

**ARIELLI Nir and COLLINS Bruce: *Transnational Soldiers. Foreign Military Enlistment in the Modern Era*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. 263 pp.**

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### The complexity of modern enlistment.

**M**ale military conscription has long been considered among the elements that most deeply characterized the process of consolidation of nation states. As a mode to guarantee state security and, at the same time, an instrument to mobilize masses to their ‘civic duty,’ compulsory conscription progressively spread out throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

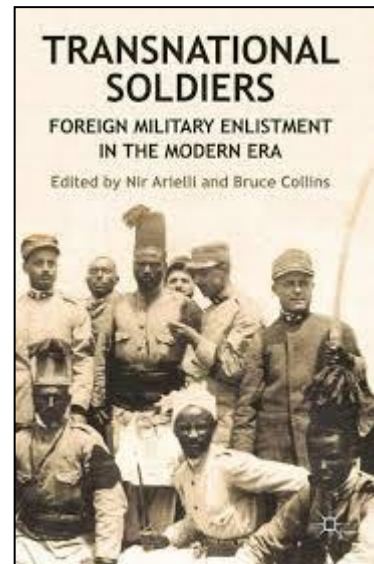
Though nobody could underestimate the central task played by compulsory male conscription, the recent transformations of nation states, decolonization processes and the consolidation of international economic and political interdependence stimulated the emergence of new historical perspectives also in military enlistment studies.

The volume edited by Nir Arielli and Bruce Collins helps understand the complexity of military conscription over the last two centuries by adopting a worldwide geographical focus. Although the volume is divided into thematic-chronological sections, each one highlights how the making and the transformations of national armies were characterized by various transnational interconnections and by a number of different modes of military service.

The first section (‘Re-examining the Decline of Mercenary Armies, 1776-1815’) tackles the changes that intervened in the very nature of military service between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Although 18<sup>th</sup> century military volunteering is usually simply described as mercenarism, reason for transnational enlistment could vary significantly. In some cases, enlisted soldiers were part of an army hired out by one state to another in conformity with previous traditions of military recruitment and cooperation. Similar situations are described by Daniel Krebs and Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi in their contributions. Especially since the last decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as Kevin Linch argues in his chapter about foreign recruitment in Britain during the French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, transnational enlistment became motivated not only by financial but also by other *ideal* reasons such as counter-revolutionary and anti-French sentiments.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the spread of nationalism deeply influenced the criteria used to select foreign troops. Some aspects of this problem are tackled in the second section of the book (‘Colonial Military Mobilization’) which focuses on the complex relation between European



colonial powers and their search (and need) for military manpower in the colonies. On the one hand, authors point out that the search for military manpower in the colonies could not take place without previous categorization of local inhabitants according to their supposed skills, abilities, and political loyalty. As Bruce Collins explains in his chapter, after the Mutiny-Rebellion of 1857, the concern about the role of native troops in the Indian army pushed the British elite to pay closer attention to possible different loyalty levels among local troops. In fact, the particular will of Punjabis to join the army and crush the sepoy Mutiny-Rebellion stimulated deeper reflection about their reasons and qualities thus enabling a process of sub-categorization of local peoples according to their socio-political and historical relations. As Christian Koller underlines, supposed political loyalty represented the main criterion that from time to time pushed the French authorities to impose limitation to the enlistment of some ethnic / national groups into the Foreign Legion. Supposed political loyalty, however, was not the only criterion adopted. In the case of Caymanians' mobilization and enrollment in the British Navy during the Second World War, which Daniel Owen Spence discusses in his contribution, race was a key factor in the Navy's initial preference for them. On the other hand, authorities' selection criteria, adopted policies, and military experience in imperial armies turned out to be of central importance for the reshaping of the sense of national / ethnic belonging within recruited groups. That's the case of people that enlisted in the Foreign Legion, where *ad hoc* practices were adopted in order to "level legionnaires' national, cultural and social differences." Mobilization of Caymanians within the British imperial army, their encounter with the British and other West Indians strengthened the Caymanians' cohesion and sense of belonging to a separate community.

As the following section 'After Empire: Flows of Military Talent' widely illustrates, not only were colonial armies places where new identities were shaped or strengthened but they also supplied the military personnel that would shape up national armies after the outbreak of colonial empires. That appears especially true in territories experiencing armed conflicts just after the emergence of independent states. As in the case of other east-central European countries, the creation of the Lithuanian nation state in 1918 occurred within the context of an ongoing civil war that lasted until 1920. In his contribution, Tomas Balkelis points out that in such a critical situation the majority of junior ex-Tsarist officers of Lithuanian origin became central for the creation of the first Lithuanian troops and, later, rose to high-ranking positions within the army. In other cases, the outbreak of colonial empires and the formation of independent states became a major reason for the creation of transnational networks of military talent. Stimulated by economic and ethnic reasons but also by historical loyalties that were sometimes in striking contrast with the interests of both former colonial powers and new independent states' elites, webs of fighters overlapping independent state's borders emerged. The post-colonial flows of military talent after the second World War in Thailand and Burma, and the conflict that spread out in the Central-Southern African region in the 1960s are the two study cases presented in the volume, respectively, by Nicholas Farrelly and Miles Larmer.

Apart from loyalties, over the last two centuries the persistence of transnational military enlistment was stimulated by a number of factors having both voluntary and coercive basis. The issue is debated in the section 'Ideology, Adventure, Coercion.' On the one hand, the

analysis carried out by Martin Robson sheds light upon the different reasons inspiring the voluntary troops that served in the British Auxiliary Legion in Spain in 1835. While in this case social factors played an important role in determining motivation to join the Legion, ideology resulted a much stronger mobilization stimulus for the British radicals that joined Garibaldi's volunteers in Italy in 1860 Marcella Pellegrino Sutcliffe discusses in her contribution. Even stronger was the force of ideology that mobilized tens of thousands of foreign volunteers that fought in the Spanish civil war. In his chapter, Nir Arielli points out that while recruitment was coordinated by Communist parties, ideological motivations stimulated rejected volunteers to seek new ways to reach Spain and fight. Ideology, finally, could condition the possibility and the modes to serve in a foreign army also indirectly. In his contribution, Donál O'Sullivan investigates the experience of Soviet POWs in the second World War that after being employed in the German army were captured by allied forces and prepared for sabotage works in Germany. Their experience as transnational soldiers was neither intentional nor voluntary but remained evidently influenced by the fear to be sent back to the USSR (where POWs could be shot for treason) and the growing distrust among allied forces.

Due to its temporal and geographical perspective, the volume, on the one hand, offers an interesting overview encompassing the limited field of transnational enlistment and giving a new perspective on the very problems of military enrolment in the age of nationalism. On the other hand, the volume is conceptually interesting since it enables to see national armies as multi-level conglomerates in which the achievement of national goals results as the output of transnational networks and loyalties, transnational mercenarism and compulsory national enlistment. Last but not least, the volume clearly and effectively underlines, as the editors point out in their own conclusions, that far from opening the way to a new era, today's phenomena such as the emergence of transnational Jihadist network and of professional contractors, do not represent a way back to the pre-modern era but the increasing prevalence of a trend that persevered throughout the last 200 years.