Mutiny, war, or small war?
Re-visiting an old debate

Abstract

The problem of naming the events of 1857-59 is almost a commonplace in historical writings and not without reason, for the choice of a name implied an explanation of those events, and explanations were usually tied to political positions. By the early twentieth century, the debate had taken a form that endures to this day, as radical nationalists discovered a general state of ‘war’ in the events of 1857-59, while the apologists of empire preferred the suggestion of a local disturbance that the term ‘mutiny’ evoked.

But this debate conceals more than it reveals. For one, the origins of the ‘mutiny or war’ quarrel considerably antedates the nationalist and imperialist points of view, and may indeed be found within the terms of colonial govern mentality. As I hope to show by drawing on several texts from 1857 to 1862, the rebellion brought into the open certain long-standing fissures within British policy on the nature and function of the East India Company’s rule; fissures that would re-appear with certain modifications in the ‘mutiny or war’ debate that began in the early twentieth century.

Secondly, the debate has tended to obscure the moot question: that of the constitutional relation between the two principals in the case: the Mughal emperor and the East India Company. Words such as ‘mutiny’ or ‘war’ are not very helpful unless their legal context is first established; and, as I hope to show, once that context is established, the terms may acquire new, unexpected meanings.

Finally, the ‘mutiny or war’ debate has tended to isolate the events of 1857-59 from other instances of the nineteenth-century colonial ‘small war’, whether in China, Afghanistan, New Zealand, Jamaica or North Africa, all of which were moments of resistance against colonial domination, and shared certain tactical and strategic similarities. Theories of the ‘small war’, which have appeared in recent decades in several guises, may perhaps yield some new tools for reviewing the rebellion.

I

MUTINY OR WAR

It often seems as if that old dispute – whether the rebellion of 1857 was a mutiny or a national war of independence – began only in the early twentieth century, as a new
generation of radical nationalists began to challenge the decrees of colonial historiography and to write their own versions of the past. There is, of course, a reason for this assumption. Savarkar’s polemical work, *The Indian War of Independence*, came out in 1909 in a political atmosphere dominated by Swadeshi, by the Surat split in the Congress, and by terrorist groups working in and out of India. As if to aid the self-constitution of the new nationalism of these years, Savarkar’s book argued strenuously for the first time that what the British had so far described as merely a mutiny was, in fact, a war of independence, much like the American war of independence, and directed moreover against the same imperium.

Savarkar was certainly not the first Indian writer to reflect on the event as a whole. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan’s *Asbab-e-Bagawat-e-Hind* (Causes of the Indian Rebellion), Dorabhoy Franjee’s *The British Rule Contrasted with its Predecessors*, and *The Mutinies and the People* by Sambhu Chandra Mukherjee had appeared within two years of the event. But these accounts by a modernizing Muslim in British service, a Bombay Parsi, and an Anglicized Calcutta publicist, respectively, all shared the sizeable British opinion that the rebellion was no more than an aberration; that whatever political freight or popular energy it may have possessed was essentially retrograde and incoherent. In the immediate aftermath of the rebellion when British power seemed invincible, these texts tried to distance the peoples their authors claimed to represent from the rebels and their cause, and to assure the government of loyalty.

Such anxieties about loyalty are absent in the major nineteenth-century Indian account of the rebellion, *Sipahi Juddher Itihasa* (History of the Sipahi War) by Rajanikanta Gupta, which was written between 1870 and 1900 and published in five volumes. Based on John William Kaye’s *History of the Sepoy War in India* (1864-76),

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the main burden of Gupta’s work was to show how on some crucial points the Indian view of the event was quite different from the view that British historians took, and that such difference was evidence of a fundamental difference of racial feeling and national memory. While this recognition of divergent interpretations was itself a sign of the times - *Sipahi Juddher Itihasa* was after all written in the decades that saw the rise of the Indian National Congress and its slow but irreversible radicalisation through the 1890s – Gupta’s history hardly disturbed the half-century old consensus that Savarkar would prise open with his ‘war of independence’ thesis.

