Introduction

> Our power in India is altogether unnatural and artificial; and is to be maintained as it was acquired, by the sword only.[1]

When army captain John Munro wrote this line in 1806, he was invoking what had already become a cliché. British authority in India, administered through the East India Company, was secured "by the sword." At first glance, the statement seems banal, obtuse, even tautological: Across the globe, violence was embedded in the extractive, expansive dynamics of the British Empire.[2] Nevertheless, as Munro's observation suggests, Britons in the early nineteenth century spoke frequently of their growing territories in India as uniquely militaristic. The rhetoric percolated into British discourse in the 1780s during the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the Company's first governor general. The emotive speeches of prosecutor Edmund Burke during the opening stages of the trial, which ultimately ended in Hastings's acquittal, brought the reality of the Company's expanding empire dramatically to the forefront of public debate.[3]

[1] John Munro, "Observations respecting the objections that exist against carrying into effect the arrangement proposed by Lord William Bentinck for reducing three Regiments of Native Infantry and respecting the probable consequences of that Measure," January 1806, 322, Papers of Major John Munro, BL MSS Eur D1146/1.

[2] Of course, this violence has not always been at the forefront of scholarly examinations of this empire. For a discussion of this hesitancy, see Duncan Bell, "Desolation Goes Before Us," *Imperial History by the Book: A Roundtable on John Darwin's* The Empire Project, Antoinette Burton, ed. *Journal of British Studies* 54, no. 5 (2015): 987–93.

[3] Burke's prosecution of Hastings has been extremely well studied. For the trial as spectacle, see P. J. Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Lida Maxwell, *Justice, Sympathy, and Mourning in Burke's Impeachment of Warren Hastings, Public Trials* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 2. For the trial's ideological significance, see Frederick G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), chap. 5; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton,

Burke accused Hastings of a wide range of misdeeds, from corruption to conspiracy to murder, and excoriated the erstwhile governor for having claimed "that we [Britain] held the dominion of Bengal *by the Sword*, which he has falsely declared the source of right and the natural charter of dominion."[4]

Bengal, in northeast India, was the center of the Company's colonial administration in this period, the largest and wealthiest of its claimed territories. In 1765, the Company had acquired the *diwani* – the appointment to govern the province – from Shah Alam II, emperor of the declining Mughal Empire. This grant came as a result of conquest, a prize the Company had demanded after defeating Shah Alam II and his allies at the Battle of Buxar in December 1764.[5] In response to Burke's accusation, Hastings thus acceded, "I affirm, as a fact unquestioned, and unquestionable, that we derive our original title to our possessions in Bengal *from the sword alone*."[6] Where Burke and Hastings clashed, then, was not over how the *diwani* had been acquired, but rather over its legitimacy. Burke decried conquest as a morally bankrupt source of power. Hastings, in contrast espoused what Burke condemned as "geographical morality," arguing that, while right by conquest was illegitimate in Europe, India's purported lack of civil governance justified using force to secure "Asiatic" authority.[7]

Hastings's eventual acquittal suggests that it was his version of empire that ultimately carried the day. As late as 1829, one would-be colonial reformer, Gavin Young, complained, "It is a favourite maxim with a large class of politicians, and particularly with those connected with India, that what the sword has conquered, the sword must maintain."[8] Yet, where Hastings had used the language of conquest to vindicate his own authority as governor general, subsequent writers like John Munro

NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), chap. 3. For an alternate view, though, see Daniel I. O'Neill, *Edmund Burke and the Conservative Logic of Empire* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

[4] Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 8 (London: John C. Nimmo, 1887), 327.

[5] Robert Travers, "A British Empire by Treaty in Eighteenth-Century India," in *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600–1900*, ed. Saliha Belmessous (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 148–51.

[6] Warren Hastings, *The Defence of Warren Hastings, Esq. (Late Governor General of Bengal,) at the Bar of the House of Commons, upon the Matter of the Several Charges of High Crimes and Misdemeanors, Presented against Him in the Year 1786* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1786), 32. Emphasis added.

[7] Mithi Mukherjee, "Justice, War, and the Imperium: India and Britain in Edmund Burke's Prosecutorial Speeches in the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings," *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (2005): 606.

[8] Gavin Young, *Reflections on the Present State of British India* (London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., St. Paul's Churchyard, 1829), 134.

transformed the meaning of his words. "Rule by the sword" instead became a shorthand for a colonial state controlled by military actors. In the case of the Company state, it more specifically meant domination by its white, commissioned officers. The cliché went beyond what Douglas Peers, in his seminal study of the Company's armies, called the colonial garrison state, in which the army was the most visible embodiment of state power.[9] At its most extreme, "rule by the sword" positioned officers as the *authors* of state power, outside of and sometimes in conflict with their civil counterparts. To distinguish this from other forms of governmental militarism, I refer to this arrangement as a "stratocracy," a state ruled by its army. The term was dredged forth by a civil judge in 1809 in the midst of a formidable crisis, when more than 90 percent of the white officers in the Company's southern territories mutinied in a bid to overthrow the governor. It was, the judge insisted, "the worst of all Governments," but it was one that I argue prevailed in the Company's institutions long after the extremity of the mutiny had faded.[10]

The negative connotations of "stratocracy" meant that even its advocates tended to hedge their vision of militarized empire as a temporary exigency, rather than an ideal. Especially in the early nineteenth century, when calls for "good governance" within the British Empire were on the rise, would-be stratocrats insisted that military rule would pave the way for civil institutions.[11] Such possibilities, though, were firmly bound up in what Dipesh Chakrabarty described as the perpetual "not yet" of imperial rule.[12] Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, when the Company Raj reached the peak of its power, those elusive promises had much less power than the reality of the Company's military establishment. As one officer, John Taylor, put it in 1800: "Let it be remembered that it is by the sword that India is to be governed. The army is the palladium which can alone secure that country to the British crown."[13] Indeed, the independence of its army would prove one of the

[9] Douglas M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India, 1819–1835* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995).

[10] Thomas Stranger, "Extract of the Hon Sir Thomas Stranger's Address to the Grand Jury," Memorandum Book, 250, NLS Acc. 8954.

