The French army, 1789-1914
Volunteers, pressed soldiers, and conscripts

Thomas Hippler

According to a common belief, modern military conscription was invented during the French Revolution. Subsequently it became a cornerstone of republicanism in the French understanding. Without any doubt, there is some truth in this view; however, there is also much confusion about the terms of the debate. If we have a closer look at actual recruitment practices in France in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and if we compare these to practices in other historical periods or geographical contexts the distinctions quickly become less clear. The first question to be addressed is thus how to distinguish in a historically convincing way different forms of military labour, which are enslavement, professionals, mercenaries, and conscription. It will actually turn out that these distinctions have necessarily to be linked to systems of social representation, and they are inseparable from social norms and values, as well as from representations of social justice and of legitimate social orders. Things get worse if we keep in mind that historical scholarship in itself is always and necessarily linked to and indeed involved in the construction of these normative and symbolic orders themselves. To stick to the French case: there has been a constant tendency to link the setting-up of the cadre/conscript system during the last third of the nineteenth century to the legacy of the French Revolution and, more particularly, to the category of "national volunteers" fighting for liberty. In the light of this imaginary genealogy, recruitment practices of the *ancien régime* have been dismissed as military "enslavement" by a despotic state. The outcome was obviously the construction of a normative dichotomy between legitimate and illegitimate forms of recruitment. If we take a closer look at what had actually been going on in terms of recruitment practices, it appears in many cases that the differences between the earlier and the later practices were less important than commonly believed. On the contrary, there is a great deal of continuity between the *ancien régime* and the modern republic.

However, the analysis should not stop there. It is obviously not the same thing to serve in the military as a pressed soldier or to accomplish one's civic duty through military service, although the concrete practices, of military

drill for instance, may, from another point of view, be strictly the same.[1] This example clearly shows that it is impossible not to take into account the historical construction of the meaning that is attached to these practices. In other words: looking at different forms of recruitment with a historian's eye implies of necessity adopting a historical perspective with regard to the taxonomic categories that we employ to describe and to distinguish between different forms of military labour.

There are many studies of the military history of, and of mobilization efforts during, the French Revolution and the Prussian reform period, but comparative or transnational approaches are still rare. I will focus the discussion of the state of the art on recent works and those that appear to contribute to the theoretical discussion. Generally speaking, French historiography has never abandoned the field of military history in general and of the revolutionary levies in particular. With regard to the wider perspective, Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* deserves to be mentioned, since it considers the inner colonization of the French countryside in the period between 1871 and 1914 exclusively and positively from the point of view of the central power.

The general problematique of how to conceive the role of military service in a democracy has been posed chiefly by Torsten Holm[2] and Eliot Cohen[3] – but in a rather aporetical perspective[4] – from the point of view of the rational-choice theory of democracy by Margaret Levi,[5] from a military point of view by Richard Challener[6] and Maurice Faivre,[7] and from the point of view of moral philosophy by Michael Walzer.[8] For a historical inquiry, however, these works may be regarded as not very helpful.

On the methodological level, the study *Le corps militaire* by the French sociologist Alain Ehrenberg is, by contrast, very useful, even if its topic is not military service as a institution in itself. The specific interest of Ehrenberg's work lies in the correlation he seeks to establish between military drill and democratic citizenship, thereby questioning the validity of traditional

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1   Hippler, *Citizens, Soldiers, and National Armies*, p. 6.

2   Holm, *Allgemeine Wehrpflicht*.

3   Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers*.

4   Cohen's expression may be considered as symptomatic for this interpretative dilemma: if "military service touches the very essence of a polity" this is because it "incorporates some of a liberal-democratic society's most precious values and some values utterly repugnant to it": *ibid.*, pp. 33 and 35.

5   Levi, *Consent, Dissent, and Patriotism*.

6   Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms*.

7   Faivre, *Les nations armées*.

8   Walzer, *Obligations*, esp. "The Obligation to Die for the State", pp. 77-98.

dichotonomies such as autonomy and power, liberty and constraint, self-government and obedience. Democracy, according to Ehrenberg, sets up a particular type of political relationship that goes beyond traditional distinctions between those who command and those who obey and execute, in favour of a "tactic that aims at the power and the obedience of everybody". The autonomy of the individual is not to be considered solely as an obstacle to the exercise of power, but at the same time as its "intermediary" (*relais*):

Autonomy and its double wording (intermediary and obstacle) ought to be reinscribed into the mechanisms of power, into the practice of authority. One should look for their common matrix and cease to perceive it from the angle of the figure of the Other, for it is not what is outside that would necessarily and objectively do harm to power, but a form of government of human beings, where human beings are incited to govern themselves. Neither disciplinary nor liberating by nature, it is an element in a system of relations.[9]

The essential historical work of the armies of the French Revolution remains Jean-Paul Bertaud's *La revolution armée*. Inspired by this fundamental work, Bertaud's followers, such as Annie Crépin,[10] Jean-Michel Lévy,[11] Pierre Jacquot,[12] or recently Bruno Ciotti,[13] have studied the revolutionary levies on a regional level more closely, providing an essential basis from which the perspective can eventually be geographically enlarged. Moreover, the factor of desertion may said to be well documented, mainly due to the works by Alan Forrest[14] and Frédéric Rousseau.[15] The German and the French Offices for Military History published both collective volumes on the history of conscription, giving a very large chronological overview on the topic. The French volume, edited by Maurice Vaïsse, contains foremost a contribution by Jean Delmas, who gives a useful summary of the French debates on compulsory military service and the lottery draft during the nineteenth century.[16]

Some recent publications deserve a closer discussion. Being not a scholarly historical study but rather an essay – relying exclusively on secondary literature – Michel Auvray's book *L'âge des casernes* analyses military

9   Ehrenberg, *Le corps militaire*, p. 173.
10   Crépin, "Levées d'hommes et esprit public en Seine-et-Marne".
11   Lévy, "La formation de la première armée de la Révolution française".
12   Jacquot, "Les Bataillons de volontaires en Haute-Marne".
13   Ciotti, *Du volontaire au conscrit*.
14   Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters*.
15   Rousseau, *Service militaire au XIXe siècle*.
16   Delmas, "L'armée française au XIXe siècle".

service as being in historical continuity with much older obligations to the state, and its revolutionary origin nothing more than a "myth". Annie Crépin's book *La conscription en débat*, on the other hand, is essentially based on "macro-sources", such as parliamentary debates, proposals for laws, and newspaper articles. The same author has recently broadened the perspective with the publication of *Défendre la France*, which takes into account the reactions and attitudes of civil society towards military obligation, and *Histoire de la conscription* which sums up the author's work of many decades and widens the chronological horizon to the twentieth century. Crépin is the most accomplished expert on the matter in France and provides a very useful framework of the political debates of the period. There are, however, also decisive shortcomings in her analyses, inasmuch as she remains firmly grounded in the tradition of French republican and "Jacobin" historiography and thus has a tendency to accept too readily the conceptual grounds of this tradition. With the methods of the historical anthropology, Odile Roynette has analysed the "experience of the barracks" in France at the end of the nineteenth century with an impressive mastery of source material and according to an interesting problematique, insisting on the conscripts' processes of adaptation to the social microcosms of the army and the impact of the institution to the shaping of national and gender attitudes.[17]

Recruitment practices of the ancien régime

At least since 1583 the right to raise troops has been codified as a royal prerogative.[18] The construction of a centralized state in France went hand in hand with the nationalization of the armed forces; private armies and the personal possession of weapons gradually disappeared, to the advantage of central power. In the case of eighteenth-century France, the institutional situation of recruitment was extremely complex; different and even contradictory practices coexisted over a long period. Three different stages of recruitment policy in pre-revolutionary France, however, can be roughly distinguished: (1) feudal recruitment, (2) "touting", and (3) militia incorporations and "national recruitment". However, chronological boundaries between these stages were by no means clear and are distinguished here only for the sake of clarity.

