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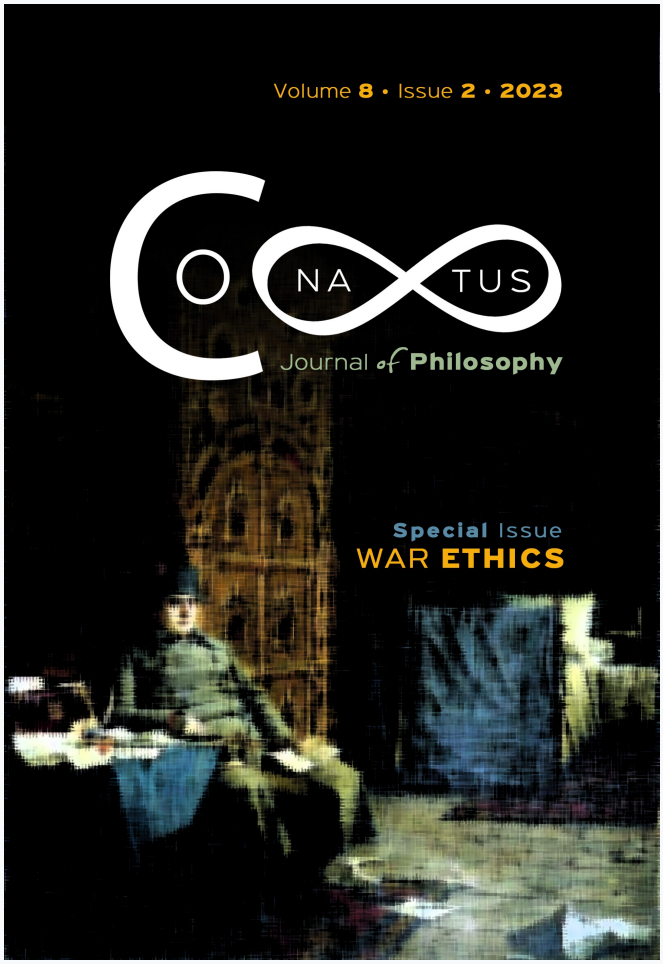

Machiavelli and Tocqueville on War and Armies

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Machiavelli and Tocqueville on War and Armies

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Abstract

In the Democracy in America's chapters on war and armies in the transition from the aristocratic to the democratic social state (état social), Tocqueville briefly draws on Machiavelli regarding the conquest of a country with or without intermediary powers between political leadership and the people by which he primarily understands the existence of local nobilities. In this reference, Tocqueville is quick to express skepticism about the overstated importance of Machiavelli in the history of political philosophy. In different places of his work though a more mitigated stance is documented. A comparative approach of Machiavelli and Tocqueville on war may seem odd, even inappropriate. In this paper I argue that the "brief encounter," in Melvin Richter's terms, of Tocqueville with Machiavelli can be fruitfully explored in order to make sense of the key importance for modern warfare of the collapse of nobility in Europe. Concomitantly, Machiavelli 's intuitions about conquering an absolutist state without intermediary powers compared to a state endowed with "prince" and "barons" can be further elaborated to better grasp its impact on wars including civil strife. In this paper I first explore Machiavelli's perception of the intermediary powers in conquest and broadly in warfare paying due attention to the importance for the preservation of liberty of latent or open civil discord between social powers or classes; then I turn to Tocqueville's rich analysis of the transformation of modern warfare due to democratic centralization and obsession with private welfare. Democratic armies constantly challenge democratic liberty and they can sometimes successfully albeit perversely integrate democratic ambition and turn it against democracy. I conclude with some reflections on the connection between war and politics regarding latent civil conflicts in democracies.

Keywords: *civil war; democratic theory; Machiavelli; Machiavellianism; Republicanism*

I. Machiavelli: Conquest, civil discord, and civil war

In *The Prince* IV, entitled "Why the kingdom of Darius, occupied by Alexander, did not rebel against his successors after the death of Alexander,"[1] Machiavelli accounts for the importance of nobility to boost resistance toward a conqueror and the impact of its lack thereof. In this vein, Turkish's despotic absolutism and France's aristocratic monarchy are set as instances of the two opposing paradigms; Machiavelli makes the case that Turkey's sovereign rules without significant lesser powers and therefore he appoints who he wants and deposes him likewise, with no possible popular support or opposition; in other words, there is no popular grounding of intermediary powers whatsoever. The French monarch instead faces significant barriers to his centralized authority; hereditary nobility with local support cannot be easily subdued without backlash. Accordingly, the attacker should realize that Turks are defending themselves under the Sultan's banner "completely united" but once beaten and his family subdued,

> there remains no one to be feared, for the others have no credit with the people. And just as, before the victory, the victor could place no hope in them, so afterwards he should not fear them.[2]

That's why after the defeat of Darius, Alexander's heirs had no difficulty in preserving the conquered kingdom.

