



# Benevolent Fathers and Virile Brothers

Metaphors of Kinship and the Construction of Masculinity and  
Age in the Nineteenth-Century Belgian Army<sup>1</sup>

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This article traces the evolution of different discourses of masculinity in the nineteenth century Belgian army. It highlights specifically the way in which officers and men used concepts such as fatherliness, brotherhood, youthfulness, filial duty and other kinship metaphors to express their gendered identities and their mutual relationships within an all-male community. Despite their continued reliance on these metaphors, the ways in which the language of age and kinship was deployed in the army changed throughout the century, and most notably around 1880. As the army became 'modern', its soldiers became brothers-in-arms rather than obedient sons and its officers became virile family men rather than wise paternal greybeards. Approaching the twentieth century, when comradeship between young men would play a key-role in the self-representation of the army, youth gained importance in military structures and the muscular and sexual vigour of the young male body became central to definitions of masculinity.

'The soldierly life might do you good, it will chase from your head the childish dreams that prevent you becoming a man'.<sup>2</sup>

When in 1858 the Flemish patriotic author Hendrik Conscience recounted his experiences as a soldier in the revolutionary army of 1830, he attributed a great part of his motivation to carry arms to his yearning for masculinity. He claimed this was a desire he shared with his father, who had apparently

stressed the masculine character of soldierly life – as the quote above shows. Moreover Conscience's insistence on the paternal provenance of these words shows that if the army was an isolated 'school' of masculinity, it remained strongly linked to the expectations and values of the family home.<sup>3</sup> Finally, Conscience's (or his father's) definition of masculinity as the absence of childish dreams, points to the intersections between constructions of gender and age at the time of writing. Being, or becoming, a man was not merely a question of renouncing feminine or effeminate behaviour, but also a departure from childhood. For the young Conscience, as his older self claimed, the military course of transformation was a success. One brutal captain in particular 'cured' his 'childish stupidity and abruptly made [him] a man'.<sup>4</sup>

In this article, I want to trace the evolution of metaphors of kinship, masculinity and age, such as the ones quoted above, through the nineteenth century. I will argue that although all three remained connected, the ways in which masculinity was expressed through metaphors of kinship and age changed substantially around 1880. Conscience's narrative, with its obvious stress on paternal authority, filial duty and reliance on the hierarchic structure of the army as a mould for masculinity, can be seen as an exemplary usage of a repertory of masculinity-related vocabulary that from the 1880's onward would make way for a different set of metaphors. Rather than relying on the language of paternity and childishness to discipline troops, the 'modern' army would base its cohesion on images of brotherhood among its soldiers. As the twentieth century approached, when comradeship between young men would play a key-role in the self-representation of the army, youth gained importance in military structures and the muscular and sexual vigour of the young male body became central to definitions of masculinity.<sup>5</sup>

1 I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, the editors of *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* and the guest editor for their stimulating comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2 Henrik Conscience, *De Omwenteling van 1830. Herinneringen uit mijne eerste jeugd* (Antwerp 1858). 'Het soldatenleven zal u misschien goed doen, en daarbinnen uit uw hoofd de droomen doen verhuizen, die u beletten man te worden'.

3 On the army as a school of masculinity, see e.g. U. Frevert, 'Das Militär als Schule der Männlichkeiten', in: U. Brunotte and R. Herrn (eds.), *Männlichkeiten und Moderne. Geschlecht in den Wissenskulturen um 1900* (Bielefeld 2008) 57-75 and C. Ehrmann-Hämmerle, *Die Allgemeine Wehrpflicht zwischen Akzeptanz*

*und Verweigerung. Militär und Männlichkeit/ en in der Habsburgermonarchie (1868-1914/18)* (forthcoming).

4 Conscience, *De omwenteling*, 146, 'hij had mij werkelijk van mijne kinderachtige bloodheid genezen en mij eensklaps tot man gemaakt'.

5 The move from a 'social' or cultural definition of manliness, largely defined as a performance of rationality and restraint, to a corporeal, (pseudo)-scientific view on masculinity, seen as a given and unchangeable biological fact has been commented upon before, e.g. in Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (London, Chicago 1995).



'The captain had cured my childish stupidity and abruptly made me a man'. Illustration depicting young Conscience's fight in a police-station's prison cell in *The Revolution of 1830*, published in 1848.



As I will attempt to show in the following sections, this move from an authority-based paternal image of masculinity to a corporeal, fraternal vocabulary to describe men was not limited to the military context, but rather the result of a continuous interplay between the barracks and ‘home’. Charting these changes therefore, will not only throw light upon evolutions within the army – documenting shifts in practices of discipline, in conceptions of hierarchy and in the basic categories defining military homo-sociality – but also contribute to the history of masculinity, and more specifically to an understanding of the multiple ways in which gender and age have been co-dependent in the construction of ‘men’ throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Most notably the evolution of paternal and fraternal metaphors in the army provides a wider framework in which to understand similar metaphors in the world of European politics.<sup>7</sup> The frequent appeals to ‘family fathers’ in the parliamentary circle, the recurring referrals to ‘forefathers’ as creators and protectors of the nation and the designation of members of the government and royal family as ‘fathers of the fatherland’, all make more sense when understood in the context of changing meanings of gender and age expressed through the vocabulary of kinship rather than against just the background of changing family relations.

The metaphorical ‘fathers’ of the first half of the nineteenth century (politicians or army commanders) represented a mainly class-based ruling elite, mirrored by the equally metaphorical sons who constituted the homo-social collective of common soldiers or ‘the people’, drawn from the lower classes. As Ute Frevert has shown, the political world of the early nineteenth century was defined by some intellectuals as a ‘Hausväter Gesellschaft’, a

6 Although in the last two decades the field of men’s studies has seen a rise of sub-fields in which age-defined groups of men are studied (in the form of boyhood studies, for example, or research on fatherhood), age only recently started to become a category of analysis. Psychological and sociological studies on masculinity and age abound (mainly focussing on adolescence and old age), the geography of masculinity and old age is, according to Anna Tarrant, coming of age, but the history of masculinity and age is very much in its infancy. Anthony Ellis’ work on the comic figure of the old man on stage is one of the few monographs dealing explicitly with masculinity and age; although a number of authors have studied specific age-groups without

focussing on age as a construct as such (e.g. by studying masculinity at university or at school, in the scouting movement or at work). A. Tarrant, ‘Maturing a Sub-Discipline: The Intersectional Geographies of Masculinity and Old Age’, *Geography Compass* 10:4 (2010) 1580-1591; A. Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Farnham 2009).

7 Or indeed of colonial politics, see e.g. S. Konishi, ‘The Father Governor: The British Administration of Aboriginal People at Port Jackson, 1788-1792’, in: M. McCormack (ed.), *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain* (Houndmills, Basingstoke 2007) 54-72.

community of family fathers.<sup>8</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century however, the paternal metaphor lost its sway and both in the military and in politics, men would be defined through their capacity for actual fatherhood. The possession of a body that biologists would call male made them all ‘brothers’ (the new dominant metaphor). By the beginning of the twentieth century, universal military service would re-define the military’s claim for homogeneity and base it on age rather than class – thus including ‘all men’ in the long run. Dovetailing (albeit not completely in synchronisation) with this evolution, suffrage was also extended to the whole male population of the nation. The changing democratic practices of exclusion thus paralleled those of the army.

The following sections present a chronological overview of these broad changes in the metaphors of kinship employed in the Belgian army of the nineteenth century. After a short sketch of the characteristics and context of this army and the sources that have been used to unearth its gendered language, I will first analyse the paternal role attributed to the army command up to the 1880’s and soldiers’ filial counterpart to this image. Secondly, I will focus on the increasing attention given to soldiers’ bodies and the rising importance of muscularity and heterosexuality in the definition of (military) masculinity. Finally, I will underline the ongoing reciprocity between home and barracks through the use of metaphors of fraternity after 1880, pointing to strands of continuity in the discourse of kinship.

### Sons of a beloved mother

The paternity metaphor was present on the Belgian political stage from the early revolutionary days, as is exemplified in a song describing the revolution as ‘patricide’, while songs published in the same period claimed Belgians’ identity as sons of the same ‘fatherland’ and that of ‘French liberty’, as the country’s mother.<sup>9</sup> The somewhat disturbing image of sons of Belgium who were both France’s maternal grandchildren and patricides not only points out the complexity of these kinship metaphors, but also calls the national context of these discourses to our attention. Although the language of gender and age and its distillation into metaphors of kinship was a widespread practice, most likely common in all of Western Europe, the specific national context of this case is important.

