‘It Still Makes Me Shudder’

Memories of Massacres and Atrocities during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

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This article looks at a number of French testimonies of massacres during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars committed by combatants, for the most part against civilians. Much of what we know about massacres is based on personal testimonies that are invariably from the perspective of the perpetrator, in this case, troops of the Grande Armée. Just as important as understanding why massacres occurred is to understand how they were represented, recalled and remembered by those who witnessed them. In this, memoirs become an indispensable tool for what they tell us about how the killings were justified, either from the individual or the state’s point of view, and for the insights one can glean into the minds of those that either committed or witnessed the atrocities taking place. Descriptions of massacres are commonly used to highlight the horror of war rather than the horror of the event itself. Massacre was also a means of underlining the difficulties encountered by the French in conquering, that is, in ‘civilizing’, Europe. Massacre, the article concludes, was an accepted if not an acceptable part of eighteenth-century European warfare. This, however, did not attenuate the horror; it was something that many veterans had difficulty recalling, even decades after the events described.

Keywords: atrocities, eighteenth-century warfare, memory, massacres, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars

On 3 March 1799 the French army arrived before the walls of Jaffa in what was then known as Syria (now just outside Tel Aviv) and started to lay siege to the town. Four days later, after a breach in the wall had been made, Napoleon sent two emissaries to negotiate the surrender; the reply was the appearance of their heads on pikes behind the walls. That same day the town fell and the troops gave themselves up to pillage, rape and murder for two, possibly four, whole days (witnesses diverge on this point), indiscriminately killing anyone that fell in their way, regardless of gender or age, stopping only with ‘the besiegers ...

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weary of killing ... tired to death, exhausted by the debauchery'.[1] Etienne-Louis Malus, a doctor who had accompanied the army, recalled what he saw many years later:

> The soldiers cut the throats of men and women, the old and the young, Christians and Turks ... father and son one on top of the other (on the same pile of bodies), a daughter being raped on the cadaver of her mother, the smoke from the burnt clothes of the dead, the smell of blood, the groans of the wounded, the shouts of the victors who were quarrelling about the loot taken from a dying victim.[2]

The killing did not stop there. Over a three-day period, from 8 to 10 March, anywhere between 2400 and 3000 prisoners were marched to a beach a little over a kilometre south of the city and slaughtered.[3] On the second day the order was given to spare bullets, and to bayonet to death those who remained. Squares of French soldiers were formed, in the middle of which prisoners were placed. The troops then advanced and killed everyone in the square:[4]

> The soldiers had been carefully instructed not to waste ammunition, and they were cruel enough to stab them with their bayonets. Among the victims, we found many children who, in the act of death, had clung to their fathers. This example will teach our enemies that they cannot count on French good faith, and sooner or later, the blood of these 3000 victims will be upon us.[5]

Another member of the expedition, Jacques-François Miot, heard what was about to happen and followed the prisoners to their place of execution. He is perhaps one of the few people who witnessed a massacre during this period to record how the victims reacted: 'They did not cry, they did not shout, they were resigned.' He also saw:

> a respectable old man whose behaviour and manners announced a superior person ... coldly dig in front of him, in the moving sand, a hole deep enough to be buried alive: no doubt he wanted to die at the hands of his own. He lay on his back in that tutelary and painful tomb,

1 X.-B. Saintine, ed., *Histoire de l'expédition française en Egypte*, 3 vols (Paris, 1830), II, pp. 344–45; P. Millet, *Le Chasseur Pierre Millet: souvenirs de la campagne d'Egypte (1798–1801)* (Paris, 1903), p. 82; C. François, *Journal du capitaine François* (Paris, 2003), p. 275, 7 March 1799. Interestingly, some memoirs, such as those by Elie Krettly, *Souvenirs historiques du capitaine Krettly* (Paris, 2003), present at Jaffa, simply pass over the massacre.

2 E.-L. Malus de Mitry, *L'Agenda de Malus: souvenirs de l'expédition d'Egypte, 1798–1801* (Paris, 1892), pp. 135–36.

3 According to Detroye, the number massacred over the three days came to 2441. Vincennes, Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre [SHAT], Mémoires et Reconnaissances, Journal de Detroye, M1 527, f. 54, 20 ventose an VII. Bonaparte boasted of 4000 executions in a letter to the Directory: *Correspondance de Napoléon I*, 32 vols (1858–70), v. n. 4035, 13 March 1798. For the location, see N. Schur, *Napoleon in the Holy Land* (London, 1999), p. 67.

4 F. Vigo-Roussillon, *Journal de campagne, 1793–1837* (Paris, 1981), p. 83.

5 André Peyrusse to his mother, in C. de la Jonquière, *L'Expédition d'Egypte, 1798–1801*, 5 vols (Paris, 1899–1907), IV, pp. 271–72.

> and his comrades, addressing their imploring prayers to God, soon covered him with sand, and stamped the ground which served him as a shroud, probably with the idea of putting an end to his suffering.[6]

The troops, it seems, only reluctantly obeyed the order to kill – 'extreme repugnance' is the phrase used – but obey they did.

These reports, graphic and detailed right down to the manner of the killing and the reaction of some of the victims, illustrate the three types of extreme violence one most commonly encounters in accounts of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, namely the slaughter associated with the sacking of towns, the killing of prisoners, and the abuse of civilians and of women in particular. Mass killings and atrocities were so widespread that they would appear to be an integral if not an accepted part of warfare during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic periods.[7] Not all historians hold this view: one recently argued, for example, that the two regions most renowned for their extreme violence, the Vendée and Spain, 'are noteworthy because their atrocities were not typical of warfare in the period'.[8] The observation is also made by a French specialist of the civil war in the Vendée who believes that for some political and military authorities, as well as soldiers and rebels, the 'normal rules of war' simply disappeared.[9] In some instances, claims of mutilation and indeed the extent of some massacres and atrocities are considered exaggerated.[10] There appears to be a commonly held view, with some exceptions, that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were relatively civilized; one historian has even asserted that there is 'little evidence that soldiers attacked civilians'.[11]

If the excesses found in the Vendée are portrayed as aberrations, as exceptions to the 'normal' rules of warfare, they are explained by

6 J.-F. Miot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des expéditions en Egypte et en Syrie pendant les années VI, VII et VIII de la République française* (Paris, 1814), pp. 145–48.

7 The massacre in history is a subject of increasing interest. Studies include: M. Levene and P. Little, eds, *The Massacre in History* (Oxford, 1999); D. El Kenz, ed., *Le Massacre, objet d'histoire* (Paris, 2005); J. Semelin, *Purifier et détruire: usages politiques des massacres et génocides* (Paris, 2005); and P. Dwyer and L. Ryan, eds, *Theatres of Violence: Revisiting the Massacre in History* (New York, forthcoming). For work on the treatment of civilians during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, see T.C.W. Blanning, 'Liberation or Occupation? Theory and Practice in the French Revolutionaries' Treatment of Civilians outside France', in M. Grimsley and C.J. Rogers, eds, *Civilians in the Path of War* (Lincoln, 2002), pp. 111–35; M. Rowe, 'Civilians and Warfare during the French Revolutionary Wars', in L.S. Frey and M.L. Frey, eds, *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Europe, 1618–1900* (Westport, CT, 2007), pp. 93–132; and M. Broers, 'Civilians in the Napoleonic Wars', in Frey and Frey, *Daily Lives*, pp. 133–74.

8 H. Brown, 'Napoleon Bonaparte, Political Prodigy', *History Compass* V (2007), p. 1392.

9 J.-C. Martin, *Violence et révolution: essai sur la naissance d'un mythe national* (Paris, 2006), p. 205.

10 See, for example, E.J. Woell, *Small-Town Martyrs and Murderers: Religious Revolution and Counterrevolution in Western France, 1774–1914* (Milwaukee, WI, 2006), pp. 149, 153.

