

The Protocols of Nena Sahib: the 1857-fantasy of Hermann Goedsche

Kim A. Wagner

The Prussian author of historical romantic fiction, Hermann Goedsche (1815-1878), is today best known for having written the source for the anti-Semitic text *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which allegedly proved the existence of a world-wide Jewish conspiracy. Goedsche's mammoth novel *Nena Sahib, oder: Die Empörung in Indien* ('*Nena Sahib, or: The Uprising in India*') written in 1858-59 under the pseudonym Sir John Retcliffe, is, however, entirely unknown outside the German-speaking world.¹ This paper seeks to introduce this unique and fascinating work to a broader audience and to examine the context of Western fears of indigenous conspiracies as expressed in connection with the uprising of 1857. Written during the events, *Nena Sahib* offers a rare example of a Continental European perspective on 1857, which completely inverts the British literary representations while at the same borrowing heavily from the conventional repertoire of Orientalist stereotypes.

The convoluted plots of the novel are altogether too elaborate to be summarized within the scope of the present article and in the following I shall confine myself to discussing the parts that impinge directly on the depiction of the 1857 uprising. The story, which begins in 1851 and ends in 1857, plays out across the world, on all the continents except for the Antarctic, and involves more than two dozen main characters and as many subplots. Initially evolving around the disputed testament of the fabulously wealthy nabob Sir David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre, whose estranged wife had him declared insane in order to obtain his riches, the plot soon spins out of control and sprouts subplots at an exponential rate.² The actual story follows the fates of various individuals who have suffered at the hands of the evil British Empire and only fairly late do the different strands of the novel coalesce in India as the plots reaches their climax in the tumult of the uprising.

The noble Irishman, Captain Ochterlony, is unjustly accused of the murder of Dyce Sombre's designing sister, and transported to Australia, while the author's alter-ego, the German and morally upright Dr. Friederich Walding, is 'press-ganged' into the British navy. These two friends knew Sir David but fell foul of the evil machinations of greedy British aristocrats and officials, and by sheer chance they later meet at the grave of Napoleon on the island of St. Helen. Also present at this meeting is the novel's other main protagonist, the Ionian freedom fighter Captain Grimaldi, who has been outlawed by the British officials in Greece. Grimaldi and a French officer have been sent on a mission by Napoleon III to ensure that the British are occupied in India and do not interfere with the

¹ Sir John Retcliffe *Nena Sahib, oder: Die Empörung in Indien* (Berlin: Carl Nöhring, 1858-59).

² It later turns out that Nena Sahib is the beneficiary of the Sir David's testament. For the sake of simplicity I have retained the novel's spelling of the name (Nena and not the historically more appropriate Nana).

aspirations of French politics in Europe. Completing this assembly of the disaffected is a young Boer, Peter Pretorius, whose lover was killed through the actions of a dastardly British officer, Lieutenant Rivers, in the Cape Colony, as well as two Indians. The latter are the emissaries of the dispossessed king of Awadh and of Nena Sahib, on their way to London to present a petition and reclaim the rightful possessions of their masters. Captain Ochterlony recognizes the common aim of the various parties and, by implication, presents the basic narrative framework of the novel in an appropriately over-dramatic scene:

‘It is not coincidence but God’s will that has brought together India, Holland, Ireland, France, Greece and even the German, on whose shorelines England enforces itself, to assemble here at the grave of that country’s mightiest enemy; Us, who have suffered the most from the English. Man’s fate is in the hand of God. Very well, let each of us make their accusation against the tyrants of the World at this grave and enter into a holy union of vengeance against England!’

He put his hand on the railing of the vault and began his tale in a monotonous voice. Lightning flickered above him as the thunder rolled and the storm raged! One after the other followed his speech. As the last one finished, they all kneeled around the stone, which had once covered the body of the great emperor, and placed their hands upon the cold black basalt and together swore:

‘Fight against England!’³

At the beginning of the novel, Nena Sahib is a suave and educated Indian prince, who is assembling a retinue of American trackers and hunters for his impending expedition as the head of the ‘San Francisco Tiger-Killing-Company’. He falls in love with the Irish girl, Margaretha O’Sullivan, whom he eventually marries and they become the perfect inter-racial couple back in India, as she exerts her temperate influence upon his fiery Oriental spirit. The British are ruthlessly exploiting their Indian subjects, torturing the peasants to extract revenue and sadistically violating their wives and daughters when they fail to pay.⁴ This obviously causes much resentment among the native rulers, especially Tukallah, alias Tanta Topi, who rules from the black castle of Malangher situated in a hidden paradisiacal valley. Tukallah, who was once the servant of Sir David, turns out to be the high-priest of

³ *Nena Sahib*, vol. I, pp. 505-6. All translations by Kim Wagner; due to the nature of Goedsche’s writing and nineteenth-century German, it has been necessary to restructure and reformulate some of the quotes.

⁴ There are, among other things, very explicit descriptions of the torture of a young Hindu maid who has her breasts crushed and pinched, see *Nena Sahib*, vol. II, pp. 131-89; and also Neuhaus, pp. 52-53.

the thugs and his Indian Shangri-La is really a thug-kingdom, which hides a subterranean temple where scores of hapless victims are sacrificed to Kali in the most brutal manner.⁵

As the narrative reaches the year 1857, Captain Ochterlony and Grimaldi are sowing the seeds of discontent as they organize the rebellion in the guise of Sofi the Dervish and the Sardinian Major Maldigri, respectively. In spite of having been wronged by the East India Company, Nena Sahib harbors no enmity against the British and thanks to his spouse he turns a deaf ear to those warning him against their greed and treachery. The situation, however, changes dramatically as the British officer, Lieutenant Rivers, kidnaps Margaretha to install her in his harem, where she becomes insane and dies soon after. Urged on by the devilish Tukallah, Nena Sahib is consumed by hatred and turns into the demonic scourge of the British as the call for rebellion is sounded: “The tiger of rebellion was unleashed – the tiger had tasted the blood of its masters and craved to bathe in an ocean of the intoxicating red stream gushing from the veins of its enemies.”⁶ With his retinue of European and Native American trackers, hunters and mercenaries, Nena Sahib turns into an Oriental Edmond Dantès, relentlessly pursuing his revenge and bringing all his wealth and power to bear upon this single objective. He even becomes the über-guru of the thugs in order to harness the stranglers to his cause, and as Nena Sahib assumes command of the rebellion, we hear in great detail of the massacres of British men women and children in Delhi and Cawnpore.

