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**DEATH IN THE MILITARY
IN SOCIOLOGICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES**

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■ INTRODUCTION

The French Ministry of Defence has been engaged in the study of death in the military since January, 2013. This paper is a presentation of the results of the different initiatives that have been undertaken over the past 18 to 24 months.

To start with, the Defence and Society Department of Irsem carried out a bibliography that clearly proved the lack of contributions on issues pertaining to death in the military. Such noticeable deficiency in the social scientific literature called for more action. Then, the Defence and Society Department has created a working group with doctoral students with a view to launching new research in this vital area. Finally, an event was organised, that was designed to bring together a diverse group of actors who are dealing with the question of death in the military in different countries. The objective was to provide a platform for exchange between academics and practitioners, and to identify key issues.

Effectively, the initiatives in question have resulted in a publication in French (*forthcoming*). It appears to be of fundamental importance to make it available to an English-speaking audience. Therefore, the main lines of research entailed in the French publication will be explored here in English, on an abridged form. The aim is to communicate the various strands of research which have been identified, as well as preliminary results and themes which are currently under discussion. It is hoped that a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural scientific dialogue can thus be created.

With Durkheim, we indeed take the comparative method to be the sociological method *par excellence*. We deeply feel the necessity to exchange on an international level in this area. In that way, the social dynamics that is inherent to the phenomenon: death in the military and war, can come into view.

The pattern of inquiry that presided over the different initiatives undertaken within the Defence and Society Department of Irsem has rested on the following idea: let's follow the deceased, his/her body or the representation of it, as well as the different social milieus and spaces through which it goes. Let's examine, then, the way the various groups involved appropriate him or her. This pattern has drawn us into different settings: from that of military comrades to the larger perimeter of the military institution; from the close circle of family, friends or neighbours to the political community in general. At each level, the comparative method has proved deeply revealing, whichever way the comparison was made: cross-army or cross-national.

The work which is under discussion here will be arranged under three chief headings:

- Firstly, the social imaginary of death in combat and its link to military activities;
- Secondly, the role of institutions and organisation in the regulation of social conduct in the face of loss, i.e. (a) the judicial institution, (b) support organizations for the relatives and relations of deceased members, (c) the media;
- Thirdly, the legacy of the death of a soldier in small and large communities, and the creation of new rites.

The contribution that is sought after here is a sociological and comparative one. Therefore, the input of religious scholars, long familiar with the issue at hand, has not been asked for; the contributions in the psychological or medical discipline were not drawn upon; the artistic and literary handling of military death was hardly touched upon. History, which has proved a pioneer in the study of death, war monuments and rituals was equally left aside, although its findings and methods irrigate the present endeavour as do those of anthropology. On this basis, present legal, political and sociological issues were tackled.

The three main points mentioned above will be developed on the following pages with a double purpose: to inform on the progress of the ongoing research conducted in France; and equally as important, to raise awareness and to encourage researchers to explore these themes, which are rich in depth and variation. A table summarizing key findings and themes under discussion is inserted at the end of this paper. It is greatly hoped that the present publication will arouse further research in comparative sociology.

I. THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY OF DEATH IN COMBAT

The social imaginary of death in the military, inside and outside the institution, is extremely centred on the issue of combat. Yet this imaginary appears to be rather disjointed from military reality. On the one hand, most military interventions today are organised with the aim of minimising deaths as far as possible; on the other hand, the military is often brought in to manage deaths that are not ensuing from combat, or military activity at all (e.g. natural catastrophes, industrial accidents). While 'death in combat' is deeply embedded in the social imaginary of both soldiers and society in general, such representation does not match the practice of the military institution. To sketch the perimeter of the activities of military institutions, and to grasp the conception that is usually formed of it, are necessary steps to take when researching death in the military.

a) *Death in the military: what is it?*

The multiple ways of death

The military milieu finds itself confronted to 'death' in a multiplicity of ways. This can be seen on two levels: the first one is the way in which military personnel are susceptible to being in situations that can lead to their (own) experience of death or its instigation; the second one is the way in which they can be brought in to manage death and its consequences independently of any circumstances of war.

As regards the first level, it is worthwhile noting that death in the military can occur during training, in combat, by accident or by suicide. Furthermore, the military can endanger the lives of others in combat that conforms to the law of war, but also in cases that are proscribed by such law (as was the case of Abu Ghraib for instance). As regards the second level, the armed forces can also be brought in to intervene in a non-military context which nonetheless poses a high lethality risk. They can be required to take action in a range of natural catastrophes (e.g. earthquakes, hurricanes), industrial accidents (e.g. chemical, nuclear accidents), civil emergencies (e.g. shipwrecks, plane crash) and others. In these cases, which sometimes involve the destruction of civil infrastructures, military institutions can detach units and even provide relief as a last resort.

