



Bangladeshi young people march to protect the Sundarbans coastal forest, home to farmers, fisherfolk, as well as the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger. What political activity have you been part of?



CHAPTER 14

Politics and Power

*"The Sundarbans is our mother. We won't let it be destroyed."
"We will give our blood and our lives but not the Sundarbans!"*

Over 1,000 young people—students, workers, and civil society activists—chanted these words as they marched more than 100 miles over four days in the spring of 2016 from the Bangladesh capital, Dhaka, to the vast Sundarbans tidal forest on the low-lying Bangladesh coast. Their march protested the environmental hazards of constructing two giant coal-fired power plants just a few miles upstream from this World Heritage site. The Sundarbans' mangrove trees, mudflats, and wetlands stretch along the vast coastal delta where the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers reach the Bay of Bengal and provide protection from frequent storm surges and tidal flooding for 40 million people in southern Bangladesh. Thousands of farmers and fisherfolk call the Sundarbans home, as do endangered Royal Bengal Tigers, freshwater river dolphins, and thousands of other indigenous plant and animal species. When climate change is already raising sea levels, why would the government agree to build more fossil fuel plants to spew more pollutants into the air and water of a fragile ecosystem, the protestors asked? And why build them on land already vulnerable to coastal flooding?

The Sundarbans campaign is just one of many ways people around the world today are taking action in an unprecedented global political movement to halt and reverse climate change and global warming.

Just a few months earlier, representatives of 196 nation-states gathered at the United Nations 2015 climate change conference in Paris, France, to discuss plans to limit human-generated greenhouse emissions and global warming. Simultaneously in Paris, thousands of demonstrators and

activists from women's groups, indigenous rights organizations, antipoverty coalitions, and environmental movements gathered to pressure national governments to honor their pledges to keep fossil fuels in the ground; to demand that fossil fuel companies be held responsible for environmental damage; and to expand the global movement of local environmental actions to stop global warming and climate change.

In the U.S., students on over 400 campuses have launched campaigns to push for divestment of school endowment funds from fossil fuels. At the University of California, three years of student demonstrations by Fossil Free UC, a group of students, faculty, and alumni, led to the divestment in 2015 of \$200 million of shares in companies profiting from coal and tar sands, the largest divestment in the United States to date. In the spring of 2016, six years after the fossil-free movement started at Swarthmore College in Philadelphia and at the same time as the Sundarbans campaign in Bangladesh, student-led divestment actions on campuses included demonstrations, teach-ins, and social media organizing. The dramatic occupation of university administration buildings, presidents' offices, and investment management offices—as well as over sixty student arrests—brought increasing public attention to student political activism and challenges to institutional power.

Power is often described as the ability or potential to bring about change through action or influence—either one's own or that of a group or institution. Indeed, power is embedded in all human relationships, whether that power is openly displayed or carefully avoided—from the most mundane aspects of friendships and family relationships to the myriad ways humans organize institutions and the structural frameworks of whole societies (Wolf 1982).

The Greek philosopher Aristotle spoke of humans as political animals. By this he meant that we live with other people in communities through which we strive to organize ourselves to achieve the good life—not as hedonists seeking the maximization of individual pleasure, but as a collective partnership (*koinonia*) seeking the good life, virtue, and beauty through community. Politics, then, is the mobilization of people's beliefs into collective action. The presence of politics and relations of power in the ebb and flow of daily life is a central focus of anthropological study. Although uprisings and demonstrations may draw attention to the most public, dramatic, and sometimes violent aspects of politics, anthropologists also consider the multiple local forms of politics—the careful political interactions and activities that occupy much of daily life and are essential in making a community a decent place to live (Gledhill 2000; Kurtz 2001; Lewellen 2003).

Throughout this book we explore power and its intersections with culture. We work to unmask the structures of power built on ideologies of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality and the institutions of kinship and religion. We



Indigenous people demonstrate during international climate change conference in Paris.

also examine the power dynamics of the world economy and the stratifications of class. In this chapter, we explore power as it is expressed through political systems and processes: the way humans have organized themselves in small groups, the role of the state in national and international politics, and the ability of people (nonstate actors) to engage in politics and exercise power through individual action and social movements outside the direct control of the state. We consider the historical and contemporary approaches that anthropologists have taken toward these crucial issues and the ways in which globalization is shifting the dynamics of power and politics on local and global levels. In particular, we will examine the following questions:

- How have anthropologists viewed the origins of human political history?
- What is the state?
- How is globalization affecting the state?
- What is the relationship among politics, the state, violence, and war?
- How do people mobilize power outside the state's control?

While reading this chapter, you will analyze many expressions of politics and the ways in which aspects of power are expressed locally and globally today. You will consider how political anthropology can help you think

more deeply about your own expressions as a political creature, including the ways you negotiate human relationships on the interpersonal, group, community, national, and global level. You will examine the changing role of the state in local, national, and global affairs and the ways humans mobilize collectively through social movements to challenge the power of the state and the effects of globalization by advocating for social change and human rights. Finally, you will consider an anthropological debate about the roots of violence in human culture. The skills you acquire in this chapter will be valuable additions to your toolkit for living as a political actor and an engaged citizen in today's global world.

How Have Anthropologists Viewed the Origins of Human Political History?

Over the course of history, humans have organized themselves politically by using flexible strategies to help their groups survive and make their communities a better place to live. Our earliest human ancestors appear to have evolved in small, mobile, egalitarian groups of hunter-gatherers. It is in these types of groups that core human characteristics and cultural patterns emerged.

For nearly a century, beginning in the late 1800s, anthropologists studying politics and power focused primarily on small-scale, stateless societies, attempting to understand human political history through the political activities of contemporary hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, and horticulturalists. But beginning in the 1960s, as nation-states emerged to dominate political activity on a global scale, the anthropological gaze shifted significantly to encompass more complex, state-oriented societies and the process by which local settings are politically incorporated into a larger context.

The specialization called *political anthropology* took clear shape after World War II as anthropologists such as Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), as well as other British social anthropologists (e.g., Gluckman 1954; Turner 1957), examined the local political systems of Africa. Others looked closely at the political systems of the Middle East and Asia (Barth 1959; Leach 1954) and the indigenous people of the Americas (Redfield 1941; Wallace 1957). These highly detailed studies of local political systems rarely placed the communities in a larger context, despite being conducted at a time when colonialist powers had imposed nonindigenous governing structures in much of the world.

As they undertook these studies of politics in many cultures, anthropologists attempted to create a common language, a typology that would



Qaanaaq, Greenland, dog teams and Inuit hunters traveling to a hunt. Once food foraging was the primary way of life for humans and our ancestors, but today food foragers are limited to the most remote areas of the planet.

enable them to communicate across cultural areas and compare and contrast their findings (Gledhill 2000; Lewellen 2003). The political anthropologist Elman Service (1962) famously classified the vast and varied world of political systems into four basic types: bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states. Although infrequently used today, this framework shaped a generation of anthropological thinking about political systems. Service proposed that political systems develop through a natural, evolutionary progression from simple to complex and from less integrated to more integrated, with patterns of leadership evolving from weaker to stronger. Subsequently, when states emerged as the dominant political actors on the world stage, the examination of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms, anthropologists hoped, might provide insights into the origins and fundamental nature of the state.

Bands

Anthropologists have used the term **band** to describe small, kinship-based groups of food foragers who move over a particular territory while hunting and gathering. Through archaeological evidence and the study of a few remaining band societies, anthropologists have identified key characteristics of band organization and leadership. A band might range in size from twenty to several hundred people depending on the time of year and the group's hunting and ritual cycles. Bands break up and re-form regularly in response to conflicts among members and the formation of new alliances.

Small, close-knit bands served as the primary way of life not only for our human ancestors but also for the entire genus *Homo*, including *Homo habilis*,

band: A small kinship-based group of foragers who hunt and gather for a living over a particular territory.

Homo erectus, and early *Homo sapiens*. As a result, evolutionary biologists suggest that life in the band shaped the development of our earliest human characteristics and cultural patterns.

Politically, bands are highly decentralized, with decisions made primarily by consensus. Leaders emerge for a task at hand (organizing the hunt, moving the campsite, negotiating a conflict), with their leadership position resting on their skill, knowledge, generosity toward others, and level of respect within the band. With limited resources to compete for, bands have minimal stratification of wealth and power. But perhaps more important, bands required active cooperation among diverse groups of relatives and nonrelatives in order to successfully adapt to an unpredictable and shifting landscape. In turn, these early patterns may have embedded in humans a tendency toward egalitarian social and political organization rather than hierarchy.

In his book *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior* (1999), evolutionary biologist Christopher Boehm explores what life in bands can tell us about whether humans are fundamentally hierarchical or egalitarian. Drawing on ethnographic studies of contemporary and historical hunter-gatherer bands as well as archaeological findings, Boehm argues that the sharing of scarce resources, including food, was for hunter-gatherer bands the most economically efficient—indeed, essential—economic strategy. And this strategy could only be sustained through egalitarianism. Cooperative gathering of foods, coordinated game hunting, and reciprocal sharing went hand in hand with resisting hierarchy and domination as successful adaptations for humans living in hunter-gatherer bands. As a result, over the course of human evolutionary history, hunter-gatherer bands and tribal communities generated an egalitarian ethos that promoted generosity, altruism, and sharing while resisting upstarts, aggression, and egoism.

