

The Politics of War Commemoration in the UK and Russia

Nataliya Danilova

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Preface

Wars do not simply vanish when politicians sign truces and weapons are set aside. Instead, society re-imagines the experience of wars during annual ceremonies of war commemoration. The power of this annual ritual lies in its ability to incite strong feelings and emotions. Remembrance emerges as an overwhelming emotional urge and the ultimate moral duty to the memory of fallen soldiers. There is a sense that only through the ritual of commemoration can we express compassion for the dead and for those that they left behind, and somehow repay our debt to the fallen. However, this debt seems never-ending, as every year we pledge ourselves to the same ritual of recommitment in our duty to remember.

The most peculiar aspect of our relationship with the fallen is a powerful, yet often unarticulated, pressure exerted by the ritual itself. It demands conformity and passionate participation; it does not accept any doubts or wavering. This power of conformity tells us that the ritual of war commemoration entails something more than remembrance of the lost lives of fallen soldiers. War commemoration reflects our own deepest desires for unity, belonging and continuity of a national story; it shapes our identities and defines our political choices. These choices reflect how we remember the fallen of the two World Wars, but they also affect our responses to modern conflicts. Here, the figure of a fallen soldier is understood as a powerful cultural construction that frames our responses to modern warfare and changes in the military profession and civil–military relations. The mass media, memorials and rituals of commemoration are seen as key sites for the collective recommitment to the memory of the dead and towards the living – from veterans to the national armed forces and the nation-state.

This study compares modern facets of war commemoration in both Britain and Russia. Both societies immerse themselves annually in commemorative spectacles of recommitment. In Britain, this recommitment occurs on 11 November, revolving around the legacy of the First World War. In Russia, society on 9 May confirms its duty to remember the fallen of the Second World War. In both cases, the collective re-imaginings of these wars do not exist on their own. The recalling of the memories and myths of the World Wars revives the power of nationalism, and reinstates commitments to the national armed forces and to the nation,

albeit in a fundamentally different way. This comparison suggests that differences in political regimes or war experiences do not necessarily send different messages. The annual ritual of war commemoration in both countries brings to life a similar mixture of nostalgia, sympathy and also nationalistic and militaristic sentiments. However, this observation does not assume a similarity in the meanings of war commemoration or its political functions, yet it encourages us to think beyond the accepted ideological labels.

This comparison also draws attention to the complexities and controversies existing around the national commemorative icons. Symbols such as the red poppy in Britain or the St George Ribbon in Russia have many parallel meanings. They express compassion, grief for the lives of fallen soldiers, a desire for national unity and support towards veterans, wounded soldiers and military families, yet they also encourage nationalism and raise support for the national armed forces, legitimating military conflicts and government foreign policies. The hidden power of commemorative symbols lies in their ability to evolve and adapt to the context of modern society with its passion for consumption, entertainment and desire to 'lighten up' commemoration.

The primary focus of this study lies in the ambitious task of inspiring a critical attitude to war commemoration as a process which can potentially evoke nationalistic sentiments, normalise warfare and militarise societies at the cultural level. For this reason, the book draws attention to the political aspects of war commemoration by prioritising the politics of remembrance over its function to console and support. This approach does not deny the value of compassion or respect to the fallen, but it arises out of the belief that only by distancing ourselves from these deeply ingrained emotions can we attempt to understand the politics of war commemoration in modern societies.

Finally, this study suggests that our duty to remember fallen soldiers is equally replicated by our duty to take responsibility for the current conflicts in which the service personnel of national armed forces had been deployed. Without this duty, we construct a comforting vision of depoliticised and decontextualised commemoration. Commemoration masks our fears about multiple threats to national identity, traditions and even survival, fears of rapid social changes, and of modern conflicts with their often ambiguous purposes and outcomes. Struggling to face these fears, we reconcile ourselves to remembrance without politics. However, this illusion does not exist in the modern world. Fallen soldiers rarely sleep in peace; instead, they become instruments for reviving nationalistic sentiments and preparing the population for

the perpetuity of war. While this seems like an enormous task, I believe it is important to continue our search for alternative modes of remembrance without mobilising our war dead for the justification of future conflicts. I do not yet know the answer to this difficult problem, but I am optimistic and I hope that this book will encourage others to join me in this search.

