Death in the Fields: Legitimist Réfractaires and State Violence in July Monarchy France

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The history of the July Monarchy has been incorporated recently into the narrative of nineteenth-century France as a period of political apprenticeship, one in which the French experimented fitfully with the institutions and practices of liberal democracy.\(^1\) Whether through depictions of the Revolution of 1830 as a quintessentially liberal revolution or through an emphasis on parliamentary politics and elections, historians have argued that, despite its ultimate failure in 1848, the July Monarchy introduced the French to modern democracy. While undoubtedly true, liberal political culture represented only one component of French politics during the 1830s and 1840s. Moreover, French liberalism' developed in conflict with opposition movements that existed largely outside of the limited democratic institutions of the period. As much as July Monarchy liberals wished to present France as a unified nation after the Revolution of 1830, French men and women held a diversity of political views, many often in deep disagreement with liberalism. These divisions acted as an engine of change in French political culture in the 1830s, compelling the government and opposition movements to contest publicly the meaning of fundamental ideas such as nation, liberty, rights, and sovereignty. This essay explores how legitimists transformed the local issue of military

desertion in the western departments into a national political drama that undermined the July Monarchy as the defender of citizen's rights and the French family. At once a local and a national phenomenon, government violence against réfractaires came to symbolize the illegitimacy of Louis-Philippe's regime and the justness of the legitimist cause.

On the morning of 1 June 1832, Pierre Jeulan left his home in the countryside near the commune of Chateaubourg (Ille-et-Vilaine) on foot for the commune of La Valette.³ Rumors had circulated that morning that Chouans had begun kidnapping young men in the area, and Jeulan hoped to find safety in a neighboring commune. After an afternoon working on a farm near La Valette, he departed along the road back to Chateaubourg accompanied by three other young men. Although initially seeing no danger, Jeulan and his companions soon encountered armed men on the road. Fearing the rumored Chouan kidnappers, the young men turned to flee, despite the armed men's warnings, and one young man was shot. Uninjured, the others successfully escaped. However, the armed men had not been Chouans, but French soldiers. The soldiers began to scour the countryside for the presumed Chouans they had failed to capture.

Around six in the evening, Jeulan found refuge in a weaver's home in the village of Rachonnières, but was quickly confronted by a soldier who asked the resident if he knew the young man. When the weaver replied no, the soldier did not hesitate and shot Jeulan in his left leg. Three more soldiers and two national guardsmen joined the first soldier; together they interrogated Jeulan on the weaver's floor. Asked who he was, Jeulan responded that he "was with them."³ A soldier retorted that he "will be neither with us, nor with others," because he was "going

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² Archives Départementales d'Ille-et-Vilaine, Rennes, anonymous letter to Prefect of the Ille-et-Vilaine, June 1832, Series 1M, Carton 125. The letter mentions that the mayor of La Valette had recorded at least one deposition and that a local commander of the National Guard had witnessed the incident.
³ Ibid.
to be shot at once."4 After the soldier's rifle failed twice, the soldier who had first entered the house stepped up and fatally shot Jeulan in the head. The soldier then smashed the butt of his rifle into the young man's corpse, breaking one of his legs, while another jumped on Jeulan's body. The local coroner later found fragments of a rifle butt lodged in his skull.

Jeulan's brutal, unfortunate death illustrated how the consequences of the ongoing conflict between legitimist rebels and the forces of order in the western departments extended well beyond sporadic battles fought during the Duchesse de Berry's rebellion in 1832. Despite the weakness of the military threat to Louis-Philippe's government in Paris, legitimist activities in the western departments created an environment of political contestation and violence that reached into the daily lives of the population. Throughout the 1830s, the government pursued young men who had failed to appear for military service or who had deserted their posts after the Revolution of 1830.5 Réfractaires proved difficult to subdue because they cooperated in roving bands and enjoyed the support of a sizable portion of the local population. Patrolling the countryside, gendarmes, national guardsmen, and soldiers therefore treated any young men who crossed their paths as potential deserters. These confrontations often turned violent and, in the minds of the political opposition, raised serious questions about the July Monarchy's arbitrary use of force and its commitment to the rights of French citizens.