Though Savarkar too relied largely on British sources, his conclusion about a general state of war, fired by an intuitive but coherent idea of a nation, and overriding communitarian difference, gave a radical genealogy to the Extremists and revolutionary terrorists, who could now turn for inspiration to the violently anti-colonial, and - indeed ‘nationalist’ - resistance of an earlier generation. By turning the mutiny into a war, and the rebels into ‘nationalist’ heroes, *The Indian War of Independence* inaugurated a potent Swadeshi historiography of the rebellion, which tells us perhaps as much about the choices that Indian nationalism faced in the first decade of the twentieth century, as about the rebellion itself.⁴

But if this quarrel over history mirrored the growing irreconcilability of nation and empire - an irreconcilability that Edward John Thompson lamented in *The Other Side of the Medal* (1925)⁵ – and if it revealed a new phase of Indian nationalism, it was certainly not unique in the annals of the rebellion.

In fact, the dispute over an appropriate description of the event began almost immediately, indeed, in June 1858, when the Adjutant-General of the Bengal Army, a Colonel George Bruce Malleson, published from Calcutta a slim but shrill pamphlet titled, *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army*.⁶ Malleson’s blow-by-blow account of the events at Barrackpore, Danapur, Meerut, Delhi and Kanpur between March and June 1857 had

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⁶ *The Mutiny in the Bengal Army: A Historical Narrative by one who has served under Sir Charles Napier* (Calcutta, n.p, 1857).
one basic point to make: that what had begun as ‘a military mutiny … speedily changed its character and became a national insurrection’. In explaining why this happened, Malleson interestingly put the blame, not on Hindu superstition or Muslim fanaticism – those staples of popular British accounts of the rebellion - but on the functionaries of the East India Company’s civil service, who, in trying to preserve ‘their own domination … extending over a hundred years … had completely failed in attaching even one section of the population to British rule’. But more than the civil service, ‘the real author of the mutiny’ was Lord Dalhousie, the governor-general in the years leading up to the rebellion, who, with his reckless annexation of kingdoms, his land resumptions in the North-western Provinces, and intrusive social reforms, had created conditions for a widespread and rebellious combination of soldiers, peasants, landowners and the nobility.

I shall return to this charge later, but for now let us contrast Malleson’s view with that of a minor civil servant, Charles Raikes, who was a judge at the Agra Sadar Court in 1857, and a witness to the rebellion in Mathura and Agra. In his *Notes on the Revolt in the Northwest Provinces of India* (1858), Raikes wrote that he attributed:

the existing disturbances in India to a *mutiny* in the Bengal army, and to that cause alone; I mean that the exciting and immediate cause of the *revolution* is to be found in the mutiny. That we have in many parts of the country drifted from mutiny to *rebellion* is all too true; but I repeat my assertion: that we have to deal now with a *revolt* caused by a mutiny, and not with a mutiny growing out of a national discontent.

It is hard to miss the apologists’ tone in Raikes’s strained description, where ‘revolution’, ‘rebellion’, ‘revolt’, and ‘national discontent’, are finally reduced to the relative simplicity of a mutiny. Neither Raikes nor Malleson are however isolated cases. In the records and debates that appeared within the first two years, the military tried to absolve itself by pointing to a general state of discontent that led to the mutiny in the Bengal

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Army, while for the civil service, it was expedient to claim that the genesis of the disturbance lay simply in military indiscipline, and thus, to contain the event through a deft semantic maneuver. By the mid-1860s, however, the dust had settled on this controversy in British official circles and in official historiography. The new consensus about the rebellion-as-mutiny that now appeared was of course shaped by the aftermath of the rebellion. The Crown replaced the Company November 1858, the rebellion died out by the end of 1859, and under the new peace of the Raj it made little sense to insist on the ‘national’ character of the rebellion.