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Any empirical research depends on the willingness of other people to share their knowledge and experiences. In this regard, I would like to thank the staff of the National Memorial Arboretum, the UK National Inventory of War Memorials archive of the Imperial War Museum in London and many other people in Britain and in Russia. I am in debt to Laura Todd, whose help and attention to detail with this manuscript was greatly appreciated. I would not have completed this research without the generosity of the University of Nottingham and the School of Politics and International Relations, which granted me an Overseas Research Scholarship, the University Endowed Scholarship Award (Andrew Hendry Postgraduate Prize) and a Post-Doctoral Bursary from the Centre for Advanced Studies.

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List of Abbreviations

AFM	Armed Forces Memorial
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CCCP	Central Committee of the Communist Party
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DfE	Department for Education (UK)
FOM	<i>Fond Obshchestvennogo Mneniia</i> (Public Opinion Survey Agency)
FZ	<i>Federal'nyi Zakon</i> (Federal Law)
HC	House of Commons
H4H	Help for Heroes
IWM	Imperial War Museum
MoD	Ministry of Defence
NMA	National Memorial Arboretum
NVO	<i>Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie</i> (Independent Military Review)
RAF	Royal Air Force
RBL	Royal British Legion
RF	Russian Federation
RSVA	<i>Rossiiskii Souiz Veteranov Afganistana</i> (Russian Union of Afghan War Veterans)
TASS	<i>Telegrafnoe Agenstvo Sovetskogo Souiza</i> (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union)
UKNIWM	UK National Inventory of War Memorials
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VTsIOM	<i>Vserossiiskii Tsentri Izucheniia Obshchestvennogo Mneniia</i> (All-Russian Centre of Public Opinion Observation)
WMDs	Weapons of Mass Destruction

1

Memory Politics and the Afterlives of Fallen Soldiers

1.1 Fallen soldiers: from the age of nationalism and beyond

A popular approach in the analysis of war commemoration associates commemorative practices with the expression of nationalism. War commemoration is perceived as an instrument that forges national identifications, unites societies and acts as an essential component in 'the symbolic repertoire of the nation-states' (Ashplant *et al.*, 2000, p. 7). This approach draws its inspiration from a classic study by Maurice Halbwachs on *Collective Memory* (1992 [1950]). According to Halbwachs, collective memory is a social construct and 'a social fact' that comes into existence by the power of social groups. Halbwachs considers collective memories as 'a part of a totality of thoughts common to a group, a group with whom we have a relation at this moment, or with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days' (1992, p. 52). From his perspective, family, religious association and social class make the most important contribution to collective memory. Scholars of nationalism extrapolate his conclusions to the level of nation-states. Exploring the origin of Western nationalism, Benedict Anderson begins his book on *Imagined Communities* with a reflection on the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in London, describing these memorials as the most 'arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism', which have been 'sacrilege of a strange, contemporary kind! Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with *ghostly national imaginings*' (Anderson, 1983, p. 9, emphasis in original). As Anderson illustrates, nations function as 'imagined communities' because they are sustained by the power of shared 'imaginings', symbols and ceremonies.

