CrossMark

Itinerario, Vol. 44, No. 2, 227–242. © The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Research Institute for History, Leiden University
doi:10.1017/S0165115320000248

Introduction: Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print

EMMA HUNTER• and LESLIE JAMES*
Email: Emma.Hunter@ed.ac.uk; leslie.james@qmul.ac.uk

A growing literature explores the varying role of print media in the colonial world and the new types of publics such newspapers and periodicals produced. However, this literature has tended to focus on specific regions, and has often sidestepped the larger question of how to conceptualise the relationship between print media and colonial rule. While some have used the term ‘colonial public sphere’ or ‘colonial publics,’ others have preferred to avoid these terms and instead thought in terms of multiple and overlapping publics. What this literature has shown is that a single analytic model for analysing public spaces of discourse is not usable. In this Introduction to our Special Issue we propose a new framework for studying the publics created through print media in the colonial world. We outline a set of four factors – addressivity, performativity, materiality and periodicity – that can be applied to specific historical case studies. We then explain how the issue as a whole models this methodology as a means to analyse how print media (as one medium within the public sphere) functioned in specific colonial and semi-colonial spaces around the world.

Keywords: Print media, public sphere, colonial society, global publics, counterpublics

In this special issue, we open up to inspection the spaces of print—newspapers and periodicals—in which colonial subjects reflected publicly on the changing social, political, and cultural world around them.[1] We shall move from eighteenth-century Venezuela, a society with no printing press but where the circulation of newsprint from elsewhere played a key role in forging political consciousness, to the Māori-language newspapers of mid-nineteenth-century New Zealand, and on through time to the newspapers of late-colonial Kenya and Malaya.

What binds these diverse case studies together? One answer is that the label “colonial public sphere” could be applied to describe these settings. Building on Jürgen Habermas’s 1989 book *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, but paying attention to the very different political contexts found outside eighteenth-century Europe, the term “colonial public sphere” has been applied in several different ways by scholars: often as a straightforward way to identify a historical and/or political context,

sometimes as a descriptor of a specific kind of public sphere, but also as a signal for a non-European, more global historical sketch of public spheres.[2] With the addition of the qualifier "colonial," Habermas's "bourgeois public sphere" shifts to describe a different type of public.

The attraction of this term is that it does justice to the scope that print offered for such public deliberation, while also recognising aspects of newspapers and periodicals which were distinctive to a context of modern colonial rule.[3] In many cases, those who edited and financed newspapers in colonial settings were associated to varying degrees with the colonial state or with missionary organisations. Where they were not, the demands of successfully navigating conditions of tight censorship often meant that the newspapers which were able to publish—and survive—in colonial settings were those which spoke a language of loyalism. The editors publishing newspapers often aimed at creating new kinds of subjects, and a strongly didactic tone is a common feature.

Yet the term "colonial public sphere" is in many ways unsatisfactory. In the first place, the concept of the "public sphere" was, as Nancy Fraser has recently reminded us, originally intended as a contribution to "a normative political theory of democracy," not as a description of actually existing societies.[4] And in applying it to historical contexts, it is necessary to be explicit about the term's associations with wider chronologies of modernisation—the transition from oral to literate societies, from manuscript to print (and the rise of industrial capitalism which turned those printed texts into commodities), the transition from community to individual and from monarchies to representative governments founded on liberal principles—for there is still a powerful trend of scholarship which puts the birth of "civil society and the public sphere" at the heart of a narrative tracing the transition to the "modern world."[5] The term thus runs the risk of being entrapped in an evaluative framework of the modern or the not-yet modern.

A second problem with the term is that it could imply that publics in colonised spaces were solely a product of their governance structures. European colonialism certainly played a role in creating the conditions whereby print media would be used to create new publics. And printing, as Tony Ballantyne has argued, "had the power to recast the economic, social, and political relationships that conditioned the ways in which coloniser and colonised made sense of their place in the world."[6] But the "colonial" was not the only factor that precipitated social and political change, nor the only context through which people made decisions about their lives and their societies. As Nile Green has shown, the capitalist circulation of goods and services and the industrialisation of communication offered means of outreach that could circumvent colonial control, facilitating a "Muslim world" identity forged by public intellectuals.[7] The interrelation between colonialism and other developments that shape public consciousness can be found in numerous examples. The Spanish American public spheres that emerged in the early nineteenth century, Pablo Piccato argues, were "structured by colonial institutions and interests." But these in turn were "tied to routes of commodities and information, and to administrative life" in cities like Buenos Aires, Mexico City, and Lima.[8] For Latin American scholars, the "urban scale" of politics in Latin America is an equally important frame for public spheres and for the growth of liberal republicanism in the nineteenth

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

century. These examples make it clear that foregrounding colonialism as a descriptor that dictates how public spheres emerge and function to the neglect of other interrelated contexts may tilt motives, agency, and historical dynamics imprecisely. Indeed, to give colonialism sole analytic authority would be to misconstrue colonialism itself.

