

# ‘Our common humanity’: print, power, and the colonial press in interwar Tanganyika and French Cameroun

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## Abstract

*If the concept of global civil society offers a way of thinking about the interwar period that does justice to the new linkages that were developing at the time, it also offers an opportunity to reflect on ‘the varied, contingent meanings of the global – and the limits to such globalist visions’, as this special issue makes clear. This article explores these themes in an African context in relation to two government periodicals, Mambo Leo and the Gazette du Cameroun, both of which first appeared in the early 1920s, and a settler-edited newspaper aimed at an African audience, L’Éveil des Camerouniens, published 1934–35. It argues that such official and semi-official publications serve to illustrate both the unexpected ways in which this period witnessed the birth of new forms of global connection and the limits of such connection.*

**Keywords** Cameroun, civil society, globalization, print, Tanganyika

In 1923, the recently established Swahili periodical *Mambo Leo* (*Current Affairs*), published by the Education Department in the League of Nations Mandate of Tanganyika, reported on a terrible earthquake in Japan. Thousands had been killed, many more had been injured or were without food. An event of this sort clearly warranted inclusion in a newspaper that always devoted attention to world news. The editor went further, however, and sought to explain why he judged it worthy of inclusion. In his editorial, he recognized that Japan was a long way from Tanganyika, and he doubted whether many Tanganyikans had ever even seen a Japanese person. But, he reminded his readers, all in the world were human beings, and ‘we should understand our brotherhood’.<sup>1</sup>

As the editors of this special issue remind us in their introduction, the interwar period was one that ‘witnessed both the de-globalization of the world and a growing sense of global interconnectivity’. Across the world, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw new networks constituted through print, their production generated by private capital, low costs, and enterprising editors. Print served to create new identities and redefine older ones.

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1 ‘Kwa wasomaji wetu (To our readers)’, *Mambo Leo*, September 1923, p. 1.

Not only were new national identities of the type first described by Benedict Anderson produced; so too were new, imperial, ethnic, religious, or racial identities, which could be both parochial and expansive. At times, print served to challenge hierarchies, while at other times it served to reinforce them in new ways.<sup>2</sup> Indian newspaper editors who attended Imperial Press Conferences in London destabilized hierarchies of colonizer and colonized.<sup>3</sup> In Penang, the English-language press sought to create new cosmopolitanisms that moved beyond a narrower Malay identity and reached out to wider communities.<sup>4</sup> In Tanganyika, the Indian press both cast itself as loyal subject of the British empire and played a role in wider Indian Ocean networks.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, while print culture had spread rapidly across the world, many remained excluded from these forms of connection. Some were excluded because they could not access the highly literate forms that were often taken by the press.<sup>6</sup> Others were excluded because tight censorship restricted the development of newspapers and periodicals. This article explores two such areas: the League of Nations Mandates of French Cameroun and Tanganyika, in the period between 1923 and the mid 1930s. While in some ways the inhabitants of these areas enjoyed more opportunities to engage with political authorities than did the citizens of neighbouring colonies, particularly through the requirement placed on mandatory powers to increase African participation in government and through the right to send petitions to Geneva, this did not extend to an independent press. Thus, while an independent and often anti-colonial press flourished in neighbouring countries under colonial rule, in Cameroun and Tanganyika the press intended for Africans was largely limited to that produced by government, settlers, and missionaries.<sup>7</sup> In Cameroun, an ordinance of October 1923 introduced the 1881 French press freedom law with a series of restrictive amendments.<sup>8</sup>