In hunter-gatherer and other small-scale communities, which served as the political and economic framework for much of human existence, members invest an enormous effort to suppress hierarchy and enhance cooperation. The resulting egalitarianism made the hunter-gatherer lifestyle possible as people worked as a group to assert dominance over anyone who tried to establish himself or herself as a leader. While other close primate kin—and perhaps humans themselves—may instinctively form social dominance hierarchies (that is, patterns of interpersonal domination) with alpha individuals presiding over them, the evidence of egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies provides a crucial insight into an alternative or complementary pattern that emerged during the time human interaction was shaped by life in small bands. Boehm argues that this social environment lasted long enough to shape innate human tendencies toward cooperation. Although hierarchical tendencies are present in egalitarian social systems, evidence reveals that hierarchical tendencies are regularly balanced out and even overcome as the

weak work together to compensate for, and even dominate, the strong in order to create egalitarianism and effective community.

Despite serving as the predominant economic, social, and political structure over the course of human evolution, by the mid-twentieth century only a few bands of food foragers remained. These groups were living in the most remote areas of the planet: the rain forests of South America, the arctic tundra of North America, and the deserts of Africa and Australia.

Tribes

The term *tribe* is frequently used in contemporary media when describing conflict among groups within a state. Media coverage of civil wars or internal conflicts—particularly in parts of Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific—frequently refers to tribal conflicts, tribal warfare, tribal factions, rifts, and alliances. In these instances, *tribe* is usually a reference to a loosely organized group of people acting together, outside the authority of the state, under unelected leaders and “big men”/“strong men” and drawing on a sense of unity based on a notion of shared ethnicity.

Most popular references to tribes carry connotations of primitive, uncivilized, and violent people who engage in conflict based on “ancient” tribal factions and hatreds. These faulty characterizations reflect the ethnocentric perspectives of observers who operate from inside a state framework. Their characterizations perpetuate the deeply problematic evolutionary assumption that less-complex political organizations are naturally less effective, stable, rational, and civilized.

As originally formulated (Service 1962), the term *tribe* referred to a culturally distinct population, often combining several bands, that imagined itself as one people descended from a common ancestor and organized around villages, kin groups, clans, and lineages. Tribes appear to have emerged between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago as humans began to shift from food foraging to pastoralism and horticulture. Like bands, tribes are largely egalitarian, with a decentralized power structure and consensus decision making. Leaders do emerge, sometimes called “village heads” or “big men” (Sahlins 1971), who garner the support of followers in several villages. But their power is limited. It is built and maintained through the leaders’ personal achievements—such as success in war, conflict resolution, group organizing, and generosity of feasts and gifts—rather than awarded through political institutions.

Anthropologists have identified confederacies of tribes in Central Africa and on the Central Plains of North America that worked together to coordinate hunting, preserve the peace, or defend against perceived outside threats. Perhaps most famous is the Iroquois Confederacy formed by five distinct but closely related indigenous groups in the northeastern United States and Canada: the Mohawk, Oneida, Onandaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. Although the Iroquois Confederacy

A replica of the eighteenth-century Hiawatha belt that records the agreement of the first five nations of the Iroquois Confederacy to live in peace (Smithsonian object no. 269056). The center tree symbol represents the Onondaga, where Hiawatha, the peacemaker, planted the Tree of Peace under which the leaders of all five nations buried their weapons of war.



appears to have predated European colonial activity in the Americas, confederacies are often formed at the demand of colonial powers, which prefer to deal with defined political groups rather than people on the move with shifting leadership and allegiances. The confederacy structure enabled colonizers to streamline the process of colonial control for trade and treaty making (Snow 1994).

In recent centuries, independent tribal peoples have largely been eliminated; they have been conquered and incorporated into the nation-states that have come to dominate the global political landscape. Today no groups operate totally outside the framework of the state. Even a weak state or a failed state directly influences all those living within its borders. In this context, today we might define a **tribe** more accurately as an indigenous group of people with its own set of loyalties and leaders living to some extent outside the direct control of a centralized, authoritative state. In many cases, current discussions use the term *ethnic group* instead of *tribe* (Ferguson 2011).

Chiefdoms

Within Elman Service's evolutionary typology of political systems, the **chiefdom**—an autonomous political unit composed of a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief (Carneiro 1981)—represented a transitional form between the simpler political structures of tribes and the more complex political structures of states. As in bands and tribes, the social relations of the chiefdom were built around extended kinship

tribe: Originally viewed as a culturally distinct, multiband population that imagined itself as one people descended from a common ancestor; currently used to describe an indigenous group with its own set of loyalties and leaders living to some extent outside the control of a centralized authoritative state.

chiefdom: An autonomous political unit composed of a number of villages or communities under the permanent control of a paramount chief.

networks or lineages. The chiefdom might encompass thousands of people spread over many villages.

Unique to chiefdoms, leadership was centralized under a single ruling authority figure—a chief who headed a ranked hierarchy of people, asserted political control over a particular territory, and held the authority to make and enforce decisions. In parts of Polynesia, for instance, chiefs functioned as full-time political specialists, resolving conflicts and organizing collective economic activity. The permanent position of chief endured from generation to generation, often passing through direct descent and inheritance from father to son or through other kinship relationships. Religious rituals and beliefs often served to confirm the chief's authority.

Through feasts and festivals such as the potlatch (see Chapter 11), the chief gathered a portion of the collective bounty of the chiefdom's harvest or hunt and redistributed the communal wealth to the populace, thereby symbolically and practically reinforcing his or her central role among the people. Though group members' access to power and resources depended on their hierarchical relationship to the chief, the process of redistribution served a central role in moderating inequality and limiting conflict within the chiefdom.

Micronesia: Adapting Political and Social Structures to an Island Ecology

As mentioned early in this section, humans have always applied flexible strategies to improve life in their communities. In *Traditional Micronesian Societies* (2009), political anthropologist Glenn Petersen explores the creative adaptation of Micronesian social and political structures to the particular ecological challenges of island life. Micronesia is an archipelago of thousands of mostly small islands in the South Pacific that are often separated by hundreds of miles. The islands are extremely fertile, with abundant fresh water, food, vegetation, and marine life. Normally, they are ideal places to live and can support a sizable population relative to their land mass.

But the islands are also highly susceptible to catastrophic storms and droughts generated by fluctuating weather patterns over the Pacific. Droughts can easily devastate the vegetation and population of smaller islands. And the storm surge associated with a direct strike by a typhoon can inundate the typical Micronesian island, which is a coral atoll less than fifteen feet above sea level. Such a surge can completely saturate the island's gardens with saltwater, causing a disaster that may require several years of intensive labor to rehabilitate. Although the frequency of devastating droughts or typhoons is unpredictable, their occurrence every twenty years or so has made an indelible mark on Micronesian political and social structure.

Petersen documents how over time Micronesians have developed an elaborate social and political organization that enables them to survive and



MAP 14.1

Micronesia

quickly recover from natural disasters. Because of the distance between islands and the irregularity of weather patterns, devastation on one island may not touch neighboring islands. Thus Micronesian social and political structures allow survivors to travel to other islands to find relief and support from extended kinship-based networks while they rehabilitate gardens at home. Key to this arrangement are the matrilineal clans widely dispersed among multiple islands that systematize the relations of reciprocity needed to overcome natural catastrophes.

Every Micronesian is a member of both a local lineage and a dispersed clan that includes local lineages on many islands. During times of catastrophe, this dual political and social system provides a highly effective adaptation to natural disasters. Even when faced with personal tragedy and the destruction of home and garden, each Micronesian is able to rely on interpersonal networks on other islands for survival and assistance. Each Micronesian knows that he or she can move in with relatives on another island or may be expected to invite displaced relatives into his or her own home while they reconstruct their gardens, homes, lineages, and lives. This kind of support can be found on islands large and small. In fact, on larger, higher islands that are less vulnerable to drought and typhoon, feast making is central to lineage and community life. Feasts, which feature the sharing and redistribution of community surpluses, such as the potlatch discussed in Chapter 11, enable individuals and groups to build prestige. But they also serve as mechanisms for supporting families, lineages, and communities in times of crisis.

Violence and Conflict Resolution in Micronesia Petersen takes particular note of the impact of the Micronesians' elaborate social and political structures on the patterns of violence and conflict resolution within their society. Micronesian culture celebrates the warrior role, holding warriors and martial skill in high regard. In fact, a central role of the chief involves preparing the group for warfare and conflict. Warfare is always seen as a possible, sometimes unavoidable means for resolving disputes. The potential for conflict over scarce resources intensifies during times of natural disaster, drought, and flood. But Petersen argues that Micronesians employ these capacities for organized violence as deliberate strategies for maintaining peace. Preparing for war serves as a deterrent, reminding people of the potential costs and spurring the development of an extensive repertoire of ways to avoid warfare and violence.

