

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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There are at least two reasons, one immediate and practical and one deeper and more mediated, that lie upstream from the writing of this book and that motivate it. The first is that many years ago, when I began to study the military and its dynamics, I looked for a work like this one, a study that would give me an overall view, general but not superficial, of what had been thought, said, and written on the topic. I did not find it then, and I do not find it now, even as the growth of social studies of the military has attained the dimensions, depth, and horizontal development (according to geographic areas) that make it truly indispensable.

It seemed to me then—as it does now—that the most sound and complete scientific approach to the study of the military is the sociological one, although certainly it can be usefully supplemented by historical investigation (especially social history), social psychology, cultural anthropology, and political science in general. Interdisciplinarity is a conquest of the modern scientific approach to every field of investigation, an interdisciplinarity whose reasons are reaffirmed, also in this handbook, by Gerhard Kuemmel, who writes: “The reason for trans-/interdisciplinarity lies in the simple truth that the military is a highly complex social phenomenon in itself and one that cuts through various levels, touches several different contexts, and is thus subject to multiple processes of interpenetration” (see Ch. 24).

The second reason arises from the observation that military matters and, beyond them, the organization of military society are continually mixing in human cultural evolution in its most diverse manifestations. Until the birth of sociology, however, this evidence had never led to scientific investigation, closely reasoned and consistent, of the military phenomenon in itself and as an originating factor of many, often fundamental, aspects of organized life in groups. Indeed, historical investigation has not provided this, even when social history, because it lacks the concrete tools to penetrate the social fact at the moment of its occurrence, Nor has the study of strategy, since it is aimed at immediate application requirements, although global strategy certainly draws on the contribution of the social sciences. Not even law science is suited to this analysis because it investigates the regulatory aspect of institutions, their juridical rather than social reality. Moreover, institutions do not exhaust the gamut of social aggregates, just as law does not embrace all human interactions.

Sociology, therefore, is the primary tool for investigating the military world and its relations and interactions with other social groups. But even after the birth of sociology as a science under this name (Comte, 1847) it was necessary to await the massive field surveys and the resulting theorizations of the American school to have, in concrete, a special sociology devoted to the military. Prior to this development, which is fairly recent (early 1940s), and in some cases after it as well, the real contributions of sociological investigation on the military appeared in the framework of widely varying disciplines.

But the rise of a special sociology dedicated to the military, determined by an important fact of social life (the Second World War), certainly did not follow any academic planning, but displayed a development that was fully marked by autonomy, diversity, and, at times, also by contradiction, often as a result of concrete, pressing requirements. If we add to these factors of dispersion and disaggregation, already relevant in themselves, the heterogeneity of the cultural formation and environmental background of scholars of the subject, the importance of collecting, rethinking, and comparing what has been said and written on this special sociology is clear.

Military sociology thus falls within the special sociologies¹ and, consistently, within the International Sociological Association there is a permanent study group that deals with this discipline, the Research Committee on Armed Forces and Conflict Resolution.

But even among the special sociologies, the one dedicated to the military seems to be “especially special.” For centuries, the military world and the military mind-set have constituted a quite different, quite separate environment from the other institutions, groups, and aggregates of civil society, and in part they still do. There are various confirmations of this, found also in the theoretical environment,² but it seems to me that the most significant, statistically concrete piece of evidence is the particular dualism of the specialists of the discipline, who are split between academic scholars, working in universities, national research centers, and similar institutions, and the military itself, mostly as officers on active duty or on leave. The reader will find significant data in this regard in the chapter “Social Research and the Military.” Indeed, the study of the sociology of the military seems to require, on the one hand, an adequate sociological preparation—as does every other special sociology—and on the other, thorough, possibly firsthand, knowledge of the particular study environment, academic scholars, that of military society.

For these reasons the most representative scholars in this field today are either university professors with long experience as participating observers in various military environments or officers who have had pertinent academic training and have decided to devote themselves to this sector of study. More than in other special sociologies, this “particularity” of the sociology of the military makes one feel the necessity of basic publications, formative and informative, considered important by both newcomers and those who are already well versed in the subject matter but who often feel the need to complete their training or to have a broader overview of the different areas of investigation of the discipline.

