WORK AROUND THE GLOBE, VOL. I

Fighting for a Living

*A Comparative History of
Military Labour 1500-2000*

Edited by
ERIK-JAN ZÜRCHER

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Fighting for a Living

Work Around the Globe: Historical Comparisons and Connections

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Most human beings work, and growing numbers are exposed to labour markets. These markets are increasingly globally competitive and cause both capital and labour to move around the world. In search of the cheapest labour, industries and service-based enterprises move from West to East and South, but also, for example, westwards from China's east coast. People move from areas with few employment opportunities to urban and industrial hubs, both between and within continents. However, labour relations have been shifting already for centuries, labour migrations go back far in time, and changing labour relations cannot be comprehended without history. Therefore, understanding these developments and their consequences in the world of work and labour relations requires sound historical research, based on the experiences of different groups of workers in different parts of the world at different moments in time, throughout human history.

The research and publications department of the International Institute of Social History (IISH) has taken on a leading role in research and publishing on the global history of labour relations. In the context of Global Labour History, three central research questions have been defined: (1) What labour relations have emerged in parallel with the rise and advance of market economies? (2) How can their incidence (and consequently the transition from one labour relation to another) be explained, and are these worldwide transitions interlinked? (3) What are the social, economic, political, and cultural consequences of their changing incidence, and how do they relate to forms of individual and collective agency among workers? These three questions are interconnected in time, but also in space. Recent comparative Global Labour History research demonstrates that shifts in one part of the globe have always been linked to shifts in other parts.

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Amsterdam University Press

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In memory of Gilles Veinstein (1945-2013)

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Nation-building, war experiences, and European models

The rejection of conscription in Britain

Jörn Leonhard

At the crossroads of state-building, nation-building, and war experiences: the evolution of the model of a nation-in-arms

The evolution of nations and nation-states was linked with experiences of war.¹ The long process of external and internal state-building was a history of warfare and its revolutionary impacts. Most of the numerous territorial states of the early modern period did not survive this violent restructuring of Europe. Between the last third of the eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth century the number decreased from about 500 states around 1500 to about 20 around 1900. State-building, so much intensified between 1794 and 1815, was directly linked to the experience of wars, and the British war-state of the eighteenth century is a particular illustration of this fundamental aspect of modern history.² As a part of this complex process, justifications of war changed, pointing to the new meaning of nation and nation-state as dominant paradigms of political and social legitimacy.³

But war not only accompanied the external processes of state-building. It also represented, from the 1750s onwards, a possible means of political emancipation and participation and hence became part of internal nation-building: this is why the modern concept of conscription is such a powerful analytical tool. War changed its character: from being merely dynastic affairs, and cabinet wars, fought with hired mercenaries from different countries who did not identify with an abstract notion of the nation, to wars fought, in theory at least, in the name of the whole nation and by the whole nation-in-arms. On the one hand, and from the last third of

1 See Leonhard, *Bellizismus und Nation*, "Nation-States and Wars"; see the chapters by Frevert, Jaun, Strachan, Förster, and Beyrau in Frevert, *Militär und Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 17-142; for the German case, see the chapters by Schmidt, Carl, and Buschmann in Langewiesche and Schmidt, *Föderative Nation*, pp. 33-111.

2 See Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*.

3 See Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, "Reflections on the History of European State-Making", p. 42, "States and Nationalism in Europe 1492-1992".

the eighteenth century, new forms of “national wars” or “people’s wars”, in particular the American War of Independence and then the French revolutionary wars after 1792, meant that more groups of society were now directly affected by war. Warfare based upon mass armies and collective conscription transcended the traditional separation of the civilian population from the direct experience of violent conflict, as had been the aim of traditional cabinet wars since the mid-seventeenth century, fought in the name of monarchical, dynastic, and territorial interests, and avoiding at the same time the horrors of civil war as they had been experienced in the confessional wars of the seventeenth century.⁴ On the other hand, national wars strengthened the state as the only legitimate institution which could provide the financial and military means of warfare.

A war fought in the name of the entire nation provoked hitherto unknown expectations of political and social participation. That became obvious in the course of the later eighteenth century, and it became an essential aspect of the new concept of a nation-in-arms which also formed the ideological basis of conscription. The ambivalence of war – externally as a form of collective aggression and violence and, internally, as a means of participation – already played a major role in contemporary war discourses and controversies over the precise meaning and possible justification of war.⁵ Thus, the concept of civil war, so dominant in the critical periods of the seventeenth century with its religious conflicts in various European societies, found its way back into justifications of war after 1750. But, in contrast to the seventeenth century, it was now no longer a civil war caused by confessional conflicts, but fought in the light of the secular concepts of liberty and equality as derived from the philosophy of human rights. Already in the 1760s the French philosopher Abbé de Mably described the expansionist wars of the eighteenth century as the natural consequence of monarchical despotism. This justified a new and international civil war of all suppressed peoples against their monarchical oppressors. Mably regarded such an international civil war as a “*bien*”, legitimizing in this context the “*nation militaire*”.⁶

During the French Revolution and the subsequent wars from 1792 to 1815 such ideas assumed a new meaning. However, the wars of this period

4 See Münkler, *Über den Krieg*, pp. 53–55, 75–77; for the state of German research, see Echterkamp and Müller, *Die Politik der Nation*; Rösener, *Staat und Krieg*; Wolfrum, *Krieg und Frieden in der Neuzeit*, pp. 49–51, 66–68, 95–97.

5 Forrest, “The Nation in Arms I”; French, “The Nation in Arms II”; see also Kunisch, *Staatsverfassung und Heeresverfassung in der europäischen, Fürst - Gesellschaft - Krieg*.

6 Mably, *Des droits et des devoirs du citoyen*, pp. 93–94.

demonstrated that the paradigm of an international and revolutionary civil war of all suppressed peoples against their despotic suppressors was soon replaced by national wars between distinct states. Conflicts from the 1790s onwards stood between the practice of traditional cabinet or state wars that had characterized European history since the end of the Thirty Years War and a new ideological concept of civil war in the name of abstract principles among which the paradigm of the nation became most prominent.⁷

The complexity of war experiences became more obvious over the course of the nineteenth century: on the one hand, the wars of the nineteenth century were in many ways still fought according to the rules of traditional cabinet wars, although the wars of the 1860s clearly showed signs of transformation from Clausewitz's "absolute war" into "total war".⁸ On the other hand, these wars reflected, in theory at least, each individual fighter's identification with a more abstract notion of nationality and nation. This justification of war was clearly a legacy of the civil war paradigm, as revived through experiences in America and France from the last third of the eighteenth century. If the contemporary concept of "national war" pointed already to the connection between the citizens' duty to defend the fatherland and their recognition as politically participating subjects, then the "people's war" transcended this connotation even further.⁹ Already during the 1760s and 1770s many American writers had referred to the war against the British as a "people's war", representing a people's ability to organize and mobilize its military in the absence of a monarchical state and at the same time challenging the traditional state's monopoly of arms on violence.¹⁰ In France the prospect of a revolutionary people's war was also perceived as a potential threat by the new revolutionary regimes after 1792. The regimes therefore responded with deliberate attempts to control and channel this development.

