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"Pernicious Publicity": The East India Company, the Military, and the Freedom of the Press, 1818–1823

Abstract Early nineteenth-century Bengal is frequently used as a case study to demonstrate how debates over press liberties acquired additional stakes in colonial settings. Yet existing scholarship overlooks how the expansion of Britain's military presence overseas during and after the Napoleonic Wars complicated reformist ambitions for a free press. In India, army officers formed a significant proportion of the European population and were both enthusiastic readers of and contributors to the fledgling colonial press. Using the example of the *Calcutta Journal*, one of India's first daily newspapers, the author shows how the boundaries of what officers could and could not publicize in the press were negotiated through legal proceedings and disciplinary action and through debate within the newspaper itself. The preservation of military discipline was the primary motivation for press regulation during this period, and the military continued to be viewed as an exception to the rule even as commitment to government intervention began to wane. Yet within the military itself, officers strenuously debated their right to speak out and claim their place within the public sphere. These disputes reflect wider divisions within the army and reveal the ambiguous position of Britain's military at a time when the relationship between state and civil society was being reconfigured.

Since the eighteenth century, publicity has emerged as a political ideal of paramount importance, regarded by English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) as "the keenest spur to exertion, and the surest of all guards against improbity."[1] Yet transparency is often sacrificed when security is perceived to be at stake.[2] In colonial India, where the survival of the East India Company's empire was believed to depend on its military superiority, the imperative to preserve military discipline led prominent colonial officials to fear the circulation of ideas and

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[1] Jeremy Bentham, "Bentham's Draught for the Organization of Judicial Establishments, Compared with That of the National Assembly, with a Commentary on the Same," in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 4, *Panopticon, Constitution*, ed. John Bowring (Edinburgh, 1843), 316. See also Gerald J. Postema, "The Soul of Justice: Bentham on Publicity, Law, and the Rule of Law," in *Bentham's Theory of Law and Public Opinion*, ed. Xiaobo Zhai and Michael Quinn (Cambridge, 2014), 40–62.

[2] Alasdair Roberts, *Blacked Out: Government Secrecy in the Information Age* (Cambridge, 2006), 18; Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York, 1982), 211.

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information that might kindle unrest within the army.[3] While the contingent loyalty of large numbers of Indian soldiers was undeniably of primary concern, the quiescence of the company's European men was not taken for granted, particularly given the history of militancy among the officer class.[4] Rather, the two spheres were perceived to be interconnected because European officers were viewed as a likely vector for the transmission of dissatisfaction and dissent to the army at large.[5] In the 1820s, this fear of military insubordination was sharpened by the growing phenomenon of officers anonymously publicizing their problems in the newspapers. Focusing on the early nineteenth-century expansion of the English-language press in Bengal, I examine how the company's government in India tried to control this "pernicious publicity" and how officers themselves accepted or resisted these constraints.[6] Against the backdrop of debates about the liberty of the press, it is possible to discern the practical impact of competing perceptions about what it meant to be a soldier, an officer, a gentleman, and a British subject.

The struggle for the freedom of the press was a critical front in the larger campaign for more transparent, accountable, and representative forms of government in the nineteenth century. Throughout the 1820s, newspaper editors insisted on their right to subject government policies to public scrutiny, waging war against colonial administrations in India, Canada, New South Wales, and the Cape as part of what C. A. Bayly has described as "the first international conjuncture of radical liberalism."[7] In India, however, the arguments marshaled against the freedom of the press took on a distinctive character that was in part a product of the imbalance between the comparatively small white community and the large Indian population. Whereas in Britain prominent government figures condemned the press as an instrument of demagogues and rabble-rousers, in India a free press seemed even more dangerous because it threatened to propagate ideas of self-government incompatible with the East India Company's hold over the subcontinent. In opposition to reformers who viewed the press as a mechanism for making government accountable to the public, many colonial officials either denied the existence of public opinion in India or refused to recognize it as a valid political consideration. This refusal stemmed in part from entrenched stereotypes of India as a land naturally suited to despotic

[3] Thomas Munro, "Minute on the Press in India, 12 April 1822," in *Report from Select Committee on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*; *with minutes of evidence, and appendix*, House of Commons (London, 1834), 117–18; "Memorandum by Sir John Malcolm, 1822," appendix, *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 137.

[4] Douglas M. Peers, "Army Discipline, Military Cultures, and State-Formation in Colonial India, c. 1780–1860," in *Britain's Oceanic Empire: Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds, c. 1550–1850*, ed. H. V. Bowen, Elizabeth Mancke, and John G. Reid (Cambridge, 2012), 282–308, at 290.

[5] Thomas Munro, "Minute on the Press in India, 12 April 1822," in *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 117–118; "Memorandum by Sir John Malcolm, 1822," appendix, *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 137.

[6] Senex, "Letter of Senex," *Calcutta Journal*, 12 January 1820, 84.

[7] C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), 70. See also Barry Wright, "Libel and the Colonial Administration of Justice in Upper Canada and New South Wales, c. 1825–30," in *The Grand Experiment: Law and Legal Culture in British Settler Societies*, ed. Hamar Foster, Benjamin L. Berger, and A. R. Buck (Vancouver, 2008), 15–37, at 16–17; John M. MacKenzie, "'To Enlighten South Africa': The Creation of a Free Press at the Cape in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Media and the British Empire*, ed. Chandrika Kaul (Basingstoke, 2006), 20–36.

forms of government and in part from the fact that the white population consisted predominantly of company employees and soldiers.[8] Historians continue to grapple with nineteenth-century attitudes to the existence or nonexistence of an Indian public and the implications of these disputes for colonial government in India.[9] What remains unexplored is the extent to which these confrontations over the liberty of the press were shaped by the militarization of British India.

The revolutionary and Napoleonic wars prompted a massive augmentation of Britain's armed forces, which, after 1815, were mainly stationed overseas.[10] Yet many aspects of the social and cultural history of the military during this period remain understudied in comparison to the experiences of other imperial actors. In the Indian context, Kenneth Ballhatchet and Erica Wald have described the East India Company's attempts to discipline and control any intemperance in its rank and file, while Linda Colley showed how these "captives in uniform" negotiated (and resisted) hierarchical military structures through dissent and desertion.[11] Peter Stanley's social history of the Bengal army contextualizes and explains the "white mutiny" of 1859–61, while Douglas Peers has influentially established the military's influence on the political ideology of the company.[12] Still, the contested place of military personnel within the emergent Indian print media has been mentioned in passing but not examined in depth.[13] In revisiting this period of controversy, what becomes clear is that the visibility that newspapers afforded to military grievances was a critical bone of contention within debates about the freedom of the press. The presence of large standing armies forced contemporaries to reckon with the uncertain relationship between the military and civil society, an aspect of the debate that has previously been neglected.

The history of the notorious *Calcutta Journal*, one of India's first English-language daily newspapers, provides a useful case study. James Silk Buckingham (1786–1855), the *Calcutta Journal*'s editor, is usually lauded as a key combatant in the empire-wide struggle for the freedom of the press. After a series of confrontations with the company, Buckingham was famously deported in 1823, becoming something of a martyr to the cause. When the *Calcutta Journal* was suppressed later that same

[8] For stereotypes of oriental despotism, see P. J. Marshall, "Taming the Exotic: The British and India in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester, 1990), 46–65, at 56.

[9] Joshua Ehrlich, "The Crisis of Liberal Reform in India: Public Opinion, Pyrotechnics, and the Charter Act of 1833," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no. 6 (2018): 2013–55, at 2015; Daniel E. White, *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print, and Modernity in Early British India, 1793–1835* (Baltimore, 2013), 22; P. J. Marshall, "The Whites of British India, 1780–1830: A Failed Colonial Society?," *International History Review* 12, no. 1 (1990): 26–44, at 38.

[10] Peter Burroughs, "An Unreformed Army? 1815–1868," in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. David Chandler (Oxford, 1997), 161–86, at 162.

[11] Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and Their Critics, 1793–1905* (London, 1980); Erica Wald, *Vice in the Barracks: Medicine, the Military and the Making of Colonial India, 1780–1868* (Basingstoke, 2014); Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London, 2003), 311.

[12] Peter Stanley, *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India* (New York, 1998); Douglas M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India, 1819–1835* (London, 1995); Douglas M. Peers, "Colonial Knowledge and the Military in India, 1780–1860," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 33, no. 2 (2005): 157–80.

[13] Marshall, "Whites of British India," 35.

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year, Buckingham petitioned first the company and then Parliament for financial redress. A parliamentary select committee was eventually formed to investigate his claims.[14] Although its 1834 report did not immediately produce the desired effect (in that the company initially resisted giving Buckingham the recommended compensation), this report, coupled with the inquiries instituted against Buckingham in India, is a valuable store of information about the *Calcutta Journal*'s operations. Previously this information has been used to tell the story of Buckingham himself, who figures prominently in histories of the nineteenth-century press.[15] However, I use parliamentary and company records to refocus attention on the anonymous officers whose letters filled the pages of Buckingham's newspaper and whose stories remain untold.

Although at least two officers and one former rank-and-file soldier were expelled from India for inciting disaffection within the army through the press, the East India Company took relatively limited action against infractions of press regulations. Officials lacked time or resources to systematically pursue the identity of pseudonymous letter writers. The uneven nature of government intervention, however, does not mean that the problem of officers writing to the press was considered insignificant. At stake were not so much the fortunes of particular individuals as different models of how state, society, and the military should relate to one another. These issues were debated both publicly and in legal courts and government circles. To understand how a precarious consensus was formed, government policy and public controversy need to be placed within the same analytical frame. Doing so reveals that alongside government regulation were other, more informal modes of policing. Contributors to the newspapers exerted social pressure by attacking editors or letter writers for overstepping the boundaries of what could, with propriety, be discussed publicly. Officers who wrote to the press did not simply have government to answer to; they were also held to account by editors and readers.

The propriety of officers writing to the press was negotiated in two different arenas: first, in disciplinary measures and legal proceedings (including court-martials and prosecution for libel), and second, in debates published in the pages of the *Calcutta Journal*. Accordingly, in what follows, I introduce the *Calcutta Journal* and describe the military debates it fostered; revise traditional accounts of the newspaper's showdown with the governor-general-in-council by demonstrating the significance of officers' letters within these disputes; and examine how the phenomenon of officers writing to the press was debated in letters to the editor. Although the Bengal government struggled to successfully prosecute troublesome editors, identify anonymous letter writers, and keep abreast of a rapidly increasing body of new print material, their task was to some extent facilitated by divided opinions among officers about the rectitude of airing military grievances to the press. In this instance, the battle for press freedoms was not simply a confrontation between government and newspapermen but was connected to wider divisions about the nature and limits of military discipline, deference, duty, and honor.

[14] Ralph E. Turner, *James Silk Buckingham, 1786–1855: A Social Biography* (New York, 1934), 213–18, 338–40.

[15] William H. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819–1832* (London, 1928), 275; A. F. Salahuddin Ahmed, *Social Ideas and Social Change in Bengal, 1818–1835* (Leiden, 1965), 61; Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York, 2010), 98–101.

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A FRIEND TO THE MILITARY

Although most histories of the *Calcutta Journal* start with the newspaper's celebrated editor, James Silk Buckingham, its story really begins with the fabulously wealthy Calcutta merchant John Palmer. Palmer was a leading figure in Calcutta society and a partner in one of its most prominent agency houses, a vital institution in colonial India that provided financial services for company servants and army officers. In 1818, after Buckingham, then a ship's captain, had lost his job for refusing to convoy a slaving ship to Zanzibar, Palmer invited him to edit a newspaper.[16] Palmer's investment in the *Calcutta Journal* was one plank in a broader campaign to promote mercantile interests in India. After the renewal of the company's parliamentary charter in 1813, British merchants were permitted free access to India's shores but remained there largely on the sufferance of the East India Company, enjoying indirect influence but no guaranteed rights in the company's administration.[17] According to Buckingham, the *Calcutta Journal*'s initial purpose was to provide a platform for merchants who otherwise had no say in government affairs. As he later explained to a parliamentary committee, "There was no journal among all the number in which the merchants of the city could find admission for any communications calculated to call in question either the wisdom or the justice of any regulation, order, or law affecting their own peculiar interests."[18] Buckingham had no prior publishing experience; his qualifications for the job were, in his own words, that he was "an independent gentleman, neither in the service of the Government nor under any party control."[19] From the first, then, Buckingham's newspaper stood in uneasy relation to the East India Company's executive.

