

Fascist Yogis: Martial Bodies and Imperial Impotence

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Abstract Between the First and Second World Wars, two retired British military officers, Francis Yeats-Brown and J. F. C. Fuller, embraced fascism and yoga. In their publications and lecture tours, they used their past experiences as soldiers in India to encourage strength, discipline, and virility. While Fuller believed that yoga could teach men to be strong and powerful leaders, Yeats-Brown celebrated yoga as a part of “Aryan” racial inheritance. This article examines both Fuller’s and Yeats-Brown’s published accounts and archival trails in order to understand the development of global masculinities within individual British lives. It reveals that their engagement with yoga was a defensive effort to appropriate the “regeneration” of martial masculinity encouraged by Indian nationalists. Claiming yoga for “great men” and “Aryan” audiences became a way to rewrite their own histories of service to the British Empire. They erased the weakness and fragility of imperial life, and replaced it with idealized bodies that were strong, disciplined, and virile. In so doing, they attempted to save imperial soldiers from political and cultural irrelevance. This reimagining used imperial hierarchies of gender and racial difference to encourage a “universal” model of martial masculinity that could restore the power of the British Empire.

On the eve of the Second World War, the former British Indian Army officer Francis Yeats-Brown wrote fondly about his three personal heroes: Mohandas Gandhi, T. E. Lawrence, and Adolf Hitler. He admired that “All three were ascetics,” a characteristic that gave them “magnetism and mastery.”¹ By highlighting these qualities, Yeats-Brown hinted at his own desire to become a “yogi.” In the 1930s, he gave lectures and published numerous accounts about his experiences with yoga, especially during his time as a soldier in India. Similarly, Major General J. F. C. Fuller, a self-proclaimed “unconventional soldier,” was a British army officer who wrote a book about yoga after serving in India. While Yeats-Brown celebrated Gandhi and Hitler, Fuller praised dictators as “blacksmiths of a return to manliness.”² By the 1930s, both Fuller and Yeats-Brown embraced yoga and British fascism, seeing the power and discipline of

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¹ Francis Yeats-Brown, “Persons and Personages: A Tory Looks at Hitler,” *Living Age* 354 (August 1938): 512–13, at 512; idem, *European Jungle* (Philadelphia, 1939), 121–22.

² J. F. C. Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier* (London, 1936), 476.

personal physical development as a model for reforming the national body. Just as yoga relied on a student's devotion to a teacher, they believed, nations should follow the wisdom of "great men." This article explores how and why yoga served as a vehicle for extreme martial masculinities that glorified strong central leadership and the ascetic virtues of struggle and strength. As the cases of Yeats-Brown and Fuller demonstrate, these currents were deeply embedded in the racial inequalities and homosocial intimacies of the imperial world.

Scholars have argued that sports such as rugby, cricket, boxing, and polo shaped cultures of fascism in Britain, yet none have examined the role of yoga as an intermediary between conservative national politics and the imperial world. Examinations of Britons who borrowed from and interpreted South Asian spiritual and bodily practices tend to focus on the political, anticolonial left or esoteric circles and sexual subcultures. At the same time, Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has shown that some fascist and physical culture movements in Britain developed in part from seemingly left-leaning bodily cultures such as vegetarianism.³ This article examines how right-wing yoga was not merely about building strong bodies but also about a specific set of imperial anxieties about race, sex, strength, and mastery. By contextualizing Fuller and Yeats-Brown's understanding of yoga within sexual and spiritual currents in Britain, India, and the wider world, this article sheds light on how British imperial soldiers felt isolated from British national politics. British soldiers' access to world travel allowed them to come face to face with the empire in ways that were often traumatic and debilitating. When they returned home, they felt a degree of political, social, and cultural impotence that could only be redeemed through rigorous physical, spiritual, racial, and gender performances.

This article focuses on two widely published authors who took leading roles in Britain's fascist movement—one a yoga expert and best-selling memoirist who inspired an Oscar nominated film and the other a prominent military historian. It places Yeats-Brown's and Fuller's published accounts in conversation with the archival trails they left behind to position both men within currents of masculinity and the body shaped by a variety of international locales. By tracking their movements across Britain, India, continental Europe, and the United States, it considers the white lies and half-truths they told to make yoga a model for British martial masculinity. By imagining European male bodies as controlled and disciplined, rather than fractured by the daily turmoil of imperial life, Fuller and Yeats-Brown envisioned an empire that was strong. This process relied on a series of "white lies" that signaled their complicity with, and ability to benefit from, colonial hierarchies of racial difference. Yoga was everything that the empire was not: controlled, disciplined, and virile.

Several scholars argue convincingly that Victorian and Edwardian masculinities were dominated by public schools, scouting movements, and sports, which relied upon the imagery of empire and militarism and laid the groundwork for British fascism.⁴ Scouting enthusiast Robert Baden-Powell encouraged teaching boys to

³ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman: Physical Culture in Interwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (October 2006): 595–610, at 605.

⁴ J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (Cambridge, 1981); Philip Mason, *The English Gentleman* (London, 1982), 70–71; Michael A. Spurr, "'Playing for Fascism': Sportsmanship, Antisemitism and the British Union of Fascists," *Patterns of Prejudice* 37, no. 4 (December 2003): 359–75; Tony Collins, "Return to Manhood:

shoot to prevent them from becoming womanly. He also celebrated outdoor life to make military recruits physically fit and maintained that sports such as polo could drive out habits like betting and drinking among military men.⁵ This disciplined militarization of boys and young men through sports encouraged team unity, imperial pride, and strong, disciplined bodies.⁶ These cultural currents found their home in British public schools, which W. H. Auden argued were similar to fascist states in that they were anti-intellectual and rooted in fear.⁷ While Auden grew up to resent and rebel against the public school ethos, those who served the empire entered into an extended state of public school life. The homosocial patterns of militarism, sport, and discipline were not merely repressive features of their adolescence but an ongoing set of ideals within and against which they wrestled as they served in military forces around the globe.

The cultural parallels between fascism and imperial military service gave many former military men precedents conducive to radical conservative politics. When W. F. Mandle studied the British Union of Fascists' national leadership in 1966 he concluded that, as Thomas Linehan explains, "the composite fascist leader in 1935 was a widely travelled, extremely restless, public-school-educated, middle-class ex-army officer in his late thirties."⁸ Yeats-Brown and Fuller certainly fit the mold, and many other military men became leading advocates of fascism. Among them were Henry Hamilton Beamish, who fought in the Boer War, settled in South Africa, and served with a South African regiment during the First World War. He was a leading critic of a supposed "Jewish world conspiracy" and formed the Britons Society in 1919 to protect the "birthright of Britons" from "aliens." The society was tied to the publication of the protofascist *Patriot* to which Fuller contributed.⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel Graham Seton Hutchison similarly started the Paladin League to oppose those "degenerates" inspired by "the metaphysics of the Bolsheviks."¹⁰ Like Fuller and Yeats-Brown, he encouraged physical culture, such as mountaineering, and the healing power of sunlight and nudism. He was banned from the British Union of Fascists but formed the National Workers' Movement, later National Workers' Party, which recruited war veterans and was fiercely anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi.¹¹ The prominence of xenophobia and appeal of fascism among army men speaks to the segregated hierarchies of military life. Military men occupied isolated and deeply hierarchical social positions in the empire, surrounded by other like-minded men. They were often closed off from the majority of the population around them and lived within segregated cantonment spaces. Despite this relatively streamlined access to privilege and power, high-achieving soldiers and officers often

The Cult of Masculinity and the British Union of Fascists," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 16, no. 4 (December 1999): 145–62; George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996), 155; Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman," 600.

⁵ P. E. McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win: Sport, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880–1935* (New York, 2008), 41; Collins, "Return to Manhood," 150.

⁶ Collins, "Return to Manhood," 146.

⁷ David Garrett Izzo, *W. H. Auden Encyclopedia* (Jefferson, 2004), 41–2.

⁸ Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester, 2000), 162.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 49–50.

¹⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, "Building a British Superman," 600, 604.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

felt frustrated by bureaucratic incompetence and isolated from the top-level decision making of imperial rule in London. Although Fuller and Yeats-Brown saw themselves as unconventional, their attraction to fascism reflected a more widespread feeling of political impotence among imperial soldiers that inspired dramatic ways of reshaping British politics.

While Fuller and Yeats-Brown exhibited patterns that were familiar among imperial soldiers, not every soldier became a best-selling author, fascist activist, or yoga enthusiast. Fuller's and Yeats-Brown's specific personal and physical anxieties shaped their later understandings of military service and masculinity and encouraged them to prove their worth as soldiers and men. Fuller spent part of his childhood in France and developed a deep admiration for Napoleon, which, combined with his personality and small stature, earned him the nickname "Boney."¹² His small frame, though, nearly prevented him from entering the Royal Military College in 1897.¹³ His service in the British army until 1933 did not quell his physical anxieties. After serving in South Africa and Ireland, he contracted enteric fever in India as "the result of climate and duty" and needed to return to England to restore his health in 1906.¹⁴ Despite these physical insecurities, Fuller's intelligence and ambition allowed him to rise to the rank of major general and become a well-respected military historian. He continued to admire great men like Napoleon and wrote numerous well-regarded historical biographies of generals, which sometimes overtly criticized Britain's military leadership.¹⁵

Like Fuller, Yeats-Brown's early life was marked by instability and bodily anxiety. Born to Irish parents, Yeats-Brown lived in Italy, Germany, the United States, and Britain before entering the Royal Military College at Sandhurst in 1904.¹⁶ He arrived in India in December 1905 and, like Fuller, found life in India extremely challenging. He was frequently ill, and his superior officers claimed that this caused him to miss an excessive amount of squadron training.¹⁷ During his service in India, he confided to his diary in 1909 that his father had failed to teach him "to be manly," which caused him to grow up "useless mentally & physically."¹⁸ As a cavalry officer in India, he suffered numerous debilitating falls from horses. During the First World War he endured years as a prisoner of war in Turkey, when he was "struck with an axe" on his lower back.¹⁹ These physical injuries fractured his body to such a degree that he retired early in 1924.²⁰

¹² J. F. C. Fuller to Walter Fuller, 18 February 1906, IV/3/1393, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (hereafter LHCMA).