Halbwachs' pioneering study advocates a non-linear development of collective memory. He suggests that 'our sense of reality [is] inseparable from our present life' (1992, p. 49) and therefore the current interests of social groups shape society's vision of the past. This presentist approach inspired one of the most famous studies of 'invented traditions' by Eric Hobsbawm. According to Hobsbawm, the 'invented tradition' is 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviours by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (1983a, p. 1). Hobsbawm explains the present-orientated essence of collective memory by society's desire for the historical continuity. In this regard, Hobsbawm, like Durkheim, believes that commemorations 'awake certain ideas and feelings, to link the present to the past, the individual to the collectivity' (Durkheim, 2001, p. 282). They revitalise shared feelings and commitments by reconciling societies with profound social transformations, while also constructing a new source of legitimacy for a nation-state (Hobsbawm, 1983b, p. 263). Hobsbawm's findings are critical for the problematisation of war commemoration in modern societies because they suggest that a turbulence of political and societal changes can be resolved through the 'invention' of the new rituals and symbols. These rituals can potentially be used to re-legitimise the political (and military) inspirations of governments and reconcile societies with controversial political outcomes of modern conflicts.

The nationalistic nature of war commemoration is thoroughly investigated by George Mosse in his book *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (1990). Mosse developed an interest in war memories from his research on the political symbolism of the Third Reich in *The Nationalisation of the Masses* (1975). He came to the conclusion that 'festivals commemorating the noble dead' were one of the most successful instruments to 'nationalise the masses' in Germany (Mosse, 1975, p. 76). He explains the success of these festivals by their ability to blend together history and the idea of the nation, where citizens form strong emotional associations with the 'glorious dead'. In *The Fallen Soldiers* (1990), he explores the power of war commemoration to form national myths and sentiments. In particular, he investigates the Myth of the War Experience, which emerged in Western societies out of ashes of the First World War. This myth 'was designed to mark war and to legitimize the war experience; it was meant to displace the reality of war' (1990, p. 7). He convincingly demonstrates that the memory of the First World War 'was refashioned into a sacred experience which provided the nation with

a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate' (1990, p. 7). According to him, the cult of the war dead is central to the Myth of the War Experience; it evokes nationalistic feelings through war memorials, military cemeteries and ceremonies of remembrance.

Mosse outlines three key characteristics of this cult. First, he discusses 'the triumph of youth' of fallen soldiers (1990, pp. 72–4). In this instance, death on the battlefield is seen as a passage in male socialisation, a transition from the boyhood of a soldier to the manhood of a fallen soldier. Second, the cult of the war dead implies 'an analogy of sacrifice in war to the Passion and resurrection of Christ' (1990, p. 74). As he explains, 'suffering purifies' and death transforms fallen soldiers into 'saints of the nation' (1990, p. 76). Here, the figure of a fallen soldier embodies both the national hero and the martyr figure. Finally, Mosse insists that the most important function of the cult of the war dead is its ability to fashion a new solidarity within societies by continuing 'a patriotic mission [which] not only seemed to transcend death itself, but also inspired life before death' (1990, p. 78). Mosse argues that the remembrance of fallen soldiers can rejuvenate the nation through engagement with the spirits of the war dead. After the First World War, numerous memorials and military cemeteries symbolised that 'the fallen did not fulfil their mission as individuals but as a community of comrades' (Mosse, 1990, p. 79). Here, Mosse puts a particular stress on the collective and 'democratic' essence of First World War commemoration, which smoothed over the differences between the identities of fallen soldiers.

The interpretation of war commemoration as a vehicle for nationalism favours the idea of 'a unitary and coherent version of the past' (Misztal, 2003, p. 127). This version of the past prefers either a linear historical narrative as in Mosse's study or expresses itself through a non-linear, presentist' concept of the national timeline, as suggested by Hobsbawm. However, as Schwarz argues, the vision of a national past cannot be 'literally constructed; but it can only be selectively exploited' (Schwarz, 1982, p. 396). In other words, the state and political elites cannot just 'invent' the past, they can also exploit and re-design popular narratives by constructing a highly selective account of national history. These exploits, as Zerubavel explains in his study of the Israeli national memory, can be activated through the complex commemoration in which 'each act of commemoration reproduces a commemorative narrative', and these narratives intersect each other by reinforcing the broader national master narrative (Zerubavel, 1995, p. 6). According