Thus, while Micronesian culture places elaborate emphasis on the role of warriors and martial skill, these are, in the language of the central island Pohnpei, considered *tautik* ("little service"). Held in greater honor in traditional Micronesian culture are what the Pohnpeians call *taulap* ("great service"): generosity of spirit, duty to one's kin, and the ability to produce food and



other goods in quantities that enable gift giving and feasting. These values are reflected and embedded in the elaborate social and political structures of dispersed matrilineal clans that provide a nonviolent means for moving people from resource shortage to resource availability, even during times of great crisis.

Putting Typologies in Perspective

Though the typology of bands, tribes, chiefdoms, and states provided a basis for cross-cultural comparison, Service's framework has frequently proven too simple to capture the complexity and diversity of political practices and institutions that are reflected in ethnographic studies and the archaeological record. For instance, evidence now clearly suggests that across human history, groups of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms were never as isolated or homogenous as mid-twentieth-century anthropologists proposed. In contrast, today we argue that movement, encounter, exchange, and change have been the hallmarks of human groups, both small and large, throughout human history.

Nor could twentieth-century political systems always be considered trustworthy representations of the human past, recent or distant. Certainly, by the time anthropologists began to enter the field in the late nineteenth century to document and classify people and their political systems, European colonial expansion—including often violent encounters—had transformed peoples and their political structures across the globe. Colonialism, the slave trade, the conquest of indigenous peoples of the Americas, military activity, missionary efforts, and global trade deeply influenced every political arrangement, from the most populous urban setting to the most rural village. It is safe

Micronesian islanders confront the effects of natural disasters—like this home destroyed by a typhoon (*left*)—with creativity, signs of aesthetic beauty, and flexible kinship structures. In this context, generosity of spirit, duty to one's kin, and the ability to produce food and other goods in quantities that enable gift giving and feasting (*right*) are held in higher esteem than martial skill or the role of the warrior.

to say that anthropologists have not observed a band, tribe, or chiefdom that has not been influenced by colonialism, the power of the state, and the forces of globalization. And today no political arrangement of band, tribe, or chiefdom can operate outside the pervasive influence of the state.

What Is the State?

state: An autonomous regional structure of political, economic, and military rule with a central government authorized to make laws and use force to maintain order and defend its territory.

As states took on an increasingly central role in shaping the local communities that anthropologists traditionally studied, political anthropologists turned their ethnographic attention to the state itself. Today we typically define the **state** as an autonomous regional structure of political, economic, and military rule with a central government authorized to make laws and use force to maintain order and defend its territory.

Anthropologists link the origins of the state to the rise of agriculture. With fixed settlements, elite specialists emerged to manage increasingly complex economic activity (Wittfogel 1957) and warriors emerged to defend agricultural surpluses from marauders (Carneiro 1978). The ability of these local elites to collect taxes and tribute in increasingly unequal and stratified societies also supported aggressive efforts to consolidate smaller, autonomous villages into states, a process through which, political scientist Charles Tilley suggests, “war made the state and the state made war” (1975, 42). Some loosely configured states existed as early as 5,000 years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and somewhat later in China, Japan, the Indus Valley (which became parts of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan), and portions of the Americas. Throughout most of human history, however, people organized themselves primarily through less centralized, flexible bands, tribes, and chiefdoms.

The global landscape of contemporary states that now dominates local, regional, and international affairs reflects the impact of Western expansion over the past 500 years, particularly European imperial and colonial expansion (see Chapter 12). European colonialists deployed economic, political, and military force to redraw the political borders of much of the world to meet colonial economic needs. In this process, the colonial powers carved states and territories out of geographic areas inhabited by indigenous groups who were previously organized along lines based more on local kinship, political, and economic relations.

Most of the states in the world today did not exist before World War II—certainly not in their current configurations. In fact, few states are older than the United States, which officially formed in 1783. Most gained independence from colonial rule only in the decades immediately following World War II. By 2015, there were 196 independent states in the world.

The Modern Western-Style State

The type of state that has emerged since the sixteenth century, built largely on a Western model and expanded through colonization and globalization, developed with certain unique characteristics (Giddens 1985). Unlike earlier forms of the state, such as China's, which had relatively porous borders and loose administration, modern states feature a central administration designed to penetrate the everyday social life of its citizenry. A standing army asserts control over a carefully defined territory. Administrative, communication, and military infrastructures define and enforce the state's borders. The state, rather than a big man or chief, serves as the source of laws and law enforcement. People of all classes within the bounds of the state acquire an identity as citizens who owe allegiance primarily to the state, not to local networks based on kinship, religion, or ethnicity (Asad 1992).

Externally, modern states compete economically and militarily with other states for resources and territory. Internally, each state seeks to establish a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a territorial domain (Weber 1919). For example, it enlists citizens' cooperation and pacifies resistance through expanded administrative power in police forces, the judicial system, tax collection, and regulatory regimes (Giddens 1985). It also accomplishes these objectives via surveillance techniques and institutions such as prisons, hospitals, and asylums, through which individuals classified as deviant from the cultural norm are removed from mainstream society and disciplined (Foucault 1977).

One unique contribution of political anthropologists to the study of the state has been a focus on the processes of the state rather than its institutions and structures. Despite the illusion that the state is fixed, cohesive, and coherent, states are in fact constantly being shaped and reshaped by elections, political campaigns, court rulings, creditors, legislation and executive orders as well as through daily interactions with individuals, communities, nonstate institutions, social movements, and other states. From this perspective, we can see that states are actually quite fluid, contested, and even fragile (Sharma and Gupta 2006).

How does the state become the ultimate authority within a particular territory? Anthropologists suggest that the state becomes real in the imaginations and experiences of people as it is encountered in a particular space. This spatialization of the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002)—the perception that the state fills a particular space, encompasses all aspects of culture, and stands above all other elements of the society—is produced through mundane bureaucratic state practices. The state is encountered in everyday acts of governance: policing, mail delivery, tax collection, mapping, surveys, issuance of passports, jury duty, voting, notarization, distribution of food to the poor, distribution of pension checks to



When does the state become real to you? Consider the particular spaces in which you encounter the state. (*from left to right*) Police officers patrol New York City's Pennsylvania Station; a courtroom in Santa Fe, New Mexico; a voting booth in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico; the construction site of a bridge over the Danube River between Romania and Bulgaria; a street in Melbourne, Australia, where firefighters race to an emergency.

hegemony: The ability of a dominant group to create consent and agreement within a population without the use or threat of force.

the elderly. Through these routine and repetitive acts, the state comes to feel all-encompassing and overarching—a dynamic that Ferguson and Gupta call “vertical encompassment.” Representations of the state on the television and radio, as well as in the newspapers or movies, all contribute to the construction of the state as concrete and real. These representations reinforce the conception of the state as the primary institutional form through which people experience social relations—family, community, civil society, economic exchange.

Aspects of State Power

The rituals and routines of the state also include overt practices of coercion. In fact, political philosopher Max Weber argued in 1919 that the fundamental characteristic of a state is its ability to establish a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in a particular territorial domain (Parsons 1964). States exert coercive power not only through military and police forces but also through the guarding and regulating of borders, the determining of criteria for citizenship, and the enforcing of discipline through rules, regulations, taxation, and the judicial system.

State power is also established through **hegemony**, which is the ability of a dominant group to create consent and agreement within a population without the use or threat of force (Gramsci 1971). How is this done? As discussed in Chapter 2, cultural institutions of government, media, schools, and religions shape what group members think is normal, natural, and possible, thereby influencing and limiting the scope of human action and interaction. Group members develop a way of seeing the world—a set of beliefs about what is normal and appropriate—that subconsciously limits their life choices and chances. As discussed in Chapter 7, states reinforce this hegemony by promoting intense feelings of nationalism (a sense of shared history, culture, language, destiny, and purpose, often through invented traditions of holidays, parades, national songs,



public ceremonies, and historical reenactments) to promote the perception of the state as a unified entity.

The hegemonic aspect of power can make group members discipline their own behavior, believing and acting in certain “normal” ways (often against their own interests), even without threat of punishment for misbehavior (Foucault 1977). Within the hegemony of ideas, some thoughts and actions actually become unthinkable and undoable. Others seem reasonable, necessary, and desirable; these include collective actions for the greater good of the “nation,” even going so far as killing and being killed. Some modern states, however, are unable to gain the cooperation of their populace through consent and must resort to coercion. Where do you see this dynamic at work in the world today?

How Is Globalization Affecting the State?

Today globalization presents serious challenges to the state, particularly in terms of flexible accumulation, time-space compression, and expanding migration. The boundaries of the state—its influence and control over internal and external affairs—appear to be shrinking in the face of pressures related to globalization and the neoliberalizing global economy.

International Nonstate Actors Challenge State Sovereignty

In a global economy with increasing flows of people, money, goods, and ideas, state borders are becoming more porous. As a result, states are increasingly struggling to control who and what enters and leaves their territories. State sovereignty—the right of the state to maintain self-determination within its borders—is being challenged by powerful international nonstate actors.

“Kayaktivists” who oppose Royal Dutch Shell’s plans to drill for oil in the Arctic Ocean, attempt to block Shell’s Polar Pioneer drilling rig in Seattle’s harbor. With a narrow summer window for arctic drilling, every day of delay reduces potential environmental damage.



