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The Spirit of the Sepoy Host: The 1857 Uprising in India and Early British Critics of Empire

> *Our rule has been that of the robber and the bandit and we are suffering from the natural result – insurrection* .
>
> Malcolm Lewin, Judge in the East India Company

> *Despite the enduring myth of a nineteenth-century Pax Britannica, British rule in India and across the empire was punctuated by revolts, rebellions, insurrection and instability. So endemic were such challenges to British imperial rule that the events of the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857 have been described as 'unique only in their scale'.*
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> Andrea Major and Crispin Bates, *Mutiny at the Margins*

In 1925, nearly three-quarters of a century after the event, the writer Edward Thompson addressed the topic of what he called 'Indian irreconcilability' – the 'unsatisfied, embittered, troublesome' attitude that marred Britain's relationship with the jewel in the imperial crown.[1] Like almost any other colonial writer, Thompson was confirmed in his belief that British rule had done India a great deal of good. Yet it was impossible to deny that in that country the British name aroused a great deal of hatred, a 'savage, set hatred' that could only be accounted for through widespread popular memories which, at any time, could flare up again in the face of resurgent discontent with colonial rule in India.[2] What accounted for 'the real wall, granite and immovable', which the Englishman encountered in India?[3] The answer, for Thompson, lay in the 'Mutiny' of 1857, a fountain that was 'sending forth a steady flood of poisoned waters':

> This case, unfortunately, is that of the one episode where we were really guilty of the cruellest injustice on the greatest scale. If we desire to eliminate bitterness from our controversy with India, we certainly have to readjust our ideas of this episode – the Mutiny … Right at the back of the mind of many an Indian the Mutiny flits as he talks with an Englishman – an unavenged and unappeased ghost.[4]

While Thompson repeats the familiar colonial canard that 'Indians are not historians', adding for good measure that 'they rarely show any critical ability',[5] he also notes that the English interpretation of the events of 1857 has had an unjust sway on history; no other significant episode had been 'treated so uncritically or upon such one-sided and prejudged evidence'.[6] He was largely right, of course, about the dominance of one-sided readings of the two-sided brutalities of 1857, and the powerful hold they exercised upon the British imagination well into the twentieth century. The vast majority of British accounts of the revolt in its aftermath were steeped in sanguinary patriotism, a sense of imperial destiny saved from peril. Public opinion was, we know, similarly shaped by retaliatory bloodlust and outrage, fuelled by a ceaseless raking up of Indian brutalities. Thompson, no 'extreme' critic of the imperial project as he repeatedly stresses, nonetheless reads the uprising as 'another of the world's great servile revolts',[7] on par with those in Demerara (1823) and Jamaica (1865), and one which drew an equally harsh retaliatory response that has never been subjected to critical historical scrutiny. For him, subsequent colonial severities were a consequence of this lamentable failure.

Fragmenting bodies, including by guns 'peppering away at niggers', was a way of ensuring that there could be no appropriate funerary rites – a final humiliation.[33] In some cases, Hindus were deliberately buried and Muslims cremated, contrary to each religion's code. Boastful letters dispatched back to England spoke of terrified civilians hunted down and killed, their hutments razed to the ground or burned down. Two sons and a grandson of the Mughal were also scandalously shot in cold blood, *after* they had surrendered, unarmed. Bahadur Shah Zafar was himself imprisoned and put on trial 'for his treasonable design of overthrowing and destroying the British government in India', though he was spared execution.[34] Though it took some time – nearly two years in the end – the uprising was ultimately put down decisively, though this did not spell an end to the periodic emergence of insurgencies, mutinies and other forms of resistance. The violence of 1857–58 had seen hundreds of Britons slain and tens of thousands of Indians slaughtered. In November 1858, the Crown proclaimed its sole control and constitutional authority, and the East India Company's rule came to an end. In July 1859 the viceroy declared a 'state of peace'.

How and why the uprising of 1857 failed does not concern us here. Among the reasons historians have advanced are the very heterogeneity of the various interests involved and the absence of a coherent ideology and centralized leadership. There was, of course, also no matching the British when it came to strength in munitions and weaponry as the counter-insurgency, which saw thousands of troops in the shape of the 'army of retribution' shipped out from Britain to assist, would brutally illustrate. Significantly, however, despite the ultimate victory, 'the rebellion and its aftermath embedded itself in the British national consciousness in a way unmatched by previous colonial confrontations', though some slave insurrections – not least the 1823 Demerara uprising – had generated public controversy, and, not many years before, the Second Afghan War had featured in public discussions.[35] Nonetheless, 1857 was undoubtedly the first major crisis in the post-Emancipation era to be relayed with relative immediacy to the British newspaper-reading public – news taking weeks rather than months to arrive – and to have generated such a vast amount of political, literary and cultural engagement, which continued into the next century. Before a degree of consensus emerged in the decade following the uprising – one in which Britain was figured as a benevolent and liberal colonial power disloyally attacked by reactionary native elites keen to preserve their own feudal and caste interests – the initial British responses to news of the uprising were in fact divided. Much scholarly work has been undertaken on mapping these fractures and debates, not least that between the Whig interpretation of the 'Mutiny' as a limited military insurrection and the Tory claim that interventionist reforms had caused the rebellion.[36] Famously, Disraeli declared: 'The decline and fall of empires are not the affair of greased cartridges. Such results are occasioned by adequate causes and the accumulation of adequate causes.'[37] Most of those subscribing to this theory 'were critical of the government and EIC, although the nature of their critique of colonial rule varied', writes Salahuddin Malik, noting that there then began 'a searching public exploration' of what these causes might have been.[38] Few, of course, challenged the legitimacy of British rule itself, focusing instead on specific policies and Company misdemeanours. On the contrary, Gautam Chakravarty has suggested, resistance in this case and others, including the 1865 Morant Bay rebellion and the 1882 Egyptian war, both of which I will examine in subsequent chapters, produced 'sophisticated forms of metropolitan counter-mobilisation structured around themes of race, religion, "pacification", imperial identity and a forthright binary of civilisation–savagery'.[39] Yet 1857, like the other crises, also produced myriad forms of dissent, ranging from a radicalized liberalism that placed the agency of colonial subjects at its centre to outright condemnations of the colonial project that went so far as to call for the complete withdrawal of Britain from India. While these do not quite add up to what Christopher Herbert rather hyperbolically terms 'a voluminous discourse of dissent', certain distinct species of unease and critique did emerge out of the intellectual and political churning that took place 1857.[40] I will explore some of the more uncompromising and interesting ones presently, and examine how they were directly shaped by the fact of rebellion read as a pedagogical text.

Although a vast body of British writings on 1857 is indeed marked by what Herbert describes as a 'hallucinatory stylistic register', evoking a sense of 'traumatic expulsion from a known world into a frightening new historical era', very little of it actually took on the imperial project directly.[41] The 'profoundly traumatic cultural crisis' generated by the conflicted responses to the retaliatory bloodshed

> indifference of the latter, the haughty neglect of the former, the reckless way in which both satisfy their personal tastes and feelings, and take no care of yours, the strange display of almost fabulous wealth and luxury, in vivid contrast with the extreme of poverty and suffering, all these you can appreciate at home. You watch them with mingled feelings, for those who so act are your countrymen, and have some points in common with yourself, some points of friendly contact, some common feelings. Take away all that softens the relation; let the conduct be the same, and let the men be conquerors of another colour, another language, and another religion, and let them add the contempt such difference too naturally inspires: you may then have the measure of the feelings of the subject Hindoo or Mahometan towards his European masters. You may understand their vengeful spirit; you may not palliate their mode of vengeance.[199]

I quote this passage at some length because of its extraordinary emphasis not only on 'feelings', but also the bold equation Congreve makes between fellow feeling and the capacity to judge not only the causes but the ferocity of – and the means deployed against – the Indian rebellion. Common ground, even shared human feeling, is not a given, but is arrived at through imaginative work. The relationship between English working-man and distant Indian subject is one that has to be dialogical in some form, entailing the work of interpretation, comprehension and reconstitution. The form of 'sympathy' that Congreve calls for entails, then, emphatically not charity, benevolence or compassion, but 'common human feeling',[200] or what Smith would call 'fellow feeling', which is 'an analogous emotion … at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator'.[201] Women and the working classes are more likely to be 'attentive' interpreters in this mode.

There is also, of course, a sound material basis for, and indeed self-interest in, identifying analogous aspirations. Like Jones, Congreve emphasizes to the working classes he addresses that the disadvantages of an exploitative domestic order and those of colonial rule are part of the same formation: 'India is the keystone of the existing system of Government.'[202] It is they, the English working classes, who will foot the bill as well as provide the cannon fodder for holding down India by force:

> On all grounds, then, so far as India is concerned, I fearlessly appeal to you for a verdict, given by the light of your common English experience, and by the light of your common human feeling; and, as you would rise, to a man, to prevent your country from being the victim of foreign oppression, so I call on you to raise your voice no less unanimously in protest against her being the oppressor.[203]

There could be no change in the domestic social order without an end to the Indian empire, and the result could be salutary: 'a dominion narrower in extent but better wielded'.[204] It is precisely in the light of this relatively modest proposal for the domestic benefits – 'in no revolutionary spirit' – of letting go of empire that we must read Congreve's pamphlet on 'India' less as a Positivist assimilation of a far-off uprising than as an exemplar of Positivism pushed to more radical analysis by a rebellion with distinct domestic resonances.[205]

The Afterlife of 1857

'The events of 1857 forced all of us to consider the whole question of the Empire', recalled another Positivist, Congreve's former Oxford tutee, and lawyer, Frederic Harrison, some years later. 'From that day I became an anti-Imperialist'.[206] Harrison, a figure we shall meet again, initially appears to have been divided between seeing the uprising, like Congreve, as necessarily universal in its assertion of righteous resistance, and deeming it a consequence of 'savage instincts', the insurmountable alterity underpinning 'the inevitable struggle of black man against white – native against European'.[207] Yet, in that same autumn of 1857, Harrison found himself accepting that this was 'a long-expected inevitable rebellion of a keen race against their conquerors and masters'.[208] Now he credited the rebels with greater thoughtfulness and agency than he had before, arguing that the soldiers who had mutinied were 'the *élite*, the leading class, the most spirited, the most intelligent, the most thoroughly Hindoo. They lead and represent the rest, as much as Cromwell's Ironsides were the marrow of England.'[209] It is the emergence of this resistance that makes a 'phantom' of British rule, a simulacrum of conquest.[210] Clearly, the mission to 'Europeanise' was not successful, even if much had been imparted, for 'no respectable native class ever identifies itself with us'.[211] If the British in India were to be overthrown in the course of an insurgency, there could be no

