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# VERNACULAR OBJECTS | INDIAN MUTINY | IMPERIAL PANIC[1]

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THIS PAPER IS A STUDY of subject-object relations in British writings about the Indian Uprising of 1857. I focus in particular on accounts vocalizing panic over a colony of objects "baldly encountered" and "not quite apprehended" in the context of remembering and remediating traumatic memories of the Uprising (Brown 5). What follows is an exercise in object-oriented investigation, reading depictions of subject-object and object-subject encounters, analyzing *matters-of-concern* emerging from the events of 1857 (Latour, "Realpolitik" 14; also, *Reassembling* 70n80, 114–20).

Every single narrative about the Rebellion contains discussions of imperial concerns with material objects. From military reports to fin-de-siècle novels, these describe a wide range of subject-object encounters, which traverse the factual to the supernatural, and variously dramatize the loss, retrieval, and affective recuperations of imperial authority. Yet it is ironic that there are no sustained examinations of material objects as constitutive of the discourses, experiences, and memorializations of 1857. This is not to say there are no critically astute studies discussing the politics, historiography, and representations of the Mutiny or about Victorian preoccupation with the traffic of objects, commodities, and "portable" properties across domestic and imperial borders.[2] Most recently, Lauren Goodlad has noted the significance of the Uprising in relation to the emergence of a global, cosmopolitan aesthetic in nineteenth-century fiction (406) while others have identified a veritable spurt in Victorian obsession with possessing, collecting, and cataloguing objects in the wake of the Mutiny (Pykett 1; Sattaur 347). Nonetheless, the task of substantially connecting the two remains pending. This paper therefore seeks to build a bridge between current conversations about Victorian imaginations of 1857 and those concerning Victorian curiosity about objects, all in an effort to gain a better understanding of the impact of the *émeute* on nineteenth-century imperial culture.

I strive in this essay to open a trialogue between the Mutiny archive, critical works exploring Victorian interest in objects (Freedgood, *Ideas*; Plotz, *Portable*; Daly, *Empire*), and the theoretical writings of Bruno Latour, Bill Brown, and Jacques Lacan to bring into conjoined focus a hitherto overlooked issue in nineteenth-century and postcolonial studies, namely, imperial responses to the *vernacularity* of inanimate objects in context of the 1857 Rebellion. In what follows, I highlight post-1857 imperial concern over and negotiation with material objects that resisted easy integration into an imperial geography of signs.



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### *What Is a Vernacular Object?*

MY PREFERRED TERM FOR OBJECTS that perplex and panic imperial authority is "vernacular objects." Vernacular objects are not very different from what Bill Brown calls "things" or what Bruno Latour identifies as "exploded objects." In fact, vernacular objects share with things their amorphous character just as they assemble around themselves bodies, facts, and matters-of-concern like Latour's objects (Brown 5; Latour, "Realpolitik" 23). Yet what distinguishes a vernacular object from the other two is its particular situation in history, that is, its connection to nineteenth-century European colonialism. This does not imply, however, that vernacular objects are oriental curiosities. As I conceive the term, vernacularity has nothing to do with an object's provincial origin (that is, where it was made and by whom) and everything to do with its historical, subversive, and heterodox character. Irrespective of their place of manufacture, natural origin, or where they end up as a result of colonial trade, vernacular objects are best identified from their intensely "heterogenous, risky, historical, local, material, and networky" dispensations (Latour, "Realpolitik" 21), and consequently for posing "interpretive difficulties" to western "scholarly traditions and experience" (Prown 4). Vernacular objects assert themselves against imperial denomination; they disrupt "intelligibility" and escape "the grid of museal exhibit" (Brown 4–5). (Re)appearing as anomalies in the phenomenal world, these objects upset the imperial politics of governance qua politics of collecting – a system of governance that relies on gathering and management of information for preservation of administrative law and order (Latour, "Realpolitik" 35; also, Richards). Put differently, vernacular objects endanger circuits of "production and distribution, consumption and exhibition" and thus colonial discipline and imperial control (Brown 4; also, Appadurai).[3]

If the term "vernacular object" designates things (as Brown defines things), albeit in the particular context of European colonialism, then why not call these vernacular *things* instead of vernacular objects? Let me defer here to an important footnote in Brown's essay. Brown writes, "We don't apprehend things except partially or obliquely (as what's beyond our apprehension). In fact, by looking *at* things we render them objects" (4n13). Or, the symbol murders the thing. Indeed, the thing or thingness of an object appears only fleetingly, vanishing as soon as it flickers into existence, thereafter rendering all remembrances and representations symbolic. Objects of imperial panic are no different because, having been named, they are already objectified at the level of representation and in language. Yet this does not mean that the thing is completely erased by the object or outside of it. Rather, as Lacan's reading of Hegel contests, the object or word or concept alone renders the thing present: "[T]he concept is what makes the thing be there, while, all the while, it isn't . . . [it] also makes the thing a thing" (Lacan, *Freud's Papers* 243). In other words, the object is the thing itself (Žižek, *Interrogating* 15).

Vernacular objects index an outside of discourse, an existence on the obverse of discourse, a *beyond-of-the-signified* that in its vacillation between presence and absence confuses, better still ab-uses, the order of imperial cognition (Lacan, *Ethics* 54; also, Derrida, *Specters*).[4] A beyond-of-the-signified. Yes. But not outside of or excluded from the field of language and representation. Instead, vernacular objects exist as included exteriors or excluded interiors. They are what Lacan calls the *l'extimité*, a neologism he coined specifically for describing the inside-outsiderly character of the thing (*das Ding*). Read thusly, a vernacular object describes an exterior that is always already present in the interior, just as it assigns to the

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interior a quality of exteriority (Miller, "Extimité" 76). In other words, "vernacular" in "vernacular object" anoints all known objects with a radically different otherness. Brown makes a similar claim when he describes "things" as the "concrete yet ambiguous within the everyday," experienced only at the level of *sudden* encounters. Existing in known bodies as both latency and excess, things are "physically or metaphysically irreducible to objects." Vernacular objects, similarly, are at once known and unknown, object and thing, appearing as matter and transcending materiality.[5] To talk about vernacular objects is to inhabit an open space where explicit answers are not forthcoming. Vernacular objects announce the *dark ecology* of the colony.

