WAR VETERANS

SQUEEZED

IN-BETWEEN SYSTEMS

The long 20th century veterans observed with social systems theory

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Wars have immense costs, financial and human. Whereas numerous studies of traumatized war veterans establish various forms of quantitative oriented reports on veteran problems, more in-depth micro-descriptions interpret the phenomenology of disrupted life narratives. The present article aims to link the level of societal macro-systemic phenomenon of human costs in war and the level of distorted psychic systems of individuals. The basic hypothesis is that individuals become divided, split and disintegrated in wars since they are placed in-between differentiated systems that communicate about the victims’ war experiences in communication codes that are not possible to reconcile and integrate. A second hypothesis is that this fragmentation of disrupted life narratives has been experienced historically with very different consequences due to developments in modernity as well as transformations in war. In the course of modernity, welfare systems have been developed to take care of disabled victims of war, physically disabled and later, to a lesser degree, psychically disabled. The article investigates if war veterans become more vulnerable due to increased individualization processes in modernity. The article presents these hypotheses in a sociological framework of German Niklas Luhmann’s theory of differentiated social systems.

**Keywords:** Systems theory, war, veterans, human costs, PTSD, sociology, individualization, disability

‘Worüber man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen’, Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1922

War veterans have not always been neglected in social research. After the First World War, a flood of investigations left the hands of authors who saw the problems of disabled individuals (Geyer 1983). Families lost their fathers, or the former ‘heads of families’ came home disabled and were not capable of fulfilling their role to earn money, to form and raise children or even to take care of themselves. Aesthetic narratives took a deep breath, and after a few years a number of great novels were published such as Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, Thomas E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Ernst Jünger’s *In Stahlgewittern* and probably the most famous Erich Maria Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts neues* (Prost & Winter 2004). Philosophy and theology went even deeper when authors with that background questioned the legacy of thought. Neo-Kantianism broke down in favour of more sophisticated Kantian philosophy, linguistic philosophy, existentialist ontology or phenomenology, the Frankfurt School etc. However, because of the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, hundreds of social researchers from central Europe fled, most of them to America (Fleck 2010). New conditions emerged; new questions were at the forefront such as problems posed by totalitarian regimes. The Second World War produced even more neglected persons and disabled war veterans. Yet, in the wake of these immense problems, the problem of war veterans drowned in the tsunami of another modernity; somewhat later the disasters became forgotten by social science and for instance Esping-Andersen’s (1990) much celebrated Swedish welfare model is claimed as a path it is possible to follow without any discussion about the humane, social and financial costs of the world wars and other modern wars that Sweden never attained.

Social theory did not take care of the problem; and accordingly the social costs of war and war experience did not constitute any transformation or even change in social theory (Joas 2003; Malešević 2010). Modern social theory hardly mentions the importance of the extremely bloody and disabling 20th century. Wars create innovations more than almost any other social phenomenon and paradoxically destruction in war often is followed by immense economic growth invented by the very physical and psychic traumatized persons who at best can forget the horrible years and enter into a post-war life conformed to materialism. Conformism and consumer materialism appeared as existential needs for most people in a generation until a new generation came along.

In social research, for sure, authors like Raymond Aron, Quincy Wright, Morris Janowitz and Samuel Huntington undertook important studies of war and military organization. But once more, war experiences risked drowning in an even scarier and more meaningless future with the possibility of a Cold War that could suddenly turn warm.

However, this picture of a general neglect of war experience is not completely true, and there are huge differences from country to country, from Western Europe to the theoretically neglected experiences of Eastern Europe over the lost experiences of the Third World (Krippendorf 1981) until the post-colonial wars, and to the dominating US experiences. It is a paradox that the present analysis cannot avoid to exaggerate the use of American analyses of the war veteran problem, simply because these analyses are easier to access. Yet the above picture of a neglected traumatic constitution of modern society does not pay honour to the now dominating social theories. The generation that has re-established and transformed social theory and thought has Zygmunt Bauman (b. 1925), Michel Foucault (b. 1926), Niklas Luhmann (b. 1927), Jean-François Lyotard (b. 1927), Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929), Pierre Bourdieu (b. 1930), Jacques Derrida (b. 1930), Jean Baudrillard (b. 1930) as its core authors. Remark that they are all continental Europeans and were all young enough to be innocent in the atrocities of the Nazi years but old enough to remember, reflect and ask penetrating questions. Remark too that they were all extremely occupied with the linguistic, symbolic, discursive or communicative turn of social thought. For sure, others could be mentioned too, but in social theory it is pointless to claim advances by later authors just remotely at the level of those authors. And for former authors, we probably have to go back to Weber, Durkheim, Simmel and Mead’s generation to find anything at that level though some authors like Hannah Arendt (b. 1906), Theodor Adorno (b. 1903), Jean-Paul Sartre (b. 1905) and Norbert Elias (b. 1897) certainly emphasized the social impact of war.

To analyse the problem of war veterans, I will use Niklas Luhmann’s theory. He was professor in Bielefeld and was without comparison the most important figure in social systems theory which has been completely remodelled since his more than 60 books cleared the ground. Fifteen years old, Luhmann was taken into the Wehrmacht, captured by the US army and 17 year old he came back to Germany in 1945. He has literally contributed in almost every field of sociology with his analyses of so-called self-referential systems of social communication. Shortly epitomized, to Luhmann the constitutive element of society is not humans but communication, and communication is only possibly because we, as humans with our thoughts and feelings, are constituted as psychic systems and living systems outside society as a self-referential communication system. The young Luhmann might have experienced that society is in war with itself, and he could only observe it from the outside at the same time as he observed himself. The self-reference of social communications constitutes meaning according to functionally differentiated codes of communication; and psychic systems also constitute meaning in the autopoiesis of their consciousness. Of course social communication cannot communicate without reference to humans or to physical and biological systems.