8 U. Frevert, ‘Unser Staat ist männlichen Geschlechts. Zur politischen Topographie der Geschlechter vom 18. bis frühen 20. Jahrhundert’, in: U. Frevert, *Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann. Geschlechter-Differenzen in der Moderne* (München 1995) 61-132, 67.

9 ‘La Liègoise’, in: *Le Chansonnier patriotique* (s.a.) 11: ‘soldats patricides / nations sages et vaillantes, maintenez vos mâles vertus’ and ‘Chant Belge’, in: A. Clesse, *Chansons nouvelles* (Mons 1848) 126: ‘La Liberté, Français, est votre mère / Mais, comme vous, nous sommes ses enfants’.

Both the Belgian nation and the Belgian army were young and very much under construction throughout the nineteenth century. During and directly after the 1830 revolution, former ‘oppressor’ Holland was represented as an enemy (hence the gruesome patricide). Later discourses of animosity, however, were directed against France.<sup>10</sup> These shifts in the nation’s position within European international politics influenced the organisation of the army. In the first years after independence the new army was modelled mainly on the French example, and to a large extent led by French officers, some of whom had been part of the revolutionary forces.<sup>11</sup> Recruitment, through conscription, was organised locally, by means of a lottery (*loting*). Although this principle was introduced as a way to distribute the ordeal of military service (which could last up to eight years) fairly among the population, the possibility to buy off one’s military service through a practice called *remplacement* resulted in an infantry that, much like the French troops, consisted mainly of poor soldiers with a rural background.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, as the practice of *remplacement* became institutionalised throughout the first half of the century, with government offices organising the trade, the share of lower-class soldiers could not but grow. After carrying out their own service, poor soldiers did not need much incentive to stay in the army and replace a middle-class draftee for a small fee. Their years in the barracks would have estranged them from their rural background, or removed the possibility of a farming career. By the end of the century this system came under attack: the barter in military service (referred to as ‘blood tax’) was increasingly interpreted as a form of social injustice and politicians as well as the army command were acutely aware of the unsavoury reputation of the army. From the 1860’s onward a number of military reforms were executed, generally attempting to increase hygiene and health in the barracks (with limited success) and shortening military service.<sup>13</sup> It was only in the twentieth century however, in 1909 that universal military service was instituted.<sup>14</sup>

In military circles France was soon replaced by Prussia as an example to follow – its grandiose victory in 1870 only added to its appeal. Its organisation

10 R. Coolsaet, *België en zijn buitenlandse politiek 1830-1990* (Leuven 1998) 105-107.

11 L. De Vos, ‘De smeltkroes. De Belgische krijgsmacht als natievormende factor (1830-1885)’, *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 15:3-4 (1984) 425.

12 On recruitment methods, the organisation of military service and the *remplacement*, see L. De Vos, *Het effectief van de Belgische krijgsmacht en de militiewetgeving, 1890-1914* (Brussels 1985).

13 On the army’s bad reputation concerning soldiers’ health, see L. Nys, ‘De grote school van de natie. Legerartsen over drankmisbruiken en geslachtsziekten in het leger (1850-1950)’, in: J. Tollebeek, G. Vanpaemel and K. Wils (eds.), *Degeneratie in België 1860-1914. Een geschiedenis van ideeën en praktijken* (Leuven 2004) 79-118.

14 In 1909 each family was bound to provide one son for service; in 1913 universal service was applied to all men of the age cohort concerned (at the age of 18).

of *grandes manoeuvres* as a means of training was praised and emulated and military commanders jealously remarked upon the military character of Prussia as a nation. The gradual move toward a re-interpretation of the role of the army within the nation (from a necessary and relatively small group of defenders of the borders toward a general experience in the ‘school of nation’) was exemplified in the changing identity of the national military training camp of Beverloo. Located on the northern border, the camp was built as a buffer between the Dutch enemy and the new nation. According to the *Journal de l’Armée Belge*, in 1836, ‘the camp (was) located in a strategic position’.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the century however, military publications changed the tone of their narratives about the camp and stressed its role as a national melting pot – a place where young men from all parts of the country came together and were taught to represent the nation. In 1888 an author in *Belgique Militaire* described the camp as the place where ‘each year, a new generation comes to familiarise itself [with military life] and to form the bonds of national fraternity’.<sup>16</sup>

Much of what follows here is based on source material pertaining to the national training camp. Because different regiments, and even different military branches, were brought together in the camp, it was a place where military hierarchy and organisation were routinely and explicitly addressed. The construction notes of the camp (from 1834 onward), reports of the training periods held at the site and articles in military journals such as *Belgique Militaire* and *Journal de l’Armée Belge* all bear testimony to the changes in the army’s representation of its own role and structure – and of the evolutions in the use of the language of kinship as a way to describe soldiers’ and officers’ gendered identities. As a way to incorporate military men’s practices as well, I have also included military manuals and a number of military songs. These documents of course, are as prescriptive as the texts about Beverloo camp, but because of their hands-on and repetitive nature, they are more indicative of soldiers’ possible interactions with the army’s disciplinary (and often educational) discourse. Moreover, especially in the case of the songs, these sources can account for the earlier years of nation in which the national army was still in its infancy but discourses of masculinity were as ubiquitous as before.<sup>17</sup>

15 *Journal de l’Armée Belge* 3 (1836) 278. ‘Le camp [de Beverloo] est placé dans une position tout-à-fait stratégique’.

16 See Devos, ‘De smeltkroes’; ‘La Caserne’, *Belgique Militaire* (1888) 476, ‘chaque année, une nouvelle génération vient s’y tremper et y nouer les liens de la fraternité nationale’.

17 Most of the material is held at the Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History,

in Brussels (KLM). Both journals were military publications, meant for internal circulation among (former) military commanders. Some of the manoeuvre reports however, were also published in the national civilian press. All of the material considered can be interpreted as officially ratified by the army command (especially the soldiers’ manuals and song collections, printed explicitly for distribution among the troops).

One of the first conclusions one can draw from this material is that, despite the continuous contact between the barracks and their surroundings (if only because soldiers brought ideas of home with them upon enrolling or after a period of leave), this bond between military and civilian life could only be imagined as being in one direction. The barracks, according to the army command, could prepare young men for their life outside the army, but civilians could never be sufficiently knowledgeable about the army. The military journal *Belgique Militaire*, for example, stated in 1875 that a civilian publication concerning military matters was ‘like a blind man expatiating upon colours or a deaf man upon the harmony of sounds’.<sup>18</sup> The Belgian army, at least in its self-representation in an article tellingly entitled ‘Education militaire et nationale’, was a world of its own, a ‘grande famille’.<sup>19</sup>

The inclusion of soldiers in a homo-social collective as a way of moulding their identity was an important part of military practice. Especially in the first half of the century, the main goal of this homo-socialisation was the creation of a strong, uniform collective.<sup>20</sup> Strict discipline in marching speed, shooting exercises and blind obedience to officers’ commands were heralded as ways to form a strong, machine-like army. For example, soldiers were instructed minutely on the collective rhythm of their feet: from 85 steps per minute for the ‘instructive pace’ up to 130 steps per minute to execute charges.<sup>21</sup> When soldiers were described or addressed in speeches or publications by the army command, they were rarely addressed as individuals. Even though the individuality of the soldier became an important theme in officers’ training (as will be shown later), army narratives usually rested on the anonymous and faceless soldierly hero, or on the troop or regiment as a whole. When a collective of soldiers made an appearance, it was often referred to as a child. Especially the infantry, gathering the poorest among military men and lacking the kind of pride that could emerge from specific demands and rulings as was the case for the other types of regiment, could be identified as a young genderless child in need of guidance and discipline, or even as a girl. An article reporting on the 1881 *grandes manoeuvres* described the infantry as ‘a good

18 ‘Echo du Parlement’, *Belgique Militaire* (1875) 102, ‘comme si un aveugle dissertait des couleurs ou un sourd l’harmonie des sons’.

19 ‘Education militaire et nationale’, *Belgique Militaire* (1891) 644.

20 The interpretation of the collective with uniform movements and disciplined bodies was recurrent in the nineteenth and twentieth century: collectivity and simultaneity, according to Tim

Cresswell, were understood as prerequisites for the creation of a respectable, modern society. T. Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York, London 2006) 92.