¹³ In 1897 his height was 64 inches, his weight 117 pounds, and his chest 33 inches. Medical officials instructed him that his admission to the Royal Military College was subject to his meeting the minimum bodily standards before completing his course. "War Office, Form G," 30 August 1897, J. F. C. Fuller Papers, Box 1, Envelope 2, Rutgers University Archives and Special Collections (hereafter RUASC).

¹⁴ "Proceedings of a Board of Medical Officers," 2 March 1906, Fuller Papers, Box 1, Envelope 2, RUASC.

¹⁵ C. B. F. F. to J. F. C. Fuller, 29 July 1929, Fuller Papers, Box 2, Envelope 12, RUASC.

¹⁶ Evelyn Wrench, *Francis Yeats-Brown* (London, 1948), 7–8, 12.

¹⁷ Francis Yeats-Brown, unpublished diary, entries for 27 November 1908 and 17 February 1909, diary 7 of 23, Francis Yeats-Brown Papers, Harry Ransom Center Archives, University of Texas (hereafter HRC).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, entry for 30 July 1909.

¹⁹ Regarding being hit by an axe during the war, see his Medical forms labeled "Statement by an Officer or Warrant Officer Concerning His Own Case," Army Form B-179B, 20 December 1921, HRC.

²⁰ "Record of Officers' Services, Indian Army," HRC.

By the time Fuller and Yeats-Brown arrived in India, they had specific physical anxieties that influenced their interests in physical culture. While Fuller was anxious about his “Boney” stature and tendency to become ill, Yeats-Brown worried about being “useless” and unmanly. Rather than curing their physical shortcomings and masculine anxieties, experience as soldiers in India exacerbated them. In a letter to his father, Fuller lamented that in Lucknow, one man went mad, another had a bad case of heatstroke, and three more died in quick succession, the last of enteric fever.²¹ Due to this tragic state of affairs, Fuller complained that “English doctors really are the most consummate asses.”²² The fallibility of British physiques was a well-known element of daily imperial life and instilled a lack of faith in British institutions among soldiers who felt threatened by their own bodies. Both Fuller and Yeats-Brown found little solace in sports.²³ As Fuller recalled, “[s]port never obsessed me as it does most soldiers,” while Yeats-Brown admitted, “I was hopeless at cricket and too slow for football.”²⁴ Yeats-Brown’s life as a cavalry officer enabled him to participate in polo and pigsticking, but he hardly lived up to the idealized image of sturdy and robust gentleman polo player in India.²⁵ Instead, he described several occasions when he played polo intoxicated or made an unfavorable showing because he was drained by fever and diarrhea. He injured his arm in one polo accident, and a debilitating fall during another in 1922 contributed to his early retirement.²⁶ When Fuller and Yeats-Brown left India and returned to England, they were eager to rewrite their personal histories of imperial weakness. While Fuller was torn between his ambitions and his “Boney” Napoleonic body unsuited to the rigors of life in India—Yeats-Brown wanted to come to terms with his “unmanly” upbringing and dramatic physical fragmentation.

CONTESTS OF MASCULINITY IN BRITISH INDIA

Fuller’s and Yeats-Brown’s experiences of being physically weakened by imperial service were alarmingly common and spoke to deeper anxieties within the British Empire. Men who had lived and served in the empire were fragile and physically weak—suffering from frequent illness, disease, and the effects of extreme weather conditions. Soldiers embarking for India received publications such as *Our Indian Empire*, which contained warnings to avoid malaria, dysentery, enteric fever, cholera, venereal disease, and typhoid. Such documents detailed what soldiers

²¹ J. F. C. Fuller to Father, 8 June 1905, IV/3/128a, LHCMA.

²² J. F. C. Fuller to Mother, 1 June 1905, IV/3/127, LHCMA.

²³ Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, 2001), 85, 101; Joseph Alter, “Yoga at the Fin de Siècle: Muscular Christianity with a ‘Hindu’ Twist,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 5 (August 2006): 759–76, at 762–63; Joseph Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism: Hindu Masculinity and Muscular Christianity,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 3 (July 2004): 497–534, at 517, 522.

²⁴ Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*, 16; Francis Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (New York, 1930), 46. See also Wrench, *Francis Yeats-Brown*, 9, quoting Yeats-Brown: “I was short-sighted and that I was no good at cricket.”

²⁵ McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win*, 56.

²⁶ About his arm, see Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 258. For illness while playing, see Yeats-Brown, unpublished diary, entries for 10 and 27 November 1908, 12 January 1909, HRC. For polo and retirement, see Evelyn Wrench, *Francis Yeats-Brown*, 70–71.

could and could not eat and drink, how to stay clean, and with whom to avoid having sex.²⁷ Within Britain, concerns about the effects of the urban environment, immigration, and eugenics in the early twentieth century deepened fears about the strength of the nation at home and across the empire.²⁸ The difficulty of finding suitable recruits during the Boer War and the return of disabled and injured youth after the First World War intensified national disquiet.²⁹ Making matters worse, British soldiers increasingly came face to face with their own physical inadequacies compared to South Asian men. British soldiers who served in India during the 1920s and 1930s noted the frequency with which Indian soldiers requested to wrestle or tried to “show off” by swinging large jori clubs.³⁰ British soldiers often declined participating in Indian sporting events, knowing that Indian soldiers would beat them at wrestling or have clubs that were “too big” for them to handle.³¹

The presence of impressive sportsmen in the ranks of the Indian Army reflected a growing trend in South Asia to actively cultivate cultures of strength and martial masculinity in the first decades of the twentieth century. Believing that South Asian bodies had been emasculated through years of colonialism, several late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century South Asian activists promoted physical culture. Some embraced models supported by the colonial state such as gymnasiums, playing fields, and recruitment offices as spaces in which to restore their masculine virility. The international physical culturist Swami Vivekananda even famously exalted football and bodybuilding as superior forms of exercise to yoga.³² Yet others reinterpreted and revitalized South Asian body cultures, such as wrestling akharas or the alchemical Siddha tradition, which emphasized tantric sex, consumption of liquids, and yogic physical postures in the quest for immortality. South Asian Muslims exalted Sufi saints who emphasized breath and postures to control the body.³³ These revitalized cultures pushed back against European “Orientalists” of the nineteenth century, including Max Müller, who had condemned “postures and tortures” for degrading “truly philosophical” systems such as yoga. A growing admiration for European “gymnastics” inspired later physical culture experts to reexamine and fully embrace the physical, rather than philosophical or alchemical, side of yoga. Indian men such as S. C. Vasu and Swami Abhedananda attempted to reclaim yogis as legitimate physical culturists for English-speaking audiences. Vinayak Damodar

²⁷ See for example, *Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India* (London, undated [c. 1911–12]), 76, 99, 102, 112–13.

²⁸ Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism,” 519.

²⁹ Seth Koven, “Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain,” *American Historical Review* 99, no. 4 (October 1994): 1167–202; Joanna Bourke, “Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of ‘Shell-Shocked’ Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914–39,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 1 (January 2000): 57–69; Susan Kent, *Aftershocks: The Politics of Trauma in Britain, 1918–1931* (New York, 2009), 5–6.

³⁰ Charles Francis Crossland, “Interview by Conrad Wood,” 16 August 1976, interview number 797, Reel 3, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM). William Homer, “Interview by Conrad Wood,” 4 August 1976, interview number 792, Reel 11, IWM.

³¹ Crossland, Reel 3, IWM.

³² Mark Singleton, *Yoga Body: The Origins of Modern Posture Practice* (Oxford, 2010), 71.

³³ *Ibid.*, 96; James H. Mills and Satadru Sen, *The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (London, 2004); David White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago, 1998); Nile Green, “Breathing in India, c. 1890,” *Modern Asian Studies* 42, no. 2/3 (March 2008): 283–315, at 285.

