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MOVES: Migration and Modernity – Historical and Cultural Challenges

A Marie Skłodowska–Curie Action European Joint Doctorate

Ph.D. Thesis

**Martial Voices: Colonial Discourses of the Indian
Sepoy on the Move**

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2023

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Martial race discourse, colonial discourse analysis, race, mimicry, ventriloquism, World War I, colonial soldiers, military migration, contact zones, colonial India, Indian Army, migrant soldiers, military migration

Over the course of World War I, the British Empire deployed 140,000 Indian soldiers and labourers to the Western Front. These Indian soldiers, or sepoy, were described in contemporary British sources as fighting for Empire out of an unquestioning sense of duty and honour. Narratives of sepoy 'sacrificing' themselves for Britain resurfaced in contemporary British memorialization of the Indian Army during the event of the war's Centenary. The puzzling notion of colonials willingly sacrificing themselves on behalf of their colonizers during World War I reproduces a well-established body of colonial discourse that described the Indian Army as made up of chivalrous, masculine, and loyal 'martial races.' This thesis is a colonial discourse analysis of martial race discourse across three 'contact zones' of colonial and postcolonial migration and encounter: colonial India, the Western Front, and lastly modern 'multicultural' Britain. Martial race discourses of colonial sepoy loyalty in World War I are fantasies through which we can observe complex, ambivalent negotiations of identity and power in imperial contexts. I apply the scholarship on martial race discourse to British representations of the sepoy figure during World War I, an unprecedented moment of colonial military migration. Martial race discourse was as an

ambivalent system of knowing Indian populations that allowed British colonizers to by turn embrace similarities to only select admirable Indian 'races', and to disavow similarities between colonizer and colonized through the insistence of insuperable differences. The stereotype of the martial race sepoy provided British authors with the knowledge with which to ventriloquize sepoys in novels that reasserted martial race discourse to address British wartime anxieties of Indian loyalty. Meanwhile, archives of letters written by Indian soldiers during the war showcase a heterogeneous body of sepoy discourse that reveal the limits of martial race stereotypes, particularly as an identity sepoys found themselves struggling to articulate their own relationship to during the war. The complexities and ambivalences of martial race discourse in British and Indian identity are in the present day submerged in a Britain that seeks an unproblematized legacy of colonial war participation. Just as martial race discourse justified and securitized the presence of Indian soldiers in a European war, the sepoy today is a figure that negotiates the belonging of South Asian populations in a British body politic hostile to immigration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It takes a village. First, thanks go to my three supervisors. Clare Wallace, David Herd and Bojan Savić have for the last three years given me advice, sharp critique, and the support I needed. I hope that I have produced work they will be proud to attach their names to.

I am grateful to the MOVES project and the European Union's Horizon 2020 fund for giving my research a home during these turbulent years. I thank the general coordinator for the MOVES project, Martin Procházka, for shepherding the project to its conclusion – and for answering every panicked email with speed and grace. My warmest thanks also to the project manager for MOVES, Petra Johana Poncarová, for all her help. Martin and Petra also gave me the opportunity to publish an article in the academic journal *Litteraria Pragensia*, where I developed much of the analysis of Rudyard Kipling's *The Eyes of Asia* that is now present in Chapter Four of this thesis.

I thank all my colleagues during the MOVES project. Some names deserve special mention. Firstly, my work package partner Cornel Borit; one cannot imagine a more insightful and enthusiastic academic peer, and friend. I also thank Madeline Bass and Peter Teunissen, invaluable collaborators in the final year of my research. And lastly, Naiara Rodríguez Peña, who pointed me toward the work of Lucassen & Smit.

The list of names I want to thank at the University of Kent's Brussels School of International Studies is prohibitively long. Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels, my MA thesis supervisor, without whom my intellectual journey would not have been possible. Lucy Williams, who first inspired me to study migration and suggested a PhD as a path for me. Yvan Guichaoua, for his sustained interest in my project and the introductions he made. Among my peers at BSIS, I especially thank Mario Baumann and Jaime Aznar Erasun for their constant presence, and intellectual generosity. Laura May Skillen, for thinking of my project and introducing me to her friend Professor Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, whom I also thank for his generosity and advice. Reda Mahajar, for his encouragement and his recommendations of postcolonial theory. My warmest thanks also to the Professional Services Team, particularly Lauren Krstic and Meredith Nelson, who are the glue holding it all together.

My love to my parents, Nafisa Ashrafee and M Mashiur Rahman, for all they have done for me and for enabling my journey to academia. I thank my brother Nafis Mashiur for a childhood's worth of inspiration. My eternal gratitude for my partner Evelin Nagy, for her love and inexhaustible patience.

My final acknowledgment goes to a total stranger. Best wishes to the person who left a dog-eared copy of Philip Mason's *A Matter of Honour* in a dim-lit bookshelf in Le Pantin, which I casually reached for while waiting for friends. That was how it began.

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1. INTRODUCTION

November 11, 2018, marked the 100th anniversary of the Armistice that ended World War I in Europe. The Centenary has sparked a resurgence of scholarly and public interest in the war. Well-established narratives of the Western Front, and the War more generally, have been productively complicated and enriched by this interest. This thesis specifically attends to the figure of the colonial Indian soldier, or sepoy, despatched to the Western Front in France and Belgium. The deployment of these Indian soldiers is a part of a larger history of colonial labour on the Western Front, a phenomenon hitherto often overlooked in the war's historiography and popular memory but increasingly prominent in the contemporary wave of interest in World War I. The Western Front has been recently conceptualized as “a turning point in the history of cultural encounter and entanglements” due to the novelty of so many non-white men from the colonies encountering Europeans through “transcontinental military migration.”¹ The Western Front was a key moment in migration from colonial periphery to metropole, and interracial encounter in Europe. 140,000 Indian soldiers and labourers served on the Western Front between 1914 and 1918.² These Indians, more than any other colonial body, dominated European media discourse during

¹ Santanu Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 31; Christian Koller, ‘The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 26, no. 1–2 (March 2008): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619280802442639> Koller provides an overview of the full range of colonial recruitment and deployment to Europe.

² The War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War. 1914–1920* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), 777.

the war years, and continue to gain the lion's share of public attention in the 'memory boom' anchored by the war's Centennial commemoration.³ What fantasies – fears and desires alike – underly the appeal of the sepoy figure, and what are the political undercurrents of this fascination? In this thesis I approach these questions through the lens of migration and encounter, as colonial Britons encounter Indian soldiers in India, Indian soldiers encounter Europeans during World War I, and the legacy of these encounters inform the perception of migrants in the modern United Kingdom.

Indian sepoys captured the European imagination even before their first arrival at the port of Marseille, in September 1914. European media representations proliferating upon the sepoys' arrival relied on pre-existing tropes of Indian soldiers, already well-established despite the novelty of the physical presence of sepoys in Europe.⁴ Fleet-footed Gurkhas with their distinctive kukri knives, turbaned and bearded Sikhs, warrior caste Rajputs on horseback and depicted with colourful uniforms; chivalrous figures all, from another time and another age. This figure of the noble, chivalrous colonial sepoy is resurrected in modern discourses in contemporary Britain, where such tropes and images are harkened back to. The sepoys are described as heroes who sacrificed themselves

³ While the phrase 'memory boom' recurs in World War I scholarship, Jay Winter seems to be originator of the term in this context. Jay Winter and Robert Wohl, 'The Great War: Midwife to Modern Memory?', in *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years On*, ed. Jay Winter (Columbia : Kansas City, Mo: University of Missouri Press ; National World War I Museum, 2009), 162.

⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 125.

for empire, colonial war participation the thread weaving South Asian belongingness into the fabric of a multicultural United Kingdom. During the war years a century ago, British public discourses celebrated these heroic figures as also being 'simple,' having an 'innate loyalty' to the empire, willing to fight and die for the honour of their regiment and community. Such discourses are puzzling. How can Indian soldiers be imagined having willingly fought for their colonial masters, and how could such a collaboration with the British Empire be seen as heroic by modern South Asians? Moreover, we must contrast this celebration of Indian warriors with a prevailing cultural view of World War I as a futile war, described most notably by Paul Fussell as the war that ended the culture of romanticization of war.⁵ While white, British Tommies are imagined having died futilely in the mud, their lives wasted by poor leadership, the colonial sepoy figure fights heroically in a romanticized view of this very same war. What about the sepoy makes this possible?

I argue that these tropes of the sepoy as being chivalrous, simple, and unquestioningly loyal to the empire reflect the colonial discourse of Indian sepoys as members of martial races. The notion of martial races is a discursive formation that elides the complexities and difficulties of celebrating an army of collaborators in the imperial project, makes possible the idea that colonial Indians were happy to fight in a war that has most popularly been conceptualized

⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

as a traumatic experience for Europeans, and which underlies what Claire Buck called “the oxymoron of ‘voluntary subjugation.’”⁶ In this thesis, I explore the concept of martial race discourse as central in representations of the sepoy created upon his migration to Europe, and across its genesis and further repetition I analyze the utility and power of the discourse as a way to ‘know’ the sepoy – and for the sepoy to ‘know’ himself.

In his history of the colonial Indian army Philip Mason asked the question, “What made Indian soldiers give their lives for a flag they could hardly call their own?”⁷ Mason’s answer to his question provides the title of his book. For the sepoy, it was ‘*A Matter of Honour*’ to fight for the colonizing, imperialist British. Martial race discourse navigated this contradiction by stressing the warlike, admirable qualities of the ‘races’ of Indians the British recruited into the colonial military (notably including Sikhs and Gurkhas), emphasizing their racial kinship to the British compared to the ‘non-martial’ and racially inferior populations of Britain, and their inherent affection and respect for British rule. From the 1880s onward and peaking in World War I, martial race discourse dominated the logic of the British Indian security regime. Only martial races were employed by the military at this time.⁸ Martial race discourse’s truisms, codified in military

⁶ Claire Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 2015, 15, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=2057850>.

⁷ Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 15.

⁸ David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, Studies in Military and Strategic History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994).

handbooks, acted as an exercise of colonial power and knowledge over the Indian populations, soothing British anxieties over their status as a migrant community surrounded by a colonized population. The discourse constructed the British's military allies as both loyal and the best of Indians (particularly important after the uprising of the Indian soldiers after 1857.)⁹ Martial race discourse was disseminated from colonial India to Britain itself and became the central trope of the Indian Army that is current today in navigating the seeming contradiction between the Indian Army as a body of colonial subalterns and a narrative of loyal, voluntary military service. Locating my research in the current burst of interest in World War I and military migration, I use the presence of the Indian soldier in the war's Western Front as a space for examining the contradictions, ambivalences, and flexibilities of martial race discourse across migration flows and cross-cultural contact.

The discourse's vehemence in its assertions of martial race superiority and tractability increased with growing challenges to its assertions, and a core part of my research is examining how the discourse was interpreted and interpellated by British and Indian voices alike. Beyond the puzzle of martial race discourse's unstable and ambivalent power and appeal, I examine its transportation to Europe during World War I as the Indian Army was deployed on the Western Front as a part of a vast and unprecedented wave of colonial military labour

⁹ Robert McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

migration during the war years. In a totally different environment from colonial India, subjected to a conflict that has been argued to have crushed a culture of romanticization of war, I study through British and Indian literature and sepoy correspondence how martial race discourses articulated crucial questions of Indian war loyalty, heroism, and consent to fight. I argue that martial race discourse's articulation of the idealized sepoy figure as a loyal, heroic, and masculine warrior dominated British imaginations of the sepoy and sepoys' imaginations of themselves alike, and I examine the construction and deconstruction of this imagined ideal of the sepoy. I argue that British and Indian desires for the existence of the martial race sepoy despite the complexities and contradictory tensions of true sepoy war experience continue to inflect contemporary portrayals and memorialization of the sepoy, particularly in the context of the commemoration of the Centenary of World War I.

Over the course of the war, European media articulated the sepoy as a staunch imperial loyalist, understood primarily as members of martial races and not as individuals. These representations addressed concerns over Indian wartime loyalty and military effectiveness, and the spoke to the discursive tension of valorizing colonial bodies while maintain a racialized structure of white supremacy. One of the outcomes of this discomfort is the creation of British wartime literature told through the eyes of sepoy narrators, where these sepoys were ventriloquized into speaking in accordance with the verities of martial race discourse. Martial race discourse provided not only the tropes of how sepoys

should speak and what they should say but articulated British desires of the nature of the sepoy and banished the anxieties felt over the possibilities of Indian disloyalty, cowardice, resentment over colonialism, and the desire for sexual relations with white women. These fears furthermore guided the censorship of Indian soldiers' letters from the Western Front, wherein we find martial race discourse was both asserted and challenged by the sepoys as they struggled to make sense of their war experiences in contrast to the hegemonic standards of the discourse. Reading Heather Streets' *Martial Races* and David Omissi's *Indian Voices of the Great War* in parallel at the start of my research process I was surprised and intrigued by the evidence gathered by these two authors that showed an ambivalent, complex relationship between sepoys and martial race discourse – often with sepoys conceptualizing themselves through this colonial discourse.¹⁰ I argue then that the discourse functioned to create an idealized image of the sepoy that was salient for both British and Indians alike as they navigated the tensions engendered by the Indian army's military deployment to the Western Front.

The Centenary of World War I saw a revival of interest in World War I in public discourse. Notably, British commemoration has focused on the memory of the sepoy, remembered in public exhibitions, speeches, battlefield visits for

¹⁰ Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester University Press, 2004), chap. 6; David Omissi, ed., *Indian Voices of the Great War: Soldiers' Letters, 1914–18*, Studies in Military and Strategic History (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire : New York: Macmillan Press, 1999).

schoolchildren, films, and newly-erected memorials.¹¹ While part of a state-sponsored agenda to correct a postcolonial amnesia which perpetuated in the United Kingdom a view of the war centering the experiences of the white, British soldier (or ‘Tommy’), and to enable the British public to “[look] at the war from many different viewpoints,”¹² the Indian sepoy has received the lion’s share of public attention compared to other colonial forces that participated during World War I. Scholars such as Vron Ware and Catriona Pennell have argued that a lingering stereotype of Indians having fought heroically on behalf of empire as members of loyal, heroic ‘martial races’ makes the sepoy an attractive figure in contemporary war commemoration, eliding uncomfortable questions of imperial coercion and subalternity.¹³ Scholars have also argued that a martial race narrative of loyal colonial war service for Empire is used by South Asian populations in contemporary Britain – particularly Sikhs – to assert a historical

¹¹ Aakriti Kohli, ‘Militarization of Sikh Masculinity’, *Graduate Journal of Social Science* 12, no. 3 (2016): 60; Max Cohen, ‘Militarisation, Memorialisation & Multiculture: Muslims and the 2014 Centenary Commemorations of World War One in Britain’, *Contemporary Voices: St Andrews Journal of International Relations* 1, no. 1 (3 May 2018): 50, <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.1466>; Catriona Pennell, ‘Taught to Remember? British Youth and First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours’, *Cultural Trends* 27, no. 2 (15 March 2018): 88–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2018.1453449>; *1917* (Universal Pictures, 2019); Megan Archer, ‘UK’s First Statue of South Asian WW1 Soldier Unveiled in Smethwick’, *Express & Star*, 11 April 2018, <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/sandwell/smethwick/2018/11/04/nations-first-statue-of-south-asian-ww1-soldier-unveiled-in-the-black-country/>.

¹² Lucy Noakes, ‘Centenary (United Kingdom)’, *International Encyclopedia of the First World War (WW1)*, 6 March 2019, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/centenary_united_kingdom; Tony Hall, ‘World War One: Introduction by Director-General Tony Hall’, BBC, 24 June 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/mediapacks/ww1/>.

¹³ Vron Ware, *Military Migrants: Fighting for YOUR Country* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2012), 23, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137010032>; Pennell, ‘Learning Lessons from War? Inclusions and Exclusions in Teaching First World War History in English Secondary Schools’, *History and Memory* 28, no. 1 (2016): 46, <https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.28.1.36>; Pennell, ‘Taught to Remember?’, 88.

relationship to the United Kingdom and a right to belong in the British biopolitical community through historical military service.¹⁴ In this context, it is alarming to read Cohen's work as he builds on Ware's concept of a 'militarized multicultural'. Cohen notes how narratives of Indian Muslim soldiers fighting for Britain in World War I have become crucial in the negotiation of Muslim South Asians' position as a 'suspect community' in Britain, and how Muslim war participation in World War I is being mobilized to facilitate the recruitment of Muslim Britons into British armed forces engaged in the 'War on Terror.'¹⁵ The tropes and images of the sepoy built up in colonial India guide the narrative of Indian participation in World War I, which in turn structure contemporary conversations around the commemoration of colonial war service and its relevance to questions of migration and citizenship.

This thesis is a project of colonial discourse analysis. I read martial race discourse as a system of knowledge and power over the colonial Indian sepoy that mediated, reflected, and was constructed by desires and anxieties pervading spaces of colonial contact. These spaces of colonial contact I imagine through Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone:

Social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination

¹⁴ Kaveri Qureshi, 'Diasporic Citizenship and Militarization: Punjabi Soldiers in the World Wars', *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 3-4 (June 2013): 400-413, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2013.793069>; Kohli, 'Militarization of Sikh Masculinity', 60-62.

¹⁵ Cohen, 'Militarisation, Memorialisation & Multiculture'.

and subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.¹⁶

To understand the discursive functions of martial race imaginaries in the contact zone of a multicultural Britain, I examine the production and reproduction of martial race discourse in two zones of contact between the populations of Britain and of South Asia. These contact zones are colonial India, particularly after the rebellion of the Bengal Army in 1857, and the Western Front of World War I which represented an unprecedented degree of contact between Europeans and non-white military labour. My analysis of martial race discourse is taken through a reading of an archive of martial race handbooks produced in colonial India, European accounts (primarily British and both literary and non-literary) of contact between Europeans and Indians on the Western Front and sepoy correspondence during the war. I also draw from historical and contemporary newspaper reports for my material.

I place representations of sepoys on the Western Front in the broader context of the colonial archive of martial race discourse. A thesis that situates representations of Indian soldiers in Europe during World War I within the colonial discourse of martial races requires systemic build-up, laying out the contours of martial race discourse before I can turn my attention to the military

¹⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 1992, 4.

migration of Indian soldiers. A road-map of the thesis now follows, to better orient readers through my argument.

I begin in Chapter Two with the conceptual framework of my thesis, focusing on my understanding of colonial discourse, particularly discourses of race. I then explore colonial discourses in the spaces Mary Louise Pratt described as contact zones, sites of colonial encounter engendered by mobility and migration. I then present the growing literature examining World War I through the lens of military migration and the Western Front as an unprecedented contact zone between colonized and colonizing populations. By way of presenting this literature I also explore the concept of 'military migration' itself and suggest that existing theories of migration do not map perfectly onto the colonial soldier's mobility. An interdisciplinary project such as this one is necessary to bring the theories of migration together with the phenomena of migration detailed in the literature of World War I military mobility and colonial race discourse in India; otherwise we are left with migrations being described by scholars outside the discipline of migration studies without the theoretical grounding of the discipline, and migration theories that overlook key moments of migration and encounter.

In Chapter Three I examine the literature on the colonial discourse of martial races, which also presumed the existence of 'non-martial' Indians. I present martial race discourse as an articulation of British fears and desires

regarding the recognition and disavowal of their own kinship to the peoples of India. For the British, the unpleasant yet unavoidable specter of similarity to the racialized, colonized peoples of India could be navigated through processes of colonial knowledge production that created discursive categories of martial, 'masculine' Indians whom the British preferred to acknowledge racial proximity to. In this respect my analysis of martial race discourse presents it as a British construction of a colonial race hierarchy between themselves, the ideal types of martial races, and the racial stereotypes of non-martial Indians – particularly the stereotype of the Bengali intellectual, or the 'babu.' This complex, multi-polar discourse addressed anxieties of colonial control over India, becoming increasingly salient in British military recruitment policy following challenges to control over India presented by the uprising of 1857, Russian expansionism in the 1880s, and Indian nationalist agitation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Martial race discourse transformed in response to crises of imperial control, as well as the inherent ambivalences and contradictions of the discourse in its negotiation of the relationship with Britons and Indians through the creation of fantastical, ideal 'martial race' stereotypes.

Reading World War I and the deployment of Indian soldiers to Europe into this genealogy of imperial crisis and anxiety, I examine how martial race discourse acted as a set of stereotypes for representing the Indian army in accordance with British desires. In Chapter Four I explore the ambivalence between depictions of Indian soldiers as chivalrous warriors, and depictions that

lean more toward a savage – even animalistic – image. Martial race discourse, a discourse that both venerated and denigrated the sepoy figure, merged these seemingly contradictory images. Depictions of the sepoy mapped onto European anxieties over the unprecedented, landscape-altering violence on the Western Front, and the sepoy could be shown as either a chivalrous antidote to the carnage, or its racialized, barbarous embodiment. I read these complexities of European race anxiety playing out through ambivalent discourses of the sepoy in Massia Bibikoff's *Our Indians at Marseilles* (1915).¹⁷ I then turn to the matter of British literary representation during the war, specifically stories told through the perspective of fictional Indian soldiers. I study three such works: Rudyard Kipling's *The Eyes of Asia* (1918), Talbot Mundy's *Hira Singh: When Indian Came to Fight in Flanders* (1918) and Roly Grimshaw's *Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse: An Echo of 1914* (1930).¹⁸ I argue that these books ventriloquize the apparent sepoy voice to articulate martial race discourse in ways that reveal European anxieties and desires from the sepoy body.

How did Indians, particularly the sepoys themselves, relate to martial race discourse? Chapter Five explores this question, primarily through a reading of a unique archive of letters written by the Indian Army on the Western Front and

¹⁷ Massia Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, trans. Leonard Huxley (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1915).

¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *The Eyes of Asia* (Doubleday, 1918); Talbot Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018); Roly Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse: An Echo of 1914', in *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15*, ed. J. H. Wakefield and C. J. M. Weippert (Kent: D. J. Costello, 1986).

preserved in the intelligence reports of the British censors screening for seditious material. I contextualize these letters in broader Indian discourses on participating in World War I. Reading the reactions of India's politicians and intelligentsia through the lens of martial race discourse, I present the scholarship that suggests that the Indian elite both subscribed to a martial race narrative of Indian racial inferiority, and desired to repudiate this discourse through proving Indian valour on the battlefield. Indian intellectual classes, prevented by and large from serving in the military, pinned their hopes for autonomy and racial respect on the war service of the rural poor that comprised the martial races. Martial race communities during the war were the targets of recruitment and exploitation, oscillating between jingoist enthusiasm, a desire for the war as an economic opportunity, and the sorrow of bereavement and awareness of the socioeconomic structures of their exploitation. The Indian Army and their martial race communities were also targets of concerted propaganda efforts by the Central Powers allied with Indian revolutionaries, propaganda which necessitated the screening of Indian letters. These letters offer us a unique opportunity to read the testimony of the largely illiterate Indian army. A critical reader can read these censored letters to unearth the complexities of martial race loyalty in the sepoy testimony and find all the reverberations of life that lie outside the expectations of the rather poorly-rendered imaginary of the martial race sepoy.

The last chapter of this thesis, Chapter Six, is a brief exploration of the last contact zone of modern multicultural Britain. Modern British commemoration of

World War I, galvanized by the Centenary, has emphasized the participation of Indian sepoy with a view to incorporating British South Asians into a sense of British national identity. The sepoy thus enters the context of tensions between multiculturalism and an inherent racialized and exclusionary British nationalism following the end of empire. Martial race discourse's unproblematic narrative of sepoy heroism and loyalty today whitewashes the long history of imperialist exploitation. Celebrating the sepoy in Britain acts to bring minorities within the logic of a British militarized state that is hostile to the idea of migration of populations who are not seen to have earned the right to belong through a narrative of war service.

This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach that merges migration studies, history, postcolonial studies and literary analysis, and thus contributes to multiple academic fields. Through the lens of migration studies I am able to build the throughline between colonial India, the Western Front, and modern Britain, as spaces of cross-cultural and interracial contact brought about through human mobility. Incorporating migration studies into the analysis of World War I strengthens the scholarship on colonial military mobility during the war years. Conversely, I aim to contribute to the consideration of both colonialism and military deployment within migration studies. I build the scholarship of martial race theory through observing its development and persistence in cultural representation and discourse both public and private; and I contribute to the

study of representations of the Indian Army during World War I through my central focus on martial race discourse.

Though I conceptualize this thesis as dealing with three contact zones, this thesis' treatment of the contact zone of modern multicultural Britain is unfortunately limited. Contemporary British discourses of the Indian sepoy during his migration to Europe provide the impetus behind this research project, but I was not able to develop a more intensive discussion on the British contact zone. As a Bangladeshi national my mobility is circumscribed by unfriendly visa regimes. This includes the visa laws of the United Kingdom, the colonial metropole that once oversaw my birthplace. The irony of not being able to simply visit and research in the United Kingdom at my own comfort, to observe how South Asian military participation in World War I is being commemorated, for a European Union project on the 'historical and cultural challenges' of migration, is clear. This is not 'historical' in the sense of 'over and done with', but rather the long shadow the past casts over our present moment and immediate future. Under yet another set of circumstances I would still have gone through the process of securing a British visa to perform fieldwork on contemporary British commemoration, but with the turbulence of COVID-19 I abandoned any such thoughts. As another consequence of travel restrictions, this is a research project undertaken without any research visits to archives. I was fortunate enough to discover quite early on a wealth of secondary sources through which I was able to access the archival material necessary for my project. Thanks to the authors cited

in my bibliography and the availability of the novels I wished to analyze, I was able to design a research project that contextualized the wartime representation of the sepoy within martial race discourse. In my conclusion chapter I reflect on missed opportunities for this research project, and further research that could be done beyond the possible scope of my thesis.

In a period where extraordinary circumstances are becoming increasingly normalized, when lives and livelihoods are constantly imperilled, I am grateful to have been able to finish this thesis, limited in its potential scope as it is. I write in solidarity with those less fortunate than I. I hope that my reflections on how the unjust structures of the past haunt our present contribute to the shaping of a freer, better future.

2. “REPUGNANT OTHERS:” COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND MILITARY MIGRATION IN WORLD WAR I

“Material objects and subjects are constituted as such within discourse,” Roxanne Doty writes.¹⁹ It is martial race discourse that gave the Indian sepoy his materiality in representations of his migration to and encounter with Europe during World War I. I defer my examination of this martial race discourse, starting in Chapter Three with its origin and functions in colonial India. For now, I will focus on the conceptual groundwork. In this chapter I outline my understanding of colonial discourse, particularly colonial discourses of race. I then connect colonial discourses to the framework of imperial contact zones and encounters, which segues into my overview of the contemporary literature on what I call the ‘colonial turn’ and the ‘migration turn’ in World War I scholarship. In this latter section I devote some time to the difficulty of conceptualizing colonial soldiers as migrants through the canon of migration studies literature, which contrasts to the readiness with which scholars from outside the migration studies field have identified World War I as a moment of colonial military migration. I introduce the concept of organizational migration as a useful step in the theorization of World War I through the lens of migration studies. Lastly, I place my research in the broader context of scholarship on the Indian sepoy.

¹⁹ Roxanne Lynn Doty, *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*, Borderlines, v. 5 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 5.

Conceptual Frameworks

A thesis on ‘martial race discourse’ as ‘colonial discourse’ requires first a detailed approach to the concept of ‘discourse’ itself. Drawing primarily on Foucault and Derrida, Doty described ‘discourse’ as “a structured, relational totality. A discourse delineates the terms of intelligibility whereby a particular ‘reality’ can be known and acted upon.”²⁰ Norman Fairclough defined discourse in the Foucauldian as “different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice,” heterogenous and underpinned by implicit propositions taken for granted by those who produce and reproduce it.²¹ These definitions of discourse are generalist and neutral, but what are these ‘implicit propositions’ in the context of power differences between the subjects of a given discourse? Drawing on Stuart Hall and Doty, I see discourse as an interlinked system (or formation) of statements, drawing on previous discourses, that all collectively cohere to privilege certain points of view as the subject position from which another group is observed and categorized, delineating (thereby limiting) the ways in which the objectified group can be understood. Discourses are dispersed executions of power dynamics that reify hierarchy through creating and limiting ‘knowledge.’²²

Colonial discourse, the “variety of textual forms in which the West produced and codified knowledge about non-metropolitan areas and cultures,

²⁰ Doty, 6.

²¹ Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 3 & 34.

²² Stuart Hall, ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power’, in *Formations of Modernity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, *Understanding Modern Societies: An Introduction 1* (Polity Press, 1992), 291–93; Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 6.

especially those under colonial control,” is thus the discourse within which the continued exploitation and subjugation of the colonized could be justified and naturalized.²³ Edward Said’s *Orientalism* was the watershed moment for the academic study of colonial discourse. In *Orientalism* Said argued that the Western representation of the ‘Orient’ as different, binary-opposed and inferior to European civilizations and peoples was essential to the furtherance of European imperialism and exploitation over the nebulous ‘East’; and that academic and cultural discourses of Orientalism were not innocent but in fact central to this discursive agenda; and lastly that Orientalist discourse was almost entirely a European imagination and thus impossible to derive an alternative to – for the very subject of the discourse is non-existent outside the discourse.²⁴

The perspective of colonial discourse as the construction and imposition of a restrictive imagination of the Other under the guise of ‘knowledge’ is important to my approach to martial race discourse in this thesis. Robert Young, referring to the work of Homi Bhabha, described the nature of this claim to knowledge: “colonial discourse of whatever kind operated not only as an instrumental construction of knowledge but also according to the ambivalent protocols of fantasy and desire.” Here, ‘ambivalence’ means the “simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action,” which upsets the

²³ Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Nachdr. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1994), 5.

²⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).

seeming totality and rigour of the exercise of power and knowledge over the colonial periphery by the colonial metropole. Instead, we are asked to attend to the complexities and contradictions that underly the relationship between center and periphery as characterized by the tension between discourse as an exercise of power and subjugation, and discourse as an embodiment of colonial fantasy and longings.²⁵

I also speak of ambivalence in the context of uncertainty, as in that discourses themselves are malleable, unfixed, uncertain: assemblages of other discourse in their formations, themselves “open-ended and incomplete,” referring back to other discourses.²⁶ This open-endedness and ‘partial fixation’ allow discourses to be flexible while still retaining the claim to ‘truth’ – despite the ambivalence, malleability and referentiality of discourse there is at heart always a central proposition that discourses come back to. “The task of a critical analysis is to deconstruct the center itself, to expose its arbitrariness and contingency and thereby call attention to the play of power in constructing all centers.”²⁷ In the context of my project, the center is the very idea of race itself.

Stereotypes, Race and Mimicry

To understand martial race discourse, its functions, and motives as well as what allows it to perpetuate itself into modern culture, Bhabha’s notion of the

²⁵ Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 2005), 153.

²⁶ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 6.

²⁷ Doty, 7.

stereotype is useful. Bhabha frames the stereotype as essentially ambivalent, “a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure”, navigating the tension between colonial discourse as representative of, as well as simultaneously ameliorative and conducive to, states of colonial anxiety in zones of contact between the colonizer and the colonized.²⁸ Stereotypes connote fixity, a paradox of categorical permanence that articulates what is commonsensical and already known with a vehemence that undermines the supposed obviousness of what the discourse claims.²⁹ Colonial discourse organises the colonized Other into discrete racial categories that are both fixed and malleable, where the Other is both eternally mysterious and different but fundamentally knowable and definable.³⁰ This resonates with Doty’s notion of discourse as constantly open.

Discourses of racial stereotyping have been described by Hall as shifting within “the interplay between the representation of racial difference, the writing of power, and the production of knowledge,” and by Paul Gilroy as an “impersonal, discursive arrangement, the brutal result of the raciological ordering of the world, not its cause.”³¹ For Bhabha, this supposed ‘ordering’ is itself disorganized and haphazard, characterized by an uncertainty – an ambivalence –

²⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2004), 101.

²⁹ Bhabha, 95.

³⁰ Bhabha, 101.

³¹ Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, The Wellek Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 39.

that is fundamental and even necessary to the process of colonial discourse. As Ann Stoler has also observed, the colonial discourse of essential natures of races...

....Implies stability and fixity, the enduring properties of people and things. But if there is anything we can learn from the colonial ontologies of racial kinds, it is that such 'essences' were protean, not fixed, subject to reformulation again and again.³²

It is uncontroversial to state that race is a discourse affixed onto ideas of biological similarity between defined (and not naturally discrete) groups of people, and John Beasley argues that modern conceptualizations of race arose in the colonial period to articulate a system of racial ordering privileging 'white' European ancestry that remain relatively salient and stable to this day – despite the continual reinvention of race stereotypes in the colonial archive.³³

Bhabha's notion of the stereotype helps us understand how racial discourse remains salient despite its mercurial nature, beyond its capacity to perpetuate colonial power hierarchies, by addressing the complexities of "pleasure/unpleasure" triggered by the stereotype.³⁴ The stereotype allows the colonized to be understood as not 'different' but instead places the colonizer in the position of an original self to which the colonized can only be compared; and

³² Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009), 4.

³³ Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the Problem of Grouping in the Human Sciences*, Routledge Studies in Modern British History 4 (New York: Routledge, 2010),

4.

³⁴ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 101.

compared such that the colonized can be no more than a lesser, grotesque mimic of the colonizing 'original'. Racial stereotyping pleases the colonizer by centering them, rendering the colonized as a body that can be denigrated and shunned as an inferior. The colonized are transformed into targets for moral intervention. The colonial grotesque is framed as awaiting rehabilitation toward a greater resemblance to the civilized qualities of the colonizing original (as in the discourse of the White Man's Burden.)³⁵ Doty also makes the point that whiteness is centered in racial discourses as the seeming unchanging concept around which the inferiority of the racialized, non-white, colonized Other could be affixed through signifiers such as 'uncivilized' or 'child-like' as though the notion of 'whiteness' were some original, neutral concept outside of the discourses of race instead of being as much constituted by discourse as its opposed signifiers.³⁶

Stereotype's ambivalent pleasure/unpleasure in finding the colonized repulsive as well as reformable is also countered by the capacity for mimicry to act as a colonial threat, where similarity between the colonizer and colonized undercuts the ideology of racial hierarchy. The grotesque of the colonial mimic challenges the boundaries of colonial categories by also estranging the colonizer from their notion of themselves. The mimic holds up a mirror where the colonizer, the supposed fixed and centered white colonizing populace, sees a reflection they find uncanny and repulsive. Colonial racial discourse is thus not

³⁵ Bhabha, 119.

³⁶ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 48.

just about creating strict categories of races to perpetuate white supremacy. Colonial discourse creates complex, contradictory channels of similarity and differences imagined between races, characterized by the white European desire to conceptualize other races as by turns different and similar, repulsive and attractive – “almost the same, *but not quite*”³⁷ – in ambivalent formations that abide by and facilitate the interests of colonial power while at the same time (once we scratch the paint) revealing the anxieties, fantasies and vulnerabilities that underlie the exercise of this power.

Parama Roy develops Bhabha’s notion of mimicry a step farther beyond the ambivalences of the colonized as the mimic of the colonizer, by examining the ambivalences of the colonizer mimicking the colonized.³⁸ Colonial discourse, in imagining the colonized, disavows the capacity for the colonized to know themselves or to articulate themselves to the colonized. Colonial discourses must arise through the colonizer’s own understanding and recognition of the nature of the colonized. Roy argued that the most effective colonial tool to understand the colonized and while at the same time demonstrating colonial mastery of existing knowledge over the colonized was to mimic or impersonate them.³⁹ In my analysis of martial race discourse I argue that the discourse articulated British imaginations of a colonized Indian body who could be seen as a desirable (but

³⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 123. Emphasis in the original.

³⁸ Parama Roy, *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

³⁹ Roy, 31.

not purely, for the ambivalence of repulsion and attraction operated still) alternative to other colonial populations as ‘almost the same, but not quite’ as the British themselves.

Colonial discourses thus have the capacity to articulate stereotypes of the colonized wherein they were still inferior to the colonizer but had qualities desired by the colonizer in themselves. This mimicry still had the capacity to undermine the colonial hierarchy but was more desirable to the British imperialists than acknowledging similarities between the British and other colonial populations. Colonial discourse thus perpetuates stereotypes of which populations can be elevated above others through their proximity and difference, avowed or disavowed, to a centered notion of whiteness. The discourse may be produced and articulated through knowledge itself constructed through the temporary inhabiting of the ‘skin’ of the Other, which I argue was crucial to the construction of martial race discourse and its perpetuation in the British representations of Indian soldiers in World War I. These representations are animated by British perceptions and imaginations of the sepoy – including, notably, literature written from the imagined perspectives of sepoys, mimicking them and their consciousness – which in turn speak to us of British imaginations of the self. These complexities are explored in Chapters Three and Four.

Colonial discourses and stereotypes such as martial race discourse become hybrids. Difference is avowed or disavowed, impinging upon “colonialist

disavowal” and letting us see constructions of race as fractured exercises of power that render both the colonized and colonizer as mutually co-constituted imaginaries, identities made in reference to one another and entirely constituted by this colonialist encounter.⁴⁰

Contact Zones and Third Spaces

Examining colonial discourse as constituting British and Indian Self-Other conceptualizations places my project in the context of colonial discourse analysis that troubles the unidirectional notion of this discourse. As Williams and Chrisman put it:

Rather than being that other onto which the coloniser projects a previously constituted subjectivity and knowledge, native presences, locations, and political resistance need to be further theorised as having a determining or primary role in colonial discourses, and in the attendant domestic versions of these discourses. In other words, the movement may have been as much from 'periphery' to 'centre' as from 'centre' to 'periphery.'⁴¹

Colonial discourse and the multidirectional movements that constitute it involve encounters between colonizer and colonized, taking place in the spaces Pratt described as contact zones. Migration creates contact zones, and in an imperial

⁴⁰ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 162.

⁴¹ Williams and Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, 16.

context power asymmetry allows the colonizer's own discourses of similarity and difference to predominate in representations of the colonized.

Through the lens of mobility and movement, I extend my analysis of martial race discourse beyond the contact zone of colonial India to observe the travels of the discourse across other productive spaces of colonial encounter – in this case, through the contact zones of Indian military migration in World War I and its contemporary memorialization. World War I upended the trajectory of imperial mobility, surveillance, and reportage between peoples of the imperial metropole and periphery, where these populations witnessed and imagined the other and inevitably structured their own ideas of themselves through mutual encounter. Pratt has called the contact zone the space of ‘transculturation’: where “subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.”⁴² Her questions regarding transculturation both in the colony and in the metropole are apposite to this thesis as she wonders how those who were subjugated by Europe contributed to European imaginations of themselves, and how these subjugated populations reproduced and still reproduce such transculturation “from colonies to the metropolis.”⁴³ Thus the third contact zone that contextualizes the thesis is that of

⁴² Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 6.

⁴³ Pratt, 6.

modern multicultural Britain and the transculturation of martial race discourse in World War I memory.

The contact zones of transculturation can be pushed further as a concept, as several scholars working with Homi Bhabha's nebulous notion of 'Third Space' have asserted. The contact zone, the Third Space, is the space "in which both cultures—colonizing and colonized—are changed," where the pure distinctions and hierarchies between cultures that the colonial ideologies rest upon are rendered untenable.⁴⁴ This Third Space – undefined and undefinable – is for Bhabha a metaphor for the space of liminality and hybridity that exists between the apparent purity of binary categories, such that we must appreciate that there is a vast 'third space' between such categories as 'periphery' and 'centre' and 'colonizer' and 'colonized' where these ideas are contingent mutually constructed. Imagining the third space of encounter, liminality and mutual construction of binaries enables us to do away with these binary concepts as verities in the first place and to appreciate "that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew."⁴⁵ That there is no distinct third space reveals that there is no distinct first or second space either: the third space of contact, contingency and negotiation characterizes the whole. These contact

⁴⁴ Bill Ashcroft, 'Caliban's Voice: Writing in the Third Space', in *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. Karin Ikas and Gerhard Wagner, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies 18 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 116.

⁴⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 55.

zones or Third Spaces are zones of hybridity, where the constitution of colonial identities becomes fluid and undecidable, undermining the categories that provide the logic of colonial authority.⁴⁶ Contact zones are thus ideal sites for the examination of colonial discourses of identity and the (dis)ordering of racial categories, which are untied to the strict binary imaginations of centre and periphery, of colonizer and colonized, and of British and Indian.

World War I and Military Migration

In 2013 Heather Jones wrote an overview of the state of the art of World War I historiography; she identified an initial tendency to privilege the war experiences of the United Kingdom and the anglophone nations of the United States, New Zealand and Australia, which in the 1990s evolved into a study of the war as a pan-European experience, and with the approach of the Centenary began to open up to the global dimensions of the ‘world’ war, with a growing emphasis on its racial and colonial dimensions.⁴⁷ War history suffered from being written from the perspective of those ‘above’, creating a Eurocentric emphasis on generals and the colonial officer class, which erased and subsumed the experiences of colonial forces beyond their instrumentality – their ‘contribution’ – to the war efforts of

⁴⁶ Britta Kalscheuer, ‘Encounters in the Third Space Links Between Intercultural Communication Theories and Postcolonial Approaches’, in *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. Karin Ika and Gerhard Wagner, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies 18 (New York: Routledge, 2009), 38.

⁴⁷ Heather Jones, ‘As the Centenary Approaches: The Regeneration of First World War Historiography’, *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 3 (September 2013): 874–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X13000216>.

European powers.⁴⁸ The historiography of World War I cannot ignore that the chief combatants on the Western Front were imperialist states. The United Kingdom, France and Germany had extensive non-European dominions and colonies. A global history of the war must account for the extra-territorial influence of these empires, their webs of alliances and their influence on global society and economics that ensured that the war was felt across the world and pulled in the participation of independent, non-European states such as Japan, the United States and China. Santanu Das, reflecting on the movements of the Japanese against the Germans in China and the New Zealander occupation of the German protectorate of Samoa, wrote that the “litany of place names often becomes the marker of the ‘world’ nature of the First World War.”⁴⁹ The focus on battles, on the geography and chronology of the war, obscures the impacts of the war across the – frequently subject – peoples of the world. Das encourages us to “substitute people, processes and effects of the war for places and events” to get a sense of the magnitude of the imperial conflict.⁵⁰

A focus on “people, processes and effects of the war” is evident in a growing body of scholarship interested in the colonial experience of World War I.⁵¹ This ‘colonial turn’ in the scholarship intersects with an interest in studying

⁴⁸ Heike Liebau et al., eds., *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, Studies in Global Social History, v. 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 1–3.

⁴⁹ Santanu Das, ed., *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

⁵⁰ Das, 4.

⁵¹ Liebau et al., *The World in World Wars*.

the war from a lens of mobility and migration.⁵² The war is now being productively seen as “an unparalleled period of circulations and exchanges.”⁵³

Over the course of the war 53,512,000 soldiers were posted in European countries outside their countries of origin, of whom 733,000 were from European colonies.⁵⁴

Envisioning World War I as a space of migration is consistent with Joshua Sanborn’s characterization of World War I as a series of ‘violent migrations’ where the war “started with trains, not with trenches.”⁵⁵

The field of migration scholarship has typically ignored the figure of the colonial soldier, as indeed it has ignored the *soldier*. Lucassen & Smit have provided both an examination of the tendencies in migration scholarship that prevent an analysis of the soldier on the move, and a theory of ‘organizational migration’ that embeds the soldier (as well as the diplomat and the missionary) into migration studies.⁵⁶ The very standard view of migration in migration studies is that economic push-and-pull factors induce free agents to move to where their labour would be most profitable, with social factors such as family or cultural and

⁵² Matthew Stibbe, ‘Introduction: Captivity, Forced Labour and Forced Migration during the First World War’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 26, no. 1–2 (March 2008): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619280802442571>.

⁵³ Emmanuelle Cronier and Victor Demiaux, ‘Encountering the Other in Wartime: The Great War as an Intercultural Moment?’, *First World War Studies* 9, no. 2 (4 May 2018): 142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2019.1651215>.

⁵⁴ Leo Lucassen et al., ‘Cross-Cultural Migration in Western Europe 1901–2000: A Preliminary Estimate’ (IISH, 2014), 78.

⁵⁵ Leo Lucassen and Aniek X. Smit, ‘The Repugnant Other: Soldiers, Missionaries, and Aid Workers as Organizational Migrants’, *Journal of World History* 26, no. 1 (2016): 1–39, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2016.0024>; Joshua A. Sanborn, ‘Unsettling the Empire: Violent Migrations and Social Disaster in Russia during World War I’, *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 2 (June 2005): 295, <https://doi.org/10.1086/431816>.

⁵⁶ Lucassen and Smit, ‘The Repugnant Other’.

colonial ties influencing the decision.⁵⁷ The eventual scholarly and political attention to the formation of ethnic minority populations due to migrants who settled down in their host communities has given rise to a contemporary understanding of migration as a problem to manage, affixed to the political questions of citizenship, belonging and national identity.⁵⁸ This ‘methodological nationalism’ in the framing and purpose of migration analysis has been criticized.⁵⁹ Lucassen & Smit have further argued that migration scholarship resists the widespread scholarly recognition of what they call ‘organizational migrants’ because migrants traveling on the whims of an organization do not exert agency or rational chance, and organizational migrants – soldiers, missionaries, aid workers and colonial officials – have historically been the opposite of the downtrodden subaltern figure that much of migration scholarship aims to highlight and give voice to. Organizational migrants are regarded within the scholarship as “reactionary instruments in the hands of capitalist, imperialist, and repressive elites.” As such, though soldiers may themselves be low-income peasants, their role as invaders associated with hegemonic forces casts them

⁵⁷ Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1998), chap. 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-26846-7>.

⁵⁸ Mary Bosworth, ‘Border Control and the Limits of the Sovereign State’, *Social & Legal Studies* 17, no. 2 (June 2008): 199–215, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0964663908089611>.

⁵⁹ Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller, ‘Methodological Nationalism and beyond: Nation-State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences’, *Global Networks* 2, no. 4 (October 2002): 301–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043>.

outside the ideological purview of migration studies – to migration scholars they are “repugnant others.”⁶⁰

Lucassen and Smit build on Joshua Sanborn’s study of the recruitment and deployment of soldiers by the Russian Empire during World War I. War is intimately tied to mobility, as Sanborn observed. Military mobility is a given as “war plans hinge on moving men into the best position to kill the enemy,” and war also creates civilian mobility via forced displacement, labour force transformations and the creation of deportation regimes to “solidify” the political community.⁶¹ The movements of vast amounts of men across the fronts of war were intrinsic to the military plans of strategists across all the great powers in World War I, and Sanborn argued that such vast population movements (Russia alone mobilized 14.9 million soldiers) were ‘violent migrations’ which had inevitable, far-reaching social impacts. The ‘ideal type’ of the ‘marginal migrant’ focuses on the relative powerlessness of the migrant in their new social realm; but also common to all migrants is the act of leaving a community and joining a new one. Sanborn argued that soldiers may occupy positions of power in their new social contexts, but they experience feelings of social dislocation just as civilian migrants do.⁶² The “forging of new social ties” is a key factor differentiating migration from mobility in most migration typologies.⁶³ Soldiers are deliberately

⁶⁰ Lucassen and Smit, ‘The Repugnant Other’, 4 & 37.

⁶¹ Sanborn, ‘Unsettling the Empire’, 290.

⁶² Sanborn, 294.

⁶³ Lucassen and Smit, ‘The Repugnant Other’, 2.

desocialized from their civilian social relations, and resocialized into new 'tribes' within the barrack room.⁶⁴ However, despite historical efforts to prevent these new military tribes interacting with civilians, soldiers at the front "coexisted and interacted with other combatant and non-combatant social groups in a larger war zone social system that included enemy troops, civilians on both sides of the pre-war borders, and the wide range of auxiliary forces that helped to feed and maintain the army in the field."⁶⁵ Military migration thus resembles more 'conventional' labour migration, with migration affecting social interaction and change at the point of departure, at the point of arrival, and at the point of return.

Military migration has a long history in the colonial context. Ulbe Bosma describes the extensive use of white European soldiers to not only militarily expand the frontiers of empire, but to then populate this frontier as settler colonists.⁶⁶ Thus, military labour migration translated to more 'traditional' forms of labour migration involving long-term habitation. In many parts of the European empires, particularly in Asia, soldiers were preferred over other forms of white settler labour because it was considered crucial to white prestige to exclude the white working class from entering the frontier labour markets, and because enclaves of settlement built around serving troops and retired veterans

⁶⁴ Sanborn, 'Unsettling the Empire', 300.

⁶⁵ Sanborn, 298.

⁶⁶ Ulbe Bosma, 'European Colonial Soldiers in the Nineteenth Century: Their Role in White Global Migration and Patterns of Colonial Settlement', *Journal of Global History* 4, no. 2 (July 2009): 317–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022809003179>.

would be better placed to react to military emergencies.⁶⁷ The scholarship on the colonial soldier largely focuses on the *white* colonial soldier in the imperial periphery. The other sort of colonial soldier, the subject of my thesis, is the local, colonized man employed as an enforcer of imperial security. The non-white subject soldier problematizes the categorization of the organizational migrant as a ‘repugnant other’: they were themselves subalterns within an imperial regime, even if their role as military enforcers of the regime renders this subalternity imperfect. The mass mobilization and deployment of non-white labour during the First World War forces us to evaluate them as organizational migrants themselves. The agency of the colonial soldier should be read in the context of recent scholarship which problematizes the extent to which white ‘volunteer’ forces during the war, even men recruited to serve in their own national armies, could have consented to participate in the unprecedented industrial violence of World War I.⁶⁸

Regardless of whether the colonial soldier is viewed as truly or imperfectly subaltern, repugnant, or pitiable, their military deployment beyond the boundaries of their homelands and into Western Europe during World War I requires scholarly consideration. Scholars who do not position themselves within

⁶⁷ David Arnold, ‘White Colonization and Labour in Nineteenth-century India’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 11, no. 2 (January 1983): 133–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03086538308582635>.

⁶⁸ John Horne and Len Smith, ‘The Soldiers’ War: Coercion or Consent’, in *The Legacy of the Great War: Ninety Years On*, ed. Jay Winter (Columbia : Kansas City, Mo: University of Missouri Press ; National World War I Museum, 2009).

the field of migration studies have engaged with the colonial soldier in World War I as a military or labour migrant without the hesitancy Lucassen & Smit identify within the field. The ‘migration turn’ and ‘colonial turn’ intersect in the production of work studying the phenomenon of colonial military labour migration in World War I, to which this thesis is a contribution. This scholarship envisions World War I as “a turning point in the history of cultural encounter and entanglements” due to the novelty of so many non-white men from the colonies encountering Europeans through “transcontinental military migration.”⁶⁹ As Das put it:

In a grotesque reversal of Conrad’s vision, hundreds of thousands of non-white men were voyaging to the heart of whiteness and beyond to witness the ‘horror, the horror’ of Western civilization.⁷⁰

These ‘hundreds and thousands of non-white men’ have attracted scholarship such as Christian Koller’s excellent introduction to the field of World War I colonial migration. Koller has written in detail on the recruitment and deployment of soldiers of colour to Europe by the French and British empires – and the discursive reactions to this deployment in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and by the soldiers themselves.⁷¹ David Olusoga, writer of *The World’s*

⁶⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 31; Koller, ‘The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War’, 114 Koller provides an overview of the full range of colonial recruitment and deployment to Europe.

⁷⁰ Santanu Das, ‘The Singing Subaltern’, *Parallax* 17, no. 3 (August 2011): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.584409>.

⁷¹ Koller, ‘The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War’; Christian Koller, ‘Representing Otherness: African, Indian and

War (2014), has also been a key figure in reviving and sustaining British popular interest in the colonial war experience.⁷² Santanu Das' edited volume *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (2011) also contains several important contributions to the study of colonial, interracial encounter across wartime contact zones.⁷³ Philippa Levine was an early writer exploring the intersection of gender and class in racialized reactions to encounters between soldiers of colour and white women in Europe, a theme most extensively explored by Iris Wigger in her study of the international campaign of racist panic around the 'Black Shame' – the French deployment of African soldiers in the occupied Rhineland following the war.⁷⁴ The volume *The World in World Wars* edited by Heike Liebau et al. places the deployment of colonial labour overseas during World War I in the context of military migration and reverberations in various home fronts across the peripheries in both World Wars.⁷⁵ Outside the work contained in generalist volumes, scholars have also focused on the military deployment of specific groups of colonial soldiers such as Joe Lunn's work on soldiers from French Africa deployed to Europe, Adrian Muckle's exploration of the use of Kanak soldiers from New Caledonia (still a part of Overseas France), Richard Smith's

European Soldiers' Letters and Memoirs', in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁷² David Olusoga, *The World's War* (Head of Zeus, 2014).

⁷³ Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*.

⁷⁴ Philippa Levine, 'Battle Colors: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldierly in World War I', *Journal of Women's History* 9, no. 4 (1998): 104–30, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0213>; Iris Wigger, *The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Intersections of Race, Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-31861-9>.

⁷⁵ Liebau et al., *The World in World Wars*.

specialization in the Caribbean war experience and its influence on pan-African nationalism, Franchesca Walker and Christopher Pugsley's respective works on the martial race imaginaries of Maori war experience and Timothy C. Winegard's writing on Canadian First Nations soldiers (much of this scholarship intersecting with the problematic of indigenous military service in colonialist wars.)⁷⁶

A notable development is Storm and Al Tuma's recent volume on the migration of colonial soldiers to Europe during both World Wars, which they explicitly position within the field of migration studies by invoking Lucassen & Smit's argument for studying military deployment as a migration.⁷⁷ I hope to join my thesis to Storm and Al Tuma's work in encouraging migration scholarship to use Lucassen & Smit's concept of organizational migration as a bridge toward considering this moment of mass migration to Europe from the colonies as indeed a 'migration' that can be approached within the bounds of the discipline.

⁷⁶ Joe Lunn, "Les Races Guerrieres": Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 4 (1999): 517-36; Adrian Muckle, 'Kanak Experiences of WWI: New Caledonia's *Tirailleurs*, Auxiliaries and "Rebels"', *History Compass* 6, no. 5 (September 2008): 1325-45, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2008.00553.x>; Richard Smith, 'The Multicultural First World War: Memories of the West Indian Contribution in Contemporary Britain', *Journal of European Studies* 45, no. 4 (December 2015): 347-63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244115599147>; Franchesca Walker, "'Descendants of a Warrior Race": The Maori Contingent, New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, and Martial Race Myth, 1914-19', *War & Society* 31, no. 1 (March 2012): 1-21, <https://doi.org/10.1179/204243411X13201386799091>; Christopher Pugsley, *Te Hokowhita a Tu: The Maori Pioneer Battalion in the First World War* (Birkenhead, Auckland, N.Z.: Reed, 1995); Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012); Noah Riseman, 'The Rise of Indigenous Military History', *History Compass*, 2014, 11.

