace in modern world ubiquitous. Even if individuals are spared the experience of combat, there are social institutions and practices that keep the war experience alive, such as mandatory military service, and invocation of social values responsible for the willingness to wage war and story-telling in diverse media also keeps the experience alive (Steinert 2003:267).

After the Islamist terror attack on the West on 11 September 2001 the concept of *war* emerged as a key term to describe the principle of organising societies (cf. Hardt & Negri 2006; Montgomery 2005:149). Thus for contemporary society, as much as it was in ancient Greece “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). It is thus not surprising that the image of ancient warrior still provides a suitable representation and a paradigm for human beings (cf. Bryant 1996:28). The ancient Greeks' emphasis on military virtue, and the idea that war is a way of life inherited from the ancient

Greeks provided the West with a formidable cultural and moral tradition (cf. Havelock 1972:20), that for a long historical period ensured the ascendancy of the West over all other competitors (cf. Hanson 2000, 2002a; Lynn 2004). Such 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' and war is the central organising principle of the world and an appropriate metaphor to make sense of societies and cultures (cf. Alliez & Negri 2003; Hardt & Negri 2006:12; Münkler 2003).

### **3.7 War as the divine and human spirit: making gods and men**

The harsh reality of naked power struggle, cruelty, violence and war is hard for many people to accept, so they attempt to escape from the "evils of life" and find salvation in religion. However, as Girard (1977) and Burkert (1983:1–2) note, the person escaping to religion is immediately "confronted with murder" and death at the very core of religion. The holy texts of all major religions are narratives of cosmic wars, bloody battlefields, torture and massacres. Thus it seems that in this world or in any other world, that there is no escape from war and violence. It is through war, as Heraclitus said, that everything comes into being and passes away; war is the father and king of all and makes some gods and some men (Heraclitus in Kahn 1979:67). In other words, human identity and consciousness and the idea of a supra-human deities or gods are born in, and through war.

Indeed, Freud (in Vance 1980:378) 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." Such transformation was a reality in the ancient Greek world where a mortal could distinguish himself in war and be transformed into an immortal god by being posthumously honoured with a cult (cf. Chaniotis 2005:36). It is no coincidence that the ways gods are represented in religious texts always reflect the character and way of life of the human group claiming to have such gods. As Finley (1972) concludes from his study of ancient Greek society:

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 ... The gods came to power on Olympus as men came to power in Ithaca or Sparta or Troy, through struggle and family inheritance (Finley 1972:154).

Thus war can be imagined as being both human and divine. According to de Maistre (2009:89) war is divine in itself because it is the law of the world; it is divine because it is beneficial for human existence; it is divine because it is a great privilege to die in battle; it is divine because it is surrounded by mysterious glory; it is divine because it provides protection to great leaders; it is a divine quest for justice and revenge for inequality; and it is divine because God is always found on the winning side (cf. de Maistre 2009:89–91).

De Maistre is not alone in attributing war to a divine injunction. The Bhagavad-Gita, an essential text of the Hindu culture describes the god Krishna as a charioteer and war counsellor of prince on battlefield which is “the field of sacred duty” (Bhagavad-Gita 2004:32). In similar manner the Koran (or Qur’an) proclaims war as divinely ordained duty for Muslim men (cf. 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).

As Malik (1992:50) notes in his study of *The Qur'anic concept of war*: “In Islam, a war is fought for the cause of Allah.” Malik contends that from this 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.” Indeed, this circular and self-affirming logic is historically affirmed in Islam and well documented universally as a fundamental axiom of the ancient religions. This is the opinion of fourteenth century Muslim jurist, Badr al-Din ibn Jama'a (Ruthven 2004:62) who proclaims that

If, in the absence of an imam, someone assumes power by force even if he were unqualified and assumes it without *bai'a* [the oath of allegiance to the Caliph], his imamate becomes binding and obedience to him is necessary in order to maintain the unity of the Muslims. That he may be unjust, vicious, or lacking in knowledge is of no consequence. If the imamate of force were challenged by another who replaces it by force, the latter becomes the recognised imam in view of the fact that his action is consistent with Muslim interests and maintenance of Islam's unity, in accordance with an utterance of ibn Umar who said: "We are on the side of the victor" (Ruthven 2004:62).

Indeed, as Huizinga (1971) discovers, in the ancient world "winning as such is, for the archaic mind, proof of truth and rightness" (Huizinga 1971:103). Thus every war is claimed to be a *just war* and the proof of its justness is victory, because only victory in battle proves that the war was fought for a just cause. Thus from this same tradition Nietzsche's Zarathustra aptly proclaims:

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).

As against 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 (Burkert 1983:2).

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 animal (Burkert 1983:2).

Such ideas are also reflected in the Aztecs ritual murder that was an expression of piety (cf. Ehrenreich 1998:65). At the heart of the sacred is an *act of killing*:

“Sacrificial killing is the basic experience of the ‘sacred’” (Burkert 1983:2–3). Burkert (1983:3) notes that 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 primary as an act of “sacrificial killing” of a victim rather than self-sacrifice. In similar ways in ancient Hebrew and Hittite the verb “to do” is used in the sense of “to sacrifice” (Burkert 1983:3), thus its meaning is closer to the expression “to do someone in” or kill. According to Burkert (1983:3) action and sacrificial killing construct the human being: the human animal becomes human because he is a *Homo Necans*; it is the act of sacrificial killing of others that makes man a *Homo Sapiens*.

Burkert (1983:8, 43) notes that human sacrifice predate animal sacrifice and in terms of historical development animal sacrifice replaced earlier cannibalism. Evidence for substitution of an animal for the human is seen in the Biblical narrative of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. There are also symbolic remnants of human sacrifice and cannibalism evident in Christianity: the death of God’s son is an example of perfect sacrifice and is re-enacted in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper where “the body of Christ” is eaten in the ritual of the Eucharist and hymns about blood and battle are sung (cf. Burkert 1983:8; Juergensmeyer 2003:162).

The ancient myths of the Hebrews and Greeks show that the original and most desirable victim for divine sacrifice was a human being, and only later human flesh was substituted for animal meat (Ehrenreich 1998). The Biblical myth of Cain and Abel seems to confirm that God’s preference was for a meal of meat: Cain was a farmer and his sacrificial offering of vegetables was rejected while Abel was a herdsman and his sacrificial offerings of meat were accepted by the deity. In the ancient world it was assumed that the 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 heart 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).

The substitution of man for animal was probably motivated by the realisation that keeping prisoners of war alive to be used as labour, or exchanged for ransom or sold into slavery were more profitable than killing them in an act of sacrifice in order to feed both gods and the human temple keepers of priests (cf. Davie 2003:195).

Most victims for human sacrifice were acquired by war and slaughtered on the battlefield. Captured enemy prisoners were brought back to be killed at the altar of the gods. (cf. Burkert 1983; Harris 1978:100; Ehrenreich 1998; Todorov 1992:143–144). The blood sacrifice – human and animal – is made to feed the gods and keep them alive and at the same time it keeps the social group alive as the sacrificed meat was also eaten by the group. Since prehistoric times war was made as a ritual killing and “sacrifice” of enemies on the battlefield to please the ancestors, or war prisoners were brought back for the required daily sacrificial ritual killing demanded by the tribal or national gods (cf. Harris 1978:105). Thus for example, the Aztec warriors “waged warfare in order to fulfil their sacred duty” (Harris 1978:99–107).

Because war was conducted by humans early religions assumed that war was conducted by the gods in the heavens. The priests and shamans were considered “spiritual warriors” doing battle on behalf of their group in the world of spirits (cf. Boyd 1997). When ancient kings died they were accompanied on their journey to the after-life by their military guards who were killed and buried with them or, as China’s first emperor had artisans craft a whole army of life-size terracotta clay soldiers to guard the imperial tomb (cf. Man 2008).

The human sacrifice can be considered as a form of language and an act of communication: dispatching a human as a messenger to the ghostly world of the gods (cf. Davie 2003:131). But what kind of communication can be established between men and the gods? The belief that through the act of sacrifice – a gift of flesh to the gods – one establishes a *communion* with them



may be a mistaken assumption. Human flesh is no different from animal meat and both human and animal sacrifice is prevalent in all early religions (cf. Davie 2003:66). Such preference for meat would indicate that the original deity was a *carnivore* (cf. Ehrenreich 1998:31, 34). Indeed, most of the gods are represented as having ferocious attributes, therefore the idea of communion with such beasts is difficult to imagine. Evans-Pritchard (1954:23) suggests that the sacrifice is rather made *against* the gods. The sacrifice is made in times of trouble and the purpose of such

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 ferocity and anger of the gods is evident from the way their character and names are described in religious text: the ancient gods are represented as conquerors and their names usually are references to being “the destroyer”, “the avenger”, and “god of battles” (cf. Davie 2003:113). Most of the primary gods of tribes and nations are gods of war. Among the various names attributed to a god, the primary importance places the emphasis on the god of war (cf. Lang 2002). In the Hebrew Bible the deity is introduced as “God is a warrior” (Longman & Reid 1995). God as a warlord fights on behalf of his people or stands in the ranks fighting side by side against their common enemies (cf. Niditch 1993:28). Indicative are the symbols of gods: weapons of war such as the sword and a bow and arrows. All such symbols of war represent power. This should not be a surprise because almost all the major religions owe their success to war, and to the use of the sword. Christianity expanded only when it was co-opted by Roman emperors and by contrast the initial pacifism of Christianity was, in part, responsible for the demise of the Roman Empire (cf.

Santassouso 2004). The limit of pacifism was acknowledged by the Catholic Church. The leaders of the early church realised that pacifism would lead to suicide rather than to expansion and growth of the church (Seaton 2005:74). Therefore a "just war theory" was elaborated to prevent total pacifism. In the Middle Ages the Christian Church acquired property and its Popes, Cardinals and Monks became formidable warlords and promote warfare. Thus Pope Julius II was known as the Warrior Pope, and a satirical dialogue (attributed to Erasmus) has him responding to St Peter's refusal to admit him to heaven with the threat that unless St Peter opens the gates he will return with armed reinforcement to throw heaven's gatekeeper out (Chambers 2006:1). Indeed, success in battle was a guarantee for success of a religion (cf. Chambers 2006:90). Muhammad already said: the sword is the key to paradise. Likewise, Christianity proved its invincibility in the wars against Muslim invaders during the Middle Ages and then embarked on Crusades into the East, into Africa and into the newly-discovered world of the Americas (cf. Chambers 2006). As Chambers (2006:1) puts it: "Blessed are the peacemakers. But blessed, too, have been the warmongers throughout the Christian centuries."

Three centuries of crusades have subsequently established Christianity as a warrior religion. The crusades conceptualised as holy war were a response to the Muslim practice of *Jihad*, or holy war that centuries earlier lead them to invade and colonise European territories. The echo of the vocabulary of Muslim Jihad is discernible in St Bernard urging the French knights to embark on a Christian 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).

Acquisition of new land and building new churches demanded military protection and new monastic warrior monks emerged such as the Templars, Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights that combine the discipline of the monastery with the aggressive spirit of the warrior knight (cf. Bartlett 1994:260–264). There exists an existential and intimate relation between religion and war which implies that, as Aho (1981:3) notes,

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.

As Aho's (1981) study uncovers, such a structure of meaning animates all the major religions. Military vocabulary is central to all religious text and discourse, thus the “model of warfare” is the underling inspiration of the religious model (Juergensmeyer 2003:160). According to Juergensmeyer (2003:160) the main task of religion is “creating a vicarious experience of warfare.” For example, the Christian way of life is described as “Christian living is a war” and this is not considered as a metaphor or figure of speech but as a “literal fact” that needs to be emulated (Juergensmeyer 2003:160–161). Religion gives strength to the warrior promising that the strongest warrior on earth will also be the strongest in heaven (cf. Davie 2003:105). Hillman (2005:178) concludes that religion is war because both give meaning to life.

### **3.8 The gift of death: war as source of meaning**

Ancient Greek wars begin with sacrifice ceremonies where an animal is offered to the gods and continue with human sacrifice on the battlefield. Thus war may appear like one great and continuous sacrificial action (cf. Burkert 1983:66). This is not a metaphorical description.

This is not merely a simile. Many of the elements in which such warfare are correlatives of those in ritual sacrifice among the

Greeks: the sequence of procession, violent blow, the spilling of blood, the burning of flesh and the pouring of libations that stands at the centre of sacrificial ritual is paralleled by the sequence in the land battle: the march into battle, the blood spilled in the fighting, the funeral pyres and the truce ... Furthermore the cry of the women at the moment of sacrifice ... has its echo in the soldiers' battle-cry, the *alalagmos*. The garlanding after battle adapts to warfare another practice from sacrificial ritual (Connor 1988:22).

But Connor (1988) has the order reversed: the ritual of sacrifices is an echo of war in society. Burkert (1983:47) notes that sacrifice and war are interchangeable. It is the battle that inspires the ritual of sacrifice and it is the battle and the heightened feeling of fear and ecstasy that create the religious experience.

In essence it is the killing that justifies life (Burkert 1983:40). The act of killing that inaugurated the gods gives meaning to death as it elevates it from a simple meaningless natural event to the level of human meaning. The warrior – the man of action and vitality – takes war as the ultimate game of life; war provides the opportunity to test oneself, to prove one's courage and thus human value by defying death in battle and surviving victoriously. From Homer to modern writers, most combatants describe their war experience as *sublime* and consider it a “lovely war” and as the most rewarding experience of their lives (cf. Bourke 1999:364; Holmes 2004:380; van Creveld 1991). As a United States marine describes his experience in Iraq: “We had a lot of fun, and we were doing something that had meaning” because it tested our courage and value as human beings (cf. Wright 2009:462). And in the twenty-first century a journalist admits that “war is a force that gives us meaning” because life in the Western postmodern world has become boring and meaningless (cf. Hedges 2003).

For both the ancient and modern warrior war requires the acceptance of a death as the ultimate price one pays. This was central to the Western tradition and is also common in non-Western cultures. It is, for example evident in the

spirit of the Samurai warrior: he accepts death *a-priori* and thus becomes fearless in defending his master (cf. Nitobe 2006; Yamamoto 2001). Similar view is found in the Bhagavad-Gita (2004:37) where Lord Krishna advises the warrior-king Arjuna that once you are forced by enemies to do battle it becomes a sacred duty to fight without fear because to refuse fighting will bring dishonour that is worse than death. Therefore, as Lord Krishna says, one has nothing to lose:

If you are killed, you win heaven;  
If you triumph, you enjoy the earth.

Indeed, for various religions death in battle is a guarantee for martyrdom and a heavenly reward. In this sense Christianity can be considered as a cult created by death: by his death Christ was elevated to immortality and the rituals of remembrance performed by the cult of his disciples keep his memory alive and they are reminded of their own rewards after death. Thus, for any warrior, as Plato already observed, "life measured solely by its length falls short, but a life shortened by honour reaches its fullest measure" (Gelven 1994:xii). And as Nietzsche's Zarathustra (Nietzsche 1969:75) advises the warrior: "Thus live your life of obedience and war! What good is long life? What warrior wants to be spared?"

Because of the risk of death war is the ultimate expression of free choice. Thus if the warrior primarily distinguished himself by a virtuous life of courage and bravery he also expresses his life by choosing his ways dying. Indeed, for a proud warrior it would be an insult to hear someone say of him: he *died peacefully in his bed* rather than say that he died a noble death in battle.

While it is commonly assumed that war is an act of self-sacrifice the Greeks understood that the main aim of battle was not the self-sacrifice of the warrior, but the killing and sacrifice of the enemy. But if killing the enemy is important, both the act of killing and of self-sacrifice ensures the life of the community. As Derrida (1995:17) suggests, 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'." (The use

of passive tense by Derrida is indicative of the tame postmodern European spirit.)

The gift of death as an act of life-giving can be traced to the ancient Greeks. The ancient Greeks invented life from death by constructing politics or the *polis*, the Greek city state, as Virilio (1997:135) puts it: "They extracted life from death, from the relation to death, from the awareness of death." The relation to death would also include the act of killing. The Greek constructed a life with its own statues: citizenship in the political community, which was not simply a lifestyle or a "way of life" but the "proper life" (Virilio 1997:135). Virilio (1997) is alluding here to Aristotle's distinction between the words *zen* and *bios*, the natural life of animals as against the way human beings chose to live. Human life includes *human reality* that is different from *natural reality*: as against mere living human reality include consciousness and self-consciousness, an awareness of life *in-itself* and *for-itself*.

The act of killing in battle gives rise to the emergence of a sense of the individuality and self-consciousness. War brings two collective bodies of men into conflict. But from the moment that two anonymous bodies of warriors collide the action becomes individualised: each man enters into a hand-to-hand battle that allows the individual to 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" and beneath the practical necessity of war is an important symbolic expression.

Underlying the violence and destruction of war is a logic based not on the use of war as a means to certain ends but on its effectiveness as a way of self and civic representation. 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 social hierarchy. Organised and disciplined warfare and hand-to-hand battle were a characteristic of Greek and Roman civilisation as against barbarians that did not fight this way (cf. Sidebottom 2004:20).

In contemporary Western societies where life became meaningless some people are searching for ways to express their vitality again by challenging death in warfare and terrorism (cf. Juergensmeyer 2003:245). Others seek struggles, death-defying sports, or risk their lives in military battles in non-Western lands to test their courage and prove that they are still human beings (cf. Fukuyama 1992:328–330). Thus for contemporary elites, as it was for the ancients, war continues to provide meaning. Burkert (1983:47) puts it thus: “War is a ritual, a self-portrayal and self-affirmation of a male society. Male society finds stability in confrontation death, in defying it through a display of readiness to die, and in the ecstasy of survival.”

### **3.9 I kill, therefore I am: killing as source of consciousness and self-consciousness**

For most contemporary commentators the salient characteristic of war is instinctively associated with dying. But according to Bourke (1999:xiii) “the characteristic act of men at war is not dying but killing.” Such an understanding exposes the faulty assumptions about war prevalent among social theorists. For example, Freud considers war as an act of suicide and as an expression of some biologically programmed instinctual “death drive” (cf. Freud 2004:70). Freud believes that the “goal of life is death” and his idea of the “death wish” is based on the assumption that there is a universal tendency in all living matter to return to the *peaceful* immobility of the inorganic matter (cf. Levin 1951:257). But Freud’s imputation is absurd: death is not an instinct and the aim of all organic life is to survive in the face of death. Indeed, Freud contradicts himself and denies that humans have a suicidal drive. According to Freud:

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).

Freud's death instinct has more affinity with the Christian negation of life and praise of life after death, as if merely to live was "a major crime worthy of death" (Levine 1951:267). Such *miserabilist* condemnation of life has been expressed by many philosophers since Socrates (cf. Nietzsche 1978:29). However, while praising life after death, the early Christians acknowledged the futility of self destruction. St Hippolytrus of Carthage complains about the enthusiasm of the new Christian converts to have themselves sacrificed and killed to attain martyrdom. And he notes that "the Church could not easily expect to expand if it *continued to be known for the ostentation and voluntary death of its members*" (Seaton 2005:74).

Of course acceptance of death can be an inspiration for courage. This is the inspiration for courage on the battlefield shown by the Samurai warriors (cf. Nitobe 2006:33; Yamamoto 2001:13–14). Similar tradition also existed among the North American Cheyenne warriors:

The fundamental point of Cheyenne military culture was that warriors already counted themselves among the dead prior to violent military engagement, and hence they were spiritually oblivious to danger or death. They prepared for battle by singing farewell to their relatives, dressing as for a funeral and singing their tribal death songs. They ritually confined themselves to death ... Because Cheyenne warriors had already accepted death, their indifference to suffering and death was calculated to cause



maximum psychological terror [to their enemies] (Turner 2003:101).

Thus not dying but killing is the essence of life on earth. Life is a manifestation of killing (cf. De Maistre 2009:89; Berlin 2003:138). The world is a permanent carnage and such carnage ordains the great scheme of things (cf. De Maistre 2009:87). Killing and violent death are found everywhere:

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 frightening 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 most perceptible in the life of human beings. As de Maistre (2009:86) notes, the murderous enterprise is central to human existence. In order to exist man has to kill:

He kills to nourish himself, he kills to cloth 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 negative or destructive; it has rather a productive aspect. Paradoxically from primordial times it was acknowledged that the social bond has its beginning in killing and bloodshed. According to Hannah Arendt (1990) every beginning 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).

Most developed forms of society developed from crime. Ultimately the legitimate society and the nation are example of successful organised crime. As Tilly (1997:165) puts it:

If protection rackets represent organised crime at its smoothest, then war making and state making – quintessential protection rackets with the added advantage of legitimacy – qualify as our largest example of organised crime.

While the idea of *legitimacy* has been mystified by juridical and moral discourse, legitimacy essentially is the probability that one powerful warlord or gangster will confirm the legitimacy of another powerful warlord or gangster. Obviously mutual confirmation and respect will be given if each warlord or a state institution has substantial military force because non-confirmation of legitimacy would leave one open to retaliation (cf. Tilly 1997:168). In other words, warlords, gangsters and heads of state recognise others, equally powerful players, and preserve the balance of power among themselves.

The prevailing belief among many social thinkers that killing is always a crime is derived from a misunderstanding of the Biblical commandment *Thou shalt not kill* and the Christian injunction to love your neighbour. The Biblical prohibition is against “murder” and not on “killing”. Prohibition against murder is a form of internal social control operating *within* a clan or social group but does not apply to *external* or foreign members from outside the community. Early tribal societies were bonded by blood kinship and the success of all societies was

due to their ability to unite for war of offense and defence. As Norbert Elias notes, the ancient family (ancient families were always extended families or clans related by blood) is a survival unit, a “unit of defence” and “unit of attack” (cf. Fletcher 1997). Thus there exists a dual moral code: one for the *in-group* members and one for *out-groups*. Killing members of the clan was a crime but killing strangers was a virtue and demonstrated courage; it was also a rite of passage into manhood and affirmation of individuality (cf. Davie 2003:18). It is not only permissible but also an obligation to kill someone who is trying to kill us (cf. Gelven 1994:141). The soldier defending his homeland *kills* – but does not *murder* – the enemy soldier. Indeed, “it is morally *wrong* to allow or abet the enemy’s destroying what is ours” (Gelven 1994:142).

Contrary to most contemporary assumptions killing and rivalry do not necessarily destroy a community but may make it stronger, as an Arab proverb seems to allude to the cohesion induced by enmity: “Me against my brother, me and my brother against our cousins, us and our cousins against the world” (Murawiec 2008:28). Internal conflicts are suspended and the antagonists unite when confronted by a new common enemy that threatens both. The enemy sometimes can be a brother, as Enzensberger (1994:11) claims, the most enjoyable fighting is in a civil war because to one fights an enemy one knows well. Such fights are recorded throughout history, for example, St Augustine reports such familial brawl:

For it was not fellow-citizens merely, but neighbours, brothers, fathers and sons even, who, 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 (Salazar 2009:33).

A similar fighting custom was recorded among the Koreans:

Every spring, leave is granted to the people to fight with stones, and the men (and even boys) proceed to open spaces where there are plenty of stones. There they form sides – usually town versus

country – and have regular pitched battles. Every year quite a large numbers are killed, and the wounded are legion (Davie 2003:149).

While St Augustine may have been puzzled by the senselessness of such behaviour, behind such violence one finds clear reasons, for example, the Korean fighting custom is motivated by the rivalry between town and country. All civil wars are re-enactments of social and racial division. As Foucault notes, the social body is made up of two groups of people of different ethnic origin that were brought together by conquest and these groups always remain in conflict.

According to Cramer (2006a:283–284) and Kalyvas (2006) civil war makes perfect sense and the violence is not pointless, random or irrational. In the words of an Italian writer:

Civil war is not a stupid thing, like war between nations ... civil war is something more logical, a man starts shooting for the people and things he loves, for the things he wants and against the people he hates; no-one makes mistakes about choosing which side to be on ... (Sciascia in Cramer 2006a:1).

The common types of social killing are the *patricide* and *fratricide*. The *patricide* expresses the way a social succession is enacted. The myth of Oedipus narrates such a rivalry between the generations, the son or a band of brothers gang up on the primal father, kill the father and take his position of power and leadership. By extension, the *fratricide* is a continuation of the power struggle among brothers and lays the foundation for 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; see also Howard 2001; Tilly 1975, 1990, 1997, 2003a, 2003b).

War is a way of conferring identity on a social group and individuals. As Simmel (1966) notes:

Essentially, France owes the consciousness of its national unity only to its fight against England, and the Moorish war made the Spanish region into one people ...The United States needed the War of Independence; Switzerland, the fight against Austria; the Netherlands, rebellion against Spain; the Achaean League, the struggle against Macedonia; and the founding of the new German Empire furnished a parallel to all these instances (Simmel 1966:100).

The way an individual's identity is established by violence and killing is admirably described by Hegel's story of the primordial battle to the death between two (not yet complete) human beings; their humanity will emerge through their mutually pressing a demand on one another to be recognised as human being. This primordial battle for recognition inaugurated human history (cf. Fukuyama 1992). For Hegel it is the ability of man to risk his life in battle for pure prestige that distinguishes the human being from other animals. The aim is not simply to endanger life in order to die, but to test oneself against a worthy opponent and kill him, or be killed in such battle.

More fundamentally, the act of killing is pivotal for the emergence of self-consciousness. Seeing a dead body on the battlefield leads to realisation that it is not I, and hence develops a sense of consciousness. But as the dead body cannot acknowledge my victory therefore it leaves the sense of consciousness incomplete. What is needed is that the enemy stay alive, acknowledge defeat and confirm the superiority of the victor. By such action of submission the victor becomes self-conscious and his value as a superior human being is acknowledged. Therefore, it is that a human being declares his humanity by proclaiming: "*I kill, therefore I am*" (cf. Murawiec 2008:9, 17). What makes the human is the ability to kill and this ability also lays the foundation for consciousness and self-consciousness. 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).

Such battle for recognition is re-enacted throughout history and in the contemporary world the battle for recognition is much in evidence in African decolonisation. Following on Hegel's description of the battle for recognition, Fanon (1973; 2008) and Sartre (1973), contend that violence and killing are the proof of being human because the African's identity was initially constructed by the violence and killing of the colonial conquest. Subsequently, the oppressed can only gain his humanity by killing and annihilating the oppressor. This seems to be a universal characteristic of humanity because such cycles of victory and defeat are an eternal phenomena and the position of domination and submission are forever reversed (cf. Schivelbusch 2004). The oppressor and oppressed attained their sense of humanity through the violence of conquest and the oppressed in turn will rise in revolt. The colonised attained identity by the violence of colonisation and in turn their independent identity and new life "can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler" (Fanon 1973:73). The colonised thus makes violence against the white settler his "only work" and it invest his character with "positive and creative qualities" (Fanon 1973:73). As Sartre (1973:19-20) notes the colonised African first gains identity by the violence inflicted by the oppression of colonial conquest and being "a child of violence ... he draws from it his humanity." Resistance adds to the sense of humanity. According to Sartre (1973), the "rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity." The historical cycle of domination and repression is reversed: if at first by colonial conquest "we were men at his (the native's) expense" now by his resistance "he makes himself man at ours" (Sartre 1973:20). Indeed, for Fanon and Sartre the act of killing is central in establishing postcolonial identity:

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).

Fanon's concept of killing is influenced by a mixture of Islam and Marxism. As Murawiec (2008:9) notes, such expression of humanness is presumed to have been an injunction from god, where the warrior proclaims:

This, O Muslim brothers, is who we are; we slay for our God, our God demands the slaying. I kill; therefore I am.

The experience of pleasure associated with killing is also well documented in modern Western warfare (Bourke 1999:358; Ferguson 1999:360–364, 447). Moreover, there is a new search for personal pleasure in modern warfare despite its having become more instrumental and the act of killing has become impersonal. Disregarding such reality the combatants in modern and postmodern warfare insist on asserting their pride in their own active agency and demand to take responsibility for the killing. As Bourke (1999:xviii, 360) documents, because modern military technology prevents the combatants seeing the effects of their weapons on the enemy, they now use their imagination to conjure face-to-face encounters, and fantasise about the deadly effect of their weapons on the enemy.

The process of personalising the enemy enables the combatants to kill and thus validate their own moral agency. The *intimate act of killing* is central to experience of war throughout history and affirms that war is not experienced as hellish trauma. For many participants the element of risk makes war pleasurable, and shows that warfare is equally about sacrificing others as well as being sacrificed. Thus for many men and women, this is precisely what makes it “a lovely war” (Bourke 1999:364).

Regardless of all the recorded evidence of the bloody history some scholars insist on imagining that human individual and social identities are imaginatively constructed. According to Anderson (1983) identities are fostered by the use of

national language and national narratives which make the individual experience inclusion in an imagined community. But as against such imagined community the social bond proves to be a real bond of blood and sacrifice (cf. Marvin & Ingle 1996:773; Marvin & Ingle 1999:27). As Marvin and Ingle (1996:773) argue,

not textual communities but communities of blood unite their members sacrificially. The holiest religious holidays do not celebrate literature but blood symbolically framed as birth or death. Texts may *describe* blood sacrifice and may be useful instruments in the formation of national consciousness for that reason. But textual communities do not physically fight for their members. Only communities bound by blood do this.

A social group's or a nation's identity is not simply constructed by linguistic abstraction, but is the "body-sourced and face-to-face" encounter that "connects language to the nation understood as a community of bodies" (Marvin & Ingle 1999:26).

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 & Ingle 1999:27).

In other words, it is the blood sacrifice and war that constructs both community and the text for the imagined community. Indeed, as Renan (in Anderson 1983) notes, a national identity is always linked to the memory of a distant massacre and terrible bloodletting. The process of social construction involves a *rite* that is transformed into a *ritual*. According to Durkheim (Richards 2006:651) a *rite* is



a repetition of action that is believed as being able to cause a desired effect in the real world. War is originally a rite, repetition of acts of fighting and killing with the added advantage that it has a real effect in reality. The more often it is re-enacted the more result it brings. Such re-enactment becomes a *ritual* that re-creates the emotions and beliefs originally constructed by war (cf. Richards 2006:651). In other words, war is firstly a utilitarian and instrumental activity that is necessary for the preservation of life. Ultimately such instrumental activity becomes symbolic: it becomes a way of life and defines the warrior's existence and gives meaning to the life and death of the individual and unites a community.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The chapter traced the experience of war and killing as they are expressed in philosophical discourse. It has shown how war is the central defining characteristic of humanity and the foundation for individual and social identities. War thus is both the *individualising* and *collectivising* human institution. While war is a social and collective activity at its core is the action of fighting and killing that require interpersonal engagement, and this is the source of identity and meaning for human existence. The humanising aspect of war is manifest at the moment the animal is transformed to a human being and this transformation quires the risking of life which shows that the human can transcend the mere animal survival instinct, and by an act of will power, replace it with immaterial values. Such transition is captured by Hegel's notion of the primordial battle at the beginning of history from which consciousness, self-consciousness and social ranking order emerge. The role of pain and killing were seen as central humanising aspects. Thus war since the time of the ancient Greeks war has been the model for human life and the foundation for communication.

The next chapter will continue the review and reading of texts in order to reconstruct the way war and killing provide the foundation for language and communication, and how war is the primary generative force for poetic narrative.



## CHAPTER 4

# POETRY IS IN THE KILLING<sup>6</sup>: BLOODY ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

*Polemos* and *Logos* are the same – Heidegger (Fried 2000:33)

War is the father of all good things; war is also the father of good prose –  
Nietzsche (2009:90)

Is not War merely another kind of writing and language for political thought? ...  
The Art of War in its highest point of view is policy, but, no doubt, a policy which  
fights battles instead of writing notes – Clausewitz (1985:402, 406)

Idealists consider beliefs cause wars. Realists consider wars cause beliefs –  
Richards (2006:651)

### 4.1 Introduction

The review and reading of literature in the previous chapter revealed the close interlink between war and killing as the source of human consciousness and identity. Because human identity is closely linked with language and communication it is possible to suggest that war, death and killing could also be related to their origin. Indeed, Heraclitus is one of the first philosophers to suggest such paternity (Kahn 1979:67). Following Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Clausewitz and contemporary media scholars such as Virilio (1997) and Kittler allude to war as constitutive of communication.

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<sup>6</sup> These wordings are taken from a chapter title in James Tatum's book *The Mourner's Song* (Tatum 2003).

The aim of this chapter is to trace how social thinkers represented the relationship between war, and considered death and killing as the central force to the formation of language. The chapter will trace the way war is assumed to incite speech, how the act of fighting is considered as the primordial model of human dialogue and death and killing as foundation for the construction of abstract concepts. Informed by a different understanding of war that will be gained from this and the previous chapter a close reading and interpretation of the role of war in the texts of selected twentieth century communication theorists, such as Huizinga, Schmitt, Foucault, McLuhan and Lyotard will be undertaken to provide a new and comprehensive understanding of war and communication in the contemporary world.

## **4.2 Language, death and killing**

There seem to be an unquestionable and widely accepted belief that communication is intrinsically a peaceful activity. Such a view is paradigmatically expressed by Habermas's (1981:314) claim that

what raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we know: language. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus.

Habermas assumes that *a priori*, humanity is unified and humans by their natural inclination always seek peaceful resolution to all conflicts. From this it follows that communication must naturally be a pacifying and unifying force. It is assumed that communication – defined as the symbolic activity of *transmitting* of messages and, *sharing* of meaning – promotes peaceful cooperation and social cohesion (cf. Habermas 1981:314). In communication theory this relationship is expressed in the Habermasian traditional alternatives premised on the assumption that the prevalence of violence results in "manipulatory speech and unilateral transmission of messages" while the lack of violence lead to "free expression and dialogue" (Lyotard 1984:16). Moreover, war, conflict and violence are assumed to increase misunderstanding because they supposedly disrupt communication and reduce all language to silence. This is a

popular belief that assumes the existence of a clear dichotomy between pure violence on the one hand, and pure communication on the other. As Dawes (2002:2) puts it, the belief that violence terminates communication because it reduces language to silence, and conversely, communication prevents violence because it transmits information are unquestionably accepted as if self-evident truth.

Underpinning such a view is a theological foundation that links the concept *communication* with the idea of a spiritual *communion*. Also included in the idea of communion is not only a desire to establish contact with other living human beings but as Peters (1999) documents, also a desire for contact and communion with the spirits of the dead, and such desire was an important impetus for development of early communication technology, and scholarly interest in, and scientific study of communication.

But such assumptions disregard the idea that conflict may have a unifying force and that the *dissensus* – the agreement to disagree – may hold society together. Indeed, it is the view of Heraclitus that war and conflict hold human society and the whole cosmos together. This perspective is affirmed in Martin Heidegger's and Jan Patočka's reading of Heraclitus: according to them it is the *polemos* that brings the enemies together to engage in face-to-face fight and thus unites them in their mutual contention (cf. Derrida 1995:17–18; Fried 2000:23–24). Bourdieu (1998:78) contends that the opposing warriors have investment or mutual interest in contending for the common object. Thus it is in war and in the tension and contention of the conflict that form a foundation for a community: a community distinguished by differences between individuals and groups, yet united in their investment in the common object of interest.

This chapter suggests that war and killing could be considered as the generative origin of communication. Because killing and warfare are central to humanity their manifold traces can be seen everywhere in speech, language and communication. To locate such traces the starting point is the ancient Greek society and its oral and agonistic social interaction.

### **4.3 *Polemos and logos are the same: the bloody origin of language and communication***

Suggestively Nietzsche locates speech and communication in war finding justification for his claim in Heraclitus' original assertion that war is the father of all things. According to Nietzsche (2009:90), if "war is the father of all good things" then it is possible to assume that "war is also the father of good prose." Following on Hegel, Nietzsche also suggests that war is the originator of the human spirit. Hegel (1910) contends that "war is the spirit and form" that provides the foundation on "which self-consciousness ... and every kind of existence is manifestly confirmed and realised." Influenced by Hegel, even the ardent pacifist philosopher such as Buber (1970) argues that the primordial bloody encounter between ancient warriors provides the foundation for meaning and human spiritual development:

Primal man's experiences of encounter were scarcely a matter of tame delight; but even violence against a being one really confronts is better than ghostly solicitude for faceless digits! From the former a path leads to God, from the latter only to nothingness (Buber 1970:75).

For Buber a true human encounter is experienced through real violence and it is this intensity of feelings that acknowledges the existence of the other human being, however, a peaceful evasion of confronting the other human being is an act of negation of the other's humanity and existence.

Indeed, the philosophers' and social thinkers' conception of war as competitive agonistic human interaction is supported by data from biology, psychology and social research (Keegan 2004a; Keeley 1997). This is summarised in the words of an eminent British historian:

Archaeological, anthropological, as well as all surviving documentary evidence indicates that war, armed conflict between

organised political groups, has been the universal norm in human history (Howard 2000:1).

All forms of social interaction and communication of primitive societies develop from the bloody and hostile encounters between warring groups; in the ancient world “war is almost the only form in which contact with alien groups is brought about at all” (Simmel 1966:32-33). The initial conflict leads to other forms of encounter and opens the possibility for co-existence and communication. That war and conflict open contact and channels of communication where they did not exist before is affirmed by sociologists (cf. Himes 1966).

The direct link between communication and war is assumed to be the result of the *agonistic* character of ancient societies whose primary mode of communication was oral (cf. Ong 1982:43). The characteristic social interaction in oral society is face-to-face encounter that is antagonistic and agonistic. This antagonism is reflected in the style of verbal interaction. As Ong (1982:45) notes, “when all verbal communication must be by direct word of mouth” they are closely “involved in the give-and-take dynamics” of everyday life and contain both attractions and antagonism. Both the physical and verbal interactions follow the same manoeuvres and resemble duels, exchange of blows and contests of wits (cf. Ong 1982:68). Thus verbal interaction is a form of “*flyting*” or verbal combat and the verbal duel is in many instances a prelude to battle. A verbal duel is also itself a form of battle that can be fought as a substitute to the real contest by arms or war (cf. Pagliai 2009:61; Pagliai 2010:87; Parks 1986; Parks 1990; Ong 1982; 1989).

More fundamentally George Herbert Mead (1965) locates the original human speaking encounter – the dialogue – takes the form of an exchange of blows, a boxing match or a dog fight. Dialogue, like all forms of hand-to-hand combats is derived from a primordial “conversation of gestures” where each combatant responds and anticipates the other’s moves (cf. Bushman 1998). For Mead the social antagonistic actions precede the deliberate symbolic communication (cf. Mead 1965:129). As Mead (in Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds 1980:36) puts it, “the

blow is the historical antecedent of the word." The result is that consciousness develops first from the violent exchange of blows and thus Mead (1965:162) concludes that the human "mind arises through communication by conversation of gestures in a social process or context – not communication through mind." In other words, mind developed as consequence of material and physical actions. As Ong (1989:29) puts it: "Agonistic activities and structures developed in the noetic world in ways complexly related to their development elsewhere" in the real material world. Such development was already prepared by inherited biological conditions: the animal and human mind is already biologically primed for war: it responds to danger in a binary pattern of either *fight* or *flight* (cf. Ong 1989:15–18).

In a manner similar to Machiavelli's (1968:52) contention that beliefs are inculcated by the use of force, Althusser (1971) proposes that Pascal demonstrated how body gestures construct ideas and beliefs in the mind. According to Althusser (1971:168–169) Pascal explains that religious beliefs develop from pure action. Pascal notes that if one want to acquire religious beliefs, all that is required is to "Kneel down, move your lips in prayer and you will believe." Althusser (1971) comments that Pascal's interpretation exposes the scandal that underlies the manufacture of all spiritual beliefs. In other words, religious beliefs do not originate in a rarefied sphere of the gods but in the mundane world of human practice. Of course, Althusser follows Marx's materialism whereby consciousness is assumed to be the product of social conditions. For Marx (1972:119), "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life." The human spirit is the product of mater and co-evolved with mater, and "language is as old as consciousness, language *is* practical consciousness" (Marx 1972:122). This is in turn summarised by Wittgenstein's (1988:178) statement that "the human body is the best picture of the human soul." Following on this argument it is possible to assume that Hegel's exclamation on seeing Napoleon after the battle of Jena that he has seen "the world soul on horseback" (Hook 1962:60), could explain the military and material origin of Hegel's philosophical concept of historical *Spirit*. Thus Napoleon, the great warrior is the primary inspiration and the model for



spirituality. For Marx it follows that the whole system of ideas expressed in language has its origin in the material social condition: "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life" (Marx 1972:118). The material construction of ideas and beliefs is confirmed by Richards' (2006) study of the way war constructed a religious cult in Sierra Leone. War provided members of the cult with a way of life, a sense of community, identity, and a set of beliefs and concepts. In other words, this also provides the groups with concepts, language and ways of speaking. The primacy of action means that ideas, beliefs and concepts are not the cause of war but are the effects of war. Contrary to the idealist assumption that beliefs in people's heads are the cause for war, Richards (2006) shows that wars "cause beliefs". The reason for this is that because

people with different basic collective interests come into contention over those interests while expressing differences of organisation as differences of belief. War is not a product of clash of civilisations but clash of civilisations is a product of war (Richards 2006:651).

Hegel already speculatively summarises the way concepts arise from war and more specifically from an act of killing. According to Kojève's (1980:186) interpretation of Hegel, discourse arises from the dialectical confrontation in the primordial fighting encounter at the beginning of history. As Kojève puts it: "Hegelian discourse is dialectical to the extent that it describes the real Dialectic of Fighting and of Work, as well as the 'ideal' reflection of this Dialectic in thought in general and in philosophical thought in particular" (Kojève 1980:190).

If thought develops in battle, then conceptual understanding can be considered as the equivalent of *murder* or *killing* (cf. Kojève 1980:140). This is so because as long as the meaning or the concept is embodied in an empirically existing living entity, the meaning, concept and the actual entity's life are one and the same and there is no place for assigning an abstract or general concept. In

order to become an abstraction the concept must detach itself from the particular living entity. Such detachment occurs by the act of killing the particular living entity. As Kojève (1984) explains:

For example, as long as the Meaning (or Essence) "dog" is embodied in a sensible entity, this Meaning (Essence) *lives*: it is the real dog, the living dog which runs, drinks, and eats. But when the Meaning (Essence) "dog" passes into the *word* "dog" – that is, becomes *abstract* Concept which is *different* from the sensible reality that it reveals by its Meaning – the Meaning (Essence) *dies*: the *word* "dog" does not run, drink, and eat; in it the Meaning (Essence) *ceases* to live – that is, it *dies*. And that is why the *conceptual* understanding of empirical reality is equivalent to a *murder* (Kojève 1980:140).

In other words, the concept or meaning is only possible because it can detach itself from the real entity; because the entity is mortal and finite it is only when it is killed and dies that it becomes an abstract concept. Hegel's idea of meaning construction is shared by Vološinov's (1998:9) idea that "a physical body equals itself, so to speak; it does not signify anything but wholly coincides with its particular, given nature" in order to become a concept or signify meaning it needs to be converted into a sign or artistic-symbolic image.

For the ancient Greeks the reality of bodies and action on the battlefield provide a *vocabulary* for the subsequent development of abstract thought, as Havelock (1982:301) explains: the image of "this corpse on the battlefield" in the artist's epic poem becomes a concept to describe a "body anywhere and everywhere." As a result "the combats of Homeric heroes found themselves being translated into battles between concepts, categories, and principles" (Havelock 1982:304). Acquisition of meaning is a process of transition from concrete to abstraction, from a state of physics to metaphysics:

Physics: discourse dealing with the ideal structure of bodies, mixtures, reactions, internal and external mechanisms;

metaphysics: discourse dealing with the materiality of incorporeal things – phantasms, idols, and simulacra (Foucault 1988a:170).

And in this transition from concrete to abstract the role of death is central:

Death supplies the best example, being both the event of events and meaning in its purest state. Its domain is anonymous flow of speech; it is that of which we speak as always past or about to happen and yet it occurs at the extreme point of singularity (Foucault 1988a:174).

In order to consider an event it needs to become metaphysical and lose its physical substance and become an abstraction. The difference is that physics is concerned with causes but the event arises as effects of cause that do not belong to the same level of reality.

The event – a wound, a victory-defeat, death – is always an effect produced entirely by bodies colliding, mingling, or separating, but this effect is never of a corporeal nature; ... The weapons that tear into bodies form an endless incorporeal battle (Foucault 1988a:172–173).

The abstraction is a progression that transforms a physical object into an object of thought. As Foucault (1988a) demonstrates:

"Marc Antony is dead" *designates* a state of things; *expresses* my opinion or belief; *signifies* an affirmation; and, in addition, has a *meaning*: "dying". An intangible meaning with one side turned toward things because "dying" is something that occurs, as an event, to Antony, and the other toward the proposition because "dying" is what is said about Antony in the statement. To die: a dimension of the proposition; an incorporeal effect produced by a sword; a meaning and an event; a point without thickness or substance of which someone speaks and which roams the surface of things (Foucault 1988a:173–174).

In Western tradition death is assumed as the foundation of knowledge. For example, Foucault (1989) shows the birth of modern medical knowledge in the 19th century was derived from death: for centuries inquires about disease looked at external signs and symptoms and could only offer a blind guess about its nature and cause but ultimately it was death and the dissection of dead bodies – primed by killing and dismembering men and bodies on the battlefield – that inaugurated modern medical knowledge: by cutting open the human corpse the invisible was made visible. As a nineteenth century doctor writes: "Open up a few corpses: you will dissipate at once the darkness that observation alone could not dissipate" (Foucault 1989b:146). Foucault notes that this shows how the "living night is dissipated in the brightness of death" (Foucault 1989b:146). Death became the key to understanding life: "Death left its old tragic heaven and became the lyrical core of man: his invisible truth, his visible secret" (Foucault 1989b:172). Thus in Western culture the first scientific discourse concerning the individual passes through death:

Western man could constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science ... only in the opening created by his own elimination ... From the integration of death into medical thought is born a medicine that is given as science of the individual. And generally speaking, the experience of individuality in modern culture is bound up with that of death ... the individual owes death a meaning that does not cease with him (Foucault 1989b:197).

Finally, another death is the death of *living speech* killed by the invention of *writing*: it is as if to inscribe something in writing is to kill it, dismember it, to embalm and entomb it in material substance. Speech is always lively, conflictual and action-oriented while writing is more detached, static and contemplative. And of course, written text from past generations can be considered as a form of communication with dead and long departed human beings.

To see the role of killing and death it is useful to look at the ancient Greeks. For the ancient Greeks war, death and killing were integral aspects of life in the ancient world. As a consequence war and killing in battle were the primary topics and inspiration for the ancient Greek poets and for all subsequent generations of poets, writers, artists and thinkers. The ancient Greeks' experience made them realise that war is a way of life (cf. Havelock 1972) and provides the language and conceptual framework for thinking and understanding the world:

War was good to think with in the ancient world. ... Greeks and Romans frequently used ideas connected to war to understand the world and their place in it. War was used to structure their thought on other topics, such as culture, gender and the individual. War was pervasive in classical thought (Sidebottom 2004:16).

For the Greeks war was "the master text" and provided the ontology by which "they knew themselves better" and defined their humanity (cf. Coker 2002:37). The principle of war: adversity, is the eternal principle of identity distinction between "us" and "them", or between "enemy" and "friend" (cf. Gelven 1994; Sidebottom 2004; Schmitt 1976).

The Greek artists, such as Homer in the *Iliad*, described in detail the exploits of battles, blood and slaughter and such scenes were familiar from direct experience to both artists and audience. The audience delighted in such bloody details of savagery because they were enjoyable (cf. Nietzsche 1997:37; Vermeule 1981:96). Ancient Greek writers and philosophers had first-hand experience of battle and like all war veterans throughout history "return to their experience in combat to clarify or broaden their thought on whatever subject they were discussing" (Hanson 2000:45). Moreover, Homer's representation of war, killing, and slaughter has subsequently delighted readers throughout the ages until the present (cf. Vermeule 1981:97; Seaton 2005). From the time of the ancient Greeks, Homer's epic poem the *Iliad* provided the paradigm of a warrior for thought and action and inspired philosophers, politicians, artists and

warriors for three millennia (cf. King 1991:xi; Lynn 2004:26; Manguel 2007:2). According to King (1991:219) the enduring interest in the *Iliad* was the result of war being the central concern of societies and the heroic warrior figure of Achilles could be “fruitfully manipulated for poetic, political, and philosophical ends.” As King (1991:220) puts it:

The *Iliad*'s military hero is used to make profound statement about the human condition. Because Achilles is not only superlative in prowess and physical beauty but also superlatively complex – possession skills of a healer, the uncompromising principles of an idealist, the self-knowledge of a philosopher, the artistry of a poet – readers are emotionally engaged with him as a completed human being.

