‘War is never civilised’: civilisation, civil society and the Kosovo war

Introduction

‘War is never civilised’. British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared on 10 June 1999, ‘but war can be necessary to uphold civilisation.’ On that day, seventy-eight days of war were brought to an end by the assertion that they had secured the principles on which the post-Cold War European order was founded. For that reason the Kosovo war provides an opportunity to study what the West believes to be the foundation of a new European order. This opportunity should be used because the reflexive confusion which followed the end of the Cold War finally seems to have settled into a new kind of political order. To appreciate how the West is constructing this order should be of concern to anyone who wants to understand what the twenty-first century has to offer European politics.

In the context of the debate on the futures of European order, Blair’s construction of the Kosovo war may be seen as an illustration of Samuel Huntington’s scenario of some forthcoming ‘clash of civilisations’. Was Blair not arguing that, while war has ceased to be a means of politics in the relations between Western states, the West’s relations with other civilisations do – at least occasionally – involve war? However, the construction of the Kosovo war as a defence of civilisation does not seem to vindicate such a reading of the emerging post-Cold War world. On the contrary, Huntington’s conception of civilisation is merely the culmination of a long tradition of conceiving government – as well as relations between governments – in terms of civilisation. This tradition began with the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment (particularly Adam Ferguson), and culminated in Immanuel Kant’s conception of the pacific federation of liberal governments as the cosmopolitan purpose of history. The centrepiece of this tradition is the construction of government in terms of civil society. In order to understand how the West came to see the Kosovo war as necessary for the upkeep of civilisation, both the concept of civilisation
and the notion of international politics it constructs should be carefully analysed.

Civilisation and civil society

Adam Ferguson coined the term ‘civil society’ in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (first published in 1767). In today’s idiom, Ferguson described how modern society, with its elaborate division of labour, shapes both domestic and international order. The division of labour, he argued, was a prerequisite to an organic society that allowed social institutions independent of the state. In their turn, these institutions would produce a truly free society, whose organic nature was believed to encourage creativity and progress. Ferguson’s work, therefore, implied a clear link between the notion of civil society and the concept of ‘civilisation’. Ferguson suggested that civil society was the vehicle of civilisation, being the result of what Norbert Elias was to term the ‘civilising process’.

Civilisation is an understanding of society as history, an understanding which developed from the same Enlightenment belief in progress and freedom through social organisation by which Ferguson defined civil society. Kant developed and sharpened these ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, and argued that the peaceful nature of civil society could be preserved only if the liberal governments of civil societies would join in what he labelled a ‘pacific federation’.

In 1999, the West believed itself to have realised such a pacific federation, and its bombing campaign was supposed to defend this cosmopolitan peace. French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin could therefore wholeheartedly agree with his British counterpart that intervening militarily in Kosovo was the answer to a profound challenge to Europe’s identity:

> For decades Europe, at any rate our Europe, has been being rebuilt on new foundations of peace, respect for human rights. To accept the flouting of these values on the European Union’s doorstep would have meant betraying ourselves. What is at stake in today’s conflict is a certain conception of Europe. Do we accept the return of barbarism on our continent or do we rise up against it? For us, the choice is clear.

This makes it obvious that ‘Europe’ is constructed as more than a matter of geography. To Western leaders like Jospin and Blair, ‘their’ Europe represents a certain monopoly of civilisation. By challenging this Western claim, the Milosevic regime not only came to represent ‘barbarism’ in the eyes of the West, but was questioning the very mechanisms by which the West defined ‘Europe’. In other words, the conflict in Kosovo did not threaten the physical borders of Europe, but it seriously challenged the West European notion of ‘Europe’.