We know that Thompson was also correct about the overwhelmingly racialized British response to the 1857 uprising that told the story in the Empire's favour. A 'great crisis in our national history', as one of its earliest and most famous historians put it, the uprising in 1857 produced, in the first instance, conflicted and diverse responses in Britain, often along party lines.[8] Relatedly, there was plenty of criticism of the follies and failures of the rule of the East India Company, which of course ended after the uprising and the takeover of India by the Crown in 1858. There was also a substantial amount of public agonizing on causation – on what had gone wrong and whether the unexpected scale and bloodiness of the uprising spoke to a lethal failure to understand India and Indians. One consequence of the uprising – and the crisis of rule that it undoubtedly provoked – was a debate about how best to undertake and manage the project of empire in India so as to minimize the possibility of revolt. The sanguinary horrors routinely evoked by accounts of the 'Mutiny' were not generally warnings against imperial rule, but cautionary notations about its dangers. Jill Bender has noted that the uprising in India also came to constitute a master-narrative, providing 'a model for understanding and responding to subsequent crises'.[9] Explicit comparisons were made between, for instance, the rebels of Morant Bay eight years later, and the 'treacherous' sepoys of north India. It remains, then, an unavoidable starting point for any examination of nineteenth-century crises of rule and their implications for Britain.

Much of the historical scholarship on 1857 appears to agree that the moment 'would mark the decisive *turning away* from an earlier liberal, reformist ethos that had furnished nineteenth-century empire its most salient moral justification'.[10] The distinguished historian Rudrangshu Mukherjee, among others, has argued that one of the consequences of 1857 was that the 'velvet glove of liberal rhetoric had to be abandoned for the mailed fist'.[11] Certainly, relations between British colonial representatives and Indian subjects on the whole manifested a hardening of racial, religious and cultural boundaries, with extreme otherness re-inscribed on the bodies of the 'fanatical' insurgents. In place of liberal policies, 'the principle of complete non-interference in the traditional structure of Indian society' would be enshrined alongside a clear racial hierarchy.[12] After the uprising was brutally crushed by early 1858, the British in India 'were able to dictate a settlement from a position of unquestioned mastery, and to enforce their will upon a subdued and chastened people'.[13] At the same time, not least for fear of further insurrection, they would, in the words of Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation, 'disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose Our convictions on any of Our subjects'. Post-rebellion unease, Christine Bolt has argued, produced 'a new awareness of the difficulties involved in understanding the Indian mind'.[14]

The 'Indian' or 'native' mind' was of course at the very heart of the question of the future of British India, and relevant too to the more general question of how the multihued subjects of the Empire were to be dealt with. The liberal and humanitarian position – steeped in principles of paternalist tutelage or 'improvement' – was that Indians, while not exactly equal, could be educated into self-government, or at least the native elites could be. For others, the mistaken view of political liberals – 'that all men were alike, entitled to identical rights and fit to be governed identically' – was itself culpable of having inspired the revolt, and had to be decisively repudiated in the post-1857 era.[15] There was, however, a third possibility, explored by a small number of thinkers, which came into view for a time. Reading the rebellion as a text, against the grain of discourses of counter-insurgency that dominated the British public sphere, this minority asked a different set of questions. What if neither the racial alterity touted by the hard-line approach nor the assimilative paternalism of the liberal tutelage model constituted the right response? Might there be a way to think about relations with India and its inhabitants that steered a course outside of this binary? For some in Britain, the rebellion presented itself as a text that necessarily asked for a different kind of reading, one that threw open other, more dialogical possibilities. If the dominant political shift, as Karuna Mantena has it, was from 'a *universalist* to a *culturalist* stance', those who undertook more self-reflexive and critical assessments of the British presence in India did not so much reject universalism as express their sense that the relationship between the universal and the particular was a complex one.[16] Could it be that universals were not so much for export from Britain to its colonies as necessarily and already embedded in the particular? Moreover, what might Britain (or, more frequently, 'England') learn from, and how might it reconstitute *itself* in response to, the rebellion? In some of the most thoughtful metropolitan engagements with the rebellion, resistance was read as self-assertion, which opened up possibilities for a more reciprocal – and incipiently egalitarian – form of engagement with distant peoples who were making claims upon and against Britain. In these readings, Britain's subjugated

stresses both the existence of these voices and their elision in colonial discourse – against those crimes, and it is to Britain's disadvantage that they are not heeded when they do. The state in which Lord Dalhousie left India is evidenced by 'the crowds of Indians now to be seen in London on every side, who have come to petition the throne of England against his acts'.[74] Norton anticipates and dismisses the apologetics that will inevitably be trotted out: 'No doubt we shall have the brilliancy of the electric telegraph and the railway flashed across our eyes; but I say these measures … were forced upon him by the pressure of public opinion; and both were measures calculated immeasurably to increase the centralizing power of government, as well as to benefit the people.'[75] It is Britain's double standards which have been shown the mirror by the 1857 uprising, for 'we do in India precisely what we will not allow Russia to do in Europe … our palpable, transparent violation in the East of principles by which we profess to be guided in the West'.[76] Seizing lands by doctrine of escheat, 'this vast universal effort to make ourselves the sole landlords of the soil … is ample cause for the general disaffection of the people'.[77] Norton emphasizes the salience of native voices – relaying accounts of conversations with Indians full of 'vehemence and passion' and the ability to speak up in self-interest. This is why, 'if we retain India, a representative form of Government must sooner or later be introduced'.[78] The spirit of such reforms, in Norton's mind, applies as much to the British as to the ruled: 'We must drop the habit of regarding ourselves as mere exiles, whose first object should be to escape from a disagreeable climate with the greatest possible amount of the people's money in the shortest possible time.'[79] Norton again goes against the grain of the ascendant insistence on radical separateness in asking whether 'it is worthy of consideration whether the era has not arrived for striving to establish friendships between ourselves and the educated Natives? There are few people, however repulsive their natural antipathies, who do not come to esteem each other when familiarity has been established between them. We may learn much from them as well as teach.'[80] He notes, moreover, that the 'native mind' is not stationary and both parties can change in response to each other:

> But we must go further; we must admit them socially to our conversational circles. They are not to be regarded as an inferior race, unworthy of, and unfitted for, polite society. They have, of course, their peculiarities and *mauvaise honte*; perhaps we also have our peculiarities in their eyes; but it is by the constant collision of friendly intercommunications that the angles of difference are broken off and polished down.[81]

In a later book, *Topics for Indian Statesmen*, Norton would return to the theme of the British needing to be educated by India a year into the rebellion: 'But one of the gravest lessons ever read in history lies open before us, and it behoves us to read it right.'[82]

How, though, was it available to read? Norton wrote his warning narrative in his capacity as a 'man on the spot', but one with a very different sense of what was unfolding 'on the ground' than those who were formulating post-1857 policies of rule. Back in Britain, news was of course only available through dispatches, letters and the published accounts of those, like Norton, who had witnessed the rebellion. These made the text of the rebellion – and the rebellion as text – available for metropolitan reading and had provided the basis for the widespread outrage at Indian atrocities. Certainly, in the first several months after the outbreak of violence, these dispatches were heavily official in character, of the sort Guha describes as written 'by those who had the most to fear' from rebellion.[83] In due course, there were also accounts by administrators and historians (or administrators-turned-historians, as Guha puts it) who also wrote from the perspective of counterinsurgency. But these were also read – and differently interpreted – by those Britons who were inclined to be more critical of the British establishment and its 'organs', such as *The Times*. In Ernest Jones's readings of news dispatches and accounts of the rebellion, we see once again a sense that the Indian revolt was a primer from which a reverse tutelage was possible, and from which lessons could be learned not only about the limits of imperial rule but also about the relationship between the universal and the particular. In his engagement with the 1857 uprising, as also Richard Congreve's, there was an effort to 'break away from the code of counter-insurgency' and understand, even adopt, 'the insurgent's point of view'.[84] Where Jones's reading anticipated a reframing of domestic politics in terms made visible by the situation in India alongside calls for identity of purpose, in Congreve's case it prompted both a call for the immediate abandonment of the imperial project – astonishing, given his quintessentially liberal preference for gradual change – and an exploration of how common ground might be forged, rather than assumed in the face of manifest cultural differences.

