Fighting for a Living

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The draft and draftees in Italy, 1861-1914

Marco Rovinello

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, conscription is “compulsory enlistment for state service, typically into the armed forces”, while a conscript and a volunteer are respectively “a person enlisted compulsorily” and “a person who freely enrolls for military service rather than being conscripted”. Seemingly straightforward terms like these become, however, much trickier in the eye of the historian, who is always striving to historicize and compare apparently ubiquitous taxonomies and phenomena.

This chapter faces both challenges starting from the nineteenth-century Italian conscription experience. It will briefly analyze the draft system of pre-unification states, and then will reconstruct the evolution of Italian recruitment laws and practices from *La Marmora’s draft act* (1854) to the eve of World War I. On the one hand, attention will be paid to the supposed shift from a professional-dynastic militia toward a draft-based army, in order to verify its linearity and the universality of Italian conscription. The chapter will show in particular how much the draft changed according to current political concerns and internal security needs. At the same time, it will highlight some constants in Italian conscription, such as the discriminatory nature of the system and the government’s ambiguous attitude toward draftees. On the other hand, the chapter will approach military service in terms of labor relations between the army and reenlisted people. From this perspective, it will investigate who opted for soldiering as a form of employment and why, while trying to establish to what extent forced/voluntary and commodified/noncommodified military labor can be identified and disaggregated in the experience of nineteenth-century Italian soldiers.

A nation-state in progress: the long road to unification 1814-1858

Although most pre-unification Italian states relied on semiprofessional dynastic militias and mercenary troops, the postunification draft did not start from scratch, and its history is inseparably linked to that of the previous recruitment systems in force on the peninsula.

Starting in 1815, roughly 30,000 Italian-speaking subjects from Lombardy and Venetia were recruited yearly into the Habsburg army (8.5-10 per cent of the peacetime force), and normally served for eight years in Italian garrisons.\(^2\) In the Duchies of Modena and Parma, the law stated that young men were obligated to fulfill their military service in person. In practice, however, the armies were composed primarily of volunteers and substitutes – namely, men paid to replace draftees in the service.\(^3\)

Leopold II’s Tuscany conscription also theoretically involved every male subject, but in practice most youngsters were exempted and the limited needs of the army were easily fulfilled by volunteers.\(^4\) In the Papal States one-third of the army consisted of two Swiss mercenary regiments, and the rest of the annual contingent (10,000 men in 1816-1831, about 7,500 in 1852-1859) was raised through volunteerism and reenlisting, even if military service had been nominally compulsory and universal since 1822.\(^5\) After its temporary abolition in the first stages of the restoration, the draft worked in the continental part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies too. However, as only 10-20 per cent of the eligible men from each class were actually recruited, the annual contingent was small (8,000 men until 1848, 12,000 between 1849 and 1858, and 18,000 after 1858) and mostly composed of volunteers, since the Bourbons also employed four regiments of Swiss mercenaries (altogether 6,000-8,000 men) and the 1834 conscription law excluded a good twenty-two exempted categories.\(^6\)

Therefore, almost all pre-unification Italian regimes kept the draft alive on paper, but in practice preferred to limit recruitment to a small percentage of their populations, mostly chosen from among the classes dangereuses. This happened for the same reasons explored by Thomas Hippler in the case of France: from the perspective of the restored sovereigns, universal conscription still looked like both a dangerous revolutionary heritage and a very expensive way to set up their militias.\(^7\) Moreover, no Italian state was a first-rank power, in need of an army large enough to back its foreign

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\(^2\) Sondhaus, *In the Service of the Emperor*.

\(^3\) Zannoni and Fiorentino, *Le Reali Truppe Parmensi*.

\(^4\) Giorgetti, *Le armi toscane e le occupazioni militari in Toscana*.

\(^5\) Biagini, “La riorganizzazione dell’esercito pontificio e gli arruolamenti in Umbria”.


\(^7\) Hippler, “Conscription in the French Restoration.”
policy; Italian states were not equipped to handle even internal troubles, as the revolutions in 1820-1821, 1830, and 1848-1849 would clearly demonstrate.

The only country with a real desire to play a major role in the postrevolutionary European balance of power, and to leading the Italian unification process, was the Kingdom of Sardinia. Thus, Piedmontese conscription history followed a very different pattern to those of the other states. Vittorio Emanuele I had abolished conscription immediately after regaining the throne in 1814. However, the unexpected outbreak of the War of the Seventh Coalition and the subsequent urgent need for men led the king to reintroduce a slightly modified draft system which mixed the French and the Prussian models, and essentially relied upon professional soldiers integrated with a very small call-up contingent. This hybrid solution remained in place until the 1830s, when Carlo Alberto modified it extensively in order to face the Habsburgs on the Lombard border with around 100,000 men. Therefore, the new system was expected to be a “perfected version of the Prussian one” with part of the army composed of volunteers or substitutes and the other portion raised through one-year long compulsory service followed by periodic training camps in the seven years that followed.

Although the new system involved no more than 25 per cent of those who were technically eligible, and provided, wealthy citizens with several ways to escape enlistment, conscription faced serious resistance: volunteers were fewer than in the Napoleon era, and many youngsters tried to escape enlistment by deserting, simulating disease, self-mutilating, and corrupting the local civil servants who made the conscription lists. The Savoy government, whose “infrastructural development” had not yet enabled it to effectively compel citizens to fulfill their duties, had to compromise by drastically reducing the annual contingent, but it refused to eliminate the draft completely. In this way, Carlo Alberto’s army was weakened – and would be defeated by the Habsburg forces in 1848 – but an important goal had been achieved: both Piedmont subjects and military authorities had already become familiar with conscription.

8 Pieri, Storia militare del Risorgimento, p. 171.
9 Ales, L’armata sarda e le riforme albertine.
10 I borrow this concept from Weiss, “Infrastructural Power, Economic Transformation, and Globalization”.
11 Pischedda, Esercito e società in Piemonte.
The Piedmontese-Italian case: some essentials about conscription laws and army features before and after unification

When in the 1850s the new minister of war – General Alfonso La Marmora – was asked to reorganize the armed forces, the parliamentary debate on the military reform was substantive. However, the distance between the backers of the “the army of quality” and the supporters of “the army of quantity” had been much reduced in comparison to the past. Both the majority and the minority agreed on the necessity of considerably enlarging the peacetime contingent, both supported the extension of service time at least up to three years, and it is significant that no one – not even the most traditionalist faction – called for the abolition of conscription and for the reintroduction of the prerevolutionary all-volunteer army.12 Nearly forty years of the draft represented a shared background among the Piedmontese ruling class.

La Marmora’s draft system of 1854 adapted its guidelines from the French recruitment law of 1818,13 with the aim of correcting the weaknesses demonstrated by the previous German-style system in 1848. In theory, the Piedmont peacetime army (50,000 men) was mostly composed of career soldiers who had started as volunteers. If not enough men volunteered to fill the annual contingent determined by the government (about 9,000-10,000 men), twenty-year-old male subjects were drafted into a two-tiered system, through a lottery. Men who picked “bad numbers” were enlisted into the first category and had to serve actively for five years. Those who picked “good numbers” were enrolled under the second category and received periodic basic training over forty to fifty days, but they were allowed get married and entered active service only in times of war.

In practice, 75 per cent of the peacetime army was composed of draftees because of the lack of volunteers. Moreover, most conscripts came from the poorest classes14 because of the extensive system of familial and religious exemptions, and because the upper classes could – in practice – buy themselves out of their obligations. At least forty-six articles detailed “how

12 The debate is reconstructed by Pieri, *Le forze armate nella età della Destra*, and Del Negro, “Garibaldi tra esercito regio e nazione armata”.
13 On French conscription laws, see Crépin, *Défendre la France*. In contrast, Ilari has asserted that La Marmora’s model was the Prussian post-1848 system: Ilari, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia*, I, p. 333. On Prussian recruitment practices, see Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army*.
14 The contingent recruited in 1860 from the former Piedmontese territories was composed mainly of peasants (54 per cent) and herdsmen (in charge of cattle) (16 per cent), while landowners were only 1 per cent. See Torre, *Relazione sulle leve eseguite in Italia*, pp. 89-91.
enlisted people can be exonerated from the service”. Realistically, the sons of the richest bourgeoisie had two ways of legally escaping enlistment. The first was substitution (surrogazione) – namely, finding a substitute who would voluntarily complete the service on behalf of the draftee. The second was liberation (liberazione/affrancamento) – that is, paying a higher sum directly to the state in order to gain exemption, and then letting military authorities find a substitute.

Substitution could involve either brothers (surrogazione tra fratelli) or unrelated people (surrogazione ordinaria), and the requirements for the substitute were more or less the same: Italian citizenship, a clean record, age eighteen to twenty-six, being physically fit and unmarried or widower with no children. The most important difference between those two types of replacement was that the first was free, while the latter cost 700 L. until 1862, and 1,200 L. thereafter. This difference stemmed from the Piedmont government’s acceptance of Hegel’s idea that family – not the individual – was the smallest component of society. Therefore, at least in theory, each family had to offer the fatherland one of its members.

Liberation was much more expensive. The fee was fixed each year by a royal decree, but it always cost nearly three times substitution – 3,100 L. in 1861, 3,200 L. in 1863, and 4,200 L. in 1866, as the war against the Habsburgs was breaking out. It was a huge sum with respect to the average Italian’s income in the 1860s and to the liberation fees paid elsewhere. Nevertheless, many men were able to buy their freedom before the official unification, and even more so afterwards (see Table 16.1), when Piedmont conscription law was extended to include the whole national territory. As the number of applications overwhelmed the number of available volunteers by a large margin, the government had to reject most applications. Otherwise, in 1864 nearly 20 per cent of the first-category conscripts would have managed to legally escape military service. The percentage of liberated draftees was even higher after 1866, when a new law allowed conscripts to be liberated

15 The main difference was that an unrelated substitute should be at least 1.60m tall, whereas a brother substitute had no minimum height and also could replace the conscript after his enrollment. See Recruitment law n. 1676, 20 March 1854, articles 130-145. All Italian recruitment laws are available in Raccolta ufficiale delle leggi e dei decreti del Regno d’Italia, which was published annually by Stamperia Reale in Turin.
16 The average annual salary in 1860s Italy was about 300 L. See Rosselli, Mazzini e Bakunin, pp. 10-18. Under Napoleon III the exoneration fee amounted to 2,000-2,500 francs (Kovacs, “French Military Institutions before the Franco-Prussian War”, p. 222), that is, an average of 2,430 L., according to the 1866 exchange rate suggested by Frattianni and Spinelli, “Italy in the Gold Standard Period”.
through the payment of fees even in the absence of enough volunteers. To complicate things further, the government did not simply tolerate this practice; it actually encouraged liberation for both economic and disciplinary reasons. In fact, the liberation fee supplied the army budget with precious extra income (see Table 16.2). This income enabled military authorities to employ fit and well-trained men by granting an extra monthly sum (**soprasoldo**) to the most disciplined conscripts already serving under the colors (**affidati anziani**) instead of enrolling the substitutes provided by draftees, about whom complains of low quality were often voiced by officers.18

Table 16.1 Liberations in the Italian army in the 1860s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Annual contingent</th>
<th>Liberations</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>2.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>55,000</td>
<td>2,254</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>46,000</td>
<td>1,936</td>
<td>4.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>2,592</td>
<td>5.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867*</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>1,009</td>
<td>2.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869***</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Substitution and liberation data were published annually in Torre’s reports. See Torre, *Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno* (1864-1870).