A third problem with the term is that it can imply more coherence and similarity across time and space than was historically the case. Print took different forms wherever it was taken up, and therefore to apply the label of "colonial public sphere" indifferently, whether speaking about Cuba in 1840, Korea in 1915, Syria in 1923, the Gold Coast in 1946, or Angola in 1965, obscures the differences in specific colonies as well as differences in imperial rule between major empires. While the form of the newspaper or periodical suggests a universal medium represented in uniform and global idioms, this masks diversity beneath the familiar title or letterhead. The development of newspapers and periodicals in colonial spaces was often shaped by cultural forms which long predated modern colonial rule. They were shaped too by different social, economic, and political contexts: varying censorship rules, financial resources, and logistical routes of mobility all played a role in how these publications were produced and received. To understand newspapers in specific contexts therefore demands a deep historical understanding of those contexts and, often, an understanding of the vernaculars in which these newspapers were published. This requirement is one reason the literature on print media has remained locked within traditional regional frameworks.

But the limitations of a concept like the public sphere do not necessarily suggest its analytic bankruptcy. Rather, they prompt the need to revisit how public spaces of discourse functioned in a colonial context. Indeed, in stretching and testing the form of any kind of "public" in colonised spaces, we might better understand that concept. It is worth remembering that Habermas's framework supplied, from the start, the adjective "bourgeois" in front of "public sphere." A single analytic model for studying public spaces of discourse has never actually applied. Yet what does the adjective "colonial" do in front of a concept like the public sphere? What sociability does "colonial" signify?

The claim we make in this special issue is that we need to chart a new course in order to understand the publics forged through print in the colonial world. This demands a new methodology. Our method is explicitly historical and comparative. We start from the ground up and put temporal and spatial dimensions together in ways that attend to the particularities of individual situations but also open up scope for comparative analysis.

We do so by exploring the case studies which follow in relation to a set of four factors to analyse how print functioned in specific spaces around the world. These factors are: materiality, addressivity, performativity, and periodicity. As we will discuss below, these factors were not separate but could work together. The element of performance inherent within the colonial press, the logistical constraints upon production, the temporal conditions of the text, and the position from which authors spoke and the direction in which they aimed their language, all shaped the appearance of the discourse that the ephemeral press articulated. And this consequently chiselled the layers of meaning and identification possible in public discourse.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Materiality

"Readers," as Roger Chartier established, "never confront abstract, idealized texts detached from any materiality. They hold in their hands or perceive objects and forms whose structures … govern their reading or hearing, and consequently the possible comprehension of the text read or heard." Historians must, therefore, attend to "all the objects and forms that carry out the circulation of writing."[9] The materiality of texts is therefore constitutive to their meaning.

Circulation plays an important part in that material meaning. While circulation has formed a crucial element in much scholarship on print in colonial contexts, it is worth noting that some of this work has also shown that circulation does not always involve the material realm: it can also be spiritual or cognitive.[10] The point for our purposes is that material circulation is central to the conception of publics as well as to the function of imperial and colonised spaces. This is partly because the expansion of European empires and the infrastructure of communication were intimately tied.[11] Two processes were at work in this linkage. As imperial trade routes solidified, messages passed along rail tracks and shipping lines via official postal networks or unofficially via traders, missionaries, seamen, and adventurers. At the same time, the perceived need to communicate between imperial outposts and metropolitan centres of government and finance drove the expansion, for example, of cable and wireless services, and thus channelled communication through particular circuits and nodes. Communication flowed via the routes built up by empire, just as the need to communicate across the empire justified infrastructural expansion. This was not merely the work of empire, but of capital interests too.[12]

Yet despite imperial expansion into Asia, Central America, and Africa, large parts of these territories remained outside modern communication networks in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Cable networks, for example, were concentrated in lucrative markets rather than across imperial territory.[13] As Rudolf Wagner argues in his contribution to this collection, the global pattern of media is one of asymmetries. Some questions that emerge from this history, therefore, are: How did the infrastructure for communication, built up largely in the service of imperial and capital interests, impact the form and content of public discourse? Did it limit or siphon the publics that emerged such that publics were convened along infrastructural lines?

Moving from the physical channels of communication to the physical format of print (the printed page), we know less about how the appearance of the printed page resulted in specific debates or particular kinds of public spheres. Print media such as newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and magazines are assumed to have a generally universal format. They have generally universal aesthetic forms that conform to rules of style and content. Newspapers, for example, have a front page with a branded title, and often a logo and motto. They contain familiar sections such as local and international news, sports and entertainment, editorials, advertisements, letters to the editor, and comment columns. They could feature regular sections like a ladies or children's column, or question-and-answer sections. These are assumed to be floating genres that are generally

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

recognisable. However, to what extent were print media copied and adapted from local genres and specific models? What was the provenance of the genres that actually appeared, and how did these then signal to a public? Did it matter to the constitution of public spheres whether the model for a particular column, for example, was generated locally or modelled after something external?

