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THE PARADOXICAL MASCULINITY OF FRENCH SOLDIERS:
REPRESENTING THE SOLDIER'S BODY IN
THE AGE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

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Representing the Soldier's Body in the Age of the Enlightenment*

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Abstract

In the age of Enlightenment, France did not succeed in imposing its military prestige, in contrast with the preceding century. In the second half of the eighteenth century, especially at the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the French army was in dire need of regeneration which was carried out under the impetus of the enlightened War Ministers who canvassed their officers en masse for advice. Officers reflected on what the body of the soldier should be like, how it would have to be fabricated within the institution through the implementation of military discipline. Military drill then appears as a major process with the aim of reshaping the body of the warrior. Through the analysis of the officers' memoranda, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the ideal male body that should be, according to the hierarchy, straight and proud, but at the same time silent, immobile, and obedient. The paper also focuses on how the soldier - as a man and a Frenchman - is valued differently to both the Prussian and the female.

Keywords

Soldier, military discipline, masculinity, body, French army, nation, gender, elite and the people, Enlightenment, military training

This paper seeks to shed light on the representation of the soldier as it emerges in the context of French military reform in the second half of the 18th century. The “reform” was a series of measures undertaken by the War Ministers, intended to be applied to the whole army. The peacetime after the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748), and especially after the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), appeared a favourable moment for the central administration to reorganize the army.¹ That this political aim would be achieved was far from self-evident: contrary to what one might imagine, the army of French absolutism – like other institutions – was not strongly centralized or controlled by the King and his administrators.² However, in the domain of the military, political reform was all the more urgent as international challenges were growing.

The Age of Enlightenment did not bring peace, but encompassed more than thirty years of wars fought by the army of the Old Regime, not only in Europe but also in the emerging colonies in India and in America.³ For France, victory became rare and bitter, defeat costly and decisive. The defeat at Dettingen⁴ in 1743 during the War of the Austrian Succession, in which the most prestigious French troops lost against the English and Hanovrian coalition, is well known. Indeed, the entire War was fought without any victorious conquest. Similarly well known is the defeat at Rossbach in 1757, during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) which was lost in a humiliating way.⁵ Meanwhile, a rising star – the army of Frederick II – was making itself famous for its well-disciplined behaviour and good training. Many historians working on the French army have convincingly highlighted the role of defeat as the motor of political reform:⁶ therefore, peacetime appears to have consisted of preparations for another war, another opportunity for revenge and victory.

In this context of crisis, the reorganization of the army was undertaken on the leading initiative of the War Ministers. It resulted in a set of new laws – in the form of royal ordinances – which transformed military life in multiple ways. To expedite the reform, the French War Ministers also took an interest in the opinions of the officers, as they had direct experience and a distinct vision of the everyday reality of the troops. The officers were thus invited to take an active part in the reform movement by giving their views on topics such as the handling and training of new recruits, the maintenance of discipline, punishing and rewarding soldiers, and the soldiers’ duties. Responding to the concerns of the central authority, the officers offered reflections which they intended to be enlightened. The corpus of memoranda which emerges from this interaction between the top royal administration and the officers is a precious source for the better understanding of the logic behind the reorganization of the army during the Ancien Regime.⁷ Indeed, this copious flow of writing originating from the army officers appears to have become the basis for official norms.

¹ On the reform of the French military, see Claudia Opitz-Belakhal, *Militärreformen zwischen Bürokratisierung und Adelsreaktion*, Sigmaringen, Thorbecke, 1994. See also Léon Mention, *Le comte de Saint-Germain et ses réformes*, Paris, L. Baudoin, 1884, and Thierry Sarmant, eds, *Les Ministres de la guerre (1570-1792)*, Paris, Belin, 2007.

² On this dimension of the society of the Old Regime, see Hiroyuki Ninomiya, “Les structures du gouvernement dans la monarchie absolue en France”, article written in Japanese, in A. Yoshioka et O. Naruse, eds, *Des problèmes de la formation de l’Etat moderne*, Tokyo, 1979. See also Sabina Loriga’s approach on the Piemontese army (*Soldats. Un laboratoire disciplinaire: l’armée piémontaise au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Mentha, 1991).

³ Lee Kennett, *The French Armies in the Seven Years’ War: A study in Military Organization and Administration*, Durhan, Duke University Press, 1967; Kenneth J. Bank, *Chasing Empire across the sea*, Montreal & Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002.

⁴ Jean Chagniot, “Une panique: les Gardes françaises à Dettingen (27 juin 1743)”, in *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XXIV, 1977, p. 78-95.

⁵ See André Corvisier, “Rossbach” in *Dictionnaire d’art et d’histoire militaire*, André Corvisier, ed, Paris, PUF, 1988.

⁶ Rafe Blaufarb, *The French Army (1750-1820): Careers, talent, merit*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2002, p. 16.

⁷ A number of these memoranda, often without signature or date, are kept at the Service Historique de la Défense (Vincennes, France).

It was within this military reform corpus that Michel Foucault identified the emergence of a new concept of the soldier.⁸ Foucault analyzed the ordinance of 20th March 1764 concerning training, and noted that “the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the required machine can be constructed.”⁹ Indeed, the officers that reflect on the issue of training soldiers as early as the 1750s expressed the necessity of shaping the body of each man in the troops. When the backwardness of France in this area became obvious, in particular compared with Prussia, the officers concentrated their observations on the soldiers’ bodies, which were to ensure the future victories of the French army.