Yet communication cannot socially communicate about every matter at one moment of time (Luhmann 1984). This means that communication as such concerns a social, material and temporal dimension. Accordingly, in order to become meaningful, communication has to reduce social, material and temporal complexities and select what to include and what not to include. This is done in the medium of semantics by binary codes that can stabilize themselves in the course of history, simply by coding themselves from their inside preferred form of communication, as when research codes research and thereby stabilize the evolution of research communication. The same can be said about legal, religious and monetary communication, and communication of art, love, etc. – and of war. Luhmann wrote major works about almost all of such functionally differentiated systems of self-referential communication and their organizational systems, but not about the war system and the military organization systems (Harste 2004; Matuszek 2007). He could probably not handle to observe it with sufficient distance since basically his systems theory is about second order observations of first order observations.

To understand why and how wars produce war veterans and what wars do to soldiers and populations we have to understand the system of war. Therefore I initially will embark on a short systems analysis of the exposure of human conditions in real wars. Under and after wars, “veterans” are categorized and classified according to essentially contested communication codes; this I discuss in a second section that describes the historical conflicts about concepts used to observe veterans. The period after WW I highlights not only the invention of substantial welfare programmes but also very comparative but divergent communication codes about veterans with extremely fatal consequences. The third section questions the limitations of communication to psychic systems; the distinction between communication and consciousness is highly philosophical but is indispensable to understand the phenomenology of distorted life experiences. In a final section the article’s conclusion exposes a heritage of hypocrisy in the political discourse about war.

The article is born out of three motives. My first aim is to demonstrate that social theory as well as political and strategic thought of war emphatically should be concerned with war veterans. My second aim is to observe war veterans who are squeezed and entangled in-between social systems; and even to observe disabled veterans, in their insufficient, missing and defect structural coupling between the thoughts, experiences, memories and feelings of psychic systems and the social communication (Harste 2010). Thirdly, I want to observe transformations in the vulnerability of war veterans over a stretch of one hundred years of world wars or globalization wars from 1914 to 2014, when the US lead coalition is to leave Afghanistan: Society changes and so do individuals at the brink of society in their self-referential narratives about who they are and how they should claim to fit into the complexities of a still more functionally differentiated society.

# A systems theory about war

Wars transform people and leave them worse off. Wars create ‘blood, sweat, soil and tears’ (Churchill 13.5.1940); nevertheless Churchill in December 1942 also declared that ‘I am sure it would be sensible to restrict as much as possible the work of these gentlemen [psychologists and psychiatrists]…it is very wrong to disturb large numbers of healthy, normal men and women by asking the kind of odd questions in which the psychiatrists specialize.’ (cited in Crocq & Crocq 2000). Though the costs of war sometimes are recognized, the debt of war costs may transcend our thoughts or at least what we communicate.

Wars lead to people suffering and becoming disabled. Perhaps society could solve conflicts in other political and legal ways (Luhmann 1984: 511ff.). Yet conflicts can take the form of war and codify social interchanges by means of struggle, fight and battle. This form of war has dominated historical state formation, especially since the end of the 15th century (Porter 1994). War is a ‘chameleon’ according to Carl von Clausewitz, director of the Berlin Military Academy at the beginning of the 19th century and probably not only the most quoted, but also the most useful analyst of those dynamics of war that lead to disabled veterans (Clausewitz 1832/1952: 110; Gray 2007; Paret 1986). In fact, Clausewitz’ major concern is not veterans but annihilation and attrition in protracted wars. And disabled veterans are a result of protracted wars.

Clausewitz has been so much discussed, analysed and cited, yet, according to Luhmann and his way of reconstructing social theory, we shall not, today, over and over rephrase the classics of social theory as if theory and its societal knowledge was born in full maturity and only has to be repeated again and again (Luhmann 1989b: 149). We have to rethink and reconstruct.

Clausewitz distinguishes between the abstract idea of absolute war and the realities that emerge once the war continues. This distinction is similar to Immanuel Kant’s distinction of pure autonomous morality and heteronomous moral realities; another of Kant’s ideas is to observe three aspects to explain societal relations or interchanges (‘Wechselwirkungen’) according to their substantial, social and temporal dimensions (Kant 1781/1788/1966: B 256ff). Such forms of ‘Wechselwirkungen’ are basic in Clausewitz’ analysis too. As we have seen, Luhmann has explained how those three dimensions operate in societal communication and also in forms of conflict. Hence we have a rather clear dynamic of warfare for a first order observation of social conflict in the form of war:

1. War is a struggle for material dimensions such as resources, territories, borders, roads, mines, whether or not people should submit, be taxed, conscripted etc. In the material dimension, calculations between the force of mass of men and machines are supposed to decide the battles (Biddle 2004).
2. War is, furthermore, a conflict between opponents and their social forces, armies, soldiers, loyalties, ideas, adherents etc. This implies force as the will to fight.
3. In the third temporal dimension, wars begin, culminate and end. This implies force in form of fast speed of attack in order to end the war quickly.