The space of print media had to be filled on a regular basis, even if that regularity was not always achieved. How were these spaces on the page being filled: that is, how was content generated and what channels did it move through? How were the dimensions of a publication decided upon? What effect did these have? What constraints did people face in gathering material? If these constraints were a result of the colonial situation, did this impact the constitution of a particular kind of public?

Finally, the materiality of print media entails all the stages of its life: from the physical tools and networks used to make it, to the physical format and layout of the media, to the physical spaces in which it is received. The space of print is not just the space of the page, but the space of reception. This is, in many respects, where the materiality factor meets the performativity factor (again, these factors can work together). It is useful to recognise, here, that print is not a separate entity from interactive, communal acts within public spheres. As critics of Benedict Anderson have rightly argued, engaging with print was not necessarily a separate enterprise where individuals in lonely spaces imagined themselves with others.[14]

Addressivity

Mikhail Bakhtin's work has established that addressivity, "the quality of turning to someone," is "a constitutive feature of the utterance," and is therefore essential to all speech.[15] Modes of address are central to how particular genres come into being but also to how publics are convened. As Michael Warner has emphasised, without a directed address to a person or group, publics "do not exist."[16] And because the direction of address is so central to communication, changes in addressivity can serve as markers of change. An addressee can be a definite person or group, or an indefinite other. Indeed, Warner argues that it is in the impersonal and indefinite address where publics often thrive, since here people can "find themselves" in the indefinite. As Isabel Hofmeyr has shown for religious texts in southern Africa, addressivity can also call many addressees into being not merely through indefinite address but in multiple modes of address that "fill all time and space" to speak to many readers "in multiple directions."[17] Hofmeyr showed how religious tracts convened publics both horizontally, among groups, and vertically, up to "the heavens" and back to earth. Yet as the discussion in "A Conversation" in this special issue emphasises, both personal and impersonal modes of address could be working to foster collectives. Lara Putnam states that it was sometimes in the definite address, in the personalised public contact between migrant workers across the circum-Caribbean, that they forged their own collective. Karin Barber's examination of Yoruba authors and editors shows how they convened new publics both by addressing definite named individuals or groups and by aspiring to speak to "the four corners of

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the world," a vast, anonymous, unknown potential readership. It is actually the interaction between personal and the impersonal, concrete and abstract, that should be explored.[18]

What this diversity of examples about the role of addressivity shows is that it is precisely because of the manifold forms of address, and the various audiences that can be convened through a single named addressee, that this mode is so generative. In this special issue, we consider a number of ways in which the lens of addressivity sheds light on the creation and dissolution of publics. First, how does paying attention to the dialogic aspect of addressivity help us better understand how publics were convened in print media? Second, if publics can be convened directly or indirectly through explicit and implicit modes of address and metaphors that code audiences, how did these work to convene publics? Third, the worldliness and "cosmopolitanism" of certain colonial spaces, and the "localness" of others, remain thorny questions for colonial history. Cosmopolitanism can be hedged and qualified, as in the use of "Islamic cosmopolitanism" when speaking about the Islamic world. How did writers in colonial print media call into being "cosmopolitan" addressees? Were publics in colonial spaces specifically "cosmopolitan" or "local"? Or, rather, how might we move beyond these terms as binary juxtapositions? Might, as Nile Green has recently argued for the Indian Ocean world, concepts of "heterotopia" better capture the "poloymorphous, fractured, and sometimes fractious profile of vernacular intellectual life"?[19]

Performativity

In their work on the public life of ideas, Lesley Cowling and Carolyn Hamilton have argued that text is only one part of a public sphere that also includes circulation, paratext, and orchestration. Editors and journalists often orchestrate the "dynamics of public debate in order to ensure the debate meets their ideas of reasoned discussion."[20] Orchestration instils a level of control and direction into public discourse by performing roles and responsibilities. Just like addressivity, performance plays a constitutive role in creating a public in the first place.

