

A third point that I would like to highlight is how restraint against war and violence, while not explicitly showcased, recurs in the article. Most anthropological discussions of war simply ignore restraint and focus exclusively on violence (e.g., Wrangham and Glowacki 2012). However, in human and mammalian agonism, restrained aggression is a prominent and reoccurring theme (Enquist and Leimar 1990; Evans Pim 2013; Fry, Schober, and Björkqvist 2010; Fry and Szala 2013; Maynard Smith and Price 1973; Roscoe 2007, 2013). The key point is that individuals and social groups across cultural contexts go to great lengths to avoid and minimize violence. Wiessner's article provides concrete illustrations of Enga actors and cultural features exercising restraint against violence and war, for example, in the listing of "rules that reduce the costs of collective action," in the activities of peace leaders striving to prevent wars and to restore peace, and in Wiessner's finding that 98% of the respondents explained that they would not participate in "modern war," as played out with automatic weapons, because it was too dangerous.

These Enga manifestations of restraint at the individual and cultural levels correspond with the interpretation that "the prevalence across mammalian species of displays instead of contact aggression and ritualized tournaments instead of 'total war' suggest that restraint is a more successful evolutionary strategy than engaging in unbridled aggression" (Fry and Szala 2013). Correspondingly, Wiessner's findings include the re-introduction of restraint in reaction to the period when lethal violence ran totally out of control as young male "Rambos" with their automatic weapons abandoned the traditional rules for fighting, which led to bloodbaths. Wiessner 2010 shows how restraint was reinstated as, "the war-weary general public supported peace efforts; mercenaries who had been admired in the 1990s as defenders of the clan were rejected as trouble-makers; most met their fates by treachery."

In a culturally comparative sense, we can see in Wiessner's research a concept of justice previously noted in various other ethnographic situations as "restoring the balance" (e.g., Fry 2006; Nader 1969; Redfield 1967). Restoring the balance is a peacemaking approach that can occur via punishment of some sort, payment of compensation, eminent justice via supernatural sanctions, or the involvement of third-party settlement procedures such as mediation or adjudication, sometimes with reconciliation rituals (Black 1993). Wiessner explains how the Enga clearly utilize the payment of compensation (e.g., in pigs, money, and goods), at times self-redress, and also practice traditional mediation procedures that lead to material compensation to restore the balance. In short, what I am suggesting is that across human societies, justice and peacemaking usually do entail procedures designed to restore the balance in human relations, and Wiessner's work provides another detailed and valuable demonstration of such peace-promoting processes.

In closing, aside from thanking Polly Wiessner for a data-rich and thought-provoking analysis, I would like to give her a shout-out for working collaboratively with Enga cultural insiders and publishing with her indigenous collaborators (e.g., Wiessner and Pupu 2012; Wiessner and Tumu 1998).

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War Is Easy but Peace Is Hard

Through rich ethnographic detail, Wiessner demonstrates that starting wars and achieving peace involve different challenges. How do you compel individuals to fight, especially when it involves taking risks? How do you prevent groups from going to war when they desire conflict? While most scholarship has focused on single processes for overcoming the collective action problem in warfare (such as incentives or sanctions), in reality, as Wiessner argues, multiple mechanisms work in concert to motivate war or encourage peace.

Wiessner asks why achieving peace is rare in small-scale societies lacking formal institutions governing conflict. Her analysis rightly focuses on the complex and often opposing social dynamics for war and peace and the reasons societies swing between the two. An additional but overlooked factor is in the payoff structure of war and peace: peace is often beneficial for the group, while war may be beneficial for individuals.

Consider a case where peace produces collective benefits, such as access to hunting areas, water points, or trade opportunities that are shared among all members of a group. All individuals within this group have equal access to the collective benefits from peace; however, peace provides few opportunities for private benefits to individuals not available to others.

Now consider the costs and benefits to individuals for initiating war. Participants in warfare only have a very small chance of being killed or injured (Wrangham and Glowacki 2012) but can gain valuable private benefits often including status, wealth, and allies. These incentives may have asymmetric or increased value to subsets of individuals who face heightened in-group competition, such as young men.

Under these conditions, the private benefits to individuals from participating in warfare easily outweigh the loss of collective benefits from peace. This payoff structure motivates some individuals (those who benefit from warfare) to start wars, even though the group as a whole may suffer from the loss of the benefits from peace. This simple payoff structure explains why war is easy but peace is hard: the loss of collective benefits from peace is often less than the private benefits obtainable through war.

Disturbingly, the possibility of asymmetric benefits—where one gains more compared to their in-group members—may be enough to motivate persons to initiate conflict (Dogan, Glowacki, and Rusch 2018). Even though a person and their group may be worse off with war, the possibility of benefiting compared to one's peers may be enough to incentivize that person to initiate conflict. This suggests that not only does the absolute payoff structure matter for an individual's decision to engage in war but that relative payoffs also matter. These dynamics may be especially acute as societies become less egalitarian and the likelihood of unequal payoffs increases.

