

Soldiers Fear during World War I – Continuity of an Emotion Culture

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The sources and manifestations of human fear are so manifold that they cannot be fully explored in a short text. The aim of this article is rather to give a picture about how soldier's fear was judged during the First World War. Furthermore, I will also discuss the history of the attitude toward soldier's fear. Understanding the relevant aspects of its discourse could help us to understand why guns were blessed by the churches and why soldiers were expected to sacrifice their lives without fear. In addition, this short article aims to show that researching the history of collective emotion provides not only insights into the hidden mental structures of a society, but it sheds light on human motivations and on the "rationality" of emotions as well.

Although emotions can be considered as anthropological constants, their naming and expression are always shaped by the written and unwritten rules of communities. Culture and language provide a frame in which the basic emotions vary and differentiate from each other. Every culture has its own set of emotions, and they play an important role in communication processes and in the maintenance of norms. In every society, there are emotions that receive positive social recognition, but there are also some with negative connotations or taboos. Soldiers fear is also one of the collective feelings that has long been denied and tabooed. But is it even possible to ignore or even forbid a feeling? History shows the consequences that the suppression of fear has had.

[WWI; History of Emotions; Military Culture; War Psychiatry]

What are Human Beings afraid of?

Fear is experienced mainly when faced with a concrete external threat, but it is possible even when there is no external threat. This formless and indeterminate "fear of the world" was completely unknown to ancient man; in this period, fear was linked to specific situations and objects.¹

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¹ C. BÖHME, Ängste und Hoffnungen. Antike, in: P. DINZELBACHER (Ed.), *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte. Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, Stuttgart 1993, p. 276.

The Greeks were most afraid of phenomena that had uncontrollable negative consequences for their lives. The inhabitants of Olympus were respected above all because their strength far exceeded that of man. Because they often treated mortals on earth arbitrarily, “*the main source of ancient man’s fear was the unpredictability of divine intentions and the resulting human helplessness*”.² The socially practiced ritual of fear reduction is the sacrifice to the gods and other practices of the cults. This was the way of communication between the earthly and the divine world, always aimed at winning the goodwill of the god in question.

For the Christian man of medieval Europe, the outside world concealed many real dangers: diseases, epidemics, natural disasters, wild beasts, robbers, bandits, murderers and, of course, the devil, which was then experienced as a real external fear. Harmful, negative phenomena were explained by the activity of unseen forces. For example, tripping over a threshold or experiencing unshakeable changes in one’s body were attributed to the harmful intentions of demons. In Central Europe, evil was already lurking in a thousand forms by the 13th century. Despite increasing social security and civilizational progress, fears were increasingly manifested in collective reactions (see heretic movements, peasant uprisings, witch-hunts, pogroms). Internal fears were mainly related to the period before and after death (doomsday, damnation, purgatory).³ The absence of fear was seen as a rare and blessed state, a sign of the good relationship between God and man.⁴

However, religion not only aroused fears, but also promised powerful help to mortals. The cross and holy water could help in the fight against demons, while the protection of a higher lord, the veneration of saints and the observance of rituals offered protection against the threatening forces of the outside world. The torture of one’s own body also served as an outward release of internal fears, but the same purifying effect was expected from the extinction of the lives of scapegoats. Superstitious fears

² Ibid., p. 278.

³ P. DINZELBACHER, Ängste und Hoffnungen. Mittelalter, in: P. DINZELBACHER (Ed.), *Europäische Mentalitätsgeschichte. Hauptthemen in Einzeldarstellungen*, Stuttgart 1993, pp. 285–294.

⁴ A. BÄHR, Gottes Wort, Gottes Macht und Gottes Furcht. Gewaltdrohung und Sprache im 17. Jh., in: J. EMING – C. JARZEBOWSKI (Eds.), *Blutige Worte. Internationales und interdisziplinäres Kolloquium zum Verhältnis von Sprache und Gewalt im Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2008, p. 215.

persisted into the modern centuries, with epidemics, earthquakes, floods, and crop failures being seen as divine punishments.⁵

In the 17th century, due to the Turkish threat and the Thirty Years' War, fear became omnipresent, a constant accompaniment to human life in Central Europe.⁶ Typical for this period was that theological fears were increasingly concentrated on specific groups of people (Jews, Turks, heretics, women), which continued to function as scapegoats for collective fears. Although by the 19th century many of the old religious and popular fears (of devils, demons, unwanted pregnancies, disease, death, pain, disasters, hunger, floods, bad harvests) had lost their power, new types of fears, mainly social, had emerged. Fear of loss of social status was not yet predominant in orderly societies hierarchized by birth. Fear of the other person persisted, and persists today, and became increasingly important in the construction of new identities (e.g., national identity, party identity) that replaced the society of orders. By the beginning of the 20th century, although the existential threats of the outside world had become much less important, paradoxically this did not go hand in hand with a general decline in fear in European societies.