Savarkar's *Indian War of Independence* (1909) went even further by exalting the ascetic virtues and martial spirit of the men who blended spiritual and secular authority in the 1857 uprising. This inspired interwar authors such as J. N. Farquhar and George Weston Briggs to similarly romanticize those warrior ascetics who had challenged British imperial rule.³⁴

The resurgence of physical culture in South Asia in the early twentieth century suggested that rather than being beacons of shame and condemnation, “yogis” could be useful to a resurgent and martial Hindu nationalism. In the 1920s, nationalist leaders reinvented yoga as an indigenous, and in some cases particularly “Hindu,” form of exercise to help strengthen the population to fight against colonialism.³⁵ In the interwar period, the physical culture movement in Bengal became a base of anticolonial and terrorist organizations against the British Empire, while prominent yoga clubs in Mysore helped revitalize forms of martial yoga. Individuals such as Tiruka, also known as Sri Raghavendra Rao, traveled across India as itinerant gurus to spread yogic physical culture and martial arts, while Aurobindo Ghose, imprisoned as an advocate of anticolonial violence after the partition of Bengal in 1905, became a revolutionary yogi between the wars. The rise of vigorous Indian nationalists underlined the willful destruction of the “effeminate Bengali” and the “manly Englishman,” imagined by nineteenth-century British officials.³⁶

Like the Hindu nationalists, Yeats-Brown and Fuller believed that yoga could be a vehicle for restoring martial strength and masculine control. They combined Indian nationalist demands for “regeneration” with European physical culture, which celebrated choreography, rhythmic movement, and control over the nerves.³⁷ Yeats-Brown felt that the true value of yoga was providing “nervous control and mental peace here on earth” to remedy the modern world full of “neurotics and mental deficiencies owing to the increasing strain of modern life.”³⁸ He assured his readers that practitioners of yoga could gain power over “the bowels, then [control] of the nervous system, then of the brain, and finally of the whole co-ordinated and ensouled personality.”³⁹ Fuller agreed that yoga could provide “a system of self-control: the control of the body, of the instincts, and finally of mind and soul.”⁴⁰ Yoga offered

³⁴ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 43, 46–47, 102; Joseph Alter, “Yoga at the Fin de Siècle,” 765; Vinayak Chaturvedi, “Rethinking Knowledge with Action: V. D. Savarkar, the Bhagavad Gita, and Histories of Warfare,” *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 2 (August 2010): 417–35; Swami Abhedananda, *How to Be a Yogi* (New York, 1903); W. R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (Cambridge, 2006), 64, 238; George Weston Briggs, *Gorakhmāth and the Kānpṛaṭa Yogīs* (London, 1938); J. N. Farquhar, “The Fighting Ascetics of India,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 9, no. 2 (July 1925): 431–52.

³⁵ Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism,” 509; Nile Green, “Breathing in India,” 288–89; Dominik Wujastyk, *The Roots of Ayurveda* (New York, 1998); idem, “The Path to Liberation through Yogic Mindfulness in Early Ayurveda,” in *Yoga in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton, 2011), 31–42, at 34.

³⁶ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 6, 9, 103–4, 176. See the famous nineteenth-century dichotomy explored in Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995). The diversity of nationalist martial bodies in India is also explored in Christopher Pinney, “The Body and the Bomb: Technologies of Modernity in Colonial India,” in *Picturing the Nation: Iconographies of Modern India*, ed. Richard H. Davis (Hyderabad, 2007), 51–64.

³⁷ Alter, “Indian Clubs and Colonialism,” 519–21.

³⁸ Francis Yeats-Brown, “Yoga’s Path to Heaven,” *Nash’s Pall Mall Magazine* 88, no. 462 (November 1931): 44–47, continued on page 101, at 101.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*, 17.

the strength, control, and virile masculinity that had eluded them—and many other soldiers—in India.

SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL REVIVAL BETWEEN THE WARS

Yeats-Brown's and Fuller's belief that yoga was a method of attaining control and discipline resonated as a cogent political philosophy. Yeats-Brown argued that one guru, Bhagawan Sri, told him after the First World War that wars were like fevers, which came when the body was diseased and were a necessary alternative to death.⁴¹ This made Yeats-Brown wonder if the solution was “[a] national as well as a personal Yoga,” to which Bhagawan Sri replied, “There is no difference, Sahib. A body whose units are in harmony is at peace with all the world.”⁴² The best way to achieve this “harmony” was by imitating the strength and wisdom of great leaders. Fuller argued that “Yoga philosophy” produced the “most influential of masters—Gotâma, Christ and Mahomet, whose mastery over the Unknowable has been the driving force of nations.”⁴³ Yeats-Brown similarly believed that “Christ himself was a Yogi” and was certain that “You may be a Christian, a Budhist [*sic*], a Moslem, or a Hindu, and yet a student of Yoga” because yoga was above all else a system of exercise.⁴⁴ In order for the control and mastery of these great men to fully flower, all practitioners needed to maintain strict devotion. Fuller argued that it was necessary to find “a Guru, or teacher, to whom the disciple (Chela) must entirely devote himself.”⁴⁵ Yeats-Brown also praised this unconditional dedication, arguing that gurus “exact a rigorous discipline from their pupils.”⁴⁶ Both Fuller and Yeats-Brown used famous religious leaders to claim that yoga was a source of genius for wise men and great ideas. They also praised yoga as a practice primarily concerned with exclusivity, discipline, and unquestioning dedication. Their willingness to call upon great spiritual leaders for inspiration indicated broader patterns of reevaluating “religious” ideas between the wars.

By representing yoga as Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu, Fuller and Yeats-Brown hinted at the influence of the Theosophical Society on their attraction to the practice. The Theosophical Society, whose popularity peaked in 1918, combined spiritualism, Christianity, and the occult with orientalist admiration for “Indian religion.” It was one among many intellectual and esoteric circles prior to the First World War that felt that Europe was on the cusp of a “mystic” or “spiritual” revival.⁴⁷ During and after the war many found solace in spiritualism, which

⁴¹ Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 259.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 259–60.

⁴³ J. F. C. Fuller, *Yoga: A Study of the Mystical Philosophy of the Brahmins and Buddhists* (London, 1925), vii–viii.

⁴⁴ Francis Yeats-Brown, “Yoga—the Indian Path to Bliss,” unpublished and undated draft lecture or article, HRC. According to the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 18 September 1932, 3, Yeats-Brown was planning to give a lecture with the same title to the Milwaukee Friday morning series of the Women’s Club of Wisconsin. Other speakers that year included Amelia Earhart and William Butler Yeats. Francis Yeats-Brown, *Yoga Explained* (New York, 1937), 10–11.

⁴⁵ Fuller, *Yoga*, 46.

⁴⁶ Yeats-Brown, “Yoga’s Path to Heaven,” 44, 47.

⁴⁷ Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004), 17, 29.

promised communication with those who had died in the conflict.⁴⁸ Discontent with the postwar status quo left many religious “seekers” who combined different systems of belief in, as Jane Shaw argues, a “perpetual quest for truth.”⁴⁹ This shifted movements such as theosophy from peripheral and esoteric circles to a feature of mainstream personal and popular experimentation. Fuller cited the role of Theosophists in having “‘discovered’ spiritual India.” In line with Theosophists, he called yoga a “science” and discussed its similarities to other religious systems, encouraging people to embrace it objectively.⁵⁰ Yeats-Brown stated that he first came to yoga in India through the Theosophical Society, where he sat at the feet of theosophical leader Annie Besant and conversed with her international following.⁵¹ While Fuller’s and Yeats-Brown’s admiration for Theosophy in their explorations of yoga echoed wider trends of seeking new answers after the First World War, their journeys to yoga were far less straightforward than they claimed.

Writing between the wars, Fuller suggested that, in addition to the Theosophical Society, his military service in India had a profound influence on his attraction to yoga. His published works maintained that as a soldier in India he studied “the Vedas and the Upanishads” and “took a deep interest in the Yoga philosophy” after meeting “holy men, yogis, advanced radicals ... and various members of the Arya Samaj.”⁵² In his 1925 book *Yoga* he cited publications by South Asian men but never named any of the “yogis” with whom he had these transformative conversations. Unlike his publications, however, Fuller’s unpublished letters and diaries suggest that his immersion in yoga came less from conversing with unnamed Indian leaders than through his connections to the British occult. While sick with enteric fever in Lucknow in 1905, he read the poetic works of occultist and magician Aleister Crowley. He used his spare time to enter an essay contest that promised a reward of one hundred pounds and the chance to write a review of Crowley’s works. This started a fruitful correspondence between the two men. Initially, Fuller worried that he was an unworthy pupil, complaining in 1906 that Crowley did not want to discuss yoga with him. Crowley responded that “I think you are one of the few people in this world worth talking to about it.”⁵³ Emboldened by the attention and praise that Crowley gave him, Fuller won the essay contest. When he returned to England on medical leave from India, he quickly married a German woman called Sonia in December 1906 and established an intimate

⁴⁸ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1995), 55, 62, 64.

⁴⁹ Jane Shaw, *Octavia, Daughter of God: The Story of a Female Messiah and Her Followers* (Yale, 2011), 126; Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 17, 29.

⁵⁰ Fuller, *Yoga*, v. He explains, “In this book it is my intention to abide by facts and simultaneously introduce sufficient cross references to other mystical systems, such as Western Magic and the Qabalah, to show that Yoga is one of a series of means of deliverance from worldly illusions,” which similarly find parallels in “Christian Mysticism, Quietism, Buddhism, Taoism and Sufiism” that have “identical” spiritual meaning.

⁵¹ Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 38–39, 67.

⁵² Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*, 17–18.

⁵³ Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 16 October 1906, IV/12/5a-d, LHCMA.

friendship with Crowley.⁵⁴ This time on leave enabled him to write a full-length study of his new spiritual guide in 1907. The result, entitled *The Star in the West*, became a useful and widely distributed tool for recruiting other men to his new master.⁵⁵ “Boney” Fuller collaborated with Crowley on the occult periodical the *Equinox*, which ran from 1909 to 1913.⁵⁶ His physical weakness in India provided him with a new path to spiritual mastery.