11 P. Browning, *The Changing Nature of Warfare: The Development of Land Warfare from 1792 to 1945* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 47. Similarly, I. Germani, 'Hatred and Honour in the Military Culture of the French Revolution', in G. Kassimeris, ed., *Warrior's Dishonour: Barbarity, Morality and Torture in Modern Warfare* (London, 2006), pp. 41–57, argues that

a bloody civil war involving revolutionaries (referred to as the 'bleus') and royalists (referred to as the 'blancs') that was exacerbated by an extreme revolutionary rhetoric calling for the extermination of the enemy.[12] The viciousness of the war in Spain, similar in some respects to the Vendée, southern Italy and the Caribbean, is explained by the fact that it was in part a guerrilla war in which it was difficult to distinguish between combatant and non-combatant. It led to the paradoxical situation in which the invader felt more insecure than the inhabitant, and might help explain the extreme nature of the violence that ensued. But that is only part of the story, and to focus on the rhetoric of violence or particular theatres of war, or indeed on particular atrocities, is to neglect the extent of the killings carried out by various French armies in all theatres of operations.[13]

What we know about mass killings and atrocities committed during these wars largely comes from accounts found in war memoirs, journals and letters. Details can also be gleaned from newspaper accounts and from the official military reports, although the latter have yet to be explored systematically and in any great detail.[14] If letters, diaries, and journal entries are more directly related to the events in time, and therefore arguably more valuable as historical documents, they too can go through a process of self-censorship. A soldier is not likely to tell his parents or sweetheart everything that he experienced, and is more likely to give reassurance than to recount stark realities. Memoirs, on the other hand, are distorted by time, even if they are sometimes based on notes taken during the wars.[15] However, if they are written many years after the event they can also be the result of more mature reflection about the wars and an individual's experiences in them.

This article, however, does not focus on either the accuracy or inaccuracy of particular atrocity stories, but on massacres from the French perspective, the manner in which mass killings and atrocities

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the Jacobin discourse of hatred against the enemy was moderated by the 'warrior's code of honour' which worked to limit the barbarity of warfare, while J. Hantraye, *Les Cosaques aux Champs-Elysées: l'occupation de la France après la chute de Napoléon* (Paris, 2005), p. 122, believes that the sacking of towns after 1650 was unusual. The exceptions to the rule are: C. Esdaile, *Napoleon's Wars: An International History, 1803–1815* (London, 2007), p. 43, who sees massacres as the order of the day, and this throughout the eighteenth century, and Broers, 'Civilians', p. 159, who goes to the opposite extreme and asserts that the wars were 'the most brutal Europe has seen up till that time'.

12 A recent proponent of this argument is D.A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare As We Know It* (Boston, 2007).

13 For the purposes of this essay, an atrocity is defined as an extreme act committed against the body of a victim, living or dead, such as torture or the hacking off of body parts, by the perpetrator. Rape falls within this category as well.

14 Military justice files at Vincennes in Paris are overflowing with individual cases of desertion, theft, rape, murder and pillage. For campaigns of 1795 and 1796, see I. Germani, 'Military Justice under the Directory: The Armies of Italy and of the Sambre and Meuse', *French History* XXIII (2009), pp. 47–68.

15 As was the case, to cite but two examples, of P. Guingret, *Relation historique et militaire de la campagne de Portugal sous le maréchal Masséna* (Limoges, 1817), and J.-J. de Naylies, *Mémoires sur la guerre d'Espagne, pendant les années 1808, 1809, 1810 et 1811* (Paris, 1817).

were recollected and portrayed, and the reasons put forward to justify them. The underlying assumption is that, often writing many years after the events they describe, memoirists are more likely to express remorse or regret for what they had seen or done. Nevertheless, the representation of massacres is only one aspect of the extreme violence that characterized the period. Of interest too are the reasons why veterans of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars felt it necessary to mention particular atrocities at all, often many years after the event, and why they did so in a medium that was not always meant for public consumption, that is through private writings that took the form of memoirs and diaries not meant for publication.[16] By focusing on the types of stories that are told, and by combining a number of different sources, we should obtain a more accurate assessment of why particular types of massacres occurred, and indeed of the state of mind of the men who ordered and committed them.

I

The sacking of towns, during which soldiers committed murder and rape in what is often described as an uncontrolled 'frenzy', was part and parcel of eighteenth-century warfare.[17] It had indeed been that way for many centuries, although there is surprisingly little literature on the phenomenon.[18] It was based on a 'law of war', an unwritten understanding that the soldiery would be rewarded for the hardships, and often the lack of pay, endured during a siege by being given permission to loot the town, unless the town capitulated before the final assault. Jaffa therefore conforms in many respects to the sacking of countless numbers of towns in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some were carried out on a relatively small scale, while others again were vast, such as the storming of Magdeburg by

[16] Memoirs especially are a process of reconstructing but also in some ways, through the selection of what is included and what is discarded, about forgetting the past: S. Luzzatto, *Mémoire de la Terreur: vieux montagnards et jeunes républicains au XIXe siècle*, trans. from the Italian by S. Carpentarie-Messina (Lyons, 1991), p. 18.

[17] See, for example, G. Rothenberg, 'The Age of Napoleon', in M. Howard, G.J. Andreopoulos and M.R. Shulman, eds, *The Laws of War: Constraints on Warfare in the Western World* (New Haven, 1994), p. 87; F. della Peruta, 'War and Society in Napoleonic Italy: The Armies of the Kingdom of Italy at Home and Abroad', in J. Davis and P. Ginsborg, eds, *Society and Politics in the Age of the Risorgimento: Essays in Honour of Denis Mack Smith* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 43.

[18] For sackings related to an earlier period, see E. Benzoni, 'Les Sacs des villes à l'époque des guerres d'Italie (1494–1530): les contemporains face au massacre', in El Kenz, *Massacre*, pp. 157–70; and G. Parker, 'The Etiquette of Atrocity: The Laws of War in Early Modern Europe', in G. Parker, *Success is Never Final: Empire, War, and Faith in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2002), pp. 150–59. For siege warfare during this period, see J.W. Wright, 'Sieges and Customs of War at the Opening of the Eighteenth Century', *American Historical Review* XXXIX (1934), pp. 629–44; C. Oman, *A History of the Peninsular War*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1902–30), V, pp. 256–64. G. Best, *War and Society in Revolutionary Europe, 1770–1870* (London, 1982), pp. 100–02, contains a brief description of a 'typical siege' during this period.

imperial troops in May 1631, which supposedly resulted in about 20 000 deaths; the fall of Warsaw to Russian troops in November 1794, which reportedly resulted in anywhere between 12 000 and 20 000 deaths in the space of a few hours;[19] the French storming of Tarragona in June 1811, which resulted in the deaths of around 15 000 civilians;[20] or the British capture of the Spanish city of San Sebastián in 1812, which saw half the population killed.[21] These are some of the most notorious examples. Generally speaking, though, the number of deaths resulting from the sacking of towns was considerably smaller. Yet again, on other occasions, such as the siege of Valencia in 1812, garrisons were allowed to leave unharmed while the civilian population was spared.

Beyond the sacking of towns, the French penal code of 1796 supposedly regulated the soldiers' conduct with civilians and dispensed harsh punishments for those caught looting, raping or killing. The reality, however, was very different, and meant that the laws of war were often set aside.[22] Mass killings and atrocities took place when villages and towns were occupied and looted by troops on the hunt for provisions, a common occurrence during the wars, and one that invariably led to clashes and violence between civilians and the military.[23] Massacres also occurred in reprisal against casualties incurred by local rebels, when prisoners were killed during and immediately after armed encounters, or when armed bands of civilians attacked isolated troops or other civilians accused of collaborating with the enemy. Without going into a teleology of massacre for the period, there is little in common, except the end result, between the execution (by guillotine and shooting) of 503 men and women who had fought with the British against French republican forces in Guadeloupe in December 1794;[24] the burning alive of 3000 wounded Austrian soldiers in the village of Ebersberg in

[19] A. Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots and Revolutionaries, 1776–1871* (London, 1999), p. 93, and *The Last King of Poland* (London, 1992), pp. 429–30.

[20] Rothenberg, 'Age of Napoleon', p. 93.

[21] Not to mention the British storming of the Spanish cities of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz. See C. Esdaile, *The Peninsular War: A New History* (London, 2002), pp. 386–87; J.A. Meyer, 'Wellington and the Sack of Badajoz: A "Beastly Mutiny" or a Deliberate Policy?', *Proceedings of the Consortium on Revolutionary Europe, 1750–1850* XX (1991), pp. 251–57; P. Hayward, ed., *Surgeon Henry's Trifles: Events of a Military Life* (London, 1970), pp. 43–44; A. Brett-James, ed., *Edward Costello: The Peninsular and Waterloo Campaigns* (London, 1967), pp. 97–98; L.-G. Suchet, *Memoirs of the War in Spain, from 1808 to 1814*, 2 vols (London, 1829), II, pp. 99–105.

[22] For a discussion on the 'laws and customs of war' during this period, see Rothenberg, 'Age of Napoleon', pp. 86–97.

[23] On this point, see Blanning, 'Liberation or Occupation?', and T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792–1802* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 83–98. The Revolutionary Wars were notorious for soldiers living off the land, but the phenomenon can be observed in earlier periods. See, for example, F. Tallet, 'Barbarism in War: Soldiers and Civilians in the British Isles, c. 1641–1652', in Kassimeris, *Warrior's Dishonour*, pp. 23–24. On attempts to reduce pillaging in the French army during the Revolutionary Wars, see J.A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791–94* (Urbana, 1984), pp. 97–115.

