

Military Sociology: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Military sociology is a new discipline and approach that seeks a better integration of the military world into society, understanding that they are a fundamental part of the origin of society and the safeguard of the structures that are originating as the State begins to grow. It is also necessary to understand that the military world is born from the civilian world as one of the structures of society, called to protect the rest of it.

Keywords: Military sociology, sociology. armed forces, origin of the society, history.

Resumen

La sociología militar es una nueva disciplina y enfoque que busca una mejor integración del mundo militar en la sociedad, entendiendo que son parte fundamental del origen de la sociedad y el resguardo de las estructuras que van originando a medida que comienza a crecer el Estado. También es necesario entender que el mundo militar nace desde el mundo civil como una de las estructuras de la sociedad, llamado a proteger al resto de ella.

Palabras clave: Sociología militar, sociología. fuerzas armadas, origen de la sociedad, historia.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a general and historical overview of this new and challenging discipline that seeks to provide answers to a particular world. Military sociology as a study is a recent branch of the social sciences; however, military societies have existed since the beginning of the formation of society and States, since it is possible to find warrior castes in practically all peoples to protect the first forms of pre-States or nascent States. Thus, for example, Mesopotamia, the area where the concept of civilization was born is a chronicle of almost constant struggles over time, and the first war of which there is a record took place in 2700 B.C. between the kingdoms of Sumer and Elam.¹ Due to the above, it is necessary to study sociology to understand the motivations and needs of the nascent peoples to have an army.

Sociology studies the social relations of man, so it can also be interpreted as the “study of society itself”², without forgetting that it is a different form of observation. For example, a country that is part of a civilization, and the characteristics that it has: “a unique idiosyncrasy that distinguishes it from those of its surroundings”.³

It is thus necessary to analyze the concept of social interaction between people since this action is the human action in the different social environments, which necessarily leads to capturing the social reality that must be given “by a structural perception, since the representation of the other is not the result of a mere accumulation of observations or impressions collected at random, but is rather the product of a structuring process”.⁴

According to the sociologist Emile Durkheim, social interaction is based on “ways of acting,

thinking, and feeling, external to the individual and endowed with a coercive power under which they are imposed on him”.⁵

From the above, it can be understood that military institutions are a fundamental part of the origin of any society, and have a need to relate to the rest of the set of social actors, not only for their knowledge but also for what they represent in the context of the State as guarantor of security and part of the identity of the nation. All this without ignoring the fact that its members are part of civil society, since they were born from it, and will always develop within it⁶.

A characteristic of military sociology is “to interpret the concept of what war is because military institutions are prepared to enter into this type of conflict at any time of its existence, therefore, it is of utmost importance to bring at this time some concepts about it”.⁷ War, from this perspective, is unfortunately inevitable, and history has shown that this is the case.

Study of the war

War has been a relevant actor in the history of mankind, being determinant in generating political and geographical changes. The sociologist Margaret Mead said that “war is only an invention, not a biological necessity”, and that war was “a defective social institution” whose sole purpose was to “accumulate prestige, avenge honor, acquire booty, or appease the bloodlust of its gods or the restless souls of the recently dead”⁸. Another view of war is provided by the famous Prussian strategist Karl von Clausewitz, creator of the theory of war, who said that “war is a form of human relationship. War does not belong to the field of the arts or sciences, but to that of social existence. It is a conflict of

great interests, resolved by bloodshed, and only in this does it differ from other conflicts”⁹.

In this sense, war is a permanent power game that reflects human nature, and that indicates that, throughout humanity and its development, man, in his quest to establish a certain order, moves from chaos through power, to the search for a new order. War is a projection of human nature in permanent conflict with itself, and to establish power structures. This social phenomenon, as facts of social nature, is the deepest expression of the conflict that the human being has to establish permanent levels of power.

Military institutions and their influence on the history

To determine the influence of military sociology and its effects on the development of society, it makes more sense to provide a historical view of how man has always wanted to know the how and why of his actions as a social actor. Man has always sought, as a form of power, to interpret history, and to control all those facts that can effectively channel the most important milestones to conduct it.

When the evolution of human beings made them move from a nomadic lifestyle to a sedentary one due to changes in nature after the last glaciation, social relations began to spread among the members of tribes and clans, who had to get together to bend the then untamed nature and transform it for their benefit and that of their clan, one of the first forms of society. It is in this way that man sees the need to create more relationships to supply his own needs through the conquest of a territory or the formation of the family, and with this, the preexisting forms of the State appear, who thus becomes the one in charge of creating the first juridical orders, such as the Code of Ur-Nammu¹⁰, that place limits on the conduct of its members, as well as to regulate

access to and distribution of the resources of the territories.