Death in combat as a dominant representation

Notwithstanding all these multiple examples, the fact remains that death in combat is a dominant representation. Death appears to soldiers as an impassable horizon on two grounds: firstly, it is perceived to be an individual test, which reveals courage or cowardice; secondly, it also comes out as a collective test, which reveals cohesion or rout. The social power of this representation is palpable in the case of the (French) reserve: the fact of being sent out to endure 'a baptism of fire' confers an incomparable legitimacy on reservists and is potentially a source of promotion. Thus the model of the infantry ('queen of battles') remains highly weighty and meaningful across the armed forces.

In the wider public too, a death in the military is always perceived as a death related to combat, despite the many other possible causes of death (e.g. in training, by accident or suicide) and its lesser probability. Such representation is both highly persistent and widely shared, whatever the circumstances surrounding the event, which are of course known of the families and the close professional circle of the deceased.

An agenda for future research 

This basic finding informs the agenda of future research. The effect of such social interpretation of death in the military (i.e. death in combat) can be studied in its many diverse forms, such as:

- public policies and legal frameworks in relation to the treatment of the deceased and of war veterans conducted by the military institution;
- social movements as well as campaigns organized by NGOs, notably the anti-war movement (pacifists, religious, or else);
- media coverage of military death;
- the creation of new rites;
- the setting up of new support and war veteran associations.

While some publications address already some of these issues, only few of them – apart from the journal *War and Culture Studies* now and then – do it by focusing on the European (and American) space in the contemporary period. This is precisely what will be done, to some degree and in exploratory mode, in the following pages. A preliminary step to take, however, consists in looking at the way in which military personnel view death in operations.

b) To take a life, or to give one's life in operations: what sense can we make of this?

The possibility of dying

Death in the military is often presented as an obvious fact. The non-recognition of this fact, inferred by certain families or certain commentators, sometimes arouses resentment. Nevertheless, everything indicates that even in the military, the fact of being deployed in a military operation is not sufficient in itself to justify death. Losing one's life, or causing the death of another, always implies a search for meaning that, without being perfectly precise, is articulated within a coherent belief system.

Prior to any exploration into the significance of death occurring in combat, it is necessary to realise that the potential for death is not always patent for the soldier, even though a voluntary decision has been made to enter the operational field. A study of military units traditionally less exposed to mortal risk, the French reserve army, allows us to identify materials artifacts that render the possibility of death more concrete for soldiers¹.

These artifacts consist of objects, procedures and technical standards. As a first entry, we find the bullet-proof vest, a heavy helmet, and dog tags (as well as the obligation to wear it before embarkation), and also the wearing of a Velcro badge that displays the blood group. Secondly, the evidence of the risk of death emanates from a number of procedures: the dental x-rays that would be used as a last resort for identification in a post-mortem, repatriation insurance for the deceased (obligatory for a foreign deployment) and the issuing of a military passport with a temporary validity. Finally, the utilisation of arms is a further source of objectivation for these soldiers. In France,

¹ Alicia Paya y Pastor : "Rendre tangible la mort probable : le cas des réservistes envoyés en Opex", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), forthcoming, *La Mort en milieu militaire. Socialisation à la mort, appropriation des défunts et ritualisation en France et à l'étranger*, Paris : Irsem.

members of the reserve are nowadays required to follow shooting training (*Instruction de tir au combat - IST*) – two occasions where the potential to cause death are made palpable.²

As a complement to this piece of research, an ethnographic study of the file and rank soldiers in the combat infantry section has shown how the young French soldiers view death before, during and after their deployment³. It has helped identifying key features of the social discourse and practices of these soldiers around the possibility of 'losing one's life'.

In this context, there appears to be a mismatch between the way a soldier's death is viewed inside the institution and outside the institution. In particular, the show of unity which is on display to the outside world is not necessarily on display internally. This is linked to the fact that the comrades of the deceased search for a cause and that this search leads to two types of explanation: death will then often be put down to misfortune or, less frequently, to the incompetence on the part of the commanding officers. Now it appears that, beyond the event itself, the evocation of death has different social functions: firstly, to forge close military bonds; secondly, to allow for disciplinary injunctions to be formulated during training (e.g. 'this position, it's the mistake that kills'); and finally, to open up discussions about the future, with all its attendant expectations, wishes and plans.

The practice of killing

In relation to the act of killing, a study was conducted of air force officers who were mobilised in Kosovo, in Afghanistan and in Lybia. The impact of the *modus operandi* of the French air force on its personnel and their relationship with death was explored⁴. Building on the idea formulated F. Gros of an 'ethical pact of reciprocity', the following hypothesis was enunciated: such pact has evolved but lies beneath the war phenomenon. Its persistence, despite the disproportion at ratio between the mortality rate of Western forces and their enemies, can indeed be inferred from a number of assertions by made the interviewees.