Soldiers' Fear

Although the sources of fear, their objects, and the strategies to overcome them have varied from century to century, the attitude to soldiers' fear has remained relatively unchanged from antiquity to the present day. To succeed, the warrior needed courage and fearlessness, and had to overcome the paralyzing effects of fear. The "fearful" soldier has been condemned in every era. Even in ancient times, fearlessness was seen as a divine angel, the hero's main signifier. Although the heroes of the Iliad and the Odyssey knew the fear of death, the heroic ideal implied that this throat-clenching emotion had to be overcome, because one who fears cannot be a role model. A fearful warrior could jeopardize the positive outcome of the battle.⁷

Even in the Christian religious world of the Middle Ages, the greatest shame of a soldier was to be suspected of fear. The motivation for the heroic act was therefore not always to gain recognition, but also to

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ J. DELUMEAU, *Angst im Abendland. Die Geschichte kollektiver Ängste in Europa des 14. bis 18. Jahrhundert*, Reinbek 1985, p. 107.

⁷ DINZELBACHER, p. 279.

free oneself from the suspicion of fear. The ideal figure of the medieval Christian warrior is the *Miles Christianus*, who fights with the ‘weapon of truth’, protected in battle by his faith in God and armoured by the fear of God. The soldier’s fear was not considered an innate quality, but a sign of divine discipline. Those who were weak in faith, that is, who did not fear God enough, were punished by the Creator with fear. A man without fear was considered a man at divine mercy, who would have nothing to fear at the Last Judgement.

In the 17th century, the constant Turkish threat affected the entire Mediterranean basin, beyond the Balkan peninsula, Hungary, the Romanian provinces, and parts of Poland.⁸ The western half of Europe, although not directly affected by the Turkish threat, suffered the atrocities of the Thirty Years’ War. The consequence of long wars was a deterioration in the morale of soldiers. No longer did mercenary armies go to war with the faith of Christ’s soldiers. When they had free time, they plundered, pillaged, and raped. In Central European sources, there were frequent references to soldiers who were no longer fighting for the “good cause” but were instead disrupting the daily lives of civilians. Improving the discipline of soldiers thus became one of the most important tasks of the period. To remedy this problem, military codes were drawn up in the second half of the 16th century, but they were not easy to enforce.

In this era, it was generally expected of that they should not fear the enemy. According to Hans Friedrich von Fleming, a writer on hunting and warfare, the cowardly soldier is the most despicable and miserable creature, unworthy of the sun.⁹ He argued that the most effective means of disciplining the soldier was to intimidate him. In his opinion the harsh sanctions (such as the death penalty) were important to make the soldier’s fear of his superior greater than his fear of the enemy. However, this discipline was a divine sanction as well, imposed by God for weak faith. A soldier’s fear was not merely shameful, but a rebellion against the divine plan which has fixed the moment of death for all mortals. The reward of

⁸ I. H. NÉMETH, *Kassai polgárok és katonák a 16. Században*, in: *Levéltári Közlemények*, 68, 1997, pp. 143–198.

⁹ H. F. FLEMING, *Der Vollkommene Teutsche Soldat, welcher die gantze Kriegs-Wissenschaft, insonderheit was bey der Infanterie vorkommt, ordentlich und deutlich vorträgt, und in sechs besondern Theilen die einem Soldaten nöthige Vorbereitungs-Wissenschaften, Künste und Exercitia, die Chargen und Verrichtungen aller Kriegs-Bedienten, von dem Mousquetier an bis auf den General; ... nebst einem Anhang von gelehrten Soldaten, Adel und Ritter-Stande, von Duellen, Turnier- und Ritter-Spielen, auch Ritter-Orden ec....*, Leipzig 1726, p. 240.

the soldier's courage was that God had freed him from fear and placed it into the heart of the enemy.¹⁰ The politics of intimidating as a means of social discipline was already a strategy in use in the Middle Ages and was used by both the Christian Church and the state.¹¹ The simultaneous use of fear provocation and fear release was a successful means of influence throughout the centuries, with the dual aims of maintaining the normative order and of emotionally mobilizing the soldier when the situation required.

Military Culture in the early 20th Century

In the years after the turn of the century, the general ideal of man in the countries of the Central Powers was in fact that of the soldier initiated in war. And after 1918, the ideal of the soldier was stylized into the prototype of the figure of the front-line fighter. In the 19th century, war was not yet a mass experience because men went to war relatively rarely. In contrast, in the 20th century, wars became places of mechanized mass conflict. In the First World War, a total of 65 million soldiers took part, about a third of whom were permanently injured or killed in combat.¹² Almost one million men were killed at Verdun. This sacrifice, however, was only possible because soldiers believed in the meaning of war and identified with the meaning of a higher power.