This new concept of the soldier is also of interest because of the emergence of a new concept of masculinity. In fact, the army, both in times of war and peace, has been increasingly seen as a site where male experience and identities were constructed. Historians of the 19th century developed a particular interest in military duty as a major event in the history of masculinity.¹⁰ In this vein, a recent essay on “masculinity, politics and war” has shed light on the roles of the military conflicts between European nations at the end of 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries,¹¹ prior to the spread of conscription, developing a notion of masculinity tightly associated with the notion of fatherland. As demonstrated in various works, to define what a soldier is – as a member of the army, or of the fatherland – leads to a definition of what a man is. While subscribing to this hypothesis, this article has the aim of analyzing how French officers of the late 18th century conceived of the soldier’s body, as revealed by their memoranda.

In search of the male body

In their memoranda, the officers were unanimously convinced of the possibility of forging new bodies for soldiers. Nevertheless, not all bodies had the same value. Interestingly, the officers highlighted the importance of the choice of men at the moment of recruitment. As the soldiers were to be recruited from a precarious male population, the officers sought to establish a classification within this category. In doing so, they appear to have been aware of the need to change the common image of the army as a store of an indifferently recruited marginal population; with better selection the army would gain in prestige.

In searching for the potential ideal soldiers’ body, the officers took into account the large male population of the Kingdom. In 1747, Montaut, a captain-aide major, considered that the army should “accept only those who are robust and courageous.”¹² Both physical and mental strength should be required of candidates for soldiering. In order to identify the ideal men, he gave two criteria. The first was geographical origin: “The strongest men are those who were brought up in the mountains, such as the inhabitants of the Alps, the Pyrenees and the Auvergne. Next, come those who live in the poor and sterile countryside, far from the big cities.”¹³ The other criterion was profession. In this case, Montaut’s preference was for “those who are obliged by their condition to a hard and painful life.” From the military point of view, the poverty of the masses was not an obstacle, but an integral element of recruitment.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, London, Allen Lane, 1977.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.135.

¹⁰ Ute Frevert, “Service militaire et histoire du genre en Allemagne au XIXe siècle”, in A.M. Sohn, et Fr. Thélamon, eds, *L’Histoire sans les femmes est-elle possible ?*, Actes du Colloque de Rouen, 27-29 novembre 1997, Paris, Perrin, 1998, pp. 251-265 ; Id., *A Nation in barracks : modern Germany, military conscription and civil society*, Oxford, Berg, 2000. See also, Odile Roynette, “Bons pour le service” . *L’expérience de la caserne en France à la fin du XIXe siècle*, Paris, Belin, 2000.

¹¹ Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh, *Masculinities in politics and war : gendering modern history*, Manchester and New York, Manchester U.P.

¹² SHD, 1M 1703 : Montaut, *Réflexions sur la manière de former de bons soldats d’infanterie*, 1747, p.1.

¹³ SHD, 1M 1703 : Montaut, *op. cit.*, p. 2: “Les hommes les plus robustes sont ceux qui sont élevés dans les montagnes, comme les habitants des Alpes, des Pyrénées et de l’Auvergne. Viennent ensuite ceux qui sont dans les campagnes misérables, stériles et éloignées des grandes villes.”

Favouring the categories of people living in hard physical conditions led to criticism of others. Speaking of soldiers recruited in cities, Montaut argued how “the softness (molesse) in which the majority of young people live makes them libertine and seditious.”¹⁴ He also despised “those occupied in soft and effeminate work, whose bodies do not undergo any exercise.” For Montaut, who belonged to the military elite, the occupations of the people might be like a sort of physical training. His judgement seems to have been out of step with the reality of working class people – men as well as women – whose bodies were constantly called upon as their main and almost only means of survival.¹⁵ Here we can perceive an echo of the opinion of the ancient nobility claiming the virtue of frugality,¹⁶ without really knowing the condition of the people belonging to the popular classes. Let us also remember that the – imagined – risk of having a weakened and effeminate body was of much more concern to the privileged, who were increasingly divided by the inequality of their wealth. The word “effeminate” also refers more to the worries of the elite¹⁷ than those of the popular classes. Historians of popular criminality have rarely come upon this word in trials for slander or libel.¹⁸ It is a word which really belongs to the vocabulary of the elite, as can be seen in harsh criticisms addressing the issues of luxury and salons.¹⁹ Montaut, however, applied it to the masses of under-privileged people. Just as the word ‘libertine’ was usually used to denounce the quirks of the high nobility,²⁰ its use to designate common people transfers new stigmata to them.

Rural life and the practice of a hard profession as a remedy against laziness appeared to be reassuring elements on which to judge the quality of a man from which to make a soldier. It is not surprising then that the choice fell upon the peasant as the ideal man for the military elite. In 1764, Monteynard insisted on the necessity of excluding vagrants and beggars from potential recruits, and maintained that what was needed instead was the recruitment of “peasants: a solid kind of men, proper for war”²¹. Souliard in the 1770s stated that “the relationship that rustic work has to military work makes the class of peasant farmer the most suitable for the army.”²² Peasants were not only capable “of resisting all the tiredness that soldiers brought up in the idleness of the city cannot bear,” but were also imbued with “a sentiment which elevates the soul and provides a source of courage.”²³ Souliard found yet more legitimacy in the practice of agriculture: “in the countryside the most robust men can be found, who feed the state in peacetime and are the most apt to protect it in wartime.”²⁴

For the military, although the ideal population was to be found in the countryside, they depict it as a closed world, even though mobility and immigration were the social reality. In contemporary literature, the figure of the soldier-ploughman appeared as a symbol of the virtue of the poor nobility who were discovering their roots in the country.²⁵ When the officers distinguished the peasant from the rest of the population, they also promoted their own ideology of *noblesse*

¹⁴ SHD, 1M 1703 : Montaut, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁵ Arlette Farge, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Galliani Renato, *Rousseau, Le luxe et l'idéologie nobiliaire*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1989, p. 261.