The novel’s depiction of India easily surpasses the mundane Orientalism of, for instance, Meadows Taylor’s *Confessions of a Thug* (1839), with a high-strung combination of *Arabian Nights*-imagery and Eastern decadence and debauchery, replete with snake-charming dwarves, dancing-girls, cobras and tigers and sacrificial orgies in white robes. Obviously, the reader is not cheated out of a *sati* rescue scene, which occurs after the massacre at Cawnpore, when the female thug, Anarkalli, realise that the man she loves, the British officer Sanders, has been crucified, blinded and mutilated to death by Nena Sahib’s men.⁷ The tragic conclusion to this condemned love-story presents a truly iconic image, as the female thug performs *sati* with the body of an Englishman inside Wheeler’s abandoned cantonment at

⁵ One would think that Steven Spielberg had used Goedsche’s depiction of the thug-temple as inspiration for *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), but the depiction of human sacrifice in cavernous temple ruins is in fact a common image within Orientalist representations of Indian religion, see for instance Cynthia Ann Humes ‘Wrestling with Kali: South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess’, and Hugh Urban ‘India’s Darkest Heart: Kali in the Colonial Imagination’, both in J.J. Kripal & R.F. McDermott (eds) *Encountering Kali; In the Margins, at the Center, In the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 145-68 & 169-95.

⁶ *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, p. 98.

⁷ This incident is based on an account in *The Indian Mutiny* (Routledge & Co, 1858), p. 148, written anonymously, see Edward Leckey *Fictions Connected with the Indian Outbreak of 1857 Exposed* (Bombay: Chesson & Woodhall, 1859), pp. 118-20. See also *ibid.* pp. 115-17, for a contemporary report of a Christian woman being crucified at Delhi. There were many such stories circulating in Britain during the summer of 1857, none of them credible, but they are indicative of the general level of public hysteria.

Cawnpore.⁸ In all its overblown symbolism, which for sure threatens the post-modern literary critic with interpretational overload and resulting analytic meltdown, this part of the story presents one of the few truly touching scenes of the novel – a moving inversion of the most stereotypical tropes of colonial India. What amounts to the conclusion of the novel is even more gothic in tenor: having fallen in love with the British girl whom he saved from the clutches of the thugs, the German protagonist, Walding, heeds the spiritual summons of her dying words, but discovers her ravished body in the infamous well at Cawnpore. In the dead of night and in pouring rain, Walding brings the corpse of his beloved to the garden of the palace at Bithoor, where Nena Sahib is sitting by the grave of his dead bride. Slung across Margaratha's grave is a white silken scarf drenched in the blood of the British massacred at Cawnpore.

The novel ends abruptly, leaving several of the plots unfinished, which was most likely due to a disagreement between Goedsche and his publisher. Some twenty years passed before the author returned to the subject in the novel *Um die Weltherrschaft* (which might be translated as: '[the struggle] For World Supremacy') and picked up the plot where he had left off.⁹ In this belated epilogue we hear of the brutal suppression of the rebellion and as Delhi is retaken by the British, the innocent inhabitants of the city are slaughtered in a manner not befitting Christians. Captain Ochterlony and Tukallah remain in Delhi to fight to the last, but are captured after being deserted by the sepoys, and in the end the noble Irishman and the thug are blown from canon along with scores of native princes. The Rani of Jhansi survives the uprising, but is forced to marry an Englishman, whom she skewers following the nuptial night after which she blows up her palace along with the evil lieutenant Rivers. Rivers survives but is crippled for life and accordingly Nena Sahib can no longer exact his revenge on him and disappears into the mountains, deserted by his followers. Some of the characters survive, and Captain Grimaldi, for instance, returns in Goedsche's later novels. Having wound up his unfinished novel and the uprising of 1857, Goedsche subsequently reintroduced Nena Sahib as a 'Gul' or demon and the owner of one of the three rings which hold the power to rule the world as he eventually joins forces with the Jesuits!¹⁰

Apart from the obvious grotesqueness and sheer exuberance of Orientalist tropes, there are a number of interesting aspects concerning Goedsche's novel. As the publication of its first volume in 1858 predates that of Edward Money's *The Wife and the Ward* (1859), *Nena Sahib* can with some right be described as *the* first Mutiny novel.¹¹ It furthermore contains each and every element usually associated with the Anglo-Indian Mutiny novel, wallowing as it does in themes of treachery and

⁸ *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, pp. 385-7.

⁹ Sir John Retcliffe *Um die Weltherrschaft* (Berlin, Verlag Richard Eckstein, 1906-08).

¹⁰ See Neuhaus, pp. 95 & 136.

¹¹ See Chakravarty, p. 109.

revenge, inter-racial marriage, disguise and identity, rape, indigenous conspiracies and religious fanaticism, thereby anticipating an entire literary tradition. The novel is thus testament to the impact of the events of 1857 outside of Britain, and reflects the manner in which the uprising was reported and perceived on continental Europe.¹² The popular and sensationalist brand of exoticism favoured by Goedsche situates the novel alongside the work of Alexandre Dumas and Eugene Sue, within the ranks of the penny-dreadful and Victorian pulp fiction, and quite separate from German high-Orientalism.¹³ With its heavy reliance on French popular literature, it is difficult to discern a distinctly German viewpoint in *Nena Sabib*, and even the blatant anti-Semitism and high-strung Christianity belongs to general discourses common across nineteenth century Europe.¹⁴ On one point, however, it does stand out: the pervasive and permeating Anglophobia. This makes *Nena Sabib* a quintessential Mutiny novel, which nevertheless completely inverts the entire 1857-repertoire. For Goedsche the conspirators of 1857 were the heroes while the British brought the uprising upon themselves through their greed and tyranny.

Goedsche and the Western Conspiracy Tradition

Herrman Ottomar Friederich Goedsche (1815-1878) came from a Catholic background and was a low-level post-functionary in a small peripheral town of eastern Prussia who wrote romantic fiction to supplement his wages.¹⁵ When the revolutions of 1848 broke out, he went to Berlin and as a staunch supporter of the Conservative party he became actively involved in politics and worked for the reactionary newspaper *Kreuzzeitung*. Goedsche produced propaganda of the most sensationalist kind and appears to have operated as an agitator and *agent provocateur* during the political upheavals of the time.¹⁶ Taking his inspiration from the literary world of Eugene Sue and Paul Féval, Goedsche dreamt up Republican and Democratic conspiracies and in 1849 he took part in forgery which involved an alleged plot by the left-wing politician Benedict Waldeck to murder the King of Prussia.¹⁷ He was arrested, but thanks to powerful connections, Goedsche only received a mild sentence and in 1853 he travelled to Turkey as a journalist. Increasingly, he turned to the writing of literature and his first major work was the 1500-page novel *Sebastopol* (1855-1857) which largely evolved around the Crimean War. Goedsche

¹² Parts of Goedsche's account strongly resemble some of the journalistic articles written by Karl Marx and Friederich Engels, see for instance 'Investigation of Torture in India', *New-York Daily Tribune*, 16 Sept. 1857.