⁷⁷ Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, 'Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945', in *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945: 'Aliens in Uniform' in Wartime Societies*, ed. Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, Routledge Studies in Modern History (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 10.

No instance of colonial military labour migration during the war has received as much attention as the movement of Indians. Santanu Das of King's College is particularly prominent within his field. Das' *India, Empire and First World War Culture* is one of the most recent and comprehensive works looking into the discursive field of Indian war participation. Das' book:

... Excavates the interwoven lives and cultural forms of several groups of people, including the Indians who served abroad, the people whom they encountered or who represented them... and, finally, men and women back in India.⁷⁸

The book serves to bring forward into scholarly analysis hitherto obscure or quite recently discovered sources of representations – such as a Bengali play celebrating the expansion of military recruitment into the 'non-martial' Bengali community⁷⁹ and testimony: most notably letters and journals from Mesopotamia⁸⁰ and the personal diaries and letters of soldiers and labourers.⁸¹ It is the book that pointed me toward the novels I examine in Chapters Four of this thesis, where I build on Das' analysis. In 2010 Claude Markovits, examining the British censors' collections of letters written by Indian soldiers, had said that they were the only viable source of sepoy testimony "since no wartime diaries have miraculously surfaced in some barn in the Punjab."⁸² Das' book is proof of how

⁷⁸ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 14.

⁷⁹ Das, 68.

⁸⁰ Das, chap. 6.

⁸¹ Das, chap. 7.

⁸² Claude Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front', in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives*

rapidly the field of scholarship is evolving that Markovits was shown to be wrong less than ten years later.

Aside from Das, Markovits himself has edited, along with Ashutosh Kumar, a recent volume solely dedicated to the Indian war experience.⁸³ The book features chapters by Kaushik Roy and Shrabani Basu, who have also published their own respective books on the subject, Basu specifically focusing on India on the Western Front.⁸⁴ George Morton-Jack has also written on the Indian Army in Europe in detail from a military history perspective.⁸⁵ Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja edited a pioneering volume drawing from the archives of German prisoner of war camps for South Asian soldiers during the war.⁸⁶ Radhika Singha, meanwhile, has written on the relatively neglected topic of Indian civilian labour during the War.⁸⁷ The war years have also been an important focus for scholars focusing on the transformation of Indian politics during the era, with Sharmishta Roy Chowdhury's recent book focusing on the impact of war and mobility on Indian anticolonialism a highlight, and Robert

from Africa and Asia, ed. Heike Liebau, *Studies in Global Social History*, v. 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 39.

⁸³ Ashutosh Kumar and Claude Markovits, eds., *Indian Soldiers in the First World War: Re-Visiting a Global Conflict*, 1st ed. (Routledge India, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003142362>.

⁸⁴ Kaushik Roy, *Indian Army and the First World War, 1914-18*, First edition (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2018); Shrabani Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury Publishing India, 2015).

⁸⁵ George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*, ed. Hew Strachan and Geoffrey Wawro, *Cambridge Military Histories* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁸⁶ Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau, and Ravi Ahuja, *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany* (Social Science Press, 2011).

⁸⁷ Radhika Singha, *The Coolie's Great War: Indian Labour in a Global Conflict, 1914-1921* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).

McLain's study of the ideologies of military masculinity in India before and immediately after the war is a key text guiding my thinking in this project.⁸⁸ Also notable is Gajendra Singh's writing on the testimonies of Indian soldiers during the World Wars, which is an important companion in my exploration of David Omissi's volume on sepoy correspondence from World War I's Western Front – a key source for my work in Chapter Five of this thesis.⁸⁹ Also worthy of note is Claire Buck's chapter on British wartime discourses of Indian military migration to Europe, and I build on her work alongside Das in my analysis in Chapter Four and Five of the sepoy in war novels.⁹⁰ I drawn upon other scholarly works on the history of the Indian Army, most notably David Omissi's *The Sepoy and the Raj* (1994), Tan Tai Yong's *The Garrison State* (2005), Philip Mason's *A Matter of Honour* (1976) and George Morton-Jack's *The Indian Army on the Western Front* (2004).⁹¹ While the scholarship on the Indian soldier on World War I's Western Front is rich and diverse, it is not oversaturated. There has been little examination of representations and self-imaginings of the sepoy through the lens of martial race discourse during World War I. A notable example is John

⁸⁸ Sharmishtha Roy Chowdhury, *The First World War, Anticolonialism and Imperial Authority in British India, 1914–1924*, 1st ed. (London ; New York, NY : Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2019.: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429439025>; McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*.

⁸⁹ Gajendra Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, War, Culture and Society, 2014; Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*.

⁹⁰ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, chap. 1.

⁹¹ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*; Tai Yong Tan, *The Garrison State: The Military, Government and Society in Colonial Punjab 1849-1947*, Sage Series in Modern Indian History 8 (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage, 2005); Mason, *A Matter of Honour*; Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*.

Soboslai's work on Sikh identity, and Heather Streets' chapter on self-representation in her book on martial race discourse.⁹²

Streets' book, *Martial Races*, is perhaps the most comprehensive book on the emergence of martial race discourse and is frequently cited within the field. Her analysis of the discourse as palliative to British anxieties over losing control in India is a key resource in Chapter Three of this thesis.⁹³ Streets' historical focus is also unique in that it carries the analysis of martial race discourse into the war years themselves, and this is work I build on in this thesis. While there are many other scholars who have written articles on martial race discourse and the ideological composition of the Indian Army, including some works of great significance for this project, the literature tends to focus on the war as the cut-off point for analysis, or stops shortly afterwards – with the contemporary reverberations of martial race discourse as an afterthought, if explored at all.⁹⁴

⁹² John Soboslai, 'Sikh Self-Sacrifice and Religious Representation during World War I', *Religions* 9, no. 2 (10 February 2018): 55, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9020055>; Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, chap. 6.

⁹³ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*.

⁹⁴ Pradeep Barua, 'Inventing Race: The British and India's Martial Races', *The Historian* 58, no. 1 (September 1995): 107–16, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6563.1995.tb00942.x>; Kaushik Roy, 'Recruitment Doctrines of the Colonial Indian Army: 1859–1913', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 34, no. 3 (1997); Kaushik Roy, 'Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880–1918', *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 4 (July 2013): 1310–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X12000431>; Amar Farooqui, "'Divide and Rule'? Race, Military Recruitment and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Colonial India', *Social Scientist* 43, no. 3/4 (April 2015): 12; Tejimala Gurung, 'The Making of Gurkha as a "martial Race" in Colonial India: Theory and Practice', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 75 (2014): 11; Kohli, ' Militarization of Sikh Masculinity'; McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914–1919*; David Omissi, "'Martial Races": Ethnicity and Security in Colonial India 1858–1939', *War & Society* 9, no. 1 (May 1991): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1179/072924791791202404>; Gavin Rand, "'Martial Races" and "Imperial Subjects": Violence and Governance in Colonial India, 1857–1914', *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 13, no. 1 (March 2006): 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480600586726>; Gavin Rand and Kim A. Wagner, 'Recruiting the

Examining World War I and its commemoration as sites for the perpetuation of martial race discourse outside the contact zone of colonial India is my primary contribution to the temporal scope of the literature on martial colonial discourse. Through following martial race discourse as my central object of analysis I also contribute to the existing scholarship that analyses wartime representations of the sepoy, and of sepoy testimony: I argue for the centrality of martial race discourse, with its complexities and contradictions, in understanding how the sepoy was imagined – and thereby how he continues to be imagined today.

“Martial Races”: Identities and Military Service in Colonial India’, *Patterns of Prejudice* 46, no. 3-4 (July 2012): 232-54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2012.701495>.

3. IMAGINING THE SEPOY IN INDIA: MARTIAL RACE DISCOURSES BETWEEN SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

There was an “essential strangeness” to the ideas that determined the composition of the armies of colonial India.⁹⁵ From the mid 19th century onwards, deliberately responding to the crisis of 1857 when the Indian soldiers of the Bengal Army revolted against the British, the British practised a policy of racial discrimination in recruiting Indians for the colonial military. The discourse of ‘martial races’ imagined Indians as divided into distinct racial types, with only some races capable of serving in the military. As George MacMunn, one of the most enthusiastic writers on martial race discourse, argued in 1933:

We speak of the martial races as a thing apart because the mass of the people have neither the martial aptitude nor physical courage... the courage that we should talk of colloquially as ‘guts.’⁹⁶

Classic examples of these peoples with ‘guts’ were Sikhs of the Punjab, transfrontier Pathans, and Nepalese Gurkha mercenaries. These martial races were elevated in colonial discourse above the mass of India’s populations through Victorian and early 20th century pseudoscientific imaginations of a shared Aryan

⁹⁵ Mary Des Chene, ‘Military Ethnology in British India’, *South Asia Research* 19, no. 2 (October 1999): 121, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272809901900202>.

⁹⁶ George Fletcher MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston & Co., 1933), 3.

heritage between these 'races' and Europeans. In this chapter I analyze the circumstances that produced this discourse of differentiation that separated India's populations between martial and non-martial, entrusting as collaborators into the business of colonial security those populations imagined as having a closer proximity to a British European self in a landscape of racialized Indian Others.

There were three major functions to this system of racial classification. The first function was to reassure a vulnerable British population surrounded by a potentially hostile colonized population that the best sorts of Indians were devoted to their defence. In response to security crises such as 1857, the encroachment of Russia southwards through Central Asia and rising Indian nationalist at the turn of the 20th century, the British needed a narrative that extolled the racial virtues of their chosen soldier populations over the Indian masses. The categorization represented by the project of martial race theory was a process of constant crisis management on the part of the British; the definitions of which races were and were not 'martial,' and thereby suitable for colonial security, changed in response to prevailing imperial panics and anxieties.

The second function was to justify British rule. As part of a wider project of narrating and ordering India's history to support an imperialist agenda of rule, the British imagined that India's past had consisted of continual invasions by hardy, fair-skinned martial races whose ancestry the British narrated as akin to

Europeans through the imagination of a shared Aryan heritage. British rule could then be placed in a historical continuum alongside the conquests of these martial races. The British played an important function in stabilizing India and preventing the 'virile' and 'masculine' martial races preying upon the non-martial and lethargic populations of India. Colonial rule was necessary to prevent the inevitable anarchy that would follow should the non-martial intellectual politicians assume control over an independent India. Complicating this goal of eternal British rule was the rhetoric of martial race theorists like MacMunn who expressed the view that eventually India would be handed over to its natural rulers, the martial races – but only after these populations were sufficiently made ready through a British stewardship that could thus be perpetually justified.

The third function thus stems from this contempt for the Indian intellectual politician and a preference for a hypothetical autonomous India ruled in the future by the martial races. The martial races could be imagined as better successors to British rule due to a discourse of relative racial proximity compared to the 'non-martial' intellectual classes. Martial race discourse gave the British an example of the right sort of Indian to feel kinship towards. Martial race discourse displays the tension at the heart of British ideologies in their rule over India, a barely coherent and frequently self-contradictory assemblage of ideas that grappled with the need to assert Indians as different from Europeans (a difference that meant a subaltern inferiority) and counter-imaginings of Indians as similar

(and thus potentially equal) to Europeans.⁹⁷ As the Indian intellectual and politician over time became increasingly capable of demanding equal rights and autonomy in the imperial framework, asserting a discourse of similarity against that of an imperial ideology of difference, the martial race soldier became the essential antithesis of the intellectual. The sepoy embodied an ambivalent stereotype as necessarily different from and inferior to the British but possessing a similarity to the British that was preferred to the colonial 'mimic man' of the intellectual. Moreover, the sepoy embodied a desire to be all that the British imperialists wished they *themselves* were: chivalrous, masculine, hardy, warlike and uncorrupted by modernity. Martial race discourse thus substitutes the British fear of resemblance to the 'wrong' sort of India with the ambivalent pleasure/unpleasure of imagining kinship to the 'right' sort of Indian.

I approach martial race discourse as a British colonial discourse that drew on existing Indian discourses and which in turn shaped both British and Indian imaginations of themselves and each other. In making these three arguments about the function of martial race discourse I aim to explore the discourse as an ambivalent terrain whose stereotypes were neither purely positive nor negative,

⁹⁷ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Repr, The New Cambridge History of India / General Ed. Gordon Johnson 3, The Indian Empire and the Beginnings of Modern Society 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

both held to be evidently true as well as in need of an ever-more exacting level of proof – “in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed.”⁹⁸

I structure this chapter in two major parts. The first section, ‘The Development of Martial Race Discourse,’ tracks the history of martial race discourse from its early stages before the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857 and its aftermath. The second major section of this chapter, ‘The Englishman, the Babu and the Sepoy’ presents martial race discourse as a means of imagining difference and similarity within a triadic constellation of three major categories: the British, the non-martial intellectual classes of India, and the martial races themselves.

The Development of Martial Race Discourse

By the early 19th century, the British had hegemony over India. The security of the British position in the subcontinent and the relative ease with which European troops had defeated Indian armies produced a culture of contempt for the peoples of India as having “a dastardly disposition and an invincible timidity.”⁹⁹ However, in the contact zone of this Indian colony British imperialists found themselves in a land with an ancient history and cultural richness with classical ties to Europe, markers of Indian civilization that could not be denied yet needed to be articulated in terms of the evident mastery of European civilization. This

⁹⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 95.

⁹⁹ Richard Owen Cambridge, *An Account of the War in India, between the English and French, on the Coast of Coromandel, from the Year 1750 to 1760* (London, 1761); quoted in Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 54.

contrasted to the context of colonialism in Africa, where race logics enabled an easier blindness toward the existence of indigenous culture and history.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, colonial rule over India was enacted through the collaboration of Indian soldiers. Locally recruited Indian soldiers were a key part of the British security apparatus, taking a cue from 18th century French-trained sepoy armies.¹⁰¹ These sepoy soldiers of the British were the site on which the tensions between competing British discourses that articulated Indians as by turns similar to, and then different from, Europeans played out. Martial race discourse began to emerge through British preferences for recruiting Indians they identified as most somatically and culturally – thereby racially – similar to Europeans: the ‘Brahmanization’ of the army through the domination of upper caste Hindus from the north of India.

‘Brahmanization’ requires contextualization in the racial politics of 19th century British India before the turning point of the 1857 ‘mutiny’ – when colonial discourse did not yet assert the inherent, racialized inferiority of the colonized Indian. Britain, a society internally transforming along principles of liberal enlightenment and increasing social enfranchisement, had a tense relationship with its empire, whose very existence seemed to contradict the principles of equality and suffrage touted at home. Thomas Metcalf identified this central tension at the heart of the British Empire as the clash between discourses of

¹⁰⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 83.

¹⁰¹ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 34.

Indian similarity and difference vis à vis Britons.¹⁰² The prevailing view saw the Indian as different due to civilizational backwardness, which necessitated a colonial rule that continued in the authoritarian, conservative framework imagined as the Indian social milieu. In the meantime, British education was crucial to lift Indians out of their civilizational backwardness and toward a future where they were no longer essentially different from Englishmen. Thomas Babington Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) outlined this agenda of 'liberal imperialism' through the "creation of a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect," who would be the vanguard of the transformation of India into a society worthy of the liberal principles that dominated British domestic political discourse.¹⁰³ While asserting Indians' fundamental potential to become similar to Britons, Macaulay also disparaged their contemporary culture as different and inferior – "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia."

Metcalf argued that Macaulay's statement was a common device to assert that Indians, whatever their future, were decidedly not *at the moment* the equals of the Britons who ruled them – and thus empire in its present configuration did

¹⁰² Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

¹⁰³ Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Minute on Education (1835) by Thomas Babington Macaulay', 2 February 1835, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/oogenerallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html.

not contradict British liberalism.¹⁰⁴ A future Indian population, headed by anglicized Indian intellectuals, could one day take its place on the same level as the British. This future would come to be seen in British discourse as *always* just that: a future, an India never quite in existence. The population designated in British discourse as the native vanguard of Indian reform in the English image would stray from the intellectual classes to the martial races. Thus, even discourses of similarity crucially hinged on the existence of difference, and through this difference true equality and colonial autonomy could be infinitely deferred under the project of endless colonial reform:

On the one hand... under certain conditions of colonial domination and control the native is progressively reformable. On the other, however, it effectively displays the 'separation', makes it more visible. It is the visibility of this separation which, in denying the colonized the capacities of self-government, independence, Western modes of civility, lends authority to the official version and mission of colonial power.¹⁰⁵

Indians were not just potential future partners of Britons (where 'potential' and 'future' should be read with irony); they were also imagined as sharing a common past. British scholarly interest in Indian history and linguistics gave rise to the notion of a common origin between Indians and Europeans through the Aryan civilization. Alexander the Great's invasion was conceptualized as a key

¹⁰⁴ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 118.

turning point in Indian history where European Greek blood entered India's populations.¹⁰⁶ Imagining Indians and Britons as racially linked in the past both reinforced the rhetoric and desire to elevate Indians to the same civilizational status as contemporary Britons and raised the anxiety-inducing question of how a common racial origin could account for the civilizational disparity between Indians and Britons in the first place. In the tension between discourses of similarity and difference between Indians and Britons, martial race discourse began to coalesce to provide answers that ideologically enabled the perpetuation of British control in India. A racial logic emerged that argued for differing degrees of proximity to the European body among an Indian population that was not homogenous, but instead could be finely graded down into racial categories.

It was argued that while Aryans in Europe had triumphed over lesser aboriginal peoples, in India they had experienced racial decline.¹⁰⁷ Having entered from the north to conquer India's 'native' Dravidian and 'Aboriginal' peoples, these 'Aryan' peoples had subsequently suffered several evils that had distanced them from their near-European ancestors. According to MacMunn they were victims...

... Of early marriage, of premature brides, and juvenile eroticism, of a thousand years of malaria and hook-worm, and other ills of neglected sanitation in a hot climate, and the deteriorating effect of

¹⁰⁶ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 86; MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 83.

aeons of tropical sun on races that were once white and lived in uplands and on cool steppes.¹⁰⁸

Misinterpretations of India's pervasive caste system led to a racialized understanding of caste that conflated incidences of upper-caste populations with the taller and lighter-skinned northern and western populations to argue that caste status was a marker also of Aryan heritage.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, notions of caste purity implied that Aryan and Grecian traits would be more visible in upper caste populations.¹¹⁰ This notion of European racial and civilizational kinship to upper caste Hindus and northern Indians played a key role in structuring the nature of the East India Company's Bengal Army.

Until the 1880s, the British operated three separate Indian armies, each tied to one of the East India Company's local centers of power, or 'Presidencies': there was the army of the Madras Presidency on the East Coast, the Bombay Presidency in the West, and the Bengal Presidency in the North.¹¹¹ Kept apart by the terrain of central India, these Presidencies were each autonomous, and this included their recruitment practices.¹¹² While the Bombay and Madras Presidencies recruited locally, the Bengal Army in the north developed a preference for the taller, fairer-skinned high-caste Hindus (often Brahmins) from the Bihar and Awadh provinces – a preference that by 1855 had become policy,

¹⁰⁸ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 125.

¹¹⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 127.

¹¹¹ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, 3.

¹¹² MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 169.

with the restriction of lower-caste troops from the Bengal Army.¹¹³ This was referred to by British officers as the 'Brahmanisation' of the army.¹¹⁴

Recruiting from the upper-castes in the north was a strategy whereby the Company aligned itself to the shifting of a military power base towards upper-caste Hindus in the wake of the dissolution of Mughal power.¹¹⁵ The preference for upper-caste men in the Bengal Army transcended political convenience and reached toward subtler processes of British desires to associate with men they saw as more akin to themselves. Increasingly the British turned to casteism to recruit Indians that most resembled European standards of idealized masculinity:

They liked to see tall men, and they preferred them to be as far in complexion as was convenient and to have features of the kind they sometimes called 'Grecian.'¹¹⁶

Feelings of caste exclusivity among soldiers became encouraged in the Bengal Army, which accommodated a number of special considerations and privileges to its high-caste sepoys to maintain the legitimacy derived from the "high status profile of its army."¹¹⁷ Keeping low-caste men from the army also prevented the potential insult of a low-caste soldier of higher rank giving an order

¹¹³ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, 3-4.

¹¹⁴ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 172.

¹¹⁵ Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising, The Past in the Present* (Oxfordshire: Peter Lang, 2010), 33.

¹¹⁶ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 21.

¹¹⁷ Rand and Wagner, 'Recruiting the "Martial Races"', 237.

to a high-caste sepoy – reflecting the same racial hierarchy the British maintained in their own relationship to Indians.¹¹⁸

Contemporary observers frequently noted that the British colonial elite displayed as much caste consciousness as the upper-caste Hindus they recruited. Casteism was a British colonial elite's projection of their own society's obsessions with "social precedence, breeding and heredity" onto an Indian milieu. As Philip Mason wrote:

They had to find reasons for the privileges they enjoyed and it soothed them to feel that they were different by birth and heredity from the men in the ranks and this principle ran through all societies as well as their own.¹¹⁹

British beliefs in the superiority of the upper-castes were thus metonymic of British desires for confirmation of their distinctiveness from their Indian subjects. Colonial discourses of racial exclusivity were derived from observing exclusivity practiced within the colonized. Caste and its hierarchies operated as a signifier that resolved back toward the core idea of race, and white British superiority.

The discourse of casteism and the policy of Brahmanisation was at the same time not a pure British fantasy but also a reciprocal dialogue with how

¹¹⁸ Omissi, "Martial Races", 3.

¹¹⁹ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 360.

upper-caste Indians understood their own military exclusivity, and upper-caste sepoys in British employment consolidated their hold over recruitment – as British dominance caused other military work opportunities to dry up. British military employment consolidated a caste consciousness among sepoys not just through the Bengal Army as an opportunity for wealth and power for upper caste sepoys, but also a threat. Sepoys had mutinied in 1806, 1816 and in 1824¹²⁰ over perceived British attempts to violate their caste and religious practices, thereby opening them up to Christian conversion.¹²¹ For the sepoys, to lose caste, to become ‘untouchable’, would result in the ostracization of sepoys from their friends and families, and sepoys frequently complained about being shunned when their social circles saw their actions as potentially defiling their caste.¹²²

The British tended to lump all concerns of sepoys, secular or religious, under the umbrella of religious fanaticism and Indian over-punctiliousness over caste.¹²³ Caste in the military was thus by the mid 19th century a reflection and a British construction of Indian society, the site upon which British desires for self-exclusivity in the contact zone of colonial encounter took on existing Indian discourses and rearticulated a military caste consciousness. Indian communal

¹²⁰ The 1824 incident is particularly notable for the scale of the mutiny as well as its cause: a refusal to go along with overseas posting by ‘crossing the black water’. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 37–38.

¹²¹ Sultan-i-Rome, ‘The War of Independence, 1857, Swat’, in *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857 - Volume 1: Anticipations and Experiences in the Locality*, ed. Crispin Bates, vol. 1 (New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2013), 203; Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 37–38.

¹²² Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 29.

¹²³ Wagner, 37.

identities and categories became ambivalent triggers of ontological security and insecurity, pleasure/unpleasure – among Indian sepoy and their British employers alike.

Caste's ambivalence as a reassuring discourse was evident in the British reaction to the events of 1857. When the Bengal Army mutinied in 1857, the dominant British narrative after the fact argued the Brahmins of the army revolted over suppositions that their caste purity was being violated by the infamous greased cartridges.¹²⁴ Crispin Bates argued that the cartridge theory...

... Posited an entirely irrational and religious cause for the insurrection, which obviated the need to enquire too deeply into the malpractices, maladministration and exploitative practices of the East India Company's rule in north India.¹²⁵

The scapegoating of the religious beliefs of the Bengal Army is evidenced by MacMunn, whose pithy attempt at explaining the Mutiny simply states: "For reasons many, and none of them effective, the somewhat pampered Bengal Army in which caste had been allowed to become a tyrant, mutinied and often massacred its officers and Europeans generally, with every sort of painful

¹²⁴ In 1853, the East India Company updated the Bengal Army's standard issue weapon to the Enfield Pattern 1853 Rifled Musket. Loading through this musket's tight, rifled barrel require ramming a bullet in with a cartridge coated in grease. The firing drill first involved tearing the greased cartridge open with the teeth. Inability to dispute rumours that the grease was composed of pork and cow fat created a panic among Hindu and Muslim sepoy that they would be forced to handle religiously unclean cartridges and even touch them with their mouths (potentially ingesting the polluting grease.)Wagner, chap. 1.

¹²⁵ Crispin Bates, 'Introduction', in *Mutiny at the Margins: New Perspectives on the Indian Uprising of 1857 - Volume 1: Anticipations and Experiences in the Locality*, ed. Crispin Bates, vol. 1 (New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 2013), xvii.

atrocities.”¹²⁶ The British were absolved of their culpability in deliberately fostering a culture of caste-based exclusivity in the Bengal Army. The events of 1857 would trigger important shifts in discourses of Indian similarity and difference, and lead to the codification of a martial race discourse of colonial military recruitment. Race, hitherto signified by caste and by faith, would henceforth operate as the prime marker of difference within Indian populations.

The seeming irrationality and fanaticism displayed by the sepoys during the so-called Indian Mutiny reshaped British attitudes to India as no longer a land of civilizationally-backwards peoples awaiting liberal, Christian enlightenment: instead, the Mutiny showcased for the British the dangers of tampering with Indian societies that were fundamentally different, and which needed to be fully understood to prevent such a tragedy from repeating itself. Mamdani argued that the classificatory turn in colonial rule occurred in British India to prevent a repeat of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857; by defining the boundaries between populations, the colonial administration established where it would rule indirectly through a policy of non-interference, and beyond those boundaries it would exercise full authority.¹²⁷ The narrativizing of 1857 led to sharper delineations of racial boundaries in India, wherein the crimes of the sepoy were fantastically exaggerated alongside British anxieties of loss of control in India. Racial

¹²⁶ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 217.

¹²⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*, 1st edition, The W.E.B. Du Bois Lectures (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012), 26.

boundaries were reinforced using gender categories. Imperial power was rearranged to provide a sense of white, masculine security over white women from the imagined violent lusts of an effeminate Indian masculinity.

Hyper-violent stories of Indian violence against British women and children figured large in Mutiny reportage.¹²⁸ These ‘outrages’ against the figure of the innocent, vulnerable figure of the Christian woman and child became the defining feature of the Mutiny in the imperial imagination.¹²⁹ The belief that the many women killed by the mutineers had been raped beforehand became especially entrenched, despite a lack of evidence of widespread sexual violence committed by the sepoys.¹³⁰ Heroic narratives of British courage against the mutinous sepoys proved popular with readers, and a narrative of righteous, Christian vengeance against the violation of innocent white women and children was quickly built from the accounts from India. These imagined rapes were used to justify the brutality of the British response, whose excesses were commented on by very few observers. One these few was Karl Marx, who wrote:

The cruelties of the English are related as acts of martial vigor, told simply, rapidly, without dwelling on disgusting details, the outrages

¹²⁸ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 134.

¹²⁹ Jenny Sharpe, ‘The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency’, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, Nachdr. (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1994), 221.

¹³⁰ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 170.

of the natives, shocking as they are, are still deliberately exaggerated.¹³¹

And as Sharpe argued:

A discourse of power that violently enforced colonial law in the name of English women... the sexual signification of the Mutiny reports sanctioned the use of colonial force and violence in the name of moral influence.¹³²

The exaggerated fear of brown and black men raping white women is a well-documented feature of colonial discourse; fears of white sexual victimhood were demonstrated by Ann Stoler to have next to no correlation with actual instances of rape, and instead with...

... Concern over protection of white women intensified during real and perceived crises of control— threats to the internal cohesion of the European communities or infringements on its borders.¹³³

The Mutiny was one such crisis of control, and the myth of white rape would constantly recur across the genre of 'Mutiny novels' that were written until the end of World War II. These novels addressed threats to white, masculine control over the empire posed by Indian independence movements and British

¹³¹ Karl Marx, 'The Indian Revolt', *New York Daily Tribune*, 4 September 1857, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/09/16.htm>.

¹³² Sharpe, 'The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency', 234.

¹³³ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, vol. 40 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2002), 58, <http://choicereviews.org/review/10.5860/CHOICE.40-4761>.

feminism in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries.¹³⁴ Gendered signifiers were crucial to the construction of racial divides in colonial discourse.¹³⁵

Mason argued the supposedly fanatical violence of the sepoy during the Mutiny was read by the British as an oedipal assault against the sepoy against his British father figure, and the sexual violence supposedly visited against white women was an extension of the same. Mason argued that the Victorian image of the woman was as an idealized, untouchable figure whose chastity was paramount. British officers refrained from even discussing women in the mess, a chivalrous custom that revealed that “they could only regard [women] as objects of forbidden desire which they dared not openly discuss,” and of whom they were frightened. The notion that sepoys “whom the English despised because they were conquered, and, as they say so often, for their colour” had laid hands on these pure objects drove the British to a violent frenzy of reprisal. The myth that sexual assault had preceded the killings of British women was a projection onto the colonized male the fantasy of what the British officers would have most despised in themselves.¹³⁶ The sepoy body, imagined to be racially similar to that of the European, could represent through mimicry British anxieties of the self, and was as a result suitable for denigration and destruction for having violently

¹³⁴ Indeed, one of the most famous Raj novels, E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, hinges on the fear of rape. As Sharpe points out, this fear is directly tied to the sexual anxieties provoked by the Mutiny. Sharpe, 'The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency'.

¹³⁵ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 168; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

¹³⁶ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 296.

crossed a sexualized (and therefore ever the more anxiously guarded) race boundary. As Mannoni argued in his analysis of the colonized as a Caliban figure built as an imperfect, derisory mimic of a colonizing Prospero:

The observer is repelled by the thoughts he encounters in his own mind, and it seems to him that they are the thoughts of the people he is observing. In any such act of projection the subject's purpose is to recover his own innocence by accusing someone else of what he considers to be a fault in himself. Thus, in order to preserve our peace of mind, we are compelled to believe that people whose thoughts – as it seems to us – are the same as our own innermost thoughts, are inferior beings and have nothing in common with ourselves at all.¹³⁷

The British anxiety of being a white, dominant minority surrounded by a colonized subaltern Indian population manifested in a fear of being engulfed, common to all colonizers, where this fear of engulfment is “projected onto colonized peoples as *their* determination to devour the intruder whole” – and this engulfment was invariably triggered through the phantasm of interracial sexual violence, a fear projected onto a colonized body that was rarely guilty of any such thing.¹³⁸ The Mutiny transformed the British image of the high caste Brahmin soldiers of the Bengal. The formerly celebrated, martial and manly high caste Hindu had not just proven disloyal, through killing European women and

¹³⁷ Octave Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1956), 20.

¹³⁸ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*.

children they were imagined having committed the ultimate sin of transracial sexual violence, the eternal item of imperial paranoia and disgust.¹³⁹

However, the chivalrous British man who defended white womanhood against the rapacious sepoy did not fight alone in the Mutiny narratives. Martial race discourse first arose through the role played by Indian allies of the British during the uprising of the Bengal Army, where the admiration once shown to the upper-caste Hindu sepoy was abandoned in favour of new discourses of Indian heroism. Though the largely loyal Bombay and Madras Armies were instrumental in helping the British regain control during the Mutiny; the British military, like the popular imagination, was seized by the role played by newly-raised armies from the Punjab region, especially Sikhs, in recapturing the north of India from the mutineers. Positive reports of the courage and military capabilities of these 'loyal' Indian soldiers proliferated through British media, in the colonies as well as the metropole, and Sikhs as well as Nepalese Gurkha mercenaries became lionized as heroes of the mutiny – worthy sidekicks of the British officers and soldiers who commanded and fought alongside them.¹⁴⁰

The white heroes the Sikhs and Gurkhas fought alongside were themselves racialized, most notably in the figure of the Scots Highlander. The Highlander was already a much-romanticized figure in British media, and during the Mutiny

¹³⁹ Harriet Tytler, *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler, 1828-1858*, ed. Anthony Sattin (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 140.

¹⁴⁰ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*.

he became the embodying symbol of the qualities of the British soldier: “Christian fortitude, selfless regard for duty, and cool competency in the face of battle against native insurgents.”¹⁴¹ Imagined as a ‘natural-born soldier’, that is, a member of a *white* martial race, the Scottish Highlander was an exotic ‘other’ who was simultaneously an aspirational embodiment of a British, military masculine ‘self’. Sikhs, already imbued with martial characteristics by British observers due to their resistance during Punjab’s annexation, silenced any doubt about their loyalty through military actions that often saw them working alongside Highlanders. Shared stories of their exploits saw these groups, one white and the other brown, co-constituted as martial races fighting in fidelity to the British empire and avenging violence against white women. As Streets argued:

Sikhs, by aligning themselves with the British, were increasingly imagined, in contrast to ‘dishonourable’ rebels, as possessing the ideal masculine qualities rebels so clearly lacked. Highlanders, in turn, seemed even more fearless, ruthless and savage fighting alongside Sikhs - qualities that were believed necessary for punishing Indians properly for their outrages against ‘innocents’. As such, tales of Highlanders and Sikhs together fulfilled fantasies about masculine revenge while providing reassurance that some Indians still held fast to the values of the British Empire.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Kenneth Mcneil, “‘Petticoated Devils’: Scottish Highland Soldiers in British Accounts of the Indian Rebellion’, *Prose Studies* 23, no. 3 (December 2000): 78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440350008586717>.

¹⁴² Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 75.

Mutiny reportage and the mutiny novel established the clear binary between the 'good' Indian and the 'bad' Indian, casting Gurkhas as well as Sikhs and other Punjabis as the new sidekicks of the British in a narrative of imperial control firmly reasserted through violent, righteous revenge for the white victims of imagined gendered violence. Martial race discourse became crystallized in this moment of imperial crisis as a relational system where race and gender imbricated to produce an imagination of the brown subaltern. At the same time, it constructed also a white British masculinity. Yet, to complicate further, British selfhood was itself symbolized not just through the heroic Englishman but in the bodies of Scots Highlanders who were themselves in 1857 relatively recent additions to the British empire.

Imperial racial discourse thus created a constellation of racialized bodies whose worth was determined by their proximity to a centered white, English self, imbuing these bodies with qualities of heroism and loyalty to empire that both derived from and helped constitute British self-imaginings of masculine, martial excellence. The center of white, male Britishness that all racial signifiers recurred toward was itself constituted by these discourses; never static, always contingent.¹⁴³ Racial discourse, at its core, was the construction of a white 'self' identity through the practice of describing racialized others. In response to the crisis of 1857, racial boundaries became redrawn and reified to better articulate

¹⁴³ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 7.

ideas of Indian military dependability based on martial discourse, but these discourses of the Indian Other were in mutual dialogue, co-constituted, with British imaginations of the self. The martial race discourse that emerged should thus be read in the context of hybridity: of British discourses of Indian 'races' that spoke to British self-imaginings.

Following 1857, the armies of India would be permanently restructured. In 1858, the British Government set up the Peel Commission to review the organization of the Indian Army. It was clear that the Indian Army needed to stay largely Indian; but it was unclear to the Peel Commission which Indians these should be beyond the anodyne recommendation that "the Native Army should be composed of different nationalities and castes, mixed promiscuously through each regiment."¹⁴⁴ The Peel Commission's suggestions that recruited populations be dispersed in mixed regiments was argued against by an 1860 report from the Punjab Committee; led by officers who had earned a great deal of influence due to the centrality of the Punjab in providing troops to suppress the Mutiny, the Committee recommended that a broad net be cast in recruiting Indians from across India's regions, castes, religions and ethnic communities. These populations would then be kept in their own specific, regionally-stationed regiments so that intergroup rivalries (such as the enmity between the Punjabis

¹⁴⁴ 'Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Organization of the Indian Army, Together with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix [Peel Commission]', 1859, xiv, Parliamentary Papers (HoC) 1859; quoted in David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, Studies in Military and Strategic History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 8.

and the Hindustanis in 1857) could be exploited in a divide-and-rule policy that would compartmentalize rebellion.

Heather Streets argues that while the Punjab Committee's recommendations were to keep recruitment broad and not focused on any martial races, "the 'divide and rule' policy so passionately laid out by the Punjab Committee powerfully articulated the idea that underscoring ethnic and local differences - and then institutionalising them in the structure of the army - could actually enhance British control over the army and hence over the subcontinent as a whole."¹⁴⁵ This laid the groundwork for a radical reversal of the Committee's recommendations.

The reorganization of the Indian Army became increasingly racialized, with the ascribed racial identity of the groups that comprised a regiment being understood as determining all aspects of "organization, discipline and economy, as well as issues of regimental identity and *esprit de corps*."¹⁴⁶ From this premise it followed logically that the best regiments would be from groups who were racially assumed to have courage - what MacMunn called 'guts.' Many British officers, shocked at the betrayal of their vaunted high-caste sepoys, were convinced that the security of India could only be entrusted with those masculine, warlike groups who had shown their worth during the Mutiny. The ad-hoc nature of army

¹⁴⁵ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, 33.

¹⁴⁶ Rand and Wagner, 'Recruiting the "Martial Races"', 241.

restructuring during the Mutiny, where the East India Company took what it could get, and the subsequent reduction and raising of Bengal Army regiments became narrativized after-the-fact through martial race discourse.¹⁴⁷ “Thus did the tragedy of 1857 open up a much fuller knowledge of the worth of the martial classes of the Punjab,” as MacMunn would go on to write.¹⁴⁸

The need for a reassuring narrative for British recruitment in India reached a turning point in the 1880s with the appointment of Lord Frederick Sleigh Roberts as Commander-in-Chief in India (1885-1893), and the expansion of Russian influence deeper into Central Asia.¹⁴⁹ This was the period in which martial race discourse became entrenched into military policy and the Indian army’s recruitment shifted – from the 1880s to World War I recruitment would draw more and more from Nepal, Punjab and the Northwest Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan, while Hindustan, Bombay and Madras would become less and less important. The process of a ‘Punjabisation’ of the Indian army, just like the Brahmanisation that had preceded it, had begun.¹⁵⁰ The Presidency Armies were disbanded in 1895, and Roberts’ work would be finished by Horatio Kitchener in 1903 with the consolidation of all the various armed forces of India into a singular Indian army.¹⁵¹ This Indian army would be dominated by the

¹⁴⁷ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 219.

¹⁴⁹ Rand and Wagner, ‘Recruiting the “Martial Races”’, 234; McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Kohli, ‘Militarization of Sikh Masculinity’, 49.

¹⁵¹ Tan, *The Garrison State*, 32.

martial races of the north, with hardly any role played by the old Madras and Bombay regiments (despite their loyalty in 1857, they were rearticulated as racially inferior to northern recruits by martial race theorists like Roberts and MacMunn.)¹⁵²

Roberts, a British celebrity since his successes in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-1880), argued vociferously in British media in favour of addressing Russia as an existential threat to the British empire, and the importance of strengthening the Indian frontier through the recruitment of *only* martial races. He wrote:

It is no use our trying to persuade ourselves that the whole of the Indian Army is capable of meeting an enemy from Central Asia or Europe; they are not, and nothing will ever make them. It is not a question of efficiency, but of courage and physique; in these two essential qualities the sepoys of lower India are wanting. No amount of instruction will make up for these shortcomings...¹⁵³

Each cold season I made long tours in order to acquaint myself with the needs and capabilities of the Madras Army. I tried hard to discover in them those fighting qualities which had distinguished their forefathers during the wars of the last and during the beginning of the present century. But long years of peace, and the security and prosperity of attending it, had... as they always seem to

¹⁵² Frederick Sleigh Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India* (London: Richard Bentley, 1897), 441; MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 292.

¹⁵³ Frederick Sleigh Roberts, *Correspondence with England While Commander-in-Chief in Madras, 1881-1885*, vol. 2, n.d., 25-26.

have on Asiatics, a softening and deteriorating effect; and I was forced to the conclusion that the ancient military spirit had died in them, as it had died in the ordinary Hindustani of Bengal and the Mahratta of Bombay, and that they could no longer with safety be pitted against the war-like races or employed outside the limits of southern India.¹⁵⁴

The British public, receptive to the opinions of celebrated officers such as Roberts, quickly developed an appetite for stories of intrigue and colonial bravery in Central Asia (most famously inspiring the setting of Kipling's *Kim*)¹⁵⁵ and the media coverage of the Sepoy Mutiny had already instilled in them a romantic notion of the martial races. Roberts was able to use his media connections to bolster his own career, keeping Russia and the Indian frontier preeminent in British public discourse as the most important space of imperial conflict – thereby monopolizing influence and funding from the British military – and overruling critics of martial race discourse, such as the various British officers of the Madras and Bombay armies who resisted their men being sidelined and denigrated.¹⁵⁶ Contextualizing martial race discourse and recruitment policy in wider British colonial history and discourse, it is nevertheless true that it was the personal initiative of Roberts more than anyone else that was responsible for its prominence in both British culture and policy. This analysis of Roberts' role in martial race discourse (and what the discourse in turn did for his career)

¹⁵⁴ Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 441.

¹⁵⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. Edward W. Said (Penguin Books, 1987).

¹⁵⁶ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, 35.

combines the structural and the individual desires and anxieties that informed the discourse. Roberts had been a young officer during the Mutiny, and he too had been swept up in the romance of the martial races, of loyal, manly Sikhs and Gurkhas fighting in tandem with the Highlanders, the manliest men the British army had to offer, and as Robert's career took off so too did the military fortunes of these martial races in the military defence of India against the specter of Russian invasion. Streets sums up the situation as, "Only now, 'real' men were needed not to avenge and protect British women (as-in the Rebellion), but to avenge and protect the borders of the Raj from Russian attack."¹⁵⁷ The British Indian Army became focused on external defence, the need to maintain any ethnic 'balance' for the sake of internal security (as originally recommended by the Peel Commission in 1858) became abandoned in the face of the need to find such Indians that could fight toe-to-toe with a European foe.¹⁵⁸ The martial races were the only ones thought capable of meeting a European enemy – during Roberts' time, represented by Russian – in battle, and it was the martial races who would go onto fight in Europe during World War I.

In creating an army of martial races that were imagined as capable of fighting a European enemy, the reassuring capacity of this army was undermined

¹⁵⁷ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 134.

¹⁵⁸ 'Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Organization of the Indian Army, Together with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix [Peel Commission]', 1859, xiv, Parliamentary Papers (HoC) 1859; quoted in David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, Studies in Military and Strategic History (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 8.

by the possibility of these soldiers mutinying against the Britons. The reliance on martial races, especially Sikhs, was noted as a source of potential crisis by observers such as Frederick Engels as early as 1858 when he suggested that the 'saucy Sikh' would see the vulnerability of the British reliance on native soldiers and seize his own opportunity for revolt and conquest. Predicting the eventual clash the British and Russian Empires in central Asia, Engels wrote:

The time may indeed not be so very distant when 'the Sepoy and the Cossack will meet in the plains of the Oxus,' and if that meeting is to take place, the anti-British passions of 150,000 native Indians will be a matter of serious consideration.¹⁵⁹

The late nineteenth century saw the creation of martial race handbooks written by British officers who purported to bring a total knowledge of their chosen 'classes' to their writing.¹⁶⁰ These handbooks assuaged British fears of a rebellious colonial army through portraying the martial races as essentially childlike, stupid, and as dependent as they were dependable. The handbooks tried to inoculate against the threat of rebellion through the force of sheer authoritative detail. Their recommendations for the very best soldiers finely graded the martial races into subdivisions, only some of whom were martial. For example, Sikhs, the exemplary martial race, were not all fit for recruitment:

¹⁵⁹ Frederick Engels, 'The Revolt in India', *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 October 1858, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1858/10/01.htm>.

¹⁶⁰ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 14.

Sikh Brahmans were condemned for their caste prejudice, urban Sikh Khattris for their reluctance to take to the plough, and low-caste Sikh Mazbhis for their supposed criminality.¹⁶¹

The Jat Sikh, described by MacMunn as “the great muscular, hardworking, rather stupid yeoman farmer... whose only toy of his childhood is a model plough” was the most well-regarded of Sikhs for recruitment.¹⁶² Yet even among Jats the handbooks could differentiate between the military quality of populations based on which area they lived in, and officers were encouraged to enquire closely into a recruit’s family history to determine if they were fit for recruitment.¹⁶³ These strict biopolitical categories gave the handbooks the comforting veneer of having been written by officers who knew their men and their habits so intimately as to be able to judge their worth based on which village they were from; the martial races could be understood and their behaviour predicted through ever narrower categories, their individual personalities irrelevant.¹⁶⁴ In leading these ‘sturdy’ yet ‘unimaginative’ soldiers, the British had a clear role to play as they “monopolized the intellectual military virtue of tactical insight,” the administrators and leaders who organized the disparate strands of the martial races together into a colonial military that covered the weaknesses of the individual races.¹⁶⁵ As the heads of the racial ‘family of man’, the British

¹⁶¹ Singh, 19.

¹⁶² MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 252.

¹⁶³ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 20.

¹⁶⁴ Farooqui, “‘Divide and Rule’? Race, Military Recruitment and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Colonial India’.

¹⁶⁵ Omissi, “Martial Races”, 27.

imperialists shouldered the ‘White Man’s Burden’ of guiding the colonized Indians, and this paternalistic attitude in the Indian army created a culture where the British saw themselves as fathers to childlike soldiers, who for all their worth could never become fully independent adults. Constructing the colonized as childlike, stupid, or savage were just a few of the signifiers that recurred back to the central notion of white superiority.¹⁶⁶

Despite the prominence of martial race discourse and its importance in structuring the very serious business of colonial security in India, there was no actual “*theory of martiality*” as Des Chene pointed out.¹⁶⁷ Instead, the creators of martial race literature relied upon a combination of personal experience and anecdotes from brother officers, supported with proverbs attributed to Indian sources to tie their conclusions within a tradition of military knowledge gleaned from practice and rooted in the history of an unchanging India and its essential truths – which, as its military officers of the empire they believed themselves to have unparalleled understanding of.¹⁶⁸ The assumptions of contemporary anthropology undergird martial race literature, with streams of Darwinism and ‘scientific racism’ informing its assumptions, but the military officers that wrote the handbooks of the martial races did not explicitly invoke the scholarly debates on the nature of caste, race and social progress. Instead, the contents of the race

¹⁶⁶ Doty, *Imperial Encounters*, 168.

¹⁶⁷ Des Chene, ‘Military Ethnology in British India’, 132. Emphasis present in the original.

¹⁶⁸ Farooqui, “‘Divide and Rule’? Race, Military Recruitment and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Colonial India’.

handbooks are a collage of what Des Chene called “character sketches.”¹⁶⁹

Passages in the handbooks quoted ‘proverbs’ such as:

The Nais [a Sikh community] are popularly regarded as extremely astute. ‘The jackal’, says the Punjab villager, ‘is the sharpest amongst the beasts, the crow among birds, and the Nai among men.’¹⁷⁰

These characters sketches demonstrated the power of colonial knowledge to know the colonized so intimately as to determine their behaviours, not as individuals, but as classes as surely as one could write about the temperament of a breed of horse.

Using Ann Stoler’s concept of the ‘colonial negative,’¹⁷¹ Gajendra Singh argues that the handbooks, “divided those currently fit for recruitment from those who were previously so and hinted at those who would become sufficiently ‘martial’ in the future. And over time those negatives could be discarded, refound, or reproduced in subtly different ways.”¹⁷² As a narrative that established the shape of power relations between Indians and the British, and between different groups of Indians, martial race discourse was by its design able to reshape itself to fit British strategic interests while providing a claim to objective facts in the

¹⁶⁹ Des Chene, ‘Military Ethnology in British India’, 132; Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, chap. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Bingley, *The Sikhs*, 1899, 56; quoted in Amar Farooqui, “‘Divide and Rule’? Race, Military Recruitment and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Colonial India’, *Social Scientist* 43, no. 3/4 (April 2015): 57.

¹⁷¹ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies*, 107.

¹⁷² Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 13.

creation of the colonial hierarchy.¹⁷³ The discourse was ambivalent between the supposed scientific inflexibility of a racial category and the constant shifting of the category to render certain populations by turn martial, non-martial, or among the various other colonial categories of the era such as ‘criminal tribes’ (where criminality, like martiality, was assumed to be hereditary). MacMunn’s statement that martial race discourse was “as scientific as the question of red corpuscle and as historical as the story of Aryan, Dravidian and Aboriginal” renders transparent that the discourse was as much a device of colonial categorization as the racial framing of Indian history.¹⁷⁴ The dubious claim to total knowledge gave martial race discourse an ‘excess plausibility’ that was...

... Derived less from analytic precision than from sheer repetition, the amassing of detail, claims to first-hand authority and, finally, effective transmission from the field-level to policy-making circles.¹⁷⁵

The excess of detail beyond what was plausible created the fantasy of stereotype, characterized by Bhabha as an ambivalence between the suspension of disbelief that a people could be categorized and predicted so finely and the sheer weight and confidence of colonial knowledge that both reinforced and undermined criticisms against its validity.¹⁷⁶ The excess of detail contained both a

¹⁷³ Rand, “Martial Races” and “Imperial Subjects”, 9.

¹⁷⁴ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 2.

¹⁷⁵ Des Chene, ‘Military Ethnology in British India’, 123.

¹⁷⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 95.

promise of security – the colonized is so well known – and the unspoken fear that the colonized cannot be captured in a stereotype no matter how finely detailed, and so the categories required constant redrawing to capture and fix the nature of a population imagined as having a definable character. Memmi summarized the futility of colonial discourse with a scorching irony: "The colonized must indeed be very strange, if he remains so mysterious after years of living with the colonizer."¹⁷⁷

Martial or non-martial, the peoples of India were classified into strict categories following the events of 1857. The cartridge narrative and the imagination of the fanatical, irrational, traitorous Indian brought forth a policy of colonial rule that emphasized the need to thoroughly understand Indians, finely demarcated into their various classes and ruled as indirectly as possible to avoid upsetting communal traditions – traditions and communities whose nature was defined and imagined by a British colonial apparatus.¹⁷⁸ As Parama Roy argued:

For the native, identity, while not essential in the usual sense of the word – since it can be and is subject to colonial dislocation and manipulation – is not an act; natives are denied irony or distance with respect to their identity. Each new identity created for them by the colonizer or the colonial situation becomes in turn essential for them; theoretically they could occupy a series of essential identities

¹⁷⁷ Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 3rd ed. (London: Earthscan, 2003), 129.

¹⁷⁸ Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 26.

in response to the models offered by the colonial state or its emissaries.¹⁷⁹

This ambivalence, where essential identities for the natives of India were ascribed by the colonial state, reimagined, and reshuffled and yet in each instance being their true essential nature, is further complicated in Roy's argument by the native's supposed opacity. The natives of India were believed to be incapable of self-reflection or of accurately representing themselves to the colonizer and required active interrogation by the apparatus of colonial knowledge for their true nature to become revealed. In this colonial project of classification the British relied upon native interlocutors, most notably the anglicized, anglophone figure of the Bengali intellectual or 'babu.' Yet it was this very figure of the Bengali babu that arose as the denigrated mirror image of the sepoy, like the sepoy both an essential crutch of the colonial administration and its racial inferior, and martial race discourse was the articulator of the tension of similarity and difference between the British self and two competing colonial mimics: the Babu and the Sepoy.

The Englishman, the Babu, and the Sepoy: Competing Indian Mimics to the British Self

The earliest known general handbook offering an overview of the martial races was written by a Bengali employee of the Government of India's Military

¹⁷⁹ Roy, *Indian Traffic*, 31.

Department.¹⁸⁰ However, the Bengali's role as interlocutor was compromised as the British also found them a detestable reflection of themselves.¹⁸¹ Like the martial race soldier, loyal but infantile and unintelligent, the Bengali was a figure of consistent mockery in British colonial discourse as an imperfect mimic of the British. The Anglicized Indian intellectual was easy to discredit as "a culturally uprooted product of Western education who had lost the essential traits of his 'race.'"¹⁸²

The post-Mutiny ideology reasserted the essential difference of Indians to Britons, leading to an essentialist, racist turn to what had before then been largely a question of differing degrees of civilizational advancement. The Mutiny especially demonized the figure of the Hindu. Going forward, a script that cast the Hindu "as licentious, but effeminate; cruel, yet physically weak; duplicitous rather than savage" would dominate in British India, and the Mutiny would establish a constant, recurring fear of native rebellion embodied in "a pornographic fantasy of rape" that would recur constantly in imperial discourse.¹⁸³ This framing of the Hindu would display the "tension between hypersexuality and sexual passivity" common to colonial representations of the

¹⁸⁰ P.D. Bonarjee, *A Handbook of the Fighting Races of India* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1899), sec. Preface.

¹⁸¹ Roy, *Indian Traffic*, 31.

¹⁸² Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'Mass-Mediated Panic in the British Empire? Shyamji Krishnavarma's "Scientific Terrorism" and the "London Outrage", 1909', in *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné, 1st edition, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series 13937 (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2017), 118.

¹⁸³ Sharpe, 'The Unspeakable Limits of Rape: Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency', 235.

colonized male as at once sexually voracious and impotent in his femininity.¹⁸⁴

Bhabha described stereotypes as “curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse,” articulating contradictory images that indicate moments of separation within stereotype where new modes of difference to the observer Self (in this case, Britons) are required due to shifts in the colonial milieu. The (largely Hindu) Bengali middle class combined discourses of Hindu passivity and lasciviousness with the growing threat to colonial rule: as ‘Indian in blood’ but ‘English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’ the Bengali represented a reality of colonial similarity that in an era of categorical racial difference no longer aligned with British imperial interests and thus required disavowal.

Mrinalini Sinha described the growing feelings of distrust the British felt toward the Bengali, as Bengalis began to demand political autonomy and racial liberalism from the late nineteenth century onwards. A British discursive strategy of race and gender ideology was deployed to construct the difference between the ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali.’ The earliest example of the British resistance to their own project of liberal education of the Bengali was the Ilbert Bill, which would have given Indian civil servants jurisdiction over European British subjects in local courts. The Bill was fundamentally reshaped following a white outcry that mobilized as opposition the Mutiny-era discourse of the helpless European woman put in an ‘unnatural’ position of being at the mercy

¹⁸⁴ Maria Lugones, ‘Toward a Decolonial Feminism’, *Hypatia* 25, no. 4 (2010): 744, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2010.01137.x>.

of native men of dubious character and intent.¹⁸⁵ The consolidation of a discourse of race, gender and class in British India rendered void the aspirations of Indians who claimed the promise of liberal equality under a racialized empire.