¹⁷ Christopher E. Forth and Bernard Taithe, eds, *French Masculinities : History, culture and politics*, New York, Editions Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p 7.

¹⁸ Cf. David Garrioch, “Verbal insults in eighteenth-century Paris” in P. Burke and R. Porter, eds, *The Social History of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge U. P., 1988, p. 104-118.

¹⁹ Carolyne Lougee, *Le Paradis des Femmes. Women, salons, and social stratification in seventeenth-century France*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton U.P., 1976.

²⁰ Jean-Christophe Abramovici, “libertinage”, in, *Dictionnaire européen des Lumières*, Michel Delon, ed, Paris, PUF, 1997, p. 648-651.

²¹ SHAT, 1M1709: Monteynard, *Observation sur l'état actuel de l'Infanterie*, 1764, p. 5.

²² SHD, 1M 1712: Souliart, sans titre, p. 2.

²³ SHD, 1M 1712: Souliart, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²⁴ SHAT, 1M 1712: Souliart, *op. cit.*, p. 2: “C'est dans les campagnes qu'on trouve ces hommes robustes qui nourrissent l'état pendant la paix et qui sont les plus propres à le défendre pendant la guerre”.

²⁵ Gérard de Puymège, *Chauvin, le soldat-laboureur*, Paris, Gallimard, 1993, pp. 100-125.

*d'épée*²⁶. While they highlighted the virtue of “poverty”, they were also willing to admire the condition of the large rural population.

Body and identity as a pedagogical issue

In their search for the ideal body, the officers found suitable material among the peasants. However, like all new recruits, they needed to go through a process of transformation. Despite being valuable for its potential, and admirable as a figure with which to identify, the real body of the recruit was not the object of admiration. On the contrary, each man was required to discard this supposed asset. Cambis, a colonel, asserted in 1753 that “a great number of our recruits are a sort of peasant who is accustomed to work related to the ground, and has contracted attitudes totally opposed to those which soldiers must have when they are at arms. They are almost all stooped and crooked, not by bad construction, but by vicious habit which it is possible to correct.”²⁷ With a certain contempt, the peasant’s posture is described as deformed and radically different from the soldier’s. However, being the product of habits, the body is not reduced to a morphological given. With the pedagogical optimism of the Enlightenment,²⁸ this officer believed in the possibility of completely transforming the human body.

One of the most important differences between the soldier’s body and the peasant’s is the mode of description. Whereas the “original” body does not require much description, the soldier’s body is described in great detail. Here are some typical indications of how the soldier should be: “the tips of the feet turned outside, the heel joint on the same line, the hock tight without affectation, the body straight above the hips, the chest open, the shoulders flat, the abdomen entered without pushing the waist, the arms falling naturally down the sides of the body, the head risen a little bit and turned to the right without leaning backward too much, the eyes wide open and the gaze assured.”²⁹ Clearly, the difference from the peasant’s body concerned shape. Compared to the imagined peasant’s body, the soldier’s body must be deployed towards the exterior. While the “former” body was introverted and bent, the ideal body of the soldier was open, balanced, and straight. The high position of the head and the strong “gaze” suggest its moral dimension.

These indications, which can be found in the writings of other officers and in ordinances, refer to a specific contemporary concept of the male body. According to George L. Mosse, balance, strength and proportion were the elements constituting the ideal male, the model deriving from ancient art discovered and promoted in the century of the Enlightenment by theoreticians such as Winckelmann.³⁰ The body of the soldier was adorned with a series of ideal male features. Thus, military officers come across as craftsmen of this modern masculinity to be applied to the popular mass, who had not a priori cultivated a taste for the formal beauty of the masculine body.

What the officers longed for from the soldier was a kind of ideal metamorphosis: “his position must be proud, free, and at ease” and the means of building this body, both efficient and aesthetic, was military drill: “exercise is one of the most essential fields of military education, as it is through it that the soldier learns the art of attacking and defending. It moreover gives swiftness and suppleness to

²⁶ Renato Galliani, *Rousseau, Le luxe et l'idéologie nobiliaire*, Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1989.

²⁷ SHD, 1M 1704: Cambis, *op. cit.*, 1753, p. 1: “le plus grand nombre de nos Recrues vient de l'espèce des Païsans qui accoutumés aux travaux de la Terre ont contractés des attitudes totalement opposées à celle qu'un soldat doit avoir sous les armes. Ils sont presque tous voutés et cagneux, non par une mauvaise construction, mais par une habitude vicieuse dont il est très possible de les corriger”

²⁸ Marcel Grandière, *L'idéal pédagogique en France au dix-huitième siècle*, Voltaire Foundation, Oxford, 1998.