But who were Jospin and Blair to define the nature of Europe? As Huntington would be the first to point out, ‘European civilisation’, on behalf
of which they were speaking, was only one voice in a cacophony of civilisational identities. Serbia ostensibly fought for the interests of the ‘Orthodox’ civilisation, and Russia half-heartedly supported its ‘Slav brothers’. From this perspective, one might argue that the Kosovo war was not the triumph of civilisation (as proclaimed by Blair), but the first, nasty glimpse of a world in which political (and occasionally armed) conflict stems from mutually exclusive identities. Huntington argues that the West cloaks its particular civilisation interests in universalism, which makes Western political leaders (including the likes of Jospin and Blair) blind to the fact that their interests, values and norms are at odds with those of many other Europeans – not to speak of peoples in other parts of the world. However, there is no such thing as an objective or stable identity. If a community of nations constructs its (collective) identity around the notion of ‘the West’, defining it in universal terms, then this is certainly relevant and ‘true’ for that community. Other states and peoples may construct other (and competing) identities, but these do not make the construction of ‘the West’ less relevant and ‘true’. What matters for our discussion here, is whether Huntington’s assertion that any identity (including the Western one) is inherently in conflict with other identities is correct. If Huntington is right, then the fight against ‘barbarism’ inevitably follows from Western identity, and the Kosovo war is the prelude to a new century of civilisational conflict. However, if Huntington is wrong, the Kosovo war may show that Europe is on its way to a cosmopolitan peace which may well rule out war as a means of international politics.

This essay pursues these questions by adopting a constructivist conception of international relations (IR). Huntington meets the constructivist argument half way, since he claims that politics is shaped by the cultural identities of governments. He differs from constructivists by arguing that the basis of these identities can be objectively defined in terms of the concept of ‘civilisation’. Huntington’s argument works according to what James March and Johan Olsen term ‘the logic of consequentiality’. For Huntington, the purpose of IR theory is to establish categories (such as ‘civilisations’) that are supposed to explain and even predict the future development of global politics. Constructivism rejects the viability of this kind of universal theory, arguing that agents do not follow a pre-programmed schedule but are influenced by the events and rules of action which constitute social institutions. Constructivist studies therefore survey what March and Olsen term the ‘logics of appropriateness’.

The study of IR is – primarily, but not exclusively – the study of governmental actions. Constructivism asks by what rules states define ‘appropriate action’. Huntington argues that different civilisations cherish different notions of what is ‘appropriate’, explaining these differences by referring to the impact of civilisation. As I argue below, that position is untenable, but for now it is important to notice that Huntington’s assertion is basically of
a constructivist nature. The question therefore remains whether there is some other way to conceptualise political appropriateness. Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ offers a solution. ‘Governmentality’ assumes that the governmental system is constructed and that it is possible to study this construction as a totality. Foucault rejects the notion that politics should be segregated from other social institutions in order to gain insight into the workings of government. On the contrary, he argues that government does not only concern politics, but also the government of the self: the way a nation is governed and the way individuals govern their own behaviour are parts of the same construction. This observation springs from a study Foucault conducted on the historical sociology of the state in which he points out that the development of the modern sovereign state has gone hand in hand with the separation of the public from the private sphere. By conceiving ‘the West’ as a configuration of governmentality rather than as a civilisation, we may better understand that the notion of civilisation is the manifestation, rather than the explanation, of the West’s construction of appropriate government in post-Cold War Europe.

This essay, first, describes the way Huntington constructs civilisation. It then argues that this construction is the manifestation of the governmentality of civil society; and it concludes that this governmentality can explain the Western construction of the Kosovo war.

‘Who are you?’

Like other constitutive texts of the post-Cold War world (such as Francis Fukuyama’s The End of History and the Last Man), Huntington suggests that the end of the Cold War has been a moment of becoming. But whereas Fukuyama argues that the collapse of communism has made states essentially similar, Huntington claims that states are becoming essentially dissimilar, mainly because they define their interests by virtue of collective identities that are mutually exclusive. He argues that during the ideological confrontations of the twentieth century, the identity of an agent (be it the individual or the state) was defined by the answer given to the question ‘Which side are you on?’ In the post-Cold War world, that question has been replaced by the much more complex and ambiguous question ‘Who are you?’

Working within the realist understanding of IR, Huntington suggests that the sources of (armed) conflict remain basically unchanged, although the construction of these conflicts is now increasingly driven by identity. This is bad news, according to Huntington, because identity is constituted by conflict: ‘Identity at any level – personal, tribal, racial, civilisational – can only be defined in relation to an ‘other’, a different person, tribe, race, or civilization.’ Now that the history of ideological struggle has come to a close,
the state and its political system are no longer able to dominate people's identity, opening up new possibilities for personal, ethnic, religious and other, non-state-centred, processes of identity formation. For Huntington, civilisation has become the defining level of identity. He defines civilisation as follows: 'The civilization to which he [the individual] belongs is the broadest level of identification with which he strongly identifies. Civilizations are the biggest 'we' within which we feel culturally at home as distinguished from all the other 'thems' out there.'