The training for soldiering began in childhood and included the idealization of the warrior ideal, the indoctrination of the ideals of sacrifice and heroism. At the outbreak of the First World War, "war games" were popular in both church and secular schools.¹³ In the westernmost provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as Wanner's description shows, teachers, officers and writers were encouraged to provide military readings for 10–14 years old that would foster loyalty to the Kaiser, patriotism, military courage, and self-sacrificing devotion to duty. Youth scout and guard associations were also supported and promoted. Hence the indoctrination during youth provided a solid base for the aim of being a brave soldier and an honoured man in society.

¹⁰ A. BÄHR, *Furcht und Furchtlosigkeit. Göttliche Gewalt und Selbstkonstitution im 17. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2013, p. 140.

¹¹ DELUMEAU, pp. 39–49.

¹² T. KÜHNE, Der Soldat, in: U. FREVERT – H.-G. HAUPT (Eds.), *Der Mensch des 20. Jahrhunderts*, New York 1999, p. 345.

¹³ G. WANNER, *Für Gott, Kaiser und Vaterland*, Feldkirch 2014, p. 107.

The loyalty of the soldier became particularly important to the higher command with the advent of modern mass armies, since orders given from a great distance had to be carried out even if the superior was not nearby. Unlike the mercenary soldiers who received a hefty salary, in modern mass armies the pay was much more modest. The loyalty of the soldier was on the one hand due to intimidation, on the other hand due to his identification with God's, the Kaiser's, and the nation's aims. Though modern wars opened entirely new dimensions of warfare, the mental models of earlier centuries, which interpreted war as a natural disaster or as a divine will, lived on. Transposing war into a mythical dimension also gave the soldier an exceptional social status. The military virtues (sense of duty, commitment to the battle, self-sacrifice) were surrounded by a nimbus of eternal validity.

The individual's fear of death was countered by the symbolic immortality of the group, since the survival of the group, even if many of its members died or were replaced, was assured.¹⁴ The military unit gave the impression of an immortal entity which, through the illusion of homogeneity and coherence, made the unbroken continuity of the members tangible.¹⁵ A soldier who did not show fear or weakness even in the moment of death was a hero for the community. But denying fear helped not only to overcome the fear of death, but it helped also to resolve the ambivalence that arose from the inner conflict between the military duty to kill and the Christian prohibition of killing. However, where a value is absolutely idealized (like the ideal of the fearless soldier), anything that contradicts it must be absolutely denied at the same time. Splitting the world between "good" and "bad" makes not only borders clear but protects soldiers from experiencing a crisis of identity.

Ideals and the harsh Reality

In contrast to the idealized world of military culture, reality presented a very different picture, since most soldiers, despite the heroic cult, feared and longed for their loved ones and found it difficult to cope with the compulsion to kill. In this respect, it made no difference whether they fought as mercenaries or as conscripts. In contrast to the humanistic image of the bourgeoisie, which tolerated weakness and negative emo-

¹⁴ C. F. SHATAN, *Militarisierte Trauer und Rachezeremoniell*, in: P. PASSET – E. MODENA (Eds.), *Krieg und Frieden aus psychoanalytischer Sicht*, Basel, Frankfurt 1983, p. 226.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

tions, the emotional taboo of civil society triggered a series of cognitive dissonances. Leon Festinger's term is used to describe the phenomenon whereby real-life experiences contradict expectations and the individual experiences the resulting dissonance as an anxiety-inducing condition that must be reduced at all costs.¹⁶

Soldiers' Fear as "Hysteria"

According to Grigorii Shumkov, the most influential Russian psychiatrist of the turn of the century, soldiers experienced their greatest fear in the minutes immediately before battle. As usual the battle began with an artillery attack. In the loud roar of the guns, everyone waited for orders. The soldiers, in a state of great tension, start to rummage in their pockets, take out a letter or a note, start to read it, and then, in most cases, burnt it. Then, on a piece of paper they wrote a final message: "*If I die, please send this message home and tell my family I was thinking of them.*" The more religious soldiers made the sign of the cross, took an icon as a talisman, kissed it and hung it around their necks.¹⁷ When this "rite" was over, they began to adjust their uniforms and equipment. They couldn't concentrate, the atmosphere was tense and alien. Many even ran to a nearby bush to relieve themselves. They tried to quench their thirst and filled their canteens with water. Many lit a cigarette, checked their weapons and ammunition. Then the order arrived, which brought some relief, but with the noise of the approaching artillery they felt they were about to die. But at this point it didn't matter, just let it end already!¹⁸

This fear, however, was linked to the moment, which mostly disappeared once the fight started. Some of the soldiers, however, developed a permanent state of fear. The symptoms were extremely varied: stuttering, loss of swallowing reflex, slurred speech, uncontrolled laughter, crying spells, temporary loss of hearing or sight and sometimes total loss of speech. Sometimes the traumatic experience also affected the musculoskeletal system: unstoppable tremor of the legs and hands, difficulty walking, catalepsy, convulsions, paralysis of certain parts of the body. Fearful states of anxiety may result in mood swings, dullness, stomach and intestinal upset, insomnia, hallucinations, suicide attempts, aggressive

¹⁶ L. FESTINGER, *A Theory of cognitive dissonance*, Stanford 1957, p. 40.