**Notes:**

* From 1867, data include also recruits from Venetia.

** Conscripts born in 1847 were drafted one year late for economic reasons.

*** Therefore 1869 data concern conscripts born in 1847 and 1848.

17 The annual expenses of the Ministry of War are reported in Rochat and Massobrio, *Breve storia dell’esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943*, pp. 67-68. The role of exemption and replacement fees in the army’s balance was a largely shared feature of the European nineteenth-century recruitment systems and a major factor in preventing governments from eliminating socially based discriminations from the draft. On France, see Schnapper, *Le remplacement militaire en France*; on the Ottoman Empire, see Zürcher, “The Ottoman Conscription System in Theory and Practice”.

18 Even La Marmora complained about this drawback of his draft system. See Ilari, *Storia del servizio militare in Italia*, I, p. 345.
Moreover, substitution and liberation were common institutions in nineteenth-century European armies.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, La Marmora had to face very little resistance when he submitted his reform to the Piedmont parliament. More criticisms arose after unification, when many officers and civilian observers accused the government of enabling its fittest and most educated citizens to refuse “the holiest duty, serving and defending the fatherland”.\textsuperscript{20} Many pamphlets described liberation as the most evident signal of the bourgeoisie’s indifference to the destiny of the state and the nation. Conversely, some officers stressed that “draft fills the gaps in the army only through the poorest classes”.\textsuperscript{21} However, these complaints were not sufficient to induce the Ministry of War to question one of the cornerstones of Piedmontese-Italian military organization.

The continuity in the recruitment law unquestionably contributed to the stability of the army structure and social composition in the crucial transition from the pre-unification militias to the national army. Naturally, the new Italian army was much larger than the Savoy one (about 200,000 men), but the militarization rate was more or less the same; generally speaking,

\textsuperscript{19} In the first half of the nineteenth century, replacement and/or liberation were in force at least in Napoleon III’s France, in post-1840 Belgium, in Saxony, Baden and Württemberg, and in the tsarist, Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, as well as in most Italian pre-unification states.

\textsuperscript{20} Errani, Re e patria, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{21} Miaglia, Sull’ordinamento delle forze militari del Regno d’Italia, p. 211. See also Marselli, Gli avvenimenti del 1870, and Monti, Osservazioni sulla legge 7 luglio 1866.
it was slightly lower (one recruit out of every three twenty-year-old men), but it was slightly higher (one out of five) if we consider men enlisted in the first category only.\textsuperscript{22} The army’s enlargement had no effect upon its sociological composition: most recruits still were peasants and shepherds, whereas landowners, students, doctors, and lawyers together composed 5.5 per cent of the contingent raised between 1863 and 1869 (see Table 16.3).

Table 16.3 Italian draftees’ professions (1863-1869)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Number of draftees</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peasants / shepherds</td>
<td>282,471</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herdsmen (in charge of cattle)</td>
<td>33,867</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porters</td>
<td>28,677</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen</td>
<td>25,864</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayers</td>
<td>24,324</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanners</td>
<td>17,340</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students / lawyers / civil servants</td>
<td>14,938</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joiners</td>
<td>14,805</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tavern-keepers / food sellers / bartenders</td>
<td>13,537</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmiths</td>
<td>11,384</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landowners</td>
<td>10,942</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopkeepers</td>
<td>8,622</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servants</td>
<td>7,188</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>3,306</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artists</td>
<td>2,524</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewelers</td>
<td>1,461</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinarians / farriers</td>
<td>1,141</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>503,453</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The data concerning the professional status of the 1860s recruits are synthetically reported in Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno 1870, pp. 82-83.

As Bruce Porter has pointed out, the outcome of wars always affects military systems, of both winners and losers.\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, it is not surprising that the 1866 defeat represented the first important turning point in Italian

\textsuperscript{22} In 1861, there were about 25 million Italians, more or less five times the number of the subjects of the King of Sardinia in 1859: Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, I, p. 368.

\textsuperscript{23} Porter, War and the Rise of the State.
conscription history. The disappointing performance on the battlefield along with the evident limits of mass nationalization led several observers to criticize the entire military organization. Most military experts claimed that the Prussians’ crushing victory over the Habsburg forces (1866) had shown the superiority of the “army of quantity” over the out-of-date French-style semiprofessional army. On the other hand, civilian critics stressed that La Marmora’s draft had not significantly contributed to the creation of a solid Italian national identity.

While few dared to defend the status quo publicly, the debate did not rapidly lead to a new arrangement. This was due to the clash between the two major schools of thought and the challenges the government still had to face in order to complete the unification process and bring the whole territory under the control of the central power. It is no coincidence that parliamentary discussion about conscription reform started in December 1870, after Rome had fallen and the Prussian victory at Sedan had swept away all remaining doubts about the German model’s efficiency. Actually, the proposal made by the new minister of war, General Cesare Ricotti Magnani, was largely inspired by the German draft system, not only from a technical viewpoint but, more generally, also regarding the tasks that the army was expected to perform. At the international level, after French power had been scaled down, Italy wished to be recognized as a middle- to high-ranking power; therefore, the army was required to back this new foreign policy objective, mostly through an increase in the annual contingent.

On the internal level, once “Italy was made”, the army had to cooperate more actively with the other nationalization agencies in “making the Italians” and, simultaneously, in keeping the political claims of the lower classes under control.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Ricotti’s reform (which actually consisted of several acts promulgated between 1870 and 1875) not only increased the number of men recruited yearly in the first category (from

24 See for example Villari, “Di chi è la colpa?” The concrete result of the army’s nationalization effort is still under question. Among those who tend to underestimate it, see Del Negro, “L’esercito italiano da Napoleone a Vittorio Veneto”. More optimistic is Mondini, “La nazione di Marte”.
25 For a detailed reconstruction of the parliamentary debate, see Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, II, pp. 115-128.
26 On Ricotti as minister of war, see Berger Waldenegg, “Il ministro della guerra Cesare Ricotti e la politica delle riforme militari”, and Labanca, Il generale Cesare Ricotti e la politica militare italiana.
27 The same attitude toward the German system characterized the 1872 French recruitment law. On the general awe of the German system on the part of the French military establishment, see Digeon, La crise allemande de la pensée française.
40,000 to 65,000) and reduced to three years (four for cavalry) of active service time,\textsuperscript{28} but also radically changed the concept of military service itself: serving evolved from a general responsibility, to be fulfilled only by those who were enrolled,\textsuperscript{29} to a “personal duty” everyone had to fulfill themselves.\textsuperscript{30} The percentage of men recruited in the first category rose from 17 per cent (1870) to 25 per cent in the early 1870s and those who were enlisted in the second category were forced to train periodically anyway, thanks to “good numbers”.\textsuperscript{31}

Additionally, if the army was to be “the true school of the Nation” as the new discipline regulations stated,\textsuperscript{32} keeping the sons of the elite outside of it no longer made sense, especially after the Paris Commune had shown how dangerous it was for the social order to rely on an army almost exclusively composed of proletarians. Therefore, Ricotti abolished both replacement and liberation. This decision generated fierce protest. Both bourgeois and Catholic forces launched powerful and harsh media campaigns against Ricotti. Additionally, many old-fashioned officers commented ironically on the pedagogical task assigned to the military institution and strongly stressed the negative influence of enlisting undisciplined seminarians and bourgeoisie on the discipline of the rank and file.\textsuperscript{33}

However, the Italian conscription system was still far from egalitarian, despite the fears of the upper classes and officers. As in France, substitution and liberation were replaced by an adapted version of the German “one-year volunteerism”, which allowed students and some other eligible parties to pay a sum (about 1,500 L.) to avoid some of the most unpleasant aspects of military service. In fact, one-year volunteers could delay their enrollment until they were twenty-seven, serve for a single year in the regiment of their choice, and then be promoted to officer after discharge by passing an easy exam.

Officially, one-year volunteerism had two major goals: first, it was thought to be the best way to involve the bourgeoisie without angering

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{28} Nominally, service time was three years. Nevertheless, the minister was allowed to discharge old classes in advance, and he usually discharged them after thirty to thirty-two months of active service.
\item\textsuperscript{29} Recruitment law n. 1676, 20 March 1854, article 4.
\item\textsuperscript{30} Law n. 2532, 7 June 1875, article 1.
\item\textsuperscript{31} Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, II, p. 213.
\item\textsuperscript{32} Ministero della Guerra, Regolamento di disciplina militare del 1. dicembre, article 8, § 33. The regulations represented another key issue of the reform. See Rovinello, “Giuro di essere fedele al Re ed a’ suoi reali successori”.
\item\textsuperscript{33} La Marmora, Quattro discorsi del generale Alfonso La Marmora.
\end{itemize}
them, and thus ensure the army of a sufficient number of skilled auxiliary officers. Secondly, the fees of one-year volunteers were supposed to replace the liberation and substitution fees in the Ministry of War’s depleted coffers. Both of these attempts failed dismally. The high fees and other factors discouraged many youngsters from applying for one-year volunteerism. Consequently, from 1875 onwards, the number of one-year volunteers was 70-80 per cent lower than the government had predicted (about 1,000-1,500 a year, instead of 5,000) and the average income for the state dropped from about 7,000,000 L. to about 1,750,000 L.34 Simultaneously, one-year volunteerism did not make military life any more appealing; on the contrary, it rapidly became a way for the richest classes to escape service by exploiting this “heritage of an ancient and hateful privilege”.35

The Italian bourgeoisie was very different from the German one.36 Most well-educated young men from good families aspired to join the liberal professions and had little interest in the military as a career. As General Emilio De Bono wrote, “It is well known that to become a one-year volunteer the first requirement was not to wish to be a soldier […] and three months spent in regiments certainly did not make them perfect soldiers or even familiar with the army […] also because they were considered as useless and transitory pleonasms.”37

