

Scandal in Mesopotamia

Sehgal, Manu; Sehwat, Samiksha

DOI:

[10.1017/S0026749X18000215](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X18000215)

License:

Other (please specify with Rights Statement)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Sehgal, M & Sehwat, S 2019, 'Scandal in Mesopotamia: press, empire and India during the First World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 5, pp. 1395-1445. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X18000215>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

This article has been published in a revised form in *Modern Asian Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X18000215>. This version is free to view and download for private research and study only. Not for re-distribution, re-sale or use in derivative works. © Cambridge University Press 2019

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Scandal in Mesopotamia: Press, Empire and India during the First World War

Journal:	<i>Modern Asian Studies</i>
Manuscript ID	ASS-RES-2015-0166.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Article
Keywords:	First World War, India, Mesopotamia, Press, Empire
Geographic Area of the Manuscript:	South Asia

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

For review Only

Scandal in Mesopotamia: press, empire and India during the First World War¹

Title: Scandal in Mesopotamia: press, empire and India during the First World War

Short title: Press, empire and India during First World War

First author's name, affiliation, and email address: Dr Manu Sehgal, University of Birmingham, m.sehgal@bham.ac.uk

Second author's name, affiliation, and email address: Dr Samiksha Sehrawat, Newcastle University, Samiksha.sehrawat@ncl.ac.uk

Abstract: By providing the first comprehensive account of the role of the British and Indian press in war propaganda, this article makes an intervention in the global history of the First World War. The positive propaganda early in the war interlaced with a rhetoric of loyalism was in contrast with how the conservative British press affixed blame for military defeats in Mesopotamia upon the colonial regime's failure to effectively mobilize India's resources. Using a highly emotive and enduring trope of the 'Mesopotamia muddle', the Northcliffe press was successful in channelling a high degree of public scrutiny onto the campaign. The effectiveness of this criticism ensured that debates about the Mesopotamian debacle became a vehicle for registering criticism of structures of colonial rule and control in India. On the one hand this critique hastened constitutional reforms and devolution in colonial India, on the other it led to the demand that the inadequacy of India's contribution to the war be remedied by raising war loans. Both the colonial government and its nationalist critics were briefly and paradoxically united in opposing these demands. The coercive extraction of funds for the imperial war effort as well as the British press's vituperative criticism contributed to a postwar anti-colonial political upsurge. The procedure of creating a colonial 'scandal' out of a military disaster required a specific politics for assessing the regulated flows of information which proved to be highly effective in shaping both the enquiry that followed and the politics of interwar colonial South Asia.

Empire and India loomed large in British First World War propaganda and in news reports early in the war. The mobilization of the Indian standing army – the largest in the empire – to fight on the Western Front within months of the declaration of war was celebrated as the empire rallying to the British cause. The news coverage replete with positive stories of colonial troops was used in war propaganda in both Britain and India to extract manpower and resources while managing the potential threat of

¹ The authors would particularly like to thank Biswamoy Pati, Mark Harrison, Ravia Ahuja, Heike Liebau, Chris Andreas and Sabine Lee for their encouragement and feedback on various drafts of this article.

political disaffection. Yet, merely a year and a half later the euphoria accompanying the initial mobilization from India had been replaced by news of the parsimony of the colonial Indian government was now held responsible for the ignominious collapse of the Mesopotamian campaign. Rebuking the powers that be, Rudyard Kipling, whose pen had celebrated the empire, captured the popular mood as he condemned incompetent colonial officials in leaving soldiers ‘thrifty to die in their own dung.../ ... strong men coldly slain/ In sight of help denied from day to day’.² The conservative British press, which had generously praised the material support extended by Indian princely rulers at the outset of the war had by 1917 begun to loudly question whether India had done enough for the war effort.

Historians documenting Indian participation in the First World War tend to focus on the early positive propaganda but not the later disenchantment, even though a greater number of Indian soldiers and Indian resources were committed to the Mesopotamian campaign and the political fallout of the ‘scandal’ of the medical breakdown there had more important consequences for Indian society and politics. This lacuna exists despite the importance of analysing the press’s war propaganda given that newspapers’ influence in Britain was at its peak during this period.³⁴ In analysing this sharp turn in the British press’s coverage of colonial India during the First World War, this article brings together several distinct historiographies – of First World War propaganda in Britain and India, of the Mesopotamian campaign and of the role of the British press in imperial politics.

² Kipling’s poem ‘Mesopotamia’, was published simultaneously in both the *Morning Post* and the *New York Times*. Rudyard Kipling, ‘Mesopotamia’, *Morning Post*, 11 Jul. 1917, p. 6.

³ Troy Paddock, ‘Introduction: Newspapers, Public Opinion, and Propaganda’, *Call to Arms*, Paddock (ed.), pp. 4-13.

⁴ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 21. Also see Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*, pp. 2-10. The distinction between ‘published opinion’ as distinct from ‘public opinion’ and the interplay between the two has been emphasised in more recent scholarship. See Adrian Gregory, ‘A Clash of Cultures: The British Press and the Opening of the Great War’, *Call to Arms*, Paddock (ed.), pp. 15-49.

By bringing into focus the link between British and Indian political developments, this article makes a significant intervention in understanding the impact of the First World War on colonial Indian history and to the global history of the war. National historiographies exclude certain topics and marginalize the role of transnational influences in shaping social, economic and political developments. The protestations of imperial loyalty during the war sit very uneasily with narratives of Indian history which privilege the development of anti-colonial critiques of colonial rule and imperial exploitation. This has contributed to the neglect of the history of Indian participation in the First World War.⁵ This article will place both British and Indian histories during the First World War within a broader international frame of analysis so that the impact of imperialism on colonial governance and economic structures of India can be better understood.

Beginning with a review of existing historiographies on press and propaganda during the First World War, we examine initial news coverage in 1914-15 which emphasized colonial India's generous contributions to the British war effort and meticulous arrangements made to safeguard the ethnic practices of Indian sepoys⁶ within an imperial 'partnership'. The publicly expressed loyalty to the imperial cause was invested with a particularly forceful meaning by Indian elites eager to share in a wider, shared discourse of loyalism. The second section analyses the meanings of Indian elites' loyalty which arose from notions of Britishness emphasising a shared British culture. By the summer of 1916, as news of the military and medical breakdown in Mesopotamia percolated through the British press, recrimination against colonial parsimony had replaced the earlier mood of public euphoria. The third section

⁵ Santanu Das, 'Ardour and Anxiety: Politics and Literature in the Indian Homefront', in *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, Heike Liebau, et al. (eds.), Brill, Leiden, 2010, p. 342.

⁶ The term 'sepoy' was a corruption of the word 'sipahi' and referred to an Indian soldier in British employ.

analyses the leading role played by the Northcliffe press in making public the scandalous neglect of sick and wounded soldiers on the Mesopotamian front. It examines the conservative British press's denunciation of the colonial Indian government for causing the breakdown and the increasingly vociferous criticism of the inadequacy of the Indian contribution to the imperial war effort. The intensity of this criticism was in such marked contrast to an earlier public rhetoric of loyalty and service to the imperial cause that it particularly energized conservative public opinion into questioning colonial loyalism. The Northcliffe press was especially influential in instigating parliamentary scrutiny of the breakdown and shaping the Commission which was appointed to investigate the military debacle. As the fourth section shows, the public discussion of Indian finances in relation to the war effort revealed imperial fault lines – while the British press criticized the failure of the Indian government to pour its economic resources unstintingly into the war effort, the Indian nationalist press decried such demands. This article explains how British conservative criticism of the Mesopotamian breakdown directly led to an increase in India's material contribution to the war, and the imposition of a war loan. It argues that not only did this cause the appeal of imperial loyalism to wane, it fuelled a more critical anti-colonial nationalism driven by the economic impact of the war loan and the political repression of war time measures.

Debating a World at War

To understand the complex and interlocking historiographies that frame this article, we begin here by considering how the story of Indian anti-colonial nationalism has dominated the study of modern Indian history. The study of the First World War has focused on key political episodes during the war – the unification of the 'moderate'

and 'extremist' factions of the Indian National Congress (1915-1916), the coming together of the Congress and the Muslim League under the Lahore Pact of 1916 and the initiation of the Home Rule Leagues in the same year, which called for dominion status for India.⁷ The Ghadar movement (1915) and introduction of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, which deepened devolution and expanded representational bodies have also been of considerable interest to historians because of their political implications for the rise of nationalism.⁸ These larger narratives do not examine the impact of the war on India as a 'home front',⁹ but rather, focus instead on tracing the causal roots of the popular upsurge in post-war nationalist movements to the economic hardship produced by the war. The economic impact of the war has been interpreted largely in terms of increasing inflation, the imposition of heavy taxes, the adverse impact of the colonial monetary policy on India, industrial expansion resulting from war-time shortages and labour unrest, and the post-war slump of the Indian economy.¹⁰ This scholarship focuses on the coercion that marked large scale recruitment of soldiers in the rural hinterland¹¹ and assumes that economic

⁷ For useful overviews of political developments during the war, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885-1947*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1995, pp. 147-53; Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 102-5; Bipan Chandra, et. al, *India's struggle for independence, 1857-1947*, New Delhi: Viking, 1988, pp. 159-69.

⁸ For new work on the Ghadar movement see Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014; and Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011. For the politics surrounding the Government of India Act of 1919, see Peter Robb, *The Government of India and Reform: Policies towards Politics and the Constitution, 1916-1921*, Oxford: OUP, 1976.

⁹ Dewitt Ellinwood and S. D. Pradhan (eds.), *India and World War I*, Manohar, Delhi, 1978, serves as a dated exception to this trend, but also see below.

¹⁰ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, 'Indian Economy and Society during World War One', *Social Scientist*, vol. 42, nos. 7/8, 2014, pp. 12-16; Krishan Saini, 'The economic aspects of India's participation in the First World War', in DeWitt and Pradhan, ed., *India and World War I*, pp. 141-76. Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, pp. 127-8.

¹¹ An exceptional look at the Punjab as a home front through two world wars can be found in Tan Tai Yong, *The Garrison State: the military, government and society in colonial Punjab 1849-1941*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2005. Other works which consider the impact of manpower mobilization for these wars are Rajit Mazumder, *The Indian Army and the making of Punjab*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2003; David Omissi (ed.), *Indian Voices of the Great War, 1914-1918*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1999. For an argument of the recruitment of Indian soldiers as cannon fodder for an imperial cause is Susan

dislocations caused by the war fed nationalist resistance during the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919) and the Non-Cooperation Movement (1921-2).¹² Despite the importance of the two Indian war loans raised through coercion in contributing to popular political mobilization, little is known about how they came to be imposed upon India. Historians mistakenly locate the war loans as the necessary outcome of the rise in Indian national debt consequent on increased military expenditure during the war.¹³ Instead, this article argues that the imposition of the war loans was a response by the colonial state to the conservative British press calling into question the value of India's contribution to the imperial war effort.

A renewed interest in the global dimensions of the First World War has contributed to a re-examination of the war from the vantage point of non-European participants in the conflict, including those from colonial South Asia.¹⁴ However, as yet, no systematic attempt has been made to examine how India figured in press coverage of the war and propaganda – an especially serious omission given its far-reaching implications for political developments in India. Also neglected is the important role

VanKoski, 'The Indian Ex-Soldier from the Eve of the First World War to Independence and Partition', Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1996.

¹² Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 168-77, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004, pp. 286-88.

¹³ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 169.

¹⁴ See especially Heike Liebau, et al. (eds), *The World in World Wars*; Franziska Roy, Heike Liebau and Ravi Ahuja (eds), *When the War Began We Heard of Several Kings: South Asian Prisoners in World War I Germany*, Social Science Press, Brill, 2011; Helmut Bley and Anorthe Kremers (eds), *The World during the First World War: Perceptions, Experiences and Consequences*, Klartext, Essen, 2014; Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War writing*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013. Among important older contributions are, Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain*, Pluto Press, London, 2002; Jeffery Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 12 (1983), 54-73. Some of the growing literature on Indians in the First World War tends to reproduce the imperial or ethnocentric biases of military authorities and other official sources. See for instance, Andrew Jarboe and Richard S. Fogarty, (eds), *Empires in World War I: shifting frontiers and imperial dynamics in a global conflict*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2014; Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front 1914-1915*, Spellmount, Staplehurst, 1999, G. M. Jack, 'The Indian Army on the Western Front, 1914-1915: A Portrait of Collaboration', *War in History*, 2006, 13, 329-62. There are numerous military histories of Indian participation in the First World War, which ignore the larger political context and social impact of the war in India and will not be discussed here. See for example, Kaushik Roy (ed.), *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, Brill, Leiden, 2011.

that the British press played in exposing the medical breakdown in the Mesopotamian campaign and its impact on colonial governance.¹⁵ The history of the press in colonial India and in the settler colonies discusses the period of the First World War only in passing.¹⁶ Chandrika Kaul's discussion of the censorship of the Indian press and the use of British newspapers for First World War propaganda by the India Office forms a notable exception.¹⁷ Simon Potter's history of the imperial news system, which examines the relationship of news agencies from the settler colonies with the British government shows that they facilitated news censorship in the settler colonies to maintain morale and boost contribution to the imperial war effort.¹⁸ Historians of South Asia interested in reconstructing the home front in major Indian recruiting regions have used news reports as sources, but without adequate attention to press censorship or the use of the press in war propaganda. Although the experience of Indian soldiers in British war hospitals has received some attention, their use in war propaganda has not been adequately examined.¹⁹ This article examines more closely

¹⁵ Ravi Ahuja refers in passing to news reports and the circulation of rumours about the war in his 'The Corrosiveness of Comparison: Reverberations of Indian Wartime Experiences in German Prison Camps, 1915-19', in *World in World Wars*, pp. 135, 139-43; Yong, *Garrison State*, pp. 105, 184, 233-4. Although Andrew Jarboe examines how the mobilization of Indian soldiers in the service of empire figured in First World War imperial propaganda, his study is limited to the Western Front and ignores the obvious, though unexamined significance of such metropolitan efforts for colonial politics. Andrew Jarboe, 'Soldiers of Empire: "Colonial Troops" in the Imperial Metropole and Imperial Propaganda, 1914-18', *Propaganda in the First World War*, Troy Paddock (ed.), Brill, Leiden, 2012. The limited scope of this analysis is undermined by the frequent reliance on uncritical blanket terms such as 'racism' to characterize representations of Sepoys in British newspapers.

¹⁶ For a recent reassessment of the politics and mechanics of colonial news gathering in nineteenth-century India, see Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India, c. 1830-1900*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2016, pp. 149-321.

¹⁷ Chandrika Kaul, *Reporting the Raj: the British Press and India, c. 1880-1922*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003, pp. 119-34. Northcliffe's imperial vision and its reflection in the newspapers he owned is examined in Chandrika Kaul, 'Popular Press and Empire: Northcliffe, India and the Daily Mail, 1896-1922', in *Northcliffe's Legacy: Aspects of the British Popular Press, 1896-1996*, Peter Catterall, et al., (eds), Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2000, pp. 45-69.

¹⁸ Simon Potter, *News and the British World: the Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876-1922*, Clarendon, Oxford, 2003.

¹⁹ Mark Harrison's *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War*, OUP, Oxford, 2010, is an excellent survey of the role of medical services in the First World War, which is attentive to experiences of Indian soldiers. See also his 'Disease, Discipline and Dissent: The Indian Army in France and England, 1914-15', in *Medicine and Modern Warfare*, Roger Cooter, Mark Harrison and Steve Sturdy (eds), Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1999. Indian soldiers' war hospitals in Britain are placed

how India was used in war propaganda by the British press. In doing so, it analyses the imperial loyalism of the early war effort and shows that the exposé of the Indian government's role in causing the Mesopotamian medical breakdown by the Northcliffe press led to important political consequences in India.

Despite greater and longer involvement of Indian soldiers on the Mesopotamian and East African fronts, the literature on India and the First World War has largely focused on the Western Front.²⁰ Since the colonial Indian state nourished sub-imperialist ambitions in West Asia and East Africa, these campaigns were also politically significant.²¹ Historians who *have* examined the Mesopotamia campaign have tended to focus on operational or military histories.²² The impact of the Mesopotamia Commission, which condemned the Indian government's prosecution of the war in West Asia has received some attention, with historians tending to re-examine the conclusions of the Commission and whether or not its condemnation of actors in India

within a longer historical trajectory of debates on state funding for medical care for Sepoys by Samiksha Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care in North India: Gender, State and Society, c. 1830-1920*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2013. Among older narratives of these hospitals see Visram, *Asians in Britain*, pp. 113-43. Recent accounts not informed by a critical engagement with or understanding of Indian history include Samuel Hyson and Alan Lester, "'British India on trial': Brighton military Hospitals and the politics of empire in World War I", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 38 (1), 2012, pp. 18-34; and Andrew Jarboe, 'Healing the Empire: Indian Hospitals in Britain and France during the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2015, pp. 347-69.