In the course of the nineteenth century, the invention of the new nation-in-arms generated distinct forms of warfare. Three ideal types can be distinguished: first, guerrilla warfare stood for the ideal type of people's war. Following the collapse of a state's authority, it was the population which in this case organized and carried out military actions, not in traditional battles but rather in small, individual actions, exemplified by the Spanish guerrilla war against Napoleonic regular troops in 1808. Second, militia

7 See Kunisch and Münkler, *Die Wiedergeburt des Krieges aus dem Geist der Revolution*.

8 Clausewitz, "Vom Kriege (1832/34)", pp. 318-319.

9 Wohlfeil, "Der Volkskrieg im Zeitalter Napoleons".

10 Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, I, p. 325.

armies combined the two principles of voluntary service with those of state control and professional military leadership in order to fight larger battles and to use the mass mobilization of nations-in-arms. The American War of Independence as well as the early years of the French revolutionary wars after 1792 provide examples for this type. Third, mass conscript armies represented the attempt to fully control and regulate a people's mobilization for war. It provided the military and fiscal state with enormous resources of power. The principle of conscription as a means of defending the whole nation also justified the use of force necessary to overcome popular resistance against the rigors of compulsory military service. France (during the Napoleonic Empire) and Prussia (from the early nineteenth century onwards) exemplified this type.¹¹

However, mass conscription did not mean an equal share of the burden of military service. Despite the myth of the revolutionary citizen-soldier, the French system allowed many exemptions, and the Napoleonic armies were far from mass conscript armies integrating the whole nation-in-arms. Prussia, during the anti-Napoleonic wars, came much closer to the ideal of mass conscription without exemptions. Yet in contrast to France, the Prussian military reforms under Gerhard von Scharnhorst and August Neidhardt von Gneisenau never resulted in a realistic promise of political participation in return for military service.¹² After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, European governments were keen to return to professional armies which were regarded as safer tools against the revolutionary contagion of arming the people. France and the German states after 1815 were particular examples of this development. It was only in the context of further military reforms and against the background of industrialization after 1850 that conscription became an option again, as the European wars in the 1850s, 1860s, and early 1870s demonstrated. However, the examples of 1859, 1866, and 1870-1871 also exemplified the advantages of short military operations which did not force societies to fully mobilize the nation-in-arms and which tried to avoid the combination of revolution and war. Only in the case of the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865 did mass conscription really develop the means of modern warfare with all its disastrous consequences.¹³

11 Förster, "Vom Volkskrieg zum totalen Krieg?", pp. 78-79; on conscription in general, see Kieran, "Conscription and Society in Europe before the War of 1914-18"; Förster, *Die Wehrpflicht*; Förster, "Militär und staatsbürgerliche Partizipation"; Levi, "The Institution of Conscription"; Frevert, *Die kasernierte Nation*; Flynn, *Conscription and Democracy*; Moran and Waldron, *The People in Arms*.

12 Frevert, "Das jakobinische Modell", p. 26.

13 Förster and Nagler, *On the Road to Total War*.

In these wars of the later nineteenth century, particular elements of total warfare became obvious, although "total war" with its new industrial character and hitherto unknown numbers of victims did not become a collective experience in Europe until 1914. Yet already the wars of the second half of the century – the Crimean War, but in particular the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865 and the Wars of German Unification between 1864 and 1871 – pointed to a transformation in the meaning of war and the changing character of modern warfare: this was essentially characterized by a new combination of technological progress, based upon increased firepower and railway transport, and mass mobilization in the name of an abstract ideal of nationality and nation-state. The state's financial, economic, and military means to achieve its aims reached a peak. This new dimension of mobilization also necessitated a new ideological justification of war. War was no longer regarded as a conflict over territory or dynastic interests, but it was fought for the ultimate existence of nations and peoples. This necessitated the stigmatization of the enemy and the overcoming of the traditional separation between a state's armies and its people. This essential distinction between the military and the civic sphere became questioned, as illustrated by both the actions of the North American General William Sherman in the Southern states of the Confederation during the American Civil War and, on a lower level of collective violence, the popular warfare of the French against the German invaders after September 1870.

It was the intensive interaction between war and nation-building from the eighteenth century that generated the ideal notion of a nation-in-arms. It included at the same time the new ideal of the politically participating citizen as the natural defender of the fatherland and hence a resurgence of the civil war paradigm against the idea of cabinet wars, separating the military sphere from that of civil society. From that point of view, the perceived national character of conflicts after 1792 instigated civic connotations of citizenship and political expectations, and participation through conscription was the most obvious of these. If the model of a nation-in-arms marked the beginning of a long-term process toward a radicalization of both national self-images and images of the enemy, thereby integrating many ethnic connotations focusing on belligerent myths and military memories, it was at the same time an ideal type of definition: not even the often quoted examples of Prussia in the 1860s, Germany after 1871, or France after 1871 ever implemented a conscription that encompassed the complete nation.¹⁴

14 Frevert, "Das jakobinische Modell", pp. 42-47; Krumeich, "Zur Entwicklung der 'nation armée' in Frankreich", "The Myth of Gambetta and the 'People's War' in Germany and France".

It was the experience of World War I with hitherto unknown numbers of victims that fundamentally challenged for the concept of a loyal nation-in-arms.¹⁵

This chapter tries to reconstruct the particular case of conscription in Britain, taking into account the British discussion of military models in Europe since the last third of the nineteenth century. In view of a European comparison, the reasons why conscription was rejected in Britain for such a long period have to be identified. In comparison with both continental nation-states and empires such as tsarist Russia, the Habsburg monarchy, and the Ottoman Empire, which introduced conscript legislation, Britain did so only during World War I in 1916 when in the context of industrialized warfare the number of volunteers no longer met the military demands of the western front. In the first part, fundamental premises about the relationship between the British military, society, and empire are discussed. The second part concentrates on the changing image of the British military, the contemporary perception of continental warfare, and the concept of a nation-in-arms since the 1870s. Third, I will look more closely at the meaning of the Boer War in that context. Finally, in a brief overview, I discuss the complexities of imperial defense before 1914 and the empire's role for Britain in World War I.

Military, society, and empire: some British peculiarities

In a classical liberal statement on the British Empire, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in 1903 stated "that we cannot provide for a fighting empire, and nothing will give us the power. A peaceful empire of the old type we are quite fit for."¹⁶ Against the background of Britain's painful experiences during the Boer War he formulated a fundamental problem which affected the British Empire and also anticipated future challenges: how could Britain's traditional military structure be reconciled with the realities of military conflict within the British Empire? How was Britain to respond to the new concept of a nation-in-arms, which had decided the outcome of the European wars of 1866 and 1870-1871 and was more and more regarded as a precondition for the political survival of great powers in a period of increased international competition?

15 Chickering and Förster, *Great War, Total War*.

16 Quoted in Spender, *The Life of Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman*, II, p. 88; see Holland, "The British Empire and the Great War", p. 114.

In stark contrast to continental European societies, Britain in the second half of the century did not witness a debate over national and people's wars, such as developed in Germany, France, and Italy, or in the United States during the American Civil War. Whenever these concepts were used in British discourse, they referred to countries other than Britain.¹⁷ Already this symptom points to particular differences between war experiences and the meaning of the military on the continent and across the Channel. Historically, Britain's geographical position without direct neighbors allowed it to rely on a relatively small professional army. Even before 1914 its planned size was less than a quarter of that of most continental armies.¹⁸ Furthermore, large standing armies had always been regarded as symbols of absolutist despotism. But in contrast to the continent where, as a consequence of the religious wars of the seventeenth century, princes and dynasties had established absolutist rule on the basis of standing armies, the absolutist experiment had failed in Britain with the end of the Stuarts in 1688. The Whig interpretation of these conflicts and its continuous influence in the early nineteenth century provided ample room for the identification of standing armies with absolutist, potentially Catholic, and therefore un-English principles.