Homer's heroic war paradigm continued its influence throughout the centuries and is still felt in the present as war and battle *is* the unconscious model at the heart of all speaking and logical discourse (cf. e.g. Bryant 1996; King 1991; Manguel 2007; Weil 2005). This is why Xenophanes credits Homer's epic poem as the source of human thought, as he says: "All men's thoughts have been shaped by Homer from the beginning" (Hawkes 1972:148). This would indicate that acts of warfare, killing, and suffering have an affinity with the human ways of being and are resonant with the structure of the human mind and cultured soul.

Death was infused with meaning because death in battle was valued as a contribution to the security and continuous existence of the community. Thus not only had it a utilitarian function but such death in the service of the community also gains meaning as an honourable death and becomes a popular theme to be memorised by being represented in Greek art (cf. Vermeule 1981:84). The warrior's acts of killing and own death are *meaningful* because they are *good* acts of killing and good deaths and in turn it is a *beautiful* death to inspire and be represented in art. The bad and shameful death is that of the coward fleeing the battlefield and so presenting his back for enemy attack, the

result is that the coward is laying dead face-down with the enemy's spear sticking from his back. The poet Tyrtaios describes such death as a "shameful sight when a dead man lies in the dust there, driven through from behind by the stroke of an enemy spear" (Hanson 2000:182). The good death is the warrior lying face-up, sword in hand and clutching the body of his dead enemy whom he killed while dying himself. Xenophon describes such a scene of heap of bodies of friends and enemies after the battle of Koroneia:

Where they had fallen in with each other the earth was red with their blood, corpses of both friend and enemy were lying with each other, shields smashed, spears snapped, swords drawn from their scabbards, some of which were thrown to the ground, some fixed in their bodies, others still in the hands of the dead (Xenophon in Hanson 2000:198).

After the battle there was fascination with the dead, "almost an urgent need to look upon the dead as they lay, before the bodies were carted away and the enormity of the scene was lost" (Hanson 2000:202). Indeed, the melee and confusion of the fighting ended and allowed curious large groups of spectators a sight-seeing tour of the undisturbed aftermath of the battle. It was also the standard practice that the victorious commander inspects the dead on the battlefield. The carnage was recorded by artists who sculptured and painted the death scenes on vases in minute details, while poets inscribed the heroic images in their words (cf. Hanson 2000:202–203). The way a warrior kills his enemy is a sign of his worth: in the *Iliad* Homer describe the first-rank fighter's act of slaying as displaying mastery and slaying the enemy in a quick and easy ways while the second-rank fighter is cumbersome and struggles and his act of slaying is brutal and grisly (Fenik 1968:15). Thus here is a clue to both moral and esthetics evaluation: death in battle was noble and good and the *good death* in battle is also a *beautiful death* for moral edification by being aesthetically represented in visual art and in discourse. Through discourse and representation brave warriors and their acts remain alive in human memory.

Homer's descriptions in the *Iliad* of "wounding and killing are copious and exquisitely detailed" (Tatum 2003:116). But this is expected because the *Iliad* is war poetry and battles take a primary role while all other themes are secondary or have their beginning in the acts of killing on the battlefield. Even if for the pacifist modern reader the *Iliad* is used as reflection beyond the spilling of blood, nevertheless, "blood and guts, in fact, mean everything" and they are "told in precise details" because they are integral to the poem (Tatum 2003:117).

In the *Iliad*, gruesome death becomes poetry and is transformed into graceful death by the mutual exchange of words between the combatants praising each other's courage that are also heard (or read) by the audience (cf. Tatum 2003:118). "Killing one's enemies can be carried out with as much craft and studied variation as any other art", and in a war poem the "poet's song and warrior's song blend into single melody" that "turns killing itself into poetry" (Tatum 2003:118–119). Tatum (2003:119) puts it thus: the poet finds poetry in the action on the battlefield and the "war's poetry is also to be found in the killing." It is a paradox that the worst murderous situation in war can artistically be the best inspiration because the "artist can patiently convey war's inhumanity, by an exquisite design and attention to details" (Tatum 2003:132–133). The description of wounding and killing performed by Achilles as "he stabbed with his sword at the liver", and the "liver torn from its place, and from its black blood", and then he strikes another opponent with a "pike at the ear, so the bronze spearhead pushed through and came out at the other ear", and again hitting with "the hilted sword" against the head of another "so all the sword was smoking with blood", and having "transfixed with bronze spearhead" through the arm, then with his sword he strikes at the neck "and the marrow gushed from the neckbone" (Tatum 2003:119–120). Tatum (2003:119–120) notes that apart from all these details,

what impresses us is Achilles' ingenuity – and the poet's. Neither of them wades into a killing the same way twice: a sword to the



liver, a pike in the ear, a sword into the head, and finally, the climax of a double mortal blow.

With Homer a whole aesthetics of the battle opens up and satisfies the curiosity of the listener or reader. Moreover, the detailed descriptions of putting the "spear through his forehead", killing by stabbing with "a spear beside the right nipple, inflicting a mortal "wound to the groin" and thrusting a "spear to the head that runs through one temple and comes out the other", all these acts of giving blows and receiving counter blows, a tit-for-tat reciprocal action (Tatum 2003:123), is a great dialogue of gestures and words that runs through the poem. Indeed, the "prestigious mode of combat" in the form of "fighting with weapons face-to-face" happened where blows are intermingled with verbal exchange of insults and praises between the combatants. Such personal involvement in the action on the battlefield changes the nature of "the simple pleasure of seeing an enemy on the other side get his just deserts" into a personal relation of respect for the bravery and humanity of the dead enemy combatant (cf. Tatum 2003:125). In the *Iliad* before being struck and killed the particular warrior's genealogy is told and his individuality is constructed, so that the listener or reader should know the dead warrior personally, and his death is experienced as a sacrifice and the warrior's spilt blood gives vitality to the community of the reader of the poem as much as it gave to the original (or mythical) community of warriors (cf. Tatum 2003:121). Moreover, the aesthetic experience and the pleasure of reading war literature and poetry is derived from the pervasive curiosity about war's mysteries: for those readers who look forward to war the literature provides a powerful stimulus to see if the experience of battle will be as terrible or as enlightening as it is described by the poet (cf. Tatum 2003:126–127).

According to Foucault (1988a:53) "it is quite likely, as Homer has said, that the gods send disasters to men so they can tell of them." Acts of speaking and writing are there so as not to die, but to be analysed and immortalised, as is seen in the power of discourse (figuratively) to stop an arrow in flight. An example of such violent and brave deeds generating words and communication

is seen in the first recorded epic poems; the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* affirm the gift of language arising from death:

The gods send disasters to mortals so that they can tell of them,  
but men speak of them so that misfortune will be averted in the  
distance of words, at the place where they will be stilled in the  
negation of their nature (Foucault 1988a:53–54).

Subsequently, all self-conscious warriors recorded their actions in words of epic poetry and later in prose narrative. For example, in the lines of the medieval *Song of Roland* (Vance 1980:380) a brave warrior proclaims:

Now let each man take care to deal great blows,  
Lest a bad song be sung of us.

Vance (1980:383) notes that history stages itself around acts of massacre that are then communicated and memorised as narratives. The process of communication is associated with, or demands “some act of mutilation or immolation” (Vance 1980:385). Therefore, “without war, there could be no hero, no history, no song, no *jongleur*, and no audience” (Vance 1980:386). For Hanson (2004) perceptively notes that wars and battles leave their influence on humanity: it is the “ripples of war” that are felt throughout the centuries and “plays, poems, and novels are written because of a day’s fighting” and art is commissioned and “philosophy born” (Hanson 2004:15). Warfare inspired language and thought and provided a paradigm for speaking and acting, thus according to Chan (2005:18) “with the technology of destruction had come the technology of thought.”

The ancient poet and the warrior have the same aim: to kill the enemies – literally and metaphorically – and to immortalise the killing and death of the brave warriors. As Vermeule (1981:94) writes about Homer’s *Iliad*:

The goal of a good epic poet, in a battle song, is to kill people with picturesque detail, power and high spirit. Homer does it extraordinarily well. The *Iliad* begins with corpses burning in an

alien plain and ends with a gallant corpse burning in prelude to the city's burning. The verses are studded with corpses in between, pierced and collapsing in a panorama of pictorial conventions, and gestures of ferocity held in check by formula and rhetoric which, as they killed, still invoked a more general life cycle through images of animals, planted fields and wild forests, storms and seas.

In Homer's *Iliad* and the ancient Greek's works of art contemplation of death is the single motivation for immortality, therefore it is the cause of achievement and creativity (cf. Vermeule 1981:94). While mortality is acknowledged "the perpetual threat of death" is confronted "with the energy and humour of life" (Vermeule 1981:96). Thus literary work such as the *Iliad* is not a poem of death but of immortality and mortal accidents (cf. Vermeule 1981:97). And for mortals death is one of life's accidents from which language was born, as Foucault (1988a:55) puts it, "death is undoubtedly the most essential of the accidents of language (its limit and its centre)."

The progression of action and thought about war are evident in the literary transition from Homer's epic poetry to historical prose of Herodotus and Thucydides. Homer's *Iliad* sings praise for the fighting where men win glory (Dawson 1996:53), Herodotus' prose narrates the sequence of action and reaction, the reciprocal tit-for-tat exchange of gifts and injuries in war (cf. Dawson 1996:74), subsequently Thucydides introduces a reversal and in his analytical thought words are followed by action: "Herodotean narrative is a series of actions; Thucydidean narrative becomes a series of debates followed by actions" (Dawson 1996:87).

War provides the exemplary tactics for speaking. Public arguments are considered as combats, wrestling matches and duels that one could learn by imitation in the same way that one learnt to wrestle. Indeed, fighting and speech were thought in the gymnasium (cf. Hawhee 2002a; 2002b; 2005). Public argumentations are structured in the form of a battle, a duel of questions and answers in an eristic encounter. The aim of such public argumentation was to

win, but winning an argument, as in winning a war was not guaranteed a priori but depended on skill and an element of chance. The verbal duelling, like a real battle depended on the combatants' and speakers' ability to demonstrate excellence and mastery. The speakers' ability to dramatise their presentation helped win favourable judgments from the public. To gain favour from the public the ancient philosophers and sophists used Homer's panoply of vivid battle scenes as a case-book from which to draw appropriate examples, to memorise them and to use them in appropriate and specific situation to support arguments. Success or failure depended on acts of memory and the ability of the narrator to dramatise the presentation. The aspiring *word warrior* had to learn by heart a whole repertoire and select a particular war imagery to apply as required by his situation. This exposed the limitation of the sophists' rhetorical art: they taught tactics and not a general strategy; they "taught arguments: not how to argue" (Ryle 1966:200).

Strategy for discourse was developed by old experienced warrior philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Socrates and Plato distilled a formal method for argumentation by identifying the abstract principles as the underlying "strategy and tactics" of battle, and so "the combats of Homeric heroes found themselves being translated into battles between concepts, categories, and principles" (Havelock 1982:304). Socrates draws his philosophy from his own battle experience and Nietzsche (1978:32) notes that not only did Socrates draw on his personal experience but also draw his philosophy from the general spirit of the Greek experience of life as war and the agonistic character of the ancient Greek society. According to Nietzsche (1978:32), Socrates introduces a crucial innovation as he "discovered a new kind of agon" and this gave him an advantage against the Sophists and he becomes "the first fencing master". For Nietzsche (1978:32), Socrates "introduced a variation into the wrestling-matches among the youth" because his method of asking substantial questions and expecting rational answers disturbed the natural "agonal instinct of the Hellenes" that until now was based on dazzling display. Extending on Socrates, Aristotle finally provided a complete art of verbal warfare in his theory of rhetoric, as Ryle (1966:18) puts it:

Here Aristotle develops the methodology of the rule-governed battles of wits of which Plato's elenctic dialogues gives us dramatised specimens. Aristotle is the Clausewitz to Plato's Napoleon.

Aristotle extends Plato's strategy and tactics of the eristic dialogic combat and Homer's heroic narratives of battle to construct a theory of logic and rhetoric.

The close link between speaking and war is central to the ancient Greek society. The Greek society and culture grew from war: the Greek *Polis* or city-state was originally a military fortification (cf. Berki 1984:43; Mumford 1962), established and defended by its free-citizen-warriors. The centre of Athenian democracy, the *agora* was originally a war council where issues of war were debated and contested. Public debate itself resembles warfare as it is an exchange of words, instead of blows between contending adversaries. Thus it is indicative that the *agora* and *agon* share the same etymology: the *agon* of contestation on the battlefield is reflected in the political debates in the *agora* (cf. Huizinga 1971:68–69).

Because war is the primary social institution on which all others depend, human ways of thinking and speech seems to reflect the structure of war. The individual's thinking and reasoning is modelled on public procedures of adversarial debates used to adjudicate conflicts and deliberations in the tribal war councils (cf. Hampshire 2000:7–9; Hampshire 2002:637–638). Ultimately, the ability to talk and manner of thinking is the result of the experience of living in the physical and natural environment and the human mind is a product of action and interaction whereby gesture and "social acts precede the symbol proper and deliberate communication" (Mead 1965:129). From such experience all basic concepts are derived and go on to become metaphors for elaboration of further concepts. It is thus conceivable that all basic concepts are directly related to strategy and tactics of living in a world of struggle, fighting and war. Considering such evidence Lakoff and Johnson (1980) conclude that many of the metaphors to describe reality and social practice of speaking and

argumentation are based on the adversarial model of war. For Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) "argument is war" is not simply a metaphor but the literal way of talking and arguing in Western society.

#### **4.4 Traces of war in speech: unity of *polemos* and *logos***

The idea that traces of war are reflected in language and discourse have been suggested by a number of thinkers. According to Nietzsche:

Primeval states echoed in speech. In the way men make assertions in present-day society, one often hears an echo of the times when they were better skilled in arms than in anything else; sometimes they handle assertions as poised archers their weapons; sometimes one thinks he hears the whir and clatter of blades; and with some men an assertion thunders down like heavy cudgel (Nietzsche 2004:183).

Walter Benjamin claims that "our linguistic usage is a marker of the depth to which the texture of our being is permeated by winning or losing a war; it makes our whole lives richer or poorer in representation, images, treasures" (Benjamin in Coker 1994: 36). Clausewitz (1985) suspects that there is a direct link between war and communication when he asks,

is not War merely another kind of writing and language for political thought? It has certainly a grammar of its own, but its logic is not peculiar to itself ... The Art of War in its highest point of view is policy, but, no doubt, a policy which fights battles instead of writing notes (Clausewitz 1985:402, 406).

In other words, communication could be understood as war because war provides the model for all human phenomena. Hegel maintains that war provides a frame for thought and the criteria for truth. According to Hegel:

History is, if you please, a long, "discussion" between men. But this *real* historical "discussion" is something quite different from a

philosophic dialogue or discussion. The "discussion" is carried out not with verbal arguments but with clubs and swords or cannon on the one hand, and with sickles and hammers or machines on the other. If one wants to speak of a "dialectical method" used by History, one must make clear that one is talking about methods of war and of work (Kojève 1980:185).

For Heidegger (Fried 2000) this shows that life itself is war (*polemos*), and therefore the social life of human beings as political animals endowed with speech reflects such reality. For Heidegger the essence of the *polemos* is evident in a symbolic world because all interpretations are polemical: "Dasein is *polemos* because Dasein's existence is hermeneutical, and all interpretation is polemical." This is so because there are always different and conflicting interpretations (cf. Fried 2000:52; Curtis 2006:15). In other words, interpretations and responding to other texts is always a confrontation, and a challenge. In this sense human interpretation is unique.

In the most general way any form of animal life depends on "interpretation", that is, the ability to respond and evaluate an external stimulus such as when recognising danger. However interpretation for human being is more complex because of the development of symbolic language, reason, imagination, etc., which comprise a "second reality" or the *symbolic universe*, or numerous realities which they construct and in which humans live and need to interpret. But what does it mean to interpret? The traditional assumption is that interpretation is uncovering some essential truth, or exposure of original hidden meaning. But as Nietzsche and Foucault showed, there is no original meaning, "no original signified" because

words themselves are nothing but interpretations, throughout their history they interpret before being signs, and ultimately they signify only because they are essentially nothing but interpretations (Foucault 2000a:276).

Interpretation is thus an imposition of meaning. For Foucault interpretation is thus "violent or surreptitious appropriation of a system of rules" and to use them to dominate those who originally made these rules and interpretations (Foucault 2000a:378).

Therefore, if life is a battle then thought itself is battle and philosophy as the search for knowledge and truth are crucial for survival, truth is implicated in the straggle for life. As Caputo, commenting on Heidegger's conception of power philosophy, explains that for Heidegger

Philosophy is a battle because life is a battle. A being whose being is itself a battle thus demands a philosophising that knows how to do battle (Caputo in Curtis 2006:13).

Caputo's (1993) comment on Heidegger is not intended as praise but as criticism of Heidegger's revolutionary project and his involvement with German National Socialism for which he earned condemnation from most Western liberal philosophers. However, while Caputo's attempt to demythologise Heidegger and subvert him by reading Heidegger against himself (cf. Caputo 1993:39) – which is already an act of warfare – nevertheless implicit in Caputo's criticism is recognition of the value of war-like philosophising. This is similarly expressed by Nietzsche's (1978:21) idea of philosophising with a hammer. Thus it is possible to concede that knowledge is related to warfare, as Huizinga (1971:180–181) puts it: "All knowledge – and this includes philosophy – is polemical by nature."

The polemic nature of knowledge was already recognised by Socrates and Plato in their understanding of the unity of philosophy and warfare. One needs to win in war the same way as one has to win the battles for social survival. And for victory in war and rhetoric one needs knowledge. For Plato the search for knowledge is a *hunt*: to know is to kill because all knowledge is useful for survival and the efficient killing of prey animals for food. Thus knowledge and science from the very beginning are linked with war and struggle for mastery (cf. Harari 1980:48). This is evident in the history of philosophy: "Moving from



combat with prey outside the species to killing inside the species, knowledge now becomes military, a martial art" (Serres 1980:276). With Bacon science becomes a game of strategy: "Baconian physics made science into a duel, a combat, a struggle for domination: it gave it an agonistic model, proposing a form of ruse for it so that the weak one would triumph" (Serres 1980:268). But as the agonistic game is open to contingencies and winning is not certain, it is transformed by Descartes who seeks means to win at every move (cf. Serres 1980:268). Descartes brings his military experience and "like many other philosophers, Descartes pursued his military calling in metaphysics" (Serres 1980:275). Science as the ultimate form of knowledge guarantees the best winning strategy because the logic or reason of the stronger is always the best, and conversely the best reason is the strongest as it guarantees winning. As Serres (1980) concludes, for Western thought, knowledge is always interrelated with death and killing:

From Plato and a tradition which lasted throughout the Classical age, knowledge is a hunt. To know is to put to death ... To know is to kill, to rely on death (Serres 1980:276).

Indeed, winning is central to the working of knowledge and scientific discourse as Thomas Kuhn (1970) and Bruno Latour (1987) have shown. Central to all theorising and scientific work is a war-like contest that consists of battles between various opponents and opposing positions and winning the battle is almost the only thing that matters because it guarantees funding and prestige. In the battles between scientists there is a general winning strategy that can be discerned: to

weaken your enemies, paralyse those you cannot weaken ... help your allies if they are attacked, ensure safe communication with those who supply you with disputable instruments ... oblige your enemies to fight one another (Latour 1987:37).

Latour (1987:172) notes that winning in the scientific proof race is similar to the winning in the "arms race" and this similarity "is not a metaphor".

Foucault (1988a:154) following Nietzsche's discovery of the will to power in the will to knowledge notes that because logic or reason was born from the will to power, it is a disguise for power and hence "knowledge is not made for understanding" but "it is made for cutting." But this is already evident in the ancient Greek world where most philosophers had a first-hand experience of cutting bodies on the battlefield (cf. Hanson 2010:45; Lynn 2004).

There should be no surprise then that Socrates stood in the ranks at Delium or that the dramatist Aeschylus chose to be remembered on his tombstone not for his plays but for the fact that he fought at Marathon. The link between philosophy, art, and combat is also part of the ever-present legacy of Greek warfare in the Western military tradition (Lynn 2004:27).

For Plato (1973:109) the defence of the community requires suitably trained warriors/soldiers as guardians (cf. Plato 1973:175). The reason that the warrior is suitable for leadership is because the warrior's skills combine all the right virtues such as courage, knowledge and wisdom (cf. Plato 1973:224–225). For Plato the philosopher-king is a warrior. The experienced hunter or warrior is the pillar of the community. The close interlink between war, philosophy and creativity leads Ruskin to conclude that great art can only be created by a nation of warriors (cf. Huizinga 1971:124). It is not a coincidence that in Greek mythology the goddess *Athena* is the goddess of both wisdom and war, indicating a common origin. Thus as Heidegger concludes: "*polemos* and *logos* are the same" and man is a warrior – a *Homo Polemos* (Fried 2000:33).

The basic manifestation of the *polemos* as *logos* is seen in the structure of philosophical inquiry. Socrates inaugurates the question and answer dialogic method as the paradigm of Western philosophy. This benign dialogue of polite questions and answers should lead to enlightenment or understanding. But as Huizinga (1971:174) notes, real dialogue is playful and an agonistic battle of wits, thus Plato's presentation of Socratic dialogue is a fiction "for obviously real conversation, however polished it may have been with the Greeks, could never

have the gloss of the literary dialogue." Socrates demonstrates only a semblance of dialogue:

Socrates speaks. The listener, each time more edified, only intervenes from time to time to punctuate with respectful approval the dazzling developments of the master. This second voice only takes the part of pauses when the virtuoso must catch his breath. If authentic dialogue means to work together on an equal footing, Socrates, who takes over the dialogue, seems more like a person in monologue. If it were not for that, he would not be the father of philosophy, for one characteristic of the great philosopher is precisely his inability to reach agreement with others (Gusdorf 1979:102).

The method of dialogue in philosophy is a fiction only inscribed in a literary work and produced by a single philosopher-author demonstrating his own knowledge. The reality of philosophical discourse is different from its idealised representation in literary fiction. As against the presupposition of a rational discourse, disinterested polite sequence of question and answers the reality is different.

... when the philosopher encounters another philosopher who asks him to justify himself, the result is almost inevitably a dialogue between deaf men... The continual experience of philosophical societies would be proof enough, if it were called for, of the fact that the thinker is almost always a man who speaks alone and doesn't listen to what is said to him (Gusdorf 1979:102)

But this show of dogmatic mastery should not be surprising because

philosophical dialogue brings into confrontation matured personalities for whom the game is already up. They limit themselves to expressing a consolidated thought which they can't deny without denying themselves. Now, conversations are rare.

True dialogue presupposes an open and receptive attitude, as opposed to sterile discussions in which each participant limits himself to restating his convictions, without ever giving an inch, and in which, as a last resort, he ends up by playing hide-and-seek or by hurling insults in a desperate effort to have the last word (Gusdorf 1979:103).

Thus one needs to look deeper into the nature of dialogue and the art of questioning. To *question* is to want to know something. But in intellectual discourse under the pretence of asking questions one attacks the speaker. "To *question* then takes on its police sense: to question is to challenge, to interpellate" (Barthes 1986:319), and to attack. The person being questioned must reply to the content and not to the manner in which a question is asked. Therefore, dialogue is a game of disputations and contests that are coded and masked (cf. Barthes 1986:319–320). Canetti (1981:331) contends that all questioning is a form of forceful intrusion, an instrument of power that is used like a knife to cut into the flesh of the victim. To the questioner it gives a feeling of power and every answer received demonstrates an act of submission on the part of the one being questioned (cf. Canetti 1981:332). The answer given also restricts the freedom of movement of the one who gives it because he has to abide by it and is forced to take a fixed position while "his questioner can shoot at him from anywhere, changing his position as it suits him" (Canetti 1981:333).

While *logos* and *polemos* have the same aim and structure, it should not be assumed that language and speech are by themselves forms of pure violence. Such claims would manifest the old belief in the magical power of words. For the primitive people language seemed as if it was a weapon so when they were verbally challenged they duck their heads or dive to the ground in order to avoid being hit by the verbal insult that was assumed to be a projectile (cf. Hughes 1998:8–9; Hughes 1988). The remnants of such magical beliefs are evident in the common and intellectual discourses that uncritically accept claims that words kill. Accepting such claims empowers some social agents to exert social domination and repression of language.

The *polemos* is always the primary force and the *hidden hand* behind the *logos*, language and discourse. Indeed, the proper and limited power of words is recognised by Hobbes (1958:139) when he observes that covenants without the sword are but empty words as they do not have the power to keep men in awe and tie them to their commitments. Machiavelli (1968:99) is aware of the limited power of discursive battle when he notes that there are two forms of fighting suitable for humans: one fights by the use of words, persuasion and the law or, alternatively one fights by the use of force. While fighting by the use of law seems proper to man it often proves inadequate, hence one needs to resort to the use of force. Using force requires one to combine the power of the lion with the cunning and deception ability attributed to the fox. It is clear that the lion and the fox have the same aim: to win and prevail but because of their difference in physical strength they do so by different means and this demonstrates that the strength of the lion needs to be supplemented by the cunning of the fox. Indeed, according to Sun Tzu the essence of war is deception: to deceive, to convince or persuade the enemy to surrender and thus gain an easy victory. This similarity is evident to New Rhetoric theorists Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1971:55) who claim that rhetorical argumentation and war have the same goal: "One can indeed try to obtain a particular result either by the use of violence or by speech aimed at securing the adherence of minds." Securing adherence of mind is a form of conflict resolution and it is the ultimate aim of both war and speech to resolve conflict between the antagonistic parties. The similarity between war and speech is also obvious to Clausewitz, as he notes: war is continuation of policy by other means. "This is because physical conflict is itself already rhetorical, already a kind of symbolic action, already understood in terms of argument" (Crosswhite 1996:128). Indeed, language itself is the field of combats, battles and duels (cf. Barthes 1986: 350), and discourse – as an act of speaking and language use – only moves by *clashes*: it emerges always *against* some preceding *doxa*, and it is always opposing some orthodoxy (cf. Barthes 1986:317).

While the *logos* may seem equally as powerful as the *polemos*, nevertheless the power of language comes from outside, from the power of the people using

the language. According to Bourdieu (1977a:21) “the constitutive power which is granted to ordinary language lies not in the language itself but in the group which authorises it and invests it with authority.” As Carl Schmitt concludes:

One of the most important manifestations of humanity's legal and spiritual life is the fact that whoever has true power is able to determine the content of concepts and words. *Caesar dominus et supra grammaticam*. Caesar is also lord of grammar (Schmitt in Mouffe 2005:87).

Thus ultimately the meaning of words is derived from social power. True social power that confers meaning on the world and the words used to describe the world has its origin in war. As Foucault (1987:308) suggests, one can hear the “distant roar of battle” in all social relations.

Individuals, groups, societies and nations are never totally at war or totally at peace and there can be no absolute dichotomy between war and peace. Indeed, throughout history war was felt as being the context against which the everyday life is experienced (cf. Favret 2005). As Cuomo (1996:42) puts it:

The consciousness of war is always part of the everyday life. War is a presence, a constant undertone, white noise in the background of social existence, moving sometimes closer to the foreground of collective consciousness in the form of direct combat yet remaining mostly as an unconsidered given.

Such conscious and unconscious experience is the underlining aspect of civilisation embedded in human discourse and expressed in culture. It originates in Homer's heroic war paradigm and continued its influence throughout the centuries and is still felt in the present as war and battle *is* experienced as being at the heart of all speaking and logical discourse (cf. e.g. Bryant 1996; King 1991; Manguel 2007; Weil 2005). Margaret Mead (1964) summarises this aptly:

Warfare is here, as part of our thought; the deeds of warriors are immortalised in the words of our poets; the toys of our children are modelled upon the weapons of the soldier; the frame of reference within which our statesmen and our diplomats work always contain war (Mead 1964:132).

The influence of war and the power-play of social relations imply that the meanings of words are socially constructed and are not peaceful impositions.

#### **4.5 Social construction of meaning: the bigger stick makes meaning stick**

As the review in the previous sections demonstrated it is likely that language originates from bodily gestures and is interlinked with the business of war. For Berger and Luckmann (1979) play of power and combat are primary activities that operate within a society and could be considered as constituting the pre-theoretical knowledge that everyone understands (Berger & Luckmann 1979:83–84). Such knowledge is embodied and internalised in a social learning process when language and meaning are acquired.

On the most basic level the use of violence on the human body may force it to produce sounds in the form of verbal cries of pain while the administration of blows may be followed by vocal sound of pleasure. More developed systems of vocal signs or words are metaphors that translate such basic physical experience. Thus the vocal sign, like the physical sign of a clenched fist elicits response in the participants in the social action. The word or vocal sign functions as if the real object were present and so elicit the same response (Berger & Luckmann 1979:54–55).

The language of gestures that gives rise to vocal signs eventually develops more complex meanings and such meanings are institutionalised by “habitualisation”, that is, actions that are repeated frequently and cast into recognisable pattern and recognised as imaginatively recreating the original situation (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1979:70–71). Both the gestures and vocal

signs and demonstrate as if stating "this is how things are done", or put differently, the reality of the sign becomes a symbolic reality representing real actions (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1979:70–71, 77).

On such foundations a system of signs and meaning of the world develops and such system explains why things in social reality are as they are. This is a "social definition of reality": the way society is structured and the explanation and meaning of such structure are defined by the socially powerful agents and groups in the society. The meaning of social definition of reality is that to a large extent reality is what people decide what it is. Ultimately, the meaning and definition of reality that "will be made to stick" and accepted as the commonly accepted meaning is determined by the power of the agents who wield "the bigger stick" (Berger & Luckmann 1979:126–127). In other words, social power legitimates and imposes meaning. The social construction of meaning is internalised by the individual and the process is described by Freud as social repression of instinct that in turn creates the human mind.

The definition of reality by agents of power is not a peaceful process but can be violent because of resistance. In a confrontation over two competing visions and versions of reality the alternative views of the world challenge one another and each side will resort to stronger support to propagate their frail power of argument, the means used include "such as getting the authorities to employ armed might to enforce one argument against its competitors" and potential competitors are physically liquidated or assimilated as soon as they appear (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1979:139). Which of the two views of the world or theories will win depends more on the social power that each contestant can marshal in support rather than on the pure theoretical or empirical merit they may have. Discussion on the merits of contending theories or world views are less likely to be decided by some imagined rational arguments. Instead, they are decided

on the less rarefied level of military might. The historical outcome of each clash of the gods was determined by those who wielded the better weapons rather than those who had the better



arguments. The same, of course may be said of the intrasocial conflicts of this kind. He who has the bigger stick has the better chance to impose his definition of reality (Berger & Luckmann 1979:127).

Human reason and understanding is no doubt interrelated with power. John Donne elucidates this clearly when he compares heavy firearms as being reason itself. Donne, referring to the use of artillery in war says that "by the benefit of this light of reason" wars have become shorter (cf. McLuhan 1969:362). Donne implies that the power of the weapon convinces or makes people see "reason" and be persuaded, as it were. And ultimately, it is power that constructs reason. The wielding of weapons or holding social power to define what a situation is may be evident from the fact that "many social situations are effectively controlled by the definitions of imbeciles" (Berger 1980:101); these definitions are accepted as legitimate regardless of their content because of the real or assumed power of the definers. Therefore, to

understand the state of socially constructed universe at any given time, or its change over time, one must understand the social organisation that permits the definers to do their defining (Berger & Luckmann 1979:134).

Nietzsche aptly summarises the role of social power as being the origin of language and meaning:

The lordly right of bestowing names is such that one would almost be justified in seeing the origin of language itself as an expression of the rulers' power. They say "This is that or that"; they seal off each thing and action with a sound and thereby take symbolic possession of it (Nietzsche 1956:160).

Similar point is strongly made by Lewis Carroll's (1985:269) narration of the conversation between Humpty Dumpty and Alice:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you *can* make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master – that's all.”

In other words, Humpty Dumpty thinks that society produces a vocabulary of "empty signifiers" and one in a position of power can fill them with meaning without much opposition. But in reality the "empty signifiers" are filled with temporary *signified* or meaning. And these meanings are always contested (cf. Laclau 2007:35). As Alice points out to Humpty Dumpty, the existence of empty signifiers is only possible at some imaginary beginning of language, or it exists as abstractions in a dictionary. In reality a signifier, a word or concept is always already related to other *signified* or meaning that have been imposed by some powerful group at some stage in history. Therefore, any definition or redefinition of concepts and reality is always contaminated by previous historical signification or meanings. Such meaning or *signified* always come into play and a series of contradictions arise because signifiers can have varieties of meanings that make them equivocal and ambiguous (cf. Laclau 2007:36).

Words have a history and as Marcuse (1970:147) says, that history is the hidden dimension of meaning in everyday speech. According to Bourdieu (1977a:25) "the meaning of a linguistic element depends at least as much on extra-linguistic as on linguistic factors," that is, on the context and situation in which it is used. Therefore, construction of meaning *ex nihilo* by a totalitarian imposition as envisaged by Orwell's creators of *Newspeak* or to direct communication as attempted by the Nazi regime (cf. Mueller 1976:24–25), are never entirely successful because of the sedimented meanings that resist a totalitarian imposition.

The social character of language and meaning implies that the individual has a more limited space for freedom and self-expression. The individual speaks the

language of his group and acquires the habits of speech and thought of his group that limit the range of words and meaning considered as acceptable and provide the framework for what can be thought and is either taboo or unthought for lack of words and meaning (cf. Mannheim 1979:2). Social mode of thought and individual thought are not entirely uniform or monolith but shaped by the diverse social groups to which the individual belongs.

Men living in groups do not merely coexist physically as discrete individuals. They do not confront the objects of the world from the abstract levels of a contemplating mind as such, nor do they do so exclusively as solitary beings. On the contrary they act with and against one another in diversely organised groups, and while doing so they think with and against one another (Mannheim 1979:3).

Social groups are political organisations and politics is conflict within and between groups. Groups and political parties are fighting organisations and their conflict is a life-and-death struggle. The political discussions reflect this struggle and the aim of discussions is not to show that one is right but to "demolish the basis of its opponent's social and intellectual existence" (Mannheim 1979:34).

Political conflict, since it is from the very beginning a rationalised form of the struggle for social predominance, attacks the social status of the opponent, his public prestige, and his self confidence (Mannheim 1979:34).

Political talk is a sublimation and substitution of discussion for the weapons of war and direct use of force, but in essence the aims of both "weapons" are the same: the one aims for physical annihilation and the other for psychic annihilation. As Schmitt (1976:28) notes politics originates in war: at the end of war the two parties to conflict exchange their military contention for political confrontation and contestations, the change means that the enemy becomes a political *adversary*. Following Schmitt, Mouffe (1993; 2000) suggests that the

warring *antagonist* enemy becomes a political debating *agonist*. (A more extended discussion of Schmitt's concepts is presented in Chapter 5).

The social definition of meaning and the transformation of war relation to social power relation and to symbolic relation show the origin of culture in war. In Bourdieu's words (1989:21) symbolic or cultural power is nothing other than the economic or cultural capital, but this power is mis-recognised; and its origin in violence and power are concealed. In turn, symbolic relations – symbolic violence – reinforce social power relations as they provide the narrative to justify and legitimate the power of the dominant group and its view of the world. In this sense cultural power is a hegemonic domination, as described by Gramsci. The ruling group and its cultural domination always generate resistance and come under symbolic attack. This is so because the existing social order constructs the world in discourse and justifies itself discursively, therefore it can be discursively resisted, attacked, challenged and contested by new groups attempting to impose new meaning. Discourse is not only a medium for the representation and narration of social conflicts but it is itself an object of desire and the very object over which conflict arises, it is the thing *for* which, and *by* which conflicts are fought (cf. Foucault 1971:89).

The grammar of power in the symbolic order implies that culture – as a field of meaning – is always contested and is an object of contestation and war. That an element of war is present in all culture is noted by Walter Benjamin's (1973:258) observation that "all cultural treasures are the spoils of war that each victorious conqueror takes over triumphantly from the defeated." Therefore, for Benjamin (1973:258) "there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another." Nietzsche (1989:40–41) locates a formative element of war at the beginning of all culture where "one cannot fail to see at the bottom of all the noble races the beast of prey ... even their highest culture betrays a consciousness of it and even a pride in it." From ancient times war and cultural refinements were the primary occupations of the warrior classes: "The heroes of the epics again served as

*paradeigmata* for those princes of war were also men of developed aesthetic refinements" (Bryant 1996:82). For example Achilles is noted for his ferocity in battle, delightful singing and skilful play of the lyre, and the chivalrous knights of medieval Europe framed their murderous occupation with ennobling harmonies of musical art (cf. Bryant 1996:82). Likewise European military elites of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were culturally refined "officers, gentlemen and poets" (Bell 2008:21).

Such genealogy, according to Edward Said (1994:xiv) means that culture can be considered as a *battlefield* on which different meaning and different groups fight one another for mastery over meaning of the world and narration of their identity and history:

Culture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another. Far from being a placid realm of Apollonian gentility, culture can even be a battleground on which causes expose themselves to the light of day and contend with one another (Said 1994:xiv).

As the fate of their identity and veracity of their historical narratives are decided in the narratives themselves, the "power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture" (Said 1994:xiii). Indeed, as the study by Huizinga (1971:96) shows, the "agonistic basis" of culture and civilisation was there from the beginning. If culture is a battlefield, then real battlefield is itself a form of culture and a form of education: firstly by giving compulsory education to the enemy (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:122), then stimulating scientific progress and technical and cultural production from literature to clothing and fashion (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:126; White 2002, 2005). Ultimately, war has been, and still remains the stimulus for the enemy to study the resources and characteristics of his attacker while the attacker tries to understand the enemy:

Alexander the Great and Caesar and Napoleon were accompanied on their campaigns by crowds of scholars and linguists to advise

them on every aspect of the enemy's patterns of culture and, of course, to loot any cultural treasures of the enemy that could be conveniently seized (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:125–126).

The same erudition exists in the contemporary wars as the "generals and their staff discuss and mediate on every aspect of the enemies' psychology, studying their cultural histories and resources and technologies, so that today war, as it were, has become the little red schoolhouse of the global village" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:125).

#### **4.6 War as the ontological and epistemological foundation of communication**

A review of the possible inspiration force of war may uncover that from Stone Age cave paintings to modern cinema and cyber-age computer games, war is the most popular theme for visual representations and an important theme in poetry and literature in almost all known cultures (cf. e.g. Brosman 1992:85; Havelock 1972; Perlmutter 1999; van Creveld 1991; 2002). As a study by Brosman (1992) concludes:

Of arms and the man I sing. From the days of the Greeks, the Romans, and the Hebrew chroniclers, epic poetry, drama, and historical accounts have repeatedly been inspired by, and often centered around, war, which Heraclitus called father of all, and king of all. The role played by ... war ... in the whole of ancient Western literature is so central that it can be considered the single most important topic of the body of literature inherited from early Western civilisation. ... much of the oral tradition of non-Western peoples, ... affirm[s] the near-universality of war as a subject for – and doubtless often an impetus to – song, drama, and narrative, oral and written (Brosman 1992:85).

The increase in communication about war in the mass media has consistently attracted large audiences (cf. Hallin & Gitlin 1993). Thus war's "ability to

entertain, to inspire, and to fascinate has never been in doubt” (van Creveld 1991:226). For many thinkers throughout history assumed that war is the measure of all things, as Clausewitz (1985:212) writes, war is “a wonderful trinity” involving: The human *instincts of hatred*, grounded in biological origins; the play of chance that is a free activity expressive of the human soul and *spirituality*; and a political instrument that belongs to the sphere of *reason*. Clausewitz inadvertently describes the way war emerges in the real world and then is transformed and becomes spiritualised. The spiritualisation of war according to Coker (2004:6) it is a process of transformation from the utilitarian to signifying practice: war is firstly an *instrumental* way of using force to gain an objective, and being successful in attaining instrumental goals it gains an *existential* value and becomes a way of life and culture for successful warriors, and in turn success in war defines the identity of the warrior and as such war becomes *metaphysical* because it gives *meaning* to death and to life itself.

The review of the humanising and identity conferring aspects of war in the previous chapter and the review in this chapter of the way war may be a possible foundation for communication and its central place and meaning in human life can be used to evaluate the implications for understanding communication and communication theory.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Following on the reviews and careful interpretative reading of literature in Chapter 3 that revealed how social thinkers since the time of the ancient Greeks understood the way war and killing are central forces in the construction of the human identities, this chapter offered a reading of the literature to trace the way war and killing are shown as the foundation of language and the way war and killing transform concrete bodies into abstract concepts imbued with meaning. The central significance of war for the human being is described by Hegel's conception of the battle that inaugurated human history. The symbolic significance of this primordial battle is its allusion to the manner that the human animal becomes a full human being. The transformation from animal life to

human life is based on the conscious willingness to risk the animal's life: by disregarding its own survival in order to pursue an abstract and immaterial reward which is valued more than life inaugurates the new species of human beings. This battle and contest expressive of human life is constantly re-enacted in wars so as to confer human meaning. From the assumed primacy of war language was born from re-enactment of exchange of blows in the dialogue of gestures. Beginning with Homer, poets, writers, philosophers and artists recorded the tragic sense of life and transformed it into an aesthetic experience that confers immortality to mortal human beings.

Having outlined a new general theoretical understanding of war this understanding will inform a close reading of the way war structures the thought and theories about communication of selected twentieth century thinkers. The next chapter will offer a reading of Johan Huizinga's theory of play that represents an early twentieth century theoretical foundation for understanding media entertainment and its relation to Carl Schmitt's theory of the political and evaluate the formative role of war in both theories.



## CHAPTER 5

# PLAY IS BATTLE AND BATTLE IS PLAY: WAR AS CULTURAL FOUNDATION IN THE THOUGHT OF HUIZINGA AND SCHMITT

Play is battle and battle is play – Huizinga (1971:61)

Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call  
war a game – Huizinga (1971:110)

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters (Chapter 3 and 4) traced war as it is represented in Western tradition and demonstrated how from the time of the ancient Greeks war was assumed as the conscious and unconscious model for human thought. Ever since the time Heraclitus, Homer and Hesiod conceived "war as a way of life" (Havelock 1972:21), the battlefield has been the natural and pervasive metaphor, as well as a literal image of human life. Such understanding of war will inform a close reading of a number of theorists in this and the following chapters.

This chapter will trace the way war appears in the thought of European scholars of the 1930s. The particular aim of this chapter is to uncover the idea of war as a neglected and central dimension in the works of Johan Huizinga who is better known for his writing on the play element in culture. A close reading and interpretation of Huizinga's theory of play will also show that it is war, rather than play, that animates Huizinga's thoughts and writing. The reading also uncovers Huizinga's critique of Carl Schmitt, a contemporary leading German legal scholar known for his concern with the idea of a state of emergency and show how his theory is structured by an intricate view of war. Both Huizinga's and Schmitt's concepts of war will be contrasted and extended.

## **5.2 Johan Huizinga: Homo Ludens**

### **5.2.1 *The agon: culture as battle-play***

In his book *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, originally published in 1938 Johan Huizinga (1971:18) proposes to show "how far culture itself bears the character of play." Huizinga's stated hypothesis is that the play element forms and structures culture, and in turn the characteristic and structure of play manifest themselves in all spheres of human culture. Thus culture emerged from the primordial playfulness of human beings. According to Huizinga (1971:23, 66), human culture originates in play and is always played-out and "civilisation arises and unfolds in and as play" (Huizinga 1971:17). Moreover, it is neither a "rhetorical comparison" nor "a conscious metaphor" to view culture as "*sub specie ludi*" (Huizinga 1971:23, 61).

Subsequent to the publication of Huizinga's book in 1938, it has become a reference point and stimulated development of academic literature on the concept of play (cf. Anchor 1978:63; Ehrmann 1968:31). However, contrary to Huizinga's stated aim, and against the unquestioned assumption that Huizinga primarily produced a theory of play (cf. e.g. Anchor 1978; Caillois 1980; Stephenson 1967), this chapter will demonstrate Huizinga's (1971) unstated actual hypothesis, and show that culture arose not in play but in agonistic battle, and that all fields of human culture bear the character and formative structure of battle and war. As will be demonstrated, for Huizinga play is identical and interchangeable with the agonistic or polemical: play is a *war-like* activity. The battle and play are indivisible and constitute a single primary structure – the "battle-play" as the foundation of human culture and civilisation.

### **5.2.2 *From battle to play: agonistic character of life***

Huizinga begins his argument by proposing that in addition to the two traditional images of man as the rational thinker named *Homo Sapiens*, and man as the toolmaker designated *Homo Faber*, we ought to add a third image of man as the game player, the *Homo Ludens* (cf. Huizinga 1971:17). Moreover, Huizinga

(1971) argues that the human being is primarily a *Homo Ludens*, and that human civilisation and culture developed on the basis of the play instinct: culture arose *in* and *through* the phenomenon of *play* (cf. Huizinga 1971: 23, 66). According to Huizinga (1971:23) all the elements of civilised life, such as, law, commerce, art and craft, poetry, knowledge and science "are rooted in the primeval soil of play." Thus culture can be considered as "*sub specie ludi*," because play is the primary generative force for human cultural development (cf. Huizinga 1971:23).

In order to define play Huizinga proposes that play is identified as the antithesis of seriousness and then he enumerates its specific characteristics as: play is free and enjoyable activity; is experienced as stepping outside of ordinary life; is voluntary and spontaneous; is contained within its own spatial and temporal boundaries; is regulated by rules; and constructs a play community (cf. Huizinga 1971:32).

However, after enumerating the characteristics of play Huizinga concludes that all these formal elements of play can be grouped under two basic aspects, namely, play as being "a contest *for* something" or as a contest for "a representation *of* something". Furthermore, even these two aspects can be condensed and united into the single idea that the "game 'represents' a contest, or else becomes a contest *for* the best representation of something" (Huizinga 1971:32). Thus for Huizinga play is singularly competitive and "represents a combat or a contest" (Huizinga in Ehrmann 1968:36). From this it will become clear that Huizinga inadvertently identifies and locates the primary aspect of play in its competitive and agonistic character. That is, for Huizinga, the real element from which culture emerged is the *agonistic, polemical, and war-like* element that subsumes playfulness. Huizinga's image of man is not the *Homo Ludens* but the playful agonistic *Homo polemos*.

The competitive nature of play, according to Huizinga (cf. 1971:66), means that culture arose in agonistic war-like play. In other words, because play is identical to the agon or strife means that agon (contest and battle) rather than play, is

the primary generative force of culture. To put it differently, the central agonistic and competitive nature of play means that play is ultimately a form of armed strife and can be represented on a continuum that encompasses a whole range of activities from the "most trifling games to bloody and mortal strife" (Huizinga 1971:60). In short, play "represent a combat or a contest" (Ehrmann 1968:36); the play, *agon* and *polemos* form a unity and are almost identical. While Huizinga's stated aim is to reveal and trace the play element as formative force of cultural development, his study inadvertently traces play as a sub-species of the more fundamental phenomenon of *agon* – contest and war. Thus, because battle and play are indivisible, Huizinga's central theme is war and battle or as he notes, it is the "battle-play" as such (cf. Huizinga 1971:60). This dual antithesis of contending playful adversarial forces is a model of culture. Here Huizinga may be influenced by Nietzsche's (1978:21) notion that war is "a joyful occasion".

Despite the emphasis on the *agon*, most scholars assume that Huizinga's enumeration of the characteristic of play is the model he applies in his own analysis, and following suit they use the list of elements for their own cultural analysis to identify how cultural forms manifest the characteristics of play (cf. Anchor 1978:79). Huizinga's classification and model of play has been modified by Caillois (1980) and has been applied with limited success by Stephenson (1967) to study of mass media. In the field of communication theory Huizinga's idea of play does not attract much interest. Huizinga was subsequently criticised by pacifist-inclined thinkers for his single emphasis on the competitive and agonistic aspect of play and culture (cf. Anchor 1978:80; Caillois 1980:152–162). Caillois (1980:158) objection is based on his condemnation of the *agon* as a perversion of culture, because according Caillois, it returns the human being to the brutality of the law of the jungle (cf. Ehrmann 1968:51–52). Tannen (1998), from a feminist perspective, condemns *agonism* as it is manifest in Ong's (1989:10) writing and by implication it would apply to Huizinga as well. Nevertheless, Huizinga's emphasis on the *agon* and *polemos* remains correct (cf. Ong 1989:25, 45).

Indeed, Walter Ong (1989:18) offers the singular and perceptively observation that Huizinga's important contribution is to focus attention on the *adversarial* and "the pervasiveness of the agonistic activity in the form of play through the entire human world" and the civilising and conscious-constructing effects of adversarial activities. According to Ong (1989:25), Huizinga's work "with 'play' was relevant, but his insights have to be refined and redirected ... by thinking in terms of 'contest' rather than of 'play' as such." But as Ong (1989:45) acknowledges, such direction was already inadvertently offered by Huizinga's insistence on the unified identity of play and contest. As Ong (1989:15) argues, contest and adversativeness are part of human life everywhere and have "provided a paradigm for understanding our own existence: in order to know myself, I must know that something else is not me and is (in some measure) set against me, psychologically as well as physically" (Ong 1989:15–16).

