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Panic, False News, and the Roots of Colonial Fear

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Abstract This article offers a microhistory of a forgotten panic that engulfed the north Indian city of Allahabad in 1870, when the city's European residents began to anticipate a revolt by the native infantry. Rumors of this looming event, I argue, confirmed suspicions that ill-advised income tax legislation and military retrenchment had created a combustible situation. The apparent threat of insurrection was therefore symptomatic of a more systemic ailment: burgeoning distrust between the government of India, local officials, and British civilians. Rather than undertaking counterinsurgent action against dissident Indians or so-called Wahhabi agitators, the central administration attempted to tamp down European critique of its policies. I thereby foreground the government's confrontational relationship with the Anglo-Indian press and analyze its legalistic efforts to police the new telegraph lines that brought the false news of this fictitious mutiny to metropolitan notice.

In the early autumn of 1870, the secretary of state for India came into possession of a perplexing, month-old letter. Its author, Calcutta-based journalist James Wilson, claimed that the capital city of Allahabad in the North-Western Provinces was "now in incipient mutiny" because of Viceroy Mayo's pigheaded policies. Native informants reported that their communities readily "expect [ed] a storm," while the disdainful European public had taken to referring to Mayo as an "overgrown lad" and a "booby." Wilson, who noted his past efforts to "stay the mad career of the government," estimated that a mere quarter of the local population would support the colonial administration if polled. Given the opportunity, he, too, would likely "vote against them," though he acknowledged the need "for Englishmen to stick together in the event of active disturbance."[1]

On the face of it, this revelation of a perceived mortal threat was hardly extraordinary. Supposedly fanatical plots in North India and conflagrations along the turbulent North-West Frontier regularly perplexed British officials following the Uprising of 1857. The customary palliative for this distemper was counterinsurgent action, a system of reprisals that sanctioned extrajudicial violence in the interest of "discouraging future resistance."[2] Diverging from the copious literature on these sanguinary encounters, I recover another type of panic, one that arose from a

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[1] As quoted in G. Campbell, Duke of Argyll, to R. Bourke, Lord Mayo, 6 October 1870, Eur Photo Eur 467, fols. 120–23, British Library, London. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as BL.)

[2] Mark Condos, *The Insecurity State: Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India* (Cambridge, 2017), 8; Elizabeth Kolsky, "The Colonial Rule of Law and the Legal Regime of Exception:

suspicion that colonial governance had fatefully veered off course and created a combustible situation. In the summer of 1870, rumors of unrest were circulating throughout the North-Western Provinces and troubling the residents of Roorkee; by late August, the European inhabitants of Allahabad had begun to anticipate an armed rising by the native infantry. A mass panic ensued and radiated throughout the region. The central authorities responded by dismissing the grievances of their own compatriots and policing the colonial information order with extra vigor.

In this article, I account for the conditions that produced the Allahabad panic and explicate why the event continued to preoccupy high-ranking administrators long after the immediate alarm subsided. One might reasonably presume that colonial observers attributed the anticipated mutiny to Muslim subterfuge. After all, the turmoil coincided with the state trials of suspected Wahhabi dissidents belonging to the Tariqa-yi Muhammadiyya who had been charged with conspiracy and treason.[3] Adherents of the deceased jihadist Sayyid Ahmed, they had allegedly developed an insidious network linking cells in North Indian cities with a central stronghold at Sitana in present-day Swat. During the Uprising, colonial agents determined that these so-called fanatics had transmitted "rancorous and seditious letters" from Patna to troops on the Afghan border; previously, they had attempted to "tamper" with the 4th Native Infantry regiment when it was stationed at Rawalpindi.[4] But despite these ongoing bouts of anticolonial insurgency, district officials and Anglo-Indian civilians in the North-Western Provinces generally did not attribute discontent within the ranks to the efflorescence of Islamic revivalism. Rather, I suggest that they heeded baseless rumors of an impending mutiny in 1870 because they were convinced that income-tax legislation had produced widespread disaffection. They further suspected that the government was inviting an outbreak of violence by reducing military expenditure and pruning the size of its army, which had ballooned as a result of the Uprising. The convergence of these multiple sites of vulnerability produced the ideal conditions for a panic.

This cognitive investment in the threat of a native insurrection was symptomatic of a more systemic ailment that recent scholarship has overlooked: burgeoning distrust between the government of India in Calcutta, the local authorities, and the European civilian population.[5] It is certainly valid to argue, as Robert Peckham and other scholars have done, that colonial observers associated panics with cultural primitivism and noted their ubiquity among "Oriental" populations.[6] French officials in Algeria also attributed the production of false news to women or Muslims who were supposedly

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Frontier 'Fanaticism' and State Violence in British India," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 4 (2015): 1218–46.

[3] For an overview of the ongoing Great Wahhabi case, see Julia Stephens, "The Phantom Wahhabi: Liberalism and the Muslim Fanatic in Mid-Victorian India," *Modern Asia Studies* 47, no. 1 (2013): 22–52.

[4] C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communications in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), 320; W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmans: Are They Bound in Conscience to Rebel against the Queen?* (London, 1871), 22.

[5] See, for example, Harald Fischer-Tine, ed., *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (London, 2016). None of the contributions in this volume substantively engage with this issue.

[6] Robert Peckham, "Introduction: Panic: Reading the Signs," in *Empires of Panic: Epidemics and Colonial Anxieties*, ed. Robert Peckham (Hong Kong, 2015), 1–22, at 6.

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prone to irrational thought; they regarded this phenomenon as an anachronistic "repetition of ageless anxieties" that granted insight into the population's collective unconscious.[7] Throughout the Allahabad debacle, however, government agents contended with a breakdown in public order among their fellow Europeans and regarded their agitation as an internal security concern. In this instance, leading administrators were not able simply to "stamp out disturbances at the first sign of their appearance," as they were wont to do elsewhere.[8] Indeed, they soon realized that they could not even sufficiently monitor the new telegraph system that was enabling the spread of false news, as it was dubbed at the time. The Allahabad panic therefore attained notoriety in part because it exposed the colonial state's tenuous control over emergent communicative infrastructures.

Analyzing responses to the nonexistent conspiracy in Allahabad helps to clarify further the extent to which colonial statecraft was handicapped by self-doubt and internal dissension. Historians such as Jon Wilson have observed that British officials were unable (and often unwilling) to forge affective relations with their Indian subjects; this estrangement resulted in a "pervasive anxiety" over the stability of colonial rule.[9] Supposedly magnanimous ventures such as the compilation of new law codes were in fact utilitarian ploys to affirm the state's power while reducing its dependence on Indian subordinates. Aloof and deracinated administrators relied on their own interpretations of recent history to decode the behavior of the colonized. Many subscribed to what Kim Wagner terms the "mutiny motif," a "master-narrative of Indian unrest" that "provided the mainspring for colonial anxieties in British India."[10] As Britons' "understanding of local movements and politics was overdetermined by the trauma of 1857," the mutiny motif "exaggerated the threat posed by Wahabis and Kukas or made a Russian invasion accompanied by a general rising seem plausible."[11] In 1894, mysterious daubs of mud on trees in Bihar were likened to the *chapatis* (baked breads) that had circulated throughout North India in early 1857 and supposedly mobilized combatants. Wary of history repeating, army officers and civil servants butted heads over whether the mud daubs were evidence of a looming plot or simply an "inconspicuous religious practice."[12]

Undoubtedly, the legacy of the Uprising cast a long shadow in 1870s Allahabad, as the defection of the Sixth Native Infantry in the spring of 1857 had caught the British in the city completely unawares. Though Allahabad was a key strategic point linking Calcutta with Punjab and beyond, its European military presence had significantly diminished during Governor-General Dalhousie's tenure (1848–1856). Once the first sparks of rebellion broke out at Meerut, Allahabad's civilian residents wrote to the newspapers pleading for additional support. An American missionary later recalled that several panics occurred over a three-week period; European women

[7] Arthur Asseraf, *Electric News in Colonial Algeria* (Oxford, 2019), 112–16.

[8] Rajnarayan Chandavarkar, "Customs of Governance: Colonialism and Democracy in Twentieth Century India," *Modern Asian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2007): 441–70, at 455.

[9] Jon Wilson, "The Silence of Empire: Imperialism and India," in *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. David Craig and James Thompson (Basingstoke, 2013), 218–41, at 220.

[10] Kim A. Wagner, "'Treading upon Fires': The 'Mutiny'-Motif and Colonial Anxieties in British India," *Past & Present*, no. 218 (2013): 159–97, at 170.

[11] Wagner, "'Treading upon Fires,'" 193–94.

[12] Wagner, 176.

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and children periodically took shelter in the fort, as they feared the revolt would soon spread from Benares.[13] Yet Colonel Simpson, the commander of the native infantry, denied that there was any discontent among his soldiers, who had recently volunteered to march against the mutineers in Delhi. On the afternoon of 5 June 1857, Simpson summoned his men, conveyed a warm message of thanks from the governor-general for their service, and organized a cordial dinner at the mess. Some hours later, members of the Sixth Native Infantry had killed seventeen British officers at that meal.[14] Left for dead, the teenaged Arthur Cheek managed to crawl to a ravine but was recaptured days later by a Muslim *zamindar* (landowner). Offered the choice of conversion or certain death, Cheek chose the latter and was consequently lionized as a Christian martyr in the metropolitan press.[15]

Even though these events were not specifically referenced prior to the panic of 1870, the Uprising was never far out of mind. In late June, an officer at the Allahabad Fort received an anonymous letter instructing him to "prepare for another 1857."[16] Around the same time, Commissioner F. O. Mayne called for an additional influx of troops. "Knowing what a blackguard place Allahabad city is, and how full it is of bad characters who cordially hate us, and are only too ready to join in another 1857," he did not "think it fair to place temptation in their way."[17] Europeans in the North-Western Provinces, then, were fully aware that localized unrest could spiral into a full-blown disturbance reminiscent of the Uprising. However, the explanatory device of the mutiny motif does not necessarily clarify *why* this community gave credence to unsubstantiated rumors of widespread plotting in the first place.

