# TRACING THE SEPOY FIGURE IN BRITISH IMAGINATION: THE 1857 REBELLION AND WORLD WAR I

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## ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

During the infamous 1857 Rebellion against British rule in India, metropolitan headlines reached a consensus: native soldiers could never regain the Empire's trust. Each newspaper included harrowing details of indigenous soldiers of the Indian Army (*sepoys*) murdering their commanding officers and European families. Less than sixty years later, however, India supplied Britain with the most colonial manpower for World War One (WWI).[1] Throughout the conflict, the British press proudly touted the loyalty of its Indian servicemen.

Investigating this enigmatic shift in British perceptions of the sepoy, I ask: How and why does the sepoy figure vacillate in popular British imagination from the 1857 Rebellion to WWI as a consequence of these two pivotal events? I argue that sepoy bodies became signifiers of disloyalty, extremism and wanton violence in the period during and after the 1857 Rebellion, but that the necessity for colonial manpower and to legitimize/protect colonial rule in WWI changed the general British construction of the sepoy to one that glorified his alleged propensity for combat and repositioned his body as a submissive tool at the Empire's disposal. To do this, I consult popular sources like newspapers and political cartoons to evaluate the prevalence of these constructions among the varied readership in the British metropole. I also employ a subaltern historiographical approach to exhume non-white sepoys from the archives, departing from earlier Eurocentric scholarship that marginalized or erased them. I highlight sepoys' own accounts from WWI to determine whether they bolster or undermine British constructions.

### *The Sepoy Figure and the 1857 Rebellion*

Despite all signs of growing disaffection within British India, most newspapers from 1857 reveal Britain's shock that its colony was at once facing its greatest rebellion. In one article from the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* released that year, an unnamed author writes that the British formerly regarded the sepoys as their "sworn and paid defenders" who "would stand by [them] to the last."[2] It was the widespread upheaval of 1857 that finally transformed the British's sepoy figure into a volatile, subhuman agent of violence, chaos, and treachery that posed a dire existential threat to the Empire. No earlier portrayals of Bengal Army sepoys' fidelity could dilute the bitter polemics on their treacherous and calculated natures that pervaded British narratives in the years during and following the 1857 Rebellion. Stereotypes about these now-abhorrent sepoys primarily targeted soldiers within the Bengal presidency and those of Islamic and Hindu faith, regarded as the main orchestrators of the insurrection. These stereotypes were exacerbated by the frequent British reduction of the Rebellion to a squabble about religion, pointing to certain sepoys' religious aversion to the greased Enfield rifle cartridges they were forced to use in the months preceding the event. By willful ignorance or other means, the British often neglected to remember the other preconditions of the Rebellion.[3]

During this unrivaled period of unrest, the British sought to villainize Indian Army sepoys who participated in the so-called mutiny--as well as the colonized "races" that came to represent them--while depicting themselves in a self-congratulatory manner that exculpated them from any of the blame assigned to the "mutineers." In order to do this, popular media sources like British newspapers represented Indian sepoys as a world apart by nature. As one writer comments in the *Newry Telegraph*,

> To tell you the truth, I never could understand the Sepoys; they are queer fellows, but I never expected they were so bad. I have, however, long come to the conclusion that a native of India is *exactly contrary to an Englishman in every way*, and in everything he does, or makes, or has anything to do with….and if I had my way *I would treat them exactly different* from the way one manages

> Europeans, and all would be right.[4] (emphasis added)

Many attributes thus came to be associated with Indian Army sepoys, positioning them in diametric opposition to Englishmen as inferiorized "Others" unworthy of the same respect and human dignity. Their supposed traits are perhaps best summarized in the following excerpt from a *Morning Post* article released in September 1857, wherein the author proposes steps for reconstructing the Indian Army in light of the Rebellion. While the writer's commentary refers more broadly to the "native" Indian populace in the British colony, many of these stereotypes were applied specifically to certain sepoys after the event. The unnamed author writes,

> The reconstruction of the army of India is, however, not a subject to be lightly approached; it is, in fact, one of those topics in which the most delicate statesmanship must unite….with the political, social, and economical requirements of an empire to be governed upon such principles of *rational freedom as alone consist with the genius of English government*—to be attached to its benefactors but not the less its rulers, whose word is to be law, not to be disputed or evaded--to be conducted from *barbarism to civilisation*, from darkness to light, through all the difficulties of bigotry, *prejudices of caste*, diversity of race, multiplicity of language, *universal deceitfulness*, *fanaticism*, and *indolence*, one of the most incurable evils in the Asiatic mind, an incapacity to recognise any government excepting *despotism*.[5] (emphasis added)

This article captures the many negative stereotypes that came to define the British's ever-changing sepoy figure in order to provide a foil for the flattering self-portrait of its creators and to stamp out any sympathy for the groups perceived as the main culprits of the 1857 Rebellion. The categories throughout the rest of this chapter deconstruct these individual stereotypes to shed light upon how and why the sepoys faced these British depictions as a result of their putative role in the revolt.

**Sepoys as Naive Religious Fanatics**

> *"Superstition was the very soul of the Orientals….The sepoys, egged on by [other] religious fanatics, thought they had many grievances."*[6]

From the onset of the 1857 Rebellion, myriad newspaper articles from the British metropole reduced the incident to a frenzied defense of Hinduism and Islam from Christian encroachment, singling out Hindu and Muslim sepoys as its main or even sole perpetrators. As one article asserts, referring later in the text to Muslims in particular,

> The ignorance, superstition, and credulity of the natives are great and not easily dispelled; and everybody who has had to deal with half-civilised populations distinguished by these qualities is well aware that nothing perpetuates disorder more than credulity and ignorance.[7]

Here, the British article provides a simplistic interpretation of the events that catalyzed the 1857 Rebellion, hinting that Indian natives are particularly vulnerable to foolish persuasions and that, due to their religion, they remain heedless of reason and logic. Such arguments also delegitimized claims of rightful grievances that may have propelled sepoys to rebel by portraying them as needlessly suspicious, inflamed by every rumor with gullibility befitting a child. This newspaper corroborates Edward W.

Said's seminal work *Orientalism*, which claims that Western writers depicted "Oriental" peoples as "irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different'" and prone to excesses in othering language that helped them fashion a self-definition that lay claim to a "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" temperament by contrast.[8]

There are, however, few articles as explicit in their construction of this reductionist, demeaning narrative as one released in 1857 by the *Hereford Journal*. In the untitled piece, a British contributor denigrates the

Brahminical institution" and its "barbarous fanaticism" as the "root of the disaffection," referring to the highest Hindu caste which priests comprise and upon which the Indian Army once relied heavily for its manpower.[9] This caste is further described as one of "heathenism," perpetuating "ignorance and superstition" as a direct foil for and attack on British attempts to introduce "progress" to India through Anglicized education, Christian missions, and government repressions of religious traditions perceived as backwards (like Suttee, a Hindu practice in which a widow would throw herself onto her husband's funeral pyre, derided by the writer in the article).[10] Through articles like this, the British pointed to sepoys' alleged primitivity and irrationality to vindicate their rule, framing their Empire as a "civilising influence" at a time when its authority in India faced many challenges.

In another excerpt from this newspaper article that hearkens back to earlier discourses of Oriental despotism, the writer even implies that sepoys from the Brahmin caste decided to mutiny out of concern that the introduction of European technologies threatened to terminate their primacy in the social strata of Indian colonized and provide conditions for the "future emancipation of the native mind" that they purportedly sought to subjugate.[11] Casting the sepoys who initiated the "mutiny" as delusional zealots undermined any anticolonial voices that attempted to delegitimize the actual grievances that led to the 1857 Rebellion and problematized any Indian ambitions for self-rule.

