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CITIZENSHIP, NATIONHOOD, AND MASCULINITY IN THE AFFAIR OF THE HANOVERIAN SOLDIER, 1756*

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ABSTRACT. *This article explores mid-Georgian debates about the nature of citizenship by focusing on a key political scandal that has hitherto been overlooked by modern historians. In 1756, one of the many Hanoverian soldiers who were stationed in England was arrested for theft in Maidstone. The subsequent efforts to release him on the part of his military superiors and the British government created a political controversy that highlighted issues such as legal liberty, the abuse of executive power, home defence policy, and the moral state of the nation. In particular, this article argues that the furore gave weight to contemporary calls to reform the militia, not so much for instrumental military reasons, but for the supposed social and political benefits of an organization that relied upon the patriotic zeal and masculine virtue of the indigenous citizen. This article is therefore a contribution to the new cultural histories of politics that emphasize the roles of nation and gender in conceptions of citizenship, and argues that the Seven Years War was in this respect a moment of crucial importance.*

At the beginning of the Seven Years War, thousands of Hanoverian and Hessian soldiers were stationed on the south coast of England. The regular army was relatively small and largely deployed abroad, which left Britain vulnerable to invasion from France: regiments were therefore hired on a short-term basis from states in Germany, a region renowned for professional soldiering. On 13 September 1756, one such soldier from Hanover was accused of stealing two handkerchiefs from a shop at Maidstone in Kent. In itself it was a fairly trivial incident and many contemporaries appreciated that it was probably a misunderstanding rather than an intentional theft. The subsequent furore, however, reached national and even international proportions, contributing to the fall of the government and an enduring shift in British military policy. This article will explore why this was so and will suggest that the answers need to be sought, not in the histories of high politics or the military themselves, but in mid-Georgian conceptions of citizenship, masculinity, and national identity.

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Why 'the affair of the Hanoverian Soldier' or 'the Maidstone affair' (as it became known) should have struck such a chord is by no means obvious. It has received only passing mention by political historians, usually by biographers of the Elder Pitt who characterize it as a fortuitous stick with which to beat the Newcastle administration.[1] Certainly, the Great Commoner made political capital out of this *cause célèbre*, since it appeared to justify his condemnations of foreign auxiliaries and continental connections. It also galvanized the 'country' opposition in its belief that the government was corrupt, unpatriotic, and militarily incapable, following as it did the losses in the Mediterranean and North America during the first stuttering stages of the war. The Maidstone affair should be considered alongside the other scandals and reverses of the summer of 1756, as John Cardwell has done in his recent survey of contemporary political literature.[2] The episode also had a very particular resonance, however, attracting column inches out of all proportion to its intrinsic significance, so is worth studying in more detail. The story of the Hanoverian soldier's arrest, release, and eventual punishment contained many themes and symbols, all of which chimed with the political culture of the day. On the negative side, it suggested that the executive was overmighty, the legal liberty of the subject was being violated, the people were degenerate and defenceless, and Britain's interests were being subordinated to those of other nations. On the other hand, it also held out an alternative vision of an active, manly, and public-spirited citizenry, whose citizenship consisted both of political participation and civilian defence. The story of the Hanoverian and the handkerchiefs became a convenient metonym for an entire socio-political worldview.

Exactly *which* story we tell is another matter. Newspaper reports tended to agree on the details – indeed, provincial newssheets duplicated their reports of the event from the same London copy, as was common practice at the time – but there was more debate about its implications in the pamphlets and the journals. Historians and political diarists of the time were more concerned with the high-political manoeuvrings that followed, in which the soldier himself was a helpless, even pitiful, participant. Tempting as it would be to attempt a 'history from below', the soldier's voice has not been directly transmitted to posterity. German auxiliary armies were largely composed of illiterate peasants, and Peter Taylor has recently noted the lack of written sources about them that do not emanate from bureaucrats or officers.[3] The nearest we are likely to get is a 'factum' produced by the Hanoverian military authorities, in which the soldier's statement is recorded via official discourse (it is recorded in French, the diplomatic *lingua*

[1] Basil Williams, *The life of William Pitt, earl of Chatham* (2 vols., London, 1914), I, p. 281; Jeremy Black, *Pitt the Elder* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 124.

[2] John Cardwell, *Arts and arms: literature, politics and patriotism during the Seven Years War* (Manchester, 2004), pp. 108–12.

[3] Peter K. Taylor, *Indentured to liberty: peasant life and the Hessian military state, 1688–1815* (Ithaca, 1994), p. 231.

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franca).[4] Even naming the soldier is not an uncomplicated issue. In English accounts his Christian names were invariably anglicized as 'Christopher William'; in the 'factum' he is 'Christophe Guillaume'. His surname is spelt in a variety of ways – including 'Shrider' or 'Shriver' – but was almost certainly 'Schröder'.[5] The soldier's elusiveness in the archive parallels his powerlessness in the affair itself, where he unwittingly became trapped in far larger institutions and political agendas.

I

Schröder was a soldier in a Hanoverian regiment stationed at Coxheath, an elevated plain south-east of Maidstone that would become the site of Britain's largest military encampment.[6] The Hanoverians had been requested by George II in March 1756 along with the Hessians as concern grew about the threat of invasion from France, and parliament – despite the grumblings of patriots and militia reformers – thanked the king for his action. Subsidy treaties had been renegotiated with Hesse-Cassel the previous summer, and Hanoverian auxiliaries had likewise been a recurrent element of British military policy, predating the accession of the dynasty.[7] The troops arrived in May and, despite initial public misgivings, they were received well: the *Gentleman's Magazine* commended their 'fine appearance' and 'most exact discipline'.[8]

On Monday 13 September, Schröder left Coxheath for Maidstone, and entered the shop owned by Christopher Harris. (The 'factum' claims that he was accompanied by another soldier named Winckler and that there was also a woman present in the shop who witnessed the event, whereas he is always alone in English accounts.) Schröder asked to view some silk handkerchiefs and Harris displayed a 'piece' of eight for him upon the counter. The German handed over some money and tried to leave the shop with the whole piece, but had – probably accidentally – only paid for six of them. Harris immediately accused the soldier of theft and called upon the assistance of the large crowd that soon gathered outside. Schröder denied theft but Harris insisted that he be carried before the local authorities. (The Hanoverians' own report maintains that Harris was antagonistic towards the soldier and used offensive language.[9]) The protagonists were presented to the mayor John Harris and a local justice of the peace, and the shopkeeper made the following statement: 'Mr Christopher Harris made oath that Wm Schröder came into his Shop and asked to see some handkerchiefs, and when his back was turned, he took two of them and afterwards gave them him again, value eight

[4] British Library (BL) Egerton (Eg.) MSS 3440, fos. 206–11.
[5] *Kentish Post, Or Canterbury News-Letter*, 18 Sept. 1756.
[6] J. M. Russell, *The history of Maidstone* (Rochester, 1978), pp. 366–74.
[7] Peter K. Wilson, *German armies: war and German politics* (London, 1998), tables 3.4, 4.1, 7.2.
[8] *Gentleman's Magazine*, May 1756, p. 259.
[9] BL Eg. MSS 3440, fos. 206–11.