Amongst these assertions, we note first of all that asymmetrical wars only are a historical exception that will fade out as soon as the technological imbalance is redressed. We then see that contexts of exposure are amply commented on: for instance, duels, which almost never happen, are brought forward to keep alive this ethical pact as are the shows of force, where the pilot is extremely exposed without the lives of others being in danger. Finally, interviewees often bring in a particular rhetorical

² However, the study that was conducted in a French reserve unit did not investigate this: the reservists that were interviewed by Alicia Paya y Pastor did not envisage using their weapons in the low intensity zone where they were deployed.

³ Mathias Thura : "L'entre-soi militaire de la mort : géométrie variable des communautés d'endeuillés", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

⁴ Mathias Delori : "Le rapport à la mort des aviateurs dans le contexte des guerres asymétriques", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

device, which can be called 'reciprocity by identification': the pilot is certainly less exposed, but he/she sees himself/herself not as an 'I' but in effect as a 'we', consisting of the ground troops and potential civil victims. Based on the interviews with air force officers, the actual way of waging war does not seem to call into question the notion that war is fundamentally an exchange of dead.

An agenda for future research

In light of these considerations, a promising avenue of research is situated at the intersection of discourse and practice. The social imaginary of death in combat that is demonstrated by soldiers, and that is spread across many diverse groups in society, does not always fit into the practices of the institution. It would be highly relevant to investigate the ways in which this imaginary is maintained and spread across groups inside and outside the armed forces. It would be equally relevant to explore its concrete effects in the military institution and elsewhere.

Many possible fieldworks spring to mind here:

- one of them would consist in examining in greater depth the context of asymmetrical wars by focusing on the usage of drones and its consequences on the social imaginary of combat;
- another one would concentrate on the non-intended effects of such imaginary, e.g. the devaluation of the many fields of military endeavour and of the efforts of the many soldiers that are unconnected to combat.

Now, there are institutions where such imaginary is in constant re-elaboration. These institutions regulate the relationship between the dead and the living. A second area of discussion is devoted to the identification of such institutions and their functions.

II. THE LOSS: PROCESSES OF REGULATION

The relationship between the deceased and the living is socially regulated. Some of the rules governing their relations emanate either from institutions, or from organizations. In this way, we can say that the relationship between the dead and the living is inscribed in regulatory processes. Here, we are going to examine three main regulatory bodies: first, the laws and the authority which are in charge of applying them; second, the support facilities that are in place for the families and relation of the deceased; third, the media.

a) Judiciary institution

Legal codification and the dead

In France, a common procedure for the three military arms surrounding the treatment of mortality is in the process of being developed. Now, given the variety of ways in which the military milieu finds itself confronted to 'death', the task of legal codification is rendered much more arduous.⁵ The procedure will need to cover the maximum possible number of cases from scattered legal sources. It will need to co-ordinate a multitude of provisions stemming from different legal rules (healthcare, law of war, civil law, customs law, transport law, etc.) applied specifically according to each situation. No matter what the exact cause of death may be, the future procedure will need to take into account the fact that the handling of each case must not compromise the pursuit of the final objectives of the mission. This necessitates, on the one hand, thorough preparation of the personnel in advance, and on the other hand, careful management of the flow of information (vis-à-vis the families, the political authorities and the greater public). In other words, the future procedure will need to enforce and ensure a wide-ranging, cohesive set of technical elements within the greater context of a humane framework for action.

The military, the judiciary and survivors

And yet, there is another dimension to law: for families and the military personnel, the justice system is increasingly employed by families or survivors to be the instrument of truth and transparency. Hence it is viewed as a means to lift any suspicion of the military institution, which is ever more considered with distrust.

In France, the military justice system has evolved enormously since the eighties at the penal level⁶. Notably, it has moved from the concept of 'justice by the military' to 'justice for the military'. This has been made more concrete in 2011 by the replacement of a military tribunal in Paris by a specialised chamber within the civil district court (*Tribunal de Grande Instance*). Hence, in a context in which there is no formal declaration of war, either on our territory or abroad, military death is treated by the civil justice system (and not the military judiciary). As a corollary, death in the military context is increasingly envisaged as a kind of work accident by the family, any beneficiaries, or by any injured parties who then sometimes bring the employer to court for lack of training and foresight.

We can note the different social value which is accorded to the concept of work accident, negative in the military profession, positive in other professional sectors. However, the dominant interpretation

⁵ As Antoine Ibanez showed in his piece of research: "La procédure interarmées relative au traitement des affaires mortuaires", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

⁶ As explored in a paper by Thierry Ramonatxo, "La mort du militaire saisie par le droit", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

in the higher ranks of the French military is the following: death in the military is the result of an engagement launched by the political authorities and accepted by the military in all its consequences. In this way, the military institution is singular in comparison to other state bodies and military personnel are not therefore ordinary victims (because they are on a state mission). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the social acceptance of this interpretation is declining in the ranks.