In sum: Vernacular objects are objects that cease to function as signs within the imperial system of signification (Baudrillard 77). More specifically, these objects disturb what Gauri Viswanathan in another context identifies as the "overarching [imperial] narrative plot" to overwrite, inhibit, and modify the local particularities of a colonial culture (157). In their defiance of Europe's epistemic mapping of the colony, these objects threaten the position of the West as a knowledge-producing subject. Imperial narratives attempting to speak to and make sense of the vernacular *non-sense*, I show below, only end up revealing the fundamental inconsistencies in the West's production of the colony as "known," "to be known," or "need not be known." Anxiety over vernacular objects exposes an essential unknowing which paradoxically underwrites and undermines the process of imperial knowledge formation, that is, what the Empire thinks it knows about the Other (Davis 377).[6] Such panic, emerging from confrontations with alien, strange, and hostile objects, articulates apprehensions over the fading away (*aphanisis*) of imperial authority and subjectivity. Below I analyze some examples from the imperial archive – imperial histories and fiction being my preferred sources here – to help illuminate this anxiety-ridden "hidden geography" (Latour, "Realpolitik" 5) of object-subject relations within the Empire. I look first at John Kaye and George Malleson's six-volume *History of the Indian Mutiny* (1865–1898) to illustrate how panic over the *lotah* (drinking vessel), the cartridge, and the Indian sepoy emerged at the interstices of imperial *écriture*, designing a rationale for the catastrophic Uprising and a corresponding if reluctant admission of failure to preempt the catastrophe. Following that, I consider discursive representations of the surveillance and discipline of imperiled subject-object relations in Arthur Conan Doyle's 1890 novella *The Sign of Four*.

## *The Cartridge*

THE MOST FAMOUS EXAMPLE of an anxiety-provoking vernacular object in Mutiny discourse is the greased cartridge. The compact cartridge of the P53 Enfield rifle was a marvel of English design and a technological innovation of its day (Smithurst 138–40). Yet the cartridge's iconic status in cultural mythography of the Mutiny comes from a very different reason. According to most imperial accounts, the P53 cartridge was the main cause of the revolt. Historical and fictional narratives allege that the sepoys rebelled after being misled by rumors that the new cartridges, which required the use of teeth, were smeared with animal fat and that the government had deliberately issued these to defile Hindu and Muslim sepoys.[7] Grease supposedly transformed this object of European provenance into a sinister thing by threatening the religious beliefs of the native sepoy. I say "supposedly" because this habitual explanation of sepoy discontent overlooks myriad other scenarios, including the possibility that native religious beliefs had nothing to do with sepoy grievances and that the cartridge

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explanation was aimed at cleansing the toxic, paralyzing dread that the revolt had precipitated in the mind of Empire (Herbert 137). Here I excavate and explore some of these possibilities, long buried by a populist belief in the cartridge-native-religion connection.

In the wake of the first stirrings of the rebel army, the celebrated British general and chief commissioner of the northwest provinces (Punjab) and later viceroy of India (1864–1869) John Lawrence noted, "The mutiny was due to the greased cartridges, and . . . *greased cartridges only*" (Kaye and Malleson 5: 280; my emphasis). Few months later, Lawrence restated his unflinching conviction in the cartridge theory in a letter written to Sir Charles Trevelyan on 16 December 1857: "the cartridge . . . was . . . the immediate cause of the revolt" (Embree 17). Many in the administration agreed, and two years later, in the first "comprehensive" account of the Mutiny, historian Charles Ball reported Lawrence's opinion embellished with a gloss on Indian bigotry. A "species of fanaticism" innate to Hindu/Indian society, together with the greased cartridges, were responsible "in working up the real, or assumed, grievances of the native troops" (Ball 1: 35). Ball substantiated his claim with proofs ranging from official reports to anecdotal stories to hearsay. Famous among these is the story of the Brahmin sepoy and a low-caste sweeper. Repeated without change in almost every retelling, it describes how, after a Brahmin sepoy refused to share his *lotah* with a low-caste sweeper for fear of losing caste by touch, the sweeper retorted, "[Your] pride of *caste* would soon be brought low; for the sepoy would presently have to bite cartridges covered with the fat of cows and pigs" (1: 37).[8] For Ball and numerous other writers, this story proved the cartridge hypothesis beyond doubt. The greased cartridge controversy these men asserted was instrumental in stoking the fires of rebellion, transforming in the process a simple object into a *matter of concern* – the cartridge assembling and crystallizing panic over the Mutiny alongside explaining indigenous social customs and religious prejudices (Latour, "Critique" 157–58). The hypothesis consolidated the stereotype of Indians as regressive characters opposed to technological advances and liberal reforms of society, and a people easily excitable in matters of religion and caste.[9]

Still, not everyone in the administration bought the cartridge hypothesis at that time; a number of military and intelligence reports categorically dismiss the idea as bogus. On 24 April 1857, the day the third cavalry at Meerut first refused the cartridges, Captain H. G. Craigie informed Major-General Hewitt, "We have *none* of the *objectionable* cartridges, but the men say that if they fire *any kind of cartridge* at present they lay themselves open to the imputation from their comrades and from other regiments of having fired the objectionable ones" (Forrest 1: 228–29; my emphasis). A few days later, at the court of inquiry held to investigate the incident Colonel G. M. C. Smyth testified, "None of [the sepoys] assigned any reason for refusing [to use the cartridges], beyond saying that they would get a bad name; *not one of them urged any scruple of religion*; they all said they would take these cartridges if the others did" (Forrest 231; my emphasis). Smyth's observation was attested further by the judge advocate-general's sworn statement that "there is absolutely no apparent reason whatever why the men of the 3rd Regiment, Light Cavalry, should have declined to use the cartridge served out to them" (Forrest 238).[10]

Back in England, the cartridge hypothesis drew unequivocal criticism from Members of Parliament Benjamin Disraeli and the Marquess of Clanricarde, historian George Malleson, and two German expatriates living in London, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. On 6 July 1857, the marquess declared in Parliament that "to suppose [the Mutiny] was a mere question of greased cartridges was absurd" (Great Britain Parliament 146: 951). Disraeli followed suit

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in a speech delivered on 27 July 1857. "The decline and fall of Empires," he famously thundered against the Palmerstone government, "are not affairs of greased cartridges" (147: 475). The "conduct of the Bengal army," he continued, was a sign of "general discontent" of the Indian people and not just an army mutiny (147: 440–72). Marx, too, thoroughly disregarded the cartridge explanation. In a series of articles written for the *New York Daily Tribune*, he blamed Britain's ruthless economic bleeding of the Subcontinent and Dalhousie's rabid annexation policies for the mass uprising in India.