As discussed in Chapter 12, international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, backed by the world’s most developed economies, are pressuring states to adopt neoliberal economic policies. These policies include free markets; free trade; the free movement of goods, capital, and ideas; and access to local markets for transnational corporations. Furthermore, to receive development loans from international financial institutions, developing countries are required to privatize state-owned infrastructure such as ports, water systems, utilities, and transportation and to reduce state funding for social services, health care, and education. Neoliberal economists suggest that these changes, while lessening the state’s ability to control what flows across its borders, will enhance the state’s ability to compete in the global economy.

Economic restructuring promoted by international financial institutions and implemented by the state has yielded a flourishing of civil society. This is evident in the phenomenon of people joining together to form local organizations and movements to protest the social upheaval and uneven development that has accompanied the institution of neoliberal economic policies. These nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), sometimes called **civil society organizations**, have become key players in challenging state policies and in creating space through which activists can work together to access resources and opportunities for their local communities.

civil society organization: A local nongovernmental organization that challenges state policies and uneven development, and advocates for resources and opportunities for members of its local communities.

Civil Society Organizations Gain a Global Reach

One key strategy of civil society organizations—which many states have viewed warily—has been to join forces with transnational movements and networks to transform local problems and conflicts into part of a global project for rights and resources. By linking up with groups outside their national borders, local civil society organizations are able to join forces with other activists, networks, and campaigns, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Africa Watch, or World Vision and even international agencies like the United Nations. These linkages enable the civil society organizations to advocate for local environmental concerns, demilitarization, women's rights, LGBT rights, human rights, and indigenous rights—issues that also transcend the borders of the state.

Communication and transportation advances associated with time-space compression—from cell phones to Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—facilitate the formation of these transnational networks. This process not only promotes the flow of observers, advisors, and participants in meetings and conferences but also stimulates global information flows of on-the-ground developments and organizing strategies. Working together, the international coalitions mobilize international sentiment and bring pressure to bear on nation-states to address problems occurring within their borders. In this way, the coalitions challenge the ultimate claims of state sovereignty over affairs within state borders.

Tanzania: The Maasai Demand Political Rights and International Recognition Anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson documents the rise of civil society organizations in Tanzania, East Africa, in *Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous: Postcolonial Politics in a Neoliberal World* (2011). The Maasai have traditionally lived as seminomadic pastoralists raising cattle on the open rangelands of Tanzania and Kenya. Marginalized within their own nation, first by colonial governments and later by the postcolonial state established after independence from Britain in 1961, the Maasai live on the economic and political periphery. They suffer from low levels of education, limited access to health care, and high levels of poverty.

Though the Maasai lifestyle has been changing and pastoralist economic patterns have been diversifying to include cultivation, trade, and wage labor, the Maasai have remained largely invisible to state planners. These bureaucrats have viewed the Maasai rangelands as “unoccupied” and have frequently sold or leased them to investors and developers.

Spurred by increasing land loss and impoverishment, beginning in the 1990s Maasai and other pastoralists in northern Tanzania began to create NGOs in an attempt to assert their political rights to resources and recognition and to represent themselves in negotiations with state and international



MAP 14.2
The Maasai

Maasai women in Tanzania address issues of poverty and livelihood through a micro-enterprise producing local handicrafts.



entities. More than 100 NGOs were created in slightly more than a decade. Key to their strategy was a decision to represent themselves as “indigenous” in order to build alliances in the international indigenous rights movement. The move generated hostile responses from their own government, which had sought to downplay any ethnic divisions within the country. But the claim of indigenous rights established the Maasai as prominent actors with the United Nations and other international human rights bodies and attracted millions of dollars of funding for the NGOs from a wide array of international organizations focused on the plight of “first peoples.”

Unfortunately, the rapid influx of outside funding and attention generated tremendous internal tensions in the Maasai community. Rifts developed among activists along lines of gender, generation, and class, and between the younger educated men who tended to run the NGOs and the rural, uneducated, grassroots communities they represented. By the early 2000s, Maasai NGOs strategically shifted themselves away from identification with indigenous rights. Instead, they cultivated a new reputation as advocates on the issue of livelihood: What cultural rights, land rights, political recognition, and services were necessary to preserve the pastoralist livelihood of the Maasai people? Through this shift, they successfully struck a new balance between two goals. They continued to advocate for Maasai political rights in relationship to the state government. But they also developed a new identity as civil society organizations dedicated to serving their people through the delivery of services and economic resources.

Hodgson (2001, 2005), a long-time observer of Maasai culture with a deep knowledge of northern Tanzania, reflects on the broader significance of these creative and often challenging projects. She notes that the Maasai efforts to address impoverishment and marginalization reveal central trends and tensions prevalent in many developing nations as local communities explore avenues for political action in a local context shaped both by the legacies of colonialism and by contemporary neoliberal economic and political policies (Homewood 2012; Lesorogol 2012).

What Is the Relationship among Politics, the State, Violence, and War?

Perhaps no use of power is more troubling and challenging than violence, the “bodily harm that individuals, groups and nations inflict on one another in the course of their conflicts” (Ury 2002, 7). Conflict happens on the playground, in the classroom, in the boardroom, and on the battlefield. As we look globally today, we seem to be experiencing a period during which violent conflict is not sporadic, but permanent—a time of continuous war in one place or another involving extraordinarily sophisticated tools and weaponry (Waterston 2009).

Are Humans Naturally Violent or Peaceful?

Underlying many discussions and debates about politics, war, and peace is the question of whether humans are naturally violent or peaceful. Is there something in the human evolutionary past that predisposes modern humans to behave in a particular way when confronted with conflict?

The main arguments can be simplified into three generalizations. First, organized human violence can be seen as a natural expression of the inherent human condition. In this view, human aggression and violence may be attributed to physiological factors such as testosterone, DNA, and neural wiring.

A second conception of violence considers humans to be inherently peaceful. In this view, violence arises through cultural practices and patterns that overwhelm basic human nature. A third scenario places the roots of human violence in between nature and culture. So, for instance, humans may be naturally prone to violence but culturally capable of avoiding it. Or humans may be naturally peaceful and only culturally provoked into forsaking their nature. Or these two alternatives are evenly matched. As described earlier, for instance, Micronesians develop and display their capacities for organized violence as a deliberate means for maintaining peace, believing that preparation for war actually serves as a deterrent to war and a reminder of the detrimental effects of violence.

Challenging the Myth of Killer Apes and Aggressive Humans Some who see contemporary violence as a legacy of our evolutionary past point to a common myth about aggressive primates and killer apes as evidence. If aggression, competition, and violence are part of our primate relatives' evolutionary development, they argue, then these impulses must be deeply ingrained in human nature as well. According to this view, natural levels of aggression, competition, and violence linked to genes and hormones must be generated internally and instinctively released in social relations. Conflict, then, naturally drives individuals farther apart into competing groups.

Physical anthropologist Frans de Waal (2002), reviewing studies of living primate macaques, chimpanzees, and bonobos, points out patterns of behavior that directly challenge this myth. (See also Chapter 5's Anthropologists Engage the World.) De Waal notes, for instance, that for social animals such as primates, this pattern of conflict and distancing would lead to everyone living alone, yielding an ineffective pattern of social relationships for individuals who rely on social cooperation for survival. In the primate social groups de Waal has reviewed, a far more complicated dynamic emerges in times of conflict. Rather than increased distance, reconciliation occurs on a regular basis. In fact, increased attraction is regularly observed between opponents after fights. Researchers have identified this reconciliation mechanism in twenty-five separate primate groups, revealing powerful inclinations toward reconciliation among individuals who have a great deal to lose if their relationship deteriorates. Among bonobos, a primate group closely related to humans on a genetic level, sex is used to resolve conflicts. Bonobo conflicts and tensions occur in all combinations of female and male. So do reconciliations. Bonobos have a high rate of reconciliation and a low rate of violence.

De Waal suggests that among primates there are various options for resolving conflicts, including avoidance, tolerance, and aggression. These options are used at various times depending on the situation, the partner, and the stakes. According to de Waal, primate studies indicate that "aggression [is] not . . . the product of an inner drive but . . . one of the options that exists when there is a conflict of interest" (24). Ultimately, researchers may find that aggressive primate behavior has a genetic component; but this component does not operate in isolation, nor is it necessarily dominant. Equally natural among primates are mechanisms for cooperation, conflict resolution, rechanneling of aggression, and reconciliation (de Waal 2002).