This discourse of denigration of the Bengali in particular as well as the broader figure of the intellectual, Anglicized Indian was a response to a growing crisis of imperial loss of control at the turn of the 20th century. In 1909 the Viceroy of India, Sir William Curzon Wyllie, was murdered in London by a young Hindu.¹⁸⁶ Indian anticolonial thinkers were meeting and writing in the heart of London (permitted by far more liberal conditions of press and assembly than existed in India), and the 1909 ‘London outrage’ created international hysteria around a new imperial ‘folk devil’: the fanatical Oriental terrorist.¹⁸⁷ Crackdowns on these anticolonial activists in Britain and France led to them seeking refuge in Germany, with the German state working to help them undermine British and French colonial rule.¹⁸⁸ Networks of anticolonial activism and the surveillance and

¹⁸⁵ Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester University Press, 1995), chap. 1, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526123640>.

¹⁸⁶ Stefan Zweig, ‘The Indian Threat to England (On the Occasion of a Political Assassination by a Young Hindu) 1909’, trans. Ashwin J. Manthripragada, *Transit* 11, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.5070/T7112038252>.

¹⁸⁷ Fischer-Tiné, ‘Mass-Mediated Panic in the British Empire? Shyamji Krishnavarma’s “Scientific Terrorism” and the “London Outrage”, 1909’.

¹⁸⁸ Kris K. Manjapra, ‘The Illusions of Encounter: Muslim “Minds” and Hindu Revolutionaries in First World War Germany and After’, *Journal of Global History* 1, no. 3 (November 2006): 363–82, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022806003044>; Daniel Brückenhaus, ‘Imperial Fears and Transnational Policing in Europe: The “German Problem” and the British and French Surveillance of Anti-Colonialists in Exile, 1904–1939’, in *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné, 1st edition, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series 13937 (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2017).

censorship of the same were established across the British, French and German Empires.

Advocates for Indian independence and autonomy were also in contact with Irish nationalists and British feminists. These dissident networks were feared as potential threats to imperial order in Britain as well as its near and distant colonies.¹⁸⁹ The Raj watched and attempted to silence outspoken and educated Indians who were preaching revolutionary violence in India and radicalizing the moderate Indian National Congress party.¹⁹⁰ Anticolonial terrorist activities plagued British Bengal in particular, and in 1912 another Viceroy of India, Charles Hardinge, narrowly avoided death from a bomb thrown by a Bengali assassin.¹⁹¹

British discourses of race and masculinity were deployed to assuage these crises of control. The binary worldview of martial race discourse both identified which Indians were threats to empire and painted them as ineffectual and weak to an imperial population terrified of a recurrence of 1857. Pre-existing contempt for the urban Indian who was imagined as “‘educated’, ‘emasculated’ and ‘effeminate’”¹⁹² allowed British authors to criticize the writings and activism of these same educated Indians. The educated Indian – especially the Bengali – and his politics were imagined as subversive and disloyal, relying on the cowardly

¹⁸⁹ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, chap. 5.

¹⁹⁰ McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914–1919*, 11.

¹⁹¹ McLain, 12.

¹⁹² McLain, 10.

tactics of poisoning, conspiracy, and bomb outrages; but ultimately these were of little effect because of the Bengali's inherent effeminacy and the lack of manly vigor that was proven by his race's historic status as "victims rather than the makers of history."¹⁹³ Indian nationalist' links with Irish nationalists and British feminists saw discursive representations of all three groups as irrational, effeminate and weak.¹⁹⁴ The Brahmin status of many high-caste Hindu nationalists allowed the Mutiny-derived tropes of fanatical Brahmins with their love of intrigue and "pretensions" of rulership – which would ultimately only "exasperate the British spirit against them" – to colour the Raj's understanding of Indian nationalism as ultimately the work of a disloyal elite. The demands of such an elite, in British discourse, did not have the support of the common Indian – just as British observers explained the Mutiny as the work of fanatical Brahmin soldiers without popular support.¹⁹⁵ Despite the articulate writings of many Indian political thinkers, British discourses cast them in the role of shadowy puppet-masters fuelled by irrational, religious fanaticism that could influence the vulnerable and the destitute of India to do their bidding.¹⁹⁶ As Parama Roy described it:

¹⁹³ Valentine Chirol Sir, *Indian Unrest* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1910), 73, <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-201508108832>.

¹⁹⁴ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 158.

¹⁹⁵ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 272.

¹⁹⁶ Fischer-Tiné, 'Mass-Mediated Panic in the British Empire? Shyamji Krishnavarma's "Scientific Terrorism" and the "London Outrage", 1909'.

It is almost always the babu—the subject who, because of his education, class position, and racial identity, is the most appropriate candidate for the position of native informant—who is the most sinister of all anticolonial forces.¹⁹⁷

The discursive signifier of the ‘babu’ became connotated to all politically active middle-class Indians regardless of ethnicity “to discredit nationalists as fraudulent men, incapable of commenting on or understanding issues such as citizenship, war or chivalry.”¹⁹⁸

Framing the Indian intelligentsia as an unnatural, contemptible force in India exorcised British fears of their own positionality as a conquering, unpopular outsider force onto the body of the babu. The mimic figure of the babu, seen as both “a political threat to the stability of the Raj, and a parody of the Englishman himself,” shifted from an object of caricature to become a figure treated with utter scorn by a British colonial administration that saw in the Bengali everything they anxiously suspected existed within themselves.¹⁹⁹ British colonial discourse vehemently asserted a historical right to rule India through a narrativization of India’s past that allowed the British government to frame itself as a successor power to the Aryans, Alexander the Great and the Mughal Empire. Within this framing the British further sought legitimization through extolling the virtues of

¹⁹⁷ Roy, *Indian Traffic*, 31.

¹⁹⁸ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 162.

¹⁹⁹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 166.

the martial races; these martial races, imagined as masculine, and chivalrous inheritors of conquering dynasties, were in the British imagination a totally different proposition to the Bengali mimic man.

As martial race discourse grew in ideological strength toward the end of the nineteenth century, it acted as the essential articulator of an Indian difference in the face of the threat to imperial control presented by the growing Westernization and liberal aspirations of India's intellectuals and politicians. The martial race soldier, the proto-European, degenerated Aryan cousin of the British colonial in India represented for the British the ambivalent other face of colonial mimicry. Instead of being threatened by a Bengali body the British saw as racially inferior but who nevertheless mimicked Britishness in a way that the British saw as a dangerous and unflattering mirror, the British could imagine a martial race body that better reflected their desired self-image. As Metcalf put it:

Whether defined by race, climate, or personality, 'martial races' were those who most closely resembled what the British imagined themselves to be. In similar fashion, 'martial races' existed in contrast to the Bengalis. Indeed, one might argue, the 'extraordinary effeminacy' of the Bengali, whom 'no necessity would induce to fight', alone gave meaning to the notion of 'martial races'. They were what the Bengali was not.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Metcalf, 127.

Discursively imagining the Bengali with the signifiers that marked them as the opposite of the white Englishman – effeminate, weak, treacherous, childlike, etc. – also established their fundamental difference to the martial races who were signified as warlike and manly, and with the somatic differences also of skin colour and height, and inhabiting different geosocial milieus to boot (for the Bengali, the low-lying swampy urban center, and for the martial sepoy the hardy, rural hills). While the martial races were themselves signified as inferior to the British, they still had the qualities of manliness, toughness, and chivalry that the British desired to construct their own self-identity with; and so, a complex martial race discourse emerged wherein a racial hierarchy was established between the Englishman, the Babu, and the Sepoy, characterized by the fear of resembling the Babu and the desire to resemble the Sepoy. In the following section I suggest the value to the British of drawing themselves imaginatively closer to the Sepoy. The sepoy was constructed in ways that spoke to British self-idealizations.

British imperialists could assuage their concerns of Bengali mimicry by praising a body of men who were steadfast, represented an unchanging cultural lineage of Aryan dominance, and socially conservative in a colonial and domestic terrain that was otherwise constantly alive with dangerous change that threatened white, masculine control. Moreover, an imaginative linkage between themselves and Indian polities that supposedly retained practices romanticized as chivalrous, whose societies were perceived as conservative, whose homes were in cold, hardy terrain that appealed both to 19th century beliefs in climactic

degeneration in hot weather and a Victorian romanticization of mountainous regions, reassured the British of their own racial qualities under the pressure of turn of the century challenges to this self-image – such as industrialization and growing social enfranchisement. Venerating a ‘medieval ideal’ was never for the British a serious argument for abandoning technological progress, but the imagination of martial, princely Indians allowed for the vicarious living of a fantasy of a lost European ideal way of life.²⁰¹

A medievalist romanticism was particularly active in British imaginations of India because of anxieties regarding the forces of social liberalisation, industrialization, and urbanization at work in the United Kingdom. A ‘social Darwinist’ narrative of racial decline had seized the British in the 1870s and 1880s, in response to “class insurgency, feminist upheavals, the socialist revival, swelling poverty and the dearth of housing and jobs.”²⁰² Urbanization driven by industrialization, and the growth of the urban poor, had British observers worrying that city living was having a deleterious effect on the racial fitness of the British population, and that the hardy, uplifting rural living that gave the British their vitality was being lost. In the face of the white male Briton’s loss of control over the imperial metropole and its periphery, eugenics discourses emerged to protect and securitize the relations between the working and the middle class,

²⁰¹ Metcalf, 75.

²⁰² McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 46.

between men and women, and demarcate their proper spaces.²⁰³ The imperial military were also paranoid a perceived racialized degeneration in the British working class. During the late 19th century, the British were deeply concerned by the large conscript armies of continental Europe and feared that the British people were not up to the task of facing these armies. The working class recruits of the army were continually showing the results of poverty in the urban centers by forcing the military to reduce their minimum height and weight requirements, and British officers were concerned that in the face of a European war this 'racial degeneration' would spell defeat for Britain.²⁰⁴ The Boer war added to this anxiety "with the attendant discovery of the puny physiques, bad teeth and general ill health of the working class recruits."²⁰⁵ As an officer in 1907 wrote after observing the German Army in maneuvers:

We are quite unprepared, and the contrast between their splendid, well-organised, army, composed of the manhood of a virile nation, and our Home army composed of anything but our manhood is enough to make us shudder.²⁰⁶

The supposed degeneration of the British working class in the urban environment was matched by the discourse of India, particularly hot and humid Bengal, as a space of miasma that rendered its inhabitants sapped of vitality, and

²⁰³ McClintock, 43.

²⁰⁴ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, 103.

²⁰⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 47.

²⁰⁶ Beauvoir de Lisle to Frederick Sleigh Roberts, 'PRO, WO 105/45, Beauvoir de Lisle to Lord Roberts', 1907.

descriptions of Calcutta as a filth-ridden ‘City of Dreadful Night’ in the hands of an incompetent Bengali administration.²⁰⁷ The martial races, meanwhile, represented an ideal of manhood that the British feared that they themselves had lost, and whose societies as imagined by British discourse contained a past that the British had advanced beyond. Technological advancement was both a source of pride and anxiety among British imperialists. As McClintock argued, race, gender and class were co-constitutive discourses, and Victorian era commentary by the “white middle-and-upper-middle class” on the working class, especially working class women, both explicitly and implicitly used the language of race to other and control the working class and to constitute a middle-class self-identity.²⁰⁸ Thus, martial race discourse can be read as a discourse that saw a British imperialist masculinity paradoxically detaching itself from identification with the white, urban working class of the imperial metropolis and instead seeking identification with classes of racialized colonial subalterns. Martial race discourse could at best imagine an idealized European fantasy of the self through an interrelationship with India’s martial races, but this idealization was in turn distanced and repudiated through rendering the martial races a caricature, a colonial inferior – at once drawn closer to the Self as well as distanced. The discourse thus created colonial hybrids out of the Bengali and the sepoy, both with their natures articulated in terms of their similarity to and distance from a

²⁰⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 166.

²⁰⁸ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 77.

European self that in turn articulated its own identity in the contact zone through colonial stereotype. The situation exemplifies Bhabha's statement:

For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory.²⁰⁹

The boundaries between the martial races and the intellectuals were sharply reinforced, to keep these categories distinct. Though many Indian intellectuals wished to fight to defend India from external threats and to show loyalty to a British imperial administration their desires were met with colonial contempt.²¹⁰ The rhetoric of racial unfitness was deployed to justify this exclusion. As MacMunn put it: "The clever young men of the universities were quite unfitted for military work even if they had desired it, hearts were not in the right place."²¹¹ MacMunn categorically stated that he (as a colonizer who could see clearly into an opaque, recalcitrant native inner life) understood the capabilities of the intelligentsia better than they themselves did, and that entrusting them with India's defence would be disastrous:

The sweeper and the outcaste cannot make a soldier nor can the clever cultured lads of the town intelligentsia. Physical courage they have not, and it is no good telling me that they think they have...
You may swagger and curl your beard, but all the swagger crumples

²⁰⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 160.

²¹⁰ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, 163.

²¹¹ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 233.

out of you if you are constitutionally wanting in 'guts,' and no man who has not seen it in himself or others can know what it is. Round the conference room hearts swell with martial glory, who have not the faintest idea of what danger means. It is this that makes us soldiers of Indian knowledge sympathise with the aspirations of the lanky sons of the non-martial classes to lead a martial life, but fear that they know not what they ask in war... The martial races of India snort with delight at the idea. We who sympathise with all young men are willing to make fair and careful trial, but not at the risk of British and Indian battalions being condemned to heavy loss to support bogus leaders.²¹²

The decision to prevent the 'clever cultured lads of the intelligentsia' from joining the army was presented as a regrettable outcome of their racial unfitness, which the British only enforced (despite their sympathies) out of a practical determination that no 'bogus leaders' could lead soldiers to doom. These 'bogus leaders' were already dominating the 'conference rooms' and potentially leading India down a dangerous political path. The non-martial races were thus denied the opportunity to prove their masculinity and capability through the military, the institution most respected by the British in India. Colonial knowledge and truth-claims were deployed to make the exclusion of the Indian intellectual from the army seem the natural outcome, and the British could construe themselves as a result as rational and well-intentioned in their rule, stern fathers who knew their colonized children best. It is significant too that MacMunn used the image

²¹² George Fletcher MacMunn, 'The Romance of the Martial Races in India', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 80, no. 4128 (1 January 1932): 182.

of martial races who ‘snort with delight at the idea’ of being commanded by a member of a race they had historically conquered, ultimately resting the legitimacy of this colonialist, British decision on the imagined reaction of the martial races of India, colonial power requiring a rhetoric of acquiescence and approval from the correct colonized populations. Just as it was politically impossible for Indians to be put in positions of command over British troops or Indian judges to preside over courts trying Europeans (as in the case of the Ilbert Bill scandal), it was impossible to imagine Bengalis commanding the martial races. Rudyard Kipling relied on the voices of the martial races to make just such a point in his story ‘The Head of the District’ (1890), wherein a Bengali is appointed to oversee a northern, martial race community and is sternly rejected by the inhabitants. When the Bengali is described to the tribesmen as being a ‘Sahib,’ a term of respect reserved usually for the British, the reaction is derisory:

“He a Sahib! He’s a *kala admi* – a black man – unfit to run at the tail of a potter’s donkey. All the peoples of the earth have harried Bengal. It is written. Thou knowest when we of the North wanted women or plunder whither went we? To Bengal – where else? What child’s talk is this of Sahibdom...?”²¹³

The device of castigating the Bengali as a pretentious, contemptible, racialized figure (‘a black man’) through the mouths of the respected martial races was a strategy Kipling would return to. In the following chapter I will

²¹³ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The Head of the District’, *The Kipling Society* (blog), 1 May 2021, <https://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/tale/the-head-of-the-district.htm>.

examine the phenomenon of ‘imperial ventriloquism’ where British authors would legitimize their own attitudes through the apparent testimony of the colonized, but herein already we see the desire specifically to adopt the viewpoint of the martial races as the ‘true’ knowledge of India. Consider Kipling again in his short story ‘One View of the Question’ (1893), where he imagines a haughty Muslim from the north, one Shafiz Ullah Khan, writing to his brother in India from London “under the shadow of the Empress:”

Once it happened that a son of some grain-bag sat with me at meat, who was arrayed and speaking after the manner of the English. At each mouthful he committed perjury against the Salt that he had eaten; the men and women applauding. When, craftily falsifying, he had magnified oppression and invented untold wrong, together with the desecration of his tun-bellied gods, he demanded in the name of his people the government of all our land, and turning, laid palm to my shoulder, saying – ‘Here is one who is with us, albeit he professes another faith; he will bear out my words.’ This he delivered in English, and, as it were, exhibited me to that company. Preserving a smiling countenance, I answered in our, own tongue – ‘Take away that hand, man without a father, or the folly of these folk shall not save thee, nor my silence guard thy reputation. Sit off, herd.’ And in their speech I said – ‘He speaks truth. When the favour and wisdom of the English allows us yet a little larger share in the burden and the reward, the Mussulman will deal with the Hindu.’ He alone saw what was in my heart. I was merciful towards him because he was accomplishing our desires; but remember that his father is one Durga Charan Laha, in Calcutta. Lay thy hand upon

his shoulder if ever chance sends. It is not good that bottle-dealers and auctioneers should paw the sons of princes. I walk abroad sometimes with the man that all this world may know the Hindu and Mussulman are one, but when we come to the unfrequented streets I bid him walk behind me, and that is sufficient honour.²¹⁴

The proud, upper-class Muslim easily demolishes the upstart, familiar Babu who brazenly committed disloyalty (“perjury against the Salt”) in conversation with the gullible, liberal set in Victorian London. It matches exactly Ashish Nandy’s observation:

Childish or feminine passive-aggression was the attribute of the effete nationalists and fake sahibs or babus drawn from the non-martial races and that of the uninformed, shallow, British liberals supporting the former.²¹⁵

The Babu believed that his education and the applause of the white audience put him on a level with Shafiz Ullah Khan, but Khan reminds him of his ancestral place as a mere commoner, there to be beaten by his betters. British imperialists had far more respect and a sense of kinship to the aristocratic Shafiz Ullah Khan than they had with the dangerous, foolish actions of British metropolitan liberals (associated with the anxiety-inducing modernizing of

²¹⁴ Rudyard Kipling, ‘One View of the Question’, in *Many Inventions* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1893).

²¹⁵ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 38.

Britain) who were ignorant of imperial realities. Metcalf wrote of Kipling's depiction of the Babu:

A political threat to the stability of the Raj, and a parody of the Englishman himself, the babu, no longer simply a stock figure of caricature, was, in the hands of men like Kipling, the object of a hatred informed by mockery and derision.²¹⁶

As Edward Said put it in his introduction to *Kim*, "Kipling was of India."²¹⁷ For Kipling, the Babu represented an aspect of himself as an Anglo-Indian intellectual and writer that he did not esteem in the masculine, militarized milieu of colonial India and so needed to be denigrated, alongside the liberal naivety of the out-of-touch London set. Thus, the Babu is a caricature that both explicitly and subconsciously addresses the discord between British values of liberalism and a militarized imperialism. Kipling revealed the anti-imperial intellectual to be held in contempt by his Indian peers, and thereby castigated British sympathizers to the Babu's cause as dupes who were unwittingly playing into both the destruction of empire and a future where the nationalists would plunge India into a state of violent repression at the hands of the martial races who were only kept in check by the British government. Shafiz Ullah Khan, despite being the protagonist of the short story and with a liberal Britain and its Bengali parody as his foil, is also portrayed as a threat, dreaming of the restoration of Islamic rule in

²¹⁶ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 166.

²¹⁷ Kipling, *Kim*, 9.

India. Ambivalently, the martial race soldier was not just a source of security and admiration among the British, but also anxiety. The babu and the Muslim aristocrat are, in quite different ways ‘half devil and half child’, as Kipling memorably expressed the nature of the colonized: both are childish and petulant, working different degrees of mischief without a disciplining white hand.²¹⁸ Thus, as attractive as the martial races were, they were not uniformly trustable: they combined the attractions of chivalry and racial kinship with the threat of betrayal and a return to the violence of 1857.

A fear and distrust of India’s religions and an image of its inhabitants as irrational slaves to their faiths operated continually through British India and was seen as a primary source of rebellion and disruption. The British believed that in 1857, the Brahmin sepoys had rebelled due to caste prejudice, yogis and fakirs instigated the masses, and the Mughal emperor had been in collaboration with the Shah of Iran in a conspiracy of Islamic world domination.²¹⁹ This narrativization of the event of 1857 reframed past engagements between British and Indian in colonial discourse, and shaped the expectations of the future as one of repeatable crisis: “The portent-laden future of revolt and betrayal is always on the imminent and dangerous horizon,” as Stoler wrote.²²⁰ India even under

²¹⁸ Rudyard Kipling, ‘The White Man’s Burden’, in *A Choice of Kipling’s Verse*, ed. Thomas Stearns Eliot (Faber and Faber Limited, 1941).

²¹⁹ William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty: Delhi, 1857*, 1st U.S. edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 439–40.

²²⁰ Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Thinking Through Colonial Ontologies*, 21.

British rule was always in colonial discourse on the brink of mutiny fuelled by religion:

Who can describe India of the travelled Popular mind? The days of romantic, jewelled visions of the East are past indeed, but there still remains enough to bewilder... murderous Thugs, shrivelled fakirs, crafty Brahmins, bigoted Mussalmans, the gibberish of heathen tongues, the seething mass of complicated and horrible superstitions, all illumined by the flames of the Mutiny which cannot be forgotten.²²¹

Martial race discourses articulated British fears of the Indian practices of Hinduism and Islam. Muslims were seen as 'worthy adversaries' for Europeans in line with centuries old confrontations between Islamic and Christian polities, and by conquering India under a rule imagined by the British as despotic in colonial discourse, they had the potential for a religious uprising to regain their lost power while at the same time providing a justification for the British Raj as a peaceful, power successor state in the vein of conquerors. Hindus, meanwhile, as adherents of a totally different tradition than the Abrahamic, had long been described in colonial discourses as inferior, subjugated by northern Islamic conquerors, and with the admiration for upper-caste Hindus overturned by the events of 1857.²²²

Martial race discourses attempted to negotiate these shifting racial imaginaries to

²²¹ 'The Church Missionary Intelligencier: A Monthly Journal of Missionary Information', 7, no. 1 (1871): 28; quoted in Pradeep Barua, 'Inventing Race: The British and India's Martial Races', *The Historian* 58, no. 1 (September 1995): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6563.1995.tb00942.x>.

²²² Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

determine which Indians, Muslim and Hindu alike, could be recruited despite their potential for religious intrigue: even certain classes of upper-caste Brahmin were brought back into the martial race fold, the discourse of caste never truly losing its pleasurable qualities as a signifier of racial purity and exclusivity.²²³

The martial race theorists were ambivalent about religion. Even though religion was seen as a motivation for anti-colonial intrigue and agitation, the martial races were meant to be religious. MacMunn said in 1932:

The army insists on men being true and steadfast in the faith they profess, as that makes a good soldier. A Sikh must be a strict Sikh, a Moslem a zealous devout Moslem, or the army has no use for them. Zeal in their faith means character and pride of place.²²⁴

The colonial obsession with categorizing the native as a totally predictable member of a characteristic community required that sepoys behave exactly in accordance with the expectations of religious behaviour noted down in the martial race handbooks. Religious feeling indicated that the martial races conformed to British expectations, even as such feelings were construed as fundamentally dangerous to the colonial order. Stern discipline was necessary to prevent such religious zeal from fostering rebellion, a discipline enabled by the

²²³ {Citation}

²²⁴ MacMunn, 'The Romance of the Martial Races in India', 185.

total knowledge provided by martial race handbooks and the capable, guiding hand of the British officer.

However, martial race discourse did not solely provide an ambivalent set of pleasures/unpleasures from Hindu and Muslim religiosity. The fanatical, worthy adversary of Islam and the caste-obsessed, intrigue-filled Brahmin culture were each contrasted to the British imagination of Sikhism. The British took pride in fostering a Sikh culture, identifying the faith itself as the source of Sikh martial prowess. To quote MacMunn's view of Sikhism: "So stimulating are its tenets and practices that it is not to be wondered that the British officers have insisted on its maintenance among their recruits."²²⁵ The British army worked hard to ensure that Sikh recruits in the army were 'pure' Sikhs, practicing the religion in the forms proper to British conceptualizations of the faith.²²⁶ The Indian Army only accepted Sikhs who underwent the ceremony of the *pahul* – a Sikh rite comparable to Baptism, performed with a double-edged sword – to ensure their Sikhs were properly socialized within the faith; this also led the army to adopt a cynical strategy of countering recruitment shortfalls by encouraging northern Hindu peasants to take the *pahul* and join the Sikh Khalsa, proving the practical flexibility of martial race doctrine.²²⁷ The *pahul* ceremony baptized Sikhs into 'Singhs' (literally 'lions'), a sub-group of Sikhs historically dedicated to the

²²⁵ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 256.

²²⁶ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 127.

²²⁷ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 9; Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 21.

defence of the Sikh community against Mughal invasion. The Singh archetype of the Sikh and its attendant pahul ceremony became institutionalized as the model of Sikhism, hitherto an ill-defined religion, under the patronage of a British martial race army.²²⁸ MacMunn proudly stated that the Indian army's insistence on the pahul ensured that the Sikhs retained their martial characteristics and religious distinctiveness due to British intervention: "It is not too much to say that Sikhism in its form of Singhs was saved by the British."²²⁹

The British discourse of the Sikh community as Singhs was necessary as a counterweight to the dangers posed by Hinduism and Islam, and martial race discourse transformed the demographics and the religious identity of Sikhs toward the form of the faith preferred by British recruiters. Military recruitment was a necessary economic choice among the agricultural Sikhs the British preferred to recruit, due to the low incomes and high debts of rural Punjabi cultivator families and the British offer of land in irrigated 'canal colonies' for military service.²³⁰ The thoughts and motivations of Sikh and other sepoy populations will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five, but a British recruitment policy centered around the martial race fantasy of the pure, warrior Sikh ideal nudged Sikh society to conform to the model desired by the British Raj.

²²⁸ Richard Gabriel Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 109–10.

²²⁹ MacMunn, 'The Romance of the Martial Races in India', 185.

²³⁰ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 195.

The British military was the essential tool for the maintenance of a Sikh nationalism in India. Through classification of non-militarized, settled Sikh populations as potentially ‘degenerating’ into Hinduism, the Indian Army was positioned to prevent Sikhs transforming into a different category. Such a slippage was characteristic to the strangeness of martial race discourse – the possibility to lose racial characteristics, or transform into a different community altogether.²³¹ Navdeep Mandair argues that the oppressive nature of this colonially imposed model of warlike Sikhism in service to the British Crown is not perceived by modern Sikhs due to the collaboration of Sikh communities with the colonial state, and Sikh thinkers in the early 20th century articulated a discourse of similarity with the colonial state in an ideological struggle against ‘effeminate’ Hinduism. A similar process of selectively defining certain Nepalese populations as Gurkhas and others as not (with martial race theorists painstakingly explaining that while the Gurkhas were much shorter than other martial races, they were the Nepalese with the most ‘Aryan’ blood and consequently the tallest)²³² led to a consolidation of a Gurkha identity characterized by the need to conform to British military expectations.²³³ The result was the Army expected their Gurkhas to perform Gurkha celebrations and dances and to speak Nepali to “reinforce cultural cohesiveness:” with these traditions and practices being alien to most of

²³¹ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 22.

²³² MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 193; Bonarjee, *A Handbook of the Fighting Races of India*, 97–98.

²³³ Gurung, ‘The Making of Gurkha as a “martial Race” in Colonial India: Theory and Practice’.

the diverse body of 'Gurkha' recruits.²³⁴ Stereotype, after all, required repetition, and through the conformity of the objects of martial race discourse to its predictions, the discourse described the social reality it constructed. The constitution of martial race stereotypes was thus a dialogue between the martial races and the British, which discursively constructed colonial relationships between societies in India.

The stress placed in martial race discourse upon loyalty and tractability could not mask the increasing social unrest taking place in the Punjab in the lead-up to the World War I, and the fears of Sikh sedition unless the energies of the community were properly channeled into the army.²³⁵ The loyalist Sikh acted as an example of ideal Sikh masculinity that contrasted against the increasing numbers of Sikhs campaigning for Indian nationalism – including the US-based Ghadar Movement – just as the martial races acted as a rebuke against the non-martial intellectuals. The Sikhs, the Punjab, and the Indian Army as a whole needed to be kept loyal and content, insulated from subversive rhetoric. If the recruiting base of the Indian Army, the instrumental of colonial control...

... Were to be 'subverted,' then the Indian Army, or portions of it, would not only cease to be of use as an instrument of state power, but could ultimately pose a threat to the Raj itself.²³⁶

²³⁴ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 202.

²³⁵ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 23.

²³⁶ Tan, *The Garrison State*, 184.

To prevent this happening, the supposedly inherent loyalty of the Punjab was maintained by repressive policies and brutal crackdowns such as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar, 1919.²³⁷ The stereotype of Sikh stupidity, shared across the other martial races, was reflected in the poor levels of literacy and educational attainment in the Indian Army's martial race peasantry; this was a deliberate policy choice to prevent the growth of the nationalist tendencies present in India's educated urban classes.²³⁸ Boundaries between the martial races and the non-martials, and the boundaries between the Indian army and subversive voices from the communities it recruited from, needed to be as strictly maintained as the boundaries between white and brown in the colonial periphery. Martial race discourse was ever a tense dialogue between the British desire to venerate and resemble the martial races, and the need to keep the racialized subaltern body distanced from the white Self; all in the context of ensuring the stability and loyalty of the arm of British imperial security in India.

Martial race discourse's truisms were maintained through the active construction of the martial races in accordance with the discourse, encouraging model martial populations such as the Sikhs to reframe their societies to better suit British desires from them as a recruitable military population. Martial race discourse thus acted as a form of social engineering that produced the warlike, masculine, heroic soldier societies the British wished to see themselves reflected

²³⁷ Kohli, 'Militarization of Sikh Masculinity', 56.

²³⁸ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, 28.

by in colonial India. Moreover, as George MacMunn argued, these martial races were the ones who were better racially suited, having always come from India's supposed ancestral rulers, to take charge of the country once Indian independence seemed a near inevitability:

The ineffective outlook of the Gandhi mind would but throw the country back, would get rid of the West and its millions of miles of life-giving water, its thousands of miles of rail that prevent famine, and would bring it where it was, like China with her bandits and war-lords.

“Scored with the brand of the burning heat,
And the wrath divine and the sins of man
And the fateful tramp of the conquerors' feet,
It has suffered all since the world began.”²³⁹

The men of those races whose hand have never kept their heads cannot be expected to do so, nor do they seem worthy of the trust that the Crown would otherwise wish to place in their hands. On the other hand the men of the Rajput, Jat and kindred races and groups have it in them in due to course to lead and control.²⁴⁰

The martial races were, in the eyes of imperialists like MacMunn the only ones who were ever fit to govern an independent India. The promise of a liberal imperialism and a reformable colonial mimic was embodied in the sepoy, not in the Bengali, for his greater imagined racial resemblance to the European.

²³⁹ Like many of the quotations in MacMunn's book, this is unsourced.

²⁴⁰ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 358.

However, this reformability was deferred to some future. Whatever qualities the martial races possessed that made them superior custodians of an independent India than the intellectual politicians, the British, construed as stern, fatherly guardians of the Indian races, did not perceive them as fully equal, yet ready for independence.

MacMunn's book was written in the aftermath of the Indian Army's participation in World War I. The martial races of India traveling to the Western Front generated widespread commentary and interest in the European contact zone, wherein the colonial knowledge of martial race discourse operated as the hegemonic framing of these colonial soldiers. Now that I have established the complexities of anxiety, resemblance, difference, and desire that underlay the discourse, I turn my attention to that crucial moment of intercultural and interracial military encounter.

4. IMAGINING THE SEPOY ON THE WESTERN FRONT: REPRESENTATION AND VENTRILOQUISM

As I follow the Indian Army in its journey to the Western Front, I look for the ambivalence of colonial desire as it played upon the sepoy body in European representation. Martial race discourses mediated the interface between the migrant Indian soldier and the white European in the unprecedented field of cross-racial, imperial encounter created by colonial military migration during the war years. The martial race army of the Raj had been envisioned by Frederick Roberts to meet the Russian Cossack “in the plains of the Oxus.”²⁴¹ Instead, the sepoy ‘met’ the German conscript across the trenches, fighting an enemy he rarely saw. He also met white Europe in the discursive battlefield of cultural encounter and representation. What did the presence of non-white, colonial, military labour signify in – and to – a Europe embroiled in ‘the war to end all wars’?

The Indian soldier on the Western Front became “the site where beleaguered white masculinity inscribe[d] its own anxieties and fantasies.”²⁴² The dehumanizing, landscape-altering violence of the war transformed Europe into an alienating space for its inhabitants, spurring white European anxiety over the claims to the superiority of white Western civilization to the colonized world. Discourses that described industrialized, urbanized Europe as a space of racial

²⁴¹ Engels, ‘The Revolt in India’.

²⁴² Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 145.

degeneration saw in the carnage of the Western Front the embodiment of these anxieties. The arrival of the martial races, both lauded as chivalrous and imaged as racially inferior did not just reverse the trajectory of colonial mobility through migration to and colonial encounter in Europe but rendered the contact zone a space of hybridity. In this contact zone the binary discourses of metropole / periphery, civilized / savage and other signifiers of colonial discourse lost their referent power. The ambivalence of martial race discourse as both an expression of ‘colonial fantasy’ and ‘colonial nightmare’ imagined soldiers that both embodied and relieved European fears and hopes.²⁴³ Colonial discourses operated “not only as an instrumental construction of knowledge but also according to the ambivalent protocols of fantasy and desire.”²⁴⁴ Martial race discourse as a colonial discourse gave Europeans knowledge claims over the nature of the Indian soldier, allowing for the navigation of the contact zone in representations of the soldier – representations that nevertheless captured the anxieties and desires operating across the contact zone. In this chapter I closely read from the archive of European writing from the war years to demonstrate the imagining of the sepoy mind and body that operated primarily in martial race conceptions independent of input from actual sepoys. The literary, imagined voice of the sepoy was deployed to reproduce martial race discourse in ways that aimed to soothe

²⁴³ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 33.

²⁴⁴ Young, *Colonial Desire*, 153.

anxiety, but also represented the tensions of the discourse in the extreme circumstances of the Western Front, far from its origins in India.

In this chapter I begin with the argument that martial race discourse provided the discursive justification to the British imagination for the military migration of the Indian army. In a climate of racialized European – particularly British – reluctance to deploy colonial labour in Europe, martial race discourses made it possible to imagine a few select colonial populations as capable and loyal enough to use in direct combat against white opponents. Exploring the Western Front as a space of European civilization anxiety that became embodied through the Indian sepoy, I tease out the various European hopes and fears that oscillated around the foreign martial race body. Martial race discourse's peculiar construction of the loyal, chivalrous but primitive soldier as the white man's subaltern sidekick provided an ambivalent framework to reconcile the tensions between European desires and anxieties. In this chapter I also I develop the notion of 'imperial ventriloquism.' I study British wartime literature written from the perspective of fictional sepoys acted as 'imperial antibiotic' that 'inoculated' British readers from the anxieties triggered by the violent presence of Indian soldiers in Europe.²⁴⁵ The act of colonial mimicry creates the slippages through which we glimpse the writers' own desires, fears, and anxieties. We ultimately see the martial race sepoy as a construct whereby the British could see themselves

²⁴⁵ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 180.

and their relationship to colonial India idealized and would puppeteer the muted voices of their colonial sidekicks to reassure themselves of their own self-conceptions.

“Direst Need”: Sending the Martial Races to Europe

During World War I 140,000 soldiers and labourers of the Indian Army served on the Western Front.²⁴⁶ Arriving in late September 1914, the Indians played a crucial role in reinforcing the beleaguered British Expeditionary Forces through to December 1915, after which it was despatched to fight the Ottomans in Mesopotamia, leaving only its cavalry elements behind.²⁴⁷ These cavalrymen were largely kept in reserve, and in early 1918 they were transferred to the Palestine Front, ending the presence of Indian troops in Europe.²⁴⁸ Indians were the only colonial force the British used in active combat in Europe, and it was the first time that the British had allowed a body of non-white men to fight white men in battle.²⁴⁹

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, Frederick Roberts had insisted on transforming the Indian Army into an army of martial race warriors that would be capable of fighting a European enemy – with the Russian Empire being the intended threat in the 1880s. Despite the discourse suggesting the Indian

²⁴⁶ The War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War. 1914-1920* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1922), 777.

²⁴⁷ Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front*, 7.

²⁴⁸ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 4.

²⁴⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 205.

Army could face Europeans in battle, British military policy was hostile to the idea of sending Indian troops to Europe itself. There was a political dimension to this policy, but also a racialized aversion to using non-white soldiers against white enemies, a policy of the British since the Boer War.²⁵⁰ I argue that martial race discourse made it possible to send Indian troops to fight in Europe despite this aversion, a distinction granted to no other non-white population under the British empire. The discourse was the basis upon which a large colonial army of Indian soldiers comprised of martial races was ready and able to be deployed to Europe at the start of the war; the discourse, moreover, made the martial races palatable, imagined as cut from a different cloth to other non-white colonial troops of the British empire. However, the discourse held within itself assumptions of Indian inferiority that discouraged this migration outside of a military emergency.

The British Army of the era was a small (if professional) force that lacked the manpower to hold its own against the giant conscript armies of the continent. The idea of using Indian reinforcements was practical. Measures to integrate the Indian Army under the command of London in the case of European war were advocated by Douglas Haig, Chief of Staff in India (1910-12), but opposed by Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India (1910-16), who refused to relinquish control of the

²⁵⁰ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 8.

army.²⁵¹ The political deadlock between these two men was broken by the outbreak of the war. Haig, by then the Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, convinced Lord Kitchener, himself formerly Commander-in-Chief in India and by then the British Secretary of War, to mobilize the Indian Army for overseas deployment. The Indian Army had served in a limited capacity in overseas expeditions to places such as China and South Africa, and initially they were intended to be sent to Egypt to free up British garrisons who could then be routed to Europe. As MacMunn, passionate advocate of martial race discourse later explained, “It was, except in the terrible circumstances which fell on the world, an impossible thought to ask these simple Indian peasantry to undergo so terrible a trial.”²⁵² On the 28th of August 1914, Lord Kitchener told the House of Lords that Indian army regiments would be deployed in France and Belgium.²⁵³

Shrabani Basu outlined the practical reasons for the British to opt for direct Indian intervention in Europe. The Indian Army had military experience, having served abroad in campaigns in the Far East, and using it sent powerful messages to Britain’s allies and her enemies: Britain’s naval power could rapidly summon a large army from its empire within weeks, and she had her largest

²⁵¹ George Morton Jack, ‘The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration’, *War in History* 13, no. 3 (July 2006): 333-34, <https://doi.org/10.1191/0968344506wh3440a>.

²⁵² MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 319.

²⁵³ Jack, ‘The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915’, 338.

colony's full support and loyalty in the conflict.²⁵⁴ The Indian presence in Europe was on the direct wishes of the King-Emperor himself, and by then Lord Hardinge was also keen to involve India directly in the war to appease the desires of Indian politicians eager to prove Indian worth on the battlefield.²⁵⁵ "The direst need", as MacMunn put it, made it necessary to put the sepoy through the "terrible trial" of fighting in Europe though "it was well known that his fighting strength was comparatively feeble without the unlimited initiative and fearless and abnormally prominent leadership of his British officers."²⁵⁶ Discourses of Indian soldiers as childish led to the British military tacitly assuming that Indians were not racially fit to meet white enemies in war and that they depended entirely on the leadership of white British officers. Moreover, using non-white soldiers in armed conflict against white opponents was seen – especially by the Germans, who refused to deploy any soldiers from their Empire to Europe – as a betrayal of imperialism's racial principles.²⁵⁷ The attitude was far from unique to Germans, and even in allied nations there were great misgivings about what would happen

²⁵⁴ Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18*, xxv.

²⁵⁵ David Omissi, 'The Indian Army in Europe, 1914-1918', in *Colonial Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1945: 'Aliens in Uniform' in Wartime Societies*, ed. Eric Storm and Ali Al Tuma, Routledge Studies in Modern History (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 122. More on Indian politician's stance on the war in Chapter Five.

²⁵⁶ MacMunn, 'The Romance of the Martial Races in India', 319.

²⁵⁷ Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War'; German colonial soldiers would see extensive use in their local theaters, see: Michelle Moyd, "'We Don't Want to Die for Nothing': Askari at War in German East Africa, 1914-1918', in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Das Santanu (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

should non-white soldiers learn how to wage war against whites. As E.D. Morel gloomily wrote shortly after the war:

We have invited our apt pupils to join with us in slaughtering our rivals for-the-time-being; bidden them attend the shambles, inspect the implements, study at their ease the methods of the business.²⁵⁸

Colonial discipline and hierarchy would be impossible to maintain once such a Pandora's Box was opened. Discourses of white, imperial mastery were revealed in extremis to be fragile: the supposedly loyal colonial soldier always embodied the threat of violence, made realer than ever before through the unprecedented use of soldiers of colour in a white Europe, against a white Europe.

From this much it appears that Indian martial race discourses had been insufficient to overcome the aversion to non-white, colonial military migration and instead various practical necessities produced the departure of the Indian Army to Europe. However, I argue that martial race discourse was essential to ultimately justifying the migration of Indian troops to Europe. British martial race discourse diffused from colonial India to the wider empire, leading to the classification of 'races' as diverse as the Sudanese, Māori and Igbo as martial: yet these imaginations did not translate into military migration to Europe.²⁵⁹ Soldiers

²⁵⁸ E. D. Morel, *The Black Man's Burden* (Manchester: The National Labour Press, Ltd., 1920).

²⁵⁹ Sarah Davis Westwood, 'Martial Race Theory', in *The Encyclopedia of Empire*, ed. Nigel Dalziel and John M MacKenzie (Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2016), 3-4, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118455074.wbeoe285>.

from British Africa were simply not used in Europe at all, and other non-white troops who were deployed were kept exclusively in ancillary and support roles, even if these same populations were used in direct combat elsewhere, as the West Indians were used in Palestine and the Māori in Gallipoli.²⁶⁰ The Indian Army was a truly exceptional case where the decades since 1857 had produced a non-white army of sufficient size, training and experience to make them viable in modern European combat. The martial race discourse that produced, and had been reproduced by, the Indian Army enabled this fighting force to be available for European deployment upon the outbreak of the war and provided the discursive apparatus that permitted its use while all other colonial forces were deemed of insufficient military use to be worth the risk of using them against white opponents. The uniquely compelling nature of Indian martial race discourse, drawing up an attractive mimic figure for the European imagination, had no equivalent in Africa or New Zealand, where populations could be construed as martial but lacked the closeness imagined for Indians in British colonial race discourse.

It is useful to consider the unique nature of British martial race discourse in India not just in comparison to other British martial race discourses, but also to the martial imaginaries of the French. In France, a controversial project

²⁶⁰ Richard Smith, "Heaven Grant You Strength to Fight the Battle for Your Race": Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the First World War in Jamaican Memory', in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Walker, "Descendants of a Warrior Race".

spearheaded by General Charles Mangin had allowed for the creation of 'la force noire', expanding French African colonial militaries into a force of sufficient strength as to be deployed into a European conflict. While the French had, unlike the British, a large military the disparity between French and German populations made French military planners, smarting from the Franco-Prussian War, worried about another French humiliation if French and German conscript armies clashed. Mangin's argument had rested on the supposedly racialized characteristics of Africa's so-called 'warrior races', a martial race discourse that ascribed to several West African races a primitive bloodlust and an insensitivity to pain (the product of underdeveloped nervous systems) combined with colonial tractability that made them a viable source of manpower in an armed conflict against the numerically superior German army.²⁶¹ These martial race imaginaries made it possible for Mangin to create la force noire, whereas similar proposals to create an armée jaune resulted in the use of Indochinese forces only in ancillary roles in Europe as there were doubts regarding their racial ability to fight Europeans.²⁶² Martial race imaginaries were thus necessary to the military migration and war participation of non-white populations on the Western Front; they created a narrative of military competence among select colonial bodies and produced armies of sufficient size and training that the imperial metropole had

²⁶¹ Lunn, "Les Races Guerrières": Racial Preconceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War'.

²⁶² Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War', 117; Mireille Le Van Ho, 'Le général Pennequin et le projet d'armée jaune (1911-1915)', *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 75, no. 279 (1988): 145-67, <https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1988.2658>.

no choice but to use them in war. However, while French martial race discourse enabled the extended use of French African soldiers in Europe, British martial race discourses only enabled the use of the Indian Army in Europe, and no other martial races of the British Empire – and that too, for only a limited duration of the war. As the ‘direst need’ passed the British relegated even the Indian martial races to the farther theaters of the war or to the backlines of Europe, out of sight and mind. Whereas the French continued to use African soldiers even into peacetime, where their use in the occupation of the demilitarized Rhineland was met with widespread, racialized condemnation in the West.²⁶³

Martial race discourse can then be placed within the context of a wider British racist distaste for colonized populations, as an interruption and exception that reveals the workings of desire, anxiety, and power in the colonial knowledge structure of race, and not as a refutation of racism as disgust. The military performance of the Indian Army during and after the war was damned with faint praise at best, with critics within the British military establishment and subsequent historiographers arguing that the Indian Army had underperformed; their casualties were high, morale was abysmal, and they were incapable of holding their nerve once their officers were killed.²⁶⁴ Despite a large number of military honours earned by Indian troops during the war and their decisive

²⁶³ Wigger, *The ‘Black Horror on the Rhine’*.

²⁶⁴ Jeffrey Greenhut, ‘Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army’, *Military Affairs* 48, no. 1 (1984): 15–18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1988342>.

participation in several key actions such as the First Battle of Ypres and the Battle of Neuve-Chapelle, the cost of Indian war participation was seen as too high. MacMunn's lamentations of 'direst need' justifying the 'terrible trial' speak to a narrative where the Indian soldier had done his best to perform his duty, but they had never been seriously expected to handle the strain of modern combat against the white man. Historians such as Kaushik Roy and Christian Koller have argued that the Indian Army's performance in France was not noticeably worse than any other army's.²⁶⁵ Martial race discourses produced an expectation that Indians would fight well and often bravely, but not so well that they could be considered a match for a European enemy – especially without white officers to back them up. The Indian soldier, once no longer needed in Europe after the arrival of Kitchener's 'New Armies' of British troops in mid-1915 could be better used against the non-white Ottoman foe in Mesopotamia. In the terrain of the European imagination the martial race Indian was thus a complex figure who oscillated between colonial excellence and colonial mediocrity, whose presence was desirable and yet only tolerated as a necessity.

²⁶⁵ Kaushik Roy, 'Combat Motivations of the Sepoys and Sowars during the First World War', in *Indian Soldiers in the First World War: Re-Visiting a Global Conflict*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar and Claude Markovits, 1st ed. (Routledge India, 2020), 46, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003142362>; Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War', 122.

Chivalry and Barbarity in an Altered Europe

The discursive richness engendered by the encounter of Europeans with Indians was, as Roly Grimshaw of the Poona Horse put it, “a great deal of gush, also bosh.”²⁶⁶ Following 1857 the stalwart, loyal and masculine martial race sepoy had become a frequent subject in British media ranging from postcards to boot polish to novels. Even before the first Indian soldier arrived in Europe, the sepoy “was a recognizable type; by 1915, he had become a species.”²⁶⁷ When the Indian Army arrived in Europe, it was to a climate of great European excitement at their presence. The martial races, the long-established heroic sidekicks of imperial adventure, were coming to Europe in its hour of need. News of India’s declaration of war alongside Britain was delivered to the British public replete with martial race tropes.

The *Illustrated London News* carried a feature on the 5th of September 1914 titled “To Fight Side by Side with the British in France: Indian Troops.”²⁶⁸ A full-page collage of photographs showed Indian soldiers posing for the camera, mostly in dress uniform. Readers were offered the spectacle of these colonial soldiers standing ramrod stiff at attention or in studied attitudes of repose, every one of them in turbans. Most of the pictures depict cavalry lancers, who with their particularly bold headdresses, their arsenal of swords and lances, are as striking as

²⁶⁶ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 98.

²⁶⁷ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 125.

²⁶⁸ “To Fight Side by Side with the British in France: Indian Troops.”, *Illustrated London News*, 5 September 1914.

their mounts. One image captioned “A Lancer Regiment Preparing to Charge” depicts a line of mounted men rushing forward, lances tipped with pennants that flutter in the breeze. The accompanying text described the soldiers as “high-souled men of first-rate training and representing an ancient civilization.” The text and imagery together suggest the Indian Army as being a throwback to a bygone age of chivalry. Claire Buck argued that lingering on “tradition and historical depth” allowed the British public to imagine the present in historical continuity with an imperial past where they “successfully dominated and assimilated these martial races” and established India as a pre-modern colonial space in need of the Empire’s civilizing mission.²⁶⁹

These images also represented an element of wish fulfilment. Indians on the Western Front would be hotly pursued by the media, and in the profusion of visual depictions that emerged there would be great emphasis placed on images of them engaging in hand-to-hand combat; in particular the signature Kukri knives of the Gurkha regiments became a “colonial visual cliché.”²⁷⁰ Das argued that these images allowed European consumers to vicariously live out a fantasy of heroic combat, engaging with the foe face-to-face or displaying valour on horseback, in a war whose industrial violence made such visions of close encounter and romantic violence obsolete with brutal, mechanical efficiency. Paul Fussell described writers attempting to grapple with the reality of the

²⁶⁹ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 13.

²⁷⁰ Santanu Das, *1914-18: Indian Troops in Europe* (India: Mapin Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2015), 23.

Western Front by reaching for the literary tropes available to them, which were “the motifs and images of popular romance.”²⁷¹ From the gulf between the innocent, romanticized expectation of war against its bleak, modern reality emerged the rich vein of fatalistic irony that characterized British trench literature. Through engaging with the established tropes of Indian soldiers as romanticized warriors from an “ancient civilization,” there was a rare opportunity for Western audiences to unironically imagine chivalrous combat still taking place in a war that was rapidly transforming European expectations of the pursuit and nature of war. The Indian soldier acted as an antidote to a view of the war as a display of “the supremacy of the machine and the technological spirit”²⁷² over the ideals of Western civilization. However, the mechanical violence of the war created a space in which the Indian presence was complicated by anxieties over the degeneration of European spaces and selves.

Sharmishtha Roy Chowdhury suggests an analysis of the war “through the lens of spatiality and mobility – that is travel.”²⁷³ The war gave the opportunity to demonstrate the power of imperial mobility through the arrival of an Indian Army to reinforce the British forces, but imperial power was also transfixed and mired in years of unsolvable and fruitless trench war deadlock. Adding an

²⁷¹ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 150.

²⁷² Anton Kaes, ‘The Phantasm of the Apocalypse: Metropolis and Weimar Modernity’, in *Noir Urbanisms: Dystopic Images of the Modern City*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2010), 19.

²⁷³ Chowdhury, *The First World War, Anticolonialism and Imperial Authority in British India, 1914–1924*, 1.

awareness of the space where the martial races arrived during World War I helps us understand European discourses around their mobility. The development of the Western Front transformed both the land and the people of Europe. John Brophy, the Anglo-Irish writer, visited the trenches of WWI forty-six years later and observed “how little space . . . separated the line, the soldier’s troglodyte world, the world which might have been another planet, from home, from England, from sanity.”²⁷⁴ This ‘troglodyte world’ was literal in the sense of the trenches, the bunkers, and the mutilation of the Western Front into a realm of mud and destruction. The British had built fortifications that dug up more earth, more quickly, than in the building of the Panama Canal.²⁷⁵ The troglodyte world was also metaphysical, in that the physical degeneration of the European landscape took place in the context of a Europe that had struggled with anxieties surrounding the racial degeneration of the working class, spurred by industry and urbanization. As discussed in Chapter Three, these anxieties were affixed to white, masculine, upper-class fears of losing racial primacy in the imperial space, and the racialization of the white working-class body developed concurrently with that of the brown and black colonized body.

Primed by a century of race anxiety tied to industrialization and urbanization, the horrific violence of World War I shook European confidence in

²⁷⁴ John Brophy and Eric Partridge, *The Long Trail: Soldiers’ Songs and Slang, 1914–18*, 1965, 22; quoted in Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 70.

²⁷⁵ J. S. Smith, *Trench Warfare: A Manual for Officers and Men* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1917), vii.

their own racial and civilizational superiority: not only was the war a powerful rebuke against the civilizing claims of European imperialism, a theme developed by Indian intellectuals such as Rabindranath Tagore,²⁷⁶ but the discourse of the 'troglydte world' reduced the European soldier to the level of something barely recognizable as human. Soldiers crawling in the mud, surrounded by the formless debris of war, industrial nightmares like tanks and chlorine gas and by the effluvia of decomposing bodies, were seen as the apogee of the racial degeneration of industrial Europe. It was into this space of anxiety over the distancing of the white European self from its idealized self-image, that non-white colonial labour entered.

Claire Buck has argued that in the world of the trenches, the physical alterations visited upon Europe (that could make it 'another planet' contrasted to the English 'home' across the Channel) and the racial degeneration of the European working-class body were embodied by the presence of non-white migrant labour, where brown and black bodies were metonymic of the ubiquitous brown mud of the trenches.²⁷⁷ European discomfort over the presence of colonial labour saw a discursive veil drawn over depictions and descriptions of most colonial soldiers, colonial labourers in particular.²⁷⁸ The Indian Army was the notable exception, prominently displayed across European media, hounded by

²⁷⁶ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, chap. 10.

²⁷⁷ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 15.

²⁷⁸ Buck, 12.

what Santanu Das called “the imperial paparazzi.”²⁷⁹ The honourable yet primeval men of the martial races both embodied and challenged the imagination of the Western Front as a space of European degeneration. The barbarism of the troglodyte world could be held at bay in the European psyche by the derring-do and chivalry of the martial races, and by commanding such men and their unswerving loyalty, the British could reassure themselves of their own racial and civilizational superiority. Fears of white racial degeneration could also be staved off through projecting such fears and fantasies onto the bodies of the martial races instead. However, the process was never perfect, slippages abounded, and from the reassuring figure of the soldier as the chivalrous hero could emerge the disquieting colonial brute. The distance at which the sepoy could be held at bay was crossed by the imagination of the martial race warrior as an Aryan, a figure for the European just a few short steps into racial decline away. The tension between the idealized fantasy of the sepoy and the racial metaphor of colonial soldiers in an altered Europe is evident in the two accounts contained in Massia Bibikoff’s *Our Indians at Marseilles* (1915).

²⁷⁹ Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, 126.