²⁹ SHD, 1M 1710 : *De l'exercice. Observations et règles générales*, p. 1: “La pointe des pieds tournée en dehors, les talons joints sur la même ligne, jarrets tendus sans affutation, le corps bien droit sur les hanches, la poitrine ouverte, les épaules plates, le ventre rentré sans pousser les reins, les bras tombant naturellement collés le long du corps, la tête élevée un peu tournée à droite sans être trop en arrière, les yeux bien ouverts et le regard assuré”.

³⁰ Gorge L. Mosse, *L'image de l'homme. L'invention de la virilité moderne*, Paris, Editions d'Abbeville, 1997, Paris, p. 36-46.

the body, deportment and grace to the person.”³¹ This officer considered that the aim of military drill was not limited to the purely tactical, but through it common people could access a form of beauty.

This attention to the body however was not exclusive to the military. The historian Georges Vigarello shows how pedagogues sought to transform and “straighten” the body throughout the 18th century.³² As he argues, there was an obvious resonance between “the space of military training and that of physical education.” However, in the army taming each body had a strategic urgency. The roughness of the body had to be reduced in order to be able to form a perfectly straight line of bodies.³³ The difference from the education of children consisted in the need to unify the behaviour of a whole population which had to work in unity, as one and the same member. In order to shape the soldier’s body, the military elite recommended various methods. One way of “straightening” it consisted of standing the soldier against a wall.³⁴ Another, showing more “confidence” in the capacity of the body, consisted of making the soldier maintain an ideal position for a period of time.³⁵ With or without support, the body should be immobilized in the desired position. By imitation, a radical transformation of identity had to take place.

Discovering soldiers’ intelligence

As a unit of the army, the human body was at the centre of the officers’ reflections. In their writing, the soldier’s body is represented mostly as a material plastic enough to be modulated under pressure, that is by using force. However, some officers put forward another training logic, based on language. According to Georges Vigarello, explanation was part of a new set of pedagogical tools that emerged in the 18th century.³⁶ In highlighting its usefulness in the military context, these officers seem to have been at the cutting edge of pedagogical innovation.

From this perspective, the soldier was not reduced to a mere body but was considered a subject of learning. Ségur, a captain aide-major in the Abbeville recruitment troop, pointed out that previously soldiers had been trained automatically, and criticized the severity with which officers tended to punish and “scold” them. Arguing against this general tendency, Ségur underlined the necessity of training “soldiers with fairness and firmness.” According to him, officers in charge of training should “know the spirit and the degree of intelligence of each soldier.”³⁷ This innovative minority point of view indicates that soldiers were generally trained through force and abuse.

In a similarly positive way, Fauville, a captain aide-major in the Royal-Cravate troop underlined the need to get the most from the soldiers’ intelligence. According to him, one could not be too concerned about the destiny of the soldiers, so “useful to the interests of the State.” From his own experience, this officer wrote the following: “I saw courageous officers listening to them with pleasure, and taking advantage of their advice; I can cite many features of their intelligence and of their depth of thinking.”³⁸ Concerning training methods, he expressed his position in the following way: “All thinking beings are naturally jealous of doing what they are doing well. From this argument I conclude that peasants enlisted in the army, taken from the extremity of the most savage province at the top of the highest mountains, at the end of four months of service under the flag will

³¹ SHD, 1M 1705 : Maccaferri, *op. cit.*, p. 2: “L’exercice est une des parties de l’éducation militaire la plus essentielle puisque c’est par luy que le soldat apprend l’art d’attaquer et de se défendre, il donne de plus de l’agileté et de la souplesse au corps, du maintien et de la grâce à la personne.”

³² Georges Vigarello, *Le corps redressé*, Paris, Jean-Pierre Delarge, 1978, pp. 79-124.

³³ Cambis asserts: “Il faut qu’ils aient tous le corps placé dans une attitude uniforme et proportionnée, sans quoi celui qui se tiendra vouté, dépassera nécessairement par la partie supérieure du corps celui qui sera droit et aplomb”(*op. cit.*, p. 3).

³⁴ SHD, 1M 1704: Cambis, *op. cit.* p. 4.

³⁵ SHD, 1M 1705: Maccaferri, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

³⁶ Georges Vigarello, *cit.*, p. 111.

³⁷ SHD, 1M 1711: de Ségur, *Catéchisme du soldat*, 1766, p. 2.

³⁸ SHD, 1M 1711: de Fauville, *Réflexions militaires*, p. 19.

be brought out of themselves and will gain this thinking capacity.”³⁹ Here, the soldiers are seen as endowed with the status of “thinking beings.”

In the 1770s, to speak of the intelligence of soldiers was no longer exceptional. Being immersed in a “culture of merit”⁴⁰ themselves, the military elite did not hesitate to evaluate their subordinates. Some officers believed that their men had real potential, and that they had the mission to dig for this intelligence and get them to express it. Bellonusus, in listing the duties of the officers, highlighted the importance of “knowing the soldiers in depth” and their talents and intelligence. In particular, “The captain will take great care to make the soldiers more intelligent and instructed: to this end he should speak with them and try to inspire them with trust and application to their duties; he should lead these young people by the hand to learn to read and write, and make those who display the intelligence and the ability learn the French language.”⁴¹ Here, the officers were clearly taking the role of instructors. Literally speaking, the army seems to be a school where people from the popular classes were encouraged to learn to master writing. French, then, was to be imposed as the common language of the troops, who were to distinguish themselves from the world where communication was not only oral but also in patois. Just as the revolutionaries were interested in the problem of the unification of languages,⁴² the military elite outlined the importance of instituting French as the language of the soldiers.