Yet in reality war is not, or only very seldom, that simple; everything turns complicated. Only futile wars with a clear looser without any possibility to strike back or to irritate and destroy the strategies and tactics of the opponent could have such a form – and then, why wage war if the only result was self-destruction. Hence, a second order observation of war might seem obvious to a systems theoretically informed historical sociology about wars, but such afterthoughts may also begin to gain support among the opponents in the course of wars. In protracted wars, the so-called centre of gravity (‘Schwerpunkt’) changes (Echevarria 2003; Harste 2011; Clausewitz 1832/1952: 875). Longer wars are, obviously, learning systems; and observers learn during wars that:

1. The struggle over the material dimension transforms its centre of gravity from the mass of men and machines to organizing supplies and the logistics involved, producing arms and reproducing soldiers conscripted. Those centres continue to transform the gravity into finance, credit, public opinion, quality of soldiers and their educational and social background.
2. In the social dimension, collateral damage includes civilians, yet relatives are also included on the micro-level, parents, girl- or boyfriends, friends and, above all, children; accordingly, morality dissolves and the force of will appears to be hollow. Eventually the hate among enemies becomes transformed into hatred against the war, and into shame, traumas, angst and sickening. The numbers of war widows and children increase as well as the various and still more crippled persons. On the meso-level, still more organizations and functional systems of society are integrated into the conduct of war or at least irritated by it. And on the macro-level, wars transform alliances and imply constraint to relations, travel possibilities, oil and trade prices, disrupt normal negotiations and international norms of interchanges.
3. The temporal dimension is probably the most important single factor since protracted wars transform their centre of gravity from space into time. The material battle becomes a war of attrition and worn-out soldiers. The soldiers serve for a longer time and have still shorter leave periods, including fathers and mothers with children who wait at home. Still more crippled persons are called into service, accordingly people with traumas and brain damage injuries are in service; eventually soldiers become so traumatized that they find it easier to remain as soldiers near the fighting zones where they find people who can understand that their sense of a normal life is broken; hence sometimes soldiers coming home prefer to be sent into service once again. At the end, the war might stop, but for the disabled and/or traumatized veterans it does not stop; they have to fight with social authorities about care in all its dimensions. To some dismissed soldiers, the struggle for life really begins when they become unable to keep their marriage, social relations, job or education, when they become homeless and begin to become addicted to alcohol, drugs, pills, violence and aggression, suicide temptations, or life in forests etc. And even there the war does not stop. It continues to create disasters for the children without fathers or with choleric, alcoholic fathers who beat their wives or children, always have headaches, cannot sleep at night nor accept that children make noise or play. And if each and every one lives such a second generation traumatized life, and if the collective social context cannot escape from traumatization then we can even observe third generation traumatization (Parsons 2008). Hence the Iraq, Afghanistan and ex-Yugoslavian civil wars, the Vietnam, Congo, Biafra, Algeria and Iran/Iraq wars are not over yet, neither are the Second World War nor the First World War.

Accordingly, the strategic repercussions of war seem to be much greater than what is traditionally accepted in war analyses that normally only bring present day international relations to the fore. We can go back in history to trace the social form dependencies and observe such repercussions. It was not just another story Odysseus undertook when he used ten years to return to Ithaca after the protracted battles at Troy (Shay 1994/2003).

# Observing the veteran as a contested concept for welfare states

The concept ‘war veteran’ fits into the frame William Connolly has coined as an ‘essentially contested concept’ (1983). We may conceive the conflict about binary codified conceptualizations as narratives for legitimacy (Smith 2005; Luhmann 1987; 1980; 1989a). Sometimes the concept “veteran” is used somewhat misleading to characterize what better could be called “ex-servicemen” (Higate 2005). The distinction soldier/human being is interpreted and replaced by a whole series of other distinctions. Immense conflicts have been fought over not only the words as such, but also their relations in their binary constitution as a counter-concepts. Several narratives can be distinguished.

This concerns, first, the complex question if a war veteran ‘deserves’ to be marked as a person ‘entitled’ to certain citizen, political and social ‘rights’. These rights imply voting rights, welfare provisions, pensions, health care, psychological aid (only before or after a certain date), educational support, marriage counselling, support from families and friends, or simply honour, parades, monuments, flag days or whatever. To these legal entitlements, social welfare provisions might follow with voting rights (Marshall 1950; Stone 1984).

According to a second narrative that emerged after the First World War, for instance, a number of such programmes were organized, but typically only for physically disabled veterans while ‘shell-shock’ or ‘Granatenzittern’ was treated with for example electroshock.

A third narrative about binary counter-concepts is to communicate about the veteran as if he is a ‘sacrifice’ and a ‘victim’. A fourth narrative is the veteran as a ‘hero’, an enforced and empowered person who ‘deserves’ because he did his duty. When he entered the army, he might have sworn in the name of his people, his army, chief of army, flag, fatherland, nation, state and government; after the war he could claim to have served those more or less abstract entities. Accordingly, as described in Figure 1, the individual person becomes split into not only two but into four times two, and each of those ‘personalities’ are formed by several communication codes about what veterans should have and receive.

Figure 1. Communication codes about veterans (about here)

These codes of successful communication about the veteran coming home can be functionally equivalent and could become structurally coupled into a cohesive social policy legitimized by a civic society and with a political legitimacy – even in the difficult case when soldiers return from a lost war, an unjust war and a war of a cruelty far beyond public acceptance. According to Luhmann’s analysis of functionally differentiated systems, we should not expect cohesion between differing codes; and in totalitarian or dedifferentiated countries many of such codes simply have no place on earth or are submitted under one or a few dominating codes and subsystems. A hundred years of empirical findings support the thesis of contested and dissent concepts and codes.