¹⁷ G. SHUMKOV, Dusevnoje sostojanie vojnov v ozidanii boja. Po nabljudenijam oficerov, in: *Voemopsichologiceszkij etjud. Voennyj sbornik*, 56, 1913, p. 100.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

behaviour, but also in the smearing of the soldier's own excrement or in the conspicuous frequency of masturbation. Others developed phobias: panic-like fear of crowds, open spaces, heights, persecution, disease and even a drop of blood.¹⁹

In 1915, Charles Samuel Myers, an English psychiatrist, named the syndrome "shell shock", but there are several other names in the literature (hysteria, dorsal hernia, neurasthenia). In France, the term was used for "commotion", like shell shock, and "motion de la guerre", referring to emotional shock. In the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy it was called "war neurosis", in Italy "war emotion" or "psychoneurosis", in Russia "war contusion" and "traumatic neurosis".²⁰ Initially, the onset of symptoms was thought to be a physical consequence of an unexpected explosion, but more recently there have been a mass of cases where no such direct physical impact has occurred.

In the German Empire, Robert Gaupp, a renowned psychiatrist, in the second year of the war, called soldiers suffering from chronic pathogenic war fears "mental invalids" and recommended their discharge.²¹ However, he changed his position a year later and argued quite differently at the Munich Psychiatric Conference in 1916. This event marked a negative turning point in psychiatric diagnosis of pathological fear in soldiers. As a result of the decision of the German professional mainstream, all fear states (sciatica, rheumatism, migraine, bedwetting, rage attacks) were included in the category of "hysteria".²² In the pathogenesis of shell shock, external factors (e.g., grenade explosion) were not considered to be of any importance. On the contrary, endogenous factors, i.e., factors linked to the soldier's character (lack of fighting spirit and patriotism, pension speculation, low morale, internal rejection of war) were emphasized.²³

The weak, unpatriotic, cowardly soldier became one of the most typical scapegoats for war defeat. The stigma of the "hysterical man"

¹⁹ S. MICHL – J. PLAMPER, Soldatische Angst im Ersten Weltkrieg. Die Karriere eines Gefühls in der Kriegspsychiatrie Deutschlands, Frankreichs und Russlands, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 35, 2009, p. 235.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

²¹ R. GAUPP, Hysterie und Kriegsdienst, in: *Münchener Medizinische Wochenzeitschrift*, March 16, 1915, p. 362.

²² MICHL – PLAMPER, p. 222.

²³ E. N. MAYENDORF, Das ideogene Moment in der Entstehung des Zitterns bei Kriegsteilnehmern und die introspektiv-psychologische Richtung in der Neurologie überhaupt, in: *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*, August 30, 1917.

also meant that the soldier was deprived of all positive attributes of a “masculine” identity, becoming, in the interpretation of the military leadership, a malingerer, a coward, a moral and wilful retard, a pension speculator.²⁴ Max Lewandowsky, a Berlin doctor and military adviser, advocated a harsh approach to the victims of war neurosis, even if they had been hailed as heroes before their disintegration.²⁵ After 1917, the intertwining of hysterical soldiers and the conspirators of the hinterland (leftists, pacifists, whining women) became a common topos.

Contrary to the romantic doctrine of German military psychiatry, according to which the soldier’s fear was a deviant phenomenon, Shumkov considered the soldiers’ fear a natural human reaction.²⁶ Opposite to his German colleagues the liberal Russian psychiatrist got a more realist view of soldiers’ fear. His starting point was that every soldier experiences fear before, during and often after battle, in other words this emotion is part of the soldier’s human essence. He was of the view that soldiers’ fears should first be thoroughly analysed and only then can the psychiatrist help soldiers control their fear. His Russian colleague Gerver, an expert on battlefield illnesses, set up a dual model, separating trench psychosis from combat psychosis. In his opinion the former was associated with stupor, disturbance of consciousness, and is triggered by the fear of prolonged waiting, while battlefield shock caused damage to the emotional sphere.²⁷

French psychiatrists were similarly perplexed by the inhuman insensitivity of their German colleagues and by the attitude abusing science at the service of the state. They couldn’t accept the simplification of the diverse pathologies, and they looked for a more differentiated picture about hysteria. André Léry, a French neurologist, studied soldiers in the battlefield immediately after the traumatic event. He succeeded to distinguish between the symptoms that follow the explosion and the reactions that follow traumatic emotional experiences.²⁸ Albert Devaux and Benjamin Joseph Logre, like their Russian colleagues, were of the

²⁴ F. ERŐS, Kínzás vagy gyógyítás? Pszichiátria és pszichoanalízis az első világháborúban, in: *Kaleidoszkóp*, 5, 2014, pp. 33–58.