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Shillings.'[10] Shoplifting goods totalling 8*s* was a capital larceny. Many English commentators therefore judged that the Maidstone authorities had demonstrated commendable leniency in committing him to the town gaol for common felony, for trial at the next quarter sessions.[11]

The Hanoverian troops at Maidstone were under the command of Georg Ludwig, Graf von Kielmansegg. Kielmansegg was incensed at the news that one of his soldiers had been imprisoned and, the day after Schröder's arrest, went to the mayor to demand his release. The general insisted that their treaty with the king stipulated that Hanoverians were to be subject to their own discipline rather than the laws of England. Harris refused to release the soldier, whereupon Kielmansegg threatened to march his troops to town to force compliance (an aspect of the story much dwelt upon by the English press). Harris sought legal advice from the deputy recorder, who confirmed his belief that foreign troops should be tried according to English law for 'Murder, Theft, and other Heinous Offences'.[12] No agreement could be reached, so Kielmansegg dispatched his *aide de camp* to the king to request his intervention.

At Whitehall, the more senior and capable members of the government were away, so – fatefully – the task fell to the secretary of state for the northern department, the earl of Holdernesse. Holdernesse was not a popular figure, and it was widely perceived that this pliable favourite of the king had been promoted above his abilities.[13] He acted promptly, sending a curt letter to the mayor that quickly achieved public notoriety and would eventually seal his own political downfall:

As this is the first Instance of Misbehaviour in any of the Foreign Troops, Who, upon the Addresses of both Houses of Parliament, have been brought over to assist in the Defence of this Kingdom; His Majesty is desirous that the Offender, if Guilty, should be instantly tried, & severely punished, for the Same, by that Martial Law to which he is subject. I am, therefore, by the King's Command, to signify to You, that his Majesty has ordered a Stop to be put to any other Manner of Prosecution.

Wherefore You are hereby required immediately to discharge Him out of Prison, and deliver Him up to General Somerveldt, on His Order.

I am, &c.

Holdernesse.[14]

The letter arrived in Maidstone at 5 a.m. that Saturday, whereupon the mayor reluctantly released Schröder and handed him over to the Hanoverians. Harris was determined that this should not be the end of the matter and replied to Holdernesse seeking clarification regarding the Hanoverians' claim of legal

[10] BL Eg. MSS 3440, fo. 173.

[11] *London Magazine*, Oct. 1756, p. 504.

[12] *Harrop's Manchester Mercury*, 5 Oct. 1756.

[13] James Waldegrave, *The memoirs and speeches of James, 2nd earl of Waldegrave, 1742–1763*, ed. J. C. D. Clark (Cambridge, 1998), p. 202.

[14] Lord Holdernesse to John Harris, 17 Sept. 1756, BL Eg. MSS 3440, fo. 176.

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exemption, 'in Case any Murders, Felonies, or other Offences shall, hereafter happen to be perpetrated by the Hanoverian Troops within the Limits of my Jurisdiction'.[15] The secretary of state, only now realizing the sensitivity of the situation and the inappropriate tone of his first letter, sought advice before responding: the attorney general William Murray perceived that 'the Monstrous Behaviour' of the German officers, 'makes the Mayor's Letter of much more consequence to your L[ordshi]p'.[16] Holdernesse replied to the mayor on 29 September with a more precise and measured letter, assuring him that no general principle was at issue, that transgressions would be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and that the soldier would be punished accordingly. The damage had been done, however, and the affair was quickly 'in all the Papers'.[17]

Holdernesse's panic is perceptible in a letter dated 'Friday Night Late' that he rushed off to Murray: 'Every Hour produces something new upon the *Maidstone Affair*; I have heard since I saw you, that great fault is found with the Letter wrote to the Mayor of that Town.'[18] Critics in the press questioned the legality of his action in demanding the discharge of a man who had been committed to prison by a magistrate.[19] The government asked its advisers to clarify the matter, who produced numerous memoranda outlining precedents and justifications for the action: these upheld both the king's right to intervene during a criminal prosecution and an army's right to discipline their own troops.[20] The Hanoverian hierarchy also reiterated its case for jurisdiction, asserting that 'the Exercise of our Justice cannot be prejudiced by the Public Opinion of the Inhabitants of this Country'. Although there was now an appreciation on their side that damage had been done to relations between the two countries, and that 'more Circumspection' would be exercised in future, the king was angered at Kielmansegg's behaviour and sent him back to Hanover.[21]

The political ramifications of the *débâcle* were far-reaching. As a contemporary remarked, 'it raised a clamour which had echoed throughout the kingdom, promoted by no one more than Mr. Pitt', who made it a central plank of his case against the Newcastle administration.[22] That autumn, as the government fell apart and Pitt was approached to take office, he consistently included among his conditions a resolution to the Maidstone affair. He considered that Holdernesse's intervention had been 'the most atrocious act of power and the grossest attempt to dispense with the laws of England that had been committed since the days

[15] John Harris to Lord Holdernesse, 18 Sept. 1756, BL Eg. MSS 3440, fo. 180.

[16] William Murray to Lord Holdernesse, 25 Sept. 1756, BL Eg. MSS 3440, fos. 184, 189.

[17] Lord Holdernesse to John Harris, 29 Sept. 1756; William Murray to Lord Holdernesse, n.d., BL Eg. MSS 3440, fos. 194, 192.

[18] Lord Holdernesse to William Murray, n.d., BL Eg. MSS 3440, fo. 200.

[19] *Con-Test*, 30 Nov. 1756.

[20] BL Eg. MSS 3440, fos. 212–62.

[21] BL Eg. MSS 3440, fos. 196–9.

[22] [Richard Glover,] *Memoirs by a celebrated literary and political character* (London, 1814), p. 89.

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of Lord Strafford', and was adamant that the episode be enquired into.[23] His zeal on this point led many to suspect that he had made a deal with the tory backbenchers to pursue the hapless secretary of state. By December Pitt was in government and Hardwicke had to dissuade him from bringing himself 'under the greatest difficulties for a bagatelle'. Although Pitt still claimed that the affair was 'a *more important thing*' than the Byng fiasco, he came to appreciate that its pursuit would be politically counterproductive and it played no part in the subsequent enquiry.[24] In any case, Holdernesse did not last long. Initially the king refused to give him up, but he quickly became a marginal figure in government.

It is difficult to tell what became of Schröder himself. By the time he came to be punished the political agenda had moved on and so the sources become thin. The *Kentish Post* reported that he 'ran the Gauntlet of his own Corps three times for the said Offence, receiving 300 Lashes each Time, given according to the Rules of strictest military Discipline'.[25] It seems therefore that he did not receive a civilian trial, although Horace Walpole notes that his harsh military punishment was given 'as a warning to Mr. Byng', suggesting that the British authorities exerted an influence.[26] Edward Lancer records that Schröder was then drummed out of regiment,[27] so it is unclear whether he returned to Hanover when the troops were withdrawn. This early withdrawal was partly because of the changed international situation, but also due to the national outcry concerning the sequence of events in which he had been an unwitting and unwilling participant. It is to the nature of this public debate that we will now turn.