Fuller’s association with Crowley placed him on a fulfilling and ambitious, if also potentially risky, life course. In *The Star in the West*, Fuller declared, “The yogi proposes to himself no less a task than to master the entire universe.”⁵⁷ Fuller’s vision of mastery and the potential of yoga extended far beyond reforming the “self.” He believed that Crowley was an ideal guide, as no one could deny the “superabundance of his genius.”⁵⁸ Despite his admiration, Fuller had some concerns about Crowley’s tendency to portray himself with feminine language. He found it strange that Crowley expressed that “[his] womb is pregnant with mad moons and suns,” stating that “we can hardly agree to endow so virile a master with so feminine an organ.” However, Fuller conceded, “we can attribute something very like it to his brain. Pregnant it certainly is.”⁵⁹ With a potent teacher containing a “virile” nature and a desire to “master the entire universe,” Fuller’s initial experience with yoga was fused with extreme devotion to masculine authority. By 1910, Fuller received letters of thanks from individuals who had taken his advice about breathing exercises in *Equinox*, becoming a master himself over the bodies and minds of others.⁶⁰

Despite Fuller’s early enthusiasm for Crowley, their relationship eventually faced considerable strain. Writing about this partnership years after Crowley’s death, Fuller stated that he had ended their friendship in 1910 due to the increasing inquiries about the nature of Crowley’s spiritual experimentation and the legal opposition challenging his credibility.⁶¹ During Crowley’s troubles, H. E. Inman questioned Fuller’s sudden abandonment of his “master,” stating that “recognising the many sterling qualities in his character, which you in the past have so fully testified to, I must confess to feeling surprised at the present attitude taken up and can only surmise that there are underlying reasons sufficiently strong to cause you to come to such a decision.” Inman said, “I do not like the idea of deserting a man when he is down unless he has done things which a man cannot support.”⁶² Crowley, who during their friendship had played upon Fuller’s delusions of grandeur by

⁵⁴ “Certified Copy of an Entry of Marriage,” 4 December 1906. Crowley states that Fuller and he had been “intimate friends” while their relationship was ending. Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 17 August 1911, IV/12/75, LHCMA.

⁵⁵ Tobias Churton, *Aleister Crowley: The Biography. Spiritual Revolutionary, Romantic Explorer, Occult Master and Spy* (Oxford, 2014), 130.

⁵⁶ Mark S. Morrisson, “The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 31, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 1–22, at 16.

⁵⁷ J. F. C. Fuller, *The Star in The West: A Critical Essay upon the Works of Aleister Crowley* (London, 1907), 292.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ See, for example, Harold J. Lloyd to Captain Fuller, 7 September 1910, IV/12/56/2, LHCMA.

⁶¹ Fuller, “Bibliotheca Crowleyana,” 1966, Fuller Papers, Box 5, Envelope 18, 8, RUASC.

⁶² H. E. Inman to J. F. C. Fuller,” 29 January 1911, IV/12/67a, LHCMA.

calling him “Napoleon Fuller,” compared his abandonment to Napoleon running away from the fight at Waterloo.⁶³

When Fuller wrote about the dissolution of his relationship with Crowley, he failed to discuss that by 1909, Crowley had entered into guru-disciple relationships with men that negotiated the occult power of same-sex desire.⁶⁴ More tellingly, Fuller played an important role in this transition. Fuller recommended that Crowley grow acquainted with Victor Neuberg, a young Cambridge undergraduate poet who rebelled against conventional religion. Neuberg became one of Crowley’s favorite disciples, enduring humiliating initiation ceremonies while naked and traveling into the desert with Crowley to have ritualized sex in 1909. Crowley’s wife, Rose, disparagingly referred to him as “Newbugger.” When Crowley reached an extreme state of ecstasy during one “hatha yoga” experiment by combining sex and ritual, he sang out loud on the streets of Piccadilly. Fuller stepped in to prevent him from preaching at the Marble Arch.⁶⁵ Fuller’s time at *Equinox* included some of Crowley’s most bold and transformative years in expressing his sexualized practice. In *The World’s Tragedy* (1910), Crowley praised sodomy. That same year he joined the Ordo Templi Orientis, led by Theodor Reuss, who emphasized the importance of sexual magic. Crowley declared that this was the most powerful form of magic and at times gave elaborate descriptions of sodomy and masturbation.⁶⁶ However, Crowley’s “legal” difficulties in 1910 stemmed from his performance entitled the “Rites of Eleusis” in London’s Caxton Hall, designed to inspire “religious ecstasy” in the audience. De Wend Fenton, a journalist of the scandal-seeking *Looking Glass*, reported that the lights were switched out during the performance and that he was kissed by someone with a mustache. Fenton alleged that the reason for Crowley’s divorce was adultery.⁶⁷ When Crowley declined to sue for libel, he lost Fuller’s confidence.

With a blooming army career ahead of him and his own cohort of adoring fans, Fuller may have felt that Crowley’s inability—or unwillingness—to protect himself from scandals tied to sexual and spiritual experimentation could have been professionally damaging. Fuller failed to mention Crowley in both his 1936 memoir and his 1925 study, *Yōga*.⁶⁸ He did, however, condemn an unnamed “potent but middle-class Magician—St. Shamefaced Sex.” He found it most unfortunate that “the great science of Yoga has not remained unpolluted by his breath.”⁶⁹ Even though fifteen years had passed between the end of his friendship with Crowley and the publication of *Yōga*, Fuller still found it dangerous to admit that he had once been a disciple of this controversial master. Only in 1966, many years after

⁶³ For Napoleon Fuller see Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, undated, IV/12/42, LHCMA; for Waterloo, see Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 2 May 1911, IV/12/73, LHCMA.

⁶⁴ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 186–220.

⁶⁵ Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 129–30, 139, 142, 150.

⁶⁶ Hugh Urban, “The Yoga of Sex: Tantra, Orientalism, and Sex Magic in the Ordo Templi Orientis,” in *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden, 2008), 401–43, at 428, 432–33.

⁶⁷ Churton, *Aleister Crowley*, 164.

⁶⁸ Despite this omission, Brian Holden Reid, in his single reference to Fuller’s 1925 work, *Yōga*, states that it was based on Fuller’s biography of Crowley. Brian Holden Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller: Military Thinker* (New York, 1987).

⁶⁹ Fuller, *Yōga*, 53.

Crowley's death and after Fuller had established himself as a prominent military historian, Fuller explained that he still found Crowley a "genius." However, this characteristic was qualified with the term "unbalanced."⁷⁰

Despite Fuller's reluctance to stand by Crowley during a period of spiritual and sexual scandal, his own early writings suggest that he was extremely interested in these topics. His "Treasure House of Images," composed under Crowley's guidance, was a deeply eroticized exaltation of faith, ritual, and devotion. As a young man in India, Fuller condemned "the old prudery and shame of the phallic Jehovah" and desired to "tear off" "[t]he mystic fig-leaf" which is an "unnatural emblem of shame" and instead "stand naked and supine in all the glory and consummation of perfect Nature."⁷¹ In a letter to his brother he chastised the "the gilded virginity of the English."⁷² His correspondence with Crowley similarly engaged with sexual matters, such as when Crowley asked Fuller, "Would you deny a phallus to anyone not a[n occult] Zelator?" Crowley expressed relief that Fuller had never visited the houses of prostitution at Port Said.⁷³ In 1907, Crowley asked Fuller if he could use his servants' quarters but asked for him to keep his whereabouts unknown, for "I would be doing Yoga of sorts."⁷⁴ Crowley doubted that Fuller's wife, Sonia, "would interfere with our work."⁷⁵ The next year, when Crowley was having difficulties with his own wife, Rose, he confided to Fuller, "I don't think we should shut our eyes to the fact that I am now a batchelor [*sic*] to all rituals and purposes."⁷⁶ Crowley reminded Fuller in 1911 that they had been "intimate friends," and in 1921, he urged reconciliation by stating that their friendship had been "the best thing in my life of that kind."⁷⁷ Fuller did not respond.

(HOMO)SEXUAL INTIMACIES

Fuller's reluctance to associate with Crowley in the 1920s, despite his own youthful interest in undermining English sexual orthodoxy, speaks to a growing perception in Britain during the interwar years that European and American practitioners of non-Christian traditions were sexually and spiritually corrupt. This condemnation built upon late nineteenth-century psychological theories of "inversion" and "deviance," which linked same-sex desire to supposedly "primitive" beliefs and spiritual mysticism.⁷⁸ By the early twentieth century, journalists, novelists, and filmmakers sensationalized the supposed sexual power that spiritually powerful men exercised over

⁷⁰ Fuller, "Bibliotheca Crowleyana," 2.

⁷¹ Fuller to Grandpa, 24 December 1903, LHCMA.

⁷² Fuller to Walter, 18 February 1906, IV/3/1393, LHCMA.

⁷³ Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 28 October 1910, IV/12/58, LHCMA; Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 3 August 1906, IV/12/3a-c, LHCMA.

⁷⁴ Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 9 September 1907, IV/12/10a-b, LHCMA.

⁷⁵ Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, undated, IV/12/30a, LHCMA.

⁷⁶ Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 23 May 1908, IV/12/15a, LHCMA.

⁷⁷ Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, 17 August 1911, IV/12/75, LHCMA; Aleister Crowley to J. F. C. Fuller, undated, IV/12/79, LHCMA. A caption on the envelope accompanying this letter states that it was "Handed to me at the War Office by an emissary from Crowley in 1921 in this filthy condition."