²⁰ Notable exceptions are Mark Harrison, 'The Fight Against Disease in the Mesopotamian Campaign', in *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced*, Peter Liddle and Hugh Cecil (eds.), Leo Cooper, Barnsley, 1996, pp. 475-89; Harrison, *Medical War*, Santanu Das, 'Indians at home, Mesopotamia and France, 1914-1918', in *Race, Empire and First World War*, Das (ed.), pp. 70-89; Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*; Pradhan and Ellinwood, *India and WWI*; S.D. Pradhan, *Indian Army in East Africa, 1914-1918*, National Book Organisation, New Delhi, 1991; James E. Kitchen, *The British Imperial Army in the Middle East: Morale and Military Identity in the Sinai and Palestine Campaigns, 1916-18*, London: Bloomsbury 2014; and; Brian Robson, *Crisis on the Frontier: the Third Afghan War and the campaign in Waziristan 1919-1920*, Spellmount, Stroud, 2007.

²¹ See, for instance, David French, 'The Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut: Prestige as a Factor in British Eastern Strategy, 1914-1916', *War & Society*, vol. 5, no. 1, (1987); V. H. Rothwell, 'Mesopotamia in British War Aims, 1914-1918', *Historical Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, (1970), pp. 273-94. S. Cohen, 'The Genesis of the British Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, (1976), pp. 119-32. On Indian sub-imperialism see, Robert Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2003.

²² See for instance, A. J. Barker, *The Neglected War: Mesopotamia 1914-1918*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967; Paul K. Davis, *Ends and Means: The British Mesopotamian Campaign and Commission*, Associated University Presses, Madison, 1994; and Paul Knight, *The British Army in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918*, McFarland, Jefferson, 2013.

was politically motivated.²³ Such re-examinations of the politics of the Commission would be more useful if they did not focus merely on British politics but also paid attention to political developments in India.

The tendency to view the history of the British press during the First World War within a national frame has obscured the entanglement of British newspapers with the British Empire. The wartime censorship of the British press and the rising influence of press barons such as Northcliffe have been important themes in this domestic history of the British press during an imperial war.²⁴ The historiography of the British press during the war does not examine how the British press perceived and portrayed colonial India's contribution to the war effort. The history of British First World War propaganda has a similar blind spot towards the empire, focusing on the activities of Wellington House, Beaverbrook's role in war propaganda and on propaganda in neutral countries and the British home front.²⁵ An analysis of news coverage of colonial India is useful in understanding how the empire was presented to the British public during the war.²⁶ Propaganda on the home front focused on justifying Britain's role in the war by drawing on a language of patriotism, on maintaining recruitment and civilian morale and on black propaganda against Germany. The use of propaganda

²³ See, for example, Douglas Goold, 'Lord Hardinge and the Mesopotamia Expedition and Inquiry, 1914–1917', *Historical Journal*, 1976, vol. 19 (4), pp. 919–45. Barker argues that the Mesopotamia Commission report was politically motivated. See Barker, *The Neglected War*; Davis, *End and Means* and discussion below. A more recent instalment to this approach is Kristian Ulrichsen, *The logistics and politics of the British campaigns in the Middle East, 1914–22*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, esp. pp. 22–3.

²⁴ Deian Hopkin, 'Domestic Censorship in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 5, no. 4. (1970), pp. 151–69; J. M. McEwen, 'The Press and the Fall of Asquith', *Historical Journal*, vol. 21, (1978); J. Lee Thompson, 'Fleet Street Colossus: The Rise and Fall of Northcliffe, 1896–1922', *Parliamentary History*, vol. 25(1), 2006, pp. 115–38.

²⁵ David Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda in First World War Britain: The National War Aims Committee and Civilian Morale*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2013; M.L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British propaganda during the First World War 1914–1918*, Macmillan, London, 1982; Gary Messinger, *British propaganda and the state in the First World War*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992; Cate Haste, *Keep the home fires burning : propaganda in the First World War*, Allen Lane, London, 1977; Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914–18 and After*, UCB Press, Vancouver, 1987.

²⁶ Paddock, 'Introduction: Newspapers, Public Opinion, and Propaganda', pp. 4–13.

to create sympathy and support for Britain in neutral countries has received much attention, but only passing mention is made in this historiography to propaganda about or in the empire despite its importance to the war effort. This article focuses attention on the British press's role in creating positive imperial war propaganda through reiteration of Indian loyalty, India's enthusiastic contribution to the war effort in the early phases of the war and about Indian soldiers on the Western Front. News agencies such as Reuters cooperated clandestinely with the British government, which used Reuters' networks to distribute propaganda within the empire and control the flow of news to the colonies during the war.²⁷ This article provides a detailed examination of British press coverage of India's participation in the First World War from a wide political spectrum. It focuses not only on war propaganda by the imperially minded newspapers of the Northcliffe press and prominent liberal papers but also news reports from a range of lesser known papers such as right-wing *Daily Express* and the popular radical working-class evening daily, *Star*. While the focus of current articles on India in British war propaganda remains on early phases of the war which stressed the loyalty of India to the British Empire, this article shows for the first time the important role played by the Northcliffe press in breaking this early consensus to report on the medical breakdown in the Mesopotamian campaign. Similarly, the historiography of British politics during the First World War acknowledges the significance of press intervention in politics during the war, especially in the reconfigurations of H.H. Asquith's government in 1915 and 1916 and on Lloyd George's manipulation of the press, but is oblivious to the imperial implications of this politics.²⁸ This article shows conclusively that the focus on the Mesopotamia scandals was an important part of the

²⁷ Potter, *News and the British World*; Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, p. 130-2.

²⁸ Asquith was the British prime minister from 1908 and was forced to resign in December 1916 amid allegations of poor management of the war. McEwen, 'Fall of Asquith', J. M. McEwen, 'Northcliffe and Lloyd George at War, 1914-1918', *Historical Journal*, vol. 24, (1981); Martin Pugh, *Lloyd George*, Longman, London, 1988.

attacks on the Asquith government by conservative British newspapers such as *the Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Morning Post*. While newspapers of all political spectrums were critical of the highest levels of the British administration in India after the exposé of the medical breakdown in Mesopotamia, news coverage varied considerably according to political leanings. Thus, the *Manchester Guardian* sought to use this indictment of colonial governance to promote devolution of power in India in keeping with liberal principles. Although the Northcliffe press had muted its negative coverage of the colonial Indian government after the Mesopotamia Commission Report, the *Morning Post* continued in its acerbic criticism till it had forced the colonial government to commit to making further contributions to the imperial war effort by raising ill-advised war loans in India. In focusing on the British press, the intention here is not to restore an older imperial historiography which treated political developments in Indian history as outgrowths of British political ideologies and influences. Indeed, press coverage of Indian finances shows the disproportionate influence exercised by the British press in shaping colonial policy. While the British press's criticism of the colonial state as a rigid bureaucracy hastened constitutional reform, its shrill demands for greater extraction of Indian economic resources imposed two war loans on a colony which was witnessing what has been called a 'massive plunder of Indian human and material resources' during the war.²⁹ On the other hand, the Indian press was heavily censored and its protests against the severity of coercion during drives to raise funds for the imperial war effort ignored.

The next section discusses how India and Indian soldiers on the Western front were portrayed in early war propaganda by the British press. This delves deeper into the nature of war propaganda relating to India by juxtaposing its various aspects— the

²⁹ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 169.

celebration of Indian soldiers' valour, the military and financial aid rendered by the colonial Indian state and its allies the princely rulers, the meanings of imperial loyalty in the early stretches of the war, the role of medical arrangements for sepoys in boosting propaganda, the prominence in the British press's coverage of the ethnic customs of Indian soldiers, imperial anxieties regarding Muslim colonial soldiers and regarding miscegenation from the proximity of Indian soldiers with white women. In providing an overview of these developments, this article argues that the effusive celebration of Indian loyalty was to ironically provide the ballast for concerted criticism of colonial Indian governance as later news coverage in the conservative British press harped on about India's failure to adequately contribute to the imperial war effort.

Indian Loyalty on the Western Front: Press and War Propaganda

By September 1914 Indian soldiers were dispatched to France to fight on the beleaguered Western front. They were deployed less than two months after the outbreak of hostilities at a time when there were no other standing armies within the British Empire to supplement the heavily depleted British forces at the front. Indian sepoys therefore gained high visibility in the British press.³⁰ The colonial state was keen to manage the flow of information about Indian soldiers and the war in India. Therefore, before discussing the positive propaganda regarding Indian soldiers, it is important to acknowledge the use of censorship to manage the flow of information to

³⁰ Much was made of the pageantry associated with the arrival of the Expeditionary Force at Marseilles, 'Indian Troops in France', *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1914, p. 9. The editorial described 'the little Gurkhas playing the "Marseillaise"...on the little bagpipes which their good comrades in the Highland regiments taught them...the great French tune sounding from the Highland pipes played by the Indian Highlanders...the Indian warriors are India's answer to the great German miscalculation about Indian fidelity', 'What We Think: Our Indian Army', *Star*, 2 Oct. 1914, p. 2; 'Soldiers of India', *The Times*, 3 Oct. 1914, p. 7.

India about the war.³¹ Telegraph censorship and the Indian chief censor controlled news sent to India about the war, even from British newspapers. Reuters was also used by the India Office to provide positive publicity for the Indian effort and suppressing news considered inimical to British rule in India.³² As Kaul points out, censorship in India was distinct from censorship in Britain and the dominions since the Indian government had a long-established tradition of controlling the press through punitive legislation embodied in successive Press Acts, censorship and emergency powers and the imperial control of news reporting through explicit restrictions on access to information in India.³³ The colonial state recognized that ‘prompt dissemination of accurate war news in the Dependency is of great importance’ due to the ‘rapidity with which wild rumours are spread among the Indian populace’, and the possibility of German spies influencing the rumours circulating in India.³⁴ To facilitate this, Francis Younghusband was appointed to the India Office in 1914 to prepare telegrams with news regarding the war for distribution to Indian newspapers by the Indian government. Since British newspapers were perceived to be faithfully reflective of British public opinion by Indians and could reach Indian soldiers on the Western Front, the India Office sought to influence British news coverage on Indian matters by promoting news stories that celebrated Indian support for the war and downplaying threats to the security of the empire. Some of this was achieved through informal

³¹ Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 123-5. For censorship on the western front see Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars*, p. 123.

³² Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 125-6, 130.

³³ Chandrika Kaul, ‘India, the Imperial Press Conferences and the Empire Press Union: The Diplomacy of News in the Politics of Empire, 1909-46’, *Media and the British Empire*, Chandrika Kaul (ed.), Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, esp. pp. 135-6; N.G. Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907-47*, Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1974, esp. 66-107. Potter argues that the widening of state censorship during and after the war in India was in sharp contrast with the wider trend of the flow of information with limited government intervention across the British Empire, especially in the Dominion colonies, Potter, *News and the British World*, p. 206.

³⁴ ‘News for India: Sir F. Younghusband’s Daily Telegrams’, *The Times*, 8 Feb. 1915, p. 6.

Younghusband had established a reputation in the pre-war period for his knowledge about foreign policy and his travels in central Asia, especially Tibet during the era of the ‘Great Game’.

contacts between Austen Chamberlain (secretary of state for India, May 1915-July 1917), leading British journalists and the two Indian viceroys who served during the war – Lord Hardinge (1910-16) and Lord Chelmsford (1916-1921).³⁵

In the opening months of the war, the British press therefore presented Indian soldiers positively as loyal subjects who had gallantly come to the rescue of the British Empire in its time of need.³⁶ The British press had been largely supportive of the war and had enthusiastically conducted positive propaganda in support of war aims, to keep up recruitment and civilian morale.³⁷ As Kaul points out, the India Office was also keen to ensure ‘a steady flow of favourable news’ at the beginning of the war.³⁸ News of Indian soldiers was a popular item in British newspapers during this early phase and the India Office sought to ‘guide’ news coverage through the appointment of F. E. Smith as a representative of the Indian press on the Western front in 1914. In his reports, Smith privileged stories of heroic achievement of the Indian army over those of high casualties.³⁹ Offers of service and gifts for the war effort from Indian princely rulers, from the Indian government and from nationalist politicians who were deemed to ‘speak for native India as a whole’ were interpreted as proof that India, like the British settler colonies, gave its consent to British imperial rule.⁴⁰ Contributions to the war effort by India were seen as evidence that the British Empire

³⁵ Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 126, 132.

³⁶ ‘The Swords of India’, *Daily Chronicle*, 2 Sep. 1914, p. 4; ‘India’s 70,000: Troops “Already Dispatched,” Says Viceroy’, *Star*, 9 Sep. 1914, 1; ‘Our Indian Army in France’, *Daily Mail*, 2 Oct. 1914, p. 4.

³⁷ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*; Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda*.

³⁸ Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 125-6. For the India Office’s war propaganda, also see Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars*, pp. 125-9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 125. Created Baron Birkenhead in 1919, Smith was appointed a ‘recording officer’ while he served as a staff officer with the Indian corps. He was to later co-author an official history entitled *The Indian Corps in France* (London: John Murray, 1917) with his successor, JWB Merewether.

⁴⁰ ‘The Empire’s Devotion’, *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Aug. 1914; ‘Enthusiastic Evidences of Patriotism’ and ‘Loyalty of Native Opinion’, *Morning Post*, 9 Sep. 1914, p. 8; ‘India’s Princely Aid: The Gorgeous East in Fee’, *The Times*, 10 Aug. 1914, p. 9; ‘India and Her Army: Eagerness to Serve in Europe’, *The Times*, 31 Aug. 1914, p. 7; ‘India’s Martial Spirit’, *The Times*, 13 Nov. 1914, p. 7; ‘Rajput Fighting Princes’, *The Times*, 8 Jan. 1915, p.3. See also, Das, ‘Ardour and Anxiety’.

continued to enjoy popular support amongst its South Asian subjects.⁴¹ The *Punch* concluded that this support was a direct result of the British civilizing mission's purported claims to 'improve' colonial society:

They're proud to share the Empire-pride.

It's them for Britain at the test;

We knew they'd never stand aside;

For when we tried and did our best

The beggars must have known we tried.⁴²

Such portrayals were fairly representative and reinforced British home front propaganda that the Allied cause was just and moral.⁴³ Calls for recruitment exhorted men from Britain and the empire to do their duty for King, country and empire.⁴⁴ Newspapers proclaimed that offers of service, men and material for the war from India testified to the popularity of British imperial rule, being material demonstrations of Indian 'loyalty' and the desire of Indian subjects to serve the Empire.⁴⁵ Messages by nationalist Indian politicians in the Legislative Council asserted the righteousness of the British cause, reiterated that India's contribution was a demonstration of its duty

⁴¹ 'The Empire's Devotion', *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Aug. 1914, 'India's 70,000: Troops "Already Dispatched," Says Viceroy', *Star*, 9 Sep. 1914, p. 1; 'India's Enthusiasm: Proposal to Share War Cost with United Kingdom', *Star*, 10 Sep. 1914, p. 1

⁴² 'India: 1784-1914', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, vol. 147, 7 Oct. 1914.

⁴³ That Britain was fighting in defence of the principle of 'Right against Might' in defence of small nations was a cornerstone of British propaganda on the home front and in neutral countries. Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 52, 57, 63; Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 159-62. 'Britain's Just Cause', *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1914, p. 7. R.E. Vernede reminded the Sepoys that 'all that they [the German enemy] had of izzat [sense of chivalrous honour] is trodden under heel- Into their hearts, my brothers, drive home, drive home the steel!', 'The Indian Army', *The Times*, 11 Aug. 1914, p. 9.

⁴⁴ Although Haste's study acknowledges the importance of the empire, she does not discuss how empire figured in the propaganda. Monger pays attention to this when discussing supranational patriotism, but only in passing, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 89-90, 151.