The Malleson-Raikes dispute was however not only about a long-standing rivalry between the civil and the military arms of the Company’s Indian administration; a rivalry that had simmered through much of the century in the periodical press, in official records and memoirs and even, at times, in fiction. The rivalry was perhaps understandable, for while the Company’s army conquered and held new territories, in its wake came the civil service, which often represented metropolitan theories and practices of government, and administered the lands and the peoples, often in ways that the old India hands in the army considered foolhardy. But behind this turf war, lay a more fundamental and trickier question: of what the ‘first one hundred years of British rule in India’ had done or undone, and with what consequences. Malleson had raised this question when he wrote about a hundred-year old failure of the civil service, and it was the same question that would reappear, though with another inflection, in nationalist historiography of the rebellion.

What is remarkable is how much there was in common between these two accounts, one by a colonial officer writing in 1858, and the other by a revolutionary terrorist fifty years later. Like Malleson, Savarkar had argued, on the evidence of civil rebellion, that there was more to the event than a mutiny. This, along with the leadership of the old royal houses of Delhi, Awadh, Bithoor, and Jhansi, and the signs of a premeditated conspiracy, led both authors to draw nearly identical conclusions about a ‘national insurrection’, or ‘war of independence’. Moreover, Malleson’s accusation that

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the government had failed in securing the loyalty of even one section of the population to British rule in a hundred years was a necessary proposition for Savarkar; only, in his case, the real author of the discontent was not Dalhousie or the civil service alone, but the very fact of British presence in India as a colonial state.

At this point it might be interesting to turn to another historian of the rebellion, John William Kaye, who published the first volume of his book the *History of the Sepoy War in India* in 1864. Kaye was well suited for this task, having succeeded John Stuart Mill as the Secretary of the Secret and Political Department of the India Office in 1858. Kaye’s title, which signals the difficulty of naming the event, seems to gesture towards a weak compromise between the two schools of thought. While the word ‘sepoy’ is a nod at the mutiny theory, the word war suggests an event more critical than military indiscipline or a law and order problem. Though as a title the phrase ‘sepoy war’ is both awkward and vague (the sepoys being meant to fight wars makes the phrase tautological), it is already an admission of the failure of mono-causal explanation. While earlier historians such as Charles Ball, E.H. Nolan and Robert Martin had begun their works with a general account of India, Kaye begins with an extended reflection of the causes of the rebellion.

This is where Kaye’s develops a wide-ranging critique of the first hundred years of British rule in India. Though Kaye had earlier written an eulogistic account of British progress in India in his 1851 book *The Administration of the East India Company*, *The Sepoy War* is more chastened and circumspect, and it shows how the ‘progress of Englishism’ in government, education, technology and social reform were fundamentally responsible for the rebellion. Against the verities of liberal-utilitarianism and philosophic Radicalism inspired by Bentham and James Mill, which had through the decades argued for more strenuous changes in India, Kaye now seeks to return to a more conservative and cautious approach to Indian society and politics. Moreover, in trying to show the link between liberal political theory as applied in India and the rebellion, the first volume of the *Sepoy War* actually discloses a hidden similarity between the Company’s recent

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12 See Nihar Nandan Singh, *British historiography on British Rule in India. The Life and Writings of John Willian Kaye* (Patna, 1986), for more on Kaye’s official career and writings.
activities in India and republicanism, whether in England or in France. For years, Kaye wrote:

clever, well-read secretaries with a turn for historical illustration discovered a parallel between this grievous state of things in Bengal and that which preceded the great revolution in France, when the privileges of the old nobility pressed out the very life of the nation, until the day of reckoning and retribution came, with a dire tyranny of its own.\(^\text{13}\)