**Sepoys as Hypersexual, Barbaric Savages**

"'*Cruelties of the Asiatics, debauched and degraded by centuries of ignorance and depravity*'"[12]

In English newspaper articles and the visual sources that accompany them, sepoys in the Rebellion are depicted as "fiends" whose "thirst for blood" culminates in vicious attacks against "helpless" Anglo-Indian populations.[13] One 1868 article that reflects on the event calls it a mutiny of "atrocity and inhuman barbarity," with the sepoy perpetrators labeled "savages" and "monsters unworthy of the name of man."[14]

Not only is the supposed primitivity of sepoys alluded to here, but also the idea of these soldiers being wholly removed from the human race and thereby undeserving of humane treatment. According to one 1858 article in the *London Evening Standard*, "mutineers" fleeing from British guns were like tigers being hunted down by the apparently valiant Anglo-Indian defenders of the empire.[15] This simile invokes dehumanizing big cat symbolism employed increasingly in the nineteenth century to describe the Indian colonized and suggests that the sepoys were like big predators in need of extirpation. Popular British imagination linked tigers to Indian rulers like various Mughal emperors, but hunting tigers was linked in turn with the domination of British imperialism over the Indian landscape.[16] Moreover, drawing parallels between "recalcitrant wild animals" like lions or tigers to "disobedient human beings" such as these "mutineers" was certainly not foreign to the British, and the semiotic hunting of such "creatures" could be akin to reinstating British control over troubling elements in Indian colonial society with apparently superior masculinity and strength.[17]

In visual sources during the Rebellion, big cat iconography also finds itself paired with the blatant hypersexualization of the sepoys represented. In a political cartoon titled "The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger," which featured in an August 1857 issue of *Punch* magazine well-known for its vast British readership, a lion is suspended mid-pounce as he races to confront a Bengal tiger, who assumes a defensive pose as it rests a defiant paw across a half-naked woman and her presumable infant (see fig. 1). Here, the sepoy not only becomes an animalistic brute, but also poses a grave threat to a British population heavily associated with innocence, purity, and fragility. This choice of victim for the illustration is without doubt deliberate and hopes to further villainize and hypersexualize the sepoy, who has such Britons in its predatory clutches, prepared to devour the white people whom he holds captive and (in the case of the woman) tarnish their sexual propriety. In addition, the inclusion of such victims also seeks to inform the viewer that the sepoy is a profound danger to not only Anglo-Indian families, but also the empire itself. As historian Lydia Murdoch explains, "The British public understood attacks on British women and children as attacks on British domesticity

and imperial authority."[1]

**Figure 1.**

John Tenniel, *The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger*, *Punch* 33 (22 August 1857): 76-77.

Even without the big cat symbolism, illustrations transformed sepoys into subhuman beasts against whom courageous British forces defended their virtuous Empire. A great example is Edward Hull's pointedly titled political cartoon *English Homes in India* (1857) released as a double spread in *The Illustrated Times*, which soon became a well-known representation of sepoys during the 1857 Rebellion (see fig. 2).[1]

**Figure 2.**

Edward Hull, *English Homes in India, 1857*, *The Illustrated Times* (October 24, 1857)

In the colorless illustration, a viewer is transported into the interior of an Anglo-Indian home, a hallowed domestic space concealing a white British woman and her two young children. The woman's eldest child present, still a mere toddler, appears to be holding a book with the alphabet as though in the midst of learning when two sepoys invade the frame from the left-hand side, clearly foreign and threatening elements despite the location being India. This "otherization" of the sepoy figures, further identified by their Asiatic clothing, is completed by the scene of British Victorian domesticity that meets the viewer's eye, with elaborate draperies, ornate rug, and a book beside the sitting family whose binding reads "England." These visual symbols all serve as visual markers of the wealth and civilization that connects this Anglo-Indian household back to its prosperous mainland.

The sepoys, on the other hand, appear disheveled and primitive with their tattered attire and lack of footwear, leaving the viewer ill at ease. The soldier closest to the presumed entrance hoists a burning torch as though to raze the structure, while the sepoy nearest the family has a broad-chested, hunkering frame that reveals an almost subhuman, beastly demeanor, his barbarism more than evident through the sword he brandishes with blood dripping from its blade. His other hand suspends itself in an almost claw-like position above the eldest child's head, as though poised to snatch like a predator. The specter of horror haunts the face of the mother, who unlike the children, is more than aware of the imminent danger that the sepoys pose to her family. This foreshadowed doom in the illustration not only conveys the very personal danger that the British identified in sepoys during the 1857 Rebellion, but also hints at the broader threat that these colonized soldiers posed to the stability of the Empire, given that the British home--and more broadly, the British family--was routinely conceptualized as a microcosm for the empire at large.[20] Given that the British-constructed elationship between colonizer and colonized also relied upon parent-child comparisons, with Oriental subjects being the "children" receiving the shelter and guidance of the imperial government, such an image of sepoys clearly repaying that supposed paternal benevolence with familicide would have produced especial outrage among its chieflymetropolitan audience.

Having vilified such sepoys, many British writers expressed no qualms with the harsh measures taken by Anglo-Saxon fighters in quelling the rebellion. Presented with such an immediate and apparently unanticipated threat to its rule in such a vital colony, Britain needed to construct this wholly unpardonable sepoy who could only be stopped through the harshest imperial reactions. The newspapers hint that these popular depictions of sepoys during the 1857 Rebellion were rather effective, as one letter published about the event in the *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* notes that "There is not a British soldier in India whose blood does not boil to revenge the wrongs done to their countrymen."[21] In this particular letter, a British artilleryman combating rebels in the colony further reports, "....some mornings we blow away as many as forty black [Indian] soldiers from our guns, and nothing gives us so much pleasure as so doing."[22]

A similar construction of the indigenous rebels presents itself in an untitled *Hereford Journal* article released six days later, which calls Nana Sahib--the last Maratha ruler, a Hindu nobleman and leading militant--a "monster" while glorifying the "gallant" General Henry Havelock who helped recapture Cawnpore from Indian rebels.[23] In short, the British crafted such incendiary rhetoric to suggest that the supposed mercilessness of the "mutineering" sepoys necessitated or simply merited a similar response in retaliation. The perceived barbarism of the sepoy figure--and its intractability given his inferiorized race--was in turn cited as reason why British supervision and governance were sorely needed in India instead of self-rule.[24]

Metropolitan authors hinted that Britons were virtuous and intentional in their conduct, indicating their racial superiority, but denied rebelling sepoys any forethought or agency.[25]

**Sepoys as Manly Warriors, or Effeminate Cowards**

*"The Indian Army [will now be] recruited entirely from among the native races….of naturally warlike disposition….to the total exclusion of feeble-bodied and poor-spirited classes."*[26]

Amid the chaos of the "Great Mutiny," it became imperative to Britain's imperial image to emphasize the heroism and valor of Anglo-Saxon fighters. References to the "British lion" abound in metropolitan newspaper articles, likening their military prowess to the strength of a top predator that would be found in an "exotic" landscape like that found in British India.[27] To juxtapose this, many writers describe sepoys as "cowardly mutineers" during the rebellion who proved no match for British military might. Since bravery was touted as a central facet of British-defined masculinity, the "mutineers" were reconfigured in British memory as effeminate through discourses that emphasized their cowardice in combat. In contrast, groups of Indian and other indigenous soldiers like Sikhs and Gurkhas from so-called "martial races"--a term once assigned by the British to delineate certain colonized peoples as innately warlike–retained their manhood in terms of perceived pluck. One newspaper article, for instance, boasts that a Gurkha regiment that helped suppress the Rebellion received the "best training for soldiers," having been "encouraged to shoot, to play at football, and have been practised at all athletics…."[28] Writings like these emphasized the masculinity of supposedly loyal sepoys, sometimes by noting their athleticism at a time when literature espoused the use of sports and intense physical training to teach British boys how to become respectable men by the period's exigent standards.[29] In a similar article, Gurkhas are described as "wonderfully good soldiers" and "small but resolute warriors," replete with an innate martiality--and thereby masculinity by British standards of muscular Christianity--that could help the British defend their Empire.[30] Nonetheless, the British inferiorized these sepoys' manhood by insisting that all sepoys still lacked the self-restraint necessary to command their own native regiments or, on a larger scale, self-govern. This qualification enabled the British to continue asserting military superiority over these sepoys, no matter how brave or physically hardy, and monitor these colonized subjects.

