
H-France Review Vol. 18 (June 2018), No. 122

Christopher J. Tozzi, *Nationalizing France's Army: Foreign, Black, and Jewish Troops in the French Military, 1715-1831*, University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville, VA, 2016. 320 pp. \$45.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780813938332.

Review by Arad Gigi, Florida State University.

In *Nationalizing France's Army*, a painstakingly-researched, clearly-written monograph, Christopher J. Tozzi traces the transformation of the French army during the Revolutionary era from a monarchical to national institution: one where service was the duty and the privilege of members of the nation, and where cultural, linguistic, or religious differences were eliminated in order to create national unity among the ranks. Tozzi argues that from the outset of the Revolution, the revolutionaries presented a particularly xenophobic, nationalist discourse that gradually led to the exclusion of foreigners from France's army. By uncovering the process of nationalizing the army, Tozzi sheds new light on the rise of French nationalism, the difficulties French Revolutionaries faced in their attempts to forge a national community, the history of minorities in the Revolution, and the tensions between revolutionary ideology and the practical necessities of the revolutionary state in a period of upheaval. As such, this monograph is a rich and welcome addition to the historiography on the Revolutionary era and the making of modern France.

Historians have long acknowledged that while the French Revolutionaries touted a universal discourse of human rights, they simultaneously promoted a nationalist rhetoric that contradicted this universalism. Hannah Arendt went as far as asserting the Declaration of Rights of Men meaningless because it is incompatible with the idea of national sovereignty, as the nation is *ipso facto* a non-universal entity.[1] Most historians reconciled the discrepancy between the universal rhetoric of 1789 and the revolutionaries' xenophobia by suggesting that the exclusionary rhetoric was born in the course, and as a result, of the revolutionary process. For Albert Mathiez, revolutionary leaders were particularly cosmopolitan in the early stages of the Revolution but this gradually changed. The crisis of summer 1791, and the subsequent implication of France in a foreign war, gave way to more nationalistic, xenophobic tendencies in France.[2] Soboul's study of the sans-culottes subsequently echoed this interpretation.[3]

In 2000, Michael Rapport presented a novel interpretation in this debate. Rapport asserted that the revolutionaries believed human rights could only be realized as political rights within the nation state. Nevertheless, he did not ignore the national bigotry of the revolutionaries and argued that the context of 1793 generated widespread xenophobia in France.[4] Tozzi challenges these arguments. Even though he only mentions her once and in passing in the entire book, he largely returns to the Arendt interpretation: he argues xenophobia was rampant from the dawn of the French Revolution. This stirred a widespread opposition to the service of foreigners in the French army. According to Tozzi, "French society did not descend from cosmopolitanism into xenophobia during the Terror as a result of the war, as Mathiez claimed, or because of fundamental contradictions within revolutionary thought, as more recent scholarship contends. Xenophobia was instead a feature of the Revolution from its earliest

moments” (p. 7). Tozzi thereby challenges the seminal work of Rogers Brubaker who asserted that French nationalism was uniquely political, rather than ethnic.[5]

The monarchies of early modern Europe, the French Bourbon monarchy included, cared little about the ethnic, religious, or national origins of their troops. They regularly hired Swiss or Hessian companies, enlisted soldiers from Ireland and Germany, or purchased slaves to serve in their navies. Most of the foreign soldiers in the Old Regime army served in foreign regiments that the crown contracted, such as Swiss, German, Irish, Italian, and Belgian regiments. These units increased the army’s manpower, as well as facilitated diplomatic relations between France and these various European political entities. In conjunction with contracting foreign regiments, the French army went to great lengths to also enlist foreign individuals to its French units. It

went as far as mobilizing black soldiers from the Caribbean and British settlers from New England to fight on the continent. As Tozzi explains, according to the prevailing logic in the eighteenth century, every foreign soldier that the army enlisted was three times beneficial to the crown: it spared a French subject from service, deprived the enemy of a man, and served the crown on the field of battle. During the Revolution, however, ideological precepts received precedence over such practical reasoning. In the name of forging a national community, revolutionary authorities were willing to compromise their armed forces: they precluded foreigners from service even though their need for fighting men was unprecedented.

Tozzi argues that from the outbreak of the Revolution, the French population was suspicious of foreign troops, who came to be seen as loyal servants of the Old Regime. These suspicions were not entirely unfounded. The crown occasionally deployed foreign troops to quell unrest in the kingdom. Most notably, foreign regiments were implicated in the flight to Varennes, which intensified the popular association of foreigners with the counterrevolution. In this context of distrust, revolutionary authorities increasingly restricted foreign military service. In order to secure national sovereignty, so the common narrative went, the army needed to be composed of the nation’s citizens.