Rather, in France, you can always find an opportunity to attract barons who are malcontents or desirous to change. Yet the situation resembles more to a guerrilla fight than to regular army battles. Both the allies and enemies of the conqueror are potential disruptors in a newly conquered country like France; the spectrum of insurrection remains alive on both sides. After recalling Roman's troubles to deal with local insurrections in Greece, Spain and France because of the existing local principalities, Machiavelli concludes that no one should be surprised by the

> ease with which Alexander held on to the region of Asia, or by the problems others encountered in preserving the territory they acquired, such as Pyrrhus and many others. This is

[1] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. and ed. Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 16.

[2] Ibid., 17.

> not caused by the greater or lesser virtue of the conqueror, but rather by the different characteristics of the conquered territories.[3]

It is noteworthy that in the *Discourses*,[4] Machiavelli devotes five chapters to the emergence of tribunes and their importance in sustaining Roman republican liberty. In this context the sense of the Machiavellian political realism[5] moves towards a different direction. Accordingly, Machiavelli described the apparent peace between the senate and the people of Rome during the rule of the Tarquins as an interim truce; it is due to senate's fear that the Tarquins will side with the popular demands. Once the Tarquins step out of the picture though, the senate resumes its older habits of outraging and repressing the people who often retaliates; the chaotic situation that ensued led to the creation of the Tribunes endowed with respect but also prerogatives; as a result they "formed a powerful barrier between the Senate and the people which curbed the insolence of the former."[6] At this juncture, the Florentine develops his famous panegyric of political agitation and tumult as means of preserving republican freedom. The populace in Rome when wanted to obtain or avert a law used to march furiously in the streets, abandon the city or refuse to enroll in the army. These "extreme means," he asserts, should not be found offensive; instead, they should be considered as healthy reflexes of a free people.[7] They are generally stem from an existing or apprehended oppression; when the fears are proven to be false, the people can be convinced and yield to the truth when presenting to them by respectful citizens. In the ensuing chapters, he defends the grounding of liberty guardianship in the people and the tribunes as the "the most assured guardians of Roman liberty;"[8] furthermore, he asks the question whether liberty is better preserved if confided to the nobles or the people but also who jeop-

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[3] Ibid., 18.

[4] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 117-134.

[5] For an interesting comparative assessment between Machiavellian realism unilaterally based on the *Prince* and the Chinese Warring States period, Panagiotis Kallinikos, "Political Realism in the Chinese Warring States Period and the European Renaissance: Han Fei and Machiavelli," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2023): 127-166.

[6] Ibid., 118.

[7] John McCormick, "Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism," *The American Political Science Review* 95, no. 2 (2001): 299-300.

[8] Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses*, 120.

ardize liberty more those who wish to acquire more power, that is the nobles or those who desire to acquire more authority to preserve their liberty from oppression, that is the people?

In the remaining chapter, Machiavelli comparatively assesses Rome on the one hand, Sparta and Venice on the other, as instance of two contrasting regimes and institutional settings. Roman republic opts for the creation of an intermediary power, the tribunes, rooted in the popular element while Sparta in ancient times and Venice in modernity anchor their defense of liberty in the nobles and the senate.[9] The great desire to dominate while the people only desires not to be dominated, thus "when the people is entrusted with the care of any privilege of liberty, being less disposed to encroach upon it, they will of necessity take better care of it."[10] He straightforwardly recounts the arguments against popular institutions such as the tribunes; the populace is accused of violently setting claim to more than the one consul they had obtain, also claiming the censure and the Praetoriate. More so, the people is accused of worshipping any potential demagogue who turns against the nobles. Machiavelli dismisses these allegations.

He pauses at length on the dilemma which men are more dangerous for a republic those who wish to acquire more power or those who are afraid of loosing what they already possess. The balance tips towards the people; the new acquisitions of power for the noble and wealthy families render them even more haughty and insolent than they formerly were. Therefore the socio-psychological profile of elite arrogance[11] quite predictably excites popular resentment.[12]

Overall, Machiavelli's idiom of "political conflictualism"[13] deflates the negative connotations of civil conflict and distinguishes between

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[9] McCormick, 298.

[10] Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses*, 122; Marie Gaille, "The *Discourses on Livy*: A 'Commentary' on the Effectual Truth of Civil Conflict," in *Machiavelli's* Discourses on Livy*: New Readings*, eds. Diogo Pires Aurélio and Andre-Santos Campos, 81-98 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 93-94.

[11] McCormick, 299.

[12] Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses*, 124; 208: "The cause is that nature has created men so that they are able to desire everything and are unable to attain everything. So, since the desire is always greater than the power of acquiring, the result is discontent with what one possesses and a lack of satisfaction with it. From this arises the variability of their fortune; for since some men desire to have more, and some fear to lose what have been acquired, they come to enmities and to war, from which arise the ruin of one province, and the exaltation of another."

[13] Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult:* The Discourses on Livy *and the Origins of Political Conflictualism*, trans. Patricia Gaborik and Richard Nybakken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

conflict with negative effects and conflict with positive effects on the free becoming of the city. In this context, the term civil war is employed only once; the degree of intensity of the civil discord and the level of violence of the means employed become the decisive factors.[14] Civil war appears to be an escalation of an otherwise acceptable and desirable level of violence among group of citizens with differing humors and passions. Accordingly, the threshold beyond which a degree of violence destroys freedom is hard to define. In other terms, the ongoing civil discord can be transcribed in terms of a latent civil war that prompts worries only when reaches an extreme level of intensity and physical violence.