The contrasting effeminacy of the sepoy figure when related to Bengalis, on theother hand, is apparent even in articles published more than a decade after the action of the 1857 Rebellion. One British writer insists that "the only indications of martialism"encountered among Bengali residents "are the flanking sentries, limp,

narrow-shouldered, convex-spined, Bombay sepoys," choosing to foreground the supposed weakness of Bengali

composition in order to detract from their manhood.[31] Another article notes that once, the Bengal Army was "full of magnificent-looking sepoys, tall and athletic," but then its members turned into those of a degenerate race that paled in comparison to the ascending "splendid qualities of Sikhs and Goorkhas as fighting men."[32]

**Enduring Representations and What Lay Ahead**

No longer trusting the sepoys that comprised the pre-"mutiny" Indian Army, the British undertook a complete restructuring of the indigenous ranks following the 1857 Rebellion. Prior to the 1857 Rebellion, the East India Company (EIC) maintained three presidency armies that recruited native soldiers from Bengal, Madras and Bombay. In so doing, the British left recruiting patterns from the ousted Mughal rulers intact and drew from South Asian communities that traditionally identified themselves with martiality, to a large extent to legitimize its imperial power.[33] The most prominent of the presidency armies was in fact the Bengal Army, which drew its Indian manpower primarily from "high" Hindu castes in Bihar, Awadh, and Berar or its Muslim population.[34] Loyalty to the British was deemed legible through a sepoy's caste, with EIC superiors holding recruits from upper castes in higher regard and even espousing their supposed manliness that the majority of the Indian population was thought to lack.[35]

After the 1857 Rebellion, however, the British adopted another system for determining which soldiers were suitable for defense of the Empire, creating binary distinctions with which to sort Indian colonized into "martial" and "non-martial" categories. The former, as many British military handbooks explained, possessed innate warlike traits and held a "spirit" that yearned for military service. This martiality came to be conflated with loyalty to the British Raj, with groups becoming increasingly labeled as "martial" if they had provided support to Anglo-Indian soldiers in quelling the 1857 Rebellion. This new portrayal of groups like Nepalese Gurkhas and Punjabi Muslims or Sikhs as "martial"--and the delineation of groups that featured most prominently in the 1857 Rebellion as disloyal and "non-martial"--served to justify the grand restructuring and consolidation of the Indian Army aforementioned. In an attempt to normalize this martial/non-martial ichotomy, the British often insisted that the Indian colonized had long ago divided themselves into respective races with some groups naturally predisposed to engendering "hotbeds of conspiracy and rebellion," ignoring their own hand in sorting Indian peoples and their territorial neighbors into different "races" or "ethnicities" in response to the 1857 Rebellion.[36]

In their grand reorganization, British recruiters turned northward and westward to rely increasingly on these "martial" Indian ethnolinguistic or religious groups that had remained loyal during this crucial test of empire, drawing heavily upon native peoples from Nepal, Punjab, and the North-West Frontier. Other so-called "martial races" like the Punjabi Sikhs and Muslims, Rajputs, Pathans, and Dogras faced unprecedented levels of recruitment.[37] The British especially marveled at the loyalty of Sikh and Gurkha sepoys even after Anglo-Indian armies deposed local leaders and confiscated traditional lands after the Anglo-Nepalese (November 1, 1914 - March 4, 1816) and Anglo-Sikh Wars (December 11, 1845 - March 9, 1846; April 18, 1948 – March 30, 1849) prior to the 1857 Rebellion. To many, this signified their presumed high estimations of the military abilities of British East India Company (EIC) soldiers and their acceptance of British rule over the Indian subcontinent.[38] It would be the same demographics called upon first and foremost when the British joined WWI on August 4, 1914, when circulating the discourse of sepoy loyalty would become necessary to justify the unprecedented arrival of non-white Indian Army troops to the shores of Europe.

*The Sepoy Figure in WWI*

Despite British reliance upon the reformed Indian Army in the years preceding WWI, many officials balked at the prospects of allowing non-white combatants to fight alongside white soldiers on European soil in 1914. Lord Charles Hardinge, the Viceroy of India for the first two years of the conflict, expressed concern that Indians would demand equal citizenship under the British Empire after fighting in Europe alongside white subjects.[39] Other British officials voiced their fears in private correspondences that the "martial races" of the restructured Indian Army would, upon surpassing the military might of their European foes, consider

themselves superior to British power or capable of overthrowing imperial rule in India.[40] Ultimately, however, the need to outdo German manpower and sufficiently honor the non-white combatants sacrificing their bodies for the Empire overrode these concerns and ensured Indian Army sepoys a spot along the Western Front.

To reassure the British populace that the formerly problematized sepoy figure would not pose a threat to the Empire while in Europe, the British press undertook the lofty endeavor of reconstructing the sepoys' image. By portraying sepoys of the Indian Army as the optimal soldiers, loyal children, and comrades-in-arms, the British Empire converted the once-dangerous sepoy into the choice weapon and trusted companion with which it could procure victory in the Great War.

**Sepoys as Warlike**

*"His greatest ambition in this world is to be possessed of a rifle."*[41]

Throughout the course of WWI, the British press routinely presented sepoys as innately martial. An article in the October 24, 1914 issue of the *Northern Weekly Gazette* proudly notes that native soldiers from India were "taught the art of killing in the severest and bloodiest of schools, and, as the saying is, would 'rather fight than eat.'"[42] This excerpt illustrates the prevalence of the sepoy's military prowess and belligerent nature in British representations. The writer further describes Gurkha soldiers who fight for the Indian Army from the independent Himalayan state of Nepal as "'natural fighters'" who--before receiving "civilized" combat training from the British, fought like "wild animals" possessed with an even "greater savagery."[43] This laudatory (albeit dehumanizing) construction of sepoys represents them as warriors by birth who possess military prowess that makes them invaluable soldiers for the British Empire once tamed by their less primitive, racially superior guidance. Here, the purported martial nature of the sepoys became a positive attribute, since British officers will lead these servicemen into battle and ensure that their might is not directed at their imperial leaders. In other words, the perceived martiality of sepoys had been repurposed to suit the changing needs of the British Empire, with any potential threat it might cause diffused by the promise of British command and guidance. To further glorify the sepoys, the British linked their constructions of sepoys' perceived martial nature to masculinity of the soldiers. Writers commended sepoys noted for their military prowess as "the example of ideal manhood," an interesting change from traditional Western stereotypes of "Oriental" peoples as effeminate.[44]

Perhaps to further garner support for Indian involvement in WWI, British newspapers took pains to suggest that sepoys yearned for combat even when injured. In an article from *The Scotsman* that details an impromptu visit from the Secretary of State for India (Lord Robert Crewe), an author contends that Crewe "was greatly struck with their [convalescing sepoys'] cheerful demeanour and their keen eagerness to get back to the front."[45] Another writer provides an anecdote to convey Gurkha soldiers' supposed nonchalance about their wounds and enthusiasm to take up arms again. "One Indian," the article reads, "when told he would not be fit to use a rifle again on account of having fingers off, exclaimed 'Mi can turn a machine gun.'"[46] Despite these cheery depictions, certain sepoys' letters to other soldiers contradict this idea that they hastened to rejoin their warring brethren, with one soldier accusing British authorities of "tyranny" for forcing rehabilitated sepoys to return to the front despite promises of repatriation.[47]

Alongside their purported warlike nature came the portrayal of sepoys as wholly invulnerable to fear. One wartime newspaper correspondent applauds the Sikhs for their impassivity under fire, claiming that "They look like graven images [during battle], so absolutely fearless are they of death."[48] In another newspaper, a writer insists that a Sikh or Rajput "knows absolutely nothing of fear" and boasts that "....the Indian soldier can fight with a….fearlessness that is unmatched by any bravery that the German fighter can ever display."[49] Here, the motives for British construction of dauntless sepoys may be to comfort its domestic readership about Britain's favorable position in the war because of such soldiers and to undermine German attempts to intimidate their opponents in WWI.