To classify the *Calcutta Journal* as an opposition newspaper would be oversimple, however. Buckingham always described himself as a supporter of Francis Rawdon Hastings, First Marquess of Hastings (India's governor-general and commander-in-chief, 1814–1823), one of Palmer's close friends and confidants.[20] Buckingham instead reserved his indignation for members of Hastings's council.[21] John Adam (1779–1825), who as chief secretary of the political department for the period 1812 to 1819 had been responsible for monitoring and disciplining the Bengal press, was a particularly outspoken adversary of press liberties. After he joined the supreme council in 1819, Adam would emerge as Buckingham's foremost opponent.[22] Whatever Buckingham's own political allegiances might have been, however, testimony collected by the parliamentary select committee suggests that, as one shareholder phrased it, "people of all politics took in the Journal."[23] This anecdotal evidence is supported by the newspaper's popularity, as it quickly outstripped its rivals to acquire an extensive readership across India. Within three months of

[16] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 49.

[17] Anthony Webster, *The Richest East India Merchant: The Life and Business of John Palmer of Calcutta, 1767–1836* (Woodbridge, 2007), 94.

[18] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 50.

[19] "Minutes of Evidence," 50.

[20] Webster, *Richest East India Merchant*, 94–95.

[21] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 16.

[22] Katherine Prior, s.v. "Adam, John (1779–1825), Administrator in India," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online*, 23 September 2004, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/104.

[23] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 1–5.

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its first appearance on 2 October 1818, it had repaid Buckingham's initial investment. Originally intended as a biweekly, by July 1919 the newspaper was published daily. At its height, it reached a circulation of one thousand copies a day, even at the relatively high subscription rate of Rs.16 per month.[24]

Like many early nineteenth-century newspapers, the *Calcutta Journal* typically devoted a significant portion of its columns to letters to the editor. The practice reflected the prevalent belief that readers had a stake in public events and a right to debate them. These letters were traditionally anonymous contributions, some possibly manufactured by editors themselves.[25] According to his biographer, at the height of the *Calcutta Journal*'s popularity in 1821, Buckingham received as many as fifty letters in a day and cumulatively published more than a thousand of them.[26] They ranged from complaints about crowding and disrepair in Calcutta to criticisms of the postal service to perspectives on sati and the slave trade. The topics covered reflected the *Calcutta Journal*'s readership, which, according to Buckingham, was predominantly wealthy merchants, army officers, and company employees.[27]

Because of the letters' anonymous character, it is usually impossible to determine their authorship, except when they became the subject of government inquiries. Many correspondents used initials or Latin names from the classical tradition, while others preferred to be tongue-in-cheek. More usefully, some authors signed their letters with a description of their status, such as "An Officer," "An Old Officer," or "A Commanding Officer." Nevertheless, among individual writers' many overlapping identities, they usually selected the one most relevant to the letter in question.[28] Thus, according to one author, "we see a Traveller will sign himself VIATOR, a Physician MEDICUS, a person exposing falsehoods, Veritas, Verax, a Friend to Truth &c. and so on *ad infinitum*."[29] Officers probably wrote on a variety of topics, their signatures in these instances giving no clue as to their occupation. In consequence, it is impossible to assemble a complete profile of their letters to the editor. What is possible, however, is to examine a collection of letters on military subjects where a combination of internal evidence and choice of pseudonym indicates that the letter writers were members of the military.

The military would have represented an important market for Buckingham. In 1818, there were 32,161 European soldiers stationed in India, whereas there were fewer than 3,000 Europeans employed in the civilian branches of the service and only 1,455 licensed European residents who were, as of 1815, not employed by the East India Company.[30] Of the European soldiers, 20,110 belonged to the British Army, while the remainder served the company via the Presidency armies

[24] "Minutes of Evidence," 51, 6.

[25] Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998), 38.

[26] Turner, *James Silk Buckingham*, 137–39.

[27] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 51.

[28] Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion*, 39.

[29] Benevolus, "Party Question Disclaimed," *Calcutta Journal*, 8 October 1819, 291.

[30] *Report from the Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company*, 6 vols. (London, 1831), 5:xv; Return of Civil Offices and Establishments under the Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay, 1817 and 1827, House of Commons Sessional Paper 633, vol. 28 (1830); Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company Report, appendix 1, House of Commons Sessional Paper 320A, vol. 5 (1831), 769.

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of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras.[31] Of the 20,110 Crown forces stationed in India in 1818, 842 were officers; there were 2,691 officers serving in the company's armies.[32]

The exact readership of the *Calcutta Journal* is impossible to ascertain because subscription lists have not survived; however, most of the readers and contributors from the military were probably officers. Officers, after all, were more likely to have the money to purchase newspapers and the ability to write letters for publication. Subscriptions were expensive, but even those who could not subscribe could be exposed to the *Calcutta Journal* in other ways. A letter writer who signed himself "An Ensign," for example, was indebted to "the kindness of a Friend, who sometimes indulges me with a sight of your Journal."[33] There is evidence of officers pooling resources to pay for a joint subscription, and at least one reader discontinued his personal subscription to the *Calcutta Journal* because he could acquire copies through his station library (though whether the library in question was a subscription library paid for by participating officers or one supplied by the company is not specified).[34] Meanwhile, "A Veteran" was infuriated with the audacity of Trim, a junior officer in his regiment, who wrote a satirical letter to the editor of the *Calcutta Journal* that he "well knew... would be read aloud at the mess table," creating "merriment and laughter, at the expence of good discipline."[35] Historians of print media during this period have often noted that books and newspapers had the potential to reach a wide audience by being shared and read aloud; the newspaper in India is no exception.[36] Whether by subscribing, borrowing, or hearing it read aloud in the mess, it seems likely that a broad range of officers of different levels of seniority would have had access to the *Calcutta Journal*. This hypothesis is confirmed by the signatures of letters to the editor, with many "A Sub" or "A Young Sub" alongside "An Old Officer" or "A Commanding Officer."

How far newspapers were accessible to the rank and file is more difficult to determine. Barred from the officers' mess and discouraged from socializing with the officer class, the rank and file would not have had the same level of exposure to relatively expensive publications like the *Calcutta Journal*. By the 1820s, the East India Company was starting to provide libraries targeted specifically at the common soldier (although the British Army did not yet do so), and there is evidence to suggest that some libraries carried newspapers and periodicals.[37] The relatively large number of former clerks who served in the company's armies (in contrast to the smaller number who served in the British Army) has led Peter Stanley to suggest that the percentage of literate soldiers in the company's service might have been significant. Because literacy rates were not recorded, however, it is not possible to know for sure how many would have been capable of writing a letter for newspaper publication.[38] A government investigation in 1832 revealed that at least one objectionable letter to

[31] *Report on the Affairs of the East India Company*, 5:xxxiii.

[32] *Report on the Affairs of the East India Company*, 5:196–97.

[33] An Ensign, "New Regiments," *Calcutta Journal*, 14 March 1820, 104.

[34] Sceptic, "Reading Room," *Calcutta Journal*, 18 May 1822, 256; "Subscription Lists," *Calcutta Journal*, 20 December 1822, 681.

[35] A Veteran, "Public Discussions," *Calcutta Journal*, 20 October 1819, 375.

[36] Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion*, 53.

[37] Sharon Murphy, *The British Soldier and His Libraries, c. 1822–1901* (London, 2016), 35, 41.

[38] Stanley, *White Mutiny*, 21, 43.

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the editor of the *Bombay Gazette* was written by a private in the British Army who signed his letter "Justinian," hinting that others may have written to the newspapers too.[39] A combination of signatures and internal evidence (particularly the preoccupation with promotion) seems to indicate, however, that most letters to the *Calcutta Journal* on military subjects were written by members of the officer class.

For these officers, the *Calcutta Journal* performed several important functions. Like other expatriates, they viewed the newspaper as a lifeline connecting them with developments in Britain. At the same time, the newspaper also furnished military men with information more specific to their interests.[40] It quickly acquired a reputation for having a considerable military readership, and officers accordingly began to use letters to the editor to pose military queries to fellow readers from the army.[41] The *Calcutta Journal* also served as a medium whereby officers could defend the reputations of individuals and regiments, using letters to set the story straight.[42] Finally, officers used the newspaper as a forum for airing grievances, identifying problems, and debating various aspects of army life.[43]

Letters along these lines usually related to a handful of key issues. The moral and martial qualities of sepoys were endlessly disputed.[44] Unsurprisingly, given the ratio of European men to women in colonial India, readers shared strategies for capturing the elusive "spinster."[45] Some letter writers complained about intemperance in the army and proposed solutions.[46] The majority of military queries related to the operations of martial law, reflecting the lack of training on this point and the proliferation of different legal codes for each branch of the service.[47] Other dominant subjects of discussion were prize money, pay, and promotion. The importance of prize money within the *Calcutta Journal*'s pages can be explained by the recent conclusion of the Third Maratha War in 1818 and the labyrinthine prize-money process that followed. As Margot Finn has observed, "Producing historical narratives that either justified or discredited claims to prize came to occupy many [East India] Company men," and some of these narratives were laid before the public in the *Calcutta*

[39] 8 September 1832, Bombay Political Department, British Library, London, Asia, Pacific and Africa Collection, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 3. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as BL, and the collection as APAC.)

[40] A Military Subscriber, "Letter of a Military Subscriber," *Calcutta Journal*, 26 May 1820, 285.

[41] An Enquirer, "Military Query," *Calcutta Journal*, 14 September 1819, 121; A Non-Effective Captain, "New Queries," *Calcutta Journal*, 19 October 1819, 264.

[42] A Soldier, "Pindarry War," *Calcutta Journal*, 13 October 1819, 323; Vindicator, "Letter from Nagpore," *Calcutta Journal*, 16 March 1822, 165–66.

[43] A Brevet Captain on the Madras Establishment, "Madras Regiments," *Calcutta Journal*, 2 October 1819, 252–53; Minos, "Civil and Military Authority," *Calcutta Journal*, 31 October 1820, 73; A Young Lieutenant, "Army Fees," 29 May 1820, 323.

[44] Carnaticus, "General View of our Indian Army," *Calcutta Journal*, 26 September 1821, 273–76; Calcutticus, "Letter of Carnaticus," *Calcutta Journal*, 28 September 1821, 309; A Bengally, "Defence of the Bengal Army," *Calcutta Journal*, 1 October 1821, 335–37; A Soldier, "Carnaticus," *Calcutta Journal*, 15 October 1821, 494.

[45] A Young Bachelor, "Supplies Wanted at Meerut," *Calcutta Journal*, 4 April 1822, 368; Coelebs, "Eligibles," *Calcutta Journal*, 15 May 1822, 210; One of the Knowing Ones, "Matrimony," 3 June 1822, 466; A Sub, "Subalterns and Ladies," *Calcutta Journal*, 18 June 1823, 254.

[46] A King's Officer, "Rack Shops and Canteens," *Calcutta Journal*, 29 January 1822, 293; A Soldier, "Drunkenness in the Army," 25 May 1822, 354.

[47] Douglas Peers, "Sepoys, Soldiers, and the Lash: Race, Caste and Army Discipline in India, 1820–50," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 23, no. 2 (1995): 211–47, at 221–22.

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Journal.[48] Discussions about promotion predominantly related to the question of whether promotion by seniority, which was the company model, was preferable to promotion by merit, which was, ostensibly, the British Army model, though, as critics pointed out, this description obscured the operation of patronage and the ability of British Army officers to purchase their commission.[49] Finally, on the topic of pay, readers remarked on their limited allowances, noted the problems caused by uneven exchange rates across India, and debated the desirability of establishing a military fund in Bengal, where soldiers would pay a monthly subscription to finance their retirement or provide for their widows and children after their deaths.[50]

Reader responses to material published in the *Calcutta Journal* were sometimes submitted to other English-language newspapers in Bengal, which, on occasion, Buckingham then reprinted in his newspaper to generate debate. Usually, these letters were from conservative critics of the *Calcutta Journal*, who apparently preferred to share their criticisms with like-minded people in less reform-oriented newspapers.[51] Similarly, letters to the editor published in the *Calcutta Journal* sometimes responded to letters printed in other publications.[52] Through the *Calcutta Journal*, then, it is possible to acquire a more general sense of contemporary newspaper debates in Bengal. In 1818, when the *Calcutta Journal* was first established, there were eight newspapers in Bengal; by 1820, only four remained.[53] Of these, the *Bengal Hurkaru* (founded as a weekly in 1795, becoming a daily from 29 April 1819) broadly shared the *Calcutta Journal*'s liberal sympathies and was initially its most serious competitor.[54] In 1821, another daily, *John Bull in the East*, was founded as a conservative newspaper in explicit opposition to the *Calcutta Journal*; the two editors exchanged heated remarks and were effectively "at war."[55] Given the large numbers of soldiers stationed in India, these rival newspapers were keen to identify themselves as the military publication of choice and were not averse to accusing their competitors of publishing libels on the army.[56]

For the most part, however, exchanges on military subjects were conducted with moderation. So long as military correspondents debated technical questions, for instance, the proper procedure for military tribunals, no one seems to have objected.