The emphasis on the generative primacy of play, which is in essence agonistic play, places Huizinga within two traditions of Western thought, both dating back to antiquity and claim original paternity in Heraclitus. This was reviewed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

First, Huizinga's central emphasis on play as the defining human characteristic has a long philosophical lineage. Man as *Homo Ludens originates* in Heraclitus' idea that "the course of the world is a playing child moving figures on a board." This view is extended in Plato's conception of man as the "plaything of God" and in Schiller's contention that man is only human when he is at play. Similar views are shared by Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger and other modern philosophers (cf. Anchor 1978:63).

Second, Huizinga's emphasis on the agonistic, polemical, and war-like character of play links him to another tradition also originating in Heraclitus who placed the *polemos* as the primordial original principle of the cosmos. Heraclitus, like Hesiod, considered both war as a lethal contest *between* societies and strife *within* a society as a manifestation of the same competitive agonistic spirit of the twin goddesses Eris. Huizinga is inspired by Nietzsche,

who was himself inspired by the value of agonistics in the ancient Greek tradition (cf. Huizinga 1971:177; Nietzsche 1997). Thus, all life is agon, play and polemos, and ultimately as Heraclitus proclaimed: war is the father of all things.

### **5.2.3 Indivisibility of playing and fighting: not a metaphor**

The replacement of the concept play with "battle-contest" or agon – competition, strife and battle – becomes evident as Huizinga's study progresses. The element of play is identical to the agonistic polemos and this means, according to Huizinga (1971) that *polemos* rather than play is the prime civilising force: the "agonistic basis of civilisation is given from the start" and culture developed "in play-like contest" and is not separate from it (cf. Huizinga 1971:95–96).

The proof that play and agon are unified and have the same identity is provided by the linguistic habits of various cultures where the concepts for fighting and playing are used interchangeably. Such linguistic usage provides the "evidence of identity between agonistic and the play principle" (Huizinga 1971:55). All the evidence shows that play, contest and serious strife (*polemos* or war) constitute one single sphere of life (cf. Huizinga 1971:63, 93). The equation and interchange of play and fight demonstrates that "it is more than a rhetorical comparison" to consider culture as *sub specie ludi* (Huizinga 1971:23). Moreover, the equation of "playing and fighting" shows that it is not a "conscious metaphor" but represents a reality. This is so because in the act of playing the distinction between "belief" and "make-believe" dissolves and the "one has *become* the other", as for example, in a magic dance the native tribesman experiences an altered-state of mind and in his magical dance he *is* the animal he plays (cf. Huizinga 1971:44).

The non-metaphorical character of the ancient understanding of play and battle is related to their link with real-world experience. Nietzsche (1989:31–32) explains such relation thus: "All the concepts of ancient man were rather at first incredibly uncouth, coarse, narrow, straightforward and altogether unsymbolic

in meaning." The pre-metaphorical nature of the ancient world considered words and things not as being separate, but as constituting a single domain of human communal life. According to Arendt (1998a) human social life is in the political sphere and consists of two primary activities, that of "action and speech." In pre-Socratic thought, action and speech belong together, and such an exemplary unity is manifest in Achilles "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words." According to Arendt (1998a:25),

speech and action were considered to be coeval and coequal, of the same rank and the same kind; and this originally meant not only that most political action, in so far as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words, but more fundamentally that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action (Arendt 1998a:26).

Foucault (1989b) explains that the pre-metaphor state was "the region where 'things' and 'words' have not yet been separated, and where – at the most fundamental level of language – seeing and saying are still one" (Foucault 1989b:xi). In the ancient world the merging and interchange of the concepts battle and play, meant that both were experienced and performed in the same manner; in playing a game, as in fighting a battle, one can lose or win a game or a battle.

#### **5.2.4 *Play is battle and battle is play: agon as foundation of culture***

To understand the formative function of the agonistic play, Huizinga turns to the ancient Greeks and finds that for them "the whole of life was play" consisting of agonistic competitive activities (cf. Huizinga 1971:50). In Greek, the concepts play, contest, and matches are expressed by the word *agon*. According to Huizinga (1971:49) "we can well say that an essential part of the play-concept is concealed in the field of operation of the *agon*."

The *agon* in Greek life, or the contest anywhere else in the world, bears all the formal characteristics of play and, as to its function, belongs almost wholly to the sphere of the festival, which is the play-sphere. It is quite impossible to separate the contest as a cultural function from the complex play-festival-rite (Huizinga 1971:50).

Here Huizinga shows that play is a subcategory of the *agon*, which is another way of saying that it is the *polemos*. Indeed, Huizinga designates this unity by the concept "battle-play" (Huizinga 1971:60).

In ancient Greece the contest reigned supreme "as the life-principle of society" and was the source of cultural and social developments (cf. Huizinga 1971:93). The "significance of the agonistic principle for culture" means that

there was no transition from "battle to play" in Greece, nor from play to battle, but a development of culture *in* play-like contest. In Greece as elsewhere the play-element was present and significant from the beginning (Huizinga 1971:95, Original emphasis).

Indeed, linguistic evidence shows that in the whole ancient world play and fight were experienced as one single sphere of life and designated by the concept *agon* or *agonia* (cf. Huizinga 1971:55, 60). Subsumed in the concept *agon* are the activities of play, challenge, danger, risk, feat, and in all these there is always something at stake. In the ancient world the "play-terms are regularly applied to armed strife" and it is literally a "battle-play" (Huizinga 1971:60). To understand such experience,

we have to feel our way into the archaic sphere of thought, where serious combat with weapons and all kinds of contests ranging from the most trifling games to bloody and mortal strife were comprised, together with play proper, in the single idea of a struggle with fate limited by certain rules. Seen in this way, the application of the word "play" to battle can hardly be called a



conscious metaphor. Play is battle and battle is play (Huizinga 1971:60–61).

For the Greeks play and battle were indivisible, even when "play may be deadly yet it still remains play" (Huizinga 1971:61). Indeed, because "the majority of Greek contests were fought out in deadly earnest is no reason for separating the agon from play, or for denying the play-character of the former" (Huizinga 1971:69). It should not be forgotten that at "the Olympics there were duels fought to the death" (Huizinga 1971:69). These contests between armed men were characterised as playful *agon* – the proof for this is the depiction of flute-players at such deadly contests, thus indicating the playful attitude.

Likewise, in ancient Israel, as noted in the second book of Samuel a "fight to the death between two groups was still called 'playing'" which links it to the sphere of laughter. Most clearly the equation between agon and play is manifest in warfare.

Ever since words existed for fighting and playing, men have been wont to call war a game ... Language everywhere must have expressed matters in that way from the moment words for combat and play existed (Huizinga 1971:110).

Huizinga (1971:61, 95) concludes that play and agon are indivisible and "polemics cannot be divorced from agonistics" (Huizinga 1971:180–181). Combat and play were blended absolutely in the minds of the ancients where "war-making parties regard themselves and each other as antagonists contending for something to which they feel they have a right" (Huizinga 1971:111).

In order to win competitors will use all possible means; even cheating is an acceptable part of the contest. The use of trickery to gain advantage in war or a game is a legitimate and innovative way for social recognition, and as such it gives rise to a new form of competition among the tricksters themselves (cf. Huizinga 1971:72–73). Evidence of the equation of play with series strife is

widespread in most languages. Play and strife have common characteristics of a contest: there is always something at stake; they involve the idea of winning against an opponent who is a partner to the contest; and there is a desire to dominate and to excel over others so as to gain honour (cf. Huizinga 1971:70). Winning a contest results in gaining honour, virtue, and glory and social rank (cf. Huizinga 1971:86). A contest is the most effective way to maintain dignity and respect, especially when "blood flows, honour is vindicated and restored" (Huizinga 1971:116).

Since ancient times the nobility always demonstrated their virtue by feats of strength in war, tournaments, and contest of words. Since ancient Greece contest of words were considered to be equal with contests using weapons. Ancient military battles were a mixture of exchanging physical blows and exchanging of words: "pitched battle is a confused melee of boasts, insults, altruism, and compliments" (Huizinga 1971:86).

The civilising function of agon and contest is manifest in giving the practical activity of fighting a spiritual or symbolic significance. This transformation, or spiritualisation is evident in ancient societies where even activities aimed at immediate satisfaction of needs, such as hunting, were experienced as play forms (Huizinga 1971:66). Thus, while war has utilitarian motives, these tend to be concealed and the spiritual aims over-emphasised. According to Huizinga (1971:111), "even when sheer hunger moves to war ... the aggressors will interpret it, and perhaps sincerely feel it, as a holy war, a war of honour, divine retribution, and what not."

Even the intimate erotic activities are not exempt from the structuring forces of the agon, contest, and battle. Love is a contest that shows all the elements of playful battle where one overcomes obstacles, competes against other suitors, wins or loses the object of desire, and finally conquest and victory are manifest in the act of copulation (cf. Huizinga 1971:63). Representing love through military vocabulary, that considers the "bed as battlefield" was a popular theme

in Roman literature, masterfully expressed in the poetic work of Ovid (cf. Cahoon 1988).

Warfare as a test of divine justice belongs to both the agonistic as well as ritual spheres. Characterisation of war as being agonistic and ludic are found everywhere: fighting war wholly as a form of contest, considering war as noble game, and seeing war as sport (cf. Huizinga 1971:117–120). The creation of a playful warrior community is part of the civilising force of the agon. The contest or war creates a social order: at the beginning of civilisation rivalry for first rank was a formative and ennobling factor, cultural forms developed in these sacred contests and "in them the structure of society will unfold" (Huizinga 1971:123). The link between war and cultural development leads Ruskin to claim that great art can only be produced by a nation of soldiers and

that all great nations learned their truth of word, and strength of thought, in war; that they were nourished in war, and wasted by peace; taught by war, and deceived by peace; trained by war, and betrayed by peace – in a word, they were born in war, and expired in peace (Huizinga 1971:124–125).

Ultimately

in all these ceremonial and ritual usages as recorded by tradition from all parts of the world, we see war clearly originating in that primitive sphere of continuous and eager contest where play and combat, justice, fate, and chance are intimately commingled (Huizinga 1971:121).

### ***5.2.5 Origin of knowledge and philosophy in the battle-play***

The ancients believed that knowledge was power because it was advantageous in war or in a contest to know the secret names of the gods or the workings of the cosmic order (cf. Huizinga 1971:127). Contests, battles and competition demand knowledge in order to be won. Moreover, combat activities demand knowledge and skills to produce weapons, art, and music.

The marks of the agon are evident in knowledge in the ancient world. Demonstrations of knowledge take the form of a riddle-contest. The riddle-contest originally was not a benign game, because the player's life was at stake: "You either solve or forfeit your head" and the riddle-contest with life at stake was common across ancient cultures (cf. Huizinga 1971:127). Closely linked to riddle-contest and developing on the same structure are the philosophical and theological interrogative discourses, in the form of a question and answer (cf. Huizinga 1971:134–135). These developed in a gradual transition from the sacred riddle-contest with the catch-questions and life at stake, to philosophical and theological disputations in the form of dialogic inquiry. Thus the man of knowledge is born from a challenge and the battle-play of contestations.

The philosopher, from the earliest times to the late Sophists and Rhetors, always appeared as a typical champion. He challenged his rivals, he attacked them with vehement criticism and extolled his own opinion as the only true one with all the boyish cocksureness of archaic man. In style and form the earliest samples of philosophy are polemical and agonistic (Huizinga 1971:138).

For Huizinga the structure of thought reflects society: the antagonistic antithetical structure of archaic society is projected as if it were the antithetical structure of the cosmos. Ancient philosophies are "pervaded by a strong sense of the agonistic structure of the universe" and "life and cosmos are seen as the eternal conflict of opposites which is the root-principle of existence" and typically reflected in Heraclitus contention that "strife was 'the father of all things'" (Huizinga 1971:139). Huizinga concludes that just as social structure was shaped by the agonistic contest and is reflected in human mind, the converse is also true:

It is no accident that the antithetical trend of archaic philosophy was fully reflected in the antithetical and agonistic structure of

archaic society. Man had long been accustomed to think of every thing as cleft into opposites and dominated by conflict. Hesiod recognised a good Eris – beneficial strife – as well as a destructive Eris (Huizinga 1971:139).

The origins of ancient Greek philosophy are grounded in the battle-play and contest ultimately culminates in the art of sophistry and the poetics of ritual and riddle-contests. The representation of the Sophists as linked with ritual in the ancient culture, typically describes the Sophist as a prophet, medicine-man, poet, whose primary business is to "exhibit his amazing knowledge", and to stage a spectacle of battle-play where he can "defeat his rival in public contest" (Huizinga 1971:170). The Sophist is a nomad performer, and on visiting a town he gives a magnificent spectacle demonstrating his skills:

He was gaped at like a miraculous being, likened to the heroes of athletics; in short, the profession of sophist was quite on a par with sport. The spectators applauded and laughed at every well-aimed crack. It was pure play, catching your opponent in a net of argument or giving him a knock-out blow (Huizinga 1971:171).

Thus for the sophists' there is no clear distinction between play, sport, and fight. The Sophists' art is also related to the riddle-contest, described as "a fencer's trick" (Huizinga 1971:172). Likewise the philosophical art of Socrates and Plato is aptly described as play and as battle (cf. Huizinga 1971:171). The sporting and agonal character of sophistry was not lost with the rise of philosophy. The agonal and sporting elements are central to subsequent philosophy which was, as a matter of fact, thought in a gymnasium together with boxing and wrestling (cf. Hawhee 2002a; 2002b).

The posing of a *problem* for the philosophical riddle was a form of challenge one throws at another's feet while at the same time it was like placing a shield in front of yourself for self defence. The questions thrown at the opponent were there to catch and ensnare him (cf. Huizinga 1971:172). The philosophical dialogue of Plato is carried in the same spirit of agon, as it "is sometimes

playing with purely childish tricks of grammar and logic, and sometimes verging on the profundities of cosmologies and epistemology" (Huizinga 1971:173). But Plato's presentation of Socratic dialogue as if it were systematically structured is a fiction: "For obviously real conversation, however polished it may have been with the Greeks, could never have had the gloss of the literary dialogue" (Huizinga 1971:174). This is so because of the strong spontaneous and agonistic character of ancient Greek oral society that enters every the conversation (cf. Huizinga 1971:175–176).

The agonistic character of dialogic communication is acquired from the agonistic character of society. The primacy of contests and the way it shapes culture is interlinked with the dominant form of communication in ancient society. Therefore according to Walter Ong (1982) the particular agonistic character of ancient society is derived from its face-to-face interaction which is agonistic and conflictual. The oral encounter in a face-to-face communicative interaction takes place in the "arenas where human beings struggle with each other." For primitive people language is mode of action, it is performance oriented rather than information oriented; it is a way of doing something to someone (cf. Ong 1982:171, 177). For example,

proverbs and riddles are not used simply to store knowledge but to engage others in verbal and intellectual combat: utterance of one proverb or riddle challenges hearers to top it with more apposite or contradictory one (Ong 1982:44).

The habit of bragging about one's own prowess, verbal tongue-lashing and reciprocal name-calling in which one opponent tries to outdo another are standard practices, and verbal communication is a *stylised art form* based on the model of combat (cf. Ong 1982:44).

Changes in mode of communication, such as the invention of writing and print which became widely diffused in society also changed behaviour and thought from oral to literate modes. Subsequently philosophical dialogue lost its agonistic character and its power declined. Intermittent revivals of controversies

have interrupted philosophy's slumber. During times of conflict and controversy the "agonistic element inevitably comes to the fore" and philosophy once again returns to its lively agonistic origin. For example, in the Middle Ages, once again, to "beat your opponent by reason or force of word becomes a sport comparable with the profession of arms" (Huizinga 1971:179). The revival of philosophical and theological disputations in the Middle Ages, gave some philosophers the opportunity to exchange their military profession and weapons of war for weapons of dialectic. Such a "mixture of rhetoric, war, and play can be also found in the scholastic competitions of the Muslim theologians" (Huizinga 1971:180).

It is such competition that inspires cultural growth, and the modern education system developed from the agonistic, ludic and ferociously competitive spirit of the medieval scholars (cf. Huizinga 1971:179–180). But controversies and restoration of the agonistic character to philosophy are condemned by contemporary scholars. For example, according to Huizinga (1971:177) "some of Nietzsche's biographers blame him for having re-adopted the old agonistic attitude of philosophy." But in Huizinga's estimation restoring agonism to philosophy is a positive development, and if Nietzsche restored the agon, then he "has led philosophy back to its antique origins" (Huizinga 1971:177). Huizinga significantly concludes that "all knowledge ... is polemical by nature, and polemics cannot be divorced from agonistics" (Huizinga 1971:180–181).

### ***5.2.6 The battle-play as structure of law***

Agon and battle-play manifest themselves in all cultural fields because these fields are produced and structured by the force of agon and polemos. Law, the idea of justice, and jurisprudence have their origin in the contest. In ancient Greece litigation was considered as an agon, characterised as a contest, and governed by rules and sacred formula. Such formative structure continues to inform the juridical process to the present (cf. Huizinga 1971:97).

The modern lawsuit still remains a verbal battle, as it was in antiquity and all possible means are used to undo the other party to the lawsuit (cf. Huizinga

1971:99, 105–106, 109). The lawsuit is correctly "regarded as a game of chance, a contest, or a verbal battle" because its outcome is uncertain and depends of chance pronouncement by a judge (cf. Huizinga 1971:99). All the proceedings before a judge are motivated by the agonistic desire to win: "The style and language in which the juristic wrangling of modern lawsuit are conducted often betray a sportsmanlike passion for indulging in argument and counter argument" (Huizinga 1971:99). In ancient society central to the lawsuit "is not so much the abstract question of right or wrong" but what occupies the archaic mind was "the very concrete question of winning or losing" (Huizinga 1971:100). And "winning as such is, for the archaic mind, proof of truth and rightness" (Huizinga 1971:103). In ancient society the final decision in a legal suit, as all decisions in war and games of chance were assumed to manifest divine judgement, and ultimately the "test of the will of the gods is victory or defeat" (Huizinga 1971:112). Therefore, to gain quick decision instead of trying out one's strength in contest, or throw of dice, or consult the oracle "or disputing by fierce words – all of which may equally well serve to elicit the divine decision – you could resort to war" (Huizinga 1971:112). Winning a war was itself proof of being in the right. Thus Nietzsche's Zarathustra is correct in proclaiming that "it is the good war that hallows every cause" (Nietzsche 1969:74). As Huizinga explains:

In order to understand these associations we have to look beyond our customary division between the juridical, the religious, and the political. What we call "right" can equally well, archaically speaking, be "might" – in the sense of "the will of the gods" or "manifest superiority". Hence an armed conflict is as much a mode of justice as divination or a legal proceeding (Huizinga 1971:112).

The complexity of these ideas can be seen in the practice of the "single combat" in ancient culture. The single combat demonstrates a variety of purposes, from showing personal courage, or used as a pre-battle test, where the bravest warriors challenge their opposite numbers. As the battle is a testing



of fate, the outcome of a single combat of champions sometimes replaced a battle by large armies (cf. Huizinga 1971:113).

### **5.2.7 *The battle-play as structure of poetry, art and politics***

The art of poetry originates in the battle-play sphere, sacred play of religion, festive play of courtship, martial contest, disputations, bragging, mockery, and play of wit (cf. Huizinga 1971:152). In the archaic culture the function of poetry was social and liturgical; it combines ritual, entertainment, artistry, riddle-making, doctrine, persuasion, sorcery, soothsaying, prophecy, and competition (cf. Huizinga 1971:142). Poetry's link with contest is evident in the rivalry among the poets and story-tellers. Indicative of such association with contest is the fact that the majority of poetry and literature have strife and war as their main theme (cf. Huizinga 1971:155). Likewise, theatrical drama and comedy was originally produced for public competition and their subject matter itself is the agonistic conflict (cf. Huizinga 1971:168).

Competition is also integral to production of music, as is demonstrated by the mythological battle of Marsyas and Apollo. The fierce contests between composers, players, and singers are well known throughout history and competition also sustains musical development in contemporary society (cf. Huizinga 1971:188). Throughout the ages music and military practice were closely associated; music playing always accompanied troops marching into battle. Thucydides records the use of music before the battle:

The Spartans now began to sing their war-songs, reminding each other of the glorious actions in which they had all shared .... Then the armies closed in. The Argives and their allies rushed forward in a violent fury, but the Spartans moved slowly to the measured music of a band of pipers. This is not done for any religious reason, but to make sure they keep in step while they're advancing and to stop the whole formation disintegrating, as so often happens when large armies move into attack (Nichols & McLeish 1979:23).

Production and use of plastic and visual art is interrelated with war and agonistic play. Art is related to artisanship and used for decoration of weapons (cf. Huizinga 1971:188–192), an original example is found in Homer's description of the blacksmith decorating Achilles' shield. Art production is itself a contest and battle:

The agonistic impulse, which we found to be powerfully operative over so many fields of culture, also comes to fruition in art. The desire to challenge a rival to perform some difficult, seemingly impossible feat of skill lies deep in the origin of civilisation (Huizinga 1971:194).

There is distinctive similarity between Huizinga's description above and Hesiod's description of the rivalry between competing artisans and their desire to challenge rivals, to demonstrate their superiority in skills, and excel over their competitors.

Competition is the driving forces behind plastic arts, and architecture. The master-pieces and demonstration of skill in plastic art do for the artist and architect "what the sacred riddle-contest did for philosophy", and "it is next to impossible to distinguish absolutely between the contest in making and the contest in excelling" (Huizinga 1971:194). Ultimately the origin of all art is a contest against death:

The great cultural heroes, so the mythologies tell us, invented all the arts and skills which are now the treasures of civilisation, as a result of some contest, very often with their life at stake ... If competitive artisanship is an ever-recurrent theme in myth and legend it has played a very definite part in actual development of art and techniques (Huizinga 1971:195).

Even behind the practical objectives of producing utensils "there always lurks the primordial play-function of the contest as such" (Huizinga 1971:197).

Huizinga (1971:198) concludes that it was not difficult for him to have demonstrated the spirit of "playful competition" as being the fundamental form of social life and that civilisation arises "*in and as play and never leaves it.*" Indeed, in his conclusion Huizinga (1971:198) singles out the "agon" and not simply "play" as the formative and driving force of social and cultural development. It is not simply "play" but "a certain play-factor" that was "extremely active all through the cultural process", and this specific factor is "playful competition" which shows that the agonistic factor is older than culture and "pervades all life" (Huizinga 1971:198). For Huizinga (1971:66), as for his contemporary intellectuals, such as Nietzsche, Schmitt, Simmel and Heidegger, and subsequent generations of thinkers such as, Norbert Elias, and Foucault, the agon and *polemos* – contest and battle – are the primary civilising forces ever present in culture and society.

### **5.2.8 Huizinga's social critique: decline of agonistic spirit and seriousness that kills**

Having identified the agonistic and playful elements as the basic structure of culture, Huizinga wonders whether this playful-battle-contest spirit still manifests itself in the contemporary culture of his time (the 1930s). To answer this question, Huizinga takes a brief look at the historical development of the distinction between play and seriousness since the antiquity.

Compared with the playful agon of ancient Greece, the Roman antiquity at first appearance seems more austere and less playful. Looked at more closely, the agonistic-ludic element reveals itself in rituals that were appropriately named *ludi*. The Roman state itself, despite its claim to utility, was not purely a utilitarian institution. The agonistic element is manifest in numerous activities such as triumphal processions, laurels, and martial glory, and all these activities obviously are not purely means to an end. The Roman Triumphal procession is more than a solemn celebration of martial victory; it is rather a means to re-experience well-being. And while Roman wars were made for self-preservation, the impulse to make war is primarily agonistic, "envy of and lust for power and

glory rather than hunger or defence" (Huizinga 1971:202). Indeed, the agonistic element is most visible in the concept "*panem et circenses*" (bread and circus). This is not simply a demand to be fed, but it is a demand for entertainment by the bloody gladiatorial spectacles: feeding of body and spirit are indivisible. This demonstrates that Rome could not live without competitive games, and the game/battle is as necessary for existence as is bread (cf. Huizinga 1971:202–203).

The medieval world inherited the Roman culture and the agonistic contest, and battle remained paramount (cf. Huizinga 1971:205). Indeed, in his early study *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Huizinga (1972:39) already notes the central importance of the battle-contest in the Middle Ages. The importance is evident from the statement by a medieval chronicle, Chastellain, who notes that "after the deeds and exploits of war, which are claims to glory ... the household is the first thing ... most necessary to conduct and arrange well." That is, first there is the public duty of war and only then comes the private duty of household management.

Compared with playful agonism of antiquity as well as with the utilitarian Middle Ages, the contemporary twentieth century modern world and its culture seem to have stopped being "played" out. Playfulness is being banished and replaced with morbid seriousness, while intellectual life becomes dominated by the grotesque Marxist misconception that the world is singularly motivated by economic and material interests (cf. Huizinga 1971:218). Huizinga (1971) notes that a central trend of the contemporary world is a reversal of values of seriousness and play.

Sport and athletics showed us play stiffening into serious business but still being felt as play; now we come to serious business degenerating into play but still being called serious (Huizinga 1971:226).

Yet even this reversal reveals that the playful agonism has not been entirely eradicated. Moreover, the agonistic spirit is encouraged by the new technology,

propaganda and mass communication that promote competitive spirit on a large scale. It is as if, play has taken over the utilitarian considerations of the economy. The result is that "business becomes play" and "play becomes business" (Huizinga 1971:226–227). The trend of making business into a playful battlefield continues further. McLuhan (1969:250) reports that in the 1960s it had become the latest fashion among Japanese businessmen to have taken to the study of classical military techniques of Sun Tzu and apply them in business. The same trends continues today with the attempts to apply Clausewitz's war principles to business (cf. e.g. Ries & Trout 1986), and the use of general war strategies as inspiration for business (cf. e.g. Greene 2007).

In Huizinga's estimation the playful contest element has also kept parliamentary politics of the 1930s alive with its sense of fair-play and gentlemen's agreement. The competitive spirit of fellowship "would allow the bitterest opponents a friendly chat even after the most virulent debate", and it is this contest-play element that eases social tension. For Huizinga (1971:234) the playful agonistic nature of humour keep society alive, but "it is the decay of humour that kills."

### **5.2.9 Huizinga confronts Carl Schmitt**

For Huizinga the decay of humour is exemplified by the writing of the German legal scholar Carl Schmitt. In the last section of his book, Huizinga (1971) briefly takes issue with Carl Schmitt's conception the political. According to Huizinga (1971:236) Schmitt considers war as the natural relation between nation-states therefore war is a serious business devoid of its ancient agonistic play element. Huizinga (1971:236) rejects Schmitt's idea that all true relation between national-state are warlike and are based on the principle distinction between friend and enemy, whereby other nations or social groups are either friends or enemies. For Huizinga, this represents a barbarous mode of thought, because the enemy is not an equally respected rival or adversary, but is simply a stranger or foreigner that is in the group's way and needs to be eliminated. For Huizinga, Schmitt's conception removes all the agonistic competition from

politics, and is a sad "fall from human reason" and is an "inhuman" and "barbarous" delusion (Huizinga 1971:236).

Huizinga's condemnation of Schmitt is derived from an ideological difference between Dutch and German intellectuals, as well as Huizinga's humanist historian's perspective, as against Schmitt's legalistic approach. Huizinga's rejection of Schmitt is also based on not being able to see how close Schmitt's formulation of the distinction of friend-foe is to Huizinga's own view of the agon. Schmitt's characterisation of the friend-enemy antithesis is an attempt to identify the particular and irreducible character of the political sphere (discussed in the next section). But the use of antithesis is also central to Huizinga's search for the unique and irreducible character of play. Furthermore, the antithesis itself is agonistic: it is a contrast and contest between extreme opposites. For example, for Huizinga (1971:24) there is always a tension between the antithesis of play and seriousness. The antitheses relevant to other cultural fields do not apply to the characterisation of play:

Play lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil. Although it is a non-material activity, it has no moral function. And valuation of vice and virtue do not apply here (Huizinga 1971:25).

This is precisely the spirit and procedure in which Schmitt approaches his search for a unique characterisation of the political sphere, as will be shown in the next section.

Huizinga also fails to realise that the enemy-friend dichotomy is the eternal "we-them" antithesis that is an "a priori existential rule that governs the way we must think about the meaning of our existence" (Gelven 1994:134).

Huizinga believes that Schmitt is assuming war to be a serious business, and so denies it its agonistic playful character. According to Huizinga (1971:236) Schmitt is mistaken to take such a view because "it is not war that is serious, but peace." For Huizinga "war and everything to do with it remain fast in the

daemonic and magical bond of play" and this is the element of agonistic contest and a sense of fair-play in both war and politics that makes both war and political contest human (Huizinga 1971:236). In this sense, according to Huizinga, even modern warfare still contains an element of the old agonistic "attitude of playing at war for the sake of prestige and glory" (Huizinga 1971:237). And it is evident that,

the methods by which war-policies are conducted and war-preparations carried out still show abundant traces of the agonistic attitude as found in primitive society. Politics are and have always been something of a game of chance; we have only to think of the challenges, the provocations, the threats and denunciations to realise that war and the policies leading up to it are always, in the nature of things, a gamble (Huizinga 1971:237).

Huizinga (1971:238) concludes that "civilisation cannot exist in the absence of a certain play-element." This is another way of affirming that civilisation cannot exist without the *agon* and *polemos*, on the basis of which the *logos* – culture, symbolic activity and language – are developed and thrive. Thus for Huizinga and many European intellectuals of the 1930s, as for Nietzsche some decades earlier, war is an expression of human spirit and provides a welcome antidote to an increasing life of boredom in a peaceful society. Thus even the mechanised ferocious slaughter of the First World War, inspired great art and was experienced as a "jolly good sport" (cf. Eksteins 1989:219).

As will be seen in the next section, Schmitt concurs with Huizinga's conclusion that banishment of war and imposition of the seriousness of peace are insidious means of destruction. Ultimately, the reason Huizinga is critical of Schmitt's idea of war as the central formative force of politics, is due to Huizinga's blindness to his own positioning of war, or battle-play as the central structuring force of the cultural spheres.

### **5.3 Carl Schmitt: the concept of the political**

#### **5.3.1 *War makes the state, and the state makes war***

The question animating Schmitt's inquiry in his book *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt 1976) is the nature of the human association: the modern state. In conventional understanding the state is the political association of people within a territorial unit (cf. Schmitt 1976:19). From the various descriptions of the state it is always linked with the political, therefore, Schmitt concludes (1976:19) that "the concept of the state presupposes the concept of the political." The political is prior to the state and is its foundation. To understand the state there is a need to understand the political.

The state as an organised political sphere can be distinguished from other forms of social organisation, while the political sphere can also be contrasted against other spheres of social life such as, the economy, morality, and law (cf. Schmitt 1976:20). Thus characteristically, the political is always presented as an antithesis of these other spheres, such as the religious, cultural, economic, legal and scientific (cf. Schmitt 1976:23). However, the political stands above all other spheres of human life and embraces them all because of the political sphere's link with the state's monopoly of power, use of violence, and legitimacy to decide on issues of life-and-death (cf. Schmitt 1976:24–25, 32). Schmitt contends that such definitions only describes the political negatively, as being an antithesis of other spheres, but do not provide a clue as to the particular *essence* or character of the activities that go on in the political sphere (cf. Schmitt 1976:20).

For Schmitt, a definition and understanding of the political can only be gained by identifying its unique characteristics or "criteria" of operation relevant to the political field in contrast to the particular criteria of evaluation applicable in other social fields. The definition of "the political" must therefore rest on identification of its own unique and specific criteria (cf. Schmitt 1976:25–26). For this purpose Schmitt first identifies the particular criteria functioning in the various human



spheres. The fundamental character of these criteria is the act of classification and evaluation relevant to the respective field.

Let us assume that in the realm of morality the final distinctions are between good and evil, in aesthetics beautiful and ugly, in economics profitable and unprofitable (Schmitt 1976:26).

The distinctive criteria and the "specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (Schmitt 1976:26). This means that the particular activities taking place in the political sphere of a sovereign state relate to the decisions on whether or not to declare war because an enemy has been identified.

This function of identifying and distinguishing between an enemy and a friend in the political field is independent from any of the criteria functioning in the other fields of human action. The distinction between enemy and friend is made by the participants in the political action, independently of any judgement of outsiders, because only the actual participants can recognise whether the enemy intends to threaten their way of life and needs to be repulsed so they can preserve their own existence (cf. Schmitt 1976:27). Thus using only political criteria, the political enemy is not morally evil, aesthetically ugly, or an economic competitor, but he is "the other, the stranger" (Schmitt 1976:27). The enemy is "existentially something different and alien" and in extreme cases "conflicts with him are possible" (Schmitt 1976:27). This is so because the enemy can threaten the existence of the political group.

From this analysis it follows that Schmitt's original thesis that the state presupposes the political, is itself dependent on another prior presupposition: If the primary action within the political field is to identify friends and enemies, and if war is always the extreme possibility, then it implies that the political presupposes war. In other words, because war is the primary and constant independent variable, Schmitt is saying more or less, that firstly, war makes the state, and secondly, the state makes war, and thirdly, that political activity is war by other means.

Indeed, Schmitt's consideration of war as the formative element of the state, and as being the reality, as well as being the constant potential threat of war is confirmed by the historical studies of European state-making from 900 to 1900 by Charles Tilly. For Tilly, the whole of history of European state-making can be characterised by the statement: "War makes the state and the state makes war" (cf. Tilly 1975; 1990; 1997).

### **5.3.2 *Enemy and friend: not a metaphor***

For Schmitt the concepts "friend and enemy" must be understood in their "concrete and existential" sense because these are "not metaphors or symbols" (Schmitt 1976:27). According to Schmitt (1976:28) it

is irrelevant here whether one rejects, accepts, or perhaps finds it an atavistic remnant of barbaric times when nations continue to group themselves according to friend and enemy ... distinction.

Such criteria are not abstractions or normative ideals but are based on reality, and the real ability of a political group to identify an enemy and a friend. The concepts friend and enemy refer to the eternal political distinction and drawing of boundaries between groups. It is a border between "us" and "them" that is the source of all human identity. The reason the distinction is not metaphorical is that, in the domain of politics people do not confront each other as abstractions but as politically interested and determined persons (cf. Schmitt in Mouffe 2000:41).

The important characteristic of the political enemy is that he is not simply a competitor, a partner to a general conflict, nor is he a "private adversary whom one hates" but the enemy is a "public enemy".

The enemy is not merely any competitor or just any partner of conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a

relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such relationship (Schmitt 1976:28).

According to Schmitt (1976:32), "for the enemy concept belongs the ever-present possibility of combat" and all "peripherals must be left aside from this term." The word combat does not mean "competition" or "intellectual controversy" nor "symbolic wrestling" which is a symbolic general understanding of life as a constant struggle in which every human being is symbolically a combatant. Schmitt (1976:33) notes that the word "combat" must be understood in its existential sense:

The friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to real possibility of physical killing ... War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity (Schmitt 1976:33).

For Schmitt the public nature of the enemy means that the enemy is *hostis* not *inimicus*, and it is only in the private sphere that it makes sense to "love the enemy" (Schmitt 1976:29). The distinction between private and public is important because the enemy does not have to be personally hateful.

Never in the thousand-year struggle between Christians and Moslems did it occur to a Christian to surrender rather than defend Europe out of love toward the Saracens or Turks (Schmitt 1976:29).

The state and the political arise from the clash of "one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity" (Schmitt 1976:28). The state and the political arena are the result of the original battle, and as the battle ends the combatants are transformed into adversary oppositional political groups. Thus it is clear that for Schmitt war is at the foundation of the political and the state.

The political battle is not metaphorical because, in the first instance the political sphere was established in a real historical battle. Moreover, like a real battle,

the political battle is not metaphorical because one can lose or win a political battle. This perspective places Schmitt in the a long philosophical tradition originating in Heraclitus, and more specifically traced back to Plato's and Aristotle's political writing, and finds its modern manifestation in Machiavelli and Hobbes, and in Germany, in Hegel's view of the state and Clausewitz's conception of warfare. Indeed, war as a real experience and as an idea was central in the thoughts of European intellectuals of the 1930s. War is a general *Zeitgeist* of European society since the nineteenth century, whereby military and martial influences are integrated into everyday social and intellectual life (cf. Bell 2008; Keegan 2004a, 2004b). Thus for Schmitt, as it was for Huizinga (1971), war is the formative element and the model for culture and political life. For Schmitt, as Leo Strauss (1976:92) notes, "the political is a basic characteristic of human life and in this sense, politics is destiny; therefore man cannot escape from the political." The inescapable affirmation of the political and the need to make real political decisions is also an affirmation of fighting and war (cf. Strauss 1976:102–103).

### **5.3.3 *Politics as war by other means; war as politics by other means***

Schmitt claims not to share Clausewitz's commonly represented view that war is continuation of politics by other means. According to Schmitt (1976:33-34) "the military battle itself is not the 'continuation of policies by other means' as the famous term of Clausewitz is generally incorrectly cited." Like Clausewitz, Schmitt considers war to be subordinate to the political: war "does not have its own logic" and always "politics remains its brain." This is so because identifying enemies and friends, and deciding on war are ultimate political decisions and not purely military ones. Schmitt approvingly quotes Clausewitz that war always assumes the characteristics of politics (cf. Schmitt 1976:34). For Schmitt war and politics must not be directly confused because war is not the aim, purpose or content of politics, but war is only a potential, and it is war and the "real possibility of physical killing" that shape the activity in the political sphere. As Schmitt puts is:

War is neither the aim nor the purpose nor even the very content of politics. But as an ever-present possibility it is the leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behaviour (Schmitt 1976:34).

And again:

The political does not reside in the battle itself ... But in the mode of behaviour which is determined by this possibility (Schmitt 1976:37).

This indicates that Schmitt considers war as the formative forces of the political, and war determines the modes of action and thought in the political sphere. As he confirms "only in real combat" the experience of enmity is revealed and "from this most extreme possibility human life derives its specifically political tension" (Schmitt 1976:35). In other words, Schmitt says that political action, i.e. the "political behaviour" is *war-like* because it was forged in, and by war, and is even determined by the imagination of a possible war, has the characteristics of war and can become a war. Having constructed the political and imparted to it war-like character war always is a mode of thought and the extreme possibility.

Schmitt seems to have diverged from his original alignment with Clausewitz's view that politics determines war. Now Schmitt seems to say that war determines the political. This points to a contradiction in Schmitt's discussion of the relation of war and politics. First he claims primacy for the political as final arbiter in matters of war, however, at the same time, Schmitt also claims that war and the potential of war determines the political action and political behaviour, which implies a circular argument.

Schmitt's contradiction is derived from his acceptance of Clausewitz's definition of modern war as if it were the only definition of warfare. For Clausewitz war is subordinate to the political, and as such it is an extension, and an instrument of political action (cf. Schmitt 1973:3). Here Schmitt limits his consideration of war

within Clausewitz's definition of modern war that assumes that war can only be engaged by a legitimate state. But Clausewitz has a much wider conception of war. For Clausewitz (1985:121) war is "chameleon-like in character" as it changes according to circumstance. Primarily, for Clausewitz "war is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale", it is the "countless number of duels which make up a war." For Clausewitz war can best be represented by imagining "two wrestles" and each "strives by physical force to compel the other to submit to his will" (Clausewitz 1985:101). And Clausewitz (1985:171) continues: "War in its literal meaning is fighting, for fighting alone is the efficient principle in the manifold activity which in a wide sense is called war." Clausewitz characterises the activity of fighting: "War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds; as one side dictates the law to the other, there arises a sort of reciprocal action" (Clausewitz 1985:103). All this implies that war can be characterised on a continuum: from the duel of two individual wrestlers to the clash of mass armies of modern nation-states.

Moreover, while Clausewitz is aware of the influence of war on politics, he also recognises that in turn, war shapes the political sphere, and influences political action. Clausewitz realises that there is a mutual reversibility between war and politics. As Clausewitz (1985:108) remarks:

Even the final decision of a whole War is not always to be regarded as absolute. The conquered State often sees in it only a passing evil, which may be repaired in after times by means of political combinations.

What Clausewitz implies, is that while it is true that modern war is an instrument of policy, it is equally true that politics is a continuation of war by other means. Thus, ultimately Schmitt cannot escape Clausewitz's agonistic conception of war and politics. Indeed, Schmitt seems to acknowledge the reversibility of war and politics, when he notes that "the politician is better schooled for the battle than the soldier, because the politician fights his whole life whereas the soldier does so in exceptional circumstances only" (Schmitt 1976:34). (In later

publications Schmitt extends his consideration of war, but a discussion of these works is beyond the scope of this chapter as it is only concerned with his work from the 1930s and as it relates to Huizinga's criticism.)

Schmitt's view of the political seems to indicate the primacy of war and battle as its structuring structure and foundation. This is reminiscent of Hegel's notion of the primordial battle at the beginning of history, or a historically recorded battle that reminds a national group of the origin of its identity. Following from Clausewitz's analysis, the political is formed when the military battle ends and the fighting is transformed into the political arena. Schmitt's emphasis on the potential war as the limit of the political indicates that, following from Clausewitz's analysis, he realises that the political can be reversed into a real battle once again. War remains a potential backdrop in two senses: (a) the primary functioning of the political is to make decisions regarding real war with identifiable enemy groups, and (b) war remains a possibility, the extreme end of the political and the last resort when the political action fails.

To understand the dynamic of war in the operation of the political Elias Canetti (1981) offers a clear explanation of the reversibility of war and politics. According to Canetti (1981:220) the modern parliamentary system is based on the "psychological structure of opposing armies." At the termination of the real war the two fighting adversary groups remain and continue to fight, but the fight takes a different form and excludes direct killing. According to Canetti (1981:220), "the two factions remain; they fight on, but in the form of warfare which has renounced killing." Thus on the political battlefield killing is exchanged for the vote: the final victory and defeat is decided by the act of taking a vote, while death and killing have been renounced as instruments of decision-making (cf. Canetti 1981:222). The similarity between the political and war is seen in that whereas in real battle the army with the largest number of combatants will prevail over the adversary, in the political battle numbers have the same importance:

A parliamentary vote does nothing but ascertain the relative strength of two groups at a given time and place ... It is all that is left of the original lethal clash and it is played out in many forms, with threats, abuse and physical provocation which may lead to blows or missiles. But the counting of the vote ends the battle (Canetti 1981:220).

The political battle is a confrontation, "it is will against will as in war", and each adversary is convinced of the rightness of his conviction; it is this spirit of will and conviction that keeps the contest alive, and in turn, the contest keeps the will and conviction alive (cf. Canetti 1981:221). Each member of the outvoted political party accepts the voting decision, and concedes defeat, but unlike defeat in real war, here life is not at stake, and there is no punishment for having opposed the winner. However, what the defeated anticipates "is future battles, and many of them; in none of them will he be killed" (Canetti 1981:221). This implies that the combatants in political parliamentary battles have immunity from death, and the conflict must stop before actual killing can take place. Ultimately, in the parliamentary battle "there are, and can be, no dead" (Canetti 1981:221). The difference between warfare battle and political battle is this:

War is war because the dead are included in the final reckoning.  
Parliament is parliament only so long as the dead are excluded  
(Canetti 1981:221).

The renunciation of death and killing as means of decision making implies that the voting and their results as sacred:

Every single vote puts death, as it were, on the side. But the effect of killing would have had on the strength of the enemy is scrupulously put down in figures; and anyone who tampers with these figures, who destroys or falsifies them, lets death in again without knowing it (Canetti 1981:222).



This interchangeability is expressed in Marx's notion of the permanent class war (cf. Schmitt 1976:37). Significantly, this reversibility of war and politics is taken up by Foucault (2003) who considers it as the central characteristic of the formation and operation of a society. Following Schmitt, Mouffe (1993; 2000) proposes that the warring *antagonist* enemy is transformed into a political debating *agonist*. (This is discussed in the next chapter).

Ultimately, Schmitt has a double vision: the political decides on issues of war, but at the same time, war is the generative paternity and formative force of the political and social order. As Schmitt states:

For only in real combat is revealed the most extreme consequence of the political grouping of friend and enemy. From this most extreme possibility human life derives its specifically political tension (Schmitt 1976:35).

Schmitt's conception of war shares in the dominant view of war and politics of European intellectuals of the early twentieth century. Schmitt positions himself within the German spirit of the times. German justification of war acknowledges war's horrors, but contends that it is an edifying struggle with purifying moral effect; what is important is the "readiness to sacrifice and not the object of sacrifice" (Fukuyama 1992:332). This affirms Nietzsche's contention that war and struggle "demonstrated one's inner strength and superiority to materialism and natural determination" and are the source of human freedom and creativity (cf. Fukuyama 1992:332).

Weber and Simmel, among others, consider war as playing the central role in state formation. Indeed, Joas (2003:156–157) notes the resemblance of Schmitt's view of war to Simmel's consideration of war as existential condition. According to Simmel (1966:109), war as armed conflict is a *primary* human condition. Thus "in early stages of culture, war is almost the only form in which contact with alien groups is brought about at all ... war is the only sociological relation between different groups" (Simmel 1966:33). The convergent relations among *people as wholes*, especially in earlier times, existed only for purpose of

war, while other relations, such as trade and commerce, hospitality, and intermarriage, only concerned *individuals* (cf. Simmel 1966:107). Simmel (1966:87) suggests that war and conflict are the main forces that constitute society and shape each social group's identity. War, conquest, victory or defeat provides a social group with its particular dynamics. For Simmel ending a war by conquest means that

it is almost inevitable that an element of commonness injects itself into the enmity once the state of open violence yields to any other relationship, even though this new relation may contain a completely undiminished sum of animosity between two parties (Simmel 1966:26).

But the conquest and the relationship between the antagonists forge some element of convergence of interests and community, thus divergence "and harmony became inextricably interwoven" and the animosity is a foundation of future commonness (Simmel 1966:26). This implies, according to Simmel, that peace is a situation of "a diffuse, imperceptible, or latent form" and ultimately emerges into open and direct fight (cf. Simmel 1966:109–110). The unity that is established for the purpose of war can maintain itself beyond the period of original struggle and the unity becomes the foundation for a national group. For example,

Essentially, France owes the consciousness of its national unity only to its fight against England, and the Moorish war made the Spanish region into one people ... The United States needed the War of Independence; Switzerland, the fight against Austria; the Netherlands, rebellion against Spain; the Achaean League, the struggle against Macedonia; and the founding of the new German Empire furnished a parallel to all these instances (Simmel 1966:100).

For a human collectivity war and conflict are the central dynamics of intra-, and inter-group relations. When a group enters into antagonistic relations with a

powerful group outside of itself, its internal relations among its members will become more cohesive and unified; while each element within the group may have its own opponent, nevertheless they all unite to face a single external enemy (cf. Simmel 1966:91–92).

#### **5.3.4 *Peace kills***

The emphasis on war as the primary factor in inter-state relations is condemned by some liberal and pacifists scholars who promote the idea of a world without war. But, according to Schmitt, such conception of the world is unrealistic:

A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics. It is conceivable that such a world might contain many very interesting antitheses and contrasts, competitions and intrigues of every kind, but there would not be a meaningful antithesis whereby men could be required to sacrifice life, authorised to shed blood, and kill human beings (Schmitt 1976:35).

According to Derrida (2005:130) for Schmitt a world without enemies is also a world abandoned by its friends and hence is no longer a human world but a "dehumanised desert." Ultimately political and human life cannot be understood without real possibility of war and bloodshed. Derrida notes that for Schmitt, "war always has a meaning" and "no politics, no social bond qua social bond has meaning without war, without its real possibility" (Derrida 2005:132). For Schmitt it is not possible to escape the political, if a state decides to disarm itself and decide not fight wars, the world will not become depoliticised, but simply politics will be disguised as economics or morality.

If a people is afraid of the trials and risks implied by existing in the sphere of politics, then other people will appear which will assume these trials by protecting it against foreign enemies and thereby taking over political role. The protector then decides who the

enemy is by virtue of the eternal relation of protection and obedience (Schmitt 1976:52).

The world consists of different and contending political groups, and no group can acquire a sense of identity without defining an adversary (Schmitt 1976:57). Schmitt concludes that the eternal political conflict is the essence of life, "the political world is a pluriverse, not a universe" (Schmitt 1976:53).

Schmitt also exposes the war-like inclination of the anti-war liberals and pacifists. The centrality of war-making is evident in the pacifist's war-like disposition: If the pacifists' hostility to war drives them to wage war against non-pacifists "in a war against war" this proves that pacifists have political energy because they are able to group people according to the friend-enemy principle. "If, in fact, the will to abolish war is so strong that it no longer shuns war, then it has become a political motive, i.e., it affirms, even if only as an extreme possibility, war and even reason for war" (Schmitt 1976:36). Ultimately, the pacifists' inspired war is inhuman because they degrade their enemy by defining him as morally inferior and making him a monster that must not only be contested and defeated, but the enemy must be utterly destroyed (cf. Schmitt 1976:36). The pacifists thus expose their fraud: they condemn war as homicide but they demand war to be waged, and that men die and kill so as to permanently end war, which is a utopian impossibility (cf. Schmitt 1976:48).