In the summer of 1791, the National Assembly decided to nationalize (*nationaliser*) most of the foreign regiments by eliminating the distinctions between them and the French regiments. A year later, the Assembly abolished the Swiss regiments, the longest-serving, largest, and most important of the foreign units. By September 1792, service in the line army was reserved, at least in theory, strictly for French citizens. This stood in stark contrast to the needs of the army that had just entered into a war against the First Coalition. The persecution of non-French troops reached its zenith during the Terror, when the need for fighting men was the greatest. Thus, the Jacobins, who made the unification of language a central element of their political program in 1793–1794, put an end to past efforts to accommodate linguistic diversity within the army, setting further obstacles to the service of foreigners. These practices, Tozzi argues, “underlined the extent to which the ideological commitments of the revolutionary regime compromised the practical priorities necessary to build an effective army and win the war” (p. 122). Interestingly, the exclusion of foreigners continued and even intensified after Thermidor and into the Directory Regime. The 1795 Constitution precluded the service of foreigners.

And yet, despite the prevalent attitude in France against foreigners and the gradual *de jure* exclusion of non-French soldiers, *de facto* these continued to serve the nation throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. This was a matter of practical necessity: France needed as many men as were willing to fight for it. Thus, the declaration of war against Austria included a clause that granted foreign deserters immunity and promised enlistment into the French army. And in summer 1792, after dissolving the Swiss regiments, revolutionary authorities made great efforts to integrate these troops in French units. State authorities could not allow themselves to lose about 10,000 soldiers, or to let so many disgruntled and armed men wander freely in the kingdom and disrupt public order. Even the Directory, whose constitution prohibited foreign service, continued to rely on the service of foreigners, especially for its operations outside of Europe in the Caribbean and in Egypt.

Toward the end of the Directory and into the Napoleonic era, the staunch opposition to foreign service had weakened and opened the way for the establishment of explicitly foreign units. This, however, was not really a return to the Old Regime practices. The new foreign units were assigned to a second-tier service, such as policing the interior or fighting overseas. During the Consulate, Napoleon introduced many more foreign units into the French army. This was in part an attempt to augment its ever insufficient manpower, and in part to forge better ties between France and the inhabitants of frontier regions. During the Empire, Napoleonic authorities set aside xenophobic considerations and recruited soldiers regardless of their ethnic origins or the language they spoke. But this was short-lived. During the latter years of the Empire, as its end was nearing, Napoleon turned against foreigners whose loyalty he now questioned. In the final years of his regime, the Emperor ordered the disarming and imprisoning foreign troops, in what, according to Tozzi, “revealed the survival into the Napoleonic period of the political apprehensions toward foreign troops that had emerged during the Revolution” (p. 193).

In *Nationalizing France's Army*, Tozzi challenges the common periodization of the years 1789-1815. Historians are accustomed to treat this period as one of constant breaks and regime changes: early moderate years that gave way to the radical Terror, which was scaled back by the right-leaning Directory, and the rise of Napoleon who dismantled many of the Revolutionary institutions. Tozzi, on the other hand, paints a more cohesive picture of the period 1789-1815 as a whole. He concludes that “diverse as they were, the various regimes that ruled France during these years shared a common set of political priorities that guided their policies on foreign troops and represented a departure only from the Old Regime” (p. 196). Throughout the revolutionary years, a close conceptual relationship emerged between military service, citizenship and national identity that led to the exclusion of non-natives from the nation and national institutions. Universalism was merely window-dressing for nationalism and xenophobia.

The title of this book marks the years 1715 to 1831 as its time frame, but this is somewhat misleading. In practice, this monograph is focused on the French Revolution and the Napoleonic eras. Chapter one is the only one dedicated to the pre-revolutionary era and serves primarily as a background for the rest of the book. The next five chapters are organized chronologically with the unfolding of the Revolution and then the Empire. Chapter seven delves into an in-depth examination of the service of a unique kind of strangers in France: Jews. Tozzi argues that in the context of a rigidifying relationship between citizenship, political rights, and military service, France's Jews saw in military service an avenue to demonstrate their loyalty and thereby to claim political rights. Once the revolutionaries decided to consider Jews as French citizens, they were eager to enlist them, a tendency that was most apparent during the Napoleonic period.