¹³ See K. Murti *India: The Seductive and Seduced "Other" of German Orientalism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000); and T.C. Kontje *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

¹⁴ See G. Cubitt *The Jesuit Myth – Conspiracy Theory and Politics in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

¹⁵ The main work on Goedsche is Volker Neuhaus' *Der zeitgeschichtliche Sensationsroman in Deutschland 1855-1878: 'Sir John Retcliffe' und seine Schule* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1980); but see also Ralf-Peter Martin *Wunschpotentiale: Geschichte und Gesellschaft in Abendteuerromanen von Retcliffe, Armand, May* (Königstein: Verlag Anton Hain, 1983), pp. 21-47.

¹⁶ Neuhaus, p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

invented the concept of the 'Contemporary Historical-Political Novel' and this in time became a series of works which dealt with contemporary historical events in a heavily romanticised manner. *Nena Sabib* of 1858-59 was the second instalment and by far the most popular of the 35 books the author wrote during his lifetime. The first volume of *Nena Sabib* sold out and went into its second printing even before volume two had been published and the novel became immensely influential in popular German literature.¹⁸

In 1868 Goedsche wrote the novel which was to make his name forever associated with conspiratorial anti-Semitism, namely *Biarritz*, which concerned the European politics of Bismarck and Napoleon III, but also contained a chapter entitled 'At the Jewish Cemetery in Prague'. In this chapter, representatives of the 12 tribes of Israel meet in secret in a cemetery at night to report on their progress in assuming control over the world by various nefarious means; and it noteworthy that their deity manifests itself as a golden calf amidst blue flames emerging from a tomb. In time this part of Goedsche's novel was turned into the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, most likely by the Russian secret police, and used to incite anti-Semitism and pogroms and eventually it became part of the Nazi anti-Semitic canon as proof of the Worldwide Jewish conspiracy.¹⁹ What had been a relatively insignificant part of Goedsche's romantic oeuvre thus had terrible consequences and today the provenance of the *Protocols* is still debated and in the Middle East, for instance, many perceive the text as authentic.

Goedsche had actually plagiarized a fictive dialogue between Machiavelli and Montesquieu, written by the French author Maurice Joly in 1864, and turned a critique of Napoleon III and the Republic into a blue-print for Jewish world domination.²⁰ In doing so, Goedsche gave free reign to his anti-Semitic sentiments but he also relied on a much broader European conspiracy-tradition which involved Jews, Freemasons, Jesuits and various secret societies such as the Illuminati, as the malign forces that pursued their evil goals in secret and caused wars and revolutions. Such beliefs were in fact commonplace in the 18th and 19th centuries: Benjamin Disraeli wrote a novel in 1844, before he became British Prime Minister, in which a Jew describes the network of influential Jews in powerful positions throughout Europe and informs the protagonist: "So you see, my Dear Coningsby, that the world is governed by very different personages from what is imagined by those who are not behind the scenes."²¹ Conspiratorial paranoia was particularly widespread in France after the Revolution, and in

¹⁸ Apart from the general influence of the novel it was the direct inspiration of Karl May's *Die Juwelen Nena Sabibel* (serialised in *Für alle Welt*, 1880-82), as well as the two novels *Rose von Delhi* and *Kreuz und Quer durch Indien*, see Neuhaus, p. 200.

¹⁹ See Norman Cohn *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967); and Cesare G. De Michelis *The Non-Existent Manuscript: A Study of the Protocols of the Sages of Zion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

²⁰ There is also a similar scene in Alexandre Dumas' *Joseph Balsamo* of 1846-48, see Umberto Eco *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 'Fictional Protocols', pp. 117-140, p. 135.

²¹ Quoted in Cohn, 1996-edition, pp. 36-7.

England following the Chartist movement and Swing riots, the emerging workers' unions were criminalised as secret societies.²² By revealing the real powers that secretly cause all events, a political world-view, which is dominated by the notion of conspiracies, brings order to an otherwise chaotic world and makes sense of what appears to be confusion, thereby ascribing a logic cause and effect to history. A political poster, written by Goedsche in the summer of 1848, provides a perfect example of his propagandistic skills and high-strung terminology and, one must assume, reflect in part at least the manner in which he perceived the events of the time:

The snake of rebellion is yet again lurking, – its crown is the republic, its breath is anarchy, its heart is communism and the theft of property – Polish emissaries with Slavic gold, French Jacobins, German Republicans and Communists are already pursuing their self-serving aims and are creeping amongst the people of the capital every evening, spreading their poisonous doctrines and whispering malicious agitation in the ears of the unguarded crowd; already a red joker is daring to mock the Prussian colours, and with secret measures this party prepares to strike...²³

When Goedsche's own political work was marked by such shrill conspiratorial paranoia, it is no wonder that his historical fiction should involve, and indeed be dominated by, the evil machinations of secret powers. Throughout his novels, Goedsche returned to the theme of conspiracies and the threat to established society posed by the various parties involved in the revolutions of 1848.

The fact that Goedsche wrote under a pseudonym, namely Sir John Redcliffe, led to much obfuscation in connection with the *Protocols*, the provenance of which has always been contested. When Goedsche's account of the meeting in the Jewish cemetery was published as a separate pamphlet in France in the 1880's, the allegedly true account was attributed to either the English diplomat 'Sir John Readclif' or the 'Chief Rabbi John Readclif'.²⁴ Thus Goedsche's penchant for charades resulted in further confusion as the original text was taken out of context and copied and republished time and again and the authenticity of the forgery seemed to be proven. When writing *Nena Sabib*, Goedsche also used his English-sounding pseudonym, which was probably inspired by the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe.²⁵ Publishing the novel under an English name provided it with a stamp of authority as it appeared to be an insider's description of the machinations of the British Empire. Yet the deceit went further and the earliest editions of *Nena Sabib* were subtitled: "Original English and German Edition" although the novel was never published in English. The text of the novel

²² See Albert D. Pionke *Plots of Opportunity: Representing Conspiracy in Victorian England* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2004).

²³ Quoted in Märtin, p. 27.

²⁴ Cohn, p. 42.