²⁵ M. LEWANDOWSKY, Was kann in der Beurteilung und Behandlung der Kriegsneurose erreicht werden?, in: *Münchener Medizinischer Wochenzeitschrift*, 30, 1917, p. 1031.

²⁶ M. ENVALD, Dve doktrini bojevogo vozspitanija vojszka, in: *Voennij szbornik*, 54, 1911, pp. 101–106.

²⁷ A. V. GERVER, *O dusevnyih rasstrojstvah na teatre voennyih dejstvij*, Petrograd 1915, pp. 36–37.

²⁸ A. LÉRY, *Commotions et motions de guerre*, Paris 1918.

opinion, that a previously brave man could become a coward one after a great emotional shock. They considered soldiers fear not as hysteria, but as “emotional hypersensitivity”. In this country there was no discussion about cowards or pension speculators because psychiatrist considered “acquired cowardice” as the effect of battlefield events.²⁹

Like psychiatric opinions, the treatment of soldiers varied also from one warring country to another. In the countries of the Central Powers, including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, “malingerers” were subjected to brutal torture. From 1916 onwards, special wards, so-called “nerve” stations, were set up in Germany and the Monarchy.³⁰ In addition to drug treatments, doctors treated the patients with isolation, dark chambers, electric shocks (Kaufmann’s surprise cure), hot and cold-water cures. It was an “old recipe” in the army for killing soldier’s fear, because they were convinced, that fear can only be banished by more fear. Psychiatrists also used electrotherapy in the allied countries and in Russia as well, but it was not the most common type of treatment. Instead, doctors used here hypnosis and re-education to influence unconscious processes. In 1915, German psychiatrists rejected the hypnotic treatment method because they considered it unworthy of the German soldier, a method reminiscent of “medieval mysticism”.³¹ Psychiatrists used the (rational/cognitive) psychotherapy of Charles Dubois to make the patient aware of the cause of his fearful state. It was hoped that this would enable the patient to regain personal control over the emotion.

However, fear did not only affect the soldiers, but also the civilians in the hinterland. French and Russian psychiatrists paid attention to this matter, but in Germany psychiatrists had a blind spot for the fears experienced by the population. They were convinced that there was a conspiracy between unpatriotic, “degenerate” civilians and “hysterical” soldiers. This topos appeared in the second year of the war, but it gained real publicity with the legend of stab in the back in the wake of the peace treaty.³² In this interpretation, the fear of civilians and women was not at all an individual problem, but a disposition. Civilians were in fact understood as the “masses”, whose feminine, capricious emotions Le Bon had already described at the end of the 19th century. According to

²⁹ A. DEVAUX – B. J. LOGRE, *Les anxieux*, Paris 1917, p. 297.

³⁰ ERÓS, p. 33–58.

³¹ P. LERNER, *Hysterical Men. War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany*, Ithaca 2009, p. 111.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 193–195.

Bonhoeffer, the emotional burden of warfare only made those sick who would have been sick without the outbreak of war. Fear of war was in fact a sign of weakness of character.³³

Soldiers as “Deserters”

Another psychological “disease” that afflicted the soldiers was homesickness. Dr. László Epstein, director of the Royal Hungarian State Mental Hospital in Budapest-Angyalföld described the psychological effects to which soldiers were constantly exposed during the war years: “*These psychological effects begin at the moment of parting from home, when the pain of never seeing his family again may shake the heart of the departing young man or father. And even if the paralyzing effect of this grief is soon counterbalanced by the enthusiasm which passes from one man to another in the ranks of soldiers going to war, let us not forget that not only each of these strong ambivalent feelings, but also their change, evokes a surge of temper which, under the influence of new excitements, may become a turbulence. And such excitements soon abound.*”³⁴

Being away from home and missing their loved ones was a particular problem for young soldiers. But it was not a new phenomenon for military psychiatry, as the early diagnosis of the disease, known as the Swiss disease shows. The “nostalgia disease” was described by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss medical student, in his preliminary dissertation in the 17th century, and he attributed the disease to the insatiable longing of soldiers. In contrast, Johan Jacob Scheuchzer explained it by physiological processes. He believed that if foreign air, rather than Swiss air, came into the bodies of Swiss soldiers, the body produced toxic fluids, which effect on the soldier’s mind and soul.³⁵ According to this concept this is not as much of a problem for older soldiers because their ageing skin pores are less likely to allow toxic air to penetrate and the lower contamination causes less disturbances.

However, homesickness did not only affect Swiss soldiers. Dr. Camillo Reuter, Colonel, former clinical assistant professor, wrote during World War I: “*Brückner and Stelzner find in the Slavs a nervous exhaustion, a lethargy*

³³ K. BONHOEFFER, *Psychiatrie und Krieg*, in: *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenzeitschrift*, September 24, 1914, pp. 1777–1779.