Although the Italian universal and disinterested duty to serve the fatherland was still largely discriminatory, the 1870-1875 reform was a milestone in the evolution of Italian conscription. Actually, Ricotti’s draft system was repeatedly modified up until the eve of World War I according to the technical assumptions and political frameworks current at any time.38 Nevertheless, these reforms disputed none of the founding principles, such as one-year volunteerism, nor the basic assumption that every citizen should personally contribute to the destiny of his own country.39

35 Ministero della Guerra, Quarta relazione della Commissione d’inchiesta per l’esercito, p. 95. Moreover, each one-year volunteer provided exemption from service to all his younger brothers. On one-year volunteerism, see Del Negro, “La leva militare in Italia”, pp. 192-195.
36 A classical comparative analysis of European bourgeoisies is Kocka, Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert.
37 De Bono, Nell’esercito nostro prima della guerra, p. 48.
38 For a synthetic reconstruction of post-1870 Italian political framework, see Seton-Watson, Italy from Liberalism to Fascism.
39 A more detailed picture of the late nineteenth-century Italian recruitment systems is offered by Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, II, pp. 128-194. On the first decade of the twentieth century, see also Botti, “Note sul pensiero militare italiano da fine secolo XIX all’inizio della
A difficult transition: from the pre-unification militias to the Italian army (1859-1863)

In order to better understand the advent of the Piedmont draft system as the forerunner of the first Italian conscription law, it is necessary to understand the political and military framework in which the transition from the dynastic Piedmont militia to the Italian national army occurred. The Italian unification process was a quite lengthy one. It started in 1848, with the unsuccessful war against the Habsburg Empire, and ended only after World War I with the annexation of Trento and Trieste. However, the route to unification was composed primarily of sudden events with unexpected outcomes, such as the conquest of Lombardy, the Mezzogiorno, and the ex-Papal territories (apart from Lazio) between 1859 and 1861. Therefore, after its formal unification in 1861, the newborn Italian state was still not only a jigsaw puzzle which the government had to assemble as quickly as possible, but also a country still at war against both internal and external enemies.

After the end of the Second War of Independence (November 1859), the government considered France to be the most dangerous external enemy they faced, and fear of an invasion from the west deeply affected Italian military policy in the early 1860s. However, the internal threats would prove to be much more compelling. In the south, the new Italian army had to continue the long war against the Brigantaggio. Moreover, the unexpected conquest of the southern regions and the central role played by Garibaldi’s all-voluntary Southern Army in defeating the Bourbons became deeply problematic when the political expectations of those people had gone unmet. Fulfilling the liberal-monarchic-sponsored plan under the Savoy flags, rather than marching on Rome, had disappointed the remaining members of the Risorgimento movement and further solidified the divisions between the volunteers and the regular army. The liberal establishment considered republicans such Mazzini and Garibaldi to be internal enemies.

prima guerra mondiale. Parte I”, and “Note sul pensiero militare italiano da fine secolo XIX all’inizio della prima guerra mondiale. Parte II”.

40 The most important steps in the Italian unification process were: the Third War of Independence which obtained Venetia (1866), the gunfights against Garibaldi’s followers in Aspromonte (1862) and Mentana (1867), the Brigandage in the southern regions (1861-1865), the revolt in Palermo (1866), and the conquest of Rome (1870). An overview of the Italian Risorgimento is provided by Riall, The Italian Risorgimento.

41 The influence of the French threat on the territorial distribution of the Italian army in the 1860s has been analyzed by Bertinara, “Lo stanziamento dell’esercito italiano in età liberale”.
because of their critical attitude toward the new monarchical state, and the Piedmont General Staff was coming to seriously mistrust the spontaneous “militarization from below”⁴² that they considered to be the military expression of antimonarchy sentiment.

The government had to reconcile a compelling need to defuse the republican and anti-unification threats with the military necessity to rapidly integrate different forces into a larger national army, able to face the challenges posed by any kind of enemy. This double necessity led the liberal establishment to opt for a short-term solution, to postpone the systematic and effective reformation of the body of the military, and to deal with the problems one at a time through ad hoc measures.

According to this approach, the 1854 conscription law was extended tout court to Lombardy in June 1859. Shortly afterwards, a provisional draft system, modeled on the one previously established in Piedmont, was set up in Tuscany. In both Lombardy and Tuscany, conscripts easily made up the required numbers. Drafting southern youngsters was much more difficult and politically unprofitable; therefore, only 2,311 (out of 3,600) ex-Bourbon commissioned officers (COs) were allowed to join the national army and most rank-and-file soldiers were automatically discharged. Only the youngest ones (those who were born between 1837 and 1840) were reenrolled, according to local conscription law because they were considered by the Piedmont establishment to be the only part of the former Bourbon army not yet “corrupted by the education they had received”.⁴³ In other words, they were young enough to embrace the Savoy cause. However, this proved to be an illusion, since most of the ex-Bourbon soldiers failed to report to the corps when called up, and the military authorities had to use extreme measures even to enlist fewer than 48,000 men over approximately three years. This was certainly “not a satisfying result”.⁴⁴

Regardless, the most delicate question was how to handle the approximately 50,000 volunteers enlisted in the Southern Army. In the fall of 1860, the minister of war, General Manfredo Fanti, had complained about the volunteers’ scanty military experience, but the issue of maintaining the integrity of the army clearly overwhelmed this military concern. In actuality, this was a purely political matter, since the Piedmont establishment was not concerned by the volunteers’ lack of technical know-how and experience. Rather, they were worried about the volunteers’ republican

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⁴² Del Negro, “Introduzione: militarizzazione e nazionalizzazione nella storia d’Italia”.
⁴⁴ Mazzetti, “Dagli eserciti pre-unitari all’esercito italiano”, p. 574.
sympathies and their blind obedience to their charismatic leader – General Garibaldi – instead of to royal authority.

From the liberal-monarchic point of view, Garibaldi’s explicit acceptance of the king’s leadership and the fierce Italian nationalism of the Southern Army’s soldiers clearly did not suffice. Moreover, it was quite complicated to integrate people with such different loyalties, expressed by very different battle cries, into the same army. While Garibaldi’s volunteers went to battle shouting “Viva l’Italia!” (“Long live Italy!”), thus making no reference at all to the monarchy, the traditional battle cry of the Piedmont army was “Avanti Savoia!” (“Let’s go, Savoy!”). Even more importantly, before receiving a gun, soldiers had to swear “loyalty to the King and His Royal Successors”.

It should be noted that the moderate government largely misunderstood the complex nature of volunteerism, especially regarding the motives of the southern volunteers. In actuality, the liberals failed to fully appreciate how differently the many components of the voluntary forces felt about the new state; rather, they mechanically linked any kind of military volunteerism with republicanism. As the framework on which the newborn kingdom was built was very fragile, arming thousands of potential enemies of the crown was a risk no government wanted to take.

Therefore, it was no surprise that, as early as November of 1860, Minister Fanti formally disbanded the Southern Army, vastly underestimating the ramifications that this decision would have upon the Brigantaggio’s rising in the Mezzogiorno and the attitudes of former volunteers toward the new state. These people were severely disappointed: they had risked their lives in the fight for national unification, but now were paradoxically discriminated against. Meanwhile, the state they had fought to build welcomed into its armed forces men who had fought against it, and then had been accepted as “brothers in arms” simply by changing their uniform and swearing the oath.

45 Ministero della Guerra, Regolamento di disciplina militare e di istruzione e servizio interno per la fanteria, article 1.
46 In the 1860s the southern provinces of the Italian new state were the theatre of a diffuse (albeit mostly uncoordinated) antistate resistance resulting from a mix of political, social, economic, and purely criminal motives. Termed the Brigantaggio already by contemporaries, it resulted in a veritable though low-intensity civil war, in which the new state prevailed also thanks to “exceptional” laws and other repressive measures. On this, see Hobsbawm, Primitive Rebels, and the more recent work of Lupo, “Il grande brigantaggio.”
Moreover, many were forced to resign from their posts after the imposition of humiliating enrollment conditions; furthermore, many applications to the ministerial commission for reenlistment were summarily rejected.\textsuperscript{47}

In sum, the liberal establishment preferred the discipline and political indifference of the regular soldiers from the former armies (especially those from northern regions) to the patriotic enthusiasm of the genuine volunteers. Evidently, the key concepts of this selection were political reliability and “Piedmontness”, not patriotism and a sense of belonging to the national community. These guidelines led Garibaldi himself to give a very polemical speech in the parliament and further increased the strong tensions between liberals and republicans outside the parliament. This, in turn, prevented a constructive debate on the draft, and the dichotomy between the standing army/nation in arms was rapidly transformed into one of the postunification rhetorical battlefields where the different factions of the Risorgimento fought to achieve their conflicting versions of the Italian state.

In fact, Italian liberals and republicans did not just propose two conscription models, as the Conservatives and the political Left and Right had done in revolutionary and postrevolutionary France or in Prussia.\textsuperscript{48} Since the institutional outcome of the 1859-1860 military victories was clearly provisional and there was a serious possibility that the institutional framework of the new state would soon be modified, both parties backed a specific kind of army, linking it (albeit implicitly) to a particular institutional framework. Moderates wished to incorporate hand-picked members of Garibaldi’s army into the small Savoy standing army and disband every all-volunteer force, in order to strengthen the monarchy and to decisively defeat its antagonists; on the other side, republicans were not particularly interested in building up the newborn Italian army, since they considered any standing army to be an obstacle to the creation of a nonmonarchic state. Therefore, the only common factor between the various republican suggestions was replacing the regular army with an all-volunteer force.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} Only a few were discharged after being granted an extra allowance. See Molfese, “Lo scioglimento dell’esercito meridionale garibaldino”.
\textsuperscript{48} On the French case, see Crépin, \textit{La conscription en débat}. On the Prussian case, see Militär-geschichtliches Forschungsamt, \textit{Militärische Reformer in Deutschland im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert}.
\textsuperscript{49} A brief synthesis of the alternative military models proposed by the Italian political Left during the nineteenth century is in Ilari, \textit{Storia del servizio militare in Italia}, I, ch. 7. On the National Guard, see Francia, \textit{Le baionette intelligenti}. On the shooting societies as a part of the nation-in-arms project, see Pécout, “Les sociétés de tir dans l’Italie unifiée de la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle”.
Military historians have stressed the decisive role of this quarrel in the formation of the postunification draft system, but there was no real debate on this topic. Rather, this was a confrontation between two (or more) incompatible concepts of the nation-state and of the role played by a specific model of military draft. Neither really wanted to concern themselves with the features of the conscription system to be adopted after unification, and nor did they want to compromise on this crucial matter. It is most likely that a compromise could have been found regarding the particular features of the conscription system, but it was not possible to reconcile the opposing goals that moderates and republicans wanted to achieve through the draft.

