

Martin SMEDJEBAK:

## *Globalisation and War*

### *The Fight for Power and Wealth*



*“They gave us parrots, cotton, spears and lots of other things which they traded against glasspearls and bells. They carry no weapons and do not know of any. They would be excellent*

*servers. With fifty men we could easily conquer them and get them to do what we want.” This is Christopher COLUMBUS’ assessment when for the first time in 1492 he sets his feet in the new world, on Haiti.*

#### A TRAGIC DISCOVERY

The mission COLUMBUS had from Spain was not to civilise the world or to christen the savages, but to conquer new territories and to bring home gold and spices. In the hunt for these treasures there were many lives taken. Within two years, half of Haiti’s 250.000 people died through murder, mutilation or suicide.

The following occupation of the land and genocide of the indigenous population of North- and South America is one of the most gruesome tragedies in human history. Still up to this day, *Columbus Day* is celebrated with admiration and prided in the memory of this “great explorer”. In 1492 the goal was power and wealth. Are we less greedy in modern history?

#### THE WAR CONTINUES

At the beginning of the 20th century two superpowers emerged: the Soviet Union and the United States. They were representatives of a war between two ideologies, communism and capitalism, and started a fierce battle to divide the world. On the one side, countless millions suffered under communist oppression in Central and Eastern Europe, Cambodia, Afghanistan and in other countries.

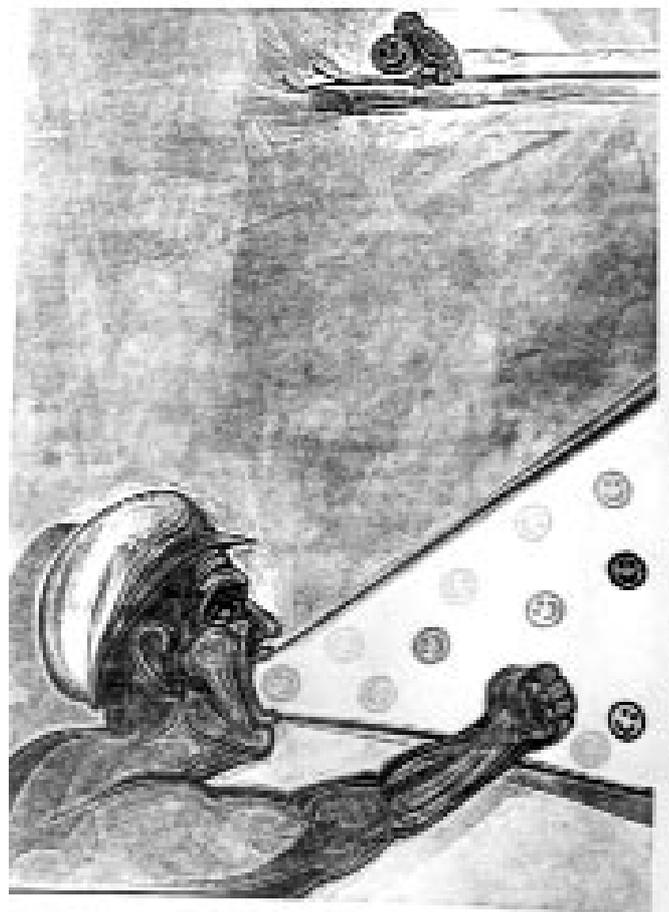
On the other side, a huge military complex was built in the US to fight “the evil empire” as one of the US presidents called the Soviet Union. Hundreds of billions of roubles and dollars were spent yearly on military costs in the 1980s, which money would have been enough to give food, healthcare and education for everyone in need on earth, many times over. Nowadays it is also recognised that US politicians greatly exaggerated the military capacity

of the Soviet Union.

The US policy at the time of the cold war was guided by the “*domino-effect principle*”. If only one country could build up a successful socialistic society it could “trick” other countries to also become socialistic. In this way the US could lose its influence and power in the whole Two-Thirds World, since independent countries may refuse US companies to enter their markets. The US engaged in military interventions or tolerated massmurders in order to fight socialism in Nicaragua, Chile, Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam and Indonesia and in many other countries.

#### NEW HUMANITARIAN WARS

During the last ten years we have heard about another kind of warfare: humanitarian military intervention. The United Nation’s security council took the decision to invade Iraq after its attack on Kuwait, NATO forces bombed Yugoslavia and now US forces are bombing Afghanistan to fight against terrorism. It is said that these wars are fought to avoid a greater evil, to save lives and protect people from dictators or



terrorists. The question is whether this is really a new kind of war or the old motives of greed and power lie behind the nice rhetoric.

Today the population of Afghanistan suffers because a terrorist network has chosen their country as their homebase. US bombs kill civilians who never heard about Osama BIN LADEN. We do not know how many hundreds or thousands of people have been killed in this war. What we do know is that a third of the population of Afghanistan, 7 out of 22 million Afghans, are on the brink of starvation.

Because of the bombings almost all the international relief organisations have been forced out of the country leaving the people without food and shelter. The humanitarian part of the US mission is to throw 57.000 packages of food from airplanes. This amount of food is obviously totally inadequate for a population where one third is soon starving, even if all were found.

**INCONSEQUENT FRIENDSHIPS**

There are many reasons to doubt the humanitarian feature of these new wars. One reason is that today we fight against powers that we supported yesterday. Iraq used to be a good friend to the US, which gave him weapons and resources in his fight against Iran. The Taliban in Afghanistan also got generous support from the US during their war against the Soviet Union. The Taliban at that time was not different from today, suppressing women and punishing everybody who broke the very strict religious laws. Yesterday they were called freedom fighters. Today they are terrorists.