There are several levels of performance evident in how print functioned, and we are using "performance" here in several different senses. First, print was often read out loud, communally and in the home; it was performed for both literate and illiterate groups. So print media convened publics through performance rather than purely through private imaginings of a public. Second, we might think of performance in terms of self-positioning, as producers of print media in colonial spaces engaged in highly didactic performances that attempted to ordain the role and purpose of print, producer, and audience. Third, we might think of performance as pretence, in relation to the ways editors and writers attempted to evade or hoodwink colonial authority. Finally, we might think of performance in the sense of editors or writers forging their personal identity.[21] Editors often dramatised their worldliness through their knowledge or their experience as travellers: circulation was performed in the press. Indeed, the globe as sign and symbol plays a prominent role in many newspaper names and logos.[22]

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In addition to these levels of performance evident in colonial spheres, we should also consider several contextual markers for colonial print that have implications for performativity. First, both at the time and in subsequent analysis, colonial print media has been characterised as ventriloquist. In some contexts, the authenticity of the press was judged by whether its backing came from "inside" or "outside." Print, of course, was never neutral. What we should be asking, then, is whether different questions are required for government- and/or missionary-owned press or an indigenous-owned press? What difference did it make if, as was often the case, newspapers intended for an indigenous readership were financed or edited by settlers or members of diasporic groups? What questions can be the same for each case, and what must be different? Second, we return to the issue of how colonialism created a tightly observed public space. As Dwayne Winseck and Robert Pike have emphasised, we should work from the premise that media is "constantly shaped by the dialectic between the free flow of information versus its control."[23] Further comparisons of how monitoring, sedition laws, and censorship operated are necessary. What impact did the watchful eye of colonial administrators, missionaries, or foreign interests have on public discourse? How did people skirt the lines of acceptable discourse using, for example, facetious argument and hyperbole? At the same time, what happens when we turn our attention to shape-shifting and the ways in which individuals employed the mask of print to cross racial, linguistic, or political boundaries, sometimes successfully and sometimes unsuccessfully?

Periodicity

The importance of the temporal dimension of print is the factor that almost all theories of publics and print agree upon. For Benedict Anderson, national identity was nourished through print precisely through a sense of simultaneity that allowed individuals to conceive of themselves within an incorporeal community.[24] Warner places emphasis on the "punctual rhythm of circulation" for a public sense of active discussion.[25] Papers and magazines are distinguished by dates and the insistence that "Reviews appear with a sense of timeliness." Yet our observation is that the press in colonies did not necessarily follow an even, metronymic rhythm but was often syncopated. The appearance of a newspaper or periodical could be highly irregular and unreliable. The "news" contained in them was sometimes weeks or months old. Speeches, poems, and reports that could be years or decades old were reproduced, often in serialised form covering months of the newspaper in that moment in time. Warner's "punctual rhythms of daily and weekly emission" do not hold. Crucially then, if publics "act historically according to the temporality of their circulation," what is the character of a public sphere when circulation is sporadic, clipped, and/or multitemporal?

These four factors can be applied discretely to analyse how publics are constituted. But they also sometimes function in relation to each other; that is, in practice they are not distinct. For example, the physical existence of media that facilitate public spheres also mark time: their materiality can also constitute their temporality. The physical format of a given medium, its aesthetics and production, direct conversation towards particular

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

audiences: its materiality also influences its addressivity. And, finally, materiality is performative: space is filled, whether on a printed page, in a public space, on the airwaves or a video, to attract and satisfy participants. The point is that—discretely and together—these factors all contribute to the convening of publics. Using these as guides, we can decipher how public discussion functioned and how publics came into being. These factors attend to the variety of ways that public spheres emerge, articulate themselves, operate, and ultimately dissolve.

Print Media and Publics in the Colonial World

This special issue begins with a conversation that brings Michael Warner, Karin Barber, and Lara Putnam together to reflect on Warner's essay "Publics and Counterpublics" some twenty years after that important intervention, which has influenced the thinking of many scholars, including the authors whose work is collected here. The discussion in "A Conversation" opens up space for critical reflection. Seven original case studies follow. The collection closes with an afterword from Stephanie Newell.

By approaching diverse case studies in relation to this uniform set of factors, the articles collected here reopen the history of print media and publics in colonial societies. Their authors reject normative links between the public sphere and democracy or the making of modernity. They also reject the expectation, still all too common in the literature, that the public sphere should map neatly onto the nation or the territorial boundaries of a colony.[26] As Leigh Denault writes of late nineteenth-century India in her contribution to this special issue, readers and writers alike worked within a frame of reference which extended across space and time[27] Their authors are instead interested in what *was* present. Through applying the lenses of addressivity, materiality, periodicity, and performativity, these essays are able to show how, in different ways and in different times and spaces, print made possible the creation of new kinds of publics in colonial settings, and how those publics functioned.

These articles range widely across time and space, though many of them have in common a focus on moments of imperial crisis or high tension. Within the case studies they address, we find a number of structural commonalities. Censorship and various forms of legal constraints are features of every case. At the same time, these case studies reveal how, even when operating within tight constraints and in circumstances far removed from the ideal of a free press, newspapers could provide a space where colonial subjects could critically reflect on political, social, economic, and cultural change. And, while more pronounced in some instances than others, the societies explored here were multiethnic, multinational, and multilingual, with all the possibilities and constraints this environment posed. While these commonalities cut across the collected articles, in each individual article some themes are more pronounced than others. We briefly highlight them here.