In what follows, I complicate the argument that the British in India suffered from a chronic, insidious anxiety that triggered erratic bouts of violence.[18] Foregrounding polarizing tensions within the European community, I assert that rumors of discontent could only catalyze panics at specific sites under specific conditions. Historians are largely able to reconstruct the circumstances of the Allahabad panic because officials and civilians were themselves eager to conduct an etiological study of the event. Following an actual mutiny, these parties might have focused their energies on distinguishing Indians' "personal acts of revenge" from anticolonial "collective political

[13] Robert Meek, *The Martyr of Allahabad: Memorials of Ensign Arthur Marcus Hill Cheek, of the Sixth Native Bengal Infantry* (London, 1857), 11. News of the uprising also triggered a panic in Singapore, where relations between the European and the Tamil-Muslim populations were already strained. The non-official community questioned the loyalty of the local Madras Army troops and fretted over the number of Indian convicts who had been transported to the island. Rajesh Rai, "The 1857 Panic and the Fabrication of an Indian 'Menace' in Singapore," *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2013): 365–405, at 390–99.

[14] [G. B. Malleson], *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army* (London, 1858), 96. Malleson attributed the mutineers' dilatoriness to their "Asiatic" inability to "comprehend the advantages of time, circumstance, position, [and] promptitude." [Malleson], *The Mutiny of the Bengal Army*, 93.

[15] Meek, *The Martyr of Allahabad*, 31–39. Prominent clergymen and Evangelical notables such as Lord Shaftesbury also heaped encomiums upon Cheek.

[16] J. Travers to F. O. Mayne, 27 June 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/17, Cambridge University Library. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as CUL.)

[17] F. O. Mayne to Elliot, 28 June 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/17, CUL.

[18] For an influential articulation of this thesis, see Jon Wilson, *The Chaos of Empire: The British Raj and the Conquest of India* (New York, 2016), 5. Critical scholars have recently begun to note its limitations. See, for example, Joshua Ehrlich, "Anxiety, Chaos, and the Raj," *Historical Journal* 63, no. 3 (2020): 777–87.

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acts."[19] But because the Allahabad panic did not result in any actual bloodshed, they instead scrutinized the policy decisions that had incited outrage and produced a feeling of vulnerability.

In disentangling the roots of the Allahabad panic, I recall Ranajit Guha's valuable distinction between fear and anxiety.[20] The nature of colonial anxiety was both nebulous and ephemeral. It could be spawned by a sense of isolation from Indian society and an inability to "find [one's] bearings in a colonial environment," or it could reflect discomfiture with the scripted roles that British agents found themselves obliged to play.[21] Fear, in contrast, was generated by a definite expectation of harm emanating from a specific source.[22] In regard to the Allahabad panic, the colonial archive is replete with cascading articulations of fear that were recorded before the event, as it unfolded, and throughout the following year. While the denizens of the city anticipated immediate bodily harm, provincial officials and civilian commentators expressed a more existential concern that the overly interventionist government was needlessly stoking Indians' disaffection. Meanwhile, the viceroy and his confrères were perturbed by the prospect of unwanted scrutiny and struggled to staunch criticism of their policies. The opening of direct telegraph lines in 1870 had brought India and Britain into unprecedented contact in a manner that was both revolutionary and potentially destabilizing.

To be sure, this was hardly the first time in the mid-nineteenth century that a nonofficial European community clashed with a colonial administration. Across the empire, settlers were committed to retaining their racial privileges and "restoring the rights of freeborn Englishmen."[23] They castigated those acting in the role of "Protectors of Aborigines" for their misplaced sentimentalism, denounced emergency gagging acts that stifled freedom of expression, and stymied official inquiries into planters' abuses.[24] In India, these tensions were particularly acute. Prior to the Charter Act of 1833, the East India Company had put up various roadblocks to settlement and even deported British critics who called attention to its more despotic practices.[25] Company officials also feared that lower-class colonists would undermine colonial prestige by "indulging in every kind of low dissipation, disgusting to the Natives and fatal to themselves."[26] In 1858, the Select Committee on Colonization and Settlement reiterated these concerns over pauperism in the colonies and advocated for the limited immigration of *respectable* European capitalists and

[19] Ann Laura Stoler, "'In Cold Blood': Hierarchies of Credibility and the Politics of Colonial Narratives," *Representations*, no. 37 (1992): 151–89, at 152.

[20] Ranajit Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," *Critical Inquiry* 23, no. 3 (1997): 482–93, at 485.

[21] Guha, "Not at Home in Empire," 484.

[22] Joanna Bourke posits that the distinction between fear and anxiety was historically contingent upon an individual or group's ability to externalize a threat and take purposeful measures to mitigate it. Moreover, fear and anxiety were fluid emotions that could be converted into each other. Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (London, 2005), 190–91.

[23] Miles Taylor, "The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire," *Past & Present*, no. 166 (2000): 146–80, at 174.

[24] Alan Lester, "British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 54 (2002): 24–48; "Indian Reform League," *Morning Star*, 21 October 1857, 2–3; *The History of the Nil Durpan, with the State Trial of the Rev. J. Long, of the Church Mission* (Calcutta, 1861), 9–28.

[25] C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2011), 29–30.

[26] "Residence in India," *British Friend of India Magazine, and Indian Review* 1, no. 6 (1842): 551.

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philanthropists.[27] Representatives of the non-official sector in turn claimed that the government feared the advent of an intermediary power that would challenge its exclusiveness and expose its serial oppression of its Indian subjects.

The question of the European settlers' race-based legal rights and privileges was a particularly vexatious one.[28] In 1883, the Anglo-Indian Defence Association and the colonial press launched a fusillade against the Ilbert Bill, which threatened to grant certain Indian judicial officers jurisdiction over criminal cases involving Europeans in the rural hinterland. Well-heeled British women even boycotted Government House social functions in protest.[29] For Partha Chatterjee, these moments of friction evidenced a racially coded "rule of colonial difference" in which the Europeans' demands for favored status impeded bureaucratic rationalization and delegitimized the expression of native public opinion.[30]

The Allahabad panic, however, offers a counterpoint to Chatterjee's influential paradigm. In 1870, the settler press *joined* Indians in their strident denunciations of the income tax and even amplified native voices. Lower-level civil servants also broke with the central government and condemned both the tax and the military's ill-preparedness in private correspondence and anonymous newspaper columns. The higher authorities in London and Calcutta were understandably alarmed by this apparent unification of belligerent interests. A granular analysis of the Allahabad imbroglio and its antecedents thereby reveals how panics were born out of mounting fractiousness, skepticism, and frustration within British colonial society.

SEEING THE SIGNS

In the early summer of 1870, the region of the North-Western Provinces was already a hotbed of unsettling rumors and innuendos. On 2 July, Yacub Khan, a Roorkee resident and converted Christian, testified before a magistrate that he had encountered a band of students from the engineering college who intimated that they were participating in a plot to kill every European and Christian in the vicinity.[31] Revelations of this sort were not necessarily unheard of. Yacub himself reported that a fat Deobandi faqir who resided near a tomb in front of the hospital routinely preached about an impending massacre.[32] Nevertheless, on this occasion Yacub attempted to hail a police officer, and when assistance was not forthcoming, he pursued the students himself. Officials noted some inconsistencies in his account and questioned the youths' motivation in revealing their scheme to an intended victim. But the

[27] Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Class and the "Domiciled Community" in British India, 1858–1930* (Oxford, 2011), 21.

[28] For an overview of the various so-called Black Acts that attempted to curtail European defendants' privileged access to the presidencies' supreme courts, see Elizabeth Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law* (Cambridge, 2010), 78–81.

[29] Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly Englishman" and the "Effeminate Bengali" in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995), 55.

[30] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), 18–24.

[31] "Memo," Home Department, MS Add. 7490/40/2, fol. 1, CUL.

[32] C. Troup to M. Court, "Deposition of 'Yacoob,'" MS Add. 7490/40/5, CUL.

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damage to public morale was already done, as Yacub's wife had recounted to the women of the station the harrowing details of her husband's ordeal.

The day after Yacub delivered his testimony, a Captain C. E. Orman notified District Commissioner M. Court of associated intrigues. It was likely that the students in question attended a weekly meeting of Muslims that occurred in a garden every Sunday evening. Orman also wanted to keep tabs on the Deobandi faqir. His subsequent consultations with a local constable revealed that the individual was known as "musth," a term usually applied to frenzied elephants that could also describe a "fanatic in religion."[33] It appears that Orman was prone to overreaction, as he visited the Roorkee bazaar in disguise to determine if the butchers were intending to rise.[34] Commissioner Court, in contrast, was rather more circumspect: even if Yacub's story was true, there was "nothing to fear from gabbers."[35] And if Court were to suddenly cancel his engagements in Allahabad and return to investigate, it would surely alarm the European residents in that city.

Once reports of Orman's sleuthing began to circulate, the rumor mill went into overdrive. At the end of July, Awadh Commissioner E. G. Jenkinson attempted to debunk and certify various pieces of gossip for the benefit of his superior, Lieutenant-Governor William Muir.[36] The notion that the European troops in Roorkee were attending church with loaded rifles was palpably false, Jenkinson maintained, but reports that a contingent of Indian sappers had been roused in the night for roll call and ordered out on parade were regrettably accurate. Onlookers misconstrued the abrupt commands—which nearly led to a collision with the 103rd regiment—as a sign that the officers intended to disarm these troops. Jenkinson also referred to an Ashuf Ali, a cross-dressing dancer from Rampore whom he described as a suspicious-looking character.[37] Having deluged Muir with this intelligence, Jenkinson assured his superior that his previous quiescence should not be taken to mean that he "was in any way careless" and not "alive to what was going on." He had chosen to report these occurrences because the anticipation of a general disturbance had "a much deeper origin than the mere idle talking of the few Mahomedan students."[38]

While Commissioner Court confidently concluded that the Roorkee business was all "clouds without rain," a feeling of unease continued to linger throughout the region. By the end of August, the city of Allahabad was embroiled in a full-scale panic. On 25 August, Mrs. Paxton, the wife of a local tradesman, notified ranking army officer Major-General Vaughan that she had overheard her attendant and *chowkidar* (guard) speaking of a ghastly plot. The nearly seven-hundred-strong Fourth

[33] M. Court to W. Muir, 14 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/27; MS Add. 7490/40/2, CUL.

[34] Orman also equipped the soldiers under his command with ten extra rounds of ammunition after receiving false intelligence that Indian troops in the city of Moradabad had revolted.

