

Conference

Gender, War and Culture: From Colonial Conquest, Standing Armies and Revolutionary Wars to the Wars of Nations and Empires (1650s-1910s)

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Part 1: Chapter 8

CITIZENSHIP, MASS MOBILIZATION AND MASCULINITY IN A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE, 1770s-1850s

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The age of democratic revolutions came with new forms of recruitment aimed at mass mobilization. Enabling changes in both the scale and modes of warfare, these new forms of recruitment – universal male conscription in particular – were also entwined with political transformations when the duty to serve became linked to the rights of citizenship. The institution of universal male conscription during the French revolution spawned a dynamic of diffusion in which the national conscript army was more or less willingly introduced, or forcefully imposed, elsewhere, and often transformed in the process.¹ Where it was rejected, the national conscript army nevertheless made its presence felt in what became a conscious refusal of a model of military recruitment that was deemed politically dangerous and/or militarily ineffective. Always controversial, the models of universal male conscription and the national conscript army loomed large in the background of all nineteenth-century conflicts over military reform and struggles around the extension of political citizenship.

The modern history of conscription is in many ways a history of masculinity, and of gender more generally. Aimed at the recruitment of men exclusively, invoking – and affecting – notions of what constitutes a man, and legitimized with a rhetoric of manliness, conscription was shaped by historically specific notions of masculinity as much as it helped transform these. The integration of all men *as* men into the military made universal male conscription an important element in the emergence of gender as a category of difference that transcended other differences – *the* difference – and as a natural and immutable binary opposition. However, given the fact that despite its ideological prominence universal male conscription remained controversial and was never fully implemented, the notion of gender that it rested on and that it helped establish was never articulated in its ‘perfect’ form either. The history of conscription is therefore also a history of gender as it intersected with other categories of difference – class, religion, race, familial and occupational status – and a history of masculinity as non-unitary category that was internally divided and hierarchically organized.

This chapter traces the entwined histories of modern conscription and gender, of masculinity in particular, as they developed in the transfer, transformation, and rejection of universal male conscription in the inter- and transnational dynamic that followed its initial establishment in revolutionary France. It will approach gender as a constitutive element of military and political culture and will concentrate on the meanings of manliness in ideological justifications and propaganda for conscription; the various ways conscription was linked, or not, to citizenship and their effects on notions of manliness; and the divergent politics of exemptions from conscription and the notions of manliness implicit in these. The chapter will draw on examples from various contexts, but the focus will be on France, Saint-Domingue, Prussia, Egypt, the Ottoman Empire, and the United States. Here I will present a relatively long and

detailed analysis of the making of universal male conscription in revolutionary France. I do this in order to identify and hopefully avoid a pitfall in writing a gender history of conscription. Much of the existing literature on conscription is still so untouched by gender history, and yet so much about men only, that it sometimes seems to be enough to simply render explicit the fact that this is a history of men to turn it into a gender history. A ‘search and replace’ command through the literature which would change all references to ‘universal conscription’ into ‘universal male conscription’ would make a difference – but not enough of a difference. What is required is an analysis which demonstrates that men have been conscripted as men, that is: to bring to light that articulations of gender and masculinity were at play in the making of conscription and to historicize these articulations. To do so takes up space and time, which I will devote mostly to revolutionary France.

Although the introduction of universal male conscription during the French revolution is situated at the start of its diffusion in the nineteenth century, conscription in France cannot be said to have emerged from a narrowly defined national context.² An analysis of French factors alone is insufficient to understand the institution of universal male conscription in France and the links between state, nation and masculinity it cemented.

