

Why Do Wars Occur and How Do They End?

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JAMES IAIN ROGERS, JUL 17 2012

From the Peloponnesian Wars to the War on Terror, the brutal act of war itself has been packaged by all as a fight over what it means to be civilised. It is Thucydides who recalls the Corcyraeans justification for why war must occur. They proclaimed; "all that we most value is at stake in the present contest"[1]. It is declarations such as this which bare resonance to virtually any war that has ever been fought. For example, it was the great Idealist Woodrow Wilson who packaged the US foray into the brutal Great War as "a crusade to make the world safe for democracy"[2]. It is this rhetoric that has remained the packing with which to wrap both Cold and Counter-Terror wars by Western power thereafter. However, what is prevalent in both these quotes is a notion of superiority, in such that one's view of what it means to be civilised is superior to the other inferior view and thus must be defended at all cost. For example, Wilson prioritises an American view of democracy over all inferior alternatives and the Corcyraeans place their view of what it means to be civilised as having 'most value'. It is as a result of this superior view of the self that a prejudice and racist view of the other as inferior occurs, and it is for this reason wars over what it means to be civilised, and thus all war occurs. In terms of how war ends; it is the view of this paper that this prejudice view of the other as inferior leads to all parties in war carrying out brutal and uncivilised acts against those they see as below their worth of civilisation. As stated by Hegel, "each consciousness pursues the death of the other"[3] and is for this reason that it shall be argued that all war, which occurs over what it means to be civilised, ends in a prejudice, brutal, and uncivilised manner which leaves it steep in irony. The layout of this essay shall now be outlined to give structure to the paper and increased clarity to the reader.

This paper shall be split into three sections. The first and second sections shall comprise of examples of war occurring over what it means to be civilised. These are the United States in Haiti (1915-1934) and the British against the Mau-Mau in Kenya (1952-1960). In these cases the prejudice and racist foundations behind why these wars occurred will be studied. This will provide empirical evidence to the notion that all war occurs as a fight over what it means to be civilised. Following this each example will clearly show the reader that all war ends in an ironic, brutal and uncivilised fashion. For example, the United States racist view of the Haitians and their use of forced labour and torture will be highlighted. Whist in the second example, the Mau-Mau's acts of mass murder and the British application of extreme violence and rehabilitation camps shall be presented in support of this notion. In the third section of the paper a critique of why wars occur and their ironic ends shall be raised and a recommendation of how war can be avoided, based around Booth's Utopian realism shall be posed. Finally, a comprehensive conclusion of the essay shall be outlined. However, first the US war in Haiti shall be studied.

To the American public, the Haitians were viewed as a "backward people in need of discipline and enlightenment"[4]. On a regular basis the public "shuddered at the lurid accounts of [Haitian] voodoo that frequently appeared in the popular press"[5]. In general the Haitian people were deemed an inferior other and in need of civilising. It was also troubling to the United States that this uncivilised other had autonomous self rule. This was because whoever had control of Haiti could effectively disrupt and control the flow of shipping into the newly opened, and vitally important, Panama Canal. Therefore, the US saw Haiti as not just a nation of savages, but of unstable savages that could disrupt US interests and thus needed to be civilised. It mattered not to President Woodrow Wilson, the famous advocate of liberal internationalism[6], liberty, equality and democracy, that the Republic of Haiti had been a "democratic and egalitarian"[7] system for over a century. Instead to Wilson and the American people, the Haitians were characterised as the uncivilised other. Racist terms such as "gook and nigger"[8] reinforced this stereotype and demonised the Haitians as a lesser form of humanity, a view that was even backed by the science of Social