[48] Margot C. Finn, "Material Turns in British History: I. Loot," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, no. 28 (2018): 5–32, at 21.

[49] A Friend to the Army, "Brevet Rank," *Calcutta Journal*, 28 August 1819, 807–8; One of the New School, "Brevet Rank," *Calcutta Journal*, 16 August 1819, 770; One of the Old School, "Brevet Rank," *Calcutta Journal*, 7 September 1819, 61–62.

[50] A Subscriber, "Military Fund," *Calcutta Journal*, 6 January 1820, 45; A Lieutenant of New Light Native Infantry, "For the Benefit of the Military," *Calcutta Journal*, 27 May 1820, 237–39; A Captain in the Bengal Army, "King's and Company's Army," *Calcutta Journal*, 12 June 1820, 494.

[51] B., "Letter Inserted in John Bull," *Calcutta Journal*, 20 May 1822, 269; Britannicus, "The Bull's Second Answer," *Calcutta Journal*, 12 March 1823, 156; Calcutticus, "Letter of Carnaticus," 309.

[52] A Sub, "Military Subjection," *Calcutta Journal*, 22 March 1823, 303–4; A Bengal Officer, "Military Correspondence," 8 March 1823, 108.

[53] Turner, *James Silk Buckingham*, 156; Statement of Number of Periodical Publications and Printing Presses in India, 1814–30, House of Commons Papers, vol. 31 (1831–32), 233.

[54] Mrinal Kanti Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal, 1780–1857* (Calcutta, 1987), 32.

[55] Chanda, *History of the English Press in Bengal*, 31.

[56] A Soldier, "More Libels," *Calcutta Journal*, 30 May 1820, 335; Salamander, "Delenda est Carthago," *Calcutta Journal*, 29 May 1830, 323; James Silk Buckingham, "Military Correspondence," *Calcutta Journal*, 12 March 1823, 156.

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Over time, however, the increasing propensity of military correspondents to publicize problems in the pages of the *Calcutta Journal* provoked the governor-general-in-council to act. Situating these confrontations within the longer history of government regulation of the press demonstrates that government's clash with Buckingham reflected a larger pattern in which press censorship was overwhelmingly concerned with preserving military discipline. The popularity of Buckingham's journal, coupled with his open advocacy of reform, seems to have sharpened this apprehension, although the question of how to combat this growing phenomenon was never fully resolved. In one notable instance, the council did make a harsh example of a senior officer, treating him, according to his own graphic imagery, "like a dog with the mange."[57] Yet, the council was ultimately forced to admit its inability to combat what one officer described as "the cacoethes"—Latin for *evil habit* or *itch*.[58]

TAMING THE ITCH

English-language newspapers began to be printed in India in the 1780s. The first and most notorious was *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* (1780–1782), whose editorial attacks on public figures culminated in editor James Augustus Hicky's imprisonment, bankruptcy, and retreat from the newspaper business.[59] Although the press was technically unregulated during the first twenty years of its existence, the governor-general-in-council was clearly prepared to act on an ad hoc basis against publications deemed licentious. Usually content with a stern reprimand, on at least three occasions, the Bengal government expelled the guilty parties from India. The precedent was set by William Duane, editor of the *World* and persona non grata with the East India Company because of a series of "intemperate articles" published in that newspaper. Duane was a printer who first came to Bengal in 1787 as a private in the East India Company's service; though not himself a career soldier, he used his newspaper to promote the interests of his former brothers-in-arms, and he was finally deported for printing a statement addressed to the army elaborating his grievances against the company.[60] Captain Thomas George Williamson (Bengal Army) was likewise forced to return to England after twenty years of service because of an inflammatory letter to the *Telegraph* on the subject of proposed military reforms.[61] Significantly, Williamson's case represents one of the few instances in which government went to the trouble of discovering the identity of the letter writer rather than cautioning the editor. From the first, then, the most serious sanctions were usually reserved for publications that threatened military discipline, the exception being Charles

[57] William Robison to John Adam, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 494.

[58] A Veteran, "Public Discussions," *Calcutta Journal*, 20 October 1819, 375*; Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "cacoethes, n.," https://www.oed.com.

[59] Ben Gilding, "The Rise and Fall of *Hicky's Bengal Gazette* (1780–82): A Study in Transoceanic Political Culture," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47, no. 1 (2019): 1–27.

[60] Appendix, *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 111; Nigel Little, *Transoceanic Radical, William Duane: National Identity and Empire, 1760–1835* (London, 2008), 90.

[61] V. C. P. Hodson, s.v. "Williamson, Thomas," in *List of the Officers of the Bengal Army, 1758–1834*, 4 vols. (London, 1947), 4:483–84; appendix, *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 111.

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McLean, an unlicensed Englishman who was expelled for his attack on the official conduct of the magistrate of Ghazipur.[62]

Press regulations were first introduced in 1799 amid the tumult of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Hereafter, newspapers had to be submitted for inspection by the chief secretary in Calcutta prior to publication; the penalty for breach of regulations was immediate embarkation for Europe. To facilitate discipline and punishment, printers were required to publish their name at the bottom of the newspaper, and editors and proprietors were required to submit their names and addresses to the secretary to government. Further prohibitions were introduced as editors and printers pushed the boundaries of what government considered acceptable during a time of war; these regulations mostly related to the publication of naval and shipping intelligence or information concerning the numbers and movement of troops. Despite a raft of new regulations, the period witnessed relatively limited conflict between government and press, apart from occasional reminders to submit proofs prior to publication. The government's main concern was to minimize the circulation of strategic information at a time when, in addition to the French threat, they were fighting a series of wars against rival Indian powers. Only two editors had to be reminded more than once to mind the rules.[63]

The abolition of the censor in 1818 set the conditions for conflict between the government and the *Calcutta Journal*. On 19 August, editors were informed that they no longer had to submit proofs for the chief secretary's approval; instead, they were supplied with a list of general prohibitions. Specifically, the press was forbidden to publish criticisms of company proceedings in India or in England; to publish discussions that might provoke alarm in the Indian population (particularly on the subject of religion); to make personal remarks tending to "dissention in society"; and to republish excerpts from English or other newspapers that might fall under any of the aforementioned descriptions or were "otherwise calculated to affect the British power or reputation in India."[64] These prohibitions were vague and potentially capacious, leaving much to editors' interpretation. In consequence, the abolition of the censor arguably subjected the press to greater risk of punishment or prosecution than before. Whereas previously the responsibility for discriminating between acceptable and inappropriate material for publication rested with the chief secretary, now editors were forced to take their fate into their own hands. Subsequently, the problems associated with this system became clear. At the time, however, the governor-general with whom the initiative to liberate the press originated, Francis Rawdon Hastings, First Marquess of Hastings, was celebrated for his beneficence. The inhabitants of Madras (subject to a separate, more rigid set of regulations) compiled an address that was publicly presented to the marquess by a deputation at the Great Hall of Audience in Calcutta. The event was widely attended and, for better or for worse, Hastings's words on that occasion would be echoed back to him in all his subsequent dealings with the press.[65]

Within a year of its foundation, the *Calcutta Journal* attracted the notice of the Bengal government, first for attacking the governor of Madras in June 1819, and

[62] Appendix, *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 111–12.
[63] Appendix, 112–13.
[64] Appendix, 114.
[65] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 54–56.

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then in January 1820, for accusing the Madras government of impeding the circulation of the newspaper within that presidency as payback for its previous comments. These early incidents indicated Buckingham's willingness to risk government displeasure by commenting on public people and public measures. Buckingham's editorial contributions continued to elicit censure from the governor-general-in-council; in July 1821 he was reprimanded for complaining that government had circulated a rival newspaper post free; in November 1821 he was accused of obstruction of justice for publishing commentary on his indictment for libel; and his fate was finally decided by his comments on the Reverend Samuel James Bryce's appointment to clerk of the stationary. Yet, most of Buckingham's run-ins with council related to the publication of letters on military subjects or by military men. Notably, of the anonymous letters that filled the pages of the *Calcutta Journal*, it was those relating to military subjects that almost exclusively attracted the governor-general-in-council's notice (with one important exception, discussed below).[66]

Buckingham was held personally accountable for two of the letters to the editor published in the *Calcutta Journal*. The decision to make him answer for the publication of these letters accorded with the 1818 guidance issued to the press in Bengal and aligned with the tactics used by the Home Office against the press in Britain. For expediency's sake, governments preferred to focus on keeping editors and newspaper proprietors in line. Not only was it practically difficult to identify anonymous authors, but because editors were responsible for selecting material for publication, they represented the channel through which dangerous opinions reached the public.[67] In an English context, historian Philip Harling has argued, "[t]he government was mainly interested in breaking the supply chain by putting stress upon its weakest links, and it was less interested in imprisoning vendors than in scaring them out of business"; the same principle applied in India.[68] The East India Company's government in India tended to follow a ritual of threatening, then forgiving editors, employing the carrot and the stick to keep them compliant.

The council's first significant step was to file an ex officio information (or legal summons) against Buckingham for publishing an anonymous attack on the system of promotion in the company's armies.[69] The letter was titled "Merit and Interest" and signed "Amulaes" (a misprint of *aemulus*, the Latin root of *emulous*, corrected in a subsequent edition).[70] The writer alleged, "No species of merit . . . receives, in this country, a commensurate remuneration," and "every excitement and emulation is barbarously and cruelly withheld, except by the pernicious means of political influence or as it is generally termed *interest*."[71] The council considered the letter to be "of so very offensive and mischievous a tendency" that it decided, with the concurrence of the advocate general (the East India Company's legal counsel in India), to prosecute Buckingham for libel "for vilifying the government and

[66] Appendix, *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 115–17.

[67] Wickwar, *Struggle for the Freedom of the Press*, 101–2.

[68] Philip Harling, "The Law of Libel and the Limits of Repression, 1790–1832," *Historical Journal* 44, no. 1 (March 2001):107–34, at 122.

[69] On ex officio information, see Arthur Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, c. 1780–1850* (London, 1949), 40.

[70] For the correction, see Aemulus, "Merit and Interest," *Calcutta Journal*, 15 November 1820, 177–78.

[71] Amulaes, "Merit and Interest," *Calcutta Journal*, 6 November 1820, 71.

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tending to excite discontent in the army."[72] Governor-General Hastings, however, vetoed council's decision on the strength of a personal appeal from Buckingham. The prosecution was waived on the conditions that Buckingham would allow an ex officio information to be passed against him unopposed and that he would write an apology to be read in court by the advocate general.[73]

When Buckingham was next threatened with prosecution for libel, it was also because of a letter written by an officer, although the letter writer's status as a military man only became public knowledge years later. The catalyst was a letter titled "State of Society in India" by "Sam Sobersides" (later revealed to be Lieutenant Colonel William Robison), in which the governor-general's aides-de-camps were accused of "silly pride and shyness" and of lacking "good breeding and respectability."[74] A heated response from "Parenthesis" elicited a second letter from "Sam Sobersides" that formed the basis for the prosecution.[75] In it, "Sam Sobersides" claimed the right as a private individual to bring a complaint to the attention of the public, for "if no wrongs are to be redressed, or suggested improvements listened to, except those which go through Secretaries and Public Officers to the Government, none will be redressed or listened to but those whom they favour; and the influence of their favour (as that of their displeasure) extends further than the Government can be aware of."[76] These insinuations against the secretaries of government led them to bring a suit of criminal libel.