[11] Young, *Reflections on the Present State of British India*, 134.

[12] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 10.

[13] John Taylor, *Letters on India, Political, Commercial, and Military, Relative to Subjects Important to the British Interests in the East. Addresses to a Proprietor of East-India Stock* (London: Printed by S. Hamilton, Falcon-Court, Fleet-Street: for Messrs. Carpenter and Co. Old Bond-Street; Egerton, Whitehall; Murray and Highley, Fleet-Street; Wallis, Paternoster-Row; Vernor and Hood, Poultry; and Black and Parry, Leadenhall-Street, 1800), 222.

most enduring aspects of the Company itself. In 1813, it lost its trade monopoly, but, as late as 1853, the Company retained its authority to appoint and to maintain an independent European officer corps.[14]

Despite the colonial army's significance, though, scholars examining the nature of the Company Raj have tended to focus on its civil administration. As the Company expanded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its growth created a wide range of new relationships between the state and its subjects – for instance, through civil and criminal courts,[15] in the context of schools and education,[16] through record-keeping,[17] or as a part of revenue collection.[18] Scholars examining the colonial state have stressed the transformative effect of these interactions on Indian society, both through intentional efforts by colonial officials to effect "civilizing" reform and more inadvertently when officials' efforts to translate unfamiliar concepts and practices distorted social systems.[19] Such studies, though, have rarely extended that approach to the Company's armies, which appear instead as mechanisms through which the colonial policy could be strengthened, extended, and enforced.[20]

[14] Anthony Webster, *The Twilight of the East India Company: The Evolution of Anglo-Asian Commerce and Politics, 1790–1860* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009), 11–12, 14–15.

[15] See, for instance, Marc Galanter, "The Displacement of Traditional Law in Modern India," *Journal of Social Issues* 24, no. 4 (1968): 65–90; Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law: Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[16] Catriona Ellis, "Education for All: Reassessing the Historiography of Education in Colonial India," *History Compass* 7, no. 2 (2009): 363–75.

[17] C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bhavani Raman, *Document Raj: Writing and Scribes in Early Colonial South India* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012); James Lees, "Administrator-Scholars and the Writing of History in Early British India: A Review Article," *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2014): 826–43.

[18] Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal; an Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris: Mouton, 1963); Burton Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); D. A. Washbrook, "Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India," *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 1981): 649–721.

[19] Scholars have fiercely debated whether the Company's expansion represented a change or a continuity with precolonial systems. A good primer on this debate is David Washbrook, "South India, 1770–1840: The Colonial Transition," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (July 2004): 479–81. Recent scholarship, though, has shifted toward emphasizing change over continuity.

[20] Most work on the Company's armies focuses on its tactics and strategies. See, for instance, Kaushik Roy, "Military Synthesis in South Asia: Armies, Warfare, and Indian Society, c. 1740–1849," *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 3 (2005): 651–90; Kaushik Roy, *War, Culture, and Society in Early Modern South Asia, 1740–1849* (Milton Park, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); G. J. Bryant, *The Emergence of British Power in India, 1600–1784: A Grand Strategic Interpretation* (New York: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2013).

The Company's Sword flips this dynamic. Rather than tools of the colonial state, this book approaches the Company's armies as key spaces in which the nature of that state took shape and in which it would be contested. From its start in the early seventeenth century, the East India Company drew on a wide range of networks for military labor, including both Indians and Europeans. Those military establishments grew quickly and exploded by several orders of magnitude during the second half of the eighteenth century. By 1805, the Company's standing army was larger than the British Army proper, composed of more than one hundred and fifty thousand troops, the vast majority of whom were sepoys (Indian soldiers).[21] As ever more numerous sepoys, officers, and European soldiers engaged with the Company, questions about how these troops could be mobilized, managed, and made to enhance the colonial state would precipitate new assumptions about how the empire's metaphorical "sword" should function.

The men – and the very occasional women – who enlisted in those armies were not passive objects in this negotiation of meaning.[22] On the contrary, individuals recruited into the Company's heterogeneous forces brought with them their own interpretations and expectations about their roles within the Company. In the chapters that follow, I explore those views, tracing the ways that the distinct ambitions of individual military actors produced conflicts, confrontations, and sometimes creative collaborations, both among the soldiers themselves and between them and the civil government that employed them. Of course, their maneuvers did not occur on a level playing field. Even in the Company's earliest operations, English officials came to India with distinct ideas about martial prestige and social virtue.[23] As a result, the Company's military institutions were among the first sites in which the colonial state codified a system of segregation on racial lines. The separate categories of "European" and "Indian" troops facilitated the solidification of colonial categories of differences. Familiar Saidian binaries, pitting Europeans as

[21] Raymond Callahan, *The East India Company and Army Reform, 1783–1798* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 6; Kevin Linch and Matthew McCormack, "Defining Soldiers: Britain's Military, c.1740–1815," *War In History* 20, no. 2 (April 2013): 145.

[22] Hannah Snell, who cross-dressed and joined the army as James Grey, supposedly to find her/his husband, fought at the siege of Pondicherry in 1748. Anonymous, *The Female Soldier: Or, the Surprising Life and Adventures of Hannah Snell* (London: R. Walker, the Corner of Elliot's-Court, in the Little Old-Bailey, 1750).