Despite the worldwide fame of some of their opponents, the liberals won the fight on the main substantive issues. The 1859-1861 extension of the Piedmont draft law to other northern regions and the strict selection of the volunteers and former Bourbon soldiers to be allowed to serve in the new Italian army provide ample evidence for such an assertion.

Drafting a nation, making a state: conscription in the 1860s

The polemics on the nation-in-arms did not significantly influence Italian military policy in the first years after unification, or in the second half of the 1860s. After facing the 1859-1861 challenges by extending the Piedmont draft to temporarily include the annexed territories, the government continued to follow a conscription policy based on La Marmora’s system until the early 1870s. A new recruitment act was issued in 1862. Nominally, this was the first Italian conscription act. However, it drew substantially upon the 1854 act, and it did not introduce significant innovations or adapt the draft system to accommodate the traditions and the needs of the recently annexed lands. This choice cannot be explained just by stressing the incapability of the ruling class to shape a new draft system, nor can it be analyzed simply in terms of political opportunity or of an increase in the supply of military manpower.

If the 1859-1861 measures had successfully resolved some of the most urgent problems stemming from the sudden unification, confirming La

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50 See for example Mola’s, Del Negro’s, and La Salvia’s essays in Mazzonis, Garibaldi condottiero. For a long-run analysis of the Italian route to the nation-in-arms, see Conti, “Il mito della ‘nazione armata’”.

51 On Garibaldi’s image as an international myth, see Riall, Garibaldi. On Mazzini, see Smith, Mazzini.

52 Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, I, p. 367.
Marmora’s draft was above all the second phase of the broader, coherent, and mostly successful strategy which enabled the Italian state to defeat all remaining threats to its own existence. In fact, some aspects of the pre-unification conscription system perfectly matched both political and technical needs of the new state. In 1863-1865, Italy was still experiencing a true civil war in the south and a centralized modern bureaucracy had yet to be created. In that context, the draft had two main goals. From a military point of view, conscription had to provide the regular army with the manpower it needed to sustain the military effort. From a political point of view, it was an important way of imposing the state’s presence in peripheral provinces and acquainting the new subjects with their status as Italian citizens.

The Ministry of War tried to achieve the first of these goals by conforming the new national army’s recruitment system to the best one available. As mentioned above, the Piedmont army was largely based on the French model, and the Second Empire’s army was still the most feared war machine in early 1860s Europe. Therefore, maintaining La Marmora’s draft did not mean the adoption of an outdated military model, nor was it a merely conservative policy; on the contrary, following the most imitated European example of the time seemed to be both the most obvious and the most effective option.

Politically speaking, La Marmora’s law seemed to be the best answer to the urgent demand for “statehood”. In fact, Piedmont draft’s mechanisms were already familiar to at least a part of the national civilian and military bureaucracy, and they had been already tested – successfully – in some other regions, such as Lombardy and Tuscany. Quite paradoxically, imposing the

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53 Although the Italian territory was much smaller and its populations were ethnically homogeneous, Italy’s attempt in the 1860s to effectively control its territory through the draft shared some features with the attempts made by some multiethnic states such as the Russian and the Ottoman Empires. On Nicholas I’s Russia, see Kagan, The Military Reforms of Nicholas I. On the Ottoman Empire, see Beşikçi’s contribution in this volume and the bibliography.

54 Almost all books for conscripts contained basic info about civics. See Sacchi, Primo libro di lettura ad uso del soldato.

55 Actually, Napoleon III had started doubting the efficiency of the French army already in the 1850s. See Kovacs, “French Military Institutions before the Franco-Prussian War”. For a contemporary Italian judgement stressing the French army’s superiority shortly before the Franco-Prussian War, see Calà Ulloa, Guerra tra Prussia e Francia.

56 It is important to bear in mind that the competition among the European powers and the traditionally supranational nature of military science contributed to the standardization not only of warfare, but also of many aspects of the peacetime military. On this, see Posen, “Nationalism, the Mass Army, and Military Power”.

Piedmont draft system upon the southern part of the country helped the former Bourbon and Papal civil servants, too. Since, realistically, no draft was in operation in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and Papal States, most of the southern bureaucrats had almost no expertise in enlistment operations. Consequently, they had to learn how to use the basic instruments of the so-called révolution identitaire\textsuperscript{57} for this new task. Therefore, the continuity in legal framework was a precious asset, since it enabled the Piedmont civil servants and officers to better assist their inexperienced colleagues.

In other words, opting for the extension of La Marmora’s law, instead of creating a conscription system \textit{ex novo}, enabled the Italian authorities to rapidly establish a clear rule regarding one of the most constraining and unpopular obligations that the new state imposed on its citizens. Naturally, given the fragile administrative framework, national conscription could not immediately be put into effect, and the first call-up actually happened in 1864. Nevertheless, establishing a shared legal framework was a necessary prerequisite and the first goal to achieve. Enlisting Italian subjects according to the pre-unification rule played a decisive role in this effort. Moreover, exporting the Piedmont draft model was a viable continuation of the strategy adopted by early Italian governments in several other critical fields.

Actually, replacing the previous laws and institutions with the Piedmont ones was the main way in which the liberal establishment was able to build the new national state.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, if forcibly maintaining the previous regulations was seen by the national governments to be the best solution to quickly standardizing the legal framework within which Italian citizens lived, imposing La Marmora’s draft system all over the country was even more profitable, since it successfully dealt with three other very sensitive questions: defending the upper classes’ privileges with respect to military duty, funding the enlargement of the armed forces while respecting the postwar budgetary constraints, and keeping most key positions in the army under the control of the Piemontese military establishment even

\textsuperscript{57} On the “culture of identification”, see Noiriel, \textit{La tyrannie du national}. For an example of the manuals addressed to draft councils to enable inexperienced mayors to execute the draft correctly, see Bernoni, \textit{Manuale del Consiglio di leva}.

\textsuperscript{58} The Piedmont penal code was slightly changed in 1865 and kept in force in all national courts (apart from the Tuscan ones) until 1889; the Piedmont school system was imposed on all Italian regions and the fiscal system as well. On Italian state-building in the 1860s, see Romanelli, \textit{L’Italia liberale}. 
though one-third of the potential draftees hailed from the Mezzogiorno.\textsuperscript{59} La Marmora’s draft system met all of those requirements.

First, the 1854 act detailed an extensive system of exemptions and allowed the richest draftees to buy themselves out of the obligation by hiring a substitute or paying a fee. Secondly, a small semiprofessional army was relatively cheap, as it was partially financed by liberation and replacement taxes. Thirdly, the long term of service enabled military authorities to “Piedmontize” southern recruits. Obviously, there was no ethnic dimension to Italian conscription,\textsuperscript{60} nor was the preference for Piedmont soldiers a purely punitive measure aimed at the defeated former enemies. In the eyes of the liberal establishment, “Piedmontness” was not an ascribed, culturally based category, but rather a synonym for “political reliability”. What is more, many high-ranking officers of the former Neapolitan and Tuscan armies had already gained this qualification by demonstrating their unconditional loyalty to the Savoy cause on the battlefields in 1820-1821 and 1848.\textsuperscript{61} After the extension of the draft to non-Piedmontese people, even simple soldiers had to “learn to be Piedmontese”, not in cultural but in political terms. Although several ex-Bourbon soldiers perceived this process as in reality a forced assimilation,\textsuperscript{62} “Piedmontizing” recruits actually consisted of transforming potentially untrustworthy provincial populations into disciplined and loyal subjects. The government was confident that this requirement would be met once the recruits had served five years under the command of mostly ex-Savoy COs.

This kind of long-term service was one of the reasons national conscription had to face very strong resistance in early 1860s Italy, mostly in those areas where the draft had previously involved just a few youngsters.\textsuperscript{63} Even

\textsuperscript{59} Italian census data from 1861 to the present are available at http://www.istat.it (accessed 15 April 2011).

\textsuperscript{60} Ethnically based draft policies were adopted in some nineteenth-century multiethnic states. On Russia, see Keep, \textit{Soldiers of the Tsar}. On the Ottoman Empire, see Aksan, \textit{Ottoman Recruitment in the Late Eighteenth Century}. See also Beşikçi’s contribution in this volume.

\textsuperscript{61} During the Crimean War, three of the five Savoy brigades were led by non-Piedmont officers (Manfredo Fanti, Enrico Cialdini, and Rodolfo Gabrielli di Montecchio) who had previously joined the Piedmont army. See Mazzetti, “Dagli eserciti pre-unitari all’esercito italiano”, p. 564.

\textsuperscript{62} An example of ex-Bourbon soldiers’ negative perception of their integration into the new national army is Fondazione Archivio Diaristico Nazionale [henceforth, ADN], Michele Musella, \textit{Nacqui nella notte de’ 20 Febbraio}, MP/96. Rochat and Massobrio also underlined that “The new unitary army’s ‘Piedmontization’ was carried out in too rigid a way, and it caused resentments, misinterpretations, and crises”. Rochat and Massobrio, \textit{Breve storia dell’esercito italiano dal 1861 al 1943}, p. 23.

if local communities often helped their own deserters by hiding and feeding them, desertion and reluctance were generally individual, spontaneous, and apolitical phenomena both in the Mezzogiorno and in the northern regions. In other words, draft-dodging did not always stem from indifference to the new nation-state, nor did it necessarily express the rejection of military service itself.

As military court sentences confirmed, many draft-evaders artlessly ignored what kind of duties the draft implied and failed to report for military service in good faith: some because they had emigrated for seasonal work, others because they had misunderstood the enlistment procedure, and still others even because in the countryside “These men […] lived in a world in which the passage of time escaped their grasp” and basically they did not know that they were twenty years old!

Nevertheless, many other youngsters consciously escaped the draft. Some of them were scared of such an unknown experience; some others had been told about hard military life by ex-draftees; most draftees did not want to leave their home villages, not only because the village community was the only one to which they felt they belonged, but also because their five-year-long absence deprived their families of a much-needed source of labor and income.

If military service was a long, unpleasant parenthesis in the lives of most Italian conscripts, some youngsters approached the experience in a more positive way. Cultural and economic factors helped those men make sense of military service. The draft’s symbolic meaning as a rite of passage to adulthood played a decisive role, since most young men wished to be declared fit for the army as a public certification of their masculinity.