⁷⁸ Joy Dixon, "Dark Ecstasies": Sex, Mysticism and Psychology in Early Twentieth-Century England," *Gender and History* 25, no. 3 (November 2013): 652-67, at 663.

willing and unwilling women and men. Within the Theosophical Society, rumors and scandals flourished as members notoriously explored the spiritual potential of homosexuality and gender fluidity through reincarnation. Notoriety surrounded the Theosophical Society after leader Charles Leadbeater was readmitted into the society in 1907 despite advocating, and possibly practicing, masturbation among young boys.⁷⁹ In the years after the First World War, when many worried about sexual intimacy between globally mobile young men and the prominence of venereal disease, many protested the “dangers” of guru-disciple relationships for facilitating sexual intimacy between men. Meanwhile, authors such as Edward Carpenter, E. M. Forster, and Christopher Isherwood used the language of the guru-disciple relationship to explore South Asian spiritual ideas and same-sex desire. By the 1930s, with the aid of Freud’s *Civilisation and Its Discontents* (1930), critics were quick to label Carpenter’s brand of sexual mysticism as both sexually and spiritually deviant. Likewise, journalists, filmmakers and artists found it all too easy to mock Crowley’s interest in magic for explicitly investigating “exotic” forms of sexuality largely considered taboo.⁸⁰

By the 1920s and 1930s, Fuller was no longer a young man eager to pull off the “fig leaf,” but a married, high-ranking army officer whose career after the First World War was on a fast track. Unlike Carpenter, Isherwood, or Forster, whose interest in non-Christian spirituality and same-sex desire found sympathizers among their socialist, pacifist, and anti-imperial circles, Fuller’s immersion in the pro-imperial and militaristic political right left little flexibility for any hint of sexual profligacy. Many British fascists targeted intellectuals for being gender “confused,” condemning “masculine” women and “feminine” men, using terms such as “pink” and “pansy” to demonize and draw parallels between Marxists and homosexuals.⁸¹ Such cultural stereotypes haunted Fuller’s works on yoga and his former association with Crowley.

Adding fuel to the international condemnation of same-sex desire and spiritual experimentation was Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* (1927), which targeted a supposedly “oversexed Hindu culture” to argue for the necessity of imperial rule. She alleged that sex between men and masturbation were commonplace in India and that parents frequently allowed older men to use their children as sexual objects.⁸² Fuller supported Mayo’s claims, arguing that India was held back by Hinduism, which was “through and through saturated with sexuality” and had “degraded the sublimity of her religion.”⁸³ Hindu nationalist groups such as the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha fought back against such accusations. Hindi literature such as Ugra’s *Chaklet* and Madhavacharya’s translation of the *Kamasutra* (both 1927)

⁷⁹ Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore, 2001), 94, 97, 112, 118.

⁸⁰ Antony Copley, *A Spiritual Bloomsbury: Hinduism and Homosexuality in the Lives and Writings of Edward Carpenter, E. M. Forster, and Christopher Isherwood* (Lanham, 2006); Matthew Thompson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2006), 78; Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 112–16; Joy Dixon, “‘Out of Your Clinging Kisses ... I Create a New World’: Sexuality and Spirituality in the Work of Edward Carpenter,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult*, ed. Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willburn (Farnham, 2012), 143–64, at 148.

⁸¹ Collins, “Return to Manhood,” 149.

⁸² Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, 2006), 62, 112.

⁸³ J. F. C. Fuller, *India in Revolt* (London, 1931), 222.

gave lengthy descriptions of sexual encounters between men, ostensibly in an effort to condemn such practices and urge men to learn the “proper” forms of sexual contact.⁸⁴ Selections from Mayo’s text were translated into Indian periodicals alongside lurid discussions of Western sexual practices to indicate that corrupt imperial rule, rather than “Hindu” customs, were to blame for homosexual activity.⁸⁵ Whatever the cause, for many British, American, and Indian audiences, sex between men in the late 1920s and 1930s was shorthand for moral corruption and political impotence.

YEATS-BROWN AND “CROSS-SEXED” YOGIS

Despite growing international backlash against same-sex desire and effeminacy, Yeats-Brown was comfortable blurring the lines between masculinity and femininity in his discussions of yoga well into the 1930s. He described female “Yogis” as being “of a masculine type” and argued that male yogis possessed “the rounded thighs and full hips of effeminacy.”⁸⁶ Rather than condemning them, he admired “this cross-sexed type, this median individual, neither quite man nor quite woman” and argued that “[i]ntroverts and contemplatives sometimes tend to bisexuality; as if humanity might be trying to evolve a higher type, independent of the terrific stresses of the sexual instinct.”⁸⁷ He applied this gender fluidity to himself, for example, when he described walking among Yoga practitioners in India in *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1931). He thought, “I have been that girl ... She is myself in another incarnation. Surely she will recognize her poor kinsman?”⁸⁸ This willingness to see esoteric practice as physically transformative was well entrenched in British theosophical circles, which maintained that people could change from one sex to another during the process of reincarnation.⁸⁹ Yet Yeats-Brown’s willingness to embrace yoga as an expression of sexual and gender fluidity was equally dependent upon his experiences with imperial military and public school life—the paragons of British masculinity—as it was on British esoteric subcultures.

Yeats-Brown’s desire to question gender binaries and exalt “bisexuality” reflected his own experimentation, uncertainty, and fascination with perceived boundaries of gender and sex. Although his early years in India made him fear that he was not “manly,” he gradually embraced his own “feminine” side. His fellow soldiers remembered that he had a “girlish” appearance and made “an extremely good-looking and attractive girl” when he “dressed up for the Fancy Ball.”⁹⁰ When he became a best-selling memoirist and published his account of being a prisoner of war in Turkey, Yeats-Brown included a photo of himself in women’s clothing, which he

⁸⁴ Ruth Vanita, “The *Kamasutra* in the Twentieth Century,” in *Same-Sex Love in India. Readings from Literature and History*, ed. Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai (New York, 2000), 237. See also Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity and Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India* (New York, 2002); Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 62.

⁸⁵ Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 24, 110, 257.

⁸⁶ Francis Yeats-Brown, *Lancer at Large* (New York, 1937), 61.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 129.

⁸⁹ Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, 113.

⁹⁰ These were recollections of Sir Alan Hartley quoted in Wrench, *Francis Yeats-Brown*, 20.

donned to make his escape.⁹¹ As a former public school boy, Yeats-Brown claimed that he endured “miserable” years at Harrow, and he was undoubtedly familiar with the widespread perception that the homosocial organization of public schools facilitated sexual intimacy between boys. The practice of “fagging” even enabled older boys to “enslave” younger boys sexually. In some cases, this intimacy was encouraged or expected, forging secret bonds between men who would rule the country and empire. The practice also hoped to “cure” men of such desires at a young age and ease their transition to heterosexual adulthood.⁹² Rather than opening him up to opportunities for heterosexual socialization, however, imperial service deepened his immersion in homosocial spaces.

Like many other men, Yeats-Brown found it difficult to get access to women after the closure of regimental brothels, leaving him to claim in his memoir, “[m]y life was as sexless as any monk’s.”⁹³ As Philippa Levine has suggested, however, the extensive regulation of prostitution and venereal disease among soldiers hid deeper concerns about situational homosexuality in barracks that lacked privacy and opportunities for recreation.⁹⁴ In fact, the army manual providing “hints for soldiers” proceeding to India warned soldiers firmly against venereal disease, by describing it as “contracted by sexual intercourse with diseased women.” Although it recommended to “avoid sexual intercourse” generally as a “chief means of prevention,” its condemnation of female prostitutes may have inadvertently left an imaginative space wherein sex with men might leave them unaffected.⁹⁵ In fact, according to Yeats-Brown’s 1909 diary, a heavy night of drinking resulted in having his britches pulled off by another soldier. He then looked into another man’s bungalow only to find that “he didn’t want me.”⁹⁶

As several scholars have argued, locating evidence of same-sex activity in the archives, especially between soldiers, is in and of itself a challenging task. Court-martials for crimes involving “sodomy” were often either not carried out or were handled internally without leaving an institutional record. Many men received punishments only when they committed some other unrelated offence.⁹⁷ Anjali Arondekar has argued that military officials sometimes used the titillating scandal of sex between men to cover up instances of imperial mismanagement or atrocities of governance.⁹⁸ Skating the boundaries between homosocial and homosexual, Yeats-Brown’s early years in India ranged from dressing as a woman to possibly imitating the ostensibly safe sexual release of the scarce British women, both of which were well entrenched in British military and public school life. Yet being an Indian cavalry officer placed him more deeply in contact with sexual anxieties of British

⁹¹ Francis Yeats-Brown, *Caught by the Turks* (New York, 1920).

⁹² See for example Jennifer S. Kushnier, “Educating Boys to Be Queer: Braddon’s ‘Lady Audley’s Secret,’” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30, no. 1 (March 2002): 61–75.

⁹³ Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 26, 67.

⁹⁴ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2003), 272, 292, 326; Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India* (Durham, 2009), 40.

⁹⁵ India Army General Staff, *Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and Some Hints for the Use of Soldiers Proceeding to India* (London, 1932), 113.

⁹⁶ Yeats-Brown, unpublished diary, entry for 2 November 1908, HRC.

⁹⁷ Many thanks to Erica Wald for our ongoing conversation on this subject.