Without doubt, the army was the institution which invented a new approach to the masses. The officers’ views of their underlings were innovative in their “respect” for the soldiers as “capable subjects.” By joining the army, ordinary men got the possibility of being recognized as beings with an intellectual capacity.

The stakes of denegation

Being gifted with intelligence, the body of the soldier could appear as the result of a pedagogical process. Although the conclusion of this process was supposed to be beneficial, the process itself involved ideas of a darker origin. To assume that the posture of the peasant is opposed to that of the soldier leads to the conclusion that the latter’s body should be rejected. As early as 1764, an anonymous author wrote that “the officer will let the soldier know that he is a soldier, that he can become an officer if he has the behaviour, if he has ambition, that a soldier is above the common people, and that he must display a figure and a tone above them, that he must present himself everywhere as a well-educated man, and give everybody a positive idea of himself, by walking well and straight, without tottering to the left or to the right like a peasant, and by not being familiar with the people below him.”⁴³ This extract refers to a concept of meritocracy that many historians have identified and highlighted in the genesis of the army in the second half of the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, “J’ai vu des braves officiers écouter avec plaisir et profiter avec succès de leurs conseil Tout être réfléchi est dans son état jaloux de bien faire ce qu’il fait, de là je conclus que le paysans, engagé au service, pris même à l’extrémité de la Province la plus sauvage au faite des montagnes les plus hautes, au bout de quatre mois de service, sous les drapeaux, sera aussy dégoûrdi, et aura autant de conceptions”.

⁴⁰ Jay M. Smith, *The Culture of Merit. Nobility, Royal Service, and the Making of Absolute Monarchy in France, 1600-1789*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press, 1996

⁴¹ SHAT 1M 1712: *Instructions concernant les Devoirs des Officiers, et bas-officiers*, 1772, p.16: “Le capitaine mettera tous les soins, à rendre les soldats intelligents & instruits; pour cet effet, il doit souvent s’entreteir avec eux, & chercher à leur inspirer de la confiance, & du zèle pour leur devoirs, il doit tenir la main à ce que les jeunes gens apprennent à lire & à écrire, & fera aussy apprendre le français à ceux qui montrent de l’intelligence & de la capacité (...)”

⁴² Cf. M. de Certeau, D. Julia and J. Revel, eds, *Une politique de la langue. La révolution française et les patois: l’enquête de Grégoire*, Paris, Gallimard, 1975.

⁴³ SHAT, 1M 1786 : *Règlement concernant les devoirs les plus essentiels de MM les Lieutenants et sous lieutenants, sergents caporaux de l’Infanterie conformément à la dernière ordonnance*, 1764, p. 4: “L’officier fera connaître à son soldat qu’il est soldat, qu’il peut devenir officier s’il a de la conduite, s’il a de l’ambition, qu’un soldat est au-dessus du peuple et doit se donner un air et un ton au dessus de luy, qu’il doit se présenter partout comme un homme bien élevé et donner à chacun une bonne idée de luy marchant bien, droit, sans chanceler à droite ou à gauche comme un Paysans et en ne se familiarisant avec personne au-dessous de luy”.

eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Indeed, officers who originated from the poor provincial nobility supported this idea against officers who had been easily promoted on account of their connections. It is interesting to note that they express the idea with regard to the soldiers. As Christina Picchichero has recently underlined, the military reformers were inspired by a certain idea of egalitarianism.⁴⁵ We cannot insist too much on this innovative dimension of the army permitting all men to have the prospect of social promotion. However, this transformation process, by contrast, assumes a negative idea of the origins from which the soldier had to be built. Just as the social elites often developed a feeling of despising the common people, so the troops were also required to adhere to this attitude. The valiant identity of the soldier was to be built by despising his former self.

The transformation from peasant to soldier was judged to be uplifting because, compared to the soldier, the peasant could not be admired. This contrast comes across as one of the fundamental themes of reflections on military drill. Thus, speaking of the fresh recruit before training, the anonymous author of a memorandum on training methods called him “that brute and ignorant peasant coming from his village.” However, in the same piece of writing, he recommended paying attention to the soldier’s intelligence, and underlined the need to “reason with him, to explain clearly the necessity of what one is teaching, to speak to him, to question him in order to know if he has heard and understood what has been explained.” Once integrated into the training process, recruited men were described as soldiers, all the more respectable since they were considered “French”: “This is a method with many advantages, especially with regard to French soldiers, who have more spirit, more intelligence, more conception, dare I say more flexibility, more obedience, more will and more ambition than all the Nations of the world (...).”⁴⁶ For the officers, the army meant the nation. Compared to those of other nations, the French soldier was to be admired for his intelligence. Unlike the social elite, who despised the people in general, the military officers seemed to credit the soldier with a certain dignity: French and intelligent.

By the end of his military transformation, a man was both soldier and French. At the time of Ancien Regime, the idea of Nation was far from understood by the inhabitants of the kingdom in general. As a recent work by David Bell shows, writings circulating amongst educated people demonstrate that this category of identity emerged in the second half of the 18th century.⁴⁷ Once again, the officers come across as a social group appropriating a new concept and transmitting it to the masses. Although in reality, having a sizeable proportion of soldiers from other countries, the Ancien Regime army was not a national army,⁴⁸ through their writings the officers brought this notion into existence.

