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Emotions on the Battlefield: Towards a Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

The focal point of this article is the relationship between emotions and close-range fighting. Emotions play a central role in warfare. Nearly all soldiers who encounter combat zones experience intense emotional reactions. Some of these emotions are negative, such as fear, panic, anger, rage, or shame, while others are more positive, including pride, elation, joy, or exhilaration. Some scholars argue that there is inherent uniformity of emotional reactions on the battlefield. However, recent studies indicate that the emotional dynamics in the combat zone are more complex and flexible. Following this research, I argue in this article that there are pronounced historical and cultural differences in the emotional responses of fighters in combat zones. Facing the same realities of close-range fighting, soldiers tend to display different emotional reactions and these reactions are more variable as the cultural and historical contexts change.

Keywords
emotions, violence, battlefield, fight, war

Introduction[1]

There is no doubt that the close-range fighting entails distinct emotional dynamics. People who take part in violent encounters experience intense emotional responses ranging from fear, angst, anxiety, panic and horror to anger, rage and even elation. The acts of fighting are often followed by physiological changes such as increased heart rate, heavy breathing, dilation of the pupils, hormonal increases and in some cases the loss of urination or bowel control. Since emotions have dominated battlefields for centuries there is a well-entrenched view that warfare generates very similar emotional reactions among soldiers. The conventional interpretations overemphasise a uniform response by humans who find themselves in similar extraordinary situations. In this article I challenge such established views and argue that the emotional dynamics of close-range fighting is historically variable and culturally flexible. The historical and sociological analysis of battlefield experiences indicates that there are substantial cultural and historical differences in the emotional reactions of individuals and groups who experience similar fighting situations.

The article is divided into three sections. The first part explores the range of emotional responses that have been documented on the battlefields throughout the world. I briefly explore the emotional dynamics of close-range fighting and emphasise the contextual variations that appear in different conflicts. Although some features of human action are universal the emotional responses vary across time and space. Hence the last two parts of the article the historical and cultural variables and aim to show how emotional responses in warfare are shaped and changed by different cultural and historical contexts.

Methods

This study examines the emotional dynamics of close-range combat through the analysis of historical records, secondary sources, and comparative interpretations. Historical records, including memoirs and archival military documents, were scrutinised to uncover how battlefield emotions were shaped and regulated in different cultural and historical contexts. These records provided firsthand accounts of soldiers' experiences, offering insight into the practices and rituals that influenced their emotional responses.

Secondary sources were crucial in contextualizing these historical findings, with scholarly articles and historical studies helping to build a theoretical framework for understanding the variability of emotional responses in combat. The literature reviewed included studies on military rituals, emotional regulation, and psychological impacts of warfare, allowing for a deeper exploration of the social and cultural factors at play.

A comparative approach was employed to explore the diversity of emotional reactions across different combat contexts, both historically and culturally. The study compared the emotional responses of soldiers in different historical periods and military cultures, highlighting how the same external stimuli—such as fear or danger—could trigger different emotional reactions depending on the soldiers' cultural background and the specific rituals they were part of.

1 The earlier version of this paper was originally published as 'Emotions and Close-Range Fighting' in Siniša Malešević (2022) Why Humans Fight: The Social Dynamics of Close-Range Violence. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Results

Although humans share universal emotional traits, battlefield reactions are not uniform or static. Instead, soldiers' feelings and behaviours vary historically and in different cultural contexts. Emotions are shaped by structural contexts, rather than being biologically fixed. Practices like synchronised drilling helped soldiers focus on coordination, turning fear into other emotions. Drill may influence emotions, but beyond that, practices like dueling also play a role in regulating feelings of honor and shame. This article shows that emotions are not biological constants but dynamic, context-dependent social experiences.

Battlefields are defined by diverse cultural contexts and emotional experiences. Rather than assuming a singular emotional regime, it is crucial to recognise cultural variations within and between societies. Cultural influences evolve through interaction with other groups, and emotional states are interpreted differently depending on the context. While conventional views suggest universal emotional reactions triggered by similar stimuli, this article argues that emotional responses are highly variable and influenced by historical and cultural forces, not just biology.

Discussion

The Frontline Combatants and Emotions

The combatants who have experienced a close-range fighting on the battlefield tend to describe it in vividly emotional terms. The frontline combat generates unique emotional experiences ranging from fear, anxiety, anger, angst and rage to panic, horror and even elation and exhilaration. There is no doubt that fear is one of the most significant and most common emotional responses that is accompanied with many of these physiological changes. Fear is generally associated with heavy breathing, palpitations, excessive sweating, and body paralysis. In most combat situations soldiers experience fear and in some instances intense fear can turn into panic, dread and horror. In one of the earliest studies of combat experience, French colonel Ardant du Picq (2006[1903]), found that fear was the principal emotion in the combat zone. In the 1860s he surveyed French officers and found that widespread fear paralysed military action with many soldiers being incapable of fighting and shooting at the enemy. Colonel du Picq (2006:90) was very clear in his assessment and also recommended how to control the fear: 'man has a horror of death…discipline is for the purpose of dominating that horror by a still greater horror, that of punishment or disgrace. But there always comes an instant when natural horror gets an upper hand over discipline, and the fighter flees….He does not hear, he cannot hear any more. He is full of fear.' The same emotional reactions were identified in many other wars. The largest study conducted during WWII by Stouffer at all (1949) identified fear as the central emotion among US soldiers. Stouffer and his collaborators surveyed the US infantry regiments in France and found that over 65 percent of soldiers had difficulty performing their military tasks because of constant feelings of fear. The same survey was undertaken among the US infantry soldiers in the Pacific theatre of war and the results were very similar with very high percentage of soldiers identifying fear as the key obstacle for efficient military action: the soldiers confessed that they experienced violent pounding of the heart (76%), were sick in their stomachs (over 50%) and many had cold sweats, would tremble or faint (Stouffer et al, 1949, p. 201). A very similar response has been recorded in other wars and among other soldiers (Collins, 2008; Bourke, 2000; Grossman, 1996; Holmes, 1985).