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64 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, p. 73.
65 Like Corselli, *Letture educative compilate pei soldati del 57 reggimento fanteria*, several other books for recruits stressed the negative influence of fellow villagers’ and ex-soldiers’ stories about military service on conscripts’ approach to service and tried to balance them through rosy descriptions of military life, such as De Amicis, *La vita militare*. On the opposition between antimilitarist and militarist literature, see Del Negro, “De Amicis Versus Tarchetti”.
66 On the relationship between village community and national community in Italy, see Cavazza, *Piccole patrie*. The Italian situation can be compared to the German one, analyzed by Confino, *The National as Local Metaphor*.
67 The attitude of Italian youngsters toward the draft has been little studied. Some information is provided by literature. See, for example, Verga, *Cavalleria rusticana*. On the reasons for reluctance in nineteenth-century Italy, see Oliva, *Esercito, paese e movimento operaio*. Italians’ refusal to enlist shared many features with desertion in other countries, such as France and Egypt. See Rousseau, *Service militaire au XIXe siècle*, and Zürcher, “The Nation and Its Deserters”.
68 Oliva, “La coscrizione obbligatoria nell’Italia unita tra consenso e rifiuto”. This seems to be another aspect of conscription that enables international comparison, since such an ambiguous
Therefore, Italian men shared the ambiguous attitude toward enlistment – a mix of fear, resignation, and curiosity – of many other rural communities all over Europe. Economically speaking, enrollment could even represent a profitable employment opportunity.

As the government pointed out frequently, the goal of substitution and liberation was not just to allow the sons of the richest classes to pay for their liberation, but also to employ people who would otherwise be considered unproductive and socially dangerous. Several European governments justified their socially discriminatory systems by paternalistically presenting the exemptions as the prerequisite for employing lower classes in the military. As the government pointed out frequently, the goal of substitution and liberation was not just to allow the sons of the richest classes to pay for their liberation, but also to employ people who would otherwise be considered unproductive and socially dangerous. Several European governments justified their socially discriminatory systems by paternalistically presenting the exemptions as the prerequisite for employing lower classes in the military.69 Also, in Italy – according to the liberal establishment – long-term service and replacement had to be considered two sides of the same coin, since both acted in the “general interest” of a society in which each class had to fulfill its own role.

On the one hand, replacement strengthened the social equilibrium, since it prevented military obligations from damaging the careers of members of the future ruling class. As La Marmora pointed out, five years in the barracks “would force with excessive strictness [the draftees] to renounce, very often forever, liberal careers and professions, suffering a destiny much unluckier than that of other classes of citizens who are not affected by the military service in their arts or jobs”.70 On the other hand, although liberation was perceived to be a hateful privilege by most of the lower-middle-class conscripts, the supplementary income from the liberation fees was redirected to the reenrollment fund, thereby perpetuating the cycle of increased employment and decreased crime and social unrest. Consequently, as the army would not have had enough money to employ volunteers without the liberation fees, it is probable that liberation was also seen by unemployed young men as the major means by which the state could provide them with a military employment opportunity. In the nineteenth-century Italian labor market, voluntary enlistment and even conscription could also be (or become) a professional choice.

attitude is part of the picture in almost any nineteenth-century European country. On France, see Bozon, Les conscrits, and Hopkin, Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture. On Germany, see Frevert, A Nation in Barracks, and Pröve, Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert.

69 On France, see Hippler’s contribution in this volume.

70 La Marmora’s talk is quoted by Massobrio, Bianco, rosso e grigioverde, p. 42.
“Conscripts by choice”: substitutes, volunteers, and reenlisted soldiers in the 1860s

Despite the double role of replacement as the means permitting the so-called “bourgeois reluctance”71 and as an employment agency, most studies have focused on the former aspect of the system of exemptions, whereas the latter has been largely neglected. This section deals with this question by briefly analyzing those who escaped the draft, their substitutes, and the reasons some youngsters preferred becoming soldiers to doing other jobs, as long as (re)enlistment in nineteenth-century Italy could be considered the outcome of a free choice.

If we look substitutions by unrelated people,72 one fact is particularly noticeable: draftees and their substitutes did not just share the same residential area, but also belonged to socially divided networks located in the same territory. In most cases, it is actually impossible to describe precisely what kind of relationship linked those people, and nor can we quantify how many conscripts knew their substitutes personally. Nevertheless, patronage relationships were sometimes evident, since the surrogates had worked for the conscript’s family before enlisting on his behalf. Therefore, replacing could even be considered as the continuation of that work relationship, and it remained, substantially, a family affair, at least according to the wider Latin meaning of the word “family”.

Sometimes, the conscript-substitute relationship was not so obvious. However, the overlapping of everyday life-space and a different social status suggests a previous asymmetrical relationship, which made substitution quite similar to the old regime’s recruitment practices: the state restricted itself to ratifying a private contract between the soldier (now the substitute), who was led to accept by his socio-economic subordinate status, and his “proprietor” (the substituted), whose exemption from serving personally roughly renewed the hierarchical superiority of ancient local lords with respect to their own peasants. Several memoirs and testimonies justify voluntary enlistment as a substitute by resignedly stressing the impossibility of denying a “favor” to a local notable.

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71 Del Negro, “La leva militare in Italia”, p. 175.
72 If analyzed in terms of labor relations, brother and unrelated-person replacement cannot be confused, since they took place within quite different legal frameworks. Moreover, the agency of men involved in brother substitutions was probably much more limited, since the voluntary enrollment of one member instead of another could be part of a family strategy to minimize the damage the draft did to the ménage familial.
In other cases, there was no direct link between the draftee and the substitute, and a broker paired the interests of the elite with the urgent needs of jobless youngsters. Theoretically speaking, John Lynn described a “conscription army” as a kind of military organization in which labor relations are strictly limited to the volunteers and the public authorities. Nevertheless, in practice very often the broker’s action deeply affected the equilibrium between supply of and demand for manpower by indirectly helping the army employ involuntary instead of voluntary labor. The broker also had an impact on the relationship between these people and central power, as he had to speak positively of military careers and even provide potential substitutes with some essential cultural and behavioral attributes in order to make serving the state as appealing as possible and convince them to opt for a career that involved killing and risking death on the battlefield in the Mezzogiorno or elsewhere. In other words, brokers acted as middlemen in two ways. On the one hand, they connected two socially different worlds; on the other, they acted as a true cultural mediator both between the local culture and the national one, and between the military set of values and the civilian one.

When brokers had to overcome resistance, they did not hesitate to use extreme measures to carry out their business: threats, blackmail, and corruption were common practices, at least according to penal court papers. Actually, moral suasion was probably the most commonly used method of leaning on potential surrogates, but it was informal and has left very few documentary traces. Therefore, it is difficult to state when substituting was a substantially free choice and when it mostly was the outcome of external pressure.

However, hiring a substitute was not very difficult, especially in the first postunification years. Annual substitution data suggest a declining trend, but confirmed that substitution remained a fairly common practice until the early 1870s: in 1863, the Ministry of War allowed 1,654 ordinary substitutions (surrogazione ordinaria) and 394 substitutions between brothers; in 1864-1865, 428 substitutes were enlisted (188 unrelated people and 240 conscripts’ brothers). Obviously, the number dropped in 1866-1868 because of the war against Austria: the Ministry of War allowed only 204 ordinary substitutions and 152 replacements performed by draftees’ brothers. In 1868-1869, the replacement number rose slightly (142 unrelated surrogates and 176 brothers were allowed to serve under the colors on behalf of other men).  

73 Lynn, “The Evolution of Army Style in the Modern West”.
74 Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno (1864-1870).
From the perspective of the richest families, substitution was affordable and – at least in some cases – allowed them to exploit their local influence to force even unwilling fellow villagers to accept replacement and to fulfill the obligation on their behalf. From the surrogate’s perspective, a fixed salary was a tantalizing prospect, and the most common reason why both civilian courts and military authorities had to deal with dozens of fraudulent reenlistments every year.

Although substitution was cheaper and easily accessible thanks to wide networks, many elite members preferred paying a higher fee and letting the state find a substitute for them. The liberation tax was so expensive that some people who had applied for it then rejected because they could not actually afford it. However, only liberation secured the replaced draftees against the many substitutes who deserted shortly after taking the first payment installment. The richest Italian families did not want to risk both a significant loss of money and – especially – the forced personal enlistment imposed on the draftees whose substitutes then deserted, should they be unable to send a suitable substitute to the corps within a few weeks.

Consequently, in 1860s Italy, substitution was a local phenomenon, mostly involving both the middle and the upper bourgeoisie, whereas liberation was truly elite. Therefore, liberation data can be considered a reliable index of the upper class’s attitude to military obligation.

First, the applications’ geographical distribution confirms that the ex-Bourbon subjects were the ones most reluctant to join the military, whereas only a few former Piedmont citizens used their money to avoid being drafted (see Table 16.4). Actually, this is not surprising: several scholars have already emphasized the ex-Piedmont subjects’ stronger attachment to the new state’s destiny. Secondly, liberation was predominantly an urban phenomenon: in

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75 As replacement looked more affordable, many provincial middle-lower bourgeois families contracted debts to hire a substitute and then went bankrupt. See Briante, “L’esercito e le polizie”. The same happened in France, as suggested by Kovacs, “French Military Institutions before the Franco-Prussian War”, p. 221.

76 Some examples are available in Archivio di Stato di Napoli [henceforth, ASN], Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto, I parte, reati comuni-camorra.

77 In 1863-1864, for instance, a good 340 draftees rejected liberation after having applied for it. See Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno 1843, p. 55.

78 More detailed data are available in Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno... (annually). Although the author was biased, in a letter addressed to Lord Rokeby in August 1864 General Calà Ulloa underlined that “in the past four years only fourteen people from crowded Naples enlisted voluntarily and defined Neapolitans’ lack of inclination to enroll a “plebiscite of reluctance”: ASN, Questura di Napoli, Gabinetto, I parte, f. 17.

79 See, for example, Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, I, p. 371.
1867, for example, Naples, Palermo, Florence, Milan, and Turin supplied about 20 per cent of the annual contingent and 40 per cent of liberated draftees.80

Table 16.4 Origins of liberated draftees and reenlisted soldiers (1867-1870)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former citizenship</th>
<th>Liberated draftees (%)</th>
<th>Voluntarily enlisted men (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of the Two Sicilies</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papal States</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of Sardinia</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Duchy of Tuscany</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno (1867-1870).