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- 2 Isabel Hofmeyr, Preben Kaarsholm, and Bodil Folke Frederiksen, 'Introduction: print cultures, nationalisms and publics of the Indian Ocean', *Africa*, 81, 1, 2011, p. 6.
  - 3 Chandrika Kaul, 'India, the Imperial Press Conference and the Empire Press Union', in Chandrika Kaul, ed., *Media and the British empire*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 125–44.
  - 4 Su Lin Lewis, 'Echoes of cosmopolitanism: colonial Penang's "indigenous" English press', in Kaul, *Media*, pp. 233–49.
  - 5 James Brennan, 'Politics and business in the Indian newspapers of colonial Tanganyika', *Africa*, 81, 1, 2011, pp. 42–67.
  - 6 Ziad Fahmy, 'Media-capitalism: colloquial mass culture and nationalism in Egypt, 1908–18', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42, 1, 2010, pp. 83–103.
  - 7 This apparent anomaly was perhaps due to fears of anti-French propaganda, at least in the case of Cameroun. See Richard A. Joseph, 'The German question in French Cameroun, 1919–1939', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 17, 1, 1975, pp. 65–90. On vernacular missionary newspapers, see Richard Bjornson, *The African quest for freedom and identity: Cameroonian writing and the national experience*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 23. Articles relating to Cameroun appeared in the anti-colonial press in Paris but were banned in Cameroun: see Vincent Sosthène Fouda, *Les médias face à la construction de l'état-nation en Afrique noire: un défi quotidien au Cameroun*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003, pp. 62–3; 'Journaux interdits', *Gazette du Cameroun* (hereafter *Gazette*), February 1934, p. 1. See also James F. Scotton, 'The first African press in East Africa: protest and nationalism in Uganda in the 1920s', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 6, 1973, pp. 211–28; John Lonsdale, "'Listen while I read": patriotic Christianity among the young Gikuyu', in Toyin Falola, ed., *Christianity and social change in Africa*, Durham NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005, pp. 563–93; Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton, *A history of Nigeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 130–1.
  - 8 Library of the Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer (hereafter ANOM), FM/1AFFPOL/1386/15; Marcel Nguini, 'La valeur politique et sociale de la tutelle française au Cameroun', PhD thesis, University of

In Tanganyika, the requirement to pay a hefty bond for any newspaper published more than every fourteen days successfully inhibited an independent African press until *Kwetu* appeared in 1937.<sup>9</sup>

Through a close reading of two government periodicals, *Mambo Leo* and the *Gazette du Cameroun*, and a settler-edited newspaper aimed at Africans, *L'Éveil des Camerouniens*, this article therefore aims to shed light on the themes explored in this special issue, with an eye to both the extent and the limits of interwar internationalism and the roots of global civil society.<sup>10</sup> Periodicals such as these did not create new transnational networks of association, nor did they develop an oppositional stance, forming the nucleus of an anti-colonial critique. Those Africans who contributed letters and articles to their pages were generally those invested in colonial rule, the 'intermediaries' who have attracted so much attention in recent historiography.<sup>11</sup> Where the existence of anti-colonial agitation taking place in Paris or Geneva was acknowledged, as it occasionally was in the pages of the *Gazette du Cameroun*, it was treated extremely critically.<sup>12</sup> Yet, while such papers tell us nothing about the history of anti-colonialism in the interwar years, the official press produced by colonial governments or settlers for an indigenous readership can offer different insights into the global history of state and civil society, especially in cases such as Tanganyika and French Cameroun after the First World War, where a new colonial power was using print to create new political subjects.<sup>13</sup> More broadly, situating such periodicals in a global context, beyond their specific region or continent, suggests that they can and ought be understood in relation to the globalization of conceptions of state, civil society, and political subjectivity. They contributed to the creation of standardized languages of political engagement, and to the development of new

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Aix-Marseille, 1956, pp. 98–100; Blaise Alfred Ngando, 'Regard sur le sens de la présence française au Cameroun en matières juridiques (1916–1959)', *Rio dos Camaroes*, 1, 2010, pp. 136–7.

- 9 Martin Sturmer, *The media history of Tanzania*, Ndanda: Ndanda Mission Press, 1998, p. 54; James F. Scotton, 'Tanganyika's African press, 1937–1960: a nearly forgotten pre-independence forum', *African Studies Review*, 21, 1, 1978, pp. 1–18.
- 10 I have consulted these newspapers in the following collections: *Mambo Leo*: 1923 onwards, East Africana Collection, University of Dar es Salaam Library; 1924 onwards, Royal Commonwealth Society Collection, Cambridge University Library. *La Gazette du Cameroun*: January 1924–January 1939, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, with some gaps. *L'Éveil des Camerouniens*: from the second edition onwards, Library of the Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer.
- 11 Benjamin N. Lawrance, Emily Lynn Osborn, and Richard L. Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, interpreters, and clerks: African employees in the making of colonial Africa*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006.
- 12 Henri Fosso, 'Méfions-nous des flatteurs', *Gazette*, May 1930, pp. 5–6; Benoit Moukete, 'L'abus des pétitions', *Gazette*, May 1930, pp. 7–8.
- 13 Both had been German colonies, and became League of Nations Mandates under the supervision of the Permanent Mandates Commission after the First World War. For the histories of these two territories under mandate, see John Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanganyika*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979; Peter Dumbuya, *Tanganyika under international mandate*, London: University Press of America, 1995; Martin Njeuma, ed., *Introduction to the history of Cameroon*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1989; Ralph A. Austen and Jonathan Derrick, *Middlemen of the Cameroons Rivers: the Duala and their hinterland, c.1600–c.1960*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Dieudonné Oyono, *Colonie ou mandat international: la politique française au Cameroun de 1919 à 1946*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992; Michael D. Callahan, *Mandates and empire: the League of Nations and Africa, 1914–1931*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999; Michael D. Callahan, *A sacred trust: the League of Nations and Africa, 1929–1946*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004. For a recent historiographical review of the League of Nations and the mandates system, see Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112, 4, 2007, pp. 1091–1117.