[24] L. Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Williamsburg, VA, 2004), p. 201.

Germany in 1809 by troops of the Grande Armée;[25] and the massacre of around 320 French men, women and children in Valencia in 1808 by a small band of men led by a friar called Baltasar Calvo.[26]

Each massacre, in other words, is surrounded by a particular set of circumstances, and the perpetrators are driven by different reasons that have to do with the place and timing of the killings. Some of the most notorious committed during the wars were carried out by republican troops in the Vendée – the so-called 'infernal columns' – who left a swathe of destruction as they marched through the French countryside.[27] But a similar tactic was used in Egypt during the retreat from Syria, when the country between St John of Acre and Jaffa was laid waste,[28] and in southern Italy, if on a smaller scale, where in the summer of 1806 the French army killed thousands of locals and devastated more than 25 villages in an attempt to wipe out all armed resistance. Lauria, a town of around 9000 inhabitants, was perhaps the worst hit, possibly as an act of revenge for what had been done to a French officer sent to parlay with the town: his body was supposedly cut into pieces, put into a basket and sent back with French prisoners.[29] During the fighting the town was set on fire so that those attempting to escape the flames were simply shot or bayoneted, without distinction of age or sex, as they emerged from their houses. The lower part of the town was soon reduced to a smouldering ruin. Masséna and his officers unsuccessfully attempted to prevent the troops from pillaging and burning.[30] Some 734 men, women and children were killed in this way (according to the French). One Neapolitan colonel estimated that there were more than 3000 dead and wounded. A further 341 people taken prisoner were shot or hanged over the following days.[31]

[25] Reported in G. Bangofsky, 'Les Étapes de Georges Bangofsky, officier lorrain: extraits de son journal de campagnes (1797–1815)', *Mémoires de l'Académie de Stanislas* II (1905), p. 291.

[26] C. Esdaile, *Fighting Napoleon: Guerrillas, Bandits and Adventurers in Spain, 1808–1814* (New Haven, 2004), p. 64. It seems that Calvo incited the crowd in order to further his own political ambitions. He was refused a position on the local junta; the massacre was a means of persuading the authorities to change their minds. An English account of this event is in E. Bronson, ed., *Select Reviews of Literature, and Spirit of Foreign Magazines* (Philadelphia, 1812), II, pp. 262–63.

[27] The literature on the Vendée is too large to cite extensively here. Examples include: C. Tilly, *The Vendee* (London, 1964); J.-C. Martin, *La Vendée et la France* (Paris, 1987); and R. Secher, *A French Genocide: The Vendée*, trans. G. Holoch (Notre Dame, IN, 2003).

[28] SHAT, Mémoires et Reconnaissances, André Peyrusse, M1 582, f. 61, 6 messidor an VII; L.-A. Berthier, *Mémoires du maréchal Berthier*, 2 vols (Paris, 1827), I, pp. 99–100; François, *Journal*, pp. 315–16, 23 May 1799; J. Miot, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1804), pp. 233–34; H. Laurens, *L'Expédition d'Égypte: 1798–1801* (Paris, 1997), pp. 282–83.

[29] According to J.-M. Chevalier, *Souvenirs des guerres napoléoniennes* (Paris, 1970), p. 74.

[30] Report from César Berthier, SHAT, Armée de Naples, C-5, 4, 23–25 August 1806.

[31] The report in SHAT, Armée de Naples, C-5, 4, 23–25 August 1806, states that 'more than 400 brigands died', not counting other casualties. See also L.-M. Routier, *Récits d'un soldat de la République et de l'Empire* (Paris, 2004), p. 87; E. Gachot, *Histoire militaire de Masséna: la troisième campagne d'Italie (1805–1806)* (Paris, 1911), pp. 206–08; M. Finley, *The Most Monstrous of Wars: The Napoleonic Guerrilla War in Southern Italy, 1806–1811* (Columbia, SC, 1994), pp. 64–65; Bell, *First Total War*, pp. 273–74.

In these instances the initial killing came from below, despite efforts to prevent it, although the subsequent killing of prisoners, meant to serve as an example, was controlled by the general on the ground, Masséna. Napoleon could be just as brutal; he was known to have urged the eradication of villages for resisting.[32] In either case, these public killings served a purpose – to reduce areas of resistance to compliance, and to strike fear into the hearts of neighbouring populations in the hope that opposition would melt away. This did indeed occur on occasion. After the pitiless sacking of the village of Longo-Bucco in Calabria, for example, the neighbouring town of Bochigliero opened its doors without resistance.[33] More often than not, however, the harsh repression instigated against local populations was in reaction to the fact that the inhabitants had resisted or that they had committed atrocities against the occupying army. In the case of the sacking of Tarragona, General Suchet blamed the atrocities committed by his men on the governor and the garrison of the town for 'defying the last assault', thus drawing on their heads 'by obstinacy or ... perseverance' the catastrophe which ensued.[34] That sort of self-serving justification is not habitual, however.

Veterans were more prone to explaining the violent excesses they were guilty of in terms of retaliation for the types of atrocities committed against the French.[35] One often comes across accounts of comrades ambushed and killed by rebels, their bodies mutilated. 'Murdered prisoners', wrote an Italian officer in the Grande Armée, 'were found torn to pieces with the most inhuman cruelty, their hearts, bowels, and brains gouged out, their private members stuffed into their mouths ... there was no form of cruelty that the insurgents did not perpetrate against our men who fell into their hands, even when they were already dying.'[36] At Los Arcos the canteen woman accompanying a regiment of the Young Guard was about to give birth, so she was left with her soldier husband in the keep of the mayor of the village. When the men returned, they found the mother hanging from a willow tree, the husband from another and the newborn from the man's neck. They buried the three of them before sacking the village, even if most of the inhabitants had fled by this stage.[37] In Portugal, Joseph de Naylies's regiment brought up the rear: 'As soon as an unfortunate soldier lagged behind, he was massacred; those horrors were punished

[32] M. Vox, *Correspondance de Napoléon: six cents lettres de travail (1806–1810)* (Paris, 1943), pp. 312–14, 7 February 1806.
[33] Duret de Tavel, *Séjour d'un officier français en Calabre* (Rouen, 1820), pp. 173–76, 178.
[34] Suchet, *Memoirs*, II, pp. 102, 105.
[35] See, for example, J.-N.-A. Noël, *With Napoleon's Guns: The Military Memoirs of an Officer of the First Empire* (London, 2005), p. 87.
[36] Cited in della Peruta, 'War and Society', p. 43.
[37] J.-E.-F. Guitard, *Souvenirs militaires du Premier Empire: mémoires du grenadier de la Garde, Joseph-Esprit-Florentin Guitard (1809–1815)* (Paris, 1934), p. 25.

by other horrors, from village to village we set alight the fires.'[38] This was atrocities and massacre as reprisal.[39]

Some memoirists attempted to explain the excessive brutality with which resistance was put down by the fact that the locals had been 'worked up into a religious frenzy' by priests and monks who had convinced their people that they were fighting the forces of Satan, that is, the French. Priests were classically described as holding bibles in one hand and weapons in the other.[40] Captain François entered the town of Manzaneres in Spain in June 1808 to find that over 1200 sick and wounded left behind had been killed by the inhabitants of the town and the neighbouring villages, and their bodies cut into pieces and dispersed around the town and the surrounding fields. They were told by a number of Spanish that priests had counselled the inhabitants to commit the crimes: 'One word from those ghosts [that is, the priests] with which the country is infested and all sorts of cruelties are committed by the people towards their enemies.'[41] The French revolutionaries had portrayed the uprisings in the Vendée in much the same way, that is, as the result of refractory clergy who incited locals to revolt.[42] Whether this was the case or not is beside the point: social, political and economic grievances that erupted into rebellion often took on religious hues, as had been the case throughout the early modern period.

Resistance most often occurred not because of any religious or political bent on the part of the inhabitants involved, but quite simply out of a question of survival. There is no denying the privations experienced by troops of all armies while on campaign during this period, which meant that pillaging and marauding often became a necessity. The marauding carried out by French armies on the move was so widespread in some regions, along with the accompanying acts of violence, that local populations often rose up en masse.[43] However, any form of resistance immediately led to those people being categorized as enemies of the Revolution, and as therefore counter-revolutionary, superstitious and in the pay of a foreign enemy. Captain Pierre Ballue attempted to place the sacking of the town of Montillano in context

[38] Naylies, *Mémoires*, p. 123.

[39] A similar scenario was played out in most occupied countries. In Egypt, for example, the village of Salmieh and the neighbouring hamlets were sacked after the French found several soldiers who had been killed and mutilated: L. Reybaud, ed., *Histoire scientifique et militaire de l'expédition française en Egypte*, 10 vols (Paris, 1830–36), III, p. 261.