II

As we have seen, it is perfectly possible to reconstruct the events of a well-documented scandal like the Maidstone affair, and to tell the story in the 'tory' history mould, in terms of personalities and high-political vicissitudes. J. C. D. Clark – possibly the only political historian to take the affair seriously – does exactly that, briefly weaving its key events into his detailed narrative of parliamentary manoeuvrings in the 1750s, *The dynamics of change*. There is much to be gained from this approach, not least because it offers a corrective to whiggish assumptions about the development of the political system, comprehending instead 'the rules of a far distant political game'.[28] On the other hand, if we are to understand *why* this event was of such symbolic importance and *how* Pitt and the patriots were able to raise and exploit 'a clamour' in the

[23] J. C. D. Clark, *The dynamics of change: the crisis of the 1750s and English party systems* (Cambridge, 1982), qu. p. 271.

[24] Hardwicke to Newcastle, 6 Dec. 1756, in P. C. Yorke, ed., *The life and correspondence of Philip Yorke, Lord Chancellor Hardwicke* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1913), II, pp. 376–7.

[25] *Kentish Post*, 13 Oct. 1756.

[26] Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the last ten years of the reign of George the Second* (2 vols., London, 1822), II, p. 85.

[27] Edward Lancer, *Some peculiar remarks upon the affair of the Hanoverian soldier* (London, 1757), p. 15.

[28] Clark, *Dynamics of change*, p. 1.

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extra-parliamentary political nation, we also have to ask questions about the wider cultural history of the period.

First of all, it is worth emphasizing that this is a context where military policy, political ideology, and national identity were intimately linked. Mid-Georgian political debate can usefully be characterized as a clash between justifications for governmental power and influence, and the 'country' ideology that opposed them. We will see that the Maidstone affair lent itself particularly well to 'country' argument: although alternative interpretations were offered, oppositional ideas had by far the greater hold at the popular level. Bob Harris has recently noted the appeal of 'country' culture, and the flexibility and inclusivity of the identities (such as 'the nation' and 'the people') that it mobilized.[29] The basic tenet of 'country' thought was that the liberties and interests of the subject were preserved by constitutional checks to the power of the executive. This theory was recognizably classical in its emphasis upon institutional balance, and the onus that it placed upon citizens and statesmen to preserve their 'independence' and act with 'patriotism': to monitor their rulers who could be corrupted by wielding power, and to reject self-interest in favour of the general good.[30] Far from being dryly classical, however, 'country' thought had a significant indigenous dimension. 'Patriots' identified themselves with the nation at large and its manly ancient values, against the effeminate vice of the court and the newly moneyed, who were implicitly less indigenous. Needless to say, the Hanoverian dynasty was particularly vulnerable to this critique of a supposedly 'foreign' ruling class.[31]

As Kathleen Wilson has argued, 'country' theory therefore evaluated the strength of the polity in fundamentally national and gendered terms.[32] Ideally, the citizenry should be manly, independent, and patriotic, and able to monitor threats to liberty from above and abroad. 'Country' thought emphasized that the English constitutional system and the citizens who participated in it were superior to those of its continental competitors: as recent commentators have recognized, foreign nations provided both an essential reference point for the Georgian self-identity, and the source of concerns about cultural contamination and hybridity.[33] This international perspective enabled the 'country' worldview to locate itself in historical and conceptual terms, so the events of 1756 served to cast British politics into a cultural crisis. The complacent national sense of superiority was thrown into doubt upon military defeats and imperial losses at the hands of France; and concerns about the Hanoverian dynasty, the presence

[29] Bob Harris, *Politics and the nation: Britain in the mid-eighteenth century* (Oxford, 2002), p. 89.

[30] Matthew McCormack, *The independent man: citizenship and gender politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005).

[31] Gerald Newman, *The rise of English nationalism: a cultural history, 1740–1830* (London, 1987).

[32] Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture and imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1998).

[33] Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992); Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning masculinity: national identity and language in the eighteenth century* (London, 1996).

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of foreign troops, and the corruption of the ruling class focused concerns about contamination from abroad. As we will see, 'country' commentators sought to use the Maidstone affair to diagnose the wider social, political, and moral roots of the disasters of 1756, and also to prescribe a remedy.

If political virtue was conceived of in terms of 'patriotism' – the interest of the people and the nation – then military policy was a clear testing-ground for this value system. Success in war was not always enough, however, since the 'country' interest usually demanded a particular type of war. In general the patriots favoured a 'blue water' policy that kept the army small, kept Britain out of European land wars, entrusted home defence to the militia, and relied upon the navy to defend the shores and expand the colonies. The alternative was a policy of 'continental connections', which proposed that Britain had to intervene in central Europe in order to maintain a balance of power that would enable the nation safely to pursue its interests. Jeremy Black reminds us that these were not in practice mutually exclusive alternatives,[34] but they were certainly presented that way in political rhetoric. The governments of William III, George I, and George II were widely castigated by their opponents for expensively pursuing the latter policy, allegedly sacrificing the real interests of England to those of the Dutch Republic and the Electorate of Hanover. One of the commentaries on the Maidstone affair, *A tract on the national interest*, objected that, 'the subjects of G[rea]t B[ritai]n should be fleeced, their blood shed, and their wealth, by millions, squandered away in support of that pitiful e[lectora]te, or any other petty G[erma]n st[a]te'.[35]

Much of the symbolic power of 'blue water' derived from the relative statuses of the army and navy in Georgian culture. Britons invested emotionally in the 'wooden walls' of the navy to defend the coasts, take the battle to the enemy, and expand maritime trade.[36] Whereas the 'tar' was celebrated on the stage and in the pages of the popular press as the epitome of patriotism and manliness, the soldier was rarely lauded in this way and remained a difficult figure in British culture.[37] Land armies were culturally and politically problematic institutions within the 'country' worldview. When deployed abroad they were merely expensive; when stationed at home during peacetime – the 'standing army' – they were a fundamental threat to domestic liberty. This was partly a hangover from the seventeenth century and it was certainly feared that a would-be tyrant could use an army to suppress its subjects as Cromwell and the Stuarts had done. Rather than just being a direct tool of oppression, however, Britons were anxious about what the institution represented. To 'patriots', the army was a vast source of contracts and offices that increased the executive's powers

[34] Jeremy Black, *A system of ambition? British foreign policy, 1660–1793* (Harlow, 1991), p. 85. See also Jeremy Black, ed., *Knights errant and true Englishmen: British foreign policy, 1660–1800* (Edinburgh, 1989).

[35] *A tract on the national interest, and depravity of the times* (London, 1757), p. 21.

[36] For example: *Gentleman's Magazine*, June 1756, p. 295.

[37] Robert McGregor, 'The popular press and the creation of military masculinities in Georgian Britain', in Paul Higate, ed., *Military masculinities: identity and the state* (London, 2003), pp. 143–56.

