

US AND THEM. A SPEAKING ACTIVITY

The song is very simply about war. Us and them is referring to the sides of the war.

"God only knows it's not what we would choose to do" is saying that he knows that both sides do not really want to be in the war. "And who knows which is which and who is who"

It is saying that everybody, in the end, is the same. In addition, there is really no point in warring with each other. Some of the stuff I have said may be a tad inaccurate, but I am only human. This is the general concept of the song, though.

I love this song, and while it is about war, on a larger scale, it is about human nature in general.

However, one thing here is KILLING me. The four lines at the end

"...out of the way, it's a busy day
I've got things on my mind
for want of the price of tea and a slice
the old man died ..."

Have always been the most touching in this song, and nobody else seems to see them the same way I always have. I have always interpreted the old man as a beggar, and the four lines a sombre commentary on how we treat our own people. The "...With, Without..." in the line before is referring to money, the root of all the fighting.

The man saying "...out of my way - on my mind..." is a man "with", perhaps a businessperson of some sort. The old man is without, a beggar who doesn't even have the money to buy lunch. Moreover, just because the businessperson is worried about things as trivial as getting to work on time, or thinking about the work he is going to have to do at his job, he does not even stop and give his fellow human being the time of day, or the five bucks/pounds/whatever to buy food. We are all human beings, and we are all we have on this Earth, so what is being said is that we should be kinder to one another.

Timeless poetry such as this has many levels of meaning.

Laid out before us by the artist so succinctly, yet so sublime.

All of us can see the reference to the nature of war, its cruelty, and futility.

However, I believe there is a more primal meaning to these words. It is more about human nature, rather than the nature of war.

The “Us and Them” verse refers to how groups (tribes) of humans can be cruel to one another, but as individuals, we like to think we would not act this way.

The “Black and Blue” verse refers to how, from the beginning of time and until its end, individuals are drawn to congregate and called to war. We like to think that as individuals our dehumanized leaders with their wicked words call us to war.

The “Down and Out” verse is the clincher (deciding factor) that exposes one cruel aspect of human nature, greed. The greed of nations cause war and we can't deny that is what the fighting is all about. Yet, in our personal lives, our greed can blind us to the suffering of the needy within our own society with people dying for the price of tea and a slice.

I believe the lyrics examines how we like to think of ourselves as individuals and how we truly act on a personal level.

It is not about WAR so much as it is about the tendency of humans to fight with each other. Not just on the battlefield, but in everyday situations. If you listen to the Roger the Hat interview, Waters discusses a bit of the meaning behind Us and Them: that we are constantly fighting each other and separating ourselves into an "us vs. them" mentality. The point is that we unnecessarily divide ourselves based on every little thing, concentrate on our differences, and forget to think about all the ways we are all in this thing together.

Therefore, yes, on a small scale, it is about war, but it's more about human nature in general. Not just the political idea of one country against another, but the very simple idea of one human against another.