



# WARFARE AND SOCIETY

Archaeological and Social Anthropological Perspectives

EDITED BY TON OTTO, HENRIK THRANE, AND HELLE VANDKILDE

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Cover: "War Magic", 1975, screenprint by the Papua New Guinean artist Timothy Akis (deceased 1984). The picture illustrates the connection between warfare and social identities. In some Melanesian societies war magic is used to transform men into warriors, so that they can kill people and thereby establish group identities and social boundaries.

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# Warfare and Society: Archaeological and Social Anthropological Perspectives

TON OTTO, HENRIK THRANE  
AND HELLE VANDKILDE

/ 1

*...you can't understand what the war has done to us. At first sight everything may look normal, but it's not. Nothing is normal. The war has changed everything.*<sup>1</sup>

The present book deals with the interrelationship between society and war seen through the analytical eyes of anthropologists and archaeologists. The opening quote – spoken by an informant to Torsten Kolind and published in his thesis about discursive practices in Bosnia just after the war in 1992-95 – captures the problems we face when we study war. Archaeologists and anthropologists alike rarely possess war experiences of their own: we study past and present wars, but remain total outsiders who depend on numerous and complex discursive layers – material, written, and spoken – to bring us insight on this subject, so demanding and so necessary to deal with. War is a ghastly thing, which unfortunately is thriving almost everywhere in the world at present: we need to understand better what war does to people and their societies. We are trained analysts, but to insiders war is mostly chaos and death and hence in a sense beyond analysis. It is a challenge in our studies to both ignore and include the compassion and feeling this subject is also about. Nevertheless, under the chaotic conditions of war and its aftermath people are fully aware of the changes happening to their world even if they cannot describe them sociologically. Doubtless, war always affects society and its agents. War does produce change, and archaeologists and anthropologists are analytically equipped to pinpoint its direction, patterning, scale and content. The perspective – and filter – of time provides one important tool, context and comparison other tools. Looking at the history of war studies, war is quite often perceived of and treated as something set aside from other practices; almost personified. However, the results published in this book allow us to say that it is never autonomous and self-regulating. War always forms part of something else. Numerous questions arise and at least some answers, often

tentative and multifaceted, are provided in the collection of studies published below. They certainly add to an ongoing debate, hopefully qualifying it as well.

The book is the end product of the research project 'Archaeological and Social Anthropological Perspectives on War and Society' at the Institute of Anthropology, Archaeology and Linguistics at Aarhus University, Moesgård. This project formed part of the Danish Research Council for the Humanities' special initiative on the subject of 'Civilisation and War'. It began the 1st of January 1999 and was officially concluded by the end of 2002, but continued on a lesser scale throughout 2003 and 2004. This book reports on the results, and in so doing incorporates a series of edited articles originating from seminars and work meetings that took place within the framework of the project. Most of all, the book presents the research conducted by members of the research team from about 1999 to 2004. The publication deals with a series of related research fields, notably war in the context of theory, philosophy, and research history, but also takes up the discussion of the position and role of war in non-state and state societies. In addition, the relationship to rituals, social identification and material and non-material forms of discourse are among the themes discussed, notably on a cooperative basis across institutions and across the two major disciplines of archaeology and anthropology. The curriculum and outcome of the War & Society project are summarised below.

### **The research team**

The research team on the project consisted of an average of five or six members. The project was headed by Professor Ton Otto, Professor Henrik Thrane and Associate Professor Helle Vandkilde, who all contributed with co-financed research, the last-mentioned as coordinator of the project and the day-to-day work. Ton Otto held the primary administrative responsibility for the project. These three researchers have contributed to the project in particular through the working meetings. The project group also comprised two doctoral students, Andreas Hårde and Torsten Kolind, who began their work on the project on 1 August 1999 and 1 November 1999, respectively. The latter recently defended his doctoral dissertation at the University of Aarhus (Kolind 2004). At the beginning of the project, anthropologist Dr. Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen made his mark on the project but left it in favour of a position with the Research Council for the Humanities. Anthropologist Dr. Claus Bossen was employed as a research fellow on the project until 31 January 2001, but fortunately continued his involvement and participation through working meetings and seminars.

In addition, visiting researchers contributed to the project: curator Nick Araho, Dr. Erik Brandt, Professor Polly Wiessner and Professor Jürg Helbling, who have all served as external supervisors for the doctoral students and as resource persons in various fields (cp. chapters 6, 9, and 11). Furthermore, the project has drawn on a number of researchers associated with the project as external resource persons. In particular, Dr. David Warburton (cp. chapter 4) should be mentioned by name for having contributed with his theoretical expertise and knowledge of the Middle East, and Jürg Helbling for his thoroughgoing assistance with the editorial work as peer-reviewer.