[35] M. Court to W. Muir, 6 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/1, CUL.

[36] The lieutenant-governor of the North-Western Provinces was a direct subordinate of the viceroy of India, who in turn reported to the secretary of state for India in London.

[37] Ashuf Ali was possibly a *hijra*, or a "transgender eunuch performer." The Criminal Tribes Act, which was passed the following year in the North-Western Provinces, mandated the classification of *hijras* as either "respectable" or "suspicious" and prohibited them from publicly wearing women's clothing. Jessica Hinchy, "Obscenity, Moral Contagion and Masculinity: *Hijras* in Public Space in Colonial North India," *Asian Studies Review* 38, no. 2 (2014): 274–94, at 276.

[38] E. G. Jenkinson to W. Muir, 24 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/32, fols. 1–2, CUL.

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Regiment of Bengal Native Infantry was conspiring to rise that evening in league with the jail keepers. These rebels intended to murder Mr. Paxton and abduct a young woman who had been staying at their residence; Mrs. Paxton noted that she was too old to be of much appeal. Around three o'clock in the morning, she heard that the revolt had been postponed until the following night. Paxton's tale was not the only indication that something was afoot. A Lady Cunningham also reported that three Indians had cruelly insulted her in passing while she was sitting on her verandah. Additionally, a native servant had been approached in the bazaar and advised to encourage his master to leave Allahabad if he happened to be a "good sahib."[39]

Despite the lack of any corroborating evidence for these claims, Vaughan hurriedly instructed the officers in his field battery to make promenades through the town and sent for two additional regiments from Cawnpore (located 200 kilometers northwest of Allahabad).[40] These commands were somewhat misinterpreted. The artillery officers took it upon themselves to load their wagons with munitions, set up a rendezvous outside the station for the women and children, and order their men to sleep in their clothes.[41] Residents of the civilian enclave of Cannington became agitated and gathered together for protection in their houses or vacated the station altogether. A number of Eurasian families fled to Calcutta. The railway telegraph operators, meanwhile, contributed to this fracas by spreading the alarm up and down the line. Vaughan himself was affected by the civilians' "open, undisguised fright" and even floated the idea of disarming the city's two hundred Indian policemen.[42] Shortly thereafter, District Magistrate J. C. Robertson entered the fray and drew up a circular entreating Europeans to return to their homes. Fleeing in the dead of night, he explained, "does not tend to heighten us in the eyes of the natives, and it also tends to put into their minds the idea that we have some reason to fear them."[43]

After the turmoil subsided in early September, leading officials did not commend Vaughan and Robertson for their perspicacity. Rather, as Muir concluded, the whole story of a mutiny "was evidently worthless trash and should have been put simply aside as such." Even Robertson's circular, which assured residents of the soldiers' extra vigilance, was "ill judged" and "quite an exception to his ordinary good sense and management." Muir hoped that the "military authorities always were on the alert," as it was "the essence of their constitution so to be." Even after Robertson squarely placed the blame on the artillery for its overhasty mobilization, Muir remained convinced that the two men had conferred about Mrs. Paxton's tale and directed the course of events.[44] By mid-September, Robertson was clearly frustrated with this scapegoating and told his superiors as much. He had it on good authority from an esteemed Indian solider that the people were widely disaffected and might be inclined to rise at a slight provocation. Had the government properly acted upon similar reports of strange doings in 1856, the calamitous Uprising may well have

[39] "Memo," Home Department, MS Add. 7490/40/2, fols. 2–3, CUL.

[40] Vaughan had been sent out to Allahabad earlier in the month as a temporary replacement for a General Beatson. *Pioneer*, 18 August 1870, 1.

[41] "Memo," Home Department, MS Add. 7490/40/2, fol. 4, CUL.

[42] Vaughan to M. Dillon, 30 August 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/46, CUL.

[43] "Memo," Home Department, MS Add. 7490/40/2, fol. 14, CUL.

[44] W. Muir to F. O. Mayne, 30 August 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/39, CUL.

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been avoided. Robertson's dressing-down had further corroborated his impression that he was "no favourite in certain quarters" and prompted him to request a transfer at the earliest availability.[45]

As accusations flew, Vaughan and Robertson found an ally in Robert Napier, the commander-in-chief of the Indian Army. Critics like Muir, Napier mused, "would not have been so scornful had they been subjected like the people at Allahabad to these growing rumours for the last month." The fault for the panic lay not with Vaughan but with the civil servants who "tumbled to pieces in one night" and "had to fly to the Fort for fear of their own peons and police."[46] News of the disturbance also reached Viceroy Mayo in Calcutta, who recognized the difficulty in which officers on the spot were placed. While the "feeling of fear" could increase if no action was taken, a reassuring show of force might inadvertently convince the public that an imaginary threat was tangible. Still, Mayo recognized that the brouhaha in Allahabad was beyond the pale. If colonial agents "without a shadow of reason" based their actions on "vague rumours and station gossip," authorities could hardly be surprised "that foolish women and timid clerks [were] frightened" and that news of the native army's mutinous state was appearing in the public press.[47]

NORMALIZING FANATICISM

Ordinarily, the dissemination of rumors and the outbreak of a panic might prompt the colonial state to stage investigations against itinerant or allegedly criminal communities and pursue extrajudicial modes of repression. In the 1830s, colonial authorities' "discovery" of *thuggee*—a covert system of hereditary, ritualistic criminality—led to the formation of a special policing department in the non-regulation territories of Sagar and Narbada.[48] Sixty years later during the mud-daubing panic, the superintendent of the Thuggee and Dacoity Department instructed his subordinate inspectors general to systematically gather information on the suspected *sadhus*, or Hindu mendicants. Only after the matter came to the attention of the House of Commons did the government of India tone down its talk of an endemic conspiracy.[49]

The Allahabad panic, in contrast, failed to provoke a similar knee-jerk reaction, as the state was already keeping tabs on supposed Wahhabis in the North-Western Provinces. From the mid-1860s to the early 1870s, officials investigated financial transactions to uncover any connections linking Muslims in north Indian cities with fanatical cells on the Indo-Afghan frontier. In July 1870, two Muslims were apprehended in Muzaffarnagar and searched for incriminating papers. The first suspect, Syud-ud-din, had been shipwrecked en route from Medina; having lost much of his personal property, he drafted a circular asking for financial aid from sympathetic Indians. Described

[45] J. C. Robertson to O. T. Burne, 13 September 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/54, CUL.

[46] R. Napier to R. Bourke, 3 September 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/49, CUL.

[47] "Circular," 18 September 1870, in "Memo," Home Department, MS Add. 7490/40/2, fol. 15, CUL.

[48] The colonial regime further consolidated its legal paramountcy by prosecuting *thugs* in the princely states. Radhika Singha, "'Providential' Circumstances: The Thuggee Campaign of the 1830s and Legal Innovation," *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 1 (1993): 83–146, at 87–88, 123.

[49] In the interest of allaying public fears, the government conducted scientific tests on mud and hair samples to certify that the offenders were animal in origin. Wagner, "Treading upon Fires," 182.

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as a fast-keeping, pious Muslim, Syud-ud-din admitted to possessing two copies of a tract entitled "Dusht-nama," which agents translated as the "Word of Reproof." Apparently, he had received the first copy in Aligarh and the second from the *zamindars* of Dadon, whose extended family members were known to have Wahhabist sympathies. Composed of "sermons for repentance" and promises of certain fulfillments, this tract and others like it were harmless enough. If anything, they were a boon to officials, as "they shewed who the pretended prophets were."[50] Not knowing exactly what to do with the indigent Syud-ud-din, Commissioner Court suggested that he be escorted to Bombay and from there returned to Medina. The other suspect at Muzaffarnagar, an unknown Arab, had been found with the names of several Muslims sewn into his hat. He provided little information when questioned, though he identified one name as that of a Wahhabi contractor in Meerut who held many government bonds and liberally distributed alms to the poor.

Beyond this rudimentary surveillance, it was unclear how the British could preemptively frustrate the fanatics' anticolonial designs. Magistrates were not often able to prevent mullahs from publicly preaching, as they did not directly "inculcate treason, but only those doctrines which necessarily lead their adopters into treason."[51] The *Jubbulpore Chronicle*—incidentally, the only Anglo-Indian newspaper I have located that explicitly associated the rumored mutiny in Allahabad with fanatical intrigues—reported a similar permissiveness in the lead-up to the panic. Members of the Fourth Native Infantry were supposedly "caught stealing away from their lines at night to hold converse with the Wahabees at the Chowk, a thing they have been in the habit of doing for months."[52] Assuming this intelligence was accurate, the colonial state's refusal to intervene or even mention these liaisons in official correspondence is quite remarkable.

Although many colonial agents presumed that the fanatics were prone to jihadist declarations, the connection between pious revivalism and political revolution remained ambiguous. Observing a distinction between these two phenomena, a number of officials in the North-Western Provinces differentiated "High Church" Wahhabis from "Low Church" conspirators. The first group, Court noted, sincerely believed "that the time for the restitution of the Mahometan faith and power is drawing near" and were "anxious to reform practices antagonistic to the principles of their religion and all that."[53] Muir, too, recognized that the term "Wahhabi" was a large one, including both the "purely religious (or Protestant) sect, as well as the political fanatics."[54] Donning an orientalist cap, he argued in scholarly writings that adherence to the doctrines of the early schools of Islamic law rendered social change impossible and inhibited freedom of judgment in Muslim societies.[55] In

[50] M. Court to Elliott, 17 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/30, fols. 1–2, CUL.

[51] W. W. Hunter, "The Indian Conspiracy of 1864," *Calcutta Review* 40, no. 79 (1864): 133.

[52] *Jubbulpore Chronicle*, as quoted in "The Late Panic at Allahabad," *Carlisle Journal*, 7 October 1870, 7.

[53] M. Court to W. Muir, 14 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/27, CUL.

[54] W. Muir to R. Bourke, 18 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/26, CUL. Using similar language, the British agent tasked with eradicating the fanatics' colony at Sitana likened their well-intentioned Indian supporters to the "subscribers of the Moravian mission" in India. Magnus Marsden and Benjamin D. Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier* (New York, 2011), 83.