Finally, Machiavelli examines whether a republic free of internal social conflicts can preserve liberty and be sustainable. He reclaims the comparative assessment between the three models of republican constitutions, Sparta and Venice on the one hand, republican Rome on the other. Exploring thoroughly their respective constitutional history, he comes to the conclusion that to avoid the Roman path of an agitated, feverish republic the legislator had only two options: either not to employ the people in the armies, like the Venetians, or to bar the entry in the city for legal aliens, as in the case of Sparta.

Indeed, Roman republic opted for the exact opposite policies. This was a wise choice according to Machiavelli because in order to preserve a power of expansion, you need to make a people "numerous and warlike" instead of small and unarmed so as to create a great empire.[15] Sparta and Venice being unfamiliar with expansion, both miserably fail when they attempted to proceed in imperial expansion because "without a great number of men, and these well-armed, no republic can ever increase." Indeed, "to found a republic which should endure a long time it would be best to organize her internally like Sparta, or to locate her, like Venice, in some strong place;"[16] in this vein, there are two mo-

[14] Gaille, 88-89: "Although the word 'tumult' is, to some degree, neutral from this standpoint, the expression 'civil war' was applied only once by Machiavelli. It referred to an extreme intensity of civil conflict, as opposed to a more attenuated form which could be described by the term 'dispute,' for example. Similarly, there were differences of degree ranging from 'controversy' to 'scandal,' from 'contention' to 'sedition.' These differences derived from the level of violence in the means employed – the fundamental question being whether the citizens 'took up arms'[venire nelle armi], 'came to blows' [venire alle zuffe], or simply fought with words [venire a parole]. We find the same range of degrees in Machiavelli's description of the actions of the antagonistic persons or groups. These antagonists could simply be the 'partisans' of a leader – for example, the Orsinis and Colonnas who, honoured with many offices and commands, became the partisans of Cesare Borgia – but also the 'factious."

[15] Machiavelli, *The Prince and the Discourses*, 126-127.

[16] Ibid., 128.

tives for making war against a republic: "one the desire to subjugate her; the other, the apprehension of being subjugated by her."[17] As a result, the republic should be made sufficiently powerful to prevent being attacked while not excessively powerful as to inspire awe to its neighbors. However, it is hardly possible to strike such a balance in human affairs and to achieve such a dynamic equilibrium without falling back on one of two extremes. States claims Machiavelli either rise or decline and even if one avoids involvement in wars, internal tranquility will prompt internal enervation and dissensions. Accordingly, he concludes that is necessary to resort to the intermediary power of tribunes of the people endowed with crucial institutional prerogatives such as the faculty of accusation. Most importantly it is necessary to "tolerate the differences that will arise between the Senate and the people as an unavoidable inconvenience in achieving greatness like that of Rome."[18] In other terms, Machiavelli embraces a "politics of porosity;" he conceives no good without evil, no order without disorder, no law without conflict.[19] This porosity should of course be taken with a grain of salt; Machiavelli overlooks the important differences between army and police, between war and police action.[20] He points to an agonistic element deeply embedded in republican freedom that vindicates certain forms of political violence with no clear borderlines.

Despite the technical nature of the work, the *Art of War* marks a significant shift in Machiavelli's approach of a republic's imperial outreach. In this context he condemns war as a full-time profession because it imprints on the individual psyche a set of inhumane character traits such as rapacity, fraud, cruelty and the likes. In the *Discourses* the praise of great individual Roman warriors that have contributed to the republican imperialist grandezza rests on their bravery but also ruthlessness and deceptiveness. In the *Art of War*, there is a clear shift from the ingenious, talented but unscrupulous individual agent to the impersonal, institutional and collective aspects of war.[21]

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[17] Ibid., 129.

[18] Ibid., 130; 195.

[19] Thomas Berns, "Politics of Porosity: War and Freedom in Machiavelli's *Discourses*," in *Machiavelli's* Discourses on Livy*: New Readings*, eds. Diogo Pires Aurélio and Andre-Santos Campos, 249-262 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021), 250; 252.

20 Jovan Babić, "Ethics of War and Ethics in War," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2019): 20.

[21] Mikael Hornqvist, "Machiavelli's Military Project and the Art of War," in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli,* ed. John M. Najemy, 112-127 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 121-122: "orders, institutions, collectivities, actions and horses [...]."

II. Tocqueville's Machiavellian moment: Risk lovers, freedom fighters, and freedom killers

Tocqueville famously distinguishes between aristocracies and democracies as "états sociaux" without discarding the political connotations of the terms. He claims that the transition from aristocratic to democratic societies is a gradual transition from conditions of inequality to conditions of equality.[22] By aristocracy he basically means the existence of separate social statuses and the hierarchical mentality that ensues. In fact, he embraces a realist perspective regarding the real social power within a monarchy or a republic. The existence of titled nobility during the feudal and post-feudal Europe marks the aristocratic era while the American and French revolutions put the nail in the coffin of the Old regime social distinctions and their political impact. Thus, the equality of conditions reflects a dynamic situation within which social segregation of feudal society is abolished, individualism and centralization of the state go hand in hand while private life prevails over any sense of public spirit.