On the other side, liberation data also supply scholars with precious information about the other two actors involved in replacement: the military authorities who selected the substitutes and the men who replaced their richer countrymen. Since, in liberation, military authorities acted as a broker by encouraging (re)enrollment and matching the conscripts’ applications with the volunteers’ enlistments, the draftee-broker-substitute triangle was independent from the conscripts’ networks. Therefore, the surrogates’ origins reflected not only the people’s attitude toward the draft, but also the government’s attitude toward the draftees. In fact, the ruling class’s mistrust of potential anti-Savoy plotters played a decisive role in keeping the number of southern substitutes low. Consequently, northern citizens were overrepresented within the volunteers’ group.

As in the first postunification stages, the government also tried to keep the army’s composition under control with respect to the percentage of volunteers. La Marmora’s law allowed volunteers with six months of experience to apply for reenlistment, giving explicit preference to all draftees

80 The data concerning the origins of the liberated draftees must be read in light of the data on the whole Italian population. According to the 1861 census, only 14.2 per cent of the Italian population lived in cities with more than 15,000 inhabitants. See Malanima, Italian Urban Population, 1300-1861; paper available on http://www.paolomalanima.it/default_file/Page646.htm (accessed 28 May 2011).
serving for their last year, on the condition that they had a clean record and a
good-conduct certificate from their previous regiment, were single, and were
fit for service. The preference for regular soldiers led military authorities
to frequently hire men who were already under the flag as conscripts. In
fact, most substitutes were affidati anziani, that is, they simply extended
their service time after discharge. In other words, when those men replaced
their liberated comrades, they were neither true volunteers nor conscripts.
They voluntarily signed on to the army after having previously been forced
to join it. In short, we could call them “conscripts by choice”. In 1870-1871, for
example, 76.5 per cent of the substitutes were twenty-five to thirty years old
and 81 per cent had already served for at least five years, whereas volunteers
under twenty-five were just 10 per cent, and only 19 per cent had not yet spent
five years in the army. In the previous years, the picture had been more or
less the same: in 1869, 802 of 1,131 (71 per cent) twenty-five- to thirty-year-old
men were enlisted, every one of them having served for at least five years.83

Again, the main criteria for selection was not the applicants’ patriotism
and military prowess, but their discipline and respect for authority. In
1870-1871 only 933 men of 2,460 reenlisted men (38 per cent) had fought for
Italy at least once (798 once, 124 twice, and only 11 three times), while 1,527
had taken part in no campaign (62 per cent) and just 23 (0.9 per cent) had
gained a medal for valor.84 In 1869, veterans constituted 647 of 1,131 (57 per
cent), but 574 of them (89 per cent) had fought only once, despite the several
wars Italy had engaged in between 1859 and 1868.

Although the selection process was not particularly strict, and most
reenrolled men were no more than disciplined soldiers, applying for reen-
listment was a demanding choice, since reenlisted soldiers had to serve
for five more years and could not abandon the army if they changed their
minds. However, reenlistment could seem a good bargain for many reasons,
especially economic ones.85 From that point of view, the Piedmont-Italian
law followed the traditional pattern which assured that the reenrolled men

82 According to Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno (1867-1870), reenlistments were 1,324
out of 1,466 in 1864-1865 and 587 out of 653 in 1865-1866.
83 Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno 1847 e delle vicende dell’esercito dal 1 ottobre 1868
al 30 settembre 1869, p. 140.
84 Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno 1845 e delle vicende dell’esercito dal 1 ottobre 1870
al 30 settembre 1871, p. 115.
85 According to Alan Ramsay Skelley, “economic pressure was the principal impetus to recruit-
ment” also in the nineteenth-century British army. See Skelley, The Victorian Army at Home,
p. 248.
received quite a high sum immediately after entering the corps and then extra monthly pay of 12 L. along with the interest (4.4.5 per cent) on the whole amount deposited by the liberated conscript.

Both reenlisted soldiers and scholars pointed out that the salary was too low to live a respectable life—indeed this was a very common complaint among European war professionals. Nevertheless, the Italian rank and file did not get by badly, mostly because the government handled a progressive decrease in available affidati by making a military career more and more appealing with respect to monthly salary, which was doubled (from 12 to 25 L.), and other benefits, such as the pension increase to 300 L./year and the automatic liberation from service of all the volunteer’s brothers.

Altogether, the professional soldiers’ salaries were more or less equivalent to those of other low-ranking public employees and basically in proportion to the modest skills they had to offer in the labor market, their human capital. Moreover, the military option assured them of a certain and predictable career, a guaranteed income, and some comforts most of them would not be able to afford otherwise: decent accommodation, clothes and shoes, three meals a day (with meat at one meal) within a controlled diet with limited alcohol consumption, and even medical care, not to mention the beneficial effects on their health from the familiarization with some elementary sanitary practices imposed by discipline regulations. In other words, signing on in the army could be somewhat appealing because it could be paradoxically perceived as a “routine job” like those in the bureaucracy, at least with respect to the benefits attached.

Some long-term benefits accompanied the short-term ones. First, once definitively discharged, reenlisted men received a state pension which was

86 For contemporary complaints, see ADN, Giuseppe Tiezzi, Ricordi di come ho trascorso la mia vita, MP/93; Giovanni Viarengo, Memorie varie, Mp/Adn. On Italian officers’ income, see Caciulli, “La paga di Marte”.

87 Reenlistment law n. 3062, 7 July 1866, articles 9 and 11. The law is quoted and commented by Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno 1845 e delle vicende dell’esercito dal 1 ottobre 1865 al 30 settembre 1866, pp. 3-30. It is interesting that Torre explicitly looked at the 1866 act under the light of the direct competition for manpower between the army and other employers, whereas scholars have analyzed it almost exclusively in terms of organizational and draft policy. See, for example, Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, I, pp. 282-283.

88 On civil servants’ income, see Melis, La burocrazia.

89 Some classical well-being indexes suggested the quality of life in the army was better than outside. For example, soldiers usually put on weight during their service. See Livi, Antropometria militare. On Italian soldiers’ everyday life, see Quirico, Naja. On Italian peasants’ everyday life, see the interviews collected by Revelli, Il mondo dei vinti.

90 From this point of view, Italian reenlistment had much in common with the French system. See Hippler’s contribution in this volume.
quite low, but was still a privilege in a country where a welfare system did not exist yet. Secondly, as reenlisted men could not marry while serving, they saved much money by delaying marriage and consequently reducing the number of future mouths to feed: not a minor issue for poor rural households whose marginal propensity to consume was very low and whose consumption composition was dominated by basic commodities. Thirdly, all men who reenlisted as soldiers had a good chance to be promoted as noncommissioned officers (NCOs) and some possibilities even to become COs. Despite the low salary and the relatively modest social status of lower ranks in the military, reenlistment could thus be a mechanism of upward social mobility for former peasants and shepherds with few, if any, other chances to improve their conditions within the static Italian society of that time.

Although the appeal of a military career mostly consisted of its economic advantages, some nonmaterial benefits also encouraged men to enlist. Probably the first one was their families’ gratitude for automatically freeing all their brothers from service (after 1866); the second one consisted of their own subjective perception of their new status; the third stemmed from the social prestige linked to their job, at least in the small towns and the countryside. Psychologically, being part of a self-referential male-only society marked both inside and outside by its own habits, dress, and slang was, for most of these youngsters, a source of pride in and of itself. Furthermore, the literate soldiers could even imagine themselves as those patriotic warrior heroes that Romanticism had made famous worldwide and that schoolbooks described as models of virtue.

Socially, wearing the uniform during parades provided these uninfluential youngsters with people’s admiration, despite their social background and current economic conditions. In addition, the liberal ruling class promoted an intensive media campaign to minimize the contribution of a democratic military to the unification process and to stress “the role the army had played in the founding myth of the national community, namely,
Therefore, the habitual fascination with uniforms was boosted by periodic celebrations in which reenlisted soldiers proudly led the rank and file thanks to their long experience in the regiments.

Altogether, both material and nonmaterial benefits could explain why some men reenlisted, despite long marches, hard training, and the strong appeal of and opportunitie in paramilitary professions, such as Custom and Forrestal guards, where many ex-conscripts found “more present advantages and good pensions for the future”. Nevertheless, a major role in encouraging conscripts to reenlist was likely played by the very fact that they were now senior soldiers. As briefly mentioned above, several men refused to enlist voluntarily because of the fear of a sudden and radical lifestyle change. And, according to the draftees’ memoirs, the first steps as a junior recruit were effectively an ordeal. On the one hand, recruits were forced to redefine their networks in a hostile environment whose rules deeply affected sociability even among peers. On the other hand, some of the typical military rites of passage (hair cutting, wearing of uniform, etc.) suddenly altered the draftees’ appearance and brought their previous set of values into question. Consequently, most recruits experienced a sort of loss of individuality, which was made worse both by the compulsory abandonment of their own dialects (at least in official conversations) and by the senior soldiers’ attempts to impose the informal hierarchy upon the newcomers by force.

When draftees had to decide their future after discharge, they had already passed this difficult phase. Actually, the affidati anziani could attain the unofficial rank of senior (anziano). And life in the barracks was much more pleasant for senior soldiers even if rules were theoretically the same for everyone. Their comrades’ respect and the constraints of discipline varied according to seniority, sometimes even despite ranks and positions. Therefore, the first year in the army was unanimously considered to be the hardest, not only because of the extreme rigidity of the NCOs’ control, but also because of the psychological pressure and the physical violence which characterized the asymmetrical relationship between senior soldiers and the younger ones.

Mondini, “Esercito e Nazione”, p. 106. Naturally, linking warfare and nation-building is not an Italian peculiarity. For the British case, see Colley, Britons; for the German one, see Ritter, The Sword and the Scepter, especially vol. I, The Prussian Tradition, 1740-1890. For a comparative approach, see Leonhard, Bellizismus und Nation.

Torre, Della leva sui giovani nati nell’anno 1845 e delle vicende dell’esercito dal 1 ottobre 1865 al 30 settembre 1866, p. 9.
Several memoirs and even some official studies remarked on the high rate of mortality in the Italian barracks during the first year of service.\(^97\) One explicitly linked mortality to hazing, while most testimonies restricted themselves to describing the officers’ attitude to “reconcile discipline with the indispensable regard and special consideration” towards “senior soldiers who knew one more than the devil”.\(^98\) Such an unwritten untouchability was confirmed also by court-martial statistics: senior soldiers were sentenced much more infrequently and mildly than their younger comrades.\(^99\) Therefore, it is at least plausible that another reason why conscripts reenlisted was that they had already passed the adaptation phase of military life and consequently they attained the privileges of their rank in the informal hierarchy of the regiment.