⁹⁸ Arondekar, *For the Record*, 39.

rule in South Asia. Richard Francis Burton claimed that sodomy and circumcision were “vices specific to Muslims” and supported the heavy recruitment of Hindu soldiers because they “hold pederasty in abhorrence.”⁹⁹ Yet by the twentieth century, a shift in recruiting emphasized the Panjab province dominated by Sikh and Muslim soldiers whom British officials believed were more likely to perform sodomy because of their virile and rugged life on the frontiers.¹⁰⁰ Yeats-Brown’s prewar imperial encounters therefore represented a continuation of the closed-door homosocial sexual intimacy and gender fluidity enabled both by military spaces and public schools. These cultural patterns met with a perceived greater availability and opportunity for homosexual encounters in British India.

Yeats-Brown’s prewar tendency to have his “britches pulled off,” or dress like a girl for the amusement of his fellow soldiers, left him with a complex understanding of sex and gender deeply rooted in his experience of empire. This took a more traumatic form when he was shot down as a pilot and captured by Turkish forces during the First World War. He endured a term at a prison camp known for its unsanitary conditions, lack of food, and severe forms of torture. After the war was over, Yeats-Brown put forward his name to give evidence against Turkish officer Muzloun Bey, commandant of the prisoner of war camp at Afion-Kara-Hissar, who was accused of marching men naked and perpetuating “sodomitical practices to which he compelled some of the prisoners to submit.”¹⁰¹ British officials were reluctant to bring forward official charges of sodomy against him because it would require evidence from his victims and “the taint might cling to them during their lives.”¹⁰² Yet again, Yeats-Brown’s life as an imperial soldier existed at a tense, and all but erased, sexual boundary.

EMBRACING THE “FEMININE”

After his traumatic wartime experience, Yeats-Brown struggled to find a place for himself sexually and professionally. He rather hastily married Olga Porter in 1923, a choice not uncommon for men contemplating or performing queer acts.¹⁰³ While he worked as a journalist at the conservative newspaper the *Spectator*, he lived in Rye and had ties to the Romney Marsh community, identified as a center of “homosexual” literary culture. Among those in residence were several individuals who blurred the distinction between “male” and “female,” including Radcliffe Hall, Christina Marshall, Edy Craig, and E. F. Benson, the latter of whom Yeats-Brown identified as a “great friend.”¹⁰⁴ When Yeats-Brown declared his love for artist and critic Rosalind Constable, with whom he remained in contact throughout the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁰ Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, 19.

¹⁰¹ The National Archives, “First and Second Interim Reports from the Committee of Enquiry into Breaches of the Laws of if War with Appendices,” presented to the Right Sir Frederick E. Smith, Bart., K.C., M.P., His Majesty’s Attorney-General, 13 January 1919 (3 June 1919), 195–96, CAB/24/85/6.

¹⁰² Ibid., 195.

¹⁰³ Francis Yeats-Brown, unpublished diary, entry for 16 November 1923, HRC.

¹⁰⁴ Sally Cline, *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John* (Woodstock, 1997), 288–89; Philip Hoare, *Oscar Wilde’s Last Stand: Decadence, Conspiracy, and the Most Outrageous Trial of the Century* (New York, 1998), 78.

1930s, Radcliffe Hall and her partner Una discouraged the relationship. Their objection was not that Yeats-Brown was married but that they believed that both he and Constable were homosexual.¹⁰⁵

Following a start-and-stop literary and journalistic career and an unsatisfactory personal life, Yeats-Brown sought a new beginning by journeying, from 1924 to 1925, to learn yoga in the Nyack, New Jersey, country club of P. A. Bernard—the so-called Great Oom. Unlike Fuller, who declined to comment on Crowley's sexual experimentation, Yeats-Brown knew that his formative spiritual guide had a certain sexual reputation before he studied with him. The crucial difference was that his master seduced women. With a fractured body, limited prospects, and an uncertain future, Yeats-Brown found in Bernard's club a relatively safe space in which to make personal and professional contacts with American elites and become a minor celebrity by giving airplane demonstrations and telling stories about the war to an adoring audience.¹⁰⁶ He also filled several notebooks on Bernard's lectures on yoga. Yeats-Brown's subsequent publications and traveling lectures borrowed heavily from Bernard's interpretations, but like Fuller, he chose to not cite his master by name.

Rather than naming Bernard as his most influential guru in his published works, Yeats-Brown focused on his time in India to validate his claims. He recalled that, prior to the First World War, he sought Sivanand Joshi in Agra, who told him to seek guru Paramahansa in Benares. Yoga had an immediate and profound influence on Yeats-Brown's life because Bhagawan Sri instructed him in yoga during a fever and saved his life.¹⁰⁷ Yoga apparently saved him again as a prisoner of war in Turkey because he fully "took to Yoga" by combining what his gurus had told him and what he had read, filling his long hours with "writhings and breathings which [he] should not have attempted during an active life." After the war he returned to Bhagawan Sri and gained further instruction in a largely physical understanding of yoga, which emphasized the importance of breath and that "[b]liss really begins with the bowels."¹⁰⁸ By writing that he had gained control over feverish illness, disobedient bowels, and the desperation of being a prisoner of war, Yeats-Brown used his published works to indicate that yoga provided him with the control over his body that had eluded him as a soldier in the British Empire. While imperial service placed him at risk of disease, debility, humiliation, and death, yoga saved him from it.

Yeats-Brown's choice to ignore P. A. Bernard and instead argue that his transformative yogic experiences came from Annie Besant and Indian gurus such as Bhagawan Sri bears a striking resemblance to Fuller's unwillingness to refer to Crowley as anything more than "St. Shamefaced Sex." Choosing Bhagawan Sri as his official yogi mirrored twentieth century ethnographic, orientalist, and anthropological writers who repudiated the nineteenth century European "experts" in favor of having colonized people "speak."¹⁰⁹ Yet as Fuller's and Yeats-Brown's examples

¹⁰⁵ Iain Finlayson, *The Sixth Continent: A Literary History of Romney Marsh* (New York, 1986), 186.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Love, *The Great Oom: The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America* (New York, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 122, 145, 265; see also Yeats-Brown, *Lancer at Large*, 314.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 199, 265–68.

¹⁰⁹ George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago, 2007), 46.

suggest, this desperation for legitimacy and authenticity also encouraged fraudulence; by 1939, even Aleister Crowley had published *Eight Lectures on Yoga* under the pseudonym Mahatma Guru Sri Paramahansa Shivaji.¹¹⁰ Yeats-Brown's admiration for Annie Besant, however, was a testament to his ability to know his audience. His memoir, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, elicited an enthusiastic response from American fans who encouraged him to continue writing and to give lectures about yoga. His years at Bernard's country club would have made abundantly clear that his target audience for yoga was American women. Although yoga was a means of remasculinization in India, it was far more popular among women in the United States, where sports and weight lifting were the favored forms of exercise for men.¹¹¹ His ability to appeal to a female audience was key to his success. He even gave a lecture entitled "Yoga—the Indian Path to Bliss" to the Women's Club of Wisconsin, and he published his 1937 work *Yoga Explained* with two photos of himself demonstrating the headstand and lotus postures, along with several illustrations of a female practitioner doing each pose that he described. The *Washington Post* credited him with leading the charge of a "Beauty Fad" of deep breathing in London.¹¹² It is thus little wonder why Annie Besant, rather than the elitist and womanizing Bernard, could be Yeats-Brown's official guru.

Yeats-Brown's willingness to appeal to women and embrace femininity made him a rather idiosyncratic figure in the fascist movement. British magazines such as *Superman* celebrated Hitler for driving women from the workforce and into the home to give men back their social and economic positions of power. Fascist leader A. K. Chesterton mocked parliamentary leaders by calling them women who were fainting from "feminine vapours."¹¹³ Fuller was more in line with other British fascists, declaring that "great men" should be "volcanic and virile" and full of "authority" and "courage."¹¹⁴ When Fuller wrote military histories of generals and dictators in the 1930s, he emphasized the importance of self-mastery in military leadership and was praised by the *New York Times* as "brilliant."¹¹⁵ By contrast, Yeats-Brown applied ideas about gender fluidity to his understanding of "virile" men. He argued in 1938 that Adolf Hitler possessed "femine [*sic*] intuition" which was "harnessed to a cool brain and a strong will."¹¹⁶ Compared to Fuller's admiration for "volcanic," "great men" rising in Europe, which echoed his initial devotion to Crowley, Yeats-Brown admired the mystical power of Hitler that echoed the "cross-sexed type" of yogi as the higher evolution of mankind.

YOGA AS RACIAL REGENERATION

Yeats-Brown's erasure of P. A. Bernard in his published works went beyond a desire to appeal to his female audience and left a more sinister political legacy in his writings

¹¹⁰ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 65–66.

¹¹¹ Alter, "Indian Clubs and Colonialism," 526.

¹¹² "Deep Breathing Is Beauty Fad Now in London," *Washington Post*, 19 December 1938, 8.

¹¹³ Reid, *J. F. C. Fuller*, 20.

¹¹⁴ Fuller, *Memoirs of an Unconventional Soldier*, 478; idem, *India in Revolt*, 266–67.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Charles McD. Puckette, "Grant and Lee: A Study in Personality and Generalship by Major Gen. J. F. C. Fuller," *New York Times*, 7 January 1934, BR13.