[23] Philip Stern, "Soldier and Citizen in the Seventeenth-Century English East India Company," *Journal of Early Modern History* 15, no. 1–2 (2011): 83–104.

rational, active, and masculine against Indians as irrational, passive, and feminine, were given a militarized slant.[24]

It was against this backdrop that the central framework of "rule by the sword" ultimately took shape. Though the rhetoric would spread widely, it was most stridently expounded by the Company's European officers themselves, the most elite part of the colonial garrison state. Eager to advance their ambitions at both an individual and a collective level, officers such as John Munro offered an interpretation of power in India that vindicated and indeed required their primacy in colonial politics. This view developed from three major precepts. First, it drew and borrowed from the view of Indian society promoted by Hastings and others in the eighteenth century as one characterized by a constant cycle of war and martial despotism. Second, it identified the Company's sepoy armies as necessary to secure or to maintain Britain's preeminence within that cycle. In the eighteenth century, this argument tended to focus on external enemies, but, as the Company gained power, it would shift toward the maintenance of internal, *civil* order. Third and finally, it pointed to examples of unrest, discontent, and even mutiny within sepoy regiments to emphasize those troops' unreliability, while simultaneously positioning the Company's European officers as the sole agents through which sepoys could be controlled. John Malcolm, a contemporary of Munro and one of the most prolific supporters of "rule by the sword," offered in 1830 a neat encapsulation of its central claim: "It cannot be too often repeated this Army is our safety and our danger."[25]

The prevalence of these ideas throughout Company's administration also suggests a new explanation for its abrupt collapse. In 1857, massive rebellions broke out across northern India, originating among the Company's sepoy regiments. After a bloody fight to suppress the revolt, the British state dissolved the Company as a governing body, transferring India's administration to the Crown. Many in Victorian Britain understood the rebellions as a "mutiny," a breakdown of military order.[26] The label persists in British historical consciousness, but has been criticized by scholars and Indian activists alike as an oversimplification that obfuscates the wider scope of the rebellion and as a loaded word that

[24] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 49. For more on how Said's binaries can be seen in the Company's descriptions of its soldiers, see Channa Wickremesekera, *Best Black Troops in the World: British Perceptions and the Making of the Sepoy, 1746–1805* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002).

[25] John Malcolm, "Report to Lord Wm. Bentinck on the Bombay Army and the Army Generally," 319^{v}, BL IOR/L/Mil/5/397.

[26] Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 11.

delegitimizes the conflict.[27] While acknowledging these points, I argue that the widespread interpretation of the rebellions as "mutiny" had added significance in the context of the Company's "stratocracy." The specter of revolt by sepoys had long preoccupied colonial officials, and its European officers had secured their authority and autonomy in the colonial state by positioning themselves as the sole actors able to prevent that threat. In 1857, "rule by sword" proved incapable of fulfilling its most basic guarantee, and the colonial state it upheld would not long survive that failure.

The Company in Eighteenth-Century India

The Company's Sword presents the Company's military expansion as the product of two distinct political contexts: eighteenth-century India during the decline of the Mughal Empire and the British Empire during what some have called the "Second Hundred Years War."[28] Both of these settings were dynamic spaces in which concepts of the state, of power, and of political identity were being busily transformed. The Company, its agents, and those it employed were participants in these processes, influenced by their developments and eager to define their own status therein. Where the two contexts overlapped, though, they inevitably produced contradictions. Burke's attempted prosecution of Hastings was a symptom of these tensions, a bitter debate over how the Company's expanding political claims in India could fit into contemporary, shifting concepts of Britishness.[29] These same questions, alongside other issues of political, social, and professional belonging, would resonate across the Company's networks throughout this period.

Eighteenth-century India saw an explosion of new states, new claims to power, and new political structures. In the previous century, the Mughal Empire had reached the peak of its political power and territorial expanse. Founded in the sixteenth century by Babur, a descendant of Timur, the Mughal state had expanded rapidly across the subcontinent, establishing a highly mobile empire of trade routes, tributaries,

[27] For the continued use in British popular history, see Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny: 1857* (London: Penguin, 2003). For debates about naming the conflict, see Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, ed., *1857, Essays from Economic and Political Weekly* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007), 1–2.

[28] This last term was coined by Arthur H. Buffinton, *The Second Hundred Years War, 1689–1815* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929). For a debate about the periodization, see H. M. Scott, "The Second 'Hundred Years War', 1689–1815," *The Historical Journal* 35, no. 2 (1992): 444.

[29] Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, 156. Nicholas Dirks has argued that the trial acted as a sort of expiation-by-spectacle for the British public in *The Scandal of Empire*, 129–31.

and military alliances.[30] By the end of the seventeenth century, though, political power in the system had already begun to shift from a unified center in Delhi to a more regionalized system. Aurangzeb, under whose rule the Mughals reached their territorial peak, relocated his capital from Delhi to the more southerly Deccan in a bid to assert stronger control over newly acquired territories.[31] Subsequent emperors, though, returned to Delhi and exercised an increasingly symbolic form of authority over their provinces. In the Victorian era, British scholars often referred to the subsequent period as a "dark century," beset by chaos and anarchy, which British rule set to right.[32] Recently, William Dalrymple in his popular 2019 book, *The Anarchy*, revived elements of this interpretation, though with the less triumphalist framing, arguing that the Company's expansion into this "fraught, chaotic, and very violent military history" was an unparalleled example of predatory capitalism.[33]

In fact, the Indian political landscape that emerged in the wake of Delhi's decline was far from anarchic. The growing autonomy of Mughal provinces like Bengal, Awadh, and Hyderabad was less a reflection of Delhi's incapacity than it was evidence of the expanding strength of their political systems, themselves reflections of the Mughal model.[34] At the same time, other states also emerged from outside Mughal structures, the most successful example of which was the rapidly growing Maratha Confederacy.[35] The ability of rulers and would-be rulers to tap into the

[30] For warfare and state formation in the Mughal Empire, see Jos L. Gommans, *Mughal Warfare: Indian Frontiers and Highroads to Empire 1500–1700* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2002); Pratyay Nath, *Climate of Conquest: War, Environment, and Empire in Mughal North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019). For a discussion of Mughal strategies of alliances, see Munis D. Faruqui, *Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[31] Audrey Truschke, *Aurangzeb: The Life and Legacy of India's Most Controversial King* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 89–90.

[32] For instance, see Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Macaulay's Essay on Clive* (New York: Macmillan & Company, 1907), 11–13. For a discussion of this historiography, see P. J. Marshall, *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Revolution or Evolution?*, Oxford in India Readings: Themes in Indian History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[33] William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), xxxii.