⁴⁵ 'Our Indian Army: The Question of Colour in War Time', *Daily Chronicle*, 1 Sep. 1914, p. 3; 'The King's Messages to the Empire: Gratitude and Pride; Unity in a Just Cause...Magnificent Loyalty: India's Offers of Lives and Resources', *Morning Post*, 10 Sep. 1914, p. 6; Valentine Chirol, 'India and the War: the Depth of National Feeling', *The Times*, 12 Sep. 1914, p. 9; 'The Response of India: Lord Curzon on Imperial Unity', *The Times*, 7 Oct. 1914, p. 10.

and gratitude to Empire.⁴⁶ It is important to link such protestations with conceptions of imperial patriotism and citizenship if we are not to dismiss all evidence of Indian cooperation with the British during colonial rule as ‘collaboration’, with all its negative connotations. This article thus initiates a closer examination of ‘imperial loyalty’ in colonial India.⁴⁷ Viceroy Hardinge had deployed Indian soldiers to France in the hope of pandering to Indian notions of ‘parity’ with Europeans and to foster enthusiasm and support for the war in India.⁴⁸ Responding to this gesture, Nationalist politicians in India represented Indian contribution to the war as an act of imperial citizenship, which was expected to be acknowledged by greater self-government after the war.⁴⁹ Santanu Das, in his analysis of the effusion of Indian loyalty in publications associated with the early years of the war argues that it arose from an ambivalent ‘knotting’ together of Anglicization and ‘an incipient nationalist consciousness’.⁵⁰ Thus, the response in India, including from nationalist leaders like M.K. Gandhi,⁵¹ was a reiteration of their adoption of ideas of imperial citizenship which located Britishness as an identity based on a notion of a shared culture of ‘language, laws,

⁴⁶ ‘India’s Splendid Rally: Offers of Service From Princes and People, “message to the Whole” World’, *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Sep. 1914; ‘India’s Enthusiasm: Proposal to Share War Cost with United Kingdom’, *Star*, 10 Sep. 1914, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Historiographically, this will involve a re-engagement with earlier interventions such as Christopher Bayly, ‘Returning the British to South Asian History: The Limits of Colonial Hegemony’, in *The Origins of Nationality in India*, pp. 77-8, 93, 122-3, 125, 285-6, 295, 309.

⁴⁸ Although lip service was paid to this and some concessions were made to this war time propaganda, unequal treatment of Indian soldiers continued through the war. That Hardinge’s strategy worked is evident from the overwhelming support he received in the Indian press when he was criticized by the Mesopotamia Commission and heavily censured in the British press in July 1917 for his role in causing the Mesopotamia campaign breakdown.

⁴⁹ Thus Dadabhai Naoroji, the most prominent Moderate nationalist leader, confidently claimed, ‘We are above all British citizens of the great British Empire, and that is at present our greatest pride’, ‘India and the War: Mr Naoroji’s Confidence’, *The Times*, 5 Sep. 1914, p. 9. Naoroji’s qualified support can be contrasted with the rather effusive composition of Nawab Nizamut Jung, a retired High Court Judge, ‘Thine equal justice, mercy, grace, Have made a distant alien race, A part of thee!’, ‘India to England’, *The Times*, 2 Sep. 1914, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Das, ‘Ardour and Anxiety’, p. 257.

⁵¹ Louis Fischer, *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Times*, Harper Collins, London, 1997, pp. 202-3. Gandhi’s appeal to Gujarati women mirrored calls in Britain ‘Women of Britain say “Go!”’, Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 55. ‘The Indian Wounded’, Letter from M. K. Gandhi, *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1914, p. 6; ‘Young India in the War’, *The Times*, 24 Dec. 1914, p. 6.

institutions, and attachment to the empire' rather than an ethnic identity.⁵² Potter and Andrew Thompson have posited that this notion of Britishness was especially relevant to discussion of settler colonies' relationship to Britain. Thompson's arguments for reconceptualizing 'loyalism' in colonial South Africa apply to India before the First World War as well. Thompson shows that the loyalty of South Africans ought not to be narrowly conceptualized as loyalty to the British Government or to 'Anglo-Saxon Imperialism' but to the idea of 'Britain', that included a 'generalized loyalty to a "British way of life"' or 'commitment to a certain set of "liberal" imperial values'.⁵³ Das's findings echo Thompson's conclusion that imperial loyalty was often undergirded by local patriotism and regional identities, even when they were critical of the economic impact of empire.⁵⁴ Monger also argues that British patriotism during the First World War spoke in several registers, with a supra-national patriotism that overlapped with the empire.⁵⁵

Press portrayal emphasized how German plans to incite Indian Muslims and other British colonial subjects to overthrow the British Empire had come to nought.⁵⁶ Pan-Islamic sentiment was at the heart of German and Ottoman propaganda and aroused considerable anxiety among British authorities due to the large number of Muslim

⁵² Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1829), cited in Potter, *News and the British World*, p. 2.

⁵³ Thompson acknowledges that this rhetoric of 'loyalty' to the empire was in tension with local colonial identities, see Andrew Thompson, 'The Languages of Loyalism in Southern Africa, c. 1870-1939', *English Historical Review*, vol. 118, no. 477, 2003, pp. 617-650.

⁵⁴ Das, 'Ardour and Anxiety', pp. 360-7.

⁵⁵ Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 24-5, 65-9.

⁵⁶ 'India's Loyalty: Moslem League Urges Turkish Neutrality', *Morning Post*, 9 Sep. 1914, p. 9; The Agha Khan's speech delivered to a Indian Volunteers Committee, chaired by Gandhi, was quoted widely in the metropolitan press, 'India's Loyal Aid in the War, Germany as the Enemy of Moslem Nations', *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1914, p. 9; 'India: 1784-1914', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, vol. 147, 7 Oct. 1914; 'Feeling in India: Moslem Press Warns Turkey...Loyalty to the British Raj', *Morning Post*, 3 Nov. 1914, p. 8; 'Curse from the Mountains: Old Indian Hunter on Our Enemy', *Daily Mail*, 10 Nov. 1914, p. 8; 'Indian Moslem Loyalty', *The Times*, 12 Nov. 1914, p. 7; 'Indian Troops at the Front', *The Times*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 3; 'Germans Bested', *Daily Mail*, 25 Nov. 1914, p. 6; 'Loyal India: Baffled German Intrigues', *The Times*, 22 May 1915, p. 18

soldiers in the Indian army.⁵⁷ News coverage of the Indian forces on the Western Front and of India's war effort therefore sought to emphasize that Indian Muslims had remained loyal to the British empire.⁵⁸ The British press made much of the claims that some Indians perceived the war as a holy war in which the British Empire and its Allies were on the just side.⁵⁹ Indeed, evidence of dissatisfaction with colonial rule was discounted in the British press as no more than 'mischievous rumours'. News of the desertion of Indian soldiers to the German side was represented in terms calculated to minimize its effect on the morale of Indian soldiers on the Western Front and on the British population,⁶⁰ even as events such as the mutiny in Singapore and the foiled Ghadar movement in India gave the lie to an imperial propaganda that focused on celebrating the loyalty of the colonies.⁶¹ Since the colonies' contribution to the war effort and the affirmation of the British cause as a just cause significantly enhanced morale, it was necessary that any evidence of colonial resistance should be accounted for to the British.⁶² British press propaganda thus emphasized the harmonious working together of sepoys and British soldiers at the front,⁶³ the welcome accorded to Indian

⁵⁷ Heike Liebau, 'The German Foreign Office, Indian Emigrants and Propaganda Efforts Among the "Sepoys"', in Roy et al., *When the War Began*, pp. 96-128. Imperial anxieties regarding security due to the use of Indian soldiers in the war have been discussed at length in David Omissi, *Sepoys and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994, pp. 113-47.

⁵⁸ 'Letters from the Front: German Overtures to the Indian Troops', *The Times*, 11 Dec. 1914, p. 6; 'Loyal India', *The Times*, 14 Jan. 1915, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Thus, the Nizam of Hyderabad was quoted as exhorting his coreligionists to loyally serve the British whose cause was described as 'just and right', 'Indian Moslem Loyalty: The Action of Turkey Denounced', *The Times*, 4 Nov. 1914, p. 7. For references to the British cause being just and holy, see Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 107; Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, pp. 95-7, 160, 176-7, 198. Also see Gregory's revisionist interpretation of British war propaganda, which argues that Christian values of sacrifice were pervasive during the First World War. Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 152-86.

⁶⁰ 'German Dismay at Indian Fighting Qualities', *Manchester Guardian*, 31 Oct. 1914, p. 9.

⁶¹ 'Indian Riot at Singapore', *Manchester Guardian*, 24 Feb. 1915, p. 7.

⁶² 'German Lies About India, Editorial', *The Times*, 20 Nov. 1915, p. 9.

⁶³ 'To Relief of Gen. Townshend: Indians from Flanders to the Tigris', *Daily Mail*, 29 Jan. 1915, p. 6; 'The Calm Spirit of India', *The Times*, 19 Mar. 1915, p. 7; 'Australians and Indians: Friendship at the Dardanelles', *The Times*, 9 Aug. 1915, p. 7

soldiers by the French population and the cordial relations of Indian troops with the French civilian population.⁶⁴

The haste in deploying sepoys to a European theatre had overturned a pre-war decision to reserve Indian troops for frontier campaigns and not having them fight a European enemy. Given that Indian soldiers were outfitted for frontier warfare, their clothing and equipment were particularly ill-suited to the much colder climate and conditions of service on the Western front. The inability to evacuate sick and wounded Indian soldiers to India or Egypt meant that hospitals had to be hastily improvised for Indian soldiers in Britain and this early disarray led to criticism of poor medical arrangements for loyal colonial soldiers.⁶⁵ Hospitals opened in Brighton and southern England were placed by Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, under the charge of Sir Walter Lawrence, who was designated the Commissioner for the Indian Sick and Wounded. Lawrence's arrangements were advertised as tangible demonstrations of British paternalism and benevolence towards their Indian subjects and stressed imperial partnership in the war.⁶⁶ India Office and officials charged with administering these hospitals were keenly aware of the possibilities and dangers presented by them for wartime propaganda and widely distributed accounts and images of the excellent hospital arrangements made for Indian troops in Britain.⁶⁷ Lawrence followed a deliberate policy of using Indian military hospitals on the Western front as centre-pieces of imperial war propaganda, arguing that 'Indians who

⁶⁴ The following are representative: 'The Indian Troops at Marseilles', *The Times*, 2 Oct. 1914, p. 9.; 'A Day At – Where Our Indian Troops Wait', *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1914, p. 3; 'Our Indian Comrades', *Manchester Guardian*, 3 Dec. 1914, p. 9; 'East and West Join Hands in France', *The War Illustrated Album deluxe: The Story of the Great European War told by Camera, Pen and Pencil*, Amalgamated Press, London, 1915, vol. 3, p. 801; 'Brothers in Arms from East and West in Bagdad', Hammerton (ed.), *War Illustrated Album deluxe*, 1919, vol. 10, p. 3398.

⁶⁵ Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 52-4.

⁶⁶ "'Hail to the King-Emperor!": Royal Visit to Indian Wounded', *Daily Mail*, 18 Nov. 1914, p. 3.

⁶⁷ 'Wounded Indians', *The Times*, 2 Jan. 1915, p. 11; 'Wounded Indians at Brighton', *The Times*, 28 May 1915, p. 11.

have been tended in hospital in England will take back to India tidings of goodwill and kindness, and feelings of gratitude and respect'.⁶⁸ He emphasized that the good treatment of Indian troops in hospitals on the Western front and in England would translate into political gains in India: 'I never lose an opportunity of impressing on all who are working in these Hospitals that great political issues are involved in making the stay of the Indians in England as agreeable as possible.'⁶⁹ Hardinge was also convinced of the 'excellent political results in India' of news of the hospital arrangements in Britain.⁷⁰ Lawrence advocated publicity of these hospitals since they reflected well on both the War Office and the Indian Medical Service.⁷¹ Public opinion in India was also considered target of those associated with hospital arrangements on the Western front: 'everything should be done to encourage responsible people, who understand India and carry any weight in that country, to visit the Hospitals [in England].'⁷² The lavish setting of the Brighton Royal Pavilion, which was converted to a hospital, was meant to evoke 'Eastern' splendour and was widely used in propaganda.⁷³ The British press played an important role in transforming medical arrangements for Indian soldiers in Britain into centrepieces of propaganda in Britain and across South Asia.⁷⁴ The British press's predilection for news stories about Indian soldiers and their 'exotic' ethnic practices was in line with this portrayal of Indian war hospitals in south England. It portrayed the tolerance of colonial subjects'

⁶⁸ 'Arrangements Made for Indian Sick and Wounded in England and France: Report by Col Sir Walter Lawrence to the SoS for War', Walter Lawrence Papers, India Office Records and Private Papers (IORPP), British Library (BL), Mss Eur/F143/65, [hereafter, Lawrence Papers], p. 4.

⁶⁹ Lawrence to Kitchener, 15 Feb 1915, Lawrence Papers, Mss Eur/F143/65, p. 27.

⁷⁰ Hardinge's letter cited by Lawrence in his letter to Kitchener, 27 May 1915, Lawrence Papers, Mss Eur/F143/65, p. 67.

⁷¹ Lawrence to Kitchener, 21 Jul 1915, Lawrence Papers, Mss Eur/F143/65, p. 92.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷³ 'Song of the Sikhs: Lord Crewe's Visit to Indian Wounded', *The Times*, 30 Mar. 1915, p. 7.

⁷⁴ See, for instance: 'Indian Heroes: Modest Story of the Great Charge', *Daily Mail*, 9 Nov. 1914, p. 3; 'What the Indian Soldiers Think', *Daily Mail*, 9 Dec. 1914, p. 6; 'Royal Visit to Brighton', *The Times*, 11 Jan. 1915, p. 4; "'In the King's Palace": Indians' Appreciation of the Brighton Hospital', *The Times*, 18 Feb. 1916, p. 3.

ethnic and religious diversity as an imperial generosity, which was believed to have created a feeling of deep loyalty towards the empire.⁷⁵ The portrayal of the eating practices of Indian soldiers was especially popular in the press, and was meant to foreground British tolerance of different cultural mores.⁷⁶ However, some of this attention was also aimed at reassuring Indians that sepoys' ethnic practices were being scrupulously respected, in order to ensure continuing recruitment from the Indian 'martial races'.⁷⁷

However, the presence of Indian soldiers and the celebration of their martial prowess also created unique challenges to the imperial gender order when liaisons began to develop between Indian sepoys and local British women with attendant anxieties about miscegenation and the blurring of racial boundaries.⁷⁸ This led to the introduction of strict discipline in Indian war hospitals in Brighton, which required Indian soldiers to be practically imprisoned within the hospitals to prevent contact with British women.⁷⁹ To compensate for the considerable dissatisfaction that this created among Indian soldiers, special 'amusements' were organized.⁸⁰ The cinema theatres of Brighton ran special shows for the Indian troops and drives were arranged

⁷⁵ 'India's Highlanders: Gallant Gurkhas Who Will Never be Beaten', *Star*, 10 Oct. 1914, p. 3; 'Indians in Camp: Picturesque Scenes in the New Forest', *The Times*, 28 Oct. 1914, p. 5. Sehrawat has argued that the ethnicity of sepoys was important for imperial military officers reliant on mercenaries from a colonized population and anxious about the loyalty of such troops. This anxiety was especially pronounced during the early phases of the First World War when Indian soldiers were deployed on the Western Front and was especially evident in the care regarding their ethnic practices in war hospitals in southern England during 1914-16. See Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, especially 202-19.

⁷⁶ 'Care for Caste at Indian hospitals: Mr Chamberlain and the V.C. *Manchester Guardian*, 14 Jul. 1915, p. 8; 'The King's Message to the Indian Army Corps', *Manchester Guardian*, 29 Dec. 1915, p. 4.

⁷⁷ 'The Indian Troops', Letter to the Editor by Gen. O'M. Creagh (retired Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army), 5 Dec. 1914, p. 9; 'Indian Soldiers' Mistreatment: Mischievous Rumours', *Manchester Guardian*, 15 Apr. 1915, p. 12; 'Wounded Indians in the New Forest', *The Times*, 1 Mar. 1915, p. 5; 'Indians in Brighton Hospital: Care for Caste Prejudices', *The Times*, 4 Sep. 1915, p. 3.