When confronted with increased and intensified armament programs and the introduction of mass conscription in other European nation-states, discussions in Britain after 1870 did not focus primarily on a conscript army. Even Lord Roberts, the popular president of the National Service League, did not demand a mass conscript army but favored specific military units capable of defending the island of Britain in case of an invasion.¹⁹ There was no equivalent to the continental experience which, as in the French revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars before 1815, and during the conflicts that developed in the course of nation-state-building in Italy and Germany from the late 1850s to the early 1870s, had catalyzed discourses about the changing meaning and justification of war. In addition, the British perception of the American Civil War seemed to underline that British society was far from becoming a military nation. Thus the concepts of a nation-in-arms and a people's war retained a foreign connotation which in the eyes of contemporaries could be applied neither to Britain's present situation nor to its history.

17 Strachan, "Militär, Empire und Civil Society"; Paris, *Warrior Nation*.

18 Spiers, *The Army and Society*.

19 Adams and Poirer, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain*, pp. 16-18; Roberts, *Defence of the Empire*.

Furthermore, and distinct from the ideal of a nation-in-arms according to which all groups of society should at least in theory be trained to defend the fatherland, the British army for a long time was regarded as a microcosm of rural society. According to this view, officers were recruited from the landed aristocracy and gentry. Together with volunteer soldiers from the countryside, they represented, in the eyes of contemporaries, the uncorrupted virtues of the nonindustrial sectors of British society. In the British Army of the early nineteenth century, "multiethnicity" referred to the disproportionately high numbers of Scottish and Irish soldiers fighting in the British forces.²⁰ Originally, only Protestants could serve as soldiers or officers in the crown's armed forces. However, the empire's rapid expansion during the eighteenth century as well as the military's development in general necessitated the recruitment of Irish Catholics. Already in the 1770s enlistment of Irish Catholics had started. Very soon large numbers were recruited for the marines and especially for the East India Company's army.²¹ By the time of the Indian Mutiny, nearly 50 per cent of the Company's army of 14,000 soldiers were Irish, and 40 per cent of the 26,000 British troops in India were Irish, mostly recruited from poor Catholic families. The fundamental role played by Irish regiments in putting down the Sepoy Mutiny revealed to many British people the extent of the Irish presence in India.²² An Anglo-Irish officer corps developed, playing a role out of proportion to their numbers in the British army in the nineteenth century. They accounted for approximately 17 per cent of all officers in the British armed forces, and at least 30 per cent of all officers serving in India. Whereas most of the Irish soldiers serving in the British armed forces were Catholics, the officers were mainly recruited from Protestant lower gentry families who sought careers for their sons.²³

Traditional interpretations of the British army in the nineteenth century have highlighted that it was this constellation that prevented any military professionalization by adhering to an amateur ideal of gentleman-officers and peasant-soldiers.²⁴ But in the light of more recent research, this point of view needs a closer look. In comparison with France, Germany, and Italy, it was not the concept of the national wars or people's wars of 1859-1861, 1864, 1866, and 1870-1871 that dominated contemporary war discourses in Britain,

20 Henderson, *Highland Soldier*.

21 Bartlett, "Ireland, Empire, and Union, 1690-1801", pp. 73-74.

22 Bartlett, "The Irish Soldier in India, 1750-1947"; Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire", pp. 104-105.

23 Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire", pp. 106-107; Bartlett, "The Irish Soldier in India, 1750-1947", pp. 20-21.

24 Strachan, "Militär, Empire und Civil Society", p. 79; see also Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition*.

but the “small wars” that accompanied the expansion of the British Empire.²⁵ Throughout the long nineteenth century, Britain was engaged in more or less constant military actions in its colonies, and these war experiences were certainly distinct from the national wars on the continent between 1848 and 1871. It was also in this context that the army’s image as a microcosm of rural Britain came to be challenged. The military crisis that the British faced in the Boer War, in the eyes of many contemporary observers, seemed to be the result of the social degeneration of officers and soldiers, due to urbanization and industrialization in the British motherland.²⁶ The experience of imperial warfare thus led to a new and critical assessment of British industrial society’s modernity and its price.

As a result of the colonial small wars, it was not only the political role of the army that changed, but also its social composition, with decreasing numbers of officers recruited from the landed gentry and aristocracy. The army as a whole became more urban and, in contrast to the ideal of Irish, Scottish, and Welsh soldiers, also more English.²⁷ This was not a multiethnic conscript army meant to integrate the many different ethnic groups within the empire. Multiethnicity in this context did not primarily refer to language but to a notion of Otherness as it had historically developed in the different regions of the British Isles. The expectation that the army had to play a fundamental role in keeping the empire together was instead derived from a different collective image that was identified with the armed forces. According to this image, the army was itself a symbol of the union with its high proportion of Irish and Scottish soldiers and officers. At the same time the union was regarded as the very center of the British Empire. Hence the army’s role for the union could not be separated from that for the empire, as the Irish case demonstrated.

In order to understand this change in public perception of the military, the change in the liberals’ attitude toward army and war needs to be taken into consideration. For a long time historians used to point to the antagonism between Gladstonian liberalism and its focus on Home Rule for Ireland on the one hand, and the army as a symbol of the union under English dominance on the other. This relation changed fundamentally in the later nineteenth century. With the institutionalization of regular police forces,

25 Callwell, *Small Wars*.

26 Cairnes, *The Absent-Minded War*; Amery, *The Times History of the War in South Africa*; Forster, *The Army in 1906*.

27 Strachan, “Militär, Empire und Civil Society”, p. 86; Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society*; Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home*; Hanham, “Religion and Nationality in the Mid-Victorian Army”.

the army was freed from domestic functions of maintaining law and order. In combination with the heroic and Christian image of the military in colonial conflicts, army and fleet became incarnations of the British Empire and an imperial idea of Britishness. This dimension underlines the necessity of carefully distinguishing between the armed forces' social composition on the one hand and the public view of army and navy on the other.

The empire-nation and the new model of the nation-in-arms

British contemporaries of the wars of German unification between 1864 and 1871 could not anticipate the new meaning of large conscript armies and a new national connotation of the military. Hence the perception of continental warfare and the experience of the empire's military conflicts became essential factors in determining the relationship between British society and the military prior to 1914.²⁸ Britishness gained a new meaning which went far beyond the union and received fundamental stimulations from the perception of continental and imperial warfare.²⁹ The wars of 1870-1871 seemed to reveal a new kind of mass warfare which went together with a "decline of the chivalry of war".³⁰ The image of a professional army, composed of mercenaries, was challenged by large conscript armies symbolizing the apparent necessity of whole nations-in-arms: "The restless military spirit which produced the soldier of fortune is now on the wane."³¹

At the same time, the *Leitmotiv* of the British military as "Christian soldiers" shaped public perceptions of the army. It was essentially derived from the experiences of the empire's wars. Given the absence of large standing armies in Britain itself, the image of the "true Tommy" as the incarnation of national and Christian values became ever more popular and began to overshadow traditional notions of antimilitarism.³² That process had already started during the wars against France before 1815 and was revived

28 Preston, *Patriots in Arms*; Maurice, *War*; Henderson, *The Science of War*, "The British Army", "Foreign Citizens", "War", all three in Henderson, *The Science of War*; Hart, *Reflections on the Art of War*, *Moral Force in War*, *A Vindication of War*; Oman, *A History of the Art of War*; Risley, *The Law of War*; Maude, "M. Bloch as a Prophet"; Browning, *Wars of the Century and the Development of Military Science*; Foster, *Organization*.