Before continuing the analysis, systems theory observes how it observes. The problem of contest and dissent is about the basic codes used. If communication about veterans is the overall problem, the more specified form of the problem is the asymmetries of the binary codes used to observe the problem as a problem. If the veteran as a victim is at the negative side of the binary distinction, and if entitled rights are observed at the positive side, heroism can be used to split the two and govern which side is negative and which is positive. And the problem concerns how to govern heroism. This was typical for the German veteran movements after the First World War (Diehl 1993; Cohen 2002; 2003) Yet the distinctions can also be observed with rights as did the welfare bureaucratic authorities of the Weimar Republic, and I have used their programmes to indicate legal entitlements (A) to the treatment of physically disabled veterans (B). Their approach was extremely professionalized using law to observe the rights; the victim was purely observed as a physically disabled person entitled to programmes established by the government agencies while the psychic self-observation of the veteran was completely excluded. The first two ranges (A, B) of semantic variations used as the medium into which distinctions were drawn and could be operated by organizational programmes that communicate about functional systems.

However, the veteran could also observe himself as a victim who, as a hero, had rights to entitlements and programmes and hence observe how legal rights and programmes were completely inadequate to replace the loss of meaning, and that the narrative of heroes was completely non-sense compared to the psychic trauma. Even if the veteran himself did not recognize this existential exclusion from the communication form of society as a self-referential psychic system, this decoupling of psychic and social systems would lead to severe paradoxes and dissatisfied frustrations.

Luhmann and his assistants observe such distinctions with a certain calculus inspired by logics of George Spencer Brown. Since the distinction is asymmetric (as between legal/illegal or true/false, peace/war etc.), we can draw the distinction in the medium of dissent and contested binary codings in a way that indicate the asymmetry with a preferred side (the horizontal bar) and the distinction between the right and left side of a vertical line (Baecker 1999). The dissent is about entitlements and form of entitlements. The observations are established among those who observe their place with the semantics of programmes, or they observe victims or heroes. The asymmetrical negative (excluded) side of the binary distinction is at the right side, and the social battle is about crossing the vertical bar and receive entitlements because programmes are available or because veterans are accepted as victims or recognized as heroes.

Figure 2. Asymmetric codifications about war veterans (about here)

Who were veterans and what to do with them? From country to country, dissent and conflicts about the differences of concepts, distinctions, forms and path dependencies were obvious (Dandeker et al. 2006). Pain is a reality for first order observations and a socially constructed reality in second order observations (Osborn & Smith 2006). The welfare state construction after WWI is particularly revealing for comparative analysis since the problems were quite similar in Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy etc and with other countries very dissimilar to compare with (Sørensen 2006).

Between 1919 and 1933, the observation form (D) gained still more political strength while C remained as the excluded form. In Germany, an immense number of voluntary associations established care centres at the end of the war, but they were soon demolished because of fear for uncontrollable and unprofessional aid. In spite of enormous resources, there is no doubt that Germany, used to top-down welfare programmes, did not fulfil the need of structural coupling of meaning in-between social systems and traumatized psychic systems. In Luhmann’s terms: It could not compensate for the fact that it compensated (Luhmann 1981a: 16). Because of the sheer size of the meaning problems and the welfare programmes, the political overload of the Weimar Republic was limited to the extreme, and at the same time the financial burden of repayments and war debt and the ensuing inflation destructed the possible couplings. Those who complained about psychic problems were excommunicated as ‘Rentenhysteriker’ (‘pension hysterics’) (Riedesser & Verderber 2004: 75-99) This also applied to Denmark who in 1920 got Southern Jutland back with its 26,000 men who served in the German Army (6,000 died); psychic problems were excommunicated in this way and were seldom recognized though a psychiatric hospital was institutionalized in Augustenborg (Marckmann 2005).

13,2 million German soldiers conscripted; 2,3 million died and 2,8-4,2 million were wounded; in a population of 63 million. 1,537,000 were permanently disabled (Cohen 2002: 193; Whalen 1984); 553,000 widows and 1,192,000 children were left. 4½ million Italian soldiers participated out of a population of 36 million. In United Kingdom, 5½ million British soldiers took part out of a population of 43 million; 1,676,000 were wounded and 755,000 permanently disabled. Europe, altogether, had 8 million physically disabled veterans.

In UK, the provisions were far smaller, 6 % of public spending to 25 % in Germany, but care was provided at a very local basis. Of course, this was completely unsatisfying and often led to disaster and misery. The disabled and traumatized veterans simply had to put on a happy face and be grateful to get provisions (Cohen 2002: 141-143). Cheerfulness, control of emotions, courage and a will to live among the ‘jolly good fellows’ should be exposed as the opposite part of a willingness to die. As a completely paralyzed veteran once said to journalists: ‘A press representative discovered in Richmond on Thursday the perfect story of the havoc of war and of the courage that turns the living hell of existence with a shattered body into something pleasant to smile upon’ (cited from Cohen 2002: 141). It probably also played some role that British servicemen were volunteers and not conscripted. Of course, physically disabled veterans are often mentally injured too. Both phenomena leads to stigmatization in Goffman’s sense (Goffman 1963).

In France, 8 million out of a population of 39 million participated. France had 1.375.800 casualties and 1.2 million disabled veterans. French women arranged for provisions directed towards the veterans (Geyer 1983; Audoin-Rouzeau & Prochasson 2008; Cabanes 2008). The provisions were almost at the same level as in Germany, but it functioned much better since the veterans were also very recognized as the heroes and victors of the war with the unsustainable promise that German repayments would soon endorse the heroes with provisions. The recognition was uniform but locally organized. The greater cost came for school children, who were disciplined into acting as servants to adult male teachers who were often disabled veterans. Ever since, France has had a far too top down meaningless discipline in schools as drill and military exercise is literally used as a medium of education.