Inheritance law and the families

Another captivating avenue for socio-legal research is the issue of inheritance and family succession. This is a key dimension of the regulation operated by civil law and its institutions. In effect, the practice of writing a will and testament by soldiers sent on operations varies according to the country.

Different examples can be brought in to show the potential this avenue of research entails. Let us consider Denmark, where a new rule was introduced not long ago: soldiers deployed on missions in external operations are now obliged to make a will before departure. This obligation has social effects, positive and negative. These can vary according to the family environment and the approbation or disapprobation of his/her relatives regarding his/her engagement. In striking contrast, in France, there is an attitude which verges on the superstitious among rank and file soldiers: writing a will and therefore contemplating the hour and way of their own death, is seen as contrary to the spirit that has to be nurtured in the military in order to guaranty one's own survival. In both cases, the age of the soldier and his family responsibilities will, without doubt, influence the type of paperwork that he or she is prepared to undertake.

Related to this is the question of marriage. Marriage is often encouraged for young couples by the military institution before a deployment, and we can see some parallels: similar to making a will and testament, the decision to marry can be a source of sometimes deep family discussions, with positive or negative outcomes.

An agenda for future research

With regard to these subjects, the field of legal sociology appears to be very promising in so far as it comprises numerous possible angles of investigation. On a more strictly legal note, further research on the evolution of the legal norms and their international comparison is desirable; on a more sociological note, it is the usage of these norms by social actors which should constitute the focus of investigations. The practices that are induced by the potential for death impact individual interactions; they grant a particular role to the judiciary at the intersection between military institutions, the families and the soldiers.

b) Organizations for the support of the family and friends

Organizations for the support of families and friends are a necessary component of the treatment of mortality. They stand at the juncture between state institutions, on the one hand and families and relatives, on the other, and are supported financially by a variety of donors, including veterans. They fulfil key functions, from the material to the psychological support of families.

Helping families practically

In France, the organisation called CABAT (*Cellule d'aide aux blessés de l'armée de terre* - support unit for injured soldiers of the Army) has a mission to take care of injured and deceased personnel and in this way also to support their families. This structure, which was reinforced in 2011, accompanies the families, for however long it is needed. It provides an interface with different services within the army and the ministry of Defence, as well as with relevant exterior organisations. It offers its own pole of social expertise (helping widows to re-enter the labour market and providing legal assistance, for example) and of psychological expertise. Since 2010, it has followed and helped 1200 injured personnel and 112 families of deceased personnel.

In the interval between the actual death and the funeral or cremation, members of CABAT will assist the family in a number of ways, following an internal process called 'IFA' (for Identification of the deceased, direction for the Family, and Aid and support). CABAT maintains a close proximity to the family at all the key moments of the memorial ceremonies (namely the 'Homage Plan' - see Section 3.a. for more detail). CABAT also aids the families to resolve a number of practical problems (reimbursement of funeral costs, salary transfer, state compensation if applicable, care of an orphan for one year before he or she becomes a ward of the state, etc.). CABAT follows and supports the psychological recovery of the family members, working with independent psychological support units.

CABAT is present at key moments for families, moments of tension and sorrow. It helps families resolve the practical problems they face following the death of a spouse, father or mother. In addition to its practical dimension, the strength of CABAT lies in the ability of its members to listen.

Supporting relatives emotionally

In the United States, many associations fulfil similar functions. One of these, chosen at random, makes it possible to draw a rough outline of comparison: this is an association founded by a widow of an officer who renders aid to the families of deceased military personnel called *Tragedy Assistance Programme for Survivors* (TAPS)⁷. This association was designed mainly to assist widows and

⁷ The work of this association is described in a paper by Claire Hunter: "Le soutien aux familles de TAPS", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

widowers, but also helps brothers, sisters, civil partners, uncles, aunts, parents-in-law, friends or any other person in relation to the deceased. Its activities' scope is wider than CABAT's in a way. Yet it is less focused on the material side of death. Its action is very much focused on the process of mourning and less on the issue of compensation.

The mission of TAPS is founded on the idea that military culture is distinct from civil culture. Accordingly, its action is conducted on the premise death in the military, regardless of the cause, needs to be treated separately, apart from civil norms. The manner of death, (accident, suicide, combat or other) therefore should not affect the aid and support that is given to the family. Affiliation to a military institution is not a determining factor in qualifying for assistance from TAPS either. Relatives and friends of a member of a private security company are also eligible for support. TAPS is particularly attentive to the consequences of death for the survivor, including the possibility of exclusion from the military community, which might result from leaving the military base or change of legal status.