Yet these strongly worded dismissals and logically argued reports made little impact on the rising tide of Victorian jingoism and warmongering. Many in the Indian administration and most people in England continued to believe in the cartridge hypothesis championed by Lawrence and his ilk. The question is, why was this hypothesis constructed and promoted when there were reliable reports to the contrary? How could Lawrence, a veteran of two Anglo-Sikh wars, completely overlook the fact that some native regiments not only knew about the use of tallow on cartridges but were using these cartridges without complaint prior to 1857 (Wagner 27)? Why did the administration ignore intelligence reports that intimated a plot to overthrow the regime (Forrest 1: 242; Muir 1: 454 and 2: 118–20)?[11] How come these contrary explanations never led the administration to question their preferred hypothesis or to ponder the probability of the rebellion being a "preconcerted" movement against colonial rule (Marx, "Revolt in India" 305)?[12] I want to contend that this is because the cartridge theory served a distinct ideological function. The cartridge-religion argument offered a cultural explanation to a political issue. By *culturalizing* colonial politics, this explanation sought to overwrite the socioeconomic and political reasons behind the outbreak. We need to consider this *politics* of imperial culture if we are to understand why representations of native religious bigotry were preferred over other, including economic, explanations.[13]

The fetishization of the cartridge ("*I know that it was not the most important cause of the Mutiny, but still I will claim it was*") was politically expedient for explaining the Mutiny to the larger public at home.[14] Imperial accusation of native religious bigotry was an ideological strategy to distract attention from, as well as to conveniently explain, the trauma of the Uprising. Battered and shocked by the rebellion, the public in Britain found satisfactory closure in an explanation that was "beautiful in its simplicity [and] so easy of comprehension" (Kaye and Malleson 5: 280). By suggesting to average Britons that the Great Rebellion was founded on religious bigotry, the cartridge explanation successfully quelled concerns apropos the event's possible anticolonial character (Brantlinger 200). It explained the grievances of the native population with colonial rule as based on archaic notions of religion and pollution, and not upon an enlightened call to freedom – a genuine resistance against foreign occupation and/or a reaction to British misrule.[15]

The Anglo-Indian military used the cartridge issue to deflect blame for the Uprising to the mismanagement of the civilian administrators of the Company (Chakravarty 49). South Asian subaltern historians and British military historians have, however, confirmed in recent years that the Company's egregious economic exploitation of the country and the military's gross mismanagement of native troops were related. These studies have documented direct connections between native civilian discontents over the Company's tax, land, and development policies and the dissatisfaction amongst native troops regarding disparity of pay between them and their European counterparts.[16] Similarly, these researches shows that if religion played any role in 1857 it did so in the English camp. Inspired by an aggressively austere Christianity, a "new" generation of administrators and military officers

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believed it their moral duty to stamp out doctrinaire Eastern religions and contributed to the growth of native discontent (Allen 107–8; Mason 257–60). This group believed that the sepoys enjoyed too many concessions on religious grounds and no further were thus to be permitted. The 1767 agreement to stop sending the sepoys of the Bengal Army across the seas and the retraction of the turban order after the mutiny at Vellore in 1806, they argued, had led the Bengal Army to believe that they could bend regimental rules and oppose army reform by citing religious reservations. Sepoy objection to the greased cartridges in the summer of 1857 offered these administrators and military commanders the perfect beating stick with which to challenge any remaining hesitancy in the government over pursuing a path of active military reform in the colonial army. Blinded by their unwavering belief in the superiority of European culture and religion, these administrators fueled a conflagration that could have been contained if they had had knowledge of the local customs and traditions of the sepoys. For the sepoys' refusal to use the cartridges, which the British officers construed as dereliction of duty and hence as an act of mutiny, was in fact part of a common practice adopted by Indian soldiers since the time of the Mughals to decline service in order to bring their employers to the negotiating table (Mason 237). The sepoys' address to authority (the symbolic big Other) did not reach the officers, who in spite of claiming themselves fathers to the childlike sepoys, failed to hear the petition of their wards. Yet none of these possibilities featured in any sustained way in imperial or populist discourses on the event. Uncomfortably poised between criticizing the Company's arbitrary exercise of power and establishing the legitimacy of the British Empire as a matter of consent, Ball's *History* is marked by early signs of cultural relativism, as Spivak dubs it. That is to say, Ball considers "interference" into indigenous culture as unacceptable and holds such actions responsible for the Uprising. However, he does not find the system of racial and economic inequality established by British colonial rule culpable in any way.

In light of these recent evidences attesting that the cartridge was a non-issue, an exercise in paradox can open up an alternative perspective. What if the cartridge hypothesis were partly correct? Could rumors about the grease have been deliberately spread, consequently allowing disaffected native groups to plan the Uprising? It is entirely possible that groups or individuals could have spread the rumors to harness the anguish of hurt religious beliefs and desperate economic conditions, thus provoking, appealing, and outraging the masses into rebellion. If that was indeed the case, then it was a brilliant strategic arrangement of vernacular sentiments as vernacular discourse around a (vernacular) material object – the discursive *re*construction of social conditions under imperial rule and the forging of a social link between politically conscious natives and the not so politically conscious Subcontinental *volk*. This, therefore, was an instance of the colonized seizing history via their use of an object that was strictly speaking a product of the Empire. Produced by industry, used by the military, and required for colonial expansion, this object – the cartridge – offers the native sepoy the possibility of regaining control over the historical narrative of the Empire and their political destiny within it. Perhaps for this reason the otherwise caste-conscious sepoys showed no hesitation in firing these "abhorred" cartridges, killing their European officers, and declaring freedom in the name of the last Mughal, Bahadur Shah Zafar.[17]

The philosophical and historical traditions supporting the fixed imaginaries of British colonial authority were constantly forced to shift, dissolve, and reappear in *différance* during the Uprising. Unable to interpret the vagaries of a heterogeneous native culture, the administration was also powerless to control indigenous circuits of subversive

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communication. To appropriate the words of Elizabeth Grosz, encounters with vernacular objects reminded the colonizer of the "teeming and interminable multiplicity" of the colony that remained in spite of the best imperial attempts at making the colony "amenable to intention and purpose" (Grosz 126). The situation came to head during 1857–58 with the administration apprehending one curious object after another. As Panchkari Bandopadhyay writes in his 1909 Bengali-language history of the Mutiny, *Sipahi Bidroher Itihas or The History of the Sepoy Mutiny*, objects as diverse as lotus flowers, animal bones, mud pats, and *chapattis* (baked unleavened bread) were rumored to have circulated throughout the Subcontinent immediately before, during, and in the aftermath of the Uprising. The *chapattis* or bread, which allegedly circulated in the northern and central provinces of India in the months prior to the outbreak was second only to the cartridges as a panic-inducing object (Bhabha 283–302). But unlike the cartridge, the administration was never able to satisfactorily say what these circulating *chapattis* signified. Whether they were conspiratorial missives or part of some idiosyncratic ritualistic practice of the natives to ward off cholera remains unknown even today. This ambivalence, Bhabha rightly infers, demonstrates the crippling effect that indigenous systems of knowledge and the circulation of indigenous communications exerted on an already panic-stricken imperial authority in 1857 (also, Guha 239–47). England's superior technocratic-military rule was ineffective in controlling and surveying the indigenous "electric" communication, as Kaye famously dubbed it (1: 491).[18]

The *chapatti* and the cartridge incidents illustrate imperial panic surfacing at the fracture between what was known of the Other and what remained unknown in the Other. Unable to reduce the heterogeneous native space into a readable map, the administration encounters, to wit is responsible for producing, the colony as an other space, where meaning and non-meaning appear simultaneously in/as vernacular objects in complete defiance of Enlightenment structures of reason. If, without panicking, the administration had tried mediating through these objects the "discrepant worlds of [colonial] meaning," then, possibly, the situation could have been different (Clifford 113). But Britain's unwillingness to do so and their desire to rewrite colonial culture in their own terms meant it was only a matter of time before imperial authority proved to be "historically contingent and subject to local reappropriation" (Clifford 10). The summer of 1857 was such a moment in the Empire's history. It was a time when vernacular objects shattered the exclusive rational and informational cartography of the colonial state by brutally dismantling "knowledge" as an institutional, pace extra-institutional, support system to colonialism.