ways for people in sub-Saharan Africa to engage with the question of what might constitute progress. But they also challenge us to reflect on what we mean by civil society, to question the universality of apparently universal institutions such as the press, and to think carefully about the limits of the global.

For most theorists of contemporary Africa, ‘civil society’ is understood to be an autonomous space, defined in opposition to the state. As Africa emerged from one-party rule in the late 1980s, civil society was understood to be something that Africa lacked and that should be created – through, for example, voluntary institutions and a free press.<sup>14</sup> However, the concept of civil society has a longer and more contested genealogy than this interpretation might suggest. There is a long tradition of conceiving civil society as a space in which to create bonds of community in the context of rapid religious, social, and economic change, in ways that work in a symbiotic, rather than an oppositional, relationship with the state. We can trace this concern across a series of intellectual traditions, from Locke’s version of civil society as political society to Hegel’s civil society as a new ‘universal family’, replacing the functions once carried out by the household family.<sup>15</sup> Extending his critique of neo-liberal definitions of ‘civil society’ as separate from the state to the history of globalization, Jean-François Bayart has argued that the development of what he terms ‘international civil society’, through groups such as non-governmental organizations and churches, as often serves to embed unequal relations of power as to challenge them.<sup>16</sup> We should therefore, as Sunil Khilnani has recently argued, reject definitions of civil society as *necessarily* a space separate from the state, and the assumption that the concept of civil society is both analytically and practically inseparable from the concept of liberal democracy.<sup>17</sup> Conceiving of civil society in this way, we can understand institutions such as the colonial press as constitutive of new norms of political thinking and communication across the world, and of new forms of engagement between the colonial state and new elites, though doing so in ways bound to the power dynamics of the colonial state.

Crucially, we must also pause to reconsider what we mean by the press, and how far this constituted a universal institution in the interwar period. In a recent article, Isabel Hofmeyr, Preben Kaarsholm, and Bodil Folke Frederiksen contrast the values and assumptions of what they term ‘Euro-American’ print culture with the values and priorities at play in the Indian Ocean world. They argue that, whereas the history of print culture in the West has been defined by ‘themes of print capitalism, copyright regimes, national state control and the construction of vast, apparently egalitarian publics’, the Indian Ocean World trajectory instead foregrounds themes of ‘philanthropic production and personalized print’.<sup>18</sup> While their focus is on small-scale printing presses, the same absence of capitalist regimes of

14 Aili Mari Tripp, ‘Political reform in Tanzania: the struggle for associational autonomy’, *Comparative Politics*, 32, 2, 2000, pp. 191–214.

15 John Dunn, ‘The contemporary political significance of John Locke’s conception of civil society’, in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, eds., *Civil society: history and possibilities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 51; Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Hegel and the economics of civil society’, in *ibid.* p. 123.

16 Jean-François Bayart, *Global subjects: a political critique of globalization*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, pp. 58–67.