The association launches many different lines of action. It organises seminars for adults, also something called the 'Good Grief Camp' for children, and retreats where the emphasis is more on adventure rather than mourning. The aim is to help the family and friends in mourning to begin to start living normally again. One of the specific methods it employs is called 'peer-based emotional support'. This does not rely on the relationship between patient and psychiatrist but rather on companionship. In effect, no diagnosis is made and the relationship is non-hierarchical: the rapport that is sought is one of a reciprocal nature. Alongside its method of finding an adult companion whose profile converges with the bereaved, it also helps children: each child is indeed encouraged to form a buddy-relationship with an adult soldier who is similarly bereaved and can play the role of a mentor. At any rate, the association also works with two other charities in the area of psychotherapeutic assistance for bereaved soldiers: Department of Veteran's Affairs and Give an Hour.

Apart from this, one of the main aims of the association is to raise awareness of this issue amongst soldiers. On visits to military bases, it attempts to help families to be aware of and to recognise certain signs: for examples, symptoms of post-traumatic stress. It also aims to increase the acceptance of the need to ask for external help when necessary.

An agenda for future research ④

This general outline illustrates how necessary and fruitful it is to compare different networks on an international level. This puts the role of the State and its associated structures into perspective. It shows the type of support that is rendered by different associations as well as by different branches of medicine in different countries (including psychology and psycho-analysis). Further, it raises

questions regarding the range of profiles that can be susceptible to particular kinds of stress and who need to be assisted on the road to recovery, depending on the country, its culture and the circumstances of death.

c) The Media

The media represents a third instance of regulation between the survivors and the deceased, in the military institution and outside of it. In the first case, we are going to briefly look at the usages of the TIC by the military and their effect on their relationship with death; in the second, we are going to consider the use of military material related to death by mainstream media and the transmission and representation of this material to the larger public.

The usage of TIC by militaries

Regarding the use of TIC by militaries, remarkable development has appeared since the war in Kosovo: in the most recent operations, it is possible to see the filming of manoeuvres and so also the death of an enemy. In this context, the images benefit from improved definition, their usage has evolved, (notably, the identification of targets for pilots) and they can, potentially, be re-played *ad infinitum*. Emblematic of these technological advances, (as well as questioning their role in operations) is the equipment in place on the operational bases of Nijrab and Kapisa: screens are placed side by side and show, on the left, the operations underway, and on the right, the number of losses in real time.

If, in an operational sense, these images form a useful de-briefing tool, they are also, in a psycho-social sense, a way of bringing exceptional events from the war zone right into the daily living space of soldiers in home territory. This exceptionally close contact between the two worlds introduces an enormous qualitative difference (still to be studied) in comparison between the military world of today and the military world of the First World War, where the injured were only seen on their return from the front. We have a glimpse here of the paradox of the modern soldier who is more protected than his forbears by new technology, yet is also rendered more vulnerable, in an unprecedented manner, through live images.

The treatment of military death by mainstream media

The handling of the death of fallen soldiers by mainstream media raises fascinating points when looked at comparatively⁸. The treatment of the deceased in the British media, for instance, is fairly comprehensive : it includes a 15mn report on the deceased on the day of the announcement of

⁸ This point is addressed in the paper by Bénédicte Chéron and Louisa Fennouche : “Le traitement médiatique de la mort des militaires”, to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid*.

his/her death, followed by a long interview with his/her relatives the day after. Tribute is paid to the deceased in the British press too.

It is unclear whether the media department in the French MoD or French public opinion would be ready to be exposed to this level of detailed investigation. It is only since 2008 that the two main channels (TF1 and France 2) have started to mention dead soldiers in the news: the treatment, however, is rather short and institutional. The press, for its part, devotes little space to the personal dimension of military death, dealing mainly with its significance for the operation.

There also are national variations regarding image, photography in particular. Here again, the contrast seems at first glance to be particularly pronounced between the English and American media on the one hand, and continental Europe (French and German) media on the other hand. The last two are much less inclined to show macabre images given the greater sensitivity of public opinion in this area.

An agenda for future research ⑤

These findings make us question the nature of the social bond that is created by television: while it is true that the media encourages the establishment of rites (in so far as it re-presents and re-enact social bonds), is it really the source of such rite? Is the media an intrinsic part of new rites, that is of new collective, codified, exceptional and symbolic practices? Or is it just an adjunct to the rite, devoid of any deeper role?

The issues that are raised by the analysis of the media and of the TIC are numerous. They cover two main areas: the role of images in the process of individualisation of the deceased, be they our army forces or those of the enemy; the role of images and their apparatus (television and the internet) in the birth of new funeral rites. At any rate, these questions lead us to investigate other subjects, notably communities of the grieving and the nature of the bond that unites them.