Nevertheless, the intense feelings of fear were not the main cause of desertion as many soldiers felt a strong sense of attachment and obligation towards their comrades and would

not leave the battlefields even when experiencing a profound sense of dread, panic and horror (Malešević, 2010; Collins, 2008). A more prevalent reaction to fear and horror of the battlefield was the soldier's general unwillingness to target and shoot at the enemy soldiers. Thus, since S.L.A. Marshall (1947) study on behaviour of US soldiers in WWII theatres of war it has become evident that a large number of frontline combatants fail to fire their guns during the combat or tend to deliberately miss or fire in the air. Marshall (1947, p. 50) argued that only between 15 and 25 percent of soldiers would fire their weapons at the enemy while the majority would misfire or not fire at all. Although Marshall's work has been questioned and criticised for its methodological weaknesses (Mann, 2019; Spiller, 1988) other scholars have identified a similar level of non-firing in other theatres of war and other combat zones throughout the world (King, 2011; Collins, 2008; Bourke, 2000).

The militaries have devised a variety of measures to counter the consequences of widespread fear. Some of these measures have centred on enhancing the coercive capacity of military units. Hence most armies have introduced battle police which have become responsible for preventing soldiers from escaping the battlefield but also to make sure that they shoot at the enemy (Collins, 2008; Holmes, 1985). In addition, more officers were allocated to the combat zone so that they can observe the implementation of fighting commands. In WWII many recruits were reluctant to shoot and would only do so when observed and pressured by their commander. As one frustrated US officer reflected on his experience during the invasion of Normandy in 1944: 'When I ordered the men who were right around me to fire, they did so. But the moment I passed on, they quit. I walked up and down the line yelling 'God damn it! Start shooting!' But it did very little good. They fired only while I watched them or while some other soldier stood over them' (Bourke, 2000, p. 74).

Other measures were centred on developing a more realistic combat training where soldiers would encounter an environment that is similar to the one in the combat zone. This would include a more physically and mentally demanding and exhausting training setting that resembles the battlefield. For example, during WWII some officers would bring the new recruits to see the defaced and damaged corpses before their first battle so that they could get used to the sight of death and destruction (Blake, 1970, p. 340). These practices would also include learning 'instinctive shooting', that is the ability to shoot under stress without seeing your target. Many contemporary armies have focused on training soldiers in this practice of target focused shooting which does not rely on the use of one's sight. Instead a soldier repeats shooting movements focused on a target that have been practiced in training and have become a habitual response. This style of shooting does not require visual confirmation but involves automatic reaction centred on the less visible target (Klein, 2016).

Another influential military practice devised to increase discipline but also manage fear and dread of the battlefield is drill. This old age military tradition has played a crucial role in maintaining group cohesion in the theatres of war as the coordinated rhythmic movement have proved influential in shifting the emotional dynamics from an individual sense of fear towards the collective experience of effervescence and bonding. As Holmes (1985, p. 42) explains: 'Part of the stress of battle stems from its puzzling and capricious nature: battle drills help to minimize the randomness of battle, and gives the soldier familiar points of contact in an uncertain environment, like lighthouses in a stormy sea'. McNeill (1997) has traced historically how drill played a decisive role in warfare throughout history. In his analysis drill helped generate intuitive emotional ties of 'muscular bonding' that created capacity for collective action on the battlefield thus preventing the soldiers from running away.

In addition to fear, dread, panic and horror soldiers can also experience a variety of other emotional reactions ranging from anger, anxiety and rage over sadness, shame, guilt and disgust to pride, awe, elation, exhilaration and even joy. Anger and rage are common emotions associated with violence. The first line of Homer's Iliad (2017) starts with the idea

of rage and the book itself depicts the anger and rage of Achilles and other warriors whose honour has been trampled upon. Nevertheless, anger and rage are usually interpreted through the reactive responses of soldiers. The soldiers that see their comrades killed or injured might be more inclined to express rage and anger: 'I did not hate the enemy [Viet Cong] for their politics, but for murdering Simpson [a friend]…revenge was one of the reasons I volunteered for a line company. I wanted a chance to kill somebody' (Caputo, 1977, p. 231) or 'real hatred of the enemy came to soldiers… when a buddy was killed. And this was often a total hatred: any German they encountered after that would be killed' (Beevor, 2009, p. 260). These experiences of US soldiers losing close comrades from the Vietnam war and WWII have recently been mirrored among the US soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq. As Sebastian Junger (2010, p. 60) documents in his *War, anger* and rage have motivated revenge attacks: 'I just wanted to kill everything that came up that was not American'. The feelings of anger have also been linked with one's perception of the enemy's unfair fighting. Burleigh (2011, p. 379) depicts a situation from the WWII in Tunisia when an imprisoned German soldier killed several British soldiers with a hidden gun: 'During the assault on Longstop Hill…a captured German drew a concealed pistol and shot several of his Argyll and Sutherland Highlander captors. The latter were " roused to a state of berserk fury—We just had a hate—at the Germans, the hill, everything" For a few days they accepted no surrenders'. The anger was even more pronounced when encountering cases of cruelty, torture and slaughtering of innocent civilians (Collins, 2008; Bourke, 2000; Grossman, 1996).

Shame and guilt also feature prominently in the emotional experiences of soldiers on the battlefield. Du Picq (2006 [1903], p. 154) was already aware that most soldiers were concerned how others see them and were eager to avoid any sense of shame: 'Self-esteem is unquestionably one of the most powerful motives which moves our men. They do not wish to pass for cowards in the eyes of their comrades'.