In the chapter entitled *Some considerations on the war in democratic societies*, Tocqueville explicitly refers to Machiavelli regarding the shifting manners of war in the democratic modernity.[23] Interestingly, few chapters back, he slightly paraphrases Machiavelli's aversion for mercenary troops in a "rubbish" note that will not be included in the final edition. Paraphrasing Machiavelli's claim that "A republic armed with its own citizens is less likely to come under the rule of one of its citizens than a city armed with foreign soldiers,"[24] Tocqueville states that: "The natural tendency of a democratic people is to have an army of mercenaries."[25] In this sense a democratic army is almost an antinomy.[26] Let us explore the nature of this antinomy starting with the exploration of the love of peace proper in democratic times and the ensuing role of army.

In a post-feudal European context wars become allegedly rarer because democratic crowds fear war and love peace. Commerce and trade

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[22] Gerald Stourzh, *From Vienna to Chicago and Back: Essays on Intellectual History and Political Thought in Europe and America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 335-358.

[23] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. James T. Schleifer, ed. Eduardo Nolla (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2010), 1177-1186.

[24] Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 44.

[25] Tocqueville, 1166.

[26] Jean-Louis Benoît, "Tocqueville: La démocratie au risque de son armée," *The Tocqueville review/La revue Tocqueville* 27, no. 2 (2006): 191-194.

as antidotes to militarism and conducing to peace are ideas that can be traced back to Montesquieu's[27] famous gentle [*doux*] commerce thesis[28]: through commercial exchange and cultural interaction, manners are soften and people resort less often to war and physical violence.[29] Closer to Tocqueville's time, in his renown piece on the liberty of the ancients compared to the liberty of the moderns, Benjamin Constant claims that even a successful war has more negative than positive impact on modern society's economy, culture or morality. According to the early French liberalism, the spirit of conquest is doomed to eclipse in commercial modernity.[30]

The expansion of the love of well-being and the development of commerce and industry conduce to a convergence of tastes and interests; therefore, the interests being intertwined and the opinions and needs similar among different countries, it is hardly possible to make war in isolation.[31] As a result, the principle of equality of conditions spreads simultaneously among neighboring nations. The quasi-total resemblance of democratic peoples among them is a game changer in the manner of making war. The heroic, exceptional warriors of the past such as the Swiss warriors of the Helvetic confederation have lost their comparative advantage; their manners become similar to the nations surrounding them; "One of the results of the democratic revolution

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[27] Charles de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and eds. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 337-38: "Commerce is a cure for the most destructive prejudices; for it is almost a general rule, that wherever we find agreeable manners, there commerce flourishes; and that wherever there is commerce, there we meet with agreeable manners. Let us not be astonished, then, if our manners are now less savage than formerly. Commerce has everywhere diffused a knowledge of the manners of all nations: these are compared one with another, and from this comparison arise the greatest advantages."

[28] Albert Hirschmann, *The Passions and The Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 56-63; Andreas Hess, "Passions, doux commerce, Interest Properly Understood: From Adam Smith to Tocqueville and Beyond," *Serendipities. Journal for the Sociology and the History of Social Sciences* 1 (2016): 178-187.

[29] Henry Clark, *Commerce, Culture and Liberty: Readings on Capitalism before Adam Smith*, ed. Henry Clark (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2003), 288-307.

[30] Benjamin Constant, "The Spirit of Conquest," in *Constant: Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Biancamaria Fontana, 51-84 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared to that of the Moderns," in *Constant: Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Biancamaria Fontana, 308-328 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Regina Pozzi, "De la paix et de la guerre dans les sociétés démocratiques: qu'en pensait Tocqueville?" in *Écrire la guerre, écrire la paix. Actes du 136 Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques*, *"Faire la guerre, faire la paix,"* 104-111 (Paris: Editions du CTHS, 2011), 105, https://www.persee.fr/doc/acths_1764-7355_2013_act_136_9_2507.

[31] Tocqueville, 1178-1179.

in Europe is therefore to make the force of numbers prevail [...] and to compel all the small nations to become incorporated in the large ones [...]."[32] Accordingly, the determining factor for victory in wars is numbers: the most men and troops possible need to move into the battleground. The French aristocrat evokes the recurring topos of the book about the "social power," the collective force that prevails over similar but weak individuals among democratic people: "this means that, in centuries of equality, armies seem to grow as the military spirit fades."[33]

At this juncture, Tocqueville explicitly turns to Machiavelli and devotes a long note on the far-reaching implications of an insightful comparison sketched in the *Prince*:

> Machiavelli says in his book *The Prince* that is much more difficult to subjugate a people who have a prince and barons for leaders than a nation which is led by a prince and slaves. Les us put, in order not to offend anyone, public officials in the place of slave sand we will have a great truth, very applicable to our subject.[34]

In the note, Tocqueville downplays the significance of Machiavelli's importance as political theorists and strategic thinker. The Florentine is deemed superficial, the profound causes passing under the radar screen. Yet at this specific point he touches upon something important, argues Tocqueville; inspired by Machiavelli's distinction, the French theorist of democracy draws a bold analogy between modern centralized democratic government and princely absolutist government; both are deemed liberticide and opposed to liberty promoting monarchy with strong aristocratic intermediary powers; it is well attested that this analogy has strong resemblance with Montesquieu's thèse nobiliaire.[35] To be sure, Tocqueville acknowledges that Montesquieu has been one major source of inspiration.[36] Indeed, Montesquieu warns that the passion for uniformity in French monarchy gradually destroyed the intermediary bodies necessary to moderate monarchy's absolutist tendencies; the lesson to be drawn is the following: the intermediary bodies

[32] Ibid., 1180.