Making a silent and immobile body

In this context of military reform, the army had become a demanding institution in terms of the construction of the body. Training was one of the most important means of creating the soldier’s “straight and proud” body. Officers took it as a given that it should be an occasion for men from the working class to distinguish themselves from their origins. However, the transformation required was not limited to the acquisition of an “appearance” worthy of a soldier, but also concerned the meaning and the significance of the voice. Regarding this point, the military reformers followed religious reformers who, in the framework of monastic life, had been developing the injunction of silence

⁴⁴ Rafe Blaufarb, *op. cit* ; Jay M. Smith, *op. cit*.

⁴⁵ Christy Pichichero, “Le soldat Sensible: Military Psychology and Social Egalitarianism in the Enlightenment French Army”, *French Historical Studies*, vol. 31, 2008, pp. 554-580.

⁴⁶ SHD, 1M 1712: *Sentiment d’un homme de guerre sur la méthode que l’on peut employer pour dresser l’Infanterie aux Exercices*, 1771, p. 39: “C’est une méthode dont on retirera les plus grands avantages, surtout vis-à-vis du soldat français qui a plus d’esprit, plus d’intelligence, plus de conception et j’ose même dire plus de souplesse, d’obéissance, de volonté et d’ambition que toutes les autres Nations du monde.”

⁴⁷ David Bell, *The cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism (1680-1800)*, Cambridge and Massachusetts, Harvard U. P., 2001.

⁴⁸ André Corvisier, *L’armée française de la fin du XVIIe siècle au ministère de Choiseul. Le soldat*, Paris, PUF, 1764, 2 vol., t. I, p. 155.

since the Middle Ages.⁴⁹ Indeed, silence is a point of articulation between authority and the subjectivity of each individual.

It appears, however, that this issue of the soldier's voice gave rise to much less commentary than that of the body. Nevertheless, some officers explicitly formulated an institutional logic in which control was exercised over the individual's capacity to speak. According to the *instructions for the Touraine regiment*, when the officers stood the soldiers without arms in the first step of training, "they must immediately require attention, silence, and immobility."⁵⁰ The same recommendation can be found concerning their bearing when armed: "It is simple and just that all the soldiers remain immobile and that they keep great silence, that they listen carefully to orders."⁵¹

Firstly, silence was an indispensable element in fighting. The purpose of the exercise was to prepare soldiers to fight, to get them into the right condition for this critical moment. This was all the more important within the framework of a military revolution based around the concepts of shallow and deep orders.⁵² Indeed, the swift circulation of orders could only be obtained through the troops remaining silent.

In a preparatory phase, however, more attention was paid to the static and frozen posture of the soldier. The anonymous author of a memorandum entitled *Discipline* argued that "the soldier is a linchpin of our profession, although we consider him an automaton because we make him immobile during training, which does not remove all feelings."⁵³ Here again, in seeking to distance himself from the general opinion, the officer unveils what was current practice in the army: the soldier's body should not only be straightened but also immobilized. More cautious than others, this officer rectified the common vision which took it for granted that an immobile position implied an absence of feelings. His intention, however, was not to respect the remaining feelings, but to work in order to achieve the goal of discipline, to "weaken and extinguish all passion even in the most critical moments."

Ideally, immobility was *ataraxia*, a complete lack of sentiment: immobility should lead the soldier to kill the affect inside himself. In silence, he should cut himself off from others. The obligation of silence prevented him from expressing and communicating his interior movement. Thus, Souliard stated that "what is particular to hard discipline is that it stifles the voice of passion; the soldier submitted to discipline is deprived of sentiment and capable of nothing more than mechanical organisation."⁵⁴ In spite of the need for each soldier to have an appropriate "gaze," this officer sought to empty him of passion; he was expected to merely execute orders automatically.

Silence, a key element of military discipline, thus became an increasingly valued attribute of the "automaton." For the author of the previously quoted memorandum *Discipline*, it was necessary to restore this supposedly ancient ethic: "discipline produces attention; attention, silence; silence, order; order, good execution; and all of these together lead to victory. Among the many things that we have taken from the civilized and disciplined ancients, we have forgotten the most essential: the silence of the Greeks, which Homer, eulogist of the greatest military deeds, was so right to admire, adding that it was not known whether Greek soldiers even had the use of their voices. Silence alone increases strength."⁵⁵ In his search for the ideal soldier, this officer found a model in the ancients. He

⁴⁹ Scott G. Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition*, Cambridge U. P., 2007.

⁵⁰ SHD, 1M 1710: *Instruction pour le Régiment de Touraine*, Chapter 4, "Du placé sans armes", p. 42.

⁵¹ SHD, 1M 1711: de Fauville, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵² Léon Mention, *L'armée de l'Ancien Régime*, Paris, L.-Henry May, s. d., p. 213-233.

⁵³ SHD, 1M 1786 : *Discipline*, p. 45: "Le soldat est la cheville ouvrière dans notre métier quoiqu'on le regarde comme un automate parce qu'on le rend immobile à l'exercice, cela ne lui ôte pas tout sentiment."

⁵⁴ SHD, 1M 1712: Souliard, *op. cit.*, p. 10: "Le propre d'une discipline dure est d'étouffer la voix des passions, le soldat qui s'y trouve soumis dépouillé de sentiments n'est plus susceptible que d'une organisation purement mécanique."