Margaret Mead and the Invention of Warfare Margaret Mead explored the difference between the human instinct for violence and the cultural institution of war in her article, "Warfare Is Only an Invention—not a Biological Necessity" written in 1940, during World War II. She presents ethnographic examples of people who do not go to war to settle disputes, thereby undermining the



Are humans naturally violent or peaceful? Despite the myth of killer apes and aggressive humans, primate studies reveal that increased attraction is regularly observed between opponents after a conflict. Here, two female bonobos reconcile after a fight.

theory of a universal biological imperative for warfare. She also describes the wide variety of reasons people go to war—not only for land and loot but for prestige and women—that can be satisfied without violence. In the end, Mead comes down firmly on the side of war as a cultural invention. And a bad one at that. What then are we to do about this invention? According to Mead (1940):

If we despair over the way in which war seems such an ingrained habit of most of the human race, we can take comfort from the fact that a poor invention will usually give place to a better invention. For this, two conditions at least are necessary. The people must recognize the defects of the old invention, and someone must make a new one. Propaganda against warfare, documentation of its terrible cost in human suffering and social waste, these prepare the ground by teaching people to feel that warfare is a defective social institution. There is further needed a belief that social invention is possible and the invention of new methods which will render warfare as outdated as the tractor is making the plow, or the motorcar the horse and buggy. A form of behavior becomes outdated only when something else takes its place, and in order to invent forms of behavior which will make war obsolete, it is a first requirement to believe that an invention is possible. (19-22)

Can your generation invent an alternative to war—a new way to resolve conflicts without violence?

The State and War

Political anthropologists actively explore the complicated cultural processes through which war is invented, learned, and enacted (Besteman 2002; Besteman and Cassanelli 1996; Farmer 2003; Ferguson 2002; Gusterson 1996, 2004; Lutz 2001; Waterston 2009). Over the past 100 years, war has become far more than waging hand-to-hand combat or pulling a trigger at close range—actions that we might associate with aggression driven by hormones. Instead, modern warfare is considerably more premeditated and calculated, relying on computers, satellites, missiles, GPS tracking, and airborne drone strikes.

Today anthropologists study a highly militarized world in which war seems normalized and permanent. Warfare has become one of the most visible of all human political institutions that reveals the state's pursuit of power. As we will see in Carolyn Nordstrom's work later in this chapter, warfare can no longer be viewed as a local military phenomenon. Indeed, modern warfare is embedded in a global system of war making. This fact pushes anthropologists to study the intersection of multiple factors that play a role in constructing warfare as a reasonable means for resolving conflicts. These factors may be as disparate as economic stratification, ethnic identity formation, migration, weapons manufacturing and trade, the imbalance between weak states and strong states, and resource shortages involving oil, water, and land (Nugent and Vincent 2004).

militarization: The contested social process through which a civil society organizes for the production of military violence.

Militarization A growing body of anthropological literature has focused on **militarization**—the contested social process through which a civil society organizes for the production of military violence (Lutz 2004; see also Bickford 2011; Geyer 1989). Catherine Lutz, an anthropologist of militarization, in *Homefront: A Military City and the American Twentieth Century* (2001), describes how the processes of militarization include not only the production of material objects such as bullets, bombs, tanks, planes, and missiles but also the glorification of war and those who make war, as states seek to shape their national histories and political culture.

Lutz warns that left unchecked, militarization threatens to shape other aspects of cultural institutions to its own ends. For example, it influences research in physics, information technology, and psychology; it affects national budget priorities; it affects discussions and debates about gender and sexuality, race and citizenship, privacy and security; and it limits what can be discussed in the news, online, or in the classroom.

Sociologist C. Wright Mills, in his classic study *The Power Elite* (1956), warned that building an expansive military structure and the industrial capacity to support it—a military industrial complex—ultimately would lead to a “military definition of reality” in which human interactions would be seen through the logic of warfare and violence. War would become the “common sense of the nation.” The central elements of this militarized thinking include cultural

assumptions that defense is the first need of every organism; that human beings are naturally aggressive and territorial; that force is the primary means to get things done in the world; and that if one weapon creates security, then a thousand weapons create more security. The fact that these assumptions seem reasonable to many people in a society were evidence to Mills of the power of militarized culture to shape the way people think.

Lutz (2004) suggests that ultimately, militarization creates a kind of hegemony of thinking: It limits what is perceived as normal and natural, what can and cannot be said or done. It identifies some people as allies and others as enemies. It dehumanizes and demonizes to make hating and killing seem logical, normal, and appropriate.

Constructing Soldiers, Constructing War Are soldiers born or made? Is it possible that if war must be constructed, soldiers must be constructed, too? In *Fallen Elites* (2011), Andrew Bickford explores the process of militarization, particularly the process by which soldiers are made—and unmade—by the state. Bickford's work sheds light on how states make soldiers in order to make war.

Bickford studied the life histories of military officers and border guards of the former East Germany who have been living in postunification Germany since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990. Originally stationed by the U.S. military as a soldier on the front lines in Berlin toward the end of the Cold War in 1984, Bickford returned after reunification as an anthropologist. He found himself at interviews, meals, and meetings sitting across the table from his recent enemies, some of whom readily admitted that given the opportunity, in the earlier era they would have shot and killed him without hesitation. After all, he had been a member of the U.S. military—an enemy. Now demobilized by the unified German military, however, these formerly powerful elites of the hard-line communist East German military participated in Bickford's anthropological study. How could matters of life and death have shifted so easily?

No one is born a soldier, argues Bickford. As the demobilized East German officers in Bickford's study reveal, soldiers who are made can also be unmade. Soldiers do not come prepackaged and ready to fight, kill, and die. Instead, individuals must be made into soldiers through processes of enculturation that teach them to fear, hate, and kill—processes that define particular people as the enemy, as a dangerous, mortal threat.

Because soldiers become the flesh-and-blood actors performing on behalf of the state, Bickford notes how crucial it is for the state to construct a powerful ideal of the soldier—an ideal imbued with characteristics of courage, honor, strength, and duty. This ideal becomes the preeminent symbol of the state and its power. In the process, the hero soldier comes to represent the ideal citizen who embodies the state's key values and worldview.



MAP 14.3
Germany

How does popular culture glorify war and those who make war? A woman walks by an advertisement for the video game “Call of Duty: Black Ops III”.



The construction of soldiers as model citizens happens in numerous ways. States formally honor the memory of soldiers—individuals who were fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, husbands, boyfriends (and less often but no less honorable, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, wives, girlfriends). States also promote the character of soldiers, representing in mythologized language and ritual their heroic deeds in defense of the state: their service as strong and virtuous warriors, protectors, and conquerors—indeed, as powerful agents of life and death, yet also as simple men and women with a job to do to protect their families, their nation, and its way of life. Creating the ideal of the soldier, argues Bickford, is essential to the process of militarization, linking that ideal to notions of citizenship, national identity, and the honor and legitimacy of the state.

Exploring the Complex Life of Dangerous Things

Anthropologist and physician Paul Farmer suggests that to understand how deeply war and violence have become insinuated into human culture, anthropologists must trace the complicated life of “dangerous things” (Farmer 2010; Waterston 2009). Try this mental exercise: Think of an object of war—perhaps a bullet, a gun, a landmine, a remote sensing device. Imagine its dangerous life. When it reaches the battlefield, how did it get there? Consider how it is designed, tested, manufactured, paid for, and delivered. Who sells it?

In the case of war, the dangerous object is embedded in a network of actions and decisions. Who sends soldiers into battle? Who chooses the enemy? Who provides the food, hospitals, toilets, cafeterias, and health-care supplies to support the soldiers? How is intelligence gathered and surveillance conducted? How is the public convinced or required to provide funding and other support for this process?

What role do movies, video games, holidays, parades, and memorials play in creating an environment in which violence is perceived as a reasonable means to resolve conflict? How do we learn to hate certain people and not others—enough to consider firing a bullet at them?

When we carefully consider the life of a dangerous object such as a bullet, we can begin to see the complex cultural production of the act of firing a gun that goes far beyond any instinctive need to resolve conflict through violence.

Anthropology on the Front Lines of War and Globalization

The fact that today's world is rife with conflict presents anthropologists with many opportunities to study current cases of warfare and violence in the context of pressures from globalization. Anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom's work exemplifies contemporary anthropological contributions to this kind of study. Nordstrom focuses on the real, messy, local experiences of violence, resistance, survival, and creativity in actual communities where war occurs, not in the comfortable offices and remote institutions of military officials and political leaders. At the same time, she turns a spotlight on the complex web of local and foreign interactions and actors that drive war and make warfare a global phenomenon.

Mozambique Between 1989 and 1996, Nordstrom made multiple visits to war-torn areas of Mozambique, a southeast African country wracked by a fifteen-year civil war after independence from Portugal that claimed a million lives, mostly civilian. To reach rural and forested regions, she traveled with bush pilots making airlifts into war zones. In contrast to typical journalistic war reports, Nordstrom experienced firsthand the low-intensity conflict called “terror warfare,” perpetrated by rebel guerrillas and Mozambican government soldiers, that targeted the country’s civilian population through military attacks, hunger, and displacement.

These destructive forces of warfare targeted the basic structures of Mozambican community life: hospitals, schools, and government offices, as well as teachers, health-care professionals, religious authorities, and community leaders. By destroying and disrupting the institutions, practices, and key practitioners of local culture, the forces of violence sought to destroy the local population’s political will.