When read collectively, these sources indicate the continued representation of sepoys as ruthless,

bloodthirsty warriors, but suggest a shift in how this imagined trait was perceived. Contrary to the discourse surrounding the 1857 Rebellion, the almost feral martiality of the sepoy figure was heralded as a war hero for using such qualities in service of the British Empire. In other words, sepoys' "savagery" had been repurposed under "superior" British management.

**Sepoys as Selflessly Loyal Subjects of Empire**

*"Faithful as Dogs"*[50]

Further fueling the image of sepoys as ideal soldiers for the British Raj, the English press devised a sepoy that fought with no other motive than to sacrifice his life for the *Sirkar* (government). Within this narrative, the sepoy is frequently positioned as a child eager to obey the command of his benevolent parent, the British Empire. Perhaps no newspaper article better evokes this imagined relationship and the power dynamics it promoted than "Wounded Indians: A Visit to the Brighton Pavilion" in London's *Evening Mail*. The unnamed author provides a story of one wounded soldier who is portrayed as childlike for his presumption that the British King appeared unwell in his visits to the front because of his concern for the sepoys' welfare. He summarizes the occasion under the subheading "Contented Children" as follows:

> 'Without doubt,' he [the unnamed sepoy patient] noted with calm conviction, 'anxiety for us people has made the King like that [visibly weary and frail].' What could a Briton say to such a statement? Politeness and sympathy force one's laughter back, and it remains only to wish that the King himself could be there and see this beautiful childlike faith in his fatherly solicitude for his soldiers.[51]

Another article very similarly calls sepoy devotion and fidelity across all their "races" "unparalleled among the peoples of the world," with the love of his king distinguished by the "implicit trust of a child."[52] As in the previous source, the British press infantilizes sepoys and describe their relationship as one of starry-eyed dependence and obsequiousness to the British authorities sending them out to war. A 1915 *Clifton Society* article hints at the possible reason behind the importance, moreover, of sepoys feeling that they receive benevolent, paternal treatment in Britain:

> It is good to think that England in her affectionate response to the outburst of Indian loyalty is making her sepoys feel that they are children of her Empire, so that they return to their homes aglow with gratitude, singing the praises of the British Raj in the bazaars and looking forward to a further participation in the perils of war, for the sake of brotherhood which common danger engenders.[53]

This quote reflects the British hope that its construction of an endearing familial relationship between sepoys and the British Raj would further guarantee the allegiance of the former and prevent nationalist dissatisfaction back in India that could emerge from unfavorable reports of British treatment of its native soldiers. Other writers established other, more balanced relationships for the sepoys, reasoning that the soldiers would remain faithful to the British cause due to the "friendships formed between men of East and West" during combat (namely with their British officers).[54]

Despite this predominant discourse of loyalty, British officials shared private doubts about sepoys' ostensible willingness to repay "the salt of the Sirkar."[55] Colonel Sir Bruce Seton, Commander of the Kitchener Indian Hospital in Brighton, secretly investigated 1,000 wounds and other injuries of sepoy patients on suspicions of self-infliction (especially among servicemen with left hand wounds). While the analysis yielded "no evidence of self-infliction of wounds which could be supported by statistical examination," the perceived need for such an inquiry hints that sepoys lauded publicly for their martial loyalty faced scrutiny in private.[56] This source indicates that, in contrast to the more public newspaper articles produced for a wide audience, British

officials constructing images of the loyal sepoy wondered at times whether they endorsed an illusion. Regardless, at a time when the 1857 Rebellion still loomed large in British imagination, inspiring plays and new literature each decade, it was imperative to eliminate doubts that sepoys would pledge their genuine allegiance to the Empire during WWI. These constructions served as a definitive promise to British readership that the sepoys fighting in Britain were unlike those featured in earlier Rebellion-based propaganda.

*Sepoys' Self-Perceptions: Contesting British Narratives of WWI Sepoys*

When considering the predominant narratives that the British left behind about non-white combatants in WWI, it is important to dispel myths and deconstruct the self-identification of sepoys where traces can be found in the archives. While few extant English sources enable historians to uncover sepoy voices, analyzing sepoy letters sent to loved ones back in India and to fellow Indian Army soldiers can offer precious glimpses into their self-perceptions of their soldierly identities while fighting for the British Raj. In order to harness these sources, the present chapter enlists *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18*, a chronological collection of 657 sepoy letters from especially the Western Front or English hospitals during WWI. Its editor is English historian David Omissi, acclaimed for his nearly thirty years of research on colonial Indian soldiers. The non-English letters were translated by British mail censors and Omissi only corrects spelling or grammar errors for clarity, leaving missives otherwise untouched. Ultimately, these letters can provide insights into how Indian Army sepoys challenged--and less frequently reinforced or internalized--the primary attributes that the British ascribed to the sepoy figure during the supposed "Great War." While Omissi's thematic categorizations of the letters and inclusion of certain missives over others within his compilation, the mediation of sepoy voices through multiple layers of British censors, the use of Indian scribes by the largely illiterate peasant soldiers to record their messages, and the tendency for letters to be read aloud in India all may limit or distort the conclusions one can draw from such primary sources, these letters still constitute important historical documents.[57]

**Casting Doubt on the British Rhetoric of Uncritical Sepoy Loyalty**

> *"If a man wishes to remain [away from war] he can do so in any case -- there are many subterfuges for a man, and you should endeavour in every manner to protect your life."*[58]

Despite British claims that sepoys vied amongst themselves to play a role in World War One, motivated by nothing but their love for the British Raj and their sense of indebtedness to its supposed paternalistic benevolence, countless sepoy letters offer alternative ways of viewing their feelings about and incentives for participation in the conflict. In reality, their willingness to serve as black soldiers in a war between white-run imperial powers hinged upon multiple considerations, among them the personal benefits that they could acquire from displaying allegiance to the British Empire. For sepoys, many of whom hailed from debt-ridden peasant families, going to war presented them with a means by which they could hope to earn more money and abate their mortgage burdens, staving off the wrath of voracious "native" landlords or moneylenders.[59] For some with particularly lofty ambitions, engaging in military service could even lead to a grant of land or life-pension for conspicuous valor that would absolve one's family from the responsibilities attached to renting land.[60] Many sepoy letters additionally tie concepts of *izzat* (personal dignity/honor) to military service for the British government.[61] One sepoy goes so far as to contend to a relative in the Punjab that "only in the Army is any *izzat* to be acquired."[62] There were also considerations of caste or clan. Myriad sepoy letters cite the desire to glorify their caste as one of the largest factors in their joining the war. As one Dogra infantryman from the 19th Lancers implores a member of his regiment entrusted with recruitment in the Punjab, "You must think of your caste and do everything to get Dogra recruits. It is the duty of every Rajput to sacrifice his life for his caste."[63] Competition between clans for raising the most troops is evident in other letters.[64]