Shame could also be associated with inappropriate behaviour towards the enemy and especially civilians. In some instances, shame would trump the original enthusiasm or pride in shooting the enemy. The soldiers would experience the instant thrill of fulfilling the military aim, but this would soon transform into regret, shame and guilt. For example an US soldier who fought in the first Gulf war, Charles Sheehan Miles, recollects his experience of killing Iraqi soldiers who were escaping the burning truck: 'As one of the occupants ran ablaze from the truck, Miles fired his machine-gun and instantly killed him. His immediate response was, he said, "a sense of exhilaration, of joy". However, a moment later he experienced "a tremendous feeling of guilt and remorse". The image of the man on fire, running and dying, stayed with him "for years and years and years," he said. His unit returned home amidst great celebration and he was awarded a medal, yet he felt, in his words, "probably the worst person alive" (Skelly, 2006). A very similar emotional switch was experienced by other soldiers who took part in other wars. For instance, a US soldier who participated in the massacre of women and children in a Vietnamese village explains how he was struggling to reconcile his orders, peer pressure and shame: 'I happened to look into somebody's eyes, a woman's eyes, and she – I don't know, I looked, I mean, just before we started firing, I mean, You know, I didn't want to. I wanted to turn around and walk away. It was something telling me not to do it. Something told me not to, you know, just turn around and not be part of it, but everybody else started firing, I started firing' (Bourke, 2000, p. 191). While some combatants felt ashamed for their actions others were ashamed for not feeling guilty: 'The deep shame that I feel is my own lack of emotional reaction. I keep reacting as though I were simply watching a movie of the whole thing. I still don't feel that I have personally killed anyone… Have I become so insensitive that I have to see torn limbs, the bloody ground, the stinking holes and guts in the mud, before I feel ashamed that I have destroyed numbers of my own

kind?' (Bourke, 2000, p. 221). Hence in some situations shame was linked with instant sense of guilt while in other instances shame and guilty were completely disconnected.

The sense of guilt often appears in two principal forms: the feeling of being responsible for death or injuries of others and the guilt of having survived the war while one's comrades have been killed. The killer's guilt was often rooted in one's realisation that the enemy is just another human being like one's self:'…I had a tear myself, I thought to myself perhaps he has a Mother or Dad also a sweetheart and a lot of things like that, I was really sorry' (Moynihan, 1980, p. 85). In his Vietnam war memoir Caputo (1977, p. 117) describes how finding personal photographs and letters of the dead Vietcong soldier provoked a deep sense of empathy and guilt among the US soldiers: these personal items 'gave the enemy the humanity I wished to deny him' which let to recognition that the enemy soldiers were also made of 'flesh and blood' instead of being 'mysterious wraiths'. This realisation caused 'an abiding sense of remorse' as the US soldiers recognised that Vietcong are 'young men…just like us'. In the Iraq war the US military attempted to work through this universal sense of empathy by prompting soldiers to differentiate clearly between military targets and civilians. Hence several US military commanders warned their soldiers: ' civilians should be treated as you would desire your family to be treated in a similar circumstances' or 'Don't fucking waste a mother or some kid. Don't fire into a crowd. These people north of here have been oppressed for years. They're just like us' (Pettegrew, 2015, p. 100). There is no doubt that the commanders' pleas were aimed at minimising the civilian casualties, but they were also focused on averting the anticipated future guilt and remorse of young US soldiers.

The survivor's guilt is something that might appear during or immediately after the battle or can become much more prominent at the end of the violent conflict. For example, many soldiers were deeply affected by the deaths of their friends and would blame themselves for this loss: 'Every time you lost a friend it seemed like a part of you was gone' (Shay, 1994, p. 79) or [I experience] 'night sweats, nightmares, survivors guilt, the feeling that you deserted your buddies by living' (Munson, 2016). This sense of guilt is often a symptom of the 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD) which has shaped much of post-war experience for soldiers who survived wars. The survivor's guilt is a mental condition characterised by strong feelings of having done something wrong by surviving a traumatic event when others have died. It is a feeling of responsibility for deaths of others that is expressed as taking somebody else's place among the living. This feeling of guilt has been present among soldiers who survived wars but also among the Holocaust survivors and other individuals who lived after major traumatic events such as epidemics, natural disasters, terrorism, airplane crashes and so on. As Primo Levi (1995, p. 295), an Auschwitz survivor, describes it: 'It is the impression that the others died in your place; that you are alive, thanks to a privilege you have not earned, a trick you played on the dead. Being alive isn't a crime but we feel it like a crime'. The soldiers affected by PTSD often express this sense of guilt in their letters and memoirs. For example, a British soldier who survived the battle of Arezzo in 1944 after most of his unit was killed reflects on his visit to their graves in 1971 in his memoir: 'Why hadn't I visited them? Because you didn't want to get too close to the dead, I thought. You wanted them buried alive in the book. They're rotting in their graves, chum. You've got to face them there. You've been dodging the column, running away from the pain and guilt of being alive when the best are dead, their lives wasted. Thrown away. For what? A botched civilization. A bitch gone in the teeth' (Houghton, 2019, p. 51).

In addition to survivor's guilt, soldiers also tend to experience another set of emotional responses that Shey (2014) and Litz et al (2009) have called moral injury. This concept stands for discrepancy in values and actions: an individual is obliged to follow the orders of legitimate authority, yet these orders clash sharply with one's moral values. In this sense

a moral injury represents a condition that creates an emotional dissonance: by engaging in these actions individuals trample upon moral codes which is likely to generate anxiety and feelings of shame and guilt. Although William Calley, US Army officer and convicted war criminal who was responsible for the My Lai massacre, is often presented as an individual who showed no emotion while in Vietnam or during his trial, it seems that like many other Vietnam veterans he also experienced a moral injury. In a recent public address he stated that 'There is not a day that goes by that I do not feel remorse for what happened that day in My Lai…I feel remorse for the Vietnamese who were killed, for their families, for the American soldiers involved and their families. I am very sorry' (James, 2009).

Although the battlefield experience is predominantly shaped by negative emotions including fear, horror, panic, guilt, shame, anxiety, anger, rage and sadness the combat zone can also yield some positive emotional responses including admiration, awe, pride, trust, elation, exhilaration and joy. Furthermore, the shared experience of soldiers living and fighting together under extremely difficult circumstances generates a complex emotional dynamic that is often expressed in the strong bonds of friendship and comradeship. Some of these bonds might develop into loving and lasting relationships with strong emotional attachments.