[34] Richard B. Barnett, *North India between Empires: Awadh, the Mughals, and the British, 1720–1801* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Munis D. Faruqi, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India," in *Expanding Frontiers in South Asian and World History: Essays in Honour of John F. Richards*, ed. Richard Maxwell Eaton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–38; Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and Punjab, 1707–1748*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[35] For a typology of these states, see C. A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18–36.

region's military economies – or, better yet, to create new economies of their own – was crucial to asserting authority. Soldiers were among what C. A. Bayly termed "service people," an emerging elite of courtiers, artisans, and other professionals courted by states to enhance their prestige.[36] The *nawabs* of Awadh, for instance, reduced their dependence on the Mughal center by cultivating a steady supply of military labor in the form of peasant-soldiers in their province in lieu of the urbanized military networks emanating out of Delhi. The Company would in fact co-opt this recruiting pool to form the core of the sepoy regiments in the Bengal Army.[37]

Martial renown was also important for rulers themselves. Again, this was not just a matter of conquest. Most of the Mughal officials who administered the increasingly independent "successor states" had risen through Mughal armies and cultivated their growing claims to sovereignty in ways that reflected their martial prowess and backgrounds.[38] The most famous officer-turned-ruler of the eighteenth century, Haider Ali of Mysore, had a familial history of service on Mughal campaigns and had distinguished himself fighting in the armies of the Wodeyar rajahs of Mysore before he amassed sufficient power to seize control of that state.[39] Elsewhere, military adventurers were able to use their professional reputations to carve out new political domains, as in the case of Himmat Bahadur (Anupgiri Gosain), a religious soldier who held power in modern-day Bundelkhund at the end of the eighteenth century.[40] Chapter 2 examines the rise and fall of Muhammad Yusuf Khan, an Indian officer in the Company's service who made a similar bid for political sovereignty in Madurai and Tirunelveli in the 1760s. In short, warfare in eighteenth-century India, violent as it was, had a complex effect on India's political landscapes: Military hierarchies, claims of prestige and expertise, and networks of patronage between soldiers helped to shape the emergence of new states.

As Yusuf Khan's career suggests, the Company's settlements across India were deeply entangled in the diplomatic negotiations and political innovation going on in this period, and its armies were necessarily

[36] Bayly, 40–41.

[37] Seema Alavi, *The Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13–26, 41–45. Alavi's argument is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

[38] Faruqi, "At Empire's End: The Nizam, Hyderabad and Eighteenth-Century India," 4.

[39] Irfan Habib, *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haider Ali & Tipu Sultan* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), xix–xx.

[40] William R. Pinch, "Who Was Himmat Bahadur? Gossains, Rajputs and the British in Bundelkhund, ca. 1800," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 35, no. 3 (1998): 293–335.

a part of this process. Nowhere were these interactions more visible or more significant than in the southerly Madras Presidency – one of the Company's three major administrative hubs in India, along with Bengal and Bombay.[41] In 1773, Madras was officially made a "subordinate" presidency under Bengal, which was elevated to the status of Supreme Government in India, and subsequent scholarship has tended to reflect this divide.[42] From a military perspective, though, things look different. It was in Madras where the Company built its first fortifications (Fort St. George was completed in 1644), undertook its first sustained military campaigns and developed its first standing armies – including its first sepoy battalions. Indeed, the Madras Presidency would remain the focus of military development for much of the eighteenth century, in part because of its proximity to and rivalry with Mysore under Haider Ali and his son Tipu Sultan.[43]

The development of the formal Madras Army in the mid-eighteenth century, conventionally explored as a tactical innovation, can in fact be understood as an institutional construct that facilitated the Company's engagement with the local military landscape. The term sepoy itself, along with the ranks of Indian officers formalized in this period (*subedar, jemadar, havildar,* and *naig*), provides insight into the Company's complex engagement with multiple recruiting networks and social hierarchies. Each rank was drawn from regional military hierarchies and political networks, but recontextualized to take on new meanings within the Company's infrastructure. Until the last decades of the eighteenth century, military actors connected to the Company moved fluidly in those networks, and their movements in turn became a part of political negotiations taking place across southern India. Drawing out these entanglements requires a geographical shift in the way that the Company Raj has been imagined. Far from a local backwater, subordinate to developments in Bengal, the Madras Presidency can thus be imagined as an active site in which the nature of the Company was constructed, producing a set of relationships along a military axis that served to compete with and complicate the civil colonial rule taking shape in the north.

[41] For part of the eighteenth century, Bencoolen operated as a separate presidency, but this was later folded into Bengal.

[42] For the importance of Bengal, see P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740–1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India*. For a challenge to this, see Thomas R. Trautmann, ed., *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[43] The Anglo-Mysore wars are curiously understudied, given the attention that contemporaries in India and in Britain paid to them, but a recent operational history can be found in Bryant, *The Emergence of British Power in India, 1600–1784*.

To examine this military landscape, *The Company's Sword* relies principally on the records of the Governor in Council at Fort St. George, the Company's government in Madras. Starting in 1750, all official letters, memoranda, and consultations relating to military affairs were collected in the Military Department.[44] Minutes from this body were sent regularly back to Britain and form part of the India Office Records now held in the British Library.[45] However, many reports and correspondence, especially those related to the Madras Army's interactions with "country powers" (Indian states) and to the status of sepoys and Indian officers, were not transferred. Thus, the fuller series of records held in the Tamil Nadu State Archives (in Chennai) was invaluable for exploring the Madras Presidency's position within India's diplomatic landscape.

In addition to the Company's own archives, this study also makes use of material from the court of Arcot, a Mughal "successor state" that from 1748 onward was the Madras Presidency's most consistent "country" ally.[46] Though surviving records from Arcot are somewhat scattered, they include court chronicles, *ruznāmah* (diaries of daily governmental activity), and some correspondence and administrative records, all written in the Mughal Persian that served as the region's diplomatic lingua franca.[47] Despite Arcot's gradual decline into a Company dependency, the alliance between Madras and its *nawab*, Muhammad Ali Khan Wallajah, was never static or one sided. Wallajah engaged creatively with the Madras Government through both official and unofficial avenues, which he used to enhance his own claims to sovereignty. European soldiers and officers in the Madras Army used those connections to elevate their

[44] William Foster, *A Guide to the India Office Records, 1600–1858* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, Ltd., 1919), 74.