[55] Avril A. Powell, "Modernist Muslim Responses to Christian Critiques of Islamic Culture, Civilization, and History in Northern India," in *Christians, Cultural Interactions, and India's Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg (Grand Rapids, 2002), 61–91, at 72.

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his mind, the Wahhabis somewhat combatted this stasis by rejecting saint-worship and advocating for personal engagement with the *hadith*.[56]

Rather than sensationalizing fanatical violence and inflating the threat of Wahhabism, officials in the North-Western Provinces normalized Muslims' anticolonial resentment as a quotidian fact of life. In 1870, Court repeated the maxim that "Mahomedans regard us as usurpers of their power, and would gladly see us knocked on the head." As a rule, they looked forward to the extermination of Christians "just as much as we believe in the second coming of our Lord, and the establishment of His Kingdom."[57] Major-General Colin Troup, a former commander of the Meerut division, was of a similar mind. The British, he advised, ought not "be surprised at the Mahomedans hating us, as it is part and parcel of their creed to do so."[58] To alert authorities of a vague, unsubstantiated plot, as Court had considered doing following the Roorkee divulgences, would only bring unnecessary public attention to a commonplace and irresolvable issue. For Muir, it was simply a "condition of our tenure here" that the British would be "always exposed to the machination of evil disposed persons." Whether from "fanaticism or from personal lapses," Muslims would strain the doctrine of jihad to suit their purposes. While Allahabad's Muslims were arguably a known entity, the same could not be said for the civilians who lost their heads and fled their homes in the dead of night. Incensed by their comportment, Muir called upon the government to actively discourage "any disposition to panic on the part of the Europeans."[59]

Assisting in this project, George William Allen's *Pioneer* newspaper encouraged its readers to avoid the "tendency to boil over with excitement, and to run about shouting whenever an alarm is sounded."[60] The lowbrow Anglo-Indian papers rarely helped matters, as their habit of giving coverage to every minor event resulted in "sensational articles about fearful conspiracies in India and dismal prophecies of political catastrophe."[61] The *Pioneer*, however, was confident that the English in India were a hardy bunch; they had not endured a century of "hard fighting and perilous complications" only to be "frightened at last by such a sputter as this Wahabee business." If the government was concerned with stymying "unreasonable fanaticism among well-to-do Mussulmans," it need only encourage them to invest in public loans to the state![62]

[56] Harlan O. Pearson, *Islamic Reform and Revival in Nineteenth-Century India: The Tariqah-i Muhammadiyah* (New Delhi, 2008), 147. There was hardly a consensus on this issue; Bengal administrator W. W. Hunter asserted that the Wahabis' revivalism was inimical to any established form of civil governance. Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 60.

[57] M. Court to Elliott, 17 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/30, fol. 2, CUL. Reflecting on the trials of Wahhabi combatants, Hunter had previously observed that "there is in this country a chronic and irreconcilable disaffection towards our rule." Hunter, "Indian Conspiracy of 1864," 136.

[58] C. Troup to F. Thesiger, 5 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/6, CUL.

[59] W. Muir to R. Bourke, 8 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/11, CUL.

[60] "Our Political Situation," *Pioneer*, 24 February 1869, 2. Allen was an entrepreneur and cofounder of the Cooper Allen tannery and boot factory at Cawnpore; he established the *Pioneer* as "the mouthpiece of the official and military classes." Francis Henry Skrine, *Life of Sir William Wilson Hunter* (London, 1901), 104.

[61] "Our Political Situation," *Pioneer*, 24 February 1869, 2.

[62] "Our Political Situation."

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With these reassurances, the *Pioneer* was attempting to assert its journalistic integrity and distinguish itself from competing papers that it accused of alarmism. Earlier in August 1870, its writers had picked a fight with the Calcutta-based *Englishman* over an article that questioned the security of India's port cities from maritime attack. The *Pioneer* was quick to note that such speculation was superfluous. The government of India was "at war with no one," and "hostile fleets do not spring into being at a mere stamp of the foot."[63] It was unfortunate that the article's author, who complained of the state's unpreparedness with "the unreasoning petulance of a tetchy child," should have "pandered to the spirit of panic which always, on the slightest provocation, pervades Calcutta."[64] The *Englishman* did not take kindly to this bashing and accused the *Pioneer* of being a government rag that merely published "the mercenary effusions of one or two hack writers." Calcutta's civilians were not unsettled by fears of a looming invasion, but rather were convinced that the hapless administration would "take the worst possible steps" if any such scenario were to arise.[65]

When the *Englishman* took notice of the Allahabad panic several weeks later, the *Pioneer* once more chastised its rival for its poor standards. On the one hand, it was "scarcely to be expected that the small fry of the Press should have abstained from sensational paragraphs about the late uneasiness in this station." After receiving torrents of inscrutable telegrams on the subject of warfare in continental Europe, it would have been a "congenial relief to the feebler provincial journals" to "find themselves amidst the more intelligible excitement of old ladies threatened by their chowkeedars." Such rumors naturally appealed to the "children of the fourth estate" who helmed the lesser papers, but they acquired a sheen of realism when they appeared in the venerable *Englishman*. The *Pioneer* therefore insisted that "no guns have ever been placed on the Jumna Bridge, and that no attack on the Jail was ever threatened or expected."[66] Yet the paper's equanimity in this instance was rather ironic. Prior to the panic, its own writers had stirred the pot by denouncing the Indian government's taxation polices and harping on the administration's insufficient regard for Allahabad's security.

THE ALLAHABAD PANIC: A DIAGNOSIS

In browsing the columns of an Anglo-Indian paper, it becomes clear that India's colonizers were acutely aware of their mental fragility. The tendency to panic, which the *Pioneer* described as a "helpless yielding up of oneself to terror, when no real or immediate dangers exist," was in fact a "national failing." Before the passage of the Volunteer Act in 1863, invasion panics in the metropole had been "as certain in their visits as measles or influenza." Britons, the *Pioneer* reckoned, were driven to a state of panic by a sense of their own impotence; given a gun, some ammunition, and the chance of a "fair fight," these debilitating fits of apoplexy would be resolved.[67] But while panics

[63] [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 9 August 1870, 2.
[64] [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 9 August 1870, 2.
[65] Quoted in "The Moral Effects of a Tropical Autumn upon the Englishman," *Pioneer*, 13 August 1870, 5.
[66] [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 5 September 1870, 1–2.
[67] "On Panics," *Pioneer*, 13 October 1870, 2. For a comprehensive account of the French invasion panics of the 1840s and 1850s, see Richard Cobden, *The Three Panics: An Historical Episode* (London, 1862).

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certainly fed on feelings of helplessness, they could only be triggered by specific catalysts. When rumors of native disaffection began to circulate throughout the North-Western Provinces, officials and civilians paid heed because they were already convinced that controversial enactments had put the state in mortal danger. Specifically, the colonial regime had invited discord by passing the highly unpopular Indian Income Tax Act of 1869 and pursuing military retrenchment to shore up a deficit of £2,500,000.[68] The railways further exacerbated this alarmism by conveying rumors of the impending mutiny to distant stations.

In the aftermath of the Uprising, colonial authorities had anticipated a backlash to unprecedented direct taxation and cautioned against it on the grounds of political pragmatism.[69] An earlier income tax designed by the finance member of the Viceroy's Council in 1860 perplexed other policy makers who denounced it as an undue burden on low-income earners.[70] Although the 1869 tax, which followed swiftly on the heels of license and certificate taxes, only applied to incomes over 500 rupees, poor Indians still feared that landholders would squeeze their tenants to recoup their losses. The measure also riled European civilians in Calcutta, who believed it had been instituted in "the most arbitrary manner, without giving the public time to consider it."[71] Other critics reportedly took issue with the intrusive nature of the tax and the potential misconduct of the lower-class Indians tasked with its collection.

The administration made matters worse by doubling the tax later that year after one council member discovered a discrepancy in the accounts.[72] This harried rejiggering unleashed a "hurricane of unpopularity" upon the government and produced a "dread feeling of expectancy" in northern India.[73] It also negatively colored Indian perceptions of subsequent colonial initiatives; many interpreted the 1872 census as a prelude to further taxation. The lieutenant-governor of Bengal even admitted that this enumeration was "ill-timed," as the recent "increase of imperial and local taxation had unsettled men's minds."[74]

Even before Yacub Khan had his fateful encounter with the students on the Roorkee bridge, officials were commenting on a palpable ill feeling in native circles. Commissioner Court reported in early June that "the income tax . . . caused a good deal of disaffection" that "shewed itself most amongst the Mahomedan population and in the major towns."[75] He doubted, however, that these Muslims would

[68] William W. Hunter, *The Earl of Mayo* (Oxford, 1892), 139.

[69] Viceroy Canning reportedly claimed that he would rather "govern India with 40,000 British troops without an income tax than govern it with 100,000 British troops with such a tax." Tirthankar Roy, "Why Was British India a Limited State?," in *Fiscal Capacity and the Colonial State in Asia and Africa, c. 1850–1960*, ed. Ewout Frankema and Anne Booth (Cambridge, 2019), 77–109, at 82; B. R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860–1970* (Cambridge, 1993), 149–52.

[70] Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Financial Foundations of the British Raj: Ideas and Interests in the Reconstruction of Indian Public Finance, 1858–1872* (Hyderabad, 2005), 264, 270–72.

[71] James Wilson, *Why Was Lord Mayo Assassinated? The Question Considered* (London, 1872), 6.

[72] By April 1870, the rate had reached 3.125 percent.

[73] As quoted in S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi, 1971), 262–63. The tax was reduced to 1 percent in 1871; the level of the minimum taxable income was also increased.

[74] Anand Yang, "A Conversation of Rumors: The Language of Popular 'Mentalitiès' in Late Nineteenth-Century India," *Journal of Social History* 20, no. 3 (1987): 485–505, at 492.

[75] M. Court to W. Muir, 5 June 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/5, fol. 1, CUL.