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Darwinism at the time[9]. As a result, it was deemed by Wilson as his “moral responsibility”[10] to install an American and thus civilised democratic government on this “inferior people”[11]. However, it was not just the Americans who had an inferior view of the other. To the Haitians the notion of a superior and civilised United States did not exist. The Haitians has seen how the United States had acted when coming into contact with different races in the past. Many Haitians had come over from the United States to find sanctuary from slavery as free men from plantations in the mid and late 1800's. Others knew of the United States “long history of bloody military confrontations, first with the American Indians [then] Mexicans, Filipinos, Cubans, Dominicans”[12] and many more. Consequently, the Haitian people viewed the Americans as a barbarous, brutal and uncivilised other, who if invaded, would be fought against to preserve the Haitian view of what it means to be civilised. From these two examples it can be clearly seen that the resulting US- Haitian war was built on the prejudice and racist views of both parties which saw the other as an inferior and their own view of what it means to be civilised as superior. It is for his reason that war occurred between the two nations in 1915 and consequently ended steeped in a brutal and uncivilised irony as will now be explained.

The ironic brutality of this war was overtly present from both sides. For example, the war itself was forged on Haitian brutality against their pro-American President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam who was hunted down and “dragged from the French legation [where he sought safety] and publicly dismembered. Portions of his body were then paraded around the streets”[13]. Moreover, the Haitians Cacos nationalist Guerrillas are well documented for their vicious and violent ambushes. As one Medal of Honour recipients account states “the detachment was suddenly fired upon from 3 sides by about 400 Cacos concealed in bushes” [14]This was a regular, brutal and most fierce style of attack, which often involved hand to hand combat by the peasants who had “rose inarms to repel the Marine patrols” [15] However, the Haitian use of force was pale in comparison to the US Marines. For example, during what the US termed as the ‘bandit suppression’ the Marines “razed settlements and shot those whom they believed to be rebels and bandits”[16]. US figures conservatively suggest this policy resulted in the brutal death of over 3,000 Haitians[17]. However, Schmidt takes this assertion further by stating that the racist and prejudice brutality of the American forces in this war “frequently degenerated into torture...and military tactics tantamount to genocide”[18]. When addressed on why such uncivilised and brutal force was used against the Haitian public, one officer simply stated that;“ these people are not civilized”[19]. However, it was from this inferior view of the other as uncivilised that the US war in Haiti was steeped in more brutal irony. The most extreme example of this was not only the enforcement of racist Jim Crow segregation laws by the US, but instead the imposition of forced labour policies on the Haitian people; a policy which many scholars argue was tantamount to an uncivilised re-birth of slavery. For example the US Marines instigated a violent practice of condemning the formerly free Haitian civilians to uncivilised and “the brutal conditions of... marine-instituted road-building programs”[20]. And it was programs such as these which were indicative of how the US war in Haiti, and in fact how any war ends; steeped in a brutal irony. From these examples it has been clear to see that not only does war occur as a fight over what it means to be civilised but war also ends in the steeped in irony. To provide further support to these notions on why war occurs and how it ends, the British war against the Mau-Mau in Kenya shall now be studied.

As has been made clear throughout this essay, war occurs as a result of prejudice and racism from both sides who feel their view of civilisation is superior in comparison to the inferior other. This is a notion that is clearly supported by the British and the Mau-Mau reasons for why war occurred in 1952. It was the aim of the British Empire to spread civilisation across the world and “whatever resistance it encountered, was nonetheless a ‘civilizing’ one against incurably ‘backward’ peoples.”[21]. Therefore in 1952 when the Mau-Mau, a resistance group made up of largely Kikuyu people, began to launch attacks on the British and the loyalists who supported them it was automatically deemed by the British Governor of Kenya that these people were a “monstrous, nauseating wickedness...a resistance movement against decency and morality and indeed everything that distinguishes man from the carrion-eating replies” [22]It essence, it was the British view that if you were to fight against the Empire, then you were fighting against decency, morality and thus what it means to be civilised, thus making you an inferior, uncivilised savage. As Elkins states, the British viewed the Mau-Mau and its supporters as suffering from a “collective psychosis that invoked a complete rejection of civilization.” [23]In sum the British formed a racist demonization of the Mau-Mau and packaged a war against them as fight over what it means to be civilised. However, to the Mau-Mau the reason why war occurred was also a war civilisation.