[45] For more on how this trans-imperial bureaucratic system developed, see Martin Moir, "Kaghazi Raj: Notes of the Documentary Basis of Company Rule, 1783–1858," *Indo-British Review* 21, no. 2 (1993): 185–86; H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), x–xi.

[46] Scholarship on Arcot is underdeveloped, but see Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Muzaffar Alam, "Commerce, Politics, and the Early Arcot State," in *Penumbral Visions: Making Polities in Early Modern South India* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 94–142; Pimmanus Wibulsilp, "Nawabi Karnatak: Muhammad Ali Khan and the Making of a Mughal Successor State in Pre-Colonial South India, 1749–1795" (PhD Dissertation, Leiden, University of Leiden, 2019), https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/handle/1887/71028.

[47] For more on the use of Persian in India, see Muzaffar Alam, "The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 131–98. For a detailed examination of Indo-Persian manuscripts produced in southern India, see Muhammad Yusuf Kokan, *Arabic and Persian in Carnatic, 1710–1960* (Madras: Ameera & Co., 1974).

own status with the Company, while Yusuf Khan – the above-mentioned politically minded officer of Madurai – did the inverse, using the Company's hierarchies to challenge Wallajah. Each of these relationships highlights the significance of the Madras Army as a political body.

The Company in British National Politics

Despite the Company's involvement in India's eighteenth-century diplomatic networks, it was not fully or even principally an Indian political entity. At the most basic level, it was an extension of the British state, chartered with the expectation that its operations in India would serve national interests. Those interests were themselves undergoing political reinvention – or, rather, invention. Britain only came into being in 1707 with the Act of Union between England and Scotland.[48] The merger launched new debates about what it meant to be British, which would continue throughout the century in an increasingly global context throughout its imperial networks.[49] Britain's political position in Europe, especially its spiraling rivalry with France, played a crucial role in shaping its emerging national identity.[50] Throughout much of the eighteenth century, the two states were at war. These conflicts provided crucial fuel for the Company's own accelerating military expansion, but at the same time called the corporation's relationship with the British state and indeed its very existence into question in new ways.

In the seventeenth century, the early English empire had been characterized by a patchwork of networks and institutions through which the state's reach could be extended beyond its resources: Chartered

[48] The Act of Union catalyzed a major change in the East India Company as well. During the political tumult in England and Scotland at the end of the seventeenth century, two corporations – designated the "old" and the "new" companies – had emerged, with the latter drawing much of its investment from Scotland. These two bodies had their own "act of union" in 1709, resulting in the United East India Company. K. N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company, 1660–1760* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 434–36.

[49] The classic study of British nationalism is Linda Colley, *Britons : Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992). For how British national identity intersected (or clashed) with imperial expansion, see Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660–1840* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas, eds., *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 1–7; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); Hannah Weiss Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign: Bonds of Belonging in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[50] Allan I. Macinnes, *Union and Empire: The Making of the United Kingdom in 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 238–39.

companies with their own military and political privileges were but one example of this.[51] However, the British state developed a much more centralized military establishment in the eighteenth century. Despite widespread social unease with the prospect of a large standing army, the peacetime establishment of the British armed forces increased at least fourfold in the course of the eighteenth century, a statistic that does not include simultaneous growth in the navy.[52] John Brewer famously described Britain in the eighteenth century as a "military-fiscal state," in which increasingly expansive wars fed into and required an increasingly extensive governing infrastructure of revenue collection, bureaucracy, and logistics.[53] In the face of these changes, the Company's status as a privatized military force collided with the central government both for martial prestige and for a tightening pool of recruits. Laws were passed to restrict the Company's access to that labor market, pushing the Company to increase its reliance on non-European combatants as well as on European troops drawn from outside of Britain, including Ireland and the German states.[54]

Yet those far-flung recruiting networks only introduced new obstacles for the Company, this time in terms of how its militarization fit with societal ideas about force in Britain. Despite the push for centralization, the British Army and Navy proper hardly enjoyed a monopoly on martial force. On the contrary, most of Britain's "soldiers" – men trained, equipped, and organized for warfare – came from various irregular bodies such as fencibles, militias, and other volunteer forces, reflecting what Ian Beckett termed Britain's "amateur military tradition."[55] In the mid-eighteenth century, the early modern idea of the militia as an obligation of civic virtue was revived and transformed as a central plank in

[51] Elizabeth Mancke, "Chartered Enterprises and the Evolution of the British Atlantic World," in *The Creation of the British Atlantic World*, ed. Elizabeth Mancke and Carole Shammas (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 236–62.

[52] Lawrence Stone, ed., *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 23. For anti-army sentiments in Britain in this period, see Jeremy Black, *Britain as a Military Power, 1688–1815* (Philadelphia: UCL Press, 1999), 271–72.

[53] John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), chap. 2. For the application of this model to the empire, see Stone, *An Imperial State at War*.

[54] Thomas Bartlett, "The Irish Soldier in India, 1750–1947," in *Ireland and India: Connections, Comparisons, and Contrasts*, ed. Denis Holmes, Michael Holmes, and Thomas Bartlett (Dublin: Folens, 1997), 12–28; Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *German Soldiers in Colonial India* (Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2014).

[55] Linch and McCormack, "Defining Soldiers," 145–46; Ian F. W. Beckett, *Britain's Part-Time Soldiers: The Amateur Military Tradition 1558–1945* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2011).

burgeoning conceptions of Britishness.[56] Such "amateur" groups are sometimes seen as hostile toward Britain's centralized armies, but, while disagreements over precedence could occur, recent scholarship has suggested that the two versions of military service were not so opposed as has been assumed. Soldiers and officers in the British Army made use of the same conceptions of civic virtue seen in the militia to depict themselves as patriotic "soldier-citizens."[57] Officers in civic militias in turn appropriated many of the trappings of military prestige from the British Army, from officers' commissions to uniforms to spectacular elements like military bands.[58] Both phenomena helped to knit together British national identity and military virtue. The wars of the late eighteenth century, especially the American Revolution and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, which affected and mobilized a large swath of the British population, only accelerated this process.