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attempt any kind of violent protest without external support. In the aftermath of the Roorkee alarm, anonymous civil servants protesting the tax in the *Pioneer* confirmed "that a sentiment of dislike and disloyalty [was] fast increasing among the people of these provinces," one evidenced by the Indians' "insolence of bearing and scarcely disguised threats of aggression."[76] Writing directly to Muir, Commissioner Jenkinson pulled no punches in his paternalistic excoriation of the tax. "Judicious management," he posited, might have soldered "the breach [that] was made between us and the natives, during the mutiny." Instead, the income tax signaled the administration's desire to "keep the whole machine at high pressure; to treat the people as grown up civilised men, instead of as children in leading strings." This "monstrous and disgusting tax" only served to demoralize "both the officers who assess it, and the people who are assessed."[77] Jenkinson seems to have subscribed to what Christopher Herbert terms the "myth of betrayed interracial homosocial love."[78] It was disheartening for any district officer who "has the good and the prosperity of the people at heart, to see the people growing further away from him every day."[79] Once the Allahabad panic erupted, colonial agents stationed outside the region speculated that it was most likely caused by "a city riot occasioned by income Tax oppression" rather than "a native army arrangement."[80] Such disturbances could break out anywhere, although they typically manifested as some sort of strike.[81]

Certain senior officials were keen to avoid additional legislative provocations. Home Secretary E. C. Bayley intervened in September after receiving word that the largely European municipality of Allahabad was contemplating a tax on bodies burnt on the banks of the Ganges and Jumna rivers.[82] The following spring, Muir advised the Financial Department that he had "never witnessed anything approaching the popular discontent created by the Income-tax during the last two years."[83] While on tour, he was "on many occasions surrounded by petitioners clamorous against their assessment to this tax"; the complaints he received "revealed an amount of discontent, deep and widespread, to an extent hitherto unknown."[84] He therefore advised Mayo to expand his recent "local finance" initiative, which reduced the central administration's overspending by allocating set annual grants

[76] [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 29 July 1870, 1–2.

[77] E. G. Jenkinson to W. Muir, 24 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/5, fol. 4, CUL. The introduction of this tax threw the lower echelon of British officials into an "insensate panic," as they feared that retrenchment might lead to the suspension of their appointments. "Indian Finance," *Pioneer*, 17 January 1870, 5.

[78] Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton, 2008), 35.

[79] E. G. Jenkinson to W. Muir, 24 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/5, fol. 3, CUL.

[80] P. B. Le Mesurier to C. R. Coles, 30 August 1870, Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, Progs., nos. 129, 187, National Archives of India, New Delhi. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as NAI.)

[81] For an account of similar forms of "dharmic protest," see Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge MA, 1997), 57.

[82] Response of E. C. Bayley, 14 September 1870, in *Selections from Vernacular Newspapers in the North-Western Provinces*, Home, Public, Progs., nos. 46–47, NAI. Allahabad's municipal committee, which included both elected and appointed ex-officio members, was established in 1868. Meanwhile, Anglo-Indian journalists dismissed Calcutta's non-elective municipality as "lame and impotent." James Wilson, *Local Self-Government in India* (Calcutta, 1869), 8.

[83] Wilson, *Why Was Lord Mayo Assassinated*?, title page.

[84] *Report of the Administration of the N.-W. Provinces for 1871–1872* (Allahabad, 1872), 13.

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to the provincial governments that they could disburse or save.[85] Advocating for the establishment of additional local-level councils, Muir deemed it essential that "independent native gentlemen" were "*seen* and *felt* to be debating on questions affecting their own people."[86]

While Muir was concerned with appeasing the native population, Anglo-Indian civilians in the presidency towns were denouncing the administration's fiscal policies as a violation of the public trust. The secretary of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce echoed a common criticism in August 1870 when he questioned the necessity of the impost amid abundant rains and high opium sales. The measure had given "rise to widespread feelings of irritation and distrust" that it was "most desirable to modify and subdue."[87] The *Times of India* also noted the impolicy of the income-tax increase, linking it with the high-handed suspension of *habeas corpus* in the unfolding Great Wahhabi case (which it considered to be equally ill-advised).[88] In isolating the causes of the Allahabad panic, the paper further insisted that the tax did not fall solely upon the upper classes. Its collection would continue to result in "toothless ryots shut up in prison, cottagers reduced to hopeless beggary, whole districts made miserable, and the dumb mofussil filled with unrest and discontent."[89]

Downplaying the seriousness of fanatical plotting in the days following the 1870 panic, the *Pioneer* alleged that the government of India's priorities were misplaced. The "Mayo-Temple levy on artisans and the struggling middle class trouble[d] the land ten times more than would a score of real Mussulman plots." Restarting the Wahhabi witch hunt and trials at this precarious moment would only "produce the very temper in which brooding disaffection has its origin." Undoubtedly the viceroy's advisors were competent administrators, but "with such a big Wahabee bee in their bonnets . . . common sense cannot be heard amidst its buzzing."[90] The *Pioneer*'s skeptical dismissal of this "portentous conspiracy" was hardly exceptional.[91] Prominent metropolitan commentators such as Frederick Chesson, the secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society, likewise did "not attach much importance to Wahabee conspiracies or Mahomedan intrigues." The only real danger to British supremacy "proceed[ed] from an entirely different source," namely mass discontent occasioned by the income tax.[92]

By early October, reports of the Allahabad panic had reached the India Office in London through the exertions of James Wilson, a former soldier and editor of

[85] This scheme was put in motion following the "Charter of the Provincial Governments" Resolution of December 1870. Mayo was not keen on the term *decentralization*, which seemed to imply an abdication of his government's duty. Hunter, *Earl of Mayo*, 151.

[86] Quoted in "Meeting at the Society of Arts, Friday, 9 June 1871, for the Adjourned Discussion of the Address read by Sir Bartle Frere," *Journal of the East India Association* 5 (1871): 125–26.

[87] H. W. L. Wood to R. B. Chapman, 10 August 1870, B380/5, fol. 163, BL.

[88] Stephens, "Phantom Wahhabi," 40. For further critiques of the viceroy's arbitrary powers of imprisonment, see A. G. Noorani, *Indian Political Trials, 1775–1947* (New Delhi, 2005), 93–113.

[89] [Untitled], *Times of India*, 3 October 1870, 2.

[90] "The Wahabees," *Pioneer*, 6 September 1870, 2.

[91] One article likened the inflated Wahhabi conspiracy to "the broad road in an American forest which terminates in the marks of a raccoon's run up a pine tree." [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 26 August 1870, 2.

[92] [Frederick Chesson], "Special Correspondence of the *Evening Mail*," 3 August 1872, in scrapbooks collected by George Thompson and Frederick Chesson, no. 10, E449.S43, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. For further critiques of the government's anti-Wahhabi campaign, see "Parturient Mountains and their Mysteries," *Englishman's Overland Mail*, 12 October 1870, 2.

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Calcutta's *Indian Daily News*. Since the imposition of the income tax, he had been hearing "rumours of disaffection" and observing "cases of oppression sufficiently numerous to warrant rebellion."[93] Unsettled by the combustible atmosphere in the city, he drafted a pamphlet in June 1870 informing Parliament of the colonial government's various missteps. But just as this tract arrived in London, the Franco-Prussian War broke out and distracted politicians from Indian issues. On 3 September, Wilson again tried his hand at whistleblowing and alerted Lord Salisbury, the former secretary of state for India, of Allahabad's mutinous atmosphere. While he personally blamed the income tax for this unrest, he noted the alternative explanations that were in circulation. Some onlookers attributed the troops' apparent petulance to a military registration order that classified their second wives as prostitutes and would have subjected them to the Contagious Diseases Act.[94] Other wagging tongues alluded to a recent parade during which a soldier had thrown his "dress" at his commanding officer and was executed for insubordination. The government, meanwhile, had failed to keep its European subjects apprised of the worsening situation. The limited news issuing from Simla, the administration's summer capital, was "that Lord Mayo will only come down in time to be at the 'Sonepore Races' and that there is talk of having some balls shortly." Meanwhile, Wilson continued to receive word that formerly loyal Indians who had "eaten the salt" of the East India Company were now cursing the tax-hungry administration.

Based on this evidence, Wilson concluded that there was a "complete antagonism between the government and the people," as the modernizing state had resolved "to do in a decade what could only be well done in a century in India."[95] His transmission to Salisbury soon came to the attention of the current secretary of state, the Duke of Argyll, who believed that the "violence of its language" sufficiently captured "the high excitement of men's minds." Although Argyll doubted that the income tax put the sepoys themselves under any financial duress, he was nevertheless concerned that Anglo-Indian and native journalists had formed a united front against it. As "the whole press of the country" was "perpetually treating the government with contempt," such censure "must act more or less on all who read it and on the army amongst them." Reflecting on the hubbub in Allahabad, Argyll was convinced that there "must be some foundation for the rumours so widely prevalent of disaffection and openness for insurrection."[96]

Mayo generally preferred to ignore the complaints of Europeans who came to India "to get as much money out of the Blacks as they can and desire to go home as soon as possible." But their resistance to his cost-cutting measures forced him to go on the defensive. He admitted that "scientific taxation [was] unsuited to India" but found it "absurd to say that the tax is in any district likely to provoke resistance or to cause . . . any political result."[97] Lecturing his own council, Mayo repudiated all the "ridiculous accusations that had been made" in the Calcutta press as to "cooking the accounts." If such libelous charges had been brought against a

[93] Wilson, *Why Was Lord Mayo Assassinated?*, 8.

[94] This explanation was later rejected. "More about the Allahabad Panic," *Homeward Mail* (London), 14 November 1870, 585.

[95] As quoted in G. Campbell to R. Bourke, 6 October 1870, Eur Photo Eur 467, fols. 122–24, BL.

[96] G. Campbell to R. Bourke, 6 October 1870, Eur Photo Eur 467, fols. 119–20, BL.

[97] R. Bourke, "Memo," 9 November 1870, B380/5, fols. 254–55, BL.