Despite the 1583 act, the king did not raise his troops directly. Characteristically, having first deprived the aristocracy of the right to keep troops, the

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17   Roynette*, "Bons pour le Service"*.
18   The following paragraphs rely mainly on *ibid*. pp. 13-27 and 46-76.

central power delegated the raising of troops back to them.[19] The military administration chose the colonels – generally nobles – who were charged with raising and maintaining regiments. In principle, the central power thus did not provide regiments with soldiers; instead, enrolment was the task of the officers, who were virtually "proprietors" of their corps. Recruitment was thus a "private" contract between a soldier and an officer, relying on existing feudal bonds, which meant that soldiers generally came from among the officer's dependent peasantry. This kind of personal recruitment had certain advantages. The military hierarchy and social structure exactly reflect the social relations between local lords and their peasants. They knew each other and they were bound by a system of mutual obligations. And, last but not least, the desertion rate was comparatively low with this kind of recruitment system.[20] However, this feudal recruitment also had certain limits. In times of war, in particular, it appeared to be impossible to significantly increase the strength of the army without other methods of enrolment.

Having exhausted the resources of personal recruitment, officers were forced to enlist soldiers they did not personally know and with whom they had no relation in civil society. This kind of recruitment is generally called "touting" (*racolage*). The difference between feudal recruitment and *racolage* can be summarized in the following way: in the case of feudal recruitment, the soldier was enlisted by an officer, whereas in the case of touting he was hired as a soldier. The procedure, however, was not different in form, since drafting was still the affair of the commander of the unit. In contrast to the procedure of feudal recruitment, the officers usually touted outside their home towns or regions. In contrast to personal and feudal staffing, "touting" allowed enrolments to be increased considerably; this kind of practice, however, turned out to be problematic, too. The more difficulty the recruiters had in finding soldiers, the more they were forced to compete with each other, and the more they were tempted to use violence or tricks in order to find recruits.

There was, however, another military institution, one that truly came under the control of the central government: the Royal Militia. The militia had been established as a regular institution under the Marquis de Louvois, the minister of war, in November 1688. In reality, militia systems had existed since the Middle Ages under various labels; their principle was the mobiliza-

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19   See André, *Michel Le Tellier et l'organisation de l'armée monarchique*.
20   Corvisier, *L'armée française de la fin du XVIIe siècle au ministère de Choiseul*, I, p. 736.

tion of peasants under the command of the lord in wartime.[21] A militia system, in the traditional sense of the term, thus involved the duty to fight for the defence of the community in the case of danger; it did not involve, however, a regular military service. The feudal militia was disbanded as soon as a war was over. Moreover, a certain number of particular militia institutions coexisted until the end of the eighteenth century. There were, in the first place, the *milices bourgeoises* formed by inhabitants of towns. Their first purpose was to maintain public order, i.e. they were a municipal police force. Occasionally, however, they were used as auxiliaries for the regular army. By the end of the century, though, the burghers tended increasingly to pay a substitute instead of themselves serving in the militia; they were, however, opposed to any attempt to abolish the institution that they considered as the expression of the cities' political liberty. When the Royal Militia came into being in 1688, its organization differed considerably from these predecessors. First, it was raised in the name of the king and not by local lords. Secondly, it was conceived of as a kind of standing auxiliary army that gathered even in peacetime and was regularly employed in wars, and not only at particular critical moments. The Royal Militia was recruited by a conscription system, which was very unpopular. As a result of the opposition of public opinion, compulsory conscription in the militia was abolished in 1697, re-established in 1701, abolished once again in 1712, and then, in 1726, definitively institutionalized.[22]

Only a small proportion of those who were potentially subject to the militia were actually conscripted, and the choice of those who had to serve was obviously subject to serious quarrels. In most cases a lottery system was adopted, but large segments of society benefited from legal exemptions, both personal and statutory. Moreover, in the course of the eighteenth century the legislation on exemptions became increasingly complex. Service in the militia being not a personal, but a communal duty, it became normal to collect money in the parish before the lottery day; this was then handed over to the chosen militiaman. This money was, on the one hand, a kind of compensation for serving the community and, on the other, a contribution to the costs of the uniform and equipment. The existence of this kind of practice induced the government to make this contribution obligatory.

Another development needs to be highlighted. Traditionally, the militia and the line army were strictly separate organizational institutions. From 1701, though, when military service in the militia was re-established, the

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21   Corvisier, *Armées et sociétés en Europe*, pp. 36-57.

22   Gébelin, *Histoire des milices provinciales (1688-1791)*.

government gradually changed its military policy towards assimilation between the militia and the line army. From then on, each militia battalion was attached to a regiment of the line army. The militia units were now labelled "second battalion" and designed to assist the "first battalion" in tactical matters. The militia thus increasingly became a recruitment pool for the regular army. With regard to the kind of recruitment, the difference between the "volunteer" recruitment of the line army and the "conscription" of the militia was eroded by the actual situation on the ground: militiamen and soldiers of the standing army were pressed. The line army was recruited to a great extent among conscripts, while the newly raised militia units consisted exclusively of "touted" volunteers. In this way, the dissimilarity between the conscripted militia corps as auxiliary military forces, on the one hand, and the regular army with volunteer recruitment, on the other, gradually faded away.[23] Simultaneously, the functions of the state's military administration increased, which meant that recruitment became directly governed by state authorities and not by relatively autonomous army officers.

The ultimate step towards a centralized system of military recruitment before the French Revolution can be dated to the ordinance of 10 December 1762 stating that "the king charges himself with recruiting". The basic characteristic of these "national" or "royal recruits" was that they were enlisted not for a particular unit, or by a particular officer, but as soldiers for the army in general. Centralized state apparatuses like the *intendances* of the provinces were charged with recruitment, and a refined system of bureaucratic control was set up in order to co-ordinate large-scale recruitment operations.