As can be seen, the social interactions between the society itself and others were already overwhelming, as well as the interest in controlling the market means, which at that time was land, the primary source for agriculture and livestock activities.

Understanding the need for the Armed Forces at Comte.

Along with analyzing the human need for an army and its development, it is important to keep in mind the phenomenon of the military world as a necessity for society. So, to approach the study of the Armed Forces and the act of war, it is necessary to study what sociology is in the first place.

Auguste Comte, a French philosopher of the 19th century, who developed the fundamental ideas for the development of modern sociology, coined the term in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* of 1838,¹¹ with several themes that undoubtedly help to formulate the origin of military sociology.

As mentioned above, the military aspect of life in society is as old as mankind itself. Comte makes the observation that man's first tools are weapons, and the first established authority is a tribal chief. In times of war, the military spirit fulfilled this social function, and it is in this context that the two main powers, military and religious, were generally concentrated in these tribal chiefs.¹² The situation has not changed in its essence for the modern State, where military power remains an essential element of the State since it is the militias that are responsible for the security of the territory and its members.¹³ Armies continue to act in this way today, with different nuances, in all international conflicts, and even more so, challenged by globalization and its characteristics. The only difference that marks

a distance between these two great powers is that the religious factor no longer has the same sphere of power as it did in the past. Nevertheless, the concentration of these powers continues to be a permanent focus of analysis and study for the various social sciences. Only the military forces, now deployed through the States and under the influence of international treaties, remain a relevant and determining factor in the spheres of power.

Military sociology and its first steps

Although Comte is the one who provides the modern definition of sociology, he was not the first to make study society or war conflicts. This, broadly speaking, was already being studied by philosophy and the social sciences. It is already possible to observe in Plato's Republic a definition of what is the city-state, the political organization, and also an approach to the law of war. Plato thus explains that the most primitive society in which all the needs of the body are satisfied: thus the "city of pigs" lives in peace and health, and war arises only when one moves from the primitive, that is, where basic needs are covered, to a more advanced state of society.¹⁴

Then there is the thought of the father of the West, St. Augustine of Hippo, who formulated the Western theory of war and, therefore, is considered the father of the "just-war theory". St. Augustine thus states that "any rightly ordered state should not wage war except in defense of its covenants or its survival".¹⁵ This can also be found much earlier in Cicero's Republic, which states that the constitution of the city demands that it be eternal. The punishment for the state is its disappearance, as it does not ensure its survival.¹⁶

Just war, also called the right to war or *jus ad Bellum*, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, must have the following characteristics to be considered as such:

1. **Must be mandated by the ruler.** St. Thomas calls him "the prince," in the sense that he is the principal of the state, and on him falls the care of the republic, the public interest. "Just as they lawfully defend them with the material sword against internal disturbers, so it is incumbent upon him to defend it against external enemies with the warlike sword".¹⁷
2. **Just cause is required.** That is to say, the challenged person deserves such a challenge through fault. War can only occur in this way by the defense or by the previous insult, never by aggression. Thus St. Thomas says that "wars are usually called just wars when they come from insults," which today are aggressions.¹⁸
3. **The intention must be straight.** War must have peace as its ultimate end, it must not be for greed or cruelty. There must not be "the desire to harm, the cruelty of revenge, the relentless and implacable spirit, the ferocity of the fight, the passion to dominate, etc. They are things in justice blamed in wars".¹⁹

From the above, it can be argued that for both Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas, the most fundamental referents of Western culture, who in turn had the genius to Christianize Plato and Aristotle, respectively, these two great columns of intellectual thought offer clear signals and ethical and moral parameters to situate the conflict called "just war", and with this, it is logically deduced the main actors, those who participate directly in the generation of conflicts or the solution of these. The above indicates that Western Christian culture, under the gaze of these two great figures of history, comes to illuminate the first source and vocation that has the military force in its actors and protagonists. That is to say, military sociology, according to this perspective, gives

the actors of the military world the capacity not only to intervene in conflicts but also to sustain the limits, so that this warlike action sustains a superior good, such as peace. Thus, the new discipline called military sociology finds this thought so relevant and determinant for the social form and order, a first source to study the phenomenon and the role that the military world has had, has, and will have permanently in the evolution and development of any society.

Subsequently, and with the advances in International Humanitarian Law, more principles of just war would be added, such as the public declaration, the last ratio, the existence of a reasonable possibility of victory, proportionality, or not to attack civilians.

The formal birth of this new discipline

With the arrival of the Enlightenment, the social problem begins to gain relevance in the world after the great revolutions that changed the world. It is when the value of the hypotheses on man's behavior became known, and which would define what would later be called the social contract for the world of Law: Jean-Jacques Rousseau affirming that "man is naturally good and society depraves and perverts him"²⁰, in contrast to Thomas Hobbes, who points out that "man is a wolf to man", not in personal relations, but between states.²¹ These different visions, in a world convulsed by two great revolutions of humanity such as the French and American revolutions, brought about a very important social turning point regarding the very nature of man and his motivations for States to have permanent armed forces.