## *The Lotah*

INSOFAR AS THE CARTRIDGE functions to vivify the established stereotype of Oriental religiosity, and as far as these representations sought to stultify public opinion in England about the anticolonial character of the rebellion, the cartridge remains as an object firmly grounded under human jurisdiction. Though the story of the low-caste sweeper and other similar accounts hinted at its "life" outside what Brown terms the "scene of phenomenological attention" (4), such itinerant excursions of the cartridge were promptly arrested through reportage and its vernacular dispensations assimilated back into the imperial cartography. The fact that cartridges might have evoked religious sentiments does not quite transform them into things since the administration continued to exercise interpretive control and strategically monitored the dissemination of information about the object. The *lotah*, a metal

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vessel used by certain classes of Indians in the nineteenth century for storing and drinking water, and imperial anxieties over it, on the other hand, more comprehensively draw out the wide-ranging universe of affect produced by colonial encounters with vernacular objects during the Mutiny.

In early nineteenth-century British writings, the *lotah* features primarily as an object of ethnographic curiosity – a signifier for understanding the curious social, religious, and caste prejudices of the colonized multitude.[19] It was not a simple article of daily use, but a signifier representing the schismatic, regressive social politics of the colonized Other: people from each of the four castes carried and zealously guarded their own *lotah* so as not to be polluted by sharing, touching, or using one carried by a member of another caste.[20] The ubiquitous *lotah*, which "every native in India carrie[d] as surely as he carrie[d] his head" (Majendie 83) was one more signifier referencing and reproducing the social, religious, and caste prejudices of the Other.

In Kaye's historical account of the Mutiny, this object of ethnographic curiosity transforms into a thing of panic. Consider the passage below where the shift is most vividly evident:

> A Hindoo, or a Hindooised Mahomedan, is *nothing without* his Lotah. A Lotah is a metal drinking-vessel, which he religiously guards against defilement, and which he holds as a cherished possession when he has nothing else belonging to him in the world. But a brass vessel may be put to other uses than that of holding water. It may brain a magistrate, or flatten the face of a gaoler, and truly it was a formidable weapon in the hands of a desperate man. (Kaye and Malleson 1: 144; emphasis mine)

The passage begins with a traditional description of the *lotah*. Drawing from a repository of writing that preceded his account, Kaye notes the object's pervasive presence in the daily life of the colonized and how it permeates deep into the social life of the natives. He shifts soon after, however, to describe its unexpected use as a weapon. The moment of this transition is equally a moment of panic materializing in the word "but" as it conjoins two distinct images of the object with two radically opposed affective universes. In consequence, the self-assured imperial ethnographer of the *lotah* makes way for the distressed imperial administrator, as Kaye reflects on the unprecedented lethal use of the *lotah* in jail riots. The conjunction thereby does not merely connect a known Hindu religio-cultural artifact with its unanticipated use as a weapon in the colony, but it represents a moment of authority in peril.[21] Anxiety here is over the dramatic transformation of an object that had been variously researched, classified, and represented through study of the Other's culture and character into a dangerous thing. It is an anxiety over inhabiting a shifting symbolic order where signifiers are characteristically unstable and knowledge is impossible to uphold.

But before it puts political authority in crisis, the *lotah* pushes ethnographic evidence into disarray. In the opening sentence itself Kaye is forced to acknowledge, perhaps intuitively deduce, the category of the *Hinduized Muslim*. I say "intuitively deduce" since reports on jail riots mention Muslim prisoners using the *lotah* for their daily ablutions as well as for attacking the jail staff. These reports challenged ethnographic research maintaining the *lotah* as a Hindu artifact. Kaye is thus forced here, by documented evidence, to account for a third demographic category – the Hinduized Muslim – designating in the process the Other's space and history as syncretic and impossible to classify, categorize, or divide with the European understanding of religion as "fixed."[22] The transient nature of Subcontinental

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religious-cultural identity suggests a very different relational paradigm than the one common in Europe, thereby posing a serious challenge to the British practice of ordering the colony into inflexible identity polarities (Viswanathan xii).

Kaye's passage illustrates a textual moment of "moulting" – when a supernumerary detail emerges to threaten imperial authority. The *lotah* transforms from an ordinary object into a fatal thing, rupturing existing knowledge as well as spotlighting the inability of the Empire to manage parameters of signification. The vernacular object evokes panic by emerging as an "insoluble" remainder of discourse – hindering the "dialectic and logic" of the imperial signifier and ascertaining that which is impossible to symbolize and represent (Miller, "Introduction" 1: 22).

## *The Brooding Sepoy*

KAYE FOLLOWS UP HIS DISCUSSION of the *lotah* with an irate commentary on the failure of the administration to intervene in and aggressively reform the indigenous culture from the very beginning. The threat of the *lotah*, he notes, could have been neutralized had its use inside jails been barred. But the government did not do so, he complains, following instead an unwavering policy of remaining neutral in matters of native faith. And when things went out of bounds it was too late to intervene. Late attempts by jail officials to substitute "earthenware vessels" for the metal *lotahs* in order to reduce fatalities ended up merely producing a new set of complications as the decision somehow constituted "in the eyes of the people . . . another insidious attempt to convert prison discipline into a means of religious persecution" (Kaye and Malleson 1: 145).

The Mutiny resulted from similar failures and self-defeating policies of the East India Company, claims Kaye. The European officers failed to correctly evaluate the character of the sepoys. They made the critical mistake of believing staunchly in the "fidelity of the native army" (Kaye and Malleson 1: 358). The officers retained an unflinching confidence in the sepoys, like a father in his children: "[T]hey called him their father, and he [the officer] rejoiced to describe them as his 'babalogue' – his babies" (1: 188). Sporadic revolts by the sepoys as at Vellore in 1806 or Barrackpore in 1824 were thus affectionately overlooked as nothing more than the "naughtiness of the child" lacking "the stern resolution of manhood" (239). The officers believed that a "few sentences of well-chosen, well-delivered Hindustani" from them would be enough to alleviate the grievances of the sepoys (197). And though these intermittent incidents of discontent led to an understanding that the sepoy "character was made up of inconsistencies [that] made him a very difficult person to manage," Kaye notes the obvious: "we did not think [then] that they made him a dangerous one" (239).