For some sepoys, however, war turned out to be far more than expected and "not [like] winning a game at all" as some recruits surmised, but rather being sentenced to "suffer pain for the rest of your life."[65] Some sepoys tried to dissuade loved ones from enlisting, likely due to concern for the relative or friend's welfare. In one letter from a Sikh who had already been wounded in the conflict to his brother, the soldier implores his

sibling, "Stay in the village and carry on the work as headman. Do not go anywhere else. Think over what I say and you will understand what I mean when I say 'stay in the village[.]'"[66] Such pleas could well be read as a rejection of the British's perceived role of Indian Army sepoys to happily affirm their loyalty to the Crown and demand the same enthusiasm from their contemporaries. A second sepoy letter reveals a sibling's displeasure at his brother's decision to enlist as he did, writing from the Brighton Hospital that he is "very much annoyed" and urges his brother to "get out of it [service] as best you can."[67] Although this writer is not inspired by discernible anti-British or treacherous sentiment, his attempts to dissuade a fellow Indian from enlisting could be interpreted as disloyal at a time when the Empire desperately required colonial manpower. Writings such as this also dispel the myth of sepoys' putative unadulterated lust for war and hints instead that they at times prioritized self-preservation. Finally, one sepoy writer entreats his loved one not to enlist with such fervor that he employs repetition to convey his urgency and the intensity of his supplication. The Punjabi Muslim, a fighter with the 59th Rifles, writes,

> For God's sake don't come, don't come, don't come to this war in Europe….I am in a state of great anxiety; and tell my brother Muhammad Yakub Khan for God's sake not to enlist. If you have any relatives, my advice is don't let them enlist….Pay Havildar and read the letters to the double company commander. Otherwise there is a strict order against writing on this subject.[68]

Some sepoys tried to take matters into their own hands when it came to their wartime involvement, using their letters to discreetly exchange information about how to feign illness or injury to escape the horrors of war.[69] While the British referred to this practice as "malingering," a term charged with contempt and suggestions of deceit, it is possible to see this as an act of resistance to British orders that sepoys sacrifice themselves in a foreign war. In one excerpt removed from a letter by a censor in Boulogne, for instance, a Kot Dafadar compels a sepoy in the 1st Lancers to "send [him] something which will make the doctors declare [him] unfit for service, and at the same time will not be dangerous to life."[70] Other sepoys used different strategies to resist taking up arms for the British Raj, such as fabricating stories of misfortune at home that purportedly required their presence to address.[71] Many letters of this kind exist in Omissi's collection, penned by soldiers of all faiths and British-imposed racial or ethnic categories. They all reveal widespread sepoy desperation to exit the war as the years of service dragged on, even if severe punishments could greet the British discovery of intentions to secure premature leave. While it must be noted that a fair amount of sepoy missives reacted to dishonest means of leaving service with marked disdain and censure, it is clear that British portrayals of sepoys as *uncritically* loyal are untenable.

**Challenging British Notions of Imperviousness to Fear and Despair**

While WWI signaled a growing recognition of war traumas for soldiers racialized as white, the psychological distress of non-white sepoys faced routine trivialization and erasure. The sheer absence of individual sepoy patient records from hospitals and psychiatric wards in WWI, or dearth of formal post-war inquiries into possible mental traumas sustained from service, suggests that the British did not feel it necessary to document any of these non-white soldiers' symptoms of psychological disturbance to establish knowledge for future treatments or medicinal developments as they did for white army men.[72] When British officials recognized sepoy' war neuroses, moreover, they were dismissed as signs of exceptional cases of mental weakness, cowardice or malingering unrepresentative of the typical Indian Army serviceman. To make this argument, however, the British had to ignore the fact that "melancholic" and "despondent" characteristics pervaded all ethnoracial groupings of sepoys in the letters that reached the Indian Mails Censor Office in Boulogne.[73] One must remember, owever, that the British failure to acknowledge sepoys' psychological distress—perhaps to avoid criticisms from the Indian subcontinent or global community about subjecting their colonized to the terrible conditions of an imperial war--should not detract from veritable sepoy accounts of their pain. It is these accounts to which we now turn.

***In the Throes of Despair***

Although some sepoys found solace in divine protection, hoped per their religious beliefs that dying on the battlefield with valor might end any subsequent cycles of death, or tried to reconcile the sepoy figure of British imagination with their lived experiences, sepoy letters reveal that these soldiers did not possess an innate sense of bravery or an infinite supply of contentment as British popular media asserted.[74] Sepoy letters indicate that many Indian Army servicemen struggled to endure their narrow encounters with death, familial separation, and a host of other issues that plagued their lives during WWI. Even if their inner turmoil is hidden from certain letters, the traumatizing experiences relayed within their contents leave hardly any doubt about the psychological distress soldiers faced. As one Garhwali rifleman named Amar Singh Rawat poetically notes,

> The condition of affairs in the war is like leaves falling off a tree, and no empty space remains on the ground. So it is here: the *earth is full of dead men* and not a vacant spot is left….One has to *stay on top of the corpses and even sleep on them*….When we attacked the German trenches [at Neuve Chapelle from March 10th-13th] we used the bayonet and the kukri, and the *bullets flew about more thickly than drops of rain*….Now I have not any sure confidence that I will see you people again; *there is nothing but hopelessness*.[75] (emphasis added)

These exceptionally horrific landscapes without doubt impacted the mental state of the sepoys thought to be invulnerable to fear or demoralization. Engaged in a constant fight for their lives, moreover, sepoys' uncertain survival likely cast a perpetual shadow over their existences and dampened their spirit (as the letter above hints). Another sepoy named Saiyid Harif informs a correspondent back in India that he cannot begin to explain the hardships he suffers alongside his comrades, admitting that he "can see no relief from the misery in store for [himself]" and can bear no more.[76] A certain Sant Singh channels his anguish in a verse-like letter to his wife, betraying a severe lack of morale which even conveys an explicit longing for death. He writes,

> We are trapped in a net of woe, while you go free. Our life is a living death. For what great sin are we being punished? Kill us, Oh God, but free us from our pain! We move in agony, but never rest. We are slaves of masters who can show no mercy….Death here is dreadful, but of life there is not the briefest hope.[77]

This despair and professed lack of control over situations--which may present to a modern reader as learned helplessness, positively correlated with depression in recent studies--pervade letters across caste/religious lines.[78]

Aside from desiring their former liberties at home, sepoys also yearned to be reunited with their families and alleviate the tribulations endured by loved ones in their absence. One writer named Bostan Khan admits that "Day and night [his] thoughts are towards [his] home," but that he feels like he "can do nothing" to provide for his family while away in France.[79] A cavalryman who signs his letter as Gholam Rasul Khan expresses his ailing mental health and homesickness in ever more emphatic terms, writing,

> My eyes throb with longing desire to see you again….At present there is pain and grief….I myself do not know what joy is: in solitude joy is useless to me. Life holds only sorrow and grief for me at present. I realize what this war is when I think of my separation from my brother. God alone knows how I eke out the days….I live in hope that some day I will again see my brother Mustapha Khan. At present time he is 'missing'.[80]

Clearly, psychological distress was a reality for many sepoys in the war, challenging British narratives of sepoy imperviousness to despair.

***Personal Encounters with Fear***

Our people used to boast a lot [about bravery] but to show it in reality is difficult….I have seen

> several men who are in the forefront at eating time, but at the hour of fighting are in the background.[81]

Corroborating the oft-veiled accounts of fear in the sepoy letters, Mulk Raj Anand's interwar novel *Across the Black Waters* (1939) can provide supplemental insights into how Indians reflected in the interwar period upon the roles of sepoys in the earlier conflict. Until recent years, Anand's work remained the only English-language novel written by an Indian on sepoy involvement in WWI. The second book in a trilogy, the fiction details the experiences of Indian Army sepoys fighting the Germans along the Western Front with stunning realism. While Anand was not himself a veteran of the war, he dedicates the book to his late father, once called Subedar Lal Chand Anand of the 2/17 Dogras. One can easily discern the impact that the parent's experiences had on the contents, as the main protagonist is named Lalu and hails from a Dogra clan as well, proudly referring to himself as a Hindu Rajput. The limited omniscient narrator reveals sepoy fears that find striking counterparts in the letters of actual soldiers during WWI.