⁷⁸ This was especially strict at the Kitchener Indian Hospital, 'A Report on the Kitchener Indian Hospital Brighton', c.1916, India Office Record (IOR), British Library (BL), L/MIL/17/5/2016, [henceforth, 'KIH Report']. See J. Greenhut, 'Race, sex and war: the impact of race and sex on morale and health services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914', *Military Affairs*, vol. 45 (1981), 71-4; Philippa Levine, 'Battle Colors: Race, Sex, and Colonial Soldierly in World War I', *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 9, Number 4, 1998, pp. 104-130.

⁷⁹ 'KIH Report', Harrison, 'Disease, Discipline and Dissent'.

⁸⁰ 'KIH Report'.

for them in motor ambulances. Indian officers went on weekly conducted tours of London,⁸¹ which focused on royal figures and the grandeur of Britain – all meant to inspire awe and reverence for the empire.⁸² This positive propaganda was meant to maintain recruitment in regions such as the Punjab, from which a substantial proportion of the British Indian army was recruited, and to sustain commitment of material and financial resources from the rest of the Indian civilian population.⁸³

The severe medical breakdown in the Mesopotamian campaign from October 1915 brought propaganda by the Indian government under considerable strain despite the existence of a particularly rigorous local censorship regime. Censorship in Mesopotamia was severe, even greater than in the Dardanelles campaign. As Arnold Wilson (then deputy political officer in Mesopotamia) pointed out, military censorship, which applied both to the letters from the front and of the official press correspondent, was meant ‘less to prevent information reaching the enemy than to prevent the public in India and at home becoming aware of the appalling sufferings that were being endured by our troops’.⁸⁴ Thus, even Edmund Candler, a journalist appointed the ‘Official Eye Witness’ for the campaign by the British government, was subjected to close censorship soon after his arrival in December 1915. His dispatches were censored thrice: in the field, in Basra and in India before they reached London,

⁸¹ Section on ‘Amusements’, *ibid.*, p. 14; ‘Sikh Sightseers’, *The Times*, 9 Apr. 1915, p. 10; ‘Indian Officers in London’, *The Times*, 29 Sep. 1915, p. 5.

⁸² Section on ‘Amusements’, ‘KIH Report’, p. 14; ‘Indian Army Devotion: Relentless Swords Against the Foe in France’, *Daily Mail*, 11 Dec. 1914, p. 3; ‘Wounded Indians to See London’, *The Times*, 24 Dec. 1914, p. 5; ‘Wounded Indians in London: At Lord Roberts’s Grave’, *The Times*, 6 Jan. 1915, p. 4; ‘Indian Wounded at Brighton’, *The Times*, 26 Jul. 1915, p. 5.

⁸³ Yong, *The Garrison State*, pp. 105-8 and Mazumder, *Army and the making of Punjab*. ‘Treatment of Indian Troops: Spread of Baseless Rumors’, *The Times*, 15 Apr. 1915, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Arnold Wilson, *Loyalties Mesopotamia, 1914-1917: A Personal and Historical Record* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969, 1st edn 1930), p. 164. For a recent effort at problematizing the significance of propaganda and censorship on the British home front, see discussion of military censorship in Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 89-90. As opposed to McCartney’s discussion of the attenuated efforts to censor communication between soldiers of a Territorial regiment and the civilian population, military censorship for Indian soldiers had a second layer of censorship deployed by the India Office in addition to regimental censorship, Omissi, *Indian Voices*, pp. 4-9.

where they were censored again.⁸⁵ Even generals' letters sent from the Mesopotamian campaign were censored.⁸⁶ Despite such elaborate arrangements, the scandalous breakdown in Mesopotamia became a major topic of debate in the British press. The next section takes a closer look at the much more negative coverage of the severe shortages occurring in the Mesopotamia campaign from early 1916, which presented the Northcliffe press as exposing government incompetence during the war and employing the trope of the 'Mesopotamia muddle'. It shows that the Northcliffe press was undeniably influential in demanding a commission to investigate the humiliating military reversals in Mesopotamia and determining its scope of enquiry. The ire of the conservative press, which included vitriolic attacks from the *Morning Post*, came to focus on the figure of the finance member of the colonial Indian government, William Meyer, who was singled out for blame for the failure to provide essential supplies and medical aid to soldiers in Mesopotamia. Meyer was seen as the personification of a rigid bureaucracy – styled 'hill-top' government – which failed to adequately mobilize India's economic resources for the imperial war effort.

Politics of Scandal: the 'Mesopotamia Muddle' in the Northcliffe Press

The Northcliffe press broke news of the medical breakdown in the Mesopotamian theatre. Early reports published in *The Times* from March 1916 were based on letters sent by soldiers privately from the front, and confirmed by its Bombay correspondents, about severe shortages in medical supplies and in essential personnel such as nurses and doctors.⁸⁷ Correspondence to newspapers from relatives of soldiers

⁸⁵ Edmund Candler, *The Long Road to Baghdad* (London: Cassell & Company, 1919), p. 65-72.

⁸⁶ 'Extracts from a letter from an officer in Mesopotamia, 5 Feb. 1916', Lawrence Papers, Mss Eur/F143/101, p. 11.

⁸⁷ The first report was made in 'Mismanagement in Mesopotamia', *The Times*, 14 Mar. 1916, p. 7.

quoting private letters from the Mesopotamian front painted a picture of suffering soldiers and aroused public outrage:

We were very short of rations in the last fight and were nearly reduced to a state of starvation; war out here is no joke. We had very hard fighting and marching, and no rest; comforts, absolutely nil. We consider ourselves lucky if we get our daily bread.... [W]e can't fight on an empty stomach; the med have done very well and keep wonderfully cheerful under depressing circumstances.⁸⁸

Correspondence from the public commending *The Times* for breaking news of the long-standing breakdown confirmed the image of the Northcliffe press as the champion of the soldier.⁸⁹ Northcliffe, the proprietor of both *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* had fashioned himself as a watchdog representing public interest by using his papers to advocate an efficient prosecution of the war, especially by bringing government errors to the attention of readers.⁹⁰ In this, the Northcliffe press was following an established genre of news reporting which had developed over the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – uncovering defects in British defence policy in the face of official inaction.⁹¹ The breakdown thus became one in a series of military disasters reported by the Northcliffe press in late 1915 and 1916, as it mounted criticism of government handling of the war and the endemic indecisiveness

⁸⁸ 'Mesopotamian Needs', Letter from John Byrne, *The Times*, 17 Mar. 1916, p. 9. The letter from Byrne's son, which was quoted was especially harrowing as it was written just days before his death.

⁸⁹ For instance, 'Fortiter' claimed shortages had existed right from the beginning of the campaign, as early as December 1914. The Northcliffe press had earlier begun campaigns that were meant to uncover official shortcomings that had, it was claimed, placed soldiers' lives in danger. Thompson, 'Rise and Fall'. See also McEwen's account of Northcliffe's criticism of Kitchener early in the war, even at the expense of a fall in the circulation of his papers, J.M. McEwen, "'Brass-Hats' and the British Press During the First World War", *Canadian Journal of History*, vol. 18, no. 1, 1983.

⁹⁰ Thompson, 'Fleet Street', pp. 122-3.

⁹¹ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 7 and J. Lee Thompson, *Politicians, the Press and Propaganda: Lord Northcliffe and the Great War, 1914-19*, Kent, Kent State University Press, 1999, pp. 12-14.

that had marred the Asquith coalition.⁹² Yet such was the enormity of the Mesopotamia scandal that Geoffrey Dawson, the editor of *The Times*, insisted that it made ‘Crimea seem [like a] trivial joke’.⁹³

The neglect of the wounded – who were crowded on unsuitable river transport and left unattended for days – evinced intensely angry reactions since medical services during war had become essential to morale.⁹⁴ Liberal newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian*, *Daily News*, *Daily Chronicle* and the radical *Star*, also shared the public indignation at disclosures of the horrors wounded soldiers had endured on the Mesopotamian front and criticized the Indian government for failing to make adequate medical arrangements.⁹⁵ Such cross-party indignation reflected a wider shift in attitudes towards medical care for soldiers during the First World War to keep up

⁹² Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 75-6. For details of the role of the press in engineering Asquith’s downfall, see McEwen, ‘Fall of Asquith’. For an analysis of the criticism of the Asquith coalition and the rising support for Lloyd George as a decisive war leader during this period of intense press criticism, see John Grigg, *Lloyd George: From peace to war, 1912-1916*, Methuen, London, 1985; George Cassar, *Asquith as War Leader*, Hambledon, London, 1994; Thompson, *Politicians, Press, Propaganda*, pp. 103-22. Anger towards the Mesopotamian breakdown was also fuelled by growing war-weariness in 1917. Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, pp. 74-6; Monger, *Patriotism and Propaganda*, p. 26.

⁹³ G. Dawson to Northcliffe, 14 Jul. 1916, Northcliffe Papers, Add MS 62251, p. 142. Harrison argues that there was a lag in adopting elements of this medical machine developed on the Western Front on fronts farther away from metropolitan scrutiny, such as those in Mesopotamia and Gallipoli. Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 297-9.

⁹⁴ Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 11-13, 301-2. See also T. J. Mitchell and G. M. Smith, *History of the Great War based on Official Documents, Medical Services: Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War* (London: HMSO, 1931), [henceforth *British Official History: Medical Statistics*], pp. 5-6.

⁹⁵ See, for instance, ‘Our Mesopotamian Troops: An “Inexcusable” Medical Breakdown’, *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Mar. 1916, p. 5; ‘Editorial: Who is Responsible?’, *Star*, 23 Mar. 1916, p. 2; ‘Supplies for Mesopotamia: Mr Chamberlain says Many Offers were Accepted’, *Star*, 24 Mar. 1916, ‘Mesopotamia: More Questions about Hospital Arrangements’, *Star*, 28 Mar. 1916, p. 1; ‘House of Lords: The Mesopotamia “Breakdown”’, *Manchester Guardian*, 19 Jul. 1916, p. 6. In contrast to the conservative press, the liberal press gave much less space to coverage of reports of the medical breakdown through 1916 and the first half of 1917, though parliamentary discussions about it were regularly reported. ‘The Mesopotamia Black Book: Nobody Has Yet Been Punished’, *Star*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 1; ‘Pukka’, *ibid.*, p. 2; ‘Public Anger Over Mesopotamia: “No Whitewashing”’, *Star*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 1; ‘Mesopotamia Scandal’, *ibid.*, p. 1; ‘Mesopotamia Report: Expedition Badly Organised and Ill-Equipped, Indian Government’s Responsibility’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 5; ‘Mesopotamia Scandal: Sufferings of the Wounded’, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 8; ‘Mesopotamia: Questions in the House’, *Manchester Guardian*, 5 Jul. 1917, p. 6; *Manchester Guardian*, ‘The Blunder of Bagdad and its Tragic Sequel: Mesopotamia Muddling’, *Daily Chronicle*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 1; ‘Mesopotamia: Sensational Disclosures’, *Daily News & Leader* [henceforth *Daily News*], 27 Jun. 1917, p. 1; ‘Medical Breakdown: Painful Revelations of the Sufferings of the Troops’, *ibid.*, p. 3; ‘Editorial: Crime & Punishment’, *Daily News*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 2.

the morale of both fighting men and of their families on the home front.⁹⁶ This also went against new military practices wherein medical and sanitary arrangements on the front were expected to be efficient and work as part of a war machine, with emphasis on conserving both manpower and resources by treating wounded or ill soldiers and returning them to the fighting line.⁹⁷

The reporting on the scandal in the Northcliffe press initiated parliamentary discussions and significantly shaped the questions that were raised.⁹⁸ Accusing the government of excessive secrecy and concealing evidence of incompetence to retain power, the Northcliffe press vociferously demanded that parliament discuss the scandal.⁹⁹ Correspondents to *The Times* were suspicious of ‘the question being shelved by the authorities’.¹⁰⁰ Politicians, including Lord Midleton (secretary of state for India, 1903-05) and Lord Sydenham, as well as important officials such as Chamberlain and Lawrence had been receiving private reports of the breakdown since early 1916.¹⁰¹ Politicians alarmed by reports of the breakdown felt able to publicly raise questions in Parliament once it had been reported in the press.¹⁰² Continuing

⁹⁶ Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 300-2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-6.

⁹⁸ Members of Parliament, such as Ian Malcolm, also wrote to *the Times* in support of its exposé of the scandalous medical breakdown. Malcolm was a Tory politician who had not only travelled to India but was associated with Red Cross work in Mesopotamia.

⁹⁹ Lovat Fraser, ‘Who is Responsible? Townshend’s Besieged Little Army in Kut’ *Daily Mail*, 27 Mar. 1916, p. 4; Lovat Fraser, ‘The Mystery: Who sent Townshend to Baghdad?’ *Daily Mail*, 24 Jul. 1916, p. 4. Press censorship was often used for political ends during the war. Censorship helped manage fall of civilian morale due to defeats but also to prevent criticism of the government’s management of the war.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from James Rolt, *The Times*, 17 Mar. 1916, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Private letters intimating medical shortages were sent to Chamberlain from February 1916. For summaries of such private letters, see ‘Medical Arrangements, Mesopotamia (enclosed with letter from Chamberlain to Hardinge, 11 February 1916)’, AC46/2/57; ‘Copy of Letter dated 16 January 1916, from an Officer Serving in Mesopotamia’, AC46/2/58; ‘Extracts from Private Letters from Mesopotamia (enclosed with letter from Chamberlain to Hardinge, 24 January 1916)’, AC46/2/60; ‘Extract from letter from Bombay’, 28 Jan. 1916; AC46/2/61; letter from Chamberlain to [Hardinge?], 22 Feb. 1916, AC46/2/2, all in the Austen Chamberlain Collection. Lawrence received letters from October 1915, some of which were sent by messenger by highly placed officers to escape the censor. ‘Extracts from letters from Indian Medical Service officers describing their experiences in Mesopotamia’, Lawrence Private Papers, Mss Eur/F143/101, pp. 1-11.

¹⁰² See, for instance, private letters and reports forwarded by Lord Midleton (the Unionist and Conservative MP and the former Governor of Bombay), Lord Selborne (the Liberal Unionist) and the

shortages of food and medical supplies months after news of the scandal broke in Britain strengthened calls in Parliament for an official enquiry into the mismanagement of the campaign.¹⁰³ In the face of mounting evidence being revealed to the public, Chamberlain was forced to admit that a ‘lamentable medical breakdown’¹⁰⁴ had taken place in the Mesopotamian campaign despite earlier attempts to inquire into the breakdown confidentially through the Vincent-Bingley Commission.¹⁰⁵

The emotive language of exposé and reform used by the Northcliffe press was particularly effective in bringing down public opprobrium on the Indian government given the increased political influence of the press during the war. This distrust of the Indian government’s statements on the breakdown was also evident in Parliament.¹⁰⁶ Even despite such criticism, the Northcliffe press, with its long-standing tradition of being sympathetic to imperial interests and paying greater attention to Indian news, took a less harsh view of the culpability of the Indian government for the scandal than did the arch-conservative *Morning Post*.¹⁰⁷ The latter’s news reports condemned the

King to Chamberlain. Selborne to Chamberlain, 23 Jun. 1916, AC46/2/46; Curzon to Chamberlain, 2 Apr. 1916, AC46/2/29; Midleton to Chamberlain, 1 Apr. 1916, AC46/2/28; Stamfordham to Chamberlain, 28 Feb. 1916, AC46/2/65; all in the Austen Chamberlain Collection, Cadbury Research Library, Birmingham [henceforth, Austen Chamberlain Collection]. For Midleton’s persistent demands for greater information regarding the campaign, see ‘Campaign in Mesopotamia’, HL Deb 30 Mar. 1916 vol. 21 cc587-93, ‘Operations in Mesopotamia’, HL Deb 22 May 1916 vol. 22 cc2-3, ‘Rations of the Troops in Mesopotamia’, HL Deb 25 Jul. 1916 vol. 22 cc905-7.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Mesopotamia Hospitals’, *Daily Mail*, 24 Mar. 1916, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Harrison shows that as the war office took over the command of the campaign in August 1916, the ‘medical machine’ developed on the Western front to evacuate casualties and improve the health of soldiers, was finally deployed on the Mesopotamian front. Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 274-84.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Rations of the Troops in Mesopotamia’, 25 Jul. 1916, HL Deb 25 Jul. 1916 vol 22 cc905-7905.