Likewise some religious communities have taken it upon themselves to decide on matters of war, or to forbid their members from engaging in war. In such situations the religious group becomes a political entity, and by forbidding its members to participate in a war it is "decisively denying the enemy quality of a certain adversary" (Schmitt 1976:37). Waging war is a form of recognition of being human and it is also recognition of the enemy's humanity. Being fought by humans, the battle is played-out as a fair-game because that war will end when the enemy retreats into his own border and is no longer a treat. As against the fair-play and agonistic character of warfare, the pacifists' pretence to speak for humanity is a fraud. The pacifists' seriousness in demanding to

pacify the globe leads ultimately to a total destruction of human beings. Schmitt contends that prevention of war and neutralising conflict by nonviolent and "peaceful" measures such as economic boycotts, are more insidious and brutal than any war could be, because the competitor has no alternative and "will be left to starve if he does not voluntarily accommodate himself" (Schmitt 1976:48).

Politics based on economic consideration are not "essentially unwarlike"; on the contrary, the application of economic pacification is more brutal (Schmitt 1976:78).

War is condemned but executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police, and measures to assure peace remain. The adversary is no longer called an enemy but disturber of peace and is thereby designated to be an outlaw of humanity ... But this allegedly non-political and apparently antipolitical system serves existing or newly emerging friend-and-enemy groupings and cannot escape the logic of the political (Schmitt 1976:79).

The attempts to escape the political and the assumption that replacing politics with economic interest will result in a more peaceful world are illusions. If peace is a form of warfare, then it is clear that pacifism and liberal ideology have increased the antagonistic attitude, as is evident from their desire to depoliticise life and their antagonism toward the state.

The political concept of battle in liberal thought becomes competition in the domain of economics and discussion in the intellectual realm. Instead of a clear distinction between the two different states, that of war and that of peace, there appears the dynamic of perpetual competition and perpetual discussion (Schmitt 1976:71–72).

The liberals and pacifists are exposed as frauds: asking men to die for a general and abstract principle does not justify killing, only the existence of a real enemy and real threat to existence can provide justification for war and killing: "The justification of war does not reside in its being fought for ideals or norms of justice, but in its being fought against a real enemy" (Schmitt 1976:49). Simultaneously the liberal bourgeois also wants to remain safe in the private domain without the danger of entering the conflicts and war the public domain of the political community: "He wants to be spared bravery and exempted from the danger of violent death" (Schmitt 1976:62–62).

Schmitt's defence of the political against its destruction by liberal depoliticisation is in itself an agonistic and combative stance. The readiness to do battle is essential because the liberals' depoliticisation is a mode of political battle disguised as non-political behaviour; depoliticising is concealment of politics (cf. Sartori 1989:71–72). The liberals' and pacifists' desire to reach "agreement and peace at any price" means that substantive and real issues of principle over which there may be conflict must be discarded to achieve consensus. For the liberals and the pacifists the only concern is finding the correct "technological means" to gain the objectives of a peaceful life. For Schmitt such attempts are dehumanising.

Agreement at any price is possible only as agreement at the price of the meaning of human life, for such agreement is possible only when man abandons the task of raising the question regarding what is right, and when man abandons this question, he abandons his humanity (Strauss 1976:101).

Thus, for Schmitt to affirm the political is affirmation of human life itself, because the political is the essence of human life. Here Schmitt follows on Weber's analysis of the disappearance of politics which both see as the disappearance of the human (cf. Schmitt 1976:79; Schmitt 2005:65; Strong 2005:xxii). It follows, that the affirmation of the political is also an affirmation of war as a real existential possibility. As Strauss puts it: "The affirmation of the

political as such is affirmation of fighting as such, regardless of the object of the fighting" (Strauss 1976:102). Such affirmation of the political also affirms respect for all those who are willing to fight (Strauss 1976:103). Ultimately, Schmitt sees politics-as-war and all political activity is war-like.

Schmitt's description of the dullness of life in the liberal warless world predates a similar conclusion reached by Fukuyama (1992) as the twentieth century was coming to a close. For Fukuyama (1992) the warless world is the "end of history" as it is the ultimate victory of liberal ideology and capitalist economy.

The end of history would mean the end of wars and bloody revolutions. Agreeing on ends, men would have no large causes for which to fight. They would satisfy their needs through economic activity, but they would no longer have to risk their lives in battle (Fukuyama 1992:311).

But human existence without war and struggle becomes meaningless and no "metaphorical wars" can satisfy the young inhabitants of the economically comfortable Western world. They, like young generations since antiquity need existential life-and-death challenges to prove their human value (Fukuyama 1992:328–329). Ultimately some men in the post-historical world will confirm their humanity by extreme sporting contest as substitutes for war, others will join real wars that are still waged in the "historical" third world and for many others

they will struggle for the sake of struggle. They will struggle, in other words, out of a certain boredom: for they cannot imagine living in a world without struggle. And if the greater part of the world in which they live is characterised by peaceful and prosperous liberal democracy, then they will struggle *against* that peace and prosperity, and against democracy (Fukuyama 1992:330).

### **5.3.5 Schmitt and Huizinga: war as the language of life**

Against Huizinga's assertion that Schmitt has no agonistic imagination (discussed in section 5.2.9 in this chapter), a faint sense of agonistic play is visible behind Schmitt's facade of seriousness. Schmitt's agonism is derived almost naturally from the central importance he attributes to war, battle and fighting. Schmitt's belief in the serious nature of war does not mean it has lost its agonistic aspect, as Huizinga (1971:235) notes, the seriousness of a bloody battle does not deny its being a form of agonistic battle-play. Huizinga's (1971) accusation that Schmitt has an inhuman view, and his view of war has no conception of playful agonism, cannot be entirely supported. In principle, Schmitt positions himself in support of political antagonism and the vitality of political and war contests against the morbid liberal-democratic and pacifist trends of "the age of neutralisations and depoliticalising." Schmitt's places himself in opposition to the anti-political ideology that desires to eliminate political contestation from decision-making. Schmitt acknowledges that political antagonism has a spirit of fighting and battle which ultimately is agonistic. Schmitt's support for the political is already support for contests and contestations, so is his condemnation of the seriousness and lack of agonistic spirit in liberal-democratic politics. As Schmitt (1976:53) notes: the world consists of diversity of conflicting views: "The political world is pluriverse, not a universe." Schmitt approvingly acknowledges Machiavelli's agonistic spirit and intellectual contribution when he notes that Machiavelli's observation of the play of human passions allowed him to derive a fundamental law of political life (cf. Schmitt 1976:59). As against the liberal-democrats' praise of the honesty of the economic sphere and condemnation of politics as evil, filthy, and criminal, Schmitt contends that politics can be equally pronounced "as the sphere of honest rivalry" while economic exchange can be grounded in deception (cf. Schmitt 1976:77). Schmitt acknowledges the lively dynamics of antagonistic confrontation: the "double-structure" antithesis has a "polemical punch" (Schmitt 1976:74). Ultimately, Schmitt may concede the truth in Huizinga's (1971:236) pronouncement that "it is not war that is serious, but peace."



Against the morbid liberal pacifism Schmitt (1976:67) suggests that identification of actual enemies is the highest form of politics. Because the political is the central sphere of social activity "war becomes the highest form of human behaviour" (cf. Neocleous 1996:52). This would imply that war is an expression of life, and in turn human life acquires meaning from war: when an enemy has been identified, life becomes existentially meaningful, because there is an awareness of threat and challenge from a real enemy. Beyond its utilitarian value war also has its own justification: it is fought "for its own sake, for the meaning it brings to the political" (Neocleous 1996:51). The meaning of human life is not given by rationality or reason, but it "emerges from a state of war by those who are inspired by great mythical images to join battle" (Schmitt in Neocleous 1996:51). Ultimately the mere existence of war is also a justification of war (cf. Schmitt 1976:49, Neocleous 1996:52). This is another way of anesthetisation of war and making it an end in itself and a form of art. Like the practice of "art for art's sake" so war can be practiced for its own sake. Neocleous (1996:51) and Wolin (1992) conclude that Schmitt shares with Ernst Jünger a vitalistic view of war that affirms war as calling out authentic passions in real situations of life-and-death. For Schmitt conception of politics-as-war demands war-like behaviour and an agonistic spirit for fighting. Therefore, Schmitt contends that the human being, society and politics can be understood through the perspective of war and by the use of military vocabulary.

Against the often heard complaint that the growth of modern technology has dehumanised war, Schmitt defends the humanising value of technology in war. For Schmitt technology is a weapon, and the use of new technology signals the return of the political (Neocleous 1996:53). According to Schmitt this is so because technology "is always an instrument and weapon" and because the instruments and weapons have become more useful, "the probability they bring becomes that much greater" (Neocleous 1996:53). As Neocleous (1996:53) concludes: "Only by being used for political purpose can technology be imbued with soul" and the "growth of technology consolidates war and politics." Ultimately, Schmitt seems to be in agreement with Huizinga that technological modern warfare has retained its agonistic spirit.

### 5.3.6 Schmitt in Hobbes's theatre

Schmitt's position on the place of war in the political sphere is reminiscent to Hobbes's conception of the primordial *state of nature* war of all against all. Hobbes assumes that such a war does not take place but is only an imagined potential that shapes the political. Ultimately, the war is always averted by the social contract and the battle remains a bloodless political battle. Similarly Schmitt (1976:35) writes: "What always matters is the possibility of extreme case taking place, the real war, and the decision whether this situation has or has not arrived." While in Hobbes' imagination the permanent war of "every man against every man" rages on relentlessly, Schmitt realises that war is a clash of human collectivities. Indeed, as against Hobbes, life in the state of nature may have been brutal but it was never lonely.

A close reading of Hobbes's description reveals no specific manifestations of the generalised war. Indeed, Hobbes acknowledges, as does Schmitt, that war does not consist in battle, or in the act of fighting, but in manifesting a will to contend battle, and in showing intention and assuming a fighting position (Hobbes 1958:106–107). Leo Strauss (1973:87) compares Schmitt's formulation to Hobbes'. According to Strauss, in Hobbes' terminology it is not war itself but the potential for war: "The nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto." Following Hobbes, Schmitt puts this in his own vocabulary thus: "The political lies not in conflict itself ... but in behaviour determined by this real possibility" (Strauss 1973:87). As for Hobbes, so for Schmitt it is the disposition for war that is the political unconscious. Thus, Foucault concludes for Hobbes there is no war, it is merely a theatrical dramatisation:

There are no battles in Hobbes's war, there is no blood and there are no corpses. There are presentations, manifestations, signs, emphatic expressions, wiles, and deceitful expressions; there are traps, intentions disguised as their opposite, and worries disguised as certainties. We are in a theatre where presentations are

exchanged, in a relationship of fear in which there are no time limits; we are not really involved in a war (Foucault 2003:92).

Similarly for Schmitt it is theatrical representation of war as the ever-present backdrop and is inspired by Hobbes's imagined war in the state of nature. Inspiration by war reached full expression in the Fascists' aestheticism of politics, and making warfare and death into a spectacle (cf. Krimmer 2010:75–76). Similarly, postmodern scholars imagine new wars as being unreal “post-modern wars” (Gray 1997), or “virtual wars” (Ignatieff 2001), taking place in distant localities and mediated to the warriors themselves via computer and video images, while mass public enjoys the mediated spectacle on television and its re-enactment in video games. These wars are experienced by the mass media audiences as if they were viewing cinematic production and entertained by another war movie (cf. Žižek 2002a). The increase in the importance of mediated experience of life, and of life lived in the symbolic sphere leads Baudrillard (1995), for example, to the speculation that the “Gulf War will not take place”, and to insist, even after the actual war against Iraq has taken place that no war has taken place. Baudrillard’s claim that “the Gulf War did not take place” does not mean that there was no war, but that for the majority of media spectators, and even to the warriors themselves, it was experienced as the unreality of a cinematic fiction, or as a constructed media event – the ultimate Gulf War movie (cf. Baudrillard 1995). Baudrillard’s pronouncement is not original but follows an earlier intellectual escape from reality by the French writer Jean Giraudoux who, just as Hitler was preparing for war produced a play “*The Trojan war will not take place*”, a modern re-enactment of Homer’s *Iliad* in which a character proclaims the belief that the Trojan War will not take place (cf. Manguel 2007:206). This is in turn reminiscent of Hobbes potential war that does not take place.

#### **5.4 Conclusion: aesthetics of a beautiful war**

The aim of this chapter was to offer a close reading of Huizinga's theory of play and show how play is interchangeable with war and is the formative foundation

for culture and communication. Throughout human history war as an activity and as an abstract idea has been the formative unconscious and foundation of culture. Close and personal experience of war in the ancient world has gradually been displaced as the modes of warfare became democratised, mechanised and impersonal. In response to the dehumanisation of war, many participants attempt to regain the personal sense of meaning and construct imaginary experiences of interpersonal acts of killing as expression of their free will and demonstrate their sense of active human agency (cf. Bourke 1999).

As against the assumed non-agonistic and lack of a ludic element of modern twentieth century mechanised mass warfare, participants as well as scholars, such as Huizinga, still find the agonistic element animating the battlefield and structuring whole life experience. The increasing distancing from the battlefield has resulted in the emergence of "Romantic Militarism" that sees war as a way for self-expression (cf. Rosenblum 1982). The ultimate expression of this romantic spirit is in Fascism's anaesthetisation of politics. For a group of artists known as Futurists, war provided the "principles of aesthetics" for new poetry, literature and graphic art (cf. Benjamin 1973:244). For the Futurists, Fascist Italy's colonial war in Ethiopia was considered as an inspiration, as Marinetti writes in a manifesto:

War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalisation of the human body. War is beautiful because it enriches a flowering meadow with the fiery orchids of machine guns. War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architecture, like that of big tanks, the geometrical formation flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages, and many others (Marinetti in Benjamin 1973:243–244)

According to Benjamin, Marinetti and the Futurists expect modern "war to supply the artistic gratification of sense perception that has been changed by technology." From Benjamin's Marxist perspective, war is a distraction because "instead of draining rivers, society directs a human stream into a bed of trenches" and drops bombs from airplanes instead of seeds (cf. Benjamin 1973:244). But war always provided human with sensibilities and seen in historical perspective, the modern war is a continuation of the ancient and eternal sensibilities provided by war. Even Benjamin admits the value of war when he notes that in Homer's time mankind at war was the object of contemplation for Olympian gods, while in the present mankind has reached self-consciousness and contemplates itself, and experiences its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure (cf. Benjamin 1973:244). But this as Eksteins (1989:83) discovers in the literature of the early twentieth century "the fascination with violence represented an interest in life" and "destruction" was considered as an act of creation."

At the end of the millennium, and at the beginning of the twenty first century, the ancient spirit of war is much alive. The Futurists and anarchists of the 1930 provide new inspiration for their postmodern counterparts. Being far removed from real battlefields, postmodern anarchists are declaring "symbolic war" against meaninglessness, and against democracy. But it is more than symbolic war because ancient military text and tactics and strategies derived from real historical wars provide the inspiration and the models for violent confrontations (cf. Juris 2005).

To understand culture and the essential political character of human life, there is a need to understand war, as was demonstrated by Huizinga and Schmitt. War has always been the cultural and political unconscious, and since the time of Heraclitus, war is the father of us all. The next chapter will offer a reading of the work of Foucault that extends on the Huizinga's and Schmitt's understanding of war and contributes to a better understanding of war as a general social matrix or power relations.



## CHAPTER 6

# WAR AS ORGANISING PRINCIPLE OF SOCIETY:

## FOUCAULT'S ANALYTICS OF WAR

I would like to try to see the extent to which the binary schema of war and struggle, of the clash between forces, can really be identified as the basis of civil society, as both the principle and motor of the exercise of power – Foucault (2003:18)

Life is the consequence of war, and society is a means to war – Nietzsche (1968:33)

### 6.1 Introduction

Foucault is known for his contribution to the study of power. What is less well known is that central to his theorising power is the model of war as the formative blue-print for society and the analytical model that shows how power fabricates individuals and societies. Thus human subjects arise in battle and play their part on the battlefield of life. Foucault's concept of war and its relation to the political extends on the discussion on Huizinga and Schmitt in the previous chapter. More than Schmitt, Foucault places war as a central matrix of power relations and shows how war and the political are interchangeable.

Foucault's central emphasis on power and social practices moves the understanding of society from the idea that it is like a language as proposed by the structuralist theories to a more firm basis in a reality of discursive practices and power relations. The structuralists and post-structuralists assume that language constructs man and society; human beings presumably live in a prison house of language. Foucault places his theory against the modern idealistic conceptions of society and the individual as if constituted by, and in, language and discourse. This solipsism is shattered by Foucault's introduction of the idea of power, discursive practice and ultimately the overarching role of war. Foucault restores the balance between words and deeds, identified by

Arendt (1998a) as being the complete human sphere of life. Such an approach places Foucault within the long tradition dating back to Heraclitus, whereby war is seen as the central driving force of human history. The aim of this chapter is to trace the idea of war in Foucault's writing, to show how he interprets social power relations as war-like relations and explicates how the model of war can provide a heuristic model for understanding of individuals and society.

## **6.2 Power: warlike relations of force**

For a long time social power was ignored by social and communication theory. Not only was power as a phenomenon overlooked but there may still be a general prohibition against critical considerations of power relations (cf. Niebuhr 1960). For social theorists imbued with democratic and egalitarian ideology power seems to be an embarrassment:

At times it is as if power were a social obscenity, whose naked limbs need to be chastely covered ... theorists have even reinterpreted the history of philosophy so that drapes can be placed over the form of power (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton & Radley 1989:147).

Evasion of power is evident in American social theory inspired by democratic idealism and pragmatism. The reason for such evasion is derived from a naive primary assumption about human nature:

It seems that the basic supposition is that people are essentially good. An engagement with power threatens to undo this because power implies that one person is in a position over another. It disrupts the peaceable relationships between subjects that most pragmatists assume. So, the question of power has been ignored by pragmatism (Garnar 2006:348).

It is no coincidence that in social theory and philosophy the idea of power is absent. The discourses of science and philosophy are the products of power, and have been set up by relations of power and are used to justify the exercise



of power. Foucault (1980:131) points out that each "society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true." Power can operate and is tolerated only when it conceals and masks itself (cf. Foucault 1981b:86). Foucault (1980:115) acknowledges his own initial difficulty in approaching the study of power which "was an incapacity linked undoubtedly with the political situation we found ourselves in."

Moreover, the dominant *structural linguistic model* used to describe man and society does not allow much consideration of social power relations. From sociological to psychoanalytic theories the common assumption is that the human being is the product of language and exists in a symbolic universe of signs, symbols and language:

Because all the practices that make up a social totality take place in language, it becomes possible to consider language as the place in which the social individual is constructed. In other words, man can be seen as *language*, as the intersection of the social, historical and individual (Coward & Ellis 1986:1).

Scholars using structuralists, semiotics, and hermeneutics theories to understand society considers it as if it were language and as such only needs to be interpreted. Social groups, such as nations, for example, are assumed to be *imagined communities* "conceived in language, not in blood" (Anderson 1983:145). It is as if nations were purely cognitive and ideological undertakings and idealistically arose in "the relatively bloodless business of *imagining*" (Ehrenreich 1998:196). Such views neglect the facts that historians have shown: societies and national groups are linked intimately, in theory and in practice, with the idea of spilling blood and war (cf. Ehrenreich 1998:196; Marvin & Ingle 1996; Marvin & Ingle 1999; Tilly 1990).

Foucault notes that to the extent that power is considered in social theory, it is mostly conceived as a negative quality: power is repression, it is the great force that makes prohibitions. But if power were only a negative repressive

mechanism, as is assumed by the theorists, then it would be a poor resource: if power had only the force of the negative on its side, a power that only prohibits and sets limits then it would be basically an *anti-energy*. This would imply that power "is incapable of doing anything, except to render what it dominates incapable of doing anything either, except for what this power allows it to do" (Foucault 1980:119; Foucault 1981b:85). This view extends into political theories where power is seen as a *commodity* that is possessed and transferred within the social body; power is held legitimately in the hands of the king, prince, sovereign, parliament or the State. The problem with these views of power is that they consider power as negative and something that is secondary, a "functional subordination" rather than as a primary social phenomenon on its own (cf. Foucault 2003:14).

To escape the irritation of the moralising discourses on power and the idealism of the *prison house of language*, Foucault proposes to link power with social practice and the use of the human body as the co-constitutive elements of society (cf. Sonderling 1994a). Thus as against the negative conception power Foucault suggests that power makes itself acceptable because firstly, it *masks* and conceals its operations (cf. Foucault 1981b:86). Secondly, power becomes acceptable because it produces things: "it induces pleasures, forms of knowledge, produces discourse"; power is "a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (Foucault 1980:123). And more importantly, power produces *reality*, and the individual human subject is the primary product of power (cf. Foucault 1987:194).

Power in the *substantive* sense, as a possession vested in a fixed social centre does not exist (cf. Foucault 1980:198). Thus, rather than being a possession, power only exists when it is *exercised* in a multiplicity of diffused centres in society. Such multiple relations of power permeate, and constitute the whole social body (cf. Foucault 1980:93). Power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. Power is understood as

the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another (Foucault 1981b:92–93).

Indeed, to the extent that power becomes centralised, it can only do so because it is dependent on the pre-existence of local *relations of forces* which are consolidated into larger strategic alliances. Power is coextensive with the whole social body and everyone is always "inside power and there is no escaping it or a position that is outside power relation" (Foucault 1981b:95).

A characteristic of relations of power is the fact that where power is exercised there is also *resistance*. The point of resistance is the point of application of power relations, a point where two forces meet; it is a point where two forces meet in *antagonism of strategy* and are interlocked (cf. Foucault 1983:211). Thus power "is the name that one attributes to a complex strategic situation in a particular society" (Foucault 1981b:93). Power relations are strategic relations which imply reciprocity of action:

Every time one side does something, the other one responds by deploying a conduct, a behaviour that counterinvests it, tries to escape it, turns the attack against itself, etc. Thus nothing is ever stable in these relations of power (Foucault in Reid 2003:4).

Foucault's definition of the dynamic nature of power relations resembles Clausewitz's definition of war. For Clausewitz (1985:103) war is an act of violence which leads to reactions and mutual interaction whereby "one side dictates the law to the other, there arises a sort of reciprocal action." War consists of numerous battles and each battle demands mutual understanding, agreement and consent from the contestants (cf. Clausewitz 1985:327). Likewise for Foucault power relations are everywhere and a state of permanent

conflict exists in society where the multiple relations of forces stimulate "a plurality of resistances" (Foucault 1981b:96). Power relations and resistance are expressed as social and historical struggles. What is at stake in these struggles is the ability to win positions of dominance and control. Power relations are *agonistic*, reciprocal incitations and struggles and take the form of a combat in which an opponent develops strategies of reaction to the action of the other as in a boxing match (cf. Foucault 1983:222). The dynamic agonistic reciprocity and interplay of power relations and the construction of resistances means that power "is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (Foucault 1983:221). This means that slavery is not a power relation but merely one of physical relation of constraint. Power is exercised on "individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realised" (Foucault 1983:221). In other words, the exercise of power allows freedom of choice in selecting a possible reaction and hence "freedom may well appear as the condition for the exercise of power" (Foucault 1983:221). Hence power is a form of "agonism" which is a "reciprocal incitation and struggle", a "permanent provocation" that does not paralyse both sides (Foucault 1983:222). Power relationships involve a dynamic contest, a constant play of forces challenging one another, winning and losing, and positions of domination and submission. Thus at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it is a relationship of *agonism*: a reciprocal incitation and permanent provocation.

The source of power relations is violence: violence is "its primitive form, its permanent secret and its last resource" (Foucault 1983:220). But power relations differ from violence: violence is a force that acts directly on the body and things, while power relation refers to "an action upon an action." Thus bringing into play power relation does not exclude the use of violence or consent and it can never do without them (cf. Foucault 1983:220).

Foucault notes that when people speak about power they almost naturally describe it as a struggle or battle:

It's astonishing to see how easily and self-evident people talk of war-like relations of power or class struggle without ever making it clear whether some form of war is meant and if so what form (Foucault 1980:119).

As Foucault asks, what is the meaning of struggle here? Is it a war? "Is civil society riven by class struggle to be seen as a war continued by other means?" (Foucault 1980:208). Therefore, Foucault asks:

Isn't power simply a form of warlike domination? Shouldn't one therefore conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war? Isn't power a sort of generalised war which assumes at particular moment the form of peace and the state? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it (Foucault 1980:123).

Here Foucault follows Nietzsche and suggests that power could be more appropriately described as a *war-like* relationship of forces, or warfare (cf. Foucault 2003:13–17). For theorising power Foucault (2003:16) proposes to use "Nietzsche's hypothesis" where power relations are assumed as a warlike clash of forces. Power is the war-like *relation of forces*, and is based in the physical aspect of the human body and has its origin in the primitive form of violence. Foucault follows Nietzsche's insight that life is a single drama is manifest in an endless play of domination (cf. Foucault 2000a:377).

Central to Foucault's thinking is the assumption that power is exercised on the individuals and they are the basic units for the formation of social groups and societies. The individual's body is a nodal point for the application and exercise of power. The individual human being is the product, or the effect of power. Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983:109) describe Foucault's vision of the world thus: The social world resembles a field or clearing in the forest created by the operation of anonymous forces; "this field or clearing is understood as the result of long term practices and as the field in which those practices operate." The social field is the result of battles and is the space where constant battles keep

the space open and define it. In this sense only one drama is ever staged in this space: eternal play of domination (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:109–110). From Foucault's Nietzschean genealogist's perspective, the play of forces also constructs the human individual; the human subject is fabricated on the battlefield of life:

Subjects do not first preexist and later enter into combat or harmony. In genealogy subjects emerge on a field of battle and play their role, there and there alone. The world is not a play which simply masks a truer reality that exists behind the scenes. It is as it appears (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:109).

### **6.3 Fabrication of the disciplinary individual in perpetual battle**

In his approach to power Foucault follows Nietzsche's (1968:33) insight that "life is the consequence of war, and society is a means to war." For Foucault (2003:18) "war is the historical principle behind the working of power" and one of the products of the working of power is the fabrication of the individual human subject.

Power is exercised through networks and individuals are in a position to submit and to exercise power (Foucault 2003:29). Foucault notes that as agents of power "we all have some element of fascism in our heads", or at a more basic level "we all have some element of power in our bodies" (Foucault 2003:30). Power is a technique of domination directed at, and applied to, individuals' bodies (Foucault 2003:34–36).

Contrary to the belief that the individual human being exists prior to power relations and is dismantled and oppressed by power:

It is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies (Foucault 1987:217).

The individual is constructed in the field of power relations: the power relations "permit the fabrication of the disciplinary individual" (Foucault 1987:308). Power inscribes itself on the human body: power relations have a hold on the body, they "invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault 1987:25). More specifically according to Foucault (1987) it is the application of a "political technology of the body" that constructs individuals and a social group. Power is applied and it inculcates "dispositions, *manoeuvres*, tactics, techniques, functioning" on bodies (Foucault 1987:26). It is through application of meticulous procedure of inquisition, punishments and torture refined over centuries, that have ultimately fabricated an appropriate individual subject to suit the needs of the contemporary social conditions (cf. Foucault 1987:19, 194). Moreover, the micro-physics operations of power networks and the application of punitive measures have produced the modern human soul. The soul is not something that is destroyed by power and domination but on the contrary the soul is the product of a "certain technique of power over the body"; the soul is born "out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint." The "soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy" and ultimately "the soul is the prison of the body" (Foucault 1987:29–30), because it comes to control the body. This is the result of gradual change in the application of methods of punishment: whereby the physical confrontation was replaced with intellectual struggles between the criminal and the judicial investigator (cf. Foucault 1987:69).

### **6.3.1 The central role of killing**

The common factor behind the fabrication of individuals and formation of society is the act of violence, killing and associated with death and warfare. Or more accurately, the ability to inflict pain, and the fear of death expressed in the dual effects of imposing discipline and punishment. The ability to kill as the key to fabrication of individual human beings was considered by Hobbes as the natural right possessed by every individual when defending his life by kill those attacking him (cf. Foucault 1981b:135).

In ancient societies killing was linked to family and clans. "The blood relation long remained an important element in the mechanism of power, its manifestations, and its rituals." In early primitive societies "in which famine, epidemics, and violence made death imminent, blood constituted one of the fundamental values" that ensured survival. The value of blood was both instrumental and symbolic:

It owed its high value at the same time to its instrumental role (the ability to shed blood), to the way it functioned in the order of signs (to have certain blood, to be of the same blood, to be prepared to risk one's blood), and also to its precariousness (easily spilled, subject to drying up, too readily mixed, capable of being quickly corrupted) (Foucault 1981b:147).

In such "society of blood" power spoke *through* blood and "blood was a *reality with a symbolic function*." But in modern society mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life and to the control and administration of sex as the cause for proliferation of life. This is a change from "*a symbolics of blood to an analytics of sexuality*" (Foucault 1981b:147-148). This is essentially derived from or is based on a change from the visible and direct killing to a more diffused and hidden killing, or killing indirectly by exposing to death some elements of the population.

The origin of the right to kill was the right of the head of the household to dispose of the lives of his children and slaves as expressed in Roman law (cf. Foucault 1981b:135). This right was later usurped by the ancient sovereign's claim to have the right "to decide life and death." The sovereign showed his power only by "his right to kill, or refrain from killing, which means that the power of life and death actually is more limited to "the right to take life or let live" (Foucault 1981b:136). This regime was gradually modified by introduction of disciplinary techniques that eventually limited the sovereign's right of direct killing but afforded him an indirect "power to *foster* life or *disallow*" it (Foucault 1981b:138). The right to kill by the sovereign is manifested in two directions: (a)



in defending the sovereign's authority against internal rebellion he was empowered to impose the death penalty, and (b) the sovereign as a guardian of the social body was empowered in case of external military threats to mobilise the citizens for military duty and thus exposing them indirectly to possible death (cf. Foucault 1981b:137). These two are united symbolically in the ancient sovereign's "right of the sword" which included the power to make war outside society and impose the death penalty within society (Foucault 1981b:137). The unification of modes of killing was made possible by the transformation of war into politics: "The principle underlying the tactics of battle – that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living – has become the principle that defines the strategy of state" (Foucault 1981b:137). Foucault alludes here to the historical development whereby warfare gradually became monopolised by the state, as he puts it:

It is one of the essential traits of Western societies that the force relationships which for a long time had found expression in war, in every form of warfare, gradually became invested in the order of political power (Foucault 1981b:102).

Indeed, this long reciprocal process of war-making and state-making in European history is documented by Tilly (1990).

### **6.3.2 *The soldier as ideal model for the human being***

The disciplinary methods derived from war and the military were transferred into society, and ultimately fabricated the modern individual subject. As Foucault puts it: "One should take as its model a perpetual battle" rather than the model of social contract (Foucault 1987:26). Thus while the model of the battlefield is a metaphor for life, for many the army is a model for society, and in the age of Enlightenment for many Europeans the army, and in particular the army of Frederick the Great serves as an model for civilian society (Bell 2008:37). Thus by extension the proper measure of the human being, and the ideal model for the fabrication of the modern individual is the soldier (Foucault 1987:135).

Until the early seventeenth century the soldier is considered as someone possessing natural talent and the appropriate body structure that was developed and perfected in actual fighting and in military training thus inculcating "a bodily rhetoric of honour" (Foucault 1987:135). However, by late eighteenth century it is assumed that anyone could be made into a soldier. Through the application of meticulous training methods correct body posture, habits and dispositions could be inculcated in anyone and it is as if "out of formless clay" one could manufacture a human machine (cf. Foucault 1987:135).

The new methods of training made possible meticulous control over the functions of the body, impose discipline, and training the body in "docility-utility". Such methods were considered superior to slavery because they inculcated obedience without the need for violent domination (cf. Foucault 1987:137). As Foucault (1987:138) notes, discipline has a double function: constructing docile subjection of the body for increased economic usefulness, while at the same time diminishing political resistance and increasing obedience. All these were the result of improved organisation of institutions of control: primarily the expansion and restructuring of the military and "militarisation of the large workshops", hospitals and schools (Foucault 1987:138). The expansion in the application of techniques of power and discipline over individuals is attributed to the work of the army and its meticulous techniques of training that produced docile bodies that were at the same time well trained and obedient to commands (Foucault 1987:135, 141). The army becomes a "matrix of organisation and knowledge" (Foucault 1980:77).

A general expansion of military barracks throughout Europe to accommodate the large peace-time armies lead to the developments and perfection of training modes (Foucault 1987:140–142, 218), and "massive projection of the military methods onto industrial organisation" also enforced a division of labour (Foucault 1987:221). Military organisation of space, rank and movement provided the fundamental disciplinary model. Monastic orders and schools were organised and operated based on a binary internal division that was

simultaneously a unified model of a military camp consisting of two competing units:

The general form was that of war and rivalry; work, apprenticeship and classification were carried out in the form of the joust, through the confrontation of two armies; the contribution of each pupil was inscribed in this general duel; it contributed to the victory or the defeat of the whole camp; and the pupils were assigned a place that corresponded to the function of each individual and to his value as a combatant (Foucault 1987:146).

It thus can be seen that war is central inspiration for the institutions, their organisation and methods of learning. But such link is already articulated by Plato's conception of inquiry as hunt (discussed in Chapters 3 and 4). While in ancient society formal organisation of learning was more limited, the organisation of individuals and institutions in the modern world was inspired by the model of Roman society:

One should not forget that, generally speaking, the Roman model, at the Enlightenment, played a dual role: in its republican aspect, it was the very embodiment of liberty; in its military aspect, it was the ideal schema of discipline. The Rome of the eighteenth century and of the Revolution was the Rome of the Senate, but it was also that of the legion; it was the Rome of the Forum, but it was also that of the camps. Up to the empire, the Roman reference transmitted, somewhat ambiguously, the juridical ideal citizenship and the technique of disciplinary methods. In any case, the strictly disciplinary element ... came to dominate the element of joust and mock warfare (Foucault 1987:146)

The organisation of men and training in coordination of movement has simplified modern warfare and armies could become larger and also easier to move and to lead in battle and in display formation on the parade ground (Foucault 1987:148). Military discipline was achieved through uniform

imposition of rhythmic control and to organise activity according to a strict timetable and surveillance and control of the smallest of details (cf. Foucault 1987:150). From control of activities and the efficient use of time the disciplinary training moved to coordinate the body and gestures. Imposing a series of particular gesture and their correlate manipulation of objects such as the efficient loading and firing of a rifle (Foucault 1987:152–154). Confirming Foucault observation, Mumford (1962:81) notes that the soldier had exerted a positive influence on the development of technology and society:

The improvement of the instruments of war have been constant ... the shambling peasant with ... his wooden club has ... been replaced with the bowman and the spearman, these had given way to the musketeer, the musketeer had been turned into smart, mechanically responsive infantryman, and musket itself had become more deadly in close fighting by means of a bayonet, and the bayonet in turn had become more efficient by means of drill and mass tactics, and finally, all the arms of the service had been progressively co-ordinated with the most deadly and decisive arms: the artillery (Mumford 1962:83).

Each development of weapons and military training in turn improved the soldier's self-esteem:

With the increase in the effectiveness of weapons, came likewise a growing sense of superiority in the soldier himself: his strength, his death-dealing properties had been heightened by technological advance. With a mere pull of the trigger, he could annihilate an enemy: that was a triumph of natural magic (Mumford 1962:85).

The well-trained soldiers operate in coordination and the military becomes a well constructed machine which maximised its effects: "Discipline is no longer simply an art of distribution of bodies, of extracting time from them and accumulating it, but of composing forces in order to obtain an efficient machine" (Foucault 1987:164). Such development is also recorded by Mumford:

The general indoctrination of soldierly habits of thought in the seventeenth century was, it seems probable, a great psychological aid to the spread of machine industrialism. In terms of the barracks, the routine of the factory seemed tolerable and natural. The spread of conscription and volunteer militia forces throughout the Western World after the French revolution made army and factory, so far as their social effects went, almost interchangeable terms. And the ... characterisations of the First World War ... a large-scale industrial operation has also a meaning in reverse: modern industrialism may equally be termed a large scale military operation (Mumford 1962:84).

Thus thinkers imagined a society as a military machine covering the whole territory of the nation where "each individual would be occupied without interruption." The military organisation of society provided Marx with a model to describe the social division of labour (Foucault 1987:163). The military discipline and training methods laid the foundations for modern mass education (cf. Foucault 1987:165). The result was a double fabrication of individuals and collectivities, "disciplinary tactics is situated on the axis that links the singular and the multiple" (Foucault 1987:149).

In other words, organising individual bodies that combine to work in concert with other bodies and form the "social body". This was the "birth of meticulous military and political tactics by which the control of bodies and individual forces was exercised within states" (Foucault 1987:168). According to Foucault (1988b:146), "through some political technology of individuals, we have been led to recognise ourselves as a society, as a part of a social entity, as part of a nation or of a state." The fabrication of the individual was carried on two levels: (a) the external relationship between individuals, and (b) the internal relationship of the individual with his inner-self.

The fabrication of the individual's sense of self has a long tradition dating back to Classical Greece and is intimately linked with the conception of war, battle

and conflict. As Foucault (1988d:67) uncovers: "The long tradition of spiritual combat, which was to take so many diverse forms, was already clearly delineated in classical Greek thought." For the Greeks the individual's relation with the self was associated with the idea of self-knowledge, self-control and self-mastery. The individual was imagined as consisting of "stronger" and "weaker" parts of the self, also expressed in Plato's idea of two parts of the soul. The self-mastery was essential as the individual relation to the self was considered in terms of conflict, struggle and resistance and the individual has to dominate himself and master himself. As Foucault (1988d:65) notes, domination "implies agonistic relation", the individual had to fight against formidable forces of temptation, to combat them as if they were formidable enemies and defeat them and remain armed and vigilant against them (cf. Foucault 1988d:66–67). The conception of battle with the self is a reflection of social relations of war, combat and agonism in ancient Greek society. According to Foucault, "this combative relationship with adversaries was also an agonistic relationship with oneself" and was "revealed in metaphors such as that of battle that has to be fought against armed adversaries", or as being able to defend oneself against attacks. Such "a 'polemical' attitude with respect to oneself" was conceived as a "wrestling and running contest" and its resolution was expressed as impressive victory over the self (Foucault 1988d:67–69). Ultimately, the individual had to "set up the government of his soul" based on the paradigm of the well-governed city (Foucault 1988d:71).

For Foucault, the individual gains a sense of identity through the application of techniques of torture, pain, punishment and discipline and "technologies of the self" as practice of self-inflicted torture and discipline. Secondly, through the application of techniques of power the individuals are combined to form a social group. "Discipline 'makes' individuals" as it is a technique of power that considers the individual as its object and as the instrument of its exercise (Foucault 1987:170). The ideal model to instil discipline in the whole society was the military camp where power could be exercised through close observation and supervision of individuals (Foucault 1987:171). The disciplinary training of individuals entails "a whole technique of human dressage, by

location, confinement, surveillance, the perpetual supervision of behaviour" and ultimately these "procedures for training and exercising power over individuals could be extended, generalised, and improved" (Foucault 1988c:105). The continuous application of disciplinary methods to individuals and social groups resulted in normalisation and homogenisation and ultimately in modern society "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons" (Foucault 1987:228).

According to Foucault (1987) "ultimately what presides over all these mechanisms is not the unitary functioning of an apparatus or an institution, but the necessity of combat and the rules of strategy" and therefore, within society we can still "hear the distant roar of battle" (Foucault 1987:308).

Foucault concludes that a model of war or perpetual battle is an appropriate model to describe society (Foucault 1987:26). And in any case the model of the Roman legion that served as the blueprint for the construction rational modern society (cf. Foucault 1987:146). Thus, as against the belief that society is a peaceful unity, the real inspiration was the military model:

Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century; but there was also a military dream of society; its fundamental reference was not to the state of nature, but to the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine, not to the primal social contract, but to permanent coercions, not to fundamental rights, but to indefinitely progressive forms of training, not to the general will but to automatic docility (Foucault 1987:169).

#### **6.4 The war apparatus as model for society**

For Foucault (2003:47) the phenomenon of war could "be regarded as primary with respect to other relations." War is primary a human condition and under its general form, we can group phenomena such as antagonism, rivalry, confrontation, and struggles between individuals, group and classes (cf.

Foucault 2003:47). War is a primal and basic state of affairs and “all phenomena of social domination, differentiation, and hierarchialisation [can] be regarded as its derivatives” (Foucault 2003:266). Thus war could as well be a model of life.

War is a primary factor in human history and relations of power express themselves primarily as *war* (cf. Foucault 1981b:102). The forces that operate in history do not obey predetermined destiny or superior regulative mechanisms that give directions and lead towards progress as is envisaged by some religious thinkers or the philosophers of the Enlightenment. These forces operate on the principle of chance and luck of victory or defeat in battle (cf. Foucault 2000a:381).

Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where rule of law finally replaces warfare; humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and proceeds from domination to domination (Foucault 2000a:378).

And following Nietzsche, Foucault further contends that the will to power is the primary explanation of history:

The success of history belongs to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them, they will make it function in such a way that the dominators find themselves dominated by their own rules (Foucault 2000a:378).

Simply stated, the facts of human history are war, violence, plunder and conquests, and the constant changing fortunes. Taking a realistic view of history without moral or religious idealisation, history appears as eternal cycle of struggles and dominations. Throughout history it was victory in battle and the power of the conqueror that defined the just and the legitimate.



For Foucault power relations are warlike relations therefore one could understand society and analyse it in terms of a model of war. Therefore, if power is simply a form of warlike domination, then

Shouldn't one therefore conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war? Isn't power a sort of generalised war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the State? Peace would be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it (Foucault 1980:123).

As for the social struggles,

should one, or should one not, analyse these "struggles" as vicissitudes of a war, should one decipher them according to a grid which would be one of strategy and tactics? Is the relation of forces in the order of politics a relation of war? (Foucault in Davidson 2003:xvii–xviii).

Further reflection on power in terms of the model of war discloses that politics and war, or war and peaceful society are not clear-cut categories. If power is a multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate, and power is a name for a complex strategical situation in a particular peaceful society (Foucault 1981b:92–93), then the link is direct: politics is war and understood as war. Foucault describes this relationship by reversing Clausewitz's well-known pronouncement that war is continuation of politics conducted by other means. Thus Foucault is looking at social power relations from a perspective of war, which is seemingly opposed to Clausewitz's interest in war as being subordinate to politics. Clausewitz considers war as being subordinate to politics while for Foucault politics is subordinate to war because war is the generative force that brings social power relations into existence. But the distinction is not permanently fixed but is flexible and interchangeable.

Should we turn the expression around, then, and say that politics is war pursued by other means? If we still wish to maintain a

separation between war and politics, perhaps we should postulate rather that this multiplicity of force relations can be coded – in part but never totally – either in the form of "war," or in the form of "politics"; this would imply two different strategies (but the one is always liable to switch into the other) for integrating these unbalanced, heterogeneous, unstable, and tense force relations (Foucault 1981b:93).

At the heart of the matter is the incorporation of war relations into society and their translation into political relations. Indeed, a long historical process in Western societies was at work transforming warfare into political power relations (cf. Foucault 1981b:102). Foucault realises that to say that politics is war by other means is as true as saying that war is politics by other means. This is so because war is the generative principle constructing society and politics, and provides the appropriate model for constructing and analysing society. But this transfer of war into politics is not a one-way process; it is reversible and has its correlate when politics becomes extended into war. Hence, the two are always liable to interchange (Foucault 1981b:93).

It may be that war as strategy is a continuation of politics. But it must not be forgotten that "politics" has been conceived as a continuation, if not exactly and directly of war, at least of the military model as a fundamental means of preventing civil disorder. Politics as a technique of internal peace and order, sought to implement the mechanism of the perfect army, of the disciplined mass, of docile useful troop, of the regiment in camp and in the field, on manoeuvres and on exercises. In the great eighteenth-century states, the army guaranteed civil peace no doubt because it was a real force, an ever-threatening sword, but also because it was a technique and a body of knowledge that could project their schema over the social body (Foucault 1987:168).

More clearly, this means that if one wants to make a distinction between war and politics then

it is strategy that makes it possible to understand warfare as a way of conducting politics between states; it is tactics that makes it possible to understand the army as a principle for maintaining the absence of warfare in civil society (Foucault 1987:168).

In other words, power is a generalised war that assumes at a particular moment the form of peace" (Foucault 1980:123).

While much ink has been spilt to praise Foucault's presumed "reversal" of Clausewitz's aphorism, nevertheless, Foucault stays true to Clausewitz's understanding of war and politics. While Clausewitz is aware of the influence of war on politics, he also recognises that in turn, war shapes the political sphere, and influences political action. For Clausewitz (1985:121) war is chameleon-like as it changes to some degree in each particular case. Clausewitz is also aware that there is a mutual reversibility between war and politics:

Even the final decision of a whole War is not always to be regarded as absolute. The conquered State often sees in it only a passing evil, which may be repaired in after times by means of political combinations (Clausewitz 1985:108).

However, Clausewitz and Foucault have different interests in their approach to politics and war. Clausewitz as a military man locates politics as the primary controller of the military and in waging war politics provides the "logic", direction and rational for war while war has its own "grammar" or modes of operation (cf. Clausewitz 1985:402). Clausewitz's discussion on war and politics is also a particular German response to the French Revolution and also motivated by his own military interests. First, Clausewitz dislikes the French, second, his theory is a response to specific political relations of power in Prussia which began to be challenged by the infusion of French ideologies of liberty and democracy (cf. Keegan 2004a:17). The difference between France and Prussia was that "in

France during the Revolution, politics had been everything; in Prussia politics had been and very largely remained even after Napoleon's defeat nothing but the whim of the king" (Keegan 2004a:17). Realising that the strength of the French military was largely derived from the popular revolutionary fever, Clausewitz would like to see the Prussian military practice warfare with the same passion as the armies of the French Republics and Napoleon's troops, but without the politics of revolution. In an attempt to preserve the power of the Prussian king against increasing demands for participation in politics, Clausewitz is faced with the problem of "how might one have popular warfare without a popular state" (Keegan 2004a:17). For such a purpose, Clausewitz would like to persuade the Prussian army that warfare is a form of political activity. By making the army more disciplined and professional and by inscribing the ideals of the Prussian regimental culture of total obedience, single-minded courage, self-sacrifice, and honour. Clausewitz assumes that by making the soldier a professional "the Prussian soldier could be safely left in a state of political innocence" and fight as if "the fire of politics flowed in his veins" (Keegan 2004a:16-17).

As against Clausewitz, Foucault is interested in the way war infuses and directs politics from the beginning. Indeed, Foucault's interest is to discover "if military institutions ... are ... the nucleus of political institutions" and "how, when, and why was it noticed or imagined that what is going on beneath and in power relations is war?" (Foucault 2003:47). Looking on society from this perspective is an inversion of Clausewitz's aphorism and thus Foucault asks:

Who, basically, has the idea of inverting Clausewitz's principle, and who thought of saying: "It is quite possible that war is the continuation of politics by other means, but isn't politics itself a continuation of war by other means?" (Foucault 2003:47-48).

But ultimately Foucault concludes that it is not important to find who inverted Clausewitz's principle but, rather, whose "principle Clausewitz inverted", because the principle that war is a continuation of politics by other means

existed a long time before Clausewitz inverted it (cf. Foucault 2003:48). According to Foucault,

the reason Clausewitz could say one day ... that war was the continuation of politics by other means is that, in the seventeenth century, or at the beginning of the eighteenth, someone was able to analyse politics, talk about politics, and demonstrate that politics is the continuation of war by other means (Foucault 2003:165).

Thus for Clausewitz the idea of war as politics was prepared a hundred years earlier by a French historian Boulainvilliers, and two hundred years earlier by English historians. And of course there was also Machiavelli's similar understanding of war and politics. Machiavelli sees the art of politics in military terms (cf. Wood 2001:lvii). The military commander is for Machiavelli a model for a statesman because he is capable of handling supporters and is apt in the use of tactics against domestic political enemies. The analogy goes further because the aim of political struggle is power, and likewise the aim of the military commander is victory and gaining power over the enemy (cf. Wood 2001:lxiv). However, Foucault misses these points because he only refers to Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1968) and neglects Machiavelli's other book: *The art of war* (Machiavelli 2001).

The link between war and politics is also developed by other discourses that considered the existence of a perpetual war of races, thus the race war inspired Marx to translate this into his conception of a permanent class war. Indeed, as was shown in previous chapters, the principle that war, politics and life are a perpetual battle have been in existence from the ancient times of Heraclitus and before.