His own response to the uprising is 'simple in the extreme': 'that we withdraw from our occupation of India without any unnecessary delay'.[164] Two years later, as the country prepared a national Thanksgiving ordered by Queen Victoria for 1 May 1859 to commemorate victory over the rebels, Congreve released the pamphlet again, along with what he called a 'Protest Published as a Placard', in which he pleaded with his fellow English to 'reflect' on the rebellion as 'the legitimate effort of a nation to shake off an oppressive foreign yoke', and not, therefore, to commemorate 'the triumph of force over right'.[165] At one level this position was of course entirely consistent with Congreve's doctrinal allegiance to Positivism. In the preceding year, he had published an article on Gibraltar where – in accordance with the views of the Positivist guiding spirit, the French philosopher Auguste Comte – he had laid out the case for a foreign policy driven by moral rather than political considerations, whereby England would do the right thing in relation to 'weaker' entities. Why, then, had he not spoken of India in this context? Only, he claims, because he had detected no native resistance: England's dominion in the subcontinent was '*apparently* unquestioned' and the *seeming* acquiescence to arbitrary English actions had suggested that there was 'no probability of an immediate agitation of the Indian question'.[166] Thus, while clear as to the wrongness of the acquisition itself, he 'had accepted it as a fact'. Indeed, he had himself partaken of the rationale of the 'improvement' mission, accepting that any withdrawal from India could be adjourned for some time while the government redeemed itself and offered compensation for conquest to its Indian subjects 'by the enforcement of order, the furtherance of material improvements, and by the lessons of Western punctuality and honour'.[167]

Why so dramatic a change in position, then, from one whose doctrinal allegiances to Positivism also committed him to order and gradualism, evolution not revolution?[168] Quite simply: 'The recent revolt has dispelled all such ideas of patient acquiescence in a recognized evil.'[169] For Positivist principles to be fully activated in relation to India, eliciting parity with weaker European nations, the emergence of native resistance was vital. Like Jones, Congreve read the revolt in India as making specific claims of England (for him, too, it was 'England' rather than Britain) and as having, in turn, distinct implications for this nation's conception of *itself*. In his assessment of Congreve as one of a very small minority who did indeed advocate full withdrawal from India, distinguished historian of empire Bernard Porter notes that the Positivist philosopher insisted that withdrawing from India would in fact be in Europe's interest, and that, contrary to the standard view, the country 'would not lapse into barbarism and anarchy once the imperial grip were relaxed'.[170] Such a 'sympathetic approach to alien civilisations was something new in English colonial criticism'. Speculating on the reasons for Congreve's unusual attitude, Porter argues that at work here was not so much 'the mass of information about those civilisations which had been accumulated in the recent past by travellers and scientists', but instead 'cultural relativism' – meaning, in this instance, a standpoint that simply chose not to be ethnocentric, and to regard other 'cultural systems' as different but not inferior to that of Western Europe.[171] This, it seems to me, is to overlook two determining aspects of Congreve's meditations on the future of India. The first is the admitted centrality of the 1857 uprising in getting him to abandon the reformist position. The second is the extent to which Congreve emphasizes the need for the English working classes and women generally to extend 'sympathy' to the ruled, sympathy defined here not merely as commonality of feeling but as a means of thinking together with Indians.

Richard Congreve was Britain's foremost exponent of the influential ideas of Comte, the Positivist founder of the 'Church of Humanity' whose values appealed to the nineteenth-century British middle classes: 'upholding morality, providing a means of controlling social change, and providing a sense of identity to the individual by defining his place within the community'.[172] There was to be no revolution, but order and progress were to be reconciled through social reconstruction. While both liberal individualism and class society were to be shunned, 'the dominant values of this society would be largely those of the middle class' and capitalism could have a 'moralized' form.[173] Congreve – who founded the English Comtean organization, the 'Religion of Humanity', in January 1859 – lectured on Positivism, and his lectures were attended by, among others, George Eliot (though she apparently found him dull). It is this commitment to a moral, ordered and controlled social change – he would reiterate that his 'whole notions are alien to disorder' – that makes the impact of the 1857 uprising on Congreve all the more remarkable for its undoubted radicalism in getting him to call for immediate, not gradual, withdrawal.[174] (Half a century later, his pamphlet 'India', responding to the uprising, would be republished and

disseminated by the London-based Indian radical and editor of the *Indian Sociologist*, Shyamji Krishnavarma.) While Congreve was something of an outlier, he matters for any study of British dissent inasmuch as Positivism's scientific and humanist tenor was one of the tributary strands of mid-nineteenth-century British radicalism. Both as a high-profile Oxford don until 1854, and later as a Comtean, Congreve also influenced a later generation of critics of empire, most importantly Frederic Harrison. A distinctive contributor to what might be regarded as the nineteenth-century legacy of imperial scepticism, Congreve would become a supporter of trade unions, as well as an advocate of Irish independence. Even as a smaller voice, however, he was among the first to bring into view three dimensions of British criticism of empire which would become increasingly salient: the need to listen to and make central the wishes of those at the receiving end of colonialism; the ways in which resistance to the imperial project called upon the metropole (in Congreve's case, England) to reflect on and reconstitute itself; and finally, perhaps most importantly, the need to forge 'sympathetic' bonds that at once recognized differences and identified points of commonality.

There are a great many things to be said about this slim but powerfully articulated work – not least about the ways in which it prefigures Thompson's critique of the one-sided writing of the history of the uprising in calling for justice (not 'military vengeance') to be dispensed in all directions without national or racial superiority determining the outcome: 'Not alone the white woman, or the child of English parents, but Hindoo women and children, should be fearfully avenged.'[175] What is of most relevance for our purposes, however, is the way in which Congreve appears to break not only from gradualism, but from *benevolence* as the driving force of reforms, advocating instead a 'sympathy' with the ruled that is conceived very differently from paternalism. Indeed, Congreve was in many ways an early theorist of 'solidarity' – not a word that he would have had available to him, but certainly a concept he seemed to understand fully. He dispenses very quickly, for instance, with the idea of imperial rule as a form of 'trusteeship' – a concept and term that would recur in arguments for the Empire well into the twentieth century, when it would also be challenged by black and Asian anticolonialists on grounds very similar to those Congreve articulates. Confronting Gladstone's argument that the mode of acquisition of India mattered less now than the 'obligations … contracted towards the nearly 200 millions of people under our rule in India', Congreve noted that the rebellion had made one thing abundantly clear in relation to the former's claim that the British occupy 'the condition of trustees' between God and the Indians: this 'trusteeship has not hitherto been *recognised*'.[176] Rebellion is thus a forceful reminder that the colonized share the right to recognize and be recognized – but also, crucially, to *refuse* recognition. Given the importance of the act of 'recognition' to international law, to which Congreve explicitly alludes in his questioning of the British right to hold India down by force, his insistence on the right of Indians to recognize or refuse recognition of the colonial presence is of no small import: 'Is there in the East Indies a different international law from what exists in England?'[177] Thus, rather than call for reforms, 'solutions which to me are incoherent and immoral', he preferred to pose the question that he believed the revolt itself was posing of England: 'Shall we set to work to re-conquer India?'[178] It is the basis on which he offers his resounding negative that is most significant: the ruled did not wish to be ruled.

At the outset, still defending his own inaction on the question of India and his past endorsement of the 'improvement' mission, Congreve suggests, perhaps a little disingenuously, that he had been waiting 'patiently for the day when … the energies of the native population should make our further hold impossible', even as he hoped that England would, on the basis of a 'purer moral feeling', voluntarily relinquish its hold on India.[179] The revolt changed all that, showing clearly that the ruled, not the rulers, would be the prime movers of both India's immediate present and distant future. 'Recent events' had demonstrated that the only way for the English to keep India was by force. Whatever their own problems, Indians appeared to 'prefer the chances of less settled government to the certainty of an alien despotism'.[180] Principles of trusteeship, Congreve pointed out, prefiguring anticolonial thinkers of the next century, could not be imposed on a reluctant people, but were 'valid only with those who accept them'.[181] The revolt could be read then as the future of the Empire in India writ large: 'For, either they expel us, or we retire.'[182] The other justification for colonial rule Congreve had to deal with was precisely a relativist one: 'that what holds good of independent States in Europe is not binding in the East'.[183] It was unclear that this claim was defensible: 'What are the limits of this difference, and on what rational basis does it rest?' Admitting frankly that he was 'not deeply versed in the literature and religious antiquities of India', based

sepoys shot down and bayonetted them, was, "You Banchats! have you been faithful to the King of Oude?" '[49] This moment of moral dialogism – where the sepoy, in turn, poses a question to the colonizer, asking him to examine his own betrayals and ethical violations – has pedagogic value; but for the British, not the natives. It is the British who need to learn to be consistent and loyal:

> Peruse the dying speech of the traitor at Sattara, as we call him – hero and martyr as the people regard him, and as we should ourselves regard him, were the fable narrated of ourselves and invading Russians – and reflect, whether his brief address to his country-men does not throw light upon the feelings which prompted the rising at Sattara.[50]

Norton – a known critic of the East India Company's courts who would become advocate-general for Madras in 1863 and who had served on the famous Torture Commission of 1855, which investigated claims that agents of the Company had tortured persons in the process of revenue extraction – begins his pointedly titled work *The Rebellion in India: How to Prevent Another* by noting that the gag orders preventing the press, both 'Native' and 'European', from covering most aspects of the uprising were 'intended to screen the cowardice and incapacity of the real authors of the revolution'.[51] Writing hot on the heels of the uprising – the book was published in London in the autumn of 1857 – Norton posed one central question: 'Shall we throw away or shall we preserve our Indian Empire?'[52] Norton was very clear that it would be a calamitous mistake to hold to the belief that 'the origin of the present crisis is *purely* military disaffection', and that 'the masses took no share in it'.[53] The widespread existence of negative feelings towards the British in India has to be taken on board as a central issue: 'There is indisputably a very large and influential population who hate us cordially.'[54] What is of real significance in Norton's sense of grim vindication is his emphasis on *engagement* with the ruled – on listening to those who, contrary to dominant assumptions, had a clear sense of their own needs. His own unheeded prognostications of trouble had been based on conversations with those he encountered in the course of his administrative work. Simply observing matters with 'ordinary intelligence' had shown that 'there was disaffection enough in the land for half-a-dozen rebellions', and that any failures these might meet with were due less to Britain's popularity and strength than to diversity and discordance among its inhabitants. [55] Given the overwhelming emphasis within the British community in India on severe retribution, repression and separation of communities, Norton's call for active engagement and listening was remarkable.

Norton had another valuable insight: the widespread Indian antipathy was to a *system* of rule, not simply to a few rotten apples, for it was 'a hatred not of obnoxious individuals who have given offence to their immediate inferiors; not a class feeling of the soldiery against their officers; but a general antipathy to the European race'.[56] Listing district after district which had become scenes of hostile outbreaks, Norton also denied that it was possible 'to limit the cause of outbreak to the offended religious prejudices of any particular caste … I believe there is no one so weak as to fancy, that had there been no greased cartridges there would have been no rebellion'.[57] Religion and cultural differences would not suffice as an explanation of causation, and any consideration of the 'feelings of the Natives' would have to be less facile.[58]

It is worth pausing on the 'actual feelings of the people', variations of which phrase Norton repeatedly uses.[59] His interest in that affective realm – and the recently manifested agency of those who act upon their emotions – enables his own criticisms of the self-serving discourse deployed by colonial administrators: 'They are so puffed up with an overweening idea of their own excellence, that they cannot believe the people disaffected under their superintendence; they are so wedded to the perfections of the Indian Government, that they cannot conceive it distasteful to the people'.[60] Equally significant is Norton's insistence that these negative feelings ought to be entirely legible in their specificity, rather than mechanically dismissed as fanaticism: 'They make no allowance for the existence among the Natives of those feelings which actuate themselves. They cannot believe that the Natives look with reverence, or affection, or respect to old institutions, old associations, old names, old dynasties. They look only to what they conclude their system ought to produce.'[61] Norton contended that this denial of parity was a significant part of the problem underlying the rebellion.