[33] Ibid., 1181.

[34] Ibid., 1182.

[35] Montesquieu, 10-31.

[36] Melvin Richter, "Tocqueville's Brief Encounter with Machiavelli: Notes on the Florentine Histories (1836)," *History of Political Thought* 26, no. 3 (2005): 418.

are necessary to avoid despotism and preserve a modern monarchy respectful of civil liberties;[37] hence Tocqueville's adaptation of Montesquieu's thesis focuses on democracy's crypto-despotic tendencies; the democratic passion for uniformity and equalization if left unchecked destroys any potential intermediary locus of power and liberty between the individual and the State.[38]

Be this as it may, the existence or lack of intermediary bodies influence the art of war and the formation of an army; Tocqueville set out to explain why democratic armies rest on massive military draft. Admittedly mass military mobilization can be hardly achieved within an aristocratic people and big armies cannot be sustained for a long time because of internal dissensions fomented by aristocratic leaders with alternative, legitimate or irrational plans; an aristocratic country is compared to a country with mountains where a guerrilla war can last for long finding natural hideouts. People accustomed to follow and pay tribute to respectful family lineage will easily follow ambitious or disgruntled aristocratic leaders, "a crowd of powerful lords" forming the "head of malcontents;"[39] therefore new centers of resistance will be formed upon any occasion. By contrast, democratic states are hard to conquer because the sovereign can count on almost unanimous support and there are not local leaders strong and prestigious enough to erect resistance strongholds. However once conquered, there is no significant and lasting resistance in a democracy. Democratic states are strong but individual citizens are isolated and weak. Accordingly, once the army defeated, "and the civil power paralyzed by the taking of its capital, the rest forms nothing more than a multitude without rule and without strength [...]."[40]

The private property is protected by the law of Nations in modern wars remarks Tocqueville where the aggressor seizes the political power but only accessorily and incidentally the property of citizens. Besides, the latter is of lesser interest for the nobles who are most attached to their political power. There is an important lesson to be drawn for democracies here. In a democratic country, citizens are independent and

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[37] Sharon R. Krause, "Political Sovereignty in Montesquieu," in *The Cambridge Companion to Montesquieu*, eds. Keegan Callanan and Sharon R. Krause, 162-181 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 166.

[38] Alexis Keller, "Tocqueville," trans. Philip Stewart, in *A Montesquieu Dictionary*, ed. Catherine Volpilhac-Auger (Lyon: Ens, 2013), http://dictionnaire-montesquieu.ens-lyon.fr/en/article/1377636456/en.

[39] Tocqueville, 1182.

[40] Ibid., 1183.

have private property although not the huge property of land observed in aristocratic eras. Hence the conquest is feared less and the war more in democracies. Tocqueville warns that this is a prelude of loss of liberty if measures are not taken to enhance political rights and strengthen the political spirit. Citizens will not resist but mildly because they lack military spirit and republican vigilance regarding their independence. In this vein, he suggests policies within the state of equality of conditions that upgrade the sense of political participation; citizens should enjoy political empowerment and therefore feel motivated to fight for their independence.[41] Otherwise, civil liberty is seriously undermined.[42] Overall, he asserts: "I imagine nothing better prepared for conquest, in case of reverses, than a democratic people who does not have free institutions."[43]

Tocqueville accounts for the Napoleonian wars in terms of a "state of society" rather than in terms of individual genius. Henceforth, to dominate a democratic state depends on the conquest of the capital in order to undermine any locus of potential resistance. Napoleon has informed his strategy drawing on the collapse of the feudal society and its intermediary powers.[44] Rather perspicuously according to Tocqueville, Napoleon did perceive the concentration of power strongholds in the capitals:

> Napoleon is the first to have travelled to the head of the army the path to all the capitals. But is the ruin of feudal society that had opened the road to him. It is to be believed that, if this extraordinary man had born three centuries ago, he would not have gathered the same fruits of his method, or rather he would have had another method.[45]

In order to better grasp the stakes of this transformation, it is helpful to turn to the first of Tocqueville's chapters on war and armies, that

[41] Ibid., 1185: "It is necessary that princes and other leaders of democratic nations to remember: only the passion and the habit of liberty can, with advantage, combat the habit and passion of well-being."

[42] This is not totally unrelated with the prospective tyranny of majority famously denounced and castigated as an unreflected consensus with potentially disastrous consequences regarding dissenting voices and their marginalization. See Hess, "Passions," 184. Tocqueville endorses strategies of public spiritedness's enhancement to avoid democratic passivity *and the* unprecedented despotism stemming from herd mentality of democratic masses.