Although the Mau-Mau have been demonised in history as a group which committed “secret and bestial oaths and

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unspeakable savagery" [24], it is fair to say that much of this was British propaganda to support their view of the uncivilised, inferior other. In reality, the majority of the Mau-Mau was made up of the largest tribe in Kenya named the Kikuyu. To Mau-Mau supporters the British were not the decent, moral and enlightened pinnacle of civilisation they proclaimed to be. The Kikuyu saw the British as a dominant and violent invading force that had taken their freedom, their highly spiritual and vital land and had ultimately destroyed their view of what it meant to be civilised. Proof of this comes from the fact that the Mau-Mau's main promise to those who joined its ranks was "ithaka na wiathi, literally translated as 'land and freedom', but better understood as self-mastery through land"[25] Therefore, from this quote it can be seen that the Mau-Mau were not the inferior savage they were proclaimed to be. Instead as Branch writes, "the Mau-Mau's promise to deliver 'freedom, land and every good thing [Kenyan's] wished to have"[26]. It was this which the Kenyan's saw as the civilisation, not the paternalistic, prejudice and racist dominance of the British. In sum, it is clear to see that this war, as in all war, occurred as a fight over what it means to be civilised. However, the conflict ended in an oxymoronically brutal, uncivilised and barbarous fashion for which both sides are guilty.

Whilst fighting for freedom, land and their view of what it means to be civilised the Mau-Mau fell into the ironic pit of uncivilised brutality against the British and fellow Kenyan's who had not joined their ranks. The Lari Massacre is one of many well documented examples of this barbarity. It was in March 1953 that the uncivilised barbarity was committed. Under the cover of darkness a group of armed Mau-Mau militants entered a Kikuyu settlement. Whilst the residence slept the Mau-Mau blocked the windows and doors of the wood huts. They then set them ablaze. Many who tried to escape were "hacked to death and others were mutilated by Mau-Mau insurgents" [27]. Consequently, "120 innocent Kikuyu men, women, and children" [28] were murdered that night. It is attacks such as this which highlight the ironic and uncivilised brutality in which all wars end. However, it was not just the Mau-Mau that was guilty of this behaviour.

It is often argued that during the war against the Mau-Mau the British Empire was "stripped of much of its romance, invincibility, and moral validity[29]". Consequently, it is said that the British lost its view of what it meant to be civilised whilst trying to save it. For example Elkins highlights how the British "launched several attacks that included wiping out an entire village of men, women, and elderly using bayonets, rifles, machine guns, and fire"[30]. It was brutal attacks such as this, along with aerial superiority and bombing campaigns by the RAF on the Mau-Mau forest camps, which resulted in the British virtually eradicating the Mau-Mau militants by 1956. However, this did not spell the end of the brutality against the perceived inferior other. The Hola Massacre is a recognised example of this uncivilised and oxymoronic end to war. It was from 1954, and the use of Operation Anvil, that the British began to brutally dominate in Kenya by rounding up all suspected Mau-Mau followers; men, women and children, and putting them into fortified camps as a way to control the population and put them through a rehabilitation process[31] to rid them of any traces of Mau-Mau inferiority. However, it was in 1959 at the Hola high security camp, for the most difficult Kenyan men, where a brutal and uncivilised incident occurred[32]. Here the Commandant, in an attempt to make the men carry out the uncivilised act of forced labour, authorised his guards to heavily beat those who refused. Therefore when many of the men fell down to their knees in protest against the forced work this uncivilised and ironic British order, which aimed to civilise these people, was put into practice. Extreme and barbaric force was used by the guards while hitting the men repeatedly with clubs and thus the order resulted in the barbaric death of eleven men and the savage hospitalisation of significantly more[33]. Overall from these examples it can be seen that the British attempted to defend its view of civilisation and the "continuity and survival of its own power' through suppression"[34]and brutality. Consequently, the example of both the Mau-Mau and the British in Kenya provides empirical proof that all wars occur as a fight over what it means to be civilised and end steeped in ironic uncivilised brutality of both sides whilst attempting to defeat the perceived inferior other. A critique of these wars, why they occur, how they end and how they can be stopped shall now be presented.