In Germany, and in other places as well, e.g. OAS in France after the Algerian War, the political problem was that the front soldiers, ‘die Frontschweine’ (‘front pigs’), believed so much in their common corporate spirit that they would incorporate their front experiences from the war into learnings about a meaningful political order in times of peace (Diehl 1993: 26). A strong hypothesis is that the politics of welfare state emerged after the world wars as what Foucault, in an echo of Carl Schmitt, calls ‘the continuation of war in the medium of politics’ (Foucault 1975: 150; 1997: 41; Schmitt 1932/1963: 107, 34). This is true in the sense described by Susan Pedersen: ‘It was the war that imposed order on diversity and that privileged a privileged logic of welfare on each state’ (Pedersen 1993: 80).

‘Charity’ apparently leads to a sense of shame and guilt. The distinction between ‘guilt’ and ‘deserved honourable entitlements’ has a long path- and form-dependency and goes back to the crusades and the legal revolution in the 12th century and is semantically situated in deep layers of noble honour, inclusion and exclusion (Flori 2001; Bauer 2004; Mäkinen & Pihlajamäki 2004; Luhmann 1980; 1981b). In that sense, the German professional social workers were right not to leave rehabilitation to the social charity of volunteers. In her *Protecting Mothers and Soldiers*, Theda Skocpol describes how already in 1891 a social commissar for pensions to Civil War veterans expressed that ‘an old soldier can receive a pension as a recognition of honourable service with a feeling of pride, while he could turn his back with shame upon an offer of charity’ (Skocpol 1993: 150). Hence in 1893, 966,012 veterans and widows got veterans pensions from the US government; 41,5 % of its income was used for that purpose. In fact about half the expenditures for US wars have been to veterans and their families (Rockoff 2012). Wars are costly and need strong welfare states with high taxes to cover the social costs of wars.

Equivalent to this fact, there is a single and indeed very famous and even dominating example of some kind of cohesive politics of solidarity: the GI Bill of the 11 million US veterans coming home after the Second World War (Angrist 1990; 2011; Juul 2009). But that story is somewhat more complex, not only because it was a hard fight to get it through Congress. Far more than any other soldiers, American soldiers most often served in logistics. The US battles have been told and filmed, not only for the sake of national pride but also for the political idea of constructing unity in the huge country that successfully entered the First World War – among other reasons – to overcome divisions that have split the US since the Civil War in the 1860s (Skocpol 1993; Juul 2009; Porter 1994: 258-275). The forward-looking reason was also to avoid the risk of unemployed and dissatisfied soldiers who could turn into communist movements – after all the Soviet Union carried by far the major burden during WWII and could rightfully be celebrated as the victor of the war. Another lesson was that dissatisfaction and unemployment in Germany and Italy lead to Nazism and Fascism after WWI. Thus, the many complex undertakings that were parts of the GI Bill were inasmuch a risk-avoiding politics of solidarity out of fear than a simple cohesive moral policy. Furthermore, US turned the greenback into gold. Though the US government should be cautious not to abuse the opportunities and ‘exorbitant privilege’ (Eichengreen 2011) in the Bretton Woods agreements from 1944, which it later did, it gave post-war opportunities unlikely to be implemented by almost all other countries that had suffered and been drained by a major war.

Yet already Korean veterans got lower pensions, even in absolute terms, than the GI Bill veterans. With the Vietnam veterans everything got worse: How were humane costs possible – so the leading political strategy seems to have told – in a war that could be won simply by letting first order tactical mass industrial power do the job? In one phrase that was the Pentagon’s attitude, repeated in the neo-conservative Rumsfeld years under G.W. Bush when Department of Veterans Affairs got its budgets severely cut while two major wars led the US army into the quagmire of asymmetric warfare. The US army had about 6,635 causalities and the coalition 8,025 causalities all together until 2012; yet about 15 times as many are wounded and often severely physically disabled since the major rescue health care service improved over the last 100 years so that the rate of dead/wounded (disabled) for US soldiers has changed from 1/2 in WWI, 1/3 in WWII, 1/8 in Vietnam and 1/15 in Iraq and Afghanistan (for a retreating army, wounded soldiers are easier lost). Other countries, like Denmark, however still had a ratio of 1/4 in Afghanistan (Lyk-Jensen et al. 2012: 41). However, as a peculiar paradox, this is not half the US story about long term attrition wars and causalities in protracted wars. From 20 March 2003 to November 2012, Iraq has had between 109,711 and 119,870 causalities officially registered by the US body count. To this a far larger excess mortality could be added.

The French and US Wars in Algeria and Vietnam transformed the centre of gravity and turned the self-perception of individuals into a focus of strategy that was increasingly oriented towards the production of fear as symbol (Harste 2011). Those problems were not strategically perceived in itself in Algeria and Vietnam, yet the horrors were immense, but of course rather smaller in scale and scope than in the World Wars. The strategic point is that the psychic systems came into focus when the wars essentially became guerrilla wars. Even as important, the modern society was transformed when the soldiers returned or shortly after their return. Society was no longer oriented towards industrial routine production, but entered into post-industrial, service-production, information, and even more embarrassing: creativity and self-development of sensitivity (Bell 1973; Harste 2000). This made veterans’ post-war adaptation more difficult if not impossible.

Furthermore, France lost French Indochina and Algeria and the US lost Vietnam. The French soldiers often suffered in silence, yet in mutual solidarity, as they did in and after the First World War (Mauvignier 2009). Of course, as we can read in Bao Ninh’s autobiographic novel *Thân Phân Cua Tinh Yêu* (*The Sorrow of War*)(1991/1993), the Vietnamese people suffered far more and became more traumatized than Americans can imagine. Compared with how Soviet and Eastern European soldiers and citizens suffered in the World Wars and in the Third World wars, it is probably completely exaggerated to focus so much on US soldiers and relatives as is done in social research since the Second World War and the Vietnam War (Krippendorf 1981). In 1945, the Soviet Union had about 15 million soldiers left out of the 43 million conscripted; of these about 11 million were wounded or disabled (Sokolov 2009; Bellamy 2007: 6-15; Danilova 2010: 900); the collective traumatization was all over (Merridale 2005; Lopez & Lasha 2011; Nikouline 2011) rudeness and brutish cynicism became normal behaviour, also towards the second generation, the war children and the occupied countries.