The French Revolution and the Napoleonic period

Confronted with these eighteenth-century developments, the innovations in matters of military recruitment in the early years of the French Revolution seem rather insignificant. From July 1789 the bourgeoisie had reorganized their own militia troops as the National Guard, partly in order to back the National Assembly in its struggle to impose its own political agenda against the monarchy, and partly in order to uphold domestic security.[24] This second role, however, was rather dubious, since National Guardsmen took part in popular uprisings and in looting.[25] In theory, only "active citizens"

23   Corvisier, *L'armée française de la fin du XVIIe siècle au ministère de Choiseul*, I, p. 247.
24   Soboul, *La Révolution française*, p. 152.
25   Devenne, "La garde nationale", p. 49.

and sons of active citizens – that is, those who had a material interest in public affairs – should be allowed to be armed as members of the National Guard, but the practice was much less clear-cut.[26] In some regions, the Guard's social composition was much less bourgeois than it should have been according to the legal dispositions.[27] In other cases, the legal dispositions were politically challenged by excluded social groups, such as the Parisian servants who in 1789 claimed a universal human right to serve in the National Guard[28] or the feminist Société des citoyennes républicaines révolutionnaires who addressed a petition to the National Assembly in 1792, demanding the creation of a "female national guard".[29] In short, service in the National Guard was intimately linked to the question of civic rights and as such became a subject of political quarrel.

In December 1789, the National Assembly rejected a request made by republicans to establish a system of universal conscription. After a week of passionate debate the Assembly decreed, on 16 December 1789, that "French troops, of all kinds, other than National Guards and Militia, will be recruited by voluntary engagement."[30] Conscription was rejected in favour of voluntary recruitment. The general structure of the regular army was to remain more or less the same: executive power over the army was in the hands of the king, military service was rejected, and the term of service clasted eight years with the possibility of extending that period. More particularly, the age limit for enlisting was fixed at sixteen. Furthermore, the actual procedure of recruitment was revised: recruiters were to work only in their home district so that they were under the control of their fellow citizens, which was supposed to prevent the notorious disorders of traditional recruitment. Another important point was the nationalization of the army: only Frenchmen were to be recruited into the French corps.[31] This principle, however, did not include the foreign corps of the army, but French and foreign corps had to be separated. Finally, soldiers would lose their civic rights for the duration of the engagement.

26   Arches, "Aspects sociaux de quelques gardes nationales", pp. 255-266.
27   For a detailed regional analyses see the contributions in the third part (pp. 267-409) of Bianchi and Dupuy (eds), *La Garde nationale entre nation et people en armes*.
28   *Petition des Personnes en état de Domesticité du District de l'Isle-Saint-Louis à messieurs les Représentans de la Commune*, Paris, 1789. See also Genty, "Controverses autour de la garde nationale parisienne", p. 65.
29   Léon, *Adresse individuelle à l'Assemblée nationale*. See also Godineau, *Citoyennes Tricoteuses*, p. 119.
30   *Le Moniteur* no. 116, vol. 2, p. 400.
31   Bouthillier, *Rapport sur le recrutement, les engagements, les rengagements et les conges*, pp. 10-15.

The outcome of the debate was thus an attempt to make recruitment into the army morally acceptable, without changing its structure or the general patterns of staffing. The long term of service, the possibility of joining the army at the age of sixteen, the maintenance of foreign corps, and the loss of civic rights for soldiers explicitly kept the armed forces at a certain distance from civil society. The third estate, furthermore, did not try to destroy the supreme power of the king over the state and the army, and contented itself with the recognition of the National Guard as the expression and guarantee of bourgeois participation in political matters.

It was war, or the imminence of war, that brought about an evolution in the patterns of recruitment. After having tried in vain to enlist 100,000 volunteers into the regular army, the Assembly decided, in June 1791, to organize battalions of "national volunteers" from the members of the National Guard. The decree affirmed clearly that these measures were limited to the time in which "the situation of the state required extraordinary service".[32] Being such an extraordinary military force obviously meant that the forms of organization and military discipline had to differ considerably from those in use in the line army. In this respect the most important feature was certainly the question of officers. The way officers were chosen was the same as in the National Guard: that is, soldiers had the right to elect their commanders. The government issued various calls for volunteers during the following years, and the whole culminated in the 1793 *levée en masse*, which has become a myth in French national historiography.[33] In theory each citizen was liable, but the exceptions were so numerous that the *levée en masse* by no means established general conscription.[34] Moreover, this civic call to the colours was clearly presented as an extraordinary event that was not meant to be translated into permanent institutional reality. The word "*levée*" has several meanings: it connoted the ideas of both "levy" and "uprising". The recruitment of troops, which is one of the main prerogatives of central power, and revolt are put on the same level. The oxymoron both affirms and denies state power. The idea for a *levée en masse* occurred during the spring of 1793 in the highly politicized milieus of the Parisian *sans-culottes*,[35] and it was part of their plan for political terror.[36] Sébastien

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32   "Décret relatif à une conscription libre de gardes nationales de bonne volonté dans la proportion de un sur vingt", printed in Déprez, *Les volontaires nationaux (1791-1793)*, p. 101.

33   On the myth of the "national volunteers", see Hippler, "Volunteers of the French Revolutionary Wars".

34   Auvray, *L'âge des casernes*, p. 42, and Jean-Paul Bertaud, *La révolution armée*, p. 100.

35   Soboul, *Les sans-culottes parisiens en l'an II*, p. 110.

36   Guérin, *La lutte de classes sous la Première République*.

Lacroix, one of the main ideologists of the *levée en masse*, recommended a vast political programme that involved stockpiling food in Paris, fixing prices for foodstuffs, monitoring public opinion, and co-ordinating a huge propaganda effort. This particular situation which would "decide the fate of the world" imposed a general mobilization of a very short duration: "eight days of enthusiasm may be more efficient for the fatherland than eight years of battle".[37]

The idea of a *levée en masse* and the politics of terror were only reluctantly adopted by the Jacobin government under popular pressure, and the concrete measures taken differed considerably from the intentions of the promoters of the idea. Most importantly, the *levée en masse* was transformed into a requisition: instead of an anarchic seizure of sovereign power by insurrectionists, it was, on the contrary, the state that "seized" individuals for service in the army. In this respect, the mythical *levée en masse* actually prefigured some of the constitutive paradoxes of republican conscription.

Most of the "national volunteers" were very young men.[38] A majority of them came from urban areas.[39] In terms of their social origin, the petty and lower bourgeoisie were well represented, and artisans and journeymen were over-represented.[40] What actually happened during the following years was that the soldiers who were already enlisted were kept under the colours for many years, in most cases against their will. On the other hand, the turnover of the military personnel was particularly high in these years – in 1792, for instance, more than a third of the soldiers had served less than one year. Moreover, the emigration of officers, most of them nobles, enabled those who were left to make very quick career progression.[41] People from lower social origins could attain positions of command that had been almost exclusively reserved for nobles a couple of years earlier: the armies of the French Revolution and of the Napoleonic empire were thus a very powerful mechanism for upward mobility.

Nonetheless, in 1798, the needs of the war effort induced the government to issue a law on conscription.[42] According to the deputy – later Marshall – Jourdan who presented the proposal in parliament, the law aimed less at

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37   Lacroix, *Pas un moment à perdre*, pp. 12-13.

38   In their ranks, 79 per cent were younger than twenty-five. In the Ain department, 249 of 544 soldiers raised in 1791 were younger than twenty (Lévy, "La formation de la première armée de la Révolution française", p. 115).

39   Jacquot, "Les Bataillons de volontaires" pp. 84-94.

40   Bertaud, *La revolution armée*, pp. 67-68.

41   *Ibid.*, p. 77.