to this view, commemoration can express itself through a series of time-loops, revolving around not one but many key events in national history. The task in this instance is to extract these keystones and to study 'the history of commemoration as well as its relation to other significant events in the group's past' (Zerubavel, 1995, p. 7). This discussion suggests that societies hardly ever remember the experience of one war without drawing parallels with other wars. Paraphrasing Maja Zehfuss' point, the experience of any war can 'haunt' societies 'even if in fundamentally different ways' (Zehfuss, 2007, p. 13). Therefore, the study of the politics of war commemoration should seek to explore not only the memory of a particular conflict but also to identify the 'templates' or 'the horizons of representations through which later conflicts are understood' (Ashplant *et al.*, 2000, p. 34; see also Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2010, pp. 91–6).

Recognition of the complex temporality of national commemoration brings forth another aspect of this process. According to Pierre Nora, from the 1980s, commemoration in Western societies is no longer associated with the nation-state, but is driven by the interests of social groups (Nora, 1996). Nora describes a transition from a nationalistic to a particularistic type of commemoration where 'the state is divorced from the nation and eventually the old couple is supplanted by a new one: state and society' (Nora, 1996, p. 5). Nora's point about the decline of the nation-state is popular among scholars of modern Western societies, who write about the declining power of the nation-state to mobilise the population under the banners of nationalism (Giddens, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1997, 2001). However, as Billig suggests, it may be premature to proclaim the death of the nation-state as well as to deny its power to create nationalistic commemoration: 'Maybe, nations are already past their heyday and their decline has already been set in motion, but this does not mean that nationhood can yet be written off' (Billig, 1995, pp. 176–7). Olick comes to the same conclusion in his analysis of the politics of regret in modern democracies. He suggests that the process of commemoration might illustrate 'not a replacement of state dominancy by society', as Nora thought, 'but the proliferation of alternatives alongside the original' (Olick, 2007, p. 189; see also Olick, 1999). These alternatives can potentially diminish the influence of nationalistic rituals and symbols, but this does not mean that governments cannot claim their superiority in framing the past or have stopped trying (Billig, 1995, p. 177). Moreover, by 'exploiting' and re-using the templates of the World War commemorations from

the 'age of nationalism', governments might seek to overcome the fragmentation of national identity.

The example of the USA demonstrates the vitality of commemoration as a vehicle for state-driven nationalism. In September 2001, the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC produced not only 'the opening to trauma time and the recognition of the contingency of political community', but also led to 'the reaffirmation of solidarity and nationhood' (Edkins, 2003, p. 19). This solidarity emerged in the context where 'the time of memory and commemoration evolved ... alongside the time of revenge' (Simpson, 2006, p. 4; see also Sturken, 2007, p. 7). This feeling of revenge reconstituted the country's 'imagined wholeness' and national unity (Butler, 2003, p. 41). As a result, 'after September 11, 2001, Americans no longer had to project themselves into distant past in order to claim its virtues. Instead, they could imagine that the cycles of history had been renewed and that a new national drama awaited them' (Hoogland-Noon, 2004, p. 352). Fundamentally, the commemoration of the victims of 9/11 revitalised the idea of the nation by demanding unity and support for subsequent military interventions.

Thus, tragedies and wars of the twenty-first century can successfully reinvigorate the nationalistic meaning of commemoration by offering a sense of historical continuity and a powerful illusion of national unity in times of trouble. However, this approach alone cannot capture the complexity of war commemoration in contemporary societies. Both its strength and its limitation come from its focus on the nation-state. This focus helps us to understand the reasons for new commemorative symbols and traditions, but it fails to problematise the interests of other groups involved in the process of commemoration.