⁵⁵ SHD, 1M 1786: *Discipline*, p. 39: "La discipline produit l'attention, l'attention, le silence, le silence l'ordre, l'ordre, la bonne exécution, et cet ensemble (la discipline), la Victoire. Entre tant de choses que nous avons pris des anciens policés et disciplinés, nous avons oublié le plus essentiel, le silence des grecs qu'Homère, ce chantre des plus beaux faits

was obviously not interested in the silence of medieval monks, and, as a “Modern” person, he was looking for the fantasized inheritance of Greece.⁵⁶ Despite being generally reputed for their eloquence, the ancient Greeks are here held up as a model of silence. Regardless of whether or not the ancients had voices, this advocate of discipline was able to ignore their rhetorical legacy. The voice, the source of speech, was obsolete for the soldiers. In praising silence, the author marginalises speech, condemning even the war cry as barbarian and shamefully undisciplined: “‘hail the King’ should be the only cry permitted.”⁵⁷

Neither Prussian nor Woman

The ideal soldier’s body did not exist a priori: the officers sought to define what it should be and then to reflect on how to actually create it. They assumed the power to be able to speak of the soldiers in their absence, like men commenting on the behaviour of women. Historians who have worked on women’s history have accurately drawn attention to the fact that men’s talk about women is a kind of power over women.⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the identity of the soldier – a typical masculine figure – is constructed through and within the discourse of the officers. It can also be noted that there is a certain similarity in this balance of power. Like men speaking of women’s bodies, the officers speculate on the soldier’s ideal body. And sometimes, an expression of admiration, mixed with some kind of desire, can be identified. The *instruction for the Regiment of Touraine* stipulates that recruits should be of a “pleasant outlook.”⁵⁹ This aesthetic consideration expressed regarding the process of manufacturing the soldier’s body suggests a homo-social dimension to the institutional space of the army:⁶⁰ just as women’s bodies are a topic of discussion between men, so soldier’s bodies were between officers.

It is interesting to note that like the relationship between genders, the relationship between officers and soldiers is asymmetrical. Officers should actively create and impose the norms: soldiers should passively receive them, that is to say, obey. In the second half of the century, this injunction of obedience is repeated in texts ordering the daily life of the soldiers. Among other texts of this type, the *instruction for the Regiment of Touraine* aims to set the targets of military duty at regiment level. According to this treaty, hand-written by an officer, all the attention of the officers should focus on the soldiers, controlling whom was an essential common duty. As for the duties of the troops, according to this author “the first of their duties consists in blind obedience to their superiors: this is the first principle that must be set in their head in peacetime as well as in wartime.”⁶¹

As a military norm, the soldier was to obey, under the threat of punishment. In the second half of the eighteenth century, although the social hierarchy was still in flux, the military hierarchy was something that could not be much disputed. If it happened that an individual from the popular class fed his “taste to challenge” the social hierarchy by insulting an individual much above him in the hierarchy, in the army this type of behaviour could lead to a court martial and could cost him his life.⁶²

In the configuration of the military, the officers appear to have collectively possessed a dominant power over the soldiers, the position of the latter becoming close to that of women, the

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militaires admiroit avec tant de raison en ajoutant qu’on ignoroit s’ils avoient l’usage de la Voix. Le silence seul fait plusieurs degrés de forces.”⁵⁵

⁵⁶ François Hartog, *Anciens, Modernes, Sauvages*, Calade Editions, Paris, pp. 99-147.

⁵⁸ Arlette Farge and Natalie Zemon Davis, eds, *Histoire des femmes en Occident, t. 3 : XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Plon, Paris, 1991.

⁵⁹ SHD, 1M 1710: *Instruction pour le Régiment de Touraine*, Chapter 2, “Des recrues”, p. 33.

⁶⁰ On the notion of homosociality, see *Between Men: English literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

⁶¹ SHD, 1M 1710: *Instruction pour le Régiment de Touraine*, Chapter 2, “Des recrues”, p. 33: “Le premier devoir du soldat consiste en l’obéissance aveugle à ses supérieurs c’est le premier principe qui doit se mettre dans la tête en paix et en guerre.”

⁶² This is demonstrated by a number of trials for insults confronting individuals from different social levels.

obedience of whom is an essential theme of writings of male elites concerning confession manuals, popular literacy such as “bibliothèque bleue” and philosophy. Even worse, men in the army who neglected this duty of subservience were subject to the worst legitimate violence. In all these respects, the soldiers were dominated males. In Michel Foucault’s terminology, the body of the soldier was a “docile body” in many ways.

However, in a major contrast with the case of women, these subjugated males were subject to another injunction – this time symbolic – which would seem to somewhat contradict the imperative to obey. Indeed, it is interesting to note that these officers, who were unanimous when it came to the need to make soldiers obey, were equally unanimous in their praise of the image of the French soldier animated by supposedly typical French qualities such as pride, a taste for freedom, and a sense of honour. Moreover, these characteristics were considered to be the opposite of those of the Prussian soldier, who, as a Prussian, was distinguished by his servile nature, ready to obey at all costs.