This approach of assessing individual costs and benefits can explain why certain subgroups may be more inclined to war or peace. The relative value of the benefits from peace and warfare should vary as a function of life history, including age, gender, and reproductive status. For example, young men may be willing to lose access to communal hunting territories or trade opportunities to gain the benefits of warfare, such as status. Elders, on the other hand, may benefit less from status than they would from access to new trading partners, creating a dynamic where elders and youth are often in opposition to each other. Variation in the payoffs of war and peace contribute to large age- and gender-based differentials in war participation (Glowacki, Wilson, and Wrangham 2017).

As Wiessner illustrates, societies can devise institutions to counteract the incentives for warfare. Individuals are not passive actors; rather, through foresight and interest, they can recognize the benefits of peace and encourage it with sanctions and rewards (Perry et al. 2018; Singh, Wrangham, and Glowacki 2017). Thus, social norms often develop that track this tension, in some cases sanctioning participants in war, especially after a period of peace. For example, “spoilers” who threaten to break the peace may be verbally chastised, and young men caught preparing for raids are sometimes physically beaten as a way of deterring warfare (Glowacki and Gonc 2013; Sagawa 2010).

Taken together, these considerations suggest complicated social dynamics where war and peace provide twin and often counter motivations. Understanding them provides a way not only to explain the prevalence of war but to begin building institutions to reduce it.

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Mindful of Machiavelli

Polly Wiessner’s analysis of warfare in New Guinea is a breath of fresh air. She exposes many of the underlying dynamics in the causes and logistics of undertaking not only war but peace, and she generates a new ecologically based paradigm for understanding institutionalized peacemaking (developed in groups with inequalities and good surpluses). Her treatment of these dynamics, involving factions and conflicting interests of many groups, is consistent with my own ethnoarchaeological research in transegalitarian societies. In fact, these same dynamics characterize not only war and peace efforts but an entire range of large-scale activities such as feasting, rituals, alliance building, costly funerals or marriages, and obtaining exotica. It is important to document the many problems facing anyone embarking on such endeavors.

However, there is one aspect that Wiessner neglects or minimizes in her attempt to model collective action, and that is the role of aggrandizing big men, albeit passing mention is made of them. As perhaps the single most important factor to consider in understanding the dynamics of war and peace, I would have emphasized their strong ambitious motivations, their energy, their unrelenting pursuit of self-interests, their ingenuity and resourcefulness in manipulating people, and their ability to disguise their true motives, as well documented by Reay (1959). These qualities of individual agency have been emphasized by other authors dealing with New Guinea warfare, which are not prominently cited by Wiessner. Thus, Sillitoe (1978:253) described big men leaders as “shrewd” in trying to control “opinion so that it is in line with their plans.” They “try and use war as a means of extending their influence over neighbors and preventing encroachments on their domain by rivals,” and a “big man must manipulate the opinions of his fellows so that their actions will further his political ambitions” (Sillitoe 1978:254). As illustrated in the documentary film *Ongka’s Big Moka*, rival big men like Rima did not shirk from fomenting wars in order to disrupt their rival’s (Ongka’s) plans to hold major mokas, whereas Ongka made every effort possible to avert warfare so that his moka could proceed. Although I have misplaced the reference, I also remember accounts of big men commissioning murders in order to foment wars that would advance their interests. Thus, big men manipulated both war and peace to suit their self-interests. As Sillitoe (1978:269) concluded: “It is not a distortion to see big men as Machiavellian in their disguised attempts to use war for their own political ends . . . and to use war to their advantage.” In all this, as Sillitoe (1978:253) also noted, the superficial reasons given for waging war often hide the concealed political aims: “The relevant point to understand is how a leader manages to control other men.” For me, that is the missing emphasis in Wiessner’s exposé of dynamics.

In addition, I would strongly disagree with Wiessner’s statement that “Leaders in small-scale societies choose strategies that are low cost.” The Great Wars, and probably most other wars, were extremely high-cost events, consuming enormous amounts of surpluses and wealth. The same is true of most ritual events, major feasts, funerals, marriages, and any other pretext that aggrandizers promote as in the interest of other people. Aggrandizers typically try to outdo rivals in support and benefits; they inexorably increase the magnitude of debts and displays to the maximum bearable. There can never be enough. The result is heavy pressures to produce surpluses (poignantly expressed by Ongka’s wife, who had to feed and manage a huge herd of pigs). We are still entangled in the same high costs and taxes for wars and other projects that are putatively for our own benefit but that serve mainly elite or corporate self-interests. I am convinced that it has been the very high costs of maintaining traditional ritual, funeral, and feasting systems that have been largely responsible for many families in transegalitarian communities dropping out of traditional