Several phenomena can explain the American discourse about their failing heroes. First, an immense brain drain of social researchers and intellectuals from Europe established an enormous development in US social science (Fleck 2010), and, as a kind of pay back, many were concerned with American soldiers. Second, exactly because the wars were far away and the traumatized few, it was possible to worry about individuals. Yet the collective traumatization of the US was not even a shadow of what it was in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union alone probably lost about 100 times as many citizens, around 44-45 million (about 26-27 million soldiers; Sokolov 2009) in the Second World War as the US (440,000). From 1959, about 4,1 million people lost their lives in the Vietnam Wars, including Kampuchea and Laos. While the US lost 56,000 men, more than 300,000 American soldiers were disabled physically (they were rescued into better hospitals than Vietnamese soldiers and civilians). According to Veteran Affairs, over 700,000 have been disabled physically and mentally, and more than 30 % servicemen suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Schulzinger 2006: 82-93). At the beginning of the 1980s, more than 9,000 suicides are clearly registered and much higher numbers have been circulated; at the end of the 1990s more than 60,000 US soldiers seem to have committed suicide and an infinite and unknown number have been addicted to drugs, alcoholism, been divorced, in prison or homeless. In 2011, Eric Shinseki (2011), the minister of Veterans Affair, could report that more than 6,000 US veterans commit suicide per year, in 2012 a VA report registered 22 a day. As Aaron Glantz has shown, US soldiers have to fight a battle about social and psychiatric aid when they come home, and very often they do not have the capacity to enter into that kind of struggle in spite of the fact that Veterans Affairs employs more than 300,000.

PTSD has been used as a form of diagnosis scheme in US psychiatry since about 1980 (Jones et al. 2003; Schulzinger 2006; Shay 1994/2003: 165-182; Ørner et al. 1998; Lindorff 2002; Galawsko 2004; PTSD Combat 2006; Jakupek et al. 2009; Glantz 2009: 8-9; Kehle et al. 2010; Maguen et al. 2010; Schnurr et al. 2010; Vasterling 2010; Adler 2011; Cesur et al. 2011). Often Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) goes along with PTSD (Carlson et al. 2010). Margaret Lindorff convincingly demonstrates that the PTSD-diagnosis also adequately describes soldiers from the Second World War, in casu Australian soldiers. Maguen (et al.) argues that PTSD is also about direct and indirect killings that are destructive for volition as a social phenomenon. The severe mental wounds cannot be neglected due to the fact that many veterans describe their relatively short life in war as, for example, 75 % of their life (Sajer (1967/2010)) that created a meaningful life. As demonstrated by Kirsten Holmstedt (2007; 2009) in her penetrating studies of female soldiers, but also well-known from many other studies, the point is the opposite: since soldiers and veterans cannot communicate adequately with relatives and social servants, not to say employers and colleagues, about their mental wounds, they wish to return to service simply in order to re-experience the corporate spirit and the buddies who understand their problems.

# The tacit battle about communication

Soldiers coming home have to fight to achieve inclusion and societal recognition (Glantz 2008; 2009; Shay 1994/2003; 2002). The veteran has to conceptualize himself and make him and his experiences, thoughts and memories available to communication. He has to make a structural coupling between his psychic system and the communication of social systems. The aim is not to include psychic systems into social communication systems but simply only to establish a structural coupling without which the psychic system dissolves in its autopoietic loneliness. To avoid the angst of loneliness, the consciousness needs rules and norms to be able to form coherent thoughts and to establish a will about doing something socially bound in a time dimension that connects the present will with past and future will.

Soldiers’ narratives may seem more beautiful and cohesive than they really are because soldiers know they must submit and adapt to the narrative of ‘pride’ in order not to be neglected and, therefore, sometimes tell stories about ‘having made a difference’ (Kofod et al. 2010). After some years, they tell about the ‘best years of their life in the army’ since the reality is that their best friends remain those they met in war. However, the point is that they can only communicate with their old soldier buddies about their harms, neglect and suffering, nightmares and sometimes small things that bother them in everyday life. Yet what does it mean to communicate and get meaning in communication under such conditions?

Luhmann hardly ever told about his time in the army. When he was captured, he learned to differentiate in differentiation, and he learned about contingencies: ‘suddenly the comrade next to me was not there anymore’ (personal interaction in 1992). I discussed Lyotard’s book *Le différend* (1983) with him in 1987 in Bosnian Mostar passing the famous bridge that was later destroyed and rebuilt. The discussion was about the non-existing expressive possibilities of victims in the Holocaust, the theme for Lyotard’s book that followed Theodor Adorno’s well-known study of *Negative Dialektik* (1966) and the break-down of even aesthetics after the Second World War. It also included Ludwig Wittgenstein’s also well-known phrase developed in the trenches of the First World War. Later Luhmann published the booklet *Reden und Schweigen* (1989c) about ‘speech and silence’. The point is that silence is a form of communication, a topic also dealt with Austrian-American psychiatrist Paul Watzlawick (et al. 1967). He too attained the conference at IUC in Dubrovnik in which we took part. The intersubjectivity of soldiers meeting again passes in dialogue and silence, the present repeats the past in silence between the words. In the Habermas/Luhmann controversy (Harste & Schütz 2o14), this double meaning of intersubjectivity is indeed the core of their debate, though probably it goes too far to see their soldier experience as the founding ground for their views on dialogue (Habermas) and co-presence (Luhmann).