In the articles collected in this special issue, the content and form of newspapers and periodicals was shaped by legal constraints and censorship in different forms. Cristina Soriano's article is perhaps the most extreme example of these constraints. Soriano

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

takes us to late eighteenth-century Venezuela and to the curious case of a public sphere without a printing press. As she shows, while no newspapers were produced locally, readers creatively procured, read, archived, and conserved newspapers from farther afield. And in the absence of a printing press, local political actors made use of other written forms to win fellow citizens to their cause, as Soriano illustrates through her analysis of a failed Republican conspiracy of 1797.

Bodil Folke Frederiksen's article also considers the implications of colonial censorship. Her focus is on colonial Kenya in the tense period of the 1940s and 1950s, when the colonial state faced two crises in short succession, first the challenges of the Second World War from 1939 to 1945, and then the anti-colonial Mau Mau rebellion of 1952 to 1960. In her article, Frederiksen explores "the state as a producer and consumer of print," and "the non-European print cultures that were the targets of the pervasive colonial vigilance." She helps us to understand censorship in dynamic terms, as "an interactive and negotiated process" which prompted creative responses from colonial subjects.

The formation of a critical public is a central theme of many of these articles. In her contribution, Leigh Denault invites us into the print world of North Indian newspapers in the second half of the nineteenth century in the period after the Great Rebellion of 1857 and before the rise of the assertive anti-colonial nationalism of the twentieth century. The vernacular newspapers of this period have often been passed over by historians. They worked within the tight legal constraints of post-1857 India, and their editors survived by espousing loyalty to the colonial state. Historians have been drawn instead to the more combative newspapers of a later period. But there is, as Denault reveals, much more to these newspapers than such a reading would suggest. They constituted "not simply an interface with the colonial state, but a forum for debate about the nature of Indian society in a shifting multilingual and global context."

The Māori-language newspapers of the same period, which Lachy Paterson explores, performed a similar function. In his article, Paterson focuses on a Māori-language newspaper published by Walter Buller, a government interpreter and son of a missionary, between 1857 and 1858. While Buller worked for the colonial state, this was decidedly not a government newspaper. It stood out among other Māori-language newspapers of the same time in providing extensive space for Māori correspondents, creating a forum in which they could reflect on the rapidly changing world around them and engage critically with the colonial state.

The crossing of linguistic, national, and religious boundaries is a theme of many of these articles. Rudolf Wagner's study focuses on the early Chinese-language press of the nineteenth century and specifically on two Chinese-language newspapers published by outsiders. One example was the *East Western Monthly Magazine*, published by the German missionary Charles Gutzlaff in the 1830s, and another was the *Shenbao*, published by the British trader Ernest Major from 1872. While historians of China have often marginalised newspapers edited or financed by foreigners, Wagner shows that these newspapers were integral parts of a dynamic and multilingual public sphere defined by what Wagner terms "transcultural flows."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rachel Leow's article also focuses on the Chinese-language press, though in a later period and a different imperial setting, that of British Malaya. Her focus is on the newspaper *Yik Khuan Poh* or *Yiqun Ribao*, established in the dramatic year of 1919, when the events of May Fourth in China reverberated around the region. Leow agrees with our other contributors that "the colonial print space is not one which we can think of as coterminous with a national public sphere" and suggests that it may be that "the 'colonial' quality of a public sphere must at least in part consist in its compound, syncopated, and polyphonic nature," one "in which first person plurals overlap and coexist within a shared territory that can be designated neither fully public nor fully private."[28]

Moving between scales is a central theme of Leow's article, as it is in Myles Osborne's article, which focuses on the periodical *Jambo*, published by the East Africa Command from 1942 to 1945. Osborne draws out the implications of *Jambo*'s location at the "nexus of the imperial and the colonial." In *Jambo*'s pages, African servicemen could transcend the barriers of colonial Kenya to engage metropolitan readers on colonial issues.

Another element of boundary-crossing can be found between newspapers that were explicitly aimed at particular publics defined in religious terms and those which sought to transcend religious divides or indeed to define the newspaper as a space from which religion was properly excluded.[29] Often treated separately, in reality, as Rudolf Wagner and Leigh Denault's contributions explore, the religious and the secular were not separate spheres of debate but rather were intimately connected. Debates transcended the boundaries of any one newspaper, reminding us that we learn a great deal by placing them in the same analytic frame, while also keeping their difference in ultimate purpose in mind.

For example, in many parts of the colonial world missionary societies put great store on establishing newspapers as a way of evangelising and reinforcing literacy and creating communities of Christians who were connected through print.[30] Their content was more similar to that of newspapers produced by colonial states or by independent editors than we might expect, and readers often read them alongside other "secular" newspapers and periodicals. At the same time, they were distinguished by religious idioms and their concern with otherworldly matters.