A whole tradition that considers war as formative force is uncovered by Foucault. For Foucault the exposure of power as the basic structure in individual and social life implies that we need a model of war to understand and analyse society. Moreover, the warlike image of society means that the model of language that normally is used as an analogy for society and as a model for

social analysis is inappropriate. The new approach demands that its "point of reference should not be the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle" (Foucault 1980:114). Therefore,

from this follows a refusal of analysis couched in terms of symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures, and a recourse to analysis in terms of the genealogy of relations of forces, strategic deployments, and tactics (Foucault 1980:114).

According to Foucault human history does not resemble its representation on the model of language (*langue*) as is claimed by structuralism and idealised by hermeneutics. Of course it is possible to read human action as if it were a text, as suggested by Ricoeur (1977) but there is a need for a much more elaborate interpretation of action and practice. For Foucault provides the model for historical understanding of society.

The history which bears and determines us has a form of war rather than language: relations of power, not meaning. History has no "meaning", though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail – but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategy and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflict. Dialectic is a way of evading the always open and hazardous reality of conflicts by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and semiology is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue (Foucault 1980:115).

*A model of war* is as an appropriate tool for social analysis because *forces are relations laid bare* and become visible as a matrix for techniques of domination (cf. Foucault 2000a:46). Foucault proposes that a heuristic understanding of society is provided by "the binary schema of war and struggle, of the clash

between forces, can really be identified as the basis of civil society, as both the principle and motor of the existence of political power" (Foucault 2003:18). Foucault suggests that

war can possibly provide a principle for the analysis of power relations: can we find in the bellicose relations, in the, model of war, in the schema of struggle or struggles, a principle that can help us understand and analyse political power, to interpret political power in terms of war, struggle, and confrontations? (Foucault 2003:23).

The analyses of power could be done "first and foremost in terms of conflict, confrontation and war", because social relations are "continuation of war by other means" (Foucault 2003:15). The appropriate analytical concepts to be used are binary schema of war and struggle, battle and resistance, tactics, strategy, relations of force (cf. Foucault 2003:18). This provides a number of suggestive ways of understanding society (Foucault 2003:15):

- The individual human subjects are constructed by violence and battle.
- The distinction between strategy and tactics can define external relations between states and internal relations between individuals and social groups within the state.
- Power relations in a society are "anchored" in relations of force that were "established in and through war at a given historical moment." In other words, the structure of society is established by war. This is so because political power ends war and establishes peace in a society; however, this does not suspend the effects of power, nor eliminates the disequilibrium existing at the conclusion of the last battle. Political power perpetually wages a silent war and inscribed the unequal relations of power in social institutions: "Politics, in other words, sanctions and reproduces the disequilibrium of forces manifest in war" (Foucault 2003:16). The victorious force on the battlefield dominates society in times of peace.

- The political struggles within the society in a state of "civil peace" and the shifting balance of forces in the political system could be reinterpreted as a continuation of war. These could be considered as episodes in an ongoing war. In other words, the history of peace is in fact the history of the last war, or stated differently it is a disguised form of a civil war (Foucault 2003:16).
- The power relations in society are in constant flux and undergo a change of fortune. Ultimately, permanently fixing these shifting power relations can only be done by war, "by trial of strength in which weapons are the final judges." Therefore the last battle ends politics and suspends the exercise of power (Foucault 2003:16).

### **6.5 War makes society and society makes war**

Foucault's explication of the relations between war and peace and the transformation of war into politics and vice versa illuminate Schmitt's views on the role of war in relation to the political discussed in Chapter 5 above. By confronting Clausewitz's statement with its reversal *external relations between states and internal relation within states* becomes intelligible:

It is strategy that makes it possible to understand warfare as a way of conducting politics between states; it is tactics that makes it possible to understand the army as a principle for maintaining the absence of warfare in civil society (Foucault 1987:168).

These two statements and the distinction between *strategy* and *tactics* are useful to describe *external* and *internal* use of the military and war in the formation of the state and politics within the state. Moreover, one of the important implications of Foucault's inversion of Clausewitz's statement is its ability to question the prevalent assumptions about the existence of social order and challenge the liberal-democratic theory of society. Clausewitz takes for granted the legitimacy of the nation-state and politics, and such legitimacy is extended to war as a means of conducting politics among nation-states. Likewise, democratic theory assumes that legitimate politics can only take place



within the law. By reversing Clausewitz's statement Foucault uncovers the pre-legal situation of domination which the law simply codified and legitimised and war and its transformation into politics within the state thus demystifies the operation of the law.

### **6.6 War as politics: strategy as foundation for external relations between states and societies**

According to Foucault (1987:168), "it is strategy that makes it possible to understand warfare as a way of conducting politics between states." From the perspective of *strategy* war is the continuation of politics between nation-states. The military is the foundation that provides a group of people or the state's ability to define itself against other groups and defend its sovereignty.

The relation between independent states or social groups is one of war, and war is the final arbiter in resolving conflict. For example Machiavelli contends that the head of state or prince "should have no other object or thought, nor acquire skills in anything, except war, its organisation, and its discipline" (Machiavelli 1968:87). Arendt (1973:188) points out that international conflict can ultimately be settled only by war because there is no other form of conflict resolution and "there is no alternative to victory."

### **6.7 Politics as war: tactics as the internal organising principle of societies**

According to Foucault (1987:168) "it is tactics that makes it possible to understand the army as a principle for maintaining the absence of warfare in civil society." Foucault's conception of war within society is based on the assumption that war is prior to society and is the formative force of the political order.

Power relations as they function in any society are essentially anchored in certain relationship of force established in and through war at a given specific historical moment. While political power puts an end to war, and establishes a reign of peace in civil society, but this is not done in order to suspend the effect

of power or neutralise the disequilibrium that was revealed in the last battle of the war (cf. Foucault 2003:15). The victorious war party installs itself in power and the relations of disequilibrium of forces continue the unfinished battles of the last war within society by "other means" provided now by politics (cf. Foucault 1980:90–91). In other words, the position of conqueror and conquered, victor or loser, are transformed into respective position of within the field of political power relations which provide the nucleolus of political and social relations. The military institutions and their practices and the techniques used in fighting a war are directly and indirectly the nucleus of political institutions in society (Foucault 2003:47).

More fundamentally, war within society resembles Hobbes's idea of war of everyman against everyman. Indeed, Foucault conceives the permanent war within society as being a war of "all against all ... we all fight each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else" (Foucault 1980:208). Hobbes, for example, sees an abstract primitive pre-social *struggle* or *war* that ends when society is formed. This generalised war is, in part, based on the idea of an ancient pre-state social reality: war of individuals tied to familial clans. The war in society relates to the ancient mode of dispute resolution: two warriors contend one another to determine who is right and who is wrong, the decision is gained by battle and the winner naturally proves his rightfulness (cf. Foucault 2002:32–33). This form of dispute resolution as a game or contest exists in many early cultures (Some examples were discussed in the section on Huizinga in Chapter 5). For example, in ancient Germanic tribal society, the victim challenges the one who wronged him with the support of the whole family clan. "What characterised a penal action was always a kind of duel, an opposition between individuals, families, or groups" without the intervention by some higher authority which did not exist in any case (Foucault 2002:35). Justice was a private war:

A kind of private, individual war developed, and the penal procedure was merely the ritualisation of that conflict between individuals ... law was a special, regulated way of conducting war

between individuals and controlling acts of revenge. Law was thus a regulated way of making war (Foucault 2003:35).

In cases of murder the judicial practice was to seek revenge, and thus "entering the domain of law meant killing the killer, but killing him according to certain rules, certain forms", such as cutting him to pieces or cutting his head off and placing it on a stake, which were acknowledged as ritualised revenge forms (Foucault 2002:35).

In pre-state societies the *military model* provides a blueprint for the construction and functioning of politics as the field of power within a society. Power as a warlike relationship means that these relationships could manifest themselves either in the form of *war* or in the form of *politics*, "but the one is always liable to switch into the other" (Foucault 1981b:93). Initially keeping the civil order and the absence of war within society was the work of the army that applied tactics to discipline the masses into coordinated docile troops. The army could guarantee the peace because it was a real force, but more importantly, because "it was a technique and a body of knowledge that could project their schema over the social body", this was the birth of "meticulous military and political tactics by which the control of bodies and individual forces was exercised within states" (Foucault 1987:168). Military men contributed to the construction of the civil society, for example, General Guibert advises that "discipline must be made national" and the state must have simple and reliable controlled administration that "will resemble those huge machines, which by quite uncomplicated means produce great effects" (Foucault 1987:169).

What is implied is that the civil order is an order of battle and the civil peace is a form of civil war. Political power does not begin when war ends, the structure of society is not constructed after the clash or arms ceases – war presides over the birth of the state, peace, laws which are born in the mud and blood of battle, victories, massacres and conquests (Foucault 2003:50). The social order is the result of war and the antagonism is transferred into politics. Politics sanctions and reproduces the unequal relations of forces manifest in the war:

The role of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to re-inscribe the relationship of force, and to re-inscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language and even in bodies of individuals (Foucault 2003:16).

This means that “we are always writing the history of the same war, even when we are writing the history of peace and its institutions” (Foucault 2003:16).

If we look beneath peace, order, wealth, and authority, beneath the calm order of subordinations, beneath the State and State apparatuses, beneath the laws, and so on, will we hear and discover a sort of primitive and permanent war? (Foucault 2003:46–47).

There is a sort of uninterrupted battle that shapes peace, and that the *civil order is basically an order of battle*, thus in the final analysis war provides the principle that allows us to understand order, peace, the State and institutions and the entire history of human societies. That is, Foucault points to the fact that violence is always the ontological condition of power and at the heart of social and political identity and encoded into all social norms (cf. Newman 2004:580–581).

Civil "society itself is based on conflict" and "the enemy can be found within society" and " therefore what is seen as the idyllic relationship of exchange within society "is nothing other than a less bloody, but no less dramatic transformation of war" (Battistelli 1993:193). War is the motor behind social institutions and order and *peace is waging a secret war*, peace is a "*coded war*":

We are therefore at war with one another; a battlefield runs the whole society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefield that puts us all on one side or the other. There is no such thing as a neutral subject. We are all inevitably someone's adversary (Foucault 2003:51).

There are no neutral positions in a society, the subject who speaks, is the subject that is fighting a war. All forms of communication and the productions of knowledge in a society are produced to be used as *weapons* in the war. Truth and knowledge can be deployed in combat from the particular perspective or position of the fighting group and the sought-for victory and ultimately the survival of the human subject (cf. Foucault 2003:52). Truth and knowledge are thus socially produced and constructed; there is no single truth or neutral knowledge, truth is an instrument in the battle – a weapon within relations of force – truth is an additional force; truth is used to perpetuate victory (cf. Foucault 2003:55),

In turn the defeated party is motivated by desire for revenge and desire to reverse their position of subordination and to turn their defeat into victory by other means (cf. Schivelbusch 2004:2). Thus ultimately,

we really do have to become experts on battles, because the war has not yet ended, because preparations are still being made for the decisive battles, and because we have to win the decisive battle. It is not reconciliations and pacifications that will bring war to an end but rather the victory of one side (Foucault 2003:51).

The relations of dominations are inscribed in rituals, in procedures that impose rights and obligations and rules, “such rules are not designed to temper violence but rather to satisfy it” (Foucault 2000a:377). The rules and laws in a society are “the calculated pleasures of relentlessness, it is the promised blood or revenge of the victorious group” and permit perpetual instigation of new domination (Foucault 2000a:378).

The political structure of society is so organised that some can defend themselves against others, or can defend their domination against the rebellion of others, or quite simply defend their victory and perpetuate it by submitting others (Foucault 2003:18).

While the social structure is organised in such a manner that some groups can take advantage over others, paradoxically in a complete totalitarian regime power becomes once again more diffused and war of individuals or war of everyman against everyman becomes more manifest. An example is the German Nazi society that the "power to kill, ran through the entire social body" (Foucault 2003:259). Not only the state had the power to kill but specific groups and individuals also were granted the privilege. Ultimately, as Foucault explains

everyone in the Nazi State had the power of life and death over his or her neighbours, if only because of the practice of informing, which effectively meant doing away with the people next door, or having them done away (Foucault 2003:259).

## **6.8 War as communication: communication as war**

Foucault's replacement of the linguistic model of society with the model of war has some implication for the understanding of communication. Foucault proposes that communication has a particular relationship with power. To identify the specific character of power Foucault proposes that,

it is necessary also to distinguish power relations from relationships of communication which transmit information by means of a language, a system of signs, or any other symbolic medium. No doubt communicating is always a certain way of acting upon another person or persons. But the production and circulation of elements of meaning can have as their objective or as their consequence certain results in the realm of power; the latter are not simply an aspect of the former (Foucault 1983:217–218).

Foucault insists that while communication has its particular relationship with power and productive activities, these are not entirely three separate domains. "It is a question of three types of relationships which in fact always overlap one another, support one another reciprocally, and use each other mutually as

means to an end" (Foucault 1983:217–218). Foucault insists that power relations have a distinct character and have nothing to do with relations of communication: "Power is only a certain type of relation between individuals. Such relations are specific, that is, they have nothing to do with exchange, production, communication, even though they combine with them" (Foucault 1988c:83). Foucault seems rather indeterminate when it comes to identify the specific nature of communication and its relation to power, but suggests that in modern disciplinary society communication has come to be more intimately linked with surveillance: the exercise of power through communication means that control is exercised through the use of the word and the increased use of communication, information, and communication technology for surveillance (Foucault 2003:223).

The relation between war and communication is theorised by Clausewitz, and a reading of Clausewitz could illuminate Foucault's ideas on communication and war. Clausewitz (1985:402) notes that it is a general belief that war breaks off communication between groups and nation. Against such belief Clausewitz contends that war is continuation of communication: "War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse, with a mixture of other means." Political intercourse does not stop with war, does not change to something different but continues. Moreover, it is "the chief lines on which the events of War progress, and to which they are attached" (Clausewitz 1985:402). When war begins the diplomatic exchanges of notes between the warring parties do not stop but are transformed and war becomes "merely another kind of writing and language for political thought" (Clausewitz 1985:402). War is not separate from politics and thus the exchange of diplomatic missives is replaced with the exchange of missiles. As Clausewitz puts it (1985:406): "In one word, the Art of War in its highest point of view is policy, but, no doubt, a policy which fights battles instead of writing notes." War and discourse thus are interlinked: "War, in its great features, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen" (Clausewitz 1985:410). Thus Clausewitz has a view of war and communication that is similar to Austin's (1984) idea that speaking and the use of language can be real forms of action.

To show Foucault's understanding of the relation of war and communication it may be useful to reinterpret some of his earlier work on discourse through the model of war. As Foucault asserts, "history constantly teaches us (that) discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (Foucault 1981a:52–53). Foucault (1981a:62) notes that that "exchanges and communication are positive figures working inside complex systems of restriction, and probably would not be able to function independently of them."

### ***6.8.1 Discourse as weapon in battle for power and knowledge***

Discourse is not simply a medium for the representation of social conflicts and systems of domination. Discourse is itself an object of man's desire and the very object over which conflict arises, it is the thing *for* which, and *by* which conflicts are fought (cf. Foucault 1971:89).

Discourse as an object of practice is an asset over which a struggle for political power is waged (cf. Foucault 1986:120). Discourse is also a tactical instrument, a weapon of attack and defence in the relations of power and knowledge and social battles are fought "among discourses and through discourses" (Foucault 1978:xxi). These are battles of great consequence because they define social reality.

Discourse is of primary importance in the exercise of power because relations of power cannot be established, consolidated or implemented without "the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse" (Foucault 1980:93). This implies that power and knowledge are joined together in discourse (cf. Foucault 1981b:100). "There is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms" (Foucault 1986:183). Such interrelation is evident in all societies.



In any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subject to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth (Foucault 1980:93).

Indeed discourse is under social control and each "society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault 1980:131). The inscriptions of violence ultimately manifest themselves as the rules and norms governing discourse.

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality (Foucault 1971:8).

Social regulation of discourse, based on relations of power control the functions of discourse and authorise the use of legitimate language, define the legitimate objects of discussion, legitimate knowledge and the legitimate speakers and listeners (cf. Foucault 1971:8; Foucault 1988a:199). This implies that "the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power/knowledge and their historical transformations" (Foucault 1987:27–28). What is at stake in these struggles is the monopoly over positions of authority, legitimacy and power.

### **6.8.2 Meaning inscribed by power and the outcome of battle**

Discourse brings into existence a reality for human beings. Discursive practices are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1986:49). There is no pre-existing natural *order of things* waiting patiently to be discovered (cf. Foucault 1986:44–45). The world does not have prior signification but it is a mere disorder (cf. Foucault 1971:22). For human consciousness the existence of *things* depends firstly on their being objects of discourse (cf. Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:50), because there is no direct access to a raw reality, no unmediated perception can distinguish differences and similarities between things without a culturally constructed discursive *grid* of intelligibility. The grid consists of

fundamental codes of culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices established for every man, from the very first, the empirical order with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home (Foucault 1989a:xx).

To the extent that human beings see an ordered reality, such an order is the imposition of discourse and power.

We should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand in glove with what we already know; there is no pre-discursive fate disposing the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose upon them (Foucault 1971:22).

The objects of discourse are the real or imaginary *references* of discourse – that is, the things one can know, may speak about, name, analyse, classify, explain and challenge within a particular discourse (cf. Foucault 1986:46).

The objects of discourse are not formed once and for all but are constantly modified and changed through discourse (cf. Foucault 1986:47). New objects

arise not because of continuous progress, revolutionary scientific discoveries, construction of superior means of observation and the refutation of errors. New objects of discourse are the result of a reorganisation of knowledge and a shift in the use of discourse which defines the objects that are to be known (cf. Foucault 1989a:x). The objects of discourse emerge from a set of complex social relations established within the discursive practice and determined in historical and social conditions. An object of discourse is constructed in particular social institutions, by individuals who are authorised to talk about such specific objects according to particular accepted procedures which are used to define and classify such objects (cf. Foucault 1986:41–42). The emergence of the objects of discourse is also related to the speaking individual making statements. Like the objects of discourse the subjects are assigned roles within the discourse.

### **6.8.3 *Individuals are constructed in discursive battles***

Discourse provides a particular role that may be filled by different individuals (cf. Foucault 1986:93–95). While, seemingly, discourse provides a place for anyone to speak, speaking is not a free activity. It is obvious that "we are not free to say just anything that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone finally, may speak of just anything" (Foucault 1971:8). To speak implies that one is in a position of power to speak. For example,

medical statements cannot come from anybody; their value, efficacy, even their therapeutic powers, and, generally speaking, their existence as medical statements cannot be dissociated from the statutorily defined person who has the right to make them, and to claim for them the power to overcome suffering and death (Foucault 1986:51).

In order to speak with power of authority the speaker needs to acquire an institutionalised position. Such a position requires a whole complex of rules and conditions that the speaker must satisfy. These conditions for entering into

discourse include educational qualifications, membership of social groups and adherence to available theoretical doctrines, *et cetera* (cf. Foucault 1986:122). The individual may only speak about specific objects that are collectively established as legitimate objects of discourse. In order to speak with any authority and credibility the individual must produce statements that are considered *true* otherwise he is totally ignored and his statements are considered to be meaningless (cf. Foucault 1971:16–17). The position and power of the individual producing discourse is defined in relation to other positions available within the institutions. Different historical periods provide different conditions for discourse and positions to the speaking subjects. Different discourses also position human subjects differently, for example

according to a certain grid of explicit or implicit interrogations, he is the questioning subject and, according to a certain programme of information, he is the listening subject; according to a table of characteristic features, he is the seeing subject, and according to a descriptive type, the observing subject (Foucault 1986:52).

However, these conditions must not be considered as imposing a rigid limitation on the initiative of the speaker, but rather provide the possibilities in which the individual's initiative can operate (cf. Foucault 1986:209). The power of the speaker and his institution is determined by the social hierarchy and distribution of power in the discursive practice.

More specifically the roles for the subjects can be identified according to a grid of (a) the specific individual who is accorded the right and status and is qualified to use such discourse; (b) the institutional site from which the individual makes his discourse and from which the discourse derives its legitimacy; (c) the legitimate position that the speaking individual must take in relation to the object of his discourse (cf. Foucault 1986:50–52). From such a complex matrix, the objects of discourse come into being and accredited speakers can make their statements.

#### **6.8.4 Discourse as battlefield**

Discursive practices consist of making statements. Statements are functions of discourse and can be located by reference to the objects and subjects of discourse (cf. Foucault 1986:87). A statement is always part of an *enunciative field* and is related to, surrounded by and interacts with other statements in discourse (cf. Foucault 1986:97, 106). There is no statement that does not re-actualise other statements and serves as a point of reference for subsequent statements which may follow.

At the very outset, from the very root, the statement is divided up into an enunciative field in which it has a place and a status, which arranges for it a possible relation with the past, and which opens up for it a possible future ... a statement always belongs to a series or a whole, always plays a role among other statements, deriving support from them and distinguishing itself from them: it is always a part of a network of statements in which it has a role (Foucault 1986:99).

The meaning of a statement is not its grammatical, semantic or logical meaning, nor is it linked to the existence of a real referent. The meaning of a statement is defined by its *use* and function in the discursive practice (cf. Foucault 1986:90). In other words, the meaning of a statement is derived from the fact that it was actually *made* and from its function. The meaning of a statement is its value within discourse, "a value that is not defined by their truth, that is not gauged by the presence of secret content; but which characterises their place, their capacity for circulation and exchange, their possibility of transformation" (Foucault 1986:120). The statement is a commodity that people can "manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose and recompose, and possibly destroy" (Foucault 1986:105).

Thus the statement circulates, is used, disappears, allows or prevents the realisation of a desire, serves or resists various

interests, participates in challenge and in struggle, and becomes a theme of appropriation or rivalry (Foucault 1986:105).

Human thought manifest in discourse is not simply theoretical reflection but it is a certain mode of social action. "As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites; it cannot help but liberate and enslave (Foucault 1989a:328). According to Foucault (Gordon 1980:245), discourse defines its object simultaneously as a target area for intervention and as a reality to be brought into existence. Discourse is a tactical instrument, a weapon of attack and defence in the relations of power and knowledge, and social battles are fought "among discourses and through discourses" (Foucault 1978:xxi). Thus, if a certain object or domain has become an area of investigation,

this was because relations of power had established it as a possible object; and conversely if power was able to take it as a target, this was because techniques of knowledge and procedures of discourse were capable of investing it (Foucault 1981a:98).

By producing discourse on particular objects a whole regime of power-knowledge-pleasure comes into existence. Such a regime empowers some groups that are able to control discourse to dominate other groups. Discourse is both an instrument and the effect of power and a hindrance and starting point of opposition to power (Foucault 1981b:101). Indeed, one aspect of the operation of power is that it encounters resistance. Discourse of power and authority is always confronted by a *counter-discourse* of resistance (cf. Foucault 1988a:209).

Because discourse is used strategically and tactically in order to be able to capture the complex relationships that are involved, Foucault suggests the use of a heuristic model – the *apparatus (dispositif)* – for *analytical* diagnostic of discursive practices (cf. Foucault 1988a:139; Gordon 1980:244). The *apparatus* as a *grid of intelligibility* brings together the discourse and its social context and eliminates the traditional dichotomy that conceptualises texts as

representations existing apart from the *real* world (cf. Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983:121). As Foucault contends, the *apparatus* is

a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions in short, the said as much as the unsaid (Foucault 1980:194).

The aim is to make sense of these practices and to decipher what is going on and rediscover "the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, play of forces, strategies and so on which at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal and necessary" (Foucault 1991:76). Such an analysis should reveal the effects of power generated by what is said, the links between discourses, effects of power and pleasure invested in them and the knowledge formed from such linkages. For example,

a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another time as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary reinterpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new field of rationality (Foucault 1980:194–195).

Thus the discursive apparatus and the way discourse operates in society are congruent with the model of war.

## **6.9 Conclusion**

The historical primacy of war means that man and society can not be interpreted by the use of a model of language but rather, the model of war makes society perfectly understandable. War is a natural fact of our culture, and hence our culture is a war-culture and ultimately "you have to understand war in order to understand our culture" (Hallin 2008). Hardt and Negri (2006) adopting Foucault's idea of war contend that the contemporary world needs to be understood in terms of global war and can provide the matrix to understand all

power relations (Hardt & Negri 2006:13). Following Foucault, the model of language is not the most appropriate for understanding communication, and it could be replaced by the model of war. Man and society are not texts to understand, but are subject who act and fight. War with its strategy and tactics, use of power and resistance, battles and offensives is an eternal way of acting and communicating as acknowledged by both Clausewitz and Foucault.

Foucault realises that struggle is perpetual and there is always a need to fight. Here Foucault is influenced by "Nietzsche's glorification of struggle in the face of nihilism" and proposes a "Nietzschean agon", an agonistic imperative (Thiele 1990:909). In this sense Foucault offers a tragic sense of life: the inescapability of power, struggle and death. And in these struggles knowledge is important, as Nietzsche points out, "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (Foucault 1988:154). Thus Foucault offers intellectual tools of critique that should be useful instruments "for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is" (Foucault 1991:84). Foucault realises that life has no meaning apart from fighting and thus would agree with Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt that "what is important is not what we fight for, but how we fight" (Huysen 1993:10). But being a realist Foucault adds unequivocally that "one makes war to win, not because it is just" (Foucault 2006:51). In other words, it does not matter what we fight for but existentially we must always be on the winning side.

The centrality of war and struggles mean that the symbolic and communication systems acquire different meanings and function: the mere symbolic nature of communication needs to be devalued in order to see the reality behind the symbolic. With such new clarity it is now realised that

our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance; under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and centralisation of knowledge; the



play of signs defines the anchorages of power (Foucault 1987:217).

But this as Foucault had shown, is the culmination of a process in the transformation of power and replacement of the utility of the sword with eloquent speech and symbolic representations, which was already begun in the Ancient Greek *polis*. Here public speaking and argumentation replaced the sword as means of political decisions making in the war council or *agora*. More intense transformations were underway since the Middle Ages whereby the rise of the courtly society leads to the decline of the old warrior way of life. As Norbert Elias writes (1982): in the competition for prestige in the court of the king the sword no longer played a central role as a tool for decision-making, it was replaced with intrigues, and conflicts were contested and settled with words. But ultimately the symbolic representation and its dissemination through communication conceal the disciplinary actions of power on the human and the social body. To understand contemporary society an understanding of the logic of war is still indispensable, as offered by Foucault.

The next chapter will offer a reading of Marshall McLuhan's theory of the media and how technology is interrelated with war and is developed and implemented by the needs of war. McLuhan's theory of the media contributes to Foucault's conception of technology of the body and its military origin.



## CHAPTER 7

# WAR AND PEACE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: WAR IN THE MEDIA THEORY OF MARSHALL MCLUHAN

War is accelerated social change – McLuhan (1969:376)

The weapon, even when it is not used to inflict death, is nevertheless a means for enforcing a pattern of human behaviour – Mumford (1962:84)

War ... is itself the principal basis of organisation on which all modern societies are constructed – *Report from Iron Mountain* (Lewin 1996:93)

### 7.1 Introduction

Marshall McLuhan is best remembered as the 1960s flamboyant media guru and for having popularised expressions such as "the medium is the message", and the "global village". His theoretical claim that the various media technologies and formats are the primary force responsible for cognitive and social changes, are mostly dismissed as being technologically deterministic and utopian.

The voluminous literature produced on McLuhan since the 1960s deals almost exclusively with his media theories and no references are made to the idea of warfare, that are scattered in his various books and articles. As against such disregard, this chapter will demonstrate that war is McLuhan's unconscious and later a conscious frame of reference and the context that structures his thought on the effects of technology on individuals' psychology and social structure. A perceptive scholar, MacDonald (2006) suggests that even McLuhan's method of inquiry and writing – mosaic of media effects – is itself a war-like rhetorical attack:

McLuhan knew how to exploit the ballistic properties of the aphorism, a genre whose speed of delivery and sudden, decisive impact rival that of a “projectile hurled by a vigorous arm” (Seneca). Like Nietzsche, who likens the aphorism to an arrow or explosive charge, McLuhan deploys the aphorism as a war machine. Just as the surrealist “shock effect” launches the artwork beyond aesthetics and into ballistics, McLuhan's aphorisms ... are verbal missiles (MacDonald 2006:509).

The primacy of war is evident in McLuhan's first 1951 book, the *Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (McLuhan 1967) where the Second World War was still alive in memory and openly acknowledged thus providing the *Zeitgeist* for much of the thinking, politics, media narratives and advertising art of the period. Thus McLuhan uncovers this underlying structure of war and social power relations and this structure then becomes the foundation for his own thinking and writing. The primacy of war in McLuhan's thought is again evident from one of the first statements he makes in his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy, published in 1962* on the origin of media technology as an extension of human sense. McLuhan notes that the origin of all human progress is derived from technological extensions of the human body linked with the necessity of warfare: "The evolution of weapons begins with teeth and the fist and ends with the atom bomb" (McLuhan 1971:4). As McLuhan develops his arguments, it emerges that war is mostly the unconscious reflection of the general *Zeitgeist* of the 1960s Cold War and gradually as the Vietnam war intensifies, the idea of war gains prominence in McLuhan's 1964 publication *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1969), and ultimately he concludes the book with a chapter on weapons as forms of media. And in his 1968 book *War and Peace in the Global Village* (McLuhan & Fiore 1968), war is the central theme.

McLuhan's interest in war is the result of the influence of Harold Inns' idea that communication media historically facilitated the military expansions on the basis of which social, economic and cultural progress was made possible. McLuhan also adopts ideas from Lewis Mumford's linking of technological development to

warfare. For example, discussing the invention of the wheel McLuhan (1969:197) notes that "the wheeled vehicle makes its appearance at once as a war chariot, just as the urban centre, created by the wheel, makes its appearance as an aggressive stronghold". McLuhan also extends on the insights gain from his encounter with the historical studies of Lynn White on military technology and social development, and John U Nef's book *War and Human Progress*, published in 1950. Moreover, McLuhan's increased reference to war reflects the intensification of, and growing interest in, the Cold War and the Vietnam War.

This chapter traces the role of war and how it structures McLuhan's thought and theoretical development.

## **7.2 The mechanical bride: between "hot" and "cold" wars**

In the preface to his 1951 book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (McLuhan 1967) McLuhan notes that social domination and tyranny are manifest today not through brute force but by propaganda and use of mass media to manipulate the mind: "Today the tyrant rules not by club or fist, but, disguised as a market researcher, he shepherds his flock in the ways of utility and comfort" (McLuhan 1967:vi). Because domination is pervasive, McLuhan's aim is to uncover and expose these techniques of control and manipulation by applying means of art criticism to society. As McLuhan notes: "Ever since Buckhard saw that the meaning of Machiavelli's method was to turn the state into a work of art by rational manipulation of power" it has become possible to apply methods of art analysis to critical evaluation of society (McLuhan 1967:vi). Thus McLuhan is aware of the centrality of power in social relations and the way art is used to manipulate and enhance social control: "The Western world, dedicated since the sixteenth century to the increase and consolidation of the power of the state, has developed an artistic unity of effect which makes artistic criticism of that effect quite feasible" (McLuhan 1967:vi). Taking note of the centrality of social power and domination McLuhan is also aware – consciously and unconsciously – of the continued influence of the

Second World War that ended in 1945 and still manifests itself in news stories and is being transformed into the "Cold War". All such references to war feature prominently on the front pages of the newspapers that resemble a symbolist landscape represented in surrealist modern painting. As McLuhan shows, on a front page of a 1948 newspaper there is a mosaic of stories about the Second World War, the Cold War, political wars and social and personal dramas and heroism (cf. McLuhan 1967:6). Such symbolist art on the front page of a newspaper presents an "X-ray drama of the common passions of the human heart", the past and present wars, and the battles and dramas of daily life (McLuhan 1967:5).

In this turbulent world the press is posing as the brave representative of the little man "facing giants and ogres" and every day the press warns about the dangers the little man faces as big interest groups are plotting against him. The press thus claims to heroically search for the public enemies and "find them and kill them" (McLuhan 1967:5). "By posing as a Jack-the-Giant-Killer, the press gives the ordinary reader a heroic image of himself as capable of similar feats" and the "newspaper invites reader participation in its triumphs" (McLuhan 1967:5). The press transforms the news of the world into a "romantic novel filled with cloak-and-dagger episodes and fascinating intrigues hatched in various chancelleries" and the news of the day is unified by focus on great leaders, dramas and wars.

For the press the two great wars of the twentieth century "were magnificent displays of what international industry and technology could do" and the wars lead to acceleration of technological development (McLuhan 1967:7). Indeed war has fundamentally shaped the press, for example the

headline is a feature which began with the Napoleonic Wars. The headline is a primitive shout of rage, triumph, fear, or warning, and newspapers have thrived on wars ever since. And the newspaper, with two or three decks of headlines, has also become a major weapon (McLuhan 1967:7).

Today the "speed of communication" enables the movements of facts as well as that of "international armies" and "news gathering" on a "world scale" and the national press keeps "mobilising the passions of whole populations year after year until the moment comes for blows." Through the "prolonged stirring of passion by means of the press" a "world war" can be launched and maintained (McLuhan 1967:7). McLuhan concludes that without the press or means of rapid communication it would be impossible to imagine war between Russia and the West (McLuhan 1967:7).

Thus the press is used to stimulate emotions leading up to a crescendo that requires a resolution of tension – a catharsis – which is found in the form of "a blood-bath". And indeed, the "actual outbreak of the Second World War was a visible relief to many after years of tense waiting" (McLuhan 1967:7). Moreover, even the pacifist attempt to replace war with sports competition ultimately incites to war, while in "peacetime" the feeling of large populations are kept bellicose that are conducive to promotion of commerce while the dramatic newspaper headlines result in good newspapers sales; thus emotions drive the sales of goods, and "wars and rumours of wars are the merchandise" the press sales successfully on the market (McLuhan 1967:7).

Death is also an important aspect of news. McLuhan exhibits a 1950 news story with the headline: "See selves on video, then two die in chair". The story tells of two condemned murders had seen themselves on a newsreel and few hours later died on the electric chair (McLuhan 1967:4). McLuhan notes that

This situation is a major feat of modern news technique. Hot spot news with a vengeance. What a thrill these men must have got from being on the inside of a big inside story. Participating in their own audience participation, they were able to share the thrill of the audience that was being thrilled by their imminent death (McLuhan 1967:4).

McLuhan concludes that "violence, mayhem, and death" with the addition of sex are the staple features found on the news pages of the press and in advertisements (McLuhan 1967:11).

War is also an important theme in commercial advertising. McLuhan provides a sample of text accompanying an advertisement for a movie magazine that tells a story of combat, death and fantasy about a famous female movie star gleaned from a soldier's letter:

Somewhere in the South Pacific ... We were moving up in an armored job - we came up where a few kids had been holding off some Japs – just as we arrived, we saw a soldier double up – heard him say 'Goodbye, darling ... We got every one of the fifteen Japs, and then we hustled to move this kid, but it was too late ... We pried open his hand, and it held this picture of you – the bullet had gone through it (McLuhan 1967:11–13).

McLuhan notes that the story sums up the meaning of "war and the glory of death" and a soldier who had fought and died accompanied by a fantasy of being in a relationship with a movie star. The power of such narratives in advertisements moves the readers and sells products but it also degrades the valour and human dignity (McLuhan 1967:13). As McLuhan (1967:11) ironically notes: "You didn't know what a hero's last words should be? Let the movie magazine tell you." Entertainment and war are interlinked as is seen from the fact that the "Hiroshima bomb was named 'Gilda' in honour of Rita Hayworth" (McLuhan 1967:99).

For the media death and murder have become central themes of entertainment. Popular are magazines with erotic covers that bear titles such as "Bury me deep ... I.O.U. – One Grave, Half Past Mayhem, Two Can Die, Dying Room Only, Murder On My Mind, Wrong Way Corpse, and Dead Men Talk" (McLuhan 1967:14). But if in the industry of fictional violence and the reality of news reports death is openly discussed, in the advertisements for real managers of death such as morticians and burial services the words referring to death are



muffled (cf. McLuhan 1967:14). Death that is brought within the sphere of the consumer world is neutralised. Likewise, neutralisation of death is achieved in the meat industry through mechanisation of killing in the abattoirs where killing is performed on a mechanical assembly-line and the death cries of animals are drowned and confused with the sound of machinery, thus death cries and mechanical noise have become unified.

McLuhan notes that killing has been entirely naturalised and that "scientific techniques of mass killing are applied with equal indifference in the abattoirs, in the Nazi death camps, and on the battlefields" (McLuhan 1967:15). And techniques of war are transferred to the life of industry, and when the war ends "the computers that direct guns might also direct machines" (McLuhan 1967:34). This implies that the logic of science and technology are derived from warfare: "It promises trips to the moon by means of discoveries which, already geared to the war machines, will first reduce the number of available passengers to the vanishing point" (McLuhan 1967:92).

The logic of automation and interchangeability shows the "murderous violence" of knowledge and the happy result of the target of automation would be as happy as "the recipient of a bomb or shell" (McLuhan 1967:34). McLuhan notes that industrial production, business and commerce have for a long time "been thinking in military terms" in order to "smash public resistance" with carefully planned "barrages" of propaganda and are followed by "shock troops of salesmen" (McLuhan 1967:34). McLuhan points out that "the American citizen lives in a stage of siege from dawn to bedtime. Nearly everything he sees, hears, tastes, touches, and smells is an attempt to sell him something" and it is as if advertisers have resorted to the use of "Chinese water-torture method" (McLuhan 1967:88). Advertising has become a kind of social ritual and if one can understand it one can understand the society. For McLuhan the underlying logic of advertising is social competition and rivalry: if you "understand rivalry" then "you understand America" (McLuhan 1967:113). Society is founded on real and "spirit of rivalry" (McLuhan 1967:115). Indeed, McLuhan realises that rivalry, battle, competition and fight are the central defining themes of the

industrial society (McLuhan 1967:123), and are symbolically represented by the logic of the "law of the jungle" that teaches competitiveness and survival skills (McLuhan 1967:125).

The competitive aspect of life is found everywhere; in particular it is expressed in sport. McLuhan observes that "naturally the imagery of competitive sport is linked to much of our thinking and feeling" and more than any other form of entertainment "competitive sport is a direct reflex of the various motives and inner dramas of society" (McLuhan 1967:135). The competitive aspect is not limited to popular sports that draws mass audiences but is also expressed in private and personal competitive games such as chess or card games. Competitive sport is magical art and is a central ritual that "seems most necessary to social functioning and survival in any given group" (McLuhan 1967:135). The high social value of sports such as football and baseball remains intact and they have maintained their positions even during the Second World War because through these sports people in military service could keep in touch with ordinary social and business life. Moreover, "war games, business games, and sport" share a common frame of reference while there is a "close relation between competitive sport and competition of war" (McLuhan 1967:137).

The centrality of warfare and war-like social competitiveness is acknowledged by members of society, and advertising, mass media and literature promote toughness: "No mollycoddling and encouragement of milksops" (McLuhan 1967:125). Acquiring toughness and learning self-defence techniques are popular pursuits of weak individuals and there are ample teachers advertising their classes or offering self-thought courses. Thus, like the "terror inspired by wild beasts, which led tribal societies to get psychologically inside the tribal totem animal" so in the contemporary society people who are "confused or overwhelmed by a machine world" are encouraged to become "psychologically hard, brittle, and smoothly metallic" (McLuhan 1967:141). McLuhan notes that as the sense of helplessness among the urban masses grows so does the "hero worship" introduced in the writing of Thomas Carlyle during the 19th

century. The hero worship continued to spread with the popular enthusiasm for Napoleon and is reflected in the modern "rise of the superman in theory, practice, and fantasy simultaneously" (McLuhan 1967:141). These values were expressed in military hero worship of the Germans, Boys Scout movement, gangsters, literary heroic characters, and Hollywood produced movie star heroes (cf. McLuhan 1967:144–145). Hero worship, competition and war are informal forms of education. But as against the informal tradition today's formal education is being degraded by pacifism. McLuhan quotes a university student bemoaning the futility of formal education that has become pacifist because what is needed is an education that sharpens competitiveness and cultivates the killer instinct in order to become successful in society and business (McLuhan 1967:125). War has a driving effect promoting success and innovation similar to that provided by education.

Modern warfare is another point of vantage which enables the observer to note how the mere logistics of the war machine cause the spread of technology and specialist education (McLuhan 1967:126).

The modern mechanised or total war also promotes prosperity and economic well-being:

As the creator of wealth and opportunity for all, war has put peace to shame in our time. War has provided higher education and higher consumer standards for more people than peace ever did (McLuhan 1967:128).

McLuhan insists that by such presentation of war he is merely exposing "the central reality of our world" (McLuhan 1967:128). But the reality has also changed, according to McLuhan, it is no longer a world of real physical toughness of the personal Neanderthal power and Darwinian melodrama but the power of abstract logistics, control and manipulation as a kind of "post-Darwinian brand of abstract toughness" (McLuhan 1967:131). Thus in the mechanical mass society and industrial age individuals are powerless and only

gain power by conforming to the group. The result is that the "smaller and meaner the man" the more he desires to possess unlimited power, and attain superhuman power (McLuhan 1967:128).

The Second World War exposed the difference between the old style heroism and modern mechanised killing, and the different styles of killing are indicators of different human personalities, and as civilisation progresses the civilised have lost their animal killer instinct and toughness. The real toughness has been transformed from the "personal Darwinian melodrama" to "abstract toughness" and the difference can be seen when the fighting spirit of the German and British are compared and it is evident that the civilised British Army shows a lack of "killer urge" (McLuhan 1967:131).

The German Afrika Corps defeated the Eighth Army because it had speed, anger, virility and toughness. As soldiers in the traditional sense, the Germans are punk, absolute punk. But Marshall Erwin Rommel and his gang are angry men, they are tough to the point of stupidity. They are virile and fast, they are thugs with little or no imagination. They are practical men, taken from a most practical and hard life to fight practically: Nazis are trained to kill. The German commanders are scientists, who are continually experimenting with and improving the hard, mathematical formula of killing. They are trained as mathematicians, engineers and chemists facing complicated problems. There is no art in it, there is no imagination. War is pure physics to them. The German soldier is trained with a psychology of daredevil track rider. He is a professional killer, with no distinction. He believes he is so tough, and can be beaten soundly and quickly by a foe using the same ruthless speedy methods he uses ... The British soldier is the most heroic on earth, but do not confuse that with military toughness. He has the toughness of determination but he has not the toughness which makes him scientifically kill his enemy (McLuhan 1967:131).

As McLuhan concludes, clean scientific killing has replaced the brutality of killing: the human quality expressed in killing was eliminated and killing becomes mechanical and ultimately even the mere animal quality in killing was replaced by clean killing performed by technology (McLuhan 1967:131). All these make up the folklore of the modern industrial man.

### **7.3 Gutenberg galaxy: from dragon's teeth to armed men**

In the introduction to his 1962 book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (McLuhan 1971), McLuhan proposes that the book can be considered as a complementary work to a book by Albert Lord that is in turn a continuation of Milman Parry's study on the nature of oral poetry in Homer's *Iliad* and how it differs from the written poetry.

McLuhan in the *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1971) does not refer to the fact that warfare is the central theme of Homer's great epic poem. Indeed as Tatum (2003) notes, most modern "peaceful readers" of the *Iliad* skip over the numerous detailed descriptions of battles and killings and focus their attention on the presumed more edifying narrative of friendship and sorrows (cf. Tatum 2003:116). It is only in his 1967 book *The Medium is the Message* (McLuhan & Fiore 1971) that he notes that "Homer's *Iliad* was a cultural encyclopedia of pre-literate Greece, the didactic vehicle that provided men with guidance for the management of their spiritual, ethical, and social, lives" (McLuhan & Fiore 1971:113). However, reading the *Gutenberg Galaxy*, it gradually emerges that war is the unconscious background in McLuhan's work as he shows how the historical change in technology and media formats, such as the change from speech to writing, resulted in changing the forms of human thought and social organisation (cf. McLuhan 1971:1–2). The principle effect of the media is not its message content but the media's technological form that influences human thought patterns and social organisation. Every technology is an extension of a particular human sense organ and extending and strengthening one particular sense effects change in all the other senses because the relationship between the senses is rearranged: "Man the tool-making animal, whether in speech or in

writing or in radio, has long been engaged in extending one or another of his sense organs in such a manner as to disturb all his other sense and faculties" (McLuhan 1971:4). McLuhan explains this further by quoting anthropologist Edward T. Hall's contention that man has developed extensions for practically everything to do with his body, and that the primary development of such extensions was inspired by the needs of warfare: "The evolution of weapons begins with the teeth and the fist and ends with the atom bomb" (Hall in McLuhan 1971:4).

For McLuhan all such extensions of the senses and their influence on human sensibility and social organisation can be explained by reference to the principle operation of metaphor that translates and transfers an experience from one domain to another domain. The dominant medium of communication during a particular historical epoch, for example speech, is the first technology to shape human thought and pattern of social organisation, because language and speech are tools that allow man to accumulate experience and knowledge and transmit it (McLuhan 1971:5). As McLuhan adds, the extensions translate experience in the way metaphor translates one experience into another: "Language is metaphor in the sense that it not only stores but translates experience from one mode into another" (McLuhan 1971:5). And conflict is the central and primary human experience that is translated into all other aspects of life. Here McLuhan refers to Shakespeare's King Lear as his example of conflict and division of power that is central to human existence (cf. McLuhan 1971:11).

The most significant contemporary change is the change from print-dominated human sensibility to that of new forms of organic sensibility caused by the return to oral culture due to the expansion of the electric or electronic media. The replacement of print media with the audiovisual electronic media is assumed to have returned the human being to an ancient oral communication stage that existed before the invention of writing. McLuhan illustrates his idea of the complex social change induced by changing technology and media by reference to Harold Innis' narration of the myth of King Cadmus who introduced

the Phoenician or phonetic alphabet into Greek society. For Innis, and McLuhan, Cadmus' introduction of the alphabet into society seems akin to having sown the dragon's teeth and "they had sprung up armed men" (McLuhan 1971:25).

Harold Innis, in *Empire and Communications*, was the first to pursue this theme and to explain in detail the simple truth of the Cadmus myth. The Greek King Cadmus, who introduced the phonetic alphabet to Greece, was said to have sown the dragon's teeth and that they sprang up armed men. (The dragon's teeth may allude to the old hieroglyphic forms.) Innis also explained why print causes nationalism and not tribalism; and why print causes price systems and markets such as cannot exist without print. In short, Harold Innis was the first person to hit upon the *process* of change as implicit in the *form* of media technology (McLuhan 1971:50).

McLuhan adds that his own book, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* "is a footnote of explanation" to the work of Harold Innis (McLuhan 1971:50). For McLuhan the influence of print media technology is such that the "citizen armies" that arose with Cromwell and Napoleon "were the ideal manifestation of the new technology" (McLuhan 1971:222). It is the uniformity induced by Gutenberg's book-printing technology that provides the means to construct the concept of common nationality, extended it into the "nation in arms", and then with the French Revolution the ideas of "liberty, equality and fraternity found their most natural ... expression in the uniformity of the revolutionary citizen armies" (McLuhan 1971:223). Constructing fraternity is not a benign process but characterised by the Jacobin's use of force and terror to stamp out foreign language and dialects and force every French citizen to use the common language (McLuhan 1971:224).

While the idea of war is much in the background of McLuhan's wide ranging "mosaic" presentation of media effects, the idea of war gradually comes to the

fore, in response to the intensification of the Cold War and growing war-related discourse in response to America's increasing military involvement in the Vietnam. In McLuhan's subsequent book *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1969) he returns to the myth of Cadmus and unpacks its significance as an explanation for the intimate interlink between military power and media technology.

#### **7.4 Understanding media: implosions and explosions in the global village**

In his 1964 book *Understanding Media* (McLuhan 1969), technology of warfare, weapons and the military begin to gain more prominence in McLuhan's thought on media. McLuhan introduces his concept of technological and media-induced revolutions in terms of the concepts "explosion" and "implosion", as he puts it: "After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding" (McLuhan 1969:11). What McLuhan means by this is that the technology of writing and printing has distanced people from one another in the same manner as an explosion scatters objects, while the invention of electronic media creates an oral interactive society and brings people together, just as implosions compact matter into close contact. Subsequently, most of McLuhan's discussion and examples are taken, as if naturally and in an unconscious manner, from war and military.

According to McLuhan (1969) despite three thousand years of technology extending man's body, affecting sensibility, and changing social ways of living, these effects have not been noticed or acknowledged. What has not been recognised is the fact that the medium of communication is more influential than the content, thus what is important to acknowledge is that "the medium is the message" (McLuhan 1969:19).