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public company, "those who made them would have rendered themselves liable to the penalties of the law."[98]

Indeed, Mayo had for some time been nursing suspicions that the Anglo-Indian papers and the non-official community were colluding against the government. Earlier that spring, his private secretary, O. T. Burne, had even developed a scheme to divide the colonial press into classes and selectively convey factual intelligence to preferred outlets.[99] Mayo therefore assured Argyll that Wilson's account was a "tissue of falsehoods from the beginning to the end."[100] Calling the editor's reputation into question, the viceroy identified him as "one of those pushing self-educated class of men who only keep themselves in notice by violent attacks on authority, and by opening his columns to paid advocacy." Like many journalists who lived among the irascible civilians in Calcutta, Wilson was inclined to represent their views as his own. Leading Indians had assured Mayo that the influence of the European press on the native population "may be put down as nil." Still, he insisted that Salisbury ought to have informed Wilson "that the man who in India propagates such malicious lies is doing the work of traitors and rebels."[101]

Wilson, however, was not the only whistleblower damaging the colonial government's reputation in the metropole. On 4 October 1870, a former editor of one of India's "leading gazettes" wrote to the *London Evening Standard* to complain of the chilling effects of bureaucratic despotism. Although the recent panic suggested that something was rotten in Allahabad, colonial authorities continued to assure the India Office of the country's tranquility and strong-armed any so-called interlopers in the non-official community who dared to assert otherwise. These tensions would only abate if the acts of misgovernment that antagonized Indians were "thoroughly ventilated through the London free press."[102] Fearing this additional scrutiny —which the new telegraph line would surely enable—Mayo was also disturbed by the prospective appointment of a parliamentary select committee on East India finance that would investigate his administration's spending. Endorsed by the "scurrilous portion of the European press," this scheme would only result in "British Peers and Privy Councilors wandering about the Country holding courts of enquiry into the conduct of men who have done no wrong."[103]

While Mayo was contending with blowback from Anglo-Indians and parliamentarians over his tax policy, he was also at loggerheads with Robert Napier. For some time, the colonial state had been trying to trim its military budget, which had risen to an all-time high during the Uprising. Between 1859 and 1863, the number of Indian troops was reduced by about ninety thousand, while British ranks were thinned by thirty thousand.[104] At the same time, new policies that favored European recruitment in branches like the artillery proved costly. Mayo

[98] "Supreme Legislative Council: Lord Mayo on the Income-Tax," *Times of India*, 6 April 1871, 3.

[99] Amelia Bonea, *The News of Empire: Telegraphy, Journalism, and the Politics of Reporting in Colonial India, c. 1830–1900* (New Delhi, 2016), 221.

[100] R. Bourke, "Mr. Wilson's Letter to Lord Salisbury on Disaffection in India," 9 November 1870, B380/5, fol. 259, BL.

[101] R. Bourke, "Memo," 9 November 1870, B380/5, fol. 253, BL.

[102] Zasnath, "The Allahabad Panic," *London Evening Standard*, 6 October 1870, 7.

[103] R. Bourke to S. Northcote, 16 November 1870, B380/5, fols. 308–10, BL.

[104] Bhattacharya, *Financial Foundations of the British Raj*, 166–67.

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therefore opted to downsize the largely idle Madras Army and slash expenditure on barracks construction and commissariat charges.[105] Much to his annoyance, Napier seemed to think it "his duty to resist every proposal by which waste of money can be avoided."[106] The fact that the commander-in-chief had convinced the Duke of Argyll of the perils of retrenchment further ruffled Mayo's feathers and led him to reassert his dominance over the military in financial matters. Yet officials and officers on the provincial level were firmly on Napier's side. In late June 1870, Commissioner Mayne had presciently declared that it was "very unwise of govt to leave [Allahabad] without European troops."[107] After the panic took hold of the British population, Robertson confirmed that the near-absence of soldiers in close proximity to the civil station had contributed to the alarm.[108]

This spatial difficulty was not the only cause for concern. To reassure the public, General Vaughan relocated a number of troops stationed at Allahabad Fort to new barracks closer to Cannington. However, he was soon forced to withdraw his request for reinforcements from Cawnpore upon discovering that these buildings were nearly uninhabitable.[109] Despite their palatial scale, roof leakages, sanitary drainage issues, and unmediated sun penetration contributed to a high rate of cholera and fever among the domiciled officers.[110] Newly assigned to Allahabad, Vaughan may have been unaware of the *Pioneer*'s reporting on the shoddy workmanship at the barracks and the paper's ongoing efforts to "root out an ulcer which is eating deep into the resources of the State."[111] The superintending engineer had actually observed these issues earlier in the year but, like many agents of the cash-strapped Public Works Department, had implemented austerity measures in accordance with the government of India's perceived wishes. In this case, the higher-ups concluded that he "rather over-did it."[112]

Even if the European troops had obtained access to decent housing, the question of whether Allahabad's civilians could count on their military prowess was another matter altogether. Readers of the *Pioneer* would have been acquainted with the recent court-martial of Private Henry Ormshaw of the First Battalion at Cawnpore

[105] Although Mayo vowed to reduce expenditure on military infrastructure by £550,000, he also intended to cut civil building construction costs by £260,000. "Public Works Reductions—Present and Prospective," 10 September 1869, MS Add. 7490/12/16/1, CUL.

[106] Bhattacharya, *Financial Foundations of the British Raj*, 170.

[107] F. O. Mayne to Elliot, 28 June 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/17, CUL.

[108] J. C. Robertson to F. O. Mayne, 26 August 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/40, CUL. The *Pioneer* likewise found it remarkable that a "large provincial capital in this country held by arms" was "almost entirely denuded of European Infantry." See [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 29 August 1870, 1.

[109] H. B. Dobell, *Dr. Dobbell's Reports on the Progress of Practical and Scientific Medicine, in Different Parts of the World*, vol. 2 (London, 1871), 90.

[110] "Cost of Fixing New Defects in New Barracks and other Military Buildings," December 1870, Military, Military Works Proceedings, nos. 38–41, part A, NAI. See also "The Allahabad Barracks," *Times of India*, 7 December 1870, 3.

[111] [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 26 July 1870, 1. An explosion in the storeroom of the Gun Carriage Factory had resulted in several fatalities and provided the initial impetus for this inquiry. The government appointed a special committee to investigate the incident; its damning report led Mayo to condemn the "negligence, incapacity, and corruption" of the Public Works Department officials involved in the building's construction. "Bengal and Calcutta," *Friend of India and Statesman*, 15 December 1870, 1428.

[112] "Defects in Allahabad Barracks—Censure Passed on Major Whish," March 1871, Military, Military Works Proceedings, nos. 86/88, part A, fol. 2, NAI.

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on charges of insubordination and personal violence. His subsequent sentencing to seven years' penal servitude was somewhat reduced because of his youth.[113] But this incident was not an isolated one.[114] As the dust from the panic settled in early September, Mayo was receiving a series of hysterical memos from Napier detailing the sorry state of the European soldiery. Complaining about the stalled construction of a new military prison, he notified Mayo of more than 293 cases of insubordination in 1869 alone. Napier believed this high number was indicative of a scheme among the troops to gain release from an inhospitable climate and the "discipline which they find irksome." His understanding was that any wrongdoing that warranted less than two years' imprisonment under the Queen's Regulations automatically resulted in the offender's transportation to Britain. Soldiers had therefore taken to committing all manner of crimes as penal servitude at home was "the very thing they want [ed]."[115] Such chicanery contributed to an intolerable culture of violence within the European ranks. In August, a Private John Watson had been ordered to confinement after his commanding sergeant heard him using insubordinate language. Watson, in response, butted the sergeant on the head with his rifle and attempted to stab him; he was thereafter sentenced to penal servitude for life. Napier also recounted occasions on which medical staff had "been wantonly struck when in the humane performance of their duty." To deter this behavior, he recommended a revival of flogging and even capital punishment, if need be.[116]

The ill feeling created by the income tax levies and the sorry state of the army contributed to an atmosphere of dread in which baseless rumors could take on a life of their own. This context partially explains the rapidity with which the alarm in Allahabad spread, but structural factors also enabled the panic to evolve into a matter of transregional significance. On 30 August, the clerk of public works and the railway stationmaster in the city of Satna (approximately 180 kilometers southeast of Allahabad) anxiously wrote to C. R. Coles, a political assistant in the Central India Agency. The Satna Locomotive Department, they reported, had received a message from Allahabad advising the rail guards to immediately apply for weapons in anticipation of a potential disturbance.[117] Previously unaware of this danger, Coles now sought intelligence from railway employees working various lines. One respondent affirmed that the Allahabad artillery had been armed for three days while the European women and children sought protection in the local hospital. While this was admittedly hearsay, he had himself "seen an official notice

[113] "Military Intelligence," *Pioneer*, 23 August 1870, 4.

[114] British soldiers in Allahabad who had served under the late East India Company were subsequently transferred to the Queen's Army; they mutinied in May 1859 after learning that they would be permitted neither a discharge nor a bounty upon their reenlistment. See Peter Stanley, *White Mutiny: British Military Culture in India*, 1825–1875 (New York, 1998), 131.

[115] R. Napier to R. Bourke, 2 September 1870, B380/5, fols. 276–77, BL. The Army Enlistment Act of 1870 was designed to resolve these issues by reducing active service to a period of six years followed by an equivalent term in the new army reserve. See Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester, 2004), 103.

[116] "General Orders by the Right Honourable Commander in Chief," 21 September 1870, B380/5, fols. 287–89, BL.

[117] T. Phillips and C. Ross to C. R. Coles, 30 August 1870, Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI. The central administration rebuked Vaughan for his hasty transmission of this order. O. T. Burne to M. Dillon, 2 September 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/36, CUL.