The 1857 Uprising changed all that. The sepoys broke all filial obligations and engaged in a brutal rebellion against their colonial masters. Like the *lotah*, the sepoys too transformed suddenly from faithful and submissive objects to "murderers of women and children" (Majendie 91). "As we now understand the matter," Kaye writes in the aftermath, "[while] more genial qualities sparkled upon the surface more forbidding traits lay dark and disguised, and were not discernible in our ordinary intercourse" (Kaye and Malleson 1: 240). Implicit to Kaye's critique is, again, an attempt to *culturalize* colonial politics. By pathologizing the rebels, he dismisses the political reasons for the mutiny, constituting it solely as a native cultural issue. Similar to discourse about the cartridges, Kaye's elaborate condemnation of the administration serves only as a front for repeating the Oriental's essential difference. If

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we want to reconsider reasons for sepoy discontent, we should begin by correcting imperial efforts at *culturalizing* colonial politics by interrogating the *politics of colonial culture*. I am not asking for a thorough dismissal of Kaye's observations on Johnny Sepoy. Instead, I am asking only for a thorough reevaluation of Kaye's observations through consideration of the colonial politics of recruitment. The empire was responsible for the formation of the sepoy army and for the constitution of the sepoy as a subject without identity. In briefly surveying the question of sepoy subalterneity through a history of recruitment and formation of the sepoy army beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, I defer here to Seema Alavi's excellent work *The Sepoys and the Company*.

The practice of recruiting exclusively from the peasant populations of the wheat-producing regions of the Subcontinent – and this is true almost exclusively for the Bengal Army (Moodley 90) – followed the ideology of military recruitment prevalent in Britain during the eighteenth century. Not only was this policy different from erstwhile practices of the Mughals, it was also at the same time an act of rewriting of Subcontinental identity. On the one hand, the policy disqualified populations from the rice-eating regions from joining service on the grounds that they were weak and effete. On the other, the policy discontinued the Mughal practice of enlisting urban-based Afghan and Pathan *risaldars* (cavalry), thereby alienating the Muslim population and creating an army of mostly high-caste Hindus from the central and northern provinces (Alavi 35–55).[23] The army created thus was a displaced, dislocated, and disjointed body inhabiting a domain of existence between the common masses, from which they were recruited, and the European officers and soldiers, from whose ranks and pay scales the sepoy was constitutively barred. The sepoy was neither a peasant nor a thoroughly Europeanized soldier.

What interests me most in this narrative is how the founding gesture of recruitment almost inadvertently produced the sepoy as an ambivalent sociopolitical configuration.[24] Neither inside nor outside the colonial body politic, the sepoys were an ambiguous body of outsiders (colonized subjects, peasant-soldiers) working for exclusive insiders (colonizers). During the Uprising, it was this ambiguous body that erupted into a monstrous existence by turning the inside out and exploding the posturing colonial sign system.[25] As Rudrangshu Mukherjee explains,

> In the moment of mutiny the sepoys cast off the markers with which an alien power had sought to regiment them and thus set them apart from the peasantry from which they were recruited. Of course the one marker they would not jettison was their arms. The "peasant in uniform" – as the sepoy was – disowned his uniform only to become the peasant with arms. In eschewing the regimental discipline that the British officers had drilled into them they reclaimed their peasant character. They merged with the ordinary people. (99)

But this was not a simple case of military desertion. The flippantly created line dividing native soldiers from peasant populations and urban proletariat of the Subcontinent was a serious source of concern for the administration during the uprising. For the sepoy in merging with the masses not only escaped the objectification of regimental confinement and discipline, he also rendered the colonial state impotent. With no possibility of identifying the guilty in the masses and incompetent to prevent sepoy-peasant mergers, the administration faced an alarming possibility: thanks to the disgruntled sepoys joining their ranks, the Indian rabble was now armed to the teeth. They were *the peasant armed* – a new configuration that

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the colonial authority classified as rioters or dacoits (see Guha 101–03; also, Stokes 143–48). Equally unnerving were reports describing rebel sepoys fighting in full regimental colors under the Union Jack and humming "Auld Lang Syne." And then, with many sepoys remaining loyal to the British and part of the counterinsurgency, it became difficult to differentiate friend from foe. These new ambivalent configurations shattered imperial autocracy "by matching official, alien violence by indigenous violence," and rendered the Empire panic-stricken, paralyzed, and dumbfounded in the first few months of the uprising (Mukherjee 93).

Imperial panic over the cartridge, *lotah*, and rebel sepoys was isomorphic. It was the panic over the failure of the imperial system in adequately *knowing* and *surveying* the vernacular. In seeking redress, the imperial historian could only opine on the lack of intervention by the colonial administration and call for extraordinary means of engagement to control the colonial *state of exception*.

## *The Thorn*

MALCOLM DARLING, AN ICS OFFICER serving in India at the turn of the century, wrote in a letter to his mother in 1906 that the Mutiny was a "phantom [still] standing behind official chairs" (qtd. MacMillan 115). Even though the administration employed a number of modalities in the post-Mutiny period to suture anxieties over the late rebellion, including the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 as a stop-gap arrangement to discipline radical outbreaks, the British literary imagination continued to revise and direct contexts for memorializing 1857.

Arthur Conan Doyle's super-sleuth Sherlock Holmes should be read in this context as a perfect figural representation of *fin-de-siècle* bourgeois desire for authority against a colony known to be disruptive of imperial imaginaries. Holmes is often called on to redress disconcerting residues of global and interpersonal exchange appearing out of the colonies in direct consequence of Britain's imperial ventures. He stems collective national anxieties over dissenters, mavericks, and differently abled/gendered/colored bodies (see, "The Adventures of the Yellow Face" and "The Mystery of the Dancing Men"). Unavoidable as well as inevitable, these bodies, as reminders, remnants, and mutants of imperialism, render necessary to the extent of almost naturalizing the emergence of and the expertise of an *extraordinary* Holmes.