¹⁰⁷ Chandrika Kaul has outlined the imperial sympathies of Northcliffe and their role in the greater attention given to covering Indian news by *the Times* and the *Daily Mail* in her ‘Popular Press and Empire’, pp. 45-69. McEwen points out that the views of the editor of the *Morning Post*, H.A. Gwynne, closely reflected those of Sir Edward Carson, leader of the Irish Unionist party. Carson had resigned from the Asquith coalition in October 1915 and since been an active critic of the Asquith government. McEwen, ‘Fall of Asquith’, Thompson, ‘Fleet Street Colossus’. He led the unionist war committee, formed in January 1916 for the more vigorous prosecution of the war, which was especially active in condemning the Mesopotamia scandal. McEwen, ‘Fall of Asquith’, Thompson, ‘Fleet Street Colossus’.

Indian government of being an ‘absolootely nootral [sic]’ country as it ‘[did] not want to be bothered about a distant and disagreeable conflict’.

Criticism of the Indian government aimed at discovering further lapses was strong in both the Parliament and British press as 1916 drew to a close.¹⁰⁸ The Mesopotamia breakdown, which was characterized variously as the ‘Mesopotamia muddle’, ‘Mesopotamia scandal’, and the ‘terrible story of Mesopotamia’ created a trope for criticizing the colonial state which was widely used in the British and Indian press. Private reports of mismanagement by the Indian government leading to poor arrangements affecting soldiers, and the disclosure thereof in sensationalized news became a pattern which was repeatedly utilised in criticizing the colonial regime. This was especially evident during the Karachi Troop Train disaster in July 1916,¹⁰⁹ which was widely covered in the press with questioning in Parliament.¹¹⁰ The death of soldiers in a hospital ship due to adverse weather conditions also drew a prompt response both from the India Office and newspapers.¹¹¹ The *Morning Post* reported instances of poor medical arrangements and overcrowding of Indian hospitals,¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ See repeated questioning in Parliament regarding military medical equipment, military hospitals in India and suggestions for their reform. ‘Army Medical Equipment (India)’, Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., lxxxv, col. 650: 7 Aug. 1916; ‘Military Hospitals (India)’, Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., lxxxvi, col. 978W: 24 Oct. 1916; ‘Barrackpore Hospital and Barracks’, *ibid.*, col. 1117: 25 Oct. 1916; specifically about Indian military hospitals: ‘Military Hospitals’, Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., xcvi, col. 1942-3W: 11 Jul. 1917.

¹⁰⁹ The deaths of British soldiers from heat stroke in a train transporting soldiers from Karachi to Peshawar caused considerable stir as it came at a time when the government was asserting that earlier lapses in organization had been remedied. The news of the tragedy was broken by the *Truth*, a weekly journal, which had a reputation for investigative journalism exposing frauds. *Truth*, Aug. 1916. ‘Indian Troop Train Tragedy: Many Deaths from Heatstroke’, *Manchester Guardian*, 22 Jul. 1916, p. 6; ‘Editorial: The New Black Hole Tragedy’, *Morning Post*, 22 Jul. 1916, p. 6; ‘Imperial Parliament: Karachi Train Blunder’, *Morning Post*, 2 Aug. 1916, p. 4; ‘Territorial Death Train’, *Daily Express*, 22 Jul. 1916, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ The news of the tragedy was reported widely in the empire as well as in the US and proved very embarrassing to the Indian government. See, for instance, *New York Sun*, 6 Aug. 1916, vol. 83, p. 39. ‘Deaths from Heat Stroke’, HC Deb 20 Jul. 1916 vol. 84 cc1226-7W; ‘Death of Territorials in India’, HL Deb 01 Aug. 1916 vol. 22 cc1037-42; ‘Death of Territorials in India’, HL Deb 25 Jul. 1916 vol. 22 cc911-6.

¹¹¹ Many Deaths on Hospital Ship: Terrible Effects of Heat’, *Manchester Guardian*, 8 Aug 1916, p. 5. Viceroy of India, ‘Hospital Ship Heat Strokes’, *Daily Mail*, 8 Aug. 1916, p. 5.

¹¹² ‘Indian Hospital Scandals: Lamentable Deficiencies’, *Morning Post*, 13 Oct. 1916, p. 4; ‘Questions in Parliament’, *Morning Post*, 21 Oct. 1916, p. 5.

while the *Daily Mail* ran several reports on the poor quality glasses supplied by the Indian government.¹¹³ So effective did the trope of the ‘Mesopotamia muddle’ become that even Indian newspapers used it to criticize the Indian government for the breakdown of medical arrangements in the Afghan campaign in 1919.¹¹⁴

The role of the conservative British press in instigating the Commission and in shaping its enquiry and report has not been sufficiently acknowledged.¹¹⁵ The Northcliffe press vociferously demanded an investigation of the mismanagement of the campaign – sustaining public attention on the campaign. Two of the claims repeatedly made by the Northcliffe press were instrumental in initiating the enquiry and in setting the terms of the investigation. The Northcliffe press claimed that the decision to advance to Baghdad was an opportunistic decision made by the government to seek a victory in Mesopotamia in order to detract attention from the failures in the Dardanelles.¹¹⁶ The second claim repeated in the Northcliffe press which determined the shape of the Commission’s enquiry was the demand that responsibility be fixed for the Mesopotamian disaster with consequences for politicians and senior officials. Questions asked in Parliament clearly echoed the Northcliffe press’s criticism.¹¹⁷ As demands for parliamentary scrutiny of the

¹¹³ ‘Green Glasses’, *Daily Mail*, 4 Sep. 1916, p. 3; ‘Green Glasses’, *Daily Mail*, 5 Sep. 1916, p. 3; ‘Soldiers’ Green Goggles’, *Daily Mail*, 6 Sep. 1916, p. 3; George Spiller, ‘Bad Green Glasses’, *Daily Mail*, 9 Sep. 1916, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ See news reports in *Justice* (Madras), 11 Aug. 1919, *Supplement to Punjab Press Abstract*, vol. 32, no. 35, p. 85, the *Hindu* (Madras), 20 Aug. 1919, *ibid.*, p. 94.

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of the report see Davis, *Ends and Means*. Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 204-27, 262-90, covers the medical aspects of the breakdown. Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 241-8 examines the impact of the culture of economy within the government on military and civilian medical care. We do not argue that the judgements of the commission were influenced by the conservative press in Britain but rather that the latter influenced the lines of enquiry pursued by the commission.

¹¹⁶ The government had clearly been influenced by a desire for victory to boost public morale after the stalemate on the western Front and the debacle in the Dardanelles. However, David French argues convincingly that the decision to focus on the mid-East was meant to strengthen the British position in Asia and protect British imperial interests. French, ‘Dardanelles, Mecca and Kut’.

¹¹⁷ See repeated demands in Parliament to ask the government to release papers related to the Mesopotamian campaign, ‘Mesopotamia Papers’, HL Deb 21 Jun. 1916 vol. 22 cc336-8, ‘Mesopotamia Papers’, HL Deb 06 Jul. 1916 vol. 22 cc601-2, ‘Mesopotamia Papers’, HL Deb 11 Jul. 1916 vol. 22 cc606-8; ‘Mesopotamia papers’, HL Deb 13 Jul. 1916 vol. 22 cc724-8.

Mesopotamia campaign mounted, Asquith's government was forced to accede to the setting up of the two commissions to enquire into the Dardanelles and Mesopotamia campaigns.¹¹⁸

In news coverage of the enquiry into the breakdown, the Northcliffe press again provided the lead with a persistence in reporting embarrassing incidents, which prompted questioning in Parliament. By repeatedly suggesting that the Commission was an exercise in whitewashing the breakdown which would fail to assign responsibility, the Northcliffe Press ensured that its preoccupations influenced the line of official enquiry into the campaign. The persistent insinuations by the conservative press, especially by the *Morning Post*, that the Commission might cover-up evidence of the government's culpability seems to have influenced its report, which specifically addressed those aspects of the expedition which had been stressed in the press campaign.¹¹⁹ Asquith was to single out the *Daily Mail* for its spiteful coverage raising a clamour for punishment of highly placed politicians and officers,¹²⁰ even as vicious attacks on Hardinge and other officials were made in the radical sections of the conservative press.¹²¹

The Commission's Report, made public on 27 June 1917, clearly blamed the Indian government's finance of the campaign,¹²² and caused a veritable storm in news coverage, with newspapers both in Britain and India criticizing the colonial

¹¹⁸ 'Still wobbling: Mr. Asquith Postpones once more', *Daily Mail*, 19 Apr. 1916, p. 4; 'Still Hushing-Up', *Daily Mail*, 11 May 1916, p. 5; 'Mr Asquith: "Please Trust us"', *Daily Mail*, 3 May 1916, p. 6; 'Carson: Plain Speaking', *Daily Mail*, 5 May 1916, p. 6. McEwen has argued that Carson used his connections with newspaper editors to engineer the failure of a compromise between Asquith and Lloyd George leading to the fall of the coalition in December 1916. McEwen, 'Fall of Asquith', Thompson, 'Fleet Street Colossus'.

¹¹⁹ 'Mesopotamia Hush-Up', *Daily Mail*, 23 Oct. 1916, p. 5.

¹²⁰ 'Mesopotamia: Mr Asquith Blames the Newspapers', *Daily Mail*, 14 Jul. 1917, p. 3.

¹²¹ 'Shamefully Misplaced', *Morning Post*, 11 Jul. 1917, p. 6; 'Mesopotamia and after', Lord Portsmouth, correspondence to the *Morning Post*, 12 Jul. 1917, p. 6; 'Mesopotamia in Chancery', *Morning Post*, 13 Jul. 1917, p. 6.

¹²² Revisiting the medical breakdown, Harrison argues that the logistical difficulties did contribute to the breakdown but systemic neglect of medical arrangements by military authorities and the absence of British public scrutiny exacerbated it. Harrison, *Medical War*, pp. 288-90.

government. So closely had the Northcliffe press followed the enquiry that Dawson crowed to Northcliffe after the release of the report that the *Times* had had a 'considerable score over it.... [W]e had managed to get the whole pith of the Report extracted for us in advance and had time to discuss it at leisure. No other paper even attempted to do it justice.'¹²³ The quality liberal newspapers were more restrained in their reporting of the shocking revelations made by the Commission than the popular evening daily, *Star*. The latter, like the conservative press, was emphatic in its condemnation of the politicians responsible for the medical breakdown, singling out prominent conservatives such as Arthur Balfour, Chamberlain and Curzon for criticism.¹²⁴ However, unlike the conservative press, liberal newspapers did not interpret the Commission's report as an indictment of the Asquith government.¹²⁵

Debates about India's financial contribution to the war had become a popular theme in the Northcliffe press. There was broad consensus in the conservative press that the cost of the Mesopotamian campaign should be borne not by the British exchequer but by the Indian government. Lovat Fraser argued that 'overburdened England' should not have to pay for the campaign,¹²⁶ which Barnes maintained was being fought to 'defend the Indian people from the horrors of a German invasion'.¹²⁷ The Northcliffe press was sharply critical of the fact that the Indian government was not paying for the cost of the Mesopotamia campaign. Both the *Times* and the *Daily Mail* explained to their readers that under existing agreements, all overseas expeditions in the service of

¹²³ Dawson to Northcliffe, 28 Jun. 1917, Northcliffe Papers, BL, London [henceforth Northcliffe Papers], Add MS 62245, p. 43.

¹²⁴ 'Pukka', *Star*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 2; 'Milner, Curzon, Carson', *Star*, 17 Jul. 1917, p. 2; 'Mr Balfour has a Bad Press Day', *Star*, 13 Jul. 1917, p. 1; 'Mess upon Mess', *Star*, 13 Jul. 1917, p. 3; 'No Responsibility', *Star*, 16 Jul. 1917, p. 2; 'The Byng Boys are Still Here', *Star*, 18 Jul. 1917, p. 2.

¹²⁵ 'Editorial: Fish and Flesh', *Star*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 2; 'Mr Balfour has a Bad Press Day', *Star*, 13 Jul. 1917, p. 1; 'Editorial: Mesopotamia - Blames Fair and Unfair', *Daily Chronicle*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 2; 'Impeachment and Court martial: Public Anger over Mesopotamia', *Star*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Fraser, 'Who is Responsible?' Lovat Fraser, who wrote leaders for the *Daily Mail*, had been a journalist in India. Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 61-2, 66, 106.

¹²⁷ 'Mesopotamia', Letter to the Editor by Barnes, *The Times*, 31 Mar. 1916, p. 9.

imperial defence were to be borne by Britain and not by India even if Indian forces were deployed. British newspapers argued that since these campaigns were meant to protect British India, the cost ought to be borne by the Indian and not the British government.¹²⁸

The Indian government was portrayed in the conservative press as shirking from contributing adequately to the war by failing to increase taxation during what was portrayed as a time of prosperity. William Meyer, the finance member of the colonial Indian Government (1913-18), came to be seen as the embodiment of a parsimonious and rigid Indian administration, characterized as ‘hill-top government’ in the conservative British press for its failure to take ‘outside opinion’ into account.¹²⁹ Meyer was especially blamed for the failure of the colonial state to release adequate funds for the campaign and medical care of soldiers. Under a news report titled ‘William Meyer: The man who grudged the money’, the *Daily Mail* argued that the finance member had continued the pre-war policy of cutting military expenditure even during the war.¹³⁰ The Indian government’s severe parsimony towards the British army on the Mesopotamian front was contrasted with the budget speech made by Meyer in March 1915, in which he had waxed eloquent on the ‘healthy condition’ of Indian finances.¹³¹ *The Times* acknowledged that reports of this speech were compared by suffering soldiers in Mesopotamia with their own lack of necessities, leading to the

¹²⁸ Fraser, ‘Who is Responsible?’

¹²⁹ See for instance, Lovat Fraser, ‘Mesopotamia’, *Daily Mail*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 2. ‘Defects of the Indian System’, *The Times*, 2 Jul. 1917, p. 9; ‘Hill-Top Government’, Letter to the Editor from ‘K.’, *The Times*, 3 Jul. 1917, p. 9.

¹³⁰ ‘Sir William Meyer: the man who Grudged the money’, *Daily Mail*, 29 Jun. 1917, p. 3. ‘More about Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 29 Jun. 1917, p. 7.

¹³¹ ‘Responsibilities in Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 14 Jul. 1916, p. 9.

widely held conclusion that the Indian government's economizing had caused the breakdown.¹³²

Nor was this view entirely confined to right-wing opinion. The liberal Sir Victor Horsley and independent minded conservative MP Aubrey Herbert had both written from the front similarly blaming the Indian Finance department for depressing expenditure on the army and on medical care.¹³³ Lloyd George's *War Memoirs* were particularly critical of the Indian government's parsimony, and lack of efficiency and organization.¹³⁴ Old India hands such as Hugh S. Barnes (who was not disinterested due to his growing interests in middle-eastern oil), argued in a letter to *the Times* that there was no excuse for the Indian government's parsimony, as '[f]inancially... the Budget show[ed], the Indian Government has been hardly touched by the war.'¹³⁵

Correspondents to *the Times* were even more strident in their criticism of Meyer, with former government officials writing to point out instances when the finance department had cut expenditure proposed by military and Indian Medical Service officers.¹³⁶ Letters to the editor also pointed to the fact that there had been a long tradition of reducing military expenditure in India, with Meyer's predecessor, Guy

¹³² It would seem that such a connection had indeed been made. Aubrey Herbert, the Conservative MP, at the front asked that a telegram be sent directly to Chamberlain claiming that 'All realise here that the past economy of the Government of India is responsible for our failures...' Telegram from Viceroy, 17 May 1916, IOR/L/MIL/7/17935.

¹³³ Sir Victory Horsley (1857-1916) was a renowned educator, a Liberal Party candidate and had volunteered as a surgeon at the beginning of the war. Horsley's letter condemning the Indian finance department for depressing expenditure on medical aid for soldiers on the Mesopotamian front had been sent to the *British Medical Journal* merely ten days before his death from sun-stroke. The *Journal*, published this letter in August 1916 when it received it in a sensational opinion piece titled 'Voice from the Dead' condemning India's 'cheeseparing policy'. 'A Voice From the Dead', *British Medical Journal*, 19 Aug. 1916, pp. 261-2.

¹³⁴ David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs of Lloyd George*, London, Odhams, 1938, vol. 1, pp. 488-95.