Proposals for transforming the French military into a force composed of citizen-soldiers were first advanced under the ancien régime and in the context of the global imperial crisis of the eighteenth century. It was in response to France’s fate in the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) that the Count de Guibert published his 1772 *Essai général de tactique* in which he combined an argument for a citizen army with a call for a new fierce kind of warfare, characterized by mobility, speed, and the will and ability to have battles be final.³ A success with the French Enlightened reading public, Guibert’s essay drew on many an Enlightenment trope, prominently among them the need to make vigorous again a society which had become soft, corrupt, effete, and effeminate as a result of commerce and luxury. The specificity of Guibert’s text resided in the fact that this generic call to ‘remasculinize’ an effeminate society was transposed into the register of military thinking and undergirded both a detailed critique of eighteenth-century limited warfare and wars of position, and an elaborate plan to overcome these limits, a plan that involved international politics, military recruitment and supply systems, strategy and tactics narrowly defined.

The language of luxury, effeminacy, and remasculinization in which Guibert framed all of this was not an exclusively French phenomenon either. France was often depicted as effeminacy’s country of origin in criticisms of corruption and over-refinement uttered in other countries, be they England, Prussia, or the Netherlands. Yet, in the end no civilized or commercial country escaped the offensive label of effeminacy as this transnational stigmatizing stereotype was, as Christopher Forth writes, ‘hurled back and forth across the Western world during the 1700s.’⁴ The past that Guibert proposed guide France as it embarked on its road to regaining vigour and transforming its military constitution was not that of the French nation either, but that of Rome – a past that was circulated endlessly in a European-wide historical imagination. Rome and its history, to be followed in its rise and to be avoided in its fall, offered the example of a city-state that had become an empire and it was as such, that is: as a history of empire, that Guibert invoked it in his calls for the restoration of manly virtue and the establishment of a national citizen army.

Guibert’s essay has often been read as prophesy of French revolutionary and of Napoleonic warfare – of their violence, of their emphasis on the mobility of troops, of the frequency of battles, of the desire to make the outcome of battles decisive, and of conscription as their mode of recruitment. Although the influence of the essay on Napoleon is undisputed, its direct effect on French revolutionary thought and practice is harder to establish.⁵ What Guibert’s essay and revolutionary political culture undoubtedly shared, however, was the language of remasculinization as an important frame in which military and political change were discussed.

Revolutionaries initially represented the revolution as a radical break with an effeminate and corrupt past from which they had liberated themselves in a sudden and spontaneous event of regeneration. Revolutionaries spoke of a rebirth of the political community which rested on the regeneration of the male citizen. Liberated, in a dramatic moment of conversion, from luxury,

corruption, immorality, and submission, the male citizen rediscovered a manly virtue which was supposed to be the force behind the revolution and the establishment of a new body politic.⁶ Initially, the revolutionaries deployed the language of remasculinization and regeneration in the political project of redefining citizenship – a project they embarked on with enthusiasm. It was less present in debates over conscription, an issue many revolutionaries approached reluctantly and which several of them rejected.⁷

Remasculinization and regeneration were important elements of the debates over the extension of citizenship rights to Jews. The extension of citizenship amounted to the admittance into a community defined by its shared manhood. This was clear from the biting sarcastic observation the Jewish pamphleteer Zalkind Hourwitz made after the National Constituent Assembly decided in December 1789 to give full rights of citizenship to protestants and actors, but adjourned the question of the extension of these rights to Jews and ‘gens de couleur’. ‘To be a citizen and even a legislator in this country of equality and liberty,’ Hourwitz wrote, ‘it suffices to be the owner of a white foreskin and to have just enough honesty to avoid being hanged.’⁸ In their response to the Assembly’s decision, the Jews of Paris, Alsace and Lorraine put forward a claim to be included into the community of ‘all men’, who, regardless of the religion they belonged to ‘have the title and the rights of citizen’. They presented their ability to ‘serve the fatherland, defend its interests, [and] contribute to its splendor’ as crucial justification for this claim.⁹