42   On the 1798 legislation, see Crépin, *La conscription en débat*, pp. 24-30.

creating new political forms than at institutionalizing the experience of
the Revolution.[43] The project, however, was also quite moderate and tried
explicitly to avoid a militarization of society. There were thus two contra-
dicting goals to be achieved: on the one hand, Jourdan advocated "universal
service", essentially because partiality would have had a negative impact on
the social acceptability of military service; on the other, he strived to limit
the burden of conscription by enlisting only the number of soldiers that was
necessary for the army and not all available individuals.[44] The solution to
this conundrum was found in the distinction between "conscription" and
"military service": conscription meant that the individual was registered as
a potential conscript, but this did not imply that that all these conscripts
had to do military service. "Many will be destined to serve, but in reality few
will probably serve", as Jourdan put it.[45] The criterion by which the soldiers
were chosen from the mass of conscripts was their age, which meant that
the youngest of a class were enlisted first. The law, however, did not fix the
length of service, and decisions about the discharge of soldiers were left to
the government.

Unsurprisingly, opinions were divided about the conditions for exemp-
tions and about the question of whether conscripts should be allowed to
hire a substitute instead of doing military service personally. The 1798 law
did not actually allow substitution, since the goal was that "the law pen-
etrates the thatched cottages of the poor as well as the sumptuous palaces
of opulence".[46] This settlement, however, was discussed again two years
later and substitution allowed. What is interesting about this discussion
was the fact that similar arguments, which had been brought forward in
1798 to justify the act of conscription and the interdiction of substitution,
now served as arguments *for* substitution. What is more, the adjustment of
military duties to the needs of "arts, commerce, and agriculture" in Jourdan's
project was translated into a criticism of "those lovers of a chimerical
equality" who wanted to "force all the members of a big nation strictly to
do the same work".[47] The "general interest" could serve as an argument not
only for an equal obligation for everybody, but also for a differentiation of
social tasks, that is, for the possibility for the rich to buy themselves out
of the obligation by hiring a substitute. The privilege, however, was also
justified as salutary for the poor: "the option of substitution will allow

43 See Laveaux, *Rapport fait par Et. Laveaux*, p. 12.
44 Jourdan, *Rapport fait par Jourdan*, p. 4.
45 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
46 Porte, *Opinion de Porte sur le projet de résolution*, p. 8.
47 Jaucourt, *Opinion de Jaucourt Sur le projet de loi*, p. 3.

the poor to receive money".[48] The legislative basis for French recruitment policy was rather elastic: on the one hand, military obligation was conceived as a consequence of citizenship, and the recruitment model can thus be described as conscription; on the other hand, the law could be interpreted as authorizing the forced recruitment of a selected number of individuals with the possibility given to the wealthy to buy themselves out.

The 1798 law was the legislative basis for the recruitment of Napoleon's army. As regional studies have shown, the rates of desertion and refusal of military service (*insubordination*)[49] were extremely high: up to 90 per cent in many cases.[50] Socially, deserters and *insoumis* came mainly from rural regions, and were well integrated into society. Families and rural communities helped deserters and *insoumis* escaping from the military. It was easier to enforce conscription in urban areas, and in this respect the social pattern of staffing remained the same during the Revolution and the Napoleonic period. In order to fulfil the military needs, Napoleonic authorities set up specific military corps for searching the countryside and hunting deserters. Moreover, many of the peace treaties during the period obliged Napoleon's "allies" to contribute to the war effort of the empire. As a result, about a third of the soldiers in the Russian campaign were not French.[51] Finally, from 1808 onwards, "extraordinary levies" were organized in order to meet the enormous manpower needs of Napoleon's campaigns. In the ten-year period 1804-1814, between 2,000,000 and 2,400,000 Frenchmen were enlisted by conscription,[52] and many of them died or were injured.[53] Among those enlisted, only about 52,000 were actual volunteers.[54] Unsurprisingly, the social impact of twenty-five years of revolutionary and imperial mass warfare was enormous.[55]

48   Delpierre, *Opinion de Delpierre (jeune)*, p. 4.

49   Deserters are those who, after becoming soldiers, leave the army without permission, whereas *insoumis* means those who refuse enlistment altogether.

50   See Rousseau, *Service militaire au XIXe siècle*.

51   On German soldiers in Napoleon's army, see Hippler, "Les soldats allemands dans l'armée napoléonienne d'après leurs autobiographies".

52   Girardet, *La société militaire de 1815 à nos jours*, p. 19. See also Smets, "Von der 'Dorfidylle' zur preußischen Nation", p. 717. Quantitative aspects of the social impact of conscription can be found in the "Compte general de la conscription" by Antoine-Audet Hargenvilliers, published in Vallée, *La conscription dans le department de la Charente (1798-1807)*. More recent scholarship has shown that the figures given by Hargenvilliers are sometimes flawed; see Rousseau, *Service militaire au XIXe siècle, and* Dufraisse, *Napoléon*, p. 69.

53   See Houdaille, "Le problème des pertes de guerre".

54   Girardet, *La société militaire*, p. 20.

55   On the social impact during the nineteenth century see Petiteau, *Lendemains d'Empire*.

The constitutional monarchies and the Second Empire

After Waterloo, and the massive desertions that had followed Napoleon's ultimate defeat, King Louis XVIII disbanded the remainder of the army and on 3 August 1815 decreed the formation of one "legion" in each department. Between 1814 and 1818 the recruits for the royal French army were exclusively volunteers, many of them in reality veterans of the old imperial army. The "Constitutional Charter" of the reformed French monarchy stipulated that "conscription is abolished". A couple of years later, however, in 1818, a form of compulsory military service was re-established. The reason was that the military authorities failed to enlist more than 3,500 men a year, which was insufficient to meet manpower needs.[56] On the other hand, it was argued that the difficulty of finding recruits on the labour market was mainly due to the government's unwillingness to provide adequate funding.[57] Conscription was viewed as a cheap way of manning the army. Amended in 1824 and in 1832, the 1818 legislation remained the basis of French recruitment policies until the Third Republic.[58] Beyond the purely military concerns, the question of recruitment was linked to a whole series of uncertainties about the nature of the political regime, about political culture, and about the relationship of the re-established monarchy to the revolutionary past. This relationship to the past was particularly difficult in post-1815 France, and two quite different sets of memory politics confronted each other: an official effort to forget the Revolution and the empire (*unité et oubli*, "unity and forgetting", was the imprint on official papers) and a discourse of atonement, promoted by the "ultras" of the Restoration.[59] The military in general and conscription in particular were universally viewed as cornerstones of the republic and of its continuity in Napoleon's empire.[60]

According to a proposal by Laurent de Gouvion-Saint-Cyr, an annual contingent of 40,000 men would be raised by voluntary recruitment or, if not enough volunteers were forthcoming, by a draft operated through a lottery. The duration of active service being six years, the general strength of the army would be 240,000 men. These numbers, however, were only a maximum, which was subject to budgetary constraints; that is, the actual strength of the army and the annual levies could in reality be lower and the effective duration of service shorter. In 1824 the duration of active service

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56   Monteilhet, *Les institutions militaires de la France*, p. 5.
57   Vidalenc, "Engagés et conscrits sous la Restauration 1814-1830", p. 240. See also Vidalenc, "Les engagements volontaires dans l'armée de la Restauration".
58   Porch, "The French Army Law of 1832".
59   See Elster, *Closing the Books*, pp. 24-47.
60   See Hippler, "Conscription in the French Restoration".

was increased to eight years from six, which further contributed to the professionalization of the conscript system: after many years in the army many conscripts had no other professional choice than to "voluntarily" remain soldiers. In this sense, and in the eyes of many contemporaries, "conscription" was little more than a legal framework for forced enlistments into a professional army. Moreover, the system allowed the possibility of hiring a substitute, which was obviously a possibility offered to the wealthy to buy themselves out of the military obligation.