³⁴ L. EPSTEIN, – Hábóru és elmebaj (Lecture on January 14, 1915), in: K. KAPRONCZAY – K. KAPRONCZAY (Eds.), *Az I. világháború magyar orvosi emlékeiből. Naplók, kéziratok visszaemlékezések, szakcikkek*, Budapest 2016, p. 448.

³⁵ See more in Z. VÖLGYI, A harctevékenységhez kapcsolódó stressz pszichológiai aspektusai, in: *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 9, 2018, pp. 270–286.

caused by homesickness, which Stelzner considers a racial psychotic condition.” He quotes Stelzner as writing: “In contrast, Stanojevits never experienced such symptoms. Since the outbreak of the war, in my experience in the mental and nervous ward of the military hospital under my direction, Hungarians and Germans have been the least prone to psychic illnesses. No generalization can be made for our Slavic peoples. The Czech and Dalmatian peoples have shown themselves to be conspicuously degenerate and prone to nervous and mental diseases, and one might say that they are on a par with the Jews in their degeneracy.”³⁶

Although Reuter agreed with Stelzner that he attributed a role to homesickness in the genesis of depressions, he rejected the “racial psychological” origin of these depressions, according to his own claim. Pappenheim reported cases of “reactive homesickness depression”, which he said only affected “narrow-minded” soldiers who were less educated and came from a rural milieu.³⁷ Like Stelzner, he attributed a strong influence to character dispositions in the etiology of the disease.

Pönitz, the head doctor at the psychiatric clinic in Halle, categorized deserters into three groups. In the first, he classified psychotics who were not afraid to commit crimes. In the second category were infantile, hysterical, epileptic, alcoholic soldiers and deserters who left the army because of homesickness or sexual jealousy. He also included vagabonds, psychopaths with a pernicious lust for freedom, and rebels, who he said accounted for 70% of deserters. The remaining 10% showed symptoms of memory deficiency. These soldiers disappeared unexpectedly and sometimes assumed new identities.³⁸

The most common reasons for leaving the squad were fear of reprisals, abuse from superiors or homesickness. Nostalgia for home and different states of fear were considered diseases that could spread like a contagion. Gustav Liebermeister, an internist from Tübingen, for example, argued that men at the front were still “sturdy” and “healthy”, but that the closer they came to their home, the greater was the risk of “infection”. In his opinion the influence of the “disease carriers” (e.g., women) of the

³⁶ C. REUTER, A háború szerepe az elmebajok kóroktanában, in K. KAPRONCZAY – K. KAPRONCZAY (Eds.), *Az I. világháború magyar orvosi emlékeiből. Naplók, kéziratok visszaemlékezések, szakkikkek*, Budapest 2016, p. 478.

³⁷ K. BIRNBAUM (Ed.), *Kriegsneurosen und -psychosen auf Grund der gegenwärtigen Kriegsbeobachtungen. Erste Zusammenstellung vom Kriegsbeginn bis Mitte März*, Berlin 1915, p. 214.

³⁸ K. PÖNITZ, Zur Psychopathologie der Fahnenflucht, in: *Archiv für Kriminologie*, 68, 1917, pp. 260–281.

hinterland could be dangerous for them.³⁹ In the army, the most obvious remedy was again to intimidate soldiers, to threaten them with the death penalty, or even to keep them away from home.

Soldiers "Sexual Perversions"

War has given rise not only to hatred and fear, but also to specific forms of love. The threatening environment forged soldiers together in a particular way, as their emotional relationships were forged in an infinitely vulnerable, fearful environment. According to Shay, the camaraderie of soldiers was therefore often akin to the most intimate family love relationships, and their durability is shown by the fact that they persisted long after the war had ended.⁴⁰ The phenomenon of affectionate relationships between men has also attracted the attention of psychiatry, because wartime neurosis could be triggered not only by the explosion of shells but also by the loss of comrades.

Touton, referring to earlier observations of warfare, described the significant impact of war on sexual instincts.⁴¹ This effect may have been inhibitory but also facilitating, as Löwy reports.⁴² After major combat deployments, it was not uncommon for soldiers to lose their morning erections and suffer a complete loss of libido. However, the impact of war events could have the opposite effect. In these cases, Löwy observed an extreme increase in potency, even to the point of "perversions". These cases represented a new category of psychiatric problems. The emergence of homosexuality and sexual perversions was a delicate social issue, as sexual potency was the main attribute of the male ideal in the soldier's time.⁴³

The ideal image of the German soldier was a relevant part of the male-dominated world of the bourgeois culture at the turn of the century.

³⁹ G. LIEBERMEISTER, Verhütung von Kriegsneurosen. Kriegsärztlicher Vortrag gehalten in Stuttgart am 26. Januar, in: *Medizinisches Correspondenz-Blatt des Württembergischen Ärztlichen Landesvereins*, August 31, 1918, p. 308.