29 Ely, *The Road to Armageddon*; MacDonald, "A Poetics of War"; Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers*; Jahr, "British Prussianism".

30 Dalberg, *The War of 1870*, p. 41.

31 Grant, *British Heroes in Foreign Wars*, p. vi.

32 Anderson, "The Growth of Christian Militarism in Mid-Victorian Britain".

during the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny in 1857-1858. The civic element of antimilitarism, derived from the conflicts of the seventeenth century and so important for the English national self-image, became more and more overshadowed by ethnic and racial connotations of the superior British empire-nation, thus at the same time integrating the different parts of the union. Against the background of the Crimean War, Lord Panmure underlined the changing image of the army in 1855: "I trust our present experience will prove to our countrymen that our army must be something more than a mere colonial guard or home police; that it must be the means of maintaining our name abroad and causing it to be respected in peace as well as admired and dreaded in war."³³ *The Times* in 1856 added that "any hostility which may have existed in bygone days towards the army has long since passed away. The red coat of the soldier is honoured throughout the country."³⁴ The successful repression of the Indian Mutiny in 1858 provoked numerous reactions pointing to Britain's Christian mission, its pioneering role for civilization, and its superiority over the barbarian. As the *Baptist Magazine* remarked in 1858: "The tide of rebellion [has been] turned back by the wisdom and prowess of Christian men, by our Lawrences, Edwardes, Montgomerys, Freres, and Havelocks [...] God, as it were, especially selecting them for this purpose."³⁵

God's mission in this view served to legitimize even the highest sacrifice: "Such a deed is done [...] when a soldier, true to his Queen and country, is true also to his God and preaches while he practices the principles and gospel of the Prince of Peace, in the presence of those with whom he acts his part in the world's drama."³⁶ Thus the *topos* of the "soldier of Christ" generated a suggestive self-image: the British nation seemed to act in accordance with a godly mission. Officers and soldiers should act as Christian heroes or die as martyrs. Contrasted with the realities of British industrial society, the imperial connotation of the military generated an exotic counterimage of a nonconditioned existence. This also explains the enormous successes of contemporary war literature which time and again presented the British Empire as a counterworld to Britain's industrial society.³⁷ "British gallantry"

33 Quoted in Bartlett, *Defence and Diplomacy*, p. 126.

34 *The Times*, 22 October 1856, p. 6.

35 *Baptist Magazine* 1 (1858), p. 323.

36 R. M. Ballantyne, *In the Track of the Troops. A Tale of Modern War. With Illustrations* (London, 1878), quoted in Hannabus, "Ballantyne's Message of Empire", p. 68; see also Ballantyne, *The Settler and the Savage, Blue Lights; or Hot Work in the Soudan*.

37 Hodder, *Heroes of Britain in Peace and War*; Rhodes, *Khartoum. Khartoum has fallen, and Gordon a Prisoner*, p. 5; Howard, "Empire, Race and War in Pre-1914 Britain"; Walls, "Carrying

became a key term in this context. It was used to characterize a collective quality of the British, as their example in India seemed to prove: "Every leaf in the history of the Indian campaigns shines with a brilliant record of British gallantry. In a country where all the forces of nature were often opposed to the advance of troops, now against a climate of unparalleled severity, and then under fierce burning rays of tropical sun [...] England and Englishmen may well feel proud of the victories so hardly gained against native troops of exceeding valour in first-rate military training."³⁸

Apart from this change in the army's perception, the empire in the course of the 1870s gained a new meaning for Britain's military position in the world. When Russian troops launched an attack against the Ottoman Empire, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli ordered indigenous troops from India to intervene. It was now no longer the British colonial troops, but the combination of navy, colonial army, and indigenous military that secured Britain's status and served as an integration of the whole empire. No doubt this was an idealized interpretation, but it explained why the nation-in-arms model as it had developed on the European continent was not regarded as a necessity for the British Empire: "England must have seen with pride the Mediterranean covered with her ships; she must have seen with pride [...] the discipline and devotion which have been shown to her and her Government by all her troops, drawn from every part of the Empire. I leave it to the illustrious duke [...] to bear witness to the spirit of imperial patriotism which has been exhibited by the troops from India."³⁹

This image and the focus on the differences between the British and continental military traditions were clearly challenged by the experiences of the continental wars in the 1860s and early 1870s. British contemporaries now had to respond to the implicit comparison between the ideal of a small professional army on the one hand and large conscript armies on the other. However, in contrast to the continental multiethnic empires, these reactions did not lead to a complete overthrow of the British army's organization before the experience of World War I, but they stimulated an increasingly intense debate about the relation between the military and society in general and imperial defense in particular. The reason for not following the example of the Habsburg monarchy, tsarist Russia, or the Ottoman Empire, to say nothing of Germany or France, may be seen in the geographically absence of imperial wars conducted by Britain. The British,

the White Man's Burden".

38 Armytage, *Wars of Queen Victoria's Reign*, p. 228.

39 Disraeli, "Berlin Treaty. Speech in the House of Lords, 18th July 1878".

at least prior to the Boer War, were never confronted with the kind of direct military crises which tsarist Russia had experienced in 1856, the Habsburg monarchy in 1859 and 1866, or the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s and again during the Balkan Wars. There was no similar pressure for the British to act, a factor which was reinforced by the dominance of the Royal Navy, which was never really challenged.

Nevertheless, the perception of the continental model of a nation-in-arms, accompanied by popular Social Darwinism, stimulated a dynamic discussion about British military organization and the future prospects of the empire. The imagined war of the future forced contemporaries to critically reflect upon and challenge the traditional view of the military and led to new concepts of war. When James Ram published his *Philosophy of War* in 1878 he insisted on the belligerent origins of the English nation in analogy to the Romans: "In effect the English nation [...] grew out of a concourse of kindred tribes engaged in incessant warfare among themselves. In the course of time domination over the rest was achieved successively by tribes of higher and higher degrees of pugnacity, and so the lines of a great nation were laid down. It was just the same in ancient Italy and in Greece, where Rome and Macedon respectively took the final lead." In comparison with France prior to and after the defeat of 1871 Ram came to see the vitalizing effects of war which he applied to the English nation as well: "Was any pure nation ever known with whom war was not a sacrifice enthusiastically offered in defense of what it held holy? In what country is public life so pure as in England? And the English are always at war in some part of the world. The lower French Empire was peace, but what a corrupting peace it was, and how much purer has France been since the Franco-German war."⁴⁰ At the same time Ram saw Britain as in danger of losing its reputation and power status if it continued to rely on volunteers for a small professional army. The military successes of disciplined and effective conscript armies had clearly demonstrated the superiority of the model of a nation-in-arms. Britain, in contrast, was about to lose the means to secure the nation's and hence the empire's survival: "If England cannot command voluntary soldiers enough to defend her homes or to maintain her empire, the sooner we give up the role of a powerful nation the better. A nation that cannot find voluntary soldiers of her own stock deserves to be conquered by any other that can."⁴¹ Ram's premises were derived from a Social Darwinist model of selection,