Although at a first glance senior soldiers had more than one good reason for reenlisting, for some of them commodifying their labor was much more a forced choice than the outcome of a freely defined strategy. According to La Marmora’s law, youngsters were recruited at the age of twenty and they actively served for five years before discharge. Therefore, military service not only stripped draftees of about one-seventh (and even more in the poor southern regions with lower life expectancy rates) of their whole life,\(^100\) but also broke their cycle of life exactly at the core point. Naturally, the military service’s effects on the recruits’ cycles of life changed according to individual situation. However, going home after military service was a shock for many conscripts, as they found their own world totally changed. In fact, during the conscripts’ absence, parents or relatives often died, girlfriends married other villagers, and friends emigrated forever.\(^101\) It was no coincidence that draftees left their villages only after saying a final goodbye to all their fellow villagers.

\(^97\) Sormani, *Mortalità dell’esercito italiano*.
\(^98\) La Zzerini, *In caserma*, pp. 125-126. Naturally, descriptions of hazing largely differed according to the rank of the memoirist. It was depicted from the officers’ perspective by De Rossi, *La vita di un ufficiale italiano sino alla guerra*, while it was reported from the simple soldiers’ point of view by ADN, L.D.M., *Ragazzo, alpino, parà*, Mg/01.
\(^100\) In 1874, the life expectancy at the age of 20 was still just 37.7 years (31.2 at birth): Corsini, “Per una storia della statura in Italia nell’ultimo secolo”, p. 18.
\(^101\) Popular songs and tales are very interesting sources for analyzing the discharged draftees’ perception of their experience in the military. See Ferraro, *Canti popolari monferrini*, and Nigra, *Canti popolari del Piemonte*. 
The draft affected many youngsters’ professional lives too. Actually, the military service’s consequences on the professional sphere largely depended on the draftee’s job. Obviously, peasants were less disturbed by draft, since they could go back home and start again tilling the soil without looking for another job. And finding a job after discharge was quite easy for farmhands too. Even if the long absence from the village weakened the conscripts’ social capital, the draft was not perceived by their fellow villagers as a voluntary absence. Thus, most draftees were not excluded from the informal welfare system which traditionally helped the former emigrants to get back into the local community and the working world.¹⁰²

By contrast, craftsmen were more damaged by the draft, since most of them were still doing an apprenticeship with older artisans when they were drafted. As true vocational training was still to be defined in nineteenth-century Italy, learning by doing represented the core of apprenticeship. Therefore, abandoning their apprenticeship for five years in practice thwarted any plan and mostly forced former conscripts to be content with less remunerative jobs. Although the skills required for setting up shop were not very complex, those young men had not still acquired enough expertise to be able to work on their own. Moreover, most ex-conscripts joined the army with very low educational attainment and regimental schools did not really help them improve their nonmilitary knowhow, since training and schooling in the military primarily aimed to transform recruits into disciplined soldiers. Once discharged, this techno-military knowhow was the only skill conscripts had gained by serving. Such expertise had little use outside the army, whereas many memoirs stressed the difficulties that former draftees faced once they tried to start their “career” again.¹⁰³

In short, many Italian ex-draftees shared the postdischarge destiny of their Austrian and French comrades, as, after many years in the army, they had no other professional choice than to “voluntarily” remain soldiers.¹⁰⁴ Naturally, this circumstance cannot be generalized, especially because no source enables us to know the reenlisted men’s professional background and to precisely quantify the percentage of craftsmen within this group. Nevertheless, it is very likely that the reduction of the civilian employment chances stemming from five-year-long military service led conscripts to reenlist.

¹⁰² On the informal welfare system operating in most nineteenth-century Italian villages, see Lorenzetti and Merzario, Il fuoco acceso.
¹⁰³ Fambri, “La società e la Chiesa”.
¹⁰⁴ See Deák, Beyond Nationalism, and Hippler’s contribution in this volume.
Altogether, analyzing military recruitment in terms of labor relations leads us to underline both the limits of some previous interpretations of reenlistment and the problems originating in the use of the official taxonomy in describing social actors’ professional choices. On the one hand, reenlistment cannot be simply considered as a sign of the ex-soldiers’ patriotism. Other decisive factors – both economic and noneconomic – encouraged draftees to reenlist in the army. On the other hand, the boundary between volunteerism and compulsory service, as well as that between forced and commodified military labor, was not so clear. Actually, most affidati were draftees who prolonged their term of service. In other words, compulsory service and volunteerism were not two antagonistic approaches to military life, but two successive phases. At the same time, the volunteer status of many reenlisted men was questionable, since commodifying their labor force in the army after discharge could be read as the consequence of the juridical constraints that forced these people to serve as conscripts and – in so doing – to renounce any other career.

Generally speaking, the 1860s Italian army was a “typical” conscript standing army, and it simply consisted of randomly selected conscripts, volunteers, and voluntarily reenlisted soldiers. Practically, some features of the Italian military system made the army not correspond to the theory. First, conscription was not universal, and it actually involved only the poorest part of the fit young population. Secondly, most “true volunteers” (those who had left their own home to join the army during the 1859-1860 campaigns) were discharged shortly after the end of the war, since they were suspected of antimonarchy sentiment. Therefore, volunteerism was mostly an alternative to the regular army, not a part of it. Thirdly, long-term service and the government’s preference for a French-style semi-professional militia kept the 1860s Italian army’s professionalization rate high. This policy enabled the army to act as a great employer in nineteenth-century Italian labor market, but it also affected the demand/supply equilibrium by drastically reducing conscripts’ freedom of choice, both while serving and after discharge.
From state-building to nation-building: volunteers and draftees in Italy after 1870

Although scholars still discuss whether Ricotti’s reform was a continuation of the Destra Storica’s military policy, the attempt to balance the army’s social composition “in name of a principle of sacred equality among all citizens in face of the so-called blood tax” represented a true cultural and practical revolution which had important consequences for post-1870 labor relations within the military. The most relevant one concerned the change in the general attitude toward commodifying military labor. During the 1860s, Catholic values and personal benefits stemming from service were largely used by the liberal ruling class for ideologically justifying the military obligation. The extra allowance for reenlistment was obviously one of the most convincing arguments.

In addition, commodifying the labor force was largely accepted as a legitimate economic behavior, just as paying for liberation was mostly considered to be a right indissolubly attached to elite status. In other words, both practices were not only legal, but also morally acceptable. This idea of military obligation had been hegemonic for some years. However, already in the second half of the 1860s, the 1854/1862 recruitment system started showing its limits. On the one hand, a mix of cultural (the end of patriotic enthusiasm), demographic (the retirement of most of the veterans of the battles of the Risorgimento), and economic (the increasing job supply deriving from the recent industrialization in northern Italy, that is, the traditional source of volunteers) factors reduced the number of volunteers. Consequently, the military administration was soon forced to allow liberations without having enough substitutes to comply with the numerous applications, and not to renounce the precious income stemming from the related fees. In practice, liberation rapidly became a sort of ill-concealed exemption tax.

105 The Ricotti policy’s continuity with those of his predecessors was first suggested by Corsi, Italia, 1870-1895. For a contrasting view, see Minniti, “Preparazione ed iniziativa”.
106 Ricotti’s report on his law proposal is quoted by Ilari, Storia del servizio militare in Italia, II, p. 285.
107 Although the religious tolerance stated by the 1848 constitution and the tensions with the pope prevented Catholicism from supplying official ideological justification for the draft, Christian virtues played a central role in Italian pedagogy for conscripts. See Paiano, “Religione e patria negli opuscoli cattolici per l’esercito italiano”. The same happened in tsarist Russia. See Wirtschafter, From Serfs to Russian Soldiers. On the French case, see Roynette, “Bons pour le service”, chs 5-6.
108 The opposite trend is precisely described in Del Negro, “La leva militare in Italia”, p. 191.
On the other hand, La Marmora’s discriminatory draft contributed little to making the army a well-organized war machine and an efficient nationalization agency, even if the liberal propaganda continuously stressed the central role of the army in “making the Italians”. In this context, the defeats in Custoza and Lissa during the Third War of Independence (1866) against Austria did not cause the definitive crisis of La Marmora’s approach to the recruitment question, but reinforced a preexisting double trend: on the one side, poor military performance discredited the army’s public image definitively, and transformed a military career into an unattractive professional choice; on the other side, military defeat was attributed to the soldiers’ lack of attachment to the nation. Consequently, military obligation officially became a personal duty, the possibility to buy oneself out of the obligation was denounced as illegitimate, and the army stopped employing a commodified labor force because allowing liberation was morally equivalent to letting people betray their country.

In addition, from the 1870s onwards Italian youngsters had fewer good reasons to reenlist. The army was no longer a mechanism for upward mobility. Budgetary constraints drastically reduced soldiers’ promotions to NCOs. Moreover, NCOs from the rank and file had very few chances to become COs without attending academy courses. The advantages of a good standardized educational background were evident by then, especially in countries – such as Italy – where officers had the crucial mission of shaping recruits both morally and patriotically. In fact, these “national cadres” were expected to have sufficient technical knowledge, adequate education, and certain pro-monarchy and antisaclalist inclinations which the government supposed were naturally linked to higher social ranks. Being bourgeois was regarded as a guarantee on its own, the way “Piedmontness” had been immediately after unification. Therefore, high fees and scholarships reserved for officers’ sons prevented most of the common people from embarking upon a military career and definitely made the high ranks in the army an elite-only prerogative. Most conscripts perfectly understood

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109 The professionalization of the officer corps was a European trend in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the professionalization of the German officer corps, see Demeter, *The German Officer Corps in Society and State*. On the French side, see Strieter, “An Army in Evolution”.

110 On the COs’ leading role in the army’s nationalization effort in the 1870s-1880s, see Del Negro, “La professione militare nel Piemonte costituzionale e nell’Italia liberale”.

111 On military schools and academies in nineteenth-century Italy, see Caciulli, “Il sistema delle scuole militari in età liberale”, and Pecchioli, *Le accademie e le scuole militari italiane*. 
the message and preferred to be discharged after the regular term. Very limited career prospects and discrimination in the regiment’s everyday life became additional reasons for the professional soldiers’ discontent, already stoked by the ever more antimilitarist Zeitgeist prevailing in the so-called Age of Capital.

In the 1870s-1880s, most draftees perceived military life not only as routine, out of date, and brutal, but also as an unprofitable parenthesis to close as soon as possible. Although many conscripts' memoirs still spoke of military service as a hard and long experience, it was no longer the five-year-long uprooting ordeal. Both the term reduction and Ricotti’s insistence on the integration between the army and civilian society enabled draftees to still “feel like civilians” while serving and to quickly reintegrate themselves in their village communities once they were discharged.