If we are to understand the problem of mentally disabled veterans, it is adequate to observe how the mentally distorted veterans observe themselves at distance, not only to societal communication in interaction systems, organizational and functional systems but also to themselves. War experiences often return in nightmares, where emotions are detached from thought, the body from the way we think, linguistically and grammatically coupled to language and therefore to others. A war experience can be as a memory about a lost beloved melody or a forgotten name we can recognize when we hear it, it is often a lost pain, luckily, but it is also a blank, and because of its importance, it becomes a blank in a biographical narrative and in the curriculum vitae: ‘For combat soldiers the temporal horizon shrinks as much as the moral and social horizon. Only getting through *now* has any existence. With this loss of a meaningful personal narrative that links past, present, and future comes a shrinkage of volition.’ (Shay 1994/2003: 176).

Yet it seems that many soldiers remember in the context of texts they once wrote, letters for instance (Sajer 1967; Rousseau 1999; Vaizey 2010). Letters are narratives with a complex temporality since the soldier plans to write them, thinks over what to write and how, writes and then wait and thinks about how, during that period, she longs for the letter and in a few days she might receive the letter, how she then thinks, reflects and then writes, followed by the transport of the letter, which then…etc. (Luhmann 1982). Such reflections can settle the worrying thoughts, the angst and connect language and thought. Phones and Skype do not have this temporal quality but face-book and sms captures time too.

The problem is that the ‘in-dividual’ easily becomes a ‘-dividual’: anyway modern individuals are, since Rousseau (1762/1971), divided into three as citizens, subjects to the state, and humans. This division is indeed much more complex and has become more complex with the increasingly different roles individuals have to play in a modern functionally differentiated society. ‘The presentation of self in everyday life’ (Goffman 1959) has become a complex patchwork with many more roles than observed in the 1950’s. Intimacy has become a far more public role since the 1970’s (Sennett 1979: 261ff). Job arrangements focus still more on the flexibility of the individual person as a performer, who is able to develop himself and to work actively on the self-government as a still more coherent innovative and creative individual. At the same time, routine jobs disappear or become still more demanding. Hence it becomes increasingly difficult not to fall outside accepted roles and stay on the inclusive side, if only by means of the roles to perform in functional systems, especially after having been socialized intensively into the total institution of an army in war (Goffman 1961). The risk of ‘falling down’ from one system to the other and to the third becomes impending. While inclusion is differentiated as modern communication systems, exclusion is integrated at the external negative side of the binary codes of role communication (Luhmann 1995c). Hence the vulnerability of the individual seems to have increased during the hundred years from 1914 to 2014 when the US lead coalition officially leaves Afghanistan. Probably, individuals also have rising expectations about a creative hedonistic life. The life story of a good life, as more than a conformist life in routines, has become much more widespread (Lipovetsky 1989; Boltanski/Chiapello 1999; Rosa 2005; Harste 2000). In *Minima Moralia*, written right after the Second World War, Theodor Adorno wrote about the future white collar work of service society, and in his aphorism ‘Health to the death’ he stated that ‘today no research can penetrate into the hell where deformations are shaped that appears as smiling faces, openness, flexibility, good mood and adaptability to practical social realities’ (Adorno 1951: § 36). To Adorno, as to Luhmann, identity could only be negative, as non-identity to role expectations.

Beneath the surface of smiling roles and routine roles there is, with Luhmann’s metaphor, ‘a deep ocean of more or less dark and opaque thoughts and emotions on the surface of which words are sailing as disparate ships’ closely or loosely connected to each other (Luhmann 1995b: 123). We can make aesthetically beautiful and philosophically interesting metaphors about the disparities among associations in-between language, thoughts, feelings, memory, and dreams, but for the traumatized veteran they become dissociated words, stories, flash-backs, nervous ticks in the wake of sudden sounds and even small sounds or sudden movements. Speech, language and dialogue turn into remote words. The body reacts without connection to the thought, and the will that connects the present state with past and future states does not appear in a unitary form. Sometimes a suicide letter as that of Daniel Somers from June 2013 describes the state of the traumatized veteran:

‘My body has become nothing but a cage, a source of pain and constant problems. The illness I have has caused me pain that not even the strongest medicines could dull, and there is no cure. All day, every day a screaming agony in every nerve ending in my body. It is nothing short of torture. My mind is a wasteland, filled with visions of incredible horror, unceasing depression, and crippling anxiety, even with all of the medications the doctors dare give. Simple things that everyone else takes for granted are nearly impossible for me. I cannot laugh or cry. I can barely leave the house. I derive no pleasure from any activity. Everything simply comes down to passing time until I can sleep again. Now, to sleep forever seems to be the most merciful thing.’ (Somers 2013)

Even simple agreements and contracts cannot be made with the traumatized person, who on the other hand can become so fixated on everyday pragmatic pre-understood arrangements that they appear as if they are formal contracts that cannot be changed according to whatever is most appropriate in a given situation. Visually we can imagine two figures, (I) the coherent structurally coupled form of thought, emotions, bodily behaviour and language; and (II) the structurally decoupled and dissociated form:

Figure 3. about here

In case (I), the ‘normal’ person, without traumas, has interconnected thoughts, language, emotions, dreams and bodily states (for instance: breath) at the same time as the normal person does not confuse or mistake thoughts with language, emotional hatred with language, dreams with the bodily reality etc. Such people speak about themselves as if they have a ‘core’ that ensures that those different aspects of their psychic systems are united with an ‘ontological security’ (Giddens 1984) as a form of ‘being’ that creates itself in an autopoiesis by means of its own creations (Luhmann 1995b). No wonder that Martin Heidegger, born in 1889 the same year as Hitler, established his great philosophy of ontological being-in-the-world, as a ‘Dasein’ and as ‘In-der-Welt-Sein’, right after the First World War.