[40] The image dominated portrayals of the Spanish clergy. Examples can be found in SHAT, Armée de Naples, C-5, 4, 23–25 August 1806; della Peruta, 'War and Society', p. 40; François, *Journal*, p. 561, 2 May 1808; Esdaile, *Fighting Napoleon*, pp. 93–94. Many memoirists, on the other hand, blamed the British for the revolts in southern Italy and Spain. See, for example, Duret de Tavel, *Séjour*, pp. 293–94.

[41] François, *Journal*, p. 570, 22 June 1808.

[42] See Woell, *Small-Town Martyrs*, pp. 161–62.

[43] Blanning, 'Liberation or Occupation?', pp. 127–28.

by explaining that the rebels had been fed and armed by England.[44] If rebels were anti-revolutionary, then the brutal suppression of regional populations in revolt was justified by that fact alone.[45] Indeed, there often appears to have been a concerted effort, in official circles at least, to portray those killed not as victims of French repression, but rather as episodes, difficult but necessary, on the road to bringing the Revolution to the peoples of Europe.[46]

The reported massacre of the inhabitants of the northern Italian town of Pavia illustrates this point.[47] The day before the sacking, Napoleon issued a proclamation lamenting the fact that nobles, priests and Austrian agents had been deluding the people.[48] When the town was stormed on 26 May 1796, Napoleon handed over the city to his soldiers. What happened next varies according to the sources. The town was pillaged for anywhere between 3 and 24 hours. Some historians refer to 'an orgy of rape and looting',[49] while the French sources tend to downplay the numbers killed. According to the memoirs of Marshal Marmont, for example, 'The town was delivered up to pillage, and though they completed the job, the troops did not commit, as often happens in such cases, murder or other atrocities.'[50] One contemporary account asserted that no murders were committed and no women were raped, which would be remarkable if it were the case; according to other accounts some officers were obliged to protect women from the 'lubricity of their comrades', while others were killed attempting to prevent troops from committing atrocities.[51] The implication of course is that outrages were indeed committed, and that the men were reined in only with difficulty, but the point is that not only did the French (almost) never deny that massacres occurred, even if they did downplay the number of deaths, but that these were portrayed as inevitable hurdles on the road to enlightenment. One can postulate from this, and from the examples that we shall see below, that a rhetoric specific to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars was invented, secular in nature, to justify mass killings.[52]

[44] P. Ballue, 'Mémoires du capitaine Ballue de la Haye-Descartes', *Bulletin de la Société archéologique de Touraine* XXXIII (1963), p. 362.

[45] There was a double standard at play here. French peasants who had attacked Prussian and Austrian troops invading France in 1792 were portrayed as soldier-citizens legitimately defending their property: Germani, 'Hatred and Honour', pp. 44–45.

[46] A. Duprat, 'La Construction de la mémoire par les gravures: Carle Vernet et les tableaux historiques des campagnes d'Italie', in J.-P. Barbe and R. Bernecker, eds, *Les Intellectuels européens et la campagne d'Italie, 1796–1798* (Münster, 1999), pp. 202–03.

[47] See T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars, 1787–1802* (London, 1996), pp. 166–67; P.G. Dwyer, *Napoleon: The Path to Power, 1769–1799* (London, 2007), pp. 229–33.

[48] *Moniteur universel*, 14 June 1796.

[49] Blanning, 'Liberation or Occupation?', p. 127.

[50] A.-F. Marmont, *Mémoires du maréchal Marmont, duc de Raguse, de 1792 à 1841*, 9 vols (Paris, 1857), I, p. 180.

[51] J. Landrieux, *Mémoires de l'adjutant-général Jean Landrieux* (Paris, 1893), pp. 70–71; F. Bouvier, 'La Révolte de Pavie (23–26 mai 1796)', *Revue historique de la Révolution française* II (1911), pp. 425–27.

[52] This secular justification for mass killings might be distinguished from massacres committed in other periods in which a distinctly religious explanation was used. For the

II

If references to massacre, murder and rape are common enough throughout the contemporary sources, as a rule veterans tend to limit themselves to describing in the broadest possible terms the circumstances surrounding a particular atrocity. The memoirs dealing with the Spanish campaign, for example, are replete with descriptions of what Spanish guerrillas, invariably dubbed 'brigands', did to captured French soldiers – tongues were torn out, ears and noses cut off, eyes and nails plucked out; captives were slowly burnt or flayed alive, genitalia were stuffed in men's mouths, victims were sawn in half, limbs were nailed to trees.[53] Some forms of mutilation – ears and fingers being cut off – involved trophy taking.[54] Captain François recalled the ferocity of the Spanish in his journal:

> I have seen ... officers, soldiers and even women disembowelled from the womb to the stomach and their breasts cut off, men sawn in two, others with the noble parts of their bodies cut off and placed in their mouths; others buried alive up to the shoulders, their parts in their mouth; others again hung by their feet in a chimney and their head burnt. Finally, at Val-de-Peñas, I saw 53 men buried up to their shoulders around a building serving as a hospital in which 400 men had been killed [*égorgés*], cut into pieces and thrown into the streets and the courtyards.[55]

This particular anecdote of a massacre committed by the Spanish against French troops might strain credulity, but the point being made is that the Spanish were barbaric, and hence deserved no mercy. It corresponds in part to the Jacobin revolutionary discourse that portrayed the Revolutionary Wars as a merciless struggle against a barbarous foe.

There is far less detail, however, when the French describe how they were given orders to sack villages and to spare no one. On Saint-Domingue, Philippe Beaudoin describes in a matter-of-fact way how 200 prisoners were hanged after a battle, how they killed prisoners before their departure in 1802 (without mentioning how many were killed) and how 600 prisoners were put to the sword after the storming of a fort.[56] In Spain, François Lavaux recalled how, 'We succeeded in

American colonial period, see K.O. Kuppermann, *Indians and English: Facing Off in Early America* (Ithaca, 2000), pp. 220–34.

53 Sergeant Lavaux, *Mémoires de Campagne* (Paris, 2004), pp. 137, 150–51; François, *Journal*, pp. 567, 569–570, 14 and 22 June 1808; Chevalier, *Souvenirs*, p. 83; E. Blaze, *La Vie militaire sous l'empire, ou, Moeurs de la garnison, du bivouac et de la caserne*, 2 vols (Paris, 1837), I, pp. 137–38.

54 For examples of trophy collecting, see A.-J. Bigarré, *Mémoires du général Bigarré, 1775–1813* (Paris, 2002), p. 56; Brett-James, *Edward Costello*, p. 112.

55 François, *Journal*, p. 567, 14 June 1808.

56 P. Beaudoin, *Carnet d'étapes: souvenirs de guerre et de captivité lors de l'expédition de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 2000), pp. 52, 56 and 61.

entering the town [...], which was immediately pillaged and reduced to ash'. Or again, 'We succeeded in entering the village [...]. We burnt [it down] and killed everyone we found there.'[57] Joseph de Naylies writes in the briefest manner of two Spanish villages that were burnt to the ground and had hundreds of their inhabitants killed.[58] Charles-Pierre-Lubin Griois refers to the sacking of the town of Corigliano in Calabria in which 'soldiers smashed in doors, pillaged houses, killed and threw people out the windows, and the cries of the men who were being pursued and the women who were being raped were mixed with the noise of shots being fired from all sides'.[59] Maurice de Tascher, an officer and a relative of Empress Josephine, gives a brief description of the sacking of Cordoba on 30 June 1808, one of the worst perhaps committed by the French during the war in Spain:

> The Cathedral and the sacred lives within it were not spared, which made the Spanish look upon us with horror, saying out loud that they would prefer we violated their women than their churches. We did both. The convents had to suffer all that debauchery has invented and the outrages of the soldier given up to himself.[60]

Montillano in Spain was the home town of a guerrilla leader by the name of Romero. On 30 April 1810 French troops were ordered to burn his house and to kill all those they found in it, but soon the flames spread to the whole town. The next day the troops proceeded to the neighbouring town of Algodonales when an advance guard of French hussars was shot at, and eight soldiers were killed: 'There was nothing else to do other than to lay siege to the rebel town, house by house, and as was customary for a town that was stormed, the garrison has to be put to the sword. That is what we did.'[61] In the course of the house-to-house fighting, Captain Ballue called on one woman to surrender: 'She refused. I had her taken to the garret and everyone was put to the sword.'[62] By the end of the day, he estimated that 700 men, women and children had been killed, not as bad, he reasoned, as having lost 'more brave men in that miserable affair than the village and its peasants were worth'.[63]