News of violence between locals and government forces spread quickly and inflamed political passions. Provincial legitimist newspapers frequently published accounts of violent

4 Ibid.
5 For more on conflict between deserters and government forces in the western departments, see Aurelien de Courson, 1830: Chouans et réfractaires (Bretagne et Bas-Maine) (Paris: Souvaitre, 1899); Jean-Robert Colle, La chouannerie de 1832 dans les Deux-Sèvres et la Vendée Orientale (Lezay: A Chopin, 1948); Hugues de Changy, Le soulèvement de la Duchesse de Berry, 1830-1832: Les royalistes dans le tourmente (Paris: Albatros et D.U.C., 1986), 138-150.
encounters between young military deserters and the forces of order. In June 1831, *La Gazette de Bretagne*, a legitimist newspaper published in Rennes, described an altercation between a dozen réfractaires, a gendarme, and two soldiers in a field near Cornillé (Ille-et-Vilaine). On horseback, the gendarme and the two soldiers charged into the middle of the group of réfractaires, demanding their surrender. Armed only with batons, the deserters initially did not resist, but they fought back once the gendarme had seized two of the band by their collars. In the ensuing confusion, a deserter named Jamier successfully landed a punch on the gendarme and began to run away. As he fled across the field, a soldier chased after him and cried for him to surrender. When the deserter failed to comply, the soldier shot him in the back. In defense of the soldier, the lieutenant commander of the third division based at Cornillé argued that another réfractaire had brandished a pistol and shot it at the same moment that the soldier had fired on the fleeing man. It is unclear whether the pistol existed or whether the alleged armed réfractaire had prompted the soldier's actions. However, *La Gazette de Bretagne* seized on the ambiguity of accounts surrounding the incident to criticize the behavior of the gendarmerie and the French military towards réfractaires.

The newspaper stressed the non-violent nature of young deserters and their hesitancy to engage government forces, even when directly confronted. According to the newspaper, réfractaires had been "inoffensive and pure of any act of violence until then," and they understood "how to profit from their numbers to paralyze pursuing soldiers' efforts." The Gazette therefore argued that the soldiers had overreacted to the threat posed by the band of deserters and, perhaps, resorted to violence out of frustration. Despite the soldier's warnings to the fleeing man, the shooting represented an atrocity because the victim had

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6 *La Gazette de Bretagne*, 30 June 1831. A similar story appeared as the lead article in *La Gazette de Bretagne* on 28 February 1832 concerning the arrest of Guillaume Tauguy, a young man who was gravely injured in the department of the Morbihan by the local gendarmerie.
not threatened the soldier's life and "the law would avenge, in such cases, the death of the most terrible criminal." Moreover, the newspaper condemned the treatment of the injured man, who died in a cart carrying him from the field, evoking the emotional suffering inflicted on Jamier and his family. The presence of Jamier's sisters at their brother's side during his transport from the field infused a sense of family drama into the incident. Instead of making the sisters walk alongside the cart, the soldiers could have allowed them to "climb in the cart so they might hold [their brother] in their arms." When the cart reached a narrow section of road, the sisters were forced to leave the cart to cut across a field only to find "their unfortunate brother had ceased to suffer" when they rejoined the convoy.

The cases of Jeulan and Jamier exemplify how political conflict in the western departments transcended the local nature of events to become regional and national controversies. Despite the government's insistence on the submission of all deserters, the young men never represented a grave threat to the regime's survival. Aware of this, government officials simultaneously demanded the arrest of deserters and acknowledged that tactics should be limited to those least likely to alienate the rural population. However, in practice, soldiers, national guardsmen, and gendarmes did not always follow their superiors' orders in the field. Legitimists seized on the actions of individual gendarmes, national guardsmen, and soldiers to undermine official representations of the July Monarchy and the credibility of liberalism. When reporting on brutality against réfractaires, legitimist newspapers portrayed the individual perpetrator's actions as evidence of the regime's hypocrisy and the degenerate state of the French political community. They sought to weaken popular support for Louis-Philippe's regime by juxtaposing liberal discourse with government actions in the western departments. At the same time, coverage of government violence offered legitimists the opportunity to contrast their own vision of politics with liberals' practice of state power. In the hands of the legitimist press, stories of the violent death or injury of réfractaires transformed the desertion of poor, young rural
men into a public controversy in which nationally significant political issues could be disputed.

In the months after the Revolution of 1830, legitimists had already begun to criticize the new regime for breaching citizens' rights. They understood that the Revolution's liberal ideals represented a weak point for a government in the process of consolidating its power. During the early 1830s, the July Monarchy worried about legitimist conspiracies and replaced or closely watched local officials sympathetic to the Bourbon monarchy. The transfer of power in the provinces caused conflict—especially in historically royalist regions where the government worked to suppress legitimist opinion and disrupt suspected plots. Visites domiciliaires constituted one of the most controversial of the repressive tactics meant to deter legitimist conspiracies. Unannounced searches of suspected royalists' homes, both in Paris and in the provinces, sparked outcries against the illegal use of state power and political discrimination. In response, legitimists in the western departments organized mutual defense associations to protest government repression. The prospectus for the Morbihan chapter of the Breton Association for the Mutual and Legal Defense of Civil and Political Rights criticized the "arbitrary and odious acts of which [the inhabitants of the Morbihan] have been and are still victims" and promised to "defend all the constitutional rights of French citizens in the West." Moreover, seizures and closures of legitimist newspapers and presses sparked outrage in