Possessed with an ability to equally penetrate the darkest depths of the human psyche and London's seamy social underbelly, Holmes, like a *fin-de-siècle* "Blade Runner," identifies each and every threat emanating from England's far-flung imperial holdings by paying attention amongst other things to the circulation of anomalous subjects and vernacular objects (re-) entering the metropolitan space.[26] In no less than half a dozen stories and one novella the criminal agency is in one way or the other connected to the Empire: "maimed colonials" like Jonathan Small in *The Sign of Four*, Henry Wood in "The Adventures of the Crooked Man," and Dr. Roylott in "The Speckled Band" threaten English society with their Orientalized fashions, habits, accents, and the "outlandish people, animals, and/or things" they bring back with them to England (Arata 140; Daly 107; also, Siddiqi 63–85). Appearing often at first in condensed forms as "abstruse cryptogram[s]" – a stone-head hammer, the sign of four – that is, as puzzles that do not fit the logic of the commonplace (Doyle, *Sign* 6), these unruly colonials and their human and non-human accomplices are responsible for

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trapping unsuspecting Englishmen in the ambivalent space between facile appearances and insidious essences. In story after story, dancing figures hide passionate symbolic *écritures*, a yellow face peels off to reveal a "negress," a stalking cyclist turns out to be an agile protector, and known objects transform into dangerous things. A speckled band turns into a poisonous snake, a thorn into a murderous weapon, and a "loose roundish mass of tawny membranes and fibres" floating on the surface of the ocean turns out to be a dangerous aquatic critter ("The Adventures of the Lion's Mane," 690–91). The safety of an England caught in these uncertainties rests squarely on Holmes's ability to identify, arrest, and contain the myriad criminals and invasive foreign bodies from the dark outposts of the globe landing on the white shores of Dover (Daly 108).

In *The Sign of Four* we witness a typical crisis and a classic Holmesian intervention. Here, Holmes domesticates a dangerous vernacular object, a thorn, that had been trafficked into London from India by a returning colonial (Jonathan Small, an 1857 veteran), and which Holmes distinguishes from the *naturally-occurring* "English thorn" (*Sign* 45). My reading below looks at the linguistic and institutional negotiation of the vernacular object by Holmes.[27]

In the fifth chapter of the *Sign of Four*, Holmes and Watson discover the dead body of Bartholomew Sholto in a room locked from inside. Unable to fathom the mystery of the locked room, Watson takes a closer look at the body only to discover a strange thing stuck behind the ear of the dead man. The following conversation ensues between Watson and Holmes:

> In God's name, what does it all mean? I asked. It means murder, said he [Holmes], stooping over the dead man. Ah! I expected it. Look here! He pointed to *what looked like a long dark thorn* stuck in the skin just above the ear. It *looks* like a thorn, said I. It *is* a thorn. You may pick it out. But be careful, for it is poisoned. (*Sign* 39; emphasis mine)

The chasm that opens in our cognition due to Watson's inability to identify the strange thing as a poisonous thorn and the object responsible for Sholto's death is bridged only by Holmes's encyclopedic knowledge about arcane things – a specialist's knowledge that quells anxieties over things of panic. The poisoned spine only *looks like* a thorn to Watson since he is surprised at the particular use of this familiar object. He thus calls out to God, the superego or guarantor of meaning, to help explain. The answer, however, comes not from God but from Holmes. He explains to Watson how thorns are used as darts in certain savage cultures, thereby tracing and connecting the crime to an-other symbolic space, the British nation to its colony.

Holmes functions in this passage (and in several other instances in this novel and his other adventures) as an authentic representative in the politico-ideological sense of the term, that is, as an ego-ideal for imperial authority via his ability to represent the crisis situation within a broader horizon (that is, symbolic order) of meaning. Read another way, Holmes aims not just to solve the curious case of the thorn but also instruct his readers about *other* cultures. His deductions seek to recalibrate existing English knowledge by guiding it toward other existing knowledge structures in distant parts of the Empire. He therefore re-presents the thorn's unnatural threatening agency by radically redefining for it a locus within altered conditions of England's geopolitical existence – England is no longer an island but intricately connected through networks of maritime passage to its colonies, including its most peculiar

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and radical *others*, the aborigines of Andaman Islands who inhabit the margins of the Empire. Queer races populate the colony – the Hindu with their "long and thin feet" and the "sandal-wearing Mahommedan" whose "great toe [is] well separated from the others because the thong is commonly passed between" – and any of them could have murdered Sholto. But the murder weapon, a poisoned dart shot from a blowpipe, and the "diminutive footmarks – toes never fettered by boots, naked feet, stone-headed wooden mace, great agility" – belong not to the Hindus or Mahommedans but to the most savage and most "fierce, morose, and intractable people" of them all: the less than four-foot-tall aboriginal inhabitants of the Andaman Islands. Though savages are found in South America, Africa, and North America, the Andamanese who inhabit the fringes, "340 miles to the north of Sumatra, in the Bay of Bengal," Holmes explains on the basis of the "very latest authority," are "naturally hideous" with "large, misshapen heads, small fiery eyes, and distorted features" (68–69).

Holmes derives legitimate authority through his ability to inscribe crisis zones with an object(ive), meaning, and a protocol of engagement. In the process, he succeeds in evading horrible (and possibly fatal) future entanglements with alien things. Holmes, for example, cautions Watson not to fidget with the thorn: "You may pick it out. But be careful, for it is poisoned." The dangerous thing is thus doubly checked and transformed into a known object through a linguistic-philosophical act of suture representing an instance of imperial safeguarding and policing. In the course of the narrative, the final closure also entails a hermeneutic sealing off of the national space against the threat of the criminal Other and a policing of the unaccounted relations produced by the metropole-colony geopolitical relationship.

Post-Mutiny, nothing was simply as it appeared, but always haunted by a shadow of death. But unlike before, there is more synergy between official and unofficial agents of the Empire. Holmes, for instance, succeeds in identifying an Andamanese aborigine on the basis of a report on the islands, its penal colony, flora, fauna, and indigenous populations published in a gazetteer (*Sign* 68). This synergy allows Holmes to meet the demand for more than ordinary supervision of England and its colonial traffic.

## *A Deferred and Brief Conclusion*

IF WE AGREE THAT the ambivalent sepoy was constituted as such by the colonial machinery and that the transformation of material objects into things does not entail *real* physical changes, then, perhaps, we may derive an argument for situating imperial anxieties about vernacular objects (and inhuman subjects) at a structural level – as resulting from encountering a rupture within the field of imperial knowledge. This rupture is, however, structural and not contingent. In other words, and to wildly appropriate and amend Lacan, anxiety qua the rupture is a constitutive condition of the Empire, a symptom of the Empire's repeated failed attempts at classifying the colony through singular categories (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 73–74). No matter what, the vernacular always escapes, slips past all efforts of symbolization, and irremediably limits the imaginaries of the Empire. The vernacular is a constant reminder of the particular's "fleeting habitation within fragile discursive categories" of European absolutism and Enlightenment universalism (Pinney 141).

We should keep in mind that Holmes does not truly manage to subdue the thorn's extraneous otherness, i.e., its vernacularity. While his detection of the thorn as a poisoned dart captures it within a linguistic-philosophical ambit, this act equally anoints the thorn as

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the singular metonym for the Other's culture. This means that an epiphenomenal otherness is produced concurrent with Holmes's suturing act, thereby reinstating the dispossessing ambivalence of the colony. The thorn in containment remains a testament to the need for repeated imperial supervision and a reminder of the impossibility of disciplining variables – of sequestering stable meaning or signification, and constituting sovereign identity.