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of patronage, tipping the constitutional scales in its favour. As one anonymous pamphleteer put it, 'the internal frame of our Government must be shaken' by the presence of a standing army, destroying 'British Freedom and Independency'.[38]

If British soldiers were bad enough, German soldiers were even more offensive to patriot sensibilities. Not that they were inherently inferior soldiers, for they were internationally famed for their toughness, discipline, and appearance. Although the patriots tarred them as 'mercenaries' during the Maidstone affair,[39] they were in practice 'auxiliaries': rather than being hired individually, they were levied, supplied, and officered as armies, which one prince sent to the aid of another in return for subsidies.[40] One of Schröder's few defenders, Edward Lancer, reasoned with those who refused to recognize this:

A Mercenary implies a Man greedy of Gain, hired on a purpose and corrupted to do an ill Act; whereas an Auxiliary (denoting by its Etymology, Helpful) is one that comes on purpose to assist you upon Occasion, which is actually the Case with the *Hanoverian* and *Hessian* Troops.[41]

It is worth emphasizing that hiring regiments from German military enterprisers – either to fight British wars on the continent or to bolster home defence – made sense from a military point of view. On the British side, it granted the government the flexibility to expand its modest capability in response to the international situation, by drawing upon the resources and expertise of states that were both friendly and strategically located. In the absence of a large army and an effective militia, the government of 1756 had no alternative but to hire auxiliaries: it was the only way that Britain could both intervene on the continent and guarantee its security.[42] Nor were German princes motivated by financial gain, as a disapproving historiography has usually alleged: Peter Wilson has emphasized the diplomatic and strategic benefits to states involved in the 'soldier trade', which were able to keep up large armies and maintain their security in the process.[43]

None of this convinced Pitt and his acolytes, of course. The government's policy of hiring foreign auxiliary troops was offensive to patriot politics in every conceivable respect, and the fact that the troops were German made them an especially easy target for their rhetoric. Although historians have tended to focus upon anti-French xenophobia, Michael Duffy has shown that Georgians had an equally rich vocabulary where Germans were concerned. Germans in

[38] *An essay on the expediency of a national militia* (London, 1757), p. 25. On this political critique of standing armies, see J. R. Western, *The English militia in the eighteenth century: the story of a political issue, 1660–1802* (London, 1965), p. 111.

[39] *Four hundred and forty six verses, containing harsh truths* (London, 1757), p. 11.

[40] Rodney Atwood, *The Hessians: mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 1.

[41] Lancer, *Some particular remarks*, p. 5.

[42] Black, *System of ambition*, p. 76.

[43] Peter K. Wilson, 'The German "soldier trade" of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: a reassessment', *International History Review*, 18 (1996), pp. 757–1008.

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general were known as a warlike people and troops from the region had been a controversial presence in England during every major conflict since the Glorious Revolution, so 'the idea of Germans as an impecunious soldier-race had implanted itself in English minds'.[44] Probably the most elaborate production on the Maidstone affair was the poem *Four hundred and forty six verses, containing harsh truths* (1757), which reiterated all the contemporary stereotypes:

> A band of mercenary fellows,
> Who in their *High Dutch* jargon rail us,
> Whose pride, or rather impudence,
> Has justly giv'n this land offence;
> Who have (as facts can ascertain)
> Spurn'd at our laws, with proud disdain;
> Who, tho' they came for our *protection*,
> Laugh'd in their sleeves at our dejection …[45]

Commentators on the affair, therefore, were able to tap a rich vein of popular prejudice that identified German soldiers with venality, arrogance, lawlessness, and aggression.

In political prints Germans were invariably identified *as* soldiers and were instantly recognizable as such. Descriptions of the Hessians when they arrived in May 1756 – when the general public reaction was more one of curiosity than outright hostility – similarly dwelt upon bodily caricature:

> They are in general tall and straight, tho' but slender made; their livery is turn'd up with Red, and trimm'd with White, in imitation of Silver Lace; They all wear a Pig tail of enormous Length, made of their own Hair, and reaches below the Waist. The Officers are richly dressed in Blue, trimm'd with Gold Lace; which to the Hats is remarkably broad.[46]

Even given the standards of eighteenth-century military uniforms, representations such as these emphasized the excessive finery of their dress and the effeminacy of their hairstyles and physical build. The prints that were produced to comment upon the Maidstone affair contained figures and references that would have struck a chord with Georgian audiences. A print entitled 'The Kentish out-laws' (Fig. 1), for example, presents a tableau that combines Schröder's arrest and Kielmansegg's threat of force. The Hanoverians are cast in affected poses and unmanly dress, with frilly cuffs and immaculate moustaches: the notorious handkerchief is here symbolically identified with effeminacy as well as illegality. Both speak in an accent that underlines their foreignness and ridiculousness ('Let mine Soldat alone or den Ick sall Sunshine you tru'), and Kielmansegg presents his sword in a fencing position, an affected pose that identifies him with the niceties of aristocratic warfare. In contrast, the English *dramatis personae*

[44] Michael Duffy, *The Englishman and the foreigner* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 15.
[45] Harsh truths, p. 11.
[46] *Harrop's*, 1 June 1756.

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Fig. 1. 'The Kentish out-laws' (5 Oct. 1756). © Copyright the Trustees of the British Museum.

on the left of the print are infinitely more admirable. A John-Bullish Christopher Harris – standing for the English people – threateningly brandishes his tailor's ruler, whilst the civic personnel appear dignified in full ceremonial garb. For reasons that we will explore later, it was necessary to imply that foreign mercenaries could never be as manly as indigenous citizen-soldiers.

The verse at the bottom of the print reminds 'Ye men of Kent' not to tolerate foreign oppressors: 'Recall to mind the Norman foe,/He didn't dare to Use you so.' Kent, of course, is replete with historical references about invaders and the allusion to the 'Norman yoke' is predictable, given its status in English libertarian culture. The presence of German soldiers in the 1750s, however, was more commonly identified with the 'Saxon yoke' of the fifth century.[47] Specifically, the arrival of the Hanoverians and Hessians was identified with the story of Hengist and Horsa, the leaders of the Saxons who came to Britain to provide protection, but made themselves kings. They were reputedly great-grandsons of Odin and were synonymous with the allegedly warlike, despotic character of the German. Many of the political prints on foreign auxiliaries contained these references: German soldiers usually appear in pairs, with Horsa

[47] John Shebbeare, *A second letter to the people of England* (London, 1756), p. 23; *German mercy: a fair warning to the people of Great Britain* (London, 1756); Earl of Stanhope (Lords, 24 May 1756), *Parliamentary history*, XV, p. 713.

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representing the Hanoverians and Hengist the Hessians.[48] Other commentators drew broader lessons from the past: the anti-government *London Evening Post* thundered, 'read the histories of all nations, search the annals of all former ages, and see if you can find one instance of a nation not being ruined, that called upon foreign forces for its defence'.[49] The use of historical analogy was so commonplace in 'country' argument that Edward Lancer was obliged to mock 'those Scribblers (who always appeal and refer themselves to Antiquity, to expose the Errors of the present Times)' in his defence of Schröder and his comrades.[50]

Besides hostility to Germans and foreign troops, the *Hanoverian* nationality of Schröder, and the fact that the king intervened in the affair, gave it a dynastic edge. If Jacobitism was a largely spent force by the 1750s, George II hardly enjoyed widespread public affection and hostility to the Hanoverians and the ruling whigs was often conflated in 'country' politics. If, as Graham Gibbs argues, hostility to Hanover did not correspond to a desire to overthrow the dynasty, even pro-Hanoverians considered it their patriotic duty to monitor the situation and to ensure that British interests were not being sacrificed in its favour.[51] Again, we return to the patriot critique of 'continental connections'. The Act of Settlement stipulated that Britain was not obliged to go to war for the defence of any other territory (implicitly Hanover) without the consent of parliament, a constitutional benchmark that was much referred-to in the context of the subsidy treaties.[52] Pitt argued that the treaties were 'purely and entirely for the preservation of Hanover', and the opposition viewed the decision to bring Hanoverian troops to England in a similar light.[53] These allegations became so vociferous in the summer and autumn of 1756 that earl Waldegrave complained that 'His Majesty's very Natural affection for his German Electorate was brought as an undoubted Proof of his Settled Aversion to his British Subjects.'[54] Besides his alleged preference for Hanoverians, George II's intervention in the Maidstone affair also brought the nature of his rule into question. In Hanover he was an absolute monarch: the white horse, the symbol of Hanover (and by extension militarism and despotism), features prominently in prints of the day, often trampling liberties under its hooves.