## Seminars and workshops

The project invested considerable energy into organising seminars and working meetings where war and warriors were discussed thematically and from various angles. Invited guests and the project members presented their thoughts and research results at international seminars that resulted in many fruitful and in-depth discussions as well as substantial contributions. More informal working meetings for the project members were held on a regular basis and created a fruitful basis for developing concepts and interpretations. In this way the project created a common platform for the individual projects under the general umbrella of War and Society. Personal opinions and points of view were typically greatly influenced by the debates that took place at the seminars and working meetings, which also rubbed off on the content of the written production, especially the present book. It is characterised positively by a combination of archaeology and social anthropology. Even though it was not always simple to direct archaeology and anthropology towards each other, it certainly proved to be worth the effort. A close collaboration between the two fields has in reality not occurred in Denmark in recent times, but the War and Society project has allowed for mutual enrichment, which may be considered one of the important outcomes of the project. This will hardly be the last project where both fields are involved on equal footing. Beyond the productive collaboration between anthropology and archaeology, the project has also received considerable input from history, politicalology and philosophy.

The English-language seminars have included the following activities:

1. *'Civilisation and war'* (focus on source materials and theory), 18.6.1999.
2. *'Warfare and Social Structure'* (warfare, violence and social structure; warfare and warriors in prehistory). 28.-29.4. 2000.
3. *'Warfare and State Formation'*. 5.10. 2000.
4. *'Warrior Identities and Warrior Ideals in Past and Present Societies'*. 26.01. 2001.
5. *'Warfare and Sacrificial Rituals'*. 10.5. 2001.
6. *'Identity and Discourse in Post-War Communities'*. 9.11. 2001.
7. *'The junction between archaeology and anthropology'* was the main heading for four activities that took place in connection with a visit by Professor Polly Wiessner and Professor Chris Gosden, 30.4.-6.5. 2002 at Moesgård.
  - A. *'Material Culture, the Individual and the Collective'*. 30.4. Seminar.
  - B. *'Anthropology & Archaeology: A Changing Relationship'*. 2.5. Lecture.
  - C. *'Warfare in the South Pacific: Strategies, Histories, and Politics'*. 3.5. Seminar.
  - D. *'Changes in Economy, Social Networks, Material Culture and Identity among the Bushmen in the 20th Century'*. 6.5. Lecture.

## Visiting scholars

Quite a few foreign researchers have contributed to the project. Below is a list of these researchers, five of whom – Erik Brandt, Ivana Macek, Polly Wiessner, Jürg Helbling and Nick Araho – were part of the project for a period of time, ranging from one week to one month. Several of these researchers do both archaeological and anthropological work and have therefore been able to give a high degree of positive input to the project (cp. chapters in this volume).

- *Jan Abbink*, Professor, African Studies Centre, University of Leiden and Department of Anthropology, Free University of Amsterdam.
- *Miranda Aldhouse-Green*, Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Wales, Newport.
- *Nick Araho*, Curator, the National Museum of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby.
- *Martijn van Beek*, Associate Professor, Department of Ethnography and Social Anthropology, Moesgård, University of Aarhus.
- *Pia Bennike*, Senior Researcher, Laboratory of Biological Anthropology, University of Copenhagen.
- *Erik Brandt*, Ph.D, Department of Anthropology, University of Nijmegen.
- *Henri Claessen*, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Leiden.
- *Raymond Corbey*, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Universities of Leiden and Tilburg.
- *Chris Gosden*, Professor, Pitt Rivers Museum Oxford, Department of Anthropology, Oxford University.
- *Anthony Harding*, Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Durham.
- *Jürg Helbling*, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Zürich.
- *Christian K. Højbjerg*, Senior Researcher, Danish Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Copenhagen.
- *Stef Jansen*, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Hull.
- *Kristian Kristiansen*, Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Göteborg.
- *Staffan Löfving*, Assistant Professor, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, University of Uppsala.
- *Ivana Macek*, Assistant Professor, Peace and conflict research group, University of Uppsala.
- *Ron May*, Senior Research Fellow, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, Canberra.
- *Lena Holmquist Olausson*, Assistant Professor, Department of Archaeological Science, University of Stockholm.
- *Michael Olausson*, Curator, Swedish National Heritage Board (RAÄ), Stockholm.
- *Richard Osgood*, Archaeologist, South Gloucestershire Council.
- *Sanimir Resic*, Associate Professor, Department of History, University of Lund.
- *Henrik Rønsbo*, Associate Professor, Rehabilitation and Research Centre for Torture Victims, Copenhagen.
- *Heiko Steuer*, Professor, Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte & Archäologie des Mittelalters, University of Freiburg.
- *Marie Louise Stig Sørensen*, Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Cambridge.
- *Nick Thorpe*, Associate Professor, Department of Archaeology, King Alfred's College, Winchester.
- *David Warburton*, Research Assistant, Department of the Study of Religion, University of Aarhus.
- *Polly Wiessner*, Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Salt Lake City, Utah.

## The individual projects

The War and Society project served as an umbrella for six individual projects that included the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology and in some cases both.

*Claus Bossen's* studies concerned the connection between early state formation and war in Hawaii and Fiji (chapter 17) and recent theories of war within social anthropology (chapter 7). On the one hand, according to his studies it appears probable that war plays a role in state formation but, on the other hand, that war and military organisation cannot stand alone. Military power should be combined with ideological, economic and political power in order for a state to form. Subsequently, the question arises of how people come to accept a ruler's sovereignty and power?