The Cold War provided the West with an 'other' through which it could clearly define itself. But now that the Cold War has been 'won', Huntington fears that the West will succumb to complacency because it believes that its 'universal values' will inevitably come to dominate global politics. The West may no longer see itself as a subject of history, he argues, but many other peoples are defining their identities in juxtaposition to 'the West'. Huntington lists the usual suspects: Islamic fundamentalism, Chinese revivalism and Russian revanchism. Since these 'civilisations' can define themselves only in conflict with their Western 'other', the West itself will have to overcome its complacency and re-engage itself in history. Otherwise, he argues, the West will cease to be a subject of history and become an object of the history of others.

Huntington therefore considers Western attempts to enlarge the geographical scope of European integration as at best futile, at worst a process that may weaken Western civilisation. 'Europe', he claims, can not be (and therefore should not be) redefined by politics, since politics has to be based on the 'fact' that Europe's (geographical) west is part of a different civilisation than Europe's east. The enlargement of NATO and the EU may try to redress this situation, but 'Europe' (as a civilisation) can never include the Slavs: 'Europe ends where Western Christianity ends and Islam and Orthodoxy begins.' Huntington therefore suggests that EU membership will be awarded to states within the Western Christian sphere, but that the defining act of political organisation will be NATO enlargement: 'NATO is the security organisation of Western civilization. With the Cold War over, NATO has one central and compelling purpose: to ensure that it remains over by preventing the reimposition of Russian political and military control in Central Europe.'

Huntington’s thesis suggests that the conflict of identity between self and other which defines civilisation almost inevitably leads to political and armed conflict. This 'logic' has been strongly criticised. Stephen Walt, for example, rightly complains that 'Huntington never explains why conflict is more likely to arise between civilisations than within them'. The explanation, I would suggest, is that Huntington conceives of civilisation in terms of peace. States within a civilisation may not feel the same need to resort to war as to a 'continuation of politics' because they (are supposed to) act in a conforming manner and do not present each other with an 'other' which
needs to be resisted and contested. Following Huntington’s logic, this suggests that within each civilisation there is a relatively good chance of peace. This interpretation explains Huntington’s rather peculiar conjecture that Africa is the only continent without a distinctive civilisation. With sub-Saharan Africa riveted by war within and between states, the continent hardly qualifies as a ‘realm of peace’. This point is underlined by the fact that sub-Saharan Africa does not have a common religion which could hold the region together.

Religion is an important element (though not the exclusive factor it is sometimes claimed to be) of Huntington’s definition of civilisation. Huntington constructs religion as a gospel of peace, as it preaches harmony and reconciliation among its followers. If people share a religion, they are also likely to share an understanding (or at least have compatible understandings) of peace. Indeed, in the case of Christianity and Islam, the realm of the faithful has traditionally been defined in terms of peace, whereas relations with the infidels were defined in terms of war. To Huntington, civilisation is thus a community of peace achieved through conflict with ‘others’. But why does Huntington believe peace depends on collective values?

The civilisation of civil society

The reason why Huntington defines civilisation in terms of peace becomes apparent when one turns to his definition of Western civilisation. He makes a distinction between the material and pop-cultural elements of Western civilisation and what he calls ‘core values’, those elements of civilisation that make the West ‘the West’. ‘The essence of Western civilisation’, he holds, ‘is the Magna Carta not the Magna Mac.’ Arguing along these lines, Huntington places himself firmly within the German conception of *Kultur* (culture), especially in the way it was presented by Oswald Spengler. Nevertheless, he goes to great lengths to disassociate his concept of ‘civilisation’ from *Kultur*. This contradiction in Huntington’s thought demonstrates his purpose for the concept of civilisation and how it reflects a very Western concept of political identity.