Thus, in seeking to forestall a future popular outburst against a seigneurial tradition, exactly what did not happen in France, by means of timely reforms, the Company’s liberal administrators produced a ‘reign of terror’ that affected all classes in the north Indian countryside. Kaye goes on write that ‘a revolution in landed property, brought about by means of English application threw up ‘dangerous and disaffected classes who bided their time for the recovery of what they had lost, in some new revolutionary epoch.’\(^\text{14}\) Foreshadowed already by the developments of the decades leading up to 1857, that revolutionary epoch is configured by Kaye as the ‘counter-revolutionary ‘Sepoy War’, when the Indian \textit{ancien regime} returned to claim its lost rights and privileges, and to bring vengeance on the authors of the original terror.\(^\text{15}\)

II

THE BUCKLER THESIS

This fifty-year old dispute over an appropriate description, which first appeared between the civil and military arms of the colonial state, and subsequently between nationalists and the apologists of empire, is a useful indicator of the ways in which history could be appropriated and represented by different interests, often in highly literary ways. In the

\(^{13}\) Kaye, \textit{History of the Sepoy War}, vol. 1, 169.
\(^{14}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 178-179.
\(^{15}\) See, \textit{The Indian Mutiny in the British Imagination} for more on Kaye and other historians of the rebellion.
writings of both the partisans and opponents of the ‘mutiny’ thesis, the same set of dramatic and actions and characters, drawn from very nearly the same archive, are tugged about in different directions, and made to signify altogether different things. Though Mallesson did speak about a hundred year old background of mis-rule, and Savarkar about the lack of principle underlying British rule in India, neither had fully unpached the implications of their claims.

The first critique of the grounds on which terms such as mutiny or national war made sense appeared in a 1922 article by Francis W. Buckler, who was then Muir professor of history at Allahabad University. In the “The Political Theory of the Indian Mutiny”, which appeared in the Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society, Buckler began in the late-eighteenth century, when the East India Company began to change its character from a mercantile company to a territorial power.16 For its role in helping the Mughal emperor against his rebellious governor in Bengal, the Company was itself appointed the governor, or subedar, of the province of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa. All Mughal subas had subedars, so there was nothing particularly unique about what happened in 1764; only, the subedar, in this case, was not a tributary king or a Mughal nobleman, but an English trading company with an eye for the main chance and a well-trained mercenary army. As subedar, the Company had to pay the emperor not only a due portion of the revenue from the territories it held on behalf of the emperor, and it had to do so with a annual ceremonial visit to Agra or Delhi, where successive governors-general paid homage and tribute to the emperor in durbars and paid nuzur, for which the emperor in turn offered his servant, the subedar, gifts, robes of honour and his blessings. This practice the Company continued until 1833, annually confirming its subordination to the emperor at a public ceremony, whose rituals went back to the Safavi rituals of kingship that Akbar had imported from Persia in the late-sixteenth century.

But while these high Mughal forms of authority persisted, the Mughal empire fell apart through the eighteenth century, even as the Company, in the time-honoured fashion of restive and ambitious subedars, began to pursue its own interests and ambitions, which

were mercantile, military, and political, though not always in that order. Throughout the late-eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the Company’s territories grew rapidly, eating into other erstwhile subas and provinces such as Awadh, the Deccan, and Central India, and chipping away inexorably at Mughal authority, even as the Company kept up the appearance of its original constitutional obligation to the emperor. For Buckler, the Company was perhaps the most sustained and draining enemy of the Mughal state, and quite apart from encouraging the secession of the suba of Awadh, from 1772, the Company even began keep for itself the revenues of Bengal, the richest of the Mughal provinces, instead of tendering it to the imperial treasury.

Buckler argues that this was not the only role-play the Company was forced to do. In the British Parliament, where its trading charter was renewed every twenty years, the Company kept up another pretence: that it was the protector, on behalf of Britain, of territories of the Mughal empire, and that the nuzur the governor-general paid annually at Delhi was only a pension for an improvident monarch. After 1764, the Company had thus two masters to serve, one in Delhi and the other in London. As Buckler demonstrates through a close reading of Mughal farmans, while the Company was given the right to trade in India by parliament, all its territorial rights and the right to administer justice and collect revenue came neither from the English crown or Parliament, nor from military strength, but from the farmans of the Mughal emperor. It was as subedar that the Company represented itself in the Mughal court, and that was how they were recognized by the other territorial powers in India.