¹³⁵ 'Mesopotamia: The War and the Indian Government', Letter to the Editor by H. S. Barnes, *The Times*, Friday, 31 Mar. 1916, p. 9. Barnes was foreign secretary to the Indian government (1900-3), during which time he dealt with Persian affairs, he also served on the Council of India in the India Office (1905-13), after which he developed considerable stakes in middle-eastern oil and banking concerns and played an influential role in retaining British commitment in the region after the First World War. See Frances Bostock, 'Barnes, Sir Hugh Shakespear (1853-1940)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/53561>, accessed 14 Nov 2015].

¹³⁶ Bruce Seton, 'Causes of Breakdown', 'Letters to the Editor', *The Times*, 30 Jun. 1917.

Fleetwood Wilson being reputed to have boasted at the end of his term in India ‘Thank God. I’ve bled the Army white.’¹³⁷ Others pointed to the long-standing policy of retrenchment in military expenditure as manifested, for instance, in the Nicholson Commission (1913) charged by the Asquith government with the brief to reduce military expenditure in India just before the war, of which Meyer had been a member.¹³⁸ Such strictures on Meyer and the colonial state showed no awareness of the fact that the systemic neglect in the Indian army was the result of a peculiar pattern of colonial finance, which gave the military first call on the government’s budget but also sought to curtail its ever-burgeoning demands.¹³⁹ Nor were they aware that this form of finance led to much greater defence expenditure in colonial India, while starving expenditure on infrastructure and welfare. *The Times* attributed the viciousness of the attacks on Meyer partly to prejudice towards his German-sounding surname.¹⁴⁰

The Mesopotamia Commission Report’s attention to the Indian finance department was clearly linked to the outcry in the conservative British press about India’s failure to contribute adequately to the defence of the British Empire.¹⁴¹ The report revealed that the shortcomings of the medical arrangements had been the result of mismanagement by army authorities and the constant scrutiny by the finance

¹³⁷ Letter to the Editor, ‘Experience’, *The Times*, 3 Jul. 1917, p. 9.

¹³⁸ Mentioned in Letter to the Editor, ‘Civilian’, *The Times*, 3 Jul. 1917, p. 9; ‘Constructive Army Reform in India’, *The Times*, 6 Jul. 1917, p. 7; ‘The Aga Khan’s Views’, *The Times*, 23 Jul. 1917, p. 5. This commission was merely one in a long series that sought to reduce army expenditure. For example, the Army Organization Commission of 1879 was meant to propose retrenchments in military expenditure after its sharp increase during the Second Anglo-Afghan War.

¹³⁹ Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, esp. pp. 219-31.

¹⁴⁰ ‘Responsibilities in Mesopotamia’, *The Times*, 14 Jul. 1916, p. 9. Privately, the editor of *The Times* was far more hostile, commenting on Meyer’s unsuitability for the office of Finance Member, given that he was a ‘a Jew and the son of a German missionary...[who] ought never to have had his present job’, G. Dawson to Northcliffe, 14 Jul. 1916, Northcliffe Papers, Add MS 62251, p. 142. In defending Meyer, Chamberlain’s views converged with the public line adopted by *The Times*, Letter from Austen Chamberlain to John Hewett, 29 Mar. 1916, Austen Chamberlain Collection, AC46/2/21.

¹⁴¹ The Mesopotamia Commission blamed the Indian government for causing the medical breakdown by failing to provide adequate river and other transport to supply the expedition and due to the impact of the Kitchener reforms (1903-9). *Mesopotamia Commission Report*, 1917, Cd. 8610, [henceforth, *Mesopotamia Commission Report*], pp. 10, 48-9.

department of the Indian government over details of military medical expenditure. This observance of 'due economy' was a direct result of the close financial supervision of military expenditure by civilian authorities as well as a military bureaucracy aimed at curbing it.¹⁴²

The *Morning Post* was to push the opinion that 'the financial resources of India should be expended in the cause of Empire' to its fullest extent.¹⁴³ It characterized India as lacking in 'patriotic spirit' at a time when 'the whole British Empire – India included – [was] fighting for dear life against the most formidable foe which has ever arisen.'¹⁴⁴ It claimed that 'though India is rolling in wealth, not a penny is allowed to be raised for the common cause. Even the elementary wants of our wounded and suffering soldiers cannot be met.'¹⁴⁵ The Indian government's failure to raise an internal war loan to meet the costs of the war was roundly criticized in the conservative British press. This reflected a wider shift in emphasis in British home front propaganda away from valorising the sacrifice of *life* to sacrificing *resources*, with an increased emphasis on the need to raise funds through war loans and savings schemes.¹⁴⁶ British imperial organizations such as the British Empire Union critical of the finance policy of the Indian government demanded that India 'show her patriotism by raising a War Loan to help the Empire'. It criticized the failure of the Indian government to raise revenue for the imperial war effort by imposing a high income tax and a 'super tax' on jute, tea and iron firms that were making 'enormous profits out of

¹⁴² *Mesopotamia Commission Report*, p. 81

¹⁴³ 'Absolootely Nootral', *Morning Post*, 21 Oct. 1916, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Haste, *Keep the Home Fires*, p. 77. For an expanded discussion of the changing meaning of the term 'sacrifice' and its malleability in British social and political life during the war, see Gregory, *Last Great War*, pp. 112-86. On war loans see *ibid.*, pp. 220-35.

the war'.¹⁴⁷ So effective was this criticism that by the close of 1916, the secretary of state for India was questioned in Parliament about the inadequacy of India's contribution to the war effort.¹⁴⁸

Although it was universally acknowledged that the Indian government's policy of economy had been responsible for the severe breakdown of the campaign, the grounds on which the colonial government was criticized by both the British press and the Commission deserve closer attention. The British press and the Commission proceeded alike from the assumption that the colonial state had failed to treat the resources of India as an extended imperial home front from which men and resources should have been extracted in the same way as they were being drawn from Britain or the settler colonies. These assumptions have been unreflexively reproduced in much of the historiography of the campaign, which often ends up assigning responsibility to the Indian government for its failure to commandeer men and resources sufficiently to ensure the success of the campaign.¹⁴⁹

Such a skewed perspective ignores that colonial India could not be characterized as a 'home front' in the same way as Britain, Australia or Canada. Neither were Indian resources at the disposal of a British government in a manner comparable to the settler colonies. Indian finances were much more heavily committed to imperial defence in peace time than in the settler colonies. Increasing economic demands during the war deepened the danger of straining the colonial regime in India both economically and politically. The threat of invasion never loomed as large over the Indian 'home front' as it did in Britain. It was difficult to explain to Indian subjects as to why they should make contributions to the war in the form of subscriptions to war charities or through

¹⁴⁷ 'India and the War', Letter from FEC Carr, Honorary Secretary, British Empire Union, *Morning Post*, 25 Oct. 1916.

¹⁴⁸ SoS to Viceroy, 13 Nov. 1916, 'Letters, 1916', Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/2, p. 309.

¹⁴⁹ Davis's *Ends and Means* is especially liable.

a war loan raised by the government since the defence of the empire had no tangible benefit for a people governed without representation and since most had no friends or family fighting on the front.¹⁵⁰ As excessive military expenditure in India had been criticized by nationalists for decades before the First World War, expanding it to meet the demands of the Mesopotamia expedition without devolving power to Indians was to court political disaster. Indeed, in contrast with the Northcliffe press and arch-conservative newspapers like the *Morning Post*, sections of the liberal press conceded that the Indian contribution to the war, especially in the early phase, had been considerable. The liberal *Daily News* acknowledged that the pre-war push for economy criticized by the Mesopotamia Commission had resulted from the fact that military expenditure constituted one-third of India's revenue while Britain's expenditure on its military before the war had been less than one-sixth its revenue.¹⁵¹ Indeed, defence expenditure in India had risen by 300 per cent during the war.¹⁵² Such admissions were nevertheless rare even in liberal newspapers, which hardly covered the 'Mesopotamia scandal'.¹⁵³

Demands for the raising of a war loan in India were to have significant political repercussions in South Asia, which are assessed in the next section. It is argued that the impact of the scandal accelerated reform of the colonial Indian administration, which led to the devolution of power under the Montagu-Chelmsford Act of 1919. Such was the sensitivity of the colonial administration to the British press that both the

¹⁵⁰ Most of the recruitment in the Indian army was concentrated in a few regions in the north. Omissi, *Sepoys and the Raj*, pp. 38-40; Yong, *Garrison State*, pp. 98-140.

¹⁵¹ Editorial: 'Lord Hardinge's Defence', *Daily News*, 4 Jul. 1917, p. 2.

¹⁵² Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 169.

¹⁵³ Some coverage was given to questions and statements in the Parliament regarding the breakdown during 1916, but these were on a much smaller scale than in the conservative and Northcliffe press. See for instance, 'Our Mesopotamian Troops: An "Inexcusable" Medical Breakdown', *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Mar. 1916, p. 5; 'House of Lords: The Mesopotamia "Breakdown"', *Ibid.*, 19 Jul. 1916, p. 6; 'Indian Troop Train Tragedy: Many Deaths from Heatstroke', *Ibid.*, 22 Jul. 1916, p. 6; 'Many Deaths on Hospital Ship: Terrible Effects of Heat', *Ibid.*, 8 Aug. 1916, p. 5; Mesopotamia Scandal: The Late Sir V. Horsley's Criticisms', *Ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1916, p. 6; 'Who is Responsible?', *Star*, 23 Mar. 1916, p. 2; 'Mesopotamia: More Questions about the Hospital Arrangements', *Ibid.*, 29 Mar. 1916, p. 1.

liberal and conservative remedies to the scandal were adopted even as it sought to suppress news of the breakdown in India through censorship. Despite this, the Indian press was strident in its rejection of the right-wing press's strictures on the inadequacy of India's war effort. As the next section demonstrates, the Indian nationalist press's riposte to the conservative press was surprisingly in tandem with colonial officials such as Meyer and the *Pioneer*, which was sympathetic to the colonial state. In considering the long-term impact of the 'Mesopotamia muddle', the next section concludes by examining the unanticipated consequences of the war loan, especially in spurring on anti-colonial protests in 1919. It will also examine how historiography on the Mesopotamia campaign has tended to echo the conservative British press's preoccupation with assessing the objectivity of the Mesopotamia Commission and the culpability of the various political figures caught up in the scandal.

The Long Shadow of the Mesopotamia Scandal in Colonial India

On 20 August 1917, barely a month after the resignation of Chamberlain, the new Secretary of State for India, the radical Liberal Edwin Montagu,¹⁵⁴ made a declaration regarding colonial policy which was to have very significant repercussions for anti-colonial nationalist politics.¹⁵⁵ The Government of India Act of 1919, which emerged from his declaration and hastened the devolution of power to Indians through Dyarchy, has been studied at length.¹⁵⁶ Although constitutional reforms were being considered by the Indian colonial state since 1915, an important driver for the announcement and its timing was the desire to make political concessions that would

¹⁵⁴ Montagu had been the under-secretary of state for India (1910-14) in Asquith's government.

¹⁵⁵ Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 97, cols. 1695: 20 Aug. 1917.

¹⁵⁶ Robb, *Government of India and Reform*; Shane Ryland, 'Edwin Montagu in India, 1917-18: Politics of the Montagu-Chelmsford report', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 79-92; R. J. Moore, *Liberalism and Indian Politics, 1872-1922*, London: Edward Arnold, 1966; S. Legg, 'Dyarchy: Democracy, Autocracy and the Scalar Sovereignty of Interwar India', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East*, 36, no. 1, 2016, pp. 44-65.

sustain the Indian war effort.¹⁵⁷ In 1917 demands for the reform of the Indian military administration had been raised in Parliament, with increased pressure on the India Office and the highest echelons of the Indian government.¹⁵⁸ Although Chamberlain explicitly disavowed any attempts to make the discussion of the Mesopotamia Commission Report into ‘the text for a great Debate upon the future of the Indian Empire’, Montagu asserted that the Mesopotamia debacle required extensive reform of the Indian government.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Montagu’s criticism of the colonial Indian government as a ‘statute-ridden machine... [which] was too wooden, inelastic, and antediluvian’ echoed the conservative press’s trope of ‘hill-top government’.¹⁶⁰ Montagu’s views on the need to politicize the colonial administration, which had governed bureaucratically and despotically, also echoed the liberal British press’s coverage of the deficiencies of Indian government in 1916 and 1917. Both the *Manchester Guardian* and *Star* claimed that the debacle in Mesopotamia was due to the ‘autocratic’ nature of the Indian government, which needed greater public scrutiny.¹⁶¹ Although their analysis varied in tone and emphasis, liberal newspapers suggested that making the Indian government responsible to Indian public opinion was the surest means of avoiding such scandals in the future.¹⁶² The minority report by Josiah Wedgwood was quoted approvingly for recommending that

¹⁵⁷ Phillip Woods, ‘The Montagu–Chelmsford reforms (1919): A re-assessment’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1994, pp. 25–42.

¹⁵⁸ SoS to Viceroy, 14 Feb. 1917, ‘Letters to and from the SoS for India’, vol. II, 1917, Chelmsford Papers, India Office Private Papers, BL, Mss Eur/E264/3, pp. 46–7.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Court of Inquiry’, Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 95, col. 2211: 12 Jul. 1917.

¹⁶⁰ ‘Court of Inquiry’, Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., vol. 95, col. 2205: 12 Jul. 1917. Montagu’s characterization of the Indian government won him fulsome press in the Indian nationalist press: ‘Home Rule for India’, *Abhyudaya*, 13 Jul. 1917, *Selections from Indian-owned Newspapers Published in the United Provinces*, no. 29 of 1917, p.p. 423–4.

¹⁶¹ ‘Mesopotamia’, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 4; H. E. A. Cotton, ‘Mesopotamia: An Impeachment of India’s Bureaucracy’, *Star*, 29 Jun. 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶² The thrust of liberal newspapers’ discussion of the Commission privileged the reform of the machinery of colonial governance, though some liberal newspapers like the *Daily News* and *Daily Chronicle* joined in demands for punishment of individual politicians and administrators.

we should no longer deny to Indians “the full privileges of citizenship”; but should allow them a large share in the government of their own country and in the control of that Bureaucracy which in this war, uncontrolled by public opinion, has failed to rise to British standards.¹⁶³

While some of this evoked conservative papers’ denunciation of the Indian government as ‘hill top government’, the emphasis was not on demanding a greater contribution from India but on acknowledging that the Indian government could not commit further resources to the war effort because it was not answerable to those it ruled. The *Daily News* carried an article by Nihal Singh arguing that the ‘Mesopotamia failure’ could have been avoided if Indian administrators had not lived in ‘splendid isolation, aloof from the people in whose name they act’.¹⁶⁴ Quality liberal newspapers repeatedly referred to constitutional reform being imminent when reporting parliamentary discussions of the Commission.¹⁶⁵ Given the support of the Liberal press for Irish demands for home rule, it was not surprising that it tended to lean towards sympathetic coverage of the Indian Home Rule League Movement rather than baiting Indian administrators and attacking the Asquith coalition.¹⁶⁶

The impact of British opinion – both conservative and liberal – on the colonial administration was considerable. Questioning in Parliament on the continuing

‘Mesopotamia’, *Manchester Guardian*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 4; ‘Crime and Punishment’, *Daily News*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 2; ‘Editorial: Mesopotamia - Blames Fair and Unfair’, *Daily Chronicle*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶³ ‘The Mesopotamia Report’, *Manchester Guardian*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 5; H. E. A. Cotton, ‘Mesopotamia: An Impeachment of India’s Bureaucracy’, *Star*, 29 Jun. 1917, p. 2; ‘Mesopotamia’, *Daily News*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 2; Letter to Editor by Joshua Wedgwood, ‘The war office and the nation’, *Daily News*, 27 Jun. 1917, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Nihal Singh, ‘The Mesopotamia Failure’, *Daily News*, 12 Jul. 1917, p. 2. Nihal Singh was a prolific contributor to British, American and Indian publications, with links to various Indian nationalists and published several books on India’s contribution to the British war effort, [<http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/saint-nihal-singh>], accessed 14 Aug. 2016].