¹¹⁶ Yeats-Brown, "A Tory Looks at Hitler," 512.

about yoga. In his 1931 autobiography, Yeats-Brown explained, “I was under the glamour of Mrs. Besant, of course, and it was she who first led me to explore the Aryan path.”¹¹⁷ In the first decades of the twentieth century, some scholars and intellectuals used the word “Aryan” with awareness of its ancient Indian context, when it was a designation meant to transcend caste identity through intellectual nobility, rather than a term signifying “inherited” physical traits.¹¹⁸ Swami Abhedananda, who published his 1903 work, *How to Be a Yogi*, with the Vedanta Society in the United States, argued that “Aryan Religion” in India was a combination of “various systems of science, philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, and religion, both speculative and practical.”¹¹⁹ Annie Besant’s own texts suggest some affinity with this interpretation, as she discussed “Aryan literature.”¹²⁰ At the same time, a racial sense of Aryanism was endemic within the orientalist circles of theosophy. Theosophical Society co-founder Madame Blavatsky echoed the observations and recruiting strategies of the British Indian Army when she celebrated India’s Panjab province for its “Aryan castes,” who were “the finest men—so far as stature and physical strength go—on the whole globe.”¹²¹ Annie Besant even espoused spiritual hierarchies consisting of root “races,” of which “Aryan” was the highest subrace and represented the utmost level of spirituality. She believed that Sanskrit literature was rooted in “Aryanism” and celebrated forms of brahmanical Aryanized Hinduism. Even as she condemned imperialism, she argued that British rule could have the positive influence of reviving India’s golden Aryan past and contributing to a universal spiritual brotherhood.¹²²

When compared to Besant’s “spiritual” hierarchy, which situated Aryan as a spiritual and “racial” designation, Yeats-Brown clearly espoused a biologically “racial” sense of the term during his time with P. A. Bernard. In one of his unpublished notebooks from Bernard’s lectures, Yeats-Brown noted that “Vedas are the scriptures of our own white Aryan race” and “to pull on pure energy requires a pure white or Aryan blood.”¹²³ Compared to this tendency to see “white” and “Aryan” as interchangeable, Yeats-Brown had a slightly expanded understanding of this term, referring to Hindu men in 1930 as “Aryan brother[s].”¹²⁴ This no doubt borrowed from the fact that in India, as in theosophy, the term “Aryan” took on an increasingly “racial” undertone in order to define “Hindus” as fundamentally distinct from Muslims. V. D. Savarkar, whose fighting warrior ascetics had helped redefine the 1857 uprising as a war of independence, used Aryan race theory in the 1920s and

¹¹⁷ Yeats-Brown, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, 40.

¹¹⁸ Donald S. Lopez Jr., *Buddhism and Science* (Chicago, 2008), 83.

¹¹⁹ Abhedananda, *How to Be a Yogi*, 32.

¹²⁰ Annie Besant, *Annie Besant: An Autobiography* (London, 1908), 352.

¹²¹ Quoted in Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (Palgrave, 2002), 53.

¹²² Peter van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain* (Princeton, 2001), 143–44; Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, 1998), 191, 199, 206.

¹²³ Francis Yeats-Brown, unpublished yoga notebook from a lecture of P. A. Bernard, 29 November 1924, Yoga Notebooks, Misc. 9.3, 1924–25, HRC. An identical claim also appears in the same notebook on 14 December 1924; idem, “Unpublished Yoga Notebook,” 3 January 1925, Yoga Notebooks, Misc. 9.3, 1924–25, HRC.

¹²⁴ Francis Yeats-Brown, unpublished notebook written during travels in India,” Indian Notebooks, Misc. 7.8, Notebook 2, part 1, HRC.

1930s to encourage anti-Muslim interpretations of India's "national" heritage.¹²⁵ Hindu nationalists and Indian Americans even identified as "Aryan" to undermine anti-Asian immigration policies in the United States.¹²⁶ By the end of the 1930s, Yeats-Brown's view of Indian men as "Aryan brothers" may have faded when he wrote to his mostly white European and American audience in *Yoga Explained*. He argued that yoga is part of "our racial inheritance" which stems from "our family relationship with the first explorers of the Aryan Path." He described these explorers as "The blond invaders" who "were a beef-eating, beer-drinking, horse-loving, pastoral, and poetic folk."¹²⁷ Even though Yeats-Brown recognized Indian men as "Aryan brothers," his beef-eating Aryans sounded a lot more like Francis Yeats-Brown, and India's British rulers, than the Hindu Brahmins he had initially described. By practicing the yogic wisdom of "Aryans," Yeats-Brown believed that yoga could reverse the "stagnation that has been the death of many races in the past."¹²⁸ He saw yoga as a key to "racial" regeneration in Europe and the United States, much like Hindu nationalists saw it in India. However, by erasing P. A. Bernard in favor of Indian gurus, and casting "Aryans" as beef-eating blonds, Yeats-Brown utilized the idea of "India" and Indian bodies, to cloak the racial hierarchies of his white American guru in Indian garb.

Yeats-Brown's emphasis on racial regeneration through yoga fit seamlessly into his ideas about how the British Empire should strengthen itself between the wars. He consistently returned to Indian examples, arguing that Brahmins "have preserved their racial type" through social exclusivity and selective breeding. He argued, "it is to the good of the world that strong racial types should flourish."¹²⁹ On the eve of the Second World War, he applied these theories to Europe, arguing that in Europe "breeding is of immense importance" and Britons were wrong for criticizing Germans and Italians "for taking measures to see that their future leaders shall be of what they consider sound stock!"¹³⁰ He hoped that England would not be "adulterated" in their "blood" with "alien strains" and pressed instead for the country to be "regenerated" so that "the Jews will not rule the world."¹³¹ Similarly, Fuller's *The Dragon's Teeth* (1932) declared "[t]hat the race is deteriorating" and blamed democracy for allowing the poor, diseased, and insane to reproduce.¹³² He encouraged "segregation, sterilisation and the lethal chamber" to combat low British birthrates and prevent mixing with "degenerate stock."¹³³ Fuller's and Yeats-Brown's celebrations of social isolation and selective human breeding for encouraging "racial" purity echoed the racial hierarchies that brought "scientific rationality" to imperial rule.

Yeats-Brown's and Fuller's preoccupation with "breeding" and racial "stock" is striking due to the fact that both men were white, married, former soldiers—the

¹²⁵ Singleton, *Yoga Body*, 104.

¹²⁶ van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, 102; Sinha, *Specters of Mother India*, 100.

¹²⁷ Yeats-Brown, *Yoga Explained*, 38.

¹²⁸ Yeats-Brown, "Yoga's Path to Heaven," 47.

¹²⁹ Yeats-Brown, *Lancer at Large*, 64–65.

¹³⁰ Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, 177.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 179; idem, to Henry Williamson, 24 November 1942, quoted in Wrench, *Francis Yeats-Brown*, 258.

¹³² Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–1939*, 29.

¹³³ J. F. C. Fuller, *The Dragon's Teeth: A Study of War and Peace* (London, 1932), 13–17.

seemingly perfect symbols of a virile nation—who had failed to produce children. By identifying “racial” inferiority as an external threat to Britain’s nation and empire, Fuller and Yeats-Brown erased the internal threats of weakness that imperial service had inflicted upon them—from Fuller’s enteric fever to Yeats-Brown’s broken back. Both men had participated in the homosocial spaces of public schools and imperial barracks, only to associate with (homo) sexual subcultures when they returned home. This made Fuller’s condemnation of the excesses of “St. Shamefaced Sex” and both men’s celebration of sexual asceticism seem especially defensive. Yeats-Brown maintained that Hitler had “never had any sex relations at all” and described Hitler, Gandhi, and T. E. Lawrence as ascetics whose “sexual abstinence” gave them “magnetism and mastery.”¹³⁴ His exaltation of sexual “abstinence” provided a useful alternative reading of his own failure to reproduce for the nation. By praising the asceticism of these great leaders, Yeats-Brown implicitly made his own reproductive failure into a righteous path.

Encouraging a disciplined sexual appetite bore a marked contrast to the sexual liberation sought by leading spiritualists, occultists, and theosophists such as Edward Carpenter, Charles Leadbeater, and Crowley. It also represented a sharp reversal from Fuller’s and Yeats-Brown’s desires for sexual liberation as young men. Instead, they echoed Indian nationalists such as Mohandas Gandhi and Indian sexologist R. D. Karve, who emphasized the retention of sexual fluids through celibacy, known as *brahmacharya*.¹³⁵ Ultimately, both Fuller and Yeats-Brown recast their own experimentation with cultures of the body and affiliation with homosexual subcultures as an ascetic strength rather than a biological weakness. As white men who had failed to secure Britain’s “racial stock,” Fuller and Yeats-Brown embodied Britain’s worst fears, but envisioned themselves as the men best equipped to offer a solution. Just as they masked the fact that the empire had made their physical bodies weak and had facilitated their intimate attachment to nonreproductive intimacy with men, they also obscured their implicit contribution to the “national” impotence and “racial” degeneration that they condemned.

FASCISM AS POLITICAL REBIRTH

Taking an active role in Britain’s fascist movement offered Fuller and Yeats-Brown an opportunity for political virility compared to their personal and professional powerlessness. After Yeats-Brown’s repeated professional failures following his premature army retirement, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* became a best seller (more than 150,000 copies sold) and earned him an Oscar-nominated film adaptation, opening up professional and social doors. He took an interest in fascism as early as 1926, when he dined with British fascist leader General Blakeney.¹³⁶ Yeats-Brown

¹³⁴ Yeats-Brown, *European Jungle*, 121–22, 373.