⁴⁰ J. SHAY, *Achill in Vietnam*, Hamburg 1994, p. 78.

⁴¹ K. TOUTON, Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtskrankheiten in den Heeren im Krieg und Frieden, in: *Berliner Klinische Wochenschrift*, 52, 1915, p. 52, p. 1, pp. 3–7; p. 2, pp. 33–36; p. 3, pp. 56–59; p. 4, pp. 79–83.

⁴² M. LÖWY, Neurologische und psychiatrische Mitteilungen aus dem Kriege, in: *Monatsschrift für Psychiatrie und Neurologie*, 37, 1915, pp. 380–388.

⁴³ G. VINNAI, Psychologische Kriegstheorien. Psychoanalytische Konstruktionen zum Thema Krieg, in: T. JÄGER – R. BECKMANN (Eds.), *Handbuch Kriegstheorien*, Wiesbaden 2011, p. 41.

The German male identity was a counter-image of a “weak” and “sentimental” femininity at the turn of the last century. The rigid separation of social roles caused certain “feminine” emotions to be taboo for men (e.g., fear, grief, vulnerability). Conversely, recruits into the army were not only deprived of their individuality during training, but their male identity was also challenged by being forced into a female role.⁴⁴ They had to make their beds, clean, tidy up, and make sure that their uniforms were always spotless. All these tasks belonged traditionally to the female role. In Russia, however, there were no such rigid distinction between men and women. After 1917 many women enlisted in the army to prove their fearlessness, which put men to shame.⁴⁵

Behind the masculine perfection of the social facade, however, there was a fear of contamination with femininity, the stigma of vulnerability and weakness.⁴⁶ The forbidden emotions (tenderness, weakness, and responsibility) did find their way into the labyrinth of the soul, but they manifested themselves in a very different way from the masculine ideal of the time. The sexual behaviour of front-line soldiers changed considerably. According to Vinnai, sexual deviance was inextricably linked to the inhumanity that was the consequence of the emotional taboo.⁴⁷ The ambivalence that merged desire, fear and aggression was the psychic source of pornographic literature and prostitution consumption. These strategies served the emotional restitution of questioned masculinity and often manifested themselves in acts of violence against women in their own or enemy countries.⁴⁸

The focus of German military psychiatric studies was to explore the relationship between sexuality and commitment to war aims. Burchard observed an above-average enthusiasm for war among homosexual and bisexual soldiers.⁴⁹ He attributed it to men’s prolonged closeness and the natural adventurous spirit. He evaluated the warlike behaviour, perseverance, and performance of homosexual soldiers in a positive

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁵ L. S. STOFF, *They Fought for the Motherland. Russia’s Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution*, Lawrence 2006, pp. 70ff.

⁴⁶ VINNAI, p. 38.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

⁴⁸ R. SEIFERT, *Krieg und Vergewaltigung. Ansätze zu einer Analyse*, in: A. STIGLMAYER (Ed.), *Massenvergewaltigung. Krieg gegen die Frauen*, Freiburg 1993, pp. 85–108.

⁴⁹ E. BURCHARD, *Sexuelle Fragen zur Kriegszeit*, in: *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft*, 10, 1915, p. 373.

manner.⁵⁰ We can read about the warm comradeship between soldiers also in Hirschfeld's documentation of soldiers' letters and his personal observations.⁵¹ Contrary to Burchard's observations, he reported cases where homosexuality was not associated with enthusiasm for the fatherland. He reported also about a case when a soldier who was 'not up to the task' had to shoot a Cossack prisoner of war, but "because of his hysterical character" he started to sob and fell into a crisis of conscience.⁵²

In the German army, homosexuality was an absolute taboo. If a soldier was found to be attracted to his own sex, it could mean the end of his military career, but it would certainly mean a significant loss of social status. This phenomenon is illustrated by a case in Birnbaum's collection of psychiatric literature, which was also reported by Hirschfeld and Steiner. A homosexual officer constantly abused his subordinates because he was afraid that his sexual "deviance" might be revealed. This fear led to severe depression.⁵³ Latent homosexuality, however, was more common in the field, where sadism was legally practiced.⁵⁴ War provided an optimal arena for sadistic soldiers, because it was allowed to subjugate and destroy the body of the enemy. The penetration into the body of the other, in Jünger's terms, the 'pleasure of blood' (Wollust des Blutes) only became conscious when the fog that enveloped the mind lifted and the soldier returned to reality.⁵⁵

Soldiers' Alcohol Abuse

An old, tried, and tested method of overcoming fear in the army was the use of mind-altering drugs, opium, morphine, and alcohol proving to be the most effective tools. During the First World War, these drugs were common practice for both the military leadership and the soldiers. Ervin Sinkó captured just such a situation in his novel "The Optimists": "*Józsika, show me that you will not be unfaithful. If you loved morphine for the sake of Bandi, now drink for my sake, drink until you are soaked, until you have thrown off every*

⁵⁰ BIRNBAUM, p. 7.