¹⁶⁵ ‘To-morrow’s Mesopotamia Debate’, *Manchester Guardian*, 12 Jul. 1917, p. 4; ‘Mesopotamia: Lord Hardinge to Make a Statement To-day’, *Daily News*, 3 Jul. 1917, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ Kaul has analysed Montagu’s concerted efforts to secure the support of the London press to create a more receptive environment in Britain for the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 135-47; 175-98.

inadequacy of medical arrangements in Mesopotamia had proved extremely embarrassing for the secretary of state for India throughout 1916 and 1917, as Chamberlain admitted to Chelmsford:

I am told that nothing will restrain the House of Lords from debating the conduct of the [Mesopotamian] expedition, next week. Everyone is receiving letters speaking of the inadequacy of the supplies and of the hardship which the force is still suffering. Public opinion here is strongly roused upon the subject. . . . I largely share their feeling of indignation at what I must regard as the lack of foresight and enterprise shown in the organization and supply of the forces.¹⁶⁷

The military secretary of the India Office, E.G. Barrow, characterized the *Morning Post's* news coverage of official 'muddles' regarding medical arrangements for soldiers as 'particularly venomous'.¹⁶⁸ What were characterized as 'very savage' newspaper attacks on hospital administration in India, especially by the *Morning Post*, continued through October and November 1916.¹⁶⁹ Chamberlain frequently pressed the Indian government to respond to complaints and news reports, for instance, regarding overcrowding in army hospitals in Bombay and Coonoor.¹⁷⁰ Chamberlain was very sensitive towards private reports of poor medical arrangements: 'I am very uneasy. These reports reach home in private letters. It was in this way that I first came to know of the Mesopotamia breakdown, and I fear the repetition of a similar scandal in India.'¹⁷¹ Viceroy Chelmsford felt that the 'attitude of distrust' towards the Indian

¹⁶⁷ SoS to Viceroy, 12 Jul. 1916, 'Letters to and from the SoS for India, 1916', [henceforth 'Letters, 1916'], Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/2, p. 157. See 'Mesopotamian Expedition', House of Lords Debate, 20 Jul. 1916, vol. 22, cc.835-74.

¹⁶⁸ Demi-official note by E.G. Barrow, 26 Oct. 1916, Private Papers of E.G. Barrow, Mss Eur/E420/14, IORPP, BL, London, [henceforth, Barrow papers], p. 36.

¹⁶⁹ Viceroy to SoS, 12 Oct. 1916, *ibid.*, p. 339. Viceroy to SoS, 10 Nov. 1916, *ibid.*, p. 406.

¹⁷⁰ Telegram no. 216 from SoS to Viceroy, 4 Aug. 1916, 'Telegrams, 1916', Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/7, p. 71. Telegram no. 235 from SoS to Viceroy, 16 Aug. 1916, *ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁷¹ Telegram no. 238 from SoS to Viceroy, 16 Jul. 1916, *ibid.*, p. 78.

government fostered by such news reports in Britain was ‘gravely embarrassing’.¹⁷² The well-established trope of the Indian medical scandal and its deployment in the press exerted considerable pressure for reform at the highest levels of Indian government, with the viceroy admitting to concern about reports ‘on the alleged scandals with regard to soldiers returning from Mesopotamia. I have to keep a constant eye on them, as correspondence goes home and then you are troubled and everybody else is troubled.’¹⁷³ The India Office was also alive to the *Post*’s ‘agitation... against the Government of India and Sir William Meyer’.¹⁷⁴ Chelmsford concurred that there existed ‘a considerable agitation’ in the British Tory press, especially in the *Morning Post*, against the Indian government.¹⁷⁵

Before turning to consider how the conservative British press’s loud criticism led to the imposition of a war loan in India, it is important to acknowledge here that this was accompanied by a concerted effort to restrict the flow of information to India regarding the breakdowns in the campaign. The severe censorship of the press in India was considered important to shield the colonial regime from news of public criticism of the Indian government and the setting up of the Commission to investigate the breakdown.¹⁷⁶

The chairman of the Commission, George Hamilton, ensured that the Commission did not go to India as this would have made it ‘the receptacle of every conceivable gossip and complaint. Its operations... [would] seriously impair the authority and

¹⁷² Telegram no. 294a from Viceroy to SoS, 13 Sep. 1916, *ibid.*, p. 135. SoS to Viceroy, 16 Aug. 1916, ‘Letters, 1916’, Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/2, p. 220.

¹⁷³ Viceroy to SoS, dated 6 Oct. 1916, *ibid.*, p. 324.

¹⁷⁴ Demi-official note by E.G. Barrow, 26 Oct. 1916, Private Papers of E.G. Barrow, Mss Eur/E420/14, IORPP, BL, London, [henceforth, Barrow papers], p. 36.

¹⁷⁵ Letter from Viceroy to SoS, 10 Nov. 1916, ‘Letters, 1916’, Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/2, p. 406.

¹⁷⁶ Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, pp. 123, 132.

undermine the prestige of the Government....¹⁷⁷ Chamberlain too felt that the enquiry would amount to ‘the trial of high officers of Government of India [which] would be fraught with grave dangers to the authorities of your [Indian] government if it takes place in the presence of Indian public....’¹⁷⁸ Despite such precautions, in his speech to the Imperial Legislative Assembly in 1916, Chelmsford had to admit that the ‘breakdown on the medical side in Mesopotamia had brought a storm of obloquy on [the] Indian administration.’¹⁷⁹ This was especially embarrassing when he spoke to raise funds for the war effort.¹⁸⁰

Press censorship in India sought to suppress news about parliamentary debates critical of the Indian government’s official machinery following the publication of the Mesopotamia Commission’s report. Chamberlain was all too aware that the Mesopotamia Commission’s report laid the Indian government open to criticism in India at the height of the Home Rule League movement¹⁸¹ and Viceroy Chelmsford expressed his dismay at the report’s ‘disastrous effect upon the position and prestige of the Government of India... [as] it comes at a peculiarly unfortunate time when the Government of India is face to face with a big political agitation...’.¹⁸² Parliamentary

¹⁷⁷ Copy of a private and confidential letter from Chamberlain to Lord G. Hamilton, 25 Sep. 1916, enclosed in letter from SoS to Viceroy, 21 Sep. 1916, ‘Letters to and from the SoS for India, 1916’, Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/2, p. 270.

¹⁷⁸ Telegram no. 324 from SoS to Viceroy, 27 Sep. 1916, ‘Telegrams to and from the SoS for India, 1916’ [henceforth ‘Telegrams, 1916’], Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/7, p. 106.

¹⁷⁹ Chelmsford, ‘Speech to First Meeting of the Imperial Legislative Council, Simla Session, 1916’, 5 Sep. 1916, *Speeches by Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy and Governor General of India* (Simla: Government Monotype Press, 1919), p. 65, and ‘Speech to Last meeting of the Imperial Legislative Council, Delhi Session, 1916-17’, 23 Mar. 1917, *ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁸⁰ Chelmsford, ‘Speech at Annual General Meeting of St. John Ambulance Association in Simla’, 27 Jun. 1917, *ibid.*, p. 365.

¹⁸¹ SoS to Viceroy, 5 Jul. 1917, ‘Letters to and from the SoS for India, 1917’, [henceforth ‘Letters, 1917’], Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/3, p. 143.

¹⁸² Viceroy to SoS, 7 Jul. 1917, ‘Letters, 1917’, Chelmsford Papers, Mss Eur/E264/3, p. 219. ‘[I]n India, as in England, it was recognised that the report of the Mesopotamia Commission had had a “disastrous” effect on the government’s prestige. Meston reported that “the air has never been thicker with suspicion”; he believed that “the anti-Government and almost anti-British feeling among the advanced party is stronger than I have ever seen it. Everything that we do is misrepresented.... The misunderstandings are spreading into wider circles....” Robb, *Government of India and Reform*, p. 73.

criticism of the Indian government was not reported by Reuters either,¹⁸³ but Indian newspapers were aware both of the censorship and expected to find out more through British newspapers which would arrive after a delay in the post by sea. The *Capital* derisively quipped that news about the reception of the Mesopotamia Commission may never reach India if the post carrying English newspapers was fortuitously sunk due to enemy action.¹⁸⁴ Indian newspapers condemned deliberate attempts by the press censor at Simla to omit news critical of the ‘authors of the Mesopotamia muddle’ while privileging opinion repudiating the Commission.¹⁸⁵ Another newspaper asserted that ‘the whole truth about the [Mesopotamia] bungle’ had not been told due to the press’s fear of the use of the Defence of India Act against them.¹⁸⁶

Having considered the role of the British press’s critique of the colonial administration in accelerating reform and devolution, it is worth considering the other important development arising from this critique which was to hasten the development of anti-colonial nationalism: the demands to raise a war loan in India. These demands had accompanied the influential criticism by the conservative British press of the finance member, Meyer, in particular and were to play an important role in stoking anti-colonial protests in 1919. This growing anti-colonial nationalism in India was accompanied by the redefinition of Britishness and imperial citizenship across the empire, producing imperial fault lines reflected in the very different postures adopted towards Meyer in the British and Indian press. Indian newspapers’ responses to British conservative papers’ tirade against Meyer’s financial policies in India during the war were significantly different.

¹⁸³ B. Horniman complained of the ‘meagre and disjointed’ summary provided by Reuters of the Commission’s report, *‘A Friend of India’: Selections from the Speeches and Writings of B.G. Horniman, Tairsee and Ram*, Bombay, 1918, p. 238.

¹⁸⁴ ‘The Week Abroad’, *Capital*, 20 Jul. 1917, p. 121.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Bombay’, *Capital*, 20 Jul. 1917, p. 129.

¹⁸⁶ *Bombay*, 17 Jul. 1917, press cutting in Fleetwood Wilson Papers, Mss Eur/E224/28-9.

The British conservative press's criticism of Meyer was reprised in the more conservative 'Anglo-Indian' press, that is, newspapers in India which represented the views of the British community based in India. This included the *Capital*, which was vehement in its criticism of Hardinge, Chamberlain and Meyer after the publication of the Commission's Report.¹⁸⁷ The animosity towards Meyer arose because he had introduced an income tax during the war which was unpopular with the British community in India.¹⁸⁸

Although Indian newspapers made use of the tropes of 'hill-top government' and 'Mesopotamia muddle' to disparage the colonial government despite their divergent political leanings, there was considerable hostility within the Indian nationalist press to demands made by conservative British newspapers for increased contributions to the war. Indian newspapers took exception to the British press's insufficient acknowledgement of the considerable sacrifices made by Indian people to the war effort.¹⁸⁹ Some Indian newspapers demanded that greater publicity be given to India's contribution in men and material during the war to counter the British press's criticism.¹⁹⁰ Senior colonial administrators claimed that this criticism ignored the considerable funds that India had already committed to the war.¹⁹¹ The *Leader* claimed that 'the petty, spiteful, attacks of the Anglo-foreign press are strongly resented throughout the country'.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ 'A Ditcher's Diary', *Capital*, 20 Jul. 1917, press cutting in Guy Fleetwood Wilson Private Papers, IORPP, BL, London [henceforth, Fleetwood Wilson Papers], Mss Eur/E224/28-9.

¹⁸⁸ 'A Ditcher's Diary', *Capital*, 20 Jul. 1917, p. 122. Indian nationalist newspapers, on the other hand, were extremely supportive of what they perceived as Meyer's targeting of the British community in India to increase revenues for the first time. See, for example, 'Sir W. Meyer and the Anglo-Indian Press', *Kisan*, 20 Oct. 1916, *SINP*, vol. 29, no. 44, p. 870.

¹⁸⁹ See for example, news reports asserting that the Indian government's contribution to the war was entirely adequate: 'India's Contribution to the Cost of the War', *Punjabee*, 2 and 3 Mar. 1917; *Tribune*, 3 Mar. 1917, *SINP*, vol. 30, no. 10, pp. 177-8.

¹⁹⁰ *Gujrati*, 10 Sep. 1916, *RINP*, no. 38, p. 10.

¹⁹¹ 'Viceroy on India's great Share in the War', *Daily Mail*, 8 Sep. 1916, p. 7.

¹⁹² *Leader*, 18 Jul. 1917, *SINUP*, no. 29, p. 422.

The raising of an internal war loan in India had been precluded in the first two years of war due to the emphasis in Indian finance on balanced budgets. The Indian colonial state was painfully aware that the nationalist critique of the economic impact of excessive military expenditure by the colonial state had made it increasingly difficult to service the needs of the metropolis while holding on to Britain's political and economic dominance in India. Meyer and the finance department's measures to curb Indian military expenditure, which were lamented in the British press and condemned by the Mesopotamia Commission Report had emerged from a system of regulating the ever-expanding military expenditure of colonial India, which had been a matter of concern since the eighteenth century. On the one hand, as the ultimate guarantor of British rule in India, the military had maintained a preeminent claim on the resources extracted by the colonial regime.¹⁹³ On the other, to check the possibility of creating large deficits due to costly colonial wars, over the nineteenth century, a system of surveilling military expenditure had been developed. The emphasis on balancing budgets and fiscal prudence had initially emerged from persistent criticism of excessive military expenditure by the expanding colonial state since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁹⁴

The *Pioneer*, which was considered 'the organ of the Indian government', thus responded to attacks regarding the insufficiency of India's war effort by asserting that the financial requirements of the army had been fully and readily supplied by the Indian finance department.¹⁹⁵ Given that the colonial administration was keen not to

¹⁹³ Douglas M. Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India, 1819-35*, I.B. Tauris, London, 1995.

¹⁹⁴ See Manu Sehgal, 'Politics, State and Empire: Colonial Warfare and the East India Company State, c.1775-1805', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Exeter, 2011, esp., pp. 163-202. Also see J. F. Richards, 'Imperial Finance under the East India Company 1762-1859', *Decentring Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World*, Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy (eds), Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2006, pp. 16-50.

¹⁹⁵ *Pioneer*, 23 Sep. 1916, cited in correspondence to *Morning Post*, 26 Oct. 1916.

provide further ballast to economic nationalist critiques of British rule as impoverishing India through heedless extraction of resources, it is not surprising that Indian nationalist newspapers also contested claims in British conservative newspapers that India was ‘an untouched mine of gold’, whose resources had not been sufficiently channelled into the British war effort.¹⁹⁶ Nationalist newspapers in India, such as the *Tribune*, argued that given India’s impoverishment, its contribution to the war had been severely taxing. It decried criticism in the British press of the colonial government for not having provided even greater financial help.¹⁹⁷

Yet, before the war, Meyer had been at the receiving end of trenchant criticism by nationalist Indian newspapers for implementing balanced budgets which were accompanied by low expenditure on education and other ‘ameliorative services’ ‘beneficial’ to Indian taxpayers.¹⁹⁸ On this, he had been at loggerheads not merely with nationalists but also colonial administrators such as John Hewett, who had been associated with the development of industries in the United Provinces in the pre-war period and had found the experience of working with Meyer frustrating due to the latter’s disregard of ‘matters of cardinal importance connected with the development of India.’¹⁹⁹ The tendency to check military expenditure had been further exacerbated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century due to Indian nationalist criticism of such expenditure as wasteful since it served to buttress the empire, but did not leave enough resources for ‘developing’ India.²⁰⁰ In the face of nationalist criticism, finance

¹⁹⁶ The *Tribune* pointed out that such claims revealed the ignorance of some retired Indian officials writing to the British press and criticized ‘their misrepresentation of India to British people’. ‘India’s supposed wealth’, *Tribune*, 14 May 1916, *SINP*, vol. 29, no. 19, p. 379; *Hamdam*, 13 Oct. 1916, *Selections from Indian Owned Newspapers in the United Provinces*, no. 42, p. 938. Indeed, Chamberlain himself had pointed out that selective quoting of the Commission’s report by newspapers like the *Daily Mail* would misinform public opinion regarding Indian issues.

¹⁹⁷ See, for instance, *Tribune* (Lahore), 6 Sep. 1917, *SINP*, vol. 30, no. 37, p. 721.

¹⁹⁸ ‘The Budget and Education’, *Punjabee*, 21 Mar. 1914, *SINP*, vol. 27, no. 13, pp. 346-7.

¹⁹⁹ From J.P. Hewett to Chamberlain, 31 Mar. 1916, Austen Chamberlain Collection, AC46/2/24.