¹³⁵ White, *Alchemical Body*, 340–41. Many thanks to Douglas Haynes and Shrikant Botre for their discussion about Karve at the colloquium “What is the History of the Body?” at the Institute of Historical Research on 14 March 2014.

¹³⁶ Yeats-Brown, unpublished diary, 18 January 1926, diary 7 of 23, HRC. The British Fascists started six months after Mussolini’s successful coup in Italy in 1923. See Martin Pugh, “Hurrah for the Black-shirts!”: *Fascists and Fascism in Britain between the Wars* (London, 2005), 51.

visited Italy in 1933, after a bout of influenza and depression, and after losing his position as editor of *Everyman* for expressing his opinions of fascism. He was revived by seeing the sites of the Fascist exhibition in Rome.¹³⁷ He became a leading and active member of the January Club, a dining group organized in 1934 to influence politicians and military men to embrace fascism and to support Oswald Mosley.¹³⁸ In 1933 and 1934, he attended a Fascist Club dinner, the Blackshirts Ball, lectures on fascist Italy, and Mosley's lectures in Royal Albert Hall. He finished writing *Dogs of War* in 1934, which proudly lambasted pacifism in Britain.¹³⁹ The success of his memoir ensured that his subsequent works received a sizable promotional push, and all of his works in the 1930s were reviewed in the *New York Times*. This included *European Jungle*, which praised Hitler's unique mental qualities; it was extolled in the *Times*, and gained supporters among leading figures such as Sir Hugh Walpole and Beverly Nichols.¹⁴⁰ When Yeats-Brown visited Spain during the Civil War as a journalist for the *Observer* in 1937, he received a "very friendly welcome" from Franco. British officials in Spain could not help but notice that "Major Yeats-Brown is a Fascist."¹⁴¹ By 1938 Yeats-Brown encouraged Britain to put its faith in Hitler or else "a shocking cataclysm is inevitable."¹⁴²

Even more than Yeats-Brown, Fuller took a leading role in the fascist movement in Britain, following years of professional frustration. When he published politicized books and articles in the 1930s, the War Office had to frequently remind him that some of his opinions reeked of disloyalty. After criticizing Britain's role in the world and disparaging the incompetence of military leadership, he was formally added to the list of retired soldiers in 1933.¹⁴³ Joining the British Union of Fascists gave him an outlet to express his political feelings, which, he believed, had been unduly stifled by the military's narrow-mindedness. With his newfound flexibility he wrote one of the most famous anti-Semitic diatribes in 1935, entitled "The Cancer of Europe" in *Fascist Quarterly*. He claimed that Jews had been a world power for over 1,000 years and had created a "conspiracy" of "Race interests" across the world.¹⁴⁴ In a staggering further effort to remove himself from any association with Crowley and the occult, Fuller lambasted Jews as the enemies of Christianity, claiming that they plotted to destroy civilization through magic and mysticism as found in the teachings of the *Qabalah* and the *Zohar*. In direct contrast

¹³⁷ Wrench, *Francis Yeats-Brown*, 166.

¹³⁸ Richard C. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London, 1998), 69. See Yeats-Brown, unpublished diaries for 1933 and 1934, HRC.

¹³⁹ Yeats-Brown, unpublished diary, 26 April 1934, HRC.

¹⁴⁰ See for example Henry James Forman, "The Bengal Lancer in Quest Again of India's Lore," *New York Times*, 17 January 1937, 91; Robert van Gelder, "Book that Praises Hitler is Out Here," *New York Times*, 6 December 1939, 33.

¹⁴¹ Herbert Rutledge Southworth, *Guernica* (Berkeley, 1977), 442n132; Judith Keene, *Fighting For Franco: International Volunteers in Nationalist Spain during the Spanish Civil War* (New York, 2007), 59.

¹⁴² Francis Yeats-Brown, "Persons and Personages," 512.

¹⁴³ This was due in large part to his work *War and Western Civilization*, which the War Office found potentially damaging for British international legitimacy. War Office to Fuller, 9 December 1932, Fuller Papers, Box 2, Envelope 14, RUASC; see also *ibid.*, 13 January 1933, 21 April 1932, and 29 July 1929. The latter regards publication of his book *Generalship*, in which he was encouraged to rewrite sections so as to not offend officers.

¹⁴⁴ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 100, 128; J. F. C. Fuller, "The Cancer of Europe," *Fascist Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (January 1935): 66–81, quoted in Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–39*, 193.

to his desire to cast off English “prudery,” “gilded virginity,” and the “mystic fig leaf” as a young man, he believed that Jews were deliberately spreading immorality through psychoanalysis and overly sexual, avant-garde art.¹⁴⁵ He quickly became a senior member of the British Union of Fascists and, after its collapse in 1935, even helped reorganize it along the lines of a conventional party rather than paramilitary group. By 1939 he was a leading contributor to the *New Pioneer*, an engine of the pro-Nazi British People’s Party, which published pro-German and anti-Semitic articles and celebrated eugenics. He was proud to receive an invitation to the 50th birthday party of Adolf Hitler, which he attended in 1939.¹⁴⁶ After he declared himself to be a British fascist in a 1939 *Times* letter to the editor, he received several letters of thanks from fans who encouraged him to keep writing.¹⁴⁷ After the outbreak of war with Germany in 1939, both Fuller and Yeats-Brown appeared at meetings organized and dominated by Nazi sympathizers and anti-Semites who urged ending the war with Germany.¹⁴⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Both men’s political participation, and ability to reach audiences in Britain and around the world, hinged upon their ability to erase or recast their difficult imperial histories. While Yeats-Brown’s career built upon his continued engagement with India, Fuller’s livelihood as a historian and political leader relied upon portraying himself as one of history’s great—and undervalued—imperial military leaders. By becoming best-selling, influential authors and political activists, both men hoped to invert their own helpless histories of living and working in the British Empire. While they were frustrated by imperial bureaucracy and burdened by the fallibility of their own bodies in India, they were living out their imperial fantasies in Britain. They felt that at the heart of the empire they could influence global culture and politics in ways that had eluded them during their imperial service. This required a combination of entitled self-delusion, careful cultural appropriation, and a recasting of the history of empire for a global audience. What they stole from India, they spread in Britain, and sold to the United States.

Fuller and Yeats-Brown knew all too well that the British Empire was ruled by bodies that were weak, not strong. Imperial soldiers’ bodies were meant to represent the strength and virility of the nation, but their bodies—and the nation itself—were fractured by encounters with war and empire, leaving the British Empire weak and sterile. Military life extended their immersion in homosocial surroundings, potentially limiting their ability and desire to reproduce. When these men came home, they found that their imperial experiences and sacrifices rarely translated into political virility. Dramatic alternatives such as yoga or fascism were vehicles for restoring the physical and political weakness that the empire had inflicted upon them. Fuller and Yeats-Brown ultimately believed that while the empire might physically

¹⁴⁵ Fuller, “The Cancer of Europe,” quoted in Linehan, *British Fascism 1918–39*, 193, 283.

¹⁴⁶ Invitation to Hitler’s Birthday Party (1939), Box 2, Envelope 18, Fuller Papers, RUASC.

¹⁴⁷ J. F. C. Fuller to the Editor, *Times*, 24 April 1939; Fuller Papers, Box 2, Envelope 18, RUASC.

¹⁴⁸ Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*, 99, 104, 139, 141, 150.

weaken its subjects, individual will and discipline could revitalize bodies and minds, making Britain strong once again.

By advocating yoga in a period when militant Hindu nationalists were reclaiming it, Fuller and Yeats-Brown represented a defensive effort among British men to lay claim to these ideas. They echoed South Asian men's concerns about the regeneration of the nation and the centrality of reproduction to create children and armies. For South Asian men, retraining Indian bodies to be martial, muscular, and masculine was crucial in the fight against colonialism. As British fascists, both Fuller and Yeats-Brown were similarly concerned with the "racial" future of Europe and the ability of the British nation to selectively breed soldiers strong enough to restore the crumbling empire. Their inability to make a mark on Britain's political landscape was made all the more humiliating by the strong, robust, and martial Indian men mobilizing against the British Empire. By appropriating yoga, Fuller and Yeats-Brown attempted to harness the potential of India's future, virile compared to the empire's withered stagnation.

The magnetism of the yogic master envisioned by Fuller and Yeats-Brown was recently reborn during "International Yoga Day" on 21 June 2015, when India's divisive prime minister, Narendra Modi, attempted to represent India's "ancient" values before the world. According to the *New York Times*, this included "an army of more than 35,000 participants," many of whom "rushed to him, touching the scarf he had used to wipe his brow."¹⁴⁹ As the examples of Fuller and Yeats-Brown can attest, these imaginings are deeply rooted in India's imperial past, as well as the global currents of martial masculinity. Fuller and Yeats-Brown hoped to reinvigorate the British Empire in the years before the Second World War. Yet yoga and martial cultures of the body remain battlegrounds for the masculine and martial regeneration of the postcolonial world, envisioned within global hierarchies of difference and belonging.

¹⁴⁹ Nida Najar, "International Yoga Day Finally Arrives in India, Amid Cheers and Skepticism," *New York Times Online*, 21 June 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/world/asia/india-narendra-modi-international-yoga-day.html?emc=edit_th_20150622&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=58022454&_r=1, accessed 22 June 2015.