In her ethnography of civil war in Mozambique, *A Different Kind of War Story* (1997), Nordstrom recounts the determined creativity that local populations used to combat this terror and violence. In one village heavily targeted and frequently overrun by troops of both armies, most community leaders and service providers had fled as refugees to avoid potential assassination. Most



MAP 14.4
Mozambique

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS

Drones and Remote Control Warfare

For over fifteen years the United States military and Central Intelligence Agency have been using weaponized drones—unmanned aircraft—to conduct highly secretive targeted killings in the war-zones of Afghanistan and Iraq and against terrorists in countries like Somalia, Yemen, and Pakistan. The U.S. public knows little about drones, how they are used, who controls them, or who their targets are. In *Drone: Remote Control Warfare* (2016) anthropologist Hugh Gusterson explores how drones are quietly reshaping the practice of warcraft, blurring the lines between civilians and combatants, intimacy and distance, policing and warfare.



1

How does it feel to operate a remote-control drone? As drones circle miles above their prey, operators may sit in air-conditioned rooms thousands of miles away tracking their victim on a video screen, sometimes for days, before launching an attack. From CIA headquarters in Virginia or an Air Force station in Nevada, the drone strike is quick, clean, and bloodless—no sound, smell, taste, or texture. The operator acts as executioner, with godlike power over life and death.





• 2

Victims and local residents experience the drone attack differently than drone operators. Without warning, missiles descend from the sky, erupting with violent and deadly force. Survivors tell of smoke, screams, the smell of burning, the ground trembling beneath them, the pain of shrapnel wounds, and the enduring grief in the aftermath. How do they know the drone will not return? The safe predictability of life has been permanently destroyed.

• 3

Advocates of drone attacks emphasize their effectiveness: accurately targeting their prey while minimizing civilian casualties. Opponents warn that combatant and civilian casualties have been severely underreported. They worry about slippage in drone missions from military operations to policing efforts—policing the world from the sky at the U.S. President's sole discretion, even when warfare is not legally authorized. And some world leaders condemn the breach of sovereign territory. Do acts of war conducted without warlike activity or U.S. human cost make the move to war far too easy?



A drone, even a weaponized drone, is simply a machine. But the social life of a drone—how it is deployed, targeted against combatants and noncombatants, and deployed in accordance with or against international law; how it affects operators, victims, and a nation's democratic institutions—raises complex ethical and political questions that an anthropology of things brings into sharper focus.

- Do you know how many times the U.S. launches a drone attack in any given week, the number of people killed, the number of unintended deaths, or the countries where airstrikes have occurred?
- Have you ever heard or read a firsthand account from victims of a drone strike? If not, why?
- Why do so few protest the U.S.'s use of weaponized drones?



What is the life of a dangerous thing like a rifle, a bullet, or a bomb? (clockwise, from top left) The Colt Defense factory in Hartford, Connecticut, makes the M16 and M4 rifles, the rifles of choice of the U.S. military; a gun poised and ready, in a refugee camp in Lebanon; the Eleventh International Defence Industry Fair, in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2013, which attracted 781 companies from 82 countries.

resources and infrastructure had been destroyed. During the first severe attack on the village, however, one remaining health-care practitioner gathered up as many medical supplies as she could carry and hid in the nearby bush until the soldiers left. Though the soldiers knew her name and searched for her, the villagers kept her secret, kept her safe. On the front lines of battle, soldiers passed through the village regularly in subsequent months. Yet the health worker remained, hiding her medical supplies, living a nomadic life on the outskirts of the area, and being protected by the villagers, who continued to carry their ailing members to her for treatment.

These actions by the health worker and the villagers are emblematic of the creativity that Nordstrom's research finds to be the most potent weapon against war—the determination to survive and resist, to continually refreshion and reconstruct one's self, community, and world. Nordstrom concludes her ethnography by suggesting that if, as early political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes proposed, violence is the "natural state" of human affairs when political institutions collapse, then war-torn regions such as Mozambique

should be rife with scenes of aggression, acts of self-preservation, and individual attempts at survival in a dog-eat-dog world. Instead Nordstrom consistently found people who resisted and defeated the political violence of war by attending to the day-to-day matters of their community—sharing food, healing wounds, repairing lives, teaching children, performing rituals, exchanging friendship, rebuilding places, and creatively reconstructing the everyday patterns that constitute a meaningful life (Englund 1999; Honwana 1999; Richards 1999).

A Comparative Study In a later book, *Shadows of War* (2004), Nordstrom makes the case that standard notions of local wars fought by local actors over local issues are largely fiction. Through a comparative study of war and violence in Mozambique, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and Angola, she instead traces the extensive global networks of individuals and industries that feed and fuel local violence and war. Mercenary soldiers, foreign strategists, arms suppliers, businesspeople, black marketeers, smugglers, humanitarian relief workers, researchers, propagandists, and journalists all circle the globe, moving from one war to the next. Multi-trillion-dollar international financial networks support warfare. Illegal drugs, precious gems, weapons, food supplies, military training manuals, and medicines are products moved by international networks of legitimate and illegitimate businesses and agencies that profit from the business of war.

Thanks to globalization, the business of war now operates on a worldwide scale. It influences both the architects of war, who primarily engage the battle from a distance, and the people who suffer the consequences on a war's front lines. Discussing the local people affected by the business of war, Nordstrom notes that theirs are not the typical war stories recounted in the media. When war is portrayed only through the prism of weapons, soldiers, territory, and strategic interests won or lost, a more significant reality is ignored: the heroic efforts of people on the front lines who resist and maintain life in the face of violence and death (Finnstrom 2005).

How Do People Mobilize Power outside the State's Control?

Systems of power, including the state, are never absolute. Their dominance is never complete. Even when a culture's dominant groups and institutions are very powerful in terms of their ability to exercise force or to establish control through hegemony, they do not completely dominate people's lives and thinking. Individuals and groups with less power or no power may still contest the established power relationships and structures through political, economic,



With globalization, an extensive network of individuals and industries circles the globe from one war to the next. (clockwise, from top) United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees workers distribute blankets to Syrian refugees along the Jordanian-Syrian border, 2012; members of the media mark their flak jackets as gunfire rings out near the Tripoli Hotel in Lebanon, 2011; an Australian mercenary trains rebel recruits in Myanmar.

religious, or military means and challenge and change cultural norms, values, symbols, and institutions. This power is a potential that anthropologists call **agency**.

In such displays of human agency, we see the way culture becomes the realm in which battles over power are waged; where people contest, negotiate, and enforce what is considered normal and what people can say, do, and even think. Because of human agency, cultures do not remain rigid and static. They change.

Efforts to change cultural patterns take various forms, which we will consider further. Human agency may be expressed through individual strategies of resistance, such as the “weapons of the weak” discussed in Chapter 2, collective efforts such as social movements, and alternative institutions to the state such as those based on religion.

agency: The potential power of individuals and groups to contest cultural norms, values, mental maps of reality, symbols, institutions, and structures of power.

Social Movements

Social movements are collective, group actions in response to uneven development, inequality, and injustice that seek to build institutional networks to transform cultural patterns and government policies. Social movements engage in contentious politics, usually outside the mainstream political process, to address specific social issues, although they usually do not seek to overthrow the social order. The study of social movements is interdisciplinary, engaging not only anthropologists but also sociologists, political scientists, and historians (Edelman 2001).

social movement: Collective group actions that seek to build institutional networks to transform cultural patterns and government policies.

Recently, the anthropological analysis of social movements has focused on the responses of local communities to the forces of globalization. Factors such as the worldwide movement of capital and production through flexible accumulation, the increasing migration within and across national borders, and rapidly increasing yet uneven rates of development have spurred the emergence of social movements as local communities organize to protect their land, environment, human rights, and cultural identities in a changing economic and political context. Simultaneously, time-space compression has facilitated increased communication and cooperation among individuals, social movements, and NGOs, thus creating opportunities for a “globalization from below” (Falk 1993, 39).

As part of this phenomenon, as we discussed earlier in terms of Hodgson’s ethnography of the Maasai, actors who operate outside the formal institutions of the state and beyond the control of dominant global financial entities (such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization) use social media and social networking to build transnational activist networks and alliances. Through these mechanisms, their combined efforts address inequality, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses (Juris 2008; Nash 2005). Within the past several years, for example, social

Activists in Kathmandu, Nepal, demand constitutional protections for “Dalits” who have been systematically marginalized by the region’s caste system.



movements from Tunisia to Egypt to Syria and New York have relied heavily on social media to challenge political, economic, and military systems of power. In the following sections, we consider several types of social movements: rural peasants in Costa Rica and urban Occupy Wall Street protestors seeking greater economic egalitarianism.

Rural Social Movements In the last thirty years, rural social movements have drawn anthropologists’ attention as farmers engage in creative political struggles to resist the impact of globalization on their land, livelihood, and way of life. As one example, Marc Edelman’s *Peasants against Globalization* (1999) examines the activism of the rural poor in Costa Rica, Central America, during the 1980s and 1990s. Edelman recounts a story that reflects the beleaguered experience of rural agricultural workers elsewhere across the globe in recent decades.

Having gained independence from Spain in 1821, Costa Rica is one of the most politically stable countries in the Americas. By the early 1980s, Costa Ricans had built a strong, economically self-sufficient democracy and taken the radical step of abolishing the nation’s military in order to invest in programs of national development. Such programs aimed to provide education, health care, tariff protections for local products, and price supports for basic food-stuffs to ensure a basic livelihood for all citizens. The programs also provided government-backed loans to farmers to stabilize agricultural production.