Its unique Indian voice and its apparently faithful depiction of sepoy's wartime experiences make it a useful addition to the following analysis.

On numerous occasions, Anand's combatants struggle to live up to Britishexpectations of non-white soldiers' immunity to fear. The narrator frequently announces

Lalu's fearful anticipation of battles, as in the following:

> Involuntarily he [Lalu] trembled. Then he tried to remember the tactics of bayonet fighting, like a schoolboy recalling his lesson just before entering the examination room. And, like the frightened schoolboy, he felt he had forgotten, and the dread loomed before his eyes, occupying the hollow of his body which shook against his will. He tried to steady himself so that he could become neutral, like his companions, who sat patient and tranquil though rather pale and silent, as if they were reflecting on their doom and yet seeking to control their flesh from giving any signs of weakness, each to his own, as if everyone were alone in this ordeal.[82]

This passage indicates that, despite sepoy attempts to compose themselves when faced with the perilous conditions of war, private dialogues of fear could accost them at every turn. On another occasion, when Lalu is stationed as a guard along the Western Front near Ypres, "a nameless apprehension spread[s] in his flesh like a stupor" and he is hardly able to conceal his fright elicited by the present situation. Anand continues, "Afraid of the invisible doom he turned with a half-suppressed whisper, 'I am not afraid', to a naked determination and stamped his feet on the mud as if to assert his conquest of cowardice."[83] Again, Anand appears to caution his readers against concluding that sepoys were devoid of fear simply because they insisted against its presence or tried their hardest to mask the undesired emotion so fervently disavowed by their British superiors.

Amid the multitude of sepoy letters that debunk the British notion of Indian Army soldiers remaining unshaken by fear as they executed their soldierly duties, there are other Indian Army voices that curiously echo British ideals of dauntless masculinity in envisioning the ideal sepoy. As a Punjabi Muslim named Juma Khan fights with the 40th Pathans in France in 1915, he sends the following back home as if to reassure a loved one that his answer to the calls of arms is both normal and natural:

> It is the duty of young men to fight as lions in the field of battle. It is of no consequence -- to die is one's duty…. [remember] it is always man's duty to do acts of bravery, because it was for this very purpose that God created man.[84]

In this letter, the writer hints that man's sole function is to perform acts of courage, thereby emasculating any sepoys who failed to do so during the war. This point is reinforced through the invocation of the association of valiant Indians with lions, as was the self-fashioning strategy of earlier Mughal rulers across the subcontinent.[85] A harsher letter propounds ideals of stoicism and avoiding overt displays of fear, claiming that

the latter is incompatible with one's manhood. In this letter, a Punjabi cavalryman named Nadir Ali reprimands a loved one back home who has been too outwardly worried and sorrowful in awaiting his return, writing:

> Do not be anxious….To be anxious is wearing to the spirit, and the enemy ridicules such anxiety. The work we are doing is a man's work. I read some of your letters 'I am weeping day by day on account of this separation.' Do not under any circumstances write like that. If you write like that again I will not answer the letter. When you write, write like a man and ask God to bring me back victorious to my native land.[86]

There may be reason to believe, however, that even these appeals to bravery existed in a relatively great number because sepoys did not feel that they were able to write about their hardships under the watchful eye of British censors. Many letters refer in passing to British censorship, with one Sikh writer called Dhan Singh even confessing that "The [British] orders are to the effect that, however much one may be suffering, only [sic] may only write and say that one is quite well and very happy; one is forbidden to write about one's trials and about the war."[87] Moreover, some sepoys perhaps internalized the notion promulgated by the British that war neuroses made a soldier effeminate. Even for white soldiers whose war traumas were more openly acknowledged during WWI could face this emasculation, with their "shell-shock" (as their war neuroses were often termed by European physicians) to feminine hysteria that hinted at an inherently weak disposition and willpower.[88] One may presume that sepoys, who received military training from British commanders who imparted such ideals of masculinity, also worried that disclosing their war traumas could signify a failure to display the valor or dauntlessness that traditional British masculinity demanded.[89] It is also possible that sepoys chose against revealing their despair to their loved ones to avoid concerning them, or with the knowledge that whatever they wrote about would likely receive a public reading in their home village. Regardless, myriad sepoys explicitly or implicitly document the fear that torments them while entangled in

WWI, countering British narratives of sepoy repudiation of the emotion.

## Epilogue:
## The Sepoy Figure in Contemporary Indian Nationalist Imagination

The fight of Indians to reclaim the continually silenced sepoy figure rages on today in popular media. While the voices of Indian participants from the 1857 Rebellion were excluded from the archives, the widely viewed film *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2005) reveals that many Indians are now contesting the once-prevailing British depictions of sepoys. The film follows the few years leading up to the 1857 Rebellion, with the main protagonist being the titular sepoy Mangal Pandey, his character inspired by a real Indian serviceman of the same name who fought with the 34th Regiment of the Native Infantry at Barrackpore and spearheaded an uprising that preceded the "Great Mutiny." Throughout the film, the negative traits ascribed to sepoys in British narratives about the 1857 Rebellion and the years surrounding it (e.g., insensible brutality, deceitful, ignorant) are transferred from the sepoy figure to EIC imperialists, with Indian Army rebels reimagined as the undisputed heroes of the day whose repeatedly ignored grievances and confrontation with continual British provocations force them to take up arms. This image of the sepoy figure invokes a proud nationalist discourse that establishes Pandey's uprising and the ensuing Rebellion as important precursors to later movements for Indian liberation from British colonial rule, even styling the latter as the "First War of Indian Independence."[90] Minutes before the closing credits, Pandey dies by guillotine for his role in the pre-Rebellion upheaval, but an uplifting song plays in the background to console viewers that he and the legacy of the rebels will never truly perish.[91] Although the identities of sepoys reach the modern scholar with biases from all angles, perhaps this song best encapsulates what is most important—the remembrance and ongoing discussion of the sepoys who lost their lives in struggles both for and against the British Raj. Just as one unnamed Gurkha reassures a loved one serving in France that he "will become as famous as the sun," so the sepoy figure must remain in the light, recalled in all his infamy and glory.[92]

Notes

1. Over 877,068 combatants from India fought in WWI on behalf of the British Empire. For

more information on the numbers of such participants, see the following: Santanu Das, "Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18: Archive, Language, and Feeling," *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 3 (2014): 392, https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwu033; Bernard Waites, "Peoples of the Underdeveloped World," in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, eds. Peter Hammond Liddle and Hugh Cecil, 596–614 (London: Pen & Sword, 1996), 598, quoted in Barton C. Hacker, "White Man's War, Coloured Man's Labour: Working for the British Army on the Western Front," *Itinerario* 38, no. 3 (2014): 29, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115314000515.

2. "The Sepoy Mutiny," *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, August 10, 1857, 3, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000250/18570810/05 4/0003.

3. It is often taken for granted or erased from the narrative that even before the 1857 Rebellion, Indian soldiers were being forced to compromise their long-held religious beliefs and go against the social underpinnings of their indigenous societies. During First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-42), soldiers traveled long distances without proper provisions and hence suffered from disease, unsanitary food, and social stigma for breaking caste rules they were compelled to forgo while serving. For more on this, see Antoinette Burton, *The First Anglo-Afghan Wars: A Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014) and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, Lloyd L. Rudolph, and Mohan Singh Kanota, eds., *Reversing the Gaze: Amar Singh's Diary, a Colonial Subject's Narrative of Imperial India* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002). Furthermore, Hindus suffered an egregious violation of their religion when the General Service Enlistment Act of 1856 mandated that Indian soldiers serve overseas, which in some communities meant a loss of caste identity. For the mention of this pre-1857 issue among others, Streets' *Martial Races* is, again, an exemplary work. Finally, one might note that newspaper coverage of the event from 1857 to the outbreak of WWI suggests that British accountability took a back seat to wagging an accusatory finger at those perceived religiously suspect for quite a few decades after the so-called "Great Mutiny."