That the Jews would point to their willingness and ability to take up arms for their fatherland in order to justify their demands for full citizenship rights was no coincidence. The notion that degenerate Jews could become valorous citizens had been advanced in Abbé Grégoire’s influential 1788 essay on the regeneration of Jews in which he argued for Jewish emancipation. The well-established narrative of moral decay as a result of commerce and luxury underpinned Grégoire’s argument that emancipation would result in the moral – and physical – regeneration of the Jews. In Grégoire’s essay this narrative had been somewhat adjusted in order to explain the particularities of Jewish degeneration. Grégoire pointed to the repression the Jews had suffered at the hands of the Christians, and explained their overrepresentation in commerce and money lending as a result of their exclusion from guilds and trades. These adaptations notwithstanding, the narrative ended on a familiar note: in a lamentation about the degenerate effeminacy of the Jew and a call for his remasculinization. That was supposed to result, among other things, in the Jews regaining the manly valour they had possessed in a glorious biblical past and a germ of which was still present in them.¹⁰ In October 1789, in a motion to the Assembly arguing in favour of Jewish emancipation, Grégoire had once more underlined the Jews’ ability to serve the nation as soldiers.¹¹

The equal citizenship of almost all white men, product and proof of their regained manliness, was the ground upon which the edifice of universal male conscription could begin to be erected, when from 1792 on military necessity forced the revolutionaries to consider new forms of recruitment. In order to overcome the objection that conscription could not be reconciled with revolutionary ideals of liberty, revolutionaries took recourse to arguments centring around equality and the demands to be made on men on the basis of their equally possessed civil and political rights. Such arguments allowed radical revolutionaries to push for general conscription and to obtain a considerable degree of success in this respect with the *levée en masse* of August 1793.¹² They were helped in their attempts to transform equal rights into equal duties by the fact that the revolutionary politics of equality had also been applied to the military. From 1790 on the civil status of soldiers had gradually been improved, resulting in 1793 in a constitution that declared service in the cause of the revolution to be compatible with full citizenship. Soldiers’ civil rights were translated into the removal of abuses from daily life in the military, and under the Jacobin Republic authorities encouraged soldiers to participate in revolutionary political culture by joining political clubs, reading the political press, and taking part in the various revolutionary festivals.¹³

That the introduction of conscription followed, and was justified by, the making of a gendered and racialized notion of civil and political equality is a crucial element of the history of conscription, citizenship, and gender. Conscription was founded on a circumscribed notion of equality: it applied to men only, and did not always include all men. The fact that conscription

rested on a circumscribed notion of equality has in various ways shaped the struggles, in France and elsewhere, during the revolution and in the longer run, over the introduction of conscription, and over the extension of both conscription and citizenship. For opponents of conscription the link with equality of rights would be a prime argument against it. For those seeking to obtain an extension of rights from the nexus of conscription and equality this would always prove to be a double edged sword, enabling both arguments for inclusion and justifications of exclusion.

Both kind of arguments were used during the revolution at Saint-Domingue. In that context the taking up of arms underwrote the claims to liberty and equality of the island's male slaves. Their ability to fight was probably doubted by few, and explained the pre-revolutionary reluctance on the part of the French colonial regime to engage slaves as soldiers in its service.¹⁴ From the perspective of the colonial regime the start of the slave revolt in August 1791 proved this reluctance to have been justified. And although the path from this revolt to the abolition of slavery on the island in August 1793, and by the National Convention in February 1794, was far from linear, the importance of the revolt for the abolition of slavery cannot be doubted. It was on the foundations of equality claimed by the willingness and ability to fight that in the context of Saint-Domingue, too, military service was introduced. First by the French Republican commissioners of the island, who claimed this would include the freed slaves in the community of 'hommes nouveaux', and then by Toussaint L'Ouverture in his attempt to gain control over the post-abolition society he had helped create.¹⁵

In metropolitan France the making of conscription would soon be accompanied by a distinct curtailment of rights, and of political rights in particular. When systematic conscription was introduced with the Loi Jourdan of 1798, the moment of universal male suffrage was already past. By not providing for replacement the law in a sense remained true to the revolutionary notion of equality, but under Napoleon practices offering the wealthy the possibility to by themselves out of service were permitted.¹⁶ The equality that conscripts of Napoleon's armies were offered in compensation for the diminishment of political and social equality, was the promise of equal access to honour and glory. These traditionally aristocratic manly attributes had fallen from grace in revolutionary military culture as they were believed to encourage individual soldiers to seek distinction for themselves and thereby serve their private interests, rather than the common good. They became central to the Napoleonic program aimed at cultivating martial masculinity in French men, a program that equated a warlike nature and the desire for honour and glory with French manliness as such and presented these attributes as attainable by all.¹⁷