40 Ram, *The Philosophy of War*, pp. 32-33, 40, 47.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 72; Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*; Adams and Poirier, *The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain*.

and he used them to criticize the traditional arguments against conscription as anachronistic and dangerous: "When nature [...] erects the lists of natural selection [...] are we English to give way to competitors really inferior to us? [...] The arming and training of whole nations for supreme struggles with each other, is the latest call that she has made upon their energies, and will do more than anything else to determine with what races superiority really lies, and which are best fitted to occupy and replenish the earth."⁴²

For Ram the dual perception of both the European continent and the empire generated a military dilemma for Britain. The European wars fought in the name of entire nations highlighted the differences between Britain and the continent.⁴³ Whereas Britain focused on its fleet and the image of a naval power, the traditional military structure came under increasing pressure when confronted with the militarization of continental societies: "Characteristic of the modern system is the increased interest evinced by all classes in each and every country in its military organization, means and methods. This is very observable in the states of the continent, particularly where universal service has been longest established. In Germany conversance with things military pervades all classes. In France the army is enthusiastically supported." In Britain, he argued, the navy was "our first line" and he could not find any cause to complain of the interest the public bestowed on it. With regard to the army the British legislature "while equally responsible with that of any continental nation" seemed less endowed with the critical knowledge "requisite for the use of its controlling power". Ram attributed this to the "circumstances of our national history". But contrary to the ideal of a nation-in-arms, prepared to mobilize the resources of the whole nation, the British military continued to rely on the voluntary system as it seemed to correspond both to British historical experiences and its constitutional self-image: "Whether before the enemy, on the sea, or in the foreign garrison, the quality of spirit and the tone which the voluntary system confers are of incalculable value; nor is it only so in the regular army, the volunteer who gives willingly, as many as one does, more than the number of drills necessary to secure his grant, is equally an exponent of its value."⁴⁴

Despite the army's popularity prior to and after 1815, the concept of a nation-in-arms remained a foreign, un-English one. The reality of the empire's small wars, which were geographically distant events without a

42 Ram, *The Philosophy of War*, p. 75.

43 Kinglake, *The Invasion of the Crimea*, VI; Barrington, *England on the Defensive*; "Imperial Defence", *Royal United Service Institution Journal* (1884); Hamley, *National Defence*.

44 Dalton and Goodenough, *The Army Book for the British Empire*, VI, pp. 88-89.

direct military impact on Britain itself, added to the belief that a radical change in the military structure was not an imminent necessity. It was not until the 1890s that this position came under serious pressure. Not least against the background of an Anglo-German naval rivalry, a future European war which would directly affect Britain now became ever more realistic. This catalyzed discussions about an adequate military structure, and imperial defense served as a key word in these debates.⁴⁵ Still it was the Royal Navy that seemed to guarantee the status of the maritime empire-nation: "The Royal Navy is to the British Empire all and far more than her army is to Germany [...]. Naval supremacy [...] signified the promise of a mighty future. To the British Empire of to-day, it is the only possible guarantee of national existence."⁴⁶ But fears of a future invasion and the naval race between Germany and Britain challenged the premise of the geographically distant empire wars. Numerous novels about a future war and fictitious invasions of the British Isles contributed to collective hysteria prior to 1914.⁴⁷ Germany now took over the role of a prime national enemy which Spain had played in the sixteenth and France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴⁸ Confessional and ideological enemy images were replaced by a structure of competing industrial societies. Military power was regarded as a direct consequence of national strength as it became visible in industrial effectiveness.

The Boer War as a crisis of imperial warfare

After the perception of continental warfare in the 1860s and 1870s, the experience of the Boer War marked a major watershed in British discourses on the concept of a nation-in-arms. The combination of initial problems in British military operations, the Boers' successful campaigns and the

45 "England's Unreadiness for War", *National Review* 9 (1887), pp. 153-169; "Naval Warfare and National Defence", *Quarterly Review* 174 (1892), pp. 534-566.

46 Clarke and Thursfield, *The Navy and the Nation*, p. 3; Clarke, "The German Strategist at Sea"; Thursfield, "Captain Mahan's Writings", "The Jeune École Française"; see Rüger, "Nation, Empire, and Navy".

47 "The Battle of Dorking", *Blackwood's Magazine* (May 1871); Colomb et al., *The Great War of 1890*. [sic] *A Forecast*; Cave and Tebbutt, *The British Army and the Business of War*; Le Queux, *Invasion of 1910, with a full Account of the Siege of London; A Second Franco-German War and Its Consequences for England* (London, 1907); Wells, *War in the Air*; Ford and Home, *England Invaded*; Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking, being an Account of the German Invasion of England*; Doyle, *Great Britain and the Next War*.

48 Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*; Robbins, *Present and Past*.

character of the events as a modern media war with a global audience distinguished this experience from earlier small wars within the British Empire.⁴⁹ In contrast to the 1870s, this time Britain was directly affected and experienced a serious crisis of its ability to effectively defend the empire. As a result, the self-image as a successful empire-nation suffered severely. The Boer War also marked a watershed in that it demonstrated the realities of an imperial war. Thousands of volunteers from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand had joined the British forces in order to conquer two small states and integrate them into the British Empire. Despite some Irish fighters on the Boer side, the pro-Boer movement in Britain made the war initially quite popular, as the “Khaki” elections in 1900 showed. Initially it had been decided not to include “coloured troops” from other parts of the empire in order to make it “a white man’s war”. However, both the British and the Boers were forced to include soldiers recruited from the African population in the course of the conflict. Consequently, more than 100,000 Africans served as scouts and labourers. Lord Kitchener, the commander-in-chief of the British forces in 1900-1902 had to admit to the arming of more than 10,000 men, but research into the topic has shown that David Lloyd George’s estimation of approximately 30,000 was much more realistic.⁵⁰ What became more important was that the military conflict soon revealed the deficiencies of the British colonial military. Final victory was achieved only by quantitative superiority and by radicalizing the means of war, especially by the systematic destruction of Boers’ farms and the deportation of women and children into newly established “concentration camps”.⁵¹

Below the surface of war enthusiasm, public responses to the events in South Africa and their interpretation by the new mass media also reflected a deepening crisis in the self-image of the empire-nation. William Lecky stated that the war meant a huge disappointment for the British nation.⁵² In addition the military operations provoked widespread criticism, which

49 Hampton, “The Press, Patriotism, and Public Discussion”; Steinsieck, “Ein imperialistischer Medienkrieg”.

50 Saunders and Smith, “Southern Africa, 1795-1914”, pp. 618-619.

51 Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class*; Pakenham, *The Boer War*; Warwick and Spies, *The South African War*; Friedberg, *The Weary Titan*; Grundlingh, “The Bitter Legacy of the Boer War”; Surridge, *Managing the South African War, 1899-1902*; Dennis and Grey, *The Boer War*.