All military organisations rely on the soldier's sense of pride. In most instances individuals feel proud of belonging to a particular company, regiment, battalion or a military branch. The leaders of military organisations are well aware that soldiers develop strong sense of unit attachment and all military organisations foster these micro-identities as they enhance social cohesion within the military (King, 2011). Nevertheless, in the combat situation the sense of pride tends to be more localised and situational. Hence there is more expression of pride in smaller units such as one's squad and platoon rather than battalion, brigade or the army as a whole. In the traumatic environments of battlefields where individuals are exposed to the continuous life-threatening situations and where they witness daily deaths of their comrades soldiers are more likely to identify strongly with these smaller, face to face, groups (Malešević, 2017). In this context pride emerges through the shared experience of hardship and ability to survive extraordinary conditions. Winning and surviving despite the odds also contributes to the sense of pride in one's squad or platoon. In the two surveys conducted among the US soldiers during the WWII an overwhelming majority of respondents expressed a strong sense of pride in their company, platoon and squad – 78 percent were fairly proud or very proud and only 9 percent said that they were not proud of their military units (McManus, 2007, p. 321). As one soldier describes this sense of pride stemmed from strong bonds of friendship that developed within the military unit: 'The soldier feared separation from his squad more than he feared the enemy. He felt secure among men whose individual characters and capabilities he knew as well as he knew his own. They had been welded together by combat, and rightly or wrongly the infantryman was convinced that his chances of surviving the next firefight were much better with his own squad than they would be in any other. His first sergeant and platoon sergeant were like fathers…and the other members of his squad were his brothers' (McManus, 2007, p. 322). In some cases, pride in one's squad or platoon was enhanced by the views other soldiers had about that particular squad or platoon. In other words, the valour and fearlessness of some platoons provoked a sense of awe and admiration among soldiers in other units. For example, in the Vietnam war the platoons that were willing to volunteer for difficult military operations or have experienced excessive violence and have survived were admired for their 'crazy' behaviour: 'when [this]…unit came in the bar, everybody else in the joint would shift out of the way…They were all crazy, but I respected them... I was fascinated with this group of men. They were all on their second or third tour of Nam…Their kinship was even stronger than ours…They didn't even think of anyone else around' (Baker, 1982, p. 121).

There is no doubt that the combat zone is defined by a variety of negative emotions including fear, anger, contempt, disgust, or guilt. However, some soldiers also experience a number of positive emotions such as joy, happiness, contentment, elation and exhilaration (Bourke, 2000). The memoirs and diaries of many combatants are full of descriptions where the battlefield is portrayed as an arena of infinite power and freedom. Some of the participants of WWI who later became well known writers depict their emotional reactions on the battlefield in terms of happiness and joy. Both Ernest Jünger, a conservative German nationalist, and Henri de Man, Belgian socialist, describe their war experience through the prism of joy and elation. De Man (1920, pp. 198-199) shows no sense of guilt for killing the enemy soldiers. In fact, he seems very happy about this: 'I secured a direct hit on an enemy encampment, saw bodies or parts of bodies go up in the air, and heard the desperate yelling of the wounded or the runaways. I had to confess to myself that it was one of the happiest moments of my life'. In a similar vein Jünger, who fought on the other side, writes about his own feelings: 'As we advanced, we were in the grip of berserk rage. The overwhelming desire to kill lent wings to my stride. Rage squeezed bitter tears from my eyes. The immense desire to destroy that overhung the battlefield precipitated a red mist in our brains. We called out sobbing and stammering fragments of sentences to one another, and an impartial observer might have concluded that we were all ecstatically happy'. These emotional responses were also documented in the Vietnam war and the recent Afghan war. The former US soldier who fought in Vietnam was very explicit about his feelings on the battlefield. He states how he fell in love 'with the power and thrill of destruction and death dealing…there is a deep savage joy in destruction…' (Marlantes, 2011, pp. 61-67, 160). The similar emotions were present among US soldiers who fought in Afghanistan and Iraq (Junger, 2010, 2016).

For some soldiers a battlefield is perceived as the ultimate test of their manhood – the opportunity to stretch one's physical, mental and emotional capacities to the limits and see whether they can survive in this situation. In a patriarchal world where one's sense of masculinity is often defined by their physical prowess and capacity to endure the external hardships, war is often viewed as a moral yardstick of manhood. Proving oneself on the battlefield and demonstrating that one can withstand pain and sacrifice means being a full man. This is something that many young recruits were socialised with in their childhood and teenage years and have aspired to show to others that they are not boys but 'real men'. In this context the popular depictions of previous wars which glorified military heroism and one's willingness to fight and endure were often understood to be the moral parameters of how young recruits should behave in the combat zone (Goldstein, 2001). This is often referred to as the John Wayne syndrome – eagerness to get into action and become a hero. As another Vietnam veteran observes, many very young US soldiers were deeply influenced by the dominant cultural representations of war and particularly by films that romanticised war and fighting: 'The John Wayne flicks. We were invincible. So, when we were taken into…war, everyone went in with the attitude, 'Hey, we're going to wipe them out. Nothing's going to happen to us'. Until they saw the realities and they couldn't deal with. 'This isn't supposed to happen. It isn't in the script. What's going on? This guy is really bleeding all over me, he's screaming his head off' (Bourke, 2000, p. 28). Hence initial elation and enthusiasm about the war regularly dissipates once young recruits experience the horrors of the battlefield environment.

The experience of the battlefield generates intense emotional reactions. Although fear is by far the most common emotion, the combatants tend to experience wide range of complex and changing emotional responses including both negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, rage, panic, horror, shame, guilt and sadness as well as some positive emotions including happiness, joy, pride, elation and exhilaration. Living in an exceptional situation of life and death individual actions and responses of soldiers are profoundly shaped by emotions.