In terms of the social origins of the soldiers, the army of the Restoration comprised two rather different sections. The bulk of the soldiers were veterans of the Napoleonic army, in particular those who had lost any contact with their home communities. In contrast, those who were recruited after 1815 came to a very large extent from poor rural backgrounds. This led to quite an unusual ideological configuration: the political right and the liberal bourgeoisie were suspicious of the military, whereas those who were nostalgic about the Revolution and the empire upheld the image of France's past military glory. In contrast to the social habits of the *ancien régime*, the aristocracy of the Restoration and the July Monarchy was reluctant to follow military careers. According to the 1818 law and similar stipulations in 1832, two-thirds of the officers should have been recruited through the military colleges of Saint-Cyr and Metz. However, the number of those who passed the entrance exams of these colleges and who were able to pay for tuition and equipment was notoriously lower than the military needed. As a result of this, nearly two-thirds of officers were in reality non-commissioned officers and thus former rank-and-file.[61]

The army, in other words, still functioned to some extent as a mechanism of upward mobility during the first half of the nineteenth century.[62] However, in contrast to the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, this upward mobility was extremely slow and of little attraction in financial terms. It usually took seven to eight years to get promoted from second lieutenant to lieutenant and the same amount of time to get promoted from lieutenant to captain. Most officers ended their military careers ended as captains after some twenty years as lieutenants. As a result of this, very few young bourgeois enlisted; instead they preferred careers in civil administration, in the liberal professions, or in business. During the mid nineteenth century non-commissioned officers earned between 75 centimes and 1 franc a day, whereas the average daily salary of industrial workers was about 2 francs,

61   Serman, *Les Officiers français dans la nation*.
62   The following relies on Girardet, *La société mililitaire,* pp. 13-63.

which was itself already notoriously insufficient. As for lieutenants, their salary was between 4.5 and 5.5 francs a day and their pension between 2 and 3.2 francs. In other words, the military held no attraction for the bourgeoisie, and salaries hardly allowed a man to ensure a decent life for his family. Moreover, the cultural image of the military was of little attraction.

The spirit of the time being understood as pacifistic and commercial, military life was depicted in contemporary literature as tedious waiting in some provincial garrison for a war that was never to come. Apart from colonial expansion after 1830, the main task for the military was actually domestic counter-insurgency. Given the social composition of the army, it was obviously necessary to prevent fraternization between soldiers and insurgents. From the point of view of recruitment, care was taken to enlist primarily in rural areas and to keep the urban working classes out of the army in order to maintain a cultural distinction between soldiers and potential insurgents. From the point of view of "military education" care was explicitly taken to separate the army from civil society: the geographical mobility of units was extremely high, and contacts with civil society were viewed with suspicious eyes and could seriously harm careers.

In terms of labour relations, the outcome of this pattern was twofold. On the one hand, the army increasingly became a social microcosm with its own rules and separated from the rest of society. On the other hand, solidarity and even a certain sense of equality developed within this closed microcosm. This was due to the facts that a majority of officers were former rank and file and that even those who came from bourgeois or noble backgrounds had somewhat lost their former social status. Differences in rank came thus foremost down to duration of service and the progressive incorporation of the values of military society. In this sense, the military was a self-reproducing system. It was, however, almost utterly incapable of attracting recruits and was thus in need of forced enlistments by the means of the lottery-draft. Another aspect needs to be highlighted: it was during the nineteenth century that a certain model of "officialdom" (*fonctionnariat*) became hegemonic and grew into one important aspect of military labour relations. In terms of careers the soldier was a model of what later became a "civil servant": as a state employee ideally he did not change his profession during his lifetime, and his relative comfort in retirement was guaranteed by a state pension. Careers, though slow, were stable and foreseeable; payment, though barely sufficient, was guaranteed.

In this sense, there was an important difference between the French army during the Revolution and the Napoleonic period on the one hand and after 1815 on the other. Revolutionary soldiers were considered to be

lacking discipline but to be superior to the military of the *ancien régime* in terms of motivation. They embodied indiscipline and the animalistic force of the rabble but, at the same time, also a heroic sense of honour which stemmed from their quality as defenders of the fatherland. The key concept was "enthusiasm": revolutionary soldiers had a goal to identify with, whereas soldiers of the *ancien régime* were considered to be indifferent about the outcome of the fight. Some of these characteristics continued to exist during the Napoleonic period, and ego-documents from foreign soldiers under Napoleon suggest that the relations between officers and rank and file were perceived as much better than they were in other armies of the time.[63] Moreover, Napoleon inherited one of the basic features of revolutionary warfare, which is the logistical principle that the army live off the countryside.[64] In many cases this in practice meant looting, but also the possibility for the soldiers to supplement their pay. According to the cultural imagination of the time, the French soldier of the revolutionary and Napoleonic period was the mirror of "the people": undisciplined, violent, and uncultured, but also passionate, even enthusiastic, and, above all, of impressive strength. Rarely wearing proper uniforms, Napoleon's armies were viewed by his adversaries as hordes of rabble, and by his followers as the emanation of the heroic strength of the nation. The post-1815 army was the perfect antithesis of this image. Pedantic discipline, subordination, patient military labour, and slow careers were the distinctive features of the new army after Napoleon. The *Diary* of Marshall Boniface de Castellane is perhaps the most explicit source for this return to an older "military spirit": "a soldier should not even think about the possibility to act otherwise than he is ordered to".[65]

The European revolutions of 1848 were an essential turning point with regard to the cultural representation of soldiers in France. Around 1848 the military was progressively assimilated to the maintainance of social order, rather than with revolutionary uprising. This is obviously linked to the role of the military in crushing insurrections and revolts all over Europe. A complete reversal of the cultural and political significance of the military was the result of this. The military became progressively part of the defence of social order, of civilization, and of religion, and the miseries of military life were now glorified as the necessary renouncement of worldly pleasures. The military, in short, was depicted as disciplined, invigorated,

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63   Schehl, *Mit der großen Armee 1812 von Krefeld nach Moskau*, p. 35.
64   See Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787-1802*, and Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic*.
65   Cited by Girardet, *La société militaire*, p. 75.

and healthy, and was thus the perfect antithesis of the corrupt urban and working-class life:

> *Ce qu'il y a de plus grand, de plus beau, de plus digne*
> *d'admiration dans nos sociétés modernes, c'est certainement*
> *le paysan transformé par la loi en soldat d'infanterie. Pauvre,*
> *il protégé la richesse; ignorant, il protège la science. [...] Ce*
> *soldat est l'expression la plus complete, la plus noble, la plus*
> *pure de la civilisation créée par le christianisme, car il met en*
> *pratique la pensée chrétienne: le sacrifice.*[66]