21 *Manoeuvres exécutées au camp de Beverloo en 1845*, texte, KLM, 29, ‘Pas d’instruction (pas ordinaire): 85 par minute / Pas de route: 100 par minute / Pas accéléré (pas de manoeuvre): 110 par minute / pas de charge: 130 par minute’.





## A MA MÈRE

Eh bien, oui ! si puissant que soit le ridicule,  
Si mauvais air qu'on ait à bien parler de soi,  
C'est assez qu'on hésite, et trop que l'on recule,  
Lorsque l'orgueil est juste et que le cœur est droit,  
Oui ! cette femme, au cœur français, à l'âme fière,  
Qui mena vaillamment ses deux fils aux combats,  
Oui ! cette femme-là, cette femme est ma mère  
Et c'est mon frère et moi qu'elle a créés soldats.

Quels sarcasmes d'ailleurs  
effraieraient ma franchise,  
Ceux-là seuls me liront pour lesquels seuls j'écris ;  
Et mes vers ne vont pas,  
Des mains des esprits forts  
comme un jouet qu'on brise  
aux mains des beaux esprits.  
Non, non !  
tous ces récits pleins de deuils et de larmes,  
Moins écrits que pensés, moins pensés que vécus,  
S'en vont toujours tout droit,

marchant toujours en armes,  
De ceux qui sont conquis à ceux qui sont vaincus.  
Et c'est devant eux-là, mère, que je t'honore,  
Devant eux qu'à genoux je tends vers toi les bras,  
Et que, d'un accent fier comme un clairon sonore,  
Je viens jeter ton nom, ma mère, à mes soldats.  
Je veux leur révéler ton cœur et ton courage.  
Ils disent que tes fils ont fait tout leur devoir :  
Le devoir qu'ils ont fait, mère, c'est ton ouvrage,  
L'honneur qu'ils en ont eu, c'est toi qui dois l'avoir.  
Ils ne sont pas partis furtifs pour les batailles,  
S'arrachant sans adieux à des bras révoltés,  
Ils ne t'ont pas volé le sang de tes entrailles,  
C'est toi, mère, c'est toi, qui leur as dit : « Partez,  
• Partez, ils sont vaincus les soldats de la France !  
• Mon cœur pour conquérir ne vous eût pas prêtés,  
• Ce n'est plus la conquête, enfants,  
c'est la défense.  
• Le sol est envahi, je vous donne ; partez ! »

Hélas ! si tous les fils étaient partis de même ;  
S'ils étaient tous partis les fils, même autrement !

Mais à combien,  
sans voir l'horreur de leur blasphème,  
Les mères ont soufflé : Ne te bats pas, crois-m'en !  
Et combien les croyaient

qui n'étaient pas crédules !  
Ah ! pauvre armée ! on va t'insultant à l'envi,  
On dit que tu trahis lorsque tu capitules :  
Comment dis-tu qu'ont fait ceux qui n'ont pas  
[servi ?

Certe, il en est venu que leurs mères en larmes  
Avaient éperdument bercés dans leurs frayeurs ;  
S'ils furent bon Français malgré ces cris d'alarmes,  
Ah ! comme un cri d'espoir les eût rendus meilleurs !  
Quel souffle ardent aurait transfiguré leur être !  
— Quand les cœurs sont vaillants,

les corps sont aguerris.  
Comme ils auraient marché,  
lutté ! vaincu peut-être !...  
Ah ! que de vrais soldats les mères nous ont pris !

Et qu'elles ne croient pas que vraiment maternelles  
Leur faiblesse du moins s'est payée en amour,  
Les larmes du départ n'ont pas coulé pour elles,  
Elles n'ont pas connu les larmes du retour.  
Qu'elles ne disent pas, qu'elles n'osent pas dire,  
O ma mère, insultant ta tendresse et ta foi,  
Qu'en nous faisant soldats tu n'étais pas martyre,  
Que tu nous as donnés sans rien donner de toi.  
Hélas ! c'est à te voir tant souffrir, pauvre femme,  
Que j'entrevois quel deuil cachaient tous tes efforts  
Tes deux enfants partis t'avaient emporté l'âme,  
Tes deux enfants blessés auront brisé ton corps.

Et voilà que vieillie et qu'infirmes avant l'heure,  
Ta main tremble à jamais, qui n'a jamais tremblé ;  
Voilà qu'encor plus haute et que toujours meilleure  
L'âme seule est debout dans ton être accablé...  
Tu sentais tout cela pourtant à l'heure sainte  
Où tes yeux dans nos yeux mettaient ta volonté,  
Tu le sentais sans peur, tu t'en ressens sans plainte,

Et c'est pourquoi j'en puis parler avec fierté.



child. She only asks to cement the tender affection with which she is flooded by her good sisters, the other types of regiment'.<sup>22</sup>

The use of feminisation of soldiers and parts of the army has been commented upon in other national contexts: in some languages, 'army' is a word of the feminine gender (*l'armée, die Truppe*), and the designation of soldiers as, for example, 'demoiselles de pensionnat' (as happened in *Belgique Militaire* in 1900) was a common way to deride young men's lack of competence or endurance.<sup>23</sup> Representations of the troops as a whole as a child, however, seem to have had another meaning. Rather than ridiculing the infantry by designating it as 'good child', the author seems to have implied that the collective of poor, young, often underfed and therefore weak foot-soldiers deserved protection from the other types of regiment and from the army command.

Unlike feminisation, the collective infantilisation of soldiers was not necessarily meant pejoratively. The immaturity implied in the designation of the troops as a child was counterbalanced by a particular form of obedience expressed through yet another kinship-metaphor – that of filial love. The image of the loving son was particularly popular in a context of patriotism. Nationalist and revolutionary songs spoke of Belgian men as the sons of a number of 'forefathers' drawn from local historical heroes (from Antiquity on, claiming descent from the Gauls). According to a song by François Van Campenhout, the composer of the *Brabançonne*, the revolutionaries' 'fathers' had even vanquished the army of Caesar.<sup>24</sup> On a more abstract level, patriots also defined their identity in terms of their filial relationship with the nation itself: Belgium was not only the land of the forefathers but also a mother in her



Soldiers retained the bond with their family at home by writing letters or through frequent periods of leave at home. Despite the army command's stress on the necessity of barrack life, soldiers' attachment to their family (and especially to their mother) was encouraged in army publications.

'A ma mère', in: Paul Déroulédé, *Chants du soldat* (Paris 1908).

22 'À propos des grandes manoeuvres et de la réserve nationale', *Belgique Militaire* (1882) 823, 'bonne enfant, elle ne demande qu'à cimenter l'affection tendre dont elle se sent pénétrée par ses bonnes sœurs les autres armes'.

23 'Manœuvre congolaise', *Belgique Militaire* (1900) 1090. See also K. Däniker 'Die Truppe, ein Weib? Geschlechtsspezifische Zuschreibungen in der Schweizer Armee um die Jahrhundertwende', in: C. Eifer and R. Seifert (eds.), *Soziale Konstruktionen. Militär und Geschlechterverhältnis* (Münster 1999) 110-134.

24 'La Marche des Belges. Chant patriotique dédié aux braves défenseurs de la liberté', in: *Le Chansonnier patriotique Belge et Français* (Brussels 1831) 89, 'au champ d'honneur, jadis, nos pères / du fier César affrontaient les soldats'.

own right, to which all (male) inhabitants were to devote their bodies, minds and hearts. The ‘Cry of the Belgians’, a song of the revolution, called directly upon the ‘children of the nation’ and claimed that ‘Belgium cried to them ‘stand up, it is time’.<sup>25</sup> In the French version of the national hymn, patriots addressed their country as ‘O dear Belgium, fatherland, dear mother, offering her their hearts, arms and blood’.<sup>26</sup>

### Paternal benevolence

Next to these allegorical or metaphorical parents, soldiers also expressed filial devotion to – if not real, than at least tangible, embodied – fathers. As has been shown most notably by German scholars, soldiers and other patriots often looked at the King as a paternal figure.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the Netherlands, where King Willem I was designated as ‘Vader des Vaderlands’, the Belgian royal family was rarely referred to in literal terms of paternity. Antoine Clesse claimed that Leopold had ‘governed the Belgians like a father’ in a song celebrating the 25th anniversary of independence, but did not represent him as a metaphorical father of the nation or its people.<sup>28</sup> However there was the notion that in times of need the King could count on the sons of the fatherland. Another patriotic text by Antoine Clesse, set to music by a military musician, made this difference between loyalty to the King and that to the nation explicit:

When the King, dear Belgium  
Calls upon all your children;  
Honour goes to those who cry:  
Like a son I love the fatherland  
Like a soldier, I'll defend it (literally: ‘her’)!<sup>29</sup>

25 ‘Le cri des Belges. Hymne national’, *Chant patriotique des Belges qui ne veulent pas du sobriquet de nerlandais*, 5, ‘enfants de la patrie / entendez-vous nos chants? / La Belgique vous crie: / Levez-vous, il est temps!’