*Andreas Hårde* studied war in the Early Bronze Age cultures of Nitra, Únětice and Věteřov-Mad'arovce in Eastern Europe, in particular in Moravia and Slovakia (chapter 24). The main issue of concern to him was how to identify acts of violence within a prehistoric material by regarding war as a social phenomenon rather than as military history. It was also important to consider warfare as a phenomenon divided into several phases, of which the preliminaries to war and its effects are just as important to study as the act of war itself. War, just like other means of power, requires a social decision-making which for one thing is expressed in social rituals. The employment of violence can thus create or strengthen a socio-political identity. The work on war in the early Bronze Age consists of two studies, the first of which concerns the relationship between warriors and social change, and the other violence – in the form of human sacrifices – as a means of power.

In sum, *Andreas Hårde's* studies show that warfare within the Early Bronze Age was closely connected to economic and political power. Evidence of war is most obvious in the periods when socio-political changes occur. The frequency of skeletal trauma, grave plundering and warrior cenotaphs increases along with changes within burial customs among the social elite and with the introduction of new prestige goods and objects of metal. In addition, violence in the form of human sacrifice was used as a means to gain power over life and death.

*Torsten Kolind's* work in the Warfare and Society project resulted in his recently completed doctoral dissertation about 'Post-war identifications. Counter-discursive practices in a Bosnian town', based on six months of field work among a Muslim population in ethnically mixed Stolac (a town in southwest Bosnia). *Kolind* examined the connections between war-related violence and identification analysing the informants' experiences of a world in ruins, destroyed by war, and the politically over-heated post-war situation. Focus was on the most central identifications of 'the others' that the Muslims in Stolac employ, the general conclusion being that these can be regarded as part of a counterdiscourse characterised precisely by the rejection of the nationalistic and ethnic categorisations and explanations existing in the public and political sphere (chapter 29). The conclusion here is that the nationalistic as well as religious identifications that were key to the war have lost their relevance. Instead, people identify themselves in respect to a local patriotism, an ideal of tolerance, the discursive construction of the Balkans as part of Europe, and the role of the victim. Apart from the role of the victim, these identifications can also be seen as part of the Muslims' everyday counterdiscourse.

*Ton Otto* was especially involved in the theoretical discussions, in particular in developing a conceptual framework for comparatively analysing war as a power

factor and as a cultural phenomenon. He was Torsten Kolind's main supervisor. In addition, Ton Otto presented and worked on empirical material from Manus (Papua New Guinea), especially historical data concerning war in a society without central authorities (chapter 12). It is normally assumed that exchange unites while war divides, but this is too simple. War creates not only groups of allies and enemies, but it also leads to networks of connections, inasmuch as there exists a responsibility to either retaliate (otherwise lose prestige and status) or mediate between fighting parties (achieve prestige). In pre-colonial Manus, war was a factor that maintained relatively small political units (through fission) but that at the same time created connections between the units and therefore integrated the region into a larger system of exchange relations. War was a strategic, but risky possibility for local entrepreneurs to increase their status. The colonial power's policy of pacification put a stop to this option. Therefore, the focus for status politics shifted entirely from waging war to organising great exchange ceremonies.

*Henrik Thrane's* research focused on territorial organisation and armament in the Scandinavian Bronze Age, above all in the study of sword production and sword function on the basis of quantitative methods (chapter 32). It has been quite a few years since active research has been carried out on this subject; in part the material has become more accessible, in part the theoretical apparatus and viewpoints concerning context and social roles have changed decisively in recent years. Henrik Thrane's principal interest was to relate the sources to the theories and understandings of war and warrior roles on which the project has worked, considering it essential to reveal how the sources support or contradict these. He was Andreas Hårde's main supervisor.

*Helle Vandkilde* examined warrior identities in the European societies of the later Stone Age and Bronze Age. Organised warrior bands often seem to have played a decisive role. It is probable that these warrior groups were recruited according to hierarchical principles, not unlike, for example, the system that can be deduced from Homer's *Iliad* and that is also evident in a large number of ethnographically studied cases (chapters 26 and 34). Vandkilde's analysis of the history of research (chapter 5) furthermore points out that war and violence do not really enter the archaeological interpretations until c. 1995. Two opposing myths have generally characterised archaeology – one of them regarding prehistory as populated with potentially violent warriors that repeatedly changed society, the other presenting prehistory as populated with peaceful peasants in harmonious and static societies. It is finally suggested that both the ideal and real sides of war and warriors in prehistory should be studied, and also that interpretative stereotypes can be avoided through the use of theories that view humans as participating both routinely and strategically in societal frameworks. Consequently, another dimension of her work has concentrated on writing war and warriors into sociological theories of material culture, social practice, power, and social identity such as notably gender.

## **Project outcome – an outline**

The subprojects typically covered more than one subject area. Below is an outline of some of the general considerations and results.