The Company's armies, though, seemed to stand outside of this nexus of militarism and patriotism. Most obviously, the Company's forces were predominantly not British. In Britain, even troops from Hanover, the German principality that shared a sovereign with Britain from 1714 to 1837, faced public protests for failing to embody the model of the British soldier-citizen.[59] Those outcries were somewhat misleading: Britain's barracks and naval ships drew on a global network of recruits, giving them a heterogeneity that was rarely recognized by contemporary Britons.[60] In India, though, the Company's sepoy regiments were an unmistakable and highly visible example of an army composed of "others." Company officials tried to counter potential unease by creating strict divides between "native" and "European" forces, but this paradoxically set sepoys more obviously apart. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, social anxieties mounted in Britain that the Company had become a vector of alien influence, in which "Oriental" vices of avarice, luxury, or despotism

[56] Matthew McCormack, *Embodying the Militia in Georgian England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[57] Hannah Smith, "The Army, Provincial Urban Communities, and Loyalist Cultures in England, c. 1714–1750," *Journal of Early Modern History* 15, no. 1–2 (2011): 152–57.

[58] Linch and McCormack, "Defining Soldiers," 147.

[59] Matthew McCormack, "Citizenship, Nationhood, and Masculinity in the Affair of the Hanoverian Soldier, 1756," *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 04 (2006): 971–93.

[60] For black military actors in British forces, see Maria Alessandra Bollettino, "'Of Equal or of More Service': Black Soldiers and the British Empire in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Caribbean," *Slavery & Abolition* 38, no. 3 (July 3, 2017): 510–33. For the diverse composition of the British Navy, see Ray Costello, *Black Salt: Seafarers of African Descent on British Ships* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012); Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 151–54.

would infect British society.[61] Burke's prosecution of Hastings occurred in this context, and, though Burke focused on the Company's civil head, he also excoriated its officers as "military farmers-general," funneling illicitly begotten wealth to their civilian counterparts.[62]

By the 1770s, Company agents who returned to Britain flush with wealth from "shaking the pagoda tree" were condemned as *nabobs*, an Anglicized distortion of the term "nawab" that spoke to racialized and Orientalized ways in which imperial anxiety was expressed.[63] Their ostracization in British society has been well studied as a social phenomenon, as a response to economic change, and as a moment of political transformation, but less attention, though, has been paid to the "nabob" crisis as a part of contemporary debates about the relationship between military service and national honor.[64] The Company's European officers, drawn from an increasingly well-connected cadre of Britons, had considerably more access to these debates than did either rank-and-file Europeans in the Company's service or their Indian counterparts. Drawing on Parliamentary debates, ministerial papers, and publicly printed pamphlets, I show how officers became an active lobbying force in the late eighteenth century, creating correspondence networks that linked the two political landscapes in which they were embedded. Their elite status in both India and in Britain allowed officers to challenge this contradiction through arguments that would provide the ideological basis for "rule by the sword."

Soldiers as Subjects

In exploring the militarism of colonial rule, *The Company's Sword* is foremost a political history of colonial institutions. However, by approaching the army as a site of contestation, rather than a tool of a monolithic state,

[61] Samuel Foote, *The Nabob: A Comedy in Three Acts Written by Samuel Foote and Now Published by Mr. Colman.*, ed. George Colman (London: Printed by T. Sherlock for T. Cadell., 1778), 13.

[62] Burke, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 2: 475.

[63] A pagoda was a high-value coin that circulated predominantly in South India.

[64] For the "nabob crisis," see Bruce Lenman and Philip Lawson, "Robert Clive, the 'Black Jagir', and British Politics," *The Historical Journal* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 1983): 801–29; Philip Lawson, "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 16, no. 3 (1984): 225–41; Tillman W. Nechtman, *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*; Christina Smylitopoulos, "Portrait of a Nabob: Graphic Satire, Portraiture, and the Anglo-Indian in the Late Eighteenth Century," *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne* 37, no. 1 (2012): 10–25.

the book highlights the importance of individual agency and ambition in shaping those institutions. Two different groups of actors occupy the foreground of this narrative: the Company's commissioned European officers and the Indian officers and sepoys they commanded. The status accorded to these two groups within the colonial state was of course fundamentally different, and it is a central argument of this book that their imbalanced relationship is key to understanding European officers' success in dominating colonial policy. European rank-and-file soldiers, though present in the margins of this study, were much less active in these debates, in part because they were not as directly implicated in that relationship. Making sense of these dynamics thus requires bringing together multiple methodological approaches to tease out the experiences of historical actors with radically different positions within the historical archive.

The Company's commissioned European officers held pride of place within colonial society. A cursory glance at the Company's military records reveals an archive brimming with endless petitions in which officers complained about apparently minor breaches of rank, seniority, and perquisites. Reading these "along the grain," as Ann Laura Stoler has urged, reveals not only the access that such officers had within the colonial government but also the state's preoccupation with redressing even minute questions of status for this elite group.[65] "Subaltern" officers – a technical designation for men ranked below captain, not a reflection of their relative agency – frequently claimed penury, but this was necessarily a relative complaint. One ditty from 1787 bemoaned the monthly wages of officers in the Bengal Army – ninety-five rupees – but this "scanty" wage still allowed the officer to maintain a household with servants:

I am a younger son of Mars, and spend my time in carving
A thousand different ways and means to keep myself from starving;
For how with servants' wages, Sirs, and clothes can I contrive
To rent a house, and feed myself on scanty ninety-five.[66]

Nevertheless, the Company's European officers regularly clashed with their employers. In both 1776 and 1809, officers in the Madras Presidency launched successful coups against civil governors out of anger at administrators' proposed reforms, which threatened to reduce their perquisites. In 1796, as discussed in Chapter 5, another mutiny – one that

[65] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), chap. 5.