26 ‘O chère Belgique, patrie, o mère chérie; à toi nos coeurs, à toi nos bras; à toi notre sang’.

27 See K. Hagemann, ‘The First Citizen of the State: Paternal Masculinity, Patriotism and Citizenship in Early Nineteenth-Century Prussia’, in: S. Dudink, K. Hagemann and A. Clark (eds.), *Representing Masculinity: Citizenship in Modern Western Culture* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke 2007) 67–88.

28 Antoine Clesse, ‘XXVe anniversaire de l’indépendance nationale’ (1855) 193, ‘Le souverain qui depuis vingt-cinq ans / a gouverné les Belges comme un père’.

29 A. Clesse and J. Muldermans, ‘Roi et patrie. Chant patriotique’, 333. ‘Quand le Roi, Belgique chérie / Fait appel à tous tes enfants; / Honneur au vaillant qui s’écrie: / Comme un fils j’aime la Patrie / Comme un soldat je la défends!’ The text is not dated, but Clesse (1816–1889) was most active from the 1840’s to the 1860’s. Nevertheless, the song seems to have survived at least until the twentieth century.

But heroes of different disciplines were represented as fathers in a national context: composer Peter Benoit was regarded as the father of national music, Hendrik Conscience who ‘taught his country how to read’ could act as the father of national literature. On a smaller scale, different figures of authority assumed a paternal identity in order to be trusted and enforce discipline. Teachers almost invariably appealed to their pupils’ filial reflex to gain their respect – and, conversely, aspired to paternal affection and care as a practice of good teaching.<sup>30</sup>

Within the army, officers and all higher ranks assumed paternal roles. Especially generals, typically men of advanced age, were often described as paternal in their demeanour. General Thiebault, for example, the head of the Beverloo camp in 1872, was credited with ‘paternal benevolence’ for the troops and ‘combined’ this with ‘intelligent firmness’.<sup>31</sup> The description of the lieutenant general presiding over the 1873 manoeuvres showed remarkable resemblance to that of a contented family father, gathering his offspring for a family dinner. ‘Enchanted when there are a lot of people’, this general could be seen ‘going from group to group, talking animatedly and smiling upon the military family surrounding him’.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, General Goethals was widely known and appreciated for his fatherliness. Soldiers looked forward longingly to his arrival in the camp, and reports of his interaction with his men stated that he knew how to give ‘meetings a familial character’.<sup>33</sup> The connection between ‘firmness’ and ‘benevolence’ seems to have been crucial in the construction of a paternal military identity. A longer description of Goethals’ behaviour shows how the ideal general was defined:

This general is remarkably calm, cool-headed and tactful. I have already discussed his proverbial friendliness, which could be studied with great profit by those commanders who take arrogance to be dignity, and confound swearing with firmness.<sup>34</sup>

30 Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 27.

31 ‘Correspondance particulière de l’Echo du Parlement’, *Belgique Militaire* (1872) 96. ‘Le commandement du lieutenant général Thiebault allie la fermeté intelligente à la bienveillance paternelle’.

32 ‘Camp de Beverloo: période de manœuvre de 1873 – notes d’un observateur’, *Belgique Militaire* (1873) 82. ‘Enchanté quand il y a beaucoup de monde’, the reporter described how he saw him ‘parcourir les groupes, causant avec animation et souriant à la famille militaire qui l’entoure’.

33 ‘Camp de Beverloo: manoeuvres de 1873, notes d’un observateur’, *Belgique Militaire* (1873) 175. ‘Le discours due général Jambers fréquemment interrompu par des hourras; la réponse du général Goethals, souvent acclamée par les officiers de toutes armes, ont donné à cette réunion un caractère de famille’.

34 *Ibid.* ‘Cet officier-général est doué de calme, de sang-froid et d’un tact réellement remarquable. J’ai déjà parlé de son anémité, qui est proverbiale et qui peut être avantageusement étudiée par quelques chefs qui prennent la morgue pour la dignité et des gros mots pour de la fermeté’.

Although the referrals to affection and to the warm atmosphere of the family were obviously part of the definition of fatherhood used in the army, the authoritarian nature of the family father's role echoed in generals' assumption of military fatherhood as well.<sup>35</sup> In 1879 the 'chefs de manoeuvres' were praised for their absolute authority – and the troops for their lack of criticism. As was customary 'Each manoeuvre was immediately evaluated', and 'the respect for the commanders' military authority is such, that these evaluations are never the object of any controversy'.<sup>36</sup>

It seems that in the years after independence and up to the 1880s, authority and age were connected and that the metaphor of fatherhood expressed and cemented that connection. In a context in which discipline and obedience played an important role, and against the background of the need for an identity for the patriot that had to be created in the new nation, the ambiguity of the fatherly general – at once 'firm' and 'benevolent' – might well have been the missing link between young recruits' civilian background and aspirations on the one hand, and their role as soldiers on the other hand. At the time, the meaning of fatherhood was in transition, and its fluid and ambiguous character dovetailed neatly with the complex meaning of military discipline. Especially in the 1870s, military commentators seem to have felt that the way in which generals enforced discipline was changing. An author in *Belgique Militaire* wondered, for example, what soldiers of the 1830s would make of their younger counterparts' behaviour.

Those military men who would have kept to the correct and stereotypical execution of the regulations of 26 April 1833 would ask themselves now where yesteryears' beautiful rows, arms sparkling majestically in the sun, have gone.<sup>37</sup>

Fathers, like generals, were defined partly by their autonomy and mobility: they constituted the link between the public sphere and the home, between family and state, between army and nation.<sup>38</sup> As fathers' unquestioned authority in the home, based on their function as the head of the family as

35 On fathers' ongoing presence in the domestic sphere, and their affective and authoritative roles there see J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London 1999).

36 'De l'influence des manoeuvres pour la preparation des troupes', *Belgique Militaire* (1879)  
7. 'Chaque manoeuvre est suivi d'une critique sur place; et le respect pour l'autorité militaire des chefs est poussé si loin que jamais ces critiques ne font l'objet de la moindre controverse'.

37 'Correspondance particulière de l'Echo du Parlement', *Belgique Militaire* (1872) 119-120. 'Les militaires qui en seraient restés à l'exécution correcte et stéréotypique du règlement du 26 avril 1833, se demanderaient, de nos jours, où sont ces belles lignes dont les armes jadis scintillaient majestueusement aux rayons de soleil'.

38 See J. Tosh, 'What should Historians do with Masculinity?: Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 38 (1994) 187-189.



a productive unit, changed and slowly turned into an authority based on children's respect and love, generals' relations with their soldiers changed as well – or at least a simplified image of the arrogant and tyrannical general was denounced as old-fashioned.<sup>39</sup>

Rather than a ruthless and unquestionable authoritarian, the ideal general of the late nineteenth century showed similarities with the 'new' affective father: he knew his men and even cared about them. Most importantly, the modern general respected the soldiers' individuality – for example by addressing them by their names, as *Belgique Militaire* in pedagogic fashion explained to its readers in 1891.<sup>40</sup> Instead of treating the whole regiment as a child who should blindly follow his orders, he was convinced of soldiers' (albeit limited) autonomy, and addressed them as rational beings whose discipline was based on choice, a reasonable trade for their leader's competence and affection rather than unconditional filial love. In an article on discipline, one author likened this move toward a modernised and more affective enforcement of discipline to its secularisation.

One should not confound discipline, the beautiful military virtue, with mute resignation. Resignation might be a good Christian virtue, but it will never be the dominant quality of a man of action.<sup>41</sup>

39 Fatherhood, like the army, is one of the early fields covered in the history of masculinity. For a history of fatherhood in broad outlines, see Y. Knibiehler, *Les pères aussi ont une histoire* (Paris 1987); J. Delumeau and D. Roche (eds.), *Histoire des pères et de la paternité* (Paris 1990) and D. Lenzen, *Vaterschaft. Vom Patriarchat zur Alimentation* (Reinbek 1991). More recent studies of fatherhood, and more specifically of the construction of the affective father of the late nineteenth century can be found in T.L. Broughton and H. Rogers (eds.), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (London 2007) and S. Olsen, 'Daddy's come Home: Evangelicism, Fatherhood and Lessons for Boys in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers* 5 (2007) 174-196. There is no abrupt change in practices of fathering in the nineteenth century, and the affective father was not exactly

new (as Davidoff and Hall have shown, affective fatherhood was very much part of eighteenth-century middle class identity as well. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago 1987)). However, the late nineteenth century presents a particularly emotional and romantic form of fatherhood.