Our Indians at Marseilles (1915)

The first Indian soldiers arrived at the port of Marseille at 7AM, 26 September.²⁸⁰

Their presence was met with widespread excitement by the Marseillais, as a local paper reported:

People threw flowers at them, offered them fruits and tobacco. Women pinned flowers on the uniforms and the turbans of the Sikh soldiers, who are impressively tall... and of the small Gurkha soldiers, as well as of the Punjabis and the Baluchis to whom they distributed small French flags which they affixed to their guns. The soldiers responded with resounding 'Vive la France' to the cries of 'Vivent les Anglais! Vivent les Hindous' coming from the crowd, and alternating with a Marseillaise which was very well executed by the Hindu military bands made up of strange musical instruments.²⁸¹

The outpouring of excitement at the arrival of the Indian army, identified both by their martial race categories and by the generic label of 'les Hindous' showcased the soft power at work in favour of 'les Anglais' who could demonstrate the extent of their imperial reach in summoning such a visually exciting colonial army to the shores of France. We see also the beginnings of racial differentiation, with the 'impressively tall' Sikhs marching next to Gurkhas invariably singled out for their diminutive stature. This powerful transracial

²⁸⁰ Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18*, 33.

²⁸¹ Claude Markovits, trans., *Le Petit Provençal*, 7 October 1914; quoted in Claude Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes', in *Indian Soldiers in the First World War: Re-Visiting a Global Conflict*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar and Claude Markovits, 1st ed. (Routledge India, 2020), 91, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003142362>.

encounter created a demand for knowledge of these striking figures. French newspapers produced an outpouring of often blatantly ill-researched content to satisfy the hunger for information.²⁸² British expertise was needed to solve the ‘mystery’ of who these Indians were, and British officers interviewed about the sepoys reproduced martial race ethnology, faithfully repeated by the French media to its readers.²⁸³ Through the course of the war, Indian soldiers would be seen as stereotypes by the French. Indians were either seen as an undifferentiated army of visually spectacular warriors, or as broad categories of martial race soldiers as communicated by the British. French appetites for images of the martial races were whetted by a range of sketches, paintings, photographs, and films produced by civilians from France as well as Britain and her colonies that showcased the doings of the Indian Army. The images range from stylized sketches of cavalry charges to newspaper cartoons of Gurkhas creeping through the trenches at night to ambush German sentries, and even photographs of sepoys playing with European children.²⁸⁴ Within these images swirl differing, conflicting responses to the treatment of the sepoy as a racialized, masculine warrior that oscillates from exoticized, even sexualized intrigue and a certain revulsion, the body either rising above the troglodyte world of the trenches or enmeshed within it.

²⁸² MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 323.

²⁸³ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes’, 91.

²⁸⁴ Das, *1914-18: Indian Troops in Europe*.

Massia Bibikoff, a Russian émigré living in France who had the opportunity to meet and paint the Indian army (under strict British supervision) after its arrival at Marseille, provides us our most thorough insight into this first moment of transracial, cross-cultural encounter in the migratory contact zone of the Western Front. Her memoir *Our Indians at Marseilles* (1915) provides us with a resonant, lyrical, at times overly effervescent account of the Indian body as an object of desire informed by martial race discourses.

Bibikoff gives a vivid description of the Indian Army's camps, men, and materiel over the course of a six-day sojourn where she interacts with a range of men including French translators, British officers, Indian cooks, and clerks and even princes. Bibikoff reveals a lifelong fascination with India and describes the Indian army as a wonderful body of men from the "Land of Marvels," with gallant Maharajas commanding "wild, rough soldiers, who seemed to have come to life again from the depths of bygone ages."²⁸⁵ She observes everything with wonder and delight, to her even the most mundane ways of the sepoy body occupying space are exotic and fascinating when transported to Europe.²⁸⁶ Despite her many interactions with Indians, she consistently frames them as members of their racial

²⁸⁵ Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, 96 & 21.

²⁸⁶ "What a group! It deserves a master's pencil. The most fertile imagination could not conceive such a picture. One is bare to the waist with a sort of white skirt draped round him, quite in the fashion; another in a grey jersey such as cyclists wear, with trousers cut short to the knee, and on his head a scarlet turban; yonder is a Sikh, engaged in taking down his long hair, like a woman, and then rolling it up again in a little chignon on the top of his head. They are all squatting or lying down in the strangest and most diversified attitudes. They are so slender, so thin, so supple that they can literally bend in two. Their knees almost touch their chin." Massia Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, trans. Leonard Huxley (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1915), 26.

types, informed by her Orientalist knowledge and desire to see her childhood fantasies come alive.

Bibikoff understands the Indians she meets through the lens of stereotype, as an embodiment of 'fairy stories' of her youth. She describes with a thrill, aided by a French interlocutor, the "special warrior caste of the Sikhs" who may be recognized via the iron ring they wear on their turbans – "the distinctive mark of their caste, which is forged from a dreadful weapon of old times, and is given them by the Guru or High Priest."²⁸⁷ British officers are eager to show off their various martial types for her to draw, presenting them always as types and never as individuals.²⁸⁸ Their individual personalities and names do not shine through. She frequently compares them to the Russian Empire's Cossacks, who act as her main frame of comparative reference.²⁸⁹ Tropes of martial race masculinity allow populations as distinct as Cossacks and Indians to merge in a European imagination of the Orient, martial populations from imperial peripheries united as reference points for idealized, imperialist self-imaginings.

Even when interacting with her object of greatest fascination, a prince called Sher Singh, Bibikoff sees him as an embodiment of Orientalist romance: "He realised the dreams of beauty in which I loved to wrap the heroes and princes

²⁸⁷ Bibikoff, 18.

²⁸⁸ Bibikoff, 22.

²⁸⁹ In what is a fairly short narrative, Bibikoff compares the Indian Army to Russian Cossacks six times. Bibikoff, 12, 17, 31, 43, 53, 115.

of the Arabian Nights.”²⁹⁰ Bibikoff identifies Sher Singh as a ruler of the Rajputs, “the most warlike, the most chivalrous, and the *best-looking* race of India” [my emphasis] and whose Kshatriya ruling class of warriors supposedly descend from the Sun.²⁹¹ Sher Singh’s interactions with Bibikoff are polite and even bathetic in contrast to this lofty fantasy (he requests her help with his shopping for mundane items like cigarettes and writing paper), but his individuality is subordinate to Bibikoff’s expectations of him as stereotype. Sher Singh invites Bibikoff and her mother to visit him in his palace after the war, promising them every luxury; it is unclear whether this is a sincere desire to have them, simple politeness, or a product of the prince’s subaltern status as an Indian, but Bibikoff is predictably excited at the prospect of living out her fantasy of Oriental adventure to the full in a world where white European women of no particular status could by default expect the attention and hospitality of Indian royalty. Sher Singh represents the desire to break from the mundanity of everyday life.

Bibikoff’s effervescent prose captures the war as a moment where, to the European eye, the colonial soldier enters Europe in its moment of crisis and brings glamour, transforming the everyday scenes of France in the “materialistic century...” to instead resemble a “fairy story” straight out of the pages of Jules Verne.²⁹² By travelling to Europe, the exotic sepoy body alters the European

²⁹⁰ Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, 85.

²⁹¹ Bibikoff, 114.

²⁹² Bibikoff, 153.

landscape itself into something unfamiliar and beautiful, martial race discourses containing within them the reassuring qualities not just of colonial loyalty but also of romance and adventure on the imperial frontier. The colonial body's arrival superimposes the colonial periphery onto the metropole, troubling the borders between Europe and its empire.

In a chapter on the colonial soldier in wartime memoirs of white, female nurses, Allison Fell gives us important insights into the forms of often tensely aggregated desire felt by the typically middle and upper classes nurses toward their non-white charges. The non-white soldier is treated with a certain horrified, racialized fascination undisguised by the patina of disgust; looked after with a maternal fondness that infantilized the soldiers; and described with a sexualized desire couched in a language of respectability and restraint.²⁹³ More on Fell's work (and on anxieties of race and sex, particularly in the hospital spaces, on the European contact zone) will follow in Chapter Five, but for now I can use her work in building the lens through which we read Bibikoff's sexualized, Orientalist desires from the body and status of the Raja and his heroic, chivalrous soldiers. The desire of colonial mastery, of identifying and categorizing and imagining the sepoys and their princes, is expressed as a sexual desire that fixated on tropes and categories rather than the individuality of the soldiers 'represented.'

²⁹³ Alison S. Fell, 'Nursing the Other: The Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs', in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Santanu Das (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

A very different articulation of the martial race Indian as an embodiment of the war's transformative power over the European landscape was offered by Maurice Barrés. Barrés (1862-1923) was a French author and politician, described by Claude Markovits as “a right-wing nationalist,” and by Jay Winter as one whose “elevated prose spread lies about war.”²⁹⁴ The Smith, Elder & Co. English edition of *Our Indians at Marseilles* contains an introduction by Maurice Barrés titled ‘A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs.’ The translator’s note by Leonard Huxley presents Barrés as the necessary authority – a “distinguished” male, French public intellectual – to present the factual groundwork to preface Bibikoff’s own work. Bibikoff herself is described as having “an impressionable personality as genuine as it is unselfconscious.”²⁹⁵ Alison Fell argued that during the war years white women became as much an Other of white male imperialism as did men of colour.²⁹⁶ Bibikoff, despite being clearly at the very least middle class and thus ‘respectable’, was not just a woman but a Russian emigre, from the outer bounds of Europe; that we should read her writing intersectionally, aware of the ways in which she was disempowered and othered in a white, Western Europe, is made all the clearer to us in the way in which Huxley presents her voice as of lower authority than that of Barrés’, *inside her own book*. The stress given on Barrés’ authority makes his relatively short introduction at least as

²⁹⁴ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes’, 98; Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 249.

²⁹⁵ Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, x.

²⁹⁶ Fell, ‘Nursing the Other: The Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs’, 158.

worthy of colonial discourse analysis as Bibikoff's own – unfortunately reifying the subordination of Bibikoff's voice.

Written with the Indian Army already engaged in war on the Western Front, away from the relative peace of the arrival images at Marseilles Bibikoff captured, Barrés' narrative showcases the industrial violence of the war, presaging the beginnings of the troglodyte world of the trenches. Barrés reports the transformation of the Front into an alien landscape of “strange forms wrought by the whim of the shells.”²⁹⁷ Within this “strange and pathetic” desolation, “the one essential is the soldier.”²⁹⁸ Barrés notes of the first sepoy he sees that he “had become such a native of these villages, a creature of these lowlands” that he did not even react to Barrés' presence.²⁹⁹ In the background there is a ruined village, as otherworldly a note amid these scenes of rural life in the Low Countries as the Indian soldier himself; both the soldier and the ruins are natives of a transformed world to which Barrés and his companions are aliens. Later when an old peasant steps aside to let a column of the “strange and beautiful beings from the East file past under the poplars of France” Barrés think it curious to see “this old man of our own country stepping out of the way of these astounding foreigners.”³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Maurice Barrés, ‘A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs’, in *Our Indians at Marseilles*, by Massia Bibikoff, trans. Leonard Huxley (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1915), 2–3.

²⁹⁸ Barrés, 3.

²⁹⁹ Barrés, 4.

³⁰⁰ Barrés, 7.

The colonial relationship is upturned: the white European defers to the colonized, who have reversed the trajectory of colonial mobility and made France, for a while, 'their' territory. This sense of the European body becoming an intruder in the transformed space wrought by the war, and its non-white warriors, is noted by Bibikoff too. She describes Indian soldiers looking at her "like a strange animal" in their camp, and of cooks throwing away fresh-made flatbreads because her passing shadow contaminated the food.³⁰¹ Bibikoff, there to observe and document the colonized body becomes a spectacle herself, an unwelcome and even polluting presence, but all this is rendered a natural extension of the transformation of Marseilles' environs into an Indian fairy tale. In Barrés' reportage there is little romanticization of this process of the white European displaced by the non-white body. The topsy-turvy process of hybridization of continental Europe into a space at home to the colonial subaltern produces anxiety, embodied by ambivalent alien forms.

Barrés encounters Gurkhas, whose description as "sturdy little men" echoes MacMunn's of "sturdy little tykes."³⁰² Barrés speculates that the Gurkhas "unite the flattened features of negro affinity to this type of the yellow race," which would not have pleased martial race theorists who went out of their way to assert the Gurkhas' Aryan heritage.³⁰³ The Gurkha kukri draws Barrés' gaze. Its

³⁰¹ Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, 21 & 29.

³⁰² MacMunn, 'The Romance of the Martial Races in India', 195.

³⁰³ Barrés, 'A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs', 4.

utility as a knife for construction and cutting boughs is acknowledged, but its role as a fierce weapon in trench war is what always excited the European imagination, and Barrés is no exception. With mock-pity, Barrés exclaims “Poor Boches!” to the Gurkhas’ British colonel’s description of the traditional Gurkha practice of war:

To glide across the hollows of their mountain valleys and the slopes of the Himalaya so as to surprise their enemy and cut out his tongue. Such at least would be their natural tactics, only disciplined and tempered by British civilisation.”³⁰⁴

The ‘natural tactics’ of the Gurkha incline towards animal stealth and violence, aided by the cat-like ability to “see clearly at night”; the Gurkha as more animal than man is an explicit connection drawn by Barrés – Gurkhas have “sphinx-like faces”, with one having a “wrinkled yellow face” only enlivened by eyes which “blinked like a wild animal’s and seemed to avoid meeting one’s look.”³⁰⁵ The Gurkhas are described to Barrés’ readers as at first wrong-footed by the climate, in superstitious fear of “devilment in the appalling uproar of the big German guns”, but they quickly acclimatized to their new habitat: “they take their pleasure in it, and having got used to the Flemish climate, they creep at night through the mud towards the enemy’s patrols like dripping tigers.”³⁰⁶ Bibikoff similarly refers to Pathans as using their “catlike liveness” to “creep like wild

³⁰⁴ Barrés, 5.

³⁰⁵ Barrés, 5–6.

³⁰⁶ Barrés, 6.

beasts over any sort of ground and surprise the enemy.”³⁰⁷ Indians are rendered strange: they are not merely capable warriors because they fight with a heroism forgotten in 20th century Europe, but because they are bestial and not quite human.

The violence of the colonial soldier was metaphorically linked to his weaponry: the Gurkha kukri, the Sikh kirpan dagger, and for Africans the coupe-coupe (bush knife). German propaganda declared such weapons, and the use of colonial soldiers who allegedly used them to take trophies of body parts from the dead and captured, were a violation of international law.³⁰⁸ Tales of colonial soldiers taking grisly trophies from the dead or murdering German wounded abounded on both sides of the conflict.³⁰⁹ These stories of black and brown savagery reflected a European need to project the violence of the war onto a colonial body from a space already identified with cruelty and violence; European violence such as the cutting of hands in the Belgian Congo reappropriated to accuse the Germans of amputating Belgian children was of a piece with the imaginative blurring of periphery and metropole on the Western Front.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, 25.

³⁰⁸ Koller, ‘The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and Their Deployment in Europe during the First World War’, 122.

³⁰⁹ Dominiek Dendooven, ‘Living Apart Together: Belgian Civilians and Non-White Troops and Workers in Wartime Flanders’, in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Das Santanu (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 18.

³¹⁰ Heather Jones, ‘Imperial Captivities: Colonial Prisoners of War in Germany and the Ottoman Empire, 1914-18’, in *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, ed. Das Santanu (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 181.

At once, the colonial soldier in Europe was an object of revulsion and admiration. Martial race discourse played the crucial role of mediating this point of discursive tension, by giving stereotypical knowledge of other races that could be more easily acknowledged as heroic by European audiences. When Barrés meets Sikhs, his tone shifts towards something more openly admiring than his language in reference to the Gurkha, whose stature and Nepalese features clearly perturbed him:

Here we see no more of those wrinkled eyes, whose look of being stuck slantwise into the face amazed me so much a couple of days since, but handsome regular features, faces of a long oval and clear and golden colouring. Hail to our Aryan brothers in the garb of Magian kings!³¹

Through an imagination of Aryan kinship, Barrés recovers admirable, heroic soldiers from the disquieting otherness of the sepoys. Yet this Aryan brother “is almost the same, but not quite” (as Bhabha would put it) as a European. Affirming kinship between Europeans and a population imagined as a colonial subaltern and primitive warrior allows the discomfort of European self-degradation to come back through the face of a near-Other, a mimic.³²

British officers are at hand to reinforce martial race discourse that elides these uncomfortable questions of cross-colonial kinship and racial degeneration.

³¹ Barrés, ‘A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs’, 6–7.

³² Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 122.

When Barrés wonders what motivates the Indians to fight, an Englishman quips, “Ah, they know the Boche is a filthy beast!”³¹³ The Indian soldier is further described to Barrés as not caring for any further motivation beyond the order of the British Government, which to them is an indisputable as the word of God. “Just as God has said, 'Thou shalt not steal,' the Raj has said, 'Thou shalt fight.’”³¹⁴ Restating the martial races’ unquestioning loyalty to the British Empire, on par with the devotion to a god, neutralizes them as a source of anxiety for the British and the French while maintaining their value as a terror against the “‘Poor Boches!’” Whether barbarian or ‘Magian king,’ the martial race Indian is presented as a deadly force whose other essential discursive quality is intense loyalty and subservience to the European master self.

As informed as they are by their Orientalist knowledge and by the interventions of their British minders, both Barrés and Bibikoff are shown to wonder about the thoughts of the Indians they see. Barrés wishes to answer the following questions for his readers: “What do these Indians think, Sikhs and Gurkhas alike? What conception of this war have they formed? What is it, and what are they fighting for?”³¹⁵ Bibikoff’s pondering on the subject is characteristically effusive in its Orientalism and reflects her tendency to project her own thoughts and fantasies on men she sees as exotically distant. Her desire

³¹³ Barrés, ‘A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs’, 7.

³¹⁴ Barrés, 8.

³¹⁵ Barrés, 7.

to breach the racial gap and associate with the Indians is driven by a curiosity that never penetrates beyond stereotype. So she asks:

At this, their sacred hour, what thoughts possess these sons of the "Land of Marvels"?... Their big, dreamy eyes, with their look of depth and intelligence, and full of Oriental languor, show that their inner life is much more real than their physical life. What do they see, these shining eyes, now veiled, now sparkling like glowing coals? What mysteries and marvels open out before them? Or can it be that at this solemn moment, when all earthly thoughts ought to be banished, they contemplate the felicities of Nirvana, the ultimate dream of every Hindu?³¹⁶

Bibikoff knows only as much of the Oriental mind as could lead her to assume it would be categorically different, likely wondrous. Barrés is not given to quite such sentimentality. His encounter with an Indian officer reveals the contradictions of imagining the martial races as racial inferiors and European kinsmen. He speaks to an Indian officer...

...With an abundance of decorations, who had been wounded in circumstances that brought him great distinction. He had a splendid face, expressive of loyalty. With his woollen jersey and his portly figure he looked like one of our sturdy village blacksmiths, and I said to myself that these strangers from a distant land who astound us by standing shoulder to shoulder with us in the defence of French soil, are very closely akin to ourselves. They like to be with our peasants and talk to them by signs, and I have seen a child

³¹⁶ Bibikoff, *Our Indians at Marseilles*, 98–99.

teaching them French on the Berlitz method. As he peeled a potato he said, " knife, potato," and the others set themselves to repeat the two words.³¹⁷

Barrés makes an imaginative attempt at rehabilitating this Indian soldier, a Sikh cousin (unlike the Nepalese Gurkhas), to his European readers. The Indian soldier, for all his foreignness, fits into the landscape because he is like the French peasant, and though he is there in a war that scars the French soil, he nevertheless fights in its defence. Barrés cannot assert similarity across the colonial barrier because he continually articulates difference. These Sikhs cannot speak to their French cousins except by signs, and their capacity to learn the language is at a primitive, child-like level. Indeed, the Sikh officer's very face expresses a loyalty that racially marks him as at best a white man's subaltern sidekick, such that even during apparent acknowledgement of how little separates the Sikhs from the French the colonial fantasies of colonial mediocrity and subservience creep in. Bhabha wrote of colonial discourse that "two attitudes toward external reality persist; one takes reality into consideration while the other disavows it and replaces it by a product of desire that repeats, rearticulates "reality" as mimicry."³¹⁸ Barrés produces in his account a mimic of the European; the homely Sikh who looks like a village blacksmith in his woolen jersey appears parodically close to but emphatically *not* European. He shifts from the mimicked figure whose difference from the European and from the original can almost seem

³¹⁷ Barrés, 'A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs', 9–10.

³¹⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 130.

negligible, to instead become ‘menace’ (again quoting Bhabha) who for all he is not European cannot have his kinship dismissed, and for all the he is not the Sikh officer in truth but merely in imagination he is still based on a real encounter with one Notable too is that Barrés describes the encounter as “an opportunity of talking to a Sikh officer” whom he describes as his “interlocutor”, yet not a word of the conversation is reported.³¹⁹ It is the last passage in Barrés’ introduction.

The decorated Sikh officer, in the moment where he can speak to someone who has proclaimed a desire to hear his words, is silenced by an abrupt ending. The intersection of imperial power and colonial knowledge allows European desire to override the possibility of subaltern speech; there is neither the need nor the opportunity given for the Indian male body to account for itself, when the European imagination already knows what it wants that body to be and what words it would say.³²⁰ In this respect the sepoy in Barrés’ and Bibikoff’s accounts are mimics of the sepoys conjured up in their imaginations, constructs of colonial discourse and not reality. Moreover, these mimics take the space that could have been afforded to an engagement with the sepoys’ own words; instead, a reality is ‘disavowed’ and ‘replaced’ with a mimicry.

³¹⁹ Barrés, ‘A Visit to the English Army: The Gurkhas and Sikhs’, 9.

³²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Communications and Culture (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988).

Under both Europeans' pens, the Indian is imagined in accordance with European desire: in Barrés' case a desire to 'know' the Indian – as a racialized savage, a heroic warrior, or a stolid, childlike peasant – in a way that does not require any Indian interlocutor, and in Bibikoff's case a desire to confirm that the heroes of her fantasies do exist in the flesh. The Indian soldier represents an alien presence in Europe; a native of a war-space that was Europe and yet not Europe, a space of traumatic violence brought about by European technological accomplishment at the expense of the colonized world. The so-called 'troglydyte world' reduced white men to the level of the semi-civilized martial races, triggering both the anxiety of racial downfall and ameliorating it with the fantasy of a heroism in fact out of reach and out of place amid barbed wire and machine gun. In this ambivalent contact zone, martial race discourse provided a toolbox from which whatever representation of an Indian soldier that could assuage French or British anxiety could be pulled. This representation made it redundant for the soldier's subaltern voice itself to be heard in negotiating the differences between Indian and European in a war that brought them and their separate worlds into juxtaposition.

Imperial Ventriloquism

The martial race soldiers represented within *Our Indians at Marseilles* are, it should be remembered, not the Indian soldiers themselves but rather mimics of the sepoys as they existed in Bibikoff and Barrés' minds. This is true for all the

characters contained in the text: British officers, Rajput Maharajahs, cooks, and the first-person narrators themselves can be conceptualized as puppets in a theater animated by the authors' intent. *Our Indians at Marseilles* is a (re)construction of a reality where the characters act and relate to one another as colonial discourses dictate: subaltern sepoys, dashing maharajahs and knowledgeable British officers. The characters are *ventriloquized*, following Senko Maynard's use of the metaphor to analyze quoted texts as creative acts by the *author* of the text instead of accurate reportage of others:

Quotation simultaneously offers separation and integration of the self's and other's voices... the quotation describes the quoting self and the quoted other as being distinct and yet identical - just like the ventriloquism where the ventriloquist and the dummy's voices are presented as being distinct yet implicitly understood as being one and the same.³²¹

The mimicry of martial race discourse, superimposing ideal forms upon the sepoy body, is performed through the manipulation of puppet figures that speak and act in accordance with the authors' desires; Western fantasy and anxiety are played out using the sepoy, the sepoy himself does not speak.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously concluded, "The subaltern cannot speak."³²² As a subaltern body of soldiers, the Indian Army was imagined and

³²¹ Senko K. Maynard, 'Textual Ventriloquism: Quotation and the Assumed Community Voice in Japanese Newspaper Columns', *Poetics* 24, no. 6 (July 1997): 391, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X\(96\)00016-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(96)00016-2).

³²² Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 308.

spoken on behalf of by a range of observers, principally British military ‘men on the spot’ who codified martial race discourse based on their colonial knowledge of their men, backed up by anecdotes of interaction and reported speech from their men. When Philip Mason reports an Indian officer and World War I veteran asking him, “Why... has the Government allowed these ‘bad characters’ of Congress to have power?” and MacMunn reports a story of Indian sepoy choosing to die in German captivity rather than defect, we cannot verify their reportage but nor can we truly doubt it. Instead these accounts together build up a tapestry of loyal Indian subservience that were unchallenged by alternative testimony straight from the source.³²³ Martial race discourse’s phobia of educated Indians resulted indirectly in the creation of an illiterate army that could leave behind nothing like the wealth of testimony created by British soldiers in World War I. Quoting Gail Braybon’s observation that “more words have been written about the great British war poets than about all the non-white soldiers put together,” Santanu Das reflected that the British poets also wrote more surviving words on the conflict than all the non-white troops put together.³²⁴ In this section I will touch on censored letters written by Indian soldiers in Europe that prove an exception to this trend, and in Chapter Five I will return to these letters as my object of analysis. However, we have seen in British discourse the deep desire

³²³ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 299.

³²⁴ Gail Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003), 28; quoted in Santanu Das, ‘Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18: Archive, Language, and Feeling’, *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 3 (1 September 2014): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwu033>.

and fascination with the sepoy body that existed from the heyday of martial race loyalty in 1857, and which exploded in the contact zone of the Western Front. Representations of the Indian soldier were created during the war by British authors where the sepoy was spoken for. These authors produced works that gave space to the racial and political anxieties engendered by the Indian presence in Europe and reassured the British and their allies that despite these anxieties all was well in the Western Front's contact zone. The books "provided space for the articulation of the fear of the imperial body being possibly 'infected,' as well as for the inoculation against such fear through the injection of a strong dose of narrative 'antibiotic'."³²⁵ The sepoy was ventriloquized in these books to serve the interests of imperial power through speaking and acting in accordance with martial race discourse's purpose of imperial antibiotic.

Andrew Hill argued that through ventriloquism the apparently autonomous voice of the subaltern is only allowed to repeat the 'discourse of the master.'³²⁶ Ventriloquism gives the discourse of the master new credence and legitimacy through the illusion of subaltern speech. The British Raj had a long literary tradition of British novels and stories written as genuine testimony from Indian sources. The purpose of this ventriloquism was to legitimise British rule "by having preconceived notions of Indians and Indian society confirmed by the

³²⁵ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 180.

³²⁶ Andrew Hill, 'The BBC Empire Service: The Voice, the Discourse of the Master and Ventriloquism', *South Asian Diaspora* 2, no. 1 (March 2010): 35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19438190903541952>.

natives themselves – even if those informants were invented,” as Kim Wagner wrote.³²⁷ One of the most famous of such inventions is the ‘memoir’ *From Subedar to Sepoy* (1873), which claims to be the recollections of a Subedar named Sita Ram as dictated to and translated by a British officer.³²⁸ Contemporary scholars dispute Sita Ram’s existence and instead suggest that he was a pastiche, constructed by a British author to act as a mouthpiece for martial race truisms.³²⁹ This inauthenticity seems to have convinced George MacMunn as well, who used Sita Ram as an example of the camaraderie between sepoy and British officer that “Indian politicians and even our own ignorant hot-air merchants would give their eyes to destroy.”³³⁰ MacMunn describing such a book as “the first and last word of what the sepoy really thinks” is unintentionally ironic but possibly irrelevant; had there been a Sita Ram in truth his words would have had to be mediated through British imperial interests in order to reach an audience.³³¹ As Hill observed the ventriloquist act of including the voice of the colonized reveals the ultimate significance of the subaltern voice. The imperial subject’s loyalty and acquiescence to control are at the heart of the anxieties of empire: the empire gave the British power and reason to create Sita Rams, and martial race discourse gave the knowledge that allowed the British to mimic sepoy speech convincingly

³²⁷ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 15.

³²⁸ Jame Lunt, ed., *From Sepoy to Subedar: Being the Life and Adventures of Subedar Sita Ram, a Native Officer of the Bengal Army, Written and Related by Himself*, trans. James Norgate (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

³²⁹ Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857*, 16; Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 29.

³³⁰ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 174.

³³¹ MacMunn, 175.

enough to deceive each other. The reader will also recall examples at the end of Chapter Three of Rudyard Kipling ventriloquizing the martial race voice to express his racialized hatred of the Indian intellectual.

I will explore three separate works of ‘imperial antibiotic’ fiction created by British authors during World War I, and study how these authors created their own ventriloquist puppet narrators, their own Sita Rams, to reflect their desires of the Indian sepoy body; and how their engagements with ‘the discourse of the master’ inoculated against – and thereby reveal the significance of – specific anxieties in the imperial contact zone. These texts are Rudyard Kipling’s *The Eyes of Asia* (1918), Talbot Mundy’s *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders* (1918) and Roly Grimshaw’s *Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse: An Echo of 1914* (1930)

A note before I begin my analysis. It is impossible to truly uncover the intentionality behind imperial ventriloquist (or any other) texts and therefore arrive at a correct interpretation. As Riffaterre argued, we can only know a text by reading it “and the text is perceivable only through the grids of preconception and assumption that the reader brings with him to the reading process.”³³² Nor is the possibility of meaning within a text bounded by authorial intent as a conscious choice. We cannot arrive at a stable and perfect interpretation of a text

³³² Michael Riffaterre, ‘Interpretation and Undecidability’, *New Literary History* 12, no. 2 (1981): 227, <https://doi.org/10.2307/468668>.

but must instead derive meaning and significance through an intertextual reading that sees text in the context of the other texts presupposed by it.³³³ The hegemony of a martial race imagination provides us a lens within which to interpret the actions and speech of these ventriloquist puppets, and the events that befall them. Martial race discourse, and the discourses that it draws from, and which point back to it in a chain of signification, provides the intertextual context within which I read the corpus of these stories. I identify the ways in which these stories articulate martial race discourse and are in turn limited by what the discourse allows to be 'true' – especially as these novels are not pure fictions, but rearticulations of real events, real words, real experiences. These were not just the words and experiences of Indian soldiers, but of the British authors themselves.

Overview of the Texts

The Eyes of Asia (1918)

The Eyes of Asia is a collection of short stories written by Rudyard Kipling on the request of the British Intelligence Department. They were originally published between May and June 1917 in American, British, and French newspapers. In 1918 they were collected and printed as a booklet by Doubleday in the United States.

Perhaps no writer had a greater popular association with the British Empire, especially the Raj, than Rudyard Kipling. His body of work includes multiple instances of writing from an Indian perspective, including perhaps the most

³³³ Riffaterre, 228.

famous example of colonial hybridity and mimicry in fiction: *Kim* (1901). He was a natural choice when the British Intelligence Department approached him in 1916 to commission a work of imperial propaganda using military intelligence: in this case, censored letters written by Indian soldiers in Europe that were clandestinely passed to him.³³⁴ These letters provided the bulk of the raw material for *The Eyes of Asia*. Kipling found the letters “a complete revelation”³³⁵ and that moved him to write “very close to the truth,”³³⁶ even copying entire excerpts almost verbatim, and for the rest he “somewhat amplified what [he] thought [he] saw between the letters”, filling in gaps (real or perceived) with his own additions.³³⁷ This makes *The Eyes of Asia* the only wartime British novel to draw directly from an archive of sepoy testimony.

The four stories of *The Eyes of Asia* are centered around letters sent from the Western Front to India. They are titled ‘A Retired Gentleman,’ ‘The Fumes of the Heart,’ ‘The Private Account,’ and ‘A Trooper of Horse.’ ‘A Retired Gentleman’ and ‘A Trooper of Horse’ reproduce the letters themselves; whereas Kipling uses framing narratives to embed the letters central to the other stories. ‘The Fumes of

³³⁴ David Alan Richards, ‘Kipling and the Great War Propagandists’, *The Kipling Journal* 90, no. 365 (September 2016): 20; Karen Leenders, ‘Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps’, *The Kipling Journal* 90, no. 365 (September 2016): 49; Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 187.

³³⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Thomas Pinney, vol. 4, 1911–19 (London: Macmillan, 1999), 374–75; quoted in Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 69.

³³⁶ Kipling, *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, 4, 1911–19:507; quoted in Leenders, ‘Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps’, 54.

³³⁷ Rudyard Kipling, ‘Kipling Papers, Tyler Gift’, n.d., 507, *The Keep*; quoted in Leenders, ‘Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Corps’, 54.

the Heart' is presented as the narrator dictating his letter to a British doctor and scribe, interspersed with many asides to the 'sahibs.' 'The Private Account' is presented as a theatrical script complete with stage directions and scene descriptions, where the letter is read out and commented on by the writer's family in India. The stories' ventriloquized writers run the gamut of the classic martial races. 'A Retired Gentleman' is narrated by Bishen Singh, a Subedar-Major (the highest-ranking infantry officer in the Indian Army), a Rajput Hindu. 'The Fumes of the Heart' is dictated by an unnamed Punjabi Sikh. 'The Private Account' centers on a letter by Ahmed, a Muslim from the Afghan frontier. Lastly, 'A Trooper of Horse' is Abdul Rahman, a Punjabi Muslim and Dafadar, the equivalent of a sergeant for Indian cavalry.

Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders (1918)

Hira Singh: When Indian Came to Fight in Flanders is an adventure novel by US-based English novelist Talbot Mundy. Talbot Mundy (1879-1940) was an English writer with a murky past as a globetrotter and adventurer across Africa, India and the East Asia, his experiences leading him to write a large bibliography of adventure novels set in locations exotic to the English imagination.³³⁸ He first published *Hira Singh* in serial format in *Adventure Magazine* in 1917, making it

³³⁸ Brian Taves, *Talbot Mundy, Philosopher of Adventure: A Critical Biography* (London: McFarland Books, 2006).

“possibly the earliest full-fledged novel about the Indian involvement in the war.”³³⁹

The novel deals with the Indo-Turco-German Conspiracy and is based on a true story of Indian prisoners of war on the Western Front who were recruited by Germany to fight against the British, who went to Afghanistan as part of a transnational attempt to get the Afghan Emir to join forces with the Central Powers; however, Mundy takes significant liberties with this history.³⁴⁰ Mundy makes the claim that he was able to “track down the hero of these adventures and find the true account of them even better than the daily paper promised.”³⁴¹ In this ‘true account’ Mundy replaces Muslim Pathan soldiers from the frontier with Sikhs from the Punjab, and adds a heroic Sikh officer by the name of Ranjoor Singh as protagonist. *Hira Singh* pretends toward verisimilitude by blurring the lines for Mundy’s readers between fantasy and verifiable fact.

Hira Singh is an example of an important genre that was by the time of World War I beginning to phase itself out: the imperial adventure novel. Mundy presents the story as a long interview he – as an unnamed first-person narrator – undertakes in the Punjab, at the regimental depot of the Sikhs after their return to India. His interlocutor is Hira Singh, a non-commissioned officer, whose

³³⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 181.

³⁴⁰ ‘Indian Troops Eluded Their Turkish Jailers: Escaped from Constantinople and Travelled Overland to Afghanistan’, *The New York Times*, 11 July 1915, 5.

³⁴¹ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, chap. Preface.

account seamlessly takes over the narrative and for almost the total story it is his voice that tells the story of the enigmatic Ranjoor Singh. The story covers eight chapters that see the Sikhs depart from India to Marseilles via Suez, fight in a cavalry charge in Flanders and then ultimately become captured by the Germans. Ranjoor Singh pretends to agree to serve the German Empire in exchange for his and his troops' freedom, and the Sikhs travel to Turkey to aid the Central Powers. However, they escape from captivity and fight their way through Turkey and Persia until they arrive in Afghanistan and humiliate a German embassy attempting to sway the Afghan Emir to their cause. They then return with honour to their regimental depot in the Punjab.

The Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse: An Echo of 1914 (1930)

The Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse: An Echo of 1914 is a novella by Captain Roland 'Roly' Grimshaw of the Poona Horse. It was originally published in serial format in the *Assam Journal* in 1930. In 1986 it was republished in a volume titled *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15* alongside selections from Grimshaw's own trench diary kept from August 1914 to June 1915.³⁴² While *Ram Singh* is ventriloquist literature, it is unique in that it is heavily informed by Mundy's diary to the point where he essentially tells his own story through an Indian voice: thus, my analysis is on the combination of these two texts in *Indian Cavalry Officer*, not

³⁴² Roly Grimshaw, *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15*, ed. J. H. Wakefield and C. J. M. Weippert (Kent: D. J. Costello, 1986).

just on *Ram Singh*. *Indian Cavalry Officer* also includes a short account titled 'A Day at an Indian Cavalry War Depot,' which I also briefly touch on.

Prior to *Ram Singh* Grimshaw wrote a novel *Indian Whirlpools* (1929),³⁴³ and several articles and short stories for *Polo Monthly*. Nevertheless, his writing in *Ram Singh* is polished, written with a frequently ironic and sarcastic tone that matches his writing in his diary, and comparisons to far more famous trench memoirs that were being published at the time – Siegfried Sassoon's *The Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928) and Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1929) as notable examples – have been made in the literature.³⁴⁴ *Ram Singh* is thus the only published story about the Indian Army on the Western Front written by a British officer who commanded them.

Grimshaw's diary begins with him on leave in the United Kingdom on the eve of war and tracks his journey to Cairo to rendezvous with the Poona Horse en route to France. From Marseilles the Grimshaw and the Poona Horse travel to the Front, engaging in the 1st Battle of Ypres and the battles of Festubert and Givenchy. Grimshaw is wounded and ends his diary convalescing in England. *Ram Singh* tells the story of Ram Singh, a Hindu Rajput from Marwar in Rajasthan, and a dafadar of an unnamed cavalry regiment. Ram Singh is described as both a stock character, an everyman, "an average N.C.O. [non-commissioned

³⁴³ This book is attributed to Grimshaw, but I could find no information on its contents.

³⁴⁴ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 27; Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 193.

officer] of Cavalry,” and as a real person whose name had been changed. The contents of the novella parallel Grimshaw’s own diary.³⁴⁵ Ram Singh is mobilized in India, dispatched via Suez to France, sees something of the country, and participates in battle until he is wounded and sent to recover in Brighton. Ultimately, he is deemed medically unfit to return to the Front and arrives home to Rajasthan. The story is told across eight chapters. All events in the story, except for a dream sequence in Chapter 2, are presented as having taken place either in Grimshaw’s presence or in the presence of a trusted third party. The narration is in the third person and is usually focused on Ram Singh’s point of view and his thoughts; however, especially in the later parts of the novella, the focus shifts toward a British officer named Smith, Ram Singh’s squadron leader who is described as a generic stand-in for any British officer but is clearly Grimshaw’s own avatar in the story. *Ram Singh* thus has Grimshaw present in three capacities: as author of the text, as author of the memoir reanimated through fiction, and through a self-insertion into the narrative via Smith.

How Does the Puppet Sepoy Speak?

The conceit of ventriloquism rests on the notion that there is a body apart from the author who speaks, the process Maynard calls ‘quotation.’³⁴⁶ To make the text ‘internally persuasive’ as the puppet’s speech, the puppeteering author may adopt a distinct manner of speech/narration in the quotation and further submerge the

³⁴⁵ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 98.

³⁴⁶ Maynard, ‘Textual Ventriloquism’.

puppeteer/author's own presence in the text. In the context of imperial antibiotic literature, the authors display their mastery over 'Indian' modes of speech. Claire Buck described such texts as "literary act[s] equivalent to going native... complicated instances of mimicry turned to the colonizers' ends... performances [that] reproduce the authority of the colonizer's knowledge."³⁴⁷ Across the texts in my corpus the authors adopted Orientalist tropes and styles of speech in the narration and dialogue to better 'mimic', that is conform to reader expectations of, the sepoy voice as distinct from the voices of the white, British authors that wrote them. Through this strategy of literal mimicry, adopting the mannerisms that signify the colonized voice, the colonized voice is imagined as distinct and distinguishable from that of the white authors and intended readers.

The Eyes of Asia and *Hira Singh* are thick with Orientalist detail that veers sharply between scene-setting and parody. Mundy's – Hira Singh's – narration is frequently purple Orientalist prose. The characters in Hira Singh's recollections speak in a Punjabi that is then 'translated' (in fact invented) into a highly mannered, archaic English that speaks to both the genre of romantic adventure and the imagination of martial race soldiers as warriors from another era ("Ye are traitors! Ye are faithless ones!" "We are no wolves!... We be true men!").³⁴⁸ The Sikhs Mundy imagines are given to innuendo, speaking in long-winded parables that are often difficult for the reader to decipher (but whose meaning is clear to

³⁴⁷ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 29–30.

³⁴⁸ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 63.

the characters). Hardly a sentence of Punjabi dialogue goes by without an exclamation point. In sum, Mundy speaks through Hira Singh and the Sikhs to create an image of dour warriors from another time and place; the portrayal is deeply earnest to the point of a comedy that seems unintended by Mundy.

Kipling's adoption of the martial race voice, however, blurs the line closer to intentional mockery. The narrators of *The Eyes of Asia* exemplify behaviour stereotypical of Western imaginings of the East, ranging from the Sikh reflexively bargaining with his British scribe, characters dispensing wisdom through verse proverbs, the belief that photographs steal souls, mistaking English aristocratic titles for caste names, and cumbersome writing styles beginning with florid addresses, "exoticizing the manner in which *sipahis* conveyed names and a sense of time and space," as Gajendra Singh put it.³⁴⁹ While Mundy's Orientalism is purely from the imagination, Kipling's authorial process of reading what he wished to see within the censored letters led to a strategy of embellishing the fairly straightforward and naturalistic writing of the letters into something more flowery. The martial race soldiers of India were 'known' in colonial discourse to speak in a particular fashion, and so Mundy's imagined sepoy voice, *sui generis*, conformed to that expectation; in Kipling's case the 'knowledge' of sepoy speech meant that authentic sepoy testimony needed to be 'amplified' to become more

³⁴⁹ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Fumes of the Heart', in *The Eyes of Asia* (Doubleday, 1918), 25; Rudyard Kipling, 'A Retired Gentleman', in *The Eyes of Asia* (Doubleday, 1918), 6; Rudyard Kipling, 'A Trooper of Horse', in *The Eyes of Asia* (Doubleday, 1918), 92-93; Kipling, 'A Retired Gentleman', 10-11; Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 193.

Orientalist, more distinctly different than the original, and thereby more persuasive as sepoy testimony for Kipling's readers. In this process, the ventriloquized sepoys are caricatures, a ventriloquism where the puppet is made a subject of mockery – unlike for Mundy who plays it straight. Whether venerated or mocked, the speech patterns of the martial sepoy in these stories exemplify only the Western expectations of the sepoy voice.

Grimshaw's assumption of the sepoy voice is the most nuanced. He writes from the third person, and so when he peppers Ram Singh's story with Hindustani words – such as 'jahaz' (ship), 'aram' (leisure), 'jung' (war) and 'hushiar' ('careful')— it is not to represent Ram Singh's actual words but rather his worldview as an Other with a particular vocabulary.³⁵⁰ Some words, such as 'gora' (white people), have a specific Indian context, but for the most part the gratuitous presence of words with easy English equivalents serves primarily to create an Orientalist aesthetic.³⁵¹ However, Grimshaw's use of the Hindustani is always correct, and he also shows Smith slipping some Hindustani into his conversation with other British officers.³⁵² The language in *Ram Singh* thus exemplifies the cross-cultural exchange engendered by the contact zones of British India and of the war space, most famously in the case of 'Blighty' being a corruption of the Bengali 'belati' ('foreign', mostly referring to things of British

³⁵⁰ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 101; Grimshaw, 102; Grimshaw, 102; Grimshaw, 107; Grimshaw, 120.

³⁵¹ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 103.

³⁵² Grimshaw, 153.

origin), Anglo-Indian slang that became normalized in British English through World War I writing.³⁵³ It displays Grimshaw's credentials, as someone so embedded among his sepoys that he understood their speech and could accurately represent their lifeways; a ventriloquism borne out of 'earned' colonial knowledge. The exchange of language makes the English and the Indian more alike, cross-comprehensible, and akin; it displays the hybridity of the Indian and the European contact zones. There are, however, a few instances where Ram Singh and other Indians are shown to mispronounce English, which reflects the Indian side of the language exchange but in laboriously rendering mispronunciations such as "Harlt-oo-gaz ther?" ("Halt! Who goes there?") Grimshaw is not immune to a Kiplingesque urge to poke fun at the Indians he commanded and their worldview, such as Ram Singh's acceptance of the theory of tides affected by the moon not based on scientific reasoning but because he believes in astrology and the power of celestial bodies.³⁵⁴ Yet, there are moments where Ram Singh's worldview, as Orientalized as it is, is presented as more than something to gently mock, as in when he declares his belief that the dead inhabit the spirits of their children, a moment Smith, his interlocutor and Grimshaw's authorial avatar in the text, treats with suitable solemnity.³⁵⁵ The nuances of the portrayal and the specificity of the detail borne out of Grimshaw's intimate

³⁵³ Thierry DI Costanzo, 'Memory and History of the Great(Er) War and India: From a National-Imperial to a More Global Perspective', *E-Rea*, no. 14.2 (15 June 2017): 17, <https://doi.org/10.4000/erea.5844>.

³⁵⁴ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 100, 126.

³⁵⁵ Grimshaw, 148.

knowledge of Indian soldiers under his command makes this the most persuasive act of mimicry in my corpus of texts, but *Ram Singh* is at its most persuasive when the colonial distance is not amplified to mock and cast the sepoy farther back into the realm of the different, but rather in moments that reflect the similarity that colonial discourse pined for but refused to fully embrace.

What Does the Puppet Sepoy Say?

As discussed in Chapter Three, in colonial discourse the martial races were imagined as aloof from the masses of India and obsessive over their caste and racial purity, a discourse through which the British could identify the martial races as the populations most akin to them and could further justify their own feelings of difference from their colonized populations. As such, the martial race soldiers ventriloquized in literature base their self-images on caste prejudice, a reflection of British self-imaginings of race superiority.

The unnamed Sikh narrator of 'The Fumes of the Heart' is angered that the British government does not punish the sweepers at his hospital for pretending to have caste restrictions from pursuing unpleasant duties, with caste consciousness being the province of soldiers.³⁵⁶ The self-evidence of caste markers, well-known to Anglo-Indians such as Kipling, are less well-known to the staff in the British hospital, allowing for a subversion of caste identity and an imposture that in this instance is merely mischievous but hints at greater British paranoias over Indians

³⁵⁶ Kipling, 'The Fumes of the Heart', 28-29.

who could pretend to be of race, caste, faith, and sundry other markers than that assigned to them by colonial knowledge.³⁵⁷ Abdul Rahman, narrator of 'A Trooper of Horse' alerts his mother that there is an insufficiency of martial Punjabi Muslims in France, and the regiment must make do with "low people" such as labourers and workmen.³⁵⁸ Grimshaw's Ram Singh in the hospital is treated as a class above the sweepers ("slave[s] of the broom") and is outraged when encountering a pretentious young medical student; he discovers the man is the son of a leather merchant in Bombay and demands to know how a "asl [pure] Rajput" can be expected to "receive impertinence from one who [he] would not permit to enter [his] house."³⁵⁹

The incident with the medical student is worth pausing over. It makes for two of the most revelatory pages in Smith's novella. The young, lower-caste doctor, though not a Bengali, embodies the 'babu' archetype with his British education and pretences toward a greater resemblance to the British than to Indians such as Ram Singh. Grimshaw's disgust for such characters as imposters is made clear by his ironic references to the medical student's Cambridge education and his good clothing, punctured by the narrative referring to the student as '*It*' and 'the creature.'³⁶⁰ Grimshaw narrates a farcical encounter where the Indian student finds Ram Singh impertinent and summons a British doctor to

³⁵⁷ Roy, *Indian Traffic*, chap. 2.

³⁵⁸ Kipling, 'A Trooper of Horse', 85.

³⁵⁹ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 174-75. Emphasis in the original.

³⁶⁰ Grimshaw, 174. Emphasis in the original.

intervene and reprimand Ram Singh. This doctor, with “a suspicion of a twinkle in [his] eye” lightly chastises Ram Singh, but largely focuses his ire upon the student, mildly humiliating him in front of a soldier the student saw as his social inferior.³⁶¹ The doctor makes it clear to Ram Singh that only the necessity of the war allowed the medical student’s father to buy his son the education that led to his appointment in the hospital, and that of course Ram Singh is right that a situation wherein a ‘pure’ Rajput needed to defer to a leather merchant’s son was ridiculous. Grimshaw’s description of Ram Singh and the medical student as ‘representing as they did the upper and underworld of India’s social fabric’ (wherein Ram Singh’s relative poverty did not preclude his caste privileges and thus he represented the ‘upper’ side of that divide) makes clear the message to the reader that education and imposture could not give the Indian intelligentsia any leg up above their ancestral, upper caste rulers.

The Rajput stared the other down – the former had 3,000 years of unchallenged social precedence behind him which, when weighed in the balance against a carefully selected shade of socks, ties and shirtings, even if supported by a B.A. (Cantab), will, so long as the Hindu religion prevails, sweep all before it.³⁶²

While caste prejudice could be read as an example of the enduring social divides the authors suggest British imperialism can help erode in India, martial race discourse points instead to an attitude that such consciousness is an

³⁶¹ Grimshaw, 174.

³⁶² Grimshaw, 175.

unchangeable fact of Indian life made manifest through the existence of racially discrete communities. The impossibility of liberal education and reform against the 'truths' of Indian society, held sacred by martial race discourse, is revealed in this tense encounter between the pretentious, low-caste, educated Indian and the sympathetic heroics of the Indian martial race soldier wounded in battle against Britain's enemies.

Santanu Das argued that British military officers' memoirs often showed great sympathy for the men under their command, but Indians of lower caste were viewed with condescending affection at best and outright revulsion at worst.³⁶³ Grimshaw's memoir showcases how little he thought of Indian labourers compared to his soldiers. Early in his diary an Indian sailor falls overboard on the way to France and the ship goes out of its way to rescue him, even as Grimshaw observes that he would understand it if it were "at least a jawan [soldier]"; a callous attitude toward the life of the non-martial Indian.³⁶⁴ Kipling and Grimshaw both ventriloquize their racial disgust and contempt for the sweepers and the intellectuals of India through an imagination of Indian values and a sense of self rooted in martial race discourse's naturalized caste hierarchy, where British

³⁶³ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 176-77.

³⁶⁴ Roly Grimshaw, "'Roly' Grimshaw's Diary, 1914-15", in *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15*, ed. J. H. Wakefield and C. J. M. Weippert (Kent: D. J. Costello, 1986), 23; The incident is significant enough in Grimshaw's memory that he reproduces it in greater detail in Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 103-4.

life is at the pinnacle and only the martial races of India deserve empathy through their closeness to the British Self.

However, caste purity is a source of danger to the British lest they safeguard it. Grimshaw devotes a lengthy passage in the first chapter of *Ram Singh* to an incident where Hindu troops are worried that their rations are beef and not mutton; ultimately the matter is resolved by a maharajah's curt assurance that: "Sahibs do not lie about such matters."³⁶⁵ The incident is treated with utmost seriousness, not as farce, and showcased the great lengths to preserve Indian caste purity taken by the British during the war – best exemplified by the religious accommodations at the Brighton Pavilion hospital for Indian wounded (much featured in wartime propaganda)³⁶⁶ – demonstrating a British knowledge of traditional Indian lifeways and the care taken to avoid upsetting them. Similarly, there are discursive comforts provided through imagining martial races as punctilious about caste requirements that paint them as both racially exclusive and religiously irrational (thus primitive); however, underneath this is the paranoia of 1857, which the British believed was sparked by a failure to maintain Indian religious and caste purity. Caste purity is a source of anxiety and vulnerability needing careful vigilance lest an accident or worse occurred – such as “the subtle work of some Hunnish agent” subverting the loyalty of the martial

³⁶⁵ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 106.

³⁶⁶ Samuel Hyson and Alan Lester, “British India on Trial”: Brighton Military Hospitals and the Politics of Empire in World War I, *Journal of Historical Geography* 38, no. 1 (January 2012): 18–34, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2011.09.002>.

racess.³⁶⁷ Grimshaw's account displays British sensitivities to, and knowledge of, caste and religious requirements, and thereby inoculates against the threat represented in the pages; a process of disavowal that requires first an anxiety-inducing avowal.

The martial races are also imagined deriving their understanding of themselves from their military relationship to Britain. Bishen Singh, the narrator of 'A Retired Gentleman,' writes home to mock a friend who thought himself too old to join in the war. He invokes a "proverb" that an upper caste Rajput who avoids battle is "only fit for crows' meat."³⁶⁸ Bishen Singh's mockery of his friend for not joining him at the front is matched by Abdul Rahman, narrator of 'A Trooper of Horse,' when he writes to his mother about the necessity of getting more of the right sort of soldiers at the front ("We Mussulmans should have at least two troops out of four").³⁶⁹ Mundy also imagines his Sikhs deriving their sense of self from fanatical loyalty to the British government in India, whose 'salt' they have eaten.³⁷⁰ Santanu Das noted how often the narrative makes references to 'truth'; Mundy constructs the Sikh identity as deriving its 'truth' from allegiance to the Raj.³⁷¹ Mundy's Sikhs declare themselves true Sikhs and true men besides because they fight with unquestioning faith in the Empire. Unquestioning loyalty to the imperial master is central to the puppet's speech because the

³⁶⁷ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 106.

³⁶⁸ Kipling, 'A Retired Gentleman', 6.

³⁶⁹ Kipling, 'A Trooper of Horse', 86.

³⁷⁰ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 114.

³⁷¹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 184-85.

puppet's identity itself derives entirely from loyalty. The question of what a Sikh would be without British intervention in India is unaddressed in these pages, but it is worth bearing in mind the British construction of Sikh identity around a martial 'Khalsa' self-conception – as discussed in Chapter Three.