Nationalizing France's Army is an illuminating study of the construction of French nationality during the Revolutionary Era through the nationalization process of one, particularly potent institution. The book's merits notwithstanding, some questions remain unanswered. I would like to dwell upon two of those. First, where did the strong sense of French nationalism come from? Historians have long acknowledged that the Revolutionary era was key in the history of nationalism. Yet, they debate the causes for this phenomenon. Was nationalism merely a political tool utilized by the rising modern state in an effort to mobilize popular support in the age of Total War?^[6] Was the rise of nationalism during the long nineteenth century the result of changing economic structures?^[7] Or was it rather the consequence of tectonic cultural transformations that took place in the early modern period?^[8] Tozzi presumes that by 1789, Frenchmen were staunchly patriotic and xenophobic and consequently that this nationalistic fervor was a defining factor of the Revolution from its very beginning. If so, what prompted this sudden rise of forceful patriotic zeal? For one, André Corvisier has argued that the evolution of warfare during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries propelled a transformation in popular attitudes toward military service. Given the ever-increasing expense of European armies and the rise of various auxiliary institutions such as urban militias, a growing number of peasants and urban-dwellers had been mobilized into service which led them to develop nationalist tendencies. As a result, Corvisier argues

that at least among the popular classes the patriotic zeal was already widespread during the decades preceding the Revolution.[9] Tozzi does not address this important question about the nature and origins of nationalism.

The reader is also left questioning foreign soldiers' motives for joining France's army. The author portrays a picture in which foreigners vied to enlist while the revolutionary state increasingly prevented this option. He asserts that many of the foreign troops came to see France as having ostracized them. Who were these men—socially, politically, ethnically—and why were they so eager to fight and die for the Revolution, even if they thought of France as their home? The motivation question has been central to debates about the military success of Revolutionary France. Namely, how did France of 1792, a country in a complete political and economic disarray, with inexperienced troops and officers, and engulfed in a civil war, manage to win the Battle of Valmy and repulse the invading European powers?

The traditional answer centers on the particularly spirited motivation of the revolutionary soldiers who, because they fought in the name of freedom and against tyranny, were more committed to the cause than the soldiers of the aristocratic monarchies. This so-called myth of the 'bayonets of Republic' came under attack in the post-World War II years, when the conduct of Nazi troops, and subsequently the US intervention in Vietnam, shifted the focus away from liberal motivation to emphasis on unit cohesiveness or '*esprit de corps*' as the source for combat effectiveness.[10] In an insightful 1984 study of the Armée du Nord, John A. Lynn merged these approaches together.[11] He developed a theory of combat effectiveness that took into account both the soldiers' motivation (which he further complicated), and the military system, to argue that the Revolution created the conditions to reform the military in ways that endowed it with unprecedented effectivity vis-à-vis its enemies. More recently, Alan Forrest has challenged Lynn's interpretation and argued that the soldiers of the Republic and the Empire quickly embraced a professional identity as soldiers, and their motivation to serve had little to do with the ideology of liberty or equality.[12] This question of motivation is all the more important today, when scholars seek to lay bare the structures of collective identities and mass political movements. Tozzi misses here an opportunity to engage in this important debate.

These questions by no means detract from the overall value of this truly illuminating study. *Nationalizing France's Army* presents a nuanced case study that is meticulously researched and clearly presented. It adds an important layer of understanding about the course of the French Revolution, the rise of the French nation in its wake, the interplay of war, citizenship and politics in the revolutionary era, the links between Revolutionary and Napoleonic France, and the tensions between revolutionary ideology and practice.

NOTES

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), pp.369-384.

[2] Albert Mathiez, *La Révolution et les Etrangers: Cosmopolitisme et Défense Nationale*. (Paris: Renaissance du Livre, 1918).

[3] Albert Soboul, *The Parisian Sans-Culottes and the French Revolution, 1793-4*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

[4] Michael Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France: the Treatment of Foreigners 1789-1799*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

[5] Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

- [6] John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2nd edition, 1993); Karen Hagemann, "Female Patriots: Women, War and the Nation in the Period of the Prussian-German Anti-Napoleonic Wars," *Gender & History* 16/2 (August 2004): 397-424.
- [7] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
- [8] David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich*. (New York: H. Fertig, 2001).
- [9] André Corvisier, *L'Armée Française de la fin du XVIIe siècle au Ministère de Choiseul: le soldat*. 2 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964).
- [10] Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12/2 (Summer, 1948): 280-315.
- [11] John A. Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-1794*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
- [12] Alan Forrest, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire*. (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2002).

Arad Gigi
Florida State University
agigi@fsu.edu

Copyright © 2018 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172