[43] Tocqueville, 1184.

[44] Pozzi, 108-109.

[45] Tocqueville, 1184.

comes right after the long digression on revolutions in democratic era. In Montesquieu's spirit, Tocqueville pursues his comparative assessment of aristocratic and democratic "social states" and correlatively of aristocratic and democratic wars. No doubt, the possibility to wage war emerges in any social state; therefore, the need to form and maintain an army brings about the importance of studying its status in peace and war. The chapter's title evokes a paradox that is more thoroughly formulated a few pages below:

> [...] of all armies, the ones that more ardently desire war are democratic armies and that, among peoples, those who most love peace are democratic peoples; and what really makes the thing more extraordinary is that it is equality which produces these opposite effects simultaneously.[46]

The nature of war depends on the nature of democratic politics, a position that brings Tocqueville closer to Clausewitz.[47]

Democratic citizens, Tocqueville argues, desire their wellbeing, and abhor violence because it disrupts their ordinary tranquility in the pursuit of material pleasure and happiness. The potential increase of wellbeing turns citizens of democracy into commercially minded traders and, as a result, peace seekers. While aristocratic "social state" [état social] recedes, the army loses its traditional appeal to the upper classes, "Under the old French monarchy, officers were only given their title of nobility; Today only their military title."[48] Military honor is not any longer what is used to be. In democratic army during peace, the officer does not enjoy the prestige of the Ancient regime. On the other hand, the citizen-simple soldiers are mostly "proletarians" and broadly of the lower social classes. They often tend to balance the lack of public acclaim and individual consideration with adventurism and opportunism. Their ambition is natural but the advancement from the lower to the higher posts of the military hierarchy is slow and the posts are just few. This "lumpen" mentality stands in sharp contrast with ordinary citizen's mindset. The excessive love of bourgeois tranquility among democratic nations puts them in the mercy of the soldiers who have contracted the "taste for war" and the "love of revolution."[49] Therefore ambitious, restless and turbulent spirit is fomented in democratic armies:

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[46] Ibid., 1157.

[47] Eliot A. Cohen, "Tocqueville on War," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 3, no. 1 (1985): 204.

[48] Tocqueville, 1155-1156.

[49] Ibid., 1159.

> So you can say in general way that democratic peoples are naturally led toward peace by their interests and their instincts, they are constantly drawn towards revolutions and wars by their armies [....] War would only be a remedy for a [democratic] people who always wanted glory.[50]

Napoleon looms large again. He would have allegedly stop in the middle of his triumph if the "passions of his soldiers" had not become so unbridled and their thirst of conquest endless. Tocqueville explicitly pauses on this danger: "There are two things that a democratic people have a great deal of difficulty doing: beginning a war and ending it." A long war put liberty in jeopardy because it risks to create Cesars and Napoleons that threaten liberty but also to vindicate an extreme concentration of powers in the hand of a civil government having formed a war cabinet. Tocqueville ends this chapter by affirming that: "A great army will always be a great danger for democracies."[51]

Apparently, augmenting the army's size in order to satisfy more ambitious men cannot be a remedy because the already satisfied will soon ask for more while novel forms of ambition will emerge and require satisfaction. The substantial remedy rests on the civil society and it almost echoes Machiavelli's reminder about civil agitation and vigilance as healthy reflexes to protect liberty in republican polity. Democratic army's simple soldiers genuinely reflect democratic mores because they represent civil society in the army; the spirit of independence and the "manly love of order" penetrate the army only insofar as they are deeply embedded into the national character in peace. A constitution of liberty is a dead letter without educated citizens passionately fond of liberty.

> Democratic peoples naturally fear trouble and despotism. It is only a matter of making these instincts into thoughtful, intelligent and stable tastes [...] have enlightened, well-ordered, steady and free citizens and you will have disciplined and obedient citizens.[52]

[50] Ibid., 1160.

[51] Ibid., 1163, 1165.

[52] Tocqueville, 1163: "When citizens have finally learnt to make peaceful and useful use of liberty and have felt its benefits when they have contracted a manly love of order and have voluntarily yielded to the established rule, these same citizens while entering the career of arms, bring these habits and these mores to the army without knowing and as if despite themselves. The general spirit of the nation, penetrating the particular spirit of the army, tempers the opinion and desires that arise from military stat, or by the omnipotent fore of the public opinion, it suppresses

It has been shrewdly observed that Tocqueville misses an important comparative point to make: the lack of putsches in the Anglo-Saxon countries due to the absolute primacy of liberty over equality and/or security.[53] The recurring fear of excessive militarism makes Tocqueville wonder in chapter xxiii, "Which class in democratic armies, is the most warlike and the most revolutionary." In this context, he contrasts again the status of simple soldiers in democratic and aristocratic armies, showing that as much as the link between soldiers and civil society is severed in aristocracies where soldiers are strangers among their fellow citizens, it is reinforced in democracies when republican spirit prevails:

> It is through the soldier above all that you can hope to make the love of liberty the respect for rights, which you knew how to inspire among the people themselves, penetrate into a democratic army.[54]

Indeed, a more egalitarian army often demonstrates a more efficient and well interiorized military discipline, far from rituals and empty formalities that sometimes plague aristocratic army. Greek and Roman republican armies have conquered the world with the soldiers addressing officers and generals on an equal footing.[55] In modern democracies officers are totally disconnected from the body politic and their interests are distinct from the rest of his country. Officer's country is the army and social visibility is only minimal except special occasions. Thus, the officer is looking forward to wars and revolutions.