52 Lecky, *Moral Aspects of the South African War*, p. 7; see Ellam, “Capitalist Patriotism and Its Effects in South Africa”; Warren, “Some Lessons from the South African War”; Robertson, *Patriotism and Empire*; Yate, “The Spirit of the Nation in War”; Mahan, “The Influence of the South African War upon the Prestige of the British Empire”; Kent, “Patriotism or Imperialism?”; Goltz, “The Military Lessons of the South African War”; Grey, *The Land We Love*.

now turned against the traditional imperial patriotism. For critical contemporaries the war had underlined that the empire was more and more founded on uncivilized violence and that it caused a huge financial burden for Britain, which prevented it from following the German model of progressive social reforms at home.⁵³ In this context, it seemed that conscription, if ever introduced, would become yet another burden for British workers: "Empire and Conscription? [...] What have you to say, John Smith, you who are to pay and bleed? No one dare seriously propose Conscription to-day, but in the histories of nations come days of imminent danger and panic; fears become excited and people lose their heads. If Conscription ever comes to England, it will come at some such crisis."⁵⁴ Other observers pointed to the general unpopularity of conscription in British society and to practical difficulties in applying it to the empire: "Conscription is talked of, but that would not be popular, our people don't want to be driven. They will always answer the call in thousands, and storm any position to give their enemy the cold steel, there is no lack of pluck, but soldiers must be trained, and their training must be kept up these days, and the best trained will win the day. Again with India and our many Colonies and responsibilities how would conscription act, you would have three or four different armies, each under different rules."⁵⁵

Yet, on the other hand, parts of the British public identified enthusiastically with the fate of the British "Tommy" who fought as a volunteer for the nation. According to this position, he deserved at least the same estimation as the military in continental conscript armies, if not more. The superiority of the volunteer over the conscript was defended: "Our hero is not a conscript. He enters the army of his own free will and choice [...]. It will be interesting to note whether any 'snubbing' process will be inflicted upon him after he has done his best for the glory and honour of the country, – or whether hats will be touched as he comes and goes in places of resort and amusement, out of respect for the uniform he wears, as is the case with his brothers in Austria and Germany." As a soldier of the crown and dressed in the Queen's uniform he ought to expect "as much respect throughout the English Empire wherever he goes, as a soldier of the German Emperor in the Emperor's uniform receives in every part of the German Empire, – nay

53 Maude, *War and Patriotism*, p. 31.

54 Thompson, *Towards Conscription*, p. 16.

55 Godwin-Austin, *An Army without Conscription*, pp. 1-2.

even more, for the German 'Tommy' is compelled to serve, while his English brother serves by choice."⁵⁶

Kenelm Digby Cotes's *Social and Imperial Life of Britain*, published in 1900 and widely read, tried to analyze the new relation between the British nation and the military in the light of recent war experiences. To him, as to many contemporaries, the Boer War had underlined the necessity of mobilizing all the resources of the nation. War had become a test of the nation's survival in an age of dynamic international competition, which Britain could only survive on the basis of a community of citizens and not as a society of antagonistic classes. Hence political participation and imperial defense became necessarily interrelated: "The connection between war and the national character, important as it always was, is of immeasurably greater importance at the present time [...]. Now that the citizen soldier has almost taken the place of the paid soldier, war will be, more than it ever was, an index of the state of the country." Following the classical premises of the Whig interpretation of history, military service and political participation had to go hand in hand. In the highly idealized sense of a linear process of uninterrupted constitutional progress, the end of dynastic wars and arming the people seemed to come together. It was again the self-image of evolutionary continuity that served as a national self-affirmation: "In England, each stage in arming the people is a stage of industrial and constitutional progress."⁵⁷

The contemporary mass media's interest in the Boer War placed the army at the very center of public concern. Yet at the same time earlier questions about the British ability to conduct a future war and to defend the empire against a growing number of European competitors were revived.⁵⁸ Although conscription was still no alternative, the contemporary war discourses around 1900 took a new direction, in that recent war experiences were related to the development of industrial society and parliamentary government as they had progressed in nineteenth-century Britain. Hence the conscription controversy after 1900 reflected the different and controversial interpretations of Britain's modernity in comparison with continental nation-states, in particular the second German Empire of 1871.

In a highly significant contribution to this debate, Charles Ross stated in 1903 that the British nation had been falsely immunized against the vitalizing effects of wars by its economic successes. In comparison with

56 Corelli, *Patriotism or Self-Advertisement?*, pp. 6-7.

57 Cotes, *Social and Imperial Life of Britain*, I, pp. 427-428, 642.

58 [Cairnes], *The Army from Within*, pp. 1, 148.

continental societies that had survived their critical moments in past wars only as nations-in-arms, Britain was now threatened by decline: "The nation is [...] over-civilised which, through the ease, comfort, and security of its existence, gives no thought to war [...]. Such a nation quickly degenerates; for it is by war, and by the constant study of war, alone, that a nation can maintain itself in such a condition as will enable it to combat and overcome its enemies." Ross and many of his contemporaries regarded war as the supreme test in the process of human evolution, and modern conscript armies seemed to be the quasi-natural means for that test. From this point of view, nations-in-arms responded to a new stage in human evolution, caused by the development of industrial societies. The Boer War seemed to have underlined that, as a successful empire-nation, Britain was already in decline. Ross also identified the structural causes behind this painful experience: it was the nation's one-sided focus on politics, administration, and economic well-being as well as the traditional mistrust of the military that had long overshadowed its belligerent qualities and prevented the necessary autonomy of the military in a modern society. For Ross it was a fundamental weakness of representative government that "soldiers and sailors [...] are placed in a position subordinate to civilian officials, whose duty it should be [...] to confine their attention to civil matters".⁵⁹

Ross reflected upon the primacy of politics, which he regarded as a central problem of European societies around 1900: were democratic systems at all capable of conducting a future war, or would their complex decisionmaking processes on the basis of parliamentary governments and a primacy of the civil over the military not render them incapable of effectively defending themselves in time of war? Here the discussion went far beyond the practical problems of changing a professional into a conscript army.⁶⁰ Unsurprisingly, Ross developed his argument on the basis of an explicit comparison with Germany and against the background of highly increased international competition. According to him, the German Empire after 1871 had successfully established a political and constitutional system which corresponded adequately to its military necessities as a new nation-state: "A military despotism which consists of a whole nation in arms, each man of which is as it were his own despot in peace-time and in matters connected purely with his personal comfort, but who is a disciplined member of a great force wielded by the head of the nation in war, is not, it would seem in reality,

59 Ross, *Representative Government and War*, pp. 7, 11, 162-163.

60 Wilson, "Democracy and the War", "The Anti-National Party in England"; Quelch, *Social-Democracy and the Armed Nation*.

despotism. The German nation appears to have succeeded where the Romans failed, inasmuch as it would seem to have found a form of government which is not incompatible either with success in war or with true liberty. All other nations liable at any moment to invasion have followed this lead." In a future war against a nation-in-arms constituted like Germany, Britain seemed inevitably inferior.⁶¹

The British Empire's particular situation with its ethnic groups and heterogeneous structures made the situation still worse. In the light of these fundamental problems integrative institutions were needed to compensate for the lack of unifying war experiences which characterized the continental concept of a unifying and integrative nation-in-arms. In contrast, the British Empire presented only a "conglomeration of [...] nations" which could be kept together neither through language or family ties nor on the basis of economic relations. Ross argued in favor of military cohesion and advocated an imperial military community, which he called a "brotherhood in arms". For him the lack of such a military community explained many of the empire's problems. According to him, it had been military service within the British union which had brought the different ethnic groups of the British Isles together: only this experience of common military service had finally integrated Scots, Welsh, and Irish into the Union of Great Britain. The union model of a successful military community now had to be applied to the empire at large. The military experience of the union served as a model for integrating the whole empire, and this allowed Ross to link the South African crisis to the Irish problem when referring to the role played by Irish soldiers in the British armed forces: "The assimilation of South Africa is no more a complicated problem than is the suppression of rebellion in Ireland. The sole difficulty lies in bringing an uneducated nation governed by sentiment and a popular government to grasp the necessity for action. A whole race, related to the Empire in blood, but distinct from it in language, in tradition, and in religion, must be brought to form an integral part of the Empire. No more loyal man than the Irish soldier exists; he has fought side by side with other men of his race, and knows their worth, even as they know his. He is proof against the wiles of the pedagogue and the politician. A brotherhood in arms, the great bond which establishes fast friendship between nation and nation as between man and man, will alone bind South Africa to the remainder of the Empire, as it will alone bring to a termination the intrigue and covert rebellion in the South of Ireland."⁶²

61 Ross, *Representative Government and War*, pp. 221-222, 292.

62 *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363, 365.