4. "Delhi," *Newry Telegraph*, October 1, 1857, 2, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000998/18571001/046/0002.

5. *Morning Post*, September 28, 1857, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000174/18570928/020/0004.

6. "Lecture on India," *Reading Mercury*, October 30, 1897, 3, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000369/18971030/011/0003.

7. *Morning Post*, January 3, 1859, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000174/18590103/011/0004.

8. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2003), 40, 57.

9. *Hereford Journal*, September 9, 1857, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000398/18570909/009/0004.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. William Francis Butler, *Charles George Gordon* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), in *Norwich Mercury*, January 1, 1890, 2, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001669/18900101/023/0002.

13. "India and China," *London Evening Standard*, February 15, 1858, 5, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000183/18580215/028/0005.

14. "Extraordinary Affiliation Case," *The Birmingham Daily Post*, January 8, 1868, 5, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000033/18680108/107/0005.

15. "India and China," London Evening Standard, February 15, 1858, 5, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000183/18580215/028/0005.

16. Joseph Sramek, "'Face Him Like a Briton': Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800-1875," *Victorian Studies* 48, no. 4 (2006): 659.

17. Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces, 1860-I914* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1996), 145, in Sramek, "Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in British India," 662.

18. Lydia Murdoch, "'Suppressed Grief': Mourning the Death of British Children and the Memory of the 1857 Indian Rebellion," *The Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 2 (2012): 369-370, https://doi.org/10.1086/664195.

19. Edward Armitage, *Retribution*, 1858, oil on canvas in gilded frame, H 269.2 x W 289.5 cm, Leeds Museums and Galleries, Leeds, England, https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/retribution-37516/.

20. Murdoch, "Mourning the Death of British Children," 369-370.

21. While the excerpt cited in this sentence comes from a British artilleryman of the Bengal horse artillery to his father in Dumfries, the paper claims that its content "shows the view taken by British soldiers of the Sepoy mutiny" overall and the fact that it was published in the newspaper suggests that it ostensibly serves as a mouthpiece for what the newspaper wished to convey about the sepoy "mutineers" to its readership. Thus, I contend that this private letter circulated for a public audience, while not originally intended for this purpose, merits attention in this paper. To view the article that reprinted the letter, see: "From an Artilleryman," *Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette*, September 3, 1857, 3, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000360/18570903/007/0003.

22. Ibid.

23. *Hereford Journal*, September 9, 1857, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000398/18570909/009/0004.

24. *Evening Mail*, January 1, 1858, 8, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001316/18580101/051/0008 .

25. Ibid.

26. "The Indian Soldiers of the Queen," *The Graphic*, January 1, 1898, 14, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000057/18980101/016/0014.

27. See, for example, *Reynolds's Newspaper*, September 13, 1857, 8, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000101/18570913/025/0008.

28. "A Fragment," *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, February 3, 1883, 11, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001857/18830203/027/0011 .

29. Sikata Banerjee, "Empire: Christian Manliness and the British Gaze," in *Make Me a Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 25.

30. "Indian Affairs," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, March 29, 1877, 6, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000206/18770329/045/0006.

31. *Hour,* February 23, 1874, 5, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002814/18740223/011/0003.

32. "A Plea for the Bombay Army," *Homeward Mail from India, China and the East*, April 25, 1887, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001712/18870425/009/0004.

33. Gavin Rand and Kim A. Wagner, "Recruiting the 'Martial Races': Identities and Military Service in Colonial India," *Patterns of Prejudice* 46, no. 3-4 (2012): 237, https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2012.701495.

34. Kate Imy, *Identity and Power in the British Indian Army: Faithful Fighters* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 4.

35. Rand and Wagner, "Recruiting the 'martial races,'" 238.

36. *Morning Herald (London)*, January 26, 1865, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002408/18650126/053/0004.

37. Imy, *Identity and Power in the British Indian Army*, 4; While martiality was not neatly synonymous with loyalty, as certain groups were still considered martial and masculine but as a whole disloyal (e.g., Hindu Marathas in West and Central India), it is nevertheless important to recognize the frequent conflation of martiality with fidelity to the British Crown and with one's manhood in British imagination.

38. For an example of a British newspaper article exuding this sentiment, see "Is India Worth Keeping?", *Southern Times and Dorset County Herald*, February 8, 1879, 3, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002182/18790208/028/0003.

39. Gregory Martin, "The Influence of Racial Attitudes on British Policy towards India during the First World War," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 14, no. 2 (1986): 93, https://doi.org/10.1080/03086538608582713.

40. Ibid.

41. Ernest F. Edmonds, "Visit to the Wounded Indian Soldiers at Brighton," *Kent & Sussex Courier*, January 15, 1915, 2, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000483/19150115/001/0002.

42. "The Indian Soldier," *Northern Weekly Gazette*, October 24, 1914, 11, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003075/19141024/065/0011.

43. Ibid.

44. Edmonds, "Visit to the Wounded Soldiers at Brighton," 2

45. "Indian Hospitals at Brighton. Surprise Visit by Lord Crewe, Cheerfulness of the Wounded," *The Scotsman*, March 30, 1915, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000540/19150330/130/0004.

46. "Rochdale Ambulance Men at Brighton: Work Amongst Wounded Indians," *Rochdale Observer*, March 6, 1915, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000310/19150306/098/0004.

47. "Sepoy Kharka (Dogra, 57th Wilde's Rifles) to Lance Naik Harnam Singh (57th Wilde's Rifles, Ferozepur, Punjab, India)" in David Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 92.

48. "The 21st Punjab Infantry," 14.

49. Caroline Marshall, "Fighters the Germans Fear," *Northern Weekly Gazette*, December 19, 1914, 24, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003075/19141219/159/0024.

50. "India's Fighting Men: Their Ancient Civilization," *The Sketch*, January 13, 1915, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0001860/19150113/010/0008.

51. "Wounded Indians: A Visit to the Brighton Pavilion," *Evening Mail*, January 4, 1915, 4, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0003187/19150104/082/0004.

52. "Edmonds, "Visit to the Wounded Soldiers at Brighton," 2.

53. "Indians Engaged," *Clifton Society*, March 18, 1915, 3, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002164/19150318/015/0003.

54. "The Y.M.C.A with the Indian Troops," *The Graphic*, September 21, 1918, 18, https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000057/19180921/019/0018.

55. This was a common term employed by sepoys who wrote of their perceived obligation to fight for the British Raj as beneficiaries (financial or otherwise) of the colonial government in India. For an example of its use, refer to the following letter, drawn from a collection in which the names of the letter-writer and the addresses are not always recorded. See "Waris Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Sepoy Hazir Khan (89th Punjabis. France)" in David Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914-18* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 92.

56. India Office Records and Private Papers Collections, British Library (hereafter BL), London, Military Collections, IOR/L/MIL/17/5/2402. Colonel Sir Bruce Seton, "An Analysis of 1,000 Wounds and Injuries Received in Action, with Special Reference to the Theory of the Prevalence of Self-Infliction," n.d. (?1915), 8, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=ior!l!mil!17!5!2402_f001r#.

57. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, xxiii, 4-8.

58. Naik Main Ram (Jat) to Sepoy Dani Ram (102nd King Edward's Own Grenadiers, Muscat)," June 9, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 69.

