

## *The two identifying cultures of Europe. Towards a renewal of the education system\**

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**Summary.** *The partnership model and the hierarchical and authoritarian model are the two basic alternatives for human relations. They correspond to the culture of Old Europe and to the Indo-European one, respectively. The archaeological findings expertly interpreted by Marija Gimbutas, illustrating the lack, in the Paleolithic and Neolithic society, of the victim/sacrificial system, allows us to review the Girardian theory of the scapegoat. In androcratic culture, the killing of a regular victim is the physiological way to expulse violence. In the victim/sacrificial system, which one can define hetero-sacrificial, the relationship to the other is indeed an appeal to its causal responsibility for the recurring crises. Conversely, in the culture of the Goddess, sacrifice is intended as self-sacrifice. The crisis which humanity is going through, shows the unsustainability of the androcratic model. The change required to achieve this target should happen in the field of education, the only field that can «make it possible for today's and tomorrow's children to see that we can create a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future – once we acquire the knowledge and skills to do so» (Eisler, 2000, p.130).*

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In all of her works, the archeologist Marija Gimbutas rejects as groundless and anti-historical the commonly used definition of civilization, developed by mainstream historians and archeologists, according to which civilization implies a political and religious hierarchical organization, a military defense system, the division into classes and a complex subdivision of work. However, this notion of civilization, Gimbutas warns, reveals an androcratic society such as the Indo-European one, as opposed to the Old European society that was gynocentric, i.e. centered around the figure of the mother and more in general of woman. The civilization that flourished in Europe between the years 6,500 and 3500 B.C. and in Crete until 1450 B.C., enjoyed a very long period of peace, produced refined expressions of art and featured a superior quality of life when compared to many androcratic societies. Neolithic Europe therefore does not represent a phase that precedes the start of culture, considering that «the generative basis of any civilization lies in its degree of artistic creation, aesthetic achievements, nonmaterial values, and freedom which make life meaningful and enjoyable for all its citizens, as well as a balance of powers between the sexes» (Gimbutas, 1991, p. viii). Old Europe was by all means a civilization and a very refined and complex one at that. To consider war as endemic to the human condition, generated by conflicts that inevitably arise between different human groups, according to Gimbutas is a serious misunderstanding.

A defining aspect is represented by religion that studies dedicated to pre-history have mainly treated as irrelevant in Neolithic Europe. But Gimbutas warns that by ignoring the religious aspects of the Neolithic age, we are neglecting the entire culture, which was instead deeply permeated by sacrality. The primordial divinity of our ancestors in the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages was feminine and corresponded to a matriarchal type of sovereignty. Prehistory has not left any traces of a Father God. The symbols and images of the Paleolithic and Neolithic are focused on a Goddess that generates by parthenogenesis, which guards over life, death and regeneration. «This symbolic system represents cyclical, nonlinear,

mythical time» (Gimbutas, 1991, p. x). The matrifocal order must not be confused with matriarchy, which implies an inversed hierarchy with respect to the patriarchal androcratic system. The matrifocal tradition lived on in the first agricultural societies of Europe, Anatolia, Near East and in minoic Crete, and in particular developed a useful technology for increasing agricultural yield, while the androcratic culture, founded on dominion and conquest, focused on the design and construction of instruments of war.

The Indo-European populations that invaded the agricultural territories of Old Europe featured a patrilocal and patrilineal social structure. «The Indo-European society was warlike, exogamic, patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal, with a strong clan type organization and social hierarchy which gave prominence to the warrior class. There is no possibility that this pattern of social organization could have developed out of the Old European matrilineal, matricentric, and endogamic balanced society. Therefore, the appearance of the Indo-Europeans in Europe represents a collision of two ideologies, not an evolution» (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 396). The stelae of the Kurgans show male symbols and artifacts: daggers, halberds, axes, arches, quivers, arrows, belts, etc.. Gimbutas considers these elements as fully viable historical sources, starting from which it is possible to reconstruct the mythical imagery and which are of great documentary value since they accurately depict the tools and weapons mentioned, namely objects that are rarely preserved in tombs. The most frequent symbols are of a solar type, i.e. the radiating sun, the double spiral, etc.. Experts of Indo-European mythology will immediately be reminded of the image of the God of the shining sky, which guarantees generation and promotes vegetation (Gimbutas, 2010).