Another reason to question the good intentions of the US is its inconsequent behaviour. If its most important goal were to protect freedom and human rights then it would act also in its country where the oppression is often even worse. Israel has been illegally occupying Palestine for many decades turning Palestine into a prison with very little resources and executing many of those who try to resist. Turkey and Saudi Arabia are among the biggest human right abusers in the world. NATO does not do anything to change this. Instead, they support these regimes because they are their allies.

**DIFFERENT FACES OF ONE MEASURE**

Try to imagine the horrible terror attack against the *World Trade Center* in New York. Try to imagine that it would happen every day of the year. Then try to imagine that it happens five times a day. In the terrorist attack on September 11 about 6000 people died. Every day more than 30 000 people die because of lack of food, clean water or adequate health care.

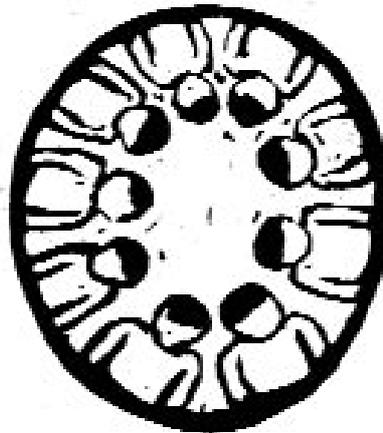
It is not a dramatic event like the one in New York City. It is instead a slow agonising death. But the feeling of loss of relatives and friends is the same whether it happens in New York or in Ghana. 30.000 people die every day an unnecessary death in a world, which has never been richer. It is not a question of scarce resources.

It is feasible to give every human being on earth enough food, clothes, health care and education. The problem is the unequal distribution of resources. The richest person in the world owns as much as the total Gross National Product of the thirty poorest countries together. In Europe we eat ice cream for 11.000 million USD a year: an amount, which would be enough to give everybody on earth access to clean water or education.

**DEFENCE OF PROPERTY**

The gap between rich and poor has been increasing more and more in the last couple of hundred years. It started with the colonisation where we in Europe stole enough resources to start the industrialisation that produced our rich and powerful companies. Today it is our rich countries that set the rules for the global trade through the IMF, WTO and the World Bank. These powerful international institutions are on a neoliberal agenda, which force the poorest countries to open up its markets for huge *Transnational Corporations*, to slash its public spending and to privatise everything from electricity to hospitals.

In a world with so much inequality, people feel that they have to defend their resources in the best way they can. We can see this defence very clearly in countries like South Africa or the US. The rich peo-



ple guard their property with elaborate security systems and personal guards. There are even whole communities that have high walls all around them and private armies of security staff to guard the precious property.

### GLOBAL STAR WARS

The same phenomena are present between countries. Europe has got its *Schengen agreement* that makes it very difficult for refugees to get a permit to stay on our continent. "*Fortress Europe*" protects its wealth from getting in the hands of the black man. The US is building their missile defence system, also called Star Wars that apparently will have the ability to shoot down missiles aimed at the US and its allies. This will be the new military wall that will make sure that the rich stay rich.

It seems that rich countries still use their superior weapons to defend themselves and gain more resources and power. The difference is that today they also have powerful global institutions like the WTO and the IMF, which can help them to keep their wealth and power by creating unfair trade agreements. War and globalisation works together to keep the *status quo* where the rich stay rich and the poor stay poor.

### IMAGINE

"Imagine there is no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for and no religion too. Imagine all the people living life in peace. Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger. A brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people sharing all the world." (John LENNON)

I believe that it is a Christian responsibility to imagine another world, a better world. Jesus says to us: "You have the kingdom within you." We have the potential within us to create something better, something beautiful. We do not have to start from scratch. There have been people before us that have imagined and started to plan a new world.

In 1998 the United Nations declared the "International decade for a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world (2001-2010)". More than two hundred nations have signed and have started national committees that will implement the program. The World Council of Churches has designated this decade to be the "Decade to overcome violence".

### KINGDOM OF DIALOGUE

If we work together on this, it could be the start-

ing point for a world of real cooperation where conflicts are solved not with aggression, but with dialogue and understanding, from the local level to the global; a world where we value human relationships and justice more than power and wealth.

Another good promise was made in 1996 at a United Nations conference when 186 countries agreed to reduce hunger and malnutrition to half by 2015, from about 800 million people today to 400 million by 2015. You could easily argue that it is cynical to accept as many as 400 million hungry people, but at least it is a target for a good improvement.

### WHICH KIND OF COALITION?

There is now a growing "coalition against terrorism". Some countries have joined the coalition when the US and the EU agreed to stop complaining about the abuse of human rights, others joined when the US promised to stop sanctions or to give them more international aid. An international fight against terrorism is not a bad start in itself, only if it violates international law and kills people who have not been convicted of any crime. But there are more pressing matters than terrorism to tackle in the world today. More and more people have begun to realise this and to act.

They have joined in new networks: local, national and global networks. People who imagine a world where there are justice, equality, freedom, a sustainable environment and peace. We might not all imagine the same world or have the same methods of reaching our goal, but we all agree that there should be more than two ways, not only to choose between capitalism and terrorism. I hope that through strong global coalitions of grassroots movements we may begin to discuss and plan for our common future. We have heard that the kingdom is within us. Now we "only" have to let it out and make it happen in our world.

- Literature: BLUM William, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions*. 1995.
- ZINN Howard, *History of the American People*. 1995.

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