This renewed image of the military came to a peak under Napoleon III. Attempts were made under the Second Empire to get closer to a "real" conscription, as had been realized, according to many French observers, in Prussia. Napoleon III actually adhered very closely to the Prussian recruitment system. In a series of articles he had written for the newspaper *Progrès du Pas-de-Calais* in 1843 – thus before coming to power – he had called for the abolition of substitution and the organization of a strong military reserve. According to him, "the Prussian organization is the only one which is adapted for our democratic nature, for our egalitarian habits". In Prussia, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte went on, the whole nation was armed for defence, whereas in France "only the bourgeoisie is armed for the defence of private interests".[67] When he became emperor his rhetoric became less democratic, but he still admired the Prussian way of identifying the citizen and the soldier. What was even more important, however, was the fact that the Prussian system promised a decisive increase in numbers in the French army, especially by the means of the formation of a strong reserve which could be incorporated in times of war. The project of the new conscription law was published by the emperor himself in a notice that appeared in *Le moniteur universel* on 12 December 1866. However, Napoleon's nephew faced serious resistance, both from the officers for whom the "quality" of "military spirit" – which needed long years of military education to be acquired – mattered more than the quantity of conscripts. The attitude of the republican party towards conscription was ambiguous: on the one hand, they strongly approved of the idea of a universal military service; on the other, they were against the regime, and the law was not radical enough in their view.[68] In

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66 *Ibid.*, p. 31.
67 Napoléon III, *Projet de loi sur le recrutement de l'armée*, p. 23.
68 See Casevitz, *Une loi manquée.*

this political situation, the emperor did not succeed in imposing his will: the law of 4 February 1868 was significantly modified by the *Corps Législatif*, and its main achievement was to forbid private contracts of substitution in favour of a procedure of replacement according to which, instead of hiring a substitute, the wealthy could directly buy themselves out.[69]

The Third Republic

The period following the French defeat in 1870-1871 was characterized by what French historiography has termed the "German crisis in French thought".[70] The defeat was attributed to a feeling of lack of attachment on the part of individuals to the fate of the nation and the state, and relief was sought by a partial adaptation of German models. This concerned, most importantly but not exclusively, the patterns of military recruitment.

The new recruitment law, issued on 27 July 1872, was a compromise between quite different, and indeed even antagonistic, political expectations. Professional soldiers highlighted, on the one hand, the need to instil a "military spirit" which necessitated long years of habits of subordination and obedience, and on the other, the need to train a large number of conscripts to be incorporated in time of war. However, the most important change concerned the attitude of the political right towards compulsory military service. Conservatives invoked the role of the military in 1848 and, more recently, during the Paris Commune of 1871, when the army had saved "civilization": "nous nous demandons si ce n'est pas là l'école où il faut envoyer ceux qui paraissent l'avoir oublié, apprendre comment on sert et comment on aime son pays. Que tous nos enfants y aillent donc et que le service obligatoire soit la grande école des générations futures."[71] On the political left, compulsory military service was traditionally linked to the republican heritage. If the army had been instrumental in crushing uprisings and revolutions, this was due, according to the republicans, to the fact that the army was not recruited through universal conscription and that it had been maintained at a distance from civil society.

In 1872, the lottery system was maintained and those with "bad numbers" were obliged to serve five years on active service, and another four years in the reserve, whereas those holding "good numbers" received a basic military training of only a year. The goal was to provide military training for every male, and a proper military education – the development of the

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69   See Schnapper, *Le remplacement militaire en France*.

70   Digeon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française*.

71   Cited by Girard, *La société militaire*, p. 122.

specifically military virtues – for a minority. This law, however, was inspired by the idea of the obligation of personal and universal service. Beyond the military necessity of this form of recruitment, the topic of the educational function of military service was stressed very much to justify universal military service. Military service as an educational project was actually a programme that had been developed since the Restoration. According to Captain Louis Pagézy de Bourdéliac, time under the colours could most usefully be spend by providing an intellectual and moral education for the soldiers: reading and writing, but also patriotism, honesty, and a cult of honour should be on the military agenda.[72] Towards the end of the Second Empire, General Louis-Jules Trochu had argued for a military service of short duration: this kind of conscription has "le triple effet de donner du ressort à l'armée, de moraliser la population, de faire pénétrer les habitudes et l'esprit militaires dans le corps social tout entire".[73] If this kind of thinking was marginal before 1870, it became hegemonic after the Franco-Prussian War and it obviously affected labour relations within the military.

The growing influence of republican positions in French political life after 1871 could not but have an impact on the subsequent legislation, and the 1889 law may be considered an institutionalization of the republican conception of military service and of the relationship between the individual and the state. It also remains true, however, that a genuinely equal obligation of the individual to the state never existed, not even after the 1905 legislation, which revoked the exceptions granted to certain categories, such as priests, thus establishing a theoretical equality of service. In practice, however, the well-educated sons of the bourgeoisie still benefited from certain advantages in terms of employment, career prospects, and even the duration of actual service. France adopted the Prussian model of the "one-year volunteers" (*Einjährig-Freiwillige*) which permitted the educated classes to be discharged after a single year of service and to be promoted as officers in the reserve.[74] Later on, holders of university degrees could be employed entirely in civilian duties while being in theory members of the army.

On the social level, the changing pattern of recruitment had enormous consequences. First of all, there is a tendency towards the "gentrification" of the military profession. This movement started under the Second Empire

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72   Pagézy de Bourdéliac, *De l'emploi des loisirs du soldat français en temps de paix*, and Anonymous, *Essai sur l'état militaire en 1825*.

73   Trochu, *L'armée française en 1867*, p. 278.

74   See Frevert, *Die kasernierte Nation*, esp. "Bürgerliche Arrangements: Einjährige und Reserveoffiziere".

but accelerated with the advent of the Third Republic. The proportion of those who were made officers after having attended military colleges rose significantly in contrast to the promotion of non-commissioned officers and thus the former rank and file. The social origin of those alumni of military colleges was predominantly the mid-level bourgeoisie, but there are also, along with sons of the petty bourgeoisie and of low-ranking civil servants, young men of noble descent and those stemming from the higher bourgeoisie. Moreover, the only way for non-commissioned officers to become officers was to be admitted to a staff college. These measures were intended to raise the level of education of military personnel, but they had also the side effect of considerably altering the social composition of the army. Among the professional cadres two distinct classes emerge: on the one hand the high-ranking officers, usually from higher social origins, who rapidly became officers after graduating from military colleges; on the other hand, non-commissioned officers and low-ranking officers, usually from lower social origins. Military hierarchies, in other words, now mirrored the hierarchies in civil society and the army lost its role as a mechanism of upward mobility.