The trial was an embarrassment from first to last. Buckingham responded publicly in the *Calcutta Journal* to news of his indictment, quoting liberally from Hastings's reply to the Madras address. The advocate general then moved for a criminal information against Buckingham because of this apparent attempt to influence the jury in the pages of his newspaper. The criminal information was approved, but a decision was made not to bring Buckingham to trial until the secretaries' libel charge was heard. When the suit for criminal libel was finally brought before the Supreme Court in January 1822, Buckingham was acquitted in full view of a crowded courtroom. To make matters worse, Judge Francis Macnaghten refused to hear the case resulting from the criminal information, forcing the advocate general to drop it (though government would try again, unsuccessfully, in 1823). The trial was widely reported in Britain, where Buckingham was applauded by the Whig and radical press.[77] Thereafter, government would use its executive powers in preference to placing trust in juries, which it perceived to be unreliable.

The governor-general-in-council did at various points solicit the identities of anonymous contributors to the *Calcutta Journal.* Three out of four of these anonymous correspondents were identified and located; for one of the letter writers, the punishment was severe. It is unclear why government chose to pursue these individuals and not "Amulaes," whose indictment of the system of promotion seems far more incendiary. Part of the reason seems to have been that "Amulaes['s]" letter was a general

[72] Extract Public Letter from Bengal, 2 April 1821, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 151–52.

[73] James Silk Buckingham to Marquess of Hastings, 16 November 1820, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 169.

[74] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 63; Sam Sobersides, "State of Society in India," *Calcutta Journal*, 11 October 1821, 453–54.

[75] Parenthesis, "Letter of Sam Sobersides," *Calcutta Journal*, 17 October 1821, 513.

[76] Sam Sobersides, "Society in India," *Calcutta Journal*, 25 October 1821, 605–6.

[77] Turner, *James Silk Buckingham*, 167–70.

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attack on abstract principles, whereas two of the letters that prompted government inquiries were, or could be interpreted as, criticisms of commanding officers on specific points of protocol; it is possible that, by identifying and reprimanding the culprit, government either hoped to attack military insubordination at the root or to diagnose and correct abuses, or both. Another explanation is that, as the *Calcutta Journal* became more popular and the practice of officers writing in it more widespread, the council was eager to make examples within the army. This was explicitly the motive behind the court-martial of Lieutenant Colonel Robison, discussed below.

The first two officers brought to the attention of the governor-general-in-council for writing to the *Calcutta Journal* managed to escape unscathed. Both had submitted specific complaints for publication. The first, Lieutenant John Smith (1st Light Cavalry, Madras Army), accused officials at Hyderabad responsible for issuing payment to the troops of recoining the money that passed through their hands and pocketing the profits; the second, Lieutenant Edward Fell (2nd Battalion, 10th Regiment Native Infantry, Bengal Army), charged the general staff who were permanently fixed at army stations of buying up all the bungalows and renting them to incoming officers at a usurious rate.[78] Both Smith and Fell were issued written reprimands; Lieutenant Smith's name was also transmitted to the Resident at Hyderabad, who had originally brought the offending letter to the council's attention. That, however, was the extent of their punishment.[79] Of John Smith, little is known apart from that he proceeded steadily through the ranks and retired as a lieutenant colonel in 1846.[80] Lieutenant Fell, meanwhile, was distinguished for his linguistic aptitude, being proficient in Persian, fluent in Hindi, and "one of the First Sanskrit Scholars now living," according to his professor at the College of Fort William.[81] In June 1820, just a few months prior to the publication of his letter in the *Calcutta Journal*, Fell had been appointed secretary of the Hindu College at Benares.[82] He was promoted to captain in 1823 and might have ascended further up the ranks had he not died of fever the following year.[83] Military contributors who submitted complaints to the *Calcutta Journal* were often assumed to be "discontented subaltern[s]" eager to "anonymously indulge [their] spleen," but neither Smith nor Fell neatly fit this model.[84] Both men might have been junior, but they were also, in their different ways, professional success stories.

The experiences of Smith and Fell also seemed to support Buckingham's conviction that the press served a useful public function by bringing abuses to government's attention. Buckingham later told the parliamentary select committee that by releasing John Smith's name to government, he enabled Smith to supply evidence of the

[78] Bengal Public Consultations, 5 May 1820, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 181; Bengal Public Consultations, 8 December 1820, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 185. See also S [Lieutenant John Smith], "Military Pay," *Calcutta Journal*, 29 February 1820, 415; A Young Officer [Lieutenant Edward Fell], "Military Monopoly," *Calcutta Journal*, 3 November 1820, 36.

[79] Bengal Public Consultations, 6 May 1820, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 182.

[80] Edward Dodwell, s.v. "Smith, J. (2 Rgt.)—Cavalry," in *Alphabetical List of the Officers of the Madras Army* (London, 1838), 164–65; *East India Register and Army List for 1848* (London, 1848), 163.

[81] William Carey, "Certificate," 22 April 1814, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/485/11625.

[82] Hodson, s.v. "Fell, Edward," in *List of Officers of the Bengal Army*, 2:168.

[83] "Edward Fell," *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany*, no. 18 (1824): 265–66, at 265.

[84] John Adam, "Minute," 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 392.

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problems connected with the exchange rate in Hyderabad. According to this account, "Government being satisfied of the existence of those evils, took the most prompt and effectual measures to remedy them. In fact, the evil was remedied."[85] Similarly, although Fell's letter was described in slightly stronger terms by council as having "a highly objectionable tendency" and being "calculated to throw discredit generally, on a respectable class of public officers," the outcome was the same. Once again, Buckingham's belief in the reformist role of his newspaper was reinforced because, according to his own account, after revealing Fell's name "the matter was then inquired into, and the grievance redressed, presenting another striking proof of the utility of such discussions through the press."[86] Buckingham's optimism, however, would prove to be short-lived.

In 1822, John Adam brought another anonymous letter to the attention of the council. The letter, titled "A Free Press—Brevet and Local Rank," and signed "A Military Friend," appeared in the newspaper's 17 May 1822 edition. The letter's ostensible purpose was to issue some queries regarding the award of brevet rank (an honorary title that did not confer additional pay or authority within the regiment) and local rank (restricted to service in a particular region, granted for a limited time or tied to the performance of a particular duty) on officers serving in the Indian princely states. The bulk of the letter, however, applauded Buckingham for the advantages he had introduced to British India through the medium of his journal. "A Military Friend" marveled that the *Calcutta Journal* had done more to improve the administration of military justice and conditions in the cantonments "than all the Orders you can pick and cull out of that valuable compilation, as clear as it is rich, the Bengal Code." In particular, he "congratulate[d] the Natives from the bottom of my heart, at the good you have already done them," and looked forward to the day "when it will no longer be in the power of those who are supposed to protect them from fraud and violence, to harass them even in legal courts, and under rules and regulations."[87] Although the author later claimed that he had no intention of casting aspersions on the company, the governor-general-in-council was unlikely to look favorably on a letter celebrating the newspaper for exposing and amending abuses that ought to have been remedied by government.

Council quickly wrote to ascertain the name and address of the author of the "gross insult." Buckingham, initially hesitant, finally complied. The author was revealed to be Lieutenant Colonel William Robison of HM's 24th Regiment of Foot, the man who, unbeknownst to council, had also penned the offending Sam Sobersides letter.[88] Robison was a Companion to the Order of the Bath and an officer of high reputation; he had served almost thirty years at stations across the British Empire, in Canada, the West Indies, the Cape of Good Hope, South America, Batavia, and India. In addition to his military service, he had acted in a political capacity during the East India Company's 1811 Indonesian campaign, where he had conducted diplomatic missions to Javanese rulers and was appointed chief secretary to the government of Batavia—in part, it seems, due to his fluency in

[85] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 39.
[86] "Minutes of Evidence," 59.
[87] A Military Friend, "A Free Press—Brevet and Local Rank," *Calcutta Journal*, 17 May 1822, 239.
[88] Public Department, 19 July 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 372.

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Dutch.[89] A dispute with another council member led him to rejoin his regiment in Bengal, where he distinguished himself in the Nepal War (1814–1816). After briefly voyaging to England for his health in 1816, Robison returned to India in 1819; he was stationed with a regiment at Nagpur when he wrote his letter to the *Calcutta Journal*.[90]

When council learned his identity, they determined that Robison should be removed from his regiment with all possible speed; they could not risk allowing him to remain in place because of the negative influence he might exercise over the men of his regiment if he succeeded to the command.[91] Within the council, there was some dispute about the best and most legitimate means of removing Robison in haste. There was general agreement that a prosecution for libel was unlikely to provide "a favorable issue to Government."[92] The council had apparently learned its lesson after its earlier tussle with Buckingham. Military justice seemed more likely to provide the desired result, but because Robison was an officer in the king's army, the council was unsure whether it was within its rights to suspend him before trial. After toying with the idea of applying to the Duke of York, they decided that the importance of sending a clear and immediate message outweighed the risk of overstepping their jurisdiction.[93] Robison was ordered to leave his regiment immediately and to proceed, at first opportunity, to be tried at Bombay.

The danger of the letter was perceived to be twofold. Not only was government compared unfavorably with the press but, more importantly from chief secretary John Adam's point of view, the letter encouraged readers to bring their grievances to the *Calcutta Journal*.[94] Robison therefore needed to be punished publicly to set an example for other army officers, "especially in the Junior Ranks." Adam wished to send a clear message of "the dangerous consequences of the practice which is so rapidly advancing of appealing on all occasions of real or imaginary grievance to the Columns of a Newspaper." In his view, there was no reason why officers could not apply for redress through formal channels, and he wished to check "the habit that now prevails, and has been gaining ground for some years of seeking it by appeals to the public thro' the newspapers," a habit that, in his mind, "must speedily confound all principles of military subordination."[95] To demonstrate that Robison's letter formed part of a larger trend, Adams cited two examples selected from a random issue of the *Calcutta Journal,* the first complaining about regulations for artillery cadets, which the writer hoped would be amended if brought to the attention of the company's government, the second pointing out the absurdity and inconvenience of one of the monthly return forms. In Adam's view, the only way of arresting this flow of letters was to eliminate its "source"—"the avowed organ of this system and without which, it never could have been carried to such a length or even

[89] William Robison to Earl Minto, 14 June 1812, BL, APAC, MSS Eur F148/18.

[90] John Philippart, *The Royal Military Calendar, or Army Service and Commission Book* [. . .], 3rd ed., 5 vols. (London 1820), 5:130–32.

[91] Public Department, 19 July 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 372.

[92] John Fendall, Minute, 22 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 404; John Adam, Minute, 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 387.

[93] John Adam, Minute, 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 387.

[94] John Adam, Minute, 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 384–85.

[95] John Adam, Minute, 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 389–91.

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commenced."[96] In other words, Adam advocated using the council's executive power to transport Buckingham from India.[97]

Despite Adam's conviction that Buckingham's newspaper was the originator of the problem, it would be Robison alone who would pay the price for this offence. Buckingham had Hastings to thank for this outcome; though the governor-general conceded, "I think the tone of Mr Buckingham culpable as tending to produce self-sufficient notions in the younger servants, civil or military, of the Honorable Company," he did not believe that a spirit of insubordination had developed to any dangerous degree. [98] In Hastings's view, expelling Robison from the army would be a sufficient indication of government's displeasure.[99] In choosing to make a single harsh example to combat a larger phenomenon, Hastings's strategy parallels the "scattershot" approach adopted by the Home Office in Britain, where, as Philip Harling has argued, "lacking the means to carry out a policy of large-scale interdiction, the home secretary had no choice but to pick out a few particularly obnoxious writings and try to make examples of as many of their 'publishers' as possible."[100] In this case, however, Hastings's focus was on the army, and his logic was that Robison's high rank and brilliant service record would render his dismissal particularly impactful.