Throughout the 18th century, Prussia had become a model of military performance.⁶³ Nevertheless, as a model of training and discipline, its army did not instill unanimous enthusiasm among the officers. Some of them admired Frederick but had a low opinion of his soldiers, while others, without mentioning the king, condemned the soldiers and the people together as “slaves.” Although they might seem obedient soldiers, according to some they were reputed to be so only under the influence of “strong alcohol” or of the fear of punishment. According to an anonymous memorandum written in 1776, “the mere idea of duty would not have enough effect on people led by mean fear and insensible to glory; no, never will this beautiful word warm the soul of a German as it can that of a Frenchman.”⁶⁴

After losing, the defeated officers started a battle of words with the Prussians. To account for the superiority of their enemies, many officers referred to them as slaves motivated by corporal punishments. Just as the image of the French soldier was one of sensitivity to honour, that of the brutally disciplined Prussian became an undisputed stereotype.

With disciplining soldiers becoming an everyday issue of military life in the French Army, the officers took lengthy recourse to this concept of otherness. For Souliard, the French army should not follow the Prussian army as an example of discipline because “this discipline is made for a bunch of slaves, fugitives and brigands.” Surprisingly, after this passage the same author passes on to a general discussion of discipline, whose goal is, as mentioned above, to “stifle the voice of passion.” Souliard continues: “We need to accustom the soldier to the most prompt obedience, he must always be at orders, the least word or the least sign telling him the will of his superiors must be followed with the maximum activity in execution; his subordination must be extreme.”⁶⁵ This was the most important injunction to the soldiers of the French Army, who were reduced to obedience to the officers. Nevertheless, this view of male subordination should be counterbalanced by the plethora of conflicting discourse on the honour of the French soldier, and the servility of his Prussian counterpart.

By manipulating the categories “Prussian” and “Prussian soldier,” the officers, the creators of the straightened soldier’s body, made it possible to denigrate their desire to dominate it. They did this by referring to the entity of ‘nation’ which was of little significance to the individuals composing the army. The army of the Ancient Regime was not a national army, but contained an important proportion of soldiers from other countries. Most probably, the majority of the common people were unfamiliar with the representation of differences based on belonging to a nation. Thus, the officers of the French army appear as the craftsmen of national identity, trying to shape and give a sense to the notion, well in advance of the French revolution.

⁶³ Jean Chagniot, *Guerre et société à l’époque moderne*, Paris, PUF, 2001, p. 193.

⁶⁴ SHD, 1M 1786: “l’idée simple du devoir n’affecteroit point assez des hommes conduits par la vile crainte, et insensible à la gloire: non jamais ce beau mot n’échauffera l’âme d’un allemand comme celle d’un français.”

⁶⁵ SHD, 1M 1712: Souliard, *op. cit.*, p. 10: “Il faut habituer le soldat à l’obéissance la plus prompte, il doit être toujours au commandement, la moindre parole ou le moindre signe qui lui annonce la volonté de ses supérieurs doit être suivie de la plus grande activité dans l’exécution. Sa subordination doit être extreme.”

If the Prussians were the incarnation of too much discipline, women embodied lack of discipline. This is another derogatory figure appearing in the writings of officers reflecting on discipline in their attempt to define what a soldier should be. As we have shown⁶⁶, while women were seen as corrupting disciplined men, undisciplined men were considered “effeminate,” often without any reflection on causality. The army was thus an institution which created the legitimization of male domination. Men, however, were also directly affected by the violence of stigmatization. One memorandum proposed the efficacy of using “light punishment” on soldiers rather than prison: “slack men under arms should be trained morning and evening; talkers should wear a gag, the dirty should go to inspection every day or should carry the tools of a peasant or of a dustman, the coward should have to cover himself with a women's skirt.”⁶⁷ This proposition indicates some of the implications of transforming the real body of the soldier into an invented ideal body. The stigmatisation of speech, and the violent devaluation of peasants and women were considered part of the processes of becoming a soldier. While recruits were supposed to imbibe military values and practices, they were also supposed to imbibe contempt for peasants and women. As docility was considered a female quality,⁶⁸ the denigration of women also allowed the blurring of the fact that the soldier was a “docile body.”

Conclusion

In the second half of the century, the French officers were engaged in intensive reflection on their soldiers. The representation of the body resulting from their discussion appears highly valuable. By this means, the military elite indicated the possibility of men taking on a new, supposedly worthy identity. However, in spite of its “proud” appearance, the soldier's body was a product of the normative writings of the military elite. Obligations such as those of silence or immobility show how violently the expression of all sentiments should be controlled. Indeed, the soldier's body was to be a submissive and “docile” body. However, although different from masculine discourses on the “docility” of women, the docility of the soldier became the object of denigration. Speaking of the soldier's body thus led to the invocation of the stereotypes of “women,” or “Prussian.” These otherness figures allowed the soldier's identity to be stabilized, and allowed the military elite to create it both rapidly and violently.

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⁶⁶ Naoko Seriu, “Du féminin dans les discours militaires au XVIIIe siècle ”, *Genre et Histoire*, n° 1, 2007 (<http://www.genrehistoire.revues.org>).

⁶⁷ SHAT, 1M 1711 : *Notes sur l'infanterie*, 1769, p.15 sq : “le négligeant sous les armes sera exercé matin et soir ; le parleur aura un bâillon à la bouche, le mal propre ira tous les jours à l'inspection, ou paroitra avec un outil de paysan ou de vuidangeur, le lâche sera couvert d'une jupe de femme”.

⁶⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'éducation*, Livre 5eme, Flammarion, Paris, 1966 , p. 482. The original text (1762) is contemporary to the memoranda of the officers, who constitute also an educated group.