Since, taken to its logical conclusion, respect for the feelings of the governed might enjoin the

addition to books in English, maps and instruments.[23] As more than a dozen cantonments fell over that hot summer, hundreds of British officers and civilians perished in the rampage; their violent deaths, in particular those of women and children, would become the stuff of broadside and ballad. Among the fatalities were also 'Anglo-Indians' or 'Eurasians', as well as Indian Christians. In one of the most infamous incidents, in June 1857, after being promised safe passage by Nana Sahib, an entire garrison was ambushed and killed near Kanpur, on the banks of the Ganges at Satichaura Ghat, while 200 women and children were butchered, quite literally, in the equally infamous Bibighar incident after being confined there, their bodies thrown into a legendary well. The latter story would electrify British newspaper readers when it reached London two months later, becoming emblematic of 'native' treason and treachery.

In an attempt by the rebels to unify multiple interests which were set in opposition to the British, and to provide a direct oppositional sovereignty to the British colonial order, the King of Delhi – the aging and somewhat reluctant Mughal, Bahadur Shah Zafar – was proclaimed emperor of India. Both Hindus and Muslims were enjoined to participate in the rebellion as a religious duty. As Kim Wagner notes, those who fought under the banner of the Mughal emperor 'became the honourable defenders of *deen* and *dharma*, of faith and social duty and obligations. The rebels, in short, fought to preserve the moral order and fabric of north Indian society'.[24] Some other princes and feudal aristocrats – most famously, Tantia Tope, leading the forces of Nana Sahib; Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, the famous warrior queen of nationalist lore who died in battle; Khan Bahadur Khan; and Firoz Shah – also provided rallying points and leadership, while some stayed out of the fray or allied with the British. In August 1857, a famous proclamation issued in Bahadur Shah Zafar's name adumbrated some of the reasons for the uprising. These included land seizures from zamindars; trade monopolies 'of all the fine and valuable merchandise, such as indigo, cloth, and other articles of shipping, leaving only the trade of trifles to the people'; the treatment of natives employed in the civil and military services with 'little respect, low pay, and no manner of influence'; the casting into unemployment of 'the weavers, the cotton dressers, the carpenters, the blacksmiths, and the shoemakers … so that every description of native artisan has been thrown into beggary'; and, finally, 'the Europeans being enemies of both the religions', Hindu and Mohammedan.[25] A multiplicity of causes fomented resistance, some of it directed against indigenous elites such as moneylenders and landlords.[26] Attacks on and the seizing of the property of the rich were a frequent feature of the uprising, as was the releasing of prisoners from gaols and the ransacking of treasuries and Kutcheries (law courts).[27] As Mukherjee notes, 'Two overlapping structures of domination – one native and the other foreign – were simultaneously attacked by the subordinated.'[28] Some of these elites, like moneylenders and traders, were also perceived to be collaborating with the British.

From a large number of historical studies and popular accounts, we are now familiar with the overwhelming sense of national distress and hysterical racial outrage generated back in Britain by rebel violence. Atrocities such as those which took place in Kanpur ('Cawnpore') and Lucknow have attained legendary status and continue to be obsessively revisited in British popular history; the mutilation of – and alleged sexual violence against – British women became central to British imaginings of the uprising. As one historian notes, the very use of violence against the British itself constituted a startling reversal of direction, a challenge to the conquering power. To the extent that authority arrogates to itself a monopoly on exercising violence, its return in the opposite direction is a transgression, an assertion of autonomy: 'The right to violence is everywhere a privilege that authority enjoys and refuses to share with those under it.'[29] A challenge to this monopoly was also, of course, a direct challenge to legitimacy of rule. As *The Times* would put it on 31 August 1857, the sepoys had 'broken the spell of inviolability that seemed to attach to an English man [*sic*] as such'.[30] The ferocity of the British counterinsurgency, observed John Lawrence, the governor of the Punjab, sought to 'make an example and terrify others' who might be tempted to undertake similar challenges to the right to violence.[31] The exemplary punishment by an 'army of retribution', as it came to be known, included shooting, hanging or blowing Indian suspects from the mouths of cannons. One British eyewitness wrote home thus:

> The prisoners, under a strong European guard, were then marched into the square, their crimes and sentences read aloud to them, and at the head of each regiment; they were then marched round the square, and up to the guns. The first ten were picked out … and they were bound to the guns … The potfires were lighted, and at a signal from the artillery major, the guns were fired. It was a horrid sight that then met the eye, a regular shower of human fragments of heads, of arms, of legs, appeared in the air through the smoke.[32]

deciphering the text of the rebellion against the grain of the interpretation provided by *The Times* and other organs on the side of the East India Company. He found in the rebels' actions not only vindication of his earlier critique of Company rule, but also evidence of a will to resist, an insurgent consciousness exhibiting an 'internal drive' to transform historical circumstances.[99] This story had to be deployed against the emerging consensus: 'The organs of the Government are trying to represent in their blackest colours the conduct of the Hindhus, Mahommedans, and Brahmins.'[100] In ways that are reminiscent of Norton's story of the sepoys who counter-accused those who charged them with treachery, Jones tells his readers that the actuality was the opposite: those who 'now talk of loyalty and truth – of faithlessness and treason' to describe rebel actions – were doing so 'as though every hour of complicity in their ill-gotten sway, were not disloyalty and falsehood, treachery and guilt, against all that man holds holiest in his individual and aggregate capacity'.[101] His position at this stage was that of a principled patriotic dissident: 'When a war of extermination is being waged between two mighty nations, the one oppressed by the other – and when the vital interests of business-life/are [*sic*] at stake – those who aim at higher morals, those who desire the prosperity of their country on the basis of justice, those who profess the sacred principle of liberty and truth, should not be silent.'[102] He had already cautioned against consuming the news coming in from India uncritically: 'The reader must recollect he hears one side of the question only.'[103]

More questionable perhaps is Jones's casting of the 'retributive agency' of the rebels as a struggle for an independent nation by a 'patriot army' – though he was not alone in countering claims that this was merely a military mutiny by pointing to a wider project that might be understood in 'national' terms.[104] As he read more deeply and extensively into the reports coming in, Jones advised his readership that, in the British press generally, they were only hearing one side. He went on openly to attack *The Times* – the 'dishonest' and 'unprincipled' 'organ of the Leadenhall Moneymongers' – for parroting the line that events in India constituted a military mutiny rather than a national insurrection.[105] It was clear to him that the 'independence' of India had to be recognized, and rule by the 'merchant-robbers of Leadenhall St' ended, if things were not to get even bloodier.[106] Was this a discursive annexation in its own right, then – India functioning as little more than an elaborate metaphor? For Pratt, Jones's attitude to the uprising in India, even as it shifted, was relentlessly opportunistic, involving the manipulation of news and events to mould it in the image of the renewed Chartist movement he now hoped to revive and lead. This meant that he also 'began to configure India and the rebellion in an increasingly European image … refracting the image of India and her people through the prism of English political culture to dissolve the boundaries of race and religion, asserting the justice of the rising'.[107] Ultimately, it would seem, the 1857 uprising had been little more than an 'effective motif' through which 'Jones could construct and manipulate bonds of identity between the reform movement and both sides in the conflict to suit his purposes'.[108] Pratt's argument here resonates with Guha's own assessment of socialist readings of peasant rebellions as a species of 'assimilative thinking' which seeks to 'arrange it along the alternative axis of a protracted campaign for freedom and socialism'.[109] There is some truth to the argument that Jones, at least initially, registered and interpreted events taking place in India in ways that confirmed and validated his own vision for a renewed Chartist struggle. It is certainly possible to see in the blatant transformation of a poem written for the New World into an encomium to the 'revolt of Hindostan' evidence of the Chartist leader annexing 1857 to 'a broader narrative of the coming of democracy across the world'.[110] It is also fair to say that, in early articles on the insurgency, Jones's invocation of the 'jewel' of Indian independence had something abstract about it: a will to bestow equality of aspiration upon these faraway denizens of a strange land, and command on their behalf the solidarity of English democrats and working-men as votaries of 'liberty and truth'.[111] Any hope of 'securing' the Indian empire, by no means assured, would necessitate a radical reform programme not entirely unlike what was being demanded at home – land given back, just laws, readjusted taxation, abolition of torture, respect for local laws and an improved judiciary. This was, of course, a familiar Chartist recipe.

Once the full scale of the bloody uprising became clear, however, Jones would begin to read events more in terms of their own implications – clearly enthused, even surprised, by what seemed to be an even more powerful rebellion than he claimed to have anticipated. This made him far more cognizant of difficulty; reform now was too little, too late, since the claims of the insurgents themselves would have to be central: 'It is all very well to talk now about remedying the state of things in India – about redressing grievances. The natives are not waiting for us to redress them – they are beginning to take the question of

Indian subjects could neither be relegated to pure otherness, as they were in the absolutist conservative response, nor simply yoked to the project of reformist improvement, in the liberal mode. For dissident English writers like the Chartist Ernest Jones and the Positivist Richard Congreve, the rebellion prompted a rethinking of their own premises and manner of engagement with the non-European; they invited their readers to think through the possibility that the cultural-particular and the humanist-universal were not entirely at odds with each other. The text of insurgency, in other words, threw open the problematic of engaging with subjugated others with whom common ground might be forged without eliding differences. If, for the official mind, one consequence of the uprising of 1857 was that a professed universalism 'easily gave way to harsh attitudes about the intractable differences among people, the inscrutability of other ways of life, and the ever-present potential for racial and cultural conflict', for some of a more dissident bent, it opened up rather more dialogical possibilities.[17] The native-in-revolt, as we shall see, was not always figured as inscrutable or irrational, but rather as staking claims upon a history they intended to make themselves, if in circumstances not of their own choosing. Partly in response, a small but distinct body of dissident discourse developed in Britain which sought to invoke a degree of sympathetic understanding for the rebellion, as well as a critical disposition towards the imperial project.