More than any other text, *Hira Singh* centralizes the question of loyalty, imbricating Sikh identity in the notion of war service. Mundy's story deals directly with the full range of anxieties provoked by the Indo-Turco-German conspiracy. The Ottoman Caliph's declaration of a Jihad against the Entente, which produced little in the way of concrete reaction from the colonial world, nevertheless excited imperial panic at the possibility. The British in India had a long history of intense suspicion regarding the loyalties of their Muslim subjects, presumed to be ever-susceptible to the lure of international Jihad, which by the time of World War I was not a serious political worry but lingered as a cultural anxiety that remains depressingly resonant today.³⁷² Though Muslims were within the ranks of the martial races their loyalties were never fully trusted, and in particular trans-frontier troops such as the Pathans were considered more loyal to clan and faith than regiment. As Barrés showed in his regard for Sikhs and discomfort with Gurkhas, not all martial races were treated the same, and the Sikh in the British imagination was associated with martial valour and loyalty, and the Sikh religion was seen as a sign of communal strength and not

³⁷² John Ferris, "The Internationalism of Islam": The British Perception of a Muslim Menace, 1840–1951', *Intelligence and National Security* 24, no. 1 (February 2009): 57–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520902756820>.

conspiracy.³⁷³ Santanu Das argued that by replacing the suspect loyalties of the Pathans with Sikhs, Mundy was able to create an unambiguous tale of colonial loyalty ventriloquized through the first person narrative of Sikh soldiers.³⁷⁴ Moreover, by changing Pathans to Sikhs Mundy could also address the US-based Ghadar Movement of Punjabi, largely Sikh, émigrés and their anticolonial propaganda that jeopardized the neat image of a uniform Sikh loyalty. Regarding the Sikhs of the Ghadar Movement in California and the Indian nationalists cooperating with the Germans in Berlin, Mundy uses Hira Singh to describe them as “hired men” and “traitors.”³⁷⁵ If “true Sikhs” and “true men” are loyal warriors of empire, then Sikhs who do not fight for Britain and choose the pen over the sword fall outside the proper bounds of a masculine racial identity. The irony of fictional characters referring to real dissidents as ‘untrue’ aside, *Hira Singh*, in its attempt to discredit the anti-imperial propaganda current during the war and the role of Indian – especially transnational Punjabi – nationalists in fomenting dissent draws into sharp focus the very salience of this anxiety.

The ambivalence engendered by the tactic of repeating, discrediting and reifying anticolonialist critique is addressed through martial race discourse; some (untrustworthy and emasculated) Indians might resent British rule, but martial races are immune to this propaganda. No population represents the notion of

³⁷³ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 251.

³⁷⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 181.

³⁷⁵ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 3 & 47.

racialized loyalty in martial race discourse than the Sikhs, who lack, for example, the imagined Muslim susceptibility to calls on their loyalty from transnational religious powers. When a German tells Hira Singh that he will finally be able to have revenge for 1857, Singh narrates:

My grandfather fought for the British in '57, sahib, and my father, who was little more than old enough to run, carried food to him where he lay on the Ridge before Delhi, the British having little enough food at the time to share with their friends.³⁷⁶

The ancestral pedigree of war service on the right side of 1857 renders the Sikhs immune to propaganda along these lines – but the anxiety returns, even as Mundy seems unaware of the irony of describing the British depriving their ‘friends’ of food. Even by dispelling the ghost of 1857, Mundy reveals how much of a bogeyman the mutiny of the Indian Army remained in the British imagination during a war where Indians of contested loyalty were used against Europeans.

The martial race loyalist’s desire to fight for empire is a constant refrain in *The Eyes of Asia* as well. While Kipling may have portrayed the Indian soldier as he truly saw them – child-like subaltern warriors – there are instances where his quotations from the letters reveal a deliberate excising or alternation of material that challenges his ideas of unquestioning loyalty. A telling example is a passage in “A Trooper of Horse”³⁷⁷ that is an almost verbatim copy of one of the sepoy

³⁷⁶ Mundy, 76.

³⁷⁷ Kipling, ‘A Trooper of Horse’, 83–84.

letters.³⁷⁸ Kipling's puppet Abdul Rahman reports having an almost identical set of dreams as a real Indian soldier named Mirza Ahmed Baig in 1916. Both sepoys, real and fictional, dream of being saved from a great snake in the trenches by their family priests. Then they go on a costly trench assault that they both survive. Afterward, they have a second dream about the priest. Abdul Rahman suddenly plays coy at this point, as Kipling (who had copied the rest of the letter verbatim) leaves out Mirza Ahmed Baig's melancholy description of the dream:

I dreamed that the assembly of people was being held and that songs were being sung. I was also present in the assembly and I went up to the Pir Murshid and said to him "two years have passed, what is going to happen now?" The Pir Murshid [the priest] regarded me with a sorrowful look, but gave no reply.³⁷⁹

It is significant that Kipling mimics the sepoy letter through its description of combat and Orientalist dreams but leaves out the sharp question regarding the length of the original writer's war service, stripping the letter of its pathos. The Indian Army was habituated to short border campaigns, and Western Front service with its great casualties, distance from home and long periods of seemingly endless deployment came as a shock to many sepoys – frequently reported in their letters.³⁸⁰ Kipling's soldiers do not reproduce even the mildest grumblings of their real-world counterparts – much less the depths of despair

³⁷⁸ Mirza Ahmed Baig, France, 2/8/1916 quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 214–15.

³⁷⁹ Mirza Ahmed Baig, France, 2/8/1916 quoted in Omissi, 215.

³⁸⁰ Omissi, 10.

evident in certain letters. The inability to express anything aside from a staunch sense of loyalty makes Kipling and Mundy's puppets seem artificial and unconvincing, relying entirely on martial race truisms of the nature of the sepoy to achieve any sense of credibility as mimicry.

It is Grimshaw, the officer of Indian cavalry whose Ram Singh experiences the war as Grimshaw himself experienced it, who undercuts this construction of the unthinking colonial loyalist. Grimshaw in his diary records his anxiety when he learns he and his Indians would be called up for war, as well as his reluctance to fight in combat against "some inoffensive German."³⁸¹ The fictional Ram Singh shadows the war experience of Grimshaw, and so when his furlough is interrupted with the summons to mobilize for a war he knew nothing about he is dismayed.³⁸² Over the course of his time in the trenches he shows no desire for war, takes no pride in it, and asks Grimshaw's avatar, Smith, "Sahib, when shall we be relieved from this great *takhlif* [discomfort]?"³⁸³ Grimshaw and Ram Singh are both removed from combat following wounds, and are sent to India shortly afterward, their war over. Ram Singh's reluctance to fight in World War I is not portrayed as cowardly; indeed, he discharges his duty well, and the story treats his return home as the rightful reward at the end of a trial by fire which is sufficient proof of Indian loyalty.

³⁸¹ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 20.

³⁸² Grimshaw, 99.

³⁸³ Grimshaw, 149.

Mundy and Kipling's vision of the martial races as motivated by desires to fight and prove their loyalty and Grimshaw's depiction of Ram Singh as a man who wants principally to do his job and go home produce two very distinct visions of war across the three texts. Kipling and Mundy depict war as a space of martial race heroism, and Grimshaw writes about the inadequacy of such heroism on the Western Front. Mundy writes a highly aestheticized romance of war; Kipling portrays war as a space of death and carnage, but one that suits the martial races exactly; and Grimshaw parodies the romantic fantasy of war through a contrast with its grim reality.

It is not a coincidence that Mundy's Orientalist adventure story is told from the perspective of a regiment of Sikh cavalry. The Indian cavalry that went to France was quickly dismounted and sent into action as infantry, a history described in *Hira Singh* as well but Mundy allows them one glorious charge on the fields of Flanders first, an action whereby Singh says "we proved our hearts – whether they were stout, and true, as the British believed, or false, as the Germans planned and hoped."³⁸⁴ Once the action shifts to Asia, where there had been more cavalry action than in Europe, the Western desire to relive the days of chivalry vicariously through the image of gallant Indians in mounted combat is given free rein. The imperial adventure story could not fully transform the troglodyte world of the Western Front into a space of high adventure, but it is

³⁸⁴ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 24.

possible to move the action Eastwards, and it is in this theater that the genre could survive during the war, as Das observed.³⁸⁵ The Western reader forgets the uncomfortable resonance between non-white colonials arriving to fight and labour in Europe and the violence wrought by the war; the colonial soldier in *Hira Singh* travels across continents, far from home, but their presence quickly passes out of Europe and deeper into the exotic Orient. “...I forget the feel of Flanders mud,” Hira Singh says. The world of the trenches and its attendant sensual horrors pass into a dream in the narrative, rendered less substantial than the imperial romance imagined in its stead.³⁸⁶ The image of chivalric heroism in the Middle East is itself a fantasy that belies the actual nature of the Mesopotamia campaign as a space of crushing British military defeats and imperial immobility.³⁸⁷ Nevertheless, it is easier to imagine a romanticized imperial adventure (despite the evidence of reality) the farther eastward from the familiar terrain of Europe Mundy sent his characters.

Though Kipling keeps his focus on the Western Front, his Indians are generally unbothered by the violence of the war-space. They do not display any sense of trauma in participating in violence, only reflecting neutrally at times on the scale of the war as being like “a world-destroying battle.”³⁸⁸ In actuality, as we

³⁸⁵ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 183.

³⁸⁶ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 10.

³⁸⁷ Chowdhury, *The First World War, Anticolonialism and Imperial Authority in British India, 1914–1924*, 16.

³⁸⁸ Kipling, ‘The Fumes of the Heart’ 42.

shall see in Chapter Five, Indian soldiers' letters were frequently miserable and pessimistic about the war, sitting well alongside the generally miserable and ironic tenor of British trench literature, but Kipling's ventriloquist puppets are staunch and martial. His depiction of the martial races at war leans toward a 'noble savage' narrative where the Indian Army is used to violence and engages with it based on their own codes of honour. A Sikh regiment systematically kills Germans who had killed a young European girl whom the soldier in 'The Fumes of the Heart' had been fond of. Centered on the racialized body of the Sikh, such fantasies of honour, obligation and violence recall the very early popularizations of martial race doctrine in British media, when Sikhs were characterized as gallant loyalists helping avenge the deaths of British women and children at the hands of Indian mutineers in 1857.³⁸⁹ Mundy's own desire for wish fulfilling imperial heroism saw his Sikhs intervene in the Armenian genocide carried out by the Ottoman Empire, but Kipling finds a way to have righteous, retributive violence visited upon 'the Hun' much closer to home.³⁹⁰ The businesslike nature of the Sikh's revenge reinforces the message to the Western reader that such violent acts are naturalized in his culture. Pathans meanwhile are depicted as expending their energies and their lives in transnational blood feuds that carry over even onto the trenches.³⁹¹ Kipling plays into a stereotype of the Pathan as

³⁸⁹ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, chap. Highlanders, Sikhs and Gurkhas in the Rebellion.

³⁹⁰ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 156.

³⁹¹ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 241.

“racially incapable of fully realizing that military discipline superseded ‘tribal loyalties’.”³⁹² It is an ambivalent depiction of the sepoy as dangerous, but not toward the British; they are a danger unto themselves if left to their own communal devices, but in the space of the Western Front their instincts are channeled toward the prosecution of violence against a dishonourable German enemy. Their nobility and their savagery may oscillate in emphasis, but the martial race soldier performs racially ingrained violence with the troglodyte world as a backdrop to their existing instincts; it is not a depiction that troubles the truisms of martial race discourse or poses a threat to the civilizing British imperial image.

Ram Singh skewers these images of martial race heroics and violence. Ram Singh has a dream in Chapter 2 where he participates in a thrilling mounted escape across the Western Front, all alone and pursued by seventy Germans on horseback.³⁹³ Ram Singh has his fullest expression as a man of a martial race in this dream. Far more grounded, it nevertheless parallels Mundy’s description of Ranjoor Singh leading his Sikhs on an adventure through the Ottoman Empire; it then acts as a parody that displays Mundy’s story as pure wish fulfilling fantasy. The dream sets up ironic foreshadowing for the immediate follow-up chapter, which begins: “Ram Singh awoke with a start.”³⁹⁴ It is a jarring awakening for the

³⁹² Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 27.

³⁹³ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 115.

³⁹⁴ Grimshaw, 119.

reader as well: Ram Singh's regiment is dismounted and plunged into trench warfare.

Hammered by artillery, armed with newly issued bayoneted rifles still unfamiliar to them, the dismounted cavalry goes on an attack that gains little and wipes out half their squadron. In *The Eyes of Asia* and in *Hira Singh*, the martial races are fearless. However, Ram Singh casts his eyes across the survivors and sees fear and trauma on the Indians' faces. "How scared everyone looked! Gone was the amiably complacent expression worn but a few hours ago... none of us will ever be the same again, thought Ram Singh."³⁹⁵ If only those who have been through combat can truly write about it – the idea of 'combat Gnosticism'³⁹⁶ – then Grimshaw transports his own war trauma onto an Indian voice to demonstrate war as a moment of bewildering pain and loss, not of stoic heroism. Grimshaw is skeptical of the value of "great martial valour" in industrial warfare.³⁹⁷ He has Ram Singh reflect on how little his skills as a martial race warrior matter in the troglodyte world, speaking out against the romantic, dreamlike image of chivalry and loyal subaltern violence:

So all these sacrifices were in vain, thought Ram Singh; what manner of war was this? Of what use his being an accomplished swordsman, horseman or even shot? Had not he and his just

³⁹⁵ Grimshaw, 122.

³⁹⁶ James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History* 30, no. 1, (1999): 203–15.

³⁹⁷ Grimshaw, "'Roly" Grimshaw's Diary, 1914-15', 71.

companions just advanced 800 yards on foot without once firing a round. This was not the war of his dreams.³⁹⁸

It is highly intriguing that a British officer of Indian cavalry, representing the institution that formulated and codified martial race discourse should at this moment provide a nuanced and grounded imagination of Indians that undercuts the fantasies of civilian authors like Kipling and Mundy. However, it would be a mistake to read Grimshaw as a critic of martial race discourses. Ram Singh's war trauma never extends beyond a questioning of the length of his military service. He does not express a moment of cowardice or disloyalty. Grimshaw's avatar, Smith, argues for the importance of fighting the war, and in 'A Day at an Indian Cavalry Depot' the Depot Commander similarly exhorts his men to keep fighting.³⁹⁹ In this respect the martial race imagination displayed by Grimshaw is a far more nuanced portrayal where the Indian Army's heroism comes from showcasing the shocks to their morale when confronted with the horror of war, which they overcome through the intervention of their British officers. To an extent, Grimshaw disproves an allegation by Jeffrey Greenhut that Indian soldiers who did not display war enthusiasm in the trenches were assumed by their white officers to be racially less brave than white soldiers.⁴⁰⁰ In a climate of criticism of the Indian Army's battle performance and courage, Grimshaw was a staunch

³⁹⁸ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 123.

³⁹⁹ Roly Grimshaw, 'A Day at an Indian Cavalry War Depot', in *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15*, ed. J. H. Wakefield and C. J. M. Weippert (Kent: D. J. Costello, 1986), 196.

⁴⁰⁰ Greenhut, 'Sahib and Sepoy', 18.

defender of the troops as having fought bravely under terrible leadership in the high command.⁴⁰¹ In his telling, the martial race Indian is a far more realistic figure than in Kipling or Mundy's vision; his heroism comes from having discharged his duty despite his suffering, not from a fantasy of being above pain, doubt or the desire for self-preservation. This is a lower and much more realistic bar for the Indian soldier to clear to remain in the British mind an example of "oxymoron of voluntary subjugation."⁴⁰² In its ventriloquism *Ram Singh* produces the most humanistic take on a martial race soldier, but it remains a martial race construction that prescribes reminders of duty to King, caste and regiment and the primacy of honour as sure-fire cures to failures of Indian nerve. We can thus see a tension: the truisms of martial race discourse struggling under the evidence of Grimshaw's own eyes of Indian war trauma. Continually the fantasy of martial race discourse intrudes upon the realism of war trauma, and the Indian is not allowed to be a body that can feel genuine disaffection.

How Do the Other Puppets Speak?

Ventriloquism relies on a heterogeneity of voices to disguise the puppeteers' presence as well as to give the illusion of speech that fully represents the values and discourses of the community or communities being ventriloquized.⁴⁰³ The most obvious example of this principle at work in imperial antibiotic literature is

⁴⁰¹ Grimshaw, "Roly" Grimshaw's Diary, 1914-15', 61.

⁴⁰² Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 13.

⁴⁰³ Maynard, 'Textual Ventriloquism', 391.

in *The Eyes of Asia*, where the combined testimony of sepoys from across four martial race communities supports the narrative of unified Indian military loyalty. Similarly, Mundy makes his point not just through Hira Singh but also the words and actions of Ranjoor Singh and a host of supporting members of the regiment. The interanimation of voices invented and puppeteered by Grimshaw, Mundy and Kipling are not confined simply to the sepoy: every person present in the narrative is a medium through which the writers convey a martial race imagination of the central Indian characters.

Kipling ventriloquizes the Pathan family reading the letter in 'A Private Account', their reactions altogether adding up to a narrative of frontier grudges migrated and transposed onto a European terrain; similarly, the dead child avenged by the Sikh of 'The Fumes of the Heart' as well as a broad range of characters encountered by Abdul Rahman of 'A Trooper of Horse' (a child, an elderly French matron, a dead woman) act within his orchestrated narrative to showcase affective emotional connections between the martial races and European civilians. Meanwhile, in *Hira Singh* we meet Gooja Singh, a soldier within Hira Singh's unit who constantly doubts and plots against the story's heroic protagonist Ranjoor Singh. Gooja Singh allows the safe exploration of the tensions surrounding martial race loyalty: Gooja Singh's ultimate, awful death is a karmic outcome that speaks to the fate of sepoys who mistrust their leaders. There is a similar sense of karma in the death of *Ram Singh's* Beji Singh, a handsome young soldier who carries on an intimate romance with a French girl

(the only acknowledgement of the taboo topic of interracial sex within the books); when Ram Singh admonishes him for carrying on an affair forbidden by the British military, Beji Singh replies: “What does it matter, Ramji? We may all be killed tomorrow.”⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, Beji Singh dies the following day. His affair before his death showcases an Indian male vitality tragically lost in trench warfare – but there is a disquieting sense that Grimshaw the author used him to both display and punish transgressions of racial and libidinal boundaries on the Western Front.

Viewing all characters within the texts from the lens of authorial puppet helps us understand their relationship to the martial race discourse that runs as a through-line within the body of imperial antibiotic. Indian hospital staff who treat Ram Singh with respect highlight his position in India’s caste hierarchy. The pretentious behaviour of the lower-caste, wealthy Indian doctor⁴⁰⁵ serves as a foil for the comparatively likeable Ram Singh to assert his own racial merits as “*asl* [true] Rajput.”⁴⁰⁶ Portraying the low-caste doctor in a manner that alienates the reader, reinforced by the fact that no one (not even the British doctors) likes him, is to persuade the reader to share the author’s disgust of such colonial ‘mimic men’.⁴⁰⁷ Mundy provides a vast cast of characters running the gamut from Arab

⁴⁰⁴ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 132.

⁴⁰⁵ Sarcastically referred to in the narration as “*It*” [emphasis in the original] and “this magnificent creature”.

⁴⁰⁶ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 174.

⁴⁰⁷ Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’.

intriguers, Kurdish chieftains, German and British officers to Afghan aristocrats for his Sikhs to interact with and showcase their immunity to temptation and coercion from being 'false' to their 'friends' the British. The brutal tribal politics of the Kurds and the ragged nature of the Afghans within the story provide alternative visions of martial savagery that the honourable Sikhs look well besides; having Armenians to rescue from Ottoman assault gives the opportunity for righteous imperial violence. A central message of clever martial valour is only possible through puppeteering characters for the Sikhs to defeat, trick and save.

Most notable is the portrayal of Germans. In *The Eyes of Asia*, they appear sporadically as objects of revulsion and hatred. In 'The Fumes of the Heart' they are shown to fire their artillery indiscriminately and kill children.⁴⁰⁸ A narrative of German brutality and cowardice is expressed in nakedly racialized form by Bishen Singh in 'A Retired Gentleman':

The nature of the enemy is to commit shame upon women and children, and to defile the shrines of his own faith with his own dung. It is done by him as a drill. We believed till then they were some sort of caste apart from the rest. We did not know they were outcaste. Now it is established by the evidence of our senses. They attack on all fours running like apes. They are specially careful for their faces. When death is certain to them they offer gifts and

⁴⁰⁸ Kipling, 'The Fumes of the Heart', 32.

repeat the number of their children. They are very good single shots from cover.⁴⁰⁹

The German is portrayed here as racially distinct, 'outcaste' from European civilization. British fears of racial degeneration through war violence are doubly-projected; first onto the primeval body of the martial race soldier who in turn speaks out with a revolting portrait of Germans as cowardly, dishonourable, and animalistic. German race anxieties surrounding the deployment of colonial soldiers highlight the irony of this portrayal. Racist German responses to the migration of non-white military labour gave the opportunity for Entente propaganda to reverse the racializing gaze by having the German seem bestial and depraved in the eyes of the ventriloquized Indian.⁴¹⁰ Lowering the German to the level of the bestial savage did not in itself rehabilitate the colonial soldier himself from such a portrayal. Instead, race operated as a metaphor for barbarity that could encompass colonial soldier and white German alike, while keeping the British themselves inoculated against the war's racially degenerative potential.

Using the Indian Army in combat against a white enemy did not act as a baleful precedent for colonial discipline: not only were Germans revealed by the

⁴⁰⁹ Kipling, *The Eyes of Asia*, 7–8.

⁴¹⁰ Such as during the post-war occupation of the Rhineland by soldiers from French Africa, widely decried as 'The Black Shame' by an international campaign of racist propaganda that argued that the French were deliberately allowing African soldiers to rape defenceless white German women. During this controversy the victimized figure of the German woman acted as a site for European libidinal fantasies of humiliating and abusing German women, as Iris Wigger argued. Propaganda that portrayed German women as sexually offering themselves to African soldiers used the taboo of interracial sex to make the German the object of revulsion. Iris Wigger, *The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Intersections of Race, Nation, Gender and Class in 1920s Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-31861-9>.

war to not be white and civilized, but their humanity itself could be questioned by a non-white observer. In this respect the German himself becomes Othered from the British Self, rendered through military violence into a colonial savage lower down the scale of racial progress than the martial races themselves. The difficulty here is obvious: to racially lower a white population to render them acceptable targets of violence by non-white soldiers is to invite back the very same disquieting association with the British as a population degenerating into savage violence. While the fictional Indian cannot consider the British soldier a savage because such words are unutterable from the dummy's mouth; the possibility of what is unspoken haunts the page.

Hira Singh does not portray the German enemy with anything like the utter loathing Kipling channels through his texts. The Germans are portrayed as racially arrogant and abusive, leading to their downfall. German characters in *Hira Singh* frequently treat the Indians with contempt and racially motivated violence, in contrast to British characters who are portrayed as respectful and trusting. The international collaborations between Germans, Turks and Indians are portrayed by Mundy to be a German-led affair where some Sikhs collaborated because they were easily led astray or hired by white masters, not because they had a genuine colonial grievance. The 'true' Sikhs of *Hira Singh* easily see right through German lies and seductions: "We began to wonder why such conquerors

should seek so earnestly the friendship of a handful of us Sikhs.”⁴¹¹ The Germans fail in their conspiracy because they maintain a self-superior attitude toward the Sikhs and presume their schemes would be effective. Their greatest mistake is underestimating both the intelligence and the loyalty of the Sikhs. Frequently the Sikhs are mistaken as Muslims and uselessly told of rumours such as the Kaiser’s conversion to Islam.⁴¹² Mundy writes of Germans trying to convince the Sikhs to betray the British Empire by describing the centuries of plunder and debasement of colonialism.⁴¹³ The Germans are ultimately undone in Afghanistan because they presume the Afghans would be gullible and easy to fool with their claims of technological prowess and their lies about the war, but the Amir reveals that he and his people are connected to world news through British technology and Mundy ventriloquizes him into dismissing the Germans as liars and fools. The chivalrous Sikh soldier is one whose loyalty Mundy frames as earned by the British, and through imagining this loyalty the British self-image could be bolstered during wartime imperial crisis. Through the puppetry of these characters, the German schemes and the Sikhs who stand firm against them, Mundy both acknowledges and attempts to dispel British discomforts with the unjustness of the colonial enterprise by putting the criticism of the British Empire in the mouths of German characters depicted as untrustworthy and incompetent in their schemes. British racial superiority is maintained through a framing of

⁴¹¹ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 47.

⁴¹² Mundy, 12 & 14.

⁴¹³ Mundy, 56.

other white Europeans as inferior to the martial races. Consciously or otherwise *Hira Singh* and *The Eyes of Asia* capture the Western Front contact zone as a site of racial confusion and slippage.

Do Puppeteers Speak?

As noted in Chapter Three, and in the general framework of race discourse I developed in Chapter Two, martial race discourses described a British idealized self-imagination by way of arranging a hierarchy of racial worthiness in India. How, then, are these unspoken but implied discourses of the British self articulated through ventriloquist literature?

As Andrew Hill writes: “Ventriloquism is a practice riddled with anxieties that centre on the identity of the ventriloquist and their ability to control that aspect of their self, which finds an outlet in the ventriloquist’s puppet.”⁴¹⁴ The mimicking of a brown voice by a white author is the inverse of Bhabha’s focus on the colonized subaltern who mimics the master.⁴¹⁵ The phrase ‘going native’ exists to denote a dangerous slippage of imperial identity, a transracial confusion exemplified in India by the phenomenon of what William Dalrymple called the ‘White Mughals’; white Europeans who practised an Anglo-Indian hybridity that

⁴¹⁴ Hill, ‘The BBC Empire Service’, 36.

⁴¹⁵ Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’.

could be more Indian than Anglo.⁴¹⁶ Kaja Silverman, through a Freudian reading of T.E. Lawrence's writing, has explored the libidinal urges that underlie the desire of white colonials to identify with and wear the skin of the non-white colonial.⁴¹⁷ Mundy, Grimshaw and Kipling do not ever in their writing slip into as drastic a racial confusion as experienced by White Mughals or Lawrence of Arabia, but through their mimicry we can see slippages between the white and brown racial identities, already shown to be fluid in the depiction of the Germans. Martial race discourse acts as a doorway not least because it provides the illusion of knowledge of how the sepoy speaks, acts, and thinks. It also provides a hybrid object as near to a European body as an Indian could be, a chivalrous, masculine skin that a British author could *want* to step into.

The protagonist of Mundy's *Hira Singh* is the Sikh officer Ranjoor Singh, a figure that excites Das as a radical breaking of the mould of the imperial adventure story protagonist, an Indian instead of a white Englishman: it is "the equivalent of having an Indian James Bond in terms of the genre."⁴¹⁸ Ranjoor Singh is not a hapless colonial subaltern who blindly follows a white master; he is shown to be an effective, charismatic and creative leader, a master of disguise and languages along with his qualities as a warrior and horseman. He consistently

⁴¹⁶ William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (New Delhi: Viking Penguin Books, 2002).

⁴¹⁷ Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 1992, chap. 7, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1605701>.

⁴¹⁸ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 186.

gets the better of his German foes. As Das describes it “Indians were supposed to be the gallant warriors but ineffective leaders – men who could fight not think,” but Ranjoor Singh defies these conventions in Das’ estimation. However, as I have discussed, the German characters in *Hira Singh* are ventriloquized to be contemptible opponents: how far can besting them count as a repudiation of martial race stereotypes? Moreover, while Ranjoor Singh is shown to have the élan and independence of an imperial adventure hero, the rest of the Sikhs in his regiment, particularly Hira Singh, are perfectly in keeping with stereotype. What makes Ranjoor Singh special is nothing from within the text but his intertextual role as the protagonist of an adventure novel; such men were traditionally white and British, and so this Sikh officer behaves and is treated exactly as a British officer. Despite his dark skin and Sikh name, the character is identical to a white protagonist. Far from being an Indian James Bond, he is a James Bond in brownface. The narrative only makes sense if Ranjoor Singh is imagined to be white.

When, after being absent for the entire journey to Europe, Ranjoor Singh appears inexplicably to join the regiment on its first cavalry charge in Flanders the only reaction from the commander Colonel Kirby is: “Thank God, old man! You’ve come in the nick of time!” When Kirby dies, he passes the torch of guardianship of the Sikhs to Ranjoor Singh with the command “Shepherd ‘em!”⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁹ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 38.

The total trust showed by the British officers to Ranjoor Singh; the carte blanche⁴²⁰ given to him to (as it is heavily implied) play a double agent against German intrigues in India; and his command of the German language; these are altogether inexplicable in a martial race Indian of no aristocratic background. Yet they would be qualities par for the course in the typically hypercompetent and independent white, British protagonist of an adventure novel.

Reading Ranjoor Singh as a British officer in all but name, skin, and mode of speech (he addresses his men with the hauteur of an Oriental potentate) we can understand his total inability to communicate his plans with his men as he ‘shepherds ‘em’ to India, foiling German plans along the way. Racially coded as distinct from his men he assumes the lonely burden of the white leader of brown men who cannot be trusted with knowledge, only to perform duties. The constant grumbling and suspicion cast by the soldiers upon Ranjoor Singh become less a natural reaction to being kept in the dark but instead the expected subaltern reactions of ingratitude and conspiracy that the stern but patient white officer must address in dealing with the colonial half-devil, half-child. Martial race discourse gives the space for Mundy to imagine a man like Ranjoor Singh, who could be Indian but still act exactly as an avatar for a British adventure hero. The wish-fulfilling fantasy of heroism and chivalry in the troglodyte spaces of World War I is not just vicariously lived out through a brown body, but martial race

⁴²⁰ An unintended but fortuitous pun.

discourse imagined a body that could be tolerable and indeed desirable for the British mind to inhabit.

Even in narratives where the sepoy is not constructed as a figure that is attractive to inhabit and identify with, unexpected sympathy arises to trouble the boundary between ventriloquist and puppet. Kipling treats his caricatures of sepoy loyalty in *The Eyes of Asia* with a general lack of empathy: ventriloquizing their voices into Orientalist pastiche, denying them the chance to express war trauma. Das's analysis of the short stories teases out areas of unexpected sympathy between Kipling and the puppet sepoy figure. Kipling reproduces without alteration extracts from sepoy letters detailing the bonds formed between them and older Frenchwomen whose homes they were billeted in. Ahmed the Pathan in "The Private Account" writes admiringly of the woman he calls his "French mother" – much to his real mother's jealous chagrin.⁴²¹ The Sikh in "The Fumes of the Heart" talks about a widowed woman who took care of him, washing his clothes, making him his breakfast, polishing his boots, and so on.⁴²² The extract is copied exactly from a sepoy letter. In the end, both the real sepoy and the fictional one part from the widow. As the genuine letter says, "When we had to leave that village the old lady wept on my shoulder. Strange that I had never seen her weeping for her dead son and yet she should weep for me."⁴²³ Das

⁴²¹ Kipling, "The Private Account." 60

⁴²² Kipling, "The Fumes of the Heart" 36.

⁴²³ Sher Bahadur Khan, France, 9th January 1916, quoted in Omissi 135–136.

argued that the mother-son relationship in the sepoy correspondence struck a chord with Kipling, who had himself been separated from his parents when sent to India – a cause of trauma from which he never recovered.⁴²⁴ Kipling may have failed to relate to the sepoys as colonial soldiers, but he understood them as sons who missed their mothers. Kipling also tragically lost his son in the war, and Das argued that this made him attentive to the love for children described in Indian correspondence.⁴²⁵ Abdul Rahman in “A Trooper of Horse” describes with genuine affection the antics of a French little boy at his billet, whom the soldier comes to look on just as his own son – the boy in turn referring to Abdul Rahman’s child as “my brother who is in India” and praying for him.⁴²⁶ Just as Kipling read the letters and related to the soldiers as sons, he appears to have related to them as fathers separated from their children. When the Sikh narrator of “The Fumes of the Heart” describes the French girl whose death he avenged as “the child of us all,” his violence is triggered not just as a defence of innocence white womanhood but through the need to avenge family.⁴²⁷ Can Kipling’s portrayal of the German Army as savage murderers of children be separated from our knowledge of him as bereaved father?

Sympathy working across the boundary between the white ventriloquist Self and the brown subaltern puppet is the subject of *Ram Singh*. Grimshaw wrote

⁴²⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 191.

⁴²⁵ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture* 191.

⁴²⁶ Kipling, “A Trooper of Horse” 97.

⁴²⁷ Kipling, “The Fumes of the Heart” 32.

of *Ram Singh* that his objective was to “perpetuate the great bond of sympathy and deep sense of affection and camaraderie which existed between British officers of the Indian Cavalry and the gallant men who followed them – often to death – for the honour of the Regiment.”⁴²⁸ As Das and Buck have commented, Grimshaw’s desire for interracial camaraderie through ventriloquist literature was by nature doomed to fail: ‘only British officers of the Indian Cavalry’ had the power and illusion of knowledge to tell the story of their ‘gallant men’, never vice-versa.⁴²⁹ It would be a mistake to dismiss Grimshaw as a simple racist. Indeed, Grimshaw shows us that racism is no simple thing, not incompatible with affection and sympathy. He professes a love for his men, defends them frequently against racist Britons, and mocks both nakedly racist attitudes among the British as well as more subtle, microaggressive displays of condescending politeness – it is his belief that Indians can always tell when they are shaking hands with “weak-minded Englishmen” who “cultivate” “that carefully suppressed repulsion” of racism.⁴³⁰ Nevertheless his diary betrays a revelatory inability to take this critique of racism beyond blaming ‘weak-minded’ individuals and toward the wider racial hierarchies of empire. He describes a British officer going out of the safety of the trenches to rescue a wounded sepoy. This is fascinating. Das’ survey of British war accounts found many moments of sepoys helping wounded Britons, but none of

⁴²⁸ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 98.

⁴²⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 192–200; Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 29.

⁴³⁰ Grimshaw, “‘Roly” Grimshaw’s Diary, 1914–15’, 47.

Britons risking their lives to rescue Indians.⁴³¹ Grimshaw's disapproval of the sepoy's rescue makes clear the logic that made such an action anomalous: "A British officer is worth more than a wounded sepoy." His immediate follow-up sentence begins with a half-hearted "I know these things cannot be measured in that way", but the imperial arithmetic was clear in the relative value of raced lives.⁴³² Buck has argued that Grimshaw's own Anglo-Irish parentage and Anglo-Indian life made his negotiation of identity and imperial loyalty complex and fractured.⁴³³ The result is a memoir that shows sympathy, respect and affection for the colonial subaltern but fails to realize its own lack of reciprocity and the impossibility of camaraderie. Nevertheless, Grimshaw makes the attempt in *Ram Singh* to bridge the imperial divide in the ultimate act of mimicry: rewriting his own experience through a representative of the men he commanded. Through discussing the treatment of anti-imperial critique in *Ram Singh* we can uncover the ventriloquist puppet's utility as a means of experiencing and saying that which the white British self could not.

Grimshaw in his diary revealed a distaste for the prosecution of the war, and an ambivalent attitude toward the treatment of Indian lives as lesser. Ram Singh himself never voices critique against empire's racial structure, but through describing racism through his puppet's words Grimshaw speaks against the

⁴³¹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 222.

⁴³² Grimshaw, "Roly" Grimshaw's Diary, 1914-15', 43.

⁴³³ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 22.

shame of it. Ram Singh is a keen observer of 'the Sahib log;' when the troop ship stops at Port Said the officers took shore leave for a party that went on late night. Ram Singh reflects that the bad war news and the nearness of death motivated the British to make merry, an empathetic sentiment followed by his sad reflection that he and the Indian troops were stuck on board even without the usual pleasure of the gramophone.⁴³⁴ The narrative's criticism of imperial power is never overt, but its presence is intentional and not clearly set up to be disregarded as in *Hira Singh*. When Maharajah Sir Pertab Singh visits Ram Singh's unit to exhort them to die fighting honourably for the King-Emperor, Ram Singh is impressed but a 'recognized cynic' observes: "The Great One is very old which makes the business of dying a very desirable and easy one." This is not criticism that Grimshaw would voice himself nor even ventriloquize through Ram Singh, but by framing it as the words of a 'cynic' he allows the sentiment to be expressed without challenge, while also distancing himself from its utterance. Grimshaw-as-narrator's observation that many sepoys in hospital were greeted enthusiastically by unknown British officers who couldn't tell them apart from other sepoys offers a sarcastic critique of racism that works subtly through the text without being overtly provocative. Grimshaw's 'great bond of sympathy' then allows him to voice such criticisms through Ram Singh, but he himself remains convinced of the value of the imperial relationship.

⁴³⁴ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 103.

Ram Singh describes his commanding officer Smith Sahib, clearly Grimshaw's own stand-in in the novel, as unlike "other Sahibs who, under a veneer of artificial cordiality often poorly disguised their inherent antipathy to an Indian." Grimshaw's belief that Indians could spot a racist by his handshake is expressed through Ram Singh's confirmation that Smith's handshake "seemed by some subtle channel to convey a genuine pleasure at meeting."⁴³⁵ Grimshaw acknowledges that imperial power can be abusive, coercive, and racist but insists that there exist sympathetic white commanders whose relationships with their men exemplify the imperial military relationship. Grimshaw's desire to rehabilitate this relationship through the imagination of an intimate bond between Smith and Ram Singh requires that he engage in a sympathetic exercise made impossible by colonial power. Das' analysis of the book is critical of it as an exercise in imperial power but attentive to its expression of "complex emotional flashpoints" and "a deeper history of feeling – intensities and intimacies heightened by racial difference in an all-male environment."⁴³⁶ As Das notes, Grimshaw's diary reveals sympathy toward the Indian dead and wounded, but this is sympathy at a distance. Grimshaw, by his own words, did not value Indian life enough to risk his or a British officer's to rescue it. Yet in *Ram Singh*, Smith has an emotionally fraught encounter with a dying sepoy, Beji Singh, who embraces Smith and says, "Sahib, Sahib," before dying. And then:

⁴³⁵ Grimshaw, 108.

⁴³⁶ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 199.

Smith Sahib turned to Ram Singh with the words '*Guzar gea*' ['Passed away'] [Emphasis in the original]. Both of them gently lifting the battered remnants, laid the body in the niche... Tears stood in Ram Singh's eyes: what would he say to Beji's mother, she a widow and Beji an only son?

Covered with blood from the death grip of a young soldier for whom he entertained more than a passing regard, Smith Sahib felt strangely unnerved at the incident.⁴³⁷

In Buck's view, Grimshaw centers a sepoy's death around his own reaction, expressed through Smith being 'strangely unnerved', a British officer's desire to avoid expressing emotional vulnerability.⁴³⁸ Das' reading is characteristically more sympathetic: Grimshaw is aware that he had led young men like Beji Singh, toward whom he felt genuine homosocial affection as an officer in the standing of a parent to his men, to a pointless death.⁴³⁹ Through ventriloquizing Beji Singh's last words as 'Sahib', having him embrace Smith, while Grimshaw in his own diary had stayed distant from such scenes, we cannot tell if Grimshaw is writing to absolve himself or as an act of self-flagellation through imagining Beji Singh's dying hands on his body. Beji Singh's last whisper is not for his mother, but an act of acknowledgement of what Smith Sahib means to him. The fictionalized puppet stays the subaltern until the end. Ventriloquism reveals to us a fractured landscape of power over the sepoy voice where speech is animated by the

⁴³⁷ Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 150.

⁴³⁸ Buck, *Conceiving Strangeness in British First World War Writing*, 30.

⁴³⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 199.

conflicted, undecidable desires of the puppeteer. The Indian body spoke with a European voice ill-disguised by mimicked accents.

Having observed how the mimicry of the martial races was haunted by the menace of difference and similarity, we can turn in the next chapter to examine what there is of sepoy testimony from the Western Front to ask the key question: did sepoys see themselves as the martial races too?

5. THE SEPOY SPEAKS: MARTIAL RACE DISCOURSE IN INDIAN SELF-IDENTITIES

In September 1914, “a member of the Indian Revolutionary party, if it may be so called, was arrested in Toulouse,” recalls Evelyn Berkeley Howell of the Indian Civil Service.⁴⁴⁰ “Upon examination his pockets were found to be stuffed with seditious literature intended for dissemination amongst the Indian soldiery.” This arrest sparked the creation of an extraordinary archive of colonial surveillance reports of the correspondence of the Indian Army in Europe during World War I – the Reports of the Censor of Indian Mail, with Howell the first man to hold the job. Censoring Indian mail to prevent ‘seditious literature’ reaching the Indian Army on the Western Front, while also producing a regular series of reports and compilations of letters to gauge the mood of sepoy discourse, this archive of censored letters paradoxically now acts as one of the largest collections of surviving testimony from the colonial Indian Army.

Having examined martial race discourse as a British fantasy of colonial acquiescence and heroism projected onto a largely muted sepoy body, the censor reports offer an opportunity to examine in greater detail the ways in which the sepoys themselves articulated their own experiences vis a vis the discourse. As discussed in Chapter Three, martial race discourse was a colonial race ideology

⁴⁴⁰ Evelyn Berkeley Howell, ‘Report on Twelve Months’ Writing of the Indian Mail Censorship’, in *Reports of the Censor of Indian Mails in France, 1914–1918*, vol. 1, 1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 369.

that drew from pre-existing Indian discourses. In their letters, did sepoys articulate the notions of caste, community, and warlike masculinity that the British codified for their own purposes? Do we find that the *British* notion of martial race discourse informed sepoys' imaginations of themselves, and their relationship to their communities and the British? Did the sepoys indeed speak the 'discourse of the master,' as their ventriloquist puppet counterparts did? And what important contradictions, slippages, and ambivalences can we draw from Indian articulations of martial race discourse?

In this chapter I read the letters preserved in the Censor Reports and suggest it as a fascinating archive that displays a complex negotiation of martial race discourse. The archive shows the importance of the discourse in structuring the military culture of India and the societies the 'martial races' hailed from – all put to the test in a moment of unprecedented migration and encounter with Europe, itself a social and geographic space altered by a traumatizing war. In extremis, seeing Europeans in their homelands and not in colonial India, undergoing the strain of a war totally removed from any prior experience and on behalf of imperial power, martial race discourse's predictions of racialized, unthinking Indian martiality and loyalty were put to the test. I conclude that the discourse is inherently important in understanding the strains of war enthusiasm and loyalty displayed in the sepoys' letters to and from home, and that martial race discourse's simplistic stereotyping of the Indian sepoy does not at all capture

the range of feeling that palpitated throughout what Santanu Das calls “the sepoy heart.”⁴⁴¹

Before turning to a reading of the sepoy letters, it is necessary to lay out the broader context of discourses operating within India during the war years. In the previous section I showed how the loyalty of the martial races was continually asserted by British ventriloquist literature as the antidote to a broader context of an Indian public, or at least a non-martial intelligentsia, whose allegiances could not be taken for granted during the war. The Indian home front was far from a cut-and-dry binary between a loyal martial race recruiting base and a disloyal civil society. Expressions of imperial loyalty and dissent were present across all social spheres. I present the literature on Indian wartime discourse to look at the influence of martial race discourse in Indian self-imaginings and link the Indian home front to the wider agenda of diasporic Indian revolutionaries who were allied with the Central Powers to spread dissent to India and its emigrant army. We thus establish the broader context within which sepoys wrote and received letters, and within which their speech was policed and surveilled by British censors.

Discourses on the Indian Home Front: Between Loyalty and Dissent

In August 1914, the Viceroy of India, Charles Hardinge, announced that the people of India were backing the British war effort. Though he did so before

⁴⁴¹ Das, ‘Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18’, 1 September 2014, 398.

consulting India's leaders on the subject, his announcement was vindicated.⁴⁴²

The British war effort received an enormous upsurge of popular support in India.

John Buchan, in his *History of the War* (1920) recorded the imperial metropolitan reaction to Indian war support:

It was the performance of India which took the world by surprise and thrilled every British heart... The British Empire had revealed itself as... a union based not on statute and officialdom but upon the eternal simplicities of the human heart.⁴⁴³

The suggestion that 'the eternal simplicities of the human heart' underlay Indian war support flattens out a complex terrain of Indian feeling during the war, where the most vocal agitators for the British cause were the same politicians, intellectuals and vernacular newspapers that were the most critical of the imperial regime and under suspicion for spreading nationalist dissent.

Constantly repeated was the slogan of 'loyalty', to the point where the native princes of India provided the British with a hospital ship of that name.⁴⁴⁴ Prayers were offered for Britain's success, and the goddess Kali, whose worship was particularly important in dissident Bengal, had supposedly thrown her

⁴⁴² Shrabani Basu, 'Turbans in the Trenches: Indian Sepoys and Sowars on the Western Front during the Great War', in *Indian Soldiers in the First World War: Re-Visiting a Global Conflict*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar and Claude Markovits, 1st ed. (Routledge India, 2020), 11, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003142362>; Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 39.

⁴⁴³ John Buchan, *A History of the Great War* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922) as quoted in Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 409.

⁴⁴⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 40.

support behind the King-Emperor.⁴⁴⁵ The Begum of Bhopal addressed the Delhi War Conference in April 1918 and declared, “India will leave nothing undone to justify the confidence, the love, the sympathy with which the King-Emperor always honoured us.”⁴⁴⁶ Gandhi wrote to Viceroy Hardinge, “I love the English Nation, and I wish to evoke in every Indian the loyalty of the Englishman.”⁴⁴⁷ Declarations like Gandhi’s, and from other Indian nationalists, perplexed the British, who conceived of India’s intellectuals and politicians as inherently disloyal – yet they were among the most fervent supporters of the Indian war effort.⁴⁴⁸

Santanu Das has observed that in declaring their loyalty, India’s elites seemed to “protest too loudly.”⁴⁴⁹ This wartime outpouring of loyalty on the part of the colonized, on behalf of the colonizer, can be understood in the context of the political motives of India’s native elite – intellectuals, politicians, and aristocrats – who hoped for powerful gains from enthusiastic Indian war participation. Underlying these desires were Indian internalizations and challenges to the verities of martial race discourse and its discriminatory tropes of Indian masculinity and martial valour.

⁴⁴⁵ Das, 50.

⁴⁴⁶ *India’s Services in the War*, vol. 2 (Lucknow: Newul Kishore Press, 1922), 63.

⁴⁴⁷ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, ‘Letter to Viceroy, 29 April 1918’, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965); quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 40.

⁴⁴⁸ McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*, 17.

⁴⁴⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 40.

The war broke out during a transitional moment in Indian politics, when a nationalist consciousness was still growing amidst a desire to achieve greater autonomy within an imperial structure. The promise of a liberal imperialism saw Indian politicians jostle for the same status in the empire as the white, settler-colonial dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Newfoundland, a political battle that also encompassed equal rights for Indian migrants to British colonies.⁴⁵⁰ Nation-state nationalism was still a radical fringe in Indian politics, confined largely to the Sikh Ghadar movement and Bengali activists, and the mainstream of “Indian nationalism... swelled and strained against the still-solid banks of empire loyalism.”⁴⁵¹ Whole-heartedly throwing India into the Entente cause was a strategy for India’s politicians to leverage war participation into a demand for Dominion status.⁴⁵² As observed by Charles Roberts, Britain’s Under Secretary for India, by linking fortunes with Britain in the Great War India could indeed achieve autonomy: “India claims not to be a mere dependent of but a partner in the Empire, and her partnership with us cannot but alter the angle from which we shall look... at the problems of the government of India.”⁴⁵³ The war was framed as a turning point where the discourses of Indian inferiority and difference could be resolved through the

⁴⁵⁰ Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, 408; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 218.

⁴⁵¹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 42.

⁴⁵² Basu, ‘Turbans in the Trenches: Indian Sepoys and Sowars on the Western Front during the Great War’, 13.

⁴⁵³ Charles Roberts, ‘Speech to House of Commons, November 26, 1914’, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 68 (1914): col. 1357.

proof of an Indian equality within the liberalizing frame of empire. This equality was to be demonstrated through military valour.

The question in 1914 that dominated the Indian press was not whether India should fight, but whether India would be allowed to fight.⁴⁵⁴ The Indian elites saw racial discrimination as the obstacle to their aims for recognition. The Indian press smarted at racial distinctions in Britain and the wider empire such the White Australia Policy, the prevention of Indians from attaining officer status in the Indian army, and bans against Indians from carrying firearms.⁴⁵⁵ The relegation of Indians in the Boer War to non-combatant status still rankled, and the fiercely opinionated Indian vernacular press from the Bengal to the Punjab argued for the chance to give Indians a chance to fight on behalf of Britain in the war, as a way towards ending the racial discrimination of empire. As the *Panjabee*, one of the hundreds of newspapers that had emerged in the Punjab province by the time of war, put it, “[Full war participation] is a step towards the eventual obliteration of existing racial prejudice, so essential to India’s self-fulfilment as a nation and an integral part of the Empire.”⁴⁵⁶ Commentators argued that Indian war participation might be disallowed because the colour bar stemmed from a “lurking suspicion that if dusky troops were pitted against white ones they might

⁴⁵⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 51.

⁴⁵⁵ *Bengalee*, 6 October 1914, West Bengal State Archives; *Sanjivani*, 15 September 1900, India Office Records; *Panjabee*, 15 August 1914, 808, L/R/5/195, British Library; *Panjabee*, 20 August 1914, 809, L/R/5/195, British Library; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*.

⁴⁵⁶ *Panjabee*, 8 August 1914, L/R/5/195, British Library; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 51.

discover their real power.”⁴⁵⁷ The dangerous demonstration of Indian equality could potentially radicalize the hitherto apolitical body of the martial race Indian Army as well:

We are convinced that self-government will be granted to this country – even if it be compensation for the services of Indians during the war. Our sepoy who have gone to the front will see Europe with their own eyes. They will see... that there is no difference – except in colour – between Indians and Europeans. Their ideas will broaden and they will naturally have some effect on their fellow countrymen. We hail with joy the approaching day of our liberty and we feel that it is not far distant.⁴⁵⁸

However, the premise of Indian equality was, even among Indian commentators, undermined by a sense of anxiety that Indians were not at present worthy of autonomy and required war service to *earn* a supposedly non-existent capacity to self-govern. Certain Indian intellectuals such as Abdur Rahim, Member of the Royal Commission of the Public Services in India, and Dadabhai Naoroji, the first Indian to win a seat at the House of Commons, argued that it was both India’s duty to fight on the British cause as a defence of civilization against German barbarism. Moreover, by fighting on behalf of the British people and their civilizing influence, Indians, described as hitherto unfit to rule

⁴⁵⁷ Ramananda Chatterjee, ‘Non-European Soldiers in European Wars’, *Modern Review* 16, no. 3 (3 April 1914): 114; quoted in McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*, 28.

⁴⁵⁸ *Zamindar*, 16 October 1914, 945-46, L/R/5/195, British Library; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 53-43.

themselves, could potentially fulfil the liberal imperialist promise of becoming sufficiently capable of autonomy.⁴⁵⁹ The enlightenment discourse of Indian civilizational inferiority which presumed an eventual day of sufficient Indian advancement to gain equality within empire was internalized by Indian politicians who saw the war as an opportunity to overcome Indian inferiority; a necessary action to defend a British civilization framed as the only Western power devoted to Indian advancement. Rahim and Naoroji expressed an internalization of colonial discourses by the colonized, a process of self-othering and self-denigration in comparison to the imagined figure of the white, civilized, British colonizer. That such a discourse was articulated by educated Indians working within the framework of British education and politics is significant; the colonial mimic man *within* the system of reform argues that there is distance still necessary to cross before the colonized can equal the colonizer.

Though Naoroji speaks in the discourse of civilization, by fixating on war service as the prerequisite to crossing the imagined civilizational gap and achieving Indian self-worth, martial race discourse underlies his statement. As Metcalf argued, the crucial distinction between the civilizational discourse and the racial discourse of Indian inferiority was that the former presumed an eventual state of civilizational parity and reform, whereas racialized discourses ascribed, through the signifiers of heredity, somatic qualities and even the

⁴⁵⁹ Abdur Rahim, *The Times*, 13 September 1914; Quoted in Rustom Pestonji Masani, *Dadabhai Naoroji, the Grand Old Man of India* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939), 527–28.

geographical environment an inherent and perpetual difference.⁴⁶⁰ British martial race theorists such as MacMunn saw in the martial races the potential for civilizational improvement and eventual leadership of India, whereas the politicians of India such as ‘Baba Gandhi’ were racially doomed to subservience despite all their pretences toward racial equality.⁴⁶¹ MacMunn’s argument rested on a selective forgetting of the enthusiasm for the war displayed by the Indian intelligentsia (including Gandhi, an enthusiastic recruiter for the army who memorably promised to “rain men” upon the British)⁴⁶² and an over-emphasis on Indian intellectuals who saw the war as an opportunity to foment anti-imperial discontent (more on whom will follow in this section). Indian intellectual war loyalty, however, articulated itself using a discourse of Indian masculinity that was shaped by the martial race discourses of the colonizing British: shaped, internalized, rearticulated, and rejected. If the Indian people were to fight a war to prove that they were worthy of home rule, it was in the context of racialized, classed, and gendered anxieties over the question of Indian military masculinity as articulated by men such as Gandhi.

⁴⁶⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*.

⁴⁶¹ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 1.

⁴⁶² Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, ‘Letter to J. L. Maffey, 30 April 1918’, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965), 382; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 60.

Gandhi's rationalization for his war recruitment while also maintaining a belief in a politics of non-violence (ahimsa) rested on the discourse of military masculinity as a prerequisite for Indian autonomy:

Practice of ahimsa may even necessitate killing... we as a nation have lost the true power of killing. It is clear that he who has lost the power to kill cannot practice non-killing. Ahimsa is a renunciation of the highest type. A weak and effeminate nation cannot perform this grand act of renunciation, even a mouse cannot be properly said to renounce the power of killing a cat... The noblest warrior is he who stands fearless in the face of immense odds. He then feels not the power to kill, but he is supremely triumphant in the knowledge that he has the willingness to die...⁴⁶³

A nation that is unfit to fight cannot from experience prove the virtue of not fighting. I do not infer from this that India must fight. But I do say that India must know how to fight.⁴⁶⁴

The imagination of India having been emasculated and made effeminate leads Gandhi to conclude that only through violent struggle can the Indian people assume the stance of the "noblest warrior" who knows how to fight, and then chooses the path of non-violence. As Das argued, Gandhi may have made a

⁴⁶³ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 'Letter to Hanumantrao, 17 July 1918', in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965), 485; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 65.

⁴⁶⁴ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 'Letter to Esther Faering, 30 June 1918', in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965), 463; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 66.

calculated compromise of his principles of non-violence to gain political capital through sending Indians to front.⁴⁶⁵

Martial race discourse inflected its vision of non-martial emasculation so thoroughly that even challenges to it from the part of Indian politicians involved an internalized acknowledgement of its claims. The discourse of martial races had so effectively created the image of the emasculated Indian that only through war could India become masculine enough to achieve self-rule, even in the imaginations of its own nationalists. The pledges of Indian loyalty were thus complicated speech acts that began with a conformist acceptance of martial race ideology's verities but were frequently strategies of changing the relations of power in colonial India. This challenge to the martial race imaginary of Indian masculinity versus Indian effeminacy is still, however, bounded within the discourse: the reclamation of Indian masculinity still could only be performed through the performance of colonial loyalty. The totalizing power of the discourse, which asserted that to be masculine an Indian must be capable of violence in service of the colonial order, held sway.