After this, Buckler’s point was brilliantly simple. Compounded by the omissions and commissions of the double obligation to the emperor and to Parliament, the Company’s administration from the late-eighteenth century ‘assumed an attitude and pursued a policy towards the Mughal emperor, which to him could appear in no other light than that of high treason; and, the culmination was reached when Dalhousie and Canning attempted to tamper with the right of succession’.17 Buttressing this political and constitutional history with a close reading of The Proceedings of the Trial of the King of Delhi and other evidence, Buckler’s case was that in 1857, the soldiers of the Bengal Army, along with the ecumenical classes, the traditional elite and the people at large,

17 Ibid., pp. 45-6.
turned against the insubordinate Company-as-subedar on behalf of their de jure lord and master, the Mughal emperor.\textsuperscript{18} The essay ends with the startling claim that: ‘if there was any mutineer in 1857, it was the East India Company’, and the use of the word ‘mutiny’ in subsequent writing, was a willful obfuscation of the constitutional basis of British power in India.\textsuperscript{19} But this obfuscation had a long history. Buckler shows how aided by a propaganda machine run by its historians and publicists, the Company ‘evolved a fictitious history of India, until, in the first half of the nineteenth century, side by side there existed a politically effective Empire with an accepted history of its non-existence’.\textsuperscript{20}

Buckler went on to add that the guilt the British ascribed to the emperor, cleverly renamed ‘the king of Delhi’ in judicial documents, ‘recoiled on the Company, his disloyal vassal, since his difficulties arose mainly from the Company’s intrigues and from the fact that after 1772, the Company reneged on its obligation to tender the revenue of Bengal’.\textsuperscript{21} For Buckler, it was this hundred-year old story of insubordination and betrayal that the loyalists of the emperor had tried, though vainly, to amend. Despite the constitutional formalism that underlies the essay, or perhaps because of it, there is in Buckler an unmistakable moral tone that is reminiscent of Edmund Burke’s criticism, made well before the Hastings’ trial, that the ‘Company never has made a treaty that it has not broken’, or that ‘there is not a single prince, state, or potentate, great or small, in India, with whom they [the Company] have come in contact, whom they have not sold’.\textsuperscript{22}

Curiously, Buckler was quite positive about the future of the new dispensation, had the rebellion been successful. At the end of the essay, he observed about the state of Delhi in the summer of 1857 that ‘cruelties, deaths, financial and other disorders are subordinate to the main issue. Temporary administrative chaos was inevitable when the

\textsuperscript{18} Proceedings of the Trial of Muhammad Bahadur Shah. Titular King of Delhi, before a military commission, upon a charge of rebellion, treason and murder … 1858, etc. (Calcutta: n.p., 1895).

\textsuperscript{19} “Political Theory of the Indian Mutiny”, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 45.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 45.

officers of the great vassal had to flee from their posts. But there is little if any evidence to show that recovery was impossible had the outbreak been successful’.23

III

REBELLION AND SMALL WAR

Buckler’s formalist interpretation was largely ignored by later historiography, and the mutiny or national war debate died out after a brief revival in the centenary publications of 1957. Thereafter, the interest in the discovery of covering law models or “causes of the rebellion” was replaced by a new attention to specific acts of resistance at particular localities. First evident in S.B. Chaudhuri’s books, Civil Disturbances During British Rule in India, and Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies, this interest reappeared with micro-economic detail in the studies of rural revolt by Eric Stokes, and later by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Gautam Bhadra and Tapati Roy.24 With its focus on discrete acts of resistance by local actors, communities and social groups, and in recovering the fragmentary voices, visions, symbols and other traces of peasant consciousness, the new scholarship on the rebellion represented a breakthrough in the historiography of the rebellion, and was itself contiguous with the rise of subaltern theory and history-writing in India. But while the new history opened up the old nationalist-imperialist logjam in