At the same time though, Tocqueville complicates his narrative. No doubt, the officer evolves through the ranks of military hierarchy. The progress is slow but steady; thus, he fears of compromising any advancement in the military career that has already been secured. In view of what may be lost, a "cooling of ambition" prevails over excessive risk-taking. By contrast the non-commissioned officer is far more unpredictable. He is the most isolated from civil society and least secure about his rank in the army, constantly threaten of loosing everything

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them. Have enlightened, well-ordered, steady and free citizens, and you will have disciplined and obedient soldiers." On alternative forms of patriotism's enhancement such as civil religion, see Spyridon Tegos, "Civility and Civil Religion before and after the French Revolution. Religious and Secular Rituals in Hume and Tocqueville," *Genealogy* 4, no. 2 (2020): 48-62.

[53] Benoît, 198.

[54] Tocqueville, 1166.

[55] Ibid., 1177.

conquered while he is enjoying very little due to his low status. He is in limbo, obsessed to become an officer but until then, his existence is profoundly precarious. He is the connecting link between the soldier and the officer but a greatly unstable one. Therefore, non-commissioned officer wants wars and is ready to engage in revolutions. He is not ideologically driven though: "in the midst of these revolutions he hopes, by means of confusion and political passions, to expel his officer and takes his place [...]."[56] Regardless of the accuracy of generalization[57] Tocqueville suggests a psychological pattern, an emotional profile that operates through the cracks of democratic polity unveiling its dark sides. Paradoxically there is a "hidden connection between military mores and democratic mores that war exposes."[58]

As noted above, a democratic people have a great deal of difficulty to begin and to end a war. Long periods of peace undermine army's readiness while officers and generals turn old and rusty and recently enrolled soldiers remain young and inexperienced. Given the love of tranquility and well-being of democratic people, and the subsequent obsession of gain and lucrative enterprising, begin a war is always difficult. Besides the military service is compulsory and non-professional soldiers are eager to return to their civilian lives. War in its beginnings is hard to cope with but a war in progress operates a gradual conversion:

> War after destroying all industries becomes itself the great and sole industry, and then the ardent and ambitious desires given birth by equality are directed from all sides towards it alone [...]. Death constantly opens ranks, empties places, closed and open careers.[59]

The risk loving nature of modern democracies takes advantages of war but exposes them to self-destruction. This mentality is apparently deeply intertwined with democratic souls:

> No greatness is more satisfying to the imagination of a democratic people than military greatness, a brilliant and open greatness that is obtained without work, by risking only your

[56] Ibid., 1169.

[57] Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Volume 1, eds. Richard Howard and Helen Weaver (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 229.

[58] Tocqueville, 1175.

[59] Ibid.

> life. The competitiveness of market apparently nurtures a culture of risk that thrives in wars. Thus, while interest and taste moves the citizens of a democracy away form war, the habits of their soul prepare them to wage war well.[60]

This transformation of ambitious economic risk lovers to warlike, ruthless amateurs explains why modern wars are relatively rare but "when they arise, they are on a field more vast;"[61] one can convincingly argues that 20th century total wars are anticipated with extreme accuracy.[62]

Put together, the above-mentioned threads shed a different light on the endemic threat of civil wars in democracies. Administrative centralization and majority rule prompt surprise wars in case of revolutions; the need of sudden conquest of the capital, the center of power is more than obvious. Correlatively civil wars can be bloody but not very long, "civil wars will become much rarer and shorter." Taking over the machine of the government by surprise attack instead of long war is the only successful option. Otherwise "when a war is official, the party which represents the State is almost always sure to win."[63] Conflicting parties can wage war in an intense and destructive way, yet the stake lies in the capture of the power of the State. Henceforth in modern civil wars no intermediary power or body can be a potential game changer.[64]

Tocqueville develops a deflated conception of civil war; ideology or concerns about extreme violence move to the backstage while the importance of seizing the government's center becomes a priority. The conquest of state apparatus runs the show, according to Tocqueville, instead of personal charisma or party loyalty. The impersonal status of the state and the subsequent problem of deference to impersonal authority are addressed by the emergence of novel forms of leadership based on State worship in some of 20th century totalitarian ideologies.

Be this as it may I deem worthwhile to return to a form of latent [civil] war spotted by Tocqueville. In a brief eccentric moment, Tocqueville de-

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 1179.

[62] Aron, 230.

[63] Tocqueville, 1185.