The lack of attention to the influence of media formats is pervasive. For an example, McLuhan (1969) quotes General David Sarnoff expressing a belief that media are neutral but their value is determined by the way they are used.



McLuhan then argues that such a claim ignores the nature of the medium itself and is as perverse as if one were to suggest that "firearms are in themselves neither good nor bad; it is the way they are used that determines their values" (McLuhan 1969:19). According to McLuhan (1969) this is similar if one were to say: "If the slugs reach the right people firearms are good", and by the same logic "if the TV tube fires the right ammunition at the right people it is good" (McLuhan 1969:19). Later McLuhan adds that with television the viewer becomes the screen and "is bombarded with light impulses that James Joyce called the 'Charge of the Light Brigade'" (McLuhan 1969:334). Here the light of television is a pun on the epic military cavalry charge of the British Light Brigade.

McLuhan credits Napoleon as being one of the first to notice the effects of the medium. "Cardinal Newman said of Napoleon" that he understood the grammar of gunpowder. Napoleon was also aware of the ability of other media such as the "semaphore telegraph that gave him a great advantage over his enemies" (McLuhan 1969:21). Napoleon also noted the power of communication media and warned that "three hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets" (McLuhan 1969:22). Similarly De Tocqueville was aware of the power of print media in homogenising the French people and facilitating the Revolution, while in England the oral character of culture and limited diffusion of the new visual print media prevented an English revolution because there was no media to unify the people (cf. McLuhan 1969:22). For McLuhan, ultimately "any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary" (McLuhan 1969:23). And different media characterise different cultures, thus the alphabet and literacy of the West induce a sequential logic and rationalism, as against the nonlinear logic of oral culture that is viewed by the West as irrational. In similar manner, the prevalence of speech and images in the electric media are experienced as irrational by literate society because these media do not conform to the sequential logic of print dominated bias. The change from literate print media to electric oral media is experienced as "conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organisation of existence" (McLuhan 1969:24).

Neglecting to pay attention to the medium and its power to induce a particular "cultural bias" makes the contemporary person look like those British politicians of the 1930s who did not want to recognise the danger of Hitler and the possibility of war, because they could only think of appeasement (cf. McLuhan 1969:26). In similar manner the present literate culture is threatened by electric technology but is oblivious to the treat:

The treat of Stalin or Hitler was external. The electric technology is within the gates, and we are numb, deaf, blind, and mute about its encounter with the Gutenberg technology, on and through which American way of life was formed (McLuhan 1969:26).

The conventional response to new media is like the incomprehension of doctors listening to Louis Pasteur telling them that "their greatest enemy was quite invisible" (McLuhan 1969:26). According to McLuhan (1969) the most significant "effects of the technology do not occur at the level of opinion or concepts, but alter the sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance" (McLuhan 1969:27). The influence of technology and media on the senses is explained as if by extending one particular sense it will be strengthened, while simultaneously causing a correlative amputation of another sense. As McLuhan explains:

Battle shock created by violent noise has been adapted for dental use in the device known as *audiac*. The patient puts on headphones and turns a dial raising the noise level to the point he feels no pain from the drill. The selection of a *single* sense for intense stimulus, or of a single extended, isolated, or "amputated" sense in technology, is in part the reason for the numbing effect that technology as such has on its makers and users (McLuhan 1969:54).

The effect of media needs to be recognised because of the profound social change it brings and because "a man is not free if he cannot see where he is going, even if he has a gun to help him get there" (McLuhan 1969:29).

For each of the media is also a powerful weapon with which to clobber other media and other groups. The result is that the present age has been one of multiple civil wars that are not limited to the world of art and entertainment (McLuhan 1969:29).

Regarding war McLuhan inserts a quotation from John U Nef's book *War and Human Progress* to say that the "total wars of our times have been the result of intellectual mistakes" because the "formative power of the media are the media themselves" (McLuhan 1969:29–30). In turn this formative power can be classified in terms of *cold* or *hot* degree of intensity and levels of data the media can carry (cf. McLuhan 1969:31).

Changes in media technology are disruptive as is evident from the introduction of the steel axe by missionaries into Australian native society. The introduction of the steel axe resulted in the collapse of the indigenous culture that was based on stone axe possession. While the stone axe was scarce, as well as a sacred and an important male status symbol, the infusion of the more powerful steel axes that were also distributed in abundance to women and children destroyed male domination and male dignity (cf. McLuhan 1969:33). Thus the use of one particular media has *heating* effects on society while the use of another medium can *cool* emotional tempers (cf. McLuhan 1969:37). The effects are like the "cool war and the hot bomb scare" (McLuhan 1969:40). In similar manner the effects of speech and writing are of different intensities whereby in oral culture "the sound of a man's name" can be "a numbing blow" (McLuhan 1969:41).

What has been the source and driving force of technological extension of man? In his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan (1971) quotes anthropologist Edward T Hall's explanation that man has developed extensions for practically everything to do with his body and that such extension began with warfare: "The evolution of weapons begins with the teeth and the fist and ends with the atom bomb" (Hall in McLuhan 1971:4). McLuhan reaffirms and elaborates this statement in his book *Understanding Media: (McLuhan 1969)* "War and the fear

of war have always been considered as the main incentives to technological extension of our bodies" (McLuhan 1969:57). However, more than preparation for war, it is the aftermath of war and invasion that is "a rich technological period" because the conquered culture has to adjust to the invading culture and from the "intensive exchange and strife of ideas" release of social energies and new technologies develop (McLuhan 1969:57). War as source of energy for innovations have become permanent influences in our lives because of the expansion of media of communication: "For most of our lifetime civil war has been raging in the world of art and entertainment" and

Most of this civil war affects us in the depths of our psychic lives, as well, since the war is conducted by forces that are extensions and amplifications of our beings. Indeed, the interplay among media is only another name for this "civil war" that rages in our society and our psyches alike (McLuhan 1969:58).

The technologies that extend man become active factors for social change, and they are the active "agents" that make things happen. Commodities such as coal, steel and cars have changed social arrangements of daily life. "In our time ... the medium of language itself" is "shaping the arrangements of daily life, so that society begins to look like a linguistic echo or repeat of language norms" (McLuhan 1969:59). The interaction of different media, and different cultures such as the literate and tribal cultures, release energy and seem like an atomic fission and fusion; like "'A' bomb" and "'H' bomb" (McLuhan 1969:60). McLuhan's allusion to military and combative examples and the use of military language is becoming clearer.

The challenge of infusion of new technology is similar to that of a culture becoming captive by military conquest, and innovation may not be a novelty but "annihilation" (McLuhan 1969:80). To understand the influence of technology and find a way to accommodate it rather than to be annihilated "the artist can show us how to 'ride with the punch,' instead of 'taking it on the chin'." (McLuhan 1969:77). Further McLuhan provides an example of accommodation

by reference to Toynbee's discussion of "how the lame and the crippled respond to their handicaps in a society of active warriors." The ideal response strategy is adopted by Vulcan, the "smith and armourer" who became an indispensable specialist. In the same manner a whole community should adapt when it is "conquered and enslaved".

The same strategy serves them as it does the lame individual in a society of warriors. They specialise and become indispensable to their masters (McLuhan 1969:80).

McLuhan refers to Toynbee's contention that rapid technological change, or "times of trouble" produce militarism and lead to territorial expansion and empire. Again, McLuhan refers to the Greek myth of King Cadmus who sowed dragon teeth, and they sprung armed men, and he explains that this indicates that "the alphabet produced militarism ... phonetic alphabet was the greatest processor of men for homogenised military life that was known to antiquity" (McLuhan 1969:83). "Militarism is a kind of visual organisation of social energies that is both specialist and explosive ... it creates large empires and causes social breakdowns" (McLuhan 1969:83). Militarism is a form of industrialism as it concentrates homogenised energies into production. An example of early industrialisation is the military:

The Roman soldier was a man with a spade. He was an expert workman and builder who processed and packaged the resources of many societies and sent them home. Before machinery, the only massive work forces available for processing material were soldiers or slaves (McLuhan 1969:83).

McLuhan seems to be repeating Lewis Mumford's (1962) assertion that "the Roman soldier, indeed, conquered through his spade as well as his sword" (Mumford 1962:87). Indeed, the influence of Mumford is discernible throughout McLuhan work (cf. Carey 1981:162). McLuhan's central claim about the formative role of technology on human sensibilities and on social formation are derived from Mumford as much as they are derived from Harold Innis (cf.

Cooper 1981:153). Indeed, McLuhan acknowledges the influence of Mumford and Innis and therefore, Mattelart (1994) contends, that to understand McLuhan it is necessary to see the crucial influence of Harold Innis and Lewis Mumford on his work, and in turn the influence of Kropotkin, and Geddes on Mumford's work (cf. Mattelart 1994:227–128).

Mumford's (1962:81–83) observation that the needs of the hunter and the soldier have driven technological developments as extension of senses and extension of human organs into weapons is echoed by McLuhan. The idea of balance of the senses and over-determination of one sense by the use of a particular technology was already described by Mumford who attributes it to the activity of the hunter: in performing his task the hunter

is a beast of prey, and the needs of his appetite as well as the excitement of the chase cause him to inhibit every other reaction – pity or esthetic pleasure – in the act of killing ... Trained in the use of a weapon, killing becomes his main business (Mumford 1962:82).

Mumford goes to note the primary role of war and military technology as shapers of sensibilities and social structure, and he puts it thus: "The weapon, even when it is not used to inflict death, is nevertheless a means for enforcing a pattern of human behaviour" (Mumford 1962:84).

Continuous improvements in the means of war-making extended the power of empires but at the same time also caused decline because specialised slaves and foreign mercenaries – the "rootless parasites" – gradually displaced the indigenous populations (cf. McLuhan 1969:84). Thus for McLuhan the myth of Cadmus (which he already introduced in his previous book) again provides a significant power to explain the way technology is interlinked with military power and determines social change and cultural progress through military conquests and expansion of empires. As McLuhan (1969:92) notes, the Greek myth about King Cadmus introducing the phonetic alphabet into Greek society was like

sowing of the dragon's teeth and "they sprang up armed men" who replaced the ruling class:

Like any other myth, this one capsulates a prolonged process into a flashing insight. The alphabet meant power and authority and control of military structure at a distance. When combined with papyrus, the alphabet spelled the end of the stationary temple bureaucracy and the priestly monopolies of knowledge and power (McLuhan 1969:92).

The alphabet that was easy to learn and master, and the papyrus that was cheap and transportable effected the transfer of power to the military class (cf. McLuhan 1969:92–93). The process of change provides new technology to extend the ability to give and receive verbal commands at a distance. This is so because the marks of the ink on the papyrus, or on paper are "trapped words" and trapped thoughts, and anyone who could master the technique could decipher the words and thought entrapped in the symbols and free them again into speech (McLuhan 1969:91). As McLuhan notes, "all this is implied in the myth about Cadmus and the dragon teeth, including the fall of the city states, the rise of empires and military bureaucracy" (McLuhan 1969:93). And as McLuhan comments in an interview: "Whenever the dragon teeth of technological change are sown, we reap a whirlwind of violence" (McLuhan 1997:242–243). Technological changes bring pain of adjustment and violence and war. However, the violence and war are normal components through which, and by which, humans construct their identity, as McLuhan (1997) notes, violence and war is "the normal stigmata of the identity quest" and new society rises from the ashes of the old (McLuhan 1997:263). Later McLuhan will elaborate on the role of pain as conferring identity.

McLuhan suggests that as an indicator of man's extension the myth of the dragon's teeth has another significance elucidated by Elias Canetti's observation that teeth are agents of power in man and beasts:

That the power of letters as agents of aggressive order and precision should be expressed as extension of the dragon's teeth is natural and fitting. Teeth are emphatically visual in their lineal order. Letters are not only like teeth visually, but their power to put teeth into the business of empire-building is manifest in our Western history (McLuhan 1969:93).

The introduction of phonetic alphabet changed social structure and habits of thought, and the lineal sequence of writing extended into the idea of logic, while the habit of reading introduced individual independence and personal freedom and liberated the individual from domination by the family and clan. The individual freedom manifested itself most significantly in the ancient military:

Careers are open to talent in Republican Rome, as much as in Napoleonic France ... The new literacy had created an homogeneous and malleable milieu in which mobility of armed groups and of ambitious individuals, equally, was as novel as it was practical (McLuhan 1969:98).

Technologies are extension of physical and nervous human systems and were developed to increase "power and speed". As indeed, the motivation to increase power and speed drives all development (cf. McLuhan 1969:99). The increase in speed of transportation of goods, as well as the transportation, or communication messages also provides new means for increased control to be exercised from a distance; ultimately increase in speed provides for military control (McLuhan 1969:100). The same idea is elaborated by the founder of modern cybernetic science, Norbert Wiener (1956:97) who notes that "where a man's word goes, and where his power of perception goes, to that point his control and in a sense his physical existence is extended."

The result of increase in speed provided an opportunity for a socially powerful class to centralise and consolidate their power (cf. McLuhan 1969:101). As McLuhan puts it: "A speed-up in communications always enabled a central authority to extend its operations to more distant margins" (McLuhan



1969:106). The introduction of the alphabet and papyrus extended the Roman road system for military movement, and in the Roman city "broad straight avenues" were used "to speed military movements, and to express the pomp and circumstance of power" (McLuhan 1969:110). Correspondingly, the shortage of papyrus in Rome due to the loss of Egypt meant a decline of the military and a decrease in military traffic on the roads of the empire. Ultimately this led to the collapse of the Roman power and the corresponding military ascendancy of the Muslim empire (cf. McLuhan 1969:111).

In Rome the army was the "work force" and the main "mechanised wealth-creating process" as the "military made and delivered the goods" and naturally "trade followed the legion" and therefore the "legions were the industrial machine." Likewise, in a later historical epoch "Napoleon's armies" were "the industrial revolution" (McLuhan 1969:111). The Napoleonic wars were a technological "catching up" of France with England; the First World War was a final phase in the industrialisation of Germany and America. As indeed the industrialisation of America began during the civil war where the railways "raised the art of war to unheard-of intensity" (McLuhan 1969:113). As McLuhan notes:

War is never anything less than accelerated technological change ... and ... militarism is itself the main route of technological education and acceleration for lagging areas ... War is certainly a form of emphasis that delivers many a telling touch to lagging social attention (McLuhan 1969:113).

In other words, war is the main cause of social change and provides the drive and education for change. New media and new war open new possibilities: the electric technology has extended the human nervous system and with it "the field of battle has shifted to mental image-making-and-breaking" (McLuhan 1969:113).

The effect of the printed word has been paradoxical: on the one hand it created individualism and separated people, but on another level it provides the

technology to homogenise people. Thus this process has been gradually increasing and the power of the printed world created "mass mind" and the "mass militarism of citizen armies" (McLuhan 1969:117). And the increase and amassing of people placed the previously isolated literate individual in the crowd and provided him with new delightful experience (cf. McLuhan 1969:120). Increase in amassing of people developed the idea of numbers as a technology for counting and became a necessity for military tasks and at the same time the replacement of the Roman numerals with Arabic digits increased efficiency:

Before the advent of ordinals, successive, or positional numbers, rulers had to count large bodies of soldiery by displacement methods. Sometimes they were herded by groups into spaces of approximately known area. The method of having them march in file and of dropping pebbles into containers was another method (McLuhan 1969:126).

The typographic extension of man constructed nationalism, mass markets, universal literacy and detached the individual from traditional groups "while providing a model of how to add individual to individual in massive agglomeration of power ... and ... led other men to create giant corporations, both military and commercial" (McLuhan 1969:184).

Ultimately print, literacy and numeracy gave the West power and knowledge because it provided means for the dissociation of thought and action, with the result that man "could act without reaction or involvement" and this "dissociation of action from feeling" and emotions afforded greater efficiency in warfare where man could disregard danger and drive himself into action saying: "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead" (McLuhan 1969:191).

The press was already acknowledged as weapon by Napoleon who was semi-literate, and again the power of the press as a form of weaponry is acknowledged by Oriental oral culture such as the Russian Communist party. For Lenin the newspaper was a "collective agitator" and an organiser; Stalin

called the newspaper "the most powerful weapon of our party", and Khrushchev valued it as "chief ideological weapon" in the battle to transform tribal and oral Russian society into a uniform nation (cf. McLuhan 1969:229). As McLuhan notes the power of the print is the visual effect of seeing printed letter and words, and "Gutenberg made it possible to 'see' the mother tongue in uniform dress" (McLuhan 1969:229).

While there are many references to the value technology of war, and war being the unconscious structuring framework of his book, nevertheless, McLuhan at times neglects to locate the origin of some media in their warrior milieus. For example, discussing clothing as a private extension of the individual skin, McLuhan neglects to conclusively link clothing with armour. However, this omission is corrected later and in his subsequent book. Similarly, in discussing the clock McLuhan only notes its function as a time keeping machine in the civilised world, and writes that in primitive societies it is a status symbol visibly worn in public just like the sword (cf. McLuhan 1969:157). In discussing the photograph and the telegraph McLuhan (1969:203) ignores much of their military link. He only briefly refers to effects caused by the photograph and the telegraph when used to report from the Crimean war "which created the image and role of Florence Nightingale" (McLuhan 1969:214). In other words, the telegraph, photograph and the newspaper brought news at an increasing speed from the distant warfront and a sensitive person such a Florence Nightingale "began to pick up human-distress signals" in these reports and photographs and shaped a role for herself as caregiver for wounded soldiers (cf. McLuhan 1969:269). McLuhan briefly notes that the telegraph wire provided means for a newspaper reporter to become the first war correspondent. Of more profound military value was the increased speed in modes of transportation and the corresponding "speed-up" of delivery of information by newspapers (cf. McLuhan 1969:219).

McLuhan notes that the interlinking and interaction between various technologies and media show that the greatest social effects and consequences are seldom noticed and mostly dismissed by scholars. This

omission is the result of debilitation caused by the scholars' print-dominated logic and work in isolated fields of specialised study. As a corrective perspective McLuhan points to the innovative work of historian Lynn White whose study of medieval technology and social change illuminates how "the feudal system was a social extension of the stirrup" that was introduced by mounted warriors invading Europe from the East (cf. McLuhan 1969:192).

With the stirrup came mounted shock combat that called into existence a new social class. The European cavalier class had already existed to be armed, but to mount a knight in full armour required the combined resources of ten or more peasant holdings. Charlemagne demanded that the less prosperous freemen merge their farms to equip a single knight for wars. The pressure of the new war technology gradually developed classes and economic system that could provide numerous cavaliers in heavy armor. By about the year 1000 A.D. the old world *miles* had changed from "soldier" to "knight" (McLuhan 1969:192).

Moreover, the development of technologies related to horsemanship were interlinked with development of the wheel and caused profound social changes in transportation during the Middle Ages (cf. McLuhan 1969:193). The combined extension of power effected by the wheel and the written and printed word advanced centralisation of power and expansion of empires; invention of electric technologies and fast transport further extend power to the margins of empires (cf. McLuhan 1969:198–199).

The infusion of the stirrup and the heavy armoured knight in the medieval world were "expensive yet so mandatory ... for shock combat" and this brought into being a whole new economic arrangement such as the "cooperative feudal system" in order to pay for the military equipment and waging war. New technology changed the battlefield and society: during the "Renaissance gunpowder and ordnance ended the military role of the horse mounted knight and returned the city to the pedestrian burgess" (McLuhan 1969:232-233).

### **7.4.1 War games**

According to McLuhan (1969:238) modern technology equalises society, for example Gutenberg print technology and literacy "created the first classless society in the world." But it is warfare that had the greatest levelling and equalising effect: the experience of "mud and blood baths of the Western Front ... fraternised and tribalised" the soldiers and on their return home new legislation to prohibit alcohol drinking were introduced in order to limit the fraternisation and reduce the threat to the "individualist society" (McLuhan 1969:249).

War and games are extensions "of social man and of the body politics" and provide ways of adjusting to strain of change and relief from the stress of the daily world of work. The use of war games has been incorporated into the culture of work in Japan where it has become a fashion for businessmen to study classic military strategy and tactics and apply them to their business operations (cf. McLuhan 1969:250). In the print-dominated world of individualism games are used to detribalise the individuals and to accommodate them to the new world of oral electric media, while in primitive parts of the world still dominated by their oral culture, "war games" are an integral part of daily life. This is evident from the life of a primitive tribe in New Guinea where, on a weekly basis, two tribes "arrange a formal battle at one of the traditional fighting grounds" (McLuhan 1969:251). The formal battle seems like a game or "more like a dangerous field sport than true war" (McLuhan 1969:251). The battle lasts one day, ends before nightfall, and the playful warriors are experts at evading injury. However, while the formal battle is more like a game, the lethal part of this primitive warfare is the sneak raid and ambush where men, women and children are slaughtered. War and the killing are integral to the spirit of game and war. These tribal people "fight because they enthusiastically enjoy it" and for them it is "a vital function" of being a complete human being.

These people, in short, detect in these games a kind of model of the universe, in whose deadly gavotte they can participate through the ritual of war games (McLuhan 1969:251).

For the primitive people the game is a model of the universe, as for example, the Olympic Games dramatically re-enacted the agon or the "cosmic struggle" (McLuhan 1969:252). The war and games are forms of interpersonal communication and are an extension and public dramatisation of inner social life and provide release from tension. Thus the war for the primitive man and the game of sport for civilised man are popular art forms and offer means of participation in the full life of their societies (cf. McLuhan 1969:253). Games provide satisfaction, and like war express all aspects of the human characteristics, and it is for this reason that "war has been called the sport of kings" (McLuhan 1969:255). Indeed, McLuhan acknowledges the role of force and brutality in both war and games as identity conferring element, as he puts it: "Brutality used in sport may humanise under some conditions" (McLuhan 1969:40).

Politics is another form of a game that characterises a society. For example, the British parliament is a contest game for two teams derived from battle as is seen from the seating arrangement of benches opposing one another. This can be contrasted with the French Parliament that prefers centralism that is reflected in the semicircle seating arrangement all facing the central chair of a leader. Thus, while the British politician visibly and physically is positioned to play and fight together with his team rather than play a private game, the French uniformity of seating arrangement offer opportunity for private intrigues and multiplicity of games can be played which result in anarchy (cf. McLuhan 1969:257).

The value of games is their imaginative simulation of learning and translation of experience. Games provide a creative learning to prepare for future possibilities "ahead of their times." Thus the game and works of art create live models for situations that will arise in the future and so prevent a person from seeing the

present through the spectacles of the past, like the "General staffs [that] are always magnificently prepared to fight the previous war" (McLuhan 1969:259).

But the new communication technology speed-up information transfer and change warfare and social relations. For example, the introduction of electric media into German society changed the nature of military commands and hierarchy within the military, sometimes with unintended consequences:

The telephone, the teleprinter and the wireless made it possible for orders from the highest levels to be given directly to the lowest levels, where, on account of the absolute authority behind them, they were carried out uncritically (McLuhan 1969:263).

Not only military order could be communicated directly from top to bottom, but military information from the battlefields became almost instantly diffused among the civilian publics by the introduction of the telegraph and newspaper. For example, in traditional British military experience battlefield disasters were assumed to be a normal part of warfare and became public knowledge only long after the battle ended, but with the introduction of the telegraph, war correspondents and newspapers could make such information available almost instantaneously to the civilian audiences for whom it was a novelty and offered them means of involvement. Thus, the first mass media reporting on the Crimean war disaster changed public participation:

For the first time in history, through reading the dispatches of Russell, the public had realised "with what majesty the British soldier fights." And these heroes were dead. The men who had stormed the heights of Alma, charged with the Light Brigade at Balaclava ... had perished of hunger and neglect. Even horses which had taken part in the Charge of the Light Brigade had starved to death (McLuhan 1969:269).

And with such information becoming available, sensitive people like Florence Nightingale "began to pick up human stress signals" and find a position for themselves as social reformers and activists (cf. McLuhan 1969:269).

The invention of the typewriter by Remington (the fact that Remington was also a leading gun manufacture goes unacknowledged by McLuhan) has introduced changes into military and business organisation with the result that the typewriter became indispensable in warfare and business.

A modern battleship needs dozens of typewriters for ordinary operations. An army needs more typewriters than medium and light artillery pieces, even in the field, suggesting that the typewriter now fuses the functions of the pen and the sword (McLuhan 1969:276).

While technology developed for military use, in turn technology developed by the military on the battlefield becomes available for civilian use, for example, "the Braille system of dots-for-letters had begun as a means of reading military messages in darkness, then was transferred to music, and finally to reading for the blind" (McLuhan 1969:287). Conversely, new technology is adapted for military needs, such as installation of radio telephones in "mobile panzer divisions" revolutionised traditional army structure and command systems (McLuhan 1969:289).

The way war and military technology shape society is seen in the style of social activities such as music and dance. McLuhan (1969) notes that the age of Napoleon invented the waltz. The waltz is a manifestation of the mechanical age, with emphasis on the mechanical and repetitive movements that no doubt were demanded by new military technology such as loading and firing a rifle (cf. McLuhan 1969:298). As McLuhan (1969:298) explains, "for a waltz to yield its full meaning, there must be military dress." Indeed, waltzing was part of military life; Lord Byron records the waltzing before the battle of Waterloo. Moreover, the waltz was also suitable for the citizen's army consisting of individuals



liberated from the feudal courtly hierarchies: "The waltzers were all uniform and equal, having free movement in any part of the hall" (McLuhan 1969:298).

#### **7.4.2 Weapons and war of the icons**

Towards the end of his book McLuhan (1969) introduces weapons as forms of media and notes their relations to the new communication media that are being used as weapons in the Cold War. The mass media provide new means of conducting warfare between the West and Communist Russia where real weapons are replaced by media images and icons in the intensifying "Cold War" that now seems as "the war of the icons" (McLuhan 1969:361). Fighting the Cold War battles consists in eroding the collective image and dignity of the enemy and "ink and photo are supplanting soldiery and tanks" and as a consequence the "pen daily becomes mightier than the sword" (McLuhan 1969:361).

The term "*guerre des nerfs*" coined by the French some decades earlier has come to describe the "Cold War". It is now "an electronic battle of information and of images" that replaced the "industrial hardware" weaponry of the previous generation's "hot" wars. The difference is that in the "hot wars of the past" the weapons eliminated enemies individually and even the "ideological warfare of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries proceeded by persuading individuals to adopt new points of view, one at a time" (McLuhan 1969:361). However, as against the old weapons the new weapons are used to *destruct* and *distract* en masse: the new weapons of electric persuasion, the photo, movie, and television are "dunking entire populations in new imagery" (McLuhan 1969:362). This merely illustrates that the latest technology is always used for warfare. McLuhan (1969:362) notes: that "if the cold war in 1964 is being fought by informational technology, that is because all wars have been fought by the latest technology available in any culture." And McLuhan adds that because the media are weapons, one needs to develop and train defence against such weapons: "Just as we now try to control atom-bomb fallout, so we will one day try to control media fallout", and he envisages that education will become the

civil defence against "media fallout" (McLuhan 1969:326). McLuhan also imagines a future ability to program and control an entire culture's sensory life and to stabilise the bellicose temperament by raising or lowering the emotional "temperature", and for this purpose the "computer can be used to direct a network of global thermostats to pattern life" (McLuhan 1997:263). As McLuhan (1997) puts it: "We could program five hours less of TV in Italy to promote the reading of newspapers during an election, or lay on an additional 25 hours of TV in Venezuela to cool down the tribal temperature raised by radio the preceding month" (McLuhan 1997:263).

McLuhan notes that warfare technology has always been the technology of thought, as demonstrated by John Donne acknowledging "the blessing of heavy firearms" and he sees the artillery as the "light of reason" because it can be used effectively to convince the enemy to end a war sooner. McLuhan (1969) adds that Donne seemed to realise that the "scientific knowledge needed for the uses of gunpowder and boring of cannon" is "the light of reason" itself (McLuhan 1969:362). The psychic and social effects of technological extension of man are particularly closely related to the developments and changes in the technology of warfare, as documented by John U Nef in his book *War and Human Progress* (cf. McLuhan 1969:362–363). The effects of weapon technology on thought and cultural development are evident from King Amanullah exclamation: "I feel half an Englishmen already", after having fired a torpedo (McLuhan 1969:363). A similar idea is expressed by a schoolboy telling his father:

Dad, I hate war,

Why, son?

Because war makes history, and I hate history (McLuhan 1969:363).

Thus McLuhan explains the important role of war technology to effect cultural development:

The technique developed over centuries for drilling gun-barrels provided the means that made possible the steam engine. The piston shaft and the gun presented the same problem in boring hard steel. Earlier, it had been the lineal stress of perspective that had channelled perception in paths that led to the creation of gun fire. Long before guns, gunpowder had been used explosively, dynamite style. The use of gunpowder for propelling of missiles in trajectories waited for the coming of perspective in the arts (McLuhan 1969:363).

The visual perspective on space provided by the arts is intimately interrelated to performance of military skills. For example, "nonliterate are generally poor shots with rifles" because of their experience with "the bow and arrow" which requires them to be in close proximity to the game but does not prepare them for shooting accurately at a distance, demanded by the use of the rifle (cf. McLuhan 1969:363). The different weapons extend different senses: "If the arrow is an extension of the hand and the arm, the rifle is an extension of the eye and teeth" (McLuhan 1969:363). The relation between literacy and marksmanship is historically evident in the ability of the "highly literate Bostonians" to outshoot the mostly illiterate "British regulars" during the American War of Independence. Marksmanship was also not a skill of the Native American or woodsman but was a distinctive skill of the literate colonist. It is assumed that "gunfire" is intimately linked artistic modes of representation such as "with the rise of perspective and with the extension of the visual power of literacy" (McLuhan 1969:364).

In the Second World War single-shot accuracy of the literate marksman was replaced by "automatic weapons fired blindly in what were called 'perimeters of fire' or 'fire lanes' and this spraying of the air with bullets was efficient at night and did not demand sighting the enemy" (cf. McLuhan 1969:364). Such a change of weapons is analogous to the change from print to electric media, whereby the man schooled in the use of literacy cannot easily adapt to the oral sensibility of the new medium: "This is why the transition from mechanical to

electric technology is so very traumatic and severe for us all. The mechanical techniques with their limited powers, we have long used as weapons" and now the new weapons create new sensibilities (cf. McLuhan 1969:365). According to R Buckminster Fuller "weaponry has been a source of technological advance for mankind because it requires continually improved performance with ever smaller means." By paying attention to the weapon technology Fuller has shown that war produces new inventions, induces progress, and improves technological hardware that allow humans to gain more power with less material input and physical exertion (cf. McLuhan 1969:365). Thus McLuhan (1969:376) concludes that "war is accelerated social change."

McLuhan returns to a discussion of clothing and military fortification he begun earlier in the book. He notes that historical changes are evident in the development of cities: "The city, itself, is traditionally a military weapon, and is a collective shield or plate of armour, an extension of the castle of our very skins" (McLuhan 1969:366). McLuhan acknowledges that Mumford's study of the city shows its origin as a fortress (cf. McLuhan 1969:197). However in the information age the city becomes obsolete, as it was in primitive time when humans were nomadic hunters and food-gatherers. Like the ancient hunter the modern human being is in a psychical and social state of nomadism and "it is called information-gathering and data processing" which have become global and ignore the national borders and the walled defences of the city have become useless against them (cf. McLuhan 1969:366).

The city, like a ship, is a collective extension of the castle of our skins, even as clothing is an extension of our individual skin. But weapons proper are extensions of our hands, nails, and teeth, and come into existence as tools needed for accelerating the processing of matter (McLuhan 1969:366–367).

In this sense, "all technology can plausibly be regarded as weapons" (McLuhan 1969:367). By the use of technology of weapons and war – or militarism – civilisation has expanded:

By militarism, Rome extended civilisation or individualism, literacy, and lineality to many oral and backward tribes. Even today the mere existence of a literate and industrial West appears quite naturally as dire aggression to nonliterate societies (McLuhan 1969:367).

Indeed, McLuhan perceptively explains much of the mixture of envy and anti-Western hate expressed by many non-Western societies culminating in the twentieth century's "clash of civilisation" (cf. Huntington 1998). McLuhan notes that "today we appear to be poised between two ages – one of detribalisation and one of retribalisation" and Orientalisation (cf. McLuhan 1969:367). McLuhan in a magazine interview explains that the "global village", despite homogenisation and standardisation will not be a peaceful place because the global reach makes for "maximum disagreement and creative dialogue inevitable" (McLuhan 1997:259). While "uniformity and tranquillity" are supposed to be the characteristics of the global village, it is however more likely that "conflict and discord as well as love and harmony" will prevail, just as is was in "the customary life mode of any tribal people" (McLuhan 1997:259).

War itself can be viewed as the "processing of difficult and resistant materials by the latest technology" to create uniformity and is part of "a process of achieving equilibrium among unequal technologies" (McLuhan 1969:367).

The effects of new weapons and new technologies are always ambiguous:

On the one hand, a new weapon or technology looms as threat to all those who lack it. On the other hand, when everybody has the same technological aides, there begins the competitive fury of the homogenised and the egalitarian (McLuhan 1969:367).

In other words, weapons are the driving force that shape society. Changes in weapon technology increase their power to shape the human mind and society. For example "mechanical technology as extension of parts of the human body

has exerted a fragmenting force, psychically and socially, this fact appears nowhere more vividly than in mechanical weaponry" (McLuhan 1969:368).

But with the new electric technology and "information as a weapon" human unity and fraternity are becoming more visible. But in turn, the new equality drives people to establish new differences and acquire more power than others so as not be dominated. However, maintaining the balance of power with modern weapons poses a dilemma because "as an instrument of policy, modern war has come to mean 'the existence and end of one society to the exclusion of another'" and ultimately the modern nuclear weaponry becomes "a self-liquidating fact" (McLuhan 1969:368).

McLuhan concludes the book with the realisation that warfare and weapons are the media and the message and have been central to the psychological, social and cultural development throughout human history. The theme of war becomes central in his next book: *War and Peace in the Global Village* (McLuhan & Fiore 1968).

### **7.5 War and peace in the global village**

McLuhan's aim in his 1968 book *War and Peace in the Global Village* (McLuhan & Fiore 1968) is to decipher the effects of new technology on the order of human sensory life. In this book McLuhan claims to follow James Joyce, the Irish author of *Finnegans Wake*, who was the first to have discovered "that all social changes are effects of new technologies ... on the order of our sensory lives." Consequently, every technological innovation causes pain, upheavals, and disturbs the human psychological balance. This necessarily results in aggression and "wars" which are attempts to regain the comforting sense of the old and familiar world (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:5). As McLuhan explains, new technologies cause constant change and the occupants of the new technological environment attempt to adjust so as to escape the pain of change (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:13, 16).

While people constantly attempt to adjust and make sense of their new environment, this becomes a difficult task because their ability to understand the world is determined by their pre-existing knowledge based on old technologies. In other words, they cannot see something new of which they have no knowledge, so they tend to see the new technological and media landscapes as if through a rear-view mirror of the old. As McLuhan puts it, "people are always adjusted to the preceding environment, much as the General Staff is always superbly prepared to fight the last war" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:12).

### ***7.5.1 Weapons make the man***

The primary technology to shape consciousness and social structure is the dominant communication technology used by a society. Thus McLuhan notes that the phonetic alphabet was a technology that made man rational and invented a perception of space that is continuous. In other words, such rational and pictorial space is the result of writing and printing (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:7). Invention of new electric media creates a new sense of environment dominated by spoken words and sounds. By the use of technology the human being extends his body's reach into the world, thus writing and printing were mechanical technologies that extended a single human sense at a time, however the new electric media technology are extensions of the whole nervous system (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:19–20). To explain the technological extension of the body's interaction with the world McLuhan refers to the idea of clothing and fashion as being weaponry (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:21).

Clothing as weaponry had become a primary social factor. Clothing is anti-environmental, but it also creates a new environment. It is also anti- the elements and anti-enemies and anti-competitors and anti-boredom (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:22).

In other words, clothing provides protection against the elements or the weather and protection against enemies so it isolates the human from the environment.

It is not only protection but clothing can also be used as assault weapon to be used against (anti) enemies and competitors. McLuhan quotes Ashley Montague who (erroneously) believes that technological advancement of civilisation has made man more, rather than less, violent and warlike, while the pre-historic man is assumed to have been more peaceful (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:23). McLuhan seems to accept Montague's belief that civilisation drives man to war thus McLuhan asserts that "civilisation, [is] the mother of war" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:24). Here McLuhan contradicts his position as expressed in his 1951 book *The Mechanical Bride* (McLuhan 1967:131) where he seems to accept the view that civilised man has lost his killer instinct (Discussed in section 7.2 above). Accepting the assumption that civilisation corrupts man links well with McLuhan's claim that "civilisation is entirely the product of phonetic literacy" that made man more violent, but such bellicosity "dissolves with the electronic revolution and we rediscover a tribal" sensibility that makes people more peaceful (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:24–25). Thus the idea of the Noble Savage is discernible in McLuhan's pronouncement.

McLuhan's assumption that the increase in human aggression is the result of better warfare technology and efficient means of transport and mobile communication technology is adapted from Harold Innis (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:25). For McLuhan, such an assumption makes sense because military technology provides the foundation for cultural and social developments and in McLuhan's hands provides a whole explanation of historical development. Thus the Roman military found the alphabet most useful:

Wedded to the phonetic alphabet, papyrus was the means of creating their huge network of straight roads which gave a special character to their military activities. Papyrus meant control and direction of armies at a distance from a central bureaucracy ... The Roman roads ensured high speeds of military maneuvers and made possible the carrying of large quantities of supplies on campaigns. When papyrus ceased to be available ... the Roman roads fell into disuse and the Roman Empire fell apart ... Having



their straight and even roads, the Romans did not have the same need for mounted men who could traverse uneven terrain. Perhaps this was why they relied on the chariot rather than cavalry for those who wore heavy armor. With the disappearance of the roads and the chariots, a radical new substitute had to be devised for those who had need of heavy armor in battle. That substitute was the stirrup (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:26).

The stirrup, introduced into the West from Oriental sources in the early eighth century made it possible for a man in heavy armour to be mounted on a horse. Moreover, the production of heavy armour required skilled labour of craftsmen which proved expensive and resulted in rearrangement of the economy. Fitting a warrior knight with a suit of armour also required additional expense such as horses and squires which necessitated change in land ownership, agriculture production and social structure (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:27). McLuhan refers to the writing of the historian Lynn White who explains the changes induced by the stirrup. According to White, "inherent in this ... was the recognition that if the new technology of warfare were to be developed consistently, military service must become a matter of class" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:28). The result was the creation of a chivalric class dedicated to fighting. Military obligations were the primary social relationships of the Middle Ages and anyone who could not fulfil the knight's war duty lost his property. Ultimately the "vassal class created by the military mutation of the eighth century became for generations the ruling element of European society" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:29).

The demands of the new fighting style of the horse "mounted shock combat" was not a suitable occupation for amateur warriors but demanded long technical training and dedicated skilled professional warriors (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:31). As battles become fiercer armour becomes heavier and the knights were unrecognisable beneath their carapace. Thus there arose a need for means of identification on the battlefield and markings on shields, pennons and hereditary arms were introduced in Europe. The stirrup and the knight's armour proved their superiority against psychologically stronger militaries but less

advanced technologically, as was seen from the victory of William the Conqueror over the English (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:31). Ultimately this history shows that the weapons construct the human identity, and war technology shapes the individual and society:

It is not playing tricks with semantics to insist that the feudal knight himself, and his society, knew who he was in terms of his arms. The exigencies of mounted shock combat, as invented by the Franks of the eighth century, had formed both his personality and his world (White in McLuhan & Fiore 1968:31).

Thus the simple invention of the stirrup had a "catalytic an influence on history":

The requirements of the new mode of warfare which it made possible found expression in a new form of western European society dominated by an aristocracy of warriors endowed with land so they might fight in a new and highly specialised way. Inevitably this nobility developed cultural forms and patterns of thought and emotion in harmony with its style of mounted shock combat and its social posture (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:33).

The new mode of warfare introduced a new cultural sensibility of chivalry. The psychological, cultural and social development is obviously the result of modes of warfare, or simply it was "impossible to be chivalrous without a horse" and ultimately with the new technology the warriors become the masters of Europe and the New World. That all this historical change was the result of the simple stirrup was a great feat (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:33). More innovations followed and the diffusion of new military technologies kept changing society. The invention of gunpowder made the knight's armour obsolete and the feudal system becomes redundant (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:34). But the knight's armour left an enduring legacy: the medieval armour was an amalgam of technology, clothing and weaponry, and affected "the institutional clothing of education and politics that emerged directly from it" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:35).

Having noticed the direct changes caused by technology McLuhan claims to see similar technological change being driven by the computer which he claims to be "by all odds the most extraordinary of all the technological clothing ever revised by man" because it is not an extension of single sense but an extension of the entire central nervous system (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:35). McLuhan bases his claim on the assumption that all technology extend human body and senses, for example the "wheel is an extension of the foot, the computer is an extension of our nervous system" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:53). And since the new information environment is the direct extension of the nervous system it is more profound than the "natural environment" because it is a "form of clothing that can be programmed at will to produce any effect desired", and it supplants the evolutionary function of biology as proposed by Darwin (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:37).

For McLuhan innovation in military and communicational technology have been the primary driving forces throughout history. Military and warfare technologies are of prime importance as they are the catalysts and interact with other technologies. The centrality of warfare in history is evident from the fact that historical periods are demarcated by their major wars, as McLuhan explains it:

Technologically, the principal developments between the battle of Hastings and the battle of Naseby were gunpowder and Gutenberg revolutions. Both of these revolutions are still resonating in our daily lives. Perhaps full credit has not been given to the gunpowder principle in relation to the motor car. Exploding gunpowder in a cylinder is the main principle of the internal combustion engine, which had a very archaic aspect even in its beginnings. The electric circuit added to the musket, as it were, was the hybrid that produced the motor car. At the battle of Naseby (1645) most of the medieval technology was present and dominant. Cromwell, however, had created a new regimental structure of his foot soldiers, transferring the Gutenberg principle of lineality to human

organisation. His Ironsides were sort of simulation of individual medieval armor in corporate form (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:37–38).

Gutenberg's invention of the movable type introduced mechanical repetitions (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:54) and these were transformed into repetitive military drill, mechanical handling of weapons and meticulous battle tactics introduced by Gustavus Adolphus (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:40–43). However, despite the central and decisive role of military technology's influence on human sensibilities most military historians have ignored and downplayed the role of military and media technological innovation on the course of history. Rather than follow technological details historians are fond of "making a romantic landscape" and in similar manner to Hollywood movie producers they describe the general deployment of forces in the field. However, even such descriptions contain indicators of technological changes and their effects on warfare, and on the human institutions and psyche (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:38–39, 44). McLuhan provides an example in an extensive quotation from John Morley writing about Cromwell and the English civil war. Morley begins with the characteristic descriptive epic of the historian:

The temper of the time was hard, men were ready to settle truth by blows ... The cavalier was hot, unruly, scornful, with all the feudal readiness for bloodshed ... sustained by the thought of the heroes of the Old Testament who avenged ... Men lived and fought in the spirit of the Old Testament and not of the New (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:40).

McLuhan shows that as Morley's discourse progresses he begins to include references to technology almost against his will, as he notes: "it is not within my scope to follow in detail the military operations of the civil war" because in his judgment military operations for "many months" were "a series of confused marches, random skirmishes" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:40). But then he slips in an observation that "soldiers appeared on both sides who had served abroad" and "the great changes in tactics made by Gustavus Adolphus quickly found

their way into operations of the English war" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:40–41). These include changes in cavalry formations, and placement of "platoons of foot and light field-pieces" that improved mobility. But Morley believes that these new continental European military innovations had little use for the two warring English bands who "drew up in front of one another" and then "hammered one another" and "who hammered hardest ... won the day" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:41). But here again description of technological changes slip in, as Morley narrates that armour falls into disuse because of the introduction of firearms and because it hindered the wearer from fighting. Important technological changes sometimes have no immediate effect, an example is the much lauded introduction of firearms. Long after the invention of gunpowder and the appearance of the musket on the battlefield, the bow and arrow still dominated the field. The reason for this was that the musket was still inefficient while the arrows did more damage to the enemy and "the whiz of the arrow ... kept the horses in terror" and likewise had effect on the warriors as the "flight of the arrows" had "demoralised" those who "watched them hurtling through the air" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:42). However, gradually even the initially ineffective artillery pieces were "causing a change in fortifications" that went "from wall to earth works" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:43).

The way technology changed the human character is particularly noticeable with the introduction of mechanical technologies into warfare. These resulted in loss of the human spirit and the virtues that were constructed on the battlefield over the centuries. Thus as Tom Macaulay laments that "the age of chivalry is gone" and "sophisters, economists and calculators have succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever" and with it "heroic enterprise is gone" and so have "honour" and "courage" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:51).

The interlinking of needs of warfare and communication is evident in the evolution of human symbolism and verbal communication: the biblical description of Adam's first action as giving names to things and animal is assumed to have been designed so as he could control them. Likewise, the origin of symbolism is also intimately connected with magic: "a word gives

power over the thing named" or it is a form of manipulative magic whereby the manipulation of an image or clay figure of the enemy – sticking a needle into it – one can kill the enemy from a distance (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:59). Thus word magic could be considered as military technology because one could disarm the enemy from a safe distance. War and robbery are also akin to magic as techniques to get something for nothing (cf. Mumford 1962:83). And as the improvement of weapons made them more effective and efficient means for killing at a distance, so a soldier "with a mere pull of the trigger ... he could annihilate an enemy" and "that was triumph of natural magic" (Mumford 1962:85). Virilio (1989) suggests that war produces magical spectacle of immolation of the sacrificial victims and is associated with spiritual force (cf. Virilio 1989:7–8).

Central to McLuhan's thinking about war and media is the idea of pain and both pain and war are forms of education. McLuhan identifies pain as a distinct human sense, in addition to the five senses (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:13). McLuhan assumes that any new technology, including new media create pain because they displace the old technologies and disrupt the established balance among the senses that was the source of comfort (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:16). Adjusting to new technological environment means an attempt to evade pain and restore the old sense of balance. There are two ways for escaping the pain of technological change: (i) fighting war to restore balance, or (ii) escaping from reality into drugs-induced imaginary peace.

### ***7.5.2 Escape from mechanical universe into drug induced pacifism and primitive technology***

McLuhan seems to accept Montagu's claim that civilisation corrupts and increases human aggression, making man more bellicose and violent (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:23). McLuhan summarises this in a footnote, thus: "Civilisation, the mother of war" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:24). Thus McLuhan contends that after experiencing "two centuries of mechanical environment" that were "inspiring a lust for violence as compensatory feedback" it should not be

surprising that human beings are violent (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:76). Responding to this pain caused by the environmental change from the peaceful organic life of primitive oral culture to the harsh mechanical environment induced by writing and print, man as if naturally strikes out in violence and war, or he escapes into drug induced hallucination (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:73). Drugs provide a phantasy world of peace and make the drug user believe that life is "too precious, that we must not kill unless we are being invaded" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:76). McLuhan claims that a similar sense of euphoria of cosmic peace is being induced by the new electronic media, particularly by television (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:76–77). McLuhan notes that like drugs, the electronic "environment itself constitutes an inner trip, collectively, without benefit of drugs" and the "impulse to use hallucinogens is a kind of empathy with the electric environment" and both entail a rejection of the old mechanical world (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:77). The pacifying effect of drugs and the passivity induced by them is also noted by Roland Barthes (1986). According to Barthes (1986), as against the aggressive effect of legally sanctioned use of alcohol, a sense of "general goodwill" is induced by smoking cannabis: the movement slows down, only few words are spoken, and "the whole relation of the bodies (though a relation that is motionless and remote) is relaxed, disarmed (thus, nothing in common with alcoholic intoxication, the legal form of violence in the West)" and the space seems to be produced by "subtle asceticism" and everything in this space is "floating" (Barthes 1986:331).

The similar effect of drugs and the electronic environment convinces Western youth to reject their own culture, which they experience as nihilistic and meaningless, and their lives as filled with "a feeling of nothingness" and a sense of everyday drabness (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:82). McLuhan seems to hint that the loss of meaning is the result of the lack of a need to fight, as McLuhan comments: "It will soon be impossible to entice any reasonably awake person to accept any high political or business position" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:84).

As against the pacifying effects of drugs on Western culture the new electronic environment has a different effect on primitive and oral cultures that have not experienced the painful experience of literacy. For them there is no need to overcome the mechanical bias of literacy and as they have retained some of their warrior sense they can beat the West and "conquer the white" world (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:79). Their victory may be easy because the West is disarmed by the new electronic media. McLuhan believes that the new electric oral media and in particular television undermine the rationality and logic of Western culture that was introduced by the technology of writing and Gutenberg's typographic technology; the loss of such logic will lead to the "decline of the West" and "its rapid Orientalisation" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:97).