As these case studies make clear, the importance of the colonial setting does not lie in the places we might initially assume—in the presence of censorship, of sharply unequal power relations, of a multinational and multilingual context, or in the absence of political rights. These elements were important but they also were—and remain—features of many noncolonial settings. While historians have examined the perceived secrecy of the colonial state and of secret societies that set themselves up against the colonial administration, debates about secrecy and openness in how publics conceive themselves are not exclusive to colonial contexts. In eighteenth-century Germany, for example, debates about pseudonymous and anonymous authors demonstrated a "perceived tension between critical openness and secrecy" that shaped emerging concepts of Enlightenment publics.[31]

But common to modern colonial states was governance by fragile legitimacy in a world of empires. Colonial states sought to establish their rule by introducing and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

embedding new legal and governance structures. For colonial subjects, the need to navigate new forms of law, politics, and economics helps explain the creativity we see in the colonial press, as writers and editors drew on both old and new political languages to engage their rulers, or to criticise or hold power to account.

Colonial states sought to enclose their subjects within territories, but they also created infrastructures which enabled colonial subjects to transcend territorial borders.[32] Such was the case with newspapers. As we have seen, the very fact that newspapers were addressed to the world allowed readers and writers to reach beyond the territorial state or nation. This fact offered editors a means of disciplining readers and writers, but, as Leigh Denault and Bodil Folke Frederiksen show, it also enabled editors, readers, and writers to use tools of critical reflection as a means of engaging and sometimes challenging colonial states.

Even in situations of high levels of state control, the normative ideal of the newspaper and of the role of a free press in political society was significant for many of the editors and correspondents in the case studies which follow. As Stephanie Newell argued in her 2013 book *The Power to Name*, "nothing could be closer to West African newspapermen's definitions of the role of the press between the 1880s and World War II than Habermas's utopian model of the public sphere."[33] Similar ideas are expressed in the other colonial settings discussed in this issue. While public debate was never "free," the powerful principle that it ought to be helped make possible the constitution of critical publics. This was the case, for example, in *Te Karere O Paneke*, the Māori-language newspaper edited by Walter Buller which Lachy Paterson explores. As Paterson writes, "It was Buller's own liberalism that provided a platform where Māori voices might be heard, for the new and changing society they encountered to be discussed and critiqued."[34]

Colonial states were also engaged in a cultural project to create loyal subjects. This helps explain the didactic element of many of the government-owned or edited newspapers and periodicals we explore here. But at the same time, colonial states were acutely conscious of their lack of knowledge of the societies over which they sought to rule. The historian Nancy Rose Hunt has recently suggested that "we have not thought enough either about colonies as nervous places, productive of *nervousness*, a kind of energy, taut and excitable."[35] This sense of nervousness is palpable in the colonial archive. In moments of high political tension, colonial administrators turned a spotlight on the press in general and the vernacular press in particular.

For colonial states, the multilingual nature of the press was a particular source of anxiety. As one of our contributors, Rachel Leow, reminds us in her book *Taming Babel*, modern states, both colonial and postcolonial, have frequently struggled with diversity, and this is particularly striking in the ways in which "monoglot" colonial states confronted the "polyglot" societies over which they sought to rule.[36] Inability to understand how words were being used and what audiences might hear prompted a particularly acute form of anxiety in colonial officials. At times, colonial states sought to control the vernacular press, at other times they sought to intervene by publishing in the vernacular, to greater or lesser degrees of success.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But for colonial subjects, writing in languages other than that of the colonial government could provide an opportunity. As Bodil Folke Frederiksen argues, the reliance of colonial states on translators weakened their hold. Proving that material was "seditious" was hard to do. Language was used in creative and enterprising ways, and in certain contexts the ways in which words were used changed quickly, making it difficult for colonial linguists or censors to keep up.

Studying the production and reception of the press in the colonial world, then, also offers new perspectives on colonial society, by providing a window both into the anxieties of colonial states and into how colonial subjects applied creative techniques in order to function within the colonial everyday.

Conclusion

In this special issue, we make the case for a new approach to studying the publics created through print media in the colonial world. The articles collected here draw on their authors' rich understanding of local contexts and, in many cases, the vernaculars in which newspapers were published. Understanding the role of print media in the colonial world demands this deep knowledge of local contexts. Yet, we contend, there is much to be gained by bringing these case studies together and approaching them through a shared framework.