The painful events of the two World Wars challenged both social sciences and sociology to find some answers to human relations, conflict, and war. In this sense, the victorious powers such as the United States and England sought to approach the effects that this type of conflict had caused not only in the general

population, but also on those actors who were directly involved in the conflict, and who were affected by this war environment at the universal level.

These powers make a qualitative leap in the social sciences and focus specifically on producing in practice a new science, a new way of looking at social phenomena, a new approach that they will call military sociology.

What are these aspects, problems, or studies that military sociology deals with?

- Anything that relates to the participation of persons in military operations, and its effects from the psychological and moral point of view.
- It will study all those conflicts in the war and post-war period, and where the population may have been affected.
- This new discipline will also study all those phenomena resulting from the winning powers in these conflicts and their new relations with civil society.
- It will also study how propaganda, slogans, and communication phenomena could have affected the occupied territories or the liberated territories.
- This new form of social science will also seek to question and answer the deepest aspects of the disorders that occurred in all those combatants who participated in the conflict, and to study at the same time the different ways of reinsertion, with the background of a real human and psychological crisis of those who were protagonists of the conflict.
- It will also deal with the reaction, effects, social traumas, the way of facing fears, and personal projects

of those who were prisoners of war.

All of the above came to satisfy such a relevant aspect to be studied. From this point, military sociology addressed for the first time all aspects related to the horrors of war, the loss of human lives, and its effects, and produced the fundamental question that relates to the link that is generated between those involved in a military conflict, and the general population, in times of war and peace.

Military forces, always present in history, and whose war capabilities leave an indelible mark in different times and situations, will become a subject of study and concern for "military sociology". They will become "military sociology" a subject of study and concern, to recognize all those aspects that, being present in human nature, have different projections when it comes to the operational function of those who act in a military force.

Military sociology effectively addresses the search for answers to a new phenomenon, which is related to locating the human person, in its military function, and its various effects during a conflict not desired voluntarily, but being the "instruments" that the States have of "political, territorial and demographic conflicts". Military sociology will seek to respond to a more global and broader view of what is the role of the person as an individual, or also how that person (military) acts within a human group called military force, to understand the great differences between the individual and his freedom, and that same individual inserted in a military environment, in situations aimed at conflict resolution, but being at the same time actors in the conflict. The paradox of the reality in which military sociology acts is that, through the political and military force controlled by states, and aimed at generating peace, this same objective has as a common denominator the generation of a conflict often of horror and misfortune. Military sociology is the only discipline that seeks to study an organization necessary for states such as the army, and which has a mission as lofty as that of procuring peace, but whose means often involve weakening,

diminishing, or subjugating particular interests.

Conclusions

This paper has sought a first look at what has been the development of military sociology. However, military sociology comes to respond to an increasingly relevant and present area in society, which is nothing more than seeking a better form of integration and relations between the civilian world and the military world, which is not exhausted in the conflicts of war and its tragic consequences, but on the contrary, challenges society with greater force in the changes of globalization and the radical transformations of a society increasingly subject to uncertainties and threats.

This brief, very general review of the history of this discipline called military sociology calls for a reflection that can effectively address the major issues of sociology as a whole, and bring to the attention of society as a whole the objectively indisputable professional capacities that the military world has and is currently developing, but which could be enhanced by a broader, more generous view that effectively reflects the democratic evolution of any modern society.

The military world, incipient in its origin and structure, and later organized as part of the structure of every State, has an indisputable historical role, which demands from the current political forces, greater attention to knowing the thinking, the idiosyncrasy, and the feeling of the military world, to put it at the service of the great challenges of humanity.

The presence in modern States of cohesive Armed Forces, hierarchically disciplined and subordinated to State decisions, and not to political-partisan decisions, could effectively make the Armed Forces, the military world, and all its capabilities, make a much safer and orderly world, one that effectively aims at the common good.

All the personal, moral, and ethical capacities that sustain military training and life can effectively be the basis of a new social order, thus giving rise to the empowerment of more

democratic societies that seek order, and that bring as a consequence the development of the peoples.

The tragedy that the world is currently experiencing, due to COVID-19 has shown an evident reality as it is a real war of the States themselves to sustain order within their territories due to the crisis and inefficiency of international organizations, as well as to face the violence of organized crime, and to provide the members of the population with the appropriate logistical means for health responses. This fact alone demonstrates, objectively and fully, that looking at the military world requires new approaches and the need to open research spaces to this new discipline called military sociology.

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