Hastings's decision to punish Robison was confirmed by the receipt of a furious letter from Robison himself; it was this letter that formed the basis for his general court-martial in Bombay. The lieutenant colonel was seriously ill when he addressed government, and his suffering no doubt exacerbated his sense of injustice. He made no attempt to plead for mercy; instead, he claimed "the right which belongs to every injured British subject of protesting . . . against an unwarrantable Tyrannical exercise of authority."[101] Like Buckingham before him, Robison quoted liberally from Hastings's reply to the Madras address, pointing out that the address itself had been composed by officers as well as civilians. Robison hoped that the governor-general would publicize the fact "that he no longer considers it 'salutary for supreme authority to be subject to scrutiny or comment on its measures' and that it is resolved to turn any officer out of the Country at 24 hours notice, who dares to publish a single comment or sentiment upon public affairs displeasing to them."[102] Robison insisted on his good intentions; far from trying to discredit Hastings's administration, he had acted on the assumption that the *Calcutta Journal* offered a useful channel whereby the existence of oppressions unknown to the company's government could be brought to its attention (in this case, abuse of Indians in the military bazaar).[103] Because it later formed the basis for his trial, Robison's letter has survived, unlike the letters presumably written by John Smith and Edward Fell in response to the council's inquiries. This unique survival provides rare insight into the reasons why

[96] John Adam, Minute, 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 396.
[97] John Adam, Minute, 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 401.
[98] Marquess of Hastings, Minute, 1 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 413–14.
[99] Marquess of Hastings, Minute, 1 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 417.
[100] Harling, "Law of Libel," 121.
[101] William Robison to Marquess of Hastings, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 485.
[102] William Robison to Marquess of Hastings, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 494.
[103] William Robison to Marquess of Hastings, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 486–87.

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officers wrote to the press in the first place, as Robison alluded to previous frustrated attempts to institute reforms through official military channels.[104]

On the basis of this letter, Robison was tried by a general court-martial at Bombay in early October 1822 on three charges: "for conduct incompatible with the duty of an officer, in traducing the Government under which His Majesty's Orders had placed him"; "for having pointed insulting and scandalous remarks at the head of the Supreme Government"; and "for abusive and grossly insubordinate language applied to, and highly reflecting on, the Commander in Chief."[105] Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman was the most common charge leveled against officers at court-martial during this period, encompassing a range of offences both severe and seemingly trivial. In the nineteenth century, officers of the crown belonged overwhelmingly to the aristocracy and landed gentry, and, as gentlemen, were expected to adhere rigidly to a code of honor that emphasized loyalty to king and country.[106] By disparaging the government of India generally in his anonymous submission to the *Calcutta Journal*, and then the commander-in-chief personally in his subsequent letter, Robison appeared guilty of a serious code violation.

The jury reached a contentious decision, reflecting the emotionally charged nature of the trial. Despite finding Robison guilty (except for the charge of scandal, of which they acquitted him), their sentence was lenient; the jury recommended only that Robison should be "reprimanded in such manner as the officer approving this sentence may find fit."[107] Their clemency was explicitly due to the defendant's service record, as attested by letters from the late Governor-General Lord Minto that Robison had produced in his defense.[108] The Marquess of Hastings, in his capacity as commander in chief, officially registered his disapproval that "to such Flagrant violations of Military Subordination, the Court awards a punishment appropriate solely to the lowest class of deviation from Military Regularity."[109] The adjutant general of the British army agreed; in his mind, Robison's long service and high rank actually exacerbated the crime, "inasmuch as the effect of such conduct upon others must produce an influence pernicious in proportion to the deference and respect paid to the character of the individual who offends."[110] By the time the adjutant general had penned these words, however, Robison was dead. He had predicted that the voyage to England would kill him, and he expired at sea on the last leg of his journey from Malta to England, leaving behind three orphaned children.[111]

At this stage, Hastings had already taken practical measures to dissuade officers from submitting anonymous grievances to the press. In June 1822, a prohibition

[104] William Robison to Marquess of Hastings, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 489–90.

[105] Courts Martial Proceedings, 1822, National Archives, WO 71/266/39, 2. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as TNA.)

[106] Arthur N. Gilbert, "Law and Honour among Eighteenth-Century British Army Officers," *Historical Journal* 19, no. 1 (1976): 75–87, at 75–76.

[107] Courts Martial Proceedings, 1822, TNA, WO 71/266/39, 65.

[108] Courts Martial Proceedings, 1822, TNA, WO 71/266/39, 65.

[109] General Orders, 9 November 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 514–516.

[110] General Orders, 9 November 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 514–516.

[111] William Robison to John Adam, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 497; Will of William Robison, Lieutenant Colonel in His Majesty's Twenty Fourth Regiment of Foot, 12 February 1824, TNA, PROB 11/1682,103.

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against the practice was disseminated to the army in general orders.[112] After insisting on the uselessness of submitting complaints to the press and emphasizing how these remonstrances undermined the army in public opinion, the general order forbade officers "in the strictest manner" from "sending to the News Papers any such Anonymous Representations." The order warned, "Should a Letter of that nature henceforth be traced to any Officer (and means will be taken to make the discovery almost inevitable) the Commander in Chief will immediately submit to the Governor General in Council the necessity of suspending the Individual from Duty and Pay while a solicitation is made to the Honorable Court for his entire removal from the Service."[113] Buckingham claimed to support the prohibition, recognizing the authorities' right to curb infringements of military discipline in whatever way they saw fit. The editor was also seemingly heartened by the fact that the prohibition specifically outlawed letters of complaint and did not, therefore, prevent soldiers from writing to the press on general subjects.[114] Some of Buckingham's military readers, however, were not so sanguine, detecting in these general orders further evidence of "Arbitrary Power."[115]

Their suspicions were borne out; the order was a prelude to stricter government regulation of the press. On 4 April 1823, John Adam, who had assumed the role of acting governor-general after the Marquess of Hastings's resignation, submitted new regulations to be promulgated by the Supreme Court within the Presidency of Bengal. According to these regulations, publications intending to provide public news and intelligence were obliged to obtain a license from government, which in turn required them to submit an affidavit containing the names and addresses of the printers, publishers, and proprietors, as well as the address of the printing establishment itself, to be updated as necessary. The governor-general-in-council reserved the right to revoke the license at any point; anyone who printed, published, sold, or distributed an unlicensed publication would be fined Rs. 400.[116]

By the time these new regulations had been issued, Buckingham had departed for England. When the Marquess of Hastings left India in 1823, Buckingham lost an important ally. Shortly thereafter, he published a fiery attack against a government appointment in a broadside "extra," and acting governor-general John Adam consequently revoked his license to reside in India.[117] Once in England, Buckingham founded a new journal, the *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*, to continue his campaign against the East India Company.[118] Robison featured prominently in its early issues; Buckingham recounted the entire case, furnishing a complete transcription of Robison's court-martial. Buckingham also alluded, tantalizingly, to a lengthy attack on the company that Robison had written at sea. As it was lost at some point

[112] James Silk Buckingham, "Treatment of the Late Colonel Robison, of His Majesty's 24th Regiment, in India," *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review* 2, no. 5 (May 1824): 101–24, at 101.

[113] General Orders, 8 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/L/MIL/17/2/271, 161.

[114] James Silk Buckingham, "Discussion of Military Grievances," *Calcutta Journal*, 11 June 1822, 573–74.

[115] A Bengal Officer, "Military Correspondence," *Calcutta Journal*, 8 March 1823, 108.

[116] Margarita Barns, *The Indian Press: A History of the Growth of Public Opinion in India* (Liverpool, 1940), 115.

[117] Barns, *Indian Press*, 107–8.

[118] "Minutes of Evidence," *Report on the Suppression of the Calcutta Journal*, 79.

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after his death, one can only speculate about what it contained—perhaps some evidence of the abuses within the army that Robison had hinted at in his letters.[119]

Because of the threatening tone of the general orders, some officers stationed in India started to write letters to the *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*, "as the present very heavy grievances of the Bengal army cannot be made known through the Indian press."[120] Officers submitting complaints to Indian newspapers continued to be a problem for the Bengal government, however, despite the prohibition against it. In 1823, the governor-general-in-council once again contacted the editor of the *Calcutta Journal*, this time about a letter signed "Young Officer" contesting a recent army promotion.[121] Though acting in direct contravention of the general order, the anonymous author had clearly taken its warning seriously because he carefully avoided leaving any trace of his identity. The editor, John Francis Sandys (who had assumed the *Calcutta Journal*'s management after Buckingham's expulsion), claimed that the letter was placed in his letterbox while he was absent from the office, had no postmark, and "appeared to be written in a feigned hand."[122] The council presented Sandys with an ultimatum: either he would furnish the name of the letter writer, or the postmaster general would be instructed to prevent the *Calcutta Journal* from circulating via the public post. When Sandys submitted a signed affidavit declaring his ignorance, however, the council recognized the futility of trying to intimidate him further.[123] Although the general orders had threatened prospective correspondents with "inevitable" discovery, it was, to the contrary, extremely difficult to identify anonymous letter writers who did not want to be found.[124] Previously, it was not uncommon for the *Calcutta Journal*'s correspondents to include a note to the editor authorizing him to share their names and contact information in case of private or official inquiries. After all, many hoped that their letters would provoke the East India Company's government to take action to remedy an abuse, and they were therefore happy to supply further evidence to support their claims. The prohibition of 1822, however, made it clear that officers who submitted such letters for publication risked expulsion from the army; by raising the stakes in this fashion, the prohibition encouraged officers to protect their anonymity more assiduously.

The council's unwillingness or inability to take further action in response to the letter of "Young Officer" also reflects ongoing ambivalence regarding the relationship between government and the press. Although the two subsequent governors-general, William Pitt Amherst (1823–1828) and William Henry Cavendish Bentinck (1828–1835), both left Adam's press regulations in place, neither was willing to enforce them.[125] Bentinck's 1829 minute on the subject makes this unwillingness explicit. Referencing Amherst's policy of leaving the press alone, Bentinck confirmed the justice of the measure, observing that government intervention "had no other

[119] Buckingham, "Treatment of the Late Colonel Robison," 101.

[120] A Bengal Subaltern, "On the Unjustifiable Reductions of Allowances in the Bengal Army," *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*, 22, no. 67 (July 1829): 72–77.

[121] Young Officer, "Application for Information," *Calcutta Journal*, 2 April 1823, 441.

[122] Extract Public Letter from Bengal, 31 July 1823, BL, APAC, IOR/H/533, 344.

[123] Extract Public Letter from Bengal, 31 July 1823, BL, APAC, IOR/H/533, 345.

[124] General Orders, 8 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/L/MIL/17/2/271, 161.

[125] Barns, *Indian Press*, 163–64.

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effect than to give celebrity to the editor, greater notoriety to an objectionable doctrine, and to drag the local government before the tribunal of public opinion in England."[126] Despite these convictions, Bentinck nevertheless made a public statement on 6 September 1830 urging officers not to write to the press regarding the reduction of *batta* (field pay) at key military stations in Bengal. While Bentinck claimed to believe that "more good than harm was produced by the open and public declaration of the sentiments of the army" in that it provided "a vent to public feeling," he also feared "the possibility of unmilitary and insubordinate language highly discreditable to the character of the army. . . which might end in a conflict between government and its officers."[127] Bentinck's decision to make the present case "an exception to the general rule" reflected the fears of contemporaries within the company, who believed that the public prints "have inflamed the minds of the officers," and complained, "Every crude effusion, every violent proposition, every fallacious calculation, has found a ready place in the columns of the newspapers."[128] Even at a time when government was no longer convinced of the necessity or desirability of regulating the press, officers writing to the newspapers were still viewed as an uncomfortable exception.

Divided opinion within the company about the appropriate response to soldiers submitting grievances to the press is clearly illustrated by the case of Private Hugh Joseph O'Donnell. In 1832, the governor of Bombay brought O'Donnell to the attention of the Bengal government because of a letter written to the *Bombay Gazette* under the pseudonym "Justinian." In this letter, O'Donnell described the important services that soldiers performed for their country, condemned the limited wages that they received in return, and fulminated against the money they lost by exchanging rupees for pounds. The Bombay government immediately identified the letter as a "mischievous publication," "calculated to stir up discontent, disaffection and mutiny in that portion of His Majesty's army all over India" (meaning the rank and file), suggesting that it was the letter's appeal to enlisted men that made it threatening.[129] After some prevarication, the editor of the *Bombay Gazette* gave in to government pressure and released the author's name: Hugh Joseph O'Donnell, a private in the Queens Royal Regiment (2nd Foot).[130] O'Donnell was brought to a general court-martial in Bombay, where he was found guilty of highly seditious and mutinous conduct and sentenced to solitary imprisonment for six months. The Bombay government had originally intended to send O'Donnell back to Britain at the expiration of his period of confinement.[131] To do

[126] William Bentinck, "Minute on the Press, 6 January 1829," in *Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, ed. C. H. Philips, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1977), 1:137.

[127] Bentinck, "Minute on the Press, 6 September 1830," in *Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 2:505.