1.2 War trauma and communities in grief

To understand the alternative side of war commemoration, we need to shift the focus of our attention from the interests of the state to the desires of survivors and bereaved communities. The intellectual background of this approach comes from 'cognitive psychology, psychoanalysis, trauma studies and oral history's quest to retrieve the memories of groups whose histories had previously been neglected' (Radstone, 2005, p. 137). Drawing upon these studies, war commemoration in this context tells us a story of suffering, grief and reconciliation of social groups touched by war.

In a similar fashion to Mosse's analysis of the cult of the war dead, the cultural historian Jay Winter investigates war memorials in Britain, France and Germany after the First World War. Unlike Mosse, Winter is less interested in the nationalising appeal of war memorials. His primary concern is to study 'how multiple forms of associational life which have as their focus the commemoration of the dead assist those they had left behind' (1995, p. 6). In this instance, Winter approaches the commemoration of the dead as 'a communal enterprise' and a 'place of individual and collective mourning' (1995, p. 79), whereby 'the marks of the spot where communities were reunited, where the dead were symbolically brought home, and where the separations of war, both temporary and eternal, were expressed, ritualised and in time, accepted' (1995, p. 98). In sum, Winter not only prioritises the interests of communities over the interests of the nation-state, he also sees commemoration as a therapeutic activity which heals war trauma and brings about reconciliation.

Within this approach, the effect of war memorials is associated with the needs of survivors and bereaved communities. According to Winter, these communities are closely connected by 'experiential ties' of 'fictive kinship' (1999, p. 40). This kinship springs from a common experience of trauma and loss. This concept of experiential and, in essence, traumatic kinship is grounded in Freud's analysis of mourning and melancholia: 'mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on' (Freud, 2001 [1917], p. 243). The proponents of this approach apply psychoanalytical analogies by transferring the impact of an individual trauma to the trauma of communities and nations (McNally, 2003; see also Merridale, 2000; Etkind, 2009). This extrapolation implies that 'all "bad events" – and particularly those which involved violence – have a pathological effect on the sufferer's psyche' (Bourke, 2012, p. 25). However, as Bell reminds us, 'even if psychoanalysis can provide a satisfactory account of individual behaviour, it is often not clear how useful it is as a concept for analysing collectives' (2006, p. 8). Psychoanalytical associations when transferred to the level of collectives tend to universalise the impact of trauma. This indiscriminate approach to trauma advances 'an undifferentiated "victim" culture' (Bell, 2006, p. 9; see also Bourke, 2005). This culture allows for the representation of soldiers of defeating and winning sides, civilian survivors of war, families of deceased soldiers and wider society as victims of war while also assuming 'a universal human response to grief' along with a universal desire for closure and reconciliation

(Ashplant *et al.*, 2000, p. 33). This victim-centred reframing of war commemoration corresponds with broader debates on the individualisation and pluralisation of identities in modern Western societies (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 1992; Bauman, 1997, 2001). This focus on the identities of soldiers overshadows the broader context of war commemoration and brings us to the limitations of this approach.

First and foremost, the analysis of commemoration 'exclusively in terms of the psychological and emotional dynamics of individual remembering' downplays the importance of the context and, we can add, the differences between war experiences (Kansteiner, 2002, p. 185). Moreover, it constructs the vision of a decontextualised commemoration that treats 'war' as a continuum of violence and tragedy. This decontextualisation is appreciative of the identities of soldiers and their individual losses, but it lacks the potential to question the necessity of soldiers' sacrifice. As Wagner-Pacifi and Schwartz conclude in their analysis of the Vietnam War memorialisation, in the context of controversial war, 'to the original dilemma of how to honour the participant without reference to the cause, there is a corresponding reciprocal problem of how to ignore the cause without denying the participant' (Wagner-Pacifi and Schwartz, 1991, p. 404). Their research does not offer the answer to this question, but following their line of enquiry, we might ask: when is it important to ignore and 'forget' the cause of wars while remembering the fallen soldiers? If this separation of the cause from the participant results from the aims of a controversial war, does it mean that our 'forgetfulness' of ambivalent causes of wars can open the door to state- or military-driven narratives, whilst at the same time closing the door for public deliberation of controversial wars? After all, by the late 1980s, the commemoration of the Vietnam War overcame its moral dilemmas by demonstrating that 'the identities and heroic sacrifices of fallen soldiers [can be] remembered, but the broader political context of the conflict (on which American society lacks moral consensus) [can be] quietly ignored' (Ducharme and Fine, 1995, p. 1311). As a result, the decontextualised commemoration recognised the sacrifices of the American soldiers in Vietnam, but it also assisted in the re-militarisation of society (Bacevich, 2005).