59. Mulk Raj Anand, *Across the Black Waters* (New Delhi, India: Vision Books, 1940), 205-206.

60. Ibid.

61. See, for example, "Mahomed Mazafar Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Sahib Khan (Gujrat District, Punjab)," October 21, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 328. The writer was himself a combatant stationed in France, serving with the armored cavalry regiment known as the 19th Lancers.

62. "Fazullah Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Chandhir Ghulam Sarwar Khan (Gujrat District, Punjab)," September 17, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 236.

63. "Hira Singh (Dogra) to Pensioned Risaldar Albal Singh (19th Lancers, Hoshiarpur, Punjab)," October 11, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 244. Based on Omissi's collection of letters, it appears that Rajputs felt an especial pride in their British-assigned identities as a martial "race" and sought to indicate their superiority in relation to other castes by raising many soldiers. This Rajput pride emerges in the following letters as well, among others: "Gulab Singh (Dogra, 57th Rifles) to Bhur Singh (25th Cavalry, Bannu, NWFP)," April 3, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 50; "Gulab Singh (Rajput, 16th Rajputs) to Kalu Singh (3rd Cavalry, France)," August 2, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 85; and "Dafadar Ram Prasad Singh to Sowar Thakur Gajendra Natu Singh (Rajput, 2nd Lancers, France)," January 1916 [?], in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 146. The letter on page 85 is perhaps the most compelling evidence, with the the Rajput writer expressing that WWI has presented members of his caste with the first occasion to show the German enemies "the jewel of the real Rajput blood," further announcing that the "time is at hand that our reputation will be exalted." This sepoy has perhaps internalized British notions of martial races and Rajput's biological affinity for battle.

64. See, for example, "Amlok Ram (Rajput) to Sita Ram (Head Constable of Police, Rawalpindi, Punjab)," January 17, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 269.

65. To read the full letter from which this startling quote derives, see "Jumna (Jat) to Havildar Ram Saran (Depot 6th Jats, Jhansi, UP, India)," October 14, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 108-109. Convalescing in Kitchener's Indian Hospital in the Brighton buildings, the writer cautions his brother against joining the war abroad, further warning that "there is nothing to be gained" from engaging in the combat, no matter the glory one believes he may procure.

66. "A wounded Sikh to a brother (India)," February 14, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 37.

67. "Asim Khan (Pathan) to his brother (59th Rifles)," March 19, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*," 44.

68. "Havildar Abdul Rahman (Punjabi Muslim) to Naik Rajwali Khan" (31st Punjabis, Fort Sandeman, Zhob District, Baluchistan)," May 20, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 61. The end of this letter likely reveals the writer's wariness about divulging too much information to the recipient because of British censorship, and the censors' dislike of sepoys dissuading others from enlisting or hinting at the unfavorable conditions of war.

69. For an example of this, see "Mohammad Gaki Khan (UP Muslim) to Sowar Mohammad Rafi Khan (30th Lancers, France?)," June 6, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 67.

70. "Kot Dafadar Talib Mohamed Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Reservist Fazal Karim Khan (1st Lancers, Risalpur, Peshawar District, NWFP)," November 9, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 250.

71. For an example of this, see "Kehar Singh (Sikh) to Sirdar Sahil Singh (Amritsar District, Punjab)," November 9, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 251. A sepoy of the same regiment crafted a similar letter the following year, which one can also consult: "Abdul Majid Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Mahomed Salim Khan (Bikaner State, Rajputana)," December 27, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 341.

72. Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 50.

73. Hilary Buxton, "Imperial Amnesia: Race, Trauma and Indian Troops in the First World War," *Past & Present* 241, no. 1 (2018): 226, https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gty023.

74. For evidence of this, see the following letters: "A wounded Sikh to his brother (Amritsar District, Punjab)," January 21, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 31; "A Gurkha to Jemadar Budhiman Gurung (1/1st Gurkhas, France)," February 7, 1915, in Ibid., 35; "Havildar Bhura Singh (Dogra) to Subedar Hamira (44th Merwara Infantry, Egypt, 43)," c. April 1915, in Ibid., 58; "Sonu Gaekwar (Maratha, 107th Pioneers) to Shankerao Gaekwar (Poona District, Bombay)," in Ibid., 88; "Pirbhu Dyal (Dogra) to Ji Singh (Kangra District, Punjab, India)," August 12, 1915, in Ibid., 125; and "Ressaidar Jowan Singh (Sikh) to [illegible] Singh (Gurdaspur District, Punjab)," October 29, 1915, Ibid., 340. It warrants note that this source of bravery and motivation for sacrificing oneself to the British military cause also transcended religious and clan distinctions, however, as did many other attitudes of the Indian Army sepoys explored in this research.

75. "Rifleman Amar Singh Rawat (Garhwal Rifles) to Dayaram Jhapaliyal (Garhwal District, UP)," April 1, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 48.

76. "Sowar Saiyid Harif (Decanni Muslim) to Mohamed Ibrahim (Depot Saugor, Central Provinces)," March 15, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 164-165.

77. "Sant Singh (Sikh) to his wife," September 18, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 102. For another highly transparent glimpse into the deteriorating mental health shared by many sepoys during WWI, see "Jemadar Abdul Rahim Khan (Deccani Muslim) to Mir Hassan Khan (Hyderabad, Deccan)," February 7, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 275. The writer implores a deity for help escaping his present circumstances, even if by death, admitting that he and his comrades "have given up all hope of life" and that "It would be a good thing if my soul were to quit my body."

78. One such study is the following: Bastian Bruns et al., "Learned Helplessness Reveals a Population at Risk for Depressive- like Behaviour after Myocardial Infarction in Mice," *ESC Heart Failure* 6, no. 4 (2019): 711, https://doi.org/10.1002/ehf2.12440.

79. "Bostan Khan (Punjabi Muslim previously serving with an Ammunition Column at the front) to his father Gulab Khan (Rawalpindi District, Punjab, India)," October 10, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 107.

80. "Gholam Rasul Khan (Hindustani Muslim) to his father Mahomed Nawas Khan (Aurangabad, Gaya District?, Bihar?)," May 24, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 189. For an equally poignant examples of such sentiments, see "Sowar Abdul Wahab (Hindustani Muslim) to Bahadur Singh (Rae Bareli District, UP)," December 18, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 341 and "Sabir Ali (Hindustani Muslim) to Haidar Khan (Sultanpur District, UP)," September 3, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 317.

81. "Jodh Singh (Dogra) to a subedar of the 38th Dogras (Malakand Cantonment, NWFP)," May 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices*, 64.

82. Anand, *Across the Black Waters*, 112-113.

83. Ibid., 125-126.

84. "Juma Khan (Punjabi Muslim) to Dulu Khan Gahi (India)," November 1, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 116.

85. Sramek, "Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India," 659.

86. "Nadir Ali (Punjabi Muslim) to Lumberdar Sultan Mahomed (Jhelum District, Punjab)," April 11, 1916, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 174-175.

87. "Dhan Singh (Sikh) to Lahore Singh (Patiala State, Punjab)," January 20, 1917, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 270.

88. George L. Mosse, "Shell-Shock as a Social Disease," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (2000): 103, https://doi.org/10.1177/002200940003500109.

89. Ibid.

90. It warrants mention, however, that the film generated much controversy over its historical accuracy. To learn more about the debate, one may desire to read the following: Kim A. Wagner, "Epilogue: 1857 Today," in *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising*, 243-246 (New York: Peter Lang, 2010).

91. *Mangal Pandey: The Rising*, directed by Ketan Mehta (Kaleidoscope Entertainment, Maya Movies, TFK Films, 2005), 2:19:30 to 2:26:41, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmF2SytVwSw.

92. "A Gurkha to Jemadar Budhiman Gurung (1/1st Gurkhas, France)," February 7, 1915, in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 35.

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