The main theme of the symbolism of the Goddess in Old Europe is the mystery of the cycle of birth, death and regeneration. «Symbols and images cluster around the parthenogenetic (self-generating) Goddess who is the single source of all life. Her energy is manifested in springs and wells, in the moon, sun, and earth, and in all animals and plants. She is the Giver-of-Life, Wielder-of-Death, Regeneratrix, and the Earth Fertility Goddess, rising and dying with the plants. Male gods also exist, not as creators but as guardians of wild nature, or as metaphors of life energy and the spirits of seasonal vegetation» (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 399, Gimbutas 1986, pp. 262-263). The pantheon of the proto-Indo-Europeans basically depicted the ideology of an economic and social order based on an agricultural and pastoral system guided by a superior authority and by a class of warriors that introduced the use of horses and weapons for war. The male divinities were solar, gods of the sky and of the shining sun, and in the bronze age carried weapons (daggers, swords and shields) and wore copper and gold

breast plates and copper-plated belts. «The Indo-Europeans worshiped the swiftness of arrow and spear and the sharpness of the blade. The touch of the axe blade was thought to awaken the powers of nature and transmit the fecundity of the Thunder God. The frightening black God of Death and the Underworld marked the warrior for death with the touch of his spear tip, glorifying him as a fallen hero» (Gimbutas, 1991, p. 399).

The two systems of belief regarding life after death are therefore entirely different. The Old Europeans firmly believed in cyclic regeneration in which the main idea is contained in the expression “tomb is womb”. This, Gimbutas explains, is why the tombs were egg-shaped, i.e. uterus-shaped, or anthropomorphic, where the tomb was imagined to be, literally, the body of the Goddess. The triangle as symbol of birth, representing the vulva, is also present in grave architecture. The other symbols represent regeneration, water that gives life and vital energy, cup marks, concentric circles, snakes, bull heads as uteri, triangles, lozenges, zig-zags, or images of the Goddess of regeneration herself engraved with labyrinths, vulvas and breasts (Gimbutas, 1986, 1991).

The Indo-Europeans’ conception of the afterlife instead made them believe in the linear continuity of the individual’s life in this world into the afterworld. For this reason, the Indo-Europeans believed in the existence of another life in the land of the dead. Consequently, mortuary houses were built so that the deceased could take along their earthly possessions, be they of common use or ornaments representing their social rank. The survivors continued to bring food offerings to the burial sites so as to ensure the well-being of the dead. The afterworld was imagined as a cold and swampy underground kingdom ruled by a sovereign. The dead usually reached this gloomy underworld after three days of walking or on horseback or in chariots. The souls were destined to a pale and passive existence, and there was no possibility of rebirth (Gimbutas. 1991, 2010).

The model based on cooperation and the model based on hierarchism and authoritarianism are the two basic alternatives for human relations and correspond to the Old European culture and to the Indo-European culture, respectively. Riane Eisler, the original interpreter of Gimbutas’ work, shows how the two alternatives are not mutually exclusive but rather must be intended as the two extremes of a continuum. Eisler admits that, in fact, western societies have made considerable progress in the direction of the cooperation or partnership model. If this were not the case, today it would be impossible even to discuss the issue, or doing so would be extremely risky, even life-threatening, as it befell the many free-thinkers in Europe during the Middle Ages. Eisler proposes a table to illustrate the continuum between the two extreme models (Table 1) (Eisler 2000, p. 11):

**Table 1. Illustrates the Partnership Model and the Dominator Model**

<i>Partnership Model</i>	<i>Dominator model</i>
Egalitarian structure with hierarchies of actualization	Authoritarian structure with hierarchies of domination
Equal valuing of females and males	Ranking of males over females
Institutionalization of mutual honoring, respect, and peaceful conflict resolution	Institutionalization of fear, violence, and abuse
High social investment in stereotypically “feminine” traits and activities, such as empathy, caring, nonviolence, and caretaking	High social investment in stereotypically “masculine” traits and activities, such as the control and conquest of people
Myth and stories honoring and sacralizing partnership	Myths and stories honoring and sacralizing domination.