This paper has convincingly shown that war is packaged and displayed as a fight over what it means to be civilised, and it is for this reason that wars occur. As a result, these wars then end steeped in irony as both sides commit brutal uncivilised acts in the name of civilisation. However, the question that must be asked is, if we know why wars occur and how they end, then why does society not avoid them? Of course, Hegel would say that war cannot be avoided due to it being a 'state of nature' and thus is inevitable[35]. However, a Kantian view would suggest that, war is avoidable but only by looking up from the state 'Towards Perpetual Peace' from a regulatory international league of

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nations[36]. Although, Kant is closer to the fold by suggesting war is avoidable, neither of these is correct. Instead, it is the view of this paper that one must focus their attention down onto the individuals who make up these prejudice states that wage ironic uncivilised war over civilisation. As stated by Booth “ the answer to the question...‘what is war?’ is primarily cultural”[37]. Thus, war is a construct of society and if it constructed by society, why can it not be deconstructed and avoided? The way this paper proposes to achieve this is by making the brutal realities of war clear for all to see. Instead of being packaged as a war over what it mean to be civilised against the inferior and uncivilised other’, which makes it acceptable, it should be seen by the society as the unacceptable, uncivilised brutality against humanity that it is. Examples of this notion in reality can be seen through the public’s reaction to the Vietnam and Iraq wars. In both these conflicts war was packaged as a fight over what it means to be civilised, namely liberal capitalist democracy. However, when this social construct was exposed by the media as the ironic uncivilised brutality it is, the societies unpackaged the war mongering rhetoric and demanded the end to these wars. . As Booth states “people should be the primary referent, not the state”[38]. Thus it can be seen that society can change this social construct thus making war avoidable. Although, it is too early to provide substantive proof for this notion, and it is understood that it is Utopian in its aims, this does not mean it is not realistic; maybe the world is ready to return to a pre-Carr Utopian movement. In this world of the internet, social networking and twenty-four hour news it can only increase the chances that society see’s the brutal realities of war and thus in time unpackaged and condemn it to the annals of history where it belongs. A concluding section shall now be outlined.

Throughout this paper it has been convincingly argued that all war occurs as a fight over what it means to be civilised. The US war in Haiti and the British in Kenya were both clear examples of this. Whilst studying the US in Haiti it was found that both the Haitian and American people view one-another as the inferior and uncivilised other; thus making their own view of civilisation superior and worthy of defence, no matter the cost. In a similar vein the Mau-Mau in Kenya saw the British view of civilisation as brutal and savage; whereas the British saw the Mau-Mau as a backwards and savage society. In sum, all parties saw their view of what it means to be civilised as superior and in need of defence at any cost. Therefore, when war occurred in each case, it was ultimately a fight over what it means to be civilised. In terms of how war ends, well this paper concludes that all war ends steep in irony. This is because although all war is fought over what it means to be civilised, it ends in ironically brutality and uncivilised violence against the perceived inferior other. The American use of uncivilised forced labour, subjugation and brutality against the Haitians was confirmation of this. Moreover, the Haitian gruesome murder of pro-American leaders and violent ambushes against the US provides increased support to this notion. Furthermore, in the second example the Mau-Mau application of mass-murder against those loyal to the British, as well the British implementation of uncivilised and brutal detention camps, give further verification of this notion. In the final section a critique of war and somewhat utopian recommendations for how it can be avoided was made. Here it was argued in support of Booth, that war is a social and cultural construct. As a result, it was stated that one much look to society to deconstruct and see war as the ironic brutality it is and thus reject it as a legitimate and acceptable state act. Overall from all the examples studied in this paper it can be convincingly stated that war occurs as a fight over what it means to be civilised and consequently due to this brutal and uncivilised nature, ends invariably steeped in irony.

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