⁵¹ M. HIRSCHFELD, Aus der Kriegszeit, in: *Vierteljahrsberichte der wissenschaftlich-humanitären Komitees während der Kriegszeit*, 15, 2015, pp. 3–35.

⁵² M. HIRSCHFELD, Zur Behandlung im Kriege erworbener hysterischer Zustände, insbesondere von Sprachstörungen, in: *Zeitschrift für die Gesamte Neurologie und Psychiatrie*, 34, 1916, pp. 195–205.

⁵³ BIRNBAUM, p. 382.

⁵⁴ VINNAI, p. 38.

⁵⁵ E. JÜNGER, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, Berlin 1922, p. 9.

*last of your good mind, otherwise you will not be able to understand me, the poor madman, and take me into your heart. For I have great, fearful secrets to lock up in your heart this very day. 'What's this?' he lifted a bottle. No, this is nothing [...] give me Pálinka! Cointreau, that's good [...].*⁵⁶

The consumption of alcohol, which was always sanctioned by cultural and social practices, was a natural part of the military, and typically served four main purposes. The first was a medical purpose: anaesthesia, disinfection, and healing. Alcohol was believed to have a disinfectant and versatile healing effect. The second is a mental-therapeutic purpose, a relaxing effect, which has the function of suppressing fear, stress, and bad memories. Last but not least, it was also used as a reward after combat operations. The third benefit was that it increased the soldier's courage, helping him to continue the fight. Finally, it was also useful for providing calories and extra energy (a liter of 12% wine contains 500–700 calories, pure vodka 2800 calories and rum up to 4000 calories).

Alcoholism was mainly a challenge for Russian psychiatrists, but it was a problem in all warring countries. Psychiatrists in Russia have investigated the role of alcoholism in the development of war neuroses. In the case of alcohol-related psychoses, the main danger was its inheritance, but the mass incidence of alcohol abuse was also worrisome.⁵⁷ Although shortly after the outbreak of the war the Tsarist government restricted the trade in spirits, wine, and beer by withdrawing some of the licenses previously issued and reducing the maximum alcohol content from 40% to 37%, the measures had the opposite effect to that expected.

In Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, unlike in other belligerent countries, alcohol abuse was not such a problem. Indeed, production in these countries fell sharply (in the case of beer, in Germany to 30% of pre-war levels), but the fall in sales was not due to the introduction of prohibition but to a shortage of grain stocks.⁵⁸ Shortages of essential brewing ingredients such as sugar, cereals and potatoes caused the shortages in the two main belligerent countries of the Central Power. German soldiers got synthetic drugs mixed into their food. The substances, containing amphetamine and MDMA, were produced by the Merck company. Drug addiction caused serious problems in the country

⁵⁶ E. SINKÓ, *Optimisták*, Budapest 2010, p. 864.

⁵⁷ MICHL – PLAMPER, p. 237.

⁵⁸ J. P. MCGOWAN, Alcohol, in: S. TUCKER (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of World War I*, Cremona Drive 2015, p. 83.

after the end of the war. Although the Nazis tried to combat it radically, this scrupulousness disappeared completely after the outbreak of the Second World War. The use of Pervitin was expected to keep soldiers awake and to dissolve fear. The pill put the soldier in a euphoric state, and he felt no exhaustion. In military jargon, it was called Panzerschokolade or Hermann-Göring-Pill.

Summary

Although the stupor temporarily helped these people through a period of fear, it did not completely remove the threat of reality. Beyond the phenomena of fear, the war had many other psychic consequences that have received very little attention in historical research today. However, there is a growing body of research in the social psychology literature on the massive impact of collective trauma on the affected and later generations. The Holocaust is the most common subject of analysis, although the effects of soldiers' trauma of the First World War has, in my opinion, still not been dealt with in Europe. The trauma of the First World War has been covered up by the trauma of the Second World War, and the memory of the First World War has been covered up by the memory of the Second World War.

Just as traumas live on, disappearing like a diving trail and resurfacing in times of crisis, fear does not disappear, it has been only metamorphosed. Every society has its own emotional culture and its own normative practices of how emotions should and should not be expressed. And these practices are passed down unreflected from generation to generation. Gender roles involve not only normative expectations and behaviours, but also emotions. In fact, the ideal of German psychiatry is not so far away from the childhood ideals of our generation. "Soldier stuff", we used to say, when a child was injured, which meant that the soldier mustn't cry and mustn't be afraid of anything. Modern man is developing ever more perfect weapons to fight the "enemy". At the same time, he is still weaponless against collective fear. Today, the social sciences pay much more attention to cognitive processes, to the rational motivations of historical actors. At the same time, the study of emotions highlights the relevance of the "irrational" and "subjective" dimension in the shaping of history. Only the study of these phenomena reveals the hidden continuities of mental structures, that go back centuries, continuities that lead right up to the present day, to our own present.