The Variation in Time

The essentialist theories of emotions shed some light on the common patterns of behaviour on the battlefields. For example, there is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of soldiers have experienced fear in combat situations. The military organisations recognise that being fearful is a completely normal and expected reaction to the unprecedented violence and horror of battlefields. Contemporary military education devotes a great deal of attention to teaching soldiers how to manage their fear in combat. Most military organisations devise manuals and organise lessons on 'enhancing performance under stress' where the focus is on developing skills and techniques for 'fear inoculation' (Bausman, 2016).

Nevertheless, this has not always been the case. In fact, for much of history the sense of fear was hidden, downplayed, denied or only attributed to the enemy. As Kuijpers and der Haven (2016) show, until the 18th century in Europe fear was almost uniformly depicted as a property of the other. Fear is something that only disgraced enemy soldiers are prone to do whereas one's own comrades would regularly be praised for their bravery and heroism. 'The long tradition of soldiers' writing dictates the communication of fearlessness and other empowering masculine ideals that tend to suppress some emotions: fear, feelings of senselessness, disgust, personal grief, and underscore others such as the love of fatherland, courage and a fighting spirit' (Kuijpers and der Haven 2016:12). For example, diaries of officers and clerks who recorded 16th and early 17th century battles throughout Europe tend as a rule to ascribe fear and horror to the enemy side: 'several thousand [enemy soldiers], induced by great anxiety and fear, had thrown themselves into the river Danube and drowned'. In direct contrast one's own soldiers are depicted as heroic and fearless: 'though his Majesty died like a chevalier, the soldiers were not scared but attacked the enemy like lions, taking their pieces and beating the foe' (Bahr, 2016, p. 53).

This attitude changes from the late 17th to the early 19th century when soldiers gradually start recording their own experiences of the battlefield. One of the first such documents is the memoir of Swiss mercenary Ulrich Bräker where he reflects on the horrors of war and his own dislike and fear of the battlefield (Füssel, 2016). During the 19th and 20th centuries many ordinary soldiers and officers have produced diaries, letters, memoirs and other written evidence of their personal struggles in the theatres of war throughout the word. In many of these records a personal sense of fear features prominently. However, this change in the depiction and understanding of fear was rather gradual, and it was not irreversible as many militaries continued to conceal the realities of war from the future recruits and their families. Even in the early 20th century most military administrators avoided any references to the fear generated in the combat situations or to the long-term emotional effects that the exposure to daily violence had on young soldiers. In this context the concept of shell shock was introduced during WWI to account for situations where soldiers were unable to function properly due to the traumatic experiences of war. The term was used in a vague sense and would include not only posttraumatic stress disorder but also a sense of powerlessness, panic, fear and inability to complete everyday tasks (Hochschild, 2012). This change in attitude to, and depiction of, fear also went hand in hand with the diversity in the experiences of fear.

Although the great majority of combatants experienced fear through history they did not experience it in the same way, have not shown these feelings to others in identical physical expressions and have managed their sense of fear in many different ways. Even soldiers who experienced tremendous fear one day might act very differently the next day. In the words of a German captain who fought in WWI: 'Soldiers can be brave one day and afraid the next. Soldiers are not machines but human beings who must be led in war. Each one of them reacts

differently, therefore each must be handled differently…to sense this and arrive at a correct psychological solution is part of the art of leadership' (von Schell, 2013, p. 24).

Furthermore, the historical record indicates that fear is not only an individual reaction but is an emotional state that is shaped and managed differently by different military organisations. While historically some militaries discouraged, suppressed and even punished any references to fear in the combat zone other militaries were eager to recognise fear as a normal, acknowledge its impact on the battlefield and tried to manage and channel such emotions. In other cases, fear was conceptualised as something that is not located in one's own body but as an external force that can strike unsuspected individuals. For example, until the mid-19th century the New Zealand's Maori warriors associated fear with the actions of spirits. Hence if a soldier exhibits what we would regard as the signs of fear (i.e. shaking, cold sweat etc) before the battle this was interpreted as an indication that the soldier is possessed by *atua* – a spirit which reacts angrily to any breaches of social rules as defined in Maori's canon of rules – *tapu.* This situation could be ameliorated through a specific ritual whereby a possessed warrior is required to crawl between the legs of a Maori woman of high social standing. The ritual cleansing would be judged as a success if there were no signs of fear in the warrior after the crawl: he would be free of *atua* and ready for the battle. If the signs of fear persist the ritual would be deemed unsuccessful and the warrior would not take part in the battle. At the same time there was no conceptual space for *atua* possessing somebody during the battle – this was thought to be impossible. Thus in the pre-19th century Maori culture there was no room for fear on the battlefield and it seems that the Maori warriors did not experience a sense of fear in combat as fear was understood to be a property of an external force (Plamper, 2017, p. 4).

The historical diversity of fear indicates that this is not a fixed biological given but an emotional reaction that is variable and situational. As Lutz (1988, p. 4) rightly argues the essentialist understandings of emotions that overemphasise the biological universals are too rigid to accommodate a complexity of human emotional reactions. Hence it is necessary to 'deconstruct an overly naturalised and rigidly bounded concept of emotion, to treat emotion as an ideological practice rather than as a thing to be discovered or an essence to be distilled'. Nevertheless, emotional reactions are not just a form of 'ideological practice' but also a product of specific historical changes. As Reddy (2001) argues convincingly the long-term social and political changes regularly coincide with the changes in 'emotional regimes' and as such they establish new norms of emotional life. For example, the French revolution unleashed an unprecedented social transformation that replaced the political, economic and cultural hegemony of aristocracy with the dominance of the new bourgeois rulers. However, this change developed on the back of the changing emotional regimes that by the late 18th century have already affected many non-aristocratic elements of French society. This was well illustrated by the different emotional reactions to crying: 'while tears were frowned upon at Versailles, they were given full reign in the theatres and salons beyond the reach of the court' (Rosenwein, 2010, p. 22).