Browsing through the literature, one notes not only the absence of a basic handbook, as mentioned above, but also, as pointed out in the careful investigation by Morten G. Ender,³

¹Special sociology defined as a science that embraces a sector of investigation corresponding to an area of group life that can be identified in more or less every type of society and in different historical periods. In this regard see also Boene (1981) and Caforio (1987).

²See, for example, Goffman (1961) and Boene (1990).

³Ender, Morten G., & Jones, Ariel (2001). “The Treatment of Peace, War, and the Military in Introductory Sociology Textbooks.” Background paper presented at the Biennial International Meetings of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Baltimore, Maryland, October 19–21, 2001.

that “while military sociology has become a large and growing field, few introductory sociology textbooks discuss the military in depth. However, to date, no studies of the treatment of peace, war, and the military in introductory sociology textbooks exist.”

Noting this lack, I had already taken the initiative of publishing a reader (*The Sociology of the Military*, Caforio, 1998b) of the most significant studies of the discipline, divided into six large sectors as follows: “Antecedents”, which collected essays on the “founding fathers” of our discipline (who are, generally, also the founding fathers of sociology *tout court*); “The American School”, containing the writings by and/or on the American scholars who produced a kind of “renaissance” (or, according to some, a birth) of the sociology of the military starting in the 1940s; and then four sectors that assembled the most significant writings in contemporary sociology of the military subdivided according to subject, namely “A Model for Comparative Research”, “The Military Profession”, “Armed Forces and Society”, and “The New Missions of the Armed Forces.”

Now this welcome initiative of the series of handbooks by Kluwer Academic/Plenum gives me the opportunity to complete this work with a true basic handbook. It is dedicated, as stated above, to those who are already scholars of the subject and, naturally, like every handbook, to those who are coming to the sociology of the military for the first time, whether for reasons of professional culture (active officers), as university students, or due to a particular interest from a neighboring discipline, such as the sociology of organization, the sociology of the professions, or the sociology of politics.⁴

The volume I present here is subdivided into six sections which in part reproduce the sectors of the reader mentioned above and in part expand their scope. The first section, “General Introduction,” contains this brief introduction and two studies: one is devoted to a brief historical excursus into what was written and said about our discipline prior to the contemporary works, and the second is a study on military sociologists today and on the conditions in which they operate in the various parts of the world.

Next is a section entitled “Theoretical and Methodological Framework”, which is dedicated to the theoretical and methodological orientations of the discipline: like the other special sociologies, the sociology of the military has elaborated its own set of interpretive models and theoretical approaches. This thematic excursus is intended to present to the reader and put up for discussion concepts, models, and theories currently employed in social research on the military.

The third section, called “Armed Forces and Society”, is devoted to civil–military relations, with all the issues and aspects connected with these relations, including the delicate aspect of democratic control of the armed forces. Special attention is given to the study of the problems of military families, an emerging theme linked to the growing professionalization of armies. This is followed by a section with the all-inclusive title, “Inside the Military”, which presents a broad range of studies on aspects of military culture, professional training, and the conditions and problems of minorities in the armed forces.

The fifth section, entitled “Trends in the Military”, takes up an aspect of the strong ongoing change in the military, an aspect that I would define as one of structural change. It contains studies on the restructuring of national militaries and its consequences, on the

⁴Within the social sciences field as well, an interdisciplinary approach is today the rule. See, for example, what occurs in scholarly meetings, especially international ones like the International Sociological Association’s 2002 World Congress in Brisbane, where the research committee “Armed Forces and Conflict Resolution” organized joint sessions with the research committees of the sociologists of the professions and the sociologists of education.

transition taking place in many countries from conscription to an all-volunteer force, and on the impact of technological evolution on the military and its members.

Another aspect of change regards the new duties and functions of armed forces in the post-Cold War era with respect to the traditional tasks, a topic treated in the short section called "New Missions". This section deals chiefly with the impact that the new missions have had on the organic features of armed forces and on soldiers' training as observed in its change through the years.

A large reference section, to which all the chapters of the book make reference, terminates the volume and makes it easier for readers to locate the necessary references to expand and delve deeper into the study of the sectors that most interest them.

Twenty-four scholars from 13 different countries have participated in writing the handbook; they are all significant representatives of the major currents of thought and research existing today in our discipline.