Within social anthropology war has long been an object of study. In archaeology, however, war did not become an established area of study until the past

decade, and it must be assumed that the many ethnic wars and genocides of the 1990s as well as the massive media coverage have played a decisive role. The horror and awful chaos of war are now analysed in social anthropological studies, but shall henceforth also be incorporated in archaeological studies, which still do not portray prehistoric war realistically enough. This is especially due to the fact that the discourse is still influenced by some myths of heroic warrior elites.

War should be understood as a collective and violent social practice which is always based on a cultural logic and therefore cannot merely be explained with reference to biology, genetics or evolution. Warriorhood is a social identity closely connected to military actions, but also motivated by stereotypic myths of men and war. Helle Vandkilde's studies focus in particular on this aspect. Warrior organisations are clubs with a military objective that generally have male members. A certain degree of support is found for the hypothesis that warrior organisations themselves carry a potential for social change, but apparently it can only be activated during crises and considerable external pressure. The warrior institutions can be separated into three categories on the basis of whether the access is regulated through the criteria of age, status/prestige or social rank. The first category is found, for instance, among nomadic tribes in Eastern Africa, the other among prairie Indians and the Central European Corded Ware Culture. All three categories integrate elements of 'Gefolgschaft' in the sense of a long-term reciprocal relationship between a leader and his group of warrior-followers, who are bound by economic interests and moral rules. Gender is a relevant aspect to study. War is waged as a rule (but not always) by men. Often women take on the responsibility for the families' and the society's honour and contribute by rousing to war and by assisting before, during and after the acts of war. The border line between soldier and warrior is rather fluid, but the role of the warrior is decidedly more marked by an individualistic mode of thought and organisation.

Material culture and personal appearance organise and maintain all kinds of identities, among these warrior identities as they exist in many prehistoric, historical and ethnographic contexts. Weapons and special dress and body attitudes are strategically used to form and manipulate the image of the warrior as identity and ideal within the warrior group, between warrior groups, and in respect to the outside world, but at the same time have an effect on the individual warrior by influencing his self-understanding and personal appearance. Furthermore, advances in weapon technology can escalate conflicts and in some cases (e.g. horses and swords) actually precipitate social change.

Ritual war is a rather unclear concept that has been misused to postulate peaceful conditions in societies without centralised political power. It must be pointed out that 'ritual war' will always merely be one facet of a military reality, with all its implications of human suffering and death. On the other hand, war is almost always related to different kinds of rituals carried out before, during and after acts of violence. Sacrifices of weapons and people in prehistory can be regarded as part of a series of actions that includes war. In addition to this, there are certain religious aspects by which appeals are made to 'higher powers' for a positive intervention. Through his Bronze Age case study (chapter 24), Andreas Hårde shows that violence in the shape of human sacrifices was used by the political elite as a means to consolidate their control over life and death and to frighten outer and inner enemies. The mass graves that mar the past and the

present should on the one hand be associated with military acts, but they also have distinct functions in the way of debasing and deterring defeated enemies as well as demonstrating power.

Power is a key concept in the understanding of war and warriors. Power – i.e., dominance – can be achieved either through persuasion or force; in the case of the latter, through war and violence or threats of violence. War can certainly be part of groups' and individuals' strategic effort to achieve overall dominance. On the other hand, there are a number of examples where war is carried out by warrior groups operating autonomously and in isolation in respect to the more primary authorities of society and here it is not directly related to dominance. In certain decentralised societies war is not directly accessible as a source of dominance, but these societies are nevertheless often extremely marked by war that seems to have the effect of maintaining rather than changing the society.

War is a key ingredient in social change and for this reason alone it is relevant to study. There is no one-sided relationship between input and output, and perhaps more than any other kind of strategic act war tends to create unintended effects. Since war is a violent form of social practice, it can be said to always contribute in some measure to social change even if its aim is maintaining the political status quo. War is thus in a very general sense a processual force. States have, for instance, always attempted to maintain themselves through war. Also other kinds of centralised societies have used war and the military as a source of power, for instance, to strengthen an existing base of power. This was true, for example, in the complex Bronze Age societies in Southern Scandinavia and the so-called chiefdoms on Fiji, Hawaii, and in the Grand Chaco. War is therefore often used for reproductive purposes, but can war also change society more radically?

This question has in particular been discussed in connection with theories of state formation. Claus Bossen (chapters 7 and 17) evaluates the relationship between war and state formation, and concludes that there is a connection, but that many other factors come into play. The same question is, however, relevant to discuss in cases where the social structure in 'egalitarian' societies quite suddenly moves in the direction of institutionalised hierarchy, such as in north and central Europe with the emergence of the Battle-axe or Corded Ware cultures (2800-2500 BC) or in certain hot spots in the Early Bronze Age of Central Europe and the Balkans (2000-1500 BC). War was also, for example, a strategic but risky opportunity for local entrepreneurs on New Guinea to develop their status, but egalitarian institutions pulled hard in the opposite direction. In this area, our studies have not been able to indicate clear regularities or patterns in either the archaeological or the social anthropological material, but it should be emphasised that the topic deserves further illumination. Warfare is part of most state formations and of the formation of the above-mentioned hierarchies, but other factors enter into a complex interaction with war. Furthermore, there are a number of cases, historically and in recent times, in which war has wiped out societies rather than contributed to creating something new. A regularity that can be pointed out, however, is that war tends to create more war.

