

# Barbara ehenreichs the roots of war

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Danilo Figueroa --- Engl ---- 6 Apr Ehenreich's Flawed War on War Barbara Ehenreich's essay "The Roots of War" primarily employs the cause/effect rhetorical model in seeking the root causes of war. She intelligently employs a chain of events through which a number of causes and effects unfolds which gives us some original insights on the insights of war. Here, the chain of events elucidated in the writing is closely related to the notion of warfare by human beings. By drawing many cause and effects of warfare, Ehenreich attempts to challenge many of the prevailing understandings of war. In the very introductory paragraph of her paper itself, she negates some of the widespread misunderstandings on war such as the ideas that 'war is essentially human', 'war is essentially modern capitalist' and 'war is instinctual'. War is mysterious. It stems from mysteries and it mystifies. There exist hundreds of misconceptions about war. Many people think that war is unique to human species. The proverbial saying goes that even animals do not kill except for food. According to Barbara Ehenreich, "there are [o]nly three types of creatures engage in warfare- humans, chimpanzees and ants"(598). Is tendency to go for war part of our genome make up? Feminists for long thought that it is testosterone that makes men war prone. War is not new to the human society. War prevails in all kinds of societies from primitive hunter-gatherers to modern capitalist ones. The first cause/effect assertion by the writer is that war is not equal to violence because violence is just part of it. It is a reductionism to say that war is equal to violence. No, war is greater than violence. Violence is just part of the larger whole known as war. Ehenreich asserts that "[b]attles, in which the violence occurs, are only one part of war" (599). In the second cause/effect

delineation, war is portrayed to be more systemic and systematic than something which could be governed merely by some instincts. She considers war is to be more complex as it involves many complex 'unnatural' acts from the actor such as leaving home, going for intense training etc. The idea is that the 'actual war' is only the extension of the war efforts which constantly takes place in our society. Ehenreich sums up her point by saying that no instinct exist 'that could impel a man to leave home, cut his hair short, and drill for hours in tight formation' (599). Her cause/effect relation terms of the difficulty in getting men to wage war does not hold true. She reasons that men have employed many methods throughout the history to escape going for war by "fleeing their homelands, shooting off their index fingers, feigning insanity" (599). However, one could argue that the repressive state apparatus necessary for war is built on the ideological state apparatus. Children who are so used to violent video games and Hollywood movies may not find it difficult to shoot at the enemy (even innocent civilians). For instance, there are number of incidents involving American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan killing civilians just for the sake of killing. The recent Apache helicopter shooting video brought out by Wikileaks is much revealing for its depressing similarity with any violent war computer games. In another cause effect formulation of war, she puts forwards the idea that war spread like diseases from one area to another and from time to time. Therefore, Ehenreich argues that [w]ar begets war and shapes human societies as it does so. Here, the problem is that there are only certain type of countries which usually wage war or other nations. To exemplify, in 18th and 19th centuries, the European colonialist countries, especially Britain

waged more wars than any other countries. In the same way, The United States and the Soviet Union had fuelled many of the wars across the globe. It means that we need better explanations for war which must deal with concrete reasons in concrete times. And, Ehenreich is certainly wrong in her reasoning to say that “not only the means of production that shapes societies but the means of destruction” (600) as the means of means of destruction also needs to be produced. But, she is correct in arguing that mass allocation of funds for war efforts is at the expense of essential services. Ehenreich refers to war as parasitic as “it has persisted and propagated itself with the terrifying tenacity of a leech attached to the neck of living prey, feeding on human effort and blood” (600). However, war is not a self-growing tree in the air. It grows in particular soils nourished well by particular politics, culture and economics. There is no universal law that war reproduces war. War could also create aversion to war in societies which are torn apart by war. Without World War II, it would be nearly impossible to imagine Japan as a pacifist state. The biggest problem with such a meta-analysis of root causes of war is that it cannot by default give right answers. Meta-analyses of root causes are always rootless. The reasons of war are concrete in concrete situations. We can only analyze particular wars such as Iraq War, World War II etc. It is necessary to be grounded in specific historic junctures to capture the dynamism within. Analyses of war would be less destructive and more productive if they analyze the specific roots of specific wars. Work Cited Ehenreich, Barbara. “The Roots of War.” *The Bedford Reader*. 10th ed. Eds. X. J. Kennedy, Dorothy M. Kennedy, and Jane E. Aaron. Boston: Bedford, 2009. 598-601