That framework demonstrates that public spheres in colonial society were not a priori a space for discourse distinctive from other possible public spheres. Rather, we suggest that public spheres function through the interaction of several different factors that, in combination, serve to activate spaces of discourse into various publics. These factors can be found in other historical contexts or political and social systems, and so this framework can be used to analyse other sites of public debate. The adjective "colonial" in front of public sphere does not hold as an exclusive identifier of a unique kind of public sphere inapplicable to other contexts. At the same time, these four factors help us to draw out key commonalities in how public discourse functioned in spaces of colonial governance. And in turn, exploring colonial public spheres from this perspective draws our attention to important facets of the nature of the colonial state.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the many people and institutions who have helped shape this special issue, particularly Andrew Arsan, Stephanie Newell, and Karin Barber. Its origins lie in a conference we organised with Andrew Arsan at CRASSH, the Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Cambridge, in 2015. Our discussions continued at a second conference which we organised with Stephanie Newell at Yale University in 2017. We are grateful to CRASSH for funding and hosting the 2015 conference and we gratefully acknowledge the support of the Edward J. and Dorothy Clarke Kempf Memorial Fund and the MacMillan Center for International and Area

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Studies at Yale University for funding and hosting the 2017 conference. We would also like to take this opportunity to honour and remember Rudolf Wagner, who delivered an inspiring keynote lecture at the Cambridge conference and took part in the Yale conference. He passed away in 2019.

Bibliography

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2016.

Askew, Kelly. "Everyday Poetry from Tanzania: Microcosm of the Newspaper Genre." In *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Derek Peterson, Emma Hunter, and Stephanie Newell, 179–223. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 2016.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987.

Ballantyne, Tony. "What Difference Does Colonialism Make?: Reassessing Print and Social Change in an Age of Global Imperialism." In *Agents of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, edited by Sabrina Alcorn Baron, Eric N. Lindquist, and Eleanor F. Shevlin, 342–52. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

Barber, Karin. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

——. Introduction to her *Print Culture and the First Yoruba Novel*, 1–75. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Bhattacharya, Neeladri. "Notes Towards a Conception of the Colonial Public." In *Civil Society, Public Sphere, and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, edited by Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld, 130–56. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." In *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, edited by Sue-Ellen Case, 270–82. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

Calhoun, Craig. *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. London: MIT Press, 1992.

Carcia, José Luis, *et al*. *Media and the Portuguese Empire*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

Chartier, Roger. "Laborers and Voyagers: From the Text to the Reader." *Diacritics* 22:2 (1992), 49–61.

Cowling, Leslie, and Carolyn Hamilton, "Producing Media Debate: Journalistic Practice and Public Discussion." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 32:3 (2011), 45–60.

Fraser, Nancy. "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World." *Theory, Culture and Society* 24:4 (2007), 7–30.

Frost, Mark Ravinder. "Asia's Maritime Networks and the Colonial Public Sphere, 1840–1920." *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 6:2 (2004), 63–94.

Green, Nile. "Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West: Industrial Communications in the Making of the 'Muslim World.'" *American Historical Review* 118:2 (2013), 401–29.

——. "Waves of Heterotopia: Toward a Vernacular Intellectual History of the Indian Ocean." *American Historical Review* 123:3 (2018), 846–74.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. "Books in Heaven: Dreams, Texts and Conspicuous Circulation." *Current Writing* 18:2 (2006), 136–49.

——. *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Hunt, Nancy Rose. *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Hunter, Emma. "Modernity, Print Media and the Middle Class in Colonial East Africa." In *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire*, edited by Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, 105–22. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019.

James, Leslie. "The Flying Newspapermen and the Time-Space of Late Colonial Nigeria." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60:3 (2018), 569–98.

Kaul, Chandrika, ed. *Media and the British Empire*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

La Vopa, Anthony J. "Conceiving a Public: Ideas and Society in Eighteenth-Century Europe." *Journal of Modern History* 64:1 (1992), 79–116.

Leow, Rachel. *Taming Babel: Language in the Making of Malaysia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Meyer, Birgit, ed. *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion and the Senses*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Nash, Kate. "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: Critique and Critical Possibilities." *Theory, Culture and Society* 24:4 (2007), 53–7.

Newell, Stephanie. *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2013.

Piccato, Pablo. "Public Sphere in Latin America: A Map of the Historiography." *Social History* 35:2 (2010), 165–92.

Potter, Simon J. *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922–1970*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

——. *News and the British World: The Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876–1922*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Wagner, Rudolf, ed. *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), 49–90.

Winseck, Dwayne R., and Robert M. Pike. *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007.

Notes

- Emma Hunter is Professor of Global and African History at the University of Edinburgh. She is the author of Political Thought and the Public Sphere in Tanzania: Freedom, Democracy and Citizenship in the Era of Decolonization, published by Cambridge University Press in 2015, and a co-editor, with Derek Peterson and Stephanie Newell, of African Print Cultures: Newspapers and their Publics in the Twentieth Century, published by the University of Michigan Press in 2016.

* Leslie James is an historian of West African and Caribbean political and intellectual histories. Her book, *George Padmore and Decolonization from Below: Pan-Africanism, the Cold War, and the end of empire* (2015) shows how black thinkers stretched the category of 'intellectual' by melding their ideas, political organizing, and social community. Her next book examines how the circulation of ideas in the West African and Caribbean press played a constitutive role in the processes and outcomes of decolonisation.