Captain Ballue's avowal, implied rather than direct, that he had actually taken part in the killing is not common. The interesting point about these descriptions – any number of examples could be given – is that the act of recalling past campaigns and the horrors that went with them almost never equated to an individual admittance of having taken

[57] Lavaux, *Mémoires*, pp. 151, 152–55.
[58] Naylies, *Mémoires*, pp. 64–65.
[59] C.-P.-L. Griois, *Mémoires du général Griois, 1792–1822*, 2 vols (Paris, 1909), I, pp. 326–27.
[60] M. de Tascher, *Notes de campagne, 1806–1813* (Châteauroux, 1932), p. 124.
[61] Ballue, 'Mémoires', p. 362.
[62] Op. cit., p. 363.
[63] Op. cit., p. 364.

part in massacres, atrocities or rape. One veteran insisted, after talking about the frenzied killing of the inhabitants of a southern Italian town, that 'he had never killed anyone in that manner'.[64] After the sacking of Cordoba, Jean-Baptiste Chevillard claimed that his children could walk the streets: 'no accusatory voice would be raised against their father; his heart and his hands remain pure'.[65] Indeed, there are not too many direct references to killing, even in the course of battle.[66] This may have been a question of guilt and shame on the part of some, or it may have been because mass killings and atrocities were such a common feature during these wars, and were therefore so accepted, that they had to be particularly horrific to merit a mention at all. To cite one memoirist, 'If I were to list all the villages that we pillaged and burnt, I would never finish.'[67] Propriety no doubt played a role here too. Joseph de Naylies, a veteran of the Spanish campaign whose memoirs touch on the horrors committed by both sides in the conflict, nevertheless preferred at one point not to enter into the details of the extreme acts committed by some Spanish peasant women against the body of a French officer.[68]

Not all veterans were so matter-of-fact about their experiences. Others had difficulty in recalling what they had witnessed, no doubt traumatized by their experiences.[69] General Bigarré served in Saint-Domingue in 1792. Writing about his experiences almost four decades later, he admitted being witness to an 'infinity of horrors' whose memory still afflicted him.[70] General Lejeune, captured by the *guerrilla* in Spain in 1810, and who saw the brutal killing of three French prisoners before him, was haunted 35 years later by the noise of sabres hacking into their heads and shoulders: it 'has not ceased to reverberate in my ears and still makes me shudder with horror'.[71] Jean Trefcon described the retreat from Oporto in 1809: 'We were obliged to abandon our artillery and the baggage train. The wounded, the women and children had to stay behind and were pitilessly murdered by the

64 Routier, *Récits*, pp. 87–88.
65 J.-B. Chevillard, *Souvenirs d'Espagne* (Paris, 1999), pp. 83–84.
66 The same phenomenon has been remarked upon in First World War narratives: S. Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York, 1998), p. 66. There are, however, exceptions to the rule. Captain François freely admits to killing and wounding enemy soldiers and peasants: François, *Journal*, pp. 567, 568, 572, 14 and 26 June 1808.
67 Lavaux, *Mémoires*, p. 159.
68 Naylies, *Mémoires*, p. 94.
69 For example, Baron L.-F. Lejeune, *Mémoires du général Lejeune, 1792–1813* (Paris, 2001), p. 408, maintained that he lacked the courage to recall the days and nights that were the retreat from Moscow. A similar phenomenon for battlefield experiences is discussed in A. Forrest, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (London, 2002), pp. 112–17.
70 Bigarré, *Mémoires*, pp. 42–43. He went on to recount an incident in which two black rebels were caught by a black 'general', Couacou, aligned with the French, who pulled out their teeth and eyes, had them tarred, impaled and then set alight.
71 Lejeune, *Mémoires*, p. 329.

Spanish less than two minutes later, and God knows with what refined cruelty. It still makes me shudder.'[72]

Eugene Labaume is a rare example of a veteran who spoke of his own state of mind, in this case as Moscow was being sacked around him.[73] He was unable to sleep at night because of what he describes as 'the unfortunate cries of those who were being killed, or the tears of young girls who found refuge on the palpitating breasts of their mothers', joined with the 'howling of the dogs which, according to Moscow custom, [were] chained to the doors of the palaces and which could not escape the fire which surrounded them'. Far from falling asleep, Labaume went on to relate how he was besieged by a mass of thoughts as he relived the scenes of horror he had witnessed.[74] Even then this is but the briefest of glimpses into the nightmares that may have haunted men as they tried to sleep at night, an almost imperceptible admittance of trauma and distress, and, in the case of atrocities committed, of guilt and shame.

One can assume that for some at least the act of writing, the translation of their experiences and emotions into some kind of comprehensible account, was a kind of personal catharsis that may have helped them exorcise their past.[75] This was the case for Sergeant Bourgogne, who declared in his memoirs that:

> I should not, out of respect for the human race, write about all the scenes of horror, but I have made it a point of honour to describe all that I saw. It would be impossible for me to do otherwise, and as all of this would unsettle my mind, it seems to me that once I have put them on paper, I will no longer think of them.[76]

There was always the possibility that 'composure' would not occur, no matter how the veteran attempted to cast out his devils. Others simply preferred silence, unable or unwilling to dwell at any length on their experiences, or perhaps simply unable to put them into words. It is not uncommon therefore to find explanations such as, 'It is impossible to give an account of all the atrocities to which they [the Spanish] had resorted in those mountains. It would make the hardiest tremble. I would rather just leave it at that.'[77] 'Let us draw a curtain on the horrible scenes that took place,' wrote Jean-Baptiste Chevillard of the sacking of Cordoba in June 1808. 'May my memory lose the recollection of all the crimes that occurred before me!'[78]

[72] T.-J. Trefcon, *Carnets de campagne du colonel Trefcon, 1793–1815* (Paris, 1914), p. 71.
[73] E. Labaume, *Relation circonstanciée de la campagne de Russie* (Paris, 1815), pp. 214–16.
[74] Op. cit., p. 215.
[75] Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, p. 16; L. Montroussier, *Ethique et commandement* (Paris, 2005), p. 147.
[76] A. Bourgogne, *Mémoires de sergent Bourgogne* (Paris, 1992), p. 84.
[77] Lavaux, *Mémoires*, p. 155.
[78] Chevillard, *Souvenirs*, p. 83.

III

Despite the fact that by the end of the eighteenth century the killing of civilians, and to a lesser extent prisoners, was no longer considered acceptable, and was indeed on the wane, the Revolutionary Wars, by their very nature, led to encounters between armies and civilians that all too often led to massacres and atrocities, often in the heat of or in the immediate aftermath of battle.[79] Historians often cite the infamous Jacobin decrees of 1793 and 1794 ordering that émigré prisoners, as well as captured British, Hanoverian and Spanish troops, be put to death, but point out that most commanders simply avoided carrying out the orders.[80] The longer the wars lasted, however, the more commonplace was the killing of prisoners. The massacre of prisoners at Jaffa was justified on the grounds that they represented a burden, and that among their number were men who, captured and released at El-Arish a couple of weeks previously, had broken their vow not take up arms again.[81] At Austerlitz the French gave no quarter until the last hour of the battle.[82] During the retreat from Moscow, Russian prisoners who fell by the wayside through sickness or lack of food were shot or killed by a blow to the head.[83] For their part, Cossacks were accustomed to stripping captured French naked, regardless of sex, and leaving them to wander in the snow.[84] After the Old Guard took control of Plancenoit on the field of Waterloo, for example, they went about cutting the throats of Prussian prisoners.[85] Immediately after the same battle, Prussian soldiers reciprocated at Le Caillou, clubbing and bayoneting to death the French wounded, and setting fire to a farm and adjacent barns full of wounded soldiers.[86]

[79] A distinction can be drawn between what have been dubbed 'hot' and 'cold' massacres, hot being those committed in the immediacy of battle, while cold are premeditated, and often occur over a period of days. See Tallet, 'Barbarism', p. 23; I. Volmer, 'A Sea of Blood? Massacres during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, 1641–53', in P. Dwyer and L. Ryan, eds, *Theatres of Violence: Revisiting the Massacre in History* (New York, forthcoming).

[80] Forrest, *Napoleon's Men*, p. 122. Around 3000 émigrés and another 8000 Spanish prisoners were nevertheless shot: Rothenberg, 'Age of Napoleon', p. 88. For the killing of prisoners in a later period, see N. Ferguson, 'Prisoner Taking and Prisoner Killing in the Age of Total War: Towards a Political Economy of Military Defeat', *War in History* XI (2004), pp. 148–92.

[81] Laurens, *L'Expédition*, p. 267.

[82] Rothenberg, 'Age of Napoleon', p. 90.