Beyond the Sepoy War

Since our interest is in how the events of 1857 in India shaped an emergent critique of empire within Britain, I will not devote much space here to discussing the uprising itself. An historical episode that has received a great deal of scholarly attention from the late nineteenth century onwards, the uprising continues to be revisited and debated in salutary ways.[18] In a volume produced by the Indian Council to commemorate the 150th anniversary of those events in 2007, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya notes rightly that the literature on the subject is 'dauntingly large' and includes important new revisionist work examining formerly overlooked aspects such as gender, the role of tribal and Dalit communities, and its representations in popular culture, making use of Indian-language sources as well.[19] Initially a point of contestation in British debates, it became clear that the insurgency was more than a military mutiny, and involved 'considerable participation by the civilian population', and diverse elements of that population.[20] It is also clear that a complex chain of causation extended well beyond the legendary 'greased cartridges' for the Enfield rifle, and indeed beyond religious identities and sentiments alone, even if those certainly played a determinate role. Our interest here is in how an understanding of causes and causality – and the predictable ferocity of the counterinsurgency – shaped dissent around the imperial question back in Britain.

The briefest of overviews then: the uprising – or the 'Ghadar' as it is known in Urdu – formally broke out on 10 May 1957. The ostensible 'last-straw' provocation for it has traditionally been attributed to the controversial cartridges for the new Enfield rifle, which had been provided to the native regiments of the East India Company's army, greased, it was rumoured, with pig and cow fat – thereby violating the religious sensibilities of both Muslim and Hindu infantrymen. The iconic cartridges, as Jill Bender has noted, 'provided a convenient explanation for the rebellion, one that did not openly challenge the legitimacy of British colonial control or validate Indian unrest'.[21] Rumour itself, of course, played a key role in the fomenting of the uprising, often acting, as in the instance of Meerut, as the match which lit a dry haystack. There were manifold other problems which caused soldierly discontent, including poor pay, loss of allowances, and insistence on overseas service. We know that soldier violence, one element of the uprising of 1857, was not in itself unprecedented; a contemporary observer notes that there 'had previously been several mutinies in the native army … but they had been suppressed with little difficulty'.[22] Troubles had in fact been rumbling from February 1857 onwards when in May, the troops at Meerut rose against their officers, shot them dead, freed imprisoned fellow troopers and set off for Delhi. (One of the most famous figures associated with the rebellion, the infantryman Mangal Pandey, had already been executed on 29 March for firing at and wounding his commanding officer at his barracks near Calcutta.) Once the rebels reached and captured Delhi, they were joined by the 54th Bengal Native Infantry, which, ordered to fire at them, had refused to. Violence then spread across northern India into other cantonments as well as civilian areas, with government officers, telegraph lines, post offices, treasuries and local courts – the apparatus and infrastructure of colonial rule – unsurprisingly being targeted for destruction, in

to the Indian uprising several years after its first publication.[154] It was in the wake of 1857 that the 'vantage point of the colonized' became a manifest reality outside the text for Jones. The other fact is that, for all its deprecation of the brutality of British rule and condemnation of the exploitation of the Indian peasantry, and notwithstanding a sense that a national insurrection of sorts could be discerned in events, Marx's famous dispatches on the Indian uprising for the *New York Tribune* did not particularly interest themselves in that vantage point – one reason that I have not engaged with them here. His suggestion that it was conceivable that the Indians could throw off the English yoke remained abstract, something for the distant future. But it is true that, by this point, Marx was markedly less inclined to view colonialism as a beneficial force – and this, as well as his passing concession that what England 'considers a military mutiny is in truth a national revolt', may well have had something to do with Jones's analysis.[155]

It is fair to say that, even if 1857 was not the occasion for the immediate production of revolutionary anticolonialism in Britain, some important political and intellectual seeds had nonetheless been sown, including in Marx's case. While proletarian internationalism of the domestic variety may have always been integral to Jones's engagement with colonial questions, there seems little doubt that the historical actuality of the 1857 uprising caused him to shift markedly in the direction of seeking 'contagion' from that source of revolutionary agency. Given that Marx and Jones were estranged by that point, it remains open to question whether Jones in fact influenced his friend after 1855, but it is not inconceivable that engagement with Jones in the first half of the 1850s, and then subsequently studying the 1857 rebellion, were part of Marx's developing understanding of anticolonialism in the long run. Pranav Jani has argued eloquently that it took the events of 1857 'to force Marx to develop a better understanding of the agency of the colonized subject', and that there is to be discerned 'a more dialectical relationship between the development of Marx's ideas and the 1857 Revolt' than scholars have identified before.[156] While this dialectical understanding is not, I think, immediately visible in his famous articles on the Revolt itself for the *New York Tribune*, which focus largely on British mistakes and military manoeuvres, Marx does evoke even here 'the secret connivance and support of the natives' given to the sepoys, while cautioning against expecting 'an Indian revolt to assume the features of a European revolution'.[157] He notes too that the imperial project in India is one that benefits individuals, and as such increases the national wealth, but is also offset by the very great costs involved in 'endless conquest and perpetual aggression'.[158] Agreeing that some of the outrages committed by the sepoys were 'hideous' and 'appalling', Marx was inclined to see them as mirroring colonial atrocities: 'the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India'.[159] Jones too noted trenchantly: 'The conduct of the "rebels", throughout the mutiny, has been in strict and consistent accordance with the example of their civilised governors.'[160] He would repeatedly point out that the 'wild, wanton, and wicked demand for native blood' would only make sense if it weren't the British who had, in the first place, 'sowed the seeds of that sanguinary harvest which is but now being reaped in British India'.[161] Certainly Marx, like Jones, was inclined to read the discourse of counterinsurgency critically, as one in which it was supposed that 'all the cruelty is on the side of the sepoys, and all the milk of human kindness flows on the side of the English'.[162]

No 'Patient Acquiescence': Richard Congreve and 'Common Human Feeling'

If Jones appeared to back down on his revolutionary fervour for the Indian cause in favour of an interim amelioration of grievances (which Marx regarded as a turn to the right), a rejection of reforms aimed at keeping Indians as happy as possible came from an avowedly non-revolutionary quarter: the leading English Positivist, Richard Congreve. In a pamphlet published in November 1857, even as national outrage in Britain was reaching a high point, Congreve, aware that he might be charged with 'reckless opposition to the feelings of the majority', launched an attack on what he called 'the better language now adopted' to justify continued British rule in India:

> We occupied India under the impulse of commercial and political motives; we have governed it as a valuable appendage, commercially and politically. That is the broad truth. When our Empire is tottering to its fall, then to step forward with moral or Christian motives for holding it, which have never influenced our previous policy, is a very questionable course.[163]

on a 'mass of information', Congreve insisted on the right of Indian civilization not to be subjected to English rule.[184] As other liberals had done, he cited Burke copiously on the difference between savages in the Americas (whom it was, presumably, acceptable to conquer) and the Indians, 'cultivated by all the arts of polished life, whilst we were yet in the woods'.[185] Ultimately, however, Congreve's own argument, while it drew on the Burkean critique of empire, rested less on India's civilizational achievements than on the fact of ongoing resistance, which had made clear that there was no probability of amalgamation (of the sort Norton wanted) and 'a genuine union being at last effected'.[186] Given that 'the different manners of the East' were not, to his mind, grounds for a relativist application of international law or moral principles, the fact was that the rebellion pointed to the impossibility of common cause under British rule.[187] With the right kind of imaginative labour, common cause could, however, be *forged* between English working-men and Englishwomen, on the one hand, and Indians under British rule on the other. If colonial conquest had resulted in such a 'want of sympathy' with conquered societies, that even 'instructive forms of civilisation' were destroyed, it could be attributed to a distinctively class-based attitude.[188] Congreve was clear that the end of colonial rule was specifically 'alien in conception and results to the thoughts and wishes of the upper classes of England'.[189] But he was more hopeful of others' attitude to Indians, the 'large numbers in England who, if my opinions could reach them, would sympathise with them in spirit at least, if they could not wholly accept them'.[190] This was a necessarily dialogical process, involving cognition and recognition, imaginative labour that the English people could undertake, even in the absence of actual contact with Indians. Adam Smith's cognitive model of 'sympathy' as denoting not just pity or compassion but 'our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever' is useful here.