For the traumatized person (II), nothing of this are fused into anything like a coherent unity and when they are fused, it is as confusion that mistakes flash-backs for reality, alarms the body and the breath as if a 100 meter run should begin right away, nightmares endure after the wake up and sleep is interrupted and far too short, emotions are about angst and fear. The existentialist philosophies, novels and plays by Sartre (1943), Camus, Becket and Ionesco described such a dissociated alienated being-out-of the-world inspired by Søren Kierkegaard (1843/1967) and Picasso famously painted both figures, the united individual and the disunited -dividual.

# Hypocrisy in war and politics

War is about suffering. Extended and protracted wars lead to tremendous financial breakdowns, credit crises and unemployment. Wars cannot be ‘won’, only lost. The humane losses are so penetrating that they become tabooed and are paradoxically impenetrable for memories and narratives in any rational way (Wittgenstein 1922; Luhmann 1989c; Timmerman-Levenas 2010). Traumatization has its own rationality; it is not a controllable and calculable system subject to instrumental rationality with any form parallel to New Public Management or rational choice. Rather it is a self-referential form excluded and excommunicated to outside of society. Wars too have their own self-referential form as a social system whether they become symmetric in the classical sense or asymmetrical (Harste 2004; Matuszek 2007; Mack 1975; Lind et al. 1989; Arreguin-Toft 2001; Record 2005; Hammes 2006; Münkler 2006; Thornton 2007). Protracted wars, symmetrical or asymmetrical, have financial and humane costs far beyond the moment when the so-called time of peace begins. Wars do not end when they officially are over. The US led coalitions can leave Iraq and Afghanistan, but the Iraq and Afghanistan experiences stay alive as a diabolic and destructive force for years and generations to come, as did the World Wars.

It is a supreme form of political hypocrisy to tell the narrative of control and plans that can win wars and lead to a meaningful life that is constructive to personalities. As Clausewitz described, wars are outside control once they have begun. Plans do not hold and friction begins (Yarger 2006). If the first victim in war is the mediatized ‘truth’, the second is finance, and the third is human life and meaning.

The amazing and deeply worrying fact is that military strategy and political ideas do not include the tremendous costs of war. Military planners have hardly ever calculated with those long-term costs. They continue to be instrumentally submitted to aggressive political ideas. The political system offers opportunities for governments to tell best case narratives and to neglect worse case scenarios (Luhmann 1991: chap. 8), but – according to Clausewitz – in war worst case is far more likely than god or even bad cases. Politicians can be naïve and even stupid, uneducated and narrow-minded persons, but military strategists should know about war and the costs of war. Accordingly they should neglect orders to wage unrealistic campaigns, not to say illegal interventions. Wars can be legally and morally defended as humanitarian interventions. But most likely, they lead to humane costs and long-term suffering.

Why do political systems, organizational systems, mass media and the public opinion have such a blind spot? According to Luhmann systems have blind spots. The risk is that they can only observe the external outside world and its lifeworld in terms of their own semantics, codes and criteria (Luhmann 1986: 52, 59). There might be generational phenomena of neglected memories and hopes for prosperity and innovations in new tactical technologies such as the far too celebrated RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs) (Knox & Murray 2001; Angell 1909). As important is the fact that wars can lead to innovations in organization and technology, science, finance, culture and even in theology. An extreme range of innovations followed the World Wars. Hence, paradoxically, wars destruct but also innovate. Furthermore they lead to an endeavour for stability and even conformity which, balanced with innovations including cultural transformations, can result in economic growth and prosperity. The aftermath of the prolonged warfare of the long 17th century experienced the reforms of the Enlightenment. The Napoleon Wars were followed by a century of industrial growth and modernization. The 1920’s and especially the 1950’s and 1960’s experienced an unprecedented growth. Sorrow was blinded with material goods and neglected with cultural materialism and later wars replaced social meaning with the materialist meaning of still cheaper imported goods from South-East Asia.

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# Figures

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **A. Entitled rights/veteran** | **B. Disabled/veteran** | **C. Victim/veteran** | **D. Hero/veteran** |
| * pensions | * physical injured | * pity | * political rights |
| * health care | * medical treatment | * empathy | * honour |
| * psychological help | * electroshock | * ear-lending | * listeners |
| * education | * re-education | * patience | * qualifications |
| * job | * work-place | * non-stigmatization | * positions |
| * housing | * handicap centres | * place | * access |
| * marriage | * family aid | * love | * paternal place |
| * supporting friends | * Samaritan aid | * support | * pride |
| * supporting families | * appointed roles | * politeness | * respect |
| * grateful children | * discipline | * respect | * thankful nation |

Figure 1. Communication codes about veterans

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **A & B** | |  | | **C** | |  | **D** | |
|  |  |  |  | |  |  |  |  |  |
| entitlements | | disabled victims heroes | | entitlements for empathy | | hero | entitlements | | victims |
| programmes | | |  | | victim | |  | heroes | |

Figure 2. Asymmetric codifications about war veterans

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I. Structurally coupled | | | II. Structurally decoupled | | |
| Language | thought |  | words |  | flash-backs |
| Emotions dreams | relaxed body | | angst |  | alarmed body |
|  |  |  | nightmares | | |

Figure 3.