This particular logic of war has been scrutinised by Jürg Helbling among tribal societies (chapter 9). Contemporary tribal wars always take place in the context of expanding or deteriorating states and in the wider context of the world economy influencing the course and intensity of war, but it is nevertheless imperative to search for the internal logic of these indigenous wars. Two structural conditions may explain the high level of war in these societies. First, the local

groups operate autonomously in a political system that can best be described as anarchic. Second, these local groups are relatively immobile being dependent on locally concentrated resources. People do not wage war because they are fond of it. Despite high economic and personal costs and despite the fact that peaceful cooperation will yield the highest gain for all groups, each group is compelled to adopt a bellicose strategy. Game theoretical considerations may explain this apparent paradox: engagement in peaceful strategies is simply too risky because a one-sided bellicose strategy will potentially bring the highest gains while a one-sided peaceful strategy may lead to the highest losses. Only when both parties engage in peaceful strategies, both will gain, but none can be certain of this. Therefore the military superiority of one group inevitably constitutes a threat to the others, forcing them to attempt achieving superiority in turn. Helbling concludes that the two structural conditions of tribal societies create an environment in which war is prevalent. The societies adapt to this social environment and this explains a number of their characteristics which often – but according to Helbling mistakenly – are considered as causes of tribal warfare, such as the centrality of warrior values, political status competition and conflicts over scarce resources.

War is always waged against ‘the others’, and in this sense it may be said that war often originates from narrowly defined groups, but on the other hand war often appears to strengthen these groups as well as create new groupings. The connection between war and identity is thus quite complex as demonstrated by Torsten Kolind concerning the Bosnian material (chapter 29). His conclusion is that everyday identifications can be regarded as part of a counterdiscourse – against the nationalistic and religious categorisations that on the public and political level were the reasons and aims for the war in Yugoslavia. The direction and kind of the changes can seldom be pinpointed in advance due to the presence of crucial unpredictable elements, in part because identity is formed in various ways at several levels ranging from everyday life to overriding political authorities.

### **New problems and questions**

The Warfare and Society project can, *qua* the perspectives and results described above, point out a number of new problem areas and questions that require profound study through new research. In particular, three complexes of problems should be mentioned:

More research is necessary in the limitations that seem to be in force in societies with egalitarian institutions – as on Papua New Guinea – , especially the potential of war to create political inequalities and structural social change. It is also necessary to further analyse the qualitative changes in war brought about by the use of firearms or other new technology. In Papua New Guinea a destabilisation of the existing exchange systems occurred and as a result an acceptance of the colonial power and its efforts at pacification; in fact, an external state’s monopolisation of violence. In general, it must be considered relevant to theorise warfare as a form of transaction unlike, yet in many ways also complementary to, other forms of exchange in societies without centralised power.

Violence and war articulate existing identities and create new identities often in a determining way, but it is also important to analyse the discursive strategies that people use to adapt these general identities to everyday life, which is precisely where a need exists to create new exchange relations and connections.

The relationship between the formation of social identities and material culture needs further illumination. The understanding of war and the role of warriors in prehistoric societies is still not profound enough, and henceforth the focus should be directed more toward using the archaeological material and relevant theoretical tools interactively; along the lines of Vandkilde's proposal in this volume (chapter 26). The creative and preserving role of material culture in respect to a large number of violent and non-violent identities within and across lines of gender, age, family, status, rank, occupation and ethnicity still requires thorough investigation. Concrete investigations with theoretical superstructures can clearly occur through interdisciplinary collaboration, especially between social anthropology and archaeology. The warrior is for instance often particularly visible in European prehistory, especially in the funerary domain, but the question remains of the extent to which these presentations represent contemporary ideals and myths. Other questions that remain unanswered are when the first warrior institutions appeared in Europe and what their social and economic background was. The appearance of institutionalised warriorhood (probably in certain hotspots around 5000 BC and again, more massively, around 2800 BC) seems to coincide with three other phenomena, namely, a clear gender differentiation in funerary etiquette, the formation of an elite, and a drastic expansion in the use and production of copper objects. But for the present this must remain a qualified hypothesis.

### **About this book**

The structure of this book reflects the six areas upon which the project activities and debate were focussed during the four years it ran: war as presented in philosophy, social theory and the discourses of anthropology and archaeology; war in non-state societies; war and the state; war, rituals and mass graves; war, discourse and identity, and war and material culture. The publication gathers in total thirty-four contributions from a selection of seminar participants, among these the project participants. Included in these are the editors' introductory articles, which serve as critically annotating introductions to each of the six subject areas.