Imperial defense prior to and after 1914

The link which contemporary observers established between the war in South Africa and the Irish crisis is highly significant for the British Empire's complexity before 1914. The military was in many ways the very link between these different scenarios. Ireland was, as Engels had once put it, England's first colony, but it also formed part of the empire's metropolitan center by supplying the empire with soldiers, settlers, and administrative personnel, thus taking advantage of possible careers in the military, in the colonial administration, or in commerce and trade.⁶³ That was *per se* no exception: Indians also helped to govern India, and colonial subjects of the French Empire engaged in similar functions.⁶⁴ But nowhere did the dual role generate such a paradoxical constellation. The example of the Boer War demonstrates this: two Transvaal Brigades were formed by the Irish on behalf of the Boers, but serving on the opposite side were about 28,000 Irish soldiers in the British army. Ireland's status as both colonial and imperial became obvious during the war: if pro-Boer agitation inspired the Irish republican movement, serving the empire against the Boers in South Africa was an important aspect of Ulster Unionism. Yet comparing Irish and Boer secessionist nationalism ignored the Boers' treatment of black Africans. Pro-Boer agitation certainly radicalized nationalist feelings in Ireland before 1914, in that parliamentary representation was increasingly seen as irrelevant.⁶⁵

This highly complex identity as both colonial and imperial is obvious from many biographies of leading Irish Home Rulers in the last third of the nineteenth century: they were proud of Irish feats within the British forces, yet critical of the British Army itself, which they often regarded as a repressive force in the hands of Protestant Unionists. They welcomed the individual careers of their children in the colonial forces or in the imperial administration, but were critical of the rulers of the empire as such. Hundreds of Irish nationalists exemplified this paradoxical constellation in their own biographies and careers: they welcomed Home Rule, but they also fought in the British forces after 1914, and yet later proceeded in the ranks of the Irish Republican Army.⁶⁶

63 Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire", pp. 92-93; Holmes, "The Irish and India", p. 235; Jeffery, "An Irish Empire"?

64 Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies*.

65 Kenny, "Ireland and the British Empire", pp. 19, 193.

66 Jackson, "Ireland, the Union, and the Empire", pp. 137-139.

The interrelation between imperial and colonial identity also continued after 1914, but now the constellation began to change. An estimated 200,000 men from all parts of Ireland served in the British forces during World War I. Thus Irishmen made up about 10 per cent of the British army recruits in 1913 compared with 20 per cent in 1870. In the Dominions, enlistment during World War I varied between 13 per cent and 19 per cent of the overall white population, but for Ireland the figures were down to only 6 per cent. Recruitment from Ireland declined especially after the Easter Rising of 1916.⁶⁷ At the same time a very influential antiwar movement emerged that included veterans from the Transvaal Committee. The complexity of empire relations meant that serving the British forces did not exclude secessionist and radical nationalism. There was still an elaborate overlapping of military service and revolutionary agitation against London.⁶⁸

Finally, the contemporary reference to Ireland in the context of coming to terms with the experience of the Boer War certainly overshadowed the fact that prior to 1914 it was with regard to the Home Rule debate that serious tensions arose between parts of the military elite and the government in London. The army presented itself as the most important integrating force of both union and empire, as the Curragh mutiny demonstrated. When in March 1914 officers of the 6th Cavalry Brigade in Ireland declared that they were not prepared to march to the North to implement autonomy, Lord Roberts openly supported their position and demanded the resignation of the chief of the General Staff.⁶⁹ Here, the army's self-image as the guarantee of the British union as the empire's center became apparent. Ireland and not the maritime empire was the testing ground for this process which, because of the outbreak of World War I, was postponed until 1918. The example of the violent actions of demobilized soldiers in Ireland after the end of the war underlined the role of the military at the periphery.⁷⁰

It was World War I that brought about both a new role of the colonies and Dominions and a fundamentally new relationship between Britain and the empire. Radicalizing the earlier experience of the Boer War, the

67 Kenny, "The Irish in the Empire", pp. 108-109; Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War*, pp. 39, 107-143, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 1.

68 Kenny, "Ireland and the British Empire", 20; Jackson, "Ireland, the Union, and the Empire", p. 142.

69 Beckett, *The Army and the Curragh Incident*; Muenger, *The British Military Dilemma in Ireland*; see *Speeches and Letters of Field-Marshal Earl Roberts on Imperial Defence, A Nation in Arms. Speeches on the Requirements of the British Army, delivered by Field-Marshal, The Earl Roberts, Lord Roberts' Campaign Speeches. A Continuation of "The Message to the Nation"*.

70 Gregory, "Peculiarities of the English?"

empire now came close to being a single military entity with joint military operations in various theaters of war.⁷¹ Pan-British sentiments dominated in the white Dominions, and the outbreak of war was often used to defend the very different positions held in the hierarchy of the empire. Thus reactions from Canada or Australia differed from those in India, where the annual Indian National Congress in Madras during December 1914 was poorly attended.⁷² What became clear, however, was the growing importance of imperial troops for the military theaters around the world, as the numbers of imperial soldiers sent abroad and lost in military operations demonstrate (see Table 17.1).

Table 17.1 Soldiers from the British Empire in World War I

	Estimated population in 1914	Troops sent abroad	% of popula- tion	Killed, died, and missing	% of troops sent abroad
British Isles	46,000,000	5,000,000	10.9	705,000	14.1
Canada	8,000,000	458,000	5.7	57,000	12.4
Australia	5,000,000	332,000	6.6	59,000	17.8
South Africa	1,400,000	136,000	9.7	7,000	5.1
New Zealand	1,100,000	112,000	10.2	17,000	15.2

Source: All data, except percentages, are taken from table 5.1 in Holland, "The British Empire and the Great War", p. 117.

A special role was played by the Indian army. From summer 1914 to the end of 1918 it recruited another 826,868 combatants and 445,592 noncombatants. Indian army casualties officially included 64,449 killed and 69,214 wounded. In sum, 16.2 per cent of all Indian soldiers recruited during the war were killed or wounded in action. In 1918, a total of 943,344 Indian troops were serving in major war theaters: 14.1 per cent in France, 5.0 per cent in Africa, 62.4 per cent in Mesopotamia, 12.3 per cent in Egypt, 1.0 per cent in Salonica, 5.2 per cent in Aden and in the Gulf. Making India the "barrack in the Eastern seas" also meant changing its weight within the empire, and the result was a new equation between war contributions and political status. A new tacit principle emerged that anticipated future developments: "no contribution without representation".⁷³

71 Jeffery, *The British Army and the Crisis of Empire*, p. 1.

72 Holland, "The British Empire and the Great War", pp. 114-117.

73 *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123; Brown, "War and the Colonial Relationship".