[83] G. Ducque, *Journal de marche du sous-lieutenant Ducque* (Paris, 2004), p. 42; J. Zaluski, *Les Chevau-légers polonais de la Garde (1812–1814): souvenirs* (Paris, 1997), p. 36; H. von Roos, *Souvenirs d'un médecin de la Grande Armée* (Paris, 2004), pp. 125–26.

[84] Labaume, *Relation circonstanciée*, p. 321.

[85] Cited in A. Barbero, *The Battle: A New History of Waterloo* (London, 2005), p. 246. For an earlier example, see J. Fricasse, *Journal de marche du sergent Fricasse de la 127e demi-brigade, 1792–1802* (Paris, 1882), p. 23.

[86] Barbero, *Battle*, pp. 290–91.

In theatres characterized by irregular warfare, there were almost never any prisoners taken. In Spain the troops of the Grande Armée did not want to take any prisoners because they were 'brigands, they kill us as we march in isolation'.[87] Captured rebels were 'immediately hanged from the olive trees which lined the roads',[88] while troops captured by the Spanish were invariably tortured to death and their bodies mutilated. This particular aspect of the killings, the semi-ritualized desecration of the body widely practised on all sides during the wars, is difficult to explain. One can only speculate whether there was a hierarchy of cruelty, that is, whether the mutilation of a particular body part was considered to be more frightful than another, whether some forms of torture were considered worse than others, the extent to which the types of mutilation carried out may have been tied to local custom and practices, or whether there was a 'choreography of violence' associated with the public torture and killing of prisoners. Let me give a few examples before talking about possible explanations.

The Grande Armée in Spain was composed of, among others, three Italian divisions. In one instance Piedmontese troops exacted vengeance from monks caught after the capture of St Jacques of Compostella, accusing them of inciting the people against them. It has to be said that French prisoners had been tortured and mutilated during the siege. On capturing two monks, described as 'among the fattest', the Piedmontese tied them back to back against a young oak, which was then used as a skewer on which they were placed over a fire and roasted alive. The Italians called it an 'auto da fé à la piémontaise'.[89] Anti-clerical attitudes, one can conclude, were present among not only the French troops of the Grande Armée.

General Renée was captured in the gorges of Sierra Morena with his wife and child. He was supposedly sawn in half in front of his wife, who was first 'dishonoured' in front of him, after which the child was sawn in half in front of the mother before she too endured the same fate.[90] There were even reports of cannibalism, although invariably the French or their allies were the victims. In one particular incident ten Polish prisoners were found by the French after they had taken the town of Strongoli in Calabria in July 1806. According to the surviving Poles, each day one prisoner was taken to the town square, tortured to death, cut up and fed to the remaining prisoners.[91] On another occasion a somewhat more symbolic form of cannibalism occurred in the village of Acri in Calabria when a brigand chief by the name of Spaccapitta is supposed to have roasted a number of pro-French

[87] E.V.E.B. Castellane, *Journal du maréchal Castellane, 1804–1862*, 4 vols (Paris, 1895), I, pp. 23 and 24.
[88] Lejeune, *Mémoires*, p. 159; della Peruta, 'War and Society', p. 43.
[89] A. Thirion, *Souvenirs militaires* (Paris, 1892), p. 40.
[90] François, *Journal*, p. 567, 14 June 1808.
[91] Finley, *Most Monstrous of Wars*, pp. 52–53.

officials in the public square. He is said to have taken a piece of bread and placed it on the body of one of the victims and then, to the delight of the assembled crowd, eaten it.[92]

In the past, ritualistic killings that involved acts of mutilation, disembowelling and cannibalism have been interpreted as having religious overtones, so that if tongues were torn out it was an attempt to render mute the blasphemer, or if hands and limbs were cut off it was an attempt to render inactive the desecrator, or if genitalia were cut off it was because the victim was perceived as sexually aberrant.[93] Removal of the offending part is thus seen to be a symbolic purging of the (social) body.[94] The extent to which the clergy were an integral if not an inspirational part of the *guerrilla* in Spain lends some weight to the possibility that the repertory of atrocities committed by the Spanish against troops of the Grande Armée could have been inspired by the Bible, but this approach is rather restrictive and does not take into account, for example, local traditions of popular folk justice (intended to purify local communities and humiliate the enemy), or the extent to which these atrocities often involved public performances. It is, moreover, problematic when considering the atrocities carried out by the French revolutionary and imperial armies, often staunchly secular, and which tended to exaggerate the influence of the clergy as the origin of resistance. One should not, for example, read too much into the killing by bayonet of 50 monks cornered in a church in Spain.[95] There was probably nothing symbolic or metaphorical about that incident; the monks were simply killed where they were found, no doubt held responsible, as we have seen, for inspiring the neighbouring villages to revolt.

A more secular explanation is required for the extreme violence perpetrated by both regular soldiers and armed insurgents in some theatres of war during this period. We do not know the degree to which alcohol was involved, but this would in any event provide only a partial clarification. A few veterans reflected on what might have driven men to commit such atrocities. Pierre Guingret asserted that rapes were committed by a few 'wretches' ('misérables') who had been drawn by lot from towns.[96] François Bernoyer suggested that the troops 'knew that the impunity of the moment allowed them to explode their passions. From that time on, one can truthfully say that they lost their reason and

[92] Cited in op. cit., p. 49; J. Rambaud, *Naples sous Joseph Bonaparte, 1806–1808* (Paris, 1911), p. 143.

[93] N.Z. Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France', *Past & Present* LIX (1973), pp. 51–91. It is also possible that the infamous *noyades* ('drownings') that took place in the Loire, at Nantes, Angers and Saumur, can be interpreted in semi-religious terms; there is an obvious connection between water and the cleansing of the body, and revolutionary zealots used the metaphor with horrific consequences: Woell, *Small-Town Martyrs*, p. 161.

[94] Davis, 'Rites of Violence', pp. 57–65.

[95] Jean Duhut to his father, 16 July 1808, cited in Forrest, *Napoleon's Men*, p. 93.

[96] Guingret, *Relation historique*, pp. 123–27.

that they became crueller than the cruellest animals on earth. I was able to convince myself of it on several occasions.'[97] Something like a killing frenzy took hold of the men once they started: 'The ecstasy of blood, the frenzy of rape, the fever of loot ... annihilated all feelings of compassion and honour ... In those hours of aberration, the soldier knew nothing and respected nothing. He even trampled underfoot his own comrades wounded by enemy fire.'[98]

In some respects, all torture and mutilation are public acts. They are performed in front of a group of witnesses (even if only other perpetrators), or the corpse or body parts are subsequently exposed in a public space, either attached to or hung from a tree, placed along the roadside or displayed in a public square. Indeed, as we have seen in the case of the victims tortured in the village of Acri in Calabria, it occurred in the public square – the centre of all cultural and economic activity – in front of an approving crowd.[99] In some instances the victims were left with a warning note or a placard was hung around their necks, at least if Goya's engravings in the *Desastres de la guerra* ('Disasters of War') are to be believed.[100] This type of 'public presentational torture' was meant as a warning to those that might contemplate collaboration with the enemy, or possibly to communicate to the enemy Other the extraordinary lengths they were prepared to go to prosecute the war to a successful conclusion.[101] In these instances the mutilated body was meant to elicit shock and horror, and serve as a warning.

IV

Another theme present among veterans' accounts is the excesses committed against women.[102] These were carried out wherever regular

[97] F. Bernoyer, *Avec Bonaparte en Egypte et en Syrie, 1798–1800: 19 lettres inédites* (Paris, 1981), pp. 147–48, 19 April 1799.

[98] Saintine, *Histoire*, II, pp. 344–45. A remarkably similar declaration was made almost 200 years later by Private Vernado Simpson when asked to explain how he could carry out atrocities during the My Lai massacre in Vietnam: M. Bilton and K. Sim, *Four Hours in My Lai* (London, 1993), p. 7.

[99] An element underscored by M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Harmondsworth, 1979), pp. 59–60. See also M. Humphrey, *The Politics of Atrocity and Reconciliation: From Terror to Trauma* (London, 2002), pp. 1–10, 91–104.

[100] On Goya for this period, see R. Hughes, *Goya* (London, 2003), pp. 261–319.

[101] I would like to thank Annie Pohlman for pointing this out. The phrase is from D. Rothenberg, '"What We Have Seen Has Been Terrible": Public Presentational Torture and the Communicative Logic of State Terror', *Albany Law Review* LXVII (2003–04), pp. 465–99, who examines torture as an element in contemporary governmental policy. A similar experience can be found in the public lynchings that took place in the United States, a kind of 'racial terrorism'. On this point, see C. Harold and K. Michael DeLuca, 'Behold the Corpse: Violent Images and the Case of Emmet Till', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* VIII (2005), pp. 263–86; and K.W. Fuoss, 'Lynching Performances, Theatres of Violence', *Text and Performance Quarterly* XIX (1999), pp. 1–27. On the French experience of public executions in the eighteenth century, see P. Bastien, *L'Exécution publique à Paris au XVIIIe siècle: une histoire des rituels judiciaires* (Paris, 2006).