23 Ibid., p. 47.
historiography, the focus on particular instances of popular resistance made it harder to speak about the rebellion as a unified event, or to locate the event alongside other similar events elsewhere in the world. Yet, what is difficult is not always impossible, and it may even be necessary work, in any contemporary commemoration that remembers the event as a whole, to re-address the rebellion in terms of a general theory, though without reviving the old, indeed misleading, totalizations that were the basis of the mutiny or war dispute.

While there is a good bit of literature on the military aspects of the rebellion, on the strategies of the rebels and British campaigns of re-conquest, there is little or no work that views the rebellion in the light of long and dense history of colonial conflicts during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Walter Laquer, John Lonsdale, and Moor and Wesseling have variously shown, Britain was involved in close to eighty-two ‘irregular’ colonial military campaigns between the 1830s and 1870s. Add to this the Anglo-Egyptian war (1882), the Belgian-Arab war (1892-94), the Germany-Tanganyika war (1905), the Anglo-Burmese war (1885), the Franco-Madagascar war (1894-95), the Aceh war (1873-79), the second British-Afghan war (1878-80), the Italo-Ethiopian war (1895-96), and the Franco-Indo-Chinese war (1882-84), and one gets an idea of the ubiquity of indigenous resistance to colonial advances and interventions.

The increasing frequency of conflicts in Asia and Africa, and surely the rebellion of 1857 should be included in any list of these, led to the making of a theory of colonial or irregular warfare in the 1890s. The first important work on the subject was Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice (1899) by Major C.E. Calwell of the Intelligence Department at the War Office in London. Though Calwell does not expressly discuss the Indian rebellion, there is much his discussion of strategic and tactical issues that applies to the rebellion. Calwell began with an initial distinction between the conduct of

European warfare and colonial warfare, or between big and small wars.\textsuperscript{26} While big wars were fought between states on well-defined battlefields and employed regular troops and conventional strategies, the small war was typically between a (colonial) state and loose bands of militias without a central military or political command structure. Calwell noted that ‘strong and well-organized opponents … were the earlier adversaries for the Europeans, both militarily and politically, both during conflict and thereafter’, but that ‘an enemy with lower degree of organization, which limited itself to guerilla activities, was much more difficult to deal with’, mainly because the civilian and the combatant were often indistinguishable.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, small wars were different from conventional wars between European states in that the former ‘were conducted to establish permanent presence’, and thus ‘a purely military approach was insufficient’, for ‘account always had to be taken of civilians’.\textsuperscript{28} This attention to the civilian population during insurgency was of course two-fold: it could mean what is now popularly known as ‘winning hearts and minds’, but could also mean punishing the civilian population since the combatants were closely merged with civilians. Calwell further distinguished between three types of small war: these were (a) wars of conquest and annexation, (b) wars of subjugation and pacification, and (c) wars of discipline and punishment. In all three cases, small wars were ‘expeditions against savages and semi-civilized races by disciplined soldiers, campaigns to suppress rebellions and guerilla warfare in all parts of the world where organized armies are struggling against opponents who will not meet them in the open field’.\textsuperscript{29} The irregular nature of these conflicts called for an equally unconventional response. The absence of a clear political core and the fluidity between the civilian and the combatant called for direct assault on the population, for the strategic principle was that of ‘overawing the enemy by bold initiative and resolute action’. This meant the use


\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Small wars}, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.
of light mounted brigades or flying columns (instead of static defence), unusual tactics, a scorched earth policy, the avoidance of prolonged conventional campaigns, behind-the-lines action and, lastly bluff and bluster. For Calwell, ‘this is the way to deal with Asiatics – to go for them and to cow them by sheer force of will’.  