Congreve's appeal to women was brief and relatively predictable in its gendered assumptions: since they hold aloof from the strife and personal ambition that mar men's politics, women can bring vital moral considerations and a moderating power to political questions. Here, too, in 'the court of moral feeling', Congreve stressed the need to pose questions, then listen for and keep in the foreground the wishes of the ruled in India: 'Is it with the consent of its people that we persist in trying to rule it, or solely by virtue of a favourable judgement on our claim pronounced by none but ourselves?'[191] It is really, however, with his appeal to 'the Working Men of England' that Congreve came up with a theory of common condition that enabled him to make the case for the 'keenest political sympathy' not just between himself as philosopher and the proletariat, but between them and the subjects of British India.[192] Here Congreve enunciated a claim about the intertwined structures of empire which would be articulated by other critics too in the decades to come: 'The question is two-fold. It is an Indian one, but it is also an English one. The interests of both countries are at stake. You may take them apart for convenience, but you cannot really separate them.'[193] The working-men were in a unique position to listen to and sympathize with the aspirations of the ruled, not least because they lacked the upper classes' material and personal connections to India and 'derive no advantages from its possession'.[194] They too were ruled and lied to by the same class: 'You will not be deceived by the assertions that the mass of the Hindoo nation wishes us to continue its ruler', not least because of the 'similar ones made at home by your own state of feelings'.[195] The extent to which Congreve stressed the similarity (rather than congruity) of condition, as well as the resulting capacity to interpret the feelings of the ruled, is striking: 'You know that your own state of feeling is misinterpreted or entirely neglected by those who administer your Government; is it likely that they would be successful in interpreting that of the distant and alien population of India?'[196]

Congreve is not suggesting that the standpoint of the working Englishman is the *same* as that of the subject of rule in India – or not quite. He is instead calling for this man to recall at once his own condition and 'sympathise' – as he already does with those in Hungary or Italy who ask for independence and justice – 'with the Hindoo in his struggle for the same objects'.[197] This did not, as he had already made clear, imply an *identity* of culture or belief systems. It did, however, mean that those at the receiving end of exploitation were in a better position to conceive 'what we ourselves should feel in the like situation', to use Smith's elaboration of 'sympathy'.[198] The working-men of England, by contrast with the English upper classes, were in a unique position to undertake the imaginative labour that could bridge some of that distance and difference:

> You can judge of the bearing of the English in India by the bearing of the same classes at home, by the bearing of your aristocracy, whether commercial or landed, by the bearing of your middle classes. The hard

firstly, to grossly underestimate the radicalism of insisting at this point in time that 'Indians have as good a right to govern India, as the English have to govern England'.[141] It also minimizes the extent to which Jones's readings of the crisis were clearly responsive to events, and to the increasing emphasis he placed on the assertiveness of the rebels. The *People's Paper* also carried letters by Indians, such as one on 23 January 1858, headed 'Importance of the Study of the Indian Language' and signed by one 'Syed Abdoolah', calling for daily spoken communication between British and Indians.[142] Jones commented in this regard, 'There can be no greater proof of the iniquity of our rule' than that colonial officials 'are not even expected to understand the tongue of those whom they are sent to govern.'[143] It is also worth noting that Jones attended and spoke at public meetings on India, with, for instance, the paper carrying prominent front-page notices of such events. 'An Important Exposure of our Government of India', on 17 February 1858, was to be attended by MPs John Townshend, Charles Gilpin and H. Ingram. His ideas were not without means of circulation beyond the *People's Paper* and were articulated within earshot of the influential.

By the late autumn of 1857, Jones appeared to switch from cheering on the insurgency to assessing the flaws and strategic mistakes of the counterinsurgency, including poor planning: 'Thus imbecility is losing a great colonial Empire.'[144] This, Pratt suggests, exemplifies 'his proclivity to switch between identification with rebel or counter-insurgent as the likelihood of a successful rebellion receded'.[145] While it is clear that, as the insurgency was put down over several months, Jones manifestly revised his vision of where things would go, deflated perhaps after his bout of raucous cheerleading, and also explicitly sickened by the bloodshed he wanted stopped, it is certainly not the case that he simply reneged on his commitments to popular resistance: 'The national character of the Indian insurrection can be no longer truthfully disputed', he wrote. 'No matter whether it be the Anglo-saxon or the Hindhu, the American or the Celt … the people are ever the only saviours of imperilled nations, the cradle and the home of all great thoughts and truths. It is the people who conceive; it is the people who realise, the greatness of every age.'[146] Indians were setting a 'noble example'. The failures of counterinsurgency largely provided Jones with a weapon with which to continue his relentless attack on the incompetence and blunders of the ruling elites. Indeed, after a few weeks' silence, as 1857 drew to a close Jones would title an article 'How to Secure India', but almost immediately issue a caveat: 'Let not the above title mislead our readers … We do not believe that the British can prove a rightful claim to one solitary acre of ground … of Hindostan.'[147] But, he says, with the knowledge of where things are headed, it would be another half-century or so before English rule could be undone, in which case, the only recourse was to make English-ruled India 'as happy as you can; do as much justice as circumstances admit'.[148] To this end, British rule had to be democratized, and treaties honoured in the name of the English people, with princes restored to their thrones and their subjects treated on terms of honourable equality.[149] One of the last articles on the topic in the paper, which would itself fold in 1858, would note categorically that, in the final analysis, given that the insurgency was not quite fully crushed, 'the development of Indian greatness will be found most consistent with India's freedom from British rule, and its thorough, uncontrolled, and unshackled independence'.[150]

Marx and 1857: A Brief Note

What of Jones's friend and comrade, Karl Marx? In an interesting essay Thierry Drapeau argues that, while scholars have 'long established the intellectual ascendancy Marx had over [Jones], they have failed to track the opposite direction of influence'.[151] Drapeau contends that, while it may be that Marx's eventual 'multilinear perspectives' on anticolonialism derived from intensive study of non-Western societies, 'Ernest Jones was inextricably linked to the unfolding of those efforts in the early 1850s … adding nuance and deeper understanding to them'.[152] There is some merit to the argument that Jones and Marx influenced each other during the early 1850s, when their friendship took root, and certainly Marx would move away over time from the 'Eurocentric, unilinear, and determinist model of historical development' he had cleaved to in 1848.[153] But there is less evidence to suggest that Marx made huge strides in that direction in the 1850s as a consequence of Jones's influence. For one thing, Jones himself would not really relocate 'the initiative of revolutionary transformation … to the oppressed peoples of the British Empire' until after 1857; his 'The New World, a Democratic Poem' was only reworked as a tribute

redress in their own hands.'[112] This is the insight which militates against reducing the entirety of Jones's engagement with India in 1857 to 'self-interested political calculation', a charge which obscures the fact that events served to shape his understanding of anticolonial resistance in more supple ways than is suggested by simple opportunism.[113] It is true, of course, that Jones was positing, in Guha's terms, 'an ideal rather than the real historical personality of the insurgent', as was true of most British attempts to read the rebellion against the grain in the absence of direct contact with rebels; the insurgent's consciousness was mediated by the dissident's.[114] When it comes to the past, as Guha also suggests, it is necessary 'not to deny the political importance of such appropriation'.[115] But Jones was also doing important work in relation to his present in actively rereading – and reframing – the information that came to him and the rest of Britain via the government and *The Times*, the main source of reportage about the uprising, rather than simply 'min[ing] them for evidence'.[116] Reprinting these sources in the paper, Jones constructed an archive of sorts, comprising, in addition to *The Times* (which he would attack directly in stinging editorials), government dispatches, telegrams, private correspondence, articles from the Indian press, eyewitness accounts, placards and proclamations. The *People's Paper* also carried reviews of books critical of the East India Company and British rule in India, which frequently alluded to native discontent and simmering resistance. As Jones read vast quantities of 'the prose of counter-insurgency', he discovered Guha's insurgent, the 'entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion'.[117] That which can be dismissed as appropriation may also be evidence of a growing sense that the impulse to liberation was indeed to be found beyond familiar spaces, and in particular beyond Europe's boundaries.

What makes Jones's reading of the rebellion more active and dialogical than a mere annexation of events to a pre-existing framework would invoke is the way in which he repeatedly identifies the rebel as a speaking subject with a voice who can be heard in sundry texts, and who, as such, ought to be heeded. Engaging with and interpreting these utterances enabled Jones to elaborate a discourse which ran counter to the one being forged in the British public sphere. Once it became clear that the 'mutinies' were picking up in frequency, Jones began to republish his densely informed articles from 1853, giving his readership more contextual knowledge. There he had cited the unheeded petitions and complaints made by subjects under East Indian Company rule, to which Norton also refers. Rather than immediately annexing early dispatches about the insurgency to the Chartist cause, Jones in fact appeared disinclined to see what was happening as genuinely revolutionary. As more detailed reports of the actual mutinies came in, the paper criticized the colonial regime's failure to listen; ignoring symptoms of disaffection in people who knew their rights had been a big mistake on the part of the British India government. The sanguinary events of the summer of 1857 should not have come as a surprise, for 'the native press [had] openly revealed' the possibility of an uprising.[118] Parliament had ignored 'the complaints of the injured' in the form of petitions, as well as 'seditious journals' brought to its attention, and so: 'The result is before us.'[119]

These voices, and this result, would now need to be heard as inspiration in the other direction. 'Now is the time to shew the Hindhus that we are prepared to reform, not them, but ourselves'.[120] The argument that Jones is merely annexing a distant rebellion to an English cause is complicated by the trouble he takes to invert the direction of influence; events in India became more a textbook than a motif. 'Democracy must be consistent', he insists, noting that he has not concealed the fact that he is 'avowedly … on the Indian side'.[121] It is Indian action that casts light on Englishness, demanding that the latter clarify and assert *itself*; one form of national assertion makes claims upon the other: 'If it is "un-english" to be on the side of the Hindhu, it is more "un-english" to be on the side of tyranny, cruelty, oppression and invasion.'[122] If the Indians are to reclaim their country from their rulers, so too do the English need to reclaim their country, or rather, 'England, as misrepresented by her rulers'. Jones was crystal clear about where transformation was required and it was not in India: 'It is time that England change – or rather, that England make her veritable voice be heard – the voice of the English people – and cry, "right is right, and truth is truth." '[123] The much-vaunted pedagogical enterprise of empire had rebounded on the British: 'If they massacre us, *we taught them how*'.[124] In several articles, Jones uses striking metaphors of corporeal transmission to draw out the reverse direction of influence, especially with regard to unity of purpose. 'Suppose the spirit of the Sepoy host (without its barbarity) were infused into English Democracy', he writes, 'where then would be class government?'[125] Two weeks later, as news of cholera outbreaks came in, he would exhort fellow Chartists with characteristic trenchancy: 'Do you not see that the Asiatic East can send us something better: – yet more terrible than cholera; the glorious contagion of successful

revolution?'[126] The language here is, of course, distinctly reminiscent of David Hume's elaboration of sentiments, passions or manners spreading between people like a 'contagion' – a word Hume uses along with its cognates, 'sympathy' included, 'to refer to the *process* by which people enter into the sentiments of others'.[127] It was also a deliberate reframing of the ruling elites' anxiety that rebellion could spread across the colonies. So, for instance, the Duke of Cambridge: 'I cannot forget the observation made by the Emperor Napoleon, who said, in alluding to our Indian affairs, that we should keep an eye to all our colonies, and on no account think of reducing our force in them, as a mutiny was a very catching thing, and nobody could foresee how other localities might take the infection.'[128]