III. COMMUNITY, SOVEREIGNTY, GLOBALISATION

Those who have died in operations are honoured and recognized by various communities of the grieving. The extension and practices of such communities are moving and need to be identified. While small communities flourish in social spaces that sometimes remain disconnected, the comparative examination of new rites of national scope shows how central the state and nationalism/patriotism remain for any inquiries on death in the military.

a) *Small and big communities of the grieving*

Spontaneous commemoration inside and outside the institution

Which communities of the grieving do we know of inside and outside the military institution? Research conducted in France has shown that the occurrence of death lays bare the structure of social groups within the military institution.⁹ Hence, soldiers happen to be more or less empathetic depending on their position in an operational and tactical framework. Beyond the organisation chart, which shapes groups into triads and associates a junior and senior member of the armed forces, other social groups are formed. These can include personnel from other companies, depending on the density of the experience on the base and in the barracks. In other words, social life on the base favours the formation of groups that are unconnected to the formal structure of the organization. The occurrence of death reveals circles of comrades that are formed within the institution, sometimes unwillingly favoured by it, and that do not fit with operational arrangements.

This shows that cohesion is variable in scope. For one thing, soldiers do not make a difference between the circumstances of death (e.g. accident or operations); for another thing, it is the soldiers and the different social groups they belong to which allow for the memory of the deceased to be kept alive. Having said this, it is to be noted that the current turnover in regiments leads to a dramatic weakening of collective memory. Memorial installations – pictures, monuments, altars or else – are not sufficient in themselves to keep the memory of a deceased comrade alive, whatever the cause of her/his death might have been.

Research on Denmark¹⁰ has brought a range of emerging practices from part of civilian groups or families into view. Different phenomena can be mentioned here: spontaneous monuments can for instance be erected, as was the case of the commemorative park built in 2007 in the garden of an inn that is historically related to a famous operation conducted against the Prussian army in 1849. Or then funerary steles and gravestones can be personalised: some of them show distinctive signs for families, while others target a wider public, imbued as they are with a political statement regarding the military or a particular operation. Then again, virtual crypts are a further example of emerging practices, being the product of yet other communities of the grieving which gradually gain in importance.

In this context, it can be said the material culture and social practices related to death do not only help establish a relationship between the deceased and the living. They also are a way for new interpretation of death in the military to come forth, in a multiplicity of spaces situated at the crossroad between public and private.

⁹ See Mathias Thura, cited in note 4.

¹⁰ See Birgitte Sørensen : “Pratiques mémorielles spontanées et mutations du nationalisme danois” to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

Formal recognition in big communities

The recognition that is demonstrated to a fallen soldier by a larger community is another way for the living to come to term with the deceased. In France, a system has been elaborated in the name of the nation, by which honorary awards are granted to the deceased and material compensation to his/her family.¹¹ The State recognizes the utility of the sacrifice that is made on two counts: by the soldier who has sacrificed her/his life in combat (displaying the flag, the hymns, etc.) and by the families who have sacrificed a son or daughter (making them the beneficiaries of a number of provisions).

Such a system originates in the First World War and is currently undergoing some transformation. One of its main transformations underway lies in the tendency to extend the symbolism and compensation scheme to a greater number of cases. Demands exist that aim at replacing the concept of 'combat' with that of 'service' and to place fallen soldiers and victims of terrorism on an equal footing.

Compared to Denmark, the specificity of the military in relation to death is most intensely defended in France. The idea according to which the deceased might have succumbed to no more than a (calculated) professional risk is fiercely fought against. In the background, a judicial argument goes on, which has to do with the possibility (or not) to treat the military activity and the potentiality of death it entails within a legal framework rooted in labour law.

An agenda for future research

Questions indeed emerge regarding the classification of death cases and its consequence. As mentioned earlier, death can occur in a variety of ways in the military context. It can for instance happen while manipulating weapons before being deployed; it can also happen on a military base in Afghanistan following a jogging session; it can happen in ground fighting. Taking these examples together, which of them should be the object of a specific policy of recognition? Which criteria should be applied to distinguish them from another? What makes them specifically 'military'?

The recognition that is shown to the fallen soldiers varies depending on the size of the community that is involved and its material culture. Whether it emanates from small or large communities, the recognition that is given can have a public dimension. This is why the discussion inevitably leads us to examine the new national rites that have emerged more or less simultaneously over the past few years in different countries.