The affair of the Hanoverian soldier, then, had significant military, dynastic, and international dimensions. To a certain extent, this vindicates Kathleen

[48] See, for example, 'The 2 H. H.'s' (1756), British Museum Catalogue (BMC) 3342; 'In Neat Silver Coin 50,000£' (1756), BMC 3344; 'Hengist and Horsa' (1756), BMC 3346.

[49] *London Evening Post*, 1 June 1756.

[50] Lancer, *Some particular remarks*, p. 23.

[51] Graham Gibbs, 'English attitudes towards Hanover and the Hanoverian succession in the first half of the eighteenth century', in A. M. Birke and Kurt Kluxen, eds., *England und Hannover* (Munich, 1986), pp. 33–47.

[52] For example: Lord Temple (Lords, 13 Nov. 1755), *Parliamentary history*, XV, p. 533.

[53] William Pitt (Commons, 15 Dec. 1755), *Parliamentary history*, XV, p. 663.

[54] Waldegrave, *Memoirs*, p. 175. On anti-Hanoverianism and the Maidstone affair, see Cardwell, *Arts and arms*, pp. 108–12.

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Wilson's insistence that British political culture be viewed in an extra-national (if not necessarily an imperial) light. On the other hand, as we will now see, the majority of public commentary on the affair was focused rather closer to home. The debate concentrated instead on its implications for the domestic political and legal systems, and for the citizens that participated in them.

III

The protagonists in the print debate on the Maidstone affair can be divided into two camps. The majority of column inches were taken up by those critical of the conduct of the Hanoverians and the government. This critical commentary was squarely within the 'country' mould, suggesting that the story was conveniently consistent with 'patriot' preoccupations. The Maidstone affair appeared to demonstrate that the liberties of the subject were endangered by a corrupt government who were prepared to abuse the legal system and to sacrifice British interests to those of other nations: as such, citizens should demand redress and the means to defend themselves. These implications were apparently so obvious that several newspapers pointedly declined from commenting on the affair, merely relating the events in a dryly factual way and encouraging the reader 'to make his own Observations'.[55] The outcry against the soldier and the government was spearheaded by 'Britannicus', the pseudonymous correspondent to the *London Evening Post*. The paper achieved a wide readership through extensive reprinting in the provincial press and was influential ideologically: indeed, Harris has argued that its chief essayist provided a link between the mid-century 'country' platform and the Wilkite radicals of the 1760s.[56] As we will see, 'Britannicus' was adamant that the 'most alarming Transaction at Maidstone' was not a singular event, but typified the corruption of Britain's rulers, the political system, and the people at large.[57]

On the other side, a handful of commentators responded to the hostile reporting of the 'patriots'. There was no single ideological position here: although they were sympathetic to the actions of the king's government, there was no consistent party, 'court', or pro-Hanover line of reasoning. Rather, these commentators objected to the excesses of 'country' journalism and urged a more humane and reasoned approach. We have already encountered the complaints of Edward Lancer, author of *Some particular remarks upon the affair of the Hanoverian soldier* (1757):

Thus the Publick is imposed upon by such Writers, who under the sacred Cloak of Patriotism, would (by representing Flies as Elephants) make the unthinking Part of the

[55] *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 25 Sept. 1756. The *London Magazine* (Oct. 1756) agreed: 'This affair needs no comment, the consequences are evident.'

[56] Bob Harris, 'The *London Evening Post* and mid-eighteenth-century British politics', *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), pp. 1132–56. Harris tentatively identifies 'Britannicus' as Paul Whitehead: *Politics and the nation*, pp. 7, 51, 321.

[57] *London Evening Post*, 12 Oct. 1756.

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Nation believe all the absurd Stories they have a mind to invent, and thus by their Noise and Clamour, about a pityful *Hanoverian* common Soldier, have thrown the whole Nation into a Ferment.[58]

Other commentators berated Britons for their lack of hospitality and gratitude towards those who had come to defend them – who, after all, were subjects of the same sovereign.[59] Schröder's leading defender in the press was 'A. B.', a regular correspondent to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (which itself published articles and letters on both sides of the question). 'A. B.' similarly regretted that the incident had become a 'party matter' – accusing the *London Evening Post* of 'rage' – and instead professed to address the issue with impartiality and 'common sense'.[60]

If anything, it was the legal implications of Schröder's release that most concerned hostile commentators. This serves to underline the importance of the law in the 'country' worldview. 'Britannicus' was in no doubt as to the importance of the affair:

The Loss of Minorca, however injurious to the Commerce, and dishonourable to the Crown of Great Britain, may be esteemed as trifling, if compared to the Insult which the LAWS of this KINGDOM then receiv'd from our *Hanoverian Mercenaries*, since That totally unhinges our Constitution, and takes away the only Security which ENGLISHMEN have for their *Lives*, *Liberties*, and *Estates*.[61]

'Country' commentators placed a great deal of emphasis upon the law as the basis of English liberty: every citizen was equal in the eyes of the law and had a right to due process under it. It preserved a man's right to his property (in this case, the shopkeeper's handkerchiefs) and was the very basis of a prosperous commercial society.[62] The actions of Holdernesse and the Hanoverians at Maidstone were therefore not merely symptoms of the government's oppressive design, but in themselves undermined the constitutional basis of the subject's freedom. The common law was as much a part of the ancient constitution as the nation's political institutions and should be treated with comparable reverence. Instead, 'Britannicus' continued, 'we see the Laws of this once glorious Kingdom, purchased, maintained, and delivered down to us, by the Blood of our brave Forefathers, forced to submit to foreign Mercenaries'.[63] This focus upon the legal and constitutional implications of the Maidstone affair pervades the visual satires on the topic. The title of 'The Kentish out-laws' plays upon the Hanoverians' claims to be 'out', or above, the law. The print depicts the mayor and Maidstone's legal personnel, who insist that 'We have a Right & What Sir We will maintain' and prove it by referring to the Magna Carta.[64]

[58] Lancer, *Some particular remarks*, p. 16.
[59] *Kentish Post*, 27 Nov. 1756.
[60] *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1756, pp. 475–7; see also Dec. 1756, pp. 581–2.
[61] *Harrop's*, 12 Oct. 1756.
[62] *Tract on the national interest*, pp. 7–8.
[63] *London Evening Post*, 28 Sept. 1756.
[64] See also: 'Law for the out-laws' (Fig. 2).