Huntington defines ‘the West’ in terms of social and political values:
• the classical legacy;
• Catholicism and Protestantism;
• the separation of spiritual and temporal authority;
• the rule of law;
• social pluralism;
• representative democratic bodies; and
• individuality.29

Huntington has been criticised for dismissing the state as an agent of international relations.30 Given his broad definition of Western civilisation, this
is hardly fair. One could even argue that Huntington makes an effort to define what makes Western states unique. This uniqueness is the product of history, and his list of Western characteristics can therefore be read as a timeline describing how the West starts off in antiquity, solidifies in Christendom, matures in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and culminates in the democratic societies of NATO. Reasoning along these temporal lines, Huntington reproduces what David Gress has identified as the grand narrative of ’the West’. The West, Gress tells us, is an ancient reference to the land of promise in European culture. The West is not constructed as a subject of history, but rather as an entity that can shape its own history by virtue of its superior values. As such, the notion of the West defines what is best in the civilisation Huntington terms ’Western’.

Gress argues that it was through the First World War I that ’the West’ acquired its current meaning, as a reference to the north Atlantic community of democratic nations. After Russia had left the war and the United States had joined it, it was possible to give the endless battles in Flanders meaning by constructing them as a struggle of democratic nations against German ’autocracy’. US President Woodrow Wilson, for example, argued that the war had been brought about by a German governmentality in which the use of force was considered a legitimate extension of politics. At the beginning of the war, Wilson believed that the ultimate source of the conflict could be found in the balance-of-power system and that the war could be stopped by revising that system. However, when Germany rejected his peace proposals and had stepped up its submarine warfare, Wilson came to believe that the war was the result not so much of the workings of the balance of power as of the very nature of German governance. Where the US and its allies came to see ’the Kaiser’ as the symbol of an aggressive society, ’democracy’ was deemed to be the culmination of an historical process. As such, it was not the European order that had to be changed: it was Germany itself which had to be forced to adopt democratic principles of government which had progressively generated freer and more peaceful societies. The conclusion to be drawn was that democracies were peaceful not because they were democracies, but because democracy as a system of government was the culmination of a long-term civilising process.

As mentioned earlier, this notion of a ’civilising process’ has been developed by Elias, who described the same practice as does Foucault in his concept of governmentality: the historical process whereby a public sphere is created which sets new standards for how individuals are supposed to govern their behaviour and how the state is supposed to govern its subjects. One of the clearest examples of such a (joint) process is how the state has tried to monopolise the exercise of violence within society. In seventeenth-century Europe, most men of standing were carrying side-arms and were allowed to use them under certain circumstances. This practice showed that violence was a right, and occasionally even a duty of private persons,
mainly because the lack of public order, and state-organised violence – ranging from standing armies to the actions of police forces – made it necessary for individuals (as well as for society in general) to depend upon private violence. In the course of the seventeenth century, this situation changed as the state gradually assumed the monopoly of violence. The state assumed the responsibilities hitherto held by individuals, who were now compelled not to use force against each other. This process is continuing to this very day, as more and more acts of violence are delegitimised in the private sphere. The right of the head of a household to punish servants, as well as his wife and children, has disappeared to the point where some governments have prohibited parents from physically disciplining their own children.

In 1767, Ferguson described the development of the monopoly of violence as a constitutive part of the division of labour within the emerging ‘civil society’ of Britain. ‘Through Hegel’s use of this term, civil society is now widely regarded as the private elements of society (e.g., the economy or social movements). But, as Ernest Gellner, John Hall and John Keane have pointed out, Ferguson originally used the notion of civil society to delineate the separation of public and private functions as the unique characteristic of a new kind of society. Ferguson described a certain Western governmentality based on an increasing division of labour which allowed for the diversification of society’s resources, a process that would in turn result in increased wealth. As a former military chaplain, he was interested in the relationship between the norms of army and society, and considered it crucial that each man was no longer required to defend himself and his family, since this would allow him to specialise in other professions. The state’s monopoly of violence therefore produced a civil nation in which political and military power were separated. Such a civil society, Ferguson argued, was characterised by ‘peace and regular policy’. Civil society was peaceful because the monopoly of violence had made warfare the monopoly of the state, thus allowing the domestic relations of citizens to be guided by peace. As Elias would later point out, both the manners of people and the manner in which individuals relate to each other were being transformed, thus making society ever more civil. As the state was no longer dominated by a violent struggle for power, domestic policy was stabilised, allowing for cultural sophistication, commerce and progress, which all depended heavily on law and order. Civil society was thus characterised by an evolution which accumulated ever more civility. This notion of a society striving for perfectibility is the link between civil society and civilisation.