¹¹ This point is the focus of the paper by Pierre Laugeay : "Les marques publiques de reconnaissance de la Nation à ses soldats morts au combat" to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

b) New national rites

New memorial ceremonies for the fallen have been organised in the name of the nation following the war in Afghanistan in different countries. Three cases will be considered here: the United-Kingdom, Denmark and France. Each needs to be looked at on its own but they all, taken together, raise generic questions relative to the use of memory of past wars in today's context, on the role of the state and on the military profession. More fundamentally, they raise the question of nationalism and the figure of the enemy.

In the name of the Nation: Wootton Bassett

As soon as one looks at new national rites, the case of Wootton Bassett immediately comes to mind.¹² This small Wiltshire town, in the UK, was the theatre of new funeral ceremonies of national scope between 2007 and 2011 that were organised without the support of the state. While only a few individuals first stood alongside the funeral procession in order to pay their respects, a substantial number of citizens, associations members and journalists finally joined in Wootton Bassett became the representative of the nation and of the support it is likely to give its own soldiers.

Interestingly, the inhabitants of Wootton Bassett have always denied taking a political stance. Rather, they have always put forward their willingness to express solidarity to the family of the deceased. The political dimension of their action is no less obvious. This can be seen from the controversy that it provoked from different groups, the most notorious being *Islam4UK* (today banned), or from the numerous marks of sympathy that they attracted.

The rite that was developed in the village is remarkable if one considers the following facts: firstly, the body of the soldiers fallen in overseas operations were only repatriated in exceptional circumstances since the First World War and up until 2001, in line with the non-repatriation order in force over that period; second, no public ceremony of homage is organized by the British state (even if a private ceremony, gathering military comrades and personnel as well as family, is organized by the military institution). Yet it is significant that Elizabeth II granted Wootton Bassett a royal patronage in recognition of its role in the repatriation of British soldiers.

Today, the body of the deceased goes through the base were they used to arrive before it was closed for building works between 2007 and 2011: Brize Norton in Oxfordshire. No comparable ceremony has taken place there to this day.

¹² As explored by Aline Gaus in her paper : "Le rituel de rapatriement de Wootton Bassett : comment une petite ville en est venue à pleurer les morts au nom de la Nation", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

Nationalism's transmutation in Denmark

Denmark makes a good case for comparison. This implies to go back in time and recall a few historical facts. The year 1864 is considered to be the date of birth of the Danish nation-state: it is then that the Prussian army seized a third of the territory and naturalised the people that resided there. These events led to a reinforcement of the sense of community amongst members of the remaining Danish society and to the setting up of key infrastructures. Denmark remained neutral during the First World War and was occupied during World War Two, so that even if Danes came to fight on both occasions, it was not in the name of Denmark. Today, Denmark adopts a more affirmative international stance, taking part in military operations alongside the US among others.

In this context, monuments and ceremonies have been created in order to pay tribute to soldiers fallen in combat. One can mention here the *Monument for Denmark's international Effort since 1948* that was built in 2011 near the Citadel in Copenhague (5 000 to 6000 people go by on a daily basis); or monuments built in garrisons across the country; or even the establishment of a 'homecoming parade' the last Friday of August as well as a 'Flag-flying day' on September 5th each year (38 cities took part in 2012). Yet, it seems that the parades generate a certain unease amongst soldiers and their family and this has led Birgitte Sørensen to question the attributes of Danish nationalism today.¹³

In this perspective, she notes two points: for one thing, a nationalist discourse is mostly owned by the extreme-right and a majority of Danes do not want to be associated with it. For another thing, Danish nationalism draws less on the usual symbols such as emblems, hymns or parades; rather, it centres on a set of everyday practices that are taken to express more eloquently the democratic and humanitarian ideal (equality, liberty, law and development aid). More than that, the following opinion seems to be widespread: namely that there is only a difference in degree, but not in substance, between the kind of service to the community soldiers and other public servants (e.g. teachers) make. In light of these developments, the new rites that have been established by the military institution during the recent Afghan conflict might be out of date.

Centrality of the state in France

In France, the state and the military institution play a comparatively important role. This is true as regards the organisation of the new funeral rites for soldiers fallen in combat since 2011: namely the Homage Plan (*Plan homage*).¹⁴ This particular place of the state is clearly visible from a very simple piece of evidence, namely the path followed by the coffin between the airport and its final station, the *Invalides*. Once in Paris, the body processes along emblematic routes: the avenue of the Great Army (*avenue de la Grande armée*) up until the *Place de l'Etoile* (where Napoléon erected the *Arc de*

¹³ See the contribution of Birgitte Sørensen, quoted in note 10.

¹⁴ See "Le Plan Hommage" by Thierry Maloux, to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

Triomphe) to finally arrive in the courtyard of the *Invalides* (the building of which was decided by Louis the 14th in 1670 for the injured at war). In other words, the path of the coffin aims at inscribing the loss in the history of the French state. Popular support is allowed just before the entry into the *Invalides*, but the ceremony that then takes place is a private one, conducted under the auspices of the military institution. At this stage, the body has not been 'given back' to his/her family.