²⁵ Neuhaus, p. 37.

is also generously supplied with explanatory footnotes and even references to non-existent sources; yet again giving the impression that this was a work of some weight and not just a novel. In fact, several passages of the novel are accompanied with footnotes explicitly assuring the reader of the authenticity of the description. Goedsche's account of the massacre at Sati Chowra Ghat, for instance, is accompanied by the following comment: "The terrible scenes which we have described for you, were recounted by only one person, an eyewitness, the Havildar Rudschur Dschewarri, who after the battle at Cawnpore managed to make his way back to British where his statement was taken down by the authorities."²⁶ Similarly, Hindi words and Indian beliefs and myths were referred to and explained in footnotes, thereby imbuing the text with a further semblance of ethnographic value.²⁷ Thus Goedsche consciously sought to blur the distinction between 'fact' and 'fiction', between history and romance; and, one might say, the obfuscation of the framing of the novel constitutes a continuum of the conspiracies within the story, as the author himself played the same game of deception that he was describing.²⁸

Thugs, Conspiracies and Communication

Right from the outset, the uprising of 1857 was perceived in terms of a conspiracy by local officials, military officers, government administrators, politicians, and the Anglo-Indian and British public at large. In July 1857, Disraeli dismissed the significance of the greased cartridges and argued that the uprising was: "...the consequence of a conspiracy long matured, deeply laid, and extensively ramified."²⁹ Secret oaths, rumours and the enigmatic distribution of chapattis suggested hidden forces at work and various individuals and groups were pointed out as the true 'ringleaders', most notably the Indian Muslims with the ageing Mughal emperor at the head.³⁰ There is in fact very little difference between many historical accounts and the exposition of the conspiracy of 1857 in Mutiny-novels and thus it is hardly surprising that Goedsche should seize upon this aspect and make it the focal point of his story. *Nena Sahib* is, however, unique in the prominent role in the uprising assigned to the thugs, as

²⁶ *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, p. 365. See also vol. III, p. 183, where Goedsche in true hypocritical fashion begs of his female readership not to continue reading as he is about to describe deeds too horrible for retelling and which are moreover not the products of his fantasy, but historical facts(sic!).

²⁷ See for instance *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, pp. 130, 156 & 161.

²⁸ See also Svetlana Boym 'Conspiracy Theories and Literary Ethics: Umberto Eco, Danilo Kiš and The Protocols of Zion', *Comparative Literature*, 51, 2 (1999), pp. 97-122.

²⁹ Quoted in Pionke, p. 86. See also G.B. Malleson *The Indian Mutiny of 1857* (London: Seeley and Co, 1891), pp. 21-33.

³⁰ See Alex Padamsee *Representations of Indian Muslims in British Colonial Discourse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); and Pionke, chap. 4.

the historical rebel leader Tantia Topi is revealed to be Tukallah, the ruler of a thug kingdom.³¹ When considering the notion of conspiracies in the context of colonial India, it is practically impossible not to mention the thugs, the alleged fraternity of ritual stranglers who worshipped the Hindu goddess Kali.

The thugs are to colonial conspiracy-theories of the Raj what the Templars are to their European counterparts: sooner or later one comes across them and this has always been the case.³² In 1854, a British doctor in India noted that: “Insane patients very generally dislike natives and, when they suspect conspiracies, notions of Thugs, & c. are very common.”³³ Fear of thuggee was not only limited to the colonial setting of India: the first workers’ unions in the British Isles were often described as malevolent secret societies by the authorities and Thomas Carlyle spoke of “Glasgow Thuggery” in connection with the trial of the Glasgow Spinners in 1838.³⁴ The rhetoric associated with thuggee also invoked an entire arsenal of police and judicial measures that could be brought to bear upon the uprising of 1857 – an extraordinary foe necessitated an extraordinary response. In 1858 it was stated in *The London Quarterly Review* that: “Mercy quite as much as justice demands that, ‘on the anti-Thuggee principle,’ every village, every haunt should be scoured, and not a man who fought against ‘his salt’ be left to propagate the idea of future crime.”³⁵

Philip Meadows Taylor first introduced the thugs to a European readership in *Confessions of a Thug* of 1839, which became immensely popular in Victorian England, but also spawned a number of Continental European works featuring Indian stranglers in various incarnations. In the highest selling novel of the nineteenth century, Eugène Sue’s *The Wandering Jew* published in 1844-45, the thug prince Feringheea escapes British captivity and ends up in the service of the Jesuits in France, while a German novel entitled *Die Thugs, oder Indischer Fanatismus* appeared in 1845.³⁶ Sue’s use of the thugs in his novel had been confined to a few characters and a very brief description of their practices, and thus it appears that Goedsche was the very first to assign to them a significant role in the historical events of colonial India preceding their supposed eradication in 1838.

As early as 1812, during the very first British operations against thugs, a British official commented that: “It has been said that these people compose a regularly organized and secretly tho’

³¹ In Meadows Taylor’s *Seeta* (London: Henry S. King, 1872), the rebellious sepoy Azrael Pande is a former thug, while the hapless Flashman runs afoul of the resurrected thugs under the direction of Russian agents in George Macdonald Fraser’s *Flashman and the Great Game* (London: HarperCollins, 1975).

³² See Umberto Eco *The Pendulum of Foucault* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989).

³³ J. Macpherson ‘Report on insanity among Europeans in Bengal’, *The Indian Annals of Medical Science*, April 1854, pp. 704-5, quoted in Singha, p. 179, n. 44.

³⁴ H.D. Traill (ed.) *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Scribner, 1896-1901), vol. 29, p. 120.

³⁵ *The London Quarterly Review*, 18 Jan. 1858.

³⁶ Eugène Sue *Le Suif Errant* (Paris, 1844-5); Carl Gottfried Rössler *Die Thugs, oder Indischer Fanatismus. Historischer Roman* (Altenburg: Schnuphase’sche Buchhandlung, 1845). The title of the latter translates as: *The Thugs, or Indian Fanaticism. Historical Novel*.

extensively connected society similar to that of the Illuminati or other bodies of that description, the influence of which is widely felt tho' the society itself and its members were concealed by a veil of mystery which none but the initiated can draw aside."³⁷ As it happened, the official in question did not concur with this description of the thugs but the comparison was to become a recurring theme in colonial accounts of thuggee. A key element in the colonial representation of thuggee was in fact the geographical ramifications of the phenomenon and the elaborate network of gangs supposed to be working in unison; according to a British account of 1833: "...the Thugs have established a regular system of intelligence and communication throughout the countries they have been in the practice of frequenting, and they become acquainted, with astonishing celerity, with proceedings of their comrades in all directions."³⁸ At times the thug informants themselves reinforced this perception of their association and connections and one claimed that "he could send a message to Calcutta, or any part of the country, and receive an answer in much less time than the dawk [*official mail*]."³⁹ One of the key tropes concerning conspiracies is the alleged ability of conspirators to communicate swiftly and in secret; the Frenchman Augustin Barruel (1741-1820), who more than anyone contributed to the notion of a great Jewish conspiracy, gave the following account of the manner in which the Grand Master of Freemasons distributed his orders:

...from neighbour to neighbour and from hand to hand the orders are transmitted with incomparable speed, for these pedestrians are delayed neither by bad weather, nor by the mishaps that normally befall horsemen or carriages; a man on foot can always get along when he knows the country, and that is the case here. They stop neither to eat nor to sleep, for each one covers only two leagues. The mail-coach takes ten hours from Paris to Orleans, stopping for an hour; the distance is thirty leagues. Fifteen pedestrians, replacing one another, can reach Orleans from Paris in nine hours, using short-cuts and above all never stopping.⁴⁰

One significant aspect of Barruel's account is the notion of neighbours and 'local knowledge', which aids the conspirators in communicating with great speed. This is reminiscent of the concept of the speed by which news travels among Indians and even more so, how the chapatis were distributed prior to the outbreak of rebellion in 1857. The mysterious chapatis were alleged to travel 200 miles in 24 hours, double the speed of mail runners, and the historian John Kaye stated that during the uprising

³⁷ Halhed to Perry, 10 Dec. 1812, in Perry to Dowdeswell, 15 Jan. 1813, BCJP, P/131/12, 30 Jan. 1813 (no. 62), APAC.

³⁸ *The New Monthly Magazine*, 38, 1833, p. 285.

³⁹ See Pringle to Barwell, 9 May 1827, *Ramaseena*, vol. II, p. 252

⁴⁰ 'Souvenirs du P. Grivel sur les PP. Barruel et Feller', *Le Contemporain*, July, 1878, pp. 67-70, quoted in Cohn, p. 36. See also Neuhaus p. 33, for a similar story regarding the '13 Jews of Königsberg' who could communicate with a "telegraph-like speed."

news travelled among the natives in a manner “almost electric”.⁴¹ When compared to accounts of the thugs and criminal communities, indigenous means of communication and the distribution of chapattis prior to the outbreak in 1857, the similarities between European and Orientalist notions of conspiracies are immediately apparent. A recurring theme within the colonial sphere is the image of the ‘jungle drums’ purveying hidden meanings undecipherable to the authorities or secret societies planning to overthrow the colonial rule. There was a fear of things happening just under the surface unknown to the colonial administration and kept secret by the indigenous population. This perceived or real threat assumed alarming proportions in times of unrest when the British found themselves unable to get access and gather information from certain social strata of their Indian subjects. In this context, the fears associated with the thugs were merely a distillate of common fears of the indigenous population more generally. Thuggee was only the most sinister association in what might be described as a continuum of secrecy within Indian society, which was in effect inaccessible to the British. The thugs and the uprising of 1857 embodied all that the British feared from their Indian subjects more generally and when combined constituted the ultimate scenario of colonial paranoia.

Counter-insurgency and Agency

Ranajit Guha and Gautam Chakravarty have both described the different stages within the body of British accounts of the uprising of 1857, with the two key components being insurgency followed by counter-insurgency.⁴² At the end of most of texts concerning 1857, order is restored in some form through the daring acts of the British heroes, who usually disguise themselves as natives and engage in counterinsurgency. Goedsche, however, has hundreds of pages leading up to the outbreak of the uprising, which only occurs in the last volume of the tripartite novel, and the main focus is on the planning and execution of the conspiracy. As the original novel ends after the massacres at Cawnpore, there is no counterinsurgency and no re-establishment of order. In *Nana Sahib*, it is the European protagonists who mediate between the world of the Indian rebels and the Anglo-Indian world and function as the crucial instruments of insurgency. Goedsche has in effect introduced a third party to the traditionally binary conflict of colonial India and through the use disguises and aliases, key components of any conspiracy, notions of identity are constantly blurred. In a manner of speaking,

⁴¹ See S.A.A. Rizvi & M.L. Bhargava (eds.) *Freedom Struggle in Uttar Pradesh* (Kanpur, 1957), vol. I, p. 392; Kaye, vol. I, p. 361; Troy Downs ‘Host of Midian: The Chapati Circulation and the Indian revolt of 1857-58’, *Studies in History*, 16 (2000), pp. 75-107; and C.A. Bayly *Empire and information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Neuhaus for a similar story regarding the ‘13 Jews of Königsberg’ who could communicate with a “telegraph-like speed”, p. 33.

⁴² See Ranajit Guha *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Gautam Chakravarty *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Goedsche presents the reversal of the surveillance fantasy as expressed within most Mutiny-novels, since the heroes are the conspirators, spreading sedition and planning the rebellion together with the natives.⁴³ In 1857 yogis and fakirs were reported to be the harbingers of revolt and Britain's ongoing conflict with Russia, which found its expression in the 'Great Game', led to suggestions that the Czar played a role in instigating the uprising.⁴⁴ In *Nena Sahib* the European protagonists heroes are in effect the agents of foreign powers and following the *coup d'état* of 1851, Napoleon III dispatches Grimaldi on his mission to India with the following orders:

"...For the time being, England determines the outcome of affairs in Europe, and I do not know how this country will respond to the new turn of events; I must have it in my power to paralyze its evil resolve and enforce its neutrality. England's weakest point is its colonies, especially India – its power is on a weak footing and sooner or later there will be an uprising. Several Indian princes have already offered to become the allies of France – the Governor of Pondichery is asking for resolute and experienced officers, as observers, who can communicate with the French, when they have managed to attach themselves to the courts of Indian princes. In a word – for the next five years, peace in India must be in the palm of my hands – after that, come what may; the power of France will be secured, and England will do my bidding instead of my being subservient to the London cabinet. This memorandum, which contains the orders and correspondence of various Indian notabilities, provides sufficient information concerning the proceedings and necessary precautions."⁴⁵

Unlike Russia, France has no design on the subcontinent itself and, according to Goedsche, Napoleon III merely instigates the rebellion in India to tie the hands of England in the context of European politics. Ultimately, the uprising of 1857 is little more than a strategic distraction while India simply provides a colourful backdrop to the international politics of the major European powers. As much as he sought to explain the rationale and justification behind the Indian's hatred of their British rulers, Goedsche diminished the agency of his native characters by making the European protagonists the main instigators of the uprising. The concept of conspiracy necessarily involves the notion of hidden forces at work, of unknown ringleaders who pull the strings and manipulates people and events: as such the understanding of 1857 as a conspiracy raises an important issue regarding agency. Many British officials at the time found it hard to believe that the sepoys or the Indian population more generally would rebel on their own accord, and the uprising was explained as the work of a few who had spread

⁴³ See Chakravarty, chap. 5.

⁴⁴ See Bayly, p. 316; David Urquhart *The Rebellion of India* (London: D. Bryce, 1857); and Robert Sterndale *The Afghan Knife* (London: Sampson, Low, 1879).