40 'Education militaire et national', *Belgique Militaire* (1891) 587. 'Le capitaine qui a appelé un soldat par son nom, vient de lui dire qu'il le connaît, qu'il sait de quoi il est capable, qu'il a confiance en lui'.

41 As a military commander wrote in 1905, see: 'De la discipline', *Belgique Militaire* (1905) 342. 'Il convient, en effet de ne pas confondre la discipline, cette brillante vertu militaire, avec la résignation muette. Si la résignation est une admirable vertu chrétienne, elle ne sera jamais la qualité dominante de l'homme d'action'.

Apart from granting obedient soldiers a voice, this author also underlined their access to a masculine, rather than a childish, identity.

As the content of fatherhood and military leadership changed, the ways in which paternity was mobilised in a military context changed as well. By the end of the century, publications to encourage parents to allow their children's military training not only referred to the jovial, affective way in which generals would treat their recruits, but started to refer to generals' identity as actual family fathers as well. A man who could show concern and affection in the domestic realm, it was claimed, would also do so in the barracks. 'Why would you think', one author asked, 'that this captain, major or colonel, who has a family, who is good and paternal toward his own, promptly becomes bad and brutal once he crosses the threshold of the barracks?'<sup>42</sup> Throughout most of the nineteenth century, generals' 'paternal' character had been seen as a metaphorical way to describe their relations with their subordinates: they were 'like fathers' to their soldiers. In the 1880s, the discourse of paternity changed: generals were no longer fathers to their soldiers, but resembled their soldiers' fathers because, as men of their age, they were likely to have adolescent or maturing sons. The parallel between the family father and the military commander was no longer based on their similar position (autonomous and authoritarian) in their own private sphere. Rather, generals could claim their authority and autonomy because they shared the affective and reproductive characteristics of all of the nation's family fathers.

Moreover, the army command also explicitly framed its defence of the barrack life as a refutation of the ostensible fears of 'certain family fathers who tremble for their sons' faith'. Claiming an understanding of parents' preconceptions of the army and their concerns for their sons, military authors attempted to reassure them:

Rest assured, dear parents, your children will only benefit and in their vacations will return with round, rosy cheeks, an indication of good health. Their breast will have expanded, their shoulders broadened and their whole constitution will speak of force, vigour and health.<sup>43</sup>

42 'La caserne: II. Les chefs militaires ne sont pas des soudards brutaux et despotiques', *Belgique Militaire* (1901) 338. 'Pourquoi voudriez-vous que ce capitaine, que ce major, que ce colonel, qui a une famille, qui est bon et paternel avec les siens, devînt subitement mauvais et brutal en franchissant le seuil de la caserne?'

43 'Emplacement du camp de Beverloo, réservé a nos établissements d'instruction militaire', *Belgique Militaire* (1882) 47. 'A toute cette censure

si sévère viendront s'ajouter les plaintes, les cris de certaine pères de famille qui gémiront sur le sort de leurs fils, qu'ils ne verront plus deux fois par semaine. Rassurez-vous, chers parents, vos enfants ne s'en porteront que mieux et ils vous reviendront aux vacances avec de grosses joues, bien rouges, indices d'une bonne santé, leur poitrine sera plus dégagée, leurs épaules seront plus larges et toute leur constitution indiquera force, vigueur et santé'.

Including descriptions of Beverloo's rural idyll, descriptions of the barracks framed the camp as a place that showed some resemblance to home. Despite the repeated stress on the need for homo-sociality for the creation of soldiers, texts directed at civilians often also contained descriptions of mothers visiting the camp, the quality of the food and the salubriousness of the buildings.

As commanders' identity as family fathers was paralleled by their affective authoritarian function within the army, subordinate military men's place in the family (as sons) was associated with their role in the army as well. When in 1894, for example, Prince Albert led his 'peloton de grenadiers' during the manoeuvres, he was described as 'the joyful and gay comrade of the regiment's young officers'.<sup>44</sup> The real son of the symbolic father of the troops, and explicitly visible as a young man, he appeared as his fellow-soldiers' brother and thereby strengthened the bonds between the army and the nation.<sup>45</sup> In the same way the suggested affinities between generals and family fathers increased the bond between military and civilian lives. Even though the barracks remained a micro-cosmos, a separate society within the nation, the army increasingly called attention to the role of soldiers as future citizens and their officers as (father-like) guides toward responsible citizenship.<sup>46</sup>

In a sense, this was a reference to soldiers' own potential for fatherhood. At the end of the nineteenth century, soldiers' education in the barracks was one not only guiding them toward respect and discipline, but also, as the director of the 1895 manoeuvres stated, one in which the army acted as a 'school of moralisation'.<sup>47</sup> It prepared young men for their future responsibilities in the domestic as well as the political sphere. Although the actual coincidence of universal draft and universal suffrage only occurred in the twentieth century, the references to responsible citizenship as a goal for military training surfaced at least two decades earlier. Rather than a direct link between military duty and political rights, these texts seem to appeal to a more corporeal understanding of men's role in the nation. Much like women, they

44 'La mobilisation et les manoeuvres', *Belgique Militaire* (1894) 319, 'le camarade joyeux et gai des jeunes officiers du régiment'.

45 The Belgian King, and this is particularly true of Leopold II, was the official head of the country's army.

46 In this regard, Foucault's designation of the barracks as a 'hétérotopie de crise' fits: the barracks represented a space of transformation away from society, but with a reintroduction into that society as its goal. M. Foucault, 'Des espaces autres', *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (1984) 46-49.

47 'Le banquet du directeur des manoeuvres', *Belgique Militaire* (1895) 296-300. 'L'armée est également une école de respect, de discipline et, disons-le, de sacrifice. Aussi puis-je dire que l'armée est une école de moralisation'.

were to consider their (potential for) reproduction and their parental role as a basis for their identity as participants in the nation.<sup>48</sup>

For politicians, a similar evolution can be traced. By the end of the nineteenth century, they were no longer supposed to exert paternal governance. Rather, following the logic of liberal democracy, they were seen as representatives of the country's family fathers and their potential for being that was grounded in their own actual fatherhood. More and more, corporeal characteristics signalling a male identity, i.e. the potential for reproduction and fatherhood, came to determine the basis for different positions of authority within the nation. The form of that authority and its execution changed. In political circles as well, the tyrannical father was deemed to be 'retrograde and outdated', while parliamentarians were expected to act with 'virility'.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the link between masculinity and authority remained intact and even gained strength as the connection came to rely more on gender rather than on gender and age in equal measure: as sex was increasingly thought of as biological and impervious to change, the interpretation of authority as inherently 'male' became more plausible.<sup>50</sup>

The increasing attention paid to the male body as a prerequisite for participation in politics also changed current ideas on autonomy and independence. Before, terms like 'virility' or the concept of men's strength had been measured in terms of maturity.<sup>51</sup> In the family, on the battle-field, in a duel, the mature man had been considered to be favoured.<sup>52</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, however, as gender became tied to biological characteristics, muscles took over from maturity, and the male body replaced

48 On the interaction between women and nation, see e.g. N.Y. Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London 1997) and M. Sinha, 'Gender and Nation', in: C.R. McCann and S. Kim (eds.), *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (New York 2010) 212-231.

49 Discourse by J. Destrée in the Chamber of Representatives, 1 August 1895, 'la conception de l'omnipotence du père de famille est une conception rétrograde et arriérée'; Chamber, 3 August 1895. 'Ayons donc un peu plus de virilité'.

50 Age became 'naturalised' at roughly the same time but, as Karen Sanchez-Eppler states, because 'age is inherently transitional' it lends itself less easily to the creation of fixed identities. K. Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago 2005) xxv.

51 Which was a gendered term in and of itself, as women's majority – unlike men's – depended not only on their age, but also on their marital status.