17 Sunil Khilnani, ‘The development of civil society’, in Kaviraj and Khilnani, *Civil society*, pp. 24–5.

18 Hofmeyr, Kaarsholm, and Folke Frederiksen, ‘Introduction’, pp. 7, 15; Rochelle Pinto, *Between empires: print and politics in Goa*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 121.

production, and the element of personalization, are present in the African newspapers studied here, with an added element of didactic paternalism.<sup>19</sup> And, as Harri Englund's recent study of *Nkhani Zam'maboma* (a Chichewa radio programme on the Malawian state broadcaster MBC) has shown, media that fail to conform to the conventions of liberal democracy can nevertheless offer an important channel of communication, and play a role in the creation of new publics.<sup>20</sup>

After briefly introducing these periodicals, I look first at 'virtual' globalization and the shifts in individual imaginaries produced even by loyalist newspapers in tightly controlled public spheres. I then move on to consider the ways in which these publications contributed to a globalization of concepts, as a common vocabulary for talking about progress developed and found expression in these publications, in ways that mirrored discussions elsewhere in the interwar world. In the third part, I return to the specifics of these publications and the circumstances of their production, and emphasize the ways in which they formed part of a project of state-building, which served the ends of imperial competition as much as those of global connection, while resting in turn on the creation of new exclusions within individual territories.

### Three interwar newspapers

The *Gazette du Cameroun* first appeared in 1923; its mission, as laid out in the ordinance establishing it, was for it to be a monthly newspaper, distributed free of charge to Africans. It would publish texts likely to interest the indigenous population, alongside advice on the practical application of principles of health and agriculture. The Commissaire de la République's chief of staff was to be responsible for its preparation.<sup>21</sup> The appearance was official, resembling that of the monthly *Journal Officiel du Cameroun* in its typeface and appearance, and it was similarly produced at the government printer in Yaoundé. There were no pictures and few commercial advertisements: one typical advertisement, which appeared on the back page, was a list of products produced at the Regional School in Ebolowa that were available for sale.<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, no circulation statistics for the *Gazette* appear either in *Annuaire Statistique du Cameroun* or in a sample of reports submitted to the League of Nations. The annual report for 1923 merely referred to a 'significant number' being distributed locally, and specified that those who understood French were expected to communicate the messages of the *Gazette* to those who did not, and that it was intended to reach, via local officials, deep into rural areas. To give a sense of the number of potential readers, in 1922 there were eighty-nine *écrivains-interprètes* (clerk-interpreters), holders of the highest civil service post that could be reached by Africans, many of whom became active contributors to

19 On the didactic element of African creative writing, see Stephanie Newell, ed., *Readings in African popular fiction*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002, p. 2.

20 Harri Englund, *Human rights and African airwaves: mediating equality on the Chichewa radio*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011.

21 The Commissaire de la République was the highest official in France's African mandates. Ordinance reprinted in the annex to ANOM/BIB/AOM/50157/1923, *Rapport annuel du gouvernement français sur l'administration sous mandat des territoires du Cameroun, pour l'année 1923*, p. 197. See also Erik Essoussé, *La liberté de la presse écrite au Cameroun*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008, p. 53.

22 'École régionale d'Ebolowa', *Gazette*, May 1925, p. 8.

the *Gazette*.<sup>23</sup> Whether the newspaper ever reached far beyond that tiny, though expanding, circle is hard to say, but among that group some at least were enthusiastic. The mandatory power reported that they had already received ‘numerous letters from Africans who wish to pay a subscription so as to be sure of “receiving the good advice of the *Gazette* every month”’, and many francophone Cameroonians went on to contribute news and letters to its pages.<sup>24</sup>

This publication was followed in 1934–35 by the brief appearance of a settler-produced newspaper, *L'Éveil des Camerouniens*, also aimed at an African readership but intended to be more lively and more responsive to its public. Unlike the *Gazette*, it was to function on a commercial basis, paid for by subscribers at a rate of 20 francs for the year, and printed by a commercial printer in Douala. A French settler, Eugène Schneider, was the editor, and he also edited the settler newspaper *L'Éveil du Cameroun*, which cost rather more, at 50 francs per year. Alfred A. Musinga was assistant editor.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the *Gazette*, *L'Éveil des Camerouniens* (hereafter *L'Éveil*) was to appear fortnightly, rather than monthly. Readers compared it favourably with its rival. Louis Marie Pouka wrote to thank its founder for giving ‘all young Africans capable of making themselves understood in French the opportunity to reveal their ideas, to communicate their thoughts, and to initiate themselves into the difficult art of writing’. He compared *L'Éveil* with the ‘monotonous’ *Gazette du Cameroun*, which ‘often sends the reader to sleep’.<sup>26</sup> But *L'Éveil* proved financially unsustainable and, after a brief experiment with publishing in African languages, it folded in mid 1935. A desperate appeal for at least 300 new subscribers, so that the newspaper might survive, gives a sense of its limited circulation.<sup>27</sup>

