

**Roberto Vivo, *War: A Crime Against Humanity*, Buenos Aires: Hojas del Sur, 2014. Pp. 335. Paperback.**

The traditional approach of accepting war as military occurrence of historical happenstance led to the just war theorem and the intellectual view that the acts committed during war can only be considered a crime when committed without military necessity. This explains why an online search for the title of Vivo's book re-directs the researcher to books on war crimes and genocide studies, although it should be clustered with literature on peace studies, or possibly even philosophical studies inquiring into the origins and character of human violence and war. Vivo's central point though, is not the single war crime committed and traced to a specific individual, but that the crime of engaging in war itself (similar to the crime of murder) warrants severe punishment. Vivo's study of the history of war shows that between 50% and 90% of its victims are civilians and therefore, so he argues, waging and participating in war is a crime against humanity.

Chapter 1, entitled "Violence and Man" builds up the foundation for any subsequent debating over social or legal terms of the claimed inevitability of war. Vivo offers an intriguing paleo-anthropological approach to this question by taking us on a journey through 8,000 years of evolving human societies. He traces the shaping of socialization from the nomadic hunters through sedentary agriculture, to the cultural, ethnical, religious and historical concepts we use when considering humankind today. He posits that we can identify the origins of war in the changing nature of society, and not the nature of human beings.<sup>1</sup> He proceeds to weave his preliminary conclusions in with philosophical works of Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Rifkin before laying out the full circle of his critique of the modern politics of war-mongering against "terrorists". Vivo offers an explanation how the socialization and indoctrination of the common citizen can lead to the comprehension of other peoples and nations as enemies. The forms of state-orchestrated manipulations of public opinion, so Vivo argues, will continue to dehumanize the "enemies" and lead to degenerate forms of state violence and social encouragement of hatred of the "others". He reminds the reader that in modern wars "at least half to three-quarters of all victims are [unarmed] civilians" who died only for the "racial ethnic or politico-religious hatred" that was seeded by states. No matter how justified by conventional norms of military necessity, or how "just" a war is declared, in the end "state violence is "democide", a form of genocide in which the unarmed civilians are exterminated because they are treated as enemies of state-led wars. Vivo does not shy back from denouncing the proposition that leaders can resort to war with impunity under just war declarations, when indeed by the nature of destruction, war is the ultimate form of state terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

His rather depressing conclusion about nature and causes of war, leads up to Chapter 2, "The History of Peace"--an effort to juxtapose long periods of peace in human history, that represent forms of peaceful co-existence, as alternatives to the politics of war. This chapter is a whirlwind tour of all major religions: the "golden rule" of ethical reciprocity and the call for universal love can be identified as common denominator in all major religions that shape the societies of the modern world. Vivo's discussion of ancient religions is followed by tracing the manifestations of peaceful coexistence including, modern declarations of equality of every citizen, movements of liberty and democracy and the championing of diplomatic relations during the Cold War. He closes with a critical analysis of the missions of the supra-national institutions that were created to promote these objectives, and the structural and political problems that plague them, starting his review with the inception of the League of Nations after World War I.

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<sup>1</sup> Vivo, *War: A Crime Against Humanity* (2014), 30-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

While recognizing the peace-making initiatives fostered by the global community as represented in the UN, he points at the limited success of establishing lasting world peace.

In Chapter 3, entitled “Open Society and Closed Society”, Vivo provides an excellent study of the potential for war in open versus closed societies. Again, Vivo does not just state something by the power of theoretical acclamation but offers ample historic information on the origins and the features of liberal and conservative thought, on important spiritual movements and on forms of political radicalism and fundamentalism. It is shown how political fundamentalism is often manifested in spiritual motivations. Vivo locates the chance for peace in the roles that secularization played in history, claiming that it helped to mediate between fundamental beliefs and created opportunities of de-confrontation.