²⁰⁰ This criteria had been used by the colonial government to reject many schemes for industrializing India proposed by Indian nationalists. For a sympathetic representation of early nationalists’ views on

members were able to claim that India's material progress was proceeding satisfactorily by showing a balanced budget. Gladstonian principles, which had become pillars of Indian public finance, valorised anaemic levels of public expenditure, balanced budgets, eliminating the national debt by devoting budgetary surpluses to it and stringent control over government expenditure.²⁰¹ This emphasis on balancing budgets meant that only those 'developmental' schemes would be considered for finance by the colonial state which were expected to yield a profit.²⁰² Thus, it might have been reasonable to suppose that the Indian nationalist press would join the conservative British press in criticizing Meyer as this same principle had brought him under attack for his rejection of the proposal to build a railway in Mesopotamia, which had worsened the shortage of medical supplies at the front.²⁰³

Under attack from the conservative press for having made an inadequate contribution to the war effort, Meyer sought to strike a chord with Indian nationalists when he claimed that 'We do not think ... [the Tory and Northcliffe press] will ever be satisfied until the last drop of India's blood is sucked.'²⁰⁴ Although Meyer claimed that '[t]he Government of India have no... excuse to be influenced to far-reaching decisions by the mean, misinformed and misdirected criticisms of the Northcliffe deal in England and India',²⁰⁵ he introduced an internal war loan in India in March 1917.²⁰⁶ His proposal to make a special contribution of £100 million to the war on behalf of the

the need of curtailing Indian military expenditure in the late nineteenth century, see Bipan Chandra, *Essays in Colonialism* Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2000, pp. 144-5, 188, 194-6, 203 and 293. For a less persuasive analysis of nationalist criticism of British military expenditure, see S. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*, OUP, Delhi, 1990, pp. 65-9.

²⁰¹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Financial Foundations of the Raj*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2005, pp. 40-7.

²⁰² Sehrawat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. xlv, xlvi-1.

²⁰³ 'Mesopotamia Culprits', *Daily Mail*, 28 Jun. 1917, p. 4.

²⁰⁴ 'India's War Gift to England' *Message*, 4 Mar. 1917, *Report on Indian Newspapers in the Bombay Presidency (RINBP)*, no. 10, 1917, p. 9.

²⁰⁵ 'India's War Gift to England', *Message*, 4 Mar. 1917, *RINBP*, no. 10, 1917, p. 9.

²⁰⁶ *Financial Statement and Budget of the Government of India, 1917-18*, pp. 17-21, 29-34. 'India's Contribution to the War', *The Times*, 5 Mar. 1917, p. 7.

Indian government was also meant to silence criticism in the British press. As Meyer explained in a speech to an Indian audience, the Indian government's financial contribution to the British war effort was increased in direct response to criticism in the British press:

We have been subjected to much criticism in certain quarters for not contributing more than we have done.... [T]hese ... are the organs of the Tory Press in England, which are the tools in the hands of the Northcliffe deal and that section of the press in this country which is in the leading-strings of that deal....²⁰⁷

Such statements did not, however, prevent Indian newspapers from criticizing imperial control of Indian finances and the pre-eminence of the British over Indian press in determining Indian financial policy: 'While it [the colonial government] has shown remarkable activity in unjustly putting down the Indian press and platform, an impression prevails largely, that it is helpless before the strong influentially backed organs of the English and Anglo-Indian Press.'²⁰⁸ Nationalist critics of colonial rule played upon the widening gap between the imperial rhetoric of 'material progress' and the economic hardships produced by the diversion of Indian revenues into the war effort. The additional financial burden imposed by the loan was criticized by Indian nationalist newspapers, which denounced the drowning out of demands for 'schemes of development' by the 'din of war'.²⁰⁹

Thus, the two war loans in India were introduced in a significantly different political atmosphere from that which gave rise to the initial spurt of protestations of loyalty by Indian political leaders. By 1916, such protestations had given way to the

²⁰⁷ 'India's War Gift to England' *Message*, 4 Mar. 1917, *Report on Indian Newspapers in the Bombay Presidency*, no. 10 of 1917, p. 9.

²⁰⁸ 'India's War Gift to England', *Message*, 4 Mar. 1917, *RINBP*, no. 10, 1917, p. 9.

²⁰⁹ *Tribune* (Lahore), 2 Mar. 1917, *SINP*, vol. 30, no. 10, p. 178.

more militant agitation of the Home Rule League movements. These were to be followed immediately after the war by waves of growing political protests against the colonial state, fuelled considerably by the economic hardship created by the war and forced contributions to the war effort.²¹⁰ The Indian war loans opened in March 1917 and June 1918 collectively raised £75 million.²¹¹ Collections from a public weary of contributing to the war effort and unwilling to contribute further were marked by official coercion. Vernacular newspapers, despite the punitive censorship, reported this coercion.²¹² As the *Hindusthan* asked rhetorically: ‘Is it right to make the war loan a success by resorting to terrorism?’²¹³ Indeed, so marked was the frustration of the Indian public with increased war collections that ‘Our Day’ collections announced towards the end of 1917 were widely characterized as ‘*Aur de*’, which translated as ‘give more’.²¹⁴ Several witnesses to the committee investigating the 1919 disturbances claimed that these had emerged from dissatisfaction with the colonial administration, arising partly from the use of force to increase subscription to the war loans.²¹⁵ Fazl-i-Husain, an important political leader in the Punjab, called these forced contributions ‘compulsory voluntary aid’,²¹⁶ while another witness testified that ‘people were bullied, beaten and coerced’ to raise funds for war loans Punjab.²¹⁷ This coercion was seen to have directly fed into the ‘Rowlatt disturbances’ in April 1919 – characterized

²¹⁰ For an overview, see Sarkar, *Modern India*, pp. 147-204; Chandra et al., *India's Struggle for Independence*, pp. 146-83. Also see arguments about the role of soldiers returning after fighting in the war in political protests in Punjab and parts of north India in Ahuja, ‘Corrosiveness of Comparison’, pp. 139-45; VanKoski, ‘Indian Ex-Soldier’, pp. 115-33 and Omissi, *Sepoys and the Raj*, pp. 123-31.

²¹¹ *India's Contribution to the Great War*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Publishing, 1923), pp. 156-7.

²¹² *Kesari*, 10 Apr. 1917, *RINP*, no. 15, p. 9; *Parkash*, 23 Jun. 1918, *SINP*, vol. 31, no. 27, p. 357.

²¹³ *Hindusthan*, 28 Apr. 1917; *Kaiser-i-Hind*, 6 May 1917, *RINP*, no. 18, p. 7.

²¹⁴ ‘Our Day’ collections raised funds for the St John Ambulance Association and the Red Cross. M.S. Leigh, (comp.), *The Punjab and the War* (Lahore: Superintendent Government Printing, 1922), p. 48.

²¹⁵ Evidence of Lala Mohan Lal Seth, lawyer and municipal commissioner, Kasur, *Evidence Taken before the Disorders Inquiry Committee*, Calcutta, Superintendent Government Printing, 1920, [henceforth, *Evidence Disorders Inquiry*] vol. 4, Lahore and Kasur, p. 384.

²¹⁶ Fazl-i-Hussain, member, Punjab Legislative Council, 20 Dec 1919, *Evidence Disorders Inquiry*, vol. 5, Gujranwala, Gujrat, Lyallpur and Punjab Provincial, p. 160.

²¹⁷ R. C. Chopra, *Evidence Disorders Inquiry*, vol. 5, p. 223.

as ‘the biggest and most violent anti-British upsurge which India had seen since 1857’.²¹⁸ During the protests, crowds attacked symbols of British authority such as post offices and railway stations across much of Punjab and in several cities, including Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Calcutta and Bombay.²¹⁹ These protests and their suppression marked a turning point in the anti-colonial nationalist movement – they were followed by an era of mass nationalist protests, such as those during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-22. Similarly, India’s economic relationship with Britain underwent a marked transformation after the war which meant that only the most ingenious financial manipulation could allow Britain to generate economic benefits from India.²²⁰

Despite the existence of this rich history of trans-national connections between propaganda, news, war and politics, historians examining the Mesopotamia Campaign have tended to restrict their analysis to themes that dominated the reporting of the Mesopotamia breakdown. While the criticism by the Indian press of demands for an increased contribution to the war effort has not found its way to the historiography of the Mesopotamian scandal, the British press’s demand for punishment of colonial officials such as Hardinge and criticism of the Indian government has been widely featured in the scholarship of the campaign.²²¹ Historiography on the Mesopotamia campaign and Commission has tended to focus on the veracity of its findings and whether or not responsibility for the breakdown was correctly apportioned.²²² In an early study of the campaign, A. J. Barker’s claim that the Mesopotamia Commission

²¹⁸ Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 189.

²¹⁹ The protests were against the draconian Rowlatt Act which extended war time measures permitting imprisonment without trial. *Essays on Gandhian Politics: The Rowlatt Satyagraha of 1919*, ed. R. Kumar Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971.

²²⁰ Bose and Jalal, *Modern South Asia*, p. 107.

²²¹ Goold, ‘Lord Hardinge’.

²²² The Commission had criticized senior army officers such as Commander-in-Chief Beauchamp Duff, General Nixon and senior figures including viceroys Hardinge and Chamberlain.

report was politically motivated seemed to reprise debates in the British press regarding who was ultimately at blame for the breakdown – the British or ‘home’ government, the colonial Indian administration or the ‘men on the spot’. He argues that the restriction of the terms of the commission to the period before the British authorities took charge indicates that any blame for the breakdown would be laid at the door of the Indian government, and the British government’s conduct of the war would not be scrutinized. Barker suggests that the Commission failed to take into account the logistical difficulties of organizing a campaign in the difficult terrain of the region.²²³ Both Paul Davis and John Galbraith have also resuscitated discussion in the British press regarding who was to blame for the breakdown in the campaign. Davis disagrees significantly with Barker regarding the Commission being politically skewed, but nevertheless frames his discussion of it in terms set out in the British press during the war.²²⁴ The impetus of some of this historiography comes from initial characterizations of the Commission as a whitewashing exercise in the conservative British press, which was expected to pin individual responsibility for systemic failures on politicians or senior administrators. Other historical assessments have examined the light that the campaign can throw on the fall of the Asquith government and British politics of the time.²²⁵ A narrow focus on such themes unwittingly reproduces the imperial biases of the British conservative press. Although the Northcliffe press’s coverage of the Mesopotamia breakdown was meant to embarrass Asquith, and undermine his government, the fallout of the Commission’s findings for the Indian

²²³ Barker, *The Neglected War*, pp. 458-65; also see Edwin Latta, ‘The Indian Army in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918, Parts I-III’, *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research*, 72 (1994), pp. 99-102, 160-79, 232-46. A preoccupation regarding the strategic origins of the campaign also dominates S. A. Cohen, ‘The genesis of the British campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1976, pp. 119-32.

²²⁴ Davis, *End and Means*, pp. 215-27; John Galbraith, ‘No Man’s Child: The Campaign in Mesopotamia, 1914-16’, *International History Review*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1984, pp. 358-85.

²²⁵ See fn. 92 above.

government was considerable and deserves to be analysed for a better understanding of the significance of the war for economic and political developments in India. The focus needs to shift away from these longstanding concerns about the campaign or an assessment of individual figures towards the interweaving of these histories with developments in colonial South Asia.

Politics of Reform: Nationalism and Empire after the War

Postcolonial historiography tends to minimize imperial influences in Indian political development while privileging the agency of Indian actors. As a result, this historiography tends to ignore aspects of Indian history that reveal the complicity of Indian actors in imperial projects. Engaging again with articulations of imperial loyalty during the First World War is useful in examining the nature of Britain's cultural imprint on westernized Indian elites acting as intermediaries between the colonial state and Indian society. Further, by focusing on supra-national connections this article shows the impact such connections had on the ability to sustain the British empire during a moment of imperial crisis by facilitating redistribution of resources from the Indian colonial economy to the imperial war effort. It assesses the changing political meaning of a colony's 'contribution' to a distant conflict; the preponderance of the metropolitan press in reconfiguring key ideological underpinnings of colonial politics and economic control and how the outbreak of the war was viewed in colonial politics and the wider imperial context.

The British press had celebrated concrete manifestations of Indian loyalty to the empire in the form of contributions of men and material during the early phases of the war. The rhetoric of loyalty used for this contribution did not permit any discussion of the constitutional arrangements for dividing the costs of military campaigns. This

rhetoric ignored that the division of the costs of the campaign for the defence of the empire between the Indian colony and the British metropole had been a contentious part of colonial politics. The use of the Indian army as an imperial gendarme and the heavy weight this placed on India's finances had led to the evolution of an elaborate system of checks on India's military expenditure. In the atmosphere of wartime propaganda that spurred the British settler colonies on to greater commitment to the war effort, the Northcliffe and Tory press used the rhetoric of colonial contribution for imperial defence to characterize India's financial contribution as having fallen short.

The scandalous Mesopotamian medical breakdown opened up space for the criticism of the Indian government by the British press – marking a turning point in British perceptions of colonial rule in India and of the empire in India. As this article argues, the Northcliffe and Tory press's exposé of the scandalous breakdown raised questions about the campaign that clearly informed discussions in Parliament and even influenced the scope of investigation by the Mesopotamian Commission. Although in this exposé of a colonial scandal the medical breakdown loomed large, the one concrete consequence of the scandal was not the reform of Indian military medical care but rather the increased financial burden of the war on the Indian exchequer.²²⁶

British newspapers, reflecting an increasing focus on rallying the British public and empire towards a sacrifice of resources (rather than men) to win the war, demanded an increased Indian financial commitment to the war with only a superficial interest in reforming colonial finances or the medical arrangements for the Indian army. Instead, despite declarations by the viceroy and finance member that India had been 'bled white' by its contributions to the war effort, the British press sought to increase India's

²²⁶ It was not surprising that despite the sharp impetus of the India Office, reforms in army hospitals suggested by the Mesopotamia Commission were sacrificed to prevent cuts to the number of British soldiers maintained at the expense of the Indian exchequer. Sehwat, *Colonial Medical Care*, pp. 225-47.

contribution to imperial defence. The nationalist press in India stridently criticized such demands, by contending that government expenditure on imperial defence would further marginalize schemes to 'develop' India.²²⁷

Despite Chamberlain's exhortations against transforming the parliamentary debate on the Mesopotamian breakdown into a re-evaluation of the entire system of Indian government, calls to initiate constitutional reforms were made by liberal politicians like Montagu and liberal newspapers like the *Manchester Guardian*.²²⁸ As Chamberlain's successor in the India Office, Montagu's drive for substantial constitutional reform was accepted in Britain largely due to the persistent criticism of the Indian government in the British press after the Mesopotamian debacle. Within India, attacks from the Tory press had also led to a shift, with the dashing of Indian nationalist hopes that contribution to the British war effort would introduce Indian self-government and earn India a status within the empire similar to the settler colonies. The extension of war time restrictions on political protests through the Rowlatt Act and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre led to a growing realization of illiberal and racist conceptions of empire. Efforts by the colonial government to appease criticism of the British press increased the economic burden of war for the Indian population and were clearly responsible for the groundswell of popular protests during the Rowlatt Satyagraha (1919) and the Non-Cooperation movement (1921-2).²²⁹

By focusing exclusively on British/imperial politics, the historiographies of the British press, of British wartime propaganda and the Mesopotamian campaign ignore

²²⁷ Therefore, post-war efforts by the British government to shift the financial burden of maintaining British forces in Mesopotamia to the Indian exchequer were unsuccessful. Keith Jeffery, "An English barrack in the oriental seas"? India in the aftermath of the First World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 15 (3), 1981, p. 369-86.

²²⁸ 'Mesopotamia', *Manchester Guardian*; 28 Jun. 1917, p. 4.

²²⁹ Both Shahid Amin and Ahuja argue that this was partly also a result of transformations in subaltern consciousness due to participation in the war. Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-92*, OUP, Delhi, 1995, pp. 15, 36, 38-9; Ahuja, 'Corrosiveness of Comparison', pp. 143-4.

the inter-relatedness of colonial, metropolitan and imperial politics and therefore systematically ignore the implications of the Mesopotamian breakdown for South Asian history. That the Tory or Northcliffe press, with their imperial sympathies, were unwilling to take into account the burden of the war effort on colonial subjects can be countenanced, but the neglect by First World War historiography of Indian perspectives and the colonial context is far more problematic. By bringing into a single frame of analysis the British press's critique of the Mesopotamian medical breakdown and the implications of it for India; and by juxtaposing discussions of Indian loyalism during the war with nationalist and imperial critiques of India's contribution, the interplay of newly emerging Indian nationalism with supra-national British patriotism within the empire can be revealed. Such an approach reveals the imperial fault lines exposed by India's participation in the First World War.