[102] There are no figures, and indeed no studies on the numbers of women that may have been raped during the wars. The phenomenon is only briefly touched on in Forrest,

soldiers came to grips with civilians in revolt, and although there is no evidence that rape was carried out in any systematic way – or indeed that it was used by the French imperial regime as a tool of terror to subdue recalcitrant populations, as it had been for other regimes and in other periods – rape nevertheless took place frequently, and appears to have been so prevalent that it was probably considered a 'right of conquest', a 'reward' of sorts, and was thus a random act of (sexual) violence. This sort of behaviour was sometimes endorsed by the army. Some of the ditties distributed and sung by soldiers, for example, were virtual invitations to rape.[103] Nevertheless rape underlined the powerlessness of the communities concerned and the superiority, physical and cultural, of the conqueror. The following passage from an anonymous book on the first Italian campaign gives an indication of just how widespread the practice was:

> Debauchery is the epidemic evil of all armies. In that of Buonaparté, it was carried to excess. Almost every honest family has had to lament its dishonour. Age, state, condition, education, nobility, nothing guarantees the honour of the sex from the lust of the soldier. Altars, even sanctuaries, have not sheltered those who have devoted their lives to God. The examples have been frequent and horrible. I have even seen a number of these cannibals cruelly massacre those that had been abducted and dishonoured.[104]

Similarly, the sack of Jaffa led to a 'traffic of young women' being exchanged for other objects looted in the town. The men, however, soon began to fight over them, so that Napoleon ordered his men to bring all the women back to town to the hospital courtyard 'on pain of a severe punishment', where they were promptly executed by a company of chasseurs.[105] Pierre Guingret, while campaigning in Portugal, described how women of all classes were abducted, bought and sold, or exchanged during card games for luxury items. Other, less fortunate women were obliged to 'satisfy the most unbridled passions' in order to avoid death, but were often killed anyway.[106] Sergeant Lavaux writes of several soldiers entering a convent in Spain where an unspecified

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Napoleon's Men, p. 146. On legal attitudes towards rape in France at the end of the eighteenth century, see G. Vigarello, *A History of Rape: Sexual Violence in France from the 16th to the 20th century* (Malden, MA, 2001), pp. 87–102. On rape and warfare in the modern context, see J. Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (London, 2007), pp. 357–86.

[103] M.J. Hughes, 'Making Frenchmen into Warriors: Martial Masculinity in Napoleonic France', in C.E. Forth and B. Taithe, eds, *French Masculinities: History, Culture and Politics* (Houndmills, 2007), p. 62; and M.J. Hughes, '"Vive la République, Vive l'Empereur!": Military Culture and Motivation in the Armies of Napoleon, 1803–1808', PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005, pp. 229–31.

[104] *Examen de la campagne de Buonaparte en Italie par un témoin oculaire* (Paris, 1814), pp. 82–83.

[105] Bernoyer, *Avec Bonaparte*, pp. 147–48, 19 April 1799. We do not know how many were killed on this occasion.

[106] Guingret, *Relation historique*, pp. 123–27.

number of nuns were raped and murdered – the whole incident is described in a few lines.[107] In a remarkably frank admission an officer, Esprit Castellane, recalled a woman being saved by an officer of the general staff who entered a house after the storming of Burgos to find her 'in the midst of fifty soldiers. Each one was waiting his turn'.[108] General Davout wrote of women being 'requisitioned' in Germany in order to 'satisfy their [the troops'] unspeakable desires'.[109] It was not unusual for men, even outside the 'normal' atrocities that took place during the storming of towns and the systematized marauding, to assault females of all ages, including prepubescent girls.

If rape committed by others was often described – and as we have seen it was rare for veterans to own up to atrocities of any description – it was much more frequent for officers to portray themselves as helping defenceless women, or taking steps to limit excesses and even to prevent massacres being committed. During the sacking of Jaffa, Saintine described how some officers tried in vain to put a halt to the killing: 'General Robin, unable to make himself obeyed, threw himself into the middle of his brigade and sabred his own men to try and stop the disorder'.[110] Colonel Jean Trefcon entered the Spanish town of Medina del Rio Secco shortly after it was stormed by the French, and witnessed 'revolting scenes' that he could not prevent because of the small number of men he had with him.[111] He nevertheless managed to save a 'young person' who, without his intervention, would certainly have been raped.

General Lejeune writes of the massacre of a number of men, women and children who had taken refuge in a church during the siege of Saragossa in 1808, but a little later goes on to describe how his regiment saved an old nun from getting caught in the crossfire.[112] Captain Routier spent more time writing about the one peasant woman he saved from the sacking of Lauria than in describing the massacre that took place there.[113] Fantin des Odoards took under his protection a 19-year-old woman whose husband had been killed and who had been raped by French troops; he returned her to her mother a few days later.[114] Alfred de Saint-Chamans and his brother protected a young Dutch woman from being raped by French soldiers at Oporto.[115] Griois supposedly intervened to prevent a group of nuns from being raped

[107] Lavaux, *Mémoires*, pp. 152–53.
[108] Castellane, *Journal*, I, p. 33.
[109] Comte Henri de Vigier, *Davout, maréchal d'empire, duc d'Auerstaedt, prince d'Eckmühl (1770–1823)*, 2 vols (Paris, 1898), I, pp. 51–42, 4 prairial an III.
[110] Saintine, *Histoire*, II, pp. 344–45.
[111] Trefcon, *Carnets*, p. 50.
[112] Lejeune, *Mémoires*, pp. 144 and 146–47.
[113] Routier, *Récits*, pp. 87–88.
[114] L.-F. Fantin des Odoards, *Journal du général Fantin des Odoards: étapes d'un officier de la Grande Armée, 1800–1830* (Paris, 1895), pp. 246–47, 48.
[115] A.A.R. Saint-Chamans, *Mémoires du général Cte de Saint-Chamans, 1802–1832* (Paris, 1896), pp. 130–31.

by Polish soldiers in Corigliano.[116] Bangofsky describes fighting off soldiers in a house in order to protect a woman and her daughters.[117]

Similarly, Joseph de Naylies intervened to protect a young woman in Portugal who was about to become the victim of a number of drunken soldiers.

> Seeing, from the street where we were fighting, a woman who was about to throw herself from a balcony, I saw her suddenly pulled back in by some soldiers into the apartment. I went up, sword in hand, warded off the brigands when one of them took aim at me. The shot went off and I owe my life to the drunkenness which prevented him from aiming well. Three dragoons ran to the noise of the gun shot and helped me chase them away.[118]

Naylies, however, was an officer with royalist sentiments who preferred to portray the war in Spain as unjust, and the Spanish as 'victims of the ambitious fury of an unjust conqueror'.[119] He underlined those occasions when he was able to save Portuguese and Spaniards from the fury of the French army. These anecdotes are no doubt meant to offset the accounts of rape and murder throughout which they are often interspersed, as though officers were pointing the finger at the lower ranks, underlining just how horrible was war but at the same time just how gallant 'noble' men could be. Captain Routier admitted that saving one peasant woman amid the general carnage that was taking place around him 'fed his heart for a long time with a sweet satisfaction', as though the one good deed helped compensate for the atrocities he had witnessed.[120]

V

Most of the examples given here deal with massacres and atrocities committed against civilians by the French military. We have not looked at other kinds of massacres committed during this period, often by armed civilians against other non-armed civilians, such as the brutal slaying of political suspects by French revolutionaries during the September massacres of 1792, the prison massacres of the White Terror in 1795 or the revenge attacks carried out by royalist sympathizers against Bonapartists in the south of France in 1815.[121]

[116] Griois, *Mémoires*, I, p. 327.
[117] Bangofsky, 'Étapes', pp. 272–76.
[118] Naylies, *Mémoires*, pp. 99–100.
[119] Op. cit., p. 65.
[120] Routier, *Récits*, p. 88.
[121] On these episodes see F. Bluche, *Septembre 1792: logiques d'un massacre* (Paris, 1986); S. Clay, 'Vengeance, Justice and the Reactions in the Revolutionary Midi', *French History* XXIII (2009), pp. 22–46; D.P. Resnick, *The White Terror and the Political Reaction after Waterloo* (Cambridge, MA, 1966).

Nor are massacres and atrocities committed by other armies in other circumstances taken into account. Without further study, it is difficult to know whether they were as frequent as the excesses committed by the French, but they were often just as cruel. One need only think of the rebellion in Ireland in 1798 or the Russian attitude towards Turks to realize that the extreme violence described in this article was nothing out of the ordinary for the eighteenth century.