Conclusion: Britain in comparative perspective

Whereas French, German, or Italian societies experienced their war ideal in national wars, fought in their collective imagination by nations-in-arms, the British referred to the empire's small wars, in which the army came to represent an imagined empire-nation, an idea encompassing many ethnic and racial connotations. In contrast to continental societies, the tendency to anticipate a major future war in Europe as a conflict over the existence of the entire nation was a rather late development in Britain. Only after 1890, and in the context of the naval race with Germany, did a possible German invasion lead to hysterical reactions among the British public. These invasion panics had their origins in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries when they had been focusing on Spain and France as the main political and confessional enemies, a perception that was renewed before 1815 and again during the three anti-French panics of 1848, 1852, and 1859.⁷⁴ It was only from the 1890s onwards that Germany began to replace France as the anticipated invader of the future. This collective perception increased the popularity of both the army and the navy before 1914. But in contrast to continental countries, it was not a cult of a nation-in-arms that characterized this development, but rather a belated militarization of society, as the numerous paramilitary activities of army and navy leagues, boy brigades, and boy scout movements illustrated.⁷⁵

National wars, shaping the religious and national identity of the British, had characterized the conflicts with Spain and France in the early modern period and during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Instead of the short national wars on the continent between 1859 and 1871, Britain witnessed more or less constant military action in its colonies. The absence of large conscript armies on the British island and the colonial small wars allowed the imagination of an empire-nation, symbolized by the army abroad which came to represent British and Christian values. In contrast to continental cases, belligerent images of the British nation paradoxically developed both earlier and later: earlier in the wars from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries against Spain and France and later, in the context of armament races, in the anti-German invasion panics during the decade before 1914. With the disappearance of traditional antimilitarism, ethnic

74 Colley, *Britons*.

75 Strachan, "Militär, Empire und Civil Society", p. 90; Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force*; Strachan, *History of the Cambridge University Officers Training Corps*; Beckett, *Riflemen Form*.

and racial connotations of Anglo-Saxon superiority and British-Christian civilization increasingly dominated contemporary war discourses.

Before 1914 a large spectrum of connotations associated with modern warfare characterized the British case. The presence of positive and affirmative or critical positions reflected the complexity of a modern industrial society which fell under increasing pressure from the empire's overstretch and international competition. War was accepted as a necessary means and a ferment of state-building.⁷⁶ It could be seen as a universalized principle of competition, selection, and rationalization: "The science of organisation must raise and standardise the art and practice of all organisations, whether employed in military warfare, in the warfare which society or a nation wages as a whole, or in a warfare which a section of society wages – must apply to an Empire as to a municipality, to a public department as to a private business."⁷⁷ If Britain did not experience the nation-in-arms model by the introduction of conscription, it certainly experienced a process of militarization of society. Popular notions of a belligerent jingoism were a prominent feature of prewar mass culture. Veterans', voluntary and military associations, youth movements, and students played an important role in this militarization of British society before 1914.⁷⁸

Yet at the same time the numerous articles, essays, and books on imperial defense also underline the impact of implicit comparisons between the British Empire and continental powers which were perceived as belligerent nations-in-arms.⁷⁹ Conscription remained a controversial issue. This comparison was made even more difficult in the light of British workers' distance toward the military, which was regarded as a potential weakness in a future war: "The mass of the people is utterly oblivious of sound military principles [...] there are millions of the working classes to whom England, as England, does not exist. They recognise [...] no allegiance to a country in which their whole stake is the chance of wresting a bare subsistence from the blind commercial force by which they are wholly dominated."⁸⁰

76 Holsti, "The Relation of War to the Origin of State".

77 Williams, *Military and Industrial War and the Science of Organisation*, p. 14.

78 Price, "Society, Status and Jingoism"; Pryke, "The Popularity of Nationalism in the Early British Boy Scout Movement"; Ward, *Red Flag and Union Jack*; Levensen, *Elite, Männlichkeit und Krieg*, pp. 123-125, 171-173.

79 Dilke and Wilkinson, *Imperial Defence*; Wilkinson, *The Great Alternative*, "Preparation for War", *The Brain of an Army*, *Britain at Bay*, *War and Policy*; Horsfall, *National Service and the Welfare of the Community*; Underwood, *A Plea for National Military Training in Britain*; Arnold-Foster, *Military Needs and Military Policy*; James, "The Moral Equivalent of War"; Callwell, "Introduction".

80 Cornford, *The Defenceless Island*, pp. 235-236.

This was no exception in European comparison. In stark contrast to his belief in maintaining political and military control of war, the military hero of the German Wars of Unification, Helmuth von Moltke, who had benefited so much from the military power of a disciplined conscript army, in one of his last speeches in the Reichstag in May 1890, pointed out that the traditional concept of cabinet wars had now irrevocably come to an end. Reflecting upon the dilemma of the nations-in-arms, he saw traditional cabinet wars replaced by new peoples' wars as they had developed since 1848. Wars were no longer fought on the basis of a political and military primacy, but seemed more and more influenced by social interests, social conflicts, and public opinion. Moltke argued that the causes that made peace so difficult to maintain were no longer princes and governments, but peoples and classes, pointing in particular to the lower classes' social interests and their will to use revolutionary force in order to improve their socioeconomic position. Nations-in-arms would ultimately mean arming the people – with all the social and political consequences that would have. Under these circumstances a short and decisive war seemed no longer possible. Given the enormous armaments of all European powers, a future war was likely to last indefinitely. A decisive reason for this prospect was the fact that mass conscription had transformed the limited size of earlier armies into nations-in-arms with virtually unlimited human resources. Anticipating an experience which all European societies would share after 1914-1918, he argued that no power could be totally defeated, and that consequently peace treaties would have only a temporary significance. Moltke was convinced that the war of the future would no longer be fought for territorial gain or power positions, but for the very existence of nations and nation-states. Future wars would therefore transform the complete social and political basis of existing nations and of civilization itself.⁸¹

Confronted with wars against revolutionary and Napoleonic France, Prussia at the beginning of the century had introduced universal conscription and, in contrast to the French model, exemptions had not been allowed. However, and again in contrast to France, Prussia denied any coupling of conscription and citizenship rights. Moltke noticed to what extent the new tendencies toward nations-in-arms and people's wars, which he saw advancing after the conflicts of the 1860s and 1870s, would ultimately include the right of political and social participation of all classes of society and hence question the foundations of the new German Empire

81 Moltke, "Speech in the Reichstag, 14th May 1890"; see also Schlieffen, *Über die Millionenheere* (1911); Leonhard, "Nation-States and Wars".

of 1871. The war discourses of the later nineteenth century anticipated what would become reality only after 1914: a new concept of national service, based upon common war sacrifices, by which all classes of society could demand to participate equally in a democratic society. Britain, prior to World War I, had experienced a different path toward this development, but the consequences of relating national war service to political participation after 1918 became a common feature of all western societies which had experienced the Great War.