Both archaeologists and anthropologists have contributed to the subject areas, which occur quite mixed in this respect. It also appears that many of the authors are inspired by their 'neighbouring discipline' and consequently incorporate other perspectives. Several articles are definitely situated in the intersection between archaeology and anthropology. Through its seminar activities and this book, the War and Society project has demonstrated a potential for new insight to be gained through combining theories, methods and results from different disciplines. The essence of archaeology is by nature far-sighted and material, although when operating in historical periods it is able to add the evidence of written discourse. Social anthropology is more contemporaneous and based especially on spoken discourse. The data patterns of the disciplines should however be interpreted within a social context, and in this way it becomes possible to compare and integrate results.

Considering the scope and quality of the contributions, the three editors also consider the book an important contribution to the international discussions in this field, which are increasing currently due to the escalating situation in the Middle East and disturbing reports from other war-stricken areas in the world.

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## N O T E

1. Kolind, T. 2004. Post-war Identifications: Counterdiscursive practices in a Bosnian Town. Ph.D. dissertation. Aarhus University: Institute of Anthropology, Archaeology and linguistics, p. 65



**Warfare and Society**

**Conceptions of Warfare  
in Western Thought and Research**

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# Conceptions of Warfare in Western Thought and Research: An Introduction

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This section addresses the overall conceptual frameworks that have informed Western thinking about warfare and explores how these frameworks have impacted on anthropological and archaeological research into war and violence. One of the central questions, of course, concerns the origin of war: has it always existed, if not in reality then as a potential of human nature, or is it a product of the development of human society? It is clear that in order to ask and answer such a question we must first agree on what to regard as warfare. Even though there is widespread agreement that warfare can and should be distinguished from phenomena such as homicide and feuding, authors, also in this section, disagree about the nature of the political units that can wage wars. David Warburton argues that only states make wars and he thus places himself in a long tradition of Western thought that sees statehood and warfare as intrinsically connected. One should be aware, however, that this tradition of thought arises in a period of Western history when states were the common form of organising polities – and thus wars. The disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, also products of Western history, extend the empirical horizon to societies without centralising authorities and this makes it necessary to consider whether the violent interactions in which these societies engage should also be called war.

In this introduction, Otterbein's definition is used as a guideline: war is a planned and organised armed dispute between political units (Otterbein 1985: 3). In this definition these units do not necessarily have the character of states (cp. also Ferguson 1984: 5), thus extending the phenomenon of warfare to a large range of societies. The idea that warfare has evolved in relation to the transformation of human societies has strongly influenced anthropological and archaeological research, but before I develop this central assumption further I want to highlight another central idea that has impacted on Western thinking (and acting) up to the present day: that of the morally justified war.

## The idea of morally justified war

Warburton (chapter 4) sketches two main lines of thought concerning war in the Western history of ideas. One line is exemplified by the Greek historian Thucydides (5th century BC) as well as by the German general Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831). In this line of thought war is the exercise of power to impose one's will – 'politics by other means' as Clausewitz (1989) formulated it. Thucydides emphasised that we should not have an idealised concept of warfare. According to him the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. Ideas of morality play no role in this perspective: war is the application of violence to achieve one's goals. However, there is another line of thought that has played a dominant role in Western history, namely that of war as a morally justified activity. Thomas Aquinas clearly formulates a concept of the 'just war', which among other things is characterised by the right intention to engage in war. Warburton follows this conceptual thread among other Western thinkers, in particular Rousseau and Hegel. Obviously we cannot find the roots of this concept in ancient Greece, which apart from Thucydides' cynical view of human nature also gave rise to the older Homeric worldview of war as a game of honour and revenge. According to Warburton the roots of this idea have to be found in the Near East. Ancient Egyptian and Assyrian warfare was connected with the idea that their military and political expansion was sanctioned by their gods, who gave victory in war.

The Hebrew bible incorporated this idea of divine justification, but here we have a God who also used war to punish his own people. Being in fact the only God, a concept of absolute and universal justice became connected with warfare. Through the Hebrew bible the idea of a just war became absorbed into Western thought, and adapted to various forms of states: from medieval kingdoms, which had to relate to the overarching church organisation, to states characterised by the Reformation, and later modern democratic states claiming the right to call on their citizens to take up arms for just causes.

Warburton continues his sketch of the history of the idea of just wars by observing an interesting contrast between Europe and the United States of America. European states have become weary of their numerous conflicts which showed that territorial expansion – however morally defended – was in practice unsustainable over time because dominated peoples always fight back. By the end of the 20th century most European states shared a determination to avoid the use of war as a political instrument. For many Europeans warfare no longer was morally justified, rather the opposite. The USA however continued its belief in the justification of war. Its conceptions were structured to a high degree by the context of the Cold War with the communist regimes, which was seen as an ideological conflict. At the same time it was generally conceived that real war was impossible because of the implicit risk of total destruction caused by modern nuclear weapons. This war was no longer territorial but based on ideological principles. America was not seen as defending (only) its own interests, but rather as fighting for universal values such as individual rights, democracy and economic growth.