The partnership model is not extraneous to hierarchy. Eisler makes a distinction between actualization hierarchy and domination hierarchy (Eisler, 1987, 1995). In the first, the purpose of the hierarchical order is not domination but the better execution of each member’s tasks in the common interest. In the second, instead, the real aim of the hierarchical structure is to allow a few individuals to exercise dominion, control and abuse of power over the weaker others. The former system is egalitarian, the second is based on an almost ontological disparity between the strong and the weak, the dominators and the dominated. The first system’s cohesion is not obtained against someone, via the permanent antagonism between the group and a victim who, in turn, finds him or herself playing the role of scapegoat, as instead occurs in the second system.

The existence in bygone times of the Old European culture, in which the partnership model was alive and operational, together with the archeological findings skilfully interpreted by Marija Gimbutas, who points out a lack of the victim/sacrificial system in the Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures and sheds new light on Girard's scapegoat theory (Girard, 1972, 1978). While René Girard's reconstruction of the victim mechanism and the opposition between myth and science (or revelation) remains valid in regards to the androcratic system of Indo-European populations, in which social cohesion is maintained via periodical lynching and recurring sacrificial rites, the same cannot be said for the system based on the culture of the Goddess of prehistoric times. The model of a matrifocal and matrilinear society that Gimbutas assigns to the Paleolithic and Neolithic communities bear all of the signs of a truly experimented system, even though it was supplanted, interrupted and partially assimilated by the Indo-European populations that counted on an androcratic type of aggressive and authoritarian order. The anguish of being annihilated can prove to be a typically male attitude when faced with death. Indeed, androcratic cultures have developed imposing representations of life after death so as to reassure mortals that their life continues even after they are deceased, in a form not visible to survivors. In Old European cultures, the Goddess of birth, death and regeneration expresses the certainty that life continuously renews itself and that the condition ruling over this renewal is the death of the individual. Survival here refers not to individual existence, which is finite, but to life itself, which is infinite and immortal. Whereas in the androcratic culture, survival is accomplished only as it relates to the immortality of the individual via the passage of the individual into another timeless world, in the culture of the Goddess one survives in the sense that one is regenerated, in another form and appearance, into other individuals. The differing concept of survival is closely linked to the different concept of sacrifice present in the two cultures. In the androcratic culture, the violent tension of rivalry that arises within society finds its natural outcome in the periodical identification of a scapegoat. The periodical killing of a victim is the physiological remedy of the expulsion of violence accumulated within that society. The persecutory system is founded on the assumption that, if something doesn't work or goes awry, one must find a culprit and remove him/her. One can therefore define it as a hetero-sacrificial system. The relationship with the other essentially boils down to an appeal to his/her responsibility in causing our troubles, suffering and failures. The other is called into question as a potential culprit, as the probable cause of the trouble that has befallen us. Conversely, in the culture of the Goddess, sacrifice is intended as self-sacrifice. In the event of violent

conflict, it is the other that is allowed to prevail and not the self. The relationship with the other is not based on hate but on love, not on exclusion or expulsion but on inclusion and promotion. In this case, the motto is not *mors tua vita mea*, but *mors mea vita tua*. In the culture of the Goddess, survival of one's own life in the current form counts for nothing, because one's own life is not all that important, the individual is a fleeting apparition and subject to continuous transformations even during its visible permanence on Earth. In the androcratic culture, instead, existence and survival after death are personal, and thus individuals tend towards preserving themselves in the form of psychophysical unity. This concept allows to authorize any kind of violence aimed at safeguarding one's self in the current form (Tugnoli, 2012).