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'Country' writers had a particular difficulty with soldiers in this respect, even British ones. The notion that a large number of men should dwell among the people but be subject to a different set of laws was an affront to legal libertarianism. This issue was highlighted by the annual set-piece debate over the renewal of the Mutiny Bill. As the duke of Bedford had argued in the Lords that May, while troops are subject to martial law, 'I can hardly call those that belong to it Englishmen; because they live under a quite different sort of laws, and are very uncertain of its being ever in their power to restore themselves to the enjoyment of the laws of their country.'[65] This conception of armies as necessarily oppressive, un-English, and exempt from civilian law lent particular spice to the Maidstone affair. This was the primary focus of a broadside entitled *The Hanoverian treaty: or, Maidstone spectacle*. It begins by posing the rhetorical question, 'WHAT Protects your Properties, Liberties, or Lives, but your LAWS?', and then insists that the supposed claim of legal exemption in the treaty that brought the Hanoverians to England is a fundamental threat to constitutional freedom. The auxiliaries are 'Hirelings', hungry for 'Treasure', who are governed by military discipline 'too arbitrary for the Law of this Land to suffer'. How can they be expected to respect the laws of the land, it concluded, when they have been given 'a License to transgress them'?[66]

The notion that the Hanoverian troops should have been licensed to break the law provoked some fierce responses. Kielmansegg had allegedly claimed that his treaty with the British gave the Hanoverians the right to discipline their own troops. The press then latched on to the wording of the mayor's letter to Holdernesse, which enquired whether the troops were immune to civilian law in the event of 'Murder, Felony, or any other Crime', and insinuated that all acts of robbery, violence, or rape would go unpunished. 'Britannicus' suggested that such a treaty bespoke 'an Intention of allowing these Mercenaries to commit such atrocious Crimes here'.[67] In response, the Hanoverians' defenders asserted – quite correctly[68] – that it was both standard practice and entirely reasonable that an army in a foreign land should reserve the right to discipline itself. Lancer argued that Schröder was a member of an army rather than a private individual and, as such, could expect to receive a harsh punishment under its own regulations.[69] 'A. B.' was more pragmatic: of course the Hanoverians would stipulate this, given 'how little they were liked by the people' and 'how many snares might be laid for them': 'our natives (according to the adage) might more safely steal a horse, than a *Hanoverian* look over a hedge'.[70]

[65] Duke of Bedford (Lords, 24 May 1756), *Parliamentary history*, XV, p. 720.
[66] *The Hanoverian treaty: or, Maidstone spectacle* (n.d.).
[67] *London Evening Post*, 12 Oct. 1756. See also *Tract on the national interest*, p. 13.
[68] Government memoranda reveal that British troops serving abroad were disciplined by court martial. Such a clause was included in the Hessen treaty, and the Hanoverian troops needed this protection as they did not come under the remit of the Mutiny Act. BL Eg. MSS 3440, fos. 244–62.
[69] Lancer, *Some particular remarks*, pp. 3–6.
[70] *Gentleman's Magazine*, Oct. 1756, p. 476.

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'Country' writers, however, were unforgiving and demanded a response from the government. *Jackson's Oxford Journal* joined the chorus of newspapers insisting 'that a full explanation thereof ought to be given by those who are chiefly concerned'.[71] The leading opposition essay paper, *The Monitor*, characteristically went further. It was in no doubt as to Holdernesse's guilt and condemned all the MPs who had voted in support of the auxiliary scheme: any politician who would 'expose the disarmed people of Britain to a *foreign mercenary army*, can never be a true lover of his country'. It fell to the electors to punish them at the upcoming election: if they failed to do this they would 'forfeit the amiable character of a true Briton and a good citizen'.[72] *The Monitor* was not alone in blaming the whole political class for the recent political and military scandals. *A tract on the national interest* regarded 'the affair of the Hanoverian thief' as 'invincible proof of the great influence bribery and corruption has had in high places': this was 'the spring of all our mismanagements and losses, both at home and abroad'.[73] It is striking how these commentaries on the affair focused not upon guilty individuals but diagnosed structural faults in the political system. Their critique of places and pensions suggests that the 'country' programme was well on its way to evolving into the 'economical reform' of the later Georgian period;[74] and their emphases upon voter influence and electoral accountability set the scene for the campaigns for parliamentary reform.

This crisis of public spirit, however, was not limited to the political world: the moral panic of the mid-1750s concerned the whole of society. The year 1756 saw press jeremiads against gaming and theatregoing, and renewed calls for a reformation of manners; it was also widely perceived that Britain was in the grips a of crime wave, which made Schröder's act of theft doubly significant.[75] These concerns about social and moral vice had an important political dimension. As we have seen, 'country' thought placed a great deal of emphasis upon the virtue of individual citizens and assessed the strength of the polity in terms of its moral health. Its view of civilization, however, was pessimistically classical, since virtue exists in the past and is always decaying. A key agent of this corruption was 'luxury': writers like 'Britannicus' saw luxury as a moral disease that was spreading to the people at large from the higher orders, or even from the government itself.[76] In the wake of the Maidstone affair he painted a comprehensive 'POURTRAIT of a corrupt GOVERNMENT', which would govern through

[71] *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 2 Oct. 1756.

[72] *The Monitor, or the British Freeholder*, 25 Sept. 1756, pp. 365–6.

[73] *Tract on the national interest*, pp. 13–14.

[74] *Harsh truths*, p. 5. See also 'Britannicus', qu. in *Harrop's*, 26 Oct. 1756.

[75] 'Ah! woful and corrupted times,/Replete with base and horrid crimes!': *Harsh truths*, p. 11. See also Nicolas Rogers, 'Confronting the crime wave: the debate over social reform and regulation, 1749–1753', in Lee Davison et al., eds., *Stilling the grumbling hive: the response to social and economic problems in England, 1689–1750* (Stroud, 1992), pp. 77–98.

[76] Harris, '*The London Evening Post*', pp. 1145–7. See also John Sekora, *Luxury: the concept in western thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore, 1977).

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bribery, tax heavily, suppress virtue, 'hire Foreign Troops for their own protection, and subvert the Laws and Liberties of the Land'. Most damningly of all: 'Under such a government, the People will be taught to game and be luxurious, in order to make them poor and dependant; and to take from them all Possibility of Resistance, they will be denied the Use of Arms, and render'd effeminate.'[77] This link between arms-bearing and gender was crucial to 'country' argument in 1756. In this final section it is worth exploring how the Maidstone affair was exploited by proponents of militia reform, and why the masculine virtue of the citizen became central to their case.

IV

The affair of the Hanoverian soldier meshed with hostility to the whole principle of hiring foreign auxiliaries for home defence. This reaction should therefore be placed firmly in the context of the contemporary debate which contrasted the auxiliary policy with proposals to reform the militia. The previous autumn, parliament debated the subsidy treaties alongside proposals for the New Militia; in May 1756 the Lords rejected a militia bill as the Hessians and Hanoverians were arriving; and then, in December, a bill was moved once more as they began to depart. The fate of Schröder, the auxiliary policy, and the New Militia were very much bound up together.

It is widely recognized that the militia has a prominent place in Western political theory, and was a particularly powerful shibboleth in eighteenth-century Britain. The militia institutionalized the classical principles of active citizenship and constitutional balance on which 'country' politics was founded. According to Roman and Machiavellian prescriptions, arms-bearing in defence of the state was the most important expression of the citizen's liberty. The militia repelled attacks from without and denied the executive the means to oppress from within. Equally importantly, the militia fulfilled the polity's moral and material conditions: the citizen morally earned his place in the state by pledging to defend it, and bearing arms was a sign both of economic independence and individual *virtus* (connoting both political virtue and masculine virility). J. G. A. Pocock and others have shown how these republican forms were tremendously influential in the English-speaking world from the seventeenth century.[78] The militia was especially prominent in political argument during the 'standing army controversy' of 1697–8, and remained an important test of political faith for the 'country' opposition for decades to come.[79]

[77] Reprinted in *Harrop's*, 26 Oct. 1756.