The new electronic media, combined with the drug culture drive people to renounce the Western mechanical culture and strive to return to some imagined romantic simple life in "nature". Such rejection and undermining of Western culture are not only conscious acts but are also the effects of new technology produced by the "integral and organic character of electric technology" itself (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:97–99).

### ***7.5.3 War and pain as means for conferring human identity***

McLuhan assumes that pain is a natural accompaniment of technological innovation and is intimately linked to war. Moreover, pain relates to war because war is a form of education and education is supposedly always painful (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:97). McLuhan is close to Nietzsche's (1989) argument that pain is a means for education because inflicting pain creates memory, and makes something stay in memory, so "pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics" and historically it is evident that to create a memory for himself man could not do without spilling of blood, torture, sacrifice, and ultimately pain constructs a sense of identity (Nietzsche 1989:61). It follows that when the pain caused by the new technology threatens an individual's or a corporate's body sense of identity they lash out in self-defence: "When our



identity is in danger, we feel certain that we have a mandate for war" because the old self-image "must be recovered at all cost" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:97).

On the relationship between media and identity McLuhan refers to Fanon's discussion of the use of radio in Algeria since 1956. For Fanon, the infusion of radio into society was not simply an example of adoption of new modern technology through which to gain French identity, but it was the only means of "entering into communication with the Revolution" and living with it (Fanon in McLuhan & Fiore 1968:99). In this manner the radio was a means of resistance and a technology for the Algerians for forging a common independent identity (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:102). Colonialism and new technology caused pain and in response the individual and society strike out and go to war to regain their old identity. In this sense "war itself is a quest for the recovery of identity and respect" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:127). Similarly it was also seen in 1914 in the German reaction to the industrialisation of its neighbours (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:127). Another example of war conferring identity is the way modern warfare made use of the technology of the railways during the American civil war. Here the mass involvement of people and industrial technology for mass transport were extended to the military transportation of people and "as every citizen had become a worker" which also meant that "every citizen became a soldier" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:129). In the Second World War the radio restored the old shared tribal identity and gave strength to masses of people (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:132–134).

#### ***7.5.4 War as education – education as war***

Introducing the idea of "war as education" McLuhan discusses Napoleon as a prime example of an educator because not only was he an educator but he saw "war as educator" and this is manifest in Napoleon's life through his own education and in the manner of training his military recruit (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:102–103). Napoleon's important educational contribution was to teach his troops the value of time and speedy movement. The important legacy left by Napoleon was his understanding of the military value of time and the advantage

of speed that culminated in his introduction of driving on the right-hand side of the road to improve the efficiency of transport (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:106). The ability of Napoleon's military to move fast was the first instances of *Blitzkrieg* (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:108). The Germans perfect it in the twentieth century with the introduction of radios in their panzer tanks.

To show the positive value of war McLuhan turns to discuss the book *Report from Iron Mountain*, published in 1967 (i.e. Lewin 1996). For McLuhan the first lesson from reading the *Report from Iron Mountain* is that war is a primary phenomenon as "it is itself the principle basis of organisation on which all modern societies are constructed" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:116). Thus because war is an autonomous system, it is a requirement of the system itself that "periodic armed conflict" should be engaged and enacted, and thus "readiness for war characterises contemporary social systems" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:116). According to McLuhan, to say that readiness for war is a characteristic of the social system is to say, as did Ortega y Gasset, that war as a ritual is similar to the handshake being a remnant of an "ancient ritual of war" that both regulated and limited warfare (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:116).

Unknown to McLuhan and other commentators at the time (i.e. 1967), the *Report from Iron Mountain* (Lewin 1996) was a political satire of the ways thinking of the Cold War nuclear deterrence strategists (cf. Lewin 1996:119). However, the satire provides insights based on solid historical and philosophical data that are more real than the musing of the contemporary anti-war idealists (cf. Arendt 1973:84). As Hannah Arendt (1973:84) perceptibly notes, "the satire ... is probably closer to reality ... than most 'serious' studies." The main argument of the *Report from Iron Mountain* is that war is essential to the functioning of society and cannot be abolished unless it is replaced by more murderous means of dealing with problems, and this is vindicated by historical facts (Arendt 1973:84–85, note 4). According to Arendt (1973:88) the authors of the *Report from Iron Mountain* claim that the "war-making potential" is the primary principle force that structures society, and that the economic, political, philosophical and juridical systems serve the war system, rather than war

serving these systems, therefore they conclude that "war itself is the basic social system" containing other modes of social organisations. For Arendt such conclusions are more reasonable and veritable than Clausewitz's claim that war is subordinate to the state (cf. Arendt 1973:88).

Even more conclusive than this simple reversal proposed by the anonymous author of the *Report from Iron Mountain* – instead of war being “an extension of diplomacy (or of politics, or of the pursuit of economic objectives)”, peace is the continuation of war by other means – is the actual development in the technique of warfare (Arendt 1973:88).

Arendt (1973) adds that the persistence of warfare has nothing to do with a secret "death wish" or irrepressible aggressive instinct but attests to the simple fact that there is no substitute for war as the "final arbiter in international affairs", because as was already noted by Hobbes, covenants without the sword are but words (Arendt 1973:84–85). Moreover, there is no substitute for war if people desire to maintain their "freedom from foreign rule" and have national self determination (Arendt 1973:85). McLuhan, like Arendt, notes that the "old men from Iron Mountain" emphasis on the primacy of war means that war is an inseparable feature of the economic establishment, because war drives the economy of each society (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:118). War accelerates research and technological development (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:120).

While there is a general misconception that war is subordinate to state policy, McLuhan notes that its own important functions such as “to defend a nation from military attack by another, or to deter such an attack; to defend or advance a 'national interest' – economic, political, ideological; to maintain or increase a nation's military power for its own sake” (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:120). According the McLuhan (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:120) there are even other more profound functions for war in modern society of which the "old men from

"Iron Mountain" had no inkling, for example, war persists because it is "a quest for that identity that is always threatened by technological innovation."

McLuhan notes the paradox and synergy between war and technological development: while research and technological development are accelerated by war, at the same time the innovations resulting from such war-driven research destroy identity and promote war in turn (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:120). There is no escape from progress because it is driven by war and "war has always provided the basic incentive" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:122).

War is the principle motivational force for the development of science at every level, from the abstractly conceptual to the narrowly technological ... it is historically inescapable that all the significant discoveries that have been made about the natural world have been inspired by the real or imaginary military necessities of their epochs (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:122).

The men from "Iron Mountain" also enumerate the positive psychological and philosophical functions of war: "War as an ideological clarifier" demonstrates that the dualism of traditional dialectic used in philosophy and politics "stem from war as the prototype of conflict" and this is so because there cannot be more than two sides to a question, as "there cannot be more than two sides to a war" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:123). Further, war is the foundation for mutual understanding between nations: "War as the basis for international understanding" shows how before the development of modern communication war provided the means and the incentive for "the enrichment of one national culture with the achievements of another" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:123).

McLuhan uncovers more functions for war, for example, war is a source of general employment and increases the individual human being's sense of value. War is a form of education and it accelerates the process of education and provides a "compulsory education" for the enemy (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:124). The education function is seen in any war where the antagonists study all aspects of their opponents, such as psychology, cultural history,

resources and technology, to the extent that war "has become the little red schoolhouse of the global village." But the educational factor has always existed throughout history whereby the great generals were accompanied by crowds of scholars and linguists to advise on all aspects of the enemy and "loot any cultural treasure" they found (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:124–125).

McLuhan observes that the new electronic technology has generalised war and that "we are now in the midst of our first television war" and television constructs a "total environment" and hence the war is also total war (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:134).

The television war has meant the end of the dichotomy between civilian and military. The public is now participating in every phases of the war, and the main actions of the war are now being fought in the American home itself (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:134).

It is impossible to escape war in the electronic age because "the age is one of communication and Cold War" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:91–92). The new electronic media technology is effective for the Cold War between the two super powers. Through the "vast web of communication" they can "receive information and transmit commands", and the Cold War provides great opportunities to exploit the new technologies (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:92). For example, television war is both "hot" and "cold". McLuhan explains this in his 1967 short book *The Medium Is the Message* (McLuhan & Fiore 1971):

Real, total war has become information war. It is being fought by subtle electric information media – under cold conditions, and constantly. The cold war is the real war front – a surround - involving everybody – all the time - and everywhere. Whenever hot wars are necessary these days, we conduct them in the backyard of the world with the old technologies (McLuhan & Fiore 1971:138).

In the shadow of the Cold War this is a reminder that violence is a quest for identity and manifests itself in different cultures (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:139).

However, in the nihilistic and meaningless Western youth culture of drugs and electronic television, violence has become self-directed asceticism, an exercise of self-inflicted pain and self-denial. In an attempt to find meaning in life some Westerners have become "apostolate of pain" as they seek new adventures (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:84–85). Expressive of such state is Hermann Hesse's story of *Siddhartha* that serves as a "way of discovering one's own inner boundaries" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:139). But such turning inward is an action of the coward and the drop-out, who does not want to participate in life or the war and claims to be a peaceful man.

But violence and war are natural ways of being human and even the young generation raised on drugs stages its own violent anti-war protests as alternative forms of warfare and so can establish its identity. McLuhan concludes that the link between pain and war shows "war as education", and conversely "education as war" and a realisation that information is a weapon (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:149). This is important because the use of education as war and information as weapon usually go unnoticed.

Perhaps less obvious is the aggressive and military character of sending medical missionaries ... to India to implement birth control campaigns. In the information age it is obviously possible to decimate populations by the dissemination of information and gimmickry (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:149).

In other words, the strict division between war and peace cannot be maintained. McLuhan reminds the reader that "war has always been a form of compulsory education for the other guy, but even the greatest ravagers of mankind never dreamed of destroying as many people as those educators hope to do" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:153).

Advertising is another way by which war is conducted on the community of customers where it is used as "an educational onslaught" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:153). That education is war becomes clear from the fact that pain is central to any education: inflicting pain in the process of learning to adapt to the environment is integral to education (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:150–151).

From education McLuhan returns to consider clothing as a form of weaponry and that modern fashion has become a substitute for war, or a kind of boredom, a "Bore War" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:153). Example of clothing used as weapon is provided by Fanon's discussion of the Algerian revolutionary war whereby unveiling of the Arab woman was a painful and disorienting experience but allowed her to dress in European cloths to go unnoticed and plant bombs in the territory of the European settler community (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:157).

The original idea for using clothing as weaponry is derived from the need to combat a hostile environment (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:160). The use of clothing as military uniform originates among members of tribal societies wearing the same costume, and similarly, in modern societies military uniform was used to unify a group into a corporate body (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:161). Fashion originates from armour used in battle (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:163), and the military origin and influence is still seen in contemporary fashion: in the variety of neckties, the "starched harnesses", and rugged "military fashion" of the "trench style" coats (cf. McLuhan & Fiore 1968:166–167). The influence of warfare on dress and social organisation and rituals is widespread, and war is the primary paradigm for society.

When the Duke of Wellington said that the battle of Waterloo had been won on the playing fields of Eton, he was drawing attention to the role of sport as a sort of capsule or live paradigm of any society ... To simulate one situation by means of another, to turn the whole working environment into a small model, is a means of perception and control by means of public ritual (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:169).

An important ritual linked to war is play, examined by Johan Huizinga (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:170). The role of play is central to development of human vocal communication considered as a form of "verbal play" and is one among the many forms of human playing such as "fighting, sexual play, and any other older categories."

Speaking is a form of a war play that provides means to talk about situations that don't exist, are not present, or as are anticipated in the future, or occurred in the past, and this creates a habit of being imaginatively prepared for any eventuality and "is very much like carrying a weapon when there is no immediate need for it" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:170). Thus one speaks and plays at having to deal with uncertainties (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:173), and such uncertainties multiply in the "post-industrial time" of the present (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:184). Uncertainties increase because "all media or technologies, languages as much as weaponry, create new environments or habitats, which become the milieux for new species or technologies" (McLuhan & Fiore 1968:190). Like McLuhan, White (2005:9) concludes his historical study of how war drives technological innovation with the observation that there "will always be a new enemy, a new reason to develop weapons, medicine, transportation systems and communication networks."

## **7.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter the role of war was traced in McLuhan's texts. It was shown how the influence of the Second World War was the general *Zeitgeist* – the social and cultural unconscious – of the period and influenced McLuhan's theoretical writing. Subsequently as the Cold War and the Viet Nam war intensified, so the place of war in his thought becomes more visible and a structuring principle. McLuhan shows how war is a form of communication, and communication is a form of war.

McLuhan's emphasis on the role of the medium itself as being the message seemed a novel way of considering the effect of communication. However, such an idea was already a well-established way of thinking about media messages



among the early communication scholars, such as Shannon, Weaver and Norbert Wiener whose work was driven by the need of war. Wiener (1956:21) explains that "messages are themselves a form of pattern and organisation ... the information carried by a set of messages is a measure of organisation."

Indeed, the general structuring importance of war can be seen in retrospect, as Ignatieff (1999) suggests:

We forget that the Cold War made sense of the world for us: it gave an apparent rationale to the wars of the Third World; it explained the sides; it identified whose side we should be on (Ignatieff 1999:98).

The link between war and technology has a long history. Technology has always been linked with death and killing because it is the means that guarantees survival. This link is beautifully illustrated by the invention of the electric chair. In August 1890 the electric chair was used for the first time to execute a prisoner in New York. The execution by use of electric current was hailed by one of the witness, a Dr Southwick as the "culmination of ten years of work and study" and as signifying great progress so that "we live today in a higher civilisation from this day" (White 2002:137). However, the execution did not go smoothly and the prisoner remained alive after the first attempt of running electric current through his body. Realising that the prisoner in the electric chair was still alive, another doctor, Edward Spitzka implored the warden, as the only man in the room carrying a gun: "For God's sake kill him and be done with it" (White 2002:136). Ultimately, the prisoner was killed after literally being fried, cooked and burnt in the electric chair. Dr Southwick, speaking to the media after the execution spectacle concluded that the killing was "the grand success of the age" and predicted that "this is a grand thing, and is destined to become the system of legal death throughout the world" (White 2002:137).

Death and technology seem to be interlinked. In similar manner communication technology, death and killing are closely linked: For Plato writing is seen as

dead speech. While war is the major drive for innovation in communication technology, the drive for modern development of communication technology and the scholarly study of communication is found in the desire for immortality: to embalm speech in wax through recording it, and to desire to find technological means to communicate with the dead motivated Thomas Edison to invent the telephone (cf. Peters 1999).

McLuhan's pioneering insights on media and communication technology and their relations to war inspired a few others to follow and extend such studies. Studies by Paul Virilio (1989) affirm the primary role of war in the progress of the media. As communication is becoming global it has become the paradigm for the new global society, thus Mattelart (1994:viii) inquiring into the ascendancy of communication to globality shows that it is intimately interrelated with war. "Communication serves first of all to make *war*" from which progress and culture emerged (Mattelart 1994:xiii). This is so because there can be no war without means of representation and therefore, like communication media "weapons are tools not just of destruction but also of perception" (Virilio 1989:8). Following Virilio, German media theorist Friedrich Kittler's study of the complex historical relationship between war and media technology confirms "war as the father of all media" (Winthrop-Young 2002:828). Moreover, as Kittler's (1999) historical studies show, media are military technologies and ultimately the use of media that is not for military and warfare purposes, is an abuse of military equipment. Thus historically "the entertainment industry is, in any conceivable sense of the word, an abuse of army equipment" (Kittler 1999:96–97; Winthrop-Young 2002:832).

The next chapter will offer a close reading and explication of Lyotard's writing on the postmodern condition. A review of his conceptions of war, language, communication and war will offer new insights and understanding of life and communication in the postmodern communicational world.

## CHAPTER 8

# TO SPEAK IS TO FIGHT: WAR AS STRUCTURE OF THOUGHT AND SOCIETY IN LYOTARD'S POSTMODERN CONDITION

To speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts – Lyotard  
(1984:10)

Making thought a war machine – Deleuze & Guattari (1986:44)

### 8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the work of McLuhan that linked technology, media and warfare as fundamental to culture and in turn how the media technology and media practices are kinds of warfare that have become more prominent in the *Global Village* or the *postmodern* discursive world. In this chapter an understanding of the contemporary world is provided by a prominent postmodern thinker, J-F Lyotard's identification of communication and war as central characteristics of the postmodern condition. Against the hegemony of the textualist bias of structuralist and poststructuralist theories and in line with Foucault, Lyotard returns language to its pragmatic origin – to its agonistic form of action – within social reality. The chapter will also show, how by using Lyotard's insights the contemporary world can be understood as a return of the Middle Ages, as the postmodern condition comes to resemble the conflictual spirit of a Neo-medieval world of war and conflict.

By acknowledging society's eternal agonistic and conflictual nature, Lyotard offers new insights for social theory and communication studies. However, while Lyotard offers a postmodern perspective to locate the role of verbal duels as primary communication encounters, he seems to remain in the idealism of

linguistic abstraction and somehow neglects the character of real conflict and warfare while his postmodern posture of indeterminacy does not provide sufficient indication on how to analyse the progress of battles, identify warriors and decide on victories and defeats.

## **8.2 War and communication in the postmodern condition**

Social theorists have been attempting to find an appropriate way to understand the contemporary society and culture, most notably described as "the postmodern condition", assumed as a kind of new social formation whereby the developed Western societies enter the "post-industrial age" and cultures the "postmodern age", and the whole configuration of the postmodern condition is noted for its communicational or discursive characteristics (cf. Lyotard 1984:3).

The prominent postmodern theorist J-F Lyotard (1984) proposes that an understanding of the communicational *postmodern condition* requires a communication approach that will acknowledge the peculiar discursive characteristics of postmodernity. But while Lyotard (1984) identifies communication as central characteristics of the postmodern condition, he also discerns the coexistence of a characteristic conflictual diversity. According to Lyotard (1984), because communication and information are becoming commodities and of central importance to the capitalist global economy,

it is conceivable that the nation-states will one day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour (Lyotard 1984:5).

For Lyotard the postmodern condition opens up a new field of action that combines "industrial and commercial strategies" on the one side, and "political and military strategies" on the other (Lyotard 1984:5). Lyotard is of course not the first to identify information and media with war, McLuhan (1969) outlined the relationship between development of media and warfare (McLuhan was discussed in Chapter 7). Mattelart's (1994) study of international

communication since the nineteenth century notes that "communication serves first of all to make war ... War and its logics are essential components of the history of international communication and of its doctrine and theories, as well as its uses" (Mattelart 1994:xiii). Thus war is the frame of reference for development of communication technology and communication theories (Mattelart 1994:xiv). Lyotard thus implies that there is a need to understand communication from a conflictual perspective.

### **8.3 Communication agonistics: to speak is to fight**

The postmodern condition can be understood from a communication perspective. For Lyotard however, communication must be understood as reflecting its social nature: that is, its eternal agonistic dynamics that characterises all living human societies throughout history. However, it is unfortunate that the traditional communication and information theories miss this agonistic aspect of society because of their biased emphasis on consensus as if it was the natural norm. As Lyotard (1984) notes, the postmodern condition can be best understood from within the conceptual framework of linguistics, and *communicational agonistics*, whereby the emphasis is on the *pragmatic* aspects of language and communication (cf. Lyotard 1984:9). This implies that communication should be understood as a form of *speech act* or *language game*. The underlying principle of such an understanding of communication is that "to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech act [that] fall within the domain of a general agonistics" (Lyotard 1984:10). Here Lyotard extends and modifies Wittgenstein's conception of the social usage of language as if it were a game of chess whereby each act of speaking is akin to a move in the game and the game is defined by its rules (cf. Lyotard 1984:37). Lyotard suggests that language and language games can provide a way to understand society because it is possible that "the *entirety* of social relations" are primarily linguistics relations. But even if not all social relations are linguistic relations, nevertheless, "language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist" (Lyotard 1984:15).

Moreover, because of the increasing prominence and centrality of language and communication in society "both as a reality and as an issue" of contentions, it would "be superficial to reduce" the significance of communication "to the traditional alternative between manipulatory speech and unilateral transmission of messages on the one hand, and free expression and dialogue on the other" as is done by Habermas (Lyotard 1984:16). This is also reflected in the dominant communication and information theories. Considering language and communication from within a simple cybernetic information theory perspective neglects and obscures "the agonistic aspect of society" whereby language games are always dynamic and conflictual relations of strategic actions and responses taking place within the field of social power (cf. Lyotard 1984:16).

The dynamic nature of the world and society means that these can be considered as complex systems that are always in the process of conflict that is an eternal and permanent condition. Hence this can be theorised in terms of Heraclitus' contention that "conflict, the father of all things" is the single and prime "causative process" or principle (Lyotard 1984:59). From this it follows that speaking is akin to fighting (Lyotard 1984:10).

The reason Lyotard insists on placing the conflict and dissensus as the starting point for understanding society is his realisation that such an understanding is derived from Western tradition dating back to the ancient Greeks. But against such traditional understanding Lyotard concludes that contemporary systems and administrative theories condemn conflict and posit consensus as if the only valid principle. Lyotard contends that to represent social reality as if it were stable and amenable to total control is to misrepresent it. For Lyotard, there can never be a stage of complete knowledge about society that allows for total control and eradication of indeterminacy. Because of the agonistic character of human nature, unpredictability is always a central part of society, as Lyotard argues:

Take the aggressiveness as a state variable of a dog: it increases in direct proportion to the dog's anger, a control variable.

Supposing the dog's anger is measurable, when it reaches a certain threshold it is expressed in the form of an attack. Fear, the second control variable, has the opposite effect; when it reaches its threshold it is expressed as flight. In the absence of anger or fear, the dog's behaviour is stable ... But if the two control variables increase together, the two thresholds will be approached simultaneously: the dog's behaviour becomes unpredictable and can switch abruptly from flight to attack, and vice versa. The system is said to be unstable: the control variables are continuous, but the state variables are discontinuous (Lyotard 1984:59).

Lyotard points to the instability of society which he calls "paralogy" (1984:60) as always being in tension and conflict. Thus one needs to recognise the "heteromorphous nature of language games" (Lyotard 1984:66). From Lyotard's perspective conflict and dissensus can acknowledge the complexity, social diversity and varieties of language games, but this diversity is denied, unacknowledged, and suppressed by the perspective of Habermas's outmoded and inadequate theory of rational consensus (cf. Lyotard 1984:60–61, 65–66). According to Lyotard (1984:61) consensus is an ideal that is never reached, thus if "the goal of dialogue is consensus" this "consensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end" (Lyotard 1984:65). The end or aim is dissent because dialogue is an open system and someone will always come with something new to say and so disturb the consensus (Lyotard 1984:61). Lyotard's idea is confirmed by Derrida's (1978:116–117) assertion that "there is war only after the opening of discourse", by which he implies that a dispute can only arise once communication and expression have taken place.

Moreover, there is always diversity and there is no universally valid metaprescription for all language games (cf. Lyotard 1984:65). Attaining complete consensus is only possible by an act of terror which eliminates all oppositional players from the language game (cf. Lyotard 1984:63–64). Thus Lyotard concludes:

What is needed if we are to understand social relations in this manner, on what ever scale we choose, is not only a theory of communication, but a theory of games which accepts agonistics as a founding principle (Lyotard 1984:16).

The implication is that playing a language game may have various motives, but nevertheless, winning the game is the primary and the only motive even if at times it remains unacknowledged or misrecognised objective (This was also shown in the discussion on Huizinga in Chapter 5). In this sense if speaking is considered as a move in a language game, in a manner similar to a move in a game of chess, then a "move can be made for the sheer pleasure of its invention: what else is involved in that labour of language harassment undertaken by popular speech and by literature?" (Lyotard 1984:10). But behind the pretence that the player claims to be playing for the sake of playing, winning still remains the primary motive. Lyotard notes that the motive for the use of language in a language game may well be the joy and pleasure gained at the level of linguistic *parole*, but the competitive and agonistic nature soon discloses itself, as Lyotard notes,

undoubtedly even this pleasure depends on a feeling of success won at the expense of an adversary – at least one adversary, and a formidable one: the accepted language, or connotation (Lyotard 1984:10).

Thus the agonistic, competitive and fighting aspects of linguistic communication are evident at all levels of communication:

In the ordinary use of discourse – for example, in a discussion between two friends – the interlocutors use any available ammunition, changing games from one utterance to the next: questions, requests, assertions, and narratives are launched pell-mell into battle. The war is not without rules, but the rules allow and encourage the greatest possible flexibility of utterance (Lyotard 1984:17).



The contest and battle is not reserved for the oral interpersonal level of interaction but is also evident in institutionalised discourse, "an institution differs from a conversation in that it always requires supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible within its bounds" (Lyotard 1984:17). However, the limitation that an institution imposes on "moves" within a language game are not fixed for all times, but "the limits are themselves the stakes and provisional result of language strategies, within the institution and without" and new rules are negotiated and made as the game progresses (Lyotard 1984:17). Thus because communication is a social activity it takes the form of an agonistic language game whether it is on an individual's level of dialogic performance or large scale social interaction (cf. Lyotard 1984:16).

#### **8.4 The war of all against all: positions for individuals and groups on Lyotard's agonistic communication battlefield**

Lyotard imagines communication as an agonistic act where speaking is a language game and the individual speakers conduct a fight in the form of dialogue. Lyotard's view is anchored in his understanding that the basic unit of communication is an act of an individual human being. The human being is envisaged as an atomistic individual existing within a social network (cf. Lyotard 1984:15–16), or a social bond that is constructed by language. Whatever else social relations may be they are primary relations within a language game, and

there is no need to resort to some fiction of social origin to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist: even before he is born, if only by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, his relation to which he will inevitably chart his course (Lyotard 1984:15).

However, while the social bond is linguistic it is not composed of a single abstract language because there is no language in a general sense (cf. Lyotard 1988:xii). Nor is there only one single language game in a society: the social use of language consists of indeterminate numbers of language games, each

with its own rules. Lyotard's view of language follows Wittgenstein's description of a multiplicity of language games by comparing it to an ancient city with a maze of streets, old and new houses, old and new suburbs (cf. Lyotard 1984:40). The multiple language games, and their different rules and pragmatic efficacy provide a position and place people in different roles so they can play their allocated parts. Ultimately the limit of the social bond is death: the social bond is always traversed by fear of death and the various forms of death – imprisonment, repression, hunger – all threaten to interrupt the social bond (cf. Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:99).

Lyotard seems to conceive of the speech act as a Hobbesian war of all against all. This is because the breaking up of the "grand narratives" of modernity leads to dissolution of the social bond and "disintegration of social aggregate into a mass of individual atoms" (Lyotard 1984:15). But rather than being a radical break up of society, Lyotard assumes that it is an "atomisation of the social into flexible networks of language games" (Lyotard 1984:17). And the agonistic nature of society means that the individual "atoms are placed at the cross roads of pragmatic relationships, but they are also displaced by the messages that traverse them, in perpetual motion", and the human "atoms" forming its matter are competent to handle statements (Lyotard 1984:16). The postmodern individual thus exists as an atom linked in a network, but each individual is not powerless but is an active player with limited autonomy.

*A self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny they may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent (Lyotard 1984:15).

Lyotard's view of the postmodern individual is no different from the modern view of the individual and thus Lyotard seems to accept the modern anthropological assumption by his adoption of Wittgenstein's linguistics. For Lyotard in the postmodern world an individual's ability to enter and play a language game increases by the infusion of new telecommunication technology. As Lyotard (1991) notes, "any piece of data becomes useful (exploitable, operational) once it can be translated into information", and the use of such data is not limited by the place and time of its reception and use (cf. Lyotard 1991:50). This is so because the new communication technology changes the use and experience of space and time:

The question raised by the new technologies ... is that of the here-and-now. What does "here" mean on the telephone, on television, at the receiver of an electronic telescope? And the 'now'? Does not the "tele-" element necessarily destroy presence, the "here-and-now" of the forms and their "carnal" reception? What is a place, a moment, not anchored in the immediate "passion" of what happens? Is a computer in any way here and now? (Lyotard 1991:118).

From Lyotard's perspective institutionalised communication is an extension of the basic position of an agonistic individual's dialogue and only differs in that it has some limiting formal rules. However, even these rules are not determined with complete finality because they are the product of prior contestation and are subject to variation and change by the ongoing play of challenges and contestations.

For Lyotard communication generally follows the model of war because language has its origin in fighting and war. Fighting is a "conversation of gestures" as in a boxing match that provides a model for communication (cf. Bushman 1998). In other words, the social antagonistic fighting action precedes the symbol and deliberate communication (cf. Mead 1965:129). As George Herbert Mead (in Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds 1980:36) contends: "The blow is

the historical antecedent of the word." Consciousness develops first from actions and gestures, as Mead (1965:162) contends: "Mind arises through communication by conversation of gestures in a social process or context – not communication through mind." Lyotard (1984) contention that speaking is fighting is based on similar conception to Mead's (This was discussed in Chapters 3 and 4). Indeed, Lyotard invokes Levinas' comment on some theological text that commends: "Do before you understand" and Levinas notes that it is always the practice that the people act first and understood after the fact (Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:41).

Thus Lyotard is close to Mead's view of communication as a boxing match which is also taken up by Bourdieu as a paradigmatic model. For Bourdieu (1977a), the speaking and communication encounter is conducted as an exchange of blows:

In dog-fights, as in the fighting of children or boxers, each move triggers off a counter-move, every stance of the body becomes a sign pregnant with meaning that the opponent has to grasp while it is still incipient, reading the beginning of a stroke or a sidestep, the imminent future, i.e. the blow or the dummy (Bourdieu 1977a:11).

Lyotard's conception of the agonistic individualistic model of communication has empirical support from linguistic research. According to Farb (1974:12–14) language is always used in order to achieve some objective. This means that the ordinary way people speak resembles a verbal duel or a war game:

Most speakers unconsciously duel even during seemingly casual conversation, as can often be observed at social gatherings where they show less concern for exchanging information with other guests than for asserting their own dominance (Farb 1974:93).

In less formal situations when "two people who know each other approach, a duel immediately takes place over who will speak first" (Farb 1974:93). The contest to determine a speaking position is occasioned by the fact that in any

conversation only one speaker can speak at a time, and the speaker issues a challenge by speaking and establishes positions of domination and subordination – active speaker, passive listener (cf. Farb 1974:93–94). In a dialogue the role of the one person asking questions includes the right to interrogate and the right to pose questions and the person "being interrogated ... plays a passive role in which he is forced to respond verbally" (Farb 1974:100–101). In many situations the verbal duel is an alternative to actual fighting. This was, for example, the situation of black youth in American society in the 1960s, whereby while being relatively powerless the black Americans discovered that

one of the few ways they could fight back was verbally. Verbal battle against whites became more important than physical battle, where blacks have been outnumbered and outgunned (Farb 1974:107).

The verbal combat or "flyting" is a verbal expression of a general mode of aggressive, competitive agonistic human interaction rooted in biology, psychology and social and cultural existence. The verbal duel is found as prelude to battle and is in itself a form of battle and contest (cf. Pagliai 2009:61; Pagliai 2010:87; Parks 1986; Parks 1990; Ong 1982; Ong 1989). As Pagliai (2009:63) notes, a verbal duel is a genre of argumentative language, a form of argumentative dialogue between two persons or parties that challenge each other to perform a display of verbal skilfulness in front of an audience. The outcome of such duel is victory or defeat and thus social recognition of the individual's worth or status.

### **8.5 War on totality: the terrorism of consensus**

For Lyotard speaking is fighting and communication follows the model of war because language gains its character from its origin in fighting and war. This individual-centered ontology of communication is extended by Lyotard to social discourse. According to Lyotard (1984) the postmodern condition returns language to its pragmatic tradition. As against seeing society from the

Structuralists' reductionist perspective of "meaningful action considered as text" (cf. Ricoeur 1977), Lyotard acknowledges the nature of linguistic speech and language games as proper forms of social action: which means that *meaningful text can be considered as action*.

For Lyotard (1984) the postmodern fragmentation has a liberating effect and provides condition for creativity, as against the totalising spirit of modernity and its iron cage of formal logic and formal; discursive rules. Thus modernity expressed by the "grand narrative" of progress and emancipation as promoted by Habermas was oppressive. Indeed, Lyotard contends that the enforcement of universal unity and disregard of local knowledge by the discourse of modernity is a form of terrorism. The universalisation enforces conformity and eliminates opposing players from the language games, because it threatens them: "Say or do this, or else you'll never speak again" (Lyotard 1984:46). Terrorism is the

eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game ... He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened (Lyotard 1984:63–64).

For Lyotard terrorism is manifest in the fashionable contemporary concepts of "*system efficiency*" increasingly used by social engineers and politicians. In the name of efficiency they have destroyed democratic politics, and the true practice of scientific inquiry as a contest.

As against the totalising discourse and practice of modernity, the postmodern is liberating and its fragmentation means that there is no unified universal narrative or common language to translate the incommensurable variety of discourses. According to Lyotard "there is no reason to think that it would be possible to determine metaprescriptives common to all these language games" (Lyotard 1984:65). This is so because the ultimate goal of dialogue is not consensus, "consensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end. Its end, on the contrary, is paralogy" and search for dissent (Lyotard 1984:65–66).

There is only heterogeneity and dissensus on the global level, as well as within locally played language games (cf. Lyotard 1984:66). Thus Lyotard's theory aptly describes the isolated individual in the postmodern global landscape of electronically mediated communication (cf. Poster 1990:129). Here within the agonistic and playful culture of the postmodern it is possible for individuals and groups to resist the totalising force of the system of consensus and "wage a war on totality" and to "activate the differences" in and through speech (Lyotard 1984:82).

Lyotard further develops his agonistic theory by introducing the idea of the "*differend*" (Lyotard 1988). The "*differend*" is a case of conflict between at least two parties that cannot be resolved equitable for lack of rules of judgment that are applicable to both arguments. Applying some single rule to both arguments would distort and will not do justice to one or the other (Lyotard 1988:xi). This paradoxical situation is experienced in the postmodern diversity of discourses and speech acts because regulating them by one universal metalanguage is to do them injustice.

By declaring such and such a phrase permitted, such and such a phrase prohibited, and such and such a phrase obligatory, authority subjects them, whatever their heterogeneity might be, to a single set of stakes, justice. Singing undoubtedly relates to the beautiful, but it may be unjust if it is a certain song, at a certain time, in a certain place (Lyotard 1988:143).

For Lyotard the discursive nature of the postmodern means that speech acts, described as "phrases", and genres of discourse are similar to statements made within a particular *discursive practice* (Lyotard 1988:xii). Language games are pragmatic and hence they are "events". Within any such event phrases come into conflict with each other, and "a phrase offends a phrase, or do it wrong" (Lyotard 1988:85). This is to acknowledge that it is impossible to avoid conflicts and simultaneously that there is no universal genre of discourse to regulate and resolve conflict. This implies that the only thing left to do in a

world where one cannot but communicate is "to save the honour of thinking" (Lyotard 1988:xii). To save the honour of thinking is important in the postmodern condition because of the erosion of belief in the solid foundation of knowledge and existence of objective reality. The rise of the ideology of instrumentalism and performativity has debased thinking and actively preventing critical thinking. The belief that transfer of data, information and clear communication is all that is needed for intellectual development is a delusion because it neglects the complexity of language and thought. All these attitudes promote nihilism which needs to be combated.

The "linguistic turn" of Western philosophy (Heidegger's later works, the penetration of Anglo-American philosophies into European thought, the development of language technologies); and correlatively, the decline of universalist discourses (the metaphysical doctrines of modern times: narratives of progress, of socialism, of abundance, of knowledge). The weariness with regard to "theory", and the miserable slackening that goes with it (new this, new that, post-this, post-that, etc.). The time has come to philosophise (Lyotard 1988:xiii).

For Lyotard, to philosophise is to stimulate thought through agonism and rekindle the spirit of fighting and conflict. Indeed, Lyotard invokes Heraclitus as providing the principle justification for his own postmodern agonistic theory. According to Lyotard (1984:59, 88 note 35) because Heraclitus rightly recognised "conflict, [as] the father of all things" therefore conflict can be assumed as the single cause for all phenomena (cf. Lyotard 1984:59), and has been recognised as the generative engine of all things. In other words, what Lyotard aims for is finding a credible way of "speaking" and thinking by combining and linking different and incompatible phrases from various discursive regimes. Linking these different, contradictory and often incommensurable phrases that cannot be translated will obviously give rise to internal conflict in the new discourse (cf. Lyotard 1988:xii).



Language is not an "instrument of communication"; it is a highly complex archipelago composed of domains of phrases belonging to regimes so different from one another that a phrase from one regime (a descriptive phrase, for example) cannot be translated into a phrase from another regime (an evaluative or prescriptive phrase) (Lyotard 1986–1987:218).

To understand the reason for these differences and conflicts it may be useful to consult Perelman's discussion of the New Rhetoric. For Perelman differences and conflicts arise firstly as the result of the ambiguity in the language being used because there is always an unstable link between the linguistic terms and their designated concepts or the images they symbolised. Secondly, when discussing disputed terms one provides definitions, but "to define" already implies that one makes a choice because there are various ways of defining an idea and each definition needs to be discussed and explained before it is accepted (cf. Perelman 1982:62). Arnold (1982:xiii) explains that according to Perelman

every definition implicitly admits that some other definition is possible; otherwise, there would be no need to define in the first place. Likewise, every evaluative term or statement implicitly admits that one *could* give a different evaluation and make some defense of it. Were it not so, we would have no need to express *our* evaluation.

While the above are concerned with abstraction of rhetoric, Clausewitz (1985:109) notes that similar problems arise in reality when two states contend over the political object of war. According to Clausewitz (1985:109), "one and the same political object may produce totally different effects upon different people, or even upon the same people at different times" and thus leads to different types of warfare. In similar manner the phrases or genres of discourse encounter one another and give rise to "differends" (Lyotard 1988:28). Such

conflictual interactions and "encounters between phrases of heterogeneous regimen" are unavoidable (Lyotard 1988:29), but also lead to innovations.

With the idea of the *differend* Lyotard seems to have reified discourse and introduced anthropomorphism that is a regression into the old textual position of the Structuralists (cf. Sonderling 1994a; 1994b). It is as if language acts by itself (cf. e.g. Lyotard 1988:85). As Best and Kellner (1991) note, for Lyotard's postmodern idea of politics is now politics of a discourse and struggles within language games:

Political struggle for Lyotard is a matter of discursive intervention within language, contesting rules, forms, principles and positions, while offering new rules, criteria, forms of life, and perspectives. The struggle takes place within a given language game (such as politics, philosophy, and art), and perhaps between these language games. Yet Lyotard insists that there is no overarching language game, no privileged discourse, no general theory of justice within which struggles between different languages could be adjudicated (Best & Kellner 1991:163).

Lyotard's position emerges from the model he uses to describe postmodern politics: the Greek Sophists that merely attacked the master discourses and fabricated their rules (cf. Best & Kellner 1991:162). Thus having decided that politics is not so much a matter of action but a way one speaks, Lyotard further theorises the various social groups as "minorities" and reduces them to mere language games, "minorities are not social ensembles; they are territories of language. Every one of us belongs to several minorities, and what is important, none of them prevails" (Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:95). Indeed, for Lyotard the physical existence in the postmodern is less important than the discursive existence, "the ideal is no longer physical strength as it was for the man of antiquity; it is suppleness, speed, the ability to metamorphose (go to a ball in the evening and fight a war at dawn)" (Lyotard 1986–1987:219). Of course, Lyotard does not show much knowledge of military history, because such

flexibility and ability to play on the erotic, social, and cultural fields at night and play on the real battlefield in the morning was an integral part of life for the European warrior nobility for centuries (cf. Bell 2008).

However, ultimately Lyotard seems to ask: how can one communicate without a common language and not succumb to the terror of totalising discourses of rationalism and modernity as well as to terrorism of the multicultural demand for political correctness and docility and new terror of religious fundamentalists' encroachment on freedom of speech (cf. Gasché 2000:128). Under these conditions the question is: how to restore honour to philosophical thinking that has been dishonoured by people demanding conciliation and denial of radical differences (cf. Gasché 2000:141). Likewise the language of art, science and philosophy is dishonoured by modernity and capitalism and their demands to conform to clear communication: phrases must "become communicable" so they can be encoded into computer language and marketed and exploited for their commodity value (cf. Lyotard 1986–1987:210–212).

Lyotard is right to suggest that there is no universal language to communicate and translate between incommensurable discourses because there is "no language in general" (Lyotard 1988:xii). There are only particular discourses, genres, and language games which are instances of language-in-use or "paradigms" in Thomas Kuhn's (1970) conception of a scientific community. According to Wittgenstein (1988:88) each particular language game is "forms of life" because for people to play in a particular language game they must agree and synchronise both their linguistic definitions and social judgments. Most clearly such synchronisation can be seen in the ways scientific and scholarly communities socially construct, what Kuhn calls, the dominant scientific paradigms. Kuhn's (1970), and more recently Bruno Latour's (1987) extensive study of the daily working life of scientists shows that at the centre of constructing theories and organising scientific work is a war and a battle between various opponents and opposing positions and winning the battle is the only thing that matters. In this battle there is a general strategy that can be used to win, it aims to

weaken your enemies, paralyse those you cannot weaken ... help your allies if they are attacked, ensure safe communication with those who supply you with disputable instruments ... oblige your enemies to fight one another (Latour 1987:37).

The construction of theoretical paradigm is an "enrolment drive" to gain adherents (Latour 1987:111). Winning against opposing paradigms and adversaries in the scientific contest is "proof race" and needs to establish a large network of committed enlisted members and allies and "make dissent impossible" (Latour 1987:103). As Latour (1987:172) notes, the "similarity between the proof race and arms race is not a metaphor."

All this shows that Lyotard may be wrong in suggesting that there is no universal procedure for resolution of conflicts and "differends". Such claim can only be made if one forgets about the role of power and conflict itself. Indeed, Lyotard credits power as being a good performativity and as the ultimate means of legitimation of a particular language game (cf. Lyotard 1984:47). Therefore, it is possible to assume that the productive use of power does not resolve conflict but solves it by cutting the Gordian knot: it cuts off the opponent's head and victory is proclaimed. And power is always a social reality where the phrases confront one another. Moreover, the fact is that if the phrases belonging to different regimens or genres of discourse, encounter each other and come into conflict, it means that they have some common properties and that the "encounter" takes "place within a single universe, otherwise there would be no encounter at all!" (Lyotard 1988:29).

Thus to speak in the postmodern world is to fight. According to Lyotard (1986–1987:213–214), "in the absence of narratives of legitimation – there is only one possibility left for us: to fight for that work of incommunicability" and for the right of a language game to exist; it is also to fight for the "urge in thought to go beyond experience", and "to fight and create differences of opinion" (Lyotard 1986–1987:216–217).

The model for Lyotard's counter-discourse and difference of opinion is provided by the "eruption of heterogeneity into the politics of modernity" (Poster 1990:131). In other words, the small discourses of marginalised revolutionaries, militant minorities, and the German and Italian terrorist cells that dominated the European political left after the 1968 youth rebellion. Lyotard (Lyotard & Thébaud 1989) considers terrorism as having two types of operation: one type is fair-play where violence belongs to the "game of war" in which the terrorists make incursion and destroy part of the adversary's forces, such as when "the group Red Army Fraction makes incursion and destroys the American computer in Heidelberg, that is war ... That is part of the rather exact game that is a two-sided war" (Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:67). The other form of terrorism applies when the same group kidnaps a banker. In this form it is not a just and fair game because the person kidnapped and threatened with death is not the player, and the threat is addressed to a third party, and not to the person kidnapped. This "threat of death, that is used as an argument" is part of "pedagogical politics" (Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:67).

Ultimately the relativism and lack of criteria of evaluation expose an existential weakness in Lyotard's discourse. By celebrating terrorism the postmodern thinker cannot mount a defence against mortal enemies. Indeed, the ability to distinguish between enemies and friends, as propounded by Carl Schmitt (discussed in Chapter 5) is promoted by Derrida (2005) in his discussion on the politics of friendship. Like Schmitt and Nietzsche, Derrida realises that a world without enemies is also a world without friends and such non-distinction implies that the world has lost all meaning and it is no longer a human world (cf. Derrida 2005:76–77, 83–84).

Lyotard's concept of heterodox dissensus thinking and speaking as being a form of battle is similar to Deleuze's and Guattari's (1986) conception of thought as a nomadic "war machine". Thought is constructed and conforms to the model of the State apparatus and its military institution. The model of the State sets the goals for thought, provides it with "paths, conduits, channels, organs, an entire *organon*" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:40). The State's claim to

universality is reflected in logical thought's claim to universality, where the "cogito, is the State's consensus raised to the absolute" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:42–43). The counter-thought, is a nomad thought, comes from outside and is always violent, iconoclastic, and has its origin in the attack against the sedentary State and its military institution by the mobile people and forces of a nomadic "war machine" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:44). The war machine is the invention of the nomads and exists outside the State and is distinct from the State's military institution which it confronts (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:49). Thus *dissensus*, is the thought from outside the totality and "places thought in immediate relation with the outside, with the forces of the outside" and thus makes "thought a war machine" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:44). The counter-thought is like "a tribe, the opposite of a State" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:45), and as such "it does not ally itself with a universal thinking subject, but ... with a singular race" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:48). This counter-thought and counter-discourse is "anti-dialogue", it "speaks before knowing ... relays before having understood" and "proceeds like a general in the war machine" and ultimately "bring[s] something incomprehensible into the world" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:46–47). In this sense any ideological, scientific or artistic movement can be a potential war machine (Deleuze & Guattari 1986:121).

The encounter of speaking and war also shows the limit of language. The problem of incommensurability is not that people do not understand language, even if they participate in different language games. The problem is not linguistic understanding or even translation between discourses.

Communication sometimes masquerades as the great solution to human ills, and yet most of the problems that arise in human relations do not come from a failure to match signs with meanings. In most cases, situations and syntax make the sense of words perfectly clear; the basis of conflict is not a failure of communication but a difference of commitment. We generally understand each other's words quite well: we just don't agree (Peters 1989:397).

In other words, people understand but do not agree about the ends and means. No amount of translation and linguistic clarification will resolve the difference. Words and concepts are always “essentially contested concepts” and in any social and political discourse, as Pêcheux (1978:265–266) observes, there is no objective understanding of political words because there is no commonsense understanding in politics. Pêcheux (1978:265) contends that “words, expressions, and utterances change their meanings according to the position from which they are uttered” and “no universal semantics will ever be able to fix what should be understood by” such words. This is an unending contest:

Thus the ideological struggle has nothing whatsoever to do with so-called semantic misunderstandings giving rise to vacuous problems which will disappear in the light of the formation of a universal semantics. On the terrain of language, the ideological class struggle is a struggle for the sense of words, expressions and utterances, a vital struggle for each of the two opposite classes which have confronted each other throughout history, right up to the present (Pêcheux 1978:266).

Like Lyotard and Schmitt, Chantal Mouffe acknowledges the irreducibility of conflicts and sees in the multiplicity of discourse, conflicts, antagonism and agonism the foundation for a new radical democratic politics (cf. Mouffe 1993, 2000, 2005). If difference between particular aspects of language games are factors in conflict it is so because “people with different basic collective interests come into contention over those interests while expressing differences of organisation as differences of belief” (Richards 2006:651).

## **8.6 Lyotard's paganism: back to the future in a neo-medieval postmodern world**

The value of Lyotard's agonistic model is pertinent for understanding communication in the postmodern global society. Seeing the world through postmodern theory of hyperreality provides a limited view because globalisation

suddenly seems as a perplexing paradox of *integration* and *fragmentation*: as if the world is simultaneously coming together and falling apart, or as Urry (2002:57) puts it: a complex system that is neither well-ordered nor in a state of perpetual anarchy.

When talking about globalisation, one is in danger of being blind to the opposite trend of fragmentation; when shifting to the discourse of fragmentation, one can hardly grasp the evidence of globalisation (Friedrichs 2001:478).

The confusion is intensified because of the emphasis on communication. Communication is considered as the paradigm of the new global society and its economy that is based on flows of non-material messages (cf. Mattelart 1994:viii). However, the notions of free flows of communication and the idea of the global conjure the idea of homogenisation and unification on a large scale. However, such notions are also distorting and reductive because they conceal the complex, contradictory, and interdependent processes. The postmodern and global world is a "contradictory system" manifest simultaneously in homogeneity as well as tension, conflicts, schism and fragmentation. So to understand the contemporary world criss-crossed by struggles for hegemony it would be better to think of it as a "baroque system" (Mattelart 1994:ix). Other scholars looking at contemporary reality suggest that the new postmodern world of disorder, seems to resemble the social (dis)order of the Middle Ages. Thus on the global scale, Bull (1995) and Eco (1987), suggest that the highly developed Western postmodern interaction between societies indicate a *neo-medieval* postmodern age, while a society such as Khomeini's theocracy in Iran is a return to neo-medievalism based on a medieval tradition of the past (cf. Poster 1990:132). And of course, societies in postcolonial Africa still seem to exist in a mediaeval condition (cf. Eco 1987:74).