Ferguson was one of the first thinkers to use the English term ‘civilisation’. To him, civil society was the sociological manifestation of civilisation. Civil society was a description of the nature of a given society and the dynamics by which that society developed. As civilisation, civil society represented ‘an ideal order of human society’, an order which was considered...
'ideal’ because it was supposed to have history on its side.\textsuperscript{42} Kant described the culmination of history as the realisation of a true civil society, and argued that war could be abolished since the increasing civility of and among states would guarantee the peaceful settlement of disputes.\textsuperscript{43} When civil societies had created a ‘pacific federation’, Kant concluded, they would be able to look back on history as if its very purpose had been to create a ‘cosmopolitan system of general political security’.\textsuperscript{44}

To summarise: the West is not a civilisation. But it may define itself as civilisation, and this definition constitutes a governmentality. After the First World War, the West was defined in terms of civil society, which in turn was defined in terms of civilisation. Gress shows how the West became constructed as the culmination of civilisation: ‘the West’ was constructed as the system of cosmopolitan security which Kant had argued would be the culmination of human history. Therefore, the alliance of democracies that came into being after the Second World War was regarded not only as an alliance of states but as the culmination of Western civilisation.\textsuperscript{45} History, Gress ironically points out, was constructed as a progression ‘from Plato to NATO’.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, when NATO acted as it did on the Kosovo issue, it acted on the belief that its bombing campaign was enforcing Kant’s idea of a ‘cosmopolitan system of general political security’.

The cosmopolitan soul of Europe

The West will have to realise, Huntington argues, that ‘its Europe’ is fundamentally different from ‘Orthodox Europe’, the Europe of Russia and, indeed, of Serbia. Between these ‘two Europes’ there is either conflict (of all sorts) or mutual recognition, but never the possibility of comprehensive and peaceful integration. The war over Kosovo showed that the West did not construct Europe that way. As I mentioned earlier, Prime Minister Jospin constructs ‘Europe’ as a governmentality rather than as a geographical or geopolitical notion. To Jospin, Europe is the result of a civilising process which started in the West after the Second World War and by 1999 had resulted in a definition of Europe as a cosmopolitan political system. The Kosovo war was therefore not a way of drawing the line between this cosmopolitical Europe and the ‘barbarians’ (the ‘other’). On the contrary, the Kosovo war was undertaken to secure the civilising process in Central and Eastern Europe. Robin Cook, Britain’s foreign secretary, argued in The Guardian that there are now two Europes competing for the soul of our continent. One still follows the race ideology that blighted our continent under the fascists. The other emerged fifty years ago out from behind the shadow of the Second World War. The conflict between the international community and Yugoslavia is the struggle between these two Europes.\textsuperscript{47}
Cook obviously agrees with Jospin that the West could not accept ‘barbarism’ in one part of Europe and have civilisation in another. There could be only one Europe, and this Europe had to be civilised. But what did this manifestation of ‘barbarism’ signify? Jospin as well as Cook defined ‘barbarism’ as a lapse into the ‘Europe of the past’. In 1999, the West had become used to the construct of the Second World War as the close of its past barbarity, a barbarity now left behind by the civilising process. The Second World War had brought out the evil of human society in the shape of fascism, and the West had barely been able to defeat it. Fascism had been able to flourish because of the ongoing confrontation between European states, and, in the words of the former British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, ‘a Europe of nation-states always signified a Europe of war’. Only by removing the state as the sole source of government in Europe could a new governmentality be introduced, one that did not automatically lead to war. This argument shows a remarkable consistency in the way the process of European integration has been conceived from the time of the Schuman plan to the 1990s. ‘The European Common Market’, Christopher Coker remarks, was ‘a “civilising process” that was intended to render Europe at peace with itself for the first time.’ In the late 1990s, this civilising process was believed to have produced a new European governmentality, a new ‘Europe’.