Although human beings have some universal emotional traits the emotional reactions on the battlefield are not uniform and static. Instead, the inner feelings and behaviours of soldiers are historically variable and highly diverse. In different time periods one can witness very distinct ideas about emotions and also different emotional behaviours. This indicates that the biological foundations of emotional reactions are not transhistorical but something that has been shaped, remoulded and transformed by diverse structural contexts. For example, Scheer (2012) shows how combat motivation has changed historically using different organisational measures ranging from coercive policing, remuneration and compensation to military drill. All these measures have contributed to and have been shaped by the emotional responses of soldiers.

Van Der Haven (2016) and McNeill (1997) identify drill as playing a decisive role in transforming emotions on the battlefield. While McNeill (1997) focuses on the dynamics of rhythmic movements of soldiers produced in the close-order drill which contributes to heightened emotional experiences of 'muscular bonding' van der Haven (2016) explores how collective action of military organisations transform fear into pride. In both cases the emphasis is on the changing historical dynamics of emotional responses on the battlefield. Analysing the 17th century army manuals van der Haven demonstrates how the military commanders were instructed to mould emotional reactions through drill and obedience. For example in the army manuals used in the 17th century French and the Dutch States Army the unquestioned obedience was seen as a precondition for effective social cohesion that would prevent expressions of fear: 'for we have seen a million times that soldiers who never broke their ranks, -and were willing to maintain such order and unity together, never allowing the lines of their battalion be broken-, never went into battle, nor moved without orders, always defeated their enemies sooner or later' (Billon, 1617 in van der Haven, 2016; p. 28). Hence the introduction of drill contributed towards shifting the battlefield behaviour from the traditional, aristocratic, focus on individual heroic deeds towards successful collective action through hierarchical obedience. While the pre-modern aristocratic warriors were concerned with the individualised concepts of honour and shame resulting from their actions on the battlefield the early modern armies attained pride through coordinated collective military action. In addition, the practice of synchronised drilling allowed soldiers to refocus their attention on the details of coordination of their behaviour with others which proved highly beneficial on the battlefield: on the one hand these new, almost automatic skills, helped collective fighting and on the other had by focusing their attention on technical aspects of coordination the feelings of fear were gradually transformed into other emotions.

For McNeill (1997) drill was also important as a mechanism of group bonding that enhanced emotional ties between soldiers. In the 17th Netherlands military units were encouraged to adopt a variety of collective practices including the collective prayer before the battle, sharing a meal with comrades, singing military songs and religious psalms and so on. The group character of daily close-order drills impacts on emotional change in a similar way as these ritualistic practices transform individual behaviour. The experience of regular participation in drills amplifies one's emotional response. As McNeill (1997, p. 2) reflects on his own experience as a soldier in WWII this prolonged everyday collective action of marching in unison with others generates a strong 'muscular bond' where one develops an emotional change: 'A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, that's to participation in collective ritual'. This very Durkheimian experience of shared collective excitement stands in opposition to the mostly individualised emotional reactions of traditional aristocratic warfare and indicates clearly that emotions are not fixed but highly diverse and historically changing phenomena.

Nevertheless, drill was not the only social practice that transformed emotional reactions. Another important ritual associated with the regulation of emotional dynamics was duelling. Whereas drill helped regulate fear and anxiety dullening was a practice that managed feelings of honour and shame. Initially duelling was a sole prerogative of aristocracy. This practice dates back to the Middle Ages and the code of chivalry and was prevalent among the European nobility throughout the early modern period. Although the states have tried to ban dulling, this practice still retained popularity in the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, from the 18th century onwards duels have become 'democratised' in a sense that ordinary soldiers would engage in duelling to restore their honour. Despite the official ban and regulations that often-stipulated death penalties for duelling the practice was widely tolerated as many officers understood that duelling was an effective mechanism of social control. More specifically duels

helped regulate the dynamics of honour and shame thus maintaining a degree of social cohesion within the military while also exalting the martial values of bravery, respect and willingness to fight till the end. As Berkovich (2016, p. 99) shows ordinary soldiers often imitated their superiors and their duels were governed by the similar informal yet highly influential codes: 'The social pressure to conduct duels was high…Jean Rossignol, who served eight years as a private in Louis XVI's army, describes fighting in no less than ten formal duels, as well as numerous brawls'. The widespread practice of duelling has influenced the emotional dynamics on the battlefield. The soldiers who lost face and were unwilling to restore their honour through duels were shamed and deemed to be cowards. Thus, this historically specific ritual has played a significant role in shaping the emotions of ordinary soldiers, indicating yet again that emotions are not biological givens but highly contextual and dynamic social experiences.

The Variation in Space

The collective emotional experiences do not only change through time, they also exhibit significant cultural variation. Hence not all soldiers act in the same way on the battlefield. John Keegan (1994, p. 12) has already noted that specific cultural practices shape different trajectories of warfare. He questioned the dominant neo-Clausewitzian paradigm which interprets all wars as similar in terms of being an extension of politics by other means and argued that war is 'an expression of culture, often a determinant of cultural forms, in some societies the culture itself'. In this context he found enormous differences between the military practices of different societies including Easter Islanders, Mamluks, Zulus, Japanese and the contemporary European armies. He also recognised the importance and cultural variability of emotions on the battlefield. In this context he differentiates between the three types of 'warrior traditions' – the primitive, the Oriental, and the modern 'Western way of war'. In his view the 'primitive war' is 'fed by passions and rancours that do not yield to rational measures of persuasion or control'. Hence, in his view, this war is regulated by ritual practices and: 'once defined rituals have been performed, the contestants shall recognise the fact of their satisfaction and have recourse to conciliation, arbitration and peace-making' (Keegan, 1994, pp. 58, 387). The 'oriental warfare' is associated with horse warriors and steppe nomads who rely on evasion, delay and indirect fighting which for Keegan was important in developing the tradition of military and emotional restraint. The third, modern Western type, developed through face to face fighting of ancient Greeks and the Christian just war tradition which together with the technological military advancements in the last three centuries have centred on winning wars through the decisive battles (Keegan, 1994).