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7 See de Changy, *Le soulèvement de la Duchesse de Berry*, 47-48, 97-100.
8 For example, on 21 February 1831, *La Gazette de France* proposed that the Chamber of Deputies pass a new law that would reaffirm individual liberty and protect the surety of citizens' homes. The proposed law would establish that "the home of a citizen is sacred and the domestic refuge is inviolable." On 15 January 1831, *La Gazette de Bretagne* lamented that "[a citizen's] home might be perhaps only a cottage open to all the bad weather of the seasons: but this cottage should be an inviolable sanctuary where justice can inspect with a reserved eye only when the most extreme necessity demands it." See also *La Gazette de Bretagne*, 20 December 1831 or 18 December 1832.
9 Association Bretonne pour la défense mutuelle et légale des droits civils et politiques: *Prospectus* (Nantes, 1832).
light of the regime's declaration in favor of freedom of the press. The controversy over réfractaires therefore entered into a legitimist political culture that already emphasized the July Monarchy's uneven commitment to citizen's' rights. However, violence against réfractaires, as well as visites domiciliaires, also permitted legitimists to introduce a family drama into their critique of liberalism.

For legitimists, the hunted réfractaire became a symbol for the July Monarchy's insensitivity to the suffering of families and its indifference to the morals and values of the French people. By treating young deserters as enemies of the nation who could be justly killed, legitimists believed, liberals demonstrated that they valued political survival over the sanctity of the family. In fact, legitimist accusations pointed to a deeper division between liberal and legitimist political cultures during the 1830s. Whereas July Monarchy liberals emphasized the rational exercise of the rule of law, legitimists evoked the sentimental bonds between the French people as the basis of the political community. Despite the importance of Louis-Philippe's family in official political culture, legitimists positioned the family more centrally in their political imaginary than liberals. The death of young deserters at the hands of the government—so near their homes, but separated from their families—presented legitimists with an opportunity to contrast favorably their conception of the nation with that of liberals. If the July Monarchy acted hypocritically over citizen's rights, legitimists argued, they also only paid lip service to the sanctity of the family.

The specter of Jamier's sisters, who could see their brother's suffering, but who were kept from comforting him at the moment of his death, encapsulated legitimist fears of a French

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nation that no longer respected the sentimental and moral bonds that held society together. As told by La Gazette de Bretagne, the two sisters appeared out of nowhere, estranged from their brother by political tyranny, haunting his cart as a symbol of the family life that had been denied them. In the same portrait, legitimists depicted the suffering family and its unrepentant tormenters, who threw aside compassion despite the young man's innocence and his sibling's grief. For legitimists, the fields of western France represented a theater for the ruin of the French family.

Representations of réfractaires and the consequences of government violence that appeared in the regional press reached a national audience because Parisian newspapers in the 1830s routinely collected and reproduced articles and letters originally published in the provinces. Moreover, legitimists increasingly realized that press coverage of the events in the western departments represented an important political issue at the national level. In July 1832, La Quotidienne, a national legitimist newspaper, published on its front page a letter from the Duc de Fitz-James on government abuses in the western departments. In his letter, the Duc expressed outrage that the western population had to endure "despotism without limit and without shame," and he encouraged the legitimist press to "unmask criminal abusers of the law and to make the truth known." In particular, the Duc pointed to the case of Pierre Jeulan and the mayor of La Valette, who had subsequently been brought up on charges due to his account of Jeulan's murder. The story of Jeulan and the mayor of La Valette, he argued, spoke "volumes about the situation in the miserable western departments and about the execrable tyranny that oppressed them." Because the national and regional press had the power to publicize government crimes, such as the death of Jeulan, they represented

11 La Quotidienne, 23 July 1832. During the early 1830s, the Duc de Fitz-James was a member of the Royalist Committee in Paris, a small group of high-profile legitimists, including François-Renée Chateaubriand and Pierre-Antoine Berryer, who conspired to return the Bourbon family to the French throne.
the "only defensive weapon that royalists [had] at their disposal." If the newspapers maintained strict standards of evidence, the Duc believed, press publicity could even "soon become an offensive weapon." Legitimists in Paris therefore recognized the national political significance of conflict in the western departments and understood that revelations of government violence could potentially challenge the legitimacy of the July Monarchy.