The second problematic aspect of this approach follows from its predisposition to ignore the political context of wars. This disregard for the context not only pushes the 'state out of the frame of consideration' (Ashplant *et al.*, 2000, p. 9), but also downplays the importance of the political aspects of this process. As Joanna Bourke warns us, 'the victim culture has had a politically neutering effect' on modern

societies (Bourke, 2005, cited in Bell, 2006, p. 9). In accepting the view that soldiers can be seen as individuals and victims of war, it is very difficult to discuss issues of political responsibility and ethical commitments with regards to wars. Undoubtedly, this conceptual framework is sensitive to the feelings of survivors and bereaved families, but this sensitivity comes at the cost of treating these groups as politically passive subjects. It positions them as recipients of society's compassion rather than the active social actors. Jenny Edkins, in her seminal book *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, points out that 'in contemporary culture victimhood offers sympathy and pity in return for the surrender of any political voice' (2003, p. 9). Survivors and bereaved families are often faced with a dilemma: to accept sympathy without political participation or challenge the existing memory narratives by claiming a political voice. As Edkins suggests, the 'trauma time' has a potential to bring politics into memory narratives by disrupting 'the linear time of the state' (2003, p. xiv). Although, as we demonstrated above, state-driven commemoration does not necessarily express itself through a linear timeline, 'trauma time' can nevertheless expose relations of power. From this perspective, representations of traumatic events construct an 'intimate bond between personhood and community and, most importantly, they expose the part played by relations of power' (Edkins, 2003, p. 4). Adopting this thesis to war commemoration, we suggest that this process is constituted by evolving power relations, activated through discourses and practices of commemoration. The analysis of this relational politics of war commemoration defines the main purpose of our investigation. Edkins' approach brings politics back to the analysis of war commemoration, but this approach appears to be relatively 'blind' towards changes in modern warfare, the role of the armed forces, and the interaction between the military, the state and civilian society. The following section fills this gap.

1.3 The era of the posts-: war, military and society

Accepting the idea that war commemoration is a deeply contextual phenomenon, this section engages with debates about a series of transformative shifts in civil-military relations. In the literature these relationships are considered through a series of transitions from the era of a *total war* or a *heroic warfare* to a *post-heroic warfare*, from a period of the *modern* militaries, based on conscription, to the *postmodern* armed forces and, finally, from acceptance of a high number of military casualties to a sensitive public attitude towards the loss of lives in

modern conflicts. Drawing on these debates, we develop a set of research hypotheses and research questions about the nature of contemporary war commemoration.

In the introduction to a pivotal volume, *The Politics of War Commemoration*, the authors discuss the politics of naming modern conflicts noting that in many modern societies the definition of war is subject to controversy (Ashplant *et al.*, 2000, pp. 54–5). Although there is significant literature on the changing nature of warfare, which is assumed to have happened between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, there is no definite answer to what constitutes this change. Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers in the introduction to the volume *The Changing Nature of War* point out that ‘the perception of newness is often not so much a matter of empirical change but of our conceptual perspective on war’ (2011, p. 18). From their perspective, the ‘assertive newness of modern wars’ often results from a lack of historical contextualisation of modern conflicts (Strachan and Scheipers, 2011, p. 7). Therefore, our perception of the change or continuity in the nature of warfare is relational and can only be tested through the historical contextualisation.