MAP 14.5
Costa Rica

YOUR TURN: FIELDWORK

Exploring the Balance of Power in Human Relationships

Human political engagements encompass every relationship in our lives. You don't have to be running for elected office or participating in a social movement to be involved in politics. Every relationship has a power dynamic. In some, you have power over the other person. In others, someone has power over you. Or the dynamic of power may shift back and forth depending on the circumstance.

Make a list of all the relationships and interactions you have in the course of a day: with family, friends, teachers, students, employers, coworkers, shop owners,

waiters, government officials. Or watch a television show or a movie and observe the relationships of power represented there. Now describe the way power is balanced in each relationship you experience or observe. How is power organized? Can you see the intersections of age, gender, income, race, religion, sexuality, and/or citizenship? What political negotiations are present in these relationships? Consider how these political dynamics were established and how they might be changed. Must they continue indefinitely as they are?

During the mid-1980s, however, Costa Rica was drawn into the civil wars of its neighbors, serving as a key ally of the United States on the Central American peninsula as war and upheaval spread in Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Panama. Simultaneously, a debt crisis affecting most of Latin America shook Costa Rica's economy and spurred rapid inflation. Under the auspices of providing foreign aid to an ally, the U.S.-sponsored Food for Peace program delivered massive quantities of subsidized corn, wheat, and rice—purchased from U.S. farmers—to the Costa Rican market. The subsidized food, however, undercut Costa Rican farm prices, making it increasingly difficult for local farmers to sell their own products at the price needed to break even.

Ultimately, these changes in the Costa Rican food market drove many small-scale farmers out of business, lowered the country's overall food production, and ended its history of food self-sufficiency. Structural adjustment loans offered by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to help Costa Rica through the crisis required the government to eliminate price supports, tariff protections, and government-backed loans while drastically reducing investments in health care and education. These measures further deepened the country's crisis.

Edelman retells the stories of local, small-scale farmers—often called “peasants” in the anthropological literature—and their national umbrella group, UPANACIONAL, as they fought these threats to their way of life. The peasants marched, blocked highways, and held street demonstrations. They built alliances with wealthy farmers, lobbied national politicians, and promoted charismatic activist figures into national prominence to speak on their behalf. In fact,

A farmer holds a puppet of Costa Rican president Laura Chinchilla during protests in the capital, San Jose, over new property taxes on agricultural land, 2012.



the rural farmers that Edelman depicts challenge many traditional stereotypes of peasants. In the face of difficulties tied to both national and international policies, they reveal themselves to be worldly, outspoken, forward thinking, creative, persistent, and proud, refusing to be silenced or sidelined.

The climax of the Costa Rican peasants' collective action and direct pressure tactics came as several dozen farmers and movement leaders occupied government buildings in June 1988. At the conclusion of the standoff, the activists were arrested; however, the negotiated settlement extracted a government commitment to provide access to low-interest credit for Costa Rica's rural farmers. This was a significant victory in response to the peasants' demands. Edelman concludes that the Costa Rican peasants may not have stopped the effects of globalization on their nation's rural population, but through collective action they were able to soften the harshest blows (Gudmundson 2001; Welch 2001).

Occupy Wall Street Anthropologists seek to understand how social movements arise, mobilize, and sustain themselves. Even though conditions of inequality and injustice are widespread in many parts of the world, the activation of movements for social justice occurs in only certain situations. Anthropologists have investigated the material, human, cognitive, technical, and organizational resources necessary for social movements to succeed (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Recent attention has turned to the **framing process** of movements—specifically, how shared meanings and definitions arise to motivate and justify collective action.

framing process: The creation of shared meanings and definitions that motivate and justify collective action by social movements.

Actions by the Occupy Wall Street movement beginning in September 2011 illustrate the role of the framing process. How did Occupy protestors capture the attention of a nation (and beyond) and build a consensus for social action? What factors led to their success? Organizers of the movement had been involved in planning well before September 2011. The financial crisis of 2008, precipitated by reckless speculation on the part of big banks and investment companies, had created an underlying instability in the U.S. economy and intensifying recriminations in the political sphere. But when protestors occupied Zuccotti Park near Wall Street in lower Manhattan three years later, they needed other strategies to capture people's attention and imagination. There were two keys to their success, both related to framing. First was the framing of the movement as simultaneously virtual and physical. And second was a framing of their cause under the banner "We Are the 99%."

Anthropologist Jeffrey Juris, who studied Occupy Boston, has examined both the core identity of the Occupy movement and the cultural and technological mechanisms that sustained its momentum. The interplay between virtual and physical forms of protest has been key. Social media drew a diverse group of people with shared concerns—in this case, over economic inequality—into shared physical spaces. Listservs, websites, and collaborative networking tools facilitated new patterns of protest that built on and resonated with more traditional forms. Social media served a key role in keeping the physical outdoor protests and occupations alive, vibrant, and relevant. In the process, not only did the physical occupations become a protest tactic, but also the "physical and communal embodiments of the virtual crowds of individuals aggregated through the viral flows of social media" (Juris 2012, 269).

Another key to Occupy's success rested on framing the movement's cause under the banner "We Are the 99%." With this simple phrase, Occupy Wall Street gradually focused public discourse on questions of the fundamental fairness of the U.S. and global economy in light of rapidly growing conditions of inequality over the past forty years that have steadily transferred wealth from 99 percent to 1 percent of the nation's population. Despite growing calls by political leaders and media critics demanding that Occupy Wall Street activists put forward specific policy proposals to address the problems they were decrying, the movement steadfastly refused. Instead its members focused on the underlying issue of inequality framed in their motto, "We Are the 99%."

Activists recognized that sustaining a consensus for action would depend not only on the underlying economic conditions and openness of the political system to change, but also on the movement's ability to continue to successfully frame its identity. However, Juris suggests that movements such as Occupy Wall Street can pursue multiple paths. While continuing to develop alternative models of democratic self-organizing that directly challenge state

Occupy Wall Street protestors successfully framed the debate against corporate greed and social inequality with their motto “We Are the 99%.” Where else have you heard this framing used?



policies, such movements can also recognize the possibility for indirectly shaping policy debates by influencing wider political discussion. Writing in the spring of 2012, Juris noted that Occupy Wall Street had already contributed to a shift in public discourse. The framing process of Occupy has successfully highlighted growing inequality and the influence of financial and corporate interests in the economy and politics. At the same time, Occupy has functioned as a laboratory for the production of alternative forms of democracy and community (Juris 2012). Where have you encountered this framing of the 99 percent and the 1 percent in discussions on inequality?

Alternative Legal Structures

In addition to overt social movements and subtle, nonovert forms of resistance, it is possible to challenge structures of power in an arena where the state usually holds clear authority: in matters of the law. But how do people organize alternative legal structures outside the direct control of the modern state? What gives authority and legitimacy to alternative structures if they are not enforceable by the state's coercive power? Legal anthropologist Hussein Ali Agrama spent two years conducting ethnographic research on local courts and councils in Cairo, Egypt, to explore these questions (Agrama 2010, 2012).

Islamic Fatwa Councils in Cairo, Egypt Agrama compared the operations of two key local sources of legal authority: (1) the Personal Status courts operated by the Egyptian state and (2) the Al Azhar Fatwa Council, independently

established in 1935 and one of the oldest and most established centers of Islamic authority. In the busy and crowded Personal Status courts, Egyptians of all walks of life appear before a judge, an official of the state, who makes legally binding rulings that draw on the Egyptian Constitution and legal codes that are based on the principles of Islamic Sharia (law). In the equally busy and crowded Fatwa Council, held in a spacious room located at the main entrance to the Al Azhar mosque, seekers approach Islamic legal scholars and interpreters of Islamic law, or muftis, for religious answers about matters of daily life. The muftis respond freely with legally nonbinding answers to anyone who asks. Their decision is called a “fatwa”—a response to a question about how to live ethically and rightly.

In comparing these two court systems, Agrama encounters a startling dynamic. Both deal with an overlapping set of issues heavily focused on matters of marriage, sex, divorce, reconciliation, and inheritance. Both draw their decisions from Islamic Sharia, although the Personal Status courts engage Islamic law through the Egyptian Constitution and legal code, whereas the muftis refer directly to Sharia and other Islamic traditions in their fatwas. What interests Agrama is that despite these basic similarities, the petitioners’ responses to the authorities’ rulings are markedly different. The legally binding judgments of the Personal Status court are generally looked on with great suspicion. People go to great lengths to avoid the consequences of the court’s decisions despite the state’s ability to coerce obedience to its judgments. In distinct contrast, the Fatwa Council exercises great authority even though seeking decisions from the Council is not obligatory, a fatwa is not legally binding, and once issued, a fatwa does not have to be obeyed. In fact, petitioners can seek more than one fatwa on the same issue if they wish. But Agrama’s research finds that petitioners take fatwas very seriously, following the decisions even if they entail great difficulty or unhappiness—this despite no identifiable institutional enforcement mechanism.