In 1999, Western governments believed that this civilising process had delivered them from their past and had introduced a ‘cosmopolitan system of general political security’. The end of the Cold War had ensured that the civilised ways of the West were the only game by which European politics could be played. However, the Serbian regime had shown otherwise, and by doing so it denied entirely the claim that European politics had been truly transformed. This would not have been the case had Serbia been constructed as part of an antagonistic ‘Orthodox’ civilisation. In that case, Serb violence against ‘Muslims’ within Kosovo would have proved that civilisations were indeed in conflict, and that very conflict would have constructed ‘Orthodox’ Serbs and ‘Muslim’ Kosovar Albanians as the West’s ‘other’. However, as it turned out, the West had no ‘other’ in Europe. There was no other Europe for the West but the Europe of the past. The methods of the Serb army and militias therefore constituted a more massive and serious provocation than the atrocities in Rwanda (a few years earlier), or the conduct of the Russian army in Chechnya (a few months later). The notion of Europe’s own non-civilised past was so present in the Western construction of its own European political project that, faced with the non-civilised ways of the Serbian government, the West felt it had to act in order to secure its own future.

There was no ‘other’ in the construction of European identity because that identity was defined in terms of cosmopolitan integration. The West believed itself to have moved beyond the Europe of the nation state, but what rules of government (‘governmentality’) constituted this ‘modern Europe’? During
the Kosovo war, Prime Minister Blair probably came closest to defining this new governmentality when he spoke, in April 1999 in Chicago, about ‘a wider context’ in which the events of Kosovo should be placed, a context he defined as that of ‘globalisation’. The interdependence of the world’s economies, Blair argued, was only the ‘most obvious’ manifestation of the new governmentality since we ‘are all internationalists now’. The West could no longer define itself only as a community of nation states as the very governmentality of these Western states themselves had become cosmopolitan. Blair agreed with his Foreign Secretary that cosmopolitanism had been created during the Cold War, but that it was only at that time, during the Kosovo campaign, that this historical civilising process had come into its own:

We are witnessing the beginnings of a new doctrine of international community. By this I mean the explicit recognition that today more than ever before we are mutually dependent, that national interest is to a significant extent governed by international collaboration and that we need a clear and coherent debate as to the direction this doctrine takes us in each field of international endeavour. Just as within domestic politics, the notion of community – the belief that partnership and co-operation are essential to advance self-interest – is coming into its own; so it needs to find its own international echo.

By arguing that in today’s Europe the national interests of states are defined by ‘liberal’ cosmopolitan rules, Blair’s Chicago speech offers a fine description of what Alexander Wendt has termed a ‘Kantian culture’. Although ‘national interests’ are routinely invoked by Western leaders, the states to which these interests attach are believed to have gone through a civilising process. West European societies have transcended their past war-like nature and have adopted a practice of ‘international collaboration’. International action is no longer guided by the transhistorical notion of ‘national interests’, but is instead dominated by the ‘international echo’ of domestic politics. In a sense, the civilising process has created ‘a new Europe’.

Arguing along these lines in his Chicago Speech, Prime Minister Blair thus invoked Ferguson’s notion that individual societies would gradually transform into an international community. Western governmentality is now constructed in cosmopolitan terms and the formulation of national interests has become subject to the rules of a new cosmopolitan system. ‘If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society’, Blair argued, ‘then that is in our national interest too.’

Taken together, the values he was referring to are constitutive of a true civil society. But why should the West want to spread civil communality? Because, Blair argued, ‘the spread of our values makes us safer’, since states that share civil values will eventually integrate into a democratic community and, following the logic of his new international community, will subscribe to ‘the belief that partnership and co-operation are essential to advance self-interest’. This system of cosmopolitan security would make armed conflict
extremely unlikely because ‘the principle of international community applies also to international security’.55