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to the effect that the Railway volunteer corps should come get their arms and ammunition."[118] Another worker on the 136th rail line corroborated this account, adding that he had witnessed the unusual sight of Europeans congregating on each end of the Jumna Railway Bridge, which led him to believe that "there must be some truth in the rumours prevalent in Allahabad."[119] A driver on the Jubbulpore Line of the East India Railway had also observed a wholesale exodus of Europeans from the city in recent days. By his understanding, a "Native Regiment had been disarmed and one of the sepoys was to be shot this morning."[120]

Coles took the initiative and transmitted these reports to Calcutta, noting that the panic was being kept alive by the drivers' loose tongues and their passengers' imaginations. He then proceeded to Allahabad to confirm Robertson's telegraphic insistence that "the panic here is utterly groundless."[121] Upon his arrival, it was clear that "much alarm existed," as his own brother-in-law was sleeping with a loaded revolver under his pillow and other weapons at hand. Coles convinced Robertson to accompany him to the rail station and conciliate the Anglo-Indian populace, but the civilians remained skeptical. If reports of an uprising were fallacious, why were military patrols deployed, artillery units mustered, and European troops ordered from Cawnpore? Coles himself could scarcely "account for old women's tales influencing as it has done the entire mercantile community of Allahabad." Still, he sent for his family to prove that such fears were groundless.[122] Robertson, meanwhile, wrote to the district traffic commissioner of the East India Railway pleading for his assistance in allaying the panic. Echoing his controversial circular, he fumed at the "spectacle of families running about the station at night" and found the danger of vacating homes to be most objectionable.[123]

TELEGRAPHS AND THE SCOURGE OF FALSE NEWS

While the panic died down after the first week of September, it remained a topic of sustained official discussion well into November. This episode enjoyed such disproportionate attention because it revealed the central government's inability to control its informational infrastructure and hold its own European subjects to account. A telegraphic network linking the presidency towns had been completed in 1855; a decade later, a landline constructed through Ottoman territory connected India with Britain. Reuters deployed its first agent to Bombay the following year.[124] Even with a six-day lag time and recurrent interruptions in service, a popular

[118] Statement of H. Marshemer, n.d., Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI.
[119] Statement of J. H. Thomas, n.d., Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI.
[120] Statement of Alexander Wright, n.d., Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI.
[121] J. C. Robertson to C. R. Coles, 30 August 1870, Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI.
[122] C. R. Coles to Stratton, 1 September 1870, Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI.
[123] J. C. Robertson to G. H. Ford, 31 August 1870, Central India Agency, Baghelkhand Agency, file 120, NAI.
[124] India would soon emerge as Reuters' most profitable market. Daniel Headrick, "A Double-Edged Sword: Communications and Imperial Control in British India," *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 35, no. 1 (2010): 51–65, at 57.

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demand for coverage of European conflicts steadily grew in India. In 1870, the opening of a London to Calcutta landline by the Siemens-backed Indo-European Telegraph Company and the separate laying of underwater cables between Bombay and Falmouth by John Pender's various firms dramatically reduced transmission times.[125] These were momentous achievements. Connected directly to India in June via the latter line, President Ulysses S. Grant joined Mayo in his "wish for a lasting union between the Eastern and Western hemispheres."[126]

As "events replaced descriptions, and bulletins replaced diaries,"[127] some traditional press outlets began to associate telegrams "with superficiality, sensationalism, and even inaccuracy."[128] Amelia Bonea has perceptively noted that battlefield updates received during the Austro-Prussian War were far from objective, as rival camps in Vienna and Berlin used the telegraph as a propaganda tool.[129] Some months into the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), the London correspondent for the *Pioneer* took France's journalists to task for contributing to the "most completely organised system of false news and fraudulent despatches ever imposed . . . since the world began."[130] The *Englishman* similarly pleaded with the government to bypass Reuters and provide its own authenticated telegrams to the colonial press on the state of the war. It also urged the administration to vigorously punish every transmission of a "wilful falsehood," thereby discouraging the disaffected native press from circulating untruths.[131] Verifiable information was especially desired in Calcutta, as French and German residents there were branding each other as aggressors and undermining the European community's "social serenity."[132]

Colonial officials were somewhat cognizant of the potential security risks posed by this unprecedented global interconnectivity and the resultant annihilation of time and space.[133] Muir, for instance, advised the Calcutta authorities to be "specially careful," as the telegraphic speculation that Russia had allied with Prussia was sure to "produce any amount of distorted rumours." It was therefore necessary that the "tone of the Native press . . . be carefully watched on this point."[134] He was not necessarily

[125] By 1864, the Indian administration was operating its own submarine cable through the Persian Gulf, but it refused to lease this line or incentivize investment in any private British telegraph firm. In 1869, the backers of John Pender's British-Indian Submarine Telegraph Company had amassed £400,000 of private capital and were celebrating the fact that their enterprise was "free from the incubus and trammels inseparable . . . from Government help." J. C. Parkinson, *The Ocean Telegraph to India* (Edinburgh, 1870), 21.

[126] "India," *Journal of the Telegraph* 3, no. 15 (1870): 177.

[127] Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c. 1830–1920* (New York, 2010), 114.

[128] Bonea, *News of Empire*, 167.

[129] Bonea, 291, 301. The westward spread of Russian influenza in 1889 also exposed the duality of the telegraph as an instrument of enlightenment and misinformation. Medical experts warned that newspapers, with their surfeit of telegraphic updates, were indulging in exaggeration and speculation in a manner that might trigger a mass panic. Robert Peckham, "Panic Enabled: Epidemics and the Telegraphic Network," in Peckham, *Empires of Panic*, 131–54, at 142.

[130] "Special Correspondence," *Pioneer*, 28 September 1870, 3.

[131] As quoted in "Indian Extracts. The Necessity for Authentic Telegrams," *Pioneer*, 25 July 1870, 5.

[132] "Gossip. Calcutta," *Pioneer*, 26 July 1870, 3. Around this time, the German community in Calcutta formed a patriotic committee to solicit subscriptions for the relief of the wounded in Berlin.

[133] On the origins of this linguistic innovation, see Duncan Bell, "Dissolving Distance: Technology, Space, and Empire in British Political Thought, 1770–1900," *Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 3 (2005): 523–62, at 554–55.

[134] W. Muir to R. Bourke, 21 July 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/29, CUL.

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being overcautious. In September, a contributor to one Indian newspaper observed that the Allahabad disquiet had "transpired at a time when there was a great war between France and Prussia during which the Emperor Napoleon was forced to surrender himself to the enemy." It therefore was likely that "rumours of this had come from those quarters and this caused a groundless panic among the people."[135]

The immediate panic in Allahabad dissipated rather quickly. On 2 September, Robertson observed that the European population was "considerably ashamed of themselves, as well they may be."[136] The following day, however, an alarming telegraphic notification conveyed by the submarine cable appeared in the London *Times*, the *Spectator*, and the *Scotsman*: "A vague panic exists among Europeans and Bengalese in Allahabad. The 4th Native Infantry is the cause of apprehension. General Vaughan has brought more English troops from Cawnpore, and the magistrate has issued a circular reassuring the residents. The panic is believed to be unfounded, but there are many bad characters in Allahabad."[137] The *Spectator* was puzzled by this intelligence, as the British did not typically "move troops in India against bad characters or move without clear necessity." It was also unclear how "Allahabad, the key of Northern India, the city which commands both the Ganges and the Jumna," could be left undermanned.[138] The apparent threat was compounded when two more telegraph messages appeared in the *Times* days later. According to the first, which was transmitted through Reuters via the Indo-European line, "numerous reliable advices state that a general feeling of insecurity prevails in Allahabad. The Government is taking precautionary measures, and has also ordered a detachment of the 14th Regiment to proceed thither." Sent by way of the submarine cable, the second reported "that the 4th Native Infantry, at Allahabad, have laid down their arms, on account of a comrade having been shot for insubordination after his trial by court-martial."[139]

Encountering this "echo of the original rumour" in the home papers perplexed Anglo-Indian news writers who assumed that the matter had been laid to rest. The *Pioneer* regretted that the *Times* had needlessly alarmed metropolitan readers whose family members were based in Allahabad.[140] The *Times of India* was similarly distressed and called upon Lord Mayo to "dissipate vague and ill-founded uneasiness by a frank statement of the proximate causes of the disaffection at Allahabad."[141] By late October, the government had yet to issue any formal explanation. The most reassuring response actually came from Napier, who made a point of selecting the 4th Native Infantry as his escort during his tour of Assam.[142] Despite the *Pioneer*'s insistence that the panic was groundless and hardly worthy of attention, editorials concerning the event appeared in its columns into the winter months.[143] Its writers

[135] "Translation of Extract from *Nauraub Ahsar*," 15 September 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/75, CUL.

[136] "Memo," Home Department, MS Add. 7490/40/2, fol. 8, CUL.

[137] "India," *Times*, 3 September 1870, 5; "News of the Week," *Spectator*, 3 September 1870, 1050; [Untitled], *Scotsman*, 3 September 1870, 2.

[138] Quoted in [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 27 September 1870, 1. The population of Allahabad exploded after it was designated the new capital of the North-Western Provinces in 1858.

[139] "News in Brief," *Times* (London), 5 September 1870, 9.

[140] "The Allahabad Panic," *Pioneer*, 22 October 1870, 4.

[141] Quoted in "The Allahabad Panic," *Pioneer*, 7 October 1870, 2.

[142] "The Allahabad Panic and the 4th N. I.," *Pioneer*, 6 December 1870, 5.

[143] The *Homeward Mail* regularly excerpted these articles for its metropolitan readership.

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were keen to controvert testimonies from Allahabad residents who continued "against reason and proof, to persist in believing that the 4th Native Infantry were disaffected, and that a horde of mutineers was on the other side of the Jumna." These rumormongers, the *Pioneer* reasoned, fabricated bogeymen because they were eager "to escape the shame of having been scared without cause."[144]

While Allahabad's civilians relitigated the causes of the panic, Mayo was contending with the state's apparent loss of control over its own telegraph system. Earlier administrations had implemented a range of safeguards aimed at curbing the dissemination of sensitive information through these new channels. Section 11 of the 1854 Telegraph Act imposed fines and prison sentences upon employees who leaked governmental intelligence; a subsequent act penalized attempts to bribe telegraph office staff.[145] When the "Bengal Europeans" belonging to the East India Company's defunct regiments began to mutiny in the spring of 1859, the government banned the public use of the telegraph altogether to deter sympathetic protests in distant stations.[146] Given the existence of a standing order "forbidding telegraph signalers to receive alarming messages regarding public affairs," Mayo was distraught that news of the panic had spread so quickly, and on 13 September, he requested copies of the telegrams received in London and any particulars regarding their senders or place of origin.[147] The following month, his administration initiated its own investigation through the Public Works Department.

This department soon discovered that Dr. George Smith, the Calcutta correspondent for the *Times*, was behind the first transmission dispatched via Reuters on 2 September.[148] Much to the government's likely chagrin, an elaboration on this telegram appeared in the paper one month later. In that piece, Smith reported that "the income-tax and the prospect of a local house-tax have caused great dissatisfaction"; meanwhile, the "fraudulent construction of the new barracks" had led to the contraction of the British force at Allahabad, which prompted "alarmists to write to the newspapers on the subject."[149] In another missive, penned in mid-October, the indefatigable Smith once more demanded a formal inquiry into the "native insubordination and European panic" in the city.[150]

Yet the government could not identify the origin of the most incendiary telegram that mentioned an outright mutiny, as it had been sent via the railway telegraph line. While the telegraph, according to an 1869 memo, was "emphatically a State institution" under the monopolistic control of the Indian Telegraph Department, the privately owned railways had slowly but surely been gaining concessions over the

[144] [Untitled], *Pioneer*, 6 December 1870, 1.