A feeling of emasculation under colonial rule also affected the martial races. Martial race theorists bemoaned the softening of the martial races under the 'Pax Britannica', and India's princes, shorn of any real power, saw war as the

⁴⁶⁵ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 67.

replacement for the ritual of hunting in its display of aristocratic masculinity.⁴⁶⁶ The native princes, who ruled one-third of 'British' India with varying degrees of autonomy and were close allies of the Raj, desired to see their authority and martial heritage demonstrated on the field of battle both to their subjects and to the British, thereby strengthening a sovereignty that was in practice precarious if not hollow.⁴⁶⁷

Robert McLain depicted colonial rule in Indian political discourse as a process of emasculation, a deliberate policy of suppressing the "virile qualities" of India's people to temper the possibility of insurrection.⁴⁶⁸ While martial race discourse ascribed 'effeminacy' to the non-martial races as their insuperable fate, there existed an Indian discourse that instead identified non-martial effeminacy as an *outcome* of British rule. While martial race discourse argued peoples such as the Bengalis were unmartial and unsuitable for military service, Indian critics of martial race discourse argued that a policy of keeping educated (and thereby potentially subversive) Indians out of the Indian Army was justified by a martial race discourse that then became self-fulfilling: deprived of the opportunity for military service, races *became* non-martial. Just as martial race discourse argued that a 'race' could lose essential martial qualities within even one generation through military inaction, Indian discourse assumed non-martial Indians

⁴⁶⁶ Das, 40.

⁴⁶⁷ Das, 44-49.

⁴⁶⁸ McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*, 20; Annie Besant, *India: A Nation* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918), 54.

(Bengalis in particular) had been made to become unmartial and unmasculine. Bengali masculinity had long been beleaguered, with many attempts by Bengali intellectuals to show that their people were not meek and effeminate but capable of martial vigour – including athletic and gymnastic competitions at fairs thrown by the land-owning Tagore family, attempts to get the stick-wielding lathiya security guards of the landlords employed in the British military, and unsuccessful calls for the establishment of a Bengali militia.⁴⁶⁹ These attempts were often parodied by Bengalis themselves, who found the middle-class ‘Babu’ and his mimicry of Englishmen amusing in contrast to the realities of an “inadequate education and job prospects that were made worse by discriminatory practices.”⁴⁷⁰ Sinha wrote that Bengalis had consoled themselves, after their desire to form a volunteer militia had been denied in 1886, by arguing that through showing the desire to fight, the Bengalis had proven to the British they had a martial spirit.⁴⁷¹ Yet Bengali anxieties over the loss of masculinity could not really be assuaged through self-consoling discourse but required an actual demonstration of martial valour.

Joining the war was the key to the full resurgence of Indian masculinity.

The fixity of the categories of martial and non-martial was tested during the war years, and the need for manpower opened up recruitment to groups hitherto

⁴⁶⁹ McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*, 8; *Streets, Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, 166.

⁴⁷⁰ McLain, *Gender and Violence in British India: The Road to Amritsar 1914-1919*, 9.

⁴⁷¹ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century*, 93.

denied the opportunity to fight.⁴⁷² Most notable of these was a unique event in colonial Indian history where a regiment of Bengalis, the 49th Regiment, was formed out of members of the intellectual, Bengali middle-class and posted to the Mesopotamian theatre.⁴⁷³ The 49th ultimately performed poorly due to ineffective leadership – but these failings of the ‘Babus’ were interpreted as a vindication of martial race theory.⁴⁷⁴ Martial race theorists such as Frederick Roberts had established a pattern of using the poor military performance of races deemed unmartial – such as the troops of the Madras Army during the Third Burma War of 1885 – to confirm their own prejudices.⁴⁷⁵ There was widespread enthusiasm in Bengal at the prospect of fighting for the cause of both Indian nationalism and a chance to prove the masculinity of the Bengali people. Das’ study of the 1916 play *Bangali Paltan* (Bengali Platoon) revealed in the text the Bengalis’ consciousness of their image as “a cowardly, weak and effeminate race,” with the formation of the 49th Regiment wiping away this stereotype as it discursively represented an acknowledgement from the British King-Emperor that the Bengalis were worthy of demonstrating their loyalty through war service.⁴⁷⁶ A British discourse of Bengali effeminacy could only be overturned by a British acknowledgement of

⁴⁷² Ashutosh Kumar and Claude Markovits, ‘Introduction’, in *Indian Soldiers in the First World War: Re-Visiting a Global Conflict*, ed. Ashutosh Kumar and Claude Markovits, 1st ed. (Routledge India, 2020), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003142362>.

⁴⁷³ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 68.

⁴⁷⁴ Roy, ‘Combat Motivations of the Sepoys and Sowars during the First World War’, 48; MacMunn, ‘The Romance of the Martial Races in India’, 183.

⁴⁷⁵ Roberts, *Forty-One Years in India*, 441.

⁴⁷⁶ Satish Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Bangali Paltan*, 1916, 23; quoted in and translated by Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 70.

Bengali masculinity which, in the moment captured by the play, seemed vindicated by the raising of the 49th. However, Das also identified within the play other motivations for recruitment beyond proving Bengali masculinity through war service; military pay was attractive during wartime inflation, and economic hardships were laid squarely at the feet of the British. Bengali colonial loyalty should thus be read in the context of colonial grievance; grievance against feelings of racialized emasculation as much as against colonialism's economic depredations. We see the complexities of Bengali masculine feeling when Kazi Nazrul Islam, a recruit of the 49th and future national poet of Bangladesh, wrote:

I cannot control my sense of joy. I wanted fire – only fire – fire raging across the air and the sky, within and without, and amidst it all I shall stand with the world-engulfing fire raging in my heart and see how fire meets fire. I also wanted blood. I wish I could wring the necks of all the people in the world and suck all their blood – that would quench my thirst. Why do I have such hostility towards my fellow beings? Have they done me any harm? I can't answer that... The most curious fact is that the tiniest suffering of these men is enough to turn my heart into a wasteland like the Sahara, wailing uncontrollably.⁴⁷⁷

Nazrul's bloodlust, felt sincerely and observed with a detached puzzlement, ambivalently sitting alongside a great well of human empathy, captures the war excitement and confusion of a people hitherto denied the

⁴⁷⁷ Nazrul Islam, *Bandhon Hara: Unfettered* (Dhaka: Nymphaea Publication, 2016); quoted in and translated by Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 327–28.

opportunity for a masculine-coded violence. Nazrul, moreover, as anticolonial activist, popularly noted as both the soldier-poet and the rebel-poet, wields war service in the cause of imperialism together into the broader purpose of his writing as a form of universal struggle against authoritarianism. War awakens Nazrul's capacity to both kill and love humanity, an awakening contextualized by joining the ranks of the army of an imperial power he criticized; conversely speaking, his seeming support of the British military cause undercut by his criticism of its capacity for unjust violence.⁴⁷⁸ Bengali war writing's complex articulations of Bengali desires for colonial redress and self-actualization through the seemingly contradictory medium of imperial war service prepares us to read through the lines of loyalty expressed in the sepoy letters to come later in this chapter.

Further troubling the notion of war service to assert Indian political autonomy and abolish racial discrimination was the separation between the martial race peasant soldiers of the Indian Army and the non-martial intelligentsia, middle classes, and political elite who pinned their hopes for political advancement and racial uplift upon them. Some commentators hoped that war service would radicalize the politics of the supposedly apolitical Indian Army, but Gandhi was adamant that there was no hope of the Army joining in the movement for Indian political autonomy. As he wrote:

⁴⁷⁸ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 324.

We often refer to the fact that many sepoy of Hindustan have lost their lives on the battlefields of France and Mesopotamia. The educated classes cannot claim the credit for this. They were not sent out by us, nor did they join up through patriotism. They know nothing of swaraj [self-rule]. At the end of the War they will not ask for it.⁴⁷⁹

The discourse of apolitical, loyal martial races that we have thus far seen in the writing of MacMunn, men uninterested in leveraging their war loyalty into political gains in support of an Indian nation is here re-articulated by an Indian politician. The martial races are thus a class apart in Gandhi's imagination; for the worse, and not for the better. Anticipating that Indian soldiers' war service would be interpreted by the British as only a display of taken-for-granted loyalty and that the soldiers would not make any attempt to push for a nationalist cause they did not identify with, Gandhi argued that self-rule could be best accomplished if educated, politicized Indians were allowed to enlist.

The gateway to our freedom is situated on the French soil... If we could but crowd the battle-fields of France with an indomitable army of Home Rulers fighting for victory for the cause of the Allies, it will be also a fight for our own cause. We would then have made

⁴⁷⁹ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "Speech at Gujarat Political Conference - I", 3 November 1917', in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965), 55; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 62.

out an unanswerable case for granting Home Rule, not in any distant time or near future but immediately.⁴⁸⁰

The meager concessions given to the non-martial, intellectual classes of India during the war for their own military service ensured that there was no possibility for Indian politicians' desires for political advancement for India that did not involve the use of the peasantry. Gandhi, an active recruiter for the army during the war years, callously stated that the quota system deployed to maintain troop levels would still be lower than local death rates.⁴⁸¹ The martial races were instrumentalized as the ticket to the ending of racial discrimination for Indians as a whole. World War I represented the potential to turn this instrument of political oppression to the advantage of nationalism. For all that the rhetoric of martial races praised the soldier and denigrated the intellectual, the realities of the class divide between the soldiers and the politicians of India set a dark tone to their aspirations: the racial hierarchies of the colonial military ensured that they would not pay the blood price for Indian political advancement.

Das depicts the vast mobilization campaign enacted in rural Punjab during the war, and a range of surviving poems, songs and articles that display a range of reactions to the war: from hectoring, jingoist recruitment songs that urge service

⁴⁸⁰ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 'Letter to V. S. Srinavasi Sastri, 18 July 1918', in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965), 489; Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 63.

⁴⁸¹ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, 'Appeal for Enlistment, Leaflet No. 1, Nadiad, 22 June 1918', in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XIV (Ahmedabad: Government of India, 1965), 443; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 62.

to the King as the duty of all ‘true’ men, to poems that juxtapose playful imagery such as the festival of Holi with the brutality of the war in Europe (of which Indians were clearly not ignorant).⁴⁸² The Indian Army was presented as a vehicle for socioeconomic advancement, as in a song Das quotes:

Get enlisted, the recruits who stand out there,
Here you get broken slippers, there you’ll get full boots, get enlisted
Here you get torn rags, there you’ll get suits, get enlisted
Here you get dry bread, there you’ll get biscuits, get enlisted
Here you’ll have to struggle, there you’ll get salutes, get enlisted.⁴⁸³

The juxtaposition of rough and unpredictable village living ‘here’ is contrasted with the allure of “‘suits,’ ‘boots’ and ‘salutes’ (mentioned in English)” ‘there,’ in the army.⁴⁸⁴ The song makes no reference to an imperial loyalty, focusing instead on material gains, creature comforts and markers of social status. Appeals to the martial races, supposedly naturally loyal and heroic, are devoid of lofty rhetoric, and focused on the concerns of young men in impoverished rural environments. Even more blatantly ‘loyalist’ songs and poems presented the material benefits, perks and securities offered by the British colonial government as the reason to fight loyally for the King-Emperor.⁴⁸⁵ Rakshanda Jalil’s compilation of Indian wartime writing includes works of a revolutionary spirit that that run counter to the rhetoric of loyalty, with the

⁴⁸² Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, chap. 2.

⁴⁸³ *Jat Gazette*, November 1914; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 81.

⁴⁸⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 83.

⁴⁸⁵ Das, 100.

bourgeois intellectual framing of the war as a moment of revolutionary transformation. Consider the following poem by Zafar Ali Khan:

The world has changed, so must you
Beware, for the time past won't return
But the heat and flow of your blood must be so
That it should melt even a mould of ice
The monsters in the calamitous sea of hard work
Should swallow up entirely the fish of wealth
Holding aloft the flag of complete freedom
Go forth playing the bugle of belief
Some crumbs have fallen from the table of Britannia
O Toadies, go crawling on your bellies to pick them.⁴⁸⁶

War was presented to the martial race recruits as an opportunity to smarten up and advance their livelihoods, and to in fact preserve the colonial body that provided them with material benefits; against these enticements we contrast criticisms of imperial loyalty and ironic commentaries on the violence of war. These masculinist discourses – of bread-winning, or of going ‘forth playing the bugle of belief’ – contrast with the quiet heartbreak captured in many of the songs of rural Punjabi women from the time. These lamentations written by women were all from the villages that the Punjabi soldiers hailed from and are unmatched by the rather more jingoist attitudes of women in India’s political and social elite – class and gender together imbricated to provide vastly different

⁴⁸⁶ Zafar Ali Khan, ‘Azaadi Ka Bigul (The Bugle of Freedom)’, in *The Great War: Indian Writings on the First World War*, ed. and trans. Rakhshanda Jalil (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2019).

attitudes toward war enthusiasm.⁴⁸⁷ As an example of the contrast we may first read 'The Gift of India' by the upper-class nationalist Sarojini Naidu and compare its glorification of war and the price paid by the Indian war dead, with the keen sense of sorrow and class outrage in a Punjabi folk song.

Is there aught you need that my hands withhold,
Rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold?
Lo! I have flung to the East and West
Priceless treasures torn from my breast,
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
To the drum-beats of duty, the sabres of doom.

Gathered like pearls in their alien graves
Silent they sleep by the Persian waves,
Scattered like shells on Egyptian sands,
They lie with pale brows and brave, broken hands,
They are strewn like blossoms mown down by chance
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and France.

Can ye measure the grief of the tears I weep
Or compass the woe of the watch I keep?
Or the pride that thrills thro' my heart's despair
And the hope that comforts the anguish of prayer?
And the far sad glorious vision I see
Of the torn red banners of Victory?

When the terror and the tumult of hate shall cease
And life be refashioned on anvils of peace,

⁴⁸⁷ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 114.

And your love shall offer memorial thanks
To the comrades who fought in your dauntless ranks,
And you honour the deeds of the deathless ones,
Remember the blood of thy martyred sons!⁴⁸⁸

Written in English and reminiscent of Kipling's 'Epitaphs of the War,'⁴⁸⁹

Naidu's stern nationalist sorrow and pride is a far cry from:

My husband, and his two brothers
All have gone to lām⁴⁹⁰
Hearing the news of the war
Leaves of trees got burnt

War destroys towns and ports, it destroys huts
I shed tears, come and speak to me
All birds, all smiles have vanished
And the boats sunk
Graves devour our flesh and blood

He wears a tusser shirt
O train, move slowly
You have a passenger bound for Basra

The sand is hot in the cauldron
Germany stop the war
We do not need it

⁴⁸⁸ Sarojini Naidu, 'The Gift of India', in *The Great War: Indian Writings on the First World War*, ed. Rakhshanda Jalil (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2019).

⁴⁸⁹ Rudyard Kipling, 'Epitaphs of the War', in *A Choice of Kipling's Verse*, ed. Thomas Stearns Eliot (Faber and Faber Limited, 1941).

⁴⁹⁰ A corruption of the French 'l'armee', a popular term used for the Indian Army in Punjab.

Trees by the roadside
Wicked Germany, stop the war
There are widows in every household

Potholes on the roads
Poor people's sons were killed in Basra.⁴⁹¹

Naidu's poem speaks to the imagination of an India united in sacrifice, India as a mother addressing a British audience ('you'), sending her own sons to fight and thereby secure the gratitude and respect of the Empire. The grief expressed within the poem highlights the importance of the reward that India should receive for the deaths of her sons, their deaths described with romanticism and dignity. The folk singer's lament, however, is by juxtaposition a rebuke. Naidu's perspective of an all-encompassing India speaking to an Anglophone audience claims the sorrow of a mother. Whether the folk-singer who penned the song lost her husband or not in truth, the perspective brings us back to the communities who truly paid the price of Britain entering the war, and there is no hint of a sentiment of pride in the deaths of 'poor people's sons' – merely the simplicity of the observation of this socioeconomic injustice, an anger that perhaps does not dare speak itself more harshly for fear of repression, with Germany left bearing the brunt of the singer's ire. If 'Wicked Germany stop[ped] the war,' no more Indian poor needed to die – but the singer does not (or cannot) ask why Britain needed Punjabi peasants for their war in the first place. Naidu's

⁴⁹¹ Quoted in Rakhshanda Jalil, ed., *The Great War: Indian Writings on the First World War* (New Delhi: Bloomsbury, 2019).

vocal loyalty is not 'truer' of Indian sentiment than the folk singer's sullen silence on Britain's role in her husband's potential death in the heat of Basra. Rather, there could have been no singular Indian discourse on the war, and our analysis benefits from considering closely who is speaking and what is unsaid.

The class divide of martial race discourse turned rural India, particularly in the recruitment grounds of the Punjab, into spaces where contradictory impulses of imperial-patriotism, war as an opportunity for material gain, and war as an imposition upon 'poor people's sons' collided. The second section of this chapter will examine how this social context of war as opportunity (for socioeconomic advancement or nationalist transformation) and as class-based exploitation informed the attitudes evident in the correspondence between the sepoys in Europe and their families in India. The class divides and ambivalences also present India as a space where loyalty to Britain could not be guaranteed despite the rhetoric of the elite, where grassroots dissent could be tapped into by Indian nationalists and the Central Powers.

George MacMunn's vision of an Indian public united in support of Britain except for the sinister machinations of the Indian intelligentsia is, as we have seen, a simplification of a story wherein even the personification of his disdain – Gandhi – enthusiastically recruited for the Indian Army, and the martial races themselves were not guided by a simplistic narrative of 'loyalty.' The masses of India were likewise portrayed by MacMunn as behind British rule, were it not for

the influence of revolutionaries and politicians – an insecure, imperialist claim to consent over the ruled that contained the fear that such consent did not exist or was not naturally given. The war was a moment where British rule in India was menaced by the possibility of unrest in India stoked by overzealous recruitment and a growing awareness among the Indian masses that Britain was but one of several European powers.

While MacMunn cast blame onto the visible politicians such as Gandhi, dissent was being ignited by collaborations between expatriate Indian nationalists and agents of the Central Powers, with Germany and Turkey exerting a particularly powerful pull on the Indian imagination. The principal targets of propaganda were Muslims across India, Sikhs in the Punjab, and in particular the soldiers of these communities in the Indian Army in and out of Europe. While I have previously explored propaganda from the so-called Indo-Turco-Germanic conspiracy directed towards sepoys in my examination of Talbot Mundy's *Hira Singh*, a more systemic examination of the networks of anti-British dissent is important to inform our understanding of British censorship of Indian wartime discourses.

The principal vehicles for the generation of Indian dissent were rumours, “weapons that spread terror by working as predictions of violence.”⁴⁹² Since 1857,

⁴⁹² Glen A. Perice, ‘Rumors and Politics in Haiti’, *Anthropological Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (1997): 2, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317797>.

the capacity for Indian dissent to spread through rumour and gossip was a frequent object of fear for a British ruling population constantly paranoid regarding their state of vulnerability at the hands of an unknowable and unpredictable colonized population.⁴⁹³ Heike Liebau argued that wartime censorship of Indian media and mass illiteracy lead to the proliferation of rumours that worried the British administration.⁴⁹⁴ These rumours tended to focus on the German Empire and notably on the figure of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had captured the imaginations of many Indians, especially students, as a challenger to the British Empire.⁴⁹⁵ The Kaiser was particularly active in positioning himself as sympathetic to Islam, as a means of inciting the Muslim populations of the Russian, French and British empires in revolt. Of particular interest to the Kaiser was the objective of weakening Britain through a Turkish invasion of Egypt and uprising in India.⁴⁹⁶ It has been argued that it was the Kaiser's encouragement that led the Ottoman Caliph Mehmed V Reşad to frame the Ottoman joining of the Central Powers in the war as an Islamic jihad, as a means to the end of Islamic rebellion at the expense of the empires of the

⁴⁹³ Note the inexplicable nature of the '*chapatits*' circulated in rural Indian in 1857, and their presence in British historiography as an omen of violence. Troy Downs, 'Host of Midian: The Chapati Circulation and the Indian Revolt of 1857-58', *Studies in History* 16, no. 1 (February 2000): 75-107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/025764300001600104>.

⁴⁹⁴ Heike Liebau, 'Kaiser Ki Jay (Long Live the Kaiser): Perceptions of World War I and the Socio-Religious Movement Among the Oraons in Chota Nagpur 1914-16', in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al., *Studies in Global Social History*, v. 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁴⁹⁵ Raj Kumar Trivedi, 'Turco-German Intrigue in India During the World War I', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 43 (1982): 655.

⁴⁹⁶ Manjapra, 'The Illusions of Encounter', 364-65.

Entente.⁴⁹⁷ As such, rumours in India fused imaginations of the Kaiser as a friend to Muslims and as a challenger to British imperial hegemony. Indian rumour suggested that the Kaiser was respectful of Islam and that German soldiers refused to fight Indian (particularly Muslim) soldiers, while the British were imagined to be planning to desecrate Muhammad's tomb and smuggle his remains over to the British museum – the rumours went so far as to suggest that the Kaiser had converted to Islam himself, with the German people following suit.⁴⁹⁸ Rumours that transformed Kaiser Wilhelm II into a heroic figure, sympathetic to India's religions and the plight of her downtrodden, had the potential to incite real revolt within India's Muslims, and through the propaganda efforts of German missionaries the image of the Kaiser was also transformed into a deified figure that appealed to India's other faiths as well.⁴⁹⁹ MacMunn described the dangers of "the roll of the drum ecclesiastic", the religious call to arms that could be incited by the Kaiser and the Caliph: "the age-old sedition in India which has seethed for a thousand years would have broken into rebellion."⁵⁰⁰ The environment of India was simultaneously, in colonial discourse,

⁴⁹⁷ Mustafa Aksakal, 'The Ottoman Proclamation of Jihad', in *Jihad and Islam in World War I*, ed. Erik-Jan Zürcher (Leiden University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_605452.

⁴⁹⁸ Liebau, 'Kaiser Ki Jay (Long Live the Kaiser): Perceptions of World War I and the Socio-Religious Movement Among the Oraons in Chota Nagpur 1914-16'; Martin Sökefeld, 'Rumours and Politics on the Northern Frontier: The British, Pakhtun Wali and Yaghestan', *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 02 (May 2002), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X02002020>.

⁴⁹⁹ Sökefeld, 'Rumours and Politics on the Northern Frontier'; Liebau, 'Kaiser Ki Jay (Long Live the Kaiser): Perceptions of World War I and the Socio-Religious Movement Among the Oraons in Chota Nagpur 1914-16', 259.

⁵⁰⁰ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 333.

a securitized space where the British had total control, and also always just a step shy of chaos.

What excited rural Indians about the Kaiser was in many respects the novelty of learning that the British were not the only European empire, but that they were engaged in a war against another power that could draw moral authority from association with the Ottoman Empire and its Caliph. The Kaiser's power was also demonstrated by the infamous assault on the Mumbai harbour by the German warship *SMS Emden* on the night of 22 September 1914. Though this was the only time India was directly assaulted during the war, it sparked rumours of imminent German naval invasion.⁵⁰¹ The Germans capitalized on the *Emden* panic by distributing propaganda to Indian soldiers at the frontlines or in India itself, proclaiming the futility of battling a German Empire armed with powerful marvels of technology.⁵⁰² German flamethrowers, poison gas, and zeppelin airships particularly excited Indian bazaar gossip, showing that the Indian masses were deeply affected by the stories emerging from their counterparts on the war's frontlines.⁵⁰³ While reports of Germany's capabilities, factual or exaggerated, were decried by some Indian newspapers as finding fertile soil in the popular imaginations of the illiterate masses, Das argued that the spread of oral rumours

⁵⁰¹ Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18*, xvii.

⁵⁰² Liebau, 'Kaiser Ki Jay (Long Live the Kaiser): Perceptions of World War I and the Socio-Religious Movement Among the Oraons in Chota Nagpur 1914-16', 266.

⁵⁰³ *Shahid*, 11 August 1915, L/R/5/196, British Library; *Siraj-Ul-Akbar*, 12 March 1917, L/R/5/199, British Library; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 96.

indicated the liveliness of the Indian social imagination underneath the binary notions of a 'loyalist' or a 'dissenting' India:

If the colonial state commandeered the people into allegiances of loyalty, rumours provided the much-needed space for the articulation of internal conflicts, contradictions and contestations suppressed in the official sphere.⁵⁰⁴

Dissenting discourses to imperialist British hegemony filtered through India organically through the productive power of rumour.

While rumours were an organic channel for the dissemination of the Central Powers' propaganda, there was certainly an active production of propaganda to incite rebellion in the colonial (particularly the Muslim) world, and it was such propaganda that specifically prompted the screening of Indian soldiers' correspondence in Europe. Germany's efforts to spread dissent in the colonial world was aided by Indian anticolonialists, united in an uneasy and asymmetrical power dynamic in their shared desires to dismantle a British imperial hegemony:

"In the late nineteenth century, Germans and Indians, positioned across multiple imperial systems, and across the colonial divide,

⁵⁰⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 96.

began to use each other to pry apart and reorganize the world order.⁵⁰⁵

The networks of Indian anticolonial activists operating in Europe had been steadily expelled from their headquarters in the United Kingdom and then from France; while in the early 20th century joint Anglo-Franco crackdowns on Indian nationalists had inspired protest in liberal circles in Britain and France, by the start of World War I the political climate enabled greater cooperation between the Entente powers in muzzling colonial dissenters operating domestically.⁵⁰⁶ A system of colonial censorship and surveillance across the Entente nations was mobilized to prevent collaborations between Germans and anticolonialists. By stifling domestic dissent, the British and French authorities created the ironic result where disaffected colonial nationalists sought refuge in Germany, adding to the existing networks of Indian revolutionaries living in Berlin (and in Constantinople).⁵⁰⁷ The Indian revolutionary diaspora also included a sizable body of Sikhs in California (the Ghadar group mentioned in my earlier discussion of *Hira Singh*) who also collaborated with the Germans and the Turks in a multinational project of anti-imperialist dissent with two imperial powers as partners. As Gajendra Singh argued, “during the First World War the engine of revolutionary activity shifted from cosmopolitan elites in India to semi-

⁵⁰⁵ Kris Manjappa, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire*, Harvard Historical Studies 183 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1.

⁵⁰⁶ Brückenhaus, ‘Imperial Fears and Transnational Policing in Europe: The “German Problem” and the British and French Surveillance of Anti-Colonialists in Exile, 1904–1939’, 229.

⁵⁰⁷ Brückenhaus, 229; Trivedi, ‘Turco-German Intrigue in India During the World War I’, 655.

permanent communities of migrant labourers abroad.”⁵⁰⁸ Transnational Indian communities’ political activism focused upon the body of Indian soldiers posted abroad in military service. That many these migrants abroad, particularly among the Sikh community, were former colonial soldiers further distinguishes the Indian army as a locus of both wartime migration and questions of imperial loyalty and national sovereignty.⁵⁰⁹

The collaboration, however, between the Indian political diaspora and the Central Powers bore little fruit. In an ironic repetition of British imperial ethnology that showed little respect for Indian intellectual interlocutors, the German ethnologists and Orientalists heading the propaganda efforts at the *Nachrichtenstelle für den Orient* (Information Office for the Orient) relied on their own preconceptions of Indian society instead of the expertise of the Indian nationalists who joined their Committee for Indian Independence.⁵¹⁰ As we saw in the preceding chapter, the French had their own version of a martial race ethnology, as did the Germans: German ethnologists believed that each racial-cultural group had its own distinctive worldview; the Muslim worldview was “fanatical, manly, valorous and warlike,” and the Indian Muslim mind was held to

⁵⁰⁸ Gajendra Singh, ‘India and the Great War: Colonial Fantasies, Anxieties and Discontent: India and the Great War’, *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 2 (October 2014): 346, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12097>.

⁵⁰⁹ Singh, 347.

⁵¹⁰ Ravi Ahuja, ‘Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)’, in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al., *Studies in Global Social History*, v. 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2010), 148.

be particularly “volatile.”⁵¹¹ German belief in Islam’s military potential and desire to incite rebellions in the most warlike Muslims – Indians, and the Bedouin – to destabilize British rule from Egypt to India ran into an immediate hurdle. The infrastructure of Indian nationalism, especially abroad, was largely dominated by a Hindu intellectual elite whereas India’s Muslims had relatively little political capital following the dismantling of Mughal rule.⁵¹² Though there were attempts by the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin to frame their propaganda towards secular nationalism, German preoccupations with Islam led to the comic result of Hindu intellectuals being asked by Europeans to stir up pan-Islamist revolution.⁵¹³ Hindus were dispatched to help in the Middle East, and asked to assume Muslim names when writing for propaganda magazines with names like *Jihad-Islam*.⁵¹⁴ In this respect, the German ethnological imagination of India as the home of a warlike Muslim population prevented the actual effectiveness of propaganda targeting an army itself the result of British martial race imaginaries.

German beliefs in the martial spirit of Indian Muslims spurred ambitious plans. In partnership with the Ottomans and with the help of Indian nationalists, Indian soldiers, primarily Muslim prisoners of war, were to be urged to switch allegiances – with the help of the Turks, these soldiers were then to be smuggled back into India via the Afghan border to fight the British from the rear. This

⁵¹¹ Manjapra, ‘The Illusions of Encounter’, 369.

⁵¹² Manjapra, 371–72.

⁵¹³ Ahuja, ‘Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)’, 149.

⁵¹⁴ Manjapra, ‘The Illusions of Encounter’, 375.

proposed 'Indian Legion' was met with little enthusiasm from the prisoners, as Mundy depicted in *Hira Singh*.⁵¹⁵ There were only two notable instances of Indian military revolt on record; the defection of about a dozen Pathans from the frontlines in February 1915, who joined the ill-fated mission to Afghanistan, and a quickly put-down but briefly dangerous mutiny in the Indian garrison of Singapore.⁵¹⁶ British martial race discourse's imagination of Indian loyalty, simplified and inaccurate as it was, was built from a far greater familiarity than German colonial discourses of Indian society: the imagination of fervent Jihadists who would accept German propaganda if it aligned with their supposed religious grievances was a miscalculation upon which a costly and ineffective intelligence program was founded. Indeed, the primary output of the German prisoner of war camps for colonial soldiers was a wealth of ethnographic material as German scholars finally had the opportunity to study the colonized populations of the British and French empires closely.⁵¹⁷

German dreams of Jihad were slowly whittled away; the costly failure of a mission to Kabul to persuade the Afghan emir to join the war on the side of the Central Power convinced the Germans that the Indian nationalists were not useful to their aims.⁵¹⁸ The Germans and the Turks also failed to recruit Persia as

⁵¹⁵ Ahuja, 'Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)', 148.

⁵¹⁶ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 103; Heather Streets-Salter, 'The Local Was Global: The Singapore Mutiny of 1915', *Journal of World History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 539-76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2013.0066>.

⁵¹⁷ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 164-73.

⁵¹⁸ Manjara, 'The Illusions of Encounter', 376.

an ally and to placate Sharif Hussein, leader of the Arab Revolt – the latter uprising ultimately ending the Ottoman Empire’s role as co-parent of a stillborn global Jihad.⁵¹⁹ The Indian revolutionaries, meanwhile, were disaffected with their asymmetric relationship with the Germans and lack of autonomy, and their hopes of an Indian home front with its security apparatus exhausted by the British war effort in Europe did not come to fruition. The Committee for Indian Independence ultimately renounced their associations with Germany and relocated to Stockholm.⁵²⁰ Those who stayed behind were blacklisted after the war by British intelligence and found themselves unable to return to India. Some took up work in the service industries, or at the *Deutsches Orient Institut* or entered higher studies; still others lived on stipends from the Foreign Office or were given funds by the German state to open storefronts.⁵²¹

Despite the ineffectiveness of the Turco-German-Conspiracy and its bathetic ending, the potential for a colonial uprising instigated by the Germans was taken seriously by the British. The question of Indian loyalty could not simply be taken for granted, as my study of ‘imperial ventriloquist’ literature showed, but needed to be shored up through the animation of apparent Indian voices parroting their loyalty to Britain and denigrating German propaganda efforts. Meanwhile, the Indian army itself and the communities it hailed from, required

⁵¹⁹ Trivedi, ‘Turco-German Intrigue in India During the World War I’.

⁵²⁰ Ahuja, ‘Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)’, 150.

⁵²¹ Manjara, ‘The Illusions of Encounter’, 377.

watching to ensure that the propaganda did not reach them. I began the chapter with the arrest of an Indian agitator in Toulouse. Incidents of Indian revolutionaries spreading dissent among the sepoys in Europe plagued the British, who demanded French assistance in curbing the problem. Most notably in October 1914 the Indian nationalist, feminist and socialist Bhikaiji Rustom Cama tried to agitate among Punjabi soldiers who had landed in Marseilles; she was arrested by the French authorities and her collaborator, Sardar Singh Rewabhai Rana, was exiled to Martinique.⁵²² Such incidents are alluded to in both *Hira Singh* and *Ram Singh*, but the agitators in these books are never themselves Indian. In *Hira Singh*, the Indian Army is presented as impervious to a host of Italian⁵²³ and French spies whispering cunningly worded treachery into their ears, propaganda that always fell short of the mark through some basic error such as trying to preach Jihad to Sikhs.⁵²⁴ In *Ram Singh*, Grimshaw describes an incident where tins of mutton passed to the sepoys in Marseilles bear the image of a cow, leading Hindu soldiers to worry that they were secretly being fed beef – “Was it an accident [at the factory producing the tins] or the subtle work of some Hunnish agent?”⁵²⁵ The conspiracy to turn the Indian Army against the British in Europe is portrayed in these books as all-pervasive, ‘subtle’ enough to be

⁵²² Basu, *For King and Another Country: Indian Soldiers on the Western Front 1914-18*, 48-49; Ole Birk Laursen, “‘I Have Only One Country, It Is the World’: Madame Cama, Anticolonialism, and Indian-Russian Revolutionary Networks in Paris, 1907-17”, *History Workshop Journal* 90 (25 February 2021): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbaa014>.

⁵²³ Italy was at the time neutral, unwilling to commit to the war despite a historical alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary.

⁵²⁴ Mundy, *Hira Singh: When India Came to Fight in Flanders*, 15-16.

⁵²⁵ Grimshaw, ‘Experiences of Ram Singh’, 106.

potentially at fault in any inconvenience; the insecurity and paranoia of the British position is addressed by the disavowal of the propaganda as any at all Indian discourse. The sepoys, the only Indians present in the narrative, are in *Hira Singh* firm and unquestioning Indian loyalists and in *Ram Singh* they are easily convinced to eat the mutton through faith in their British commanders. Removing the presence of Indian nationalists and presenting their work as mere pawns of the Germans expressed a narrative that delegitimized the propaganda as the work of incompetent European enemies.

In actuality, the Indian Army's loyalties were carefully watched and surveilled. I will now turn to the most notable form of colonial surveillance used on the Indian Army, the censorship of their correspondence and subsequent compilation of letters into archives. In this section I will describe the history and mechanisms of this censorship and evaluate the methodological problems of unearthing an 'authentic' sepoy voice under the accreting layers of mediation between the sepoys' thoughts and the readers of the censor reports. As a unique archive of correspondence written by a body of men I see as colonial military migrants, I study the letters within the broader contexts of the literatures on migrant letters and on World War I military correspondence.

Reading the Archive of Censored Sepoy Letters

Evelyn Berkely Howell, first Head Censor of Indian Mail, commanded a small of team of censors that never numbered more than eight people at the height of its

duties. In 1914 their initial task initially was to monitor the incoming mail at the Indian Base Post Office at Boulogne, to check for seditious letters. Then Howell's team began to monitor the outward mail of wounded sepoy recuperating in Britain, and by January 1915 they had expanded to the letters being sent by sepoy in general from France.⁵²⁶ Targets for censorship included mentions of disaffection and the transmission of sensitive data, but in this respect the Indians' letters were subjected to the same scrutiny as white troops'.⁵²⁷ Specific to the sepoy's correspondence, the censors policed disparaging attitudes towards whites, and in particular references to sex with white women.⁵²⁸ It was considered damaging to "the prestige and spirit of European rule in India" if the sepoy were allowed to conceive of a 'wrong idea' of the *izzat* (honour) of European women.⁵²⁹ Incendiary subject matter in sepoy correspondence was thus explicitly understood by the censors as challenges to a racialized, imperialist hierarchy where there was more than just the sepoy's honour at stake. As the war went on, it also became important to screen against references to self-mutilation to get out of war duty (a practice called malingering), and to stop hints sent from sepoy to sepoy on how best to hurt oneself effectively and surreptitiously.⁵³⁰

It was no easy task to stop the sepoy speaking and hearing such sedition.

The censors had an onerous task. The Indian Army, for all that it lacked literacy,

⁵²⁶ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 6.

⁵²⁷ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 95.

⁵²⁸ Omissi, 'The Indian Army in Europe, 1914–1918', 129.

⁵²⁹ Evelyn Berkeley Howell, 'Censor's Report', 19 June 1915, EUR/MSS/F143/83.

⁵³⁰ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 98.

was not immune to the War's generative effect of a "sudden and irrepressible bulimia of letter-writing."⁵³¹ In her analysis of French World War I epistolary practices, Martha Hanna found that "four million letters made their way from or to the front every day."⁵³² Hanna attributed this culture of letter-writing in large part to the importance given to teaching the practice of correspondence in French schools. However, the sepoys of the Indian army had no such schooling nor tradition. Through dictation to scribes, sepoys across France and the UK were producing 10,000-20,000 letters a week by March 1915.⁵³³ Das informs us that sepoys posted in imperial service abroad had generally enjoyed the privilege of sending and receiving mail, but that there had been nothing before like the volume of correspondence generated during the war.⁵³⁴ Why did an army of illiterate peasants produce at this time such a volume of correspondence? The scholarship of migrant letters could have the simple answer:

As scholars of working-class writings remind us, separation caused by migration was one of the biggest pushes for millions of people to start writing for the first time, whatever their capacity.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Martin Lyons, *The Writing Culture of Ordinary People in Europe, c.1860-1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 77; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 206.

⁵³² Martha Hanna, 'A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I', *American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003): 1339.

⁵³³ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 7.

⁵³⁴ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 206-7.

⁵³⁵ Marcelo J. Borges and Sonia Cancian, 'Reconsidering the Migrant Letter: From the Experience of Migrants to the Language of Migrants', *The History of the Family* 21, no. 3 (2 July 2016): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1222502>.

Sent an unprecedented distance for terms of service beyond what they were accustomed to, the Indian soldier as a military migrant is not separable from the long history of men working far from home, keeping the link between himself and home alive. Military service has been identified as a key transmitter of literacy in colonial India, as demobilized men who taught themselves to write returned home.⁵³⁶ The provision of writing material by the British state and charities such as the YMCA⁵³⁷ also speak to an imperialist encouragement for the sepoys to express themselves, in a political climate where Indians at home needed reassurance that their troops were being well looked after. Imperial propaganda required that the sepoy be allowed to speak, and propaganda required that this speech be observed.

However: it was impossible for Howell's team to censor and screen all the letters as each letter needed to be read, understood, and then translated: a process that could take the very best censor up to two hours.⁵³⁸ The censor office was in fact meant to be a second site of censorship, with the first being at the regimental level. British officers of the regiments censored letters, often after having them read out by Indian officers. This regimental censorship was haphazard and decreased in efficiency as British officers with command of Indian languages began to die out over the course of the war. Indian officers took

⁵³⁶ Oliver Vanden Eynde, 'Military Service and Human Capital Accumulation: Evidence from Colonial Punjab', *Journal of Human Resources* 51, no. 4 (1 October 2016): 1010, <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.51.4.1013-5977R1>.

⁵³⁷ Omissi, 'The Indian Army in Europe, 1914-1918', 5.

⁵³⁸ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 7.

advantage of their positions as translators to slip their own dissident correspondence through.⁵³⁹ By 1915, the regimental censorship had devolved into little more than a formality, a rubber-stamping of letters no one had time to screen.⁵⁴⁰

Due to the inefficiency at both levels of censorship, the primary function of the Indian Mail Censor became intelligence-gathering. Starting in December 1914, at a weekly (later fortnightly) basis Howell's team gathered about a hundred translated letters together into a budget of extracts from the correspondence, and sent these compilations along with reports on their contents to a range of interested parties: "the Secretary of State for India, the India Office, the War Office, the Foreign Office, Buckingham Palace, and to the commanders of the Indian divisions (among others)."⁵⁴¹ The translated letters included brief information regarding the caste and religion of the correspondents, their names and addresses, and the date and original languages. These reports were designed to gauge the morale of the Indian army and to pinpoint actionable grievances such as a lack of Qurans at the Front.⁵⁴²

These censor reports with their associated letters still survive in the archives of the British Library, while their originals are generally lost to time –

⁵³⁹ Havildar Abdul Rahman, France, 20/5/1915 quoted in Omissi, 61.

⁵⁴⁰ Omissi, 5–6.

⁵⁴¹ Omissi, 7.

⁵⁴² Kristina Myrvold and Andreas Johansson, 'Miniature Qur'ans in the First World War: Religious Comforts for Indian Muslim Soldiers', *Postscripts: The Journal of Sacred Texts, Cultural Histories, and Contemporary Contexts* 9, no. 2–3 (22 October 2018): 203, <https://doi.org/10.1558/post.35862>.

with only a few recently resurfacing.⁵⁴³ This creates a paradoxical situation where the creation of archive of colonial surveillance and control allowed sepoy testimony to survive. For quite a while it was argued by scholars such as Claude Markovits these reports were the only viable source of sepoy testimony “since no wartime diaries have miraculously surfaced in some barn in the Punjab.”⁵⁴⁴ Santanu Das’ recent overview of Indian cultural representation during the war has included newly-discovered sources of testimony that prove Markovits had been unduly pessimistic.⁵⁴⁵ Nevertheless there is nothing else like the sheer breadth of correspondence contained in the censor reports.

How representative were these letters as honest expressions of sepoy feeling, screened as they were by colonial censors? External intervention began for most letters even from the moment of composition, and so the letters were from the outset public correspondence. A few sepoys were already literate at the start of the war, and some learned to read and their own letters during their time in France.⁵⁴⁶ As Marcelo Borges writes, migrant workers with low literacy levels nevertheless made do, “relying on rudimentary knowledge of writing and seeking the help of family and acquaintances” in maintaining their intimate connections

⁵⁴³ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 207.

⁵⁴⁴ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front’, 39.

⁵⁴⁵ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*. Most notably letters and journals from Mesopotamia and the personal diaries and letters of soldiers and labourers.

⁵⁴⁶ Mir Zaman Khan, France, 12/3/1916 quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 163.

via correspondence.⁵⁴⁷ Sepoys may have taught each other to write, but the most common mechanism through which they assisted each other was by acting as scribes. However, despite the heavy reliance on scribes, we cannot be sure who these scribes always were.⁵⁴⁸ Some British officers themselves may have also worked as scribes.⁵⁴⁹ We can speculate that sepoys dictating to a 'sahib' would be more reticent, but it is impossible to tell from reading a letter to whom it might have been dictated. The scarcity of the literacy also made writing and reading the letters acts of public spectacle, both at the Front and India itself. Sepoy letters would often be read out aloud before being posted.⁵⁵⁰ There are also multiple instances of sepoys peevishly telling their correspondents to avoid writing things that were embarrassing to have read out in public.⁵⁵¹ Letters from back home went through the same process, with scribes writing on behalf of the senders. In the tradition of rural communities, migrant letters were composed and read out loud at both the points of sending and reception, "not necessarily the result of low levels of literacy, but more importantly they were the product of the 'familiar and cooperative' nature of migration itself."⁵⁵² The Indian war correspondence

⁵⁴⁷ Marcelo J. Borges, 'For the Good of the Family: Migratory Strategies and Affective Language in Portuguese Migrant Letters, 1870s–1920s', *The History of the Family* 21, no. 3 (2 July 2016): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1081602X.2016.1208620>.

⁵⁴⁸ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 5.

⁵⁴⁹ A possibility corroborated in Rudyard Kipling's *The Eyes of Asia* (1918). Kipling, 'The Fumes of the Heart', 25.

⁵⁵⁰ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front', 37. The practice is also described in Roly Grimshaw's novella 'Experiences of Ram Singh, Dafadar of Horse', written from Grimshaw's personal observance of Indian soldiers recuperating in hospitals in Britain. Grimshaw, 'Experiences of Ram Singh', 173.

⁵⁵¹ Naik Ibrahim Khan, France, 29/10/1915; Niaz Hussein, France, 27/6/1916 quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 115.

⁵⁵² Borges and Cancian, 'Reconsidering the Migrant Letter', 287.

thus captures a moment of cross-cultural connectivity wherein the practices described by scholars studying Asturian migrants parallel the experiences of Indian communities. The public nature of correspondence, Claude Markovits argues, instilled a “high value on social (and sexual) conformity” on the part of the sepoys and their communities, even before the layer of censorship.⁵⁵³ It is thus important to acknowledge that under circumstances wherein the sepoys could write to, and receive letters from, individual correspondents such as their wives without any third party intervention, they may well have expressed themselves differently; nevertheless, censorship aside, the circumstance of letter-writing and reading as collaborative, community effort was in no way unique to the Indian army and did not discourage the sepoys from corresponding.

Even censorship’s impact on the willingness of the sepoy to correspond was haphazard. Some sepoys went so far as to directly address the censor, asking him for lenience, urging him to remove any offending material but not destroy the letter.⁵⁵⁴ There does not seem to be resentment or surprise at the existence of censorship, but sepoys tried to get around it, nevertheless. At times codes were used to pass along information that the sepoys thought would surely be too sensitive to write nakedly, one of the most prominent examples being the use of ‘red pepper’ to refer to white troops and ‘black pepper’ to refer to Indians when

⁵⁵³ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front’, 37.

⁵⁵⁴ Teja Singh, Brighton, 12/8/1915; Dilbar, Punjab, 21/5/1916; Driver Lal Din, France, 14/7/1916; quoted in Omissi, ‘The Indian Army in Europe, 1914–1918’, 88, 187, 206–7.

describing the depletion and exhaustion of Indian regiments on the Western Front and how British troops were replacing them. The censors were aware of the ruse and did not restrict such letters.⁵⁵⁵ Thus, the awareness of censorship could lead to an excess of self-silencing not warranted by the actual degree of colonial vigilance, and sepoys resorted to highly oblique language and the use of parables whose coded nature was made clear by stating variations on 'think clearly on this.' Use of codes and innuendo to evade the understanding of the censor may well have created confusion for the letters' intended readers as well; censorship cannot be said to have had no effect on the free communication of the sepoys, but its impact is impossible to gauge. While Paul Fussell argued that British wartime correspondence was a slave to the strict limitations of what could be expressed via the Field Service Post Card,⁵⁵⁶ Indian sepoy correspondence seems to have resembled French correspondence in its ambivalent relationship to a haphazard process of censorship. In her study of French wartime correspondence, Hanna argues that censorship of letters had a certain chilling quality on what could be uttered but did deter French soldiers and their acquaintances from trying to communicate through strategies such as sending multiple copies of the same letter to evade the censors' net.⁵⁵⁷ If the presence of a fellow countryman acting as censor for their correspondence was little deterrent to the French during the war,

⁵⁵⁵ Bugler Mause Ram, Brighton, 2/4/1915; Sepoy Mansa Ram, Brighton, April 1915; Lance Naik Ram Carup Singh, Milford-on-Sea, May 1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 49, 57–58, 65.

⁵⁵⁶ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 199.

⁵⁵⁷ Hanna, 'A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I', 1355.

then the dwindling number of British censors proficient in Indian languages renders the censorship of sepoy letters even more inefficient in their impact.

Evelyn Howell, Head Censor, was initially optimistic regarding the 'unstudied' and 'genuine' sentiments expressed in the letters, but later he became more disillusioned and doubted that sepoys expressed themselves freely under censorship.⁵⁵⁸ However, Omissi has argued that this was Howell oscillating between two unlikely extremes:

The historian must always be alert to the impact of scribal intervention, censorship and self-censorship. Certainly the uncensored record of the troops might have been different; but, equally, most soldiers had no other means of communicating with their families. The sheer quantity of letters (roughly one per man per fortnight) shows the personal importance of the postal service to the troops... The historian can be too sceptical as well as too credulous. The crucial issue is, surely, less what we cannot learn from these letters, than what we can learn from them. What do they reveal about the experiences and mentalities of Indian peasant soldiers?⁵⁵⁹

The sheer quantity of the sepoy correspondence is alone an argument for its importance as a transmitter of sepoy thought, stretching from the fields of Flanders to the villages of the martial races in India, mindful of external intervention and mediation, but just as often enabled and produced by it (the

⁵⁵⁸ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 9.

⁵⁵⁹ Omissi, 9.

sepoys and their families could hardly have spoken without the help of others.)

As Joshua Sanborn put it, regarding mail correspondence during the war:

“Whisked away to the front, the only way the mobilized men could keep in touch with their home regions was through a *heavily censored, but heavily used*, mail system.”⁵⁶⁰

Both the censorship and the degree of usage are important in our analysis of wartime correspondence.

The censor reports contain only a fraction of this correspondence, the slice observed by the censors themselves and then further curated. Curated based on what criteria? The reports’ primary purpose of serving as a barometer of the Indian Army’s mood means that the archive is also likely to be representative of the letters produced at any given period. However, Howell was a linguist with a keen eye for Indian poetry, and Claude Markovits argues that he also approached the selection of the letters with an eye towards producing a collection that would also have entertainment value.⁵⁶¹ We should be aware, then, that the censor reports are not the totality of the correspondence but from the relatively small body of letters actually screened by the British censors, this is a selected archive whose purpose of colonial surveillance was also potentially subverted by one man’s aesthetic preferences. Kipling’s production of *The Eyes of Asia*, a work of

⁵⁶⁰ Sanborn, ‘Unsettling the Empire’, 299. My emphasis.

⁵⁶¹ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front’, 39.

entertainment and propaganda, continues a process established by Howell wherein sepoy testimony is preserved based on the value perceived within it by a British observer.

The censorship of sepoy correspondence was thus – comparable to the process of French wartime censors – an exercise of state control and mediation over private communication; yet this communication was both private and communal, characterized as other migrant letters were by “delegated and multiple writing, and... practices of collective reading and circulation beyond the original recipient.”⁵⁶² Imperial control over subaltern discourse through censorship cannot be ignored, but it should not be overvalued – both in the sense that such control was dubiously effective as censorship, and the ‘sepoy heart’ may not have fully expressed itself were the censorship absent. The methodologically problematic nature of the censor reports makes them an excellent opportunity to study sepoy articulations of martial race discourse: in an environment where censorship, mediation, group conformity, lack of privacy and sundry other limitations are likely to put pressure on a sepoy to conform to martial race stereotypes in his letters and to not express anything controversial, I look for the cracks that underlie the performance of martial race discourse. Under circumstances of public surveillance and imperial control, letters produced that fit British expectations are just as valuable as an insight into sepoy self-

⁵⁶² Borges and Cancian, ‘Reconsidering the Migrant Letter’, 287.

imaginings and conformity as those letters that actively run against the discursive grain. Moreover, letters wherein martial race imaginaries are expressed and performed for the benefit of Indian recipients speak to the power of the discourse in establishing the communal standards of conformity for the sepoys. Earlier in this chapter I developed the theme of colonial discourse as a mutual (if asymmetric) dialogue between colonizer and colonized as I explored how martial race discourse was internalized, challenged, and contradicted by Indian civil society, revolutionaries, the Central Powers, and the rural working class. As such, the reader of the censored letters should not expect the martial race soldiers to totally reject the stereotypes of martial race discourse. As Heather Streets argues, subaltern populations often did conform to colonial stereotyping.⁵⁶³ Even so, the postcolonial scholar's personal sympathies might well be surprised and challenged by the degree to which the sepoy letters (at first blush) conform to British martial race discourse.

One of the central tropes of martial race discourse is the notion of sepoys fighting unquestioningly in World War I because serving the British empire was the 'honourable' thing to do, because it would bring glory to their regiment, and because they trusted the colonial state and their British officers. As the British

⁵⁶³ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 203.

officers who edited Grimshaw's *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15* put it in their introduction:

The innate loyalty of the Indian soldier rose magnificently to the occasion; all willingly and cheerfully left their homes and country – not because they were assured of the righteousness of the cause for which they were to risk their lives, but because the Sirdar [*sic*] (Government) had ordered it and because their own British officers considered the cause a just one, participation in which would advance the name of their regiment.⁵⁶⁴

The notion of 'izzat' rolls together these claims to sepoy loyalty. Izzat is a concept often translated to mean "respect, respectability, honour,"⁵⁶⁵ or "honour, standing, reputation or prestige."⁵⁶⁶ Sepoys who fought in WWI have been understood to have fought for izzat, or other concepts such as "dharm and shaheed/shahadat" – which translate roughly to 'faith' and 'martyrdom' – or through obligation from having 'eaten the salt' of the British Raj or the King-Emperor himself.⁵⁶⁷ Ahuja has criticized scholarship that takes for granted this "rather impoverished as well as static idea of 'honour'... assumed to have controlled the Indian sepoy troops in each of their movements like an army of so many string puppets."⁵⁶⁸ What is understood to be 'izzat' is overwhelmingly

⁵⁶⁴ Grimshaw, *Indian Cavalry Officer 1914-15*, 10. The word should be 'sirkar'; 'sirdar' translates to 'chief' or 'leader'.

⁵⁶⁵ Ahuja, 'Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)', 134.

⁵⁶⁶ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 12.

⁵⁶⁷ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 68.

⁵⁶⁸ Ahuja, 'Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)', 134.

present in the sepoy testimony; the task of the researcher of the letters is to delve into the nuances of the articulation of izzat without dismissing its sincerity or importance.

Izzat's complexities are in display in a letter which at first glance reads entirely in accordance with the idea of the sepoy as Mundy, MacMunn or Kipling might have wished him to be:

We have been fighting for fourteen months, and the fighting has been very fierce. I have been in every fight and have fought with great valour. Our people have exalted the name of our country. When the order comes that the enemy is advancing in this direction, as a tiger advances on his prey [so we stand to] and with fine spirit knock the senses out of him. Our troops have been accounted the stoutest of all the troops. At this time, they are in such heart that they would stay the tiger unarmed. [Every man] fighting with heroic bravery becomes himself a hero. It was my very good fortune to be engaged in this war. We shall never get such another chance to exalt the name of race, country, ancestors, parents, village and brothers, and to prove our loyalty to the Government. I hope we shall renew our Sikh chronicles. Do not be distressed ... Such hardships come upon brave men. What is fated must be endured. I pray to God to give us a chance to meet the foe face to face...⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁹ Kartar Singh, France, 22/1/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 142.