52 See J. Hoegaerts, "'L'homme du monde est obligé de se battre'". Duel-vertogen en -praktijken in en rond het Belgische parlement, 1830-1900', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 124:2 (2011) 190-205, 196-197.

the masculine mind as the seat of autonomy.<sup>53</sup> Obviously, family fathers remained responsible for their families and retained governance over them, but a man's independence was increasingly defined as a form of individual, corporeal autonomy. And since the male body was shared by all men, control over one's own body became part of the very definition of masculinity – and a prerequisite for citizenship.<sup>54</sup>

### The heterosexual soldier

As this corporeal, individualistic definition of autonomy spread, corporal punishment gradually disappeared from the army. Rather than signalling an increased disembodiment of masculinity and soldierly identity, as one would perhaps expect from a society that made men's bodies largely invisible, the disappearance of lashings and beatings from ordinary military practice went hand in hand with a renewed respect for the soldier's body.<sup>55</sup> Increasingly, his individual muscular strength became a concern for the army command. Authors at the end of the nineteenth century not only vociferously supported gymnastics, physical education and regular health check-ups, they also lamented the state of the foot-soldier's body: young, underfed and poor recruits were often too small, too weak or not 'virile' enough to be soldiers, according to authors who referred to them as 'our little infantrymen'.<sup>56</sup> The military discourse, in that respect, only reflected a more general concern about male bodies. As different historians of masculinity have shown, the turn of the twentieth century was characterised by an almost obsessive fear of feminisation and degeneration among men – and especially among white-

53 In an opposite movement, the meaning of childhood changed as well: throughout most of the nineteenth century 'childhood is better understood as a status or idea associated with innocence and dependency than as a specific developmental or biological period' (Sanchez-Eppler, *Dependent States*, xxi). Much in the same way independence became a result of being a man, rather than the other way around, at the end of the nineteenth century children only became to be seen as dependent because they were young.

54 As is exemplified by the increasing popularity of physical culture at the turn of the century, but also by the growing temperance movements of

the period which would grant lower-class men entrance into the political sphere, see Hurd, 'Class, Masculinity, Manners and Mores', 78-83.

55 According to Donna Haraway, 'Self-invisibility is the specifically modern, European, masculine, scientific form of the virtue of modesty', see D. Haraway, 'Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium', in: D. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Techno-Science* (Routledge 1997) 23.

56 'Les manoeuvres de 1883', *Belgique Militaire* (1883) 418, 'nos petits fantassins'.



collar workers. It was feared that their supposed lack of corporeal autonomy and their lack of physical exercise would result in a loss of masculinity.<sup>57</sup> The army seemed to offer an almost natural solution to this problem – a space that combined the development of what were considered masculine characteristics of violence and corporeal strength with the purity of a homo-social environment that shielded young men of the dangers of a degenerative society.

Increasingly, that homo-sociality became a matter of gender. Although the army had never drafted women, their presence in military spaces (the barracks, the training camp, on marches) seems to have been fairly usual and problem free until well into the nineteenth-century. Women, though almost completely invisible in the sources, were frequently employed as washerwomen, as *cantinières* and *vivandières* and some accompanied their husbands. Unlike the French army, Belgian army commanders did not attempt to ‘virilise’ the army by refraining from the employment of women for what were seen as women’s tasks.<sup>58</sup> The presence of women did emerge as a problem, however. Documents on the lay-out and construction of the Beverloo training camp show that the exclusion of women grew as a conscious concern for military architects throughout the nineteenth century. The canteen, for example, only had a door at the exterior of the camp, to make women’s entrance to the barracks proper more difficult.<sup>59</sup>

As ‘real’ women disappeared from military spaces, however, representations of women and imaginary women abounded in soldiers’ and commanders’ discourse. The women that are almost invisible in military documents on actual camp life are compensated for by numerous songs about *cantinières* sung by soldiers or even on stage. ‘La cantinière’, a simple, repetitive song about this female ‘joy of all men’ celebrated the imaginary woman’s arms, feet, cheeks and even her teeth, but mostly the fact that ‘the *cantinière* allows herself to be embraced’.<sup>60</sup> Major La Flamme published a song entitled ‘La cantinière’ for the troops that would have fit the *variété*-stage perfectly: the melody is too complex for it to have been sung by the troops, but some gifted soldiers or officers might have been able to croon that ‘it is

57 Francis, ‘The Domestication of the Male?’, 643-645.

58 G. Mihaely, ‘L’effacement de la cantinière ou a virilisation de l’armée française au XIXième siècle’, *Revue de l’histoire du XIXième siècle* 30 (2005) 21-43.

59 See e.g. ‘Note descriptive des travaux a exécuter pour la construction des souveaux logemens de deux bataillons d’infanterie’, *Document held at the Royal Museum for the Armed Forces and Military History* 73:5 (1840-1846) 1, ‘La cantine n’a

d’autre issue qu’à l’extérieur, cette disposition a pour but d’empêcher le soldat d’entrer dans les cantines après l’heure de la retraite, et d’éviter, en même temps, que les femmes aient un accès trop facile dans l’intérieur des casernes [...]’.

60 The origin of this song is hard to trace. The first verse of one of the many versions circulating went: ‘La cantinière aux beaux bras, / est le plaisir des jeunes soldats / Les jeunes soldats / sont militaires / pour embrasser la cantinière / Gauche, droite, sabre à coté / la cantinière se laisse baiser’.

in the *cantinière's* nature to be the soldiers' comrade'.<sup>61</sup> In many instances, the *cantinière* was indeed represented as the soldiers' companion. Donizetti's 'La fille du régiment', an opera describing a young woman's life as 'daughter' of the regiment shows the main character (a soprano) mostly as the sergeant's daughter, sharing her 'father' with a troop of protective brothers.<sup>62</sup>

However, unlike the 'daughter of the regiment' whose visibility as part of the army caused no problem in 1840 and only turned into a sexually attractive woman in the eyes of an outsider (Toni), the imaginary women praised in song later on in the century were the object of soldiers' heterosexual admiration. The fact that the army command sanctioned and spread these songs gives us further clues to the soldierly identity they were trying to create. The ideal soldier, so it seems, was not only a future father and citizen, but also an affective husband-to-be.<sup>63</sup> A particularly sugary song, entitled 'à la Belgique', addressed the nation in different feminine roles, including a verse that suggested that the fatherland was a secretly attractive young woman underneath her veil of virginity.

Then, softly, like a mother,  
 You have cradled us  
 Better still, dear nurse,  
 You have dressed our wounds  
 [...]
   
 But I know you, my dear  
 I know you better than that  
 And under your nun-like garb  
 Your heart beats joyfully.<sup>64</sup>

The blatantly romantic representation of all women in soldier songs (be they caring nurses, concerned mothers or desired girlfriends) shows that despite the army's homo-social character, heterosexuality and men's place in

61 'La cantinière', in: La Flamme, *Quelques chansons pour nos soldats* (Brussels s.a.). 'La cantinière est par état / la camarade du soldat'.

62 G. Donizetti, J.H. Vernoy de Saint Georges and J.F. Bayard, *La Fille du Régiment: Opéra comique* (Paris 1840).

63 As would befit the period in which a 'companionate marriage' grew to be the norm. On the changes of the meaning and practices of marriage, see e.g. P. Mainardi, *Husbands, Wives and Lovers: Marriage and its Discontents in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven 2003).

64 'À la Belgique', in: Paul Dérouléde, *Chants du soldat* (Paris 1908) unpaginated: 'Puis, douce comme une mère / Tu nous as bercés; / Mieux encore, chère infirmière, / Tu nous as pansés [...] Mais je te connais, mignonne / Je te connais mieux / Et sous ton voile de nonne / Ton coeur bat joyeux'.

domestic, woman-governed, environments were deemed crucial for them as well. Considerable rhetorical work went into the image of soldiers as ardent (but chaste) lovers of women, but also conversely as the objects of women's heterosexual desire.