Without oversimplifying the debate on the changing nature of warfare, two interlinked arguments deserve our attention. First, there is a certain consensus in the literature that in modern societies ‘the most striking change’ in the practice of war is ‘the unlocking of the close relationship between war and the state’ and also ‘the unlocking of the close relationship between war and the nation’ (Strachan and Scheipers, 2011, p. 14). Here it is suggested that the meaning of war in modern societies is different because of the changing relationships with both the state and the idea of the nation. For example, the commemoration of the World Wars is often explained by the totality of these wars. This totality established itself through conscription, destruction on a mass scale, and mass military and civilian casualties, and resulted in the national Myth of the War Experience and the cult of the war dead discussed earlier in this chapter (Mosse, 1990). However, ‘in the past two decades several scholars argued that western societies have entered a post-heroic age’ (Scheipers, 2014, p. 1; see also Luttwak, 1995; Coker, 2002). Scheipers also suggests that this post-heroic warfare can also be described as ‘a post-nationalistic war’ due to a decline in associations with the idea of the nation, or the state (2014, p. 4). According to this view, the state in Western democracies struggles to convince the population both to sacrifice their lives for the greater cause and to tolerate the death of soldiers in modern conflicts. Although the post-heroic warfare

concept is widely criticised within security studies (Gelpi *et al.*, 2009; Feaver and Miller, 2014), it gives us some grounds for the conceptualisation of war commemoration in modern societies. Here our research questions are: how does war commemoration reflect the nature of modern warfare? Does it associate the fallen soldiers with the framework of a *heroic* war or depict them as victims of *post-heroic* warfare whose lives were unnecessarily lost?

Reflecting on the concept of post-heroic warfare, McInnes writes about 'a shift in the nature of war from an era of total war toward one where war is a spectator sport' where a 'large number of casualties is the exception, not the norm' (2002, p. 4). In modern societies, wars are often led by a minority of professional soldiers and are observed by the majority of an often uninterested population through news reports. In this instance, such labels as a 'post-heroic warfare', a 'spectator sport war' or a 'risk-transfer' war and the 'Western way of war' (Shaw, 2005a) describe a principal difference between wars led by Western democracies and wars led or experienced by non-Western and non-democratic societies. This conclusion brings us to a second point on the nature of modern warfare. This more straightforward argument refers to 'a technological progress, embodied in such conceptions as the "revolutions in military affairs"' (Strachan and Scheipers, 2011, p. 19). From this perspective, it is assumed that military technology has already changed the face of the modern battlefield. As McInnes argues, 'the technological lead of the West means that its air forces are able to roam the skies with relative impunity, providing a symbol of Western potency and the ability to act without incurring costs' (2002, p. 144). The changing nature of warfare in this instance emphasises the technological superiority of Western militaries and also implies that the death of soldiers not only should be avoided due to the dominant societal attitudes, but also could be avoided due to that technological supremacy. Both arguments on the changing nature of warfare draw a distinction between the West and the 'rest'. This distinction implies a hierarchy between the 'valuable' lives of soldiers from Western societies and the lives of soldiers and civilians from non-Western societies (Butler, 2003; Zehfuss, 2009).