As a consequence, one has to conclude that the overall propensity to massacre had little to do with discipline, or the lack of it, among the armies concerned, or indeed with ideology. Discipline, for example, did not prevent the Prussian army, as well as Hessian troops under the command of the Grand Duke of Wurttemberg, from razing a number of villages in Alsace in 1815 and killing some of their inhabitants as an act of reprisal.[122] The Russians exacted vengeance on prisoners and the wounded during the retreat from Moscow; hospitals are reported to have been set alight and burnt while their patients were still in them.[123] Nor is there any indication, at least in the sources examined here, that revolutionary rhetoric exacerbated the frequency of massacres, or inspired the perpetrators to commit them. Central and northern Europe and northern Italy are interesting in that, while massacres occurred at the beginning of the French invasions, they do not appear to have been as frequent as in southern Europe. In other words, massacres occurred more frequently in those regions where resistance to French rule was strongest, and where local elites had little or no control over the populace or were unwilling to cooperate with the French authorities.

Another way of putting this is that extreme violence and massacres appear to have been directly linked to the invading army's desire to control the space it occupied in order to guarantee its own security.[124] That is why one is more likely to see massacres taking place in certain regions at the beginning of the French occupation. In Switzerland in 1797 and 1798, for example, whole towns were sacked, while the Russian garrison at Zurich was put to the sword after the city fell to the French in 1799.[125] Similar scenes were played out in Germany, and in Russia in 1812 countless villages were torched.[126] As the invading army becomes more firmly entrenched, then if the degree and frequency of violence does not diminish it becomes far more institutionalized. When revolts occurred in the northern Italian provinces of Parma-Piacenza,

[122] W. Krimer, *Erinnerungen eines alten Lützower Jägers, 1795–1819*, 2 vols (Stuttgart, 1913), II, p. 205; P. Leuilliot, *La Première Restauration et les Cent jours en Alsace* (Paris, 1958), pp. 276–79.
[123] J. Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Foot Soldier* (Moreton-in-Marsh, 1997), p. 67.
[124] A point also made by J. Hantraye, *Cosaques*, pp. 30, 31.
[125] H. Foerster, 'L'Opposition populaire à la République helvétique', in R. Chagny, ed., *La Révolution française: idéaux, singularités, influences* (Grenoble, 2002), pp. 161–66.
[126] Bangofsky, 'Étapes', p. 251; G.E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (Bloomington, 1980), p. 120.

Tuscany and Liguria in the early years of the Consulate, repression was carried out by military commissions and not the army per se.[127]

The fact that the French were more often the invader helps explain the prevalence of massacres committed by them, although we have also seen the types of atrocity Italians and the Spanish were capable of. (The presence of the British army in those regions may have encouraged resistance in ways that have not been explored here.) Certainly, as the coalition armies gained momentum and invaded foreign (not only French) space towards the end of the empire, we see that they too were guilty of atrocities against civilian populations. Massacres, in short, had nothing to do with nationality or indeed the degree of discipline in an army, and nothing to do with ideology. They had everything to do with the fact that mass occupation armies came into direct contact with civilian populations who resented the depredations committed against them; with the conventions of revolutionary warfare; and with the conventions of guerrilla warfare. Massacres were, to that extent, part of the struggle to control the geographic and political space which the French had occupied.

It is, however, possible, though there is no space to explore this point in any detail here, that the French, imbued with a sense of cultural superiority,[128] looked down on the peoples they had conquered in a way that bordered on racism, and that this may have exacerbated attitudes towards the conquered. Many officers considered those they ruled over were 'sauvages' and 'barbares'. We know too that from the seventeenth century on, the French classed people within a hierarchical continuum.[129] This, however, can go only part of the way towards explaining the prevalence of massacres. The Grande Armée, it should be recalled, was made up of many different nationalities. We have seen how cruel Italian soldiers in Spain could be, but we know that perpetrators of atrocities do not have to be motivated by racism to murder.[130]

More prosaic reasons have to be put forward to explain the frequency of the phenomenon. The necessity of large armies to live off the land has to be one of the primary causes of the clashes that took place between civilians and the military. Massacre and atrocity often occurred as a result, born of the indifference and brutality of the soldier on the one side and the desire for retaliation on the other. However, we have also seen, from the perspective of the military, how massacre and atrocity

[127] See M. Broers, *The Napoleonic Empire in Italy, 1796–1814: Cultural Imperialism in a European Context?* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp. 83–93.

[128] On this point, see M. Broers, 'Cultural Imperialism in a European Context? Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Napoleonic Italy', *Past & Present* CLXX (2001), pp. 152–80; and S. Woolf, 'French Civilization and Ethnicity in the Napoleonic Empire', *Past & Present* CXXIV (1989), pp. 96–120. Broers and Woolf deal essentially with the attitude of French administrators. The attitude of the French military towards the peoples they had conquered is yet to be explored in any detail.

[129] See Woolf, 'French Civilization', p. 104.

[130] C.R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1993).

often occurred as a result of enforced hardships and privations; that, motivated by revenge, they sometimes involved the loss of comrades before the killings took place;[131] that they were often characterized by a 'frenzied' killing of the inhabitants without distinction of age or sex; that they often involved communities that had risen in revolt against an army of occupation; that they demonstrated, in some situations, a certain lack of control by officers over the troops; that they were an inevitable part of the interaction between an occupying army and the civilian population; and that they were an accepted if not expected part of the conduct of the soldier. It is safe to say there was not a region or country invaded by the French in which massacres did not occur, although they were more frequent in some areas than in others. It is clear too that atrocities were often carried out from a position of weakness, that is, they were a means by which the perpetrators dealt with their own fear of being attacked – violence as a defence mechanism that had little to do with ideology or excessive aggression.

There was nothing exceptional in the viciousness of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Indeed, they were in their savagery entirely on a par with previous European wars, including the Thirty Years War, as well as wars less noted among historians for their barbarity but which were nevertheless just as savage, such as the War of the Spanish Succession, the Seven Years War, the War of the Austrian Succession, and even the American War of Independence. If this paper is in part a reflection on the nature of (Revolutionary and Napoleonic) warfare, and on what is increasingly referred to as the 'face of occupation', it is also one from the perspective of the veteran, who sometimes assumes the voice of the perpetrator, consequently describing the horrors committed against others, combatants and non-combatants alike, but who more often than not assumes the voice of the victim, describing the horrors inflicted on French troops by rebels resisting the invading armies. We have seen that recounting the past for some veterans was a difficult process that elicited painful memories. It is not all that unusual for veterans to dwell on traumatic events, especially since many memoirs were written in retirement when there was time to reflect on the past, but there is also perhaps an intensified need on the part of veterans to draw meaning from their experiences years after the events in which they had participated.[132] These accounts are thus an attempt to convert trauma into history. Although one cannot know just how successful this process might have been, they certainly

[131] In a report to Berthier in SHAT, Armée de Naples, C-5, 4, 26 August – 1 September, Masséna gives a reasonable explanation for the behaviour of his troops, who had experienced atrocities that would 'make humanity tremble'; they incited acts of violence in soldiers that were 'difficult to prevent and which gave the war a cruel character which should not be known between civilized nations'.

[132] See N. Hunt and I. Robbins, 'Telling Stories of the War: Ageing Veterans Coping with their Memories through Narrative', *Oral History* XXVI (1998), pp. 57–64, here p. 63.

provide an insight into just how difficult it was for some veterans to achieve a modicum of psychological recovery.

On another level, French veterans, while underlining just how hard it was to campaign and the adversities they faced, also highlighted the difficulties involved in bringing the benefits of the Revolution to the 'ignorant' and 'barbarous' peoples of Europe. After the sack of Lauria, Jean-Michel Chevalier noted, 'Voilà the horrible consequences of war brought about by the despotism of kings! Poor people!'[133] A passage in the memoirs of Denis Charles Parquin underlines how thankful some Spaniards were, despite the horrors the French had brought in their wake, for putting an end to the Inquisition.[134] The apparent message is that, even when suffering was incurred, the end goal was a noble one. If some veterans dwelt now and then on the crimes committed by their own side it is to underscore the horror of war. What is clear is that many had difficulty recalling what they had lived through, even if there does not appear to have been any shame involved in recounting what they had witnessed. What is clear too is the hatred felt for the French by many occupied peoples: their narratives surrounding massacres and atrocities are entirely different from those of the French, that is, massacres are a much more contested history than portrayed here. But that is an altogether different study.

[133] Chevalier, *Souvenirs*, p. 74.
[134] D.C. Parquin, *Souvenirs de commandant Parquin* (Paris, 2003), p. 257.