Rather than just point to the English love of liberty spread into the colonies or the happy coincidence of national aspirations, Jones seeks to chide and galvanize a dispirited, defeated people's movement by drawing its attention to a resistance that does not appear to be futile – and one which has implications for their own democratic futures: 'Indian mismanagement will be felt in our mines and mills, our farms and factories.'[129] The biblical series of corporeal and fleshly metaphors of revitalization here enable Jones to pronounce prophecy: 'Do you not see, the "dry bones" are shaking all around, putting on the full flesh of a new life, and rising up in glorious resurrection, to fight once more the old–old fight of freedom?'[130] Beyond the figurative, the revolt in India has salutary material consequences: 'Do you not see that our false system of exchange and credit, the golden crust on which our oligarchy stands, is breaking like the ice-floes at the April-thaws, before the hot breath of that Hindhu revolt?'[131] Note the acknowledged shift in emphasis from deeds of (mis)rule to acts of resistance: indeed, the first such essay is titled, with simple significance, 'The Indian Struggle'.[132] As 'one of the most just, noble, and necessary ever attempted in the history of the world' (unlike many, Jones regards India as part of world history), the struggle for liberty in India cannot justifiably be seen as different from those European struggles his readership – and others – would have sympathized with: Poland against Russia, Hungary against Austria, Italy against the Germans and the French. He thunders: 'Was Poland right? Then so is Hindostan. Was Hungary justified? Then so is Hindostan. Was Italy deserving of support? Then so is Hindostan. For all that Poland, Hungary, or Italy sought to gain, for that the Hindhu strives. Nay, more!'[133] It is easy to underplay the radicalism of this insistence on parity at a point in time when ideas of freedom were considered distinctly European in provenance: 'The wonder is, not that one hundred and seventy millions of people should now rise in part; – the wonder is that they should ever have submitted at all.'[134] The rhetoric is no longer that of 'slumbering millions' who must awaken into the dawn of a taught freedom, but of people who would not have submitted in the first place had it not been for the betrayals of their 'kings, princes, and aristocracies', a shared curse with Britain – indeed, 'the enemies and curses of every land that harboured them, in every age'.[135]

With due attention to his emphasis on 'sympathy', necessarily an act of imagination catalysed by 'contagion', Jones's yoking together of the Indian anticolonial and English democratic causes is plausibly read as an attempt to construct solidarity in the face of differences: 'We bespeak the sympathy of the English people for their Hindhu brethren.'[136] As if unsure that this will be forthcoming – 'Their cause is yours', he urges – Jones suggests an elaborate exercise of the imagination in which his readers find themselves conquered slowly through intrigue, betrayal, confiscation, pillage and attack by various groups from Europe who had first arrived and asked permission merely 'to build a factory on Woolwich Marsh'.[137] What would they, the English, do? 'You would rise – rise in the holy right of insurrection, and cry to Europe and to the world, to Heaven and earth, to bear witness to the justice of your cause'. This 'sympathy' derives, unlike contagion, not 'so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it', in Adam Smith's terms, with fellow-feeling deriving from 'changing places in fancy with the sufferer'.[138] Both are distinct from benevolence, breaking from the paternalism of reform. Of course, Jones makes a leap of faith here – that a common standpoint will emerge from the imagination of a common condition. As Knud Haakonsen notes, however, the emphasis on imagination is embedded in Smith's famous elaboration of 'sympathy', of which Jones cannot have been unaware: 'The act of sympathetic understanding is a creation of order in the observer's perceptions by means of an imagined rationale for the observed behaviour. As agents or moral beings, other people are, therefore, the creation of our imagination … the same can be said of ourselves; as moral agents we are acts of creative imagination.'[139] Jones is also vulnerable to the charge of romanticizing what he calls 'one of the grandest and most justifiable national wars ever waged by an oppressed people'.[140] Yet, to leave it at that would be,

withdrawal of a resented external power, Norton admits to a sense of his own contradictions: 'It may seem paradoxical, and I confess, I feel it difficult how to reconcile my statement of belief in discontent on the part of the masses with the admission that our Government is an improvement on any form which has preceded it.'[62] (He does, however, note that the previous form of government being 'worse' does not make this one 'good'.) This admitted paradox is important, as it is one that would continue to dog British critics of empire into the next century: the clash between acknowledging the wishes of the ruled and an inability to relinquish fully the liberal principle that it was possible to govern benevolently and responsively. Norton is conscious that his disquisition on the deep-rooted and widespread causes of disaffection here fails to follow through on its own conclusions about widespread disaffection, with a call for the withdrawal of Britain from the colony. Norton's declaration sits at odds with his analysis: 'It is not possible to conceive a greater calamity to the people of India, than the present dissolution of the bands between them and us.'[63] But, even so, Norton's conception of a reconfigured rule is radical in its insistent inversion of the direction of assimilation. If, on the one hand, the familiar liberal trio of 'justice, prudence, and benevolence' must be deployed to 'reconcile the Natives to our rule' until, on the other, they are 'fitted to take their own government peacefully and powerfully into their own hands', the very definition of benefaction had changed.[64] It was important for the British in India to change their behaviour to the point where the natives would come to regard them less as benefactors than 'as a portion of themselves'.[65] This seemingly throwaway exegetical phrase is important, for here is neither a radical othering nor a simple assimilation of native lives and cultures to European mores. It is the British outsider who must strive to become part of the Indian self; and, for this to happen, the wishes of those whom Britain rules had to be foundational: 'We have governed too much for ourselves, too little for the people.'[66] Rather than calling for Indians to be 'lifted to the heights of Victorian liberalism', Norton was calling for the ruling British to bend their ear low to their subjects – to listen and integrate.[67] They would, of course, do the opposite, withdrawing into the enclaves of power from which rule would be undertaken carefully, but enacted upon an inferior people who did not know what was good for them.

Norton's sudden shift – and it is self-consciously, even sheepishly, sudden – from articulating a trenchant attack on the failings of British rule, including charging it with being primarily concerned with revenue extraction, to producing an equally impassioned entreaty for a reformed continuance of it, is contradictory. Yet it also embodies a wider truth: calls for reforms, especially in colonial contexts, were generally responses to pressures from below rather than initiatives from above. 'Any government of ours in India must be one of opinion,' Norton insisted, meaning not only that it must be responsive but that it must be seen to be responsive to *native* opinion.[68] Rather than waiting to bestow self-government once Indians were deemed ready for it, British rule in India must become immediately accountable to the ruled. Norton was explicitly refusing authoritarian liberalism and benevolent colonial despotism as the answer to 1857. His counter-discourse – which is based, as he repeatedly stresses, on an attention to the spoken words of the subjects of British rule – points towards the possibility of a relationship between the inhabitants of India and the British that could be dialogical. At one level, Norton's reformism may be simply pragmatic; physical force might prevail now but will not suffice in the long run: 'When once combination among them becomes feasible, and a determination to combine is persevered in, the greater force must prevail over the lesser. When a hundred million combine, writes Sir Charles Napier, the game is up.'[69] But that would be to miss Norton's repeated emphasis on the ethical centrality of the views of the ruled and the way in which he insisted on treating the 'Mutiny' as a text that invited reading and dialogical engagement. Norton was raising the startling possibility that the ruled could be the authors of their own futures, agents of change rather than wedded to 'Oriental stagnation', and that the rulers might benefit from working collaboratively with them.[70] We should note here the acknowledgement that the greater power ultimately resides with the ruled and not the occupiers, and renders all projects of 'improvement' fraught with danger: 'May it not all end in the contempt of Caliban for Trinculo!'[71] Norton is not quite suggesting that it is the British who have taught Indians self-assertion, but rather that English education has afforded natives a means, by giving them knowledge of their rulers, of assessing and puncturing British imperial mythologies: 'Those whom they mistook for gods, they discover to be mere men.'[72]

Much of the remainder of Norton's text is a damning list of annexations ('thefts'), especially of the kingdom of Oude, treaty violations, and revenue extraction that 'have had no small share in causing the suspicion with which we are now universally regarded'.[73] Indians are capable of speaking up – and Norton

suggests to Herbert that the imperial project was itself plagued by crises of 'that vital constituent of mid-Victorian culture, the national conscience'. This, he avers, shows up the fundamental wrongness of 'studies informed by Said's ground-breaking *Orientalism*', which have taken as their 'first commandment the premise of the monolithic, always self-consistent nature of imperialism'.[42] Quite apart from the patently absurd caricature of Said's work, what is really telling here is Herbert's own regurgitation of the axiom that imperialism was a self-correcting system, constitutively plagued by a sense of its own wrongness. If it was indeed the case that a constantly uneasy conscience redeems Victorian culture, then we must ask why it took events entailing violent anticolonial insurgency for a 'faculty of searching self-scrutiny' to be awakened, and for Britons to be 'afforded a deeply disillusioning view into the national soul'.[43] Why did this 'national conscience' emerge only in the face of resistance to the imperial mission and the brutal counterinsurgencies required to suppress it? Why would a value system inherently 'fatally at odds with itself' worry about 'shocking perversions' only when challenged by an opposite force making its own demands upon it?[44]

My own argument here turns away from the hypostatizing pieties of a presumed national conscience towards an examination of rebel agency as a catalyst for serious criticism of the imperial project. Looking at three very different readings of 1857 perceived as a revolutionary moment, I want to draw out some aspects of dissident engagement with India. The first is the way in which the rebellion itself functions as a text upon which is impressed the voice and will of insurgents. The second is the manner in which this text functions as a pedagogical enterprise in which the direction of tutelage is reversed: it is the colonizers who must learn from the colonized. The last – and perhaps most important for a longer narrative account of the emergence of British anticolonialism – is the emergence of possibilities for forging fellow-feeling between denizens of the metropole and inhabitants of the periphery, a shift that would replace paternalism with dialogism, thus creating new affective and political dispositions. John Bruce Norton, an 'India hand' of a critical bent, called for a radical reconstitution of relations between rulers and ruled in the direction of equality and, in a remarkable inversion, for the British to assimilate with the Indians. The Chartist leader and poet Ernest Jones would explicitly celebrate revolutionary 'contagion', whereby the Indian rebels might inspire domestic resistance. Finally, there is the unexpected radicalism of Richard Congreve, the Positivist leader who was one of the few to call unambiguously for a full British withdrawal from India and the forging of working-class solidarity with those under British rule.