Though less present in the civilian world, the image of the strapping young officer was widely spread within the army. As the army command claimed to transform young adolescents into healthy, muscular men, the appeal to female desire might have been an additional way to motivate recruits. Reporters on the *grandes manoeuvres* often described marching or parading soldiers as good-looking or vigorous, as they wrote admiringly of 'the virile aspect of the troops' or of 'their martial looks [...] and their bronzed faces'.<sup>65</sup> Even more convincing of soldiers' attractiveness must have been descriptions of women observing the manoeuvres. Descriptions of civilian audiences of these exercises tended to contain a number of clichés – the robust country woman, the distant bourgeois, enthusiastic boys and a swooning young maiden. When Princess Marie-Henriette attended the *grandes manoeuvres* with her husband (who would later become Leopold II) and her brother, she convincingly presented herself as a girlish admirer and something of a connoisseur of military masculinity. In a letter to the minister of war, she subtly bemoaned her husband's preference for the *tenué de route*, which in her opinion is not quite as 'handsome' (*jolie*) as parade uniforms, but gave the soldiers 'a more martial air'.<sup>66</sup>

In this new, corporeal and heterosexuality-centred army the soldiers' age acquired a different meaning. As shown before, up to the 1880s, age intersected with authority and thus with rank and class. Maturity and masculinity had been, if not synonymous, at least mutually constructive. In the last decades of the nineteenth century however, young men became the image of masculinity.<sup>67</sup> Their active, muscular and reproductive bodies made the performance of a new body-based masculinity possible. Although the

65 'L'aspect viril des troupes' and 'leur air martial et [...] figure bronzée'. 'Des manoeuvres d'été en 1876', *Belgique Militaire* (1876) 144 and 'Derniers échos de la période des manoeuvres de 1880', *Belgique Militaire* (1880) 152.

66 Letter from Queen Marie Henriette to Chazal 1862, held at the Royal Museum for the Armed Forces and Military History, Fonds Chazal: correspondence 39/1 F.1, 417. 'Le Roi desire que les troupes soient en tenue de route, ce qui d'ailleurs n'en est que plus martial'.

67 In the same period, significantly, the bodies of lower class and of black men came to gain currency as images of 'wild', 'natural' and therefore 'real' masculinity. See e.g. G. Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago 1995); M. Whalan, "'Taking Myself in Hand": Jean Toomer and Physical Culture', *Modernism/Modernity* 10 (2003) 597-615 and J. Reich, 'The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man: Charles Atlas, Physical Culture and the Inscription of American Masculinity', *Men and Masculinities* 12 (2010) 9-11.

authority that came with maturity was not simply dismissed, the gap between the individual mature officer and a childish collective of soldiers diminished as soldiers gained a masculine identity of their own.<sup>68</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, brotherhood and comradeship had replaced fatherliness as the army's main kinship metaphor.<sup>69</sup>

As soldiers were less often referred to as children or sons, their relation to the nation acquired different expressions as well. In the first place, the physicality of one's love for the fatherland was stressed. Men's, and specifically military men's, patriotism had always been measured by their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their country, but by the end of the nineteenth century the defiance of death was gradually replaced by a readiness to risk one's (individual and autonomous) body. The result remained the same of course, but the representation of the self-sacrificial soldier did change. Instead of praising soldiers' courage, their lack of fear and their unconditional devotion to a *mère chérie*, late nineteenth-century poets and composers hailed (especially dying or wounded) soldiers for their strength, calling attention to their broad shoulders or the patriotic heart beating in their chest, creating 'chests that pulse beneath the uniform'.<sup>70</sup>

Closeness of the soldiers' heart to the nation was made even more tangible by vivid descriptions of heroes shedding their blood for the nation. Connecting men in a literally physical way to the nation's soil, the image of the patriot bleeding into the earth of the nation made the relation between them almost erotic.<sup>71</sup> Rather than a venerated mother, Belgium became a young woman to be desired, protected and physically held close to the heart. In a collection of patriotic songs published and widely distributed in 1905, an old combatant of 1830 was quoted describing the fatherland as a

68 Simultaneously, lower class men slowly gained an identity as citizens and were increasingly successful in claiming a masculine identity. See M. Hurd, 'Class, Masculinity, Manners and Mores: Public Space and Public Sphere in Nineteenth-Century Europe', *Social Science History* 24 (2000).

69 In the twentieth century, and especially after the First World War, comradeship gained even more importance. See e.g. J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (Chicago 1996); T. Kühne, *Kameradschaft. Die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen 2006); C. Dejung,

*Aktivdienst und Geschlechterordnung. Eine Kultur- und Alltagsgeschichte des Militärdienstes in der Schweiz 1939-1945* (Zürich 2006).

70 'Au camp', *Belgique Militaire* (1881) 17. 'Les poitrines qui vibrent sous l'uniforme'.

71 On the erotic nature of patriotic sacrifice, see also J. Mostov, 'Sexing the Nation/Desexing the Body: Politics of National Identity in Former Yugoslavia', in: T. Mayer (ed.), *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation* (London, New York 2000) 89-112.

virgin, and as ‘the country’s virginal image’ appeared before them, the ‘dear youth’ of the nation was called upon to love that country ‘like we [the former revolutionaries] have loved it’.<sup>72</sup> In another introduction to the collection, children were admonished to ‘love the fatherland like [they] love their mother’. Rather than seeing the fatherland as a mother as such, they were to reproduce a specific emotion for the fatherland. Furthermore, should the country be threatened, the young readers were to ‘go to the borders to cover the Belgian soil, the ground of [their] forefathers, with the bulwark of [their] breasts’.<sup>73</sup> The protection of the nation therefore, was increasingly each man’s personal responsibility. Moreover, as (potential) family fathers they had to care not only for ‘la Belgique’ as it was, but also for the future generation. With the new-found autonomy, formerly fatherly authoritarians’ disappearance and an increasingly close bond between soldierhood and responsible civilian patriotism, the individual soldiers’ body became the ultimate representation of the patriot – and of man.<sup>74</sup>

### An army of brothers

Soldiers’ individuality, as shown before, was increasingly recognised and prized as well. In 1905 a commander’s practice of ‘chatting casually with his men, treating them like young comrades rather than subordinates’ was noted with approval.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the army continued to strive for the construction of a collective of men, and continued to phrase this collectiveness in terms of kinship. Rather than presenting the whole collective as a child however, all individual soldiers were rallied as part of one large family. If descriptions of the army as a school of masculinity as such are rare, identifications of the barracks as the breeding ground for brotherhood among soldiers are abundant. Brotherhood was deemed essential for the strength of the army. ‘Fraternity is intimate unity. When it is attained within an army,

72 ‘Lieve Jeugd!’, in: J. Moulckers, *Bundel Vaderlandsche Gezangen* (Brussels 1905) 9. ‘Bemint dit land, zooals wij het beminden’; ‘Daar prijkt ’s lands maagdelijke beeltenis voor u, haar geest zweeft boven uwe hoofden rond’.

73 ‘Hebt het Vaderland lief!’, in: Moulckers, *Vaderlandsche gezangen*, 11. ‘Bemint uw vaderland gelijk gij uwe moeder bemint’, ‘mocht het eens bedreigd worden, offert U dan voor hetzelfde op, trekt naar de grenzen, om den Belgischen grond, de aarde uwer vaderen, te bedekken met het bolwerk uwer borsten’.

74 Despite the absence of universal (male) suffrage and universal military service, then, a link between soldierhood and citizenship was forged. On the link between militarisation and patriotism on the one hand, and an increasing stress on the sentimental, bourgeois family model as a cornerstone of the nation see Hagemann, ‘The First Citizen of the State’, 83.

75 ‘De la discipline’, *Belgique Militaire* (1905) 341, ‘Les chefs [...] causaient familièrement avec leurs hommes, qu’ils traitaient en jeunes camarades plutôt qu’en inférieurs’.



that army is capable of the greatest resistance'. The easiest way to attain this necessary 'intimate unity' among the troops, it was further argued, was a shared life in the barracks.<sup>76</sup> Other than other European nations, Belgium needed the barracks in order to create a cohesive army. 'Because the Belgians are no Swiss', according to a contributor to *Belgique Militaire*, their particular brand of patriotism did not suffice to protect the borders.<sup>77</sup> Years of foreign rule had made them 'docile' and therefore unable to reach brotherhood on their own: caught under the reign of tyrannical (step)fathers for too long, it seems after the revolutionary patricide the Belgian patriot still could not manage to reconcile his new liberal democratic rights with the concept of military discipline and obedience. Thus an environment had to be created that broke the band between young men of the nation and their parents.

Throughout the nineteenth century, several military authors stressed the necessity of removing recruits from their family in order to turn them into soldiers.<sup>78</sup> Despite their frequent use of metaphors of the army as a family and the barracks as the military man's home however, the *caserne* was emphatically not 'like' a family. Instead of the complementarity that characterised the family unit (with its different members and their different roles), the barracks were characterised by aspirations of unity through uniformity. The barracks were a homo-social space, not only because of the absence of women, but also because it brought together, ideally at least, young men of the same age cohort. The tradition of *remplacement* had created rifts in these cohorts, and especially by the end of the century it was the object of steady friction.