The idea of a "return of the Middle Ages" as a new characteristic of the twenty-first century was already used at the end of the nineteenth century to meditate on the coming of the twentieth century. One of the earliest expression of such a



return of past into the future was given by Nietzsche's observation that "I am greatly worried about the future in which I fancy I see the Middle Ages in disguise" (Nietzsche in Coker 1994:172). Taking up this idea Umberto Eco (1987) considers the postmodern condition as "the return of the Middle Ages." For Eco (1987) the return is not to a reality of the past but to a new *Neo-medieval postmodernity* that indicates the similarity between social and cultural processes of the present and those of the past (cf. Eco 1987:73). According to Eco (1987:65) seeing the world as if it were neo-medieval makes sense because "it is not surprising that we go back to that period anytime we ask ourselves about our origin ... looking at the Middle Ages means looking at European infancy." According to Kobrin (1998:364) an understanding of medieval Europe that is our immediate past, "can help us imagine our postmodern future." Such a creative step "back to the future" can provide a heuristic framework for understanding the present (cf. Friedrichs 2001:476–477; Kobrin 1998:364; Deibert 1997:183-184; Cerny 2005). Human nature does not change as is expressed by Latour's (1993) observation that *we have never been modern*. This would confirm Kaplan (2003:15) argument that "the world is not 'modern' or 'postmodern', but only a continuation of the 'ancient'."

Meyrowitz (1986) contends that we may be returning to a world even older than that of the late Middle Ages because many of the features of our "information age" make us resemble the most primitive of social and political forms: the hunting and gathering society (cf. Meyrowitz 1986:315). Extending on McLuhan's idea that the electronic media have created a new form of global tribal sphere of interaction, Meyrowitz (1986:316) contends that the new "hunters and gatherers of an information age" now resemble the nomadic life style of primitive hunters and gathers, both have no loyalty to a territory – no sense of place – and no sense of borders (cf. Meyrowitz 1986:315). The easy availability of information about any individuals makes for a loss of privacy and life comes to resemble that of a primitive village society which makes for community control over private matters of individuals (cf. Meyrowitz 1986:315). Moreover, the breaking down of borders means that people come into contact more often or learn about the existence of each other. But rather than a utopian

harmony and peace such contacts lead to more wars and conflicts because when "people share the same environment, they often see more differences among themselves than when they are further apart" (Meyrowitz 1986:317).

The most important insight for an understanding of our own neo-medieval age is that war is the central reality of the world. Just as it was in the Middle Ages, so now war as a reality and as an idea is increasingly becoming the central structuring principle in the contemporary age of globalisation (cf. Foucault 2003; Hardt & Negri 2006). Gray (2004:103) points out, that the 9/11 terror attack shattered the Western myth of global peace that chained "us to a hope of unity, when we should be learning to live with conflict." Therefore, to properly understand the contemporary world, according to Eco (1987:84), demands "developing hypothesis for exploration of disorder, [and] entering into the logic of conflictuality."

The logic of neo-medieval *conflictuality* is captured by Lyotard's vision of the postmodern condition as being a form of "paganism" (Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:16, 19). The pagan postmodernity is characterised by its agonism and the absence of rules, criteria for judgement, call for the need for experimentation and production of new discourses and criteria (cf. Best & Kellner 1991:164; Lyotard & Thébaud 1989:14, 17).

Even behind the seemingly playful diversity and multiplicity of agonistic and competing discourses of the postmodern condition, Lyotard (1997) discerns the work of an element of terrorism in the dominant liberal discourse of the global society. Behind the presumed diversity the system exerts unifying and pacifying terror because it only permits agreed-upon deviations from the general consensus: "It solicits divergences, multiculturalism is agreeable to it but under the condition of an agreement concerning the rules of disagreement. This is what is called consensus" (cf. Lyotard 1997:199). Thus the seemingly tolerance of diversity is another name for a polite consensus. As Lyotard notes, postmodern politics "are managerial strategies" and the postmodern war are "police actions" which are not aimed at eliminating or killing the adversary

because of self-imposed rules that assert that it is "forbidden to kill one's adversary" (cf. Lyotard 1997:199). These wars are pedagogical wars to teach the adversary a lesson and constrain him and integrate him into the system.

Thus radicalism and critical thinking is becoming rare because only subdued diversity is permitted so as to keep the noise of dissent down (cf. Lyotard 1997:199–200). Lyotard notes that while dissent and diversity are seemingly praised by liberal discourse, nevertheless increasingly there are calls "to put an end to the disorder and the terror" of the multiple discourses of criticism and philosophy, and demands for "prohibiting all debate" (Lyotard 1997:204).

Lyotard is not the first to have noticed the terrorism at the hearth of liberal discourse and he shares this awareness with Carl Schmitt's (discussed in Chapter 5). Likewise Barthes (1986) is also suspicious of liberal discourse which he describes as the "repressive discourse" of good conscience because it distracts attention from alternative meanings. Behind the liberal pretence for neutrality, when one computes the liberal's declarations for being "neither" for this "nor" for that, it becomes clear that the liberal speaker is clearly taking a position and "is *for* this, *against* that" (Barthes 1986:325–326). Ultimately, since 2001 and the war on terror, life in the global society is set between the terrorism of the liberal system of political correctness that denies the existence of a real enemy, and the threat from the real enemy, in the form of individual Islamic terrorists: the nomad war machine.

## **8.7 Conclusion**

Lyotard's use of the agonistic character of society and realisation that speaking is a form of a fight provide a heuristic model to understand the postmodern world and its conflicts. Lyotard offers an insightful framework that explains the postmodern world as if it were a form of Neo-Medieval world.

However, despite Lyotard's emphasis on the agonistic and the need to fight, and portrayal of a conflictual and war-like society Lyotard seems to imagine war as a disembodied contest between linguistic phrases. This view can offer

insights on the idea of a virtual war of media spectacle and computer-generated graphic reconstructions. However, as Lyotard contends that if nations will go to war over information, and that communication is always agonistic then there is a need for acknowledging the reality of war and developing criteria to identify real enemies and decide victories and defeat.

The next chapter will offer a general conclusion to the study and explicate the implication of war for communication theory and show how an understanding of war provides better understanding of society and culture.

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION:

#### LIFE ON THE SHIELD OF ACHILLES

... war is a product as well as a shaper of culture ... war is a creative act of civilized man with important consequences for the rest of human culture, which include the festivals of peace – Bobbitt (2003:xxxii)

... there will always be a new enemy, a new reason to develop weapons, medicine, transportation systems and communication networks – White (2005:9)

One of Africa's post-colonial tragedies continues to be, paradoxically, that there have been no external wars for which to plan and calculate, and for which to invoke a sense of national purpose – Mazrui & Mazrui (1998:4)

Give war a chance – PJ O'Rourke (1993); Luttwak (1999)

#### 9.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to offer a new understanding of war and demonstrate how such an understanding can inform the study of culture and communication. In providing a new perspective the study also demonstrated how such an understanding is linked to a Western tradition dating back to antiquity that considers war as a valuable and formative phenomenon that structures human thought and communication. A new understanding of war is essential because war has become a central concern in the contemporary world. However, a critical understanding of war is hindered by anti-war ideological bias and an over-emphasis on the imperative of peace. This chapter will draw the conclusion and list the implication for understanding society, culture and communication in the postmodern global world.

#### 9.2 Recapitulation and overview

In order to begin an inquiry into a new understanding of war the prevailing ideological bias against a positive evaluation of war needs to be neutralised. This necessitates a critical strategy: first to question the taken-for-granted

assumptions about the primacy of peace, uncover their shortcomings and then reconstruct a new understanding of war.

**Chapter 2** reviewed and critiqued the literature of peace discourse and demonstrated that peace may not be absolutely morally good. Peace was revealed as a potentially oppressive regime and pacifists were seen as expressing a desire for imposing tyranny. Peace emerged as a disguise for conducting war by other means. As against the assumptions that peace promotes communication it was found that it is war that incites communication while peace has an inhibiting and silencing effect.

Freed from the prevalent anti-war bias **Chapter 3** began a reconstruction of a positive and formative understanding of war by tracing the experience of war as expressed in philosophical discourse. A critical reading of this discourse identified fighting, contestation and killing as the central activities of war that are the central defining characteristic of humanity and form the foundation for individual and social identities. While war is a social and collective activity at its core is the action of fighting and killing that require interpersonal engagement, and this is the source of identity and meaning for human existence. The humanising aspect of war is manifest at the moment that the animal (a potential human) is transformed into a human being and this transformation entails the risking of life which demonstrates that to be human is to transcend the animal survival instinct, and by an act of will power, replaces it with immaterial values. Such humanising transition is captured by Hegel's notion of the primordial battle at the beginning of history from which consciousness, self-consciousness and a social ranking and order emerge.

**Chapter 4** continued the exploration and focused the inquiry to trace the role of war and killing in communication. It was demonstrated that war and killing on the battlefield are the formative origin of language and play a role in transforming concrete bodies into abstract concepts and meaning. It was provisionally concluded that language was born from recording acts of war and transforming life, death and killing into poetic and aesthetic experiences. Having

outlined a framework for understanding war it was used to read, trace and understand the way war is experienced as a formative and structuring influence in selected writings of twentieth century theorists in the following chapter (Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8).

**Chapter 5** provided a case study by a close reading of the play theory of Johan Huizinga and his claims that play is the foundation of culture. The reading revealed that Huizinga considers play, as subspecies of war and that play and war are experienced as interchangeable since antiquity. Huizinga's critique of Carl Schmitt's concept of the political was evaluated and its similarity to Huizinga's idea of the agonistic spirit was explored. It was demonstrated that Schmitt's contention that war and identifying friend and enemy are the central activities of the political, and war and killing are its ultimate limits.

**Chapter 6** offered a close reading of Foucault's analytics of war as a model for society. Foucault provides valuable insights to deepen an understanding of Schmitt's idea of the war-induced political sphere. Foucault shows that war is the ever-present structure of thought and social formations and in turn fighting and exchange of blows and injuries provide a model that is more informative than the linguistic model of society.

**Chapter 7** traced the way war is reflected and shapes McLuhan's theory of the media. The chapter demonstrated how the memory of the Second World War is the initially-diffused background influence on McLuhan's theory and as the Vietnam war and the Cold War intensify so the place of war becomes the central aspect of his writing. McLuhan demonstrates that war technology and media technology have common links and constitute the environment in the life of human beings. Thus weapons and media format and not message content shape human consciousness and social structure, and ultimately communication media are the effective weapons of modern war.

In **Chapter 8** the role of war and fighting in the postmodern theory of Lyotard was traced. Lyotard offers a perspective on communication by suggesting that speaking is a form of fighting. The agonistic aspect of the language game is

acquired by the fact that it is shaped by its social origin which has war-like characteristics. Such an agonistic perspective, reminiscent of Huizinga's concept of play as war, is an appropriate framework to consider as being the characteristic of the postmodern condition where contestations take the form of challenge in and through discourse. Lyotard's attention to the fighting aspect of the postmodern condition provides a new understanding of the contemporary world that can be imagined as a return to the Middle Ages, or a Neo-Medieval postmodernity characterised by nomad warriors waging war against the totality of the state and guerrilla assaults against totalising tendencies of both intellectual theories and social groups. The postmodern spirit of indeterminacy and lack of fixed evaluation criteria reveal that Lyotard's agonistic, contestual and fighting principle could be used as the possible criteria to evaluate incompatible language games and decide outcomes of battles in the postmodern agonistic world.

Thus in conclusion, the questions posed at the outset of this thesis were answered: war could be considered as the central force of human life and as the model and as efficient means for attaining goals. Thus a wide range of phenomena is naturally structured as war and contestations which make war a form of universal thought. As such war and communication have been interlinked from the beginning of human existence and increasingly war is a form of communication while communication is becoming a weapon for war.

The next section demonstrates how the new understanding of war provides insights for a critical evaluation of communication theory in order to make it appropriate for the postmodern world.

### **9.3 New understanding of war and implication for communication theory**

The understanding of war provided by this study could provide a perspective for understanding and theorising of communication. Such a new perspective, informed by a positive view of war and conflict as formative forces can make a valuable contribution to communication theory and cultural studies by firstly



providing a critique of the unquestioned assumptions and the prevalent pacific imagination of scholars, policy makers and the mass media. What this study shows is that against the available tradition of positive valuation of war in Western philosophy dating back to the ancient Greeks, such positive consideration of the value of war is largely absent from contemporary popular and scholarly literature in the field of communication studies. In the fields of cultural studies and communication theory such negativity is further enforced by the explicit anti-war ideology and the professed pacifist bias of scholars. The widespread anti-war bias and promotion of an assumed *peace imperative* have become normative moral values. The result of such valuation implies, according to C. Wright Mills (1977:42) that

the idea of conflict cannot effectively be formulated. Structural antagonism, large-scale revolts, revolutions – they cannot be imagined. In fact, it is assumed that “the system” once established, is not only stable but intrinsically harmonious ... The idea of the normative order set forth leads us to assume a sort of harmony of interests as the natural feature of any society ... The magical elimination of conflict and the wondrous achievement of harmony, removes from this “systematic” and “general” theory the possibilities of dealing with social change, with history.

Moreover, the influence and widespread use of the structural linguistic model for social analysis tends to strengthen the pacifist anti-war bias of communication theory. Underlying the application of the linguistic model to social and communication analysis is the belief that language and communication are primarily made for understanding. This is based on the assumption that

because all the practices that make up a social totality take place in language, it becomes possible to consider language as the place in which the social individual is constructed. In other words,

man can be seen *as language*, as the intersection of the social, historical and individual (Coward & Ellis 1986:1).

The social world is imagined as a universe of symbolic meanings and symbolic exchanges without much attention being given to the utilitarian and material aspects of the linguistic and symbolic exchanges. Thus the world is represented in theory as being a potential pacific universe because it is assumed that language is “an object of contemplation rather than as an instrument of action and power” (Bourdieu 1992:37). The result is that all social relations and relations of domination are imagined as if they were symbolic interactions that should be contemplated and their meaning interpreted while their practical purposes could be disregarded. The pacifism of the linguistic perspective is strengthened by application of Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism to the study of society, culture and communication.

Lévi-Strauss inscribes social reality within the framework of communication theory as the basis for understanding society. For Lévi-Strauss communication is the model that can be used to understand and analyse all social and cultural phenomena.

In every society, communication operates on three different levels: communication of women, communication of goods and services, and communication of messages. Therefore, kinship structures, economics, and linguistics approach the same kinds of problems on different strategic levels and really pertain to the same thing (Lévi-Straus in Harari 1980:19).

Considering society as a form of communication Lévi-Straus assumes that marriage rules account for the “exchange” and circulation (i.e. physical communication) of women, economic rules for the exchange and circulation of goods, and linguistic rules for the exchange of symbolic messages (cf. Harari 1980:19). From this it is assumed that because we understand the rules for the exchange of words (language rules or *langue*) in similar manner we can

understand all other social interactions because they can be imagined as if they were a language.

The application of such linguistic thinking to social reality is a form of idealism because the practical purpose of all social actions and relationships are disregarded and they are considered merely as symbolic exchanges of meaning, while society is supposedly a mere spectacle to be observed (cf. Bourdieu 1977a:1). Ultimately all social exchanges are imagined as polite Platonic exchanges of words or exchanges of gifts conceived from a perspective of altruistic and benign philanthropy.

Missing from this model is an important, and the primary social exchange, that is the *exchange of blows and injuries* which is the basis for establishing social power relations and defining social hierarchies. The original grounding of this social exchange is to be found in war and as indicated by Derrida (1995:17) in the specific exchange involving the “gift of death”. Derrida notes that “war is a further experience of the gift of death” because it is based on the triumph over death by the act of exchanging life for death: “I put my enemy to death and I give my own life in sacrificing myself ‘for my country’” (Derrida 1995:17). The link with exchange of blows and death highlight the fact that any social exchange is not an innocent or benign activity. As Bourdieu (1977a) contends, even the gift exchange is a contest and an act of imposition of obligations that places the receiver in debt to the giver. More fundamentally, the exchange of gifts is a symbolic model of warfare. This highlights the fact that Lévi-Strauss's idea of social exchanges as abstract *symbolic exchanges* is a distortion of a more complex understanding of the social exchange of *gifts*, to which Lévi-Strauss's interpretation mainly attributes *reciprocity* and peaceful cooperation and thus sees the various exchanges as if they were exchanges of words in the Platonic dialogue or a polite conversation. Bourdieu (1977a; 1992) criticises such interpretation as misleading because it creates the “illusion of linguistic communism” and conceals the operation of power (cf. Bourdieu 1992:43).

To reduce to the function of communication ... phenomena such as the dialectic of challenge and riposte and, more generally, the exchange of gifts, words, or women, is to ignore the structural ambivalence which predisposes them to fulfil a political function of domination in and through performance of the communication function (Bourdieu 1977a:14).

At its core any social exchange involves *provocation* and *challenge* (cf. Bourdieu 1977a:12). The gift exchange places the receiver under obligation and in subordination to the giver because he has to reciprocate the gift (cf. Bourdieu 1977a:6). This implies that “giving is also a way of possessing, a gift which is not matched by a counter-gift creates a lasting bond, restricting the debtor’s freedom and forcing him to adopt a peaceful, co-operative, prudent attitude”, the obligation and debt will have to be repaid in the form of homage, respect, loyalty, undertaking work and rendering service (Bourdieu 1977a:195). Such indebtedness and reciprocity was particularly important in the ancient world and during the Middle Ages when there arose a need to mobilise for war, the debtor had to repay in forms of political support or readiness to provide troops to fight in war (cf. Bourdieu 1977a:180–183). Ultimately, the exchange of gifts becomes a competition as every gift must be requited with a greater gift so the result is a never-ending spiral of exchanges and competition, a test of strength, or a form of battle where each participant attempt to outdo the other:

Much like someone who fails to return a greeting, whoever ultimately receives more than he gives disrupts the equilibrium and becomes either an enemy or, if he acknowledges his weakness, the inferior in the social relations (Schivelbusch 2004:23).

According to Claude Lefort, “battle and the exchange of gifts are men’s struggles for mutual recognition so that men have no choice but to fight or to give” (Lefort in Schivelbusch 2004:307–308). Gift exchange is also identified as being part of a more complex phenomenon of revenge:

Nietzsche's definition of gratitude as revenge is the most concise formulation of the insight that even the good deed or a gift represents an encroachment on the autonomy of the recipient, one that the recipient cannot leave unanswered (Schivelbusch 2004:23).

From their origin in prehistory humans are linked – in reality and in narratives – by "exchanges of benefits" that commonly take the form of "gifts and exchanges of injuries that commonly turn into blood debts" (Dawson 1996:74). Ultimately, as Keeley (1997) demonstrates, war and relations of force provide a much better explanation for all the social dynamics underlying the exchanges of women, of goods and of words. In other words, this implies that communication and interpretation of meaning do not provide the best model and paradigm to understand human beings, their society, culture and communication.

A corrective to the pacific linguistic model is suggested by Foucault's (1983:217–218) identification of three primary social domains: the domain of material production; the domain of production of symbols and signification; and the domain of production of constraints by power relations. The domain of power is characterised by "action on the action" of men, and such actions involve the exchange of blows and injuries played in a social field of power relations that are described as war-like relation of forces. From this it seems that social exchanges resemble a battlefield.

The history which bears and determines us has a form of war rather than language: relations of power, not meaning. History has no "meaning", though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail – but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategy and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflict. Dialectic is a way of evading the

always open and hazardous reality of conflicts by reducing it to a Hegelian skeleton, and semiology is a way of avoiding its violent, bloody and lethal character by reducing it to the calm Platonic form of language and dialogue (Foucault 1980:115).

This has theoretical implications and it is possible to propose that a model of war is more appropriate to explain history and human society rather than resort to the fiction of the linguistic model. Foucault (1980) concludes:

From this follows a refusal of analysis couched in terms of symbolic field or the domain of signifying structures, and a recourse to analysis in terms of the genealogy of relations of forces, strategic deployments, and tactics (Foucault 1980:114).

Bourdieu (1977a:11) adds that "the typical hermeneutic paradigm of the exchange of words is less appropriate than the paradigm of the exchange of blows." Rather than being primarily symbolic, exchanges are agonistic. Thus the exchange of blows as in martial duel, hand-to-hand battle combat seems to provide a better foundation to explain society, culture and communication. Following on the work of Mead, Bourdieu (1977a:5, 12–14) considers that speaking and verbal communication resemble the exchange of blows as if in a boxing match (cf. Aranguren 1967:16–17):

It can be seen that the typical hermeneutic paradigm of the exchange of words is perhaps less appropriate than the paradigm the exchange of blows suggested by George H Mead. In dog-fights, as in the fighting of children or boxers, each move triggers off a counter-move, every stance of the body becomes a sign pregnant with meaning that the opponent has to grasp while it is still incipient, reading the beginning of a stroke or a sidestep the imminent future, i.e. the blow or the dummy. And the dummy itself, in boxing as in conversation ... presupposes an opponent capable of preparing a riposte to a movement that has barely begun and

who can thus be tricked into faulty anticipation (Bourdieu 1977a:11).

To place the dog-fight in perspective, it would be useful to follow Eco's (1979:8) distinction between the concepts *communication* and *signification*. According to Eco (1979:8) the act of *communication* presupposes a system of *signification*; this implies that *communication* is a social activity involving the exchange of signs or symbolic content within the wider context of social, economic, physical, historical and cultural conditions (Eco 1979:158). *Signification* refers to the semiotic or sign system used for communication. Following Eco it is more appropriate to say that what is generally called "communication" actually consists of both *communication* and *signification* and it may be more appropriate to define it as *discourse*: a system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activities (cf. Sekula in Hutcheon 1989:4; Sonderling 1994a; 1994b).

This means that communication is first and foremost a social form of *behaviour* or *practice* (*praxis*) situated within specific historical time and space, and not an abstract eternal phenomena of signification, as imagined by structuralists and linguistic theories. Moreover, this also highlights the social aspects of both *communication* and *signification*: communication is a social practice and a form of social relations and the signifying systems – the signs and rules for their use – are social products rather than merely a-historical and self-enclosed systems of language or *langue* (cf. Sonderling 1994a). This highlights the fact that the system of signs (signification) used for communication is also dependent on cultural, social and historical influences. What is implied is that the use of the sign system imposes a system classification and mental structures (i.e. providing names, describing relations and appropriate meanings) that are adjusted to correspond with and explain the existing social relations of power in a society and thus reproduces such relations of power (Bourdieu 1992:169). Put differently,

although it is legitimate to treat social relations – even relations of domination – as symbolic interactions, that is, as relations of communication implying cognition and recognition, one must not forget that the relations of communication *par excellence* – linguistic exchanges – are also relations of symbolic power in which the power relations between speakers or their respective groups are actualised (Bourdieu 1992:37).

The close relationship between *logos* and *polemos* (speech and war) suggests a need for a revision of the Cartesian notion of the solitary thinking individual. For Descartes the *logos* manifests as reasoned speech in the individual's mind is assumed as being the sole mode of self-control and knowledge. By the externalisation of this *logos* and self-knowledge it becomes the model for social organisation and control. However, such a view represents an individualistic ideology that can be traced to Plato and Aristotle. Plato and Aristotle identify human reasoning (*logos*) as the controlling faculty of the individual's soul. For Aristotle there is an analogy between the faculty of reason as the authoritative governing element in the individual's mind and the most authoritative elements that govern the city-state (cf. Hampshire 2002:635). This implies that individual reason is externalised and becomes the criteria for public control and city-state government. But this is a distortion and an inversion: reasoning is not a matter of the individual mind; rather the individual mind is a shadow of the process of social construction of meaning (social construction of meaning discussed in Chapter 4). According to Hampshire (2002) the primary social institutions involved in governance of the city or a social group relate to the institution of war and conflict resolution. These institutions are the following: a council that decides policy regarding war; diplomacy to negotiate with external adversary power; and institutions that inquire into social misfortunes such as defeat in war (cf. Hampshire 2002:637). Each of these institutions is an example of the political and public versions of practical reasoning as they are all involved in staging agonistic exchanges of speech acts and procedures for the fair weighing and balancing of contrary arguments bearing on a disputed issue. All such public institutions, procedures and the actions within them are based on



the centrality of the *adversary principle* (i.e. *agon*) and the hearing of arguments is practice according to the principle of *audialteram partem* (hear the other side). Within these institutions: in the council chamber, in a law-court, at a diplomatic conference, at a committee of inquiry and investigation, the various locally established techniques and idioms of adversary argument will be refined and exercised. Different cultures develop different institutions of adversary argument with different procedures. But the necessities of peaceful confrontation of un-reconciled enemies entail that the adversary principle is everywhere employed in some accepted conventional forms. Ultimately, such adversary principle and method of agonistic encounters are internalised by the individual's mind:

Discussions in the inner forum of an individual mind naturally duplicate in form and structure the public adversarial discussions. Naturally, because advocates, judges and diplomats rehearse what they are to say before they step onto the public stage. Anyone who participates in a cabinet discussion, in a law court, in a diplomatic negotiation, acquires the habit of preparing for rebuttals by opponents. He acquires the habit of adversary thinking. The public situations ... give rise to corresponding mental processes which are modelled on the public procedures, as a shadowy movement on a ceiling is modelled on an original physical movement on the floor (Hampshire 2002:638).

Human thinking is a product of social and material conditions and thinking is an *embodiment* of such practices. According to Hampshire (2000:11) human thought is not the solitary meditation of individuals but based on pressing public arguments for or against some other counter claim and position. The individual learns this form of public argument by transferring the adversarial debate by a kind of mimicry, into his own mind and making it a habit of rational thought. This implies that the Cartesian model is based on faulty assumption:

The Cartesian paradigm should be reversed ... the paradigmatic setting and circumstances of intellectual thought is not the solitary meditation by the stove but the public arguments for and against some claim publicly made ... We learn to transfer, by a kind of mimicry, the adversarial pattern of public and interpersonal life onto a silent stage called the mind (Hampshire 2000:11).

Thus assumptions about communication are based on the old Cartesian model and in light of the above could be re-formulated to be based on the adversarial principle for example, Bourdieu (1998) proposes to “integrate into one and the same explanatory model intellectual traditions customary perceived as incompatible” (Bourdieu 1998:52). Such a project would

overcome the opposition between a physicalist vision of the social world that conceives of social relations as relations of physical force and a “cybernetic” or semiological vision which portrays them as relations of symbolic force, as relations of meaning or relations of communication. The most brutal relations of force are always simultaneously symbolic relations. And acts of submission and obedience are cognitive acts which as such involve cognitive structures, forms and categories of perception, principles of vision and division (Bourdieu 1998:52–53).

Such grounding for communication and knowledge is congruent with the Western agonistic tradition. Critical social and philosophical inquiries have the structure of warfare, and indeed, imagining inquiry as a form of warfare dates back to antiquity: Plato in *The Republic* describes inquiry for truth as a hunt where the researchers must “behave like huntsmen encircling a thicket” (Plato in Havelock 1986:144). In the ancient world philosophers were also soldiers, thus Socrates stood in the ranks at the battle of Delium and the dramatist Aeschylus is remembered for fighting at the battle of Marathon (Lynn 2004:27). And it is Plato's opinion that the philosopher-warrior is best suitable to lead a society. Latter philosophers, such as Descartes, by mere necessity of life, were

also warriors (Serres 1980:268). Throughout history war as a paradigm for thought was familiar to major thinkers such as Machiavelli and Hobbes. Following in this tradition Marx (1972:13–14) considers critique as a weapon in hand-to-hand battle against an enemy. More recently Peter Winch (1977) demonstrates that philosophical inquiry is a paradigmatic instance of war and battle strategy:

I propose in this monograph ... to attack a current conception of the relations between philosophy and the social studies. ... The strategy of the book will consist of a war on two fronts: first, a criticism of some prevalent contemporary ideas ... The main tactics will be a pincer movement: the same point will be by arguing from opposite direction. To complete the military analogy before it gets out of hand, my main war aim will be to demonstrate that the two apparently diverse fronts on which the war is being waged are not in reality diverse at all (Winch 1977:1–3).

In particular the Neo-Medieval character of postmodernity that recommends a conflictual war-like understanding of the world, of society, and seeing communication in the form of a fight or war, as demonstrated in the study (and specifically a contribution made by Lyotard in Chapter 8). A general understanding of war as foundation for human identity and communication was provided in Chapters 3 and 4 of this study. A framework for understanding communication as a form of war, playful battle, mortal contest and agonistic fight was provided in the discussions in the chapters on Huizinga, Schmitt, Foucault, McLuhan and Lyotard in this study. From these a heuristic model of communication as exchange of blows and injuries has emerged.

Beyond the contribution to communication theory this study has also utility and significance for communication scholars attempting to explain the inter-relation between violence of war and communication by placing the emphasis on the positive force of war as formative of individual's and nations' identities. This study can make practical contribution to practitioners in fields such as media

studies, journalism and organisational communication. The study's reevaluation of the taken for granted assumptions about the positive value of peace and consensus, the discovery of a positive value of war and productive force of conflict provides a new perspective for the various communication disciplines that will enhance both the practice of communication professionals, journalists and researchers in mass media and organisational communication.

For journalists an understanding of war as a positive and formative force will go some way toward improving journalists' education and hopefully dispel ignorance and arrogance. In particular regarding reporting on wars in Africa, ignorance and political correctness have allowed journalists to misrepresent wars and to let themselves be duped by African politicians (cf. Pottier 2002:62–80). The result of journalists' preconceptions and ignorance is that war can be represented by the mass media as if it were a natural disaster that demands external intervention by the fictional *international community*:

By calling some terrible historical event a humanitarian crisis, it is almost inevitable that all the fundamental questions of politics, culture, history and morality without which the crisis can never be properly understood will be avoided. And the danger is that all that will remain is the familiar morality play of victims in need of aid and aid workers who stand ready to help (Rieff 2002:87).

Misrepresentation of war as disaster allows the journalists to manufacture propaganda and present distorted information that exaggerates the supposed suffering (Rieff 2002:87). The mass media knowingly and inadvertently perpetuate and promote such distorted images because of "the pressures of war journalism – ignorance about the place, strict deadlines, trauma and empathy" all "combine to produce and legitimate a selectively simplistic, distorted version of history" which becomes the accepted *politically correct* version of reality (Pottier 2002:64). The dissemination of selective images of war by the mass media rouses the public to empathy with the suffering they watch at a distance but know little about (cf. Höijer 2004; Sontag 2004).

Constructing such empathy results in financial gain and political prestige for the journalists, the peace movements and international relief agencies whose purpose and existence depends on public support and finance (cf. Rieff 2002). Thus the distorted construction of war and its presentation in the mass media are *re-imagining* constructed by the peace and humanitarian organisations and are “*imaginings the world wanted to see*” rather than a reality (Pottier 2002:3). The hegemony of such constructions and the discourse of peace that has become the politically correct perspective operate like Orwell’s *Newspeak* and serve to protect the journalists’ ideology from the “malicious attack of real things” (Thom in Scruton 2006:163). The general conflation of politics with police work, and war with crime becomes evident when social theorists, journalists and moralists are confronted with the new *civil wars* of national deconstructions in the former Soviet territories and in postcolonial nation-states in Africa.

For instance, the discourse of war around the Kosovo episode was one of uncertainty about the cognitive status of war and how it should be viewed in relation to other historical events of large-scale violence: was it a ‘purge’, a ‘genocide’, a ‘war’, a ‘civil war’, ‘ethnic cleansing’ or ‘forced expulsion’? The use of these terms and the contestation over them was a striking aspect of the war which lacked a clear definition of violence as well as such terms as who was the victim and who was perpetrator (Delanty 2001:43).

Misunderstanding of war among journalists has increased, and claims to ignorance such as “the nature of war confuses the role of the journalist” are common among members of the profession (Allen & Zelizer 2004:3). For example ignorance was evidence among journalists during the first Gulf war were “many, perhaps most, were ill-prepared to describe and access American performance on the battlefield, a problem already evident in the reporting at Granada and Panama (Braestrup 1992:xii). One reason for this was that with no general military conscription and the increase in women journalists the “cultural gap between the journalist and U.S. military has widened since

Vietnam” and military ideas such tactics, logistics, weaponry, and military language had become incomprehensible to journalists (Braestrup 1992:xii). The journalists justified their ignorance by claiming that good reporters can cover anything, however such a claim is contradicted by the fact that coverage of specialist areas such as sport is not done by people who are ignorant about sports (cf. Braestrup 1992:xiii). Result of ignorance was that journalists made fools of themselves by the farcical questions they asked and their self-righteous attitudes. As one writer summarised the situation: “Never have so many known so little about so much” (cf. Fialka 1992:62). To improve reporting of war and discourse on social conflict a practical model of war could be developed to be used as a framework. Complementing details to guide such model could be found in Lakoff’s and Johnson’s (1980:80–81) theory of metaphoric communication that suggests that the first step in applying the adversarial war model for communication requires identification of the participants such as the people or groups that play the role of adversaries. The adversaries conduct battles from various positions: in the initial condition the participants have different positions and each participant assumes that he can defend his position and demand the opponenet to surrender. The communication will follow a battle strategy: attack, defence, retreat, manoeuvring, counterattack and results in a stalemate, truce, surrender or victory. The usefulness of such model could be investigated in various communication contexts.

Such understanding of communication informed by war would be appropriate because all human life is war, and war is another name for human history. Such an understanding of war as human history is reflected in Nietzsche's enigmatic conception of the *eternal return*: the eternal recurrence of the death and rebirth cycle and their complementary cycles of war, peace and war again. Mattelart’s (1994) study of international communication since the nineteenth century concludes that "communication serves first of all to make war ... War and its logics are essential components of the history of international communication and of its doctrine and theories, as well as its uses" (Mattelart 1994:xiii). Thus war is the preferrd frame of reference for development of communication technology and communication theories (Mattelart 1994:xiv).

The analysis of the different theorists in this study shows that an analysis of communication from a war perspective can provide a realistic understanding of society, culture and communication that is not available from a peaceful perspective. Considering communication from this perspective is to realise that to speak is always to enter a fight and contention. Thus a dialogue can be conceived as a boxing match and mutual understanding is the result of such battle and contest.

#### **9.4 Life on the shield of Achilles: how understanding war contributes to understanding of society and culture**

This study demonstrated that understanding war can contribute to a better understanding of communication in the contemporary world, as well as society and the mass media. Such an understanding requires an infusion of an ancient understanding of war and linking with the old Western tradition as outlined in Chapters 3 and 4. To understand the postmodern present requires taking a step back to the future of the ancient world or the new/old Neo-Medieval world. (This was suggested as being an application of Lyotard's theory in Chapter 8.)

Homer devotes the entire book 18 of the *Iliad* to describe Hephaestus, the god of fire and the lame expert blacksmith forging magnificent shining armour for Achilles. As Tatum (2003:136) notes, Homer makes the frightening instrument of war into poetry: "Homer's readers have always been dazzled by his translation of the arts of the divine craftsman of the gods into the sublime poetry of the shield." Homer describes the elaborate and painstaking process of creation where Hephaestus

began by making a large and powerful shield, adorned all over, finished with bright triple rim of gleaming metal ... The shield consisted of five layers, and decorated the face of it with a number of designs, executed with consummate skill and representing, first of all, Earth, Sky and Sea, ... Sun, the Moon ... and all the Constellations with which the heavens are crowned ... Next he showed two beautiful cities full of people. In one of them weddings

and banquets were afoot .... and the women had come to ... enjoy the show ... But the men flocked to the meeting-place, where a case had come up between two litigants, about the payment of compensation for a man who had been killed ... Both parties insisted that the issue should be settled by a referee; and both were cheered by their supporters in the crowd ... The other city was beleaguered by two armies, which were shown in their glittering equipment ... they sallied forth under the leadership of Ares and Pallas Athena ... Fully armed and dressed in golden cloths, they were big and beautiful ... A pitched battle ensued ... and volleys of bronze spears were exchanged ... and the soldiers met and fought and dragged away each other's dead like real men ... Next he depicted a large field ... which was being ploughed ... The next scene was a vineyard ... He also showed a herd of straight-horned cattle ... at the head of the herd a pair of savage lions had seized a bellowing bull ... To this picture the illustrious lame god added a big grazing ground ... Next the god depicted a dancing-floor ... Finally, round the very rim of the wonderful shield he put the mighty Stream of Ocean (Homer 1983:349–353).

Homer's detailed description of the shield of Achilles is significant both as a description of a practical work of an ancient expert craftsman forging the necessary utilitarian instruments of war and as a highly symbolic cosmic and human narrative.

The shield served an important practical role in the battles of the Greek Hoplites – infantry battalions where the shield served both as a defensive wall and offensive instrument to push the enemy off the battlefield. As Tatum (2003:138) notes, the shield is a movable wall and enables the warrior to survive enemy attacks. The strength of the shield is reflected in Homer's description of Hephaestus forging the powerful gleaming shield, made of five reinforced layers of metal and silver and artistically decorated. The decorations on the shield also have a double function: beyond the aesthetic function represented imagery of



fearful symbols serve the practical purpose to inspire terror in the heart of the enemy seeing them. The symbolic significance of Homer's description of the forging of the shield and the intricate and detailed decorations is to showcase the artisan's art and intricate workmanship. Thus the shield of Achilles "is a fusion of poetry and craft" (Tatum 2003:139). But there is a deeper significance in the description. Hephaestus is both the god of fire and the lame god-artisan and has power of creation: Hesiod describes him as creating, on Zeus's instruction, the female of the human species (cf. Hesiod 1976:61). Homer attributes more creative power to Hephaestus: creation of the cosmos and the human world. Thus Hephaestus first placed the "Earth, Sky and Sea, the indefatigable Sun, the Moon at the full, and all the Constellations with which the heavens are crowned" and "next he showed two beautiful cities full of people", and around the outer rim of the shield he put the ocean. Thus the shield of Achilles is a "panoramic overview of war and the cosmos" and the "poetry of the shield enables us to see war's spectacles" (Tatum 2003:138–139). The significance is expressed in placing the entire cosmos and the whole human world on the shield and this tells the listeners/readers that the universe and every aspect of the human world are upheld by, and their existence is dependent on this powerful and gleaming instrument of war and on war itself. As if the instrument of war provides the condition of emergence of life and provides it with its condition of existence. The representation places the entire human life cycle on the shield thus confirming their dependence on war. This is reminiscence of Heraclitus axiomatic saying that war and conflict are universal and all things come into being and are ordained by war (cf. Kahn 1979:205–207).

Significant also is Homer's description of life in the two cities depicted on the shield of Achilles: in the one city presumably existing in idyllic state of peace, a central manifestation among its festivities is the attraction of the spectacle of a legal battle; the other city is engaged in the contests of the game of warfare. What is significant in these descriptions is that both the legal and military activities are examples of contestations or the *agon*. Homer's narrative thus

resonates with Hesiod's (1976) description of war and strife as central characteristics of human life, as he puts it in the verses of *Works and Days*:

Strife is no only child. Upon the earth  
Two Strifes exist; the one is praised by those  
Who come to know her, and the other blamed.  
Their natures differ: for the cruel one  
Makes battle thrive, and war; she wins no love  
But men are forced, by the immortals' will,  
To pay the grievous goddess due respect.  
The other, first-born child of black Night,  
Was set by Zeus, who lives in air, on high,  
Set in the roots of earth, an aid to men.  
She urges even lazy men to work:  
A man grows eager, seeing another rich  
From ploughing, planting, ordering his house;  
So neighbour vies with neighbour in the rush  
For wealth: this Strife is good for mortal men –  
Potter hates potter, carpenters compete,  
And beggar strives with beggar, bard with bard. (Hesiod 1976:59)

For Hesiod *War* and *Strife* are the two sides of the same coin. Thus while war may be terrible, it is nevertheless, an existential fact of the human tragic sense of life: by necessity man must suffer this bloodthirsty goddess, while the other sibling, the goddess of strife inspires and drives men to compete for greatness and their competition resembles a civil war. What Hesiod hints at is that both war and strife are necessary: man must first ensure his social existence by being ready for war, and then in the safety of the city can *strife* and *strive* for greater achievements. It is also as Heraclitus believes: war is the originator of order and social ranking. According to Heraclitus "war is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown a gods, others as men; some he has made slaves, others free" (Kahn 1979:67).

For Heraclitus war and conflict are expressions of the eternal principle of opposition that governs the universe and guarantees its existence. And it is from this perspective of war as the upholder of the universe that Heraclitus condemns Homer's one wrongheaded verse in the *Iliad* when he has Achilles say: "Would that Conflict might vanish from among gods and men" (Fried 2000:22–23; Kahn 1979:67). For Heraclitus the elimination of war also implies the elimination of the harmony of opposites and thus it is as if Homer were calling for the destruction of the universe (cf. Fried 2000:22-23; Kahn 1979:204; Manguel 2007:220).

The acknowledgement of war and strife by the ancient Greek philosophers and Hesiod's demonstration of the creativity of war and conflict are of interest to Nietzsche (1997:35–38) who takes them as being the true characteristics of humanity. However, Nietzsche believes that modern man has gone soft and cannot understand the reason why the ancient Greeks rejoiced in description of bloody war and battles and the endless representations of corpses and their experience of the "cruelty of victory as the peak of life's glories" (Nietzsche 1997:37).

Why did the entire Greek world rejoice over the battle scenes of the *Iliad*? I am afraid that we do not understand these things in a sufficiently "Greek" way; indeed, that we would shudder were we ever to understand them from a Greek perspective.

But contrary to Nietzsche's lament, as was seen in the chapters of this study, the dominant cultural sentiment of war is pervasive and war is perfectly understood even today. Attesting to this the *Iliad* is the "primer of tragic art" in Western tradition that does not have an equal in any other culture (cf. Steiner 1961:5–6). The *Iliad* contains a primordial narrative of war (Manguel 2007:218), and as a contemporary Italian writer and translator of Homer, Alessandro Baricco, praises the value of reading the *Iliad* in the time of everyday wars of the twenty-first century:

To say it clearly, I mean that the *Iliad* is a story of war, without care and without measure. It was composed in praise of a warring humanity, and it did it in such memorable way that it should last throughout eternity and reach the last descendant of our last descendants, still singing the solemn beauty and irredeemable emotion that war once was and always will be ... In short ... the *Iliad* is a monument to war (Baricco in Manguel 2007:219).

Like in the ancient world of Homer, understanding war is important today as the West comes to face challenges from resurrected warrior traditions from Africa (Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 1999; Mazrui 1975, 1977) and Islam's vision of a dichotomous world divided into the house of peace and the house of war (cf. Bobbitt 2009; Khomeini 2008; Lawrence 2005; Lewis 1991; Malik 1992; Perry & Negrin 2008; Peters 2005; Ruthven 2004, 2007). As against the non-Westerners' and other fundamentalists' conception of the world as existing naturally in a state of perpetual war (cf. Aho 1981; Juergensmeyer 2003), most Westerners assume that history has come to an end and believe that they do not need to fight and endanger their lives in war and battle (cf. Fukuyama 1992:311). Not only is such a view self-delusion but even the peaceful existence is unsatisfactory for many among the Western youth:

The fact that a large historical world co-exists with the post-historical one means that the former will hold attraction for certain individuals precisely because it continues to be a realm of struggle, war, injustice, and poverty (Fukuyama 1992:318).

These persons would like to prove their human worth by challenging themselves and each such adventurous person will "re-create for him or herself all the conditions of historical struggle: danger, disease, hard work, and finally the risk of violent death" either in real war and struggle or in competitive sport activities (Fukuyama 1992:319), or in the virtual world of the war film or computer war game.

Moreover, understanding war is important for understanding life and communication in contemporary Africa. As against the misinformed views of pacifists and contrary to the belief that war in Africa is endemic and it is destroying the continent (cf. e.g. Allen 1999; Allen & Zelizer 2004; Arrighi 2002; Chabal 1996; Chabal & Daloz 1999; Leys 1994; Pottier 2002), Mazrui and Mazrui (1998) proclaim a more robust and realistic perspective, informed by historical knowledge of the positive value of war. According to Mazrui and Mazrui (1998:3) the problem of Africa is "the tragedy of peaceful borders." For Mazrui and Mazrui (1998:4) the lesson of European history shows war to be the catalyst for formation of stable national identities. But from such a historical perspective it is "a terrible fact to acknowledge that one of the tragedies of the African state is that there has not been enough tension and conflict between states" (Mazrui & Mazrui 1998:3). External interventions in African wars had been destructive rather than beneficial for Africa's development because it deprives it of the creative power war to forge identity and unify nations. Thus Mazrui and Mazrui (1998:4) conclude:

One of Africa's post-colonial tragedies continues to be, paradoxically, that there have been no external wars for which to plan and calculate, and for which to invoke a sense of national purpose.

Not only is war the key to national identity construction but it is also the major and only means to achieve peace, therefore as Luttwak (1999) argues there is a need to "give war a chance" to demonstrate its positive effects. Wars must be given the chance to run their natural course in order to establish condition for settlement. War has the great virtue of resolving conflict that leads to peace when all the belligerents become exhausted or when fighting continues until one side wins a decisive victory (cf. Luttwak 1999:36-37). Indeed, in their study on the relationship between peace and war, Hughes and Seligmann (2002:183) conclude that most often a peace agreement does not terminate a war but prepares the ground for a new war. Ultimately, as Turchin's (2006:285) study of

history uncovers life cycles in the relationship between peace and war: "Peace brings war, and war brings peace."

Since antiquity peace was always understood as a manifestation of war. For Homer the artist's rendering of a scene of war "is never only that of war" but it is always a scene of the past, and thus while war confronts man with threat of death it is also a reminder of happy events in the past. According to Manguel (2007:226), "war is both things" an experience of the harsh present and remembrance of beloved past, to these Manguel (2007) adds a third element: a "reparation" for the future. Thus understanding the primacy of war provides a good understanding of peace but understanding peace as a primary phenomenon distorts understanding of reality and cannot comprehend how peace can be transformed into a tyranny.

Human beings find it difficult to exist meaningfully in peace and in a world without struggle. If there is no struggle they will struggle out of boredom and search out struggle for its own sake because they cannot imagine living without struggle, and if their own country is at peace and they live in a prosperous democracy then they will fight against peace, against prosperity and against democracy (cf. Fukuyama 1992:330). This was precisely the motive of the Western student revolts of 1968 that also lead some to join the European terrorists' cells so that they could experience their own war and establish their human worth. Indeed, the motive for the youth rebellion of 1968 and the subsequent terrorism in Germany are being acknowledged as attempts "to create an experiential equivalent of what the war had been to our parents" (Winthrop-Young 2002:825). It was thus an attempt by a young generation that "without its own war felt compelled to stage a supplement in order to live up to its predecessors" (Winthrop-Young 2002:825). Hammond (2007:10) traces a similar practice in the political life of Western societies for whom, since the end of the Cold War, life has lost its meaning. Thus in a world without meaning they attempt to regain a sense of their identity and humanity by fighting humanitarian wars. Similar historical experiences lead to the outbreak of the First World War

(cf. Fukuyama 1992:318, 330–331). Indeed, a study by Hughes and Seligmann (2002:183) indicates that peace ultimately leads to new war.

Regarding the future of war Van Creveld (1991:218) suggests that from the moment Heraclitus confirmed war as the origin of everything "war stood as the eternal, unchanging axis around which revolves the whole human existence and which gives meaning to all the rest". According to Van Creveld (1991:222) if men had a choice they may give up women before they give up the exhilarating joy of war:

It is simply not true that war is solely a means to an end, nor do people necessarily fight in order to attain this objective or that. In fact, the opposite is true: people very often take up one objective or another precisely in order that they may fight. While the usefulness of war as a means for gaining practical ends may well be questioned, its ability to entertain, to inspire, and to fascinate has never been in doubt. War is life written large. Among the things that move between two poles, war alone both permits and demands the commitments of *all* man's faculties, the highest as well as the lowest. The brutality and ruthlessness, the courage and determination, the sheer power that strategy considers necessary for the conduct of armed conflict are at the same time its causes. Literature, art, games, and history all bear eloquent testimony to the same elemental fact. One very important way in which men can attain joy, freedom, happiness, even delirium and ecstasy, is by *not* staying home with wife and family, even to the point where, often enough, they are only too happy to give up their nearest and dearest in favor of – war (van Creveld 1991:226–227).

This study provided an understanding of war and traced the way war was considered as formative force of the individual's identity and source for communication and how selected theorists use war to structure their thought. Ultimately, as this last section tries to show by way of the metaphor of Achilles'

shield, is that war is the foundation for all aspects of life, in the words of Philip Bobbitt (2003:xxxi):

War is a product as well as a shaper of culture ... war is a creative act of civilised man with important consequences for the rest of human culture, which include the festivals of peace.

In other words, what is implied by Bobbitt's (2003) statement and by this study is that a perspective informed by an understanding of war can also comprehend peace but a perspective informed only by peace cannot comprehend war.



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