⁴⁵ *Nena Sahib*, vol. I, pp. 486-7. There does actually seem to have been rumours in India in 1857 to the effect that the French were enlisting men and preparing shipments of arms in support of the rebels, see Mss Eur C629, APAC, BL. Thanks to Dr. Marina Carter for bringing this to my attention.

the spirit of sedition to the many. The sepoy were described as mere children who had been led astray by the insidious Muslims or the superstitious Brahmins who were pursuing their own agendas.⁴⁶ This was in part a strategy to avert blame from the British themselves, by ascribing the causes for the uprising to a minority of discontented, and also to facilitate reconciliation with the larger part of their subjects after 1857. The notion of Indians as passive victims to superstition and under the malicious influence of Brahmin priests was by no means new and even the thugs were supposed to:

...conceive it necessary to propitiate the goddess Bhowanee, when they regard as arbitress of their destinies, and whose mercenary and crafty priesthood, ever ready to minister to the weakness and superstitions of her followers, do not scruple to lend themselves to the vices of these wretches, and wink at their horrible deeds. It is well known that these priests give information to the thugs of the movements of travellers, and the despatch of treasure. They suggest expeditions, and promise the murderers, in the name of their goddess, immunity and wealth, provided a due share of the guilty spoil be offered up at her shrine.⁴⁷

In some colonial accounts, the priests not only provided ritual legitimacy to the thugs but were the sanctimonious masterminds behind their murderous expeditions in what amounted to a conspiracy of superstitious assassins. The more significant implication of the alleged involvement of the priests, was that the evil of the thugs was seen to reflect on all Indians who, due to the caste-system, were thought to be held under the sway of Hindu priests: “How little astonishing is it, then, that we find a class of fellow creatures, like the thugs, so sunk in the depths of infamy, when the people are led by such unprincipled leaders.”⁴⁸ A very similar thing occurs in Goedsche’s novel, as Nena Sahib is initiated into the brotherhood of the thugs: instead of kneeling to kiss the holy pickaxe as part of the ceremony, he seizes it and kills the über-guru, thereby assuming control over the stranglers himself: “...I want to become a thug like you – not a murderer of a few worthless humans, but the vanquisher and destroyer of all beings. I will sacrifice an entire people on your bloody altar – only I must be the master of Death and all its servants, lest I be its dirty slave! [...] Give me the power, Tantia Topi, give me the power!”⁴⁹ As thuggee had officially been declared to have been suppressed by the end of the 1830s, no-one would seriously suggest that they played a role in 1857, and yet it is one of the characteristics of the thug as a

⁴⁶ See Pionke, pp. 83 & 89-90.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 514. See also W.H. Sleeman’s anonymous article in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, 3 October 1830.

⁴⁸ Spry (1834), p. 515. This was a commonly held view of Indian society, as appears from another contemporary description of the ‘Thugs’: “It might be supposed, that a class of persons whose hearts must be effectually hardened against all the better feelings of humanity, would encounter few scruples of conscience in the commission of the horrid deeds whereby they subsist; but, in point of fact, they are as much the slaves of superstition, and as much directed by the observance of omens in the commission of murder, as the most inoffensive of the natives of India are in the ordinary affairs of their lives.” ‘On the Thugs’, *The New Monthly Magazine*, 38 (1833), pp. 277-287, p. 280.

⁴⁹ *Nena Sahib*, vol. II, p. 492.

literary figure, that he could be employed for any devious purpose. In *The Wandering Jew*, the thug Feringheea is enlisted to the cause of the Jesuits by the scheming clerk Rodin, who persuades the Indian that “Kali and Rome are sisters”.⁵⁰ By comparison, then, it is not so farfetched that the thugs should take part in the conspiracy of 1857; it is indeed noteworthy that in the two major films depicting the thugs, namely *Gunga Din* (1938) and Steven Spielberg’s *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), the thugs are depicted as anti-colonial and are instigating a revolt against the British. By imbuing thuggee with a seditious anti-colonial agenda, such popular representations confuse the historical acts of anti-colonial sentiments with what is regarded as barbaric and superstitious acts. The aspirations of the thugs and the rebels of 1857, as well as revolutionary nationalists of the later nineteenth-century, are in effect conflated and reduced to similar expressions of irrational Oriental fanaticism.⁵¹

If the thugs become the tools of Nena Sahib in Goedsche’s novel, he is himself also a slave to his Eastern passions and unruly temper. Educated and civilised, Nena Sahib is only transformed into the infamous ‘Demon of Cawnpore’, when the British, as represented by the evil Lieutenant Rivers, abduct his wife. It is noteworthy that Rivers is depicted with all the negative characteristics of an Oriental despot and that Margaretha is installed in his harem, which is full of native beauties that he has lured away from their families. The classic story of white women being kidnapped and sold into sexual slavery, ending up in the harem of an Eastern prince, is here inverted as a morally depraved Englishman assumes that role, while Margaretha’s rightful husband is an Oriental.⁵² Once transformed, however, Goedsche’s Nena Sahib easily lives up to his reputation in colonial lore: while besieging Cawnpore, his tent is surrounded by poles carrying the severed heads of British defenders, and when he learns that Rivers has escaped, Nena Sahib crushes the head of an innocent English child with his clenched fist.⁵³ Typically of the romantic novel of the nineteenth century, epic historical events are caused by personal motives, as the themes of love, hate and revenge become the primal forces determining the course of history. In that sense the uprising of 1857 is the direct result of Rivers’ violation of Nena Sahib’s white bride, as the final act of British tyranny, which unleashes the Oriental demon that was hitherto chained by love and Western influence. This aspect of the plot thereby embodies the entire novel’s inversion of the standard narrative, as found in scores of Mutiny-novels, where Nena Sahib is the sexual predator pursuing the British virginal heroines.⁵⁴ Usually no reason is

⁵⁰ In Goedsche’s account, the thugs might even be characterised as the Jesuits of the Orient considering the malign nature of their brotherhood, their widespread networks, ability to command loyalty and insidious means of achieving their ‘fanatic’ goals.

⁵¹ On a similar note, see Valentine Chirol *Indian Unrest* (London: Macmillan, 1910).

⁵² See for instance Ruth B. Yeazell *Harems of the Mind: Passages of Western Art and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁵³ *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, pp. 327 & 366-7. See also Leckey for similar accounts of children being murdered in various ways.

⁵⁴ See for instance G.A. Henty’s *Rujjub the Juggler* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1893).

given for the cruelty of Nena Sahib, beyond his inherent Oriental bloodlust and though Goedsche's portrayal of the Indian prince can hardly be said to be sympathetic, the author does provide some kind of explanatory context for the acts and motives of Nena Sahib.⁵⁵ Interestingly, the cruelty of Nena Sahib and the rebelling Indians, which is a central feature of any fictional account of 1857, also introduces an element of ambiguity in Goedsche's novel.