As in Denmark, families are later invited to take part to memorial ceremonies. In France, it is the case every November 11th (which is the 1918 Armistice Day, now commemorating all soldiers who have fallen for France) and, since 2011, every July 14th. However, it is not always easy for military personnel to accompany families on such events, either because of their festive nature, or by reason of the difficulties that family members might feel (particularly young spouses) to carry on playing a role which they would rather leave behind.

An agenda for future research ⑦

These three cases we have considered raise general questions that have to do with the State and the nation. They make us question how the nation is perpetuated and which role the military institution – and its dead – play in this process. They also make us question the relationship between everyday nationalism/patriotism (the one that emerges from social practices) and its institutional forms (those which the military institution supports).

■ CONCLUSION

Looking at the preliminary results and points of discussion that were presented here, it emerges that two broad interpretations can be made of the phenomenon 'death in the military in the 21st century'.

Towards post-militarism and post-heroism?

The first one, rooted in post-modernist thinking, portrays contemporary times as 'post-militarist' and 'post-heroic'.¹⁵ It claims that the use of military power is constrained, due to three main factors: firstly, the legitimacy crisis of the State (namely because of the growing demands it faces); secondly, the narrowing of its margin of action in the economic domain as a result of globalisation; thirdly, the loss of sovereignty due to the transfers that are made to international institutions. While they have long been the symbol of national unity, maintaining an essential link to citizenship, the armed forces no longer stand at the centre of the State (at a symbolic level at least).

¹⁵ See Michael Drake: "Les pertes de guerre et le corps politique à l'ère de la globalisation", to be published in Eulriet, Irène (ed.), *ibid.*

Accordingly, the memorials and rites that were entrenched in the mass culture of the 20th century have been replaced by ceremonies that correspond better to contemporary individualist and consumerist culture: the death of a soldier is no longer a sacrifice in the name of the nation but the loss of an irreplaceable life; his/her memory is honoured during short and ephemeral ceremonies, like those of Wootton Bassett. In this interpretation, a soldier's death is thus no longer associated with the nation's destiny and the neo-nationalist bursts it might provoke do not line up anymore with the way either politics or war is now conducted.

Identifying the enemy

The second interpretation challenges the preceding one, claiming that it is not supported empirically. Indeed, the findings of current research - not least those presented in this paper - show that there are strong variations amongst Western States. They also show that there are strong variations depending on the sectors that are considered. Hence while it is clear that States currently change their architecture due to their membership in a variety of regional and international institutions, it is not yet clear that their power is lessening. The recognition of Wootton Bassett's role by the Queen as a central piece in the national and imperial heritage testifies to such enduring power. While the way in which operations are led has changed and become multinational, the demonstration of the waning of the State as a power structure still has to be made.

More than that, the transformation of the mechanisms by which people feel they belong to a particular community does not equate to an incontrovertible atomisation of the social body. Studies of death in the military are well placed to explore this transformation in so far commemorations create community. To honour one's dead necessarily leads to the identification of an Other, who does not honour them, who does not recognize them, who does not take care of their families. According to this second interpretation, what counts more than the question of the state is the question of the enemy: which community is fighting? Against whom? Looking at funerary and memorial practices can help answer these questions.

This is why it is hoped that the key findings and themes under discussion presented here on an abridged form can be taken further through the design of new research, the conduct of new fieldworks and their comparison with help of the resources and insights of a wide range of social sciences.

RESEARCH THEMES FOR COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY

The research themes identified below do not necessary stand in a similar order to those pointed out in the main body of the text. All research areas mentioned previously are nevertheless inserted in the following table. Instead of being organized thematically, they are made to fit sub-disciplinary categories.

LEGAL SOCIOLOGY	1.	The implications of the death of soldiers who are not officially at war for the judiciary (absence of a war declaration)
	2.	Dying at war: Family and patrimonial law
	3.	Legal codification of mortuary affairs
POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY The nation against the state?	4.	Supporting families and relatives: the state, voluntary and non-profit organizations
	5.	Spontaneous commemorations: which rites for which communities of the grieving?
	6.	Everyday nationalism vs. grand nationalism: a new role for 21 st century military
MILITARY SOCIOLOGY Imagination and emotion in the military	7.	Death in combat: appropriation, adjustment and rejection of a dominant representation by non-combatant units
	8.	Killing at a distance: the social imaginary of combat and its transformation
	9.	The geography of empathy across the military: what death does to cohesion
SOCIOLOGY OF THE MEDIA	10.	Is the media an integral part of new national mortuary rites?
	11.	The usage of TIC for operational purposes: individualising death and its consequences
	12.	Images and figure of the enemy