In addition to national newspaper coverage, legitimist pamphlets published in Paris catalogued government abuses of power in the western departments and sought to employ regional conflict as proof of the moral and legal bankruptcy of Louis-Philippe's regime. La vérité sur l'état des provinces de l'ouest depuis la Révolution de Juillet described a provincial population terrified by the arbitrary actions of the state, including visites domiciliaires, military billeting, and arrests and shootings of suspected réfractaires. The anonymous pamphlet depicted a peaceful and reserved population which had been betrayed by a liberal government in Paris unable to forget the memory of chouannerie. Government accounts of legitimist activities could not be trusted, the pamphlet argued, because these "deceitful stories" were the product of Machiavellianism and "old hatreds." In particular, réfractaires represented victims, not criminals as the liberal press believed, because their desertions had often been motivated by the insensitivity of the government to their personal lives. Since many réfractaires had been furloughed during the Restoration, the pamphlet asserted that "a large number of these young people, who believed themselves definitively free, had been married for a long time and would have been unfairly separated from their families." While the Restoration had honored the familial duties of furloughed soldiers, the pamphlet argued that the July Monarchy treated

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14 Ibid, 4.
them only as potential Chouans who needed to be re-assimilated into the French army in order to guarantee state security.

The controversy over réfractaires fed into a national legitimist political culture that promoted regional autonomy and the family as the basis of the French nation. In July 1831, *La Gazette de France*, a national legitimist newspaper, advised that the wellbeing of France depended on the relationship between families and their local communities. An article on the front page argued that an expanding set of family networks represented the solution to the ongoing political turmoil of France that had been set off by the Revolution of 1789.

All French are part of a family, even the orphan, even the abandoned child are attached to the family that welcomes them, all families live in a commune, and by the protection that they receive there and the services they enjoy there, become in turn members of this new family or community.

By cultivating self-sufficient local communities instead of depending on the central state in Paris, the French could finally see "the end of [their] long agitations." Although legitimists found inspiration in the regional semi-autonomy of the Old Regime, they transformed the rhetoric of regionalism to incorporate the concept of popular sovereignty after the Revolution of 1830. If the French desired true democracy, the newspaper argued that universal suffrage had to be implemented at the local level, otherwise elections "would produce only confusion and would be a deception." The centralization of political power led to "less intimate assemblies, more divergent

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15 *La Gazette de France*, 12 July 1831.
interests, more infrequent and difficult communication, more difficulty in obtaining a community of shared perspectives and will." The family as the foundation of the French nation no longer began at the pinnacle of society with the royal family, but emanated from below with the innumerable households around which local communities were organized.

In the context of the legitimist imaginary of the early 1830s, the drama of the réfractaires and their families provided evidence that the July Monarchy did not understand the nature of the French nation. In order to consolidate political authority, legitimists argued, Louis-Philippe's government violently imposed its power on provincial populations and, thereby, actively engaged in the destruction of French families. While liberals purportedly believed that popular sovereignty necessitated a strong central government from which power radiated into the provinces, legitimists contended that popular sovereignty originated in the affective bonds of the family and the local community. After the Revolution of 1830, the Duchesse de Berry and her son, Henri V, embodied legitimist hopes for a restored Bourbon monarchy based on the concept of popular sovereignty through royal representation of local affective communities. During the Duchesse de Berry's rebellion, as well as throughout her almost seven-month imprisonment, legitimists therefore portrayed the Duchesse as the symbol of royalist popular sovereignty because her motherhood permitted her to represent politically all French families.17 In contrast, the plight of young deserters in western France, legitimists believed, showed that the July Monarchy employed state power to damage the most basic components of a prosperous and peaceful France, the family and the local communities in which they lived.

Réfractaires were compelling figures for the legitimist opposition because they simultaneously undermined the July Monarchy's self-presentation as the defender of citizens' rights,

17 Jeffrey B. Hobbs, "The Duchesse de Berry in Captivity: Political Legitimacy and the Nation-State in 1830s France" (M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2007). See, for example, La Quotidienne, 4 January 1833.
signified the dissolution of the French family, and publicized government violence against provincial populations. Moreover, controversies over the death of réfractaires permitted legitimists the opportunity to articulate further their critiques of the government and to construct an opposition movement with a collective memory of injustice associated with Louis-Philippe's regime. By publicizing inconsistencies between government rhetoric and actions in the provinces, stories of young deserters' deaths contributed to the development of an opposition political culture that undermined the legitimacy of the July Monarchy. The consolidation of state power in the provinces ultimately disturbed official representations of the July Monarchy as the defender of liberty and the genuine embodiment of the spirit of the Revolution of 1830. Despite the exile of the Bourbon family, legitimists therefore not only remained an active political force during the 1830s, but also affected decisively the development of democracy in France.\(^\text{18}\)