Labour relations within the army were also altered by the educational role of the military. Before the Third Republic officers and the rank and file largely shared a common background of social origin and manners. From the last third of the nineteenth century onwards, officers and non-commissioned officers were charged with morally and intellectually "improving" the recruits. The latter were no longer part of the same "family", since their presence under the colours was of limited duration. The more egalitarian recruitment of universal conscription thus had the paradoxical consequence that social relations within the army became less egalitarian on all levels. During the first years of the republic, religious instruction was a pivotal part of the moralizing mission. Moreover, the army was charged with eradicating bad behaviour such as alcoholism – only, however, among the rank and file and not among professional cadres.[75] The army being charged with delivering basic instruction to all recruits, the social inequalities became even more accentuated. Upon arrival, the recruits had to pass exams in reading, writing, and basic mathematics. The results of these exams were important in the future differentiation of labour within the military. The fact that those who held degrees could be discharged after a shorter period of actual service created a somewhat paradoxical situation: in contrast to those who benefited from a shorter term of service, very

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75   Roynette, *"Bons pour le Service"*, pp. 93-106.

few among the regular conscripts fulfilled the necessary conditions and had the requisite skills to be promoted to the rank of non-commissioned officer. The non-commissioned officers' proverbial stupidity was a result of this situation. However, the social hierarchies were also perceptible on other levels. There is some evidence that recruits from higher social origins were less subject to the physical violence which was often part of the rites of passage in the army.[76]

Variables and taxonomies

This short overview of the evolution of recruitment policies leads to the striking conclusion that the evolution of military recruitment over the "very long nineteenth century" should above all be read in terms of different approaches to state construction and nation-building and that the changes from one pattern of recruitment to others were but consequences of the overall political and cultural processes. There was a slow shift away from a military obligation in the name of the community towards its encoding as an obligation to the nation-state, that is, military duties as a civic obligation. This shift in scale was accompanied by a change in meaning of the military obligation in general and of conscription in particular. In this sense, the four basic variables of the general taxonomy of the project (payment, duration, legal constraints, and cultural factors) were constantly under debate during the period.

The general outcome of the evolution of French recruitment practices from the late eighteenth until the end of the nineteenth century is the declining importance of payment. Traditionally soldiers received a quite significant amount of money when signing the recruitment contract (*prime d'engagement*). Once they were soldiers, their normal pay was notoriously too low to enable them to live a decent life. Originally, the "proprietor" of the regiment had to pay this money but, as pointed out earlier, there was a tendency in the eighteenth-century militia system to transform this into a pecuniary contribution by the recruit's home community. This means on the one hand that military obligations were conceived of as the local community's duty; on the other hand, this practice implied that the patterns of manning both the militia and the regular army became those of a "professional" army, which implies military service for payment. There is, however, a double difficulty. The first difficulty lies in the fact that staffing was both "professional" and a communal duty, inasmuch as each parish had to furnish a certain number of recruits. The second difficulty lies in

76   *Ibid.*, p. 269.

the fact that the *prime d'engagement* was given only once and, by accepting this money, the future soldier had, so to speak, "sold himself".

Enlightenment critics thus denounced "military slavery" and called for a system in which citizens "freely" defended their fatherland. This debate continued for virtually the whole nineteenth century. Against the government's argument that it was impossible to find enough volunteers, the adversaries of conscription regularly replied that this was mainly due to the authorities' unwillingness to grant *primes d'engagement* that were substantial enough to attract people to the army. Conscription, in this sense, was clearly a means of saving public money.

During the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period, payment does not seem to have played a predominant role in enlistment. The older practices of communities collecting money for their recruits continued to exist for a while; however, this served more as compensation for the financial losses that the soldier would face compared to what he could have earned in other employment. However, the government's unwillingness to provide adequate funding was partly compensated for by an ideological justification of the extended military obligations. As pointed out, the poor payment was probably the main reason why the restored monarchy decided to re-establish a selective draft on the basis of a lottery system in 1818. In any event, during the whole period, payment was never sufficient to attract the necessary number of recruits. On the contrary, there is a very clear trend towards a delegitimization of military labour for payment. Apart from the financial aspect of the matter, payment was considered as intrinsically immoral. The only morally legitimate motivation for fighting was the attachment to the nation and the fatherland.

The question of the duration of service is handled quite differently in periods of war and in periods of peace. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Empire were characterized by nearly permanent war, and soldiers were not normally released during wartime. This meant that desertion was the only way to quit the service, and the desertion rate was actually extremely high.[77] In reality, the legal duration of service thus became an issue only with the Restoration, and the early nineteenth century saw a return to the pre-revolutionary practices, that is, a long term of service of six to eight years. In both cases, the debate essentially focused on the question of "military spirit". Professional officers and conservatives argued that long years of service – and ideally enlistment at a very young age – were needed to instil a "cult of subordination" and military discipline. Republicans,

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[77]   See Forrest, *Conscripts and Deserters.*

on the other hand, argued that the necessary military training could be achieved in a very short time. The example of the armies of the French Revolution has proven that a quite effective military could be trained very quickly. It was not the technical skills that took time to develop but rather the personal dispositions of a disciplined soldier who was used to obeying. Revolutionaries and republicans were opposed to a long term of service, precisely because they contested the necessity of a "military spirit". On the contrary, what was needed, according to them, was a "civic spirit" which included a sense of military duty, but which was not opposed to the values of civil society. It was thus necessary to ensure a high turnover of personnel and thus to limit the time of service to a strict minimum. In the words of French republicanism, this was a "national army", i.e. an army that was an emanation of the nation, i.e. of civil society. However, a limited term of service led to some paradoxes of the cadre/conscript system in which professional soldiers with lifelong military careers commanded short-term recruits and in which the military culture was essentially defined by professionals. In short, conscription led to the militarization of society rather than to the socialization of the military.

As to legal constraints, they seem to be subordinated to financial considerations, to social change, or, more importantly, to changes in political culture. The most important feature in this respect seems to be the changing understanding of nation and nationality. Matters of ethnicity were for the most part debated as matters of nationality, and we need to pay attention to the shifting meaning of the term "nation" during these years. During the eighteenth century, the term could be employed in the sense of "civil society" or even as a synonym for the third estate, as in Abbé Sieyès's famous 1789 pamphlet *Que'est-ce que tiers-état?* The answer to this question is well known: the third estate is of right the "nation", and this latter is defined as the part of the population that does useful work and that produces wealth. In contrast to many other European languages, the English language has kept this meaning. Famous examples are Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, in which "nation" designs something that we would probably term "society" today. In Disraeli's *Sybil or the Two Nations*, or in the "One-Nation Tory" movement during the 1980s, the "nation" designates one part of the population within a given territory, and indeed within a constituted nation-state. The French language lost these meanings almost completely during the nineteenth century. During the Revolution, however, concepts such as the nation and *la patrie* (and similar notions like patriot, patriotic, etc.) had a clear social and political background, rather than a "nationalistic" understanding in the modern sense.

A clear illustration of this can be found in the military realm: foreign corps – and most famously the Swiss – were assimilated to "satellites of despotism", i.e. to adversaries of the cause of the nation in both senses of the term. Foreign units were foreign to the nation in the sense that they were not a part of the revolutionary community, and also in the sense that they did not belong to the French community of descent. The consequence of this, however, was not the disbanding of foreign corps but an institutional separation between units of French nationals and of foreigners. The same logic was employed during the Napoleonic campaigns, when France's allies had to furnish large contingents of the *Grande Armée*, and with the founding of the Foreign Legion in 1831. The tension remained palpable, and the nation, however undefined, became the ultimate source of legitimacy. In the case of the foreign units in Napoleon's army, it can be argued that their presence underpinned an ideological orientation of the First Empire, that is, the idea of a European federation under French leadership. In the case of the Foreign Legion it is certainly not by coincidence that the reward for long years of service for France consisted of the naturalization of the legionnaires, that is, to their becoming French nationals.