1 In her book *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*, Isabel Hofmeyr draws a distinction between "newspapers," which follow a pattern of regular, daily publication and are read simultaneously, and "periodicals," which are published at longer intervals and read in more punctuated fashion. But in the contexts we are addressing in this collection, whether the print media in question was published daily or at less frequent

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intervals, many of the people writing in them considered them to be newspapers, held up to them normative conceptions of the power of the press, and used them as a space for political debate. For this reason, we do not draw a sharp distinction between newspapers and periodicals and consider them both as part of the broader category of print media. Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press*, 14.

2 In his analysis of colonial Asian maritime networks, Mark Ravinder Frost identifies two themes for a colonial public sphere: calls for unity among various groups, and cosmopolitanism as a critical (or counter) temper that permeated the attitude of a colonial public sphere; Frost, "Asia's Maritime Networks." Pablo Piccato, who has worked on Latin American public spheres, highlights "the local, particularly urban, dimension of the emergence" of public spheres in colonial Latin America, Pablo Piccato, "Public Sphere in Latin America," 178. Perhaps the most specific delineation of concepts that characterise a "colonial public" has been elaborated by Neeladri Bhattacharya, in a colonial Indian context. Bhattacharya, "Notes Towards a Conception of the Colonial Public."

3 This special issue foregrounds print media and specifically newspapers, while also approaching publics and print as dynamic entities that are not confined to literate readers or a printed page. Barber, *Anthropology of Texts,* 143.

4 On the normative foundations of the concept of the "public sphere" as a contribution to theories of democracy, see Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere." Though c.f. Kate Nash, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere."

5 Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; Calhoun, Habermas *and the Public Sphere*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

6 Ballantyne, "What Difference Does Colonialism Make?," 351.

7 Green, "Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West," 403.

8 Piccato, "Public Sphere in Latin America," 178–80.

9 Chartier, "Laborers and Voyagers," 50.

10 The literature emphasising circulation and empire is too numerous to cite here, but almost all the works cited here on print media and empire also emphasise circulation. For the other-worldliness of circulation, see Hofmeyr, "Books in Heaven"; James, "The Flying Newspapermen."

11 There is an extensive field of work in this area. Some of this literature includes: Potter, *Broadcasting Empire*; Potter, *News and the British World*; Kaul, *Media and the British Empire*; Carcia et.al., *Media and the Portuguese Empire*.

12 Green, "Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West," 403.

13 Winseck and Pike, *Communication and Empire*.

14 Askew, "Everyday Poetry from Tanzania," 183.

15 Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* 99.

16 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 54.

17 Hofmeyr, "Books in Heaven," 145.

18 Leslie James, Karin Barber, Lara Putnam, and Michael Warner, "A Conversation, Revisiting Publics and Counterpublics," this issue. Also Barber, introduction to *Print Culture*.

19 Green, "Waves of Heterotopia," 848.

20 Cowling and Hamilton, "Producing Media Debate."

21 Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution."

22 Wagner, "The Early Chinese Press and the Agency of Its Readers: The Dynamics of the Transcultural Spread of the "Press" as an Institution," in this issue; and Wagner, *Joining the Global Public*.

23 Winseck and Pike, *Communication and Empire,* 344.

24 Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

25 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 66.

26 Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, first published in 1983, has cast a powerful shadow on the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press

scholarship in this regard. But as one of our contributors, Rudolf Wagner, put it succinctly in a recent collection of essays exploring the early history of newspapers in China and Shanghai: "The public sphere is not coterminous with the nation but essentially transnational and international." Wagner, introduction to *Joining the Global Public*, 4.

27 Denault, "Akbar or Aurangzeb? Ethics, Empire, and Print Publics in Colonial India" in this issue.

28 Leow, "Weeping Qingdao Tears Abroad: Locating Chinese Publics in Colonial Malaya, circa 1919," in this issue.

29 In some cases, editors insisted that newspapers were by definition secular. In colonial Tanganyika, a distinctive "colonial secularism" was enforced in the pages of the monthly periodical *Mambo Leo* and contributors who sought to use religious language or speak explicitly to co-religionists were told in no uncertain terms that the newspaper was not a space for religious discussion.

30 This was especially important in rural areas where individual Christians might have little contact with other believers. Hunter, "Modernity, Print Media and the Middle Class." There are parallels here with the ways in which media has created imagined communities of religious believers in contemporary Africa, on which see Meyer, *Aesthetic Formations*.

31 La Vopa, "Conceiving a Public," 88.

32 We are grateful to Karin Barber for emphasising this point.

33 Newell, *The Power to Name*, 31.

34 Paterson, "*Te Karere o Poneke: Creating an Indigenous Discursive Space?*" in this issue.

35 Hunt, *A Nervous State*, 5.

36 Leow, *Taming Babel*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248 Published online by Cambridge University Press