[64] Ibid., 1185-1186: "The only case in which a civil war could arise would be the one to which, the army being divided, one portion raised the banner of revolt and the other remained faithful. An army forms a very tightly bound and very hardy small society which is able to be self-sufficient for a while. The war could be bloody, but it would not be long; for either the army in revolt would draw the government to its side just by showing its strength or by its first victory, and the war would be over; or the battle would begin, and the portion of the army not supported by the organized power of the State would soon disperse of its own or be destroyed."

scribes democratic mentality as an aristocracy of money.[65] The occasion for this odd observation is a "hidden war" among modern Englishmen. He set out to account for the secret uneasiness that is often observed between Englishmen, their coolness and famous British composure: "[...] they turn away from each other or, if they greet each other, they take care to speak only with a restrained and distracted air. And say things of little importance."[66] The rationale of this behavior unveils a hidden war waged between individuals devoid of public-spiritedness; this agonistic activity does not take place among groups of citizens of different social status but among individuals exercising one-upmanship. This constant in-fight permeates upward and downward social mobility; it does not rest though on a passion of liberty and independence and stirs no agitation and vigilance but is based on a passion for social distinction; hence a banal albeit stressful ordinary passion of ridiculing those who socially move up and approach our status while subverting the snobbish ridicule of our superiors. This social strife deadens citizen's urge for independence. This hidden [civil] war resonates with democratic army's opportunism and eventually opens the path to a certain kind of crypto-despotism in democracies[67]: envious citizens are too preoccupied to contest the State allegedly being above the battle;[68] citizens indulging in democratic restlessness[69] cannot be jealous but of their potential challengers of social status and let the administration growing unmonitored.

III. Concluding remarks

Amidst a bitter conflict with the French doctrinaires, mainly Guizot, about the degree to which franchise should be extended beyond a nar-

[65] Seymour Drescher, *Tocqueville and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 54-74.

[66] Tocqueville, 996.

[67] Ibid.: "When aristocracies of money follows aristocracy of birth, it is no longer the same. The privilege of a few are still very great, but the possibility of acquiring them is open to all; from that it follows that those who possess them are constantly preoccupied by the fear of losing them or of seeing them shared; and those who do not have them want at any rate to possess them, or, if they cannot succeed in that, to appear to possess them, which is not impossible. As the social value of men is not fixed by blood in a clear and permanent manner and varies infinitely depending on wealth, ranks always exist, but you no longer see clearly and at first glance those who occupy those ranks. A hidden war is immediately established among all citizens; some try hard, by a thousand artifices, to join in reality or in appearance those who are above them; others fight constantly to repulse these men usurping their rights, or rather the same men does both things, and, while he is trying to get into the upper sphere, he struggles without respite against the effort that comes from below."

[68] Ibid., 1203-1204.

[69] Dana Jalbert Stauffer, "'The Most Common Sickness of our Time': Tocqueville on Democratic Restlessness," *The Review of Politics* 80, no. 3 (2018): 450-453.

row census, Tocqueville, in his notes (1836) on the Machiavelli's *Florentines Histories,* sets the stakes: "What matters to me is to learn whether Florentine democracy can be used as an argument for or against democracy in our times."[70] Overall Tocqueville thinks that Florentine extremely violent civil discord among the great and the people remains inherent to the aristocratic structure of ancient and medieval republics; by contrast class struggle in his contemporary England, although produces novel huge inequalities and compels him to revise the conception of inequality, still belongs to a post-feudal, post-aristocratic paradigm; even Britain that seemingly contains industrial mass poverty is divided for him between urban, industrial cities and the rest of the country, less stricken by industrial pauperization. For Tocqueville, Machiavelli's "great show of wickedness," the logic of a-moralism and opportunism is self-defeating: it is almost impossible to deceive and fraud to such an extent and pass unnoticed.[71] Nonetheless he partly endorses the Florentine's praise of civil discord as inherent to free institutions creating wealth, prosperity and creativity.[72] As noted above, Machiavelli conceives civil discord in a dynamic way; civil wars are only pushing too far healthy agitation, co-substantial to political liberty; potential conquerors challenge a state's independence that cannot be preserved unless is endowed with warlike, agitated and vigilant citizens familiar with civil discord. This Machiavellian insight can be set next to Tocqueville's endorsement of Machiavelli's distinction between absolutist state without intermediary powers and monarchical rule endowed with nobility that mitigates absolutism. The former can be conquered with difficulty but once submitted, it can be easily ruled. The latter can be conquered more swiftly but will never be totally submitted. The resistance will be constantly kindled by locally implanted leaders.

Tocqueville extends these Machiavellian insights in his reflections over democratic army's challenge for democratic freedom. In democratic social state, ambition liberated from aristocratic social immobility turns toward wealth-getting and private glory; yet war presents an excellent occasion for the transfiguration of private ambition into monstrous military ambition of rapid conquest of power and rapid social ascent. Simultaneously the state's concentrated power, representing a potential liberticide threat in peace time, gets even worse during war. Therefore, Tocqueville repeatedly suggests remedies that

[70] Richter, 428.

[71] Ibid., 433.

[72] Ibid., 432.

reinforce public spirit, civic engagement and empowerment against democracy's apathetic citizenry; he reclaims to some extent Machiavelli's emphasis on agitation and vigilance while downplays Machiavelli's agonistic element of class conflict. Despite qualifications, Machiavelli's involvement in Tocqueville reflection on democratic war and armies may be profitably read as a Machiavellian moment in Tocqueville.

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