Several innovations in tactics and strategy were made possible by conscription and were largely the result of the greater number of troops it made available and of the ease and speed with which they could be replaced once conscription had been turned into a routine and reliable system of mass conscription under Napoleon. The increased size of the army allowed for breaking it up into permanent segments which could function independently and would nevertheless remain large enough to defend themselves, should they encounter the enemy. This divisional system required increased coordination, but made operations faster and more flexible. Perhaps most importantly, the large, yet mobile, armies enabled their commanders to liberate themselves from the limitations of ancien regime warfare which Guibert had identified and sought to overcome three decades earlier. The large numbers of troops available and the confidence that losses could easily be replaced allowed for seeking out and entering pitched battles with far less concern for life than had been the case in pre-revolutionary and pre-Napoleonic times. It also made possible a radical redefinition of the aim of battle: the complete destruction of the enemy forces by delivering a massive blow, followed by relentless pursuit.¹⁸ These transformations in revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare were linked to and partly enabled by the rhetoric of remasculinization and equal male citizenship upon which conscription rested. The exalted rhetoric of manliness which helped establish universal male conscription also helped produce a modern mode of warfare which rested on the assumption that men were dispensable.

The contradiction between a glorification of manliness and the dispensability of men was not the only one that marked conscription. The practice of inequitable conscription through replacement, commutation, and substitution, which would flourish throughout the first three quarters of France's nineteenth century history of conscription, was another.¹⁹ As were French policies of exemption, which, to divergent degrees, would continue to privilege a man's duties to

his family over his duties to the state and by doing so declared marital and familial status more important than male citizen's equal rights and obligations.²⁰ What all these practices did was undermine the notion that conscription was justified because it asked the same sacrifice from all men equally. This, of course, begs the question how conscription can have played a role in the making of gender as a category of difference that transcended other differences, and as a natural and immutable binary opposition, when it is so obvious that conscription was never about all men serving *as* men, and that it therefore could not underpin the notion that men and women were categorically different.

And yet it did. The practices of conscription may have undermined the notion of equality between men that it was built upon. The political conflicts over conscription and over citizenship, however, kept this notion of equality alive – or rather called it back to life, again and again. In these conflicts this notion of equality was revived either as the specter of a future of democracy and popular sovereignty that was to be averted, or as an alluring vision of exactly such a future. Resulting from the political and military contingencies of the revolutionary period, the link between conscription and equality between men was revitalized in every nineteenth-century conflict in which the nexus of conscription and citizenship was invoked. In a process of political sedimentation these conflicts therefore added layer after layer of credibility to the idea that men and women were categorically different and that gender was a natural and immutable binary opposition.

There is perhaps no better example of how profoundly the link between conscription and equality between men shaped modern notions of gender than the arguments nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminists developed to counter the claim that the restriction of full citizenship to men was justified by men's military service. If they countered this argument by claiming women fulfilled their obligations to nation and state in their own specific and non-violent way, they ran the risk of reaffirming women's difference from men and of justifying their exclusion from citizenship. If they thought through the consequences of conscription's foundations in male equality in a different direction, they could end up arguing, as Madeleine Pelletier did in the early years of the twentieth century, that women's claims to citizenship should be preceded by their – socially – becoming men. Becoming men's equals required, according to Pelletier, a 'virilisation' that was to be achieved by military training and service. The call on women to socially become men might seem to undermine the idea of gender as immutable difference, but in combination with the accompanying claim that unreformed, that is: non-masculinized, femininity was a disease it reinscribed this notion once again, and with full force.²¹

¹ For an overview: Donald Stoker, Frederick C. Schneid, and Harold D. Blanton, eds., *Conscription in the Napoleonic Era: A Revolution in Military Affairs?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

² A recent argument for a global history of the French revolution: Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson, eds., *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013).

³ Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte Guibert, *Essai général de tactique* (Londres: Chez les Libraires Associés, 1772). On Guibert and the 'Essai': Azar Gat, *A History of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 28-55; Beatrice Heuser, 'Guibert: Prophet of Total War?' in *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); R.R. Palmer, 'Frederick the Great, Guibert, Bülow: From Dynastic to National War', in *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

⁴ Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe, 'Introduction: French Manhood in the Modern World', in *French Masculinities. History, Culture and Politics*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 6-7.

⁵ Heuser, 'Guibert' 49-51.

⁶ Sean M. Quinlan, 'Men without Women? Ideal Masculinity and Male Sociability in the French Revolution, 1789-99', in *French Masculinities. History, Culture and Politics*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 33-37; Joan B. Landes, 'Republican citizenship and heterosocial desire: concepts of masculinity in Revolutionary France', in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2004); Dorinda Outram, 'Le langage mâle de la vertu': Women and the Discourse of the French Revolution', in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁷ Alan Forrest, 'Conscription as Ideology: Revolutionary France and the Nation in Arms', in *The Comparative Study of Conscription in the Armed Forces, special issue of Comparative Social Research 20 (2002)* ed. Lars Mjøset and Stephen Van Holde (2002), 99-105.

⁸ Quoted in Shanti Marie Singham, 'Betwixt Cattle and Men: Jew, Blacks, and Women, and the Declaration of the Rights of Men ', in *The French Idea of Freedom: The Old Regime and the Declaration of the Rights of 1789*, ed. Dale Van Kley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 116.

⁹ Quoted in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996) 95.

¹⁰ H. Grégoire, *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs* (Paris: Stock, 1988) 58-60. On Grégoire and regeneration: Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 2003) 87-95.

¹¹ H. Grégoire, *Motion en faveur des Juifs* (Paris: Belin, 1789) 34-37.

¹² Peter Paret, *Understanding War: Essays on Clausewitz and the History of Military Power* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) 63-66.

¹³ Alan Forrest, 'Citizenship and Military Service', in *The French Revolution and the Meaning of Citizenship*, ed. Renée Waldinger, Philip Dawson, and Isser Woloch (Westport CT and London: Greenwood Press, 1993) 153-158.

¹⁴ David Geggus, 'The Arming of Slaves in the Haitian Revolution', in *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, ed. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) 211.

¹⁵ Quoted in Elizabeth Colwill, 'Freedwomen's Familial Politics: Marriage, War and Rites of Registry in Post-Emancipation Saint-Domingue', in *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775-1830*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele, and Jane Rendall (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 72.

¹⁶ Alan Forrest, 'Policing, Rural Revolt, and Conscription in Napoleonic France', in *The Napoleonic Empire and the New European Political Culture*, ed. Michael Broers, Peter Hicks, and Agustín Guimerá (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 50-51.

¹⁷ Michael J. Hughes, 'Making Frenchmen into Warriors: Martial Masculinity in Napoleonic France', in *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics*, ed. Christopher E. Forth and Bertrand Taithe (Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

¹⁸ Paret, *Understanding War* 16-17; Macgregor Knox, 'Mass Politics and Nationalism as Military Revolutions: The French Revolution and After', in *The Dynamics of Military Revolution, 1300-2050*, ed. Macgregor Knox and Williamson Murray (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 66-67; David A. Bell, *The First Total War. Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007) 234.

¹⁹ Lars Mjøset and Stephen Van Holde, 'Killing for the State, Dying for the Nation: An Introductory Essay on the Life Cycle of Conscription into Europe's Armed Forces', in *The Comparative Study of Conscription in the Armed Forces, special issue of Comparative Social Research 20 (2002)*, ed. Lars Mjøset and Stephen Van Holde (2002) 43-44.

²⁰ Dorit Geva, 'Where the State Feared to Tread: Conscription and Local Patriarchalism in Modern France', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, no. 636 (2011).

²¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1996) 125-150.