[145] The state also began "de-skilling" Indian signalers by introducing a new coding system with a cypher that only the major department heads possessed. Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism*, 44.

[146] Stanley, *White Mutiny*, 133.

[147] E. C. Bayley to O. T. Burne, 23 September 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/82, CUL.

[148] "Telegrams about Excitement in Allahabad in September Last," MS Add. 7490/40/94, CUL. Smith would again earn the government's disfavor in 1873 by critiquing the state's laissez-faire famine relief policy in the London *Times*. Roper Lethbridge, "India in the Sixtieth Victorian Year," *Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 3rd series, 4, nos. 7–8 (1897): 1–10, esp. 2.

[149] "India," *Times* (London), 3 October 1870, 6. The article was then republished in the provincial papers. "The Panic in Allahabad," *Glasgow Evening Citizen*, 4 October 1870.

[150] "India," *Times* (London), 8 November 1870, 12.

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past fifteen years.[151] The original 1854 legislation had granted these companies revocable licenses to build their own telegraph lines under stringent conditions. The rail signalers could not convey messages between stations if there was already a government-owned line in operation.[152] Additionally, the companies were barred from setting up telegraph offices beyond the route of their rails, lest they compete with the government's own network. By the early 1860s, recurrent bottlenecks proved that the government monopoly could not handle the quantity of messages being sent. The telegraph department therefore lifted all restraints on communications between rail stations and even allowed certain companies to set up a second wire along the government's existing lines.[153]

In 1868, D. G. Robinson, the director general of the Indian Telegraph Department, began to warn Calcutta that this laissez-faire approach to telecommunications was creating all kinds of financial and security issues. As the construction of railway telegraphs accelerated, his department had failed to keep pace. Robinson's scanty budget could not provide for new lines to the cotton districts, nor could it cover the recently approved military lines. Unable to expand, Robinson's operation was losing customers and hemorrhaging money. In Allahabad alone, the telegraph station racked up about 22,000 rupees in annual expenditures but only 7,800 rupees in revenue.[154]

The rise of the railways' telegraphic network also threatened to undercut the state's control over its guarded information order. At present, Robinson observed, "there was nothing in the organization of Indian Telegraphs . . . to prevent the dissemination of false or treasonable intelligence, or to prevent the timid native signalers or clerks to betray secret messages, whether Government or commercial, whenever a European gentleman chose to walk into a Railway Office."[155] The revelation that the railway telegraphs had conveyed news of the Allahabad panic must have given him some professional satisfaction, as he had been mocked as a worrywart throughout the previous year. In late October, he reminded the secretary of the Public Works Department that he had "several times brought to notice how useless it is to forbid the Government employees to forward alarming improper telegrams, while the employees of the private companies are free to do so."[156] A few weeks later, O. T. Burne received confirmation that there was "no penalty in the Penal Code for false news" and that the intentionality of such an offence could hardly be proven in a court of law.[157]

[151] J. Talboys Wheeler, "Memorandum on Railway Telegraphs," 23 February 1869, MS Add. 7490/23/3, 1, CUL.

[152] In this event, companies could only use their lines to transmit messages that directly concerned railway business.

[153] Wheeler, "Memorandum on Railway Telegraphs," 2–6. Critics of this monopoly alleged that the telegraph had been "erected exclusively for political and State purposes" and therefore failed to serve the interests of the public at large. Charles C. Adley, *The Story of the Telegraph in India* (London, 1866), 35.

[154] Charles Girdlestone, "Note on the Recent Administration of the Indian Telegraph Department," 6 October 1869, MS Add. 7490/23/8, fol. 9, CUL.

[155] Wheeler, "Memorandum on Railway Telegraphs," 11.

[156] D. G. Robinson to Secretary of the Public Works Department, 28 October 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/97, CUL.

[157] J. F. Stephen to O. T. Burne, 17 November 1870, MS Add. 7490/40/90, CUL. While this assessment was technically correct, Act No. 8 of 1860 (Section 15) decreed that any party who transmitted or caused to be transmitted "by an Electric Telegraph established by Government a message which he knows to be false or fabricated" could be imprisoned for up to two years.

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CONCLUSION

The learning curve from the Allahabad panic was a steep one. Events in 1872 again exposed the disjuncture between the responses of local officers and the expectations of Calcutta authorities in times of perceived crisis. Punjab officials had identified a new threat in the Kukas, or Namdhari Sikhs, who had made great strides since 1867 in converting police and soldiers. While members of this sect claimed to pursue a peaceful agenda, some colonial agents presumed that the Namdharis, "under the disguise of religion," were intending to punish Muslim cow killers and had become "capable of organizing a united opposition against the Government."[158] In January, the proverbial levee burst when a group of Namdharis attacked Muslims in the princely state of Malerkotla. Deputy Commissioner J. L. Cowan reacted with haste and executed forty-nine insurgents without due process in apparent contravention of his superior's orders. In this instance, the viceroy would not tolerate the arbitrary suspension of the rule of law and removed him from service. Critics in the metropolitan and Anglo-Indian presses subsequently colored Cowan's response as that of "a panicked officer who appeared 'to have lost his head.'"[159] In a familiar refrain, one editorial also faulted the government for having failed to sufficiently inquire into the hundred-thousand-strong Kuka movement, thus allowing fears of an imminent rising to take root.[160]

There are numerous ways to interpret Cowan's overreaction coming so soon on the heels of the Allahabad affair. We may invoke Wagner's mutiny motif or else heed Mark Condos's conclusion that officials "frequently believed they were weaker and more exposed than they actually were."[161] But while Cowan's perception of a clear and present danger led him to swiftly suppress the apparent threat, the latent fear that produced the uneasiness in Roorkee and Allahabad was of a different sort altogether. It was based on self-reflection and the consequent realization that the administration had invited tumult through its ham-fisted policies. Aside from whispers on the night wind, there were no tangible indicators of malevolent designs comparable to the *chapatis* or mud daubs. There was simply a pervasive state of dread. The Allahabad panic, moreover, largely preoccupied policy makers for months on end because it exposed the state's faltering authority over both European civilians and the dissenting corners of lower officialdom.

Unlike the provincial agents who had made their peace with Muslims' unyielding hostility, Mayo by some accounts was entertaining a more bullish approach. Since his arrival, rumors had been circulating that he was "anxious to render his administration distinguished" and had determined to "put down Wahabeeism in India as he had put down Fenianism in Ireland."[162] The truth of the matter may be more complicated, as Mayo was actually encouraging his prosecutors in the Wahhabi trials to speedily wrap up their proceedings by Christmas of 1870.[163] In any event, the viceroy's murder at the hands of a suspected fanatic in 1872 effectively reignited an anti-Wahhabi panic

[158] F. B., "Report on Native Feeling in Punjaub," October 1871, MS Add. 7490/39/48, CUL.
[159] Condos, *Insecurity State*, 134.
[160] Ajax, "Rise and Progress of the Kukas, No. III," *Times of India*, 4 April 1872, 3.
[161] Condos, *Insecurity State*, 220.
[162] Wilson, *Why Was Lord Mayo Assassinated?*, 57.
[163] R. Bourke to J. F. Stephen, 25 September 1870, MS Add. 7490/39/17, CUL.

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and produced an eager readership for W. W. Hunter's sensationalist *Indian Musalmans*.[164] Later that year, Mayo's old nemesis, the free-speaking James Wilson, produced another pamphlet refuting popular explanations for the assassination. It was not the result of a spontaneous frenzy, nor was it the work of a "fraternity of hated," as the *Times* suggested. Rather, Wilson attributed such violence to "general disaffection on the ground of oppression." Instead of depoliticizing the event, Parliament and the wider British public ought to have viewed it as a symptom of the insidious disease that was irresponsible governance. To suggest otherwise would be a "wicked attempt at delusion."[165]

One may wonder whether the Allahabad panic was a unique spectacle that induced an uncharacteristic amount of hand-wringing and angst. But even if the event and its repercussions appear exceptional, any broad commentary on colonial behavioral patterns must depend upon on the data culled from contextualized analyses of discrete episodes. As demonstrated above, British understandings of fanaticism could significantly differ between regions. Compared to officials in the North-Western Provinces, the Britons policing the unsettled North-West Frontier were perhaps more inclined to conceptualize the fanatic as "an existentially threatening class of criminal" that "needed to be completely destroyed."[166] A study of the Allahabad panic's etiology and transmission further illuminates the internal stresses that estranged the European civilian community and provincial agents from disconnected policy makers in Calcutta and Britain. As trust eroded and confidence in administrative competence diminished, rumors of anticolonial intrigue became ever more credible. I also foreground the role of technology in keeping the panic artificially alive, which led bureaucrats to look upon the intra-imperial telegraph as a potential vehicle of misinformation and subversion.[167] Rather than attributing the eruption of panics to some nebulous form of colonial anxiety, historians may more productively address the fissures that fractured the British community in India and allowed particular fears to fester.

[164] Echoing his past commentary on the Santhal Rebellion, Hunter reiterated his belief that "the Indian Government is traditionally loath to recognise the political dangers which environ it, and which from time to time have imperilled its rule." Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, 103.

[165] Wilson, *Why Was Lord Mayo Assassinated?*, 59–60.

[166] Mark Condos, "'Fanaticism' and the Politics of Resistance along the North-West Frontier of British India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 3 (2016): 717–45, at 720. Benjamin Hopkins, however, cautions against the presumption of any unitary, cohesive official mind. He instead suggests that some administrators tolerated the "Hindustani fanatics" in the later nineteenth century and permitted their members to return to India unmolested. Marsden and Hopkins, *Fragments of the Afghan Frontier*, 90.

[167] After the BBC aired a satirical report that triggered a panic in 1926, critics similarly anticipated the "malignant misuse" of the radio as a vehicle for the dissemination of "false news." Bourke, *Fear*, 177.

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