[128] Bentinck, "Minute on the Press, 6 September 1830"; Colonel Conway to William Bentinck, 7 June 1829, in *Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 1:229; John Malcolm to William Bentinck, 28 July 1829, in *Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 1:137.

[129] J. C. Irwin to John Earl of Clare, Baron Fitzgibbon, 26 May 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 31.

[130] Bombay Political Department, 8 September 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 3; Discharge Papers. 1826–1834, TNA, WO 97/245/93.

[131] Lieutenant General Sir Colin Halkett to Major General Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Horse Guards, 26 July 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 66.

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so, however, the Bombay government wanted the support of its superiors in Bengal, and neither the commander-in-chief nor the governor-general were willing to authorize O'Donnell's transmission, or, indeed, to offer any opinion at all on the case. Both refused to acknowledge their jurisdiction over O'Donnell; while the commander-in-chief insisted that the offense was a political one, committed against the company's government, the governor-general, by contrast, argued that O'Donnell was guilty of an infringement of military discipline.[132] In the end, O'Donnell remained in the service and was honorably discharged on his return to the United Kingdom in 1834.[133]

One of the interesting features of O'Donnell's letter, and of his subsequent exchanges with the governor and council in Bombay, is his insistent allegiance to crown over company. In his letter to the *Bombay Gazette,* O'Donnell described the company's government as "ungrateful monopolists" guilty of "systematic spoliation" of "the King of England's military."[134] When the editor of the *Bombay Gazette* wrote to O'Donnell on the governor's behalf in the early stages of the investigation, O'Donnell acknowledged that he was the author of the letter but declared, "I am the soldier and liege subject of William the Fourth, and not of the Honorable Company"; consequently, while he had written a letter to the lord high chancellor of Great Britain and was ready to "stand or fall" by the latter's decision, he refused to acknowledge the company's authority. In O'Donnell's view, "as he, William King of Great Britain rules not where *Will* and *pleasure* rules and not the *Law*, I do not feel bound to answer in any court where he is *not*."[135]

This overt rejection of the company's authority is unusual. Most military correspondents likely belonged to the company's armies given the greater number of company officers in India and the overriding preoccupation with reforms to the company's armies manifest in letters published by the *Calcutta Journal*. In general, however, there is little in their anonymous letters to distinguish officers of the crown from company officers. For example, before his identity was revealed, contemporaries assumed that Robison was a company officer, presumably because of his focus on reform within the company's administration.[136] In his letter to the governor-general-in-council, Robison justified his criticisms not by arguing that he had no loyalty to the company but instead by suggesting that he wished to see it improved. O'Donnell's place within the British army seems to have given him a greater sense of freedom to stand up to the company, but how far others shared this view is unclear.

O'Donnell is also an intriguing exception to the pattern of officers writing to the newspapers; his example leads us to question whether other members of the rank and file might have written anonymous letters too. How representative he is of the typical rank-and-file soldier in India is difficult to assess because so many of the details of his life are shrouded in uncertainty. A farmer by trade, he was born in the parish of

[132] Sir Edward Barnes to William Bentinck, 29 September 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 73; Bentinck to Barnes, 29 September 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 74–75.

[133] Discharge Papers, 1826–1834, TNA, WO 97/245/93.

[134] Justinian, "Correspondence," *Bombay Gazette*, 23 May 1832, 3–4.

[135] Hugh Joseph O'Donnell to H. J. Boaden, editor of the *Bombay Gazette*, 1 June 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 49.

[136] B., "Letter Inserted in John Bull," 269.

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Dunmanway in Cork in 1801.[137] How and why he ended up at a recruiting station in London at the age of twenty-five is unclear, but he was part of a wave of rural Irishmen filtering into the ranks of the British army as a result of postwar recession and severe agricultural contraction in the 1820s.[138] What makes O'Donnell unique, at least compared to many of his fellow letter writers, is his evident love of words. The letter published in the *Bombay Gazette* is long, fervent, and laced with biblical and classical allusions, very unlike the usual short, discontented letters to the editor on military subjects. Equally distinctive is O'Donnell's history of persistent problems with authority. During his brief stint in the army, O'Donnell was convicted at four separate court-martials, two of which were general court-martials, usually reserved for officers and the most serious offenders from the rank and file.[139] The commander-in-chief mentioned in his 1832 letter to the Horse Guards that O'Donnell "would have been discharged last year, for an offence of a nearly similar nature," alluding to a prior general court-martial, except that O'Donnell's commanding officer "decided that the sentence of the court was illegal."[140] The commanding officer, the elderly General William Keppel, seems to have been a sympathetic figure; according to O'Donnell's own testimony, Keppel was the channel through which O'Donnell forwarded a petition on the subject of soldiers' pay in India to the radical MP and Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell.[141] On the surface, then, O'Donnell seems unusually articulate and politicized; this was certainly the opinion of the Bombay government, who felt that he had "sufficient knowledge and readiness of language to become a leader amongst a portion of the non-commissioned officers and men of the Queen's Regiment."[142] O'Donnell himself, however, believed that soldiers in general were as politically engaged as any other segment of the population and was keen to vindicate a body of men who were "theoretically believed not fit members of Civil associations or rational existence, actually automatonized into passive agency."[143] In the end, it is difficult to judge how representative O'Donnell was given that government so rarely investigated the identities of anonymous letter writers.

Within a year of O'Donnell's discharge, John Adam's press regulations had been abolished, providing legal affirmation of this long tradition of turning the other cheek.[144] Although the 1857 Uprising would cause the East India Company to once again take steps to regulate English-language newspapers, its primary concern in future would be the burgeoning vernacular press.[145] In reviewing this history of government regulation, what emerges most clearly is the uneven nature

[137] Discharge Papers, 1826–1834, TNA, WO 97/245/93.

[138] Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London, 1980), 48; John O'Beirne Ranelagh, *A Short History of Ireland* (Cambridge, 2012), 111.

[139] Bombay Political Consultations, 8 August 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 59.

[140] Lieutenant General Sir Colin Halkett to Major General Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Military Secretary, Horse Guards, 26 July 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 67.

[141] Hugh Joseph O'Donnell to H. J. Boaden, editor of the *Bombay Gazette*, 1 June 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 49.

[142] Lieutenant General Sir Colin Halkett to Major General Lord Fitzroy Somerset, Horse Guards, 26 July 1832, BL, APAC, IOR/F/4/1409/55610, 66.

[143] Justinian, "Correspondence," 3–4.

[144] Barns, *Indian Press*, 207.

[145] Barns, 247.

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of the governor-general-in-council's intervention in the English-language press. With the proliferation of public print in the early nineteenth century, the council not only found it harder to keep abreast of what was being published but also seems to have questioned whether intervention achieved the desired ends. Acting against newspapermen not only undermined the company's claims to liberality and good governance (particularly embarrassing considering Hastings's famous speech) but also risked drawing attention to the very materials they were trying to suppress. Adam's energetic pursuit of James Buckingham seems to be the exception to the rule that in the end convinced company officials of, in Governor-General William Bentinck's words, "the doubtful issue of such combats."[146]

To the extent that government did intervene, it was usually because of unease surrounding military discipline. Wary though it was of the phenomenon of officers writing to the press, the executive still seems to have been uncertain about what constituted the most effective or legitimate form of constraint. Whether the infraction counted as a political or a military offense was at times debated, as was the question of whether letter writers should be tried as soldiers or civilians. In a few cases, government reprimanded the officers in question but ended up taking action to redress their concerns, suggesting that the objection to the form of the complaint did not outweigh the desire to see it resolved. This ambivalence is also evident within the army itself, where officers had their own ideas about military grievances being broadcast in the press. Analyses of debates over press freedoms have presented these confrontations as a Manichaean struggle between the company and reformers.[147] When it comes to the phenomenon of officers writing to the press, however, many of the opinions pronounced by company officials were echoed within the military itself, where some officers expressed, if anything, an even more decided opposition to the practice.

DEBATING DEFERENCE, DISCIPLINE, AND DUTY

When reprimanded by government for publishing the embittered attack by "Amulaes" on army promotion, James Silk Buckingham argued that by exposing the letter to public criticism, he was preventing these ideas from taking root and spreading. According to Buckingham, he and his readers had through their published responses to this letter "brought shame and confusion on its author ["Amulaes"]," thereby demonstrating to the *Calcutta Journal*'s readers the indefensibility of his resentments.[148] Similarly, when John Francis Sandys published an offending letter by "Young Officer," he justified its publication on the grounds that "when imaginary grievances exist, as the Letter proves they sometimes do, is it not better for them to be so removed, than for individuals to sit brooding over them in silent

[146] William Bentinck to Lord Clare, 1 June 1832, in *Correspondence of Lord William Cavendish Bentinck*, 2:829.

[147] Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain*, 101; Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 71–81.

[148] James Silk Buckingham to Marquess of Hastings, 16 November 1820, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 169. See also A Calm Observer, "Merit and Interest," *Calcutta Journal*, 9 November 1820; A Bengalee, "Merit and Interest," *Calcutta Journal*, 13 November 1820; Veritas, "Merit and Interest," *Calcutta Journal*, 17 November 1820.

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discontent?"[149] As Sandys predicted, the letter elicited replies from readers who not only reproached "Young Officer" for his tone but supplied evidence to counteract his claims.[150] For Buckingham and his supporters, the press served a pedagogical function; it was only by providing a platform for wrong ideas that misconceptions could be exposed and amended. Acting on this principle, Buckingham frequently printed letters couched with remonstrances and disclaimers that he freely exposed to the criticisms of his readers. According to this view, the council did not need to intervene because the public could regulate themselves through the informal means of argument and reproof.

Buckingham's interpretation of the function of the press was not universal, however. One reader condemned "the rules you have prescribed for your Editorial duties" and questioned whether it was worthwhile stigmatizing the company or its soldiers "merely for the purpose of giving place to your own *trite* remarks."[151] Reacting to the publication of complaints, officers themselves wrote in to mark out the boundaries of what was or was not appropriate to comment on the press, either by insisting on greater restrictions or arguing for greater liberties. These disagreements were a product of wider divisions within the military; by taking these differences into account, historians can better understand both why some officers wrote anonymously to the newspapers in the first place and why others viewed the practice with such trepidation.

Generational conflict is the most obvious source of division permeating the pages of the *Calcutta Journal*. The problem was long-standing; in 1782, an anonymous correspondent to the *India Gazette* complained about the recurring pattern of "disputes upon military arrangement, perquisite, and preferment, between a petulant and assuming boy, and a morose and mulish veteran."[152] Junior officers lamented the difficulties they faced in their struggle for a competency, while senior officers criticized "Young Generals" for idly seeking shortcuts to promotion rather than following the path dutifully carved out by their predecessors.[153]

The major controversies staged in the *Calcutta Journal* were clearly inflected by these tensions. In contrast to senior officers' apparently widespread support for the establishment of a military fund, junior officers were divided on the question; while at least one junior officer welcomed the prospect "for the purpose of enabling old Officers to retire, and of bringing the young ones on," others complained that it was a heavy financial burden to bear at an early career stage, particularly given the high mortality rate and concomitant uncertainty of being able to retire at all.[154] When evaluating the relative advantages of promotion by seniority versus promotion by merit, junior officers also had clear reasons for wanting to eliminate a system

[149] "Letter of a Young Officer," *Calcutta Journal*, 4 April 1823, 474.

[150] An Old Officer, "Letter from the Bull of Yesterday," 474; Verax, "Further Explanation," *Calcutta Journal*, 4 April 1823, 475.

[151] An Old Observer, "A Letter of Reproof," *Calcutta Journal*, 22 August 1820, 637.

[152] Laertius, "To the Editor of the *India Gazette*," *India Gazette*, 13 April 1782, 1.

[153] A Jolly Sub, "Young Generals," *Calcutta Journal*, 22 October 1819, 389. See also B, "Military Idlers," *Calcutta Journal*, 31 October 1820, 753–54; C. B., "Military Idlers," *Calcutta Journal*, 28 December 1820, 683; Amulaes, "Merit and Interest," 71.

[154] An Ensign, "New Regiments," *Calcutta Journal*, 14 March 1820, 104. For opposite view, see Jack Sepoy, "Military Fund Revived," *Calcutta Journal*, 13 May 1822, 170; Poor Will, "Military Economy," *Calcutta Journal*, 21 November 1820, 250–51.