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## NOTES

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1. The "|" in the title is drawn from the Bengali script. In that script, "|" or *dari* functions like the period or full stop in English. Prior to the introduction of other punctuation marks such as the comma, the semicolon, interrogation, and question marks, all from English, the *dari*, used as "|" or "‖", served to designate most punctuation functions. In any case, it is not to be mistaken for or conflated with the slash "/." I employ the "|" in the title to act as the signature of the vernacular. I do so to ornamentally and linguistically arrange the Empire in its rightful ecology with the known and unknown, disturbing and annoying, elements of the colony.
2. For studies on representations of the Mutiny in British discourses, see Brantlinger, *Rule*; Sharpe, *Allegories*; Paxton, *Raj*; Chakravarty, *Indian Mutiny*; and Herbert, *Pity*. For brief overviews of scholarship examining the function and agency of material objects in Victorian literature and culture, see Sattaur, "Thinking Objectively" and Pykett, "The Material Turn in Victorian Studies." This essay draws its primary inspiration from three works – Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things* (2006), Plotz's *Portable Property* (2009), and Daly's *The Empire Inside* (2011).
3. Of particular interest to me is Appadurai's argument about commodities as "socialized" things, that is, about the relation of objects to exchange and value, on the one hand, and, the social histories of objects formed over extended periods of time as restrictive of any understanding of their more intimate forms and trajectories, on the other (6–16; 36).
4. I am drawing this argument from the following passage in Derrida's *Specters*: "One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge" (6). Vernacular objects haunt the imperial cartography of knowledge as unreadable epistemic and political signatures that materialize due to the insufficiency of the imperial universe of meaning to guarantee signifier-signified relations. The vernacular object renders present the beyond of discourse inside discourse as a limit to cognition, inquiry, and epistemic mastery.
5. Though there is a direct connection between Brown's Thing and Lacan's Thing (*das Ding*), the latter appearing in Seminar 7 of *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, "with suggestive but unspecific Heideggerian and Kantian allusions," it is impossible to enter here into a detailed examination of the relationship, primarily because post-Seminar 7 Lacan folds the Thing into his concept of the part object or *objet petit a* (Critchley 72). But then, Brown's characterization of the *thing* as a partial object, apprehended obliquely and which can be encircled but never absolutely approximated, evokes equally strongly Lacan's characterization of the *objet petit a* in Seminar 11 of *The Four Fundamental Concepts*. The

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correlation between the two can be explained first by noting that the *objet petit a* as an irreducible piece of the Real in the imaginary-symbolic matrix also indexes the beyond of discourse. Second, the *objet petit a* names the mysterious thing which, while existing in the reality remains alien to reality, irreducible as an identifiable unit and difficult to integrate into quantified systems of signification. Third, and no less importantly, both provoke anxiety by way of their sudden transformation from known to unknown, from being quantifiable to being unquantifiable, and from being a subjective support of discourse to being disruptive of discourse. Anxiety, Lacan observes, is "the striking manifestation" of a real object taking the place of a fantastic object. It is around this peripeteiac moment, termed the "moment of moulting" in his *Seminar X, L'Angloisse*, and marked by witness of the disappearance of an imaginary "situatable," "locatable," and "exchangeable" object and the appearance in its place of a "private, incommunicable [or real] object," that anxiety surfaces as a response to the constriction of a gap between desire and *jouissance*.

6. *Empires* rely on knowing. Yet in their compulsive urge to know, they often miss a vital aspect in the dialectic of knowing and not knowing, namely the presence of unacknowledged knowledge. Or, as Žižek famously reminded us in the wake of Donald Rumsfeld's comment on known-knowns, unknown-knowns, and unknown-unknowns, the Unconscious is the "unknown-known" or "what we don't know that we know." As a Thing, the vernacular object appears from this domain of *other* knowledge, from an *other scene* written out of imperial consciousness. Imperial engagements with such things consequently force the empire to face and wrestle with a "knowledge that does not know itself." See Žižek, "Philosophy."
7. See, for example, the letters, testimonies, and statements by sepoys, native officers, and European officers in Forrest, *Selections from the Letters, Despatches, and Other State Papers*.
8. Ball's account matches those that came before and after. See, for example, Major-General Hearsey to the Secretary to the Government of India, dated 11 February 1857 (Great Britain Parliament 25); see also Kaye and Malleson (1: 360) and Grant (1: 59).
9. Alongside the fear of losing religion by using the new cartridges, many historians claimed the government's banning of *sati* or widow immolation, legalization of widow remarriage, establishment of English schools, and the introduction of telegraph and railways equally nettled the sepoys. See Kaye and Malleson 1: 135–41.
10. Native depositions at court are profoundly ambiguous. While these do not mention religious scruples or anything about how they felt about the rumors, they unequivocally opine that all cartridges be considered unacceptable until the government put the mysterious rumor to rest. It is extremely difficult to say whether the sepoys were honest or were hiding something. After all, "truth" produced in these unequal exchanges is always a constructed domain of fiction (Clifford 10). Nonetheless, these depositions created confusion in the wake of the rebellion. The court of inquiry, modeled on what Foucault terms the *confessional culture of the West*, expected the sepoys to speak nothing but the truth (see Foucault, *Sexuality* 1: 56, 58). Yet surely that did not happen. The same sepoys who averred no knowledge of any impending mutiny were in the forefront of the uprising a week later. Irrespective of whether they lied or not, the administration was blindsided by their own institutional methods, which constrained them from the very beginning with logic incongruous to the local culture and psychology. For full script of sepoy depositions, see Forrest 1: 230–37.
11. One high ranking military officer and two intelligence agents, Brevet-Major Campbell, H. H. Greathed, and William Muir, in separate reports sent to different authorities, clearly voice concerns about a clandestine rebel plan to organize and provoke the masses into rebellion. All three reports dismiss the cartridge theory as ill-conceived. On 30 April 1857, Campbell wrote to Major J. Waterfield that the conduct of native troops in Meerut was premeditated and part of a "well considered and determined on" plan (Forrest 1: 242). Greathed claimed in the wake of reports of mysterious incendiary fires at several cantonments and the disobedience of sepoys refusing P53 cartridges, "A consciousness of power had grown up in the Army, which could only be exercised by mutiny" (Muir 1: 454).