Moral Ambivalence and the Spectacle of Torture

Although the European protagonists are aligned with the Indian rebels in a righteous cause to bring down the British Empire, Goedsche is unable to completely escape the Orientalist condemnation of Indian depravity and brutality during the uprising. The unholy alliance between justified Anglophobia and Oriental fanaticism leads to several moral dilemmas, and the noble Grimaldi, for one, grows weary of the intrigues as he realises the true nature of Nena Sahib's plan: "I to fear that I have acted wrongly in igniting this fire [...] I will fulfil my duty to the Emperor [but] the horrors of an honest battle is in itself enough, and there is no need to turn this into a Sicilian Vesper."⁵⁶ It is also through the personal intervention of Walding, that the Sikhs remain loyal to the British, thereby turning the struggle between "Hindu and Faringi" into an honest fight – the German hero may be Anglophobic, but he is also chivalrous.⁵⁷ Relinquishing their responsibility, the European conspirators eventually renounce the madness of Nena Sahib's revenge and the barbarism of the uprising.

The ambiguity is even more pronounced in Goedsche's depiction of the brutal slaughter and murders committed by the rebels; at times they seem justified, at times not. Mainly, they serve to shock the reader in the most voyeuristic manner and all pretensions at a moral lesson are lost amidst the screams of the tortured and mutilated. Within the Anglo-Indian literature, the massacres at Delhi and Cawnpore especially, offer the most obvious instances of melodramatic mayhem and in many ways constitute the symbolic embodiment of 1857.⁵⁸ In *Nena Sahib* this is no different: In Delhi, the stereotypically haughty and scornful daughter of the British Resident, Victoria, has struck a Hindu servant girl, in a fit of rage, and the girl, in consequence, lost her caste and became an untouchable. When the uprising erupts, the Hindu girl Auranga seeks her out and drags Victoria before the Mughal prince Akbar Jehan, whom she has once scorned by rejecting his offer of marriage. As she begs for

⁵⁵ There is a semblance of justification for Nena Sahib's acts of rebellion in Hume Nisbet's *Queen's Desire: A Romance of the Indian Mutiny* (London: F. V. White, 1893), pp. 15-6 & 185-6.

⁵⁶ *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, p. 53. Interestingly, the Sicilian Vespers is also invoked in Sir George Trevelyan's hysteric *Cawnpore* (London: Macmillan, 1865), pp. 69-70.

⁵⁷ Vol. 3 225, *Nena Sahib*, vol. III, p. 33.

⁵⁸ See also Patric Brantlinger *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 203.

mercy and invokes the rank of her father, Victoria is shown the severed tongue and head of the resident as the prince gloats:

‘Akbar Jehan has sworn to defile the name and memory of the proud Sahib of the Faringis! The dog who thought his blood too noble to mix with that of Timur, shall yet in death be embarrassed by his own child. Rip off her clothes, the hated dress of the Faringis!’

Twenty hands held up the unfortunate girl and tore her clothes to rags. In vain the girl defended herself and begged for mercy – mercy from tigers in human form! [...] Now she struggled and begged for death, but death would have been an act of mercy, and where does one find this virtue in an Easterner once his passions have taken over? Her dress fell torn to the ground, and wicked hands held down the virgin’s writhing body – wild witches of her own sex restrained the convulsing limbs as they tried to break free. The prince dismounted from his horse and threw himself upon her, accompanied by the devilish mocking laughter and hellish cheering of the crowd, which looked like wildly dancing demons celebrating the Bacchanal.⁵⁹

The scene ends in – for Goedsche – a typically exploitative manner as Victoria begs for her life:

‘Have mercy, Auranga’, the miserable girl moaned, ‘Forgive me what I have done, if one day you shall yourself hope for the mercy of heaven.’

But the Witch wound the girl’s long blond hair around her left hand and pulled her victim’s head further back, wielding a knife in her right hand. ‘Look, Hindustanis,’ she yelled, ‘how a Brahmin’s daughter repays the disgrace inflicted upon her by a Faring!’ As a circle of human monsters cheerfully held down the victim, Auranga made a deep incision with the knife across Victoria’s forehead and around her face, with all the skill of a savage scalper from the wastes of the Rio-Grande. As the tormented screamed piercingly, she then tore the white blood-spattered skin from the face, which was now a bloody mass of flesh and blood-vessels.⁶⁰

Victoria survives her ordeals, but soon after expires in the arms of two other fugitives, a French nun and an English officer, who swear to save their last bullets for themselves lest they fall into the hands of the rebels – an incident which was widely reported in the press during the uprising and which occurs in several novels.⁶¹ Having been publicly humiliated and taunted, the British, as represented by Victoria, are tortured by the inhuman Orientals, in a scene clearly drawing upon the imagery of Christian

⁵⁹ *Nana Sahib*, vol. III, p. 186.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. III, pp. 190-1. This incident is derived from *The Indian Mutiny* (Routledge & Co, 1858), p. 40, and it also appears to have been printed in the British press, see Leckey, p. 123-26 & 132-35.

⁶¹ See Leckey, p. 41-2. See also Edward Money *The Wife and the Ward* (London: Routledge, 1859), p. 371. There are other variations of the same theme, including the heroine of Henty’s *Rajjub the Juggler*, who disfigures herself with acid to prevent Nana Sahib from raping her.

martyrdom. Given the moral framework of the story, however, the reader's empathy is only invoked through the sheer barbarity of the Indians – and only in death are the evil deeds of the British redeemed. The anonymous British civilians who are massacred in Delhi, receive an equally horrible treatment at the hand of Goedsche, as a pregnant woman has her unborn child cut from her womb while another has a gun discharged into her sex – both having first been raped.⁶² Even when the English victim has the obvious sympathy of the reader, as in the case of Walding's love Edith, the description of torment is painfully explicit: Edith is given to "a Herculean, disgusting looking negro" who drags her back to his house and rapes this "white dove of the icy mountains" as he calls his victim with all the eloquence of a story-book Oriental. By making Edith's rapist a Negro, rather than an Indian, and a Herculean one at that, Goedsche was obviously playing on a common Western stereotype concerning the sexual prowess of African men and interracial rape.⁶³ The story of Edith's death was obviously inspired by the contemporary account of Col. Wheeler's daughter who murdered her would-be rapist before committing suicide following her capture at Cawnpore – a story later found to be unsubstantiated.⁶⁴ Goedsche's more or less explicit use of these stories reflects the wide-ranging currency of the sensationalism invoked in connection with the events of 1857 both in Britain and abroad. Sexual violence was a favourite theme and practically an obsession for Goedsche – in a later novel he describes how the Assassins forces slave-girls to mate with apes – and he was known among his contemporaries for his frivolity and vulgarity.⁶⁵ There was no shortage of sensationalist accounts of the brutalities of 1857 in England at the time, and James Grant's *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* of 1868, for instance, bears many similarities to *Nena Sabib*; yet few writers managed to reach the heights of hysteria and depths of abasement that Goedsche does with such obvious relish.⁶⁶