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where their youth worked against them, whereas senior officers seem to have viewed the disruption of the status quo as unfairly favoring their juniors.[155] Other issues were at stake in these disputes that had little to do with age or rank—a compelling argument against the system of promotion by "merit" was that it threatened to reward connections rather than excellence, for example—but age was recognized to be a critical factor.

Unsurprisingly, then, these wider generational tensions infused debates about the propriety of military discussion in the press. There was a widespread assumption that it was predominantly junior officers writing to the press to air their grievances or propose reforms.[156] This theory was premised in part on the idea that senior officers had a stake in preserving the status quo, whereas junior officers had nothing to lose, and much to gain, by changing it.[157] Suspecting junior officers of instrumentalizing the press in their quests for preferment, critics were inclined to dismiss grievances aired in the newspapers as the "effusion" of "impotent spleen."[158] "An Old Observer" anticipated that "we shall shortly see a complaint against the Adjutant General or Secretary to Government, because some one of your Correspondents has not been able to obtain a *satisfactory* reply to his application for a Staff Appointment."[159] Likewise, the assumption that junior officers were the *Calcutta Journal*'s primary contributors also seems to have acquired traction because it accorded with stereotypes of a younger generation that viewed book learning as a viable substitute for experience in the field. "One of the Old School" complained that young men in his regiment preferred to consult books rather than their superiors, observing that "there are reading rooms, and book clubs, spreading all over the country, and young men of five and twenty read the Edinburgh Review and Mill's History, where they imbibe disrespectful notions of our Honorable Employers, and learn to doubt the wisdom of Government."[160] By printing letters penned by these "Tyros," the *Calcutta Journal* was accused of broadcasting opinions that were doubly distorted by ambition and inexperience.[161]

More seriously, by providing junior officers with a platform to criticize their superiors, newspapers were charged with undermining subordination within the army. In his minute on Robison's letter, John Adam deprecated "a practice which will afford to every discontented subaltern the means of anonymously indulging his spleen against a commanding officer, who may exact the strict performance of his duty."[162] Adams's concerns were echoed by "A Veteran," who attested, "Anything that tends to weaken the feeling of confidence, respect, and mutual dependance [*sic*] and support, which should exist between subordinate and superior, is injurious"; there was "nothing more likely to do so," he argued, "than the practice of public discussion of points, on which, in my day, we used to look up to our immediate seniors in the corps for

[155] One of the New School, "Brevet Rank," 425; Miles, "An Old Officer's Opinion," *Calcutta Journal*, 16 September 1819, 139; Caenus, "Deeds of Arms," *Calcutta Journal*, 7 October 1819, 284.

[156] A Veteran, "Public Discussions," *Calcutta Journal*, 20 October 1819, 375.

[157] Caenus, "Deeds of Arms," 284.

[158] Catapulta, "Newspaper Discussions," *Calcutta Journal*, 17 September 1821, 176. See also A Company's Officer, "A Severe Reproof," *Calcutta Journal*, 8 November 1820, 93.

[159] An Old Observer, "A Letter of Reproof," 637.

[160] One of the Old School, "Brevet Rank," 61–62.

[161] Catapulta, "Newspaper Discussions," 60.

[162] John Adam, "Minute," 21 May 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 392.

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information." According to the writer's view, the point at issue was not so much the subject of discussion (which might be innocent enough), "but the habits which such discussions will, it is to be feared, lead to."[163] By creating alternative channels for the circulation of information, and by encouraging discussion and debate, newspapers threatened to attenuate the vertical relationships of deference that constituted military discipline. Even letter-writers who were broadly supportive of the liberty of the press argued that military discussions were an exception to the rule because of the imperative to preserve subordination within the army. "Catapulta," though claiming to "admire and venerate the policy, which has granted to India (or Bengal), the benefits of a Free Press," nevertheless believed in setting limits to this freedom in order to prevent the press from becoming "the vehicle for conveying to the world the crude remarks of every Military Tyro who thinks he has reason to find fault with the arrangements or movements of his Commanding Officer."[164] Proponents of this view argued that there were formal mechanisms for seeking redress within the army, and so there was no need for a subaltern to resort to writing to the newspapers.

From the perspective of junior officers, however, it was precisely the existence of a strict military hierarchy that made the option of writing to the press so attractive. The anonymity that it afforded had several advantages. Most obviously, it protected the complainant from repercussions. Procedure dictated that junior officers submit their grievances to their commanding officer, but doing so was sometimes risky, particularly where the commanding officer himself was implicated.[165] There was also a chance that, by submitting a complaint to his superior, an officer could be branded as a malcontent. As "A Sub" observed, "if a junior brought [a grievance] to the notice of Government (though he might succeed in getting redress), a mark would be placed against his name," leading him to conclude that "the fear of the latter would deter many from running the risk."[166] "Miles Candidus" agreed, insisting that although even "the most humble Individual" had the right to apply to his superiors, "Soldiers are not fond of making themselves publicly known in such cases"; it was therefore "a great consolation" to know that addresses could be brought to the notice of government through the *Calcutta Journal*.[167] Senior officers also had recourse to anonymous letters, as Robison's case demonstrates. Robison's reason for writing to the press was that his previous attempts to report complaints through official channels had been ignored or, in one case, blocked because the malefactors "happened to have interest enough to get screened from justice."[168] By publicizing grievances, soldiers could bypass the internal politics that sometimes obstructed the operation of the army's own regulatory frameworks.

Moreover, by submitting proposals anonymously to the press, junior officers could secure a fairer hearing for their ideas. Reflecting bitterly on past attempts, "Vexillarius" contended that even if a project for reform was "supported by the most

[163] A Veteran, "Public Discussions," 375.

[164] Catapulta, "Newspaper Discussions," 60.

[165] "Appeals, Applications, Memorials or Representations How Made," A Code of the Bengal Military Regulations, 1817, BL, APAC, IOR/L/MIL/17/2/440, chap. 4.

[166] A Sub, "Military Subjection," 303–4.

[167] Miles Candidus, "Half-Batta," *Calcutta Journal*, 2 January 1821, 125.

[168] William Robison to John Adam, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 489–90.

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uncontrovertible arguments . . . still these Bigots of Rank will sneer at and reprobate it, merely because it cannot boast of having emanated from a Field Officer."[169] In response to a letter from "A Field Officer" published in the *India Gazette* demanding to know the rank of the letter writers debating promotion by brevet, "An Old Subaltern" condemned "this conceit of replying to arguments, by alledging, not their unsoundness, but the rank of the writer. . . as if wit and judgement, like Madeira, were improved by being sent to Chunar [a major military station] for some years."[170] "Benevolus" similarly criticized "Caenus" for introducing a discussion of "the comparative merits of youth and age" into his letter on the brevet system, disputing the assumption "that good sense cannot exist except with age, or that incorrect ideas are the necessary concomitants of youth, or *vice versa*."[171] Officers who challenged the equating of merit with seniority viewed the press as a space where ideas would be judged according to their inherent worth.

For some, newspapers thus offered an avenue of intellectual escape from the confines of the military life. Junior officers poignantly objected to the idea that the military hierarchy should penetrate every aspect of their lives, even the life of the mind. They resented the implication that subalterns should "listen in silence . . . while arguments are carried on by their seniors."[172] More broadly, officers in general questioned their exclusion from the public sphere of political discussion and debate on the basis of their occupation. As "Senex" pointed out, "we too (and Heaven forbid that it should be otherwise) have our rights, our priveleges, and our interests."[173] While admitting that there were aspects of military life that should not be broadcast, some officers insisted on their identity as British subjects, arguing that certain concerns transcended their rank or military status. "A Sub" complained, "I have yet to learn, that Military men are bound silently to witness evil; and not to comment on measures which only affect them as Englishmen and have no reference to their duty as Soldiers; and I therefore see no reason why they should not use the power of reasoning bestowed on them by nature with the same freedom as others in such cases."[174]

The letter penned by "A Sub" raises the question of the blurred line between officers' personal and professional identities. Where did one end and the other begin? To what extent did a man's status as an officer supersede the rights and duties he could claim as a British subject? The question of officer' rights, and the relationship between their military and civilian identities, ran through the debates about officers issuing complaints to the press. The conundrum occupied a prominent place in Robison's court-martial. In his opening address, the judge advocate singled out for criticism the argument that "no person who becomes an officer in any manner sacrifices his rights as a freeman"; to the contrary, "from the moment that an officer accepts a commission, he voluntarily gives up many privileges which are enjoyed by his countrymen, and even subjects himself to punishment for acts

[169] Vexillarius, "Merely an Echo," *Calcutta Journal*, 22 October 1819, 388.

[170] An Old Subaltern, "Public Discussion," *Calcutta Journal*, 1 October 1819, 244–45.

[171] Benevolus, "Party Question Disclaimed," *Calcutta Journal*, 8 October 1819, 291. See also Caenus, "Deeds of Arms," 284.

[172] An Old Subaltern, "Public Discussion," 244–45.

[173] Senex, "Madras Army," *Calcutta Journal*, 16 October 1819, 37.

[174] A Sub, "Military Subjection," 303–4.

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which are not considered as offences by the civil law."[175] In the judge advocate's view, "Necessity, therefore, requires that certain restraints should be imposed on all the ranks of men who compose the military state which are foreign to the condition of other citizens."[176] In his defense, Robison refuted the assumption that his status as a military man prevented him from participating in the public sphere of political debate. Throughout, he denied that the letter in the *Calcutta Journal* constituted a military offence and insisted he be tried in his capacity as a British subject: "Whether it was a military man, or whether it was a Civilian or a Tradesman who wrote what they conceived matter of Libel on the Government or its acts . . . it was the act committed, and not the person who committed it that should have been looked to and the supreme court where the law of Libel is well known as the proper Tribunal to bring it before."[177] Hugh Joseph O'Donnell (writing under the pseudonym "Justinian") agreed that "the man by becoming the soldier, does not cease to be the citizen, and is still entitled to every privilege of municipal Law."[178] Their objections are apposite; government resorted to military justice explicitly because they feared that civilian courts would exonerate soldiers of libel charges.

The letter of "A Commanding Officer" provides another perspective on the question of officers' rights and is worth quoting at length. The letter urged commanding officers to treat their subordinates better and condemned junior officers' lack of recourse when browbeaten by their superiors. This led "A Commanding Officer" to ask: "Is it a *Soldier* only who may be bullied with impunity?"[179] He answered: "They are, indeed, sometimes called the *Slaves* of the State, and it is said that the spirit of liberty becomes fatal in Military bodies: but I cannot think that this is rightly understood. The Military are necessarily not so much their own masters as others, and there are duties, abhorrent to humanity, which we would gladly avoid, yet must perform: but I deny that a Soldier is in any way bound to put up with any thing that a private gentleman would deem himself dishonored by." His letter thus raises the issue of gentlemanliness, which, though it did not figure prominently within these debates, nevertheless seems to have been a point of tension within the officer corps more generally, particularly among junior officers.[180] "A Commanding Officer" wrote on behalf of a young friend who had been "ill used by a fellow every way his inferior, and who would tremble at his frown, were he not elevated by his present authority."[181] As Harold Perkin observed, British society during this period consisted of "a finely graded hierarchy"; upon entering military service, a young man accepted his place within a pecking order that did not always mesh neatly with wider status distinctions, no doubt producing the "constant heart-burnings" and "dissonance of feeling" that "A Commanding Officer" describes.[182] His

[175] Courts Martial Proceedings 1822, TNA, WO 71/266/39, 5.

[176] Courts Martial Proceedings 1822, TNA, WO 71/266/39, 6.

[177] Courts Martial Proceedings 1822, TNA, WO 71/266/39, 35.

[178] Justinian, "Correspondence," *Bombay Gazette*, 23 May 1832, 3–4.

[179] A Commanding Officer, "Letter of a Commanding Officer," *Calcutta Journal*, 13 October 1821, 479.

[180] Catriona Kennedy, "John Bull into Battle: Military Masculinity and the British Army Officer during the Napoleonic Wars," in *Gender, War and Politics: Transatlantic Perspectives, 1775–1830*, ed. Karen Hagemann, Gisela Mettele, and Jane Rendall (London, 2010): 127–46, at 131–32.

[181] A Commanding Officer, "Letter of a Commanding Officer," 479.

[182] Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780–1880* (London, 1969), 24; A Commanding Officer, "Letter of a Commanding Officer," 479.