As long as recruits were under the colors, the 1872 discipline regulations encouraged them to establish relations with locals. Furthermore, conscripts had to attend not only elementary school courses, but also periodic conferences about practical subjects such as hygiene, agronomy, and family management. Obviously, political and moral indoctrination was the core of those lessons, since the liberal government wanted ex-draftees to “continue their beneficial action by spreading the habit of wisely living and the deep respect for the laws in the whole nation”, especially among those youngsters who had escaped the intensive indoctrination process thanks to a “good number”. However, the effective and systematic education program laid out by Ricotti’s regimental schools reform of 1872 also provided draftees with precious nonmilitary skills they could successfully use in the civilian labor market along with their social capital. When conscripts came back home after “only” thirty months under the colors, they could

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113 General De Bono stated that the former NCOs who were promoted as COs were usually ostracized in everyday barracks life by their own colleagues who had attended academy courses. See De Bono, Nell’esercito nostro prima della guerra, p. 27.
114 On the nineteenth-century spirit, see Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital, 1848-1875.
115 ADN, S.S., La storia di famiglia, Mp/91, pp. 36-37.
116 Ministero della Guerra, Regolamento di disciplina militare del 1. dicembre 1872, article 10, § 46.
117 On regimental schools, see Manghi, “Scuola e caserma”; Mastrangelo, Le “scuole reggimentali” 1848-1913; Della Torre, “Le scuole reggimentali di scrittura e lettura tra il Regno di Sardegna e il Regno d’Italia”. On Italian military pedagogy, see Labanca, “I programmi dell’educazione morale del soldato”. Italian pedagogic effort had much in common with those elsewhere, e.g., in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. See Roynette, “Bons pour le service”, chs 5-6; French, Military Identities, ch. 3; Kirn, Soldatenleben in Württemberg 1871-1914, ch. 16.
still rely on their previous networks and – in addition – they had acquired significant human capital. It consisted not only of reading, writing, and other practical skills, but also of the social prestige they gained within their own village communities thanks to the experience they had had during military service. Conscripts traveled a lot, visited big cities, took part in grandiose ceremonies, and sometimes even met the king personally; in other words, military service made them more educated and open-minded than most of their fellow villagers. This was a significant competitive advantage within local labor markets and enabled former conscripts to become well-respected members of their village communities despite their young age. Therefore, discharged draftees were really free to choose their job either in the military or civilian world, as long as these two options existed. And most ex-conscripts chose the second option.

Actually, the increasing lack of substitutes was not a minor factor in the government’s decision to banish commodified labor force from the army. Although the defeat in the 1866 war played a role in bringing commodification into question both from a military and an ethical point of view, it would be misleading to read the renunciation of reenlistment as an unilateral and strictly political choice. The evolution in the Italian mentality and the labor market affected labor relations within the military as well.

For years the Italian semiprofessional army had successfully fought for manpower against civilian employers mostly thanks to four elements: first, the competitive set of benefits offered to reenlisted soldiers; secondly, the youngsters’ patriotic enthusiasm because of the unexpected unification; thirdly, the tendency to consider draftee replacement and commodifying the labor force as legitimate economic strategies; and, fourthly, the lack of alternative job opportunities for ex-draftees, especially craftsmen and clerks. By the second half of the 1870s all these conditions had changed and military careers increasingly lost their appeal. Consequently, the government decided (or was forced?) to base the post-1870 army upon unfree labor, i.e., exclusively upon thousands of conscripts forced to look at the army as a “second family”\textsuperscript{118} and fight for the only legitimate reason: helping the nation to win the Darwinian struggle for survival. After Ricotti’s reform had forbidden the corps to hire men on behalf of rich draftees, the only form of volunteerism in the Italian army was represented by one-year volunteers. However, as mentioned above, most one-year volunteers were not “true volunteers”; instead they were a privileged group of conscripts.

\textsuperscript{118} Ministero della Guerra, \textit{Regolamento di disciplina militare del 1. dicembre 1872}, article 9, § 39.
who enlisted as volunteers simply in order to make their military service easier and shorter.

Again, a standard taxonomy is misleading when mechanically applied to the different types of man who enlisted in the Italian army, particularly to volunteers. Actually, voluntary and forced labor continued to be intermingled until the eve of World War I.

Conclusions

This brief overview of the Italian conscription experience suggests the necessity of prudence in applying tricky concepts, such as “universal conscription”, “volunteer”, and “draftee”. On the one hand, different phenomena risk being erroneously confused under the vague label of “conscript army”. On the other hand, the shift from the pre-unification professional-dynastic militia toward the national conscript army risks being wrongly regarded as a linear progression.

Actually, the wide range of draft systems operating on the peninsula (both synchronously and diachronically) shows that conscription is the product of a constant and dialectic process which involves the draftees and the state. On the one side, the state tried to make the opposing needs of political and military authorities compatible. On the other side, conscripts react actively to their military obligation. In so doing, draftees contributed to shaping conscription laws and practices, since their resistance forced the central power both to repress the extreme expressions of refusal and to compromise, by granting some return, material or otherwise, for the draftees’ peaceful acceptance of their military duty.

Naturally, the outcome of this negotiation depends mostly on the state’s contractual power. Long- and short-term factors (the lack of financial resources, infrastructure, and efficient bureaucracy, etc.) can undermine the state’s ability to impose its authority over the entire country and to put its conscription policy in practice exactly as had been planned. In such disadvantaged conditions, conscription can help the ruling class construct a centralized state that can effectively impose its authority on its subjects – but it is also a very dangerous issue. Actually, drafting men from uncontrolled provinces is similar to committing the two most important elements of modern “stateness” – the monopoly of legitimate violence and the right to defend the territory from external threats – to unreliable people, both military and politically. In these cases, a “conscript army” tends to become
nothing more than a legal framework for different forms of recruitment whose major aim is to select recruits according to the ruling class’s interests.

Italy in the 1860s was a perfect example of this. Soon after unification, the liberal government introduced the draft into every annexed land in order to enforce its control over the new provinces and to prevent any external threat to its independence. Nevertheless, the ruling class reduced the risk of arming untrustworthy men by making conscription not genuinely universal. In other words, in the first decade after unification, the government needed its own citizens but it did not trust most of them. La Marmora’s draft system was the solution to this dilemma. In fact, recruiting the Italian nation according to Piedmont draft law was the cornerstone of the government’s strategy to keep the loyalty of the newborn militia under control.

On the one hand, substitution and liberation enabled the military authorities to prevent anti-monarchy and anti-unification feelings from eroding the core of the monarchical power by funding – through the replacement fees – the enlistment of reliable substitutes instead of potentially disloyal draftees. Besides, in 1860s Europe, buying oneself out of military duty was still considered to be morally legitimate by public opinion. Similarly, hiring a commodified military labor force was largely accepted, especially in those countries – such as Italy – where employment conditions in the army were decent, and official rhetoric described reenlistment as a profitable employment opportunity for jobless and poor men.

On the other hand, long-term service enabled officers to transform draftees into disciplined soldiers and loyal Savoy subjects. Moreover, a five-year-long absence from the civilian world led many conscripts to revise their plans, and “voluntarily” reenroll because of a lack of alternatives. Although it is very difficult to state the reason why more than 1,000 males reenlisted every year, these features of the draft help us explain how the army could be competitive in the struggle for unskilled labor, despite budgetary constraints. Moreover, it shows to what extent a sharp distinction between free and unfree military labor was misleading in nineteenth-century Italy. Any taxonomy must be carefully used.

After 1870, the fulfillment of the unification process led the government to modify the aims of conscription from state-building to nation-building. In peacetime, “making the Italians” became the first goal of military service, and a German-style draft system was set up to achieve this aim. In fact, Ricotti’s new recruitment law looked much like the German one: military service became a personal obligation, the service term was halved, and liberation and ordinary substitution were replaced by “one-year volunteerism”. Naturally, the reform affected several variables of post-1875 military
labor: duration, income, and legal constraints at least. Briefly, voluntary enlistment was no longer either a profitable employment or a mechanism for upward mobility.

However, the new conscription’s most significant effect on labor relations in the military was ideological. In particular, the abolition of liberation not only prevented the army from employing ex-draftees as substitutes, but also delegitimized the commodification of labor force in itself. Escaping military service by paying a tax was considered more and more a sign of the draftees’ unjustifiable indifference to the destiny of the fatherland. At the same time, replacing liberated men was more and more seen as an immoral way to earn money from helping those reluctant “Italian brothers” avoid fulfilling their own obligations to the national community.

Consequently, starting from the early 1870s, the idea that lower ranks should be military professionals lost its legitimacy and the army in the main stopped employing free and commodified labor force instead of draftees. Serving in the military became a personal mission that men had to accomplish in the name of the natural brotherhood of countrymen, rather than a job to be performed by professionals.

In conclusion, the Italian case study suggests that the features of the draft systems mostly depend on political issues. An exemption system, replacement, liberation, and voluntary enlistment are the most common means through which the ruling class keeps the sociological composition and the political reliability of the army under control. Technical arguments are usually used by the government to justify its military policies, but they actually do not deeply influence the choices concerning the draft.

Similarly, ideological issues – particularly those connected with nation-building – affect the draft. Charging the army with the task of nation-building produces significant changes in draft practices not only in technical terms (the length of service, the size of the annual call-up, etc.), but also in the official ideological justification of the draft, in the meaning of military obligation, and in the legitimacy of commodifying military labor. A strong ideological link is established between military service, citizenship, and national identity. The Italian draft after 1870 would be not understandable outside this ideological framework.

Economic factors also played an important role. In particular, budgetary constraints affected the Italian draft in two ways. On the one hand, they fixed the number of conscripts effectively enlisted. On the other, they limited the competitiveness of the army in the struggle against other employers for the labor force.
Conversely, the demographic issue is a much less influential factor, as the Italian population largely overwhelmed the recruitment needs. If anything, the sudden availability of new population after unification represents a problem for the Piedmontese military authorities, since it reduced the percentage of politically reliable draftees and supplied the new national army with very few further reliable volunteers. Supply on the military labor market cannot be measured simply by quantifying the eligible volunteers. The employer’s political and regional prejudices against some of the available “employees” reduces the supply of labor on the market in reality.

Verifying to what extent the nineteenth-century Italian conscription experience shares these features with other draft systems is the reason why this case study has been involved in an ambitious diachronic and global comparison, the Fighting for a Living project.