To Blair, globalisation allows the ‘domestic peace and regular policy’ of civil society to become the constitutive elements of European politics. Globalisation is thus constructed as a process of transcendence, a process which replaces the old rules of power politics with the novel rules of a cosmopolitan community.56 As such, globalisation is a late-modern concept which invokes the Enlightenment belief in the possibility of integrating civil societies into a cosmopolitan system. To the West, globalisation is proof that history is coming to an end and that a cosmopolitan system is emerging. Since history has been defined by war, as Kant has argued, history would end if civil societies would translate their ‘domestic peace and regular policy’ into such a cosmopolitan system. In this context, the notion of globalisation signifies that the West now seems to believe that this transcendence of international anarchy is currently being constructed, and that this cosmopolitan system in the making is both possible and desirable. When Blair argued that the Kosovo war was fought to protect civilisation, he was arguing that this was a war against the ‘Europe of the past’, a war to ensure the continuation and completion of a post-historical Europe. The Kosovo war was a key part of the civilising process securing the future for a ‘cosmopolitan system’ of civil societies in Europe.

**Concluding remarks**

One might argue that the West constructed the Kosovo war in terms of civilisation by default. As the bombing campaign had only the shakiest of foundations in international law, the West realised that its legal arguments were weak and that it was therefore time to use the heavy rhetoric of civilisation. This illustrates the political importance, rather than the emptiness, of the concept of civilisation. If the notion of civilisation can justify illegal military actions, then civilisation holds a very powerful position in the minds of Western political leaders and apparently also in the minds of the peoples they represent. And as war allegedly starts in the minds of men, civilisation is a concept that should be given serious attention.

Huntington has, almost single-handedly, placed this question of civilisation on the agenda of IR. Most students of IR are likely to turn to Huntington in order to explain Prime Minister Blair’s statement that ‘war can be necessary to uphold civilisation’. According to Huntington, civilisations are basically identities of peace, but conflict (including armed conflict) with an ‘other’ is necessary for civilisations to define the values which render them at peace among themselves. Following this argument, one is left to conclude that the Kosovo war showed peace in Western Europe to exclude peace with states in Eastern Europe and beyond. The West’s rejection of the universal values
of international law thus shows that the time for the particular identities of civilisation has come. It also suggests that this time will be one of war.

This line of argument has forced many students of IR to reply that the very notion of civilisation is the problem. For those critics, the Kosovo war proves that civilisation is a very dangerous concept because it excludes political solutions that go beyond established categories of exclusion and is obviously unable to include Western civilisation’s ‘other’. This, so these critics argue, is a mechanism leading directly to war. This essay has argued that while Huntington’s conception of civilisation is basically flawed, ‘civilisation’ nevertheless remains important for the way the West understands international politics. One will therefore have to focus on civilisation on its own terms in order to understand the emerging post-Cold War order.

This essay has argued that civilisation is a manifestation rather than an explanation. Huntington essentially replaces the neorealist concept of ‘the state’ as the unit of analysis with ‘civilisation’, in the belief that every international occurrence of importance can thereby be explained. This line of argument only works if all international agents belong to a unit of civilisation. The fact is that they do not, mainly because civilisation is a uniquely Western concept. It is a concept developed during the Enlightenment as a way to express the belief that society could only be understood in terms of history and progress. Western societies ‘had civilisation’ because they – or so it was believed – had a hold on the future due to their progressive modernity. Civilisation is the expression of a certain conception of society and can be understood only in light of that conception. It is also a conception of modern society as a civil society.

So when Tony Blair argued that ‘war is never civilised’, he was invoking the conception of a civil society that is constituted by ‘peace and regular policy’, internally and externally defined by cosmopolitan peace between civil societies. Within this conception, war is not a civil mode of interaction. On the contrary, war limits the possibility of a regular policy of peace on which civil society depends, nationally as well as internationally. Blair feared that if war or coercion were seen to be effective in Europe, it would come to threaten the regularity by which European politics had developed through integration since the end of the Second World War. That war has become a symbol of the end of European history as defined by armed conflict; European integration was constructed as a civilising process which was to establish a ‘cosmopolitan system of general political security’. The Milosevic regime, Cook argued, was threatening the ‘peace and regular policy’ of that European system and had thereby defined itself as ‘barbaric’. The Serb government was deemed to be uncivilised because it did not engage in the political discourse of civil society and was blatantly using violence and military force as a means of politics. In doing so, it had placed itself beyond politics in the mind of the West. War was the only possible answer to its actions, and therefore Blair could argue that ‘war is sometimes necessary for civilisation’.
This leads me to conclude that the notion of civil society offers us the best explanation for the Western response to ‘Kosovo’. It is not civilisation, but civil society that should be the unit of analysis in an account of why the West considered the Kosovo war necessary and inevitable. But how is one to conceptualise a construction of politics as a unit? In this essay, I have suggested that Foucault’s notion of governmentality may provide a conceptual framework for understanding a construction of politics as the basis of collective action. As such, governmentality serves the same analytical purpose as Huntington’s notion of civilisation. However, governmentality is not based on *a priori* assertions of how collective identity is (supposed to be) created. Because governmentality is an analytical category, it also rejects the *a priori* notion that identity is necessarily conflictual. On the contrary, this essay has tried to show that the West has not pursued ‘others’ in order to remake its collective identity after the end of the Cold War. The post-Cold War order is created on the basis of inclusion, rather than exclusion. To the West, the Kosovo war was necessary to maintain the development of the ‘cosmopolitan system of general political security’ that European civil societies have constructed as the beginning of a new political order.