In Chapter 4, entitled “War: A Crime Against Humanity”, Vivo gives a detailed account of dehumanizing and violent societies, explaining using examples of slavery, torture and racism, how the defence of the status-quo leads to war. Despite the legal attempts to condemn such wars as crimes of aggression, those same “supreme international laws” offer loopholes for war criminals. His claim made at the end of Chapter 2, namely, that the role of the Security Council, left the UN “virtually powerless for resolving disputes in which any of the Security Council members have a stake in” and that these “intentional weaknesses” of the UN serves states “that wish to keep their war-making options open and to avoid prosecution for their unjustifiable aggressions”<sup>3</sup>, is further explained in Chapter 4. He questions the integrity of western geopolitics of racist double standards when it comes to war in Africa, the Middle-East and Asia. Vivo declares that any justification for war in the name of peace is an oxymoron that modern humankind should refuse to accept as means of civilized interaction between nations. He meticulously traces the hypocrisy of U.S. foreign politics since 1945 by revisiting the changing justifications employed for wars fought, for example, in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq, to conclude that none of these wars was in the name of peace nor did they create peace, but that only the justification changed with shifting theaters of these self-proliferated conflicts and proxy-wars. Vivo’s judgment is clear: politicians who highhandedly resort to war and announce to their own electorate that illegal invasions of other countries and destruction of the economic bases of civilian life and of cultural treasures of humanity in far distant lands can be fought in the name of peace by bringing war to these countries, are the greatest obstacle to world peace. Vivo critically analyses the role of the UN’s human rights bodies and that of the ICC in prosecuting such war crimes. Vivo cautions that, no matter how much supra-national institutions try to provide “justice”, law makers try to define crimes in laws, or so-called multi-lateral defence organizations proclaim to be able to enforce these laws, war remains an “aberration from an ethical and legal standpoint” that cannot be judged in the trial of individuals. “War always implies the violent deaths of innocent people, the annihilation of all rights of those who are unable to defend themselves” and therefore, a well-argued case for “just war” cannot be made.<sup>4</sup>

The approach of introducing the reader to historic events, people, institutions, philosophical and theological concepts, to the main religions and ideologies, not for the sake of covering history as ‘how it really was’ but to show to what it really led to, allows Vivo to identify important arguments against the “just war” theory. Certain conditions of social development always pose a threat to peace. Examples of war in history, become the evidence for human fragility--the potential of being manipulated into beliefs that war could be justified. As Vivo rightly points out, big changes do not occur quickly. All revolutionary change in human history starts with a change of mind, with the re-thinking of old concepts and with the acceptance of a need for change. Human nature longs for peace and all religions ask us to treat others - being individuals or

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 263.

nations - the way you want to be treated yourself. Therefore, considering war as a socially and politically acceptable alternative to peaceful means of conflict solution needs a re-conceptualization.

Vivo vetoes ill-guided notions of just war theory and identifies the hypocrisy of war rhetoric. Vivo criticizes the trend observable among modern countries to intensify re-armament and to look for technological means of circumventing accepted international criminal and war crimes law. His open call for an abolition of war fits well into the growing literature that takes a closer look at the causes and means of modern warfare.<sup>5</sup> He observes that geo-political and economic reasons are still easily employed to justify illegal warfare and proxy wars in modern times. In a world that provides most sophisticated means and technologies to use communication, diplomacy and negotiation, mediation and concessions, he outright dismisses the claim that just-war theory has still a place in our civilized and so often proclaimed democratic societies. It is no wonder that the most prominent addressees of his critique are the supposedly most civilized and greatest democracies on this globe, the USA and the allies of Europe.

Vivo's *War: A Crime Against Humanity* is a refreshing recap of major historical events. It uses human history to explain the origin of war, the conditions under which conflicts evolve in war, and to analyze the pro-war and just war arguments swiftly for their validity. Vivo's study is the best and most meticulously researched condensation of arguments against war and on the topic of war and laws of war(fare). I hope Vivo's study will result in more research of the interacting dynamics of international confrontation and war. Just as Lemkin's path-breaking definition of genocide as an singling-out of a specific victim-group led to a better understanding of human rights in general and of racism, homophobia and anti-semitism specifically, so the waging of war should be understood as "democide", as the intentional victimization of unarmed civilians as its major casualty - or in new English "collateral damage" of warfare. Further, Vivo's multi-faceted analysis of the conditions and justifications of war should evoke significant controversy among scholars, and hopefully, lead to new approaches to teaching the history of war in the spirit of the rising importance of interdisciplinary studies.

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<sup>5</sup> Russell Faure-Brac, *Transition to Peace* (2012); Douglas Fry, *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace* (2009); Winslow Myers, *Living Beyond War* (2009); John Horgan, *The End of War* (2012); Laurie Calhoun, *War and Delusion: A Critical Examination* (2013); Judith Hand, *Shift: The Beginning of War, the Ending of War* (2013).