What accounts for the differentiation between Personal Status courts and the Fatwa Council? And how does a given fatwa acquire its authority without the threat of coercive force like that which the state makes available to the Personal Status courts? To understand the authority of the fatwa, Agrama explores the complex interactions and expectations between seekers of fatwas and the muftis that issue them. Contrary to popular impressions, fatwas are not merely designed to dispense points of correct doctrine in obedience to prescriptions found in Islamic Sharia. Rather, the mufti seeks to apply Islamic tradition and law to resolve particular problems, identify an effective solution, and point the seeker toward a path forward. The process includes significant perplexities and uncertainties: The fatwa seeker arrives perplexed by his or her life situation, and at least initially the mufti is uncertain about how to respond. In



MAP 14.6

Cairo

David Vine

Militarization at Home and Abroad

Anthropologist David Vine, professor at American University, studies U.S. militarization and its impact on people around the world and in the United States. His book *Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World* (2015) documents the effect of the more than 800 U.S. military bases operating outside the United States. Their global footprint shapes not only U.S. military interventions, but the lives of local people, U.S. military families, indigenous populations, and the environment. The cost to the U.S. national budget alone, Vine estimates, is around \$100 billion a year.

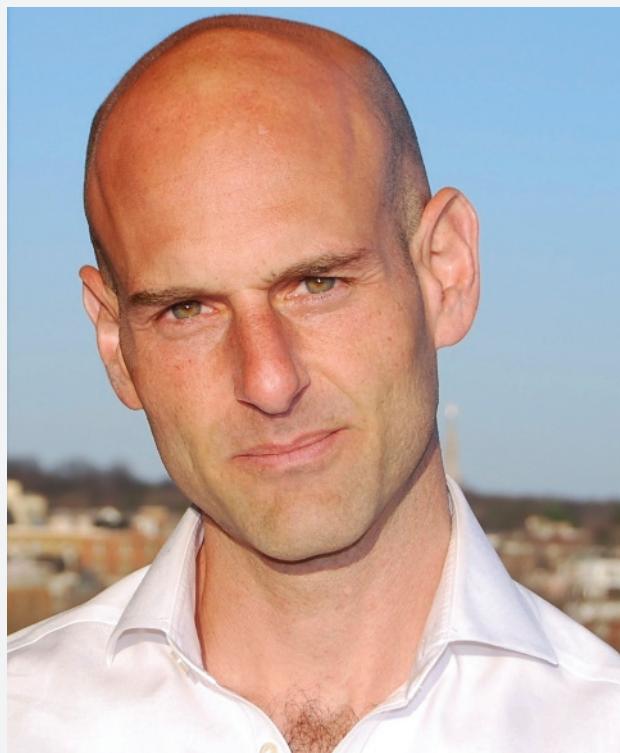
Vine became interested in militarization in graduate school while conducting research for a group of exiles from the island Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. "In the late 1960s, the U.S. and British governments forcibly removed this entire indigenous people, the Chagossians, from Diego Garcia to create a major U.S. military base. They were simply dumped in exile, deported to the islands of Mauritius and the Seychelles with no resettlement assistance. Unsurprisingly, they became deeply impoverished, and despite that, over the last almost fifty years now, they've been struggling to get back to their homeland and get proper compensation for what they've suffered. That opened my eyes to the world of U.S. military bases overseas and the damaging effects of so many of them."

"Ethnographic skills were very helpful in allowing me to live with the Chagossians, participate and research their daily lives, and see the ways in which their lives have been deeply damaged by living in exile. But I was also interested in not just looking at the ways the Chagossians have suffered but understanding why my government, the U.S. government, decided it needed a military base in the middle of the Indian Ocean and why it was appropriate to exile the entire people. I became part of a growing group of anthropologists who have studied U.S. foreign policy, U.S. military policy and policy makers, and done so

with ethnographic methods." Vine's research became his book *Island of Shame: The Secret History of the U.S. Military Base on Diego Garcia* (2009).

But what of the impact of U.S. militarization on the United States itself? "I don't think people understand how much tax-payer money we are pouring into the military. By some estimates it's around a trillion dollars annually—at least half the discretionary budget of the government. I think the Pentagon today—the U.S. military—has become a fourth branch of government. It controls such a large portion of the budget in this country and has so much power—easily as much as the legislative or judicial branches.

"President Eisenhower coined the term 'military-industrial complex'. I think it's a useful way of under-



Anthropologist David Vine

standing the combined power of the military, the military services, and the military contractors that build weaponry. Members of Congress are also part of this system that has exerted tremendous power in our daily lives and shapes, in often invisible but powerful ways, our political lives, economic lives, even our spiritual and cultural lives.”

Vine warns about the ways even students have become militarized—embedded in this system of militarization. “I think Eisenhower’s military-industrial complex speech should be required reading. He pointed out that every billion dollars spent on a bomber is money that is being taken from someone who’s unclothed, who’s going hungry or is poorly educated. Today, the reason undergraduates are going into so much debt—one reason college costs so much and secondary schools are in such poor shape—is because we’ve poured so much of our tax money, our national wealth, into the military and not into schools, hospitals, housing, and infrastructure.

“In the post-9/11 era, we’re spending money at a rate like we were at the height of the Cold War when we were faced with another superpower with nuclear arms. Now we face no such enemy and our military spending in many ways has become counter-productive. It has actually inflamed tensions in many cases. This is where bases come in. They’ve outraged local populations who—not surprisingly and understandably—don’t want their lands occupied by U.S. bases and U.S. troops. All that money is not, generally speaking, making us safer. In many ways, it’s actually making us less safe.”

Students can take steps to de-militarize themselves, Vine suggests, “first by starting to become aware of the influence of the military and the glorification of war in your lives. Perhaps even with the clothes you wear, like the camouflage that’s pervasive in our fashion. And then

in the media you consume. Perhaps ask yourself why war games involving mass killing are so popular and how that’s shaping our lives and how we think about the world and even shaping our brains. Another dimension of militarization of popular culture is Hollywood. Look at how popular violence is in media, including movies and TV. Begin to become aware of how war and violence are celebrated. And certainly begin to pay attention to money that’s being invested in war and the military and begin to talk with friends and neighbors and family about the choices

that our political leaders are making with our tax dollars, taking money from our schools, hospitals, infrastructure, and housing.

“There are other direct actions that people can take, beginning with opposing any future

wars or military interventions. Research has shown time and again that military solutions, military responses are not effective ways to solve international problems. They’re certainly not effective solutions to terrorism. And get involved in efforts to move money from the military budget to the civilian side of the budget. Research has shown that money invested in health care and education and infrastructure creates many more jobs than the equivalent amount of spending in the military.”

Vine has actively worked to resist efforts to militarize anthropology as a co-founder of the Network of Concerned Anthropologists. “We created this group in response to efforts by the military and CIA to recruit anthropologists into the War on Terror and to serve in Afghanistan and Iraq. They became in some cases armed anthropologists. This is a direct violation of our professional code of ethics to *do no harm* to the people and other animals with whom we do research. Anthropologists organized to oppose this effort to recruit other anthropologists and we were quite successful.”

Research has shown time and again that military solutions are not effective ways to solve international problems.

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Fatwa Council at the Al Azhar Mosque, Cairo, Egypt.

this context, the mufti typically begins by asking for further information in an attempt to fully understand the context and facts as presented. The fatwa seeker approaches the mufti with the hope that he will have the skills to point the way out of the trouble, to offer a way forward—to discern and speak the right words.

In the end, both seeker and mufti share a collective responsibility for the success of the fatwa: The mufti must be sure to speak the right words, and the seeker must apply them correctly. Although the consequences of an incorrect fatwa may be most damaging for the seeker during his or her lifetime, the mufti is believed to bear responsibility for the outcome in the hereafter. Ultimately, the fatwa is pronounced in order to put the questioner on the right path forward, to offer direction and facilitate a journey on which the seeker can advance within the range of doctrine toward a Muslim ideal. Agrama suggests that it is careful and personal navigation of these complexities that engenders trust and conveys legitimacy on the muftis and their fatwas.

Despite the overarching presence of the state (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) and, in this case, the explicit presence of a state-run court, individuals and communities consistently seek alternative frameworks of authority through which

to organize their lives. Agrama's study of the bustling Al Azhar Fatwa Council in Cairo provides one compelling example and sheds light on local practices of the fatwa—practices that are increasingly popular within Egyptian society and the Muslim world more generally, yet are frequently misunderstood in the West.

In the opening story of the Sundarbans march, Paris climate change demonstrations, and U.S. student fossil fuel divestment campaigns, as well as in the ethnographic examples presented throughout this chapter, we have seen the remarkable diversity of strategies that humans use to exercise power through the medium of politics. Although political upheaval in North Africa and the Middle East readily draws the focus of the world media, Agrama's work in Cairo reminds us that human political activity occurs at many different levels during the course of daily life. Whether through the politics of the state, acts of war, social movements, or small-scale resistance that James Scott (1985; see Chapter 2) labeled weapons of the weak, we have considered how anthropologists examine power and politics and the cutting edges of political activism that will continue to draw their interest in the future.