[78] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian moment: Florentine political thought and the Atlantic republican tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

[79] E. Arnold Miller, 'Some arguments used by English pamphleteers, 1697–1700, concerning a standing army', *Journal of Modern History*, 18 (1946), pp. 306–13; John Robertson, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the militia issue* (Edinburgh, 1985).

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As historians such as J. R. Western have recognized, therefore, the militia debates of the 1750s were fundamentally *political* in nature.[80] Charles Townshend's 1756 plan of militia reform was an aspect of the opposition attack on the Newcastle government and Pitt only really got on board when he was out of office: it was a quintessential issue with which Georgian 'outs' could attack the 'ins' by demonstrating their superior patriotism. More recently, Eliga Gould has questioned this equation of the militia issue with political opposition. Although rooted in the 'rhetoric' of the patriots, Gould argues that the New Militia 'actually added to the formal powers of the Crown' and represents the reconciliation of the dynasty to its opponents.[81] The debate on the Maidstone affair, however, does not bear out such an interpretation: the militia was systematically invoked in relation to an incident that questioned the nature of executive power and the Hanoverian connection, and which instead highlighted the liberties and responsibilities of the ordinary citizen. Indeed, as Kathleen Wilson has argued, this line of argument emphasized 'the indissoluble connections between an activist, arms-bearing citizenry, a patriotic martial spirit, and national strength, power and prosperity'.[82] The pervasiveness and vociferousness of these arguments suggests further that they went beyond political theory and entered the realms of self-identity: the ability to defend one's own country, property, and family informed the manner in which many ordinary Georgian men conceived of their belonging to the nation and the polity.

This link between the Maidstone affair and militia reform was brought out most explicitly in addresses to the king and instructions to MPs made by meetings of electors and other civic bodies. On 20 November 1756, the Ipswich electors expressed their concerns to their representatives, Admiral Vernon and Samuel Kent:

> In this time of danger, instead of arming our countrymen, and enabling them to defend themselves, we have seen foreign subsidiaries introduced into these kingdoms at vast expence, as if they were the properest troops to defend Britain, who have already declared, that though they take the pay, they will not be subject to the laws of Britain.

Instead, they instructed the MPs to 'endeavour to establish a well regulated and constitutional MILITIA, and thereby enable us to defend ourselves without the aid of foreign mercenaries'. The Ipswich freeholders were therefore expressing their citizenship in participatory terms, both by demanding involvement in the defence of their country, and through the very act of instructing their representatives. The Common Council of the City of London agreed. They complained to their MPs about the 'insult offered to our laws' at Maidstone,

[80] Western, *English militia*, ch. 6. See also Ian Beckett, *The amateur military tradition, 1558–1945* (Manchester, 1991), ch. 3.

[81] Eliga H. Gould, 'To strengthen the king's hands: dynastic legitimacy, militia reform and ideas of national unity in England 1745–1760', *Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), pp. 329–48.

[82] Wilson, *Sense of the people*, p. 188.

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and instructed them to 'oppose the continuance of foreign troops within the kingdom, a circumstance which must ever be considered as a reproach to the loyalty, courage and ability of this nation'.[83] The language of 'insult' and 'shame' pervades these sources: for 'country' commentators, the presence of foreign troops implied that Englishmen were unwilling or unable to defend themselves, and constituted an affront to their patriotism and masculinity.[84]

Visual satires from the period contained a range of symbols suggesting that the government were actively preventing ordinary Englishmen from defending themselves. Britons (or sometimes even Britannia) were commonly portrayed with their hands tied or amputated, denying them the use of their 'arms' in a literal sense. A broadside on the Maidstone affair complained that 'the Deprivation of Arms' is 'a Circumstance peculiar only to a State of Captivity'.[85] In terms of classical theory, armigerousness is commonly equated with citizenship and its lack with servitude: men who depend upon others for their protection must therefore be politically obliged to them. The question of popular arms-bearing was made all the more urgent in 1756 because of a controversial new Game Bill, and the debate on this issue often intersected with that on foreign auxiliaries, militia reform, and the Maidstone affair. The game laws were routinely criticized for making hunting socially exclusive but, in the context of 1756, the new Bill was presented in patriot rhetoric as a government conspiracy to disarm and therefore to oppress the people. One satirist quipped that the plan, 'Pretended but to save the Game,/Is form'd to make you blind and lame.'[86] Throughout this patriot commentary, there is a sense that a corrupt elite was seeking to make the people degenerate by deliberately neglecting their 'military spirit' and compromising their masculine virtue.[87]

In this context, the militia's socio-political purpose was at least as important as its ostensible military one, in providing a means to foster manly virtue among British men. The *Gentleman's Magazine* hoped that the militia 'will bring a public spirit into reputation, as a point of honour' and will ensure that the country is defended by 'brave men, actuated by the most exalted principles'.[88] A regenerated citizenry would then banish corruption and oppression from the political world. *A tract on the national interest* followed its account of the Maidstone incident with a plea that Britons should 'shew to the world that we have not lost all sense of virtue!'. They should be 'intrusted with arms … that we may fight our own battles in defence of our king and country, and bid defiance to all foreign invaders of whatsoever denomination'. For this author, militia

[83] *The voice of the people: a collection of addresses to His Majesty, and instructions to members of parliament by their constituents, upon the unsuccessful management of the present war both at land and sea; and the establishment of a national militia* (London, 1756), pp. 51–4, 38–40.

[84] See also *Monitor*, 25 Sept. 1756, p. 365; *Expediency*, p. 10.

[85] *Hanoverian treaty*.

[86] 'The Association 1756' (Mar. 1756), BMC 3348. See also *Tract on the national interest*, pp. 46–7.

[87] Earl of Stanhope (Lords, 24 May 1756): *Parliamentary history*, XV, p. 710.

[88] *Gentleman's Magazine*, Aug. 1756, p. 370.

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reform was part of a wider moral reformation in the social and political realms: only then would he expect to see 'luxury and vice every where and at all times discountenanced; and bribery and corruption no longer suffered to prey upon the vitals of the kingdom'.[89] Militia reform was therefore a question of political freedom. Whereas the affair of the Hanoverian soldier had helped the patriots to equate the auxiliary policy with domestic oppression and legal subversion, the militia was its opposite, being both constitutionally appropriate and conducive to liberty. An effective citizen militia would preserve 'those inestimable Rights and Liberties which are the distinguishing Privilege of freeborn Britons', both by repelling invading despots and by presenting a bulwark to overmighty rulers at home.[90]

Indeed, militia reformers asserted that it was the very patriotism of the citizen that would account for the institution's military effectiveness. The contrast between foreign auxiliaries and indigenous volunteers was a recurring theme of John Shebbeare's famous *Letters to the people of England*. The Maidstone affair lent itself to his virulent brand of anti-Hanoverianism – he condemned it as 'an arbitrary and illegal Act, a shameful stretch of m[inisteria]l power' – and reaffirmed his patriot faith in the militia. 'All mercenary Soldiers must for ever be deficient in that animating Spirit', he argued, 'which the love of Country infuses through the soul of every Native.' In the century of sensibility, he could appeal to the 'animating Impulse' which motivated men of strong national feeling. By contrast, men who relied upon foreigners for their defence were deficient in patriotism and masculine virtue: 'what are ye then but heartless Cowards, a Race of soft, effeminate Dastards?'[91]