Calwell’s proposals on the conduct of the small war find an echo in accounts of the so-called ‘pacification’ of Punjab and the North-West Frontier from the late 1840s and of course in histories of British military campaigns during the rebellion. The attacks on the civilian populations between Allahabad and Kanpur by the re-conquering army from Banaras, the destruction of standing crops, the sack of Delhi, the recruitment and deployment of the Delhi Field Force, and the killing of the Mughal princes by Captain Hodson, were all examples of irregular warfare meant to cow the population and to engage a fluid enemy. At the same time, the theory of the small war that Calwell developed on the basis of nineteenth century colonial conflicts had, and indeed, continues to enjoy a long afterlife. As Wesseling observes:

Colonial armies were accustomed – and often compelled – to attack continuously, irrespective of their chances of success, in order to sustain the image of European superiority. It is not difficult to discover the connection between this approach and the predominant mentality of 1914-18, which focused sharply on willpower, morale and holding the offensive.

But the story of the small war, and with that of the Indian rebellion, does not end there. Calwell’s theory and practice of the small war re-appeared in 1940 in an US Marine Corps Small Wars Manual, which, with periodic updates, is still the standard handbook for counter-insurgency operations, in such diverse theatres as Vietnam, Nicaragua, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. With newer forms of imperialism on the rise, and new interventions by western states in non-western polities and societies, ‘asymmetric’ conflict between governments and non-state actors seeking to overthrow

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30 Ibid., p. 22.
31 Imperialism and War, p. 26. Wesseling goes on to observe that: ‘Colonial wars were not only exciting, they were also justified and necessary (from a social Darwinist race viewpoint). And, possibly, even more important, the colonial wars were almost always successful and colonial armies were – almost by definition – triumphant armies.’ p. 26.
32 Small Wars Manual (Washington DC: USMC, Department of the Navy, 1940)
the state with non-conventional means have become a dominant concern in strategic studies in the last two decades.\textsuperscript{33} And, as the most important new theatres of insurgency are in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, the records of colonial warfare in these and contiguous parts of the world are once again in the news, as sources of valuable information on strategy and tactics. More than ever before, contemporary British and American security policy is turning to nineteenth century irregular colonial warfare, of which the Indian rebellion is perhaps the center-piece, for lessons in the containment of terrorism, counter-insurgency, disarmament, surveillance, and the re-tailoring of small war strategy and counter-insurgency for Islamic societies. As one strategist at RAND has recently observed:

> Insurgency and counter-insurgency … have enjoyed a level of military, academic, and journalistic notice unseen since the mid-1960s. Scholars and practitioners have recently reexamined 19\textsuperscript{th}-and 20\textsuperscript{th}-century counter-insurgency campaigns waged by the United States and European colonial powers…. The professional military literature is now awash with articles on how the armed services should prepare for what the US Department of Defence refers to as “irregular warfare”, and scholars, after a long hiatus, have sought to deepen our understanding of the roles that insurgency, terrorism, and related forms of political violence play in the international security environment.\textsuperscript{34}

This new prose of counter-insurgency – to borrow the phrase from Ranajit Guha – gives us a fresh context for returning to the rebellion of 1857.\textsuperscript{35} The rebellion has all the ingredients of the contemporary insurgency-counter-insurgency scenario where conventional armies are faced with unconventional, or non-classical military situations: Traditional societies, expropriated elites, religious motivation, conceptions of religious war, loose networks of resistance, fluidity between combatants and civilians. The rich

\textsuperscript{33} The term asymmetric conflict was first used by Andrew Mack in, “The Concept of Power and Its Uses in Explaining Asymmetric Conflict”, London: Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research, 1974.


dividends of the local studies of rebel actions and motivations are already with us: it is perhaps time to look again for an aggregative reading of the rebellion, and to re-locate the event in a long history of colonial, neo-colonial and neo-conservative conflict making.

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