While the Cold War petered out due to dramatic internal changes in former communist societies, a new ideological war has taken centre stage: that between fundamentalist Islamic terrorist groups on the one hand, and Western states on the other, with the USA and its allies as the central targets and combatants. This war has taken new forms, as one of the warring parties is not organised as a state.

This is clearly causing problems for the Western states, which continue a strategy of attacking 'brigand' states, supposedly harbouring or supporting the terrorists. Perhaps even stronger than during the Cold War, this war is informed by ideas of justified war from both sides. Religious rhetoric abounds and one cannot avoid speculating whether a more pragmatic attitude in line with Clausewitz and Thucydides would perhaps lead to different, less violent, strategies.

### **The origin and evolution of war**

Apart from the morality of warfare, another central question has occupied the minds of Western thinkers as well as archaeologists, anthropologists and primatologists, namely concerning the origin and evolution of war. Is warfare a heritage from mankind's biological origin or is it rather the opposite, a result of human history?

Raymond Corbey (chapter 3) presents some of the key issues and key thinkers to inform this debate, which hinges on the contrast between nature and culture. A central figure is Hobbes, who bases his argument on the idea of an original, natural state, where everyone could potentially be attacked by everyone else: a 'warre' of all against all. This original situation could only be transcended by a social contract, investing the power of violence in the sovereign state. A newer version of this transition from an original state of war to more peaceful interaction is provided by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss. In his view, exchange is the earliest and therefore most fundamental human solution for overcoming warfare; relations of exchange replace and prevent violent interactions: in order to trade one has to be able to lay aside the spear. This idea has engendered a strong line of anthropological research and theorising, exemplified by key theoreticians like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Dumont and Marshall Sahlins. They present a view of a cultural solution to a fundamental biological tendency in humankind: man's original aggression is constrained by social institutions, in particular exchange, exogamous marriage, and collective representations (ideas and values about altruism and collaboration).

Even though highly appreciative of this approach, Corbey also identifies a central problem, namely its assumption of the duality of human nature: emotion versus reason, primordial war versus pacifying gift. He argues convincingly that human nature is the result of the co-evolution of genetic make-up and socio-cultural behaviour. Culture and nature have evolved in relationship to each other and therefore human nature is also the product of culture. He further argues that a comprehensive approach that analyses the integration of nature and culture in human societies would be clearly in line with Mauss' heuristic principle: to study social phenomena and people in their totality (think of his famous concept of the 'fait social total').

I would like to point to another limitation of the Maussian line of thought, namely that its focus on cultural 'solutions' does not offer an explanation for the enormous variability of warlike phenomena that exist in human societies, in particular concerning the frequency and intensity of war. The Maussian focus on exchange implies a concern with more or less egalitarian, non-state societies, but even there great variety exists. In addition, some anthropologists argue that exchange is *not* always a solution to war: exchange may in fact also lead to war, or, to put it otherwise, exchange and warfare can apparently be well integrated in a regional system of interacting, exchanging and warring small social units

(see Brandt chapter 6; Wiessner chapter 11; Otto chapter 12; M. Strathern 1985; A. Strathern 1992).

The various forms and appearances of warfare in connection with different types of societies, in particular those characterised by a central authority (state) and those without, is the subject matter of the next two sections in this volume. Here I would like to draw attention to an interesting perspective that focuses on the borderline between nature and culture and thus relates directly to the issues raised above.

In an important article Bruce Knauff (1991) discusses the literature concerning great-ape and simple human societies, defining the latter as lacking recognisable leadership roles and status differentials among adult men. Simple human societies cover by far the largest period of the evolution of *Homo Sapiens*, but are represented poorly in the ethnographic and archaeological record. They have to be distinguished from more complex pre-state societies, called 'middle-range', where sedentism, property ownership and male status differentiation are more developed, namely complex hunter-gatherer societies, 'tribes', and 'chiefdoms'. Knauff argues that simple human societies differ from both great-ape and middle-range human societies in that they show a relative absence of competitive male hierarchies and of systematic violence between closed social groups. They are more egalitarian among the adult males, sexually, politically and in terms of sharing resources. Thus, he argues, the invention of cultural rules of cooperation and exchange has had a clear impact on the use of violence in these societies, which sets them apart from the high level of violence in middle-range societies and from the competition and violence observed among apes.

There is thus not a lineal development from pre-human to human societies, but rather something that resembles the Maussian model: a (temporary) constraint on competition and violence through cultural institutions that have given simple human societies an evolutionary advantage over their non-human environment. This is an interesting hypothesis that certainly deserves further research, but it is complicated and possibly weakened by the observation that lethal violence may actually be high in these societies, even though the cultural ethos is against it, and even though the violence may relate more to status levelling than to status elevation (cp. Knauff 1991: 391).

## Conceptions of warfare and present-day research

The contributions in this section by Helle Vandkilde (chapter 5) and Erik Brandt (chapter 6) are concerned with a third question, namely how different conceptions of warfare have impacted upon the actual research conducted by archaeologists and anthropologists. This question received high visibility through the publication of Lawrence Keeley's book *War before civilisation* (1996), which argues that anthropological and archaeological research into warfare has been hampered by the conception that primitive warfare was much less serious and destructive than modern warfare. Keeley relates this 'myth' of the rather peaceful savage to the horrible experiences of the two World Wars, which made scholars more susceptible to imagining alternatives to the horrors of modern war. Keeley's idea is supported by the anthropologist Keith Otterbein (2000), who has worked on warfare for more than three decades.