Although the army command was well aware of this practice and complaints about the replacement regularly surfaced, the fiction of the barracks as places filled with young recruits, fresh from the countryside and recently torn from their home was kept alive in military publications. In 1881 the camp of Beverloo, was said to be a 'fresh oasis'.

76 'La caserne', *Belgique Militaire* (1888) 480. 'La fraternité c'est l'union intime. Quand elle est dans une armée, cette armée est capable de la plus grande résistance'.

77 *Ibid.*, 482. 'Mais pourquoi la caserne en Belgique, et pas en Suisse? On s'en doute déjà: parce que les Belges ne sont pas des Suisses [...] Le caractère, le tempérament, les aptitudes, les mœurs d'un peuple ne se modifient pas du jour au lendemain'.

78 With similar logic, higher class boys and young men were sent to boarding school, and later to university to acquire necessary social skills in a homo-social environment. See e.g. J. Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France 1870-1920* (Ithaca 2006); A. Rauch, *Le premier sexe: Mutations et crise de l'identité masculine* (Paris 2000) 177-201; S. Levsen, *Elite, Männlichkeit und Krieg. Tübinger und Cambridge Studenten 1900-1929* (Göttingen 2006) and P.R. Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (Bloomington, Indianapolis 2005).



Comrades at work in the Beverloo camp, from a photoalbum entitled 'A travers le camp', 1908.  
Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History, Brussels.

The rural dweller, who is the most common in the army, is moved by the memory of his village, by the landscape that reminds him of his native fields, and by the forests that takes his mind back to those where, as a child, he liked to let his careless turbulence run its course.<sup>79</sup>

After some time in local garrisons, usually located in notoriously insalubrious buildings in the city, the young soldier would see the camp as a representation of the life he had been forced to leave. Additionally, the camp served as a place where recruits ‘burst into the admirable morale, and turned into touching and chivalrous brothers in arms’.<sup>80</sup> The trip to the national training camp might have removed the soldiers further from home physically, but its resemblance to surroundings most recruits would recognise as domestic also allowed for an easier recourse to the metaphor of fraternity. If the barracks were not necessarily like a home, they could feel ‘like home’.

The fiction of the age-based homogeneity of the barracks was further supported by frequent referrals to the soldiers as young men and sometimes even as adolescents. The need for their removal from the home was one that was tied to recruits’ age especially: these ‘young people’ were chosen as a healthy and robust youth and were said to be no more ‘immoral’ than ‘others of their age’.<sup>81</sup> The narrative of the barracks as a space of encounter for young men was usually part of an appealing discourse, mainly in an attempt to encourage well-off parents to forego *remplacement* and send their children to the barracks.<sup>82</sup> The metaphor of brotherhood was thus used not only *vis à vis* the young soldiers to frame their social relations in a strange non-domestic environment, but also as a way to represent barrack life to outsiders. If the metaphor of the army as a family hid family matters from the public eye, claiming a private sphere of its own, it also established a discursive bridge between soldiers and civilians, as all were engaged in similar social interactions.

79 ‘Au camp’, *Belgique Militaire* (1881) 17. ‘L’habitant des campagnes, dont l’élément domine dans l’armée, retrouve des souvenirs émouvants de son village, des sites qui lui rappellent ceux de son champ natal, et des bois qui retracent à son esprit ceux où il aimait, enfant, à égarer son insoucieux turbulence’.

80 *Ibid.*, ‘ces fraternelles agapes où les membres de l’armée font éclater cet admirable esprit de corps, cette touchante et chevaleresque confraternité d’armes’.

81 ‘La caserne. I. La caserne n’est pas un lieu d’irréligion ni de dévergandage’, *Belgique Militaire* (1901) 333, 337. ‘Ils sont ce qu’il ya de meilleure, de plus beau, de plus fort et de plus sain dans la nation; ils ont vingt ans, robuste est leur constitution’. ‘Nous n’irons pas jusqu’à prétendre que les conversations entre soldats sont toujours édifiantes, mais ce que nous affirmons, c’est qu’elles ne sont pas plus immorales que celles des autres jeunes gens de leur âge’.

82 As was the case, e.g. in: *La caserne. Prologue aux bourgeois, épilogue aux prolétaires* (s.l., s.a.).

A part of recruits' training as soldiers, their adaptation to army life, getting used to the barracks' rules and rhythm and gaining a place in its social structure, was in the hands of their peers. Banter on the bunks, recurring harassment (not documented for the Belgian case but probably similar to practices in Germany and France), and the simple example of more experienced soldiers served as a parallel to brotherly behaviour at home.<sup>83</sup> In a speech to the cadets in 1901, Colonel Devos addressed his 'young friends' after they had welcomed their 'big brothers' to the camp.<sup>84</sup> The soldiers greeted were indeed older men, but what was more important was that they were older as 'brothers', i.e. as soldiers: they had spent more time in a military environment and were therefore more 'at home' in the barracks.

## Conclusion

A study of the military micro-cosmos shows that fatherhood, even in this non-domestic setting, was one of the most influential codes of masculinity in the nineteenth century. Throughout the period studied, depictions of fatherhood, metaphors of paternity and associations of paternity with a number of politically and socially relevant characteristics, surface continually. In other homo-social contexts, such as the school and parliament, the code of fatherhood carried a similar importance: nowhere, and at no time in the nineteenth century does fatherhood disappear completely from the (public) discourse on social interaction, authority or masculinity. The meaning of the code used did shift slightly, however. It is hard to pinpoint an exact timeframe or a clear-cut change, but around 1880 the first signs of a more corporeal, reproduction-aimed understanding of fatherhood can be traced. Rather than a consciously social (and constructed) role, fatherhood became a biologically anchored identity that, as a practice accessible to all men, served to promote the new dominant metaphor of brotherhood. Rather than the symbolically fatherly authority, generals came to be represented as father-like and as actual fathers.

The change in the ways in which generals and officers could exert authority over their subordinates gives us an illuminating insight in the work that was done by masculinity, and in the way in which changing conceptions of

83 On recruits' 'socialisation' in the barracks and the frequent use of brutality by both their superiors and their peers, see Roynette, *Bons pour le service*, 250-270.


84 'Un écho des marches-manoevres', *Belgique Militaire* (1901) 928. 'Mes jeunes amis', 'le lieutenant-colonel Berg avait eu l'heureuse idée d'envoyer les jeunes pupilles de l'armée, leur fanfare en tête, à la rencontre de leurs "grands frères" pour les saluer à leur entrée dans leur garrison'.

masculinity could have a real impact on military discourse and practice as well as influence the governance of violence in the heart of the nation. Throughout the nineteenth century the construction of masculinity was essential for military men's identity and for commanders' access to authority. Whereas the twosome of masculinity and authority was consciously social and performed – generals' paternal behaviour signalling and enabling their authority – the late-nineteenth-century military hierarchy depended on characteristics that were ascribed to male bodies. The rhetorical work of creating symbolical fatherhood for commanders was replaced with performative work done by the muscular and reproductive male body. Men's shared 'real' fatherhood created a collective of brothers who, assuming their paternal rather than filial responsibilities, chose to be disciplined and actively obedient.

Around 1880 then, brotherhood replaced fatherhood as the most important kinship-metaphor for the expression of the political and social weight of masculinity. Parallel to this linguistic change, the character of the spaces occupied by men changed as well. Homo-social spaces such as the barracks and schools became more defined by their inhabitants' gender rather than other identity-markers such as age or class. Obviously, the age-cohort remained an important factor in organising men and class-distinctions did not become invisible, but the exclusion of women from homo-social spaces occupied a more preponderant place in discourses on the army (as well as the school). The growing attention granted to soldiers' heterosexuality was probably linked to this practice of exclusion. As women and men were increasingly regarded as essentially different and as their social roles were bound up with seemingly eternal, biologically defined bodies and behaviours, both their separation in the political sphere and their connection in the domestic one seemed unmistakably necessary.

The shifting meaning of masculinity and its metaphors of kinship ran parallel to a number of broader evolutions. The augmenting 'naturalisation' of gender is the most obvious one, but the move from fatherhood to brotherhood also signals an evolution in political thought and the concept of nation. By anchoring citizenship in a number of characteristics that were ascribed to men, the naturalisation at once made citizenship more democratic (making it available to all men, regardless of their class) and more perpetually exclusive (necessarily unavailable to women). Although fatherhood lost much of its symbolic meaning for the nation and its political practices, paternity as a sign of masculinity remained at the heart of the very definition of nation. Active participation in that nation became obligatory for all aspiring to masculinity, and became impossible for women and children. ◀





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