The most important issue, however, is certainly the renegotiation of the meaning of *liberté*. The French language does not distinguish between freedom and liberty, and both issues were discussed under the term of *liberté*. *Liberté* has indeed become a *Grundbegriff* in the sense of Reinhart Koselleck's conceptual history, that is, a concept that all parties were obliged to use in order to defend legitimate social claims. But the meaning of the concept was constantly under debate. Enlightenment criticism of military obligation regularly used the term "military slavery" to denounce militia obligations or peasant conscription. The military obligation was thus criticized in the name of liberty.

A conceptual reversal occurred with the French Revolution. Regarding conscription, it was striking that both its supporters and its opponents underpinned their claims with references to liberty. The conceptual quarrel is clearly displayed by the words of the Count of Liancourt who declared, during the 1789 debate on conscription, that he was "astonished to see that liberty is invoked to support the hardest and the broadest of slavery", adding that "it would be a hundred times better to live in Constantinople or in Morocco than in a country in which laws of this kind are in force".[78] And indeed, the task was obviously easier for the adversaries of conscription, since they could argue that liberty implied that people ought not to be forced

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78   Liancourt, *Opinion sur le mode de recrutement pour l'armée*, p. 7.

into the military against their will. The promoters of conscription had thus to redefine the concept according to their needs: they held that liberty was not so much a personal as a political matter, closely linked to the existence of the "public force"; that is, to a strong state, liberty "is a chimera if the stronger one can with impunity oppress the weaker one".[79] No real liberty was conceivable if not in a republic, and the absence of state power equalled the oppression of the weaker one by the stronger one and was therefore understood as "slavery". The real issue was thus access to civic rights, and a whole republican tradition had linked civic rights to military obligations. Modern conscription is unthinkable without this ideological link.

The debate over the link between liberty, freedom, and citizenship on the one hand and military obligations on the other went on under the Restoration. At the moment when the 1818 military legislation was discussed, this link became particularly problematic.[80] The reason for this was that it was difficult to separate the meaning of these concepts from their revolutionary legacy. The defenders of limited conscription underpinned their claims with a reference to citizenship: it was the duty of each citizen to defend their polity. Conservative critics made use of the same arguments as in 1789: Bonald, for instance, depicted conscription as "a law that confiscates my personal liberty prior to any misdemeanour".[81] Liberals, on the other hand, made use of the reference to liberty to argue for the possibility for the wealthy to buy themselves out of the obligation. Military obligations, according to them, were comparable to financial contributions, that is, to paying tax. Each one should thus have the possibility to contribute to the safety of the state in either financial terms or by means of personal service. This parallel between taxes and military service was quite clearly expressed in the popular name given to conscription: *l'impôt du sang*, blood tax.

On the other hand, this possibility to buy oneself out of the obligation was denounced by both conservatives and republicans as illegitimate commodification. The conservative deputy Cardonnel thus depicted in 1818 the image of "the French youth becoming a commodity [...] object of a humiliating traffic and a shameful trading and sordid interest and infamous cupidity triumphing over all feelings and over all laws of nature".[82] The interplay between the developing capitalist structures of the economy and the possibility of replacement led to insurance companies being set up against the risk of the draft; they became a flourishing business during the

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79   Dubois-Crancé, *Discours sur la force publique*, p. 8.
80   For the following, see Hippler, "Conscription in the French Restoration".
81   Bonald, *Opinion de M. de Bonald, député de l'Aveyron*, p. 4.
82   Cardonnel, *Opinion de M. le président de Cardonnel, député du Tarn*, p. 10.

first two-thirds of the nineteenth century.[83] During the Second Empire, "substitution" superseded "replacement", the difference being that the buying-out was no longer a private transaction since drafted soldiers could pay a certain amount of money directly to the state in order to be exempted. The main argument advanced for substitution was that it was a more "moral" procedure than replacement.[84] As pointed out above, financial aspects were dubious *per se*, and they were even more so if they took place in the capitalistic civil society, whereas a mediation by the state conferred some legitimacy on the buy-out. The reason for this is certainly to be looked for in the fact that the state is as such the sphere of the common interest, in contrast to the private interests that confront each other savagely in a market economy.

The above discussion of the key concepts in which military obligations were historically understood and thus culturally and politically constructed as legitimate obligations made clear that taxonomies are always and of necessity a fragile endeavour. Taxonomies always run the risk of an ahistoric – and thus in the last instance teleological – understanding of the historical material. The only way to escape from this seems to be to historicize the terms of the taxonomy itself. The above discussion of the uncertainties about the concept of *liberté* is part of this endeavour to historicize the key concepts.

As to the catalysts of change, it appears that the experience of revolutionary war was of crucial yet only temporary importance. Contemporary military observers were surprised or shocked by the "regressive" nature of the tactics of armies of the French Revolution, which differed from the very sophisticated tactics of traditional eighteenth-century armies. The same holds true for weaponry, since the most striking fact for foreign militaries was that the French used the long-superseded pike. The basic lesson that foreign observers learnt from this experience was that the motivation of the soldiers was of crucial importance for military success. As a first step, this lesson was conceptualized in terms of "enthusiasm" and in a second step in terms of the legitimizing force of nationalisms.

In this respect, the most important operator of change is certainly to be found in the realm of political representations and ideologies, that is, in the now overwhelming importance of the nation as a source of legitimacy. And the uncertainties in terms of military recruitment that are characteristic for important periods of nineteenth-century French history can without too

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83   See Schnapper, *Le remplacement militaire en France*.
84   Auvray, *L'âge des casernes*, p. 91.

much difficulty be linked to the uncertain nature of the post-revolutionary nation.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the French Revolution in terms of military policy was the defeudalization of the French army. Backed by republican ideology and by social turnover in the positions of command in the army, the state succeeded in establishing its supremacy on a permanent basis. It was only under the Third Republic that nobles sought military employment *en masse*, however, not without submitting to republican, and thus ultimately bourgeois, modes of selection. Economic and financial factors played a paradoxical role. As pointed out above, financial considerations were certainly one of the main motivations for the restored monarchy not to reintroduce the form of military recruitment that its ideologists considered fit for a constitutional monarchy, that is, a strictly voluntary recruitment. On the other hand, in many cases financial considerations also prevented conscription from becoming truly universal, for the simple reason that the overall strength of the army was subordinated to financial constraints and not to the amount of the potentially available manpower.

The most general conclusion about French recruitment policies concerns, without any doubt, the ideological link that was established between military obligations and citizenship. However, the theoretical principle that each citizen ought to be a defender of the fatherland was never universally applied, not even during the French Revolution or under the Third Republic. One had always to cope with financial constraints on the one hand, and with social acceptance – especially by the upper classes – on the other. This is why the boundary between conscripted soldiers and pressed soldiers is sometimes difficult to draw. This point becomes particularly visible under the constitutional monarchies and the Second Empire, when only a very small proportion of the potential conscripts were actually enlisted.