However, Otterbein wishes to correct Keeley's historical sketch on two accounts. In the first place the myth of the peaceful savage arose already before

World War II and, secondly, its driving force was a framework of evolutionary theory, later conceptually nurtured by cultural relativism. He further argues that Keeley has produced a 'replacement myth' which depicts pre-state societies as bellicose. Unfortunately this new myth has caused a polarisation among researchers, dividing them into Hawks and Doves

Helle Vandkilde describes the situation for the discipline of archaeology in Europe which, in her view, has been dominated by two different tales of prehistoric society. In the one tale prehistoric society is perceived as changing radically in certain periods, caused by human agents migrating and revolutionising existing societies. Even though this view, classically exemplified by V.G. Childe, implies the existence of warriors, it has not emphasised warfare as an important element of the historical changes. The other tale sees prehistoric society as changing slowly, through gradual evolution instead of revolution. The main characters in this vision are hunters, peasants and traders, while warriors are apparently neglected, and prehistoric society is imagined as basically peaceful. The later view has been dominant since World War II and this appears to accord with Keeley's periodisation of the myth of the peaceful savage.

Vandkilde observes a greater interest in, and a more realistic evaluation of warfare in recent archaeology, but finds that there is still much to do. She suggests that anthropological research, which has had only a relatively modest impact on archaeology, should be used more extensively, while research into warrior identities should be open to conceiving more variation in the status and role of warriors according to context and period.

With regard to anthropological research on warfare, particularly in New Guinea, Erik Brandt's contribution criticises and modifies Keeley's and Otterbein's hypothesis concerning the impact of the myth of the peaceful savage (cp. Brandt 2000; Knauff 1990). He does not deny that the myth has existed, also in relation to New Guinean research, but it has not hampered anthropological research in the way envisaged by Keeley and Otterbein. Brandt shows that Malinowski had already made a sharp distinction between modern war and savage war. Whereas modern war was considered as total, affecting every single cultural activity, savage war was seen rather as a form of physical exercise devoid of political relevancy. This depiction appears to support Otterbein's rendering of the origin of the myth of the peaceful savage, but Brandt shows that another view can also be detected in Malinowski's writings, one that accepts tribal war as a serious and destructive phenomenon for the people concerned, who try to constrain and overcome it by means of exchange.

This Maussian view was later reproduced and refined by the focusing of influential anthropologists, such as Andrew and Marilyn Strathern, on the role of local leaders – 'big men', who engage in exchange as an alternative and preferred way of gaining status in contrast to warfare. Their work has to be seen in the context of earlier work on New Guinea, which had not refrained from making ethnographic descriptions of ubiquitous and pervasive warfare that in all aspects were reminiscent of total war. According to Brandt, it was in opposition to such a view of total war that the work of the Stratherens should be understood, but this did not lead them to assume predominantly peaceful savages. Thus, Brandt concludes, the concept of total war, rather than the alternative notion of the peaceful savage, has burdened the ethnography of New Guinean warfare, but ethnographers have equally been influenced by the realities of war and violence they met in the field.

## Empirical studies and theoretical modelling

Brandt's conclusion is a crucial motivation and legitimation for the studies that are included in the following sections of this volume. Research cannot avoid being informed and partly determined by the conceptual frameworks that are available at the time of investigation and that are in dynamic relationship with the wider social experiences of that period. But research is also informed and influenced by the empirical findings carefully produced by anthropologists, archaeologists and other researchers in their various projects.

The first four contributors in the present section reflect on the conceptual and ideological context of research into warfare: the philosophical questions, the history of these questions in Western thought and the treatment of them in the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology. The final chapter by Claus Bossen (chapter 7) is an attempt to integrate existing theoretical perspectives into one framework. The author's central concern is to understand the relationship between warfare and social change, and the chapter provides a useful overview of anthropological, sociological and archaeological theories of warfare. Bossen critically assesses their potential to explain social change in relation to warfare and argues that the analysis of war and social change involves three perspectives or 'levels': praxis, society and process.

At the level of praxis Bossen identifies three aspects of violent acts which comprise meaning, technology and organisation. At the level of society Bossen adopts Michael Mann's four fields of social organisation: economy, politics, ideology and the military. Finally Bossen assesses the ways in which warfare and military organisation can contribute to social change, namely via internal effects within a society, via submission of one society to another, and via the general context of a warlike environment. Bossen argues that these three perspectives are mutually interdependent and therefore should be integrated into one conceptual framework. The explanatory value of such an integrated model obviously needs testing in relation to concrete cases, but as it stands Bossen's model may serve as a welcome heuristic tool to ask relevant questions about possible links and dependencies between warfare, social practice and societal change.

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