[66] W. S. Seton-Karr, ed., *Selections from Calcutta Gazettes: Showing the Political and Social Condition of the English in India* (Calcutta: Printed at the Military orphan Press by O. T. Cutter, 1864), 197.

involved garrisons across India – forced Company Directors and British state officials alike to abandon plans to restructure the military establishment in India that had been decades in the making.[67]

Given these confrontations, the Company's officers may, at least in some contexts, offer a version of what Elizabeth Kolsky termed "the unruly third face of colonialism," white actors cognizable neither as the "state" nor as "subjects." Kolsky focused on "non-official" whites in India, men who owned or operated plantations, who built businesses in Company settlements, or who wandered on the margins of colonial society. These men, Kolsky has argued, played a major role in shaping the terms of the colonial legal system, both as objects to be controlled by the state and as quasi-elite figures who furiously demanded their privileges.[68] Commissioned officers could mobilize in similar ways, but benefited also from their liminal identity that allowed them to slip between an unofficial, horizontal community – framed as a "brotherhood" of officers – and as an official corps, providing essential service to the state.[69] Highlighting the way that officers positioned themselves as orthogonal to the colonial state highlights the extent to which their demanded "stratocracy" went beyond militarism to assert a dominating influence over the colonial state.

Of course, commissioned European officers made up only a tiny portion of the Company's forces, 1 or 2 percent of the total.[70] Sepoys and Indian officers were in contrast decidedly subaltern – this time in the Gramscian, not the technical sense – and their historical experience must be pieced together through a different set of tools. Almost no writing from sepoys themselves survives from the Company era. One exception, the memoir of Sake Dean Mahomet, a *subedar* from the Bengal Army who immigrated to Ireland and then to Britain in the late eighteenth century, is a fascinating source, but one written for a British audience and consciously shaped to resonate with British views of India at the time.[71] Sita Ram Pandey's *From Sepoy to Subedar*, which first appeared

[67] These protests are explored in Callahan, *The East India Company and Army Reform, 1783–1798*.

[68] Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4–11.

[69] This liminality is discussed more in Chapters 5 and 6. For claims of brotherhood, see *Proceedings of the Committee Chosen December 10, 1787, by a General Meeting of the East India Company's Military Officers Now in England* (London: J. Debrett, 1788), 2.

[70] "A Comparative View of the Military Establishment of Bengal and Fort St Gorge in 1774 and 1783," 466–67, BL IOR/H/84.

[71] Dean Mahomet, *The Travels of Dean Mahomet: An Eighteenth-Century Journey through India*, ed. Michael H. Fisher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), xviii–xix.

in the late nineteenth century, is also sometimes considered an "authentic" sepoy autobiography – also from the Bengal Army – but I argue in the book's conclusion that its provenance is dubious at best. Sita Ram's memoirs were widely used in language training in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, making them an invaluable source for insight into British expectations about sepoys during the imperial Raj, but less so into sepoys' worldviews.[72]

In the absence of firsthand accounts from the Madras Army, I make use of two distinct methodologies to gain insight into sepoys' historical experience. First, I pay particular attention to individual cases, such as the meteoric career of Yusuf Khan, as extraordinary examples in which the boundaries of what was possible for a subaltern actor were tested and thus made visible. Extraordinary case studies are also useful in revealing the expectations of colonial officials and what happened when those assumptions broke down.[73] They pose questions about why the colonial state paid particular attention to an individual sepoy or Indian officer. Second, as in the case of white officers, sepoys' historical agency can also be seen during mutinies, defined in this book as moments of collective disobedience by military actors against their organizational hierarchy. This follows Ranajit Guha's insight that revolts – in his case, by Indian peasants – are necessarily entangled in the contours of the colonial archive, places in which the colonial state's "code of counter-insurgency" solidified *and* in which its edges can be glimpsed or even peeled away.[74]

In a military context, one might speak similarly of a "code of counter-mutiny," where moments of disobedience too were translated to reflect authorities' expectations of their sepoys. When regiments protested against lengthy expeditions, for instance, officials construed their discontent as

[72] For a full analysis of the problems with Sita Ram's narrative, see Alison Safadi, "From Sepoy to Subadar/Khvab-o-Khayal and Douglas Craven Phillott," *Annual of Urdu Studies* 25 (2010): 42–65. The most widely available version of this work is Sita Ram Pandey, *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*, ed. James D. Lunt (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970).

[73] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, translated by John A. Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi, New ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), xiii; Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920*, Critical Perspectives on Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6.

[74] Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Subaltern Studies II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1–42. Guha explored these same themes as well as strategies for reading the encoded records "against the grain" in *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Reprint (New York: Duke University Press, 1999).

outgrowths of Indian "superstitions" about traveling over the "kala pani" (dark water).[75] In 1812, when John Munro discovered a purported conspiracy toward mutiny at the garrison of Kollam (in modern-day Kerala), he described the sepoys involved as having been "misled by Artful Fakeers," religious mendicants.[76] Rather than complex products of the intersections among belief, professional expectations, social relations, and political ties, the Company's colonial administrators thus made sense of moments of disorder in ways that retrenched sepoys' supposed irrationality against the presumed rationality of their European counterparts. Where the colonial archive provides insight into that "code," placing the Company within the wider context of Indian society provides glimpses into the more complex reality of resistance that its narratives distorted.

The code of counter-mutiny would find its most robust articulation in the officers' claims of "rule by the sword." The seven chapters of this book explore how that "code" came to be within the constantly shifting military landscape in which the Company's soldiers, officers, and administrators acted. Chapter 1 begins by situating the Company within expanding English and British global networks in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It explores the political and social realities in England that first produced the Company as a private military institution and connects the corporation to a wider imperial context. Everywhere English and British colonists established settlements, their burgeoning need for military labor came almost inevitably into conflict with their desire to retain martial virtue as a privilege of the colonial elite. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Madras Presidency developed sepoy battalions as a way to resolve this conflict, one that would define the Company's "sword" as distinct from the rest of the empire.