Keegan was right that the battlefields are defined by different cultural practices and the variety of collective emotional experiences. However, his cultural determinism combined with essentialist and orientalist epistemology have prevented him from articulating a subtle theoretical framework for the analysis of emotional dynamics of the battlefields (Malešević, 2010). Thus, rather than simply assuming that 'each culture' has a singular and homogenous emotional regime on the battlefield it is paramount to recognise that cultural variations also exist within as well as between and outside specific societies. In other words, there is no one way of being a Zulu, Mamluk or 'Westerner' on the battlefield. The collective emotional dynamics is not determined by ethnic, national, religious or geographical categories. Such categories do influence group dynamics on the battlefield, but they are far from being the only social mechanism of emotional responses. Furthermore, the cultural influences are not fixed in time and space, they also change and are shaped by interaction with other groups. Taking all these important caveats into account one can focus on the social and cultural variation in the theatres of war.

The first problem that confronts the biological universalist approaches is the fact that emotions are named and interpreted differently in different cultural settings. For example, what in a contemporary US context is regularly described as sadness caused by depression in a Buddhist social environment the same feeling is likely to be categorised as suffering. While the former emotional experience is deemed to be negative and as such would call for an intervention and treatment by the medical professionals, the latter would be regarded as a positive emotional reaction that paves the way towards the ultimate form of happiness – nirvana. These cultural values are clearly reflected in the experiences of soldiers on the battlefield. Although Buddhism teaches that it is better to die than kill in war, soldiers can work towards reaching nirvana through suffering on the battlefield (Demieville, 2010, p. 19). In contrast suffering, depression and unhappiness are all seen as emotional problems that need to be rectified when recognised among the contemporary US soldiers.

There are many other examples where the emotional states of individuals are interpreted very differently depending on the cultural context. For example, while in some societies solitude is perceived as normal or even a sign of strength of an individual's character other societies treat loneliness as an emotional deficiency. Whereas self-sufficiency is praised in highly individualised modern societies and reaching happiness within oneself is valued in the Buddhist tradition other cultural contexts treat solitary action as an emotional impediment. As Fajans (1997) shows in her ethnography of Baining of Papua New Guinea solitary life is understood in a highly negative sense where loneliness is associated with hunger. For most Bainings hunger is not a physiological state but an emotional condition and not taking part in the common meal would automatically indicate the lack of sociability which in this worldview is the essence of human survival. In this context fighting in war always entails a collective enterprise and leaving a soldier alone would mean starving him and thus deliberately causing pain.

In some cultural contexts a strong emotional reaction can be regarded as a sign of severe illness while other societies tend to tolerate such change in one's behaviour. In these situations, naming of the emotional response plays a significant role in defining and understanding one's actions. For example, running amok on the battlefield is likely to be interpreted very differently in the Malayan cultural contexts than in the European militaries. This behaviour usually involves an individual who without previous indication of anger would suddenly become enraged and would embark on a rampage of violence or would attempt to kill anyone she meets. The concept of running amok comes from the Malay word meng-âmuk which could be translated as 'to make a furious and desperate charge'. In the traditional Malaysian interpretation such behaviour was a sign that the individual is possessed by an evil tiger spirit (hantu belian) and as such is not responsible for her actions (Hempel et al., 2000). In most contemporary societies this type of emotional frenzy is defined as a serious psychological disorder that requires medical treatment.

The second issue that the biological approaches cannot account for is the cultural variation in the expressions of emotions on the battlefield. While the soldiers often encounter very similar conditions in the theatres of war their emotional and physical responses can differ significantly. In some cultural contexts the horrific experience of the battlefield might provoke fear, anxiety, and panic while in other cultural settings the same experience is likely to generate a sense of excitement, anger, pride, honour or a range of other very different emotional reactions. Furthermore, the same emotions can be expressed differently while the similar physiological gestures could signpost very different emotional reactions. For example, in some societies smile indicates happiness and serenity while in other cultural traditions smile can be associated with shame or ignorance (Krys et al., 2016, Reddy, 2001, p. 101). The same applies to the war situations where some cultural settings are defined by stoic and aloof responses of soldiers to the brutalities of the frontline fighting while in oth-

ers cultural contexts soldiers show excessive emotional and physiological reactions. Hence many Italian infantry soldiers who fought on the various fronts during the WWI were often overwhelmed by fear and panic during the key battles. As reported by the witnesses many of these young recruits, mostly illiterate peasants, would comply with the orders of their officers but their emotional reactions indicated their sense of horror. The Italian and British sources describe the behaviour of the soldiers during the battle of Isonzo in 1917 in the following terms: 'soldiers advanced crying. They did not rebel: when ordered out of the trenches they obeyed; but went crying'…'most of the men in the trenches were very young…many of them were weeping and some had ice on their face [frozen tears]' (Wilcox, 2012, p. 175). The few literate soldiers who wrote letters or kept diaries record the same emotional responses with the 'long fits of crying' and 'shattered with hunger and sleep – tears fill our eyes, crying like babies' (Wilcox, 2012, p. 175). In direct contrast when Fulani warriors fight, they exhibit no visible physiological reactions and their emotional responses are very different: 'They fight each other with sticks; when hit by opponents from other clans, they show no emotion in spite of the pain. They are proud of the scars they consequently receive' (Doob, 1981, p. 35).