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12. For a slightly different view, see "Talmiz Khaldun's" "Great Rebellion." "Khaldun" cautions against identifying the Uprising as a planned rebellion waged in national interest, claiming no such nationalist feeling existed at that time. Instead, he urges that the Uprising was a peasant war against the colonial and indigenous elite, i.e., against landlords and those exercising power from urban centers of the Subcontinent.
13. I follow Žižek's definition of ideology as means for obfuscating truth (the Real) and beguiling the public. Ideology function as a "designation-perception"; that is to say, it designates a particular social issue as singular thereby instituting it centrally within the consciousness of the public only to displace the public's consciousness from more entrenched issues requiring immediate revolutionary redress. The cartridge theory is ideological as well for its ability to present a "lifeworld context," or offer easy explanations of traumatic phenomena, for the benefit of the masses. See, Žižek's *Living*.
14. The fetish object or fetishization of an object relies on a disavowal. *Verleugnung* is the term used by Freud to explain the fetishist as one who refuses to recognize the reality of a traumatic perception, namely the castration of the Mother, preferring instead to imagine a displaced object as substituting for the maternal object of desire. See Laplanche and Pontalis.
15. This opinion survives even today. Almost every other European and American historian has perpetuated the idea that the Mutiny was a product of native religiosity. See for example the opening paragraph in Edwardes's *Battles of the Indian Mutiny*.
16. Mason, for example, writes in his study of the British Indian Army, *A Matter of Honour*, that every case of mutiny by the Indian army "from first to last" was a product of three factors. First, the sepoys suffered some form of direct military grievance, especially involving pay or news of economic hardship suffered by their families back in the villages because of taxation or inflexible Company policies. Second, they were incited to violence by outside forces, either a general political unease in Indian society or specific instigation. And third, European commanding officers, who beginning as early as the 1800s showed less interest in knowing the local customs and traditions of the sepoys, mismanaged the troops (236; 452). More recently, Moodley (writing about the Vellore mutiny of 1806) and Callahan (discussing the surprising absence of any major mutinies in the British Indian army during the stresses of the First and Second World Wars) have shared Mason's assessment. While Moodley emphasizes economic hardships faced by sepoys due to army reform and not religion as the main cause of sepoy discontent in 1806, Callahan underscores superb management of the troops by commanders like Claude Auchinlek as the reason behind the stability of the Indian army in the first four decades of the twentieth-century. See also Moodley, "Vellore"; Callahan, "Indian"; and Habib, "Remembering."
17. One of the earliest mentions of this is found in an 1858 anonymous publication, *The Thoughts of a Native in Northern India on the Rebellion, its Causes, and Remedies* (4). Recently, Indian historian Irfan Habib has noted that during the trial of Bahadur Shah Zafar British prosecutors claimed that "the mutineers who had objected to the greased cartridges when issued by their British officers, were [in fact] using and biting the very same cartridge when they were firing them against the British" (Habib 23). See also Nayar, *Trial*.
18. For discussion of *chapattis* as a form of indigenous communication, see Bayly, *Empire and Information*.
19. For references to the *lotah* in ethnographic studies on Indian culture, see Shore, *Notes* (477); India Census Commissioner (212–13); Whitworth, *Anglo-Indian* (182); and Yule et al., (522). Interestingly, there is no separate entry on the *lotah* in William Crooke's 1906 book *Things Indian*, but his preface explains the regular reference to the object in other works.
20. It must be mentioned, of course, that the notion of a rigid fourfold caste hierarchy, as Chatterjee has noted, represented a skewed vision of the colonial space and indigenous culture. Imperial knowledge was thus from the very beginning false knowledge, founded on misrecognition, misreading, and deliberate mistranslation of the indigenous culture (169–209).
21. This concern is pervasive in British writings from the period. Consider for instance the following official report on a jail riot where the *lotah* was the preferred weapon for the native rioters: "The manner in

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which these ruffians are at present allowed to congregate, is eminently destructive of discipline, and not without serious risk to magistrates and other officers visiting the Jail. The *lotah*, with its neck and a strong cord attached to it, is a very formidable weapon of offence, and the *daos* and *khoodalees* with which the convicts work outside, might readily and fatally be employed, for purposes of violence, by desperate characters" (Mouat 160; also see 96–97). For Kaye's account of these incidents, see Kaye and Malleson, 1: 144–45.

22. The notion of religion as fixed can be found in the etymology of the word itself. In Middle English "religeoun," Old French "religion," as well as Latin "religio," perhaps from *religāre*, the meaning is to tie fast, hold firmly, binding. See, "Religion." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Web. 23 July, 2015.
23. Did the East India Company's Bengal regiment (infantry) have Muslim soldiers? Yes. But their numbers were fewer than upper-caste Hindus. As Alavi suggests, Muslims were recruited in the cavalry even though the role of the cavalry itself was diminished in preference for a European model of infantry-led warfare. Unlike the Madras regiment, the Bengal Army had more upper-caste Hindus in its ranks. But was this instrumental in organizing the Revolt of 1857? Did the uprising happen because Hindu sepoys were concerned about losing caste? Or did it take place due to economic hardship? Habib believes the latter. He writes that the areas from which the rebellious sepoys were recruited, irrespective of caste and religion, were some of the highest-taxed of the country: "The tax-free (*mafi*) lands had also been resumed wholesale after 1833. The Brahmins and also 'shaikhs,' from amongst Muslims, who were particularly recruited in the Bengal Army, often held *mafi* lands." Consequently, "both as peasants and as *mafi*-holders, the classes that the sepoys came from, were increasingly adversely affected, and this, of course, led to discontent spreading among the sepoys" (24).
24. From a psychoanalytical perspective we can identify two distinct modalities in operation here: first, the conscious symbolic objectification of the sepoy and, second, the production of an unconscious dislocation or gap in effect of this constitution. As a symbolic object, the sepoy army lent credibility to the colonial fantasy of the colonizer as a subject of Historical Necessity. In other words, the sepoys offered their colonial officers an opportunity to assert paternalism, to become symbolic Fathers to imaginary children, to assume the role of educators and guardians of the native soldiery. This family romance was ideologically charged. The "birth" of the sepoys as children of a new age implied that their progenitors, the British officers, were ushering in a new civilization, a civilization far better than either the conceited Muslims or the degraded Hindus had achieved in the past. The romance ended however with physical deaths, as well the death of Britain's paternal fantasy.
25. Marx made an interesting and similar observation about the sepoy army when he wrote in "The Revolt in the Indian Army" that in creating the native army the British "simultaneously organized the first general center of resistance which the Indian people was ever possessed of" (297–98).
26. In Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner*, the character of Rick Deckard (played by Harrison Ford) is charged with identifying, finding, and exterminating replicants, or human clones, who have infiltrated the world in guise of humans. These replicants are banned from entering earth, and Deckard is a freelancer who hunts them down.
27. I will not repeat here arguments concerning the relation between Doyle's novella and the collective memory of the Uprising, as a number of excellent studies have already done so. See for example, Arata, *Fictions*; Frank, "Dreaming"; Keep and Randall, "Addiction"; and Thomas, *Detective* and "Fingerprint."

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