Interestingly, these sexually explicit scenes mirror Goedsche's earlier description of the tortures inflicted by the British in connection with the East India Company's exaction of revenue, prior to the uprising, which emphasizes the themes of justice and retribution. When describing the recapture of Delhi in the novel's sequel, Goedsche very clearly represents the uprising and the horrors it entailed, as the inevitable response on part of the Indian population in the face of the un-Christian behaviour of the British:

⁶² *Nena Sabib*, vol. III, pp. 192-3. The *Bombay Times* 17 Aug. 1857 reported that a pregnant woman having her baby cut out of her belly in Delhi, see also Leckey, pp. 163-4.

⁶³ On the subject of rape in connection with 1857 see Jenny Sharpe *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Nany L. Paxton *Writing under the Raj: Gender, Race and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination, 1830-1947* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

⁶⁴ See Andrew Ward *Our Bones are Scattered* (London: John Murray, 1996), pp. 504-506; and also Leckey, p. 109, 112-13 & 154-55.

⁶⁵ Neuhaus, pp. 52 & 24 .

⁶⁶ See James Grants *First Love and Last Love: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny* (London: Routledge, 1868); and Trevelyan *Cawnpore*.

But this cold-hearted and arrogant nation of peddlers is for ever a disgrace to Europe and Christendom! [...] It could be said that, in certain areas of the city, especially in Dauri Serai, one waded in blood, and the British sacking of Delhi completely outweighed the murderous acts of the fanatic, brutal and wild Indians; this otherwise so servile and passive people had, after all, been provoked by the outrages and indescribable tyranny of the East India Company.⁶⁷

This justification for the uprising is very close to that of Karl Marx as reported in the *New York Daily Tribune*, which might in fact have been the inspiration for Goedsche:

However infamous the conduct of the Sepoys, it is only the reflex, in a concentrated form, of England's own conduct in India, not only during the epoch of the foundation of her Eastern Empire, but even during the last ten years of a long-settled rule. To characterize that rule, it suffices to say that torture formed ail organic institution of its financial policy. There is something in human history like retribution: and it is a rule of historical retribution that its instrument be forged not by the offended, but by the offender himself.⁶⁸

If the Indians were barbaric and monstrous, it was the British who had made them so, and thus in spite of the pervasive Orientalist prejudice, Goedsche's scalding indictment of the 'Tyrants of the World' remains the polemic focus of his work. Where Ochterlony and the others' quest for revenge against the British is justified and righteous, that of Nena Sahib, however, is derailed by fanatic barbarism. Goedsche therefore introduce a dual track within his revenge-story, which turns 1857 into a romantic epic of what is essentially a European struggle with an exotic subtext provided by India and the events of 1857.

Conclusion

If we read Goedsche's authorship of the model for the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* back into *Nena Sahib*, we see that the British Empire represents the physical manifestation of the world-domination that the Jewish conspirators seek. The British are repeatedly referred to as evil merchants who worship gold and who are incapable of producing anything of value themselves; they are seen to be the cause behind industrialisation, capitalism, rationalism and liberalism – in short, everything that Goedsche hated.⁶⁹ In the mid-nineteenth-century, Germany had no colonial possessions to speak of and this

⁶⁷ *Um die Welt herrschaft*, vol. II, p. 200. The British retribution is also compared to the terrors of the French Revolution, *ibid.*, p. 207.

⁶⁸ *New-York Daily Tribune*, 16 Sept. 1857.

⁶⁹ See Neuhaus, pp. 118-21.

marginal position during the age of imperialism influenced the manner in which the British Empire was regarded. Goedsche could accordingly criticise the British for their exploitation of the Indian population from a relatively neutral position – and he certainly did so. Goedsche’s rhetoric is firmly embedded within the imperialist project and *Nena Sabib* has all the characteristics of the most sensationalist and Eurocentric literature of its day; and yet, due to the author’s nationality and unequivocal Anglophobia, the moral framework is inverted. To use the words of Patrick Brantlinger, Goedsche “dehumanizes both the dominated and the imperialist dominators” but he does so in a markedly different manner from that of his contemporary British writers.⁷⁰ *Nena Sabib* is very much a “heroic adventure” and a “conspicuous demonstration of racial superiority” but its moral thrust is essentially contradictory and ambiguous.⁷¹ As opposed to many of the accounts, written during the immediate aftermath of the uprising, that calls for revenge and in some cases even the extermination of all Indians, Goedsche’s 1857-fantasy ends with the justified revenge of the Indians – and only later followed up by the un-Christian revenge of the British.⁷² In line with much of the Anglo-Indian literature of the time, Goedsche focuses on interracial relationships and in fact every main character in *Nena Sabib* is to some extent romantically involved with a person of Indian or African descent. Crucially, however, these liaisons inevitably end in tragedy, thereby reinforcing the racist stereotype even as it seems to be transcending it.

This paper has sought to draw attention to the European tradition of conspiracies as a possible source for key elements in a number of accounts relating to the uprising of 1857. While some of these elements are distinctly Indian in origin, and specific to the historical events, others seem to draw on much wider fears of sedition, secret societies and malevolent conspiracies, which hark back to the darker chapters in European history. In *Nena Sabib*, Goedsche had the occasion to rehearse his later elaboration of the alleged Jewish conspiracy as expressed in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Yet, as so much else in the novel, the conspiracy is inverted as the sympathetic Anglophobic conspirators of 1857 are later turned into the evil Jews threatening the entire World. *Nena Sabib* remains a deeply obscure work, which nevertheless reflects the impact of 1857 outside of Britain and draws attention to some of the more sensationalist aspects of the Mutiny repertoire.

⁷⁰ Brantlinger, p. 200.

⁷¹ See Chakravarty, p. 6. Goedsche’s critique of British imperialism never extends further than his Anglophobia and is no where nearly as profound as Conrad’s critique of imperialism in *Heart of Darkness* (*Blackwood’s Magazine*, 1902).

⁷² Charles Dickens was particularly vitriolic in his calls for revenge, see Charles Dickens (Walter Dexter ed.) *Letters* (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch Press, 1937-8), vol. II, p. 889.