Kartar Singh, the author of this letter, sings the praises of the Sikhs as a warrior people, who are framed as unafraid of death and even able to march into combat unarmed and prevail. He draws a parallel between the deeds performed by the Sikhs on the Western Front and those of the great Sikh warriors in the cultural chronicles of his people. The war is a blessing in Kartar Singh's eyes, giving Sikhs an opportunity to bring honour and glory to their people (explicitly their 'race,' or so the censor's translation from Gurmukhi reads) through proving their loyalty and heroism to the British colonial state. Heather Streets argues that such a letter would fit in perfectly within any martial race handbook on the Sikhs.⁵⁷⁰ Pooling together a range of letters from Sikh soldiers that explicitly draw on the notion that a Sikh is a natural-born fighter, whose duty was to fight and die for the community, Streets compellingly argues that for many Sikhs what was good for their community was identical to the interests of the British government and its colonial military. Sikhs such as Kartar Singh who express their willingness to fight honourably for the British should be understood as fighting for a colonial government that they saw as a patron of their community and not as its oppressor. Consider the following letter from the Punjabi home front, addressed to a frontline soldier:

You must know that you are very fortunate in that you have got a chance to defend your country and serve the British Government.

You will remember that British rule was foretold by our true leader

⁵⁷⁰ Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 206.

Tegh Bahadur, the ninth Guru. It was established in India only for the protection and help of us Sikhs. It was on the voice of the Guru that the Eternal sent the English here. The blessings which this rule has brought to India are not concealed from you. The rise of the Sikhs is due solely to this power... You are a brave soldier. Now is the time to display your manhood. Now is the time for loyalty. You are a true Sikh... This war for the Sikhs is a religious war, because the war is directed against the [British] rule which our Guru established.⁵⁷¹

Since 1857, the patronage offered by the British army toward the Sikhs of the Punjab, as discussed at the end of Chapter Three, acted as a decisive factor in the formation of Sikh identity around a martial ethos and interpretation of the Sikh faith. The letter-writer, a police inspector named Eshar Singh, frames the imperial relationship as not one of Sikh subservience to the British, but one where the British were divinely ordained to preserve and protect the Sikh community. Thus, loyalty to the British Empire was not servility but rather a defence of the guardians of the Sikh people. Through reframing the imperial relationship in a fashion that disrupts the realities of Sikh subjugation under the British, Eshar Singh presents World War I as a moment of empowerment and agency for the Sikh community. Sikhs as heroic martial races were proving their valour in the service of a cause that fit the material self-interests of the Sikh

⁵⁷¹ Eshar Singh, Punjab, 19/1/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 140.

community, and rather than subjects of the British they were more akin to partners.

The martial races, particularly the Sikhs, were thus incentivized to support the British war effort and to express a belligerent loyalty. Through war service – recognition, prestige and material wealth could be earned for the individual sepoy and for his community. The importance of such marks of prestige is evident in letters that stress loyalty to the British through the person of the King-Emperor. The honour of serving the King-Emperor is frequently referenced in the letters and sepoys write of the victory that they will give the King and the Government of India.⁵⁷² One Sikh sepoy wrote to a correspondent in Punjab, “Instead of being anxious, you should always be thanking the Guru for giving your family a chance of serving the King in Europe.”⁵⁷³ The King-Emperor acted as a personal conduit between the soldiers and their communities, and the greater British imperial war interest. Sepoys were touched by his concern for their wellbeing during his visits to wounded sepoys recuperating in Britain⁵⁷⁴ and by his ability to recognize soldiers who had attended him during his royal coronation durbar in Delhi in 1911 (the privilege of being his guard of honour uniquely granted to Sikh sepoys.)⁵⁷⁵ Soldiers who personally received medals from the King-Emperor were particularly

⁵⁷² A wounded Sikh, England, 15/1/1915; Farman Ali, Sindh, 1/4/1917; quoted in Omissi, 28, 281–82.

⁵⁷³ Balwant Singh, France, 25/2/1917; quoted in Omissi, 279.

⁵⁷⁴ Sub-Assistant Surgeon Abdulla, Brighton, 23/8/1915; Risaldar Muhammad Akram Khan, France, 11/4/1916; quoted in Omissi, 92 & 173.

⁵⁷⁵ Omissi, 21; Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914*, 214.

delighted with a tangible mark of imperial acknowledgement for their personal bravery and that of their community.⁵⁷⁶ John Soboslai, reading through these letters, has also argued that during the war years the King-Emperor attained a quasi-divine status, devotion to whom could in Sikh religious discourse become central in performing Sikh identity.⁵⁷⁷

The imperial relationship was thus for these sepoys highly personal, distanced from considerations such as the wider politics of the British empire and its war (the concept of fighting for an Indian nationhood hardly enters the archive of letters at all.)⁵⁷⁸ The Indian Army has been interpreted as an institution of loyalty and patronage between the martial race sepoys and their white officers.⁵⁷⁹ Individual sepoys consciously adhering “to the micro-identities of regiment, tribe and caste” were loyal to specific figures such as the King-Emperor and their officers.⁵⁸⁰ The personal bond between ‘sahib’ and ‘sepoy’ strung together the martial races and the British military apparatus, a bond that was itself imbricated in the interests of the sepoys and their communities. Personal bonds between sepoys and former heroes of empire such as the former Commanders-in-Chief in India Roberts and Kitchener also animate this imperial loyalty in the correspondence. Roberts was still alive at the start of World War I and visited the Indian troops on the Western Front, passing away days later. One

⁵⁷⁶ Subedar Mir Dast, 27/8/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 94.

⁵⁷⁷ Soboslai, ‘Sikh Self-Sacrifice and Religious Representation during World War I’.

⁵⁷⁸ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 12.

⁵⁷⁹ Greenhut, ‘Sahib and Sepoy’.

⁵⁸⁰ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 12.

sepoys writing back home with a photograph of Roberts received an excited response from his recipient, a pensioned police officer (and likely army veteran) to hang a wreath over Roberts' horse's neck at the next opportunity (the letter-writer unaware he was almost a year dead by the time of his writing).⁵⁸¹ Kitchener was killed on the 9th of June 1916 by a sea mine, and within days the troops lamented his passing.⁵⁸² As Omissi observed, the sepoy rarely mentioned officers by name and generally only in the context of something to complain about. While this might be due to the high casualty rates in the officer corps which meant that sepoy often served under men they didn't know well, "it certainly suggests that the bond between British officers and Indian men was not as close as the former often liked to assume."⁵⁸³ However, the devotion expressed towards the King-Emperor and to the former Commanders-in-Chief of the Indian Army, Kitchener and Roberts, indicate that a feeling of personal connection to distant imperial figureheads attracted a certain totemic loyalty, whereas the actual British officers the sepoy met in their daily lives did not inspire the sort of connection dreamed of in British martial race discourse. What to make of this?

Expressions of loyalty to the British cause in the letters clearly require more nuanced consideration, alive to the possibility of confusion, ambivalence and aporia, than the rhetoric of martial race discourse allows for. For a start, the

⁵⁸¹ Pensioned Sergeant of Police Gobind Saha, Punjab, 14/9/1915; quoted in Omissi, 100–101.

⁵⁸² Ghirdari Lal, Central Provinces, 9/6/1916; Alla Nakha Khan, France, 16/6/1916; quoted in Omissi, 195 & 196.

⁵⁸³ Omissi, 20.

correspondence's ambivalence and diversity of thought speaks to the seemingly obvious point martial race discourse and its attendant tropes of izzat deny: that the men comprising the Indian Army represented a diversity of feeling and opinion that could not be reduced into a totalizing narrative, and whose contradictions showcase the strategies of negotiating between the expectations placed upon sepoys and the realities of their circumstances. Moreover, many letter-writers may well have been performing a sense of imperial loyalty and war enthusiasm that was far beyond what they felt. Martial race imaginaries of stalwart soldiers loyal to regiment, King-Emperor and community could well have been a performance in many situations, meant to alleviate the concerns of friends and family back home. Sepoys might also have been performing the part of heroic soldiers whose efforts were winning glory and riches for their people, to convince themselves of the validity of fighting for the British, and of the martial race image. Izzat exerted a powerful hold on sepoys to not be seen to deviate from their expected duties, as to waver would be to be 'like a woman' or a 'sodomite', psychic incentives for the sepoys to not express anything contrary to a martial race image of the self and community.⁵⁸⁴ The public nature of the letters enforced group conformity, but the awareness that their letters were potentially going to be read by British censors could well have incentivized sepoys to perform martial race loyalty to avoid bringing shame and dishonour on their communities before the 'sahib-log'. Many sepoys might well have been producing a pantomime,

⁵⁸⁴ Omissi, 13.

ventriloquizing a martial race *image* of themselves, to maintain a comforting, profitable illusion for themselves, their friends and families, and the censors. Such conformity is reported by Hanna in French wartime correspondence, with soldiers chastised by their correspondents to avoid complaints in the service of national values.⁵⁸⁵ Similarly, the Field Service Post Card provided to British troops prevented the expression of anything but cheerful reassurances back home.⁵⁸⁶ Censorship and the social network of correspondence enforced performances across the war-space, for white and brown soldiers alike, and martial race discourse was the script to which sepoys felt the pressure of adhering. Indeed, there exist letters where sepoys receiving letters from home write sharp rebukes that speak to the pressure of maintaining the martial race imaginary on the Western Front. As one example from a Sikh author shows:

What you say in your letter about not being disloyal to the Emperor, and it being the religion of Sikhs to die facing the foe - all that you say is true. But if only you yourself could be here and see for yourself! Any shrivelled *charas*-sodden fellow can fire the gun and kill a score of us at our food in the kitchen. Ships sail the sky like kites. Wherever you look, machine guns and cannon begin to shoot, and bombs fly out which kill every man they hit. The earth is mined and filled with powder; when men walk upon it, the powder is lit and up go the men! There is no fighting face to face. Guns massacre regiments sitting ten miles off. Put swords or pikes or staves in our hands, and the enemy over us with like arms, then

⁵⁸⁵ Hanna, 'A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I', 1345-46.

⁵⁸⁶ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 201.

indeed we should show you how to fight face to face! But if no one faces us, what can we do?⁵⁸⁷

In Chapter Four I discussed the alleviatory appeal of the martial races in British war culture, how imagining chivalrous warriors fighting with honour soothed a European need to infuse the brutal industrialism of the Western Front with romanticism. This letter by an anonymous Sikh author (withheld by the censor because it was not signed) speaks to the impossibility of this juxtaposition. The martial races could not live up to their culture of loyal, heroic war service in a war of such unprecedented technological violence. The rhetoric of martial race discourse could not sustain a collision with the realities of World War I, and many sepoys were conscious of this and refused to conform to the expectations of their stereotype under the altered circumstances of the European military contact zone. The stereotype of martial race discourse thus speaks to an impossibility, anxiously repeated by British and Indian sources alike. Both parties desired it to be true that Indian soldiers were heroic loyalists fighting chivalrously for caste, community, regiment, king, and Empire – a narrative that the readers of British ventriloquist literature and Indian correspondence could read and feel reassured that Indian sepoys were living up to their image on the Western Front. The anxiety stemmed from the constant suspicion among all parties, readers and writers, Indians, and Britons, that martial race discourse was a performance of an

⁵⁸⁷ A Sikh, France, 18/10/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 110.

idealized sepoy masculinity, one that was particularly strained by the violence of the Western Front, very far from the homes of these Indian peasant-warriors.

What casts a particularly dubious light on letters seemingly in accordance with martial race tropes is the clear presence of trauma. Creeping underneath the effusion of loyalty is a jarring fatalism, as sepoys proudly proclaim that they would willingly martyr themselves for the King, and the stress of the death motif suggests an awareness of the fragility of life under the conditions in which these sepoys were forced to prove their loyalty and izzat. The confidence with which one sepoy declares, “Without death there is no victory, but I am alive and very well, and tell you truly that I will return alive to India,”⁵⁸⁸ can be contrasted to the manic energy of a wounded Garhwali sepoy who declares feverishly that he is willing to die for the King-Emperor, that it is a good death to die in battle in the King’s service, and that he desires nothing more than to recover from his wounds so he can display his loyalty on the battlefield once more.⁵⁸⁹ Other letters speak with a giddy bloodlust reminiscent of Kazi Nazrul’s Islam’s desire to drink all of mankind’s blood, such as with one sepoy’s declaration that he will not return until he destroys Germany – or dies in battle.⁵⁹⁰ Another highly curious letter comes in two parts, where in the first the sepoy writes with exhilaration after a battle of “knocking the Germans flat” and how God would give the King victory as

⁵⁸⁸ A Muslim officer to his brother, France, December 1914; quoted in Omissi, 25.

⁵⁸⁹ A wounded Garhwali Subedar, England, 21/2/1915; quoted in Omissi, 39.

⁵⁹⁰ Kartar Singh, France, 8/6/1917; quoted in Omissi, 296–97.

a certainty; but the latter part, written on a separate piece of paper, is chilling and reads like a mental breakdown:

God knows whether the land of France is stained with sin or whether the Day of Judgement has begun in France. For guns and of rifles [sic] there is now a deluge, bodies upon bodies, and blood flowing. God preserve us, what has come to pass! From dawn to dark and from dark to dawn it goes on... But especially our guns have filled the German trenches with dead and made them brim with blood. God grant us grace, for grace is needed. Oh God, we repent! Oh God, we repent!⁵⁹¹

The censor comments on this letter as “a curious psychological study, showing traces both of the nerve shattering experience through which the writer has passed and of the exhilaration induced by success.” The shellshock evident in this letter and that written by the wounded Garhwali (referred to previously) is repeated across other letters that speak to the horror of the war. Hindu sepoys reached for apocalyptic references to the Mahabharata, with one stating, simply: “This is not war. It is the ending of the world,”⁵⁹² and a Sikh declared, “The battle is beginning and men are dying like maggots. No one can count them - not in thousands but in hundreds and thousands of thousands. No one can count them.”⁵⁹³ A Muslim soldier likened the ‘martyring’ of soldiers to the parable of Abraham and Ishmael in a letter home that speaks of comforting the family while

⁵⁹¹ Amir Khan, France, 18/3/1915; quoted in Omissi, 43.

⁵⁹² A wounded Punjabi Rajput, England, 29/1/1915; quoted in Omissi, 32.

⁵⁹³ A wounded Sikh, England, 21/1/1915; quoted in Omissi, 31.

raising disquieting visions of death: “remember me, your poor brother, for my time is come to be sacrificed. At some time the knife of death will descend.”⁵⁹⁴

Omissi notes that Wilfred Owen also reached for a similar image in his work, *Englishman and Punjabi united in war trauma*.

Is it coincidence that the worst of these outpourings of despair and shock are from wounded soldiers? The Indian army had been trained for border skirmishes and used light artillery; the mass-produced slaughter and thunder of modern war, shocking to Europeans, must have truly been beyond the pale – yet there is little research devoted to exploring psychological trauma among these peasant-soldiers caught in a war where originated the term ‘shell-shock.’ Only Hilary Buxton has written on shell-shock in the Indian Army in World War I, and she argued that sepoys suffering from mental and physical trauma were understood by British medical staff, and the censors themselves, as expressions of collective, racialized woes, where the experiences of soldiers were categorized according to the martial races they were conceptualized as falling within – “racial typologies of trauma.”⁵⁹⁵ These ‘racial typologies’ of martial race discourse constructed an idealized figure that sepoys felt they had to perform and live up to, a figure whose stoic, unflinching heroism was taken for granted despite the impossibility of it being true on the Western Front – how could a war that

⁵⁹⁴ Sepoy Abdul Ghani, France, 5/8/1915; quoted in Omissi, 87.

⁵⁹⁵ Hilary Buxton, ‘Imperial Amnesia: Race, Trauma and Indian Troops in the First World War’, *Past & Present* 241, no. 1 (1 November 2018): 232, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gty023>.

shattered the European romanticization of war leave Indian troops psychically unscathed?

As Buxton argued, martial race discourse even guided the recuperating troops' healthcare. The relative hardiness of races and their martial reputations were leveraged to judge which sepoys were truly invalidated and who were simply pretending in order to avoid being sent back to fight, that is, malingering.⁵⁹⁶ Malingering was heavily punished, but sepoys still attempted it, often through self-inflicting wounds or blinding themselves.⁵⁹⁷ Letters contained advice between sepoys on how to safely wound themselves in order to get out of duty or be sent home directly (such as: "Eat the fat, but preserve the bone carefully,"⁵⁹⁸ in reference to bayonet use); the letters were often encoded in ways that the censors could spot immediately, whereas others spoke with candour of the effects of having shot themselves in the hand.⁵⁹⁹ Many sepoys tried to push through their trauma by asking for in their letters for protective amulets from home, traditional medicine or even opium and cannabis.⁶⁰⁰ Others sought out subtler alternatives to self-mutilation through their correspondence, such as requesting the seeds of the bhaiwala plant, which was used by washermen to mark clothes and thus could be in a sepoy's kit without arousing suspicion; the seeds could be applied to

⁵⁹⁶ Buxton, 232.

⁵⁹⁷ Muhabhat Khan, France, 9/2/1916; Sultan Mahomed Khan, 16/9/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 150, 236.

⁵⁹⁸ Colour Havildar Mir Haider Jan, England, 20/3/1915; quoted in Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 90.

⁵⁹⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 217.

⁶⁰⁰ Buxton, 'Imperial Amnesia', 237.

produce a serious inflammation on the body. Sepoys boasted that British doctors were “blind” and unable to tell when such subtle tricks were played;⁶⁰¹ of course, if the censors were not initially aware of the uses of the bhairwala plant’s seed, such correspondence soon alerted them. Elaborate ploys were employed, such as one Muslim sepoy pretending to be a Hindu washerman in his request for bhairwala seeds from home, ending his letter: “Ram Ram to all Hindus.” The censor saw through this immediately.⁶⁰² The number of such withheld letters in the censor reports give the impression that the British censors were well ahead of the sepoys’ attempts to bypass censorship: this can give a misleading idea of the effectiveness of the censors, as naturally many letters could have passed under the noses of censors without any archival evidence left behind.

Malingering and the almost cat-and-mouse game between censorship and evasion exemplify the tension between the martial race image of the sepoy and the degrees to which actual pain and suffering that disrupted that image was suppressed. What is especially interesting is that attempting to cheat their way out of military service was not, for many sepoys, at all inconsistent with a feeling of loyalty to the British state. Sepoys did not see malingering as disloyalty. Rather, they saw wounded soldiers as having done their duty and earned the right to return. The policy of returning the lightly wounded to the Front was widely

⁶⁰¹ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 91–92.

⁶⁰² ‘Ram Lal, Dhobi’, France, 19/9/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 103.

condemned in the letters, even as the actual care for the wounded was often praised, and several wrote to the King himself to petition him to change policy (which seems to have had the desired effect.)⁶⁰³ Malingering could be seen as an act of subaltern resistance in extremis, or a symptom of breach in a contract of trust between an empire and its collaborators. It is significant that sepoys appealed to the figure they saw themselves as ultimately loyal to, the King, to intervene and discharge them from their duty, the arbiter who could disentangle the knot of loyalty, duty, trauma, and shame. The structures of colonial loyalty cannot be denied in the letters, but *izzat* cannot be taken for granted as surpassing the trauma that led a Gurkha to run amok in the trenches and begin to murder his allies,⁶⁰⁴ or lead a sepoy whose brother had passed to write to his mother:

My brother is gone from me; my brother is dead ... Now I am dead ... All the grief that is in the world is now upon me. The world is about to pass away ...When the merciful God made wretched men, why did he not slay them in their childhood?⁶⁰⁵

The cold contrast of the censor's note that follows ("Letter passed") remind us uncomfortably of the imperial power that co-opted these men's loyalties into feeling such pain. The censors were keenly aware of such grief and tried to

⁶⁰³ Omissi, 14.

⁶⁰⁴ An incident related by the sepoy who ultimately had to shoot him. Dafadar Ali Mardan, Egypt, 20/4/1916; quoted in Omissi, 178.

⁶⁰⁵ Mir Aslam Khan; France, 27/1/1916; quoted in Omissi, 144. Aslam Khan wanted his mother to write to him more regularly, to assuage his loneliness.

suppress it as much as possible within the letters to prevent too demoralizing an image of frontline life to percolate to India. After the war medical consensus leaned towards acknowledging cases of insanity among Indian troops, but that shell shock had not been prevalent. Martial race discourses, troubled by the realities of sepoy trauma, resumed their hegemony with images of stoic and simple Indian loyalty, these memories lost until scholarly interest in them was revived.⁶⁰⁶

The simple-mindedness imagined for the Indian soldier is the flipside of martial race heroism. The letters disprove this aspect of martial race discourse. The most immediately striking thing about the letters is how richly detailed they are. Sepoys took the opportunity of letter-writing to generate a highly varied corpus of text that reflects a mosaic of viewpoints and feelings. Unlike the baroque, stilted, mock-Orientalist dialogue in Rudyard Kipling's *Eyes of Asia* the real sepoy produced writing that was at times funny, frequently effusive, and insightful, as well as often poignant and sad. While this can to an extent be attributed to scribal penmanship and embellishment, as well as Howell and Omissi's respective aesthetic preferences and editorial choices, there is no shortage of letters that are simply mundane. Taken together, the collection addresses a range of themes that challenge the two-dimensional, shaky stereotypes of martial race discourse and the supposed 'simplicity' of the sepoy

⁶⁰⁶ Buxton, 'Imperial Amnesia', 252.

themselves. It is in their descriptions of Europe and Europeans that we see the most striking negotiations of their own place in the imperial hierarchy, and the expression of ideas overlooked or rejected by martial race discourse.

Claude Markovits in his analysis of the censor reports saw the letters as representative of a discourse of “Occidentalism from below” where Occidentalism is “any body of knowledge and any representation concerning the West developed by non-Westerners,” and they wrote from ‘below’ in that their notions of the West had little relationship with any previous travel-writing created by cosmopolitan Indian elites.⁶⁰⁷ We may also consider the sepoys as having written from ‘below’ in the sense of their place as subalterns speaking through an archive of colonial surveillance. In their Occidentalism many sepoys deployed to Europe were only beginning to discover that England, Belgium, and France were distinct states and they often spoke in general of ‘this country.’ Describing Europe to their relatives, sepoys were fascinated by oddities such as the Flemish practice of using dogs to turn wheels that churned butter and they also misconceived French roadside calvaries to be a method of executing thieves.⁶⁰⁸ Soldiers were generally astonished by Europe, calling it “a fairyland,”⁶⁰⁹ impressed by its climate, the fertility of French soil, the beauty of its population, by the sights and sounds of

⁶⁰⁷ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front’, 40.

⁶⁰⁸ “They fix him alive and upright to a stake and fasten his hands with nails, and there he dies.” A wounded Sikh, England, 18/1/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 29–30.

⁶⁰⁹ Subedar-Major Sardar Bahadur Gagan, Brighton, early January 1915; quoted in Omissi, 27.

the big cities (including Madame Tussaud's in London)⁶¹⁰ and the astonishing wealth contained within them.⁶¹¹ Readers in India often asked for such details, hungry for information from sepoys who, one can imagine, were at times too busy, weary or upset to feel the need to communicate such details. As one Punjabi writer rebukes a soldier in France who was clearly an unenthusiastic correspondent:

You don't say what the climate is like or what degree of cold is experienced, and in what condition you and our friends are. All you say is 'Ram, Ram, we are quite well and happy!' My friend, what can be gathered from such words? Write and say what the people there are like, and what is bought and sold, what arrangements there are about food. Things that are worth seeing about you studiously avoid. You scribble a couple of words and dispatch the letter. There is no pleasure in hearing what you say, or in having your letter read. Write also and say how far you are from your beloved country.⁶¹²

Comparisons with India were inevitable. Sepoys often expressed how backwards they considered India when set against European prosperity and advancement, and these letters often expressed a disturbing self-loathing. As an example, an educated sub-assistant surgeon lamented that:

Our people copy the faults of the British nation and leave its good qualities alone. We shall never advance ourselves merely by wearing

⁶¹⁰ Mir laffar, France, 16/5/1916; quoted in Omissi, 185.

⁶¹¹ A wounded Garhwali subedar, 21/2/1915; Saif Ali, France, 17/8/1915; quoted in Omissi, 39, 90.

⁶¹² Zamindar Nehal Singh, Punjab, 8/5/1916; quoted in Omissi, 183.

trousers and hats and smoking cigarettes and drinking wine. In fact they have a real moral superiority. They are energetic.⁶¹³

Yet another soldier said, “the Creator has shown the perfection of his beneficence in Europe, and we people [Indians] have been created only for the purpose of completing the totality of the world.”⁶¹⁴ These narratives of an inherent European superiority and Indian backwardness were well-aligned with British discourses of race.⁶¹⁵ Kipling’s *Eyes of Asia* fixated on letters that spoke of mundane European technologies with wonder, to present sepoys as overawed with the relative superiority of Western civilization. Looking through the letters, Kipling wrote in his correspondence that the sepoys were obsessed with education, which he interpreted as a...

... Capacity to use and profit by the material of the civilization they have seen – such as churches, ploughs, washing tubs and so on... here you have hundreds and thousands of men who have gone abroad and discovered the nakedness of their own land.⁶¹⁶

However, not all sepoys reached for a narrative of racialized inferiority, and their desire for education spoke to an eagerness for similar degrees of material advancement in India.⁶¹⁷ The focus on education is particularly interesting in the context of martial race policies that tried to cultivate an

⁶¹³ A sub-assistant surgeon, England, late January or early February, 1915?; quoted in Omissi, 15.

⁶¹⁴ Shah Nawaz, Marseilles, 1/9/1915 quoted in Omissi, 96.

⁶¹⁵ MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 355.

⁶¹⁶ Kipling, “Kipling Papers, Tyler Gift,” sec. SxMs54/3/1/1, letter dated 10 or 13 July 1916; quoted in Leenders 51.

⁶¹⁷ Firoz Khan, France, 20/3/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 166.

uneducated, illiterate army; encountering Europe and communicating vociferously through letters, the loyal martial races were clearly becoming conscious of the limitations of being uneducated. The letters upset the 'natural' binary of heroic, uneducated peasantry, and the cowardly intelligentsia, with the martial races desiring to transcend the boundaries of colonial category through education and adopting Western lifeways.

Ravi Ahuja argued that the sepoys were initially awestruck by Europe, but "the idea that the Punjabi or Nepali peasant-soldier must have been absolutely dumbfounded when confronted with complex European realities can be misleading if rendered in terms of absolutes."⁶¹⁸ Garrulous sepoys were often keen for knowledge of the war and Europe, and through encountering the diversity of nations in wartime Europe:

The war had provided scales to assess the relative weight of the King-Emperor—scales that had not been available earlier. British power could be compared to that of its imperialist rivals⁶¹⁹

In their descriptions of the war situation sepoys often expressed a grudging respect or even open admiration for German military might and technological ingenuity,⁶²⁰ while at the same time being indignant of German

⁶¹⁸ Ahuja, 'Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps (1915-1919)', 156.

⁶¹⁹ Ahuja, 156.

⁶²⁰ A South Indian Muslim, a hospital ship, 9/2/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 35; _ (name withheld), Brockenhurst, 1915; quoted in Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 214-15.

atrocities in Belgium.⁶²¹ One remarkable letter explains the history of Joan of Arc and comments on the strangeness of France and Britain working together and the possible fragility of the alliance to overcome centuries of bad blood,⁶²² and another letter (withheld by the censor) tried to slyly enquire as to how the French treated the Algerian soldiers they had deployed on the Western Front – in order to compare this treatment to that of Indians by Britain.⁶²³ Far from being uniformly ignorant and abject, these letters display sophisticated understandings of and engagements with colonial power engendered by military migration and cross-cultural encounter on the European contact zone.

Nor were sepoys uniform in their admiration of Europe and Europeans. One detained letter joked that in Britain white soldiers were refusing to enlist to fight the Germans and were being shamed by Indian soldiers for their apparent cowardice.⁶²⁴ One can imagine the jarring irony. An army of colonized subjects whose culture stressed the value of masculine, military service to the British King-Emperor and his government, from a colonized country where white prestige and supremacy were strictly upheld by principle, were encountering white Britons in their home country who were shirking their duty to their king, less loyal than colonized subjects. Colonial discourses that painted the martial races as an imperfect mimic of the British self runs aground on a situation where the

⁶²¹ Rifleman Amar Singh Rawat, Brighton, 26 March 1915. Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 45.

⁶²² Jalal-ud-Din Ahmed, France, 14/10/1915; quoted in Omissi, 108.

⁶²³ Storekeeper Ram Jawan Singh, Brighton, 26/9/1915; quoted in Omissi, 102–3.

⁶²⁴ Yusuf Khan, Brighton, 6/10/1915; quoted in Omissi, 107.

'Britishness' of fighting for the King-Emperor was better performed by a colonized Other. Indian sepoys meeting regular, non-colonizing Europeans were increasingly becoming aware of the absurdities of the racial hierarchies practiced in India, and how different Europeans behaved in their own homelands. One letter from a surgeon (therefore not a martial race sepoy but rather of MacMunn's hated intelligentsia) showcases how the scales were falling from Indians' eyes:

The people here are of a very amiable disposition. They talk pleasantly, treat us kindly, and are pleased to see us. We do not hear the words 'damn' and 'bloody' at all frequently, as in India. But this only applies to those who have not seen India. Those who have, gnash their teeth at us; some laugh and some make fun; but there are not many who do this. The people here are charming. It is impossible to say why they become so bad on reaching India.⁶²⁵

Indian sepoys, accustomed to British colonizers expecting deference in the Indian contact zone, found themselves in positions of – to their mind – remarkable equality with the actual Britons they encountered in the European contact zones. Letters that speak to British sympathy and friendliness towards Indians, or British cowardice in the face of a challenge Indians were rising to meet, demonstrate the transformative power of colonial contact zones to both create and upset colonial relationships and hierarchies. The 'Occidentalism' of sepoy correspondence displays a growing awareness among the sepoys that their

⁶²⁵ Senior Assistant Surgeon J.N. Godbole, Bournemouth, 18/3/1915; quoted in Omissi, 42.

own impressions of the British prior to their arrival in Europe were as based on stereotype and generalization as British discourses of Indians. World War I saw not just martial race discourse's truisms strained in the contact zone, but also the martial races themselves coming to reassess their assumptions about their imperial masters. Sanborn argued that contact between civilians and soldiers was discouraged by military planners across the war space, but nevertheless occurred, military migration opening new contact zones wherein displaced, resocialized soldiers were in constant contact with their fellow soldiers, allies of other nationalities, enemies and civilians, all novel social experiences that belie any argument that soldiers on the move were socially isolated:

The intentional thwarting of military-civilian relationships at the outset of a war that military planners knew would hinge on effective military-civilian integration was ironic, but its effects were felt from the front line to the staff room.... Civilians were, in short, a Clausewitzian friction that introduced chance, disruption, and disorder into a conceptual and physical space that military men spent their lives trying to control in one way or another... Top army officials thus tried to form a military society that would have no external social relations, would focus all its affinities on fellow soldiers, all its antipathies on the enemy, and would stay aloof from everyone else. To the great dismay of army officials, their plan almost immediately broke down. From the start of the war, soldiers in fact engaged in social relationships with all the other social groups in their array, complicating the simple plans of their

superiors and eventually producing enough friction to force the question to the top of the wartime agenda.⁶²⁶

Similarities between French and Indian correspondence have already been mentioned, and in the previous chapter through Massia Bibikoff I explored the appeal the sepoys held for French observers. The contact zone of the Western Front provides us further evidence of the disruptions posed by colonial military migration, in that social relations between the British soldiers and their French civilian allies were strained, whereas French civilians and Indian sepoys got along well. Markovits details British soldiers treating French civilians like country bumpkins and subjecting them to violence that was also expressed through the racialized language of colonialism: referring to the civilians as ‘niggers’ and speaking Hindustani to them. The transformation of the Western Front in an altered space wherein white populations were discursively lowered in the racial hierarchy, as described in Chapter Four, returns as a theme in such interactions wherein the French were subjected to the racist violence British soldiers were used to treating Indian peasants with. Markovits writes:

The French peasants, for their part, resented the British soldiers as sly urbanites bent on pilfering, and there was generally no love lost between these two groups. Indians seem to have largely escaped these strictures, as they appear to have been on the whole rather well-behaved towards the civilian population, and in particular

⁶²⁶ Sanborn, ‘Unsettling the Empire’, 301–2.

pilfered much less. The fact that they were less frequently drunk helped.⁶²⁷

In turn, sepoy's encountering Europe reassessed themselves and their societies in relation to an often flawed, or limited, Occidentalist understanding of European life, unaware of the degree to which the altered circumstances of the war did not represent 'normality.' One such aspect that recurs again and again in the letters is the status of women. Letters are full of praise for the stoicism of French women, whose male relatives were being killed in the war but who still never expressed "a word of lamentation;"⁶²⁸ at least one sepoy urged his wife to follow the French example and "be as brave as a man."⁶²⁹ The education of European women impressed the sepoy's as well, and several wrote letters urging that girls in their own families be educated.⁶³⁰ Sepoy's seemed unaware that they were viewing wartime gender relations in Europe, where women were forced by necessity to become more self-sufficient, and patriarchal had control loosened.⁶³¹ Letters that, for example, spoke admiringly that women in France were never beaten, and that after marriage there is always domestic harmony,⁶³² do not

⁶²⁷ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes', 92–93.

⁶²⁸ Sub-Assistant Surgeon T. H. Gupta, Brighton, 9/6/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 70.

⁶²⁹ Woordi-Major Jivan Singh, France, 7/2/1917; quoted in Omissi, 276.

⁶³⁰ Dafadar Ranjit Lal, France, 26/11/1916 Omissi, 257–58.

⁶³¹ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front', 46.

⁶³² Teja Singh, France, 26/6/1916; Teja Singh, France, 6/3/1918; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 196–97, 357. Teja Singh was a prolific writer of letters.

reflect the reality that such gendered violence was far from unknown in France.⁶³³ These letters display ‘Occidentalism’ of an ideal type, imagining a Western culture free of the social ills that the sepoys saw in India. Markovits argued that the sepoys’ belief in gender relations as a crucial marker of difference between Europe and India, especially when expressed via the racialized self-loathing some sepoys displayed in their letters, might be “simply a function of the hegemonic power of colonial discourse over the minds of colonized subjects.”⁶³⁴ However, it might also reflect a genuine desire to enact social change in India to accord with what they perceived in Europe. In any case, not all progressive attitudes displayed by the sepoys are attributed to the example of the French.⁶³⁵ While some wrote from an urge to see India elevated out of a state of being that they saw as relatively primitive, other sepoys spoke out of a more personal interest: they wanted to be able to write letters to their wives without having to worry about anyone else seeing the letters.⁶³⁶

 Sepoys also expressed other intimacies. As mentioned in the discussion of *The Eyes of Asia* in Chapter Four, many sepoys wrote admiringly of the older

⁶³³ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes’, 97. Markovits also made the observation that sepoys admiring the way Frenchwomen managed without men did not seem to consider that their own wives back home were having to deal with similar challenges.

⁶³⁴ Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front’, 46.

⁶³⁵ Ishar Singh, France, 4/3/1918; Ressaldar Bishan Singh, France, 28/8/1917; Khalil Ullah, France, 3/3/1918; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 356-7. 315-6, 356.

⁶³⁶ One sepoy lamented his own inability to read, preventing him from receiving news about his mother and other female relatives: “they read out our letters to our officers, and then they discuss the contents. It is a shameful thing to read out to the Sahibs what may be said about women in our letters.”Kumar Gul, France, 25/1/1918; quoted in Omissi, 352.

French women that they were billeted with in France, with whom they established warm relationships as almost surrogate sons – many of these women having lost sons in the war.⁶³⁷ It is in documenting such moments of genuine feeling that the censor reports transcend their function as an exercise of colonial power and become a repository of human experience. Migration to the Western Front engendered conditions whereby men of a colonial army imagined in British discourse to be apolitical and disinterested, built intimate relationships with European women, and became interested in improving the material conditions of women in their own communities back home – conscious, at times, of a sense of colonial inferiority, but just as often from a newly-awakened sense of social justice or homesickness. Such letters, Markovits argues, may have partly been born out of some sepoys' desire to impress the censors with their liberal values, but a simpler assumption is that sepoys were genuine in their sentiments – though this does not exclude the impacts of environmental pressures, with sepoys articulating sincere ideas that they may well have abandoned upon their return home.⁶³⁸ Oliver Eynde's research on human capital in colonial Punjab reveals that while war service had an appreciable impact on male literacy in the Punjab, there was no such improvement in female literacy, nor was there appreciable intergenerational transfer: the Punjabi sepoys who returned home did not use

⁶³⁷ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experiences in France During World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front', 48.

⁶³⁸ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes', 99.

their new-found literacy to enact the social change they yearned for in their wartime correspondence.⁶³⁹

As is the pattern with the archive, alongside letters that speak respectfully of European women we also find ones that are more misogynistic. Several made boastful comments about sexual encounters with white women. Often these were clearly fanciful boasts as in the case of one sepoy who inserted into a letter to a friend a cigarette card displaying the 18th century Duchess of Gordon and claimed that he was sleeping with her.⁶⁴⁰ Many, however, spoke frankly of real encounters, portraying a Europe where the women “bestow their favours freely.”⁶⁴¹ Regardless of the credibility of the letter, the censors were diligent in not letting such letters pass. Howell was adamant that the sepoys not...

... Conceive a wrong idea of the ‘*izzat*’ of the English women. A sentiment which if not properly held in check would be most detrimental to the prestige and spirit of European rule in India.⁶⁴²

The strict enforcement of boundaries to prevent interaction between European women and Indian men was transplanted from India to Europe, where the social environment did not carry the same paranoia over the spectre of illicit interracial sex as in the colonies and was thus harder to enforce – but nevertheless sexual control was necessary in Europe to, in the colonialist mindset,

⁶³⁹ Eynde, ‘Military Service and Human Capital Accumulation’, 1032.

⁶⁴⁰ Tura Baz Khan, Brighton, 23/10/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 113.

⁶⁴¹ Balwant Singh, France, 24/10/1915; quoted in Omissi, 114.

⁶⁴² Howell, ‘Censor’s Report’.

maintain sexual control in India. The hospitals for Indian wounded in Britain, especially the Royal Pavilion in Brighton, were very prominent in British propaganda and acted as a message to India on the great lengths taken to take care of the sepoys, with extensive arrangements for their religious and caste needs; nurses were banished from these hospitals to reduce the symbolic visibility of contact between Indians and white women.⁶⁴³

Sepoys in hospitals in Britain were resentful of the strict surveillance kept on them to stop them meeting white women (eventually leading to an Indian sub-assistant surgeon's unsuccessful attempt to murder the commanding officer at his hospital).⁶⁴⁴ Sex did occur, however,⁶⁴⁵ and tried to get coded references to it past the censor, usually by referring these women as 'fruit' – but the censors were good at catching the reference for what it was.⁶⁴⁶ Sexual control was harder to exert over liaisons in France, however, and many sepoys were delighted at the welcome they received in brothels.⁶⁴⁷ The hospital and the brothel were, in the colonial-military discourse of the time, two radically opposed sites upon which imperial ideas of race, gender and class imbricated to police the interactions between white women and colonial soldiers, and it is useful to explore this theme more generally before returning to the treatment of sex in the sepoy letters.

⁶⁴³ Hyson and Lester, "British India on Trial".

⁶⁴⁴ Hyson and Lester, 27.

⁶⁴⁵ Storekeeper D. N. Sircar, Brighton, 12/11/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 119.

⁶⁴⁶ Omissi, 8.

⁶⁴⁷ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 83.

Philippa Levine argued that in the creation of a sexual contact zone in World War I, two distinct tropes intersected: there was on the one hand the colonial soldier “whose greatest desire was a white woman” and on the other there was the “unprincipled or unthinking pleasure-seeking woman who ‘went with’ soldiers.”⁶⁴⁸ This argument echoes Ann Stoler’s point that the policing of the sexual contact between European women and non-white men was not just about perpetuating white supremacy but also part of a classist project that kept subversive white ‘underlings’ in line.⁶⁴⁹ It was invariably a class distinction between the woman who needed protection and the woman who was in herself a danger to imperial security. The result was a system of sexual policing where non-white soldiers were segregated as much as possible from white women, and working-class white women were treated with suspicion and scorn as threats to white supremacy – echoing parallel fears of prostitutes and ‘loose women’ visiting moral corruption and venereal disease upon the white soldiers from the British Dominions. However, while a white soldier who contracted venereal disease could be chastised, he was free during the war to contract such a disease; it was only the non-white soldier who was systemically segregated to prevent sexual encounter.⁶⁵⁰ The policing of sex in the colonies was a way to maintain racial boundaries and keep subordinate European men and women in line with the imperial administration; key to this segregationist policing were policies on

⁶⁴⁸ Levine, ‘Battle Colors’, 109.

⁶⁴⁹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 40:25.

⁶⁵⁰ Levine, ‘Battle Colors’, 113.

“sexual access, prostitution and venereal disease.”⁶⁵¹ During the war years there were policies restricting the access of soldiers – white and non-white alike – to women, especially working class, for fear of indiscipline and disease entering via prostitutes. Part of the impetus to ‘protect’ the colonial soldier from the dangerous sexual desires of white women was the Othering of the soldier as a child-like figure whose “innocence was not Jesus-like but tiger-like;” the childish nature of the colonial soldier needed the paternal hand of the military to guide him away temptations he lacked the civilized restraint to resist, and the working-class white woman was similarly considered in need of the guidance of respectable, upper-class femininity to curb her own infantile desires.⁶⁵²

The intersection of class, race and gender was particularly prominent in the space of the hospital. Much energy was expended towards keeping Indian and African soldiers confined to segregated hospitals, devoid of contact with white, female nurses; this was mostly only possible within the confines of the UK, and in France there was much more contact between white nurses and non-white soldiers.⁶⁵³ Alison Fell wrote on how the wartime nurse – typically middle-class or upper-class women – was constructed as an angelic figure who served as an aspirational example of propriety for white working-class women. As such, upper-class nurses needed to be protected to ensure their interactions with non-white

⁶⁵¹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 40:45.

⁶⁵² Levine, ‘Battle Colors’, 114.

⁶⁵³ Fell, ‘Nursing the Other: The Representation of Colonial Troops in French and British First World War Nursing Memoirs’.

patients did not endanger their virtue. While the danger in these interactions was imagined in a main part to come from the 'primitive' and dangerous sexualities of non-white soldiers, even the gender and sexuality of the nurses themselves, despite their class privilege, was considered a danger to empire.⁶⁵⁴ The image of the young, upper-class French society girl turned nurse coquettishly flirting with colonial soldiers became a subject of popular caricature (itself a fantastical imagining of the sexual encounters between white women and non-white soldiers). While Fell argued that the humorous nature of these depictions helped delineate these interracial, inter-class encounters firmly within the bounds of fantasy, there was a real feeling that women would not be stern and decorous enough to properly set racial boundaries when treating soldiers.

At the same time, Fell's research revealed that many wartime European nurses, resentful of the restrictions put upon them by the military, found themselves enjoying taking care of wounded colonial soldiers, referring to them in affectionate and infantilizing tones as her "darkies" or her "big old Senegalese."⁶⁵⁵ While Fell does not discount the presence of a level of erotic fascination in the nurses' memoirs she studied, she attributes such sentiments to colonial paternalism that was once again motivated by the intersection of class and gender. These nurses, upper and middle-class women as they often were, resented the constraints to their freedom from working with wounded colonial

⁶⁵⁴ Fell, 163.

⁶⁵⁵ Fell, 167.

soldiers (constraints which the military imposed to prevent impropriety), and this discrimination based on gender led to them exerting their class privilege via racially appropriating their African and Asian patients as 'theirs'. As Stoler wrote, white women in the colonial space were in an ambiguous position as both agents of empire and subordinates in colonial hierarchies.⁶⁵⁶ The transposition of colonial soldiers to Europe brought these structural relations of race and gender to the European heartland, constraining the lives of women.

It is worth noting that the mother-son bond reported by many sepoys in the correspondence was not problematized or censored by Howell and his team and was faithfully reproduced in Kipling's *The Eyes of Asia*. The desexualisation of this relationship was perhaps a reflection of colonial discourses of domesticity in India, where the white 'memsahib' inevitably kept house through close contact with male Indian servants, who were infantilized in colonial narratives and thereby defanged as a sexual threat.⁶⁵⁷ It was perhaps also significant that these matronly women were rural French, and therefore did not raise as much anxiety among British censors. Blatantly sexual relationships between French women and Indian men were, however, a source of anxiety to the British censor.

Given that many sepoys were billeted among French households, and the absence of French men during this time, romance and sexual liaison was

⁶⁵⁶ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 40:41.

⁶⁵⁷ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 179.

inevitable regardless of the British commanders' distaste for it. Some Muslim sepoys were quite adamant in their letters that they would not engage in premarital sex with Christian women, but it is difficult to read these letters and not think the authors protest too much.⁶⁵⁸ Marriages between French women and Muslim sepoys were first allowed in October 1916, and several sepoys took the opportunity to leave the army and consider life with their 'mademoiselles', to the extent of even converting to Christianity.⁶⁵⁹ Gajendra Singh has discovered that these open-minded attitudes towards interracial and inter-religious romance changed among Muslims sepoys in late 1916, when coded letters began to reach the troops, accusing them of violating their religious morals. Several of the Muslim sepoys expressed disgust at what they saw as the lax sexual mores in Europe and a general disregard for religion.⁶⁶⁰ However it is Muslim sepoys themselves who went farthest in their relationships with French women. Many letters deal with the case of Mahomed Khan, who married a Frenchwoman seemingly of his own volition, an incident that excited much comment from the troops.⁶⁶¹ Mahomed Khan, is at first defiant in his decision to marry,⁶⁶² but as he becomes ostracized from his troops he begins to paint an unlikely picture of

⁶⁵⁸ Maula Dad Khan, France, 24/10/1915; Risaldar Anjamuddin Khan, France, 20/12/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 114, 126–27.

⁶⁵⁹ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 115.

⁶⁶⁰ Markovits, 'Indian Soldiers' Experience in France: Perceptions and Outcomes', 97.

⁶⁶¹ Abdul Ali, France, 28/2/1917; Zabur Shah, France, 6/10/1917; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 279, 322.

⁶⁶² Mohamed Khan, France, 28/5/1917; 'CIM 1917-1918', n.d., pt. 3; quoted in Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 117.

having been forced to marry by a royal order,⁶⁶³ and begins to curse his own daughter as having been born to a Kafir.⁶⁶⁴ As Omissi points out, the wedding was likely done to cover up a pregnancy scandal.⁶⁶⁵ Khan's religious protestation may reflect the effect of Islamist propaganda in the troops, but in painting a picture of himself as a pious Muslim forced by the King himself to marry a Christian Frenchwoman he might simply have been trying to deflect from his own culpability in a situation he was unhappy with. Our interpretations of these letters are equally contingent of our understandings of the stories behind them; in Mohamed Khan's case we have the privilege of more information than otherwise denied us. Other letters point toward amusing anecdotes that show how the policing of sexual interactions became more relaxed over time on the Western Front. A Muslim soldier in 1915 tries (poorly) to convince his father that he has not abandoned his wife and child in India to start an illicit affair with a French woman, using the prohibition against such relations as part of his excuse; this can be contrasted to the two cavalrymen writing in English in 1917 who speak of romances with their French girlfriend in language that would be hard to tell apart from that of an upper class Englishman of the time.⁶⁶⁶ Such letters do more than just amuse, they show that the contact zone of the Western Front broke apart the taboo over interracial sex that haunted colonial India since the

⁶⁶³ Mohamed Khan, France, 18/6/1917; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 298–99.

⁶⁶⁴ Mohamed Khan, France, 20/8/1917; 'CIM 1917-1918', pt. 4; quoted in Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 118.

⁶⁶⁵ Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 322.

⁶⁶⁶ Maula Dad Khan, France, 24/10/1915; Ressaldar Mokand Singh, Punjab, 30/1/1917; quoted in Omissi, 114, 272–73.

rumoured sexual violence of 1857. Far from the rigidity of martial race discourse and the idea of colonizer and colonized as removed from one another, the Western Front was a space of hybridity revealed and engendered by cross-cultural and interracial encounter. Within this hybrid space it was often within the ranks of the Indian Army itself that interracial and interfaith liaisons were problematized. In the context of a constant Indian paranoia regarding the perceived irreligiosity of France and the West in general, sexual discipline was synonymous with keeping allegiance to faith and community while surrounded by temptation. In such an atmosphere it is not surprising that Muslim soldiers would be the community most likely to get married to white European women, while at the same time exhibiting the greatest degree of internal moral panic. The sexual colour line of colonial race discourse was not merely externally imposed by imperialists, but *metissage* and slippage was guarded against by the martial races (defined, as shown in Chapter Three, along religious lines) themselves. Guarded against, and challenged, as the sepoys had their own encounters and experiences that could not be contained by the rigours of colonial discipline – no matter whether colonizer or colonized imposed such discipline.

There are whispers within the correspondence of intimacies that challenge still further the masculine, Muslim, martial race stereotype. Reading through the rich literature of homoerotic British trench poetry, Santanu Das argues that the

archive of Indian censor reports also contains poetic expressions of “the love that ‘dares not speak its name.’”⁶⁶⁷ Das quotes a pair of poems:

Since the day you went to the field, Oh heart of my heart,
From that day I know no ease...
My soul languishes for communion with you
And my body is like water.

And:

Oh letter mine make no delay
Take, on the wings of love, your way,
Gain strength in blessed India’s air,
And quickly reach my dear one there.
Give him the message you have brought
To keep him in his loving thought
Alive I’ll meet him here again
And dying, on his astral plane.⁶⁶⁸

Such poems are unlikely to have been platonic in intent, and speak to a buried history of homosexual longing stretching between the Western Front and India, for these poems were exchanged between serving soldiers in Europe and partners in India, a distinction Das makes between these poems and the more famous expressions of homosexual love between British comrades-in-arms.⁶⁶⁹

Was homosexuality in the Indian Army too socially aberrant to practice within

⁶⁶⁷ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 225.

⁶⁶⁸ Kot Dafadan Kutubuddin Khan, Lahore, 7/3/1917; Firoz Khan, France, 3/7/1916; quoted in Das, *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, 225.

⁶⁶⁹ Das, 225.

the ranks, and thus could only be hinted at through mail ships crossing oceans? Yet another letter, in prose, is sorrowful in its entreaty to stay faithful despite the separation of space ('white clay' being understood by Omissi to mean 'white people,' an admonishment against the temptations of Europe), and its direct call to the censor to allow the letter to pass. Why would the censor withhold a letter that spoke of platonic friendship between Indian friends? The writer, evidently, feared that his obvious romantic feelings would be noted by the censor.

I neither see your face nor does any letter come to me from you; how then am I to beguile my heart which is full of grief?... Go, my letter, and tell him that when you [the letter] were leaving me I was weeping and overwhelmed with grief... Where is now that happy time when each mail used to bring two or three letters from you...? However much he tries to appease his sorrow, it grows. At the expectation of a single letter from you he is, as it were, prostrated by sickness... He conjures you by the earth, [not?] to make any friendship with white clay.

Censor Officer, for God's sake let my paper [letter] go free, so that it may reach my friend! I adjure you, Censor, by the pure God, not to detain my letter! High officers of the postal service, for God's sake do not destroy my letter. Tears fall from my eyes; my pen weeps. I write this paper with drops of my blood, and so send it to my brother.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁷⁰ Dilbar (Pathan), Punjab, 21/5/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 187.

There could be no more fervent expression of the importance of the Indian mail to those who used it, nor any more uncomfortable reminder of the power of the colonial censor to witness private heartbreak and to prevent its expression – even through the passive fact of potential surveillance. The letter does not come with a mention of whether it was withheld or let pass, and so we cannot tell if the censor read the letter in the context of its homoerotic intent. These love letters, sent by Muslims, received by Muslims, speaks to the ambivalent relationship between Islam and homosexuality under British imperialism, with colonial interventions through penal codes and Sodomy Laws imposed upon Indian populaces to curb a historical openness toward homosexuality and queerness.⁶⁷¹ At the same time, homoeroticism suffuses martial race discourse. Pathans such as the writer of the last quoted letter, Dilbar, were particularly singled out by writers such as MacMunn as practitioners of a homosexuality that in fact *added* to their masculine appeal in British discourse.⁶⁷² Martial race discourse, as ever, mirrored British fears and desires of the self: “the assertive homosexuality of the Pathans added to their masculinity, rather than detracting from it... the assertive homosexuality of the Pathans added to their masculinity, rather than detracting from it.”⁶⁷³ Gajendra Singh argues that it was after World War I that the trope of the homosexual Pathan began to be treated in British discourse with disgust,

⁶⁷¹ Shafiqah Ahmadi, ‘Islam and Homosexuality: Religious Dogma, Colonial Rule, and the Quest for Belonging’, *Journal of Civil Rights and Economic Development* 26, no. 3 (n.d.): 556.

⁶⁷² MacMunn, *The Martial Races of India*, 245.

⁶⁷³ Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1914*, 26.

rather than as amusing racial foible.⁶⁷⁴ Migration to the Western Front produced correspondence that allows us rare glimpses into the innermost desires that animate the sepoy heart, beyond the prurience of colonial race stereotype.

And what can we learn of the licit world of heterosexual love between sepoys and their wives back home? Here again we find longing and anxiety, with men expressing to one another the fears they had of their wives' fidelity, the unprecedented distance and duration of European deployment straining the structures of family. One wounded soldier ends a missive: "In the time of calamity these four things are tried - faith, fortitude, friend and wife."⁶⁷⁵ Muslim soldiers retold parables of a Caliph who decreed that a man in his army could only stay three (or six, depending on the telling) months away from home, to maintain his honour in his marriage. One such soldier laments:

I have been astonished to think that when we have such a King, renowned throughout the world for his kindness and justice, he has never considered this problem and passed a rule enabling the sepoy to visit his wife and family from time to time and render to his wife 'due benevolence'.⁶⁷⁶

It is interesting to note that many of these letters about the fidelity of wives back home were exchanged between men. While anxieties were

⁶⁷⁴ Singh, *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*, 28.

⁶⁷⁵ Rifleman Amar Singh Rawat, Brighton, 26/3/1915; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 46.

⁶⁷⁶ Muhammad Ishaq, France, 14/1/1916; quoted in Omissi, 138–39.

transmitted through the correspondence, so was reassurance. Mir Ahmad Khan writes from Kohat in modern-day Pakistan to reassure his recipient (perhaps a brother) that the women at home are indeed sexually faithful, for there are hardly any men left at home:

Everything is quiet in our village and there have been no births or deaths. All the men are away in [the] infantry or cavalry, and therefore there can be no births. All the women are rampant, and ... the only thing to [do] is to send them out to join their husbands.⁶⁷⁷

Letters exchanged between men and their wives touch on the topic of fidelity as well. They run the gamut of emotions that can be expected from lovers separated for uncertain periods, by unprecedented distances, military secrecy, and the possibility of death. There are the gently reassuring words of Veterinary Assistant Kesar Singh to his wife, who in the past has never been more than six months from her husband:

Remember, however, that if in this world a man has honour, he has everything. Pray that God may keep me well and bring me back so that we may again enjoy those happy times... Do not think that, because I am far away, I may forget you, or that my affection for you may grow less.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁷ Mir Ahmad Khan, Kohat District, 28/4/1916; Mahomed Nawaz Khan, Punjab, 9/7/1916; quoted in Omissi, 180 & 204.