It is striking how prominently gender featured in these debates: the state of social order, the virtues of the citizenry, the benefits of militia reform, and the drawbacks of the auxiliary policy were all articulated in these terms. As such, this debate had an important familial dimension. The supposedly-Hanoverian narrator of *Harsh truths*, for example, asserted that the shopkeeper was not only obliged to let Schröder help himself to the handkerchiefs:

> I will maintain upon my life,
> That if the soldier and his wife,
> Had been with am'rous lust well-stored,
> And planted antlers on his forehead;
> E'en tho' he catch'd them in the fact,
> It was his duty to keep back;
> Nay, leave them to their time and leisure,
> And not disturb their mutual pleasure.[92]

[89] *Tract on the national interest*, pp. 27, 30, 28.
[90] *Expediency*, p. 50.
[91] John Shebbeare, *A fifth letter to the people of England* (1757), p. 32; idem, *Second letter*, p. 22; idem, *A letter to the people of England* (London, 1756), p. 48.
[92] *Harsh truths*, pp. 15–16. See also *German mercy*, p. 3.

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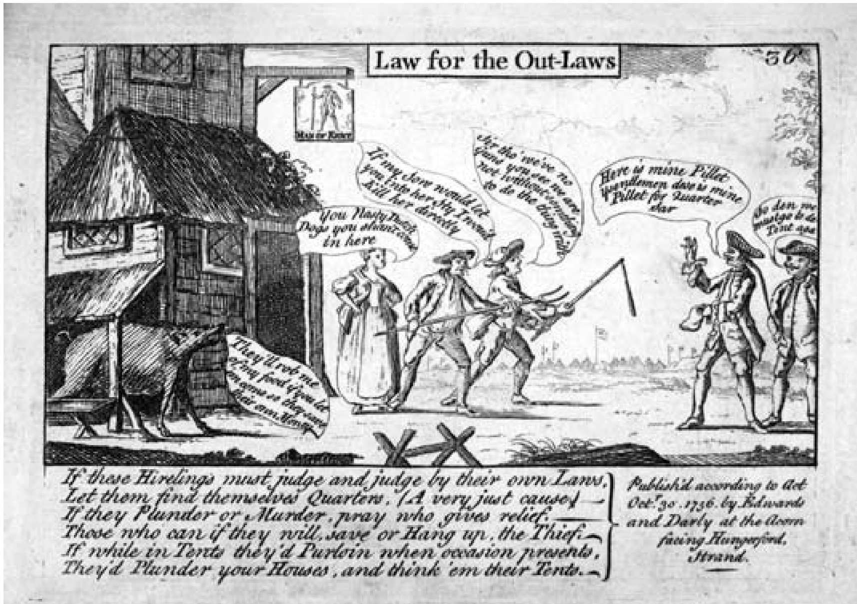

Fig. 2. 'Law for the out-laws' (30 Oct. 1756). © Copyright the Trustees of the British Museum.

Satires on the Maidstone affair therefore suggested that the presence of the foreign troops upset gender relations, by emasculating British men and subjecting their womenfolk to sexual danger. By contrast, civilian defence would restore the domestic order. One reason that was commonly given for the desirability of civilian defence was the expectation that true men would naturally want to defend their own wives and children.[93] This charge was particularly aimed at the auxiliary policy: no Briton, argued a pro-militia pamphleteer, would rely upon 'Mercenaries and foreign Soldiers' to defend 'their Wives, their Children, their Properties, and every thing else that is dear to them as freeborn men'.[94]

This theme was emphasized in one of the key cartoons on the Maidstone affair. 'Law for the out-laws' (Fig. 2) was produced six weeks after Schröder's arrest and, as such, contains many of the themes that preoccupied the affair. Two effete-looking Hanoverians – with trademark moustaches, pigtails, and handkerchief – approach the 'Man of Kent' ale-house, but are repelled by two stout Englishmen. The print attempts to link the controversy over the billeting of troops upon local publicans (a perennial grievance against armies) with

[93] *Gentleman's Magazine*, Sept. 1757, pp. 407–8; 'Song in the fair' (1759), in John McAleer, ed., *Ballads and songs loyal to the Hanoverian accession, 1703–1761* (Los Angeles, 1962), p. 36, verse 8.

[94] Anonymous, *A modest address to the commons of Great Britain* (London, 1756), p. 25.

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the alleged criminality of the troops, insinuating that, having been permitted to 'Plunder or Murder', they would now 'Plunder your Houses'.[95] The two Kentish men in the print, however, hold the key to resolving the issue: they threaten the Hanoverians with farm implements, asserting firmly 'Sir tho' we've no Guns you see we are not without something to do the thing with.' The contrast is clearly drawn between the Hanoverians' effeminacy and the manliness of the Englishmen: the latter are stout, rustic and – crucially – are defending their home and their females, the expected vocation of the patriarch. In arming themselves and defending their country, property and kin against foreign invaders, they were fulfilling a fundamental duty of citizenship within the 'country' worldview. The lesson that many Britons took from the affair of the Hanoverian soldier was that they too should be so empowered.

V

The affair of the Hanoverian soldier, then, became one of the key events of 1756. Schröder's small (and probably accidental) act of petty theft became a national *cause célèbre* because of its allusive power within a political culture that often functioned through symbolic caricature. His act was richly meaningful in a context where questions of military policy, masculine citizenship, executive power, and national degeneration were already highly charged. For a matter of weeks, commentators were able to focus these issues around an event whose intrinsic insignificance became lost in the subsequent storm. And whereas Pitt and the militia reformers were able to ride the wave, Holdernesse, Kielmansegg, and – most of all – poor Schröder were dragged under by the current.

The terms in which the subsequent debate was conducted arguably tells us a great deal about the political culture of the day. Whereas it is true that the affair lent itself peculiarly well to its brand of argument, the pervasiveness of 'country' interpretations is striking: their opponents could protest at their exaggerations and prejudices but could not themselves offer an alternative account of any popular appeal. In turn, the focus upon masculinity and national character when evaluating both the protagonists in the affair and the people at large suggests that 'country' political culture was deeply concerned with the personal attributes of the ordinary citizen. This article has employed the term 'citizen' advisedly, since mid-century 'country' culture posited an empowered and participatory notion of national and political belonging. The preoccupation with civilian defence was consistent with a worldview in which citizens should be vigilant and responsible for the maintenance of their own liberty and security; it also reveals the strong connections between personal virtue, physical virility, and masculine mastery in Georgian evaluations of their polity. Only in this context could the militia be presented as the cure-all for a nation's political, military,

[95] See also Shebbeare, *Fifth letter*, pp. 31–2; *Monitor*, 11 Dec. 1756.

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moral, and sexual ailments: in the wake of the scandals of 1756, many Britons turned to civilian defence as the way out of the crisis. Significantly, parliamentary records note that, while the Militia Bill was under consideration, 'a Petition for a constitutional and well-regulated Militia was presented by the mayor, jurats, and commonality of Maidstone in Kent'.[96] Sure enough, Schröder's handkerchief helped to clear the way for the institution that many Georgian Englishmen hoped would restore honour and manly virtue to the citizenry.

[96] 14 Dec. 1756: *Parliamentary history*, XV, p. 782.

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