The debate on the changing nature of warfare overlaps with a debate on the changing nature of military professionalism. Charles Moskos, in a seminal volume, *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (2000), discusses the transition from modern to postmodern military (see also Booth *et al.*, 2001; Williams, 2008). Moskos specifically draws our attention to a change of military professionalism by stressing transition from its 'institutional' stage (when military service is a

compulsory national duty) towards its 'occupational' condition (when military service is a matter of personal choice and a profession with certain occupational risks and guaranties). However, in his analysis of the American military, Krebs argues that 'soldiers are hailed for their sacrifice, and whatever additional pay they receive for service in a combat zone is not some emolument but only partial payment of the nation's debt to them ... This language ... is at odds with the occupational model of military service' (2009, p. 481). Fundamentally, transition from the institutional to the occupational stage of military professionalism or from the modern to the postmodern military does not necessarily mean the disappearance of associations between the idea of the nation and the military. If we accept Krebs' proposition, the military in the twenty-first century remains quite capable of performing 'the important domestic socio-political role, broadly categorised as "nation-building"' (Edmunds, 2006, p. 1073). Perhaps, as Williams suggests, the modern military in Western societies can more adequately be described as a hybrid social institution in which the institutional and occupational characteristics of military profession are intertwined with each other (Williams, 2008; Haltiner and Kummel, 2009). Finally, it is important to stress that the outlined academic debate refers to Western democracies with a tradition of all-volunteer forces and largely ignores the experience of societies that have preserved conscription. The experience of these countries is under-theorised within the field of civil-military relations. In this instance, it might be argued that the preservation of conscription in the twenty-first century does not necessarily imply the institutional stage of the armed forces in the development of the military profession. Theoretically, these societies can also move towards the hybrid system by combining elements from both stages of military professionalism. Whether war commemoration constructs a nationalistic (institutional) or professional (occupational) character or displays a hybrid nature will be subject to an empirical testing.

Considering war commemoration as a site of socio-political interaction, we further problematise the interests of the various parties involved. From the perspective of the state, war commemoration can be viewed as a vehicle for identity politics and also a channel to garner public support for wars and the armed forces. Within the field of civil-military relations, the problem of public support for wars is approached via the mutually linked concepts of casualty sensitivity and casualty aversion (Gelpi *et al.*, 2009; Feaver and Miller, 2014). This debate is shaped by contrasting claims. On the one hand, it is argued that Western societies have become more casualty sensitive and tend to

withdraw their support for war if the number of military casualties has been growing (Luttwak, 1994; Moeller, 1994). This interpretation situates public attitudes towards military casualties within the framework of post-heroic warfare. On the other hand, the results of public opinion surveys in the USA over ten years of military deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq show that, for example, American society has been much more casualty tolerant than was originally thought. According to this view, the number of military casualties in Western democracies does not directly correlate with public support for war, but public support for war is 'a function of two things – the retrospective judgement of whether the war was a good idea to begin with (the stakes) and the prospective judgement about the likelihood of success' (Feaver and Miller, 2014, p. 149). Between the two factors, 'success matters' more (Gelpi *et al.*, 2005, pp. 7–46) and therefore the main policy recommendation is to convince the public that there is 'credible plan for victory' (Feaver and Miller, 2014, p. 150). This policy advice implies that any democratic deliberation of war objectives or their outcomes is unnecessary or even damaging for the success in modern wars. According to Feaver and Miller, 'there may be many good reasons to argue over whether the war was a good idea to begin with, but changing public opinion *now* on whether the war should continue is not one of them' (2014, p. 150, emphasis added). Thus, this approach not only prioritises the interests of the political and military elites over the interests of civilian society, but also leaves little scope for public deliberation over the necessity and main purposes of modern conflicts. Our investigation does not claim to prove a correlation between war commemoration and public support for wars; rather, it is concerned with a different question. How does war commemoration evoke support for wars through the ritual of remembrance and what are the political implications of this rhetorical encouragement?

From the perspective of the military, war commemoration can be approached through studies of military culture. Starting from a classic study by Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (1960), it is accepted that military ceremonies preserve values of military culture within the armed forces, and this culture improves the cohesion and combat readiness of military units. Military sociologists have explored the positive contribution of military ceremonies in the cohesion of the American and Israeli militaries (Rubin, 1985; Machalek *et al.*, 2006; Soeters *et al.*, 2006). But Janowitz also suggests that modern militaries perform a representative function through their association with the idea of the