⁶⁷⁸ Veterinary Assistant Kesar Singh, France, 3/5/1916; quoted in Omissi, 181.

The honour of serving in the war is Kesar Singh's recompense for his separation from his lover, and he urges her value this 'honour' in the same way. The honour of being married to a man fighting for the British King-Emperor seems little comfort, especially when one considers the following two letters sent to Dafadar Prayag Singh by his wife, where the first is dated from late 1915:

Often do I see you in my dreams, but never in a state which would cause me anxiety. Question your heart. Does it not tell you that at all times I am with you in spirit? Who is there in this world, beside yourself, to whom I would give a thought? What does it matter how or where one lives, in a mansion or in a wilderness, so long as the heart is true. I am steadfast in my faith always.⁶⁷⁹

And the second in 1917:

My heart feels that it could not sustain separation from you for a single minute; but it is now three years since I was last blessed with your presence - what then must my heart suffer! I am wandering alone in the wilderness of this world. I cannot realize when it was that I last looked on your face, and I would thankfully give my life as an offering to anyone who would bring me into your presence once more.... Therefore I make this one request, that you should send for me, or write and tell me to come to you. But tell me precisely the place you are in, so that I may not fail to find it.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁹ To Dafadar Prayag Singh, UP, December 1915; quoted in Omissi, 130.

⁶⁸⁰ To Dafadar Prayag Singh, UP, 20/2/1917; quoted in Omissi, 276-77.

Prolonged loneliness and the uncertainty of ever meeting again haunt these letters, and the reader is left with the unanswerable question: did Prayag Singh manage to return to this woman? The detail of his wife desiring to know his precise location (itself a military secret that Prayag Singh would not have been able to pass through a censor) is interesting in the context of the earlier letter from Kohat I quoted, wherein the women 'running rampant' had only the solution of being sent to the frontline to be with their men. Such reunions between sepoy and wife were not possible, the distances too great, unlike the British and French soldiers who were never farther than a day from home (or farther than a day from the front, when on leave.)⁶⁸¹ Upsetting too are the men who feel alienated from their loved ones, unable to reconcile their experiences of war and trauma with the prospect of safe, happy homes, such as a soldier who accuses his wife with a poem: "We perish in the desert: you wash yourself and lie in bed."⁶⁸² Others respond to matters of the heart with callousness that could be the product of shellshock, or an attempt at black humour, such as Amar Singh who responds to questions from home regarding when he could return for his wedding:

A wedding is about to take place here, and many men have already been married. The altar [*bedi*] for my marriage has been fixed and it

⁶⁸¹ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 70.

⁶⁸² Sant Singh, 18/9/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 102. Emphasis in the original.

only remains to perform the final rites [*lawan*]... Don't be anxious. It is all very beautiful.⁶⁸³

Whether Amar Singh's fate held for him a wedding bed or the funeral bed he augured, we do not know, but it is a chilling reminder of the war wounded the hearts and minds of men and their families across great distances even before death or injury occurred.⁶⁸⁴

Before closing the discussion of the sepoy letters, one last snapshot of love, loyalty, and heroism on the Western Front, as captured in a letter I quote in full:

You reproach me with having sent you a card [instead of a letter]?
My life! What can you know of the vicissitudes of my existence here. Perhaps I wrote the card on horseback during a wild charge! Or perhaps I wrote it under a shower of bursting shells! Or perhaps I wrote it at the last gasp of life! My unjust Beloved, you reproach me when you should praise. Still, I am that lover whose lips at the moment of death will utter one word - victory. You reproach me for having not written a letter? Happy indeed am I, in that I received a letter from you, even though it contained a reproach! I kissed it till my lips were like to wear away, and now it lies over against my heart! You blame me? I love to be blamed by you!

⁶⁸³ Amar Singh, France, 5/7/1916; quoted in Omissi, 201.

⁶⁸⁴ A sowar Amar Singh, also of the 9th Hodson's Horse, died in 17/7/1917 and is commemorated at the Mazargues War Cemetery in Marseilles; but there may well have been more than one Amar Singh serving as sowar in the 9th. CWGC, 'Sowar Amar Singh | War Casualty Details 339085', CWGC, accessed 23 February 2023, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-records/find-war-dead/casualty-details/339085/amar-singh/>.

Listen. I will tell you of an incident which occurred to me, the day before yesterday. I was on the battlefield accompanied by a sowar, and came upon a wounded British soldier. 'Well friend', I said to him, 'how are things going with you?' 'Quite all right', he replied. 'I am proud I was of service in the fight, but I am thirsty.' I gave him water to drink, and asked if he wanted anything else. 'I regret nothing', he said, 'except that I shall not meet my sweetheart. She would have nothing to say to me at first, but four months ago she wrote and said that in the whole world she loved only me and begged me to come to her soon.' 'My friend', I said to him, 'may the All-Merciful God satisfy the desires of your heart, and unite you with your beloved!' 'I am finished' he said. 'And when my end comes, my one regret will be that when my love called to me I was unable to go to her.' 'My friend', I said, weeping with pity, 'my own condition is the same as yours'. I told the sowar to remove him to a safer place, as shells were falling near. He lifted him and was carrying him away, but he had not gone a hundred paces when the soldier cried out 'my beloved' and expired.⁶⁸⁵

Santanu Das also lingers on this extraordinary letter, observing that the incident of encountering the dying British soldier seems too fantastical to be true.⁶⁸⁶ The playful romance of the first paragraph is undercut by the very real danger that the writer, Hasan Shah, faced on the Western Front; though he wrote for the effect of seeming a dashing warrior, many of his compatriots would indeed have been made forever unable to write to their loved ones. Hasan Shah's rebuke

⁶⁸⁵ Jemadar Hasan Shah, France, 19/9/1916; quoted in Omissi, *Indian Voices of the Great War*, 237.

⁶⁸⁶ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 225.

to his lover (addressed as 'Dearer than Life,' with the letter posted care of a shopkeeper in the Punjab, and so she was likely not his wife) to remember the dangers under which he fought and maintained his love for her is made clearer by the melodrama of the British lover-soldier's passing. Like Das I am also inclined to consider the story an invention or an exaggeration, designed to add to the romance of Hasan Shah's letter and represent the Western Front as a space of romantic, desperate warfare where faithful lovers fought and died. In this reading, the letter brings my analysis back full circle to themes of Chapter Four, where I explored the ventriloquism of the sepoy voice to paint the Western Front with an aesthetic of chivalry and imperial loyalty. Hasan Shah, martial race sepoy, ventriloquizes the voice of the British Tommy in line with his own values of masculine, chivalrous warfare to make good with a lover that feels anxious and neglected by his absence.

The complexity of the discourses in the censor reports make a specific conclusion or argument regarding the nature of the sepoy difficult, or indeed impossible, to make. Additionally, the layers of intervention that acted upon the letters and preserved them for our reading today mean that we cannot say definitively what the nature of sepoy discourse would have been. Instead, as Spivak wrote regarding accounts of sati in colonial India, "the most one can sense is the immense heterogeneity breaking through."⁶⁸⁷ It may be pithy or self-

⁶⁸⁷ Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 297.

evident to argue that 140,000 men were indeed all individuals who resist categorization; yet the historical tide of discourse about the sepoy has exactly gone against what is obvious and prevented us from seeing men instead of tropes. Even in an archive built to indicate imperial pressures for sepoys to conform in their own discourses, we see so much that challenges simplification that we can definitively say that nothing can or should be said about what the men of the Indian Army were really like. The sepoy voice has been imagined to be saying many things; we find that there was no such thing as a 'sepoy voice.' Martial race discourse, as we can see, construed the sepoy as a particular set of unstable, contradictory imaginaries that did not contain the immensity of sepoy experience. Even as sepoys were pressured, by the British, by their communities, by themselves, to articulate their experiences in terms of martial race discourse and perform an unquestioning ideal of heroic, masculine martiality in service to Empire, we see the fine lines of the cracks underneath the mould of the colonial category. Built in India through colonial encounter in the contact zone, this moulding of the sepoy through the 'knowledge' of martial race discourse falls apart under our gaze in the military migration to the contact zone of the Western Front. Far from the martial race discourse and its tropes of sepoys who all speak and act according to what is expected of their race, we instead have an opportunity to read the lives and thoughts of people in an extraordinary moment of human history.

6. “SEPOYS NO MORE:” POST-WAR CODA

How does martial race discourse and its signifiers repeat themselves in the narrativization of the Indian army's role in World War I? To that end I turn my focus to the third contact zone of modern, multicultural Britain, where martial race discourse provided the guiding logic behind the memorialization of Indian soldiers in World War I during the commemoration of the Centenary of the War. This chapter contextualizes the moment of the Centenary and its narrativization of the sepoy presence on the Western Front in wider post-war discourses of colonial participation in World War I, within the United Kingdom and in its former Empire – now, revealingly, labelled the Commonwealth. I argue that martial race discourses dominate contemporary representations of the sepoy not just because martial race discourse acts as a body of ‘knowledge’ of the sepoy whose truth claims are not challenged, but because the ‘oxymoron of voluntary subjugation’ among the men of the Indian Army remains unquestioned in public discourse. Martial race discourse, just as it did during the war and in colonial India before it, provides a desirable narrative of the sepoy wherein the imagined heroic, Indian soldiers sacrificing themselves for the British empire are invoked to argue for the belonging of South Asian communities in modern, multicultural Britain.

World War I Commemoration and British Identity

In 2018, the Centenary of World War I, commemorative activities in the United Kingdom had an inclusive agenda. Commemoration focused on the war as it was experienced by those who did not fit in the dominant image of the white, British soldier, or the ‘Tommy.’⁶⁸⁸ State funds were poured into a wealth of public and community projects designed to broaden the understanding of the war’s scope and impact, and the BBC announced a multi-year programming strategy specifically intended to help the British public “[look] at the war from many different viewpoints.”⁶⁸⁹ Alongside inclusivity the state agenda stressed another principle. David Cameron in 2012 promised ‘a truly national commemoration’:

Our ambition is a truly national commemoration worthy of this historic centenary. A commemoration that captures our national spirit in every corner of the country, from our schools and workplaces, to our town halls and local communities. A commemoration that, like the diamond jubilee celebrations this year, says something about who we are as a people. Remembrance must be the hallmark of our commemorations.⁶⁹⁰

In the UK government’s agenda, then, war commemoration was an opportunity to display a British identity wherein inclusivity was to be compatible

⁶⁸⁸ Noakes, ‘Centenary (United Kingdom)’.

⁶⁸⁹ Prime Minister’s Office, Downing Street, ‘Plans to Mark World War I Centenary Announced’, GOV.UK, 10 November 2012, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-to-mark-world-war-i-centenary-announced>; Hall, ‘World War One: Introduction by Director-General Tony Hall’.

⁶⁹⁰ Quoted in Press Association, ‘David Cameron Reveals First World War Centenary Plans’, *The Guardian*, 11 October 2012, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/11/david-cameron-first-world-war>.

with nationalism. World War I commemoration was thus a site to address seemingly existential issues for British nationhood such as Islamic extremism and Brexit. David Cameron stressed the importance of offering up a “shared national identity that is open to everyone,” and Baroness Sayeeda Warsi argued that British Centennial commemorations needed to highlight the role played by colonial labour during the war such that ethnic minorities in Britain would understand the war as a shared national experience.⁶⁹¹ The centrality of World War I in British national identity can be placed within the context of what Paul Gilroy called a ‘postcolonial melancholia’, a British fixation upon events narrated as key moments of national triumph, firmly in the nation’s past.⁶⁹² Britain’s ethnic minorities needed to be written into this history.

British identity, Ian Baucom argues, is the result of a ‘cultivated confusion’ over the legacy of empire.⁶⁹³ In Baucom’s analysis, Britain’s relationship with empire is one of simultaneous celebration and rejection, where an imaginative nostalgia for the Raj retains a cultural life that disavows historical ties between South Asia and Britain, particularly when it comes to migration. David Dixon has written in detail on the transformation of British national identity into a racialized notion of Britishness that disavows migrants from the former colonies,

⁶⁹¹ Kristin O’Donnell, ‘We’re Here Because We’re Here: Participatory Art and the Mobilisation of First World War Memory in Post-Brexit Britain’, in *After the Armistice: Empire, Endgame and Aftermath*, ed. Michael J. K. Walsh and Andrekos Varnava, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003042761>.

⁶⁹² Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.

⁶⁹³ Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1999), 3.

centralized around the adoption of the 1981 British Nationality Act. This Nationality Act defined a new British Citizenship that reconceptualized British nationhood around a whiteness that simultaneously disavowed the Britishness of people of colour and shut the door for the easy immigration from the former empire that had in the post-World War II period helped rebuild the British economy. David Dixon referred to this as ‘obliteration of the past’: a clean new beginning for Britain inspired by the racist ideology of Enoch Powell wherein Britain delineated boundaries between itself and its former colonial empire.⁶⁹⁴ In the wake of imperial collapse, the 1981 British Nationality Act disassociated British identity from the memory of the Commonwealth and its people. Dixon argued that this allowed the British to define themselves with the sense of racial superiority engendered by empire while cutting “the ties of citizenship established in that same historical process.”⁶⁹⁵ The adoption of a racial definition of British nationhood glorifies an imperial past while rejecting the ‘white man’s burden’ posed by the claims of empire’s ex-subjects.

There is a need to correct the erasure of colonial war participation, because of the centrality of war service in the imagination of a British national identity that is hostile to the inclusion of non-white populations. In 1998, the racist British comedian Bernard Manning declared “There were no Pakis at

⁶⁹⁴ David Dixon, ‘Thatcher’s People: The British Nationality Act 1981’, *Journal of Law and Society* 10, no. 2 (1983): 164, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1410230>.

⁶⁹⁵ Dixon, 173.

Dunkirk,” despite the presence of 1,000 Indians during that World War II battle.⁶⁹⁶ When challenged on this point and told that Indians and Africans and other Commonwealth forces participated throughout the war, Manning responded that these soldiers did not “fight for us, they fought for themselves.”⁶⁹⁷ The far-right British National Party has used British war memorials to the dead to state that only those whose forefathers’ names were etched on them truly belonged in the country.⁶⁹⁸ These memorials are examples of what Pierre Nora called ‘places of memory’ (*lieux de memoire*), and what Ian Baucom calls “ultra-auratic locations” that – in this case – have etched in stone a right to belonging through ancestral military participation in the United Kingdom’s wars. The attempt to cast the World Wars as *white British* triumphs ignores the various war memorials and cemeteries dedicated to colonial, particularly Indian, war dead – such as the Chattri Memorial in Brighton, the Muslim Burial Ground in Surrey, and the memorials in Neuve-Chapelle, France, and in Basra, Iraq.⁶⁹⁹ Such processes of disavowal, of forgetting, are part and parcel of the process of constructing cultural memory and consistent with a cultivation of a British

⁶⁹⁶ Zachary Michael Powell, ‘The Form of the White Ethno-State: Dunkirk (2017) Omits Indian Soldiers for White Vulnerable Bodies’, in *New Perspectives on the War Film*, ed. Clémentine Tholas, Janis L. Goldie, and Karen A. Ritzenhoff (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 266, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-23096-8>.

⁶⁹⁷ ‘Bernard Manning Talking About Hitchikers, Blacks & Dunkirk’, *The Mrs Merton Show* (BBC One, 19 March 1998), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbldMCfjq4>.

⁶⁹⁸ Ware, *Military Migrants*, 15.

⁶⁹⁹ Susan L.T. Ashley, ‘Re-Colonizing Spaces of Memorializing: The Case of the Chattri Indian Memorial, UK’, ed. Leanne Cutcher et al., *Organization* 23, no. 1 (January 2016): 29–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508415605101>; Michèle Barrett, ‘Subalterns at War: First World War Colonial Forces and the Politics of the Imperial War Graves Commission’, *Interventions* 9, no. 3 (November 2007): 451–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698010701618703>; Ware, *Military Migrants*, 10.

imperial amnesia that erases the presence and claims of formerly colonized populations within a whitewashed imperial history.

As an example of initiatives to ‘remember’ the presence of non-white populations in the war, we may consider David Olusoga’s BBC documentary miniseries *The World’s War: Forgotten Soldiers of the Empire*, and the Forgotten Heroes 14-19 Foundation that is devoted to telling the story of Muslim participation in World War I.⁷⁰⁰ Furthermore, schools have been encouraged to look into the colonial dimensions of the war, highlighting the role played by soldiers from the empire via school visits to battlefields and memorials such as the memorial to Indian soldiers at Neuve-Chapelle in France.⁷⁰¹ The UK Heritage Lottery has funded events such as *Far From the Western Front*, where stories of South Asian servicemen were showcased “to complicate both the dominant British narrative of the First World War as trench warfare in France and Belgium, and common depiction of the British forces as white.”⁷⁰² Today’s British minorities are to feel included in a British national identity through the history of colonial war participation.

⁷⁰⁰ Forgotten Heroes 14-19 Foundation, ‘The Muslim Experience in World War I’, accessed 14 February 2019, <http://www.muslimsinww1.com/>; *The World’s War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire*, 2014, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3967920/>.

⁷⁰¹ Pennell, ‘Taught to Remember?’

⁷⁰² Ben Wellings, Shanti Sumartojo, and Matthew Graves, ‘Commemorating Race and Empire in the First World War Centenary’, in *Commemorating Race and Empire in the First World War Centenary*, ed. Ben Wellings, Shanti Sumartojo, and Matthew Graves (Liverpool University Press, 2018), 1.

There are signs that such initiatives to highlight the role of colonial soldiers are bearing fruit; in 2014, 44 per cent of the British population were 'aware' of Indian soldiers in World War I, and in 2016 that percentage rose to 68.⁷⁰³ This growing awareness of colonial – particularly Indian and Muslim – involvement in the history of World War I is encouraged by actors that range from British politicians to religious leaders to army officials.⁷⁰⁴ British South Asians communities with ties to Undivided India have also long taken pains to showcase their belonging within World War I's military history, and thereby within the British nation. Since 1999, British, French and Belgian Muslims have been making pilgrimages to the Menin Gate in Ypres to pay homage to the fallen Sikhs commemorated on the memorial, continuing past the Centenary.⁷⁰⁵ The Chattri Memorial to Indian soldiers in Brighton has since 2000 been looked after by the local South Asian community, who commemorate the soldiers annually in June in a self-consciously Indian style that Susan Ashley called both an act of decolonization and recolonization...

⁷⁰³ Noakes, 'Centenary (United Kingdom)'.

⁷⁰⁴ Cohen, 'Militarisation, Memorialisation & Multiculture'.

⁷⁰⁵ Santanu Das, 'Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18: Archive, Language, and Feeling', *Twentieth Century British History* 25, no. 3 (1 September 2014): 416, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tcbh/hwu033>; Michaël Torfs, 'Bhupinder Singh Honoured in Ieper for First World War Remembrance Efforts', *Vrtnews.Be*, 11 January 2019, <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnews/en/2019/11/01/bhupinder-singh-honoured-in-ieper-for-first-world-war-merits/>.

... Signif[ying] and affirm[ing] an Indian presence in a British social, political and military milieu, constructed through the performance and reproduced through news media broadcasts about the event.⁷⁰⁶

However, in attempting to undo a racialized whitewashing of British war history and identity, another form of whitewashing takes place where the complexities and discomforts of the military migration of colonized populations is left unaddressed.

The Loyal Sepoy in Militarized Multiculture

Analysing the ways in which British schoolchildren are taught about the multicultural nature of the war, Catriona Pennell has identified a lack of engagement with race and racism and instead a focus on the Indian sepoy, who embodies a...

... Heroic 'martial races' narrative of colonial troop experience... which overlooks more complex and contentious issues such as wartime racial hierarchy, exploitation and mistreatment.⁷⁰⁷

Martial race discourse allows for an imagination of war history where colonial soldiers can be framed as a source of pride in a multiethnic Britain. In this respect, the Centenary repeats the process of the half-Centenary. Meghan Tinsley argued that British attempts to celebrate the participation of colonial soldiers in WWI in the 1960s reflected a need to provide an inclusive narrative for the

⁷⁰⁶ Ashley, 'Re-Colonizing Spaces of Memorializing', 42.

⁷⁰⁷ Pennell, 'Taught to Remember?', 89.

changing demographics of a postcolonial Britain, playing on nostalgic tropes of a united empire and an uncomplicated nationalism where black and brown are present but the history of imperial subjugation erased.⁷⁰⁸ British nationalism's obsession with the 'morbid militaria' of heroic death in combat in service of nation and empire merges with martial race discourse to blot out critical discussions of the Indian soldier that go beyond the trope of imperialist loyalty and sacrifice.⁷⁰⁹

A history of Indian war participation must acknowledge empire. British amnesia over imperialism is evident in Baroness Warsi's remark: "Our boys weren't just Tommies – they were Tariqs and Tajinders too, and we have a duty to remember their bravery and commemorate their sacrifices."⁷¹⁰ Warsi's rhetoric places the colonial subaltern soldier on the same platform as the figurative white Tommy: all are Britain's boys. It is an imagination that Santanu Das gently chastened: Tommy, Tariq and Tajinder were all in the trenches together, but they were not equals.⁷¹¹ However, the desire to defend the mere fact of Indian war participation tends to veer into celebrating the sepoy along martial race tropes.

⁷⁰⁸ Meghan Tinsley, 'We Will Re-Member Them': Muslims in the Great War Semi-Centenary', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14, no. 3 (December 2014): 411–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12101>.

⁷⁰⁹ Paul Gilroy, 'Multiculture, Double Consciousness and the "War on Terror"', *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 4 (December 2005): 434, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220500347899>.

⁷¹⁰ Jane Merrick and Kashmira Gander, 'Special Report: The Centenary of WWI - "Tommies and Tariqs Fought Side by Side"', *The Independent*, 23 June 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/special-report-the-centenary-of-wwi-tommies-and-tariqs-fought-side-by-side-8669758.html>.

⁷¹¹ Das, 'Indian Sepoy Experience in Europe, 1914-18', 1 September 2014, 417.

One of the most instructive demonstrations of the contemporary climate in the United Kingdom concerning Indian war participation is the Laurence Fox incident in early 2020. Fox, at the time a minor British actor and now minor right-wing political activist, criticized the film *1917* (2019) for its depiction of a Sikh soldier in the British army, which he argued was an immersion-breaking instance of ‘forced diversity.’⁷¹² The backlash to Fox’s comment was fascinatingly disproportionate to his actual stature in the British cultural landscape. He was lambasted by the media industry within and beyond Britain, and politicians got involved as well, with the Chief Minister of the Punjab (historically the heartland of the Sikh people) calling Fox’s comments “bunkum” and the Sikh Labour MP for Slough Tan Dhesi writing an op-ed in *Mirror* emphasizing the outsize role played by Sikhs in Britain’s imperial military history, and their “sacrifices.”⁷¹³ This

⁷¹² *1917*; Sebastian Shakespeare and Henry Martin, ‘Actor Laurence Fox Slams Oscar-Winning Director Sam Mendes over “incongruous” Sikh Soldier in Blockbuster Movie *1917* as He Says “Forcing Diversity on People” Is “Institutionally Racist”’, *Mail Online*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-7909283/SEBASTIAN-SHAKESPEARE-Laurence-Fox-goes-war-Sam-Mendes-Sikh-soldier-movie-1917.html>.

⁷¹³ ‘Laurence Fox Apologises to Sikhs for “clumsy” 1917 Comments - BBC News’, *BBC News*, 24 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-51233734>; Mel Evans, ‘Laurence Fox Mercilessly Mocked in Baftas Opener after 1917 Comments’, *Metro*, 3 February 2020, <https://metro.co.uk/2020/02/03/laurence-fox-mercilessly-mocked-baftas-opener-1917-forced-diversity-comments-12171342/>; Rebecca Davison, ‘Laurence Fox Receives Apology and out of Court Settlement from Equity’, *Mail Online*, 13 March 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-8108505/Laurence-Fox-receives-apology-court-settlement-Equity.html>; Amit Roy, ‘1917 Sikh Lesson for Actor Laurence Fox: Nabhaan Rizwan Casting “Incongruous”’, *The Telegraph*, 30 January 2020, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/entertainment/1917-sikh-lesson-for-actor-laurence-fox-nabhaan-rizwan-casting-incongruous/cid/1740810>; FP Staff, ‘Punjab CM Criticises 1917 Star Laurence Fox over “forcing Diversity” Remark; Actor Issues Apology to Sikh Community’, 25 January 2020, <https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/punjab-cm-criticises-1917-star-laurence-fox-over-forcing-diversity-remark-actor-issues-apology-to-sikh-community-7954981.html>; Tan Dhesi, ‘“Laurence Fox Must Apologise for Bigoted 1917 Views - 83,000 Sikhs Died for Britain”’, *Mirror*, 23 January 2020, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/laurence-fox-must-apologise-bigoted-21346614>.

rhetoric of sacrifice, repeated by Dhesi and Warsi, regurgitates the view of acquiescent, colonial war service, the myth of sepoys that fought for ‘izzat’.

The erasure of imperial subjectivity and race hierarchy in war commemoration also elides the necessity of showcasing a history of war participation and imperial loyalty as a way of defending one’s community from charges of being out of place within, and disloyalty to, a modern British state. For example, commemorating the Muslim sepoy has become a strategy (to an extent even a necessity) for British Muslim communities to display their loyalties to Britain, particularly in the context of the War on Terror, and the British state (especially the armed forces) is keen on commemorating the Muslim soldier in history to create a narrative of common, multicultural purpose that is in line with the military interests of the British state – again in the context of the War on Terror and its hydra offshoots.⁷¹⁴ This ‘militarized multicultural’, as Vron Ware put it, in Britain is in line with the mentality of postcolonial melancholia where the complications of an imperial history are erased to instead linger on faded glories imperial war and death as the basis of national inclusion for non-white, non-British populations.⁷¹⁵ A history of military participation linked to minorities’ military participation today becomes the price of inclusion in a British body politic belligerent to “aliens, Blacks, foreigners, Muslims and other interlopers.”⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁴ Cohen, ‘Militarisation, Memorialisation & Multiculture’; Ware, *Military Migrants*.

⁷¹⁵ Ware, *Military Migrants*.

⁷¹⁶ Gilroy, ‘Multiculture, Double Consciousness and the “War on Terror”’, 435.

Militarized nationalism is inaccessible to communities that cannot claim the history of imperial military participation, even more so troubling as the history of war participation becomes erased. As early as 2007 Michèle Barrett documented the failures of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (founded during World War I as the Imperial War Graves Commission) to live up to its stated goals of equality in commemoration when it came to the memorialization of black and Asian dead, a scandal that came to a head in April 2021 following a UK inquiry into the Commission's history of racialized neglect, for which the Commission issued apologies.⁷¹⁷ The erasure of African (for example) military participation in the memorials of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission thus represent a writing out of black bodies from the militarized nation of Britain, and the push to reclaim this history cannot be read outside the context of the need to assert communal war participation to belong to a modern British nation. The Indian sepoy's martial race narrative makes his easier to 'remember,' allowing – or perhaps necessitating – South Asian populations that can attach themselves to the martial race identity to benefit from a British sympathy built on war reverence. Exclusionary logics and mediated

⁷¹⁷ Barrett, 'Subalterns at War'; Rajeev Syal, 'UK Inquiry Blames "Pervasive Racism" for Unequal Commemoration of Troops', *The Guardian*, 21 April 2021, sec. UK News, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/21/uk-inquiry-blames-pervasive-racism-for-unequal-commemoration-of-black-and-asian-troops>; David Lammy, 'This War Graves Report Shows Britain Must Face Its Colonial Past with Honesty', *The Guardian*, 23 April 2021, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/apr/23/war-graves-report-britain-colonial-past-soldiers-died-unremembered-race>; Alexandra Topping, 'UK Failure to Commemorate Black and Asian War Dead Known "for Years"', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2021, sec. UK news, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/22/scandal-of-unequal-commemoration-of-uks-ww1-dead-known-about-for-years>.

inclusion go hand in hand in war commemoration, with some communities left out, others such as British Muslims having to perform a historical loyalty to avoid the stigma of being ‘suspect communities,’ and yet other bodies such as the Sikhs playing on a long-acknowledged history of war participation to become ‘model minorities’:

Rearticulating the colonial Sikh subject, in order to secure their place in the multicultural nation – unwittingly reproducing the exclusionary terms on which British national identity seems to be founded, in the very act of trying to disrupt the white narration of its history.⁷¹⁸

Whose ‘boys’ are these sepoys? To whom does their memory belong? Britain’s or India’s? The commemoration of the colonial soldier has been largely pushed by migrant communities hailing from the former colonial peripheries and now living in the centres of faded empire, efforts now enthusiastically embraced by these same states in a retelling of the past as an uncomplicated instance of imperial loyalty and mutual effort that resolves the biopolitical tensions of multiculturalism and national disunity.⁷¹⁹ These colonial soldiers were long forgotten in postcolonial states as an embarrassing reminder of colonial collaboration – for indeed what is left out of commemoration of the colonial

⁷¹⁸ Qureshi, ‘Diasporic Citizenship and Militarization’, 411.

⁷¹⁹ Karine Varley, ‘“All Quiet on the French Front”: The First World War Centenary in France and the Challenges of Republican Consensus’, *Comillas Journal of International Relations*, no. 2 (29 April 2015): 86–99, <https://doi.org/10.14422/cir.i02.y2015.007>; Wellings, Sumartojo, and Graves, ‘Commemorating Race and Empire in the First World War Centenary’.

soldier as a figure who defended the British or French Empires from the Central Powers is the chief purpose of the colonial soldier as a tool of imperial repression *within* the colony. Only recently, in line with the commemorative boom of the Centenary, have there been efforts in postcolonial states such as India and Senegal to ‘remember’ the forgotten sepoy as a means of placing their national histories within the context of global crises such as World War I and to reframe their relationships with their former imperial masters as partnerships and not subaltern coercion.⁷²⁰

There is an ambivalence to the colonial soldier – Indian sepoys, African tirailleurs and askari – lost to the “mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath.”⁷²¹ Postcolonial states forgot these “imperfect subalterns”⁷²² who acted as tools of imperial repression, and former imperial powers forgot the role played by colonial militaries except to remember in times of centennial celebration that elide questions of coercion and colonial agency to instead focus on a trope of loyal colonial sacrifice. Britain’s relationship with empire is one of simultaneous celebration and rejection, where an imaginative nostalgia for the Raj retains a

⁷²⁰ Costanzo, ‘Memory and History of the Great(Er) War and India’; Ruth Ginio, ‘African Silences: Negotiating the Story of France’s Colonial Soldiers, 1914–2009’, in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben-Ze’ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thomas DeGeorges, ‘Still Behind Enemy Lines? Algerian and Tunisian Veterans after the World Wars’, in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, ed. Heike Liebau et al., Studies in Global Social History, v. 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands ; Boston: Brill, 2010).

⁷²¹ Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Sydney, AUSTRALIA: Allen & Unwin, 2014), 4, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/shu/detail.action?docID=274294>.

⁷²² Das, ‘The Singing Subaltern’, 6.

cultural life that not only ignores, but actively resists, grappling with the reality of India and other modern postcolonial states.⁷²³ Is the sepoy truly ‘remembered’ if the discourse frames him only as a sacrificing, hitherto-forgotten hero? It is remarkable to consider that in the 21st century it is socially acceptable to speak of colonized populations fighting for their oppressors in such a fashion; and yet the trope is rarely questioned. Some of Britain’s South Asian, particularly Muslim, communities reject the notion of publicly displaying loyalty to Britain through commemorating sepoy war participation: the history of imperial subjugation and its legacy of contemporary Islamophobia in Britain cannot be reconciled through militarizing multicultural commemoration.⁷²⁴ Even communities whose martial race image is not complicated by alternative discourses (such as Islamophobia) do not necessarily benefit: Gurkha veterans in the United Kingdom were as recently as August 2021 on hunger strike over discriminatory pension schemes.⁷²⁵ Vron Ware’s analysis of the rights of Gurkha veterans of the British Army in the United Kingdom has highlighted the public discourse that these martial race warriors have earned the right to belong in the British polity, in contrast to the wrong kind of claimants: “those economic migrants and spongers who had nothing to contribute in return.”⁷²⁶ Martial race discourse and the imagination of the loyal

⁷²³ Baucom, *Out of Place*, 5.

⁷²⁴ Cohen, ‘Militarisation, Memorialisation & Multiculture’, 66.

⁷²⁵ ‘Gurkha Group Ends Downing Street Hunger Strike after Talks Agreed’, *BBC News*, 19 August 2021, sec. Hampshire & Isle of Wight, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-hampshire-58274264>.

⁷²⁶ Ware, *Military Migrants*, 18.

sepoys in the past or the present mediates modern British attitudes to the figure of the 'good' migrant:

During a time when the noxious politics of immigration control had become re-centred as an electoral issue, the groundswell of public opinion indicated that those who had fought for Britain deserved the right to live there, regardless of nationality or cost to the public purse. However, far from proving that racism had disappeared, the episode simply demonstrated that it was necessary to distinguish between good immigrants and bad ones. The BNP, for example, caught between the logic of loyalty to soldiers and an agenda that favours only citizens of 'ancestral stock', dodged the contradiction by announcing: 'We would actually be happy to have the Gurkhas if we can swap them, for instance, for the very significant number from the Muslim population in this country who identify with al Qaida and who are not loyal to this country.'⁷²⁷

The image of the loyal sepoy, then, is less a guarantor of rights and equality to the 'good' migrant communities that were martial races, but a gatekeeper against the entry of populations who can be claimed to have no right to belong in modern Britain.

The most striking evidence of the fractures that underlie the commemoration of the sepoy is the vandalism of the statue, *Lions of the Great War* in 2018. The statue, *Lions of the Great War*, had been unveiled on November 4, just a week before the Centenary of the Armistice. The statue was the latest in a

⁷²⁷ Ware, 19.

handful of statues in Britain dedicated to the memory of Sikh members of the colonial armed forces of the British Empire and often built as a point of pride by British Sikhs and their gurdwara communities.⁷²⁸ 10 feet tall, the statue depicted a lone, bearded, turbaned Sikh geared and dressed for the cold mud of the trenches, cradling a rifle, and gazing determinedly upward from a granite plinth. The sculptor, Luke Perry, referred to the statue as a celebration of Britain's multicultural population and a "statement of togetherness and unity;" the local Council Leader expressed pleasure at Smethwick hosting a corrective to the lack of recognition given to the "sacrifices" of South Asians during the war.⁷²⁹

Lions of the Great War was found vandalized on the 9th of November.

Vandalism of a "statement of togetherness and unity" might seem some sort of nativist assault on the memorialization of South Asian participation in British history and the British national community, perhaps by the hand of a person who had believed Fox's words that "forced diversity" in war memory was "institutionally racist."⁷³⁰ Yet the nature of the vandalism scuppers that interpretation. The words 'sepoys no more' had been graffitied onto the statue, and 'The Great War' spray-painted out of the inscription and replaced with '1 jarnoil', speculated to be a reference to Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale — a Sikh

⁷²⁸ Amrik Singh Banse, 'Sikh Soldiers' Valour and Laurels in the UK', *The Sikh Review* 69, no. 815 (November 2021).

⁷²⁹ Archer, 'UK's First Statue of South Asian WW1 Soldier Unveiled in Smethwick'.

⁷³⁰ Shakespeare and Martin, 'Actor Laurence Fox Slams Oscar-Winning Director Sam Mendes over "incongruous" Sikh Soldier in Blockbuster Movie 1917 as He Says "Forcing Diversity on People" Is "Institutionally Racist"'.

separatist assassinated by the Indian state's assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984, a perceived blow against the Sikh faith for which the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards.⁷³¹ Hardly the sort of historical reference one associates with UKIP or the British National Party. Did a Sikh identarian deface *Lions of the Great War* to declare that the Sikh peoples were no longer sepoys, soldiers for other nations? Or did the hand wielding the spray-can belong to some other Indian community for whom '1 jarnoil' acted as a scathing indictment of Sikhs as dependable soldiers? It is still unknown who vandalized *Lions of the Great War* or why, but under the slogans graffitied on its surface are historical undercurrents that destabilize any simple suggestions of a stable Sikh presence in Indian national and British imperial histories.

The sepoy, a stereotype, and a caricature, lionized and placed on a pedestal, is rejected as a narrative: he is 'no more.' Looking back to the genesis of martial race discourse and the migration of the colonial Indian soldier to World War I, I suggest that the anonymous vandal could have gone further with their message. The sepoy never was.

⁷³¹ Press Association, 'Statue of Sikh Soldier Vandalised in Smethwick', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/10/statue-sikh-soldier-vandalised-smethwick-birmingham-war-memorial>; Mahesh A. Kaira, 'Operation Blue Star: India's First Tryst with Militant Extremism', *DNA*, 11 May 2016, <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-operation-blue-star-india-s-first-tryst-with-militant-extremism-2270293>.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis is the outcome of a three year long research project during which I tried to make sense of the disquieting questions I had when I began to read about the Indian soldier in World War I. Claire Buck's 'oxymoron of voluntary subjugation' captured the issue well, but its pithy phrasing does not do justice to the almost breathtaking disjuncture between this oxymoron on one hand, and on the other a discourse that could speak of Indian sepoy heroically fighting for empire in a war otherwise narrativized as unnecessary and traumatizing for European participants. Surely Indian soldiers could not have been so unquestioningly loyal in such a war on behalf of their colonizers, far from home?

My research quickly stumbled onto martial race discourse, which I identified through Heather Streets' work as a British imagination of the Indian soldier, with a crucial chapter in Streets' *Martial Races* exploring how the martial races negotiated their own identities amid this representation.⁷³² I was at the same time reading David Omissi's *Indian Voices of the Great War* and was immediately confronted with Indian soldiers proclaiming their devotion to the King-Emperor and the British cause, and with a contradictory current of clear war trauma. I had also begun my research in 2018 by reading Michèle Barrett's article exploring the neglect of colonial soldiers' graves and memorials by the

⁷³² Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*, chap. 6.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission, with Indian soldiers relatively better taken care of, but even within this context the CWGC had expended far more effort on the memory of Indian soldiers dead in Europe versus in the Middle East.⁷³³ Putting all these sources together it was clear that a martial race imagination of Indian soldiers as heroic and loyal warriors for empire was a desirable narrative for British audiences who wanted prominent displays of Indian soldiers' 'sacrifice' as a symbolism of empire as a non-coercive system, where the colonized were valued and trustworthy allies. The gravesites of Indians in Europe are, as Barrett argued, for a British and European audience symbols of imperial power.⁷³⁴ Martial race discourse narrated this exercise of imperial power over the subaltern as consensual in the case of an Indian army, whose devotion was constructed as chivalrous and honourable, not weakly servile. The men of the Indian Army themselves internalized the notion of honour and prestige through war service, intersecting with the statements of loyalty made by Indian intelligentsia during the war. However, unlike the political ambitions of India's elite, the martial races seemed to have little desire for political autonomy but were instead motivated by a dual system of economic incentives and military prestige. A martial race discourse that kept the martial races as the recruits of the army was in the interests of the martial races to sustain and maintain in their own discourse.

⁷³³ Barrett, 'Subalterns at War'.

⁷³⁴ Barrett, 464.

Ascertaining that the Indian army's representation in their recruitment, deployment, and representation across their encounter with Europe during World War I, I devoted myself to unpacking the origins, contradictions, and mechanisms of martial race discourse; chiefly, in understanding what 'discourse,' as a term of art, meant in this context of colonial power. I broke the structure of the thesis down into an examination of three contact zones, inspired by the work of Mary Louise Pratt, to understand how martial race discourse operated in encounters between Indians and Britons across three distinct but related environments: colonial India, the Western Front, and modern Britain. These contact zones are in the context of migration in colonial and postcolonial eras, and I read martial race discourse as the framing that represented Indians to Britons during these moments of mobility and encounter. I decided to focus primarily on the first two contact zone as a means of answering preliminary questions about the British contact zone; due to the turbulence of COVID-19 I abandoned any thoughts I had about doing UK-based fieldwork on contemporary British commemoration, the better to devote myself to the historical archive at hand.

To summarize the analysis of martial race discourse in this thesis, I began in Chapter Two with an exploration of colonial discourses of race and an overview of the colonial and migration turns in World War I literature. In Chapter Three I charted the development of martial race discourse as a British discourse that articulated British fears and desires of racial resemblance and difference to India's

various populations. Rural martial races were lionized as the ideal British self-reflection in and Indian body and a contrast to India's Westernized intelligentsia, whose proximity to Britishness was psychically disturbing and upsetting to colonial order. At the same time, these martial races were colonial subalterns and racially constituted as inferior to the British, who alone possessed the idealized, masculine qualities absent in both the martial and non-martial races of India. The crux of martial race discourse is thus the tension between the British, colonial desire to draw close to a favoured subaltern group, while enforcing distance. The sepoy emerges as a fantasy of colonial loyalty and deference, an unthreatening colonial mimic content in his indefinite racial inferiority; the sepoy also emerges as the disquieting reminder of the artifice of this imagination. In Chapter Four the analysis moved to literary representations of the sepoy during his migration to the world-altering violence of the Western Front, a moment in time that saw European self-conceptualizations as civilized and racially superior, and nevertheless reaching ambivalently toward the figure of chivalrous but racially subaltern colonial warriors. I noted the trend of ventriloquist British literature, wherein fictional sepoys acted as mouthpieces reiterating the truisms of martial race discourse to assuage the anxieties of the British and their allies – and I noted the ambivalences of this exercise and how revelatory it was of those same disavowed anxieties. Chapter Five explored Indian approaches to martial race discourse, both in the Home Front and in the correspondence of sepoys on the Western Front. Martial race discourse is an important lens through which to

study Indian discourses during World War I as an idealised figure of martial masculinity to which Indian populations aspired – martial and non-martial races alike. The circumstances of the war strained the ability to feasibly perform martial race masculinity, while at the same time the fantasy of demonstrating the military worth of one's own community, religion or race helped navigate, for many sepoys and the members of their communities, the traumas of the war. I argue that while martial race discourses are central to understanding Indian discourses during the war, the fantasy of the unquestioningly loyal, heroic sepoy leaves out the complexity of feeling of sepoy discourses. That is, between Chapters Four and Five, I show that martial race discourse acts as an inescapable shadow over discourses of the sepoy and by the sepoy, but it is always a projection, a fantasy to live up to, protect, or fight against, and in these reactions to the discourse we glimpse revelatory truths about the sepoys, their communities, their British officers, and the writers who fantasized them. Lastly, Chapter Six explored the reverberations of martial race discourse in contemporary British commemorations of World War I, wherein the figure of the loyal colonial sepoy returns to erect a barrier to recognition and inclusion in a modern, militarized multicultural Britain, wherein migrant communities must perform a history of military contribution and sacrifice for Britain to gain acceptance within a British body politic hostile to non-white immigrants, blind to all but a whitewashed, nostalgic history of empire.

It was not possible to use this project to look deeper into modern discourses of the Indian soldier in Britain. Future research could approach modern articulations of the sepoy figure more specifically to see how martial race stereotypes continue to inform discourse. Indeed, more in-depth analysis of the state of today's discourse could reveal interesting ways in which the discourse is being moved past; a study of an important *absence*, as contrasted to this thesis where I looked for the *presence* of the discourse. A range of post-war representations of the Indian sepoy including novels such as John Master's *The Ravi Lancers* (1987)⁷³⁵ show evolutions of martial race discourse in the wake of Indian independence, where British officers are written through a more critical lens and the colonial relationship framed as one that was detrimental to the Indian body and spirit. However, *The Ravi Lancers*, like the recent Punjabi film *Sajjan Singh Rangroot* (2018)⁷³⁶ (the first Indian film about World War I), reproduces martial race discourse through portraying Indian soldiers as heroic figures led by a frequently callous British colonial authority that did not deserve their loyalty – martial race discourse that valorizes the Indian body to denigrate the colonizer, not the other way around. However, martial race discourse used 'positively' can still serve to reinforce the notion of certain communities that are martial, noble, and masculine and thus more worthy of sympathy than others. Future research could investigate the images deployed in the growing body of

⁷³⁵ John Masters, *The Ravi Lancers* (Time Warner Books, 1987).

⁷³⁶ *Sajjan Singh Rangroot* (Grand Showbiz Media and Entertainment Limited, 2018).

Indian media and political interest in war commemoration to note what discourses are in operation. Martial race discourse is likely to be prominent, owing to the dominance of the martial races still in the modern Indian military.⁷³⁷ Postcolonial articulations of martial race discourse in India and Pakistan are worthy, but ambitious, projects to delve into; a possible avenue with which to begin could be to ask if and how articulations of sepoy loyalty during the war are used as a means of attaining soft power in relations with the United Kingdom.

The avenue of research that I would most like to see explored in the future is martial race discourse in the context of the split between Pakistan and Bangladesh. There is yet no systematic study of martial race discourse as the dominant discourse behind post-independence Pakistan's colonial logic, though various authors have gestured toward this reading. Following independence from Britain, the combined state of Pakistan with its Western and Eastern wings became dominated by a militarized elite. Due to the concentration of military power under British colonialism in the Punjabi 'garrison state', Muslim Punjabis gradually monopolized control over Pakistan.⁷³⁸ This post-independence capture of state power by Punjabis was not just an outcome of the colonial military racial composition; the discourse continued to structure the Punjabi military elite's self-imagination as martial conquerors and rulers. Meanwhile, Bengalis, who had

⁷³⁷ Menaka Guruswamy, 'Why the Indian Army Needs to Abandon the Colonial Concept of "Martial Races"', *Scroll.In*, 11 July 2016, <http://scroll.in/article/811303/why-the-indian-army-needs-to-abandon-the-colonial-concept-of-martial-races>.

⁷³⁸ Tan, *The Garrison State*; John Braithwaite and Bina D'Costa, *Cascades of Violence: War, Crime and Peacebuilding Across South Asia* (ANU Press, 2018), 334.

been unrepresented in the pre-independence military, continued to be sidelined in the Pakistani military, and therefore Pakistani politics, in a process Willem Van Schendel likened as an ‘internal colonization’ of East by West.⁷³⁹ The colonialist economic exploitation of East Pakistan by West Pakistan is well-documented, with Rehman Sobhan’s work being particularly authoritative on the subject.⁷⁴⁰ The “economic strangulation” of the Bengalis by Punjabis gave rise to a Bengali nationalism in Pakistan, the eventual military crackdown by the West to suppress said nationalism in 1971, the East’s declaration of independence as Bangladesh, and the Bangladesh Liberation War.⁷⁴¹ The violence perpetrated by the Pakistani army and its local Bengali collaborators upon Bangladeshis during the nine months of war has been described as a ‘genocide’, with various rebuttals and qualifications to that label raised in the scholarship.⁷⁴² Scholarship does not debate that the Pakistani state scapegoated Bengali Hindus as the source of discord within the supposedly Muslim nation state of united Pakistan and wished to destroy the Hindu community – whether this desire was genocidal in its

⁷³⁹ Willem van Schendel, *A History of Bangladesh* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 194–95.

⁷⁴⁰ Rehman Sobhan, *From Two Economies to Two Nations: My Journey to Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Daily Star Books, 2015).

⁷⁴¹ Anthony Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh: A Legacy of Blood* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), 14 & 21.

⁷⁴² Amit Ranjan, ‘Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971: Narratives, Impacts and the Actors’, *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 72, no. 2 (June 2016): 132–45, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928416637921>; Sarmila Bose, ‘The Question of Genocide and the Quest for Justice in the 1971 War’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 13, no. 4 (November 2011): 393–419, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2011.625750>; Yelena Biberman and Rachel Castellano, ‘Genocidal Violence, Nation-Building, and the Bloody Birth of Bangladesh’, *Asian Security* 14, no. 2 (4 May 2018): 106–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2017.1335712>; Mascarenhas, *Bangladesh*; Naeem Mohaiemen, ‘Flying Blind: Waiting for a Real Reckoning on 1971’, *Economic and Political Weekly* xlvi, no. 36 (2011): 13.

exercise, and whether the violence translated to genocidal intent against the Bengali population at large are the questions debated.⁷⁴³ However, scholarship on the Pakistani discourses underlying the colonialism before the war and the war during it argues that Bengalis as a whole were perceived as non-martial and effeminate by the Punjabi elite, with Muslim Bengalis suspected of being under impure Hindu influences.⁷⁴⁴ Thus, the British colonial discourses of Bengali emasculation, racial inferiority and untrustworthiness were transferred to their former martial races, whose rhetoric shifted to dwell on a supposedly Hindu Bengali identity as the main signifier (itself a continuation of British discrimination against Bengalis as Hindus, and a relative preference for Muslims.)⁷⁴⁵ Martial race discourses of Bengali inferiority and Punjabi superiority, reframed as a conflict over a racialized Islamic purity, played out in a war where sexual violence was used as a deliberate weapon of war to racially cleanse an impure Bengali nation. Nayanika Mookherjee, perhaps the leading authority on sexual violence during the war, writes:

Documents of various colonial and historical constructions reveal that Bengali Muslims were construed as Hinduized, effeminate,

⁷⁴³ Bose, 'The Question of Genocide and the Quest for Justice in the 1971 War'; Biberman and Castellano, 'Genocidal Violence, Nation-Building, and the Bloody Birth of Bangladesh'; Yasmin Saikia, 'Insāniyat for Peace: Survivors' Narrative of the 1971 War of Bangladesh', *Journal of Genocide Research* 13, no. 4 (November 2011): 475–501, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2011.625739>; Nayanika Mookherjee, 'The Absent Piece of Skin: Gendered, Racialized and Territorial Inscriptions of Sexual Violence during the Bangladesh War', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 06 (November 2012): 1572–1601, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X11000783>.

⁷⁴⁴ Saikia, 'Insāniyat for Peace'.

⁷⁴⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 202.

lazy, dark and conniving by British colonial officials—a construction which is also applied by the Pakistani army in the context of the sexual violation of Bangladeshi men and women. The discourse of genetic inscription in the act of sexual violence seems to suggest, an attempt to transform the very substance and personhood of Bengali Muslims into pure Muslims. In addition, this practice is also an attempt to leave behind a trace of the Pakistani soldier in the womb of the Bengali woman, with the hope that the children born would reflect later, in independent Bangladesh, the characteristics of their biological father and of the father embodied in the nation of Pakistan. This, I would argue, along with the earlier mentioned citationality of colonial discourses in the act of rape, renders the act of sexual violence during wars a racialized performance.⁷⁴⁶

Scholarship continues to argue that martial race discourses operate strongly in Pakistan's military hierarchy, with the discourse internalized by the Punjabi state and combined with an Islamic national identity.⁷⁴⁷ As of yet, however, there has been no systematic study that draws together pre-independence martial race discourses with the scholarship on martial race discourse's salience in Punjabi military state capture, the colonialism perpetrated

⁷⁴⁶ Mookherjee, 'The Absent Piece of Skin', 1600.

⁷⁴⁷ V. Vidya Lakshmi, 'Pakistan Army: Martial Race or National Army', 1 June 2016, <https://mantraya.org/pakistan-army-martial-race-or-national-army/>; Ashique Ali Jhatial, Nelarine Cornelius, and James Wallace, 'Rhetorics and Realities of Management Practices in Pakistan: Colonial, Post-Colonial and Post-9/11 Influences', *Business History* 56, no. 3 (3 April 2014): 456–84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00076791.2013.800970>; Mark Briskey, 'The Foundations of Pakistan's Strategic Culture: Fears of an Irredentist India, Muslim Identity, Martial Race, and Political Realism', *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 2022, no. special (16 March 2022): 130–52, <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.2022S1stratculoo8>.

upon East Pakistan, and the racialized and sexualized violence upon a fledgling Bengali nation discursively constructed as effeminate, weak and Hindu. A research project that draws this throughline and approaches the combined story of Pakistan and Bangladesh through a martial race lens would be a valuable contribution to postcolonial scholarship and genocide studies. However, such research would have to be done with the full awareness that the subject is politically incendiary in both Bangladesh and Pakistan, potentially to the point of being impracticable. Scholarship does not take primacy over personal safety.

Returning to the subject of this thesis for a final note, it is worth asking: despite the exploration of the problems of martial race discourse, how important is it, ultimately, to interrogate the dominance of heroic narratives of Indian – now South Asian – participation in World War I, especially as the more racist overtones of the discourse are being submerged? After all, Indian sepoy are described now as heroes, not as colonial simpletons as well. It is especially worth asking this question in the context of a potential accusation of sour grapes. I am a Bengali, and perhaps I would feel very differently had I been a member of a martial race as opposed to the very figure of the Bengali babu – an Anglophone academic writing postcolonial critique within the auspices of European academia, funded by the European taxpayer.⁷⁴⁸ Beyond acknowledging that unanswerable (but inescapable) question of my positionality: Das is right to warn us that by

⁷⁴⁸ In the spirit of identity as slippery, contingent and coconstituted, I am also a European taxpayer.

challenging positive images of colonial soldiers we might play into right wing, white nationalist chauvinism.⁷⁴⁹ Acknowledging this – what I seek to argue is not that Indian soldiers should not be remembered, nor that they did not have noteworthy achievements on the battlefield. Rather, the fixation on these achievements, on the martial race image, is itself in alignment with right wing interests to only celebrate the aspects of imperial heritage that portray the colonial relationship in a good light, and a lingering on the ‘loyal,’ ‘heroic’ colonial body further reifies the idea that certain modern populations are worthy migrants for having proven themselves in the battlefields of yesterday. That is, political and social inclusion in the former colonial metropole must be earned, it is not a given right. The memory of the sepoy becomes a border guard.

Can we argue against positive representations of brown bodies amid a whitewashed history? Can we claim these men were colonial dupes or ‘assassins of the Raj,’ without insulting the memories of men who may well have self-conceptualized as agents, who may have taken pride in their regimental colours and in the honour and wealth they brought to their families through war service? I argue that the construct of the ‘martial race’ soldier is a morbid British melancholia, a subjectification of real war experience, that ultimately decouples the sepoy as a body that *experienced* and *testified* and instead forces us to

⁷⁴⁹ Das, *India, Empire, and First World War Culture*, 220.

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consider an imaginary figure that makes us mistake an agenda of imperial self-glorification with the glow of postcolonial pride.

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