'We may learn much from them as well as teach': John Bruce Norton and the Illuminated Text of Rebellion

Among those Britons of a liberal disposition who did not take 'the fact of resistance … as evidence of a derisive and perverse rejection by Indians of the civilizational benefits proffered by imperial rule', but sought instead to engage with its implications for the Empire as a whole, was the Madras lawyer and jurist John Bruce Norton.[45] Norton is important for our purposes not only because he dissented from government policy and practice – well before the insurgency, which, he tells us, he predicted – but because his own conflicted view about the continuance of British rule in India begins to indicate the emergence of an attitude towards the colonized that was neither just paternalist nor simply relativist. What Norton's lengthy account of causation does make clear, however, is the need for a certain kind of reverse tutelage, whereby it would be the British who learned from the Indians.[46] Here, the actions of the rebels – rather than 'an explicit intellectual discourse', to use Trouillot's phrase – would be the primer.[47] In a resonant metaphor, Norton describes the rebellion as a text – indeed, an illuminated manuscript, wherein 'the same truth is thrust forward in a more startling and authoritative form … written in the blood of our murdered countrymen in India, illustrated by rebellion, and illuminated by the conflagrations at Meerut and Delhi, and Lucknow, and Allahabad'.[48] The reversal of textual *authority* is not insignificant: it is the rebellion that puts flesh and blood, so to speak, on the Englishman's words. Norton himself might not have been heeded when he warned of impending trouble but ignoring the claims 'written' in blood by the rebels would be catastrophic. 'We' have something to learn from 'them', and here Norton's drawing on the voices of rebels mouthing profanities is telling. He recounts an exemplary incident, 'a glimmering of the truth' relayed in the *Bombay Times*: 'At the slaughter of Neemuch, when the officers said to their native troops … "You have eaten the Company's salt, why are you not faithful to it?" The answer, as the

re-conquest, for then the British working classes 'would not allow their lives, their money, and their claims to be sacrificed in an object they would feel to belong wholly to the commercial classes'.[212] What is striking about Harrison's meditations, in contrast to Congreve's rather more surefooted insistence on the wrongness of colonial rule, is that they are shot through with doubt. 'We are indeed a nation of colonists; and India is the fairest of our possessions', Harrison concedes; but what if, in fact, all such conquests do, other than enhance commercial interests, 'is to wrap round Britannia a useless purple' which will enable historians of the future to 'show how the imperial pomp blinded both English and Europeans to the real position of this country on the map'?[213] In the end, 1857 had shown that India resisted incorporation and could only be governed now as a 'temporary possession', one which it was futile to attempt to Europeanize or Christianize. From this vantage-point, Britain's empire was at best folly, and at worst a catastrophe that did nothing for 'national existence'.[214] Though he prognosticated that the century 'long before its close – will see the last of British rule in India', within a few weeks of writing these words Harrison would find himself once more doubtful, as it became clear that the uprising would be suppressed.[215] Now, not unlike Jones, he suggested he would support a reformed project 'to govern India, but *solely from the point of view of an intelligent and patriotic native* – if it can be done. If not – marchons!'[216]

For all that it created both uneasiness and public anguish, the Indian uprising of 1857 did not constitute a crisis that forged anything like a critical consensus on the downsides of empire. As others have noted, it undermined the liberal pedagogical mission to raise the inhabitants of the subcontinent to higher civilizational standards. It is also widely accepted that lines of difference were hardened, confirming 'the mutual distrust between rulers and ruled'.[217] Yet, as I have argued here, some responses to the uprising laid the ground for a different interpretation of such crises of rule – one that undermined attitudes of paternalism and benevolence in favour of dispositions that emphasized fellow feeling, reciprocal engagement and reverse pedagogy. Such interpretations may have been a minor key against the upsurge of emotions that marked the response to the uprising, but they constitute, nonetheless, a bookmark which kept different political possibilities open. These included modes of relating to non-Europeans that both acknowledged the variety of the ways in which the 'human' expressed itself in cultures and sought to forge common ground. The idea that Englishness, or Britishness, also needed to reconstitute itself for the better in the face of resistance, learning from it in the process, was also put into play at this time.

Let us return, finally, to Edward Thompson, writing not quite seventy years later, convinced that another Indian struggle was once again imminent, but hoping that it would not be necessary, and arguing that it need not be embittered. If there was 'irreconcilability' between white and brown in India, its roots lay far back in the events of 1857: 'But from Bihar to the Border the Mutiny lives; it lives in the memory of Europeans and of Indians alike. It overshadows the thought and the relations of both races … Those memories have never slept, and now they are raising their heads as never before.'[218] The shadow of accepted accounts of the 'Mutiny' thus fell over events that followed, from the second Afghan War to the 1919 massacre at Jallianwala Bagh, by enshrining harsh retribution for any resistance. On the British side, General Dyer could not be pilloried as the sole villain of the horrific massacre in Amritsar, but needed to be seen instead, in Thompson's view, as the embodiment of a national delusion generated by a fatal mythology: 'It was our inherited thought concerning the Mutiny and Indians and India that drove him on. The ghosts of Cooper and Cowan presided over Jallianwala.'[219] If relations between the British in India and Indians were not to escalate into a final, irrevocable clash, then it was for the British, not the Indians, to 'face the things that happened, and change our way of writing about them'.[220] The process of changing the way the Empire was written about would take a very long time; indeed, it remains incomplete. Events that made such a rewriting imperative, however, would take place with determined regularity across British colonial possessions: the next one would be less than a decade after the Indian insurgency, in faraway Jamaica. It too would put questions of empire and the imperial project back into the public consciousness in Britain.

‘The spirit of the sepoy host’: Ernest Jones and Revolutionary Contagion

In a useful article referencing the 1857 uprising, Tim Pratt has argued rightly that while historians have acknowledged that the episode elicited criticism of aspects of imperial policy and administration in the imperial metropole, ‘the possibility that the rebels were actively supported in their struggle has been almost completely ignored’.[85] He notes that one of the people to conspicuously offer such support was the Chartist leader, Ernest Jones: ‘Rather than joining the chorus of horrified condemnation of the Indian insurgents, Jones actively sought to identify the causes of the rebels and Chartism by attempting to elide the political, racial and cultural differences between the British and Indians being highlighted in parliament and the mainstream press, instead stressing the linkages between their respective causes.’[86] Chartism – the movement which emerged from the publication of the People’s Charter in 1838 – was itself headed for decline by the late 1840s, when Jones entered it, and working-class radicalism in general was an increasingly marginalized force in mid Victorian Britain.[87] As Miles Taylor, drawing on John Saville, notes: ‘Ernest Jones and Chartism became synonymous in the mid-1850s.’[88] Already a reasonably well-regarded poet and a journalist of some note, Jones would give Chartism one last lease of life, lecturing widely, and editing as well as writing large portions of the weekly *People’s Paper*.[89] The latter fact is important, because ‘it was at precisely this juncture that the press assumed an overriding significance in the annals of the Chartist movement’.[90] Jones’s engagement with – and championing of – the cause of India through that period would, apart from anything else, bring a non-European and more strenuously anticolonial dimension to Chartist internationalism, which, while it had sympathies with Polish nationalism and the Irish struggle, had been largely focused on domestic matters.[91] By the time Jones came out of prison, where he had been serving a sentence for ‘sedition’ until 1851, Chartism as a mass movement was over, though its influence would be felt in other reform initiatives and movements. Jones would try valiantly after his release to resurrect it, and as he did so, he found inspiration from an unexpected quarter. Framed as a stimulus to action in England, the Indian revolt allowed Jones to try to expand the language of a movement in decline.

Although better known for writings on European affairs, including the Crimean War, Jones had long taken an interest in Indian affairs, writing stinging polemics in the *People’s Paper* about the management of the East India Company in 1853, when its charter came up for renewal before parliament. In these, he had described a ‘mighty and magnificent country’ turned into ‘a nest for the most profligate nepotism’ by the greed of a ‘race of harpies’.[93] Critical as those pieces are of British rule, there is little sense in them of the presence of colonial subjects – still less of any resistance on their part. Jones’s focus is squarely on misrule. News coming out of India in the late spring of 1857 initially appeared to interest him less for its implications for the subjects of East India Company rule than for what it meant in terms of securing British lives and commercial interests. As news of regimental mutinies started to pick up in frequency during late June 1857, the *People’s Paper* began by analysing them in generally familiar terms, as an all-too-understandable soldiers’ rebellion born of disaffection with poor working conditions which included reduced pay and pensions, onerous terms of enlistment, and lengthened marches. Given this situation as well as the sharpening of the lines separating the races, ‘is it unreasonable’, one excerpt from another newspaper asked, ‘that they should exhibit symptoms of discontent?’[94] While speculating that slighted religious feelings and the racial divide between ruler and ruled might be at work, the paper’s initial reports did little more than note that the Indian populace was ‘held at bay only by the bayonet’s point’.[95] Eventually, Jones wrote of the existence of wider discontent generated by the tax regime of the ‘Permanent Settlement’, noting accusingly that ‘the ryot was thrown into destitution – the universal confiscation of the soil was your great crime, and you are beginning to taste the fruit of retribution’.[96] Though within weeks he would deem it a ‘patriotic assertion of a gallant people’s rights, against the vilest usurpation that polluted the black page of history’, Jones seemed initially unsure whether the Indian rebellion would indeed grow.[97] He did, however, provide his readers with extended essays on the ‘vast land’, in which he delineated its many features, including a ‘mighty gathering of races’, diverse resources, and historical and artistic achievements; terra nullius, it was not.[98]

When by August, however, it had become clear that what was unfolding in India was indeed a large-scale uprising, Jones’s tone would change quite dramatically, as he set himself the task of