The third phenomenon that further challenges the simple biological universalist explanations of emotional dynamics is the cultural difference in emotional expression. In other words, the emotional reactions of soldiers tend to be culturally specific. For example, although most human beings express pain and grief when somebody close to them dies the grieving process is culturally diverse. Whereas in European societies grief and loss are associated with gloomy posture, sombre behaviour, or crying and weeping, in other cultural settings grieving involves other emotional and physical reactions. For instance, in some parts of Bali laughter is a part of the grieving process. As Wikan (1989, p. 297) ethnographic study indicates losing a close family member is often associated with jokes and giggles. Following a funeral of one's fiancé the grieving friends and relatives, including the 'poised and bright' partner of the deceased gathered around their shared photos and started laughing. They all agreed with the comment from the one of the grievers: 'This was nothing to be sad about! The boy was dead, so what would be the use? Where one stick is broken, another grows….No use grieving over one. Go on, be happy, let bygones be bygones! The world is bigger than a kelor leaf!'. These different cultural framings of emotional displays are just as visible on the battlefield. Some cultural contexts allow soldiers to express a full range of emotions while in other cultural settings the battlefield is firmly framed through the limited and regulated emotional experiences. As Barkawi (2017, p. 156) demonstrates in his analysis of Indian armies under British control during the WWII most Indian recruits had to be trained in a very different emotional regime than British officers associated with the proper soldering. Hence 'instructors had to teach recruits forms of self-control and mastery of their emotions in these excruciating situations'. In many instances the British officers relied on shame to mould young and inexperienced recruits into a fully-fledged military force. In this context they utilised the caste divisions, gender and age differences to demean those who resisted or were reluctant to fight for the British empire: 'the instructors came out to harangue the trainees for being weak, childish, feminine, and unable to control themselves. Sometimes the trainees would be made to put on saris, i.e. women's clothes, to emphasise the point' (Barkawi, 2017, p. 156).

There is no doubt that shaming soldiers using hard patriarchal categories of masculinity and femininity is something that is present throughout the world. This practice has been identified in different cultural settings. However, there is still a strong element of difference in how precisely battlefields are gendered and how soldiers' emotional reactions frame their sense of masculinity. For example, the actions of both British and Italian recruits during WWI were strongly associated with typical 20th century notions of masculinity such as virility, courage and determination. Nevertheless, as Wilcox (2012, p. 175) argues the soldiers emotional expressions were rather different in a sense that while many UK soldiers subscribed to 'the

British working-class model of stoical endurance' including 'an assumption of confidence in the outcome of war, rather than indifference or doubt' the masculinity of many Italian soldiers was defined by 'peasant endurance and the capacity for silent suffering' regardless of the war outcome. Hence while both the Italian and British soldiers would express similar emotional responses associated with one's strong sense of manhood the social sources of these emotional displays would in fact be very different.

None of this is to say that the cultural framing of emotions is fixed and inflexible or that it does not change in time. On the contrary cultural difference is influential precisely because it can change different cultural contexts and also be changed by other cultural practices. The scholars of the French revolution have demonstrated convincingly how the cult of sensibility inaugurated and promoted by the leaders of the revolution has gradually permeated different social strata in France and has also impacted on the emotional responses of French soldiers during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars (Germani, 2016; Reddy, 2001). The cult of sentimentalism was in part built on the notion that 'nature was the well-spring of authentic, patriotic emotion' and the revolutionary leaders propagated the idea that one should differentiate between the nature as 'a blind, natural force and nature as a moral imperative' (Germani, 2016, p. 187). Drawing on Rousseau's view of the collective will the revolutionaries rejected the traditional aristocratic concepts of fighting for one's family and king and in this process transformed the notion of filial attachments into a sense of moral obligation towards the community of equals: 'The heroism of revolutionary soldiers represented the triumph of the moral individual over natural man, a triumph made possible only because of a regenerative revolution' (Germani, 2016, pp. 187-188). In a similar way the 19th century Russian military practice was significantly influenced by teachings of Mikhail Dragomirov who was a general and a military writer responsible for the doctrine of what Plamper (2009) calls 'controlled berserkerdom'. This doctrine centred on the idea of channeling fear into a military virtue of self-sacrifice through denial. Dragomirov played a key role in the reorganisation of the military education system in Russia which under his influence promoted this idea of self-denial as the ultimate military virtue. Relying on drill and the training of obedience the Russian soldiers were taught to focus on self-denial as an 'effective antidote to fear'. These new military principles had some impact on changing the existing emotional regime within the Russian military thus indicating that flexibility of cultural frames (Plamper, 2009).

Conclusion

The soldiers often emphasise that combat is a profoundly emotional experience. As an Iraqi war US veteran Phil Klay (2014, pp. 42-43) writes in his memoir *Redeployment*: 'Somebody said combat is 99 percent sheer boredom and 1 percent pure terror. They weren't an MP in Iraq. On the roads I was scared all the time. Maybe not pure terror… But a kind of low-grade terror that mixes with boredom. So, it's 50 percent boredom and 49 percent normal terror, which is a general feeling that you might die at any second and that everybody in this country wants to kill you. Then, of course, there's the 1 percent pure terror, when your heart rate skyrockets, and your vision closes in and your hands are white, and your body is humming. You can't think. You're just an animal, doing what you've been trained to do. And then you go back to normal terror, and you go back to being a human, and you go back to thinking.' Fighting in war generates strong emotional reactions where fear and anxiety often mix with rage, anger, shame, honour, sadness, guilt, pride, elation and joy. The conventional interpretations emphasise that human psychological and physiological reactions on the battlefield are universal in a sense that similar emotions are triggered by similar external stimuli and thus all soldiers are likely to experience the same emotional reactions in the combat zone. In this article I have questioned this biological determinism arguing that emotional reactions on the

battlefields are highly diverse and situationally flexible. More specifically the article advances an argument that although most human beings are regularly affected by the exceptional circumstances of the battlefields their emotional responses are rarely uniform. Taking part in the theatres of war is likely to enact the physiological and psychological changes in most soldiers. However, cross-cultural and historical research indicates that almost identical situations of close-range violence can generate very different individual and collective emotional dynamics. Hence emotions cannot be reduced to physiology and rather than being 'triggered' by external stimuli emotional changes are largely shaped by historical and cultural forces. There are no emotional essences which are detached from their historical and cultural contexts. Instead all emotional responses are embedded in specific social situations. This is not to say that biology does not matter but only that physiological responses are only part of the picture where they together with the wider cultural and historical dynamics shape the emotional reactions in the combat zone.

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