Chapter 2 moves from this broader imperial context to situate the expanding Madras Army within South India's military economy and political networks. This landscape was one characterized by considerable fluidity, for both individual soldiers and their potential patrons. To gain access to these networks, Company officials sought out new

[75] After the Second Anglo-Mysore War, Archibald Campbell, governor of Madras, proudly proclaimed, "The prejudices of Cast, and Country, have decreased Daily among the Sepoy-Corps raised in the Carnatic; they will now Voluntarily embark for Bengal, or Bombay." *Narrative of the Second War with Hyder Ally*, 193, Archibald Campbell Papers, NRS GD1/6/17. For a discussion of how British ideas about *kala pani* still influenced imperial policy into the twentieth century, see Kate Imy, *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 88–94.

[76] Letter from John Munro to Fort St. George, June 4, 1812, TNSA MS Vol. 1, 231–32.

kinds of diplomatic relationships with "country" powers. Such alliances were crucial to facilitating the expansion of the Madras Army as a permanent campaigning force. At the same time, the chapter shows that the entry of these soldiers into the Madras Army often had unexpected effects on these diplomatic relationships, as sepoys and Indian officers sought to translate their service with the Company into new claims of status, prestige, or expertise. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, that dynamic resulted in new patterns of mobility, as the growing reputation of the Company as a military employer gave those trained in its regiments added capital in the constantly changing military labor market.

Chapter 3 takes up this same thread of military mobility, exploring in turn how European soldiers and officers moved through this same space. The chapter delves into the long history of European mercenaries acting as informal agents for the Company in Indian courts. This system expanded along with the Company's political ambitions in the eighteenth century. Through the career of Benoit de Boigne, a Savoyard mercenary, the chapter examines how such men served as proxies for the interests of the emerging colonial state and as tools through which alliances were constructed between Company and "country" powers. By the turn of the nineteenth century, though, expansionist Company officials had begun to replace this informal network of negotiated patronage with the more rigid system of political residents and "subsidiary alliance" that restricted the agency of Indian states. Company officers would remain essential to this new vision of colonial diplomacy, but the role of intermediary, once played by marginal figures, became a more prestigious, competitive, and thus exclusive position.

Chapters 4 and 5 dive more deeply into the question of competition within the Company's officer corps. Chapter 4 focuses on a moment when the Company's rapidly expanding civil and military institutions broke down into violence and conspiracy: the so-called Madras Revolution of 1776, in which a coterie of European officers and civil officials overthrew the governor of Madras, Lord George Pigot. The prominent role that the military leadership played in the coup allowed officers to use the revolt to set new precedents upholding military authority over civilian interference. At the same time, the events in Madras in 1776 scandalized the British public, contributing to the perception that Company officers were greedy rogues and potential rebels. Chapter 5 explores how the social outcry against Company officers contributed to contemporaneous plans by the British state to "consolidate" the Company's armies, folding them into the British Army proper. Determined to resist these reforms, Company officers developed their own political lobby, which galvanized

officers' conceit that they were a horizontal community of "brothers" fighting alongside their royal counterparts to preserve the empire.

Chapter 6 identifies the first decade of the nineteenth century as another transformative moment for the Company. At this point, the colonial state developed functional dominance over South India's military landscape, leading to renewed calls among civilian officials to reduce the army. Those changes would spark anger among both Indian and European forces. In July 1806, sepoys at the garrison of Vellore rose up in a brief, bloody revolt that would be violently suppressed. The origins of the mutiny were complex and reflected sepoys' loss of agency in an increasingly colonized military economy, but the Company's European officers moved quickly to frame the revolt as the inevitable outgrowth of civilian reforms that had interfered with the army. As one officer wrote, the mutiny occurred because "[t]he Sepoy was now taught that his Officer was not the important Man he had hitherto considered him … that if the Officer ordered, the Sepoy had no rights [sic, requirements] to obey, unless what the Officer ordered was proper."[77]

Only a year later, the Company's European officers burst into a mutiny of their own, abandoning their posts, seizing control of forts and garrisons, and even fighting a pitched battle against royal dragoons and auxiliary cavalry troopers from Mysore. When the civilian governor, George Hilaro Barlow, sought to quell the mutiny by appealing to sepoys directly, the officers decried the strategy as an attack on the stability of empire. According to Lieutenant-Colonel John Malcolm, the prospect of mobilizing sepoys against their officers threatened the entirety of British authority in India:

> It is the firm allegiance and continued obedience of the natives of which the strength of those armies is composed, which forms by far the most important principle in our government of this great Empire. This can never be denied; and it is as true that in that almost religious respect with which the sepoy of India has hitherto regarded his European officer, consisted what has been always deemed the chief link of this great chain of duty and obedience. The dignity of the local Government of Fort St. George has been saved from an imputation of weakness, by a measure which threatens the most serious danger to the future safety of our whole empire in India.[78]

The 1809 mutiny represented a culmination of the central tenets of the officers' view of empire, the maturation of "rule by the sword" as a

[77] Letter from J. Haslewood to Hall Plumer, October 13, 1806, 385, Dundas Papers, NRS GD51/3/432.

[78] John Malcolm, *Observations on the Disturbances in the Madras Army in 1809: In Two Parts* (London: William Miller and John Murray, 1812), 102.

governing ideology, and it proved persuasive. Barlow was recalled, and the officers of the Madras Army expanded their influence in the Company's government, circulating a version of stratocracy across all three presidencies.[79]

The final chapter traces the continued spread of those ideas throughout the last decades of Company rule, culminating in the rebellions of 1857. That conflict is often taken as prelude, inaugurating a new phase of direct imperial rule and anticipating a budding nationalist movement. *The Company's Sword* inverts that chronology. It places the rebellions within a continuum of military maneuver and resistance, driven by European and Indian soldiers alike, who sought to define the social and political meaning of their service in the context of an ever-changing colonial state. Their claims-making shaped the Company from its inception, and tracing out the way they navigated its structures reveals a network of often subversive negotiation that administrators were unable to control. With the end of Company rule, the position of these actors was radically changed, but the potential for agency was not lost. As the Crown Raj sought to build a militarized empire of its own, its sepoys, soldiers, and officers made clear that "rule by the sword" was never a passive construction.

[79] For more on the 1809 mutiny, see Alexander G. Cardew, *The White Mutiny, a Forgotten Episode in the History of the Indian Army* (Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay and Sons, 1929).