Children growing up in a community in which the androcratic model predominates are educated with similar methods based on fear, guilt and shame, and are encouraged to exercise rivalry in a hostile manner and to compete non-empathically, as opposed to aspiring to empathic cooperation such as to best develop the diverse capabilities and skills of the individual. Eisler compares two educational models that correspond to two types of civilization (Table 2) (Eisler, 2000, p. 23):

**Table 2. Two educational models that correspond to two types of civilizations**

<i>The Partnership Model values and supports</i>	<i>The Dominator Model values and supports</i>
Teacher and student knowledge and experience are valued	Teacher is the sole source of information and knowledge
Learning and teaching are integrated and multidisciplinary	Learning and teaching are artificially fragmented and compartmentalized
Curriculum, leadership, and decision-making are gender balanced	Curriculum is male-centered; leadership and decision-making are male-controlled
Multicultural reality of human experience is valued and tapped as source of learning	One culture's worldview is the measure with which others are analyzed and evaluated
Social and physical sciences emphasize our interconnection with other people and nature	Social and physical sciences emphasize the conquest of people and nature
Mutual responsibility, empathy, and caring are	Relationships based on control,

highlighted and modeled	manipulation, and one-upmanship are highlighted and modeled
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The educational system must be modified and updated so that humanity can move on towards the achievement of the following fundamental objectives: a) «to help children grow into healthy, caring, competent, self-realized adults»; b) «to help them develop the knowledge and skills that will see them through this time of environmental, economic, and social upheavals»; and c) «to equip young people to create for themselves and future generations a sustainable future of greater personal, social, economic, and environmental responsibility and caring – a world in which human beings and our natural habitat are truly valued and chronic violence and injustice are no longer seen as “just the way things are”» (Eisler, 2000, p. 29).

A negative consequence of the androcratic culture model consists in the lack of esteem for female skills and competences in the construction of a new humanity. Cultural tradition abounds in examples of omission as well as of actual support of female wisdom and character. There have been eras and places on Earth that have seen the formation of societies and cultures in which the partnership model prevailed and in which what we now call environmental awareness was expressed via veritable cults dedicated to Mother Earth. To date, many autochthonous populations in America believe in the sacredness of the Earth, celebrating rituals with which they acknowledge and honour our interconnection with Nature.

The cultural transformation theory shows that humanity is at an evolutionary crossroads, following in the wake of the alternation in history of the two models. The evolution of self and of society are closely intertwined, and Eisler believes that humanity is at a decisive turning point, related to which the old categories (right and left, communism and capitalism) are no longer necessary: «The Cultural Transformation theory proposes that the underlying struggle for our future is not between the conventional polarities of right and left, religion and secularism, or capitalism and communism. Rather, it is between a mounting grassroots partnership resurgence that transcends these classifications and the entrenched, often unconscious, dominator resistance to it» (Eisler 2000, p. 46). Even the evolution-based theory points out that not only cruelty and aggressiveness, but also benevolence, philanthropy and caring are the results of evolution. Birds and mammals show many examples of females that love their offspring to the point of sacrificing their life for them in the face of danger.



During the 20th century, left- and right-wing authoritarian systems represented the radically aggressive dominion of the androcratic model. Postmodernity is witnessing a rise in international organizations and intellectuals standing up and speaking out against violence against women and against weaker individuals in general. As the partnership model takes hold, the resistance of the supporters of the male dominion model increases. The values and ideals that, in the postmodern era, have been confirmed on the basis of the fundamental principle of defence of the victim, today face obstinate resistance in many cultures that have not experienced the vicissitudes of the western world (Afghanistan, Algeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran). In those countries, the lapidation of women is considered to be a legitimate instrument for the male control of female morality. Poverty, degradation and abandon are consequences of overpopulation which in turn is a consequence of the fact that male dominance denies women the right to make their own decisions regarding reproduction. Women are condemned to reproduce, increasingly becoming scapegoats, sacrificial victims of religious fundamentalism and of authoritarian violence dressed up as moralism. It is time to prepare a new world capable of guaranteeing the continuation of our human adventure and of preventing the collapse of life and of civilization on Earth by reforming the education sector which consequently becomes a key factor. Indeed, the change necessary for achieving the goal directly involves the field of education, the only field that can «make it possible for today's and tomorrow's children to see that we can create a more equitable, peaceful, and sustainable future – once we acquire the knowledge and skills to do so» (Eisler, 2000, p. 130).

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