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letter asserts that an officer's place within the military hierarchy did not, or at least, should not, require him to submit on points of personal honor; in this view, an officer's status as a military man did not efface his right as a private gentleman to defend his personal reputation.

This letter is also revealing in its use of slavery as a rhetorical device. The comparison between soldiers and slaves ripples through the English-language press in India during this period. Though the pattern is worth noting, the reasons are too complex to fully disentangle here; letter writers who made this allusion seem to have had multiple points of reference in mind, ranging from the classical tradition to Tsarist Russia to plantation slavery in the Atlantic world.[183] At the most basic level, the comparison reflects the view that a soldier's body was not his own; according to "Amulaes," the soldier's "condition closely resembles that of a slave condemned to the galley, who tolls with constant and unremitted exertion in the service of a cruel and careless master."[184] O'Donnell complained along similar lines in 1832, that the British soldier was "worked, taxed and commanded for the mere boon of living more a slave than the West Indian Negro."[185] O'Donnell's reference is no doubt informed by wider antislavery debates raging in Britain at a time when abolitionist activity was at its peak.[186] The comparison seems to parallel a common radical critique that stressed the need to prioritize the political rights and working conditions of white Britons over and above those of the enslaved.[187]

The language of slavery coexisted and even overlapped with terms like *hireling*. At a time when financial self-sufficiency was vital to genteel, masculine identity, the brute fact of accepting payment for services rendered meant that soldiers were liable to be described as mercenaries and dependents, in contrast to the republican ideal of the citizen-soldier who took up arms in defense of his community.[188] The practice of purchasing commissions mitigated the stain of dependence but did not erase it; an officer solicitous of promotion was still liable to be described as "a servile parasite or vile pander."[189] As Matthew McCormack has demonstrated, "independence" was the cornerstone of nineteenth-century masculine identity; the concept encompassed "not just autonomy, but the condition in which self-mastery, conscience and individual responsibility could be exercised."[190] Independence was considered to be a precondition for political participation; its obverse implied a lack of virtue, free will, and political legitimacy.[191]

[183] Robison, for example, complains that he has been reduced to "a state of slavery equal to that of the gentlemen in the Russian service," in Robison to Marquess of Hastings, 9 June 1822, BL, APAC, IOR/H/532, 485. For slavery in antiquity, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford, 1966), 62–90.

[184] Amulaes, "Merit and Interest," 71.

[185] Justinian, "Correspondence," 3–4.

[186] Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, 2009), 263.

[187] Ryan Hanley, "Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1813–1833," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, no 26 (2016): 103–23, at 104–7.

[188] Kennedy, "John Bull into Battle," 131–32.

[189] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men and a Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Hints*, ed. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge, 1995), 84. For more on the radical critique of soldiers, see Nick Mansfield, *Soldiers as Citizens: Popular Politics and the Nineteenth-Century Military* (Liverpool, 2019), 28–31.

[190] Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005), 2.

[191] McCormack, *Independent Man*, 13.

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In the face of allegations of dependence, officers were keen to claim their place within civil society and to emphasize that they retained a stake in the politics of their day. Perhaps the most extended discussion on this point features in *Considerations on the State of British India* (1822), a book written by Lieutenant Adam White, Bengal Army, while on furlough.[192] It includes a chapter on military discussions in the Indian press in which White underlines "that soldiers are human beings, endowed with reason as other men, and accustomed to recognize its influence as paramount in all human affairs," countering arguments "that the habits of their profession naturally dispose them to have recourse to violence and injustice." White condemned "this debasing doctrine which excludes the military profession from all pretensions to the character of moral and intellectual beings." By contrast, he pointed to contemporary republican revolutions in Spain, Portugal, Naples, and Sicily to show that soldiers "are not the mere creatures of command—the blind mechanical agents of power," but rather "are imbued with the same feelings and passions as the rest of the community, and as thoroughly impressed with the advantages resulting from rational liberty."[193] This passage echoes the insistence by "A Sub" that soldiers had the right to "use the power of reasoning bestowed on them by nature with the same freedom as others."[194] As rational and independent actors, soldiers in this view had a right to partake in contemporary public debate—a right that the letters submitted to the *Calcutta Journal* suggest that even officers felt the need to assert and defend.

The taint of dependence imbued discussions about the military and the press with added emotion. These feelings are evident in the heated reactions to an incendiary letter by "One of the Many," which one reader described as "the Gunpowder Essay. . . a perfect Congreve Rocket, which was to go off with an explosion, and blow up the Army and the Calcutta Journal together."[195] In this letter, the author (himself an officer) urged Buckingham not only to simplify the content of the *Calcutta Journal* for the sake of his military readership but also to desist from using the terms "slaves" and "hirelings" when describing "people who flatter and speak what they do not, or should not think"; these terms, he argued, were liable to wound military readers. The author insisted that military men could not be "*free*" because their reliance on government for their livelihood prevented them from criticizing government measures. Buckingham's efforts to improve such a readership were futile, "for shame has lost its efficacy upon those, who have been habituated to prostitute their dignity to power." Though portraying the army in general in disparaging terms, the author reserved his greatest ire for commanding officers, whom he described as "the most servile and illustrious spies of the state" and accused of removing officers "without a trial, and without a hearing, merely because they have spoken as every Englishman has a right to speak."[196]

Despite the outrage that it provoked, this letter nevertheless parallels arguments commonly made by officers opposed to the publication of military grievances in the press. Officers loyal to the government obviously chose to frame their allegiance differently, preferring not to think of themselves as "hirelings"; still, they emphasized

[192] Hodson, s.v. "White, Adam," in *List of the Officers of the Bengal Army, 1758–1834*, 4:445–46.

[193] Adam White, *Considerations on the State of British India* (London, 1822), 108.

[194] A Sub, "Military Subjection," 303–4.

[195] P. S., "Letter of One of the Many," *Calcutta Journal*, 23 May 1820, 250.

[196] One of the Many, "A Word of Advice from Popularity Hall," *Calcutta Journal*, 10 May 1820, 105.

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that their obligations to their employers prevented them from publicly criticizing government measures. "Britannicus" asserted that "Every good Soldier knows that he has nothing to do but to listen and obey."[197] For "Caenus," the mere "idea of a separate interest existing between the Government and its Army, is absurd," and he castigated letter writers who "contrived to array them against each other."[198] In response to a letter signed "A Military Friend" that implied the existence of abuses within the company's administration, one letter writer marveled that such criticisms could emanate from "An *Officer*, a *Company's Servant*, paid and supported by the Company." For this writer, a position within the company's army created an obligation: "Does he think himself at liberty as an *Officer* to insult the Government of the Country? If he does he has odd notions of duty."[199] "An Old Officer" made a similar point in response to a letter from "Young Officer" querying a recent appointment. According to "An Old Officer," "Young Officer" had "maliciously and advisedly violated the first Law of his profession. He has anonymously assailed the purity and dignity of his own Government by a contemptible insinuation"—namely, that the appointment in question breached government regulations.[200] Loyalty was a principal component of the officer's code of honor; in the normal course of regimental life, violations of this code would be met with ostracism or other forms of group sanction. Where the code was breached anonymously in the press, fellow officers resorted to tactics of public argument and reproof to put the letter writer in his place.

Many of the disagreements around the desirability of military discussions in the press were therefore a product of differing conceptions of what it meant to be a soldier in general and an officer in particular. To be sure, some commentators voiced their objections to military discussions more because of style or etiquette, condemning the prevalence of personal slights while generally permitting considerations of abstract principles.[201] Yet the debate about military discussions also seems to be a product of more fundamental differences of conviction. To what extent did junior officers have a right to expose the actions of their commanding officers to public scrutiny? How far did an officer's status as an employee of the state preclude him from subjecting that same state to criticism? Did his obligation to government really entail unwavering support, even preventing him from advancing his views anonymously in the newspapers? Historians have observed that the period witnessed sharply contradictory public attitudes to soldiers, who were associated simultaneously with tyranny, valor, and self-sacrifice; officers' letters to the press suggest that some of these associations were internalized by men grappling with their own place in society at large.[202] The controversy surrounding the freedom of the press brought this underlying ambivalence to the fore.

[197] Britannicus, "The Bull's Second Answer," *Calcutta Journal*, 12 March 1823, 156.

[198] Caenus, "Deeds of Arms," 284.

[199] B., "Letter Inserted in John Bull," 269.

[200] An Old Officer, "Letter from the Bull of Yesterday," *Calcutta Journal*, 4 April 1823, 474.

[201] Benevolus, "Party Question Disclaimed," 291; C. W. Turner, "Defence of Irregular Cavalry," *Calcutta Journal*, 17 January 1820, 116–17.

[202] Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars through the Crimea* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), 9–11.

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CONCLUSION

In the 1820s, controversy over the freedom of the press raged across the British Empire. In India as in Britain, government resorted to heavy-handed tactics, only to retreat when the ends no longer seemed to justify the means. In Bengal, however, the military came to occupy a particularly prominent place within these struggles. Army officers in India were not unique in their engagement with the press; in Britain and other parts of the empire, officers frequently contributed letters to newspapers and reported from the front.[203] In India, however, the large concentration of officers within the relatively small European population gave them greater visibility than elsewhere and turned the newspapers into important platforms of military debate. The prevalent belief that empire in India depended on maintaining military supremacy and, by extension, military discipline meant that the East India Company's government was primed to be suspicious of these discussions; the threat of insubordination was taken very seriously, particularly considering the long history of mutiny within the company's army. As a result, a distinctive feature of the controversy over press freedoms in India was disagreement over the question of how far officers were entitled to speak out against the government.

To the extent that government concerned itself with the press, it was largely to ensure that the principles of military subordination remained inviolate. Its involvement even in this respect, however, was uneven and irregular; in fact, some of the letters to the editor of the *Calcutta Journal* suggest that it was within the army itself that opposition to public discussions of military grievances became most heated. Differing ideas about the appropriateness of officers writing to the press were based on competing views regarding the nature and limits of military hierarchy and soldierly duty. While some officers seem to have viewed the press as a welcome space where they could escape the confines of military life, others evidently feared that writing to the newspapers would create habits of thought that might corrode an officer's sense of deference, duty, and purpose.

As time passed, the press seems to have been viewed as less threatening or subversive, both within the army and outside it. By the late 1820s, the East India Company had largely given up trying to regulate the Anglo-Indian press, a process that culminated in the repeal of the press regulations in 1835. Despite the worst fears of its detractors, there is little evidence to suggest that the press was being used to promote disaffection in the army, where, in any case, there was already a long tradition of militancy. Officers, it turned out, proved largely capable of regulating themselves when it came to their participation in contemporary print culture, and would remain active contributors to both specialist and mainstream journals throughout the nineteenth century.[204] This later history, however, should not obscure the fact that in the 1820s the freedom of the press was a significant subject of concern among people resident in or otherwise interested in Bengal, one

[203] Jeremy Black, *The English Press in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1987), 65; Edward M. Spiers, "Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press," *Archives* 32, no. 116 (2007): 28–40.

[204] Douglas M. Peers, "'Those Noble Exemplars of the True Military Tradition': Constructions of the Indian Army in the Mid-Victorian Press," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (1997): 109–42, at 115.

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where the boundaries of political participation were identified and negotiated.[205] In this struggle, officers played an important and heretofore unrecognized role.

Thinking about the relationship between officers and the media raises the specter of the whistle-blower, a twentieth-century term that nevertheless describes a phenomenon that might usefully be historicized in future research. Leaks of military or intelligence information excite heightened controversy because the stakes are perceived to be high; while some see whistle-blowers as agents for enforcing international law, others condemn them as a security threat. None of the officers examined in this study were guilty of the kinds of unauthorized disclosures that might have brought the military activities of the East India Company into question, nor do they uniformly fit the usual definition of whistle-blower as someone who exposes an irregularity or crime from within an organization. For the most part, these men were interested in their own conditions of service and their own quest for promotion rather than an abstract idea of public interest. Still, at a time when publicity was viewed as a panacea for society's ills, it is not surprising that officers would seek to bring their concerns before the public or claim their right to partake in the deliberations of their day. The position that they found themselves in, caught between their status as a soldier and their identification as a British subject, is not so dissimilar from the pressures to which military personnel are subject today, even though the nature of and motivations for public disclosures might be very different. Their letters to the *Calcutta Journal* reveal how these tensions were experienced at a time when the relationship when politics and society was being reconfigured.

[205] Marshall, "Whites of British India," 33.

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