Notes

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2 In a conflict of identities no concept is innocent and even the spelling of the name of the site of the conflict is contested. The Serb spelling translates to Kosovo and the Albanian to Kosova. As the former is the more commonly used in the West, I have adopted it acknowledging that in the absence of a neutral term the only term to use is the one used by other people trying to be neutral. See chapter 6, by Maja Zehfuss, for a further discussion of this problem.


6 Immanuel Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose’, and ‘To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch’, in *Kant’s Political Writings*


8 The purpose of this essay is neither to develop constructivist theory nor to discuss its merits vis-à-vis other theories of international relations. Instead, this essay seeks to analyse the Kosovo war and – in this case – a constructivist approach must prove its worth on its analytical merits rather than on its ontological and epistemological credentials. For discussions of credentials, see Emanuel Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics’, European Journal of International Relations, vol. 3, no. 3 (September 1997). For a general assertion of the constructivist position, see John Searle, The Construction of Social Reality (London, Penguin Books, 1995).


12 March and Olsen, Rediscovering Institutions, p. 161.


16 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, p. 128.

17 Ibid.


19 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, p. 43.


21 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, pp. 155–79.

22 Ibid., p. 158.

23 Ibid., p. 161.

‘War is never civilised’


26 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, p. 58.


28 Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, pp. 41–2.

29 Ibid., pp. 69–72.


31 This is, however, understandable as Huntington himself insists that civilisations are not political (Huntington, Clash of Civilizations, p. 44). However, Huntington focuses on reasons for acting rather than the units of action themselves. When identifying civilisations as the units of world politics in the twenty-first century, Huntington is not saying that civilisations will become agents themselves, but that civilisation will be the reason for acting. The state will remain the main agent but will no longer be capable of generating identity on its own accord.


33 Ibid., pp. 31ff.


40 Ibid., p. 214.
43 ‘The greatest problem of the human species’, Kant argued, ‘is that of attaining a
civil society’. But in isolation, a civil society could not create the ‘peace and
regular policy’ referred to by Ferguson because of the ‘distress which every state
must eventually feel within itself, even in the midst of peace’. Or, ‘the problem
of establishing a perfect civil constitution is subordinated to the problem of law-
governed external relationship with other states’. See Kant, ‘Idea for a Universal
44 Ibid., p. 49.
45 To the West, the peaceful nature of the democratic alliance is so deep-seated that
democratic peace theory has been developed to explain the alleged causal
relationship between democracy and peace. See Michael E. Brown, Sean M.
Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller (eds), *Debating the Democratic Peace*
(Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1997).
46 Gress, *From Plato to NATO*, pp. 16ff.
48 Compare Ole Wæver, ‘Three Competing Europes: German, French, Russian’,
*International Affairs*, vol. 66, no. 3 (1990).
50 Coker, *Twilight of the West*, p. 106.
51 Tony Blair, Prime Minister’s Speech to the Economic Club of Chicago (23 April
November 2000).
52 Ibid.
54 Blair, Prime Minister’s Speech to Economic Club of Chicago.
55 Ibid.
56 On the notion of globalisation as transcendence, see Jens Bartelson, ‘Three Con-