In Tanganyika, the proposal to start a new Swahili-language newspaper to take the place of the German-era *Kiongozi* was made shortly after control over the territory passed to Britain, but it took three years for *Mambo Leo* to appear in print.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the French mandate, which had the task of introducing a new language in the former German colony, the British were able to take advantage of the existence of Swahili as a *lingua franca*, and an existing, albeit small, Swahiliphone reading public. Published within the Education Department, *Mambo Leo* was, like *Gazette du Cameroun*, intended to promote and explain government policies, and it similarly appeared on a monthly basis. The newspaper promoted newly standardized versions of the Swahili language, and encouraged new farming and

23 ANOM/FM/SG/TGO/36, *Rapport annuel du gouvernement français ... pour l'année 1922*, p. 133. By 1926 there were around 300: see Bjornson, *African quest*, p. 23.

24 *Rapport annuel ... 1923*, p. 79. In an anthropological study, Yves Nicol described it as being ‘extremely successful’ among the Bakoko: Yves Nicol, *La tribu des Bakoko*, Paris: Librairie Coloniale et Orientaliste Larose, 1929, p. 222.

25 ANOM/BIB/AOM/30313/1932; Jonathan Derrick, ‘Colonial elitism in Cameroon: the case of the Duala in the 1930s’, in Njeuma, *Introduction*, p. 122; Kenneth Orosz, *Religious conflict and the evolution of language policy in German and French Cameroun, 1885–1939*, New York: Peter Lang, 2008, p. 299. In 1922, the starting rate for an African civil servant was 800 francs per year, and this could rise to 6,000 francs by the end of his career: see *Rapport annuel ... pour l'année 1922*, p. 131.

26 Louis Marie Pouka, ‘Remerciement’, *L'Éveil*, 10 August 1934, p. 2.

27 ‘À nos abonnés’, *L'Éveil*, 25 February 1935, p. 1.

28 Katrin Bromber, ‘*Ustaarabu*: a conceptual change in Tanganyika newspaper discourse in the 1920s’, in R. Loimeier and R. Seesemann, eds., *The global worlds of the Swahili*, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2006, p. 69; On the German-era press, see Hilda Lemke, ‘Die Suaheli-Zeitungen und Zeitschriften in Deutsch-Ostafrika’, PhD thesis, Leipzig University, 1929.

medical practices. But *Mambo Leo* was also intended to respond to demands for a newspaper from the African population of Tanganyika, evident from the fact that its circulation rose from 6,000 in 1923 to 15,000 by 1938, and that demand always outstripped supply.<sup>29</sup> As a result it always had more of a commercial aspect to it than the *Gazette*. Copies were available at district offices, but at a price, and readers were encouraged to pay a fee of 2 shillings and 6 pence for an annual subscription, and to place advertisements.<sup>30</sup> By the early 1930s, it was available not just from district offices but also from South Asian shopkeepers.<sup>31</sup> As well as advertisements, it contained pictures, and had a more appealing layout than the *Gazette*.

As for the content, the pages of the *Gazette* combined explicitly 'improving' stories and articles with reports of the activities of those chiefs favoured by the colonial administration, and evidence of the progress that French rule was bringing to the mandate. A typical issue, published in January 1924, included a report on a celebration held to mark the second anniversary in office of a paramount chief, news of a new croquet club created in Yaoundé, and didactic articles on the importance of learning to cultivate the land more effectively, as well as of learning to read and write, and on the dangers of smallpox. The serialization began of a story called 'The adventures of Moussa', which described a boy's arrival at school and his process of adapting to early rising, rituals of cleanliness, and regular inspections. There were also lists of promotions, resignations, and redeployments of government servants, while later issues included the purchase price of various agricultural products, as well as official announcements and ordinances.<sup>32</sup> While the first issues of the *Gazette* were entirely anonymous, over time, space was increasingly given over to news reports, fables and legends, and discussions of proverbs signed by Cameroonian authors, many of whom were African civil servants.<sup>33</sup> It was typically relatively short, including only around six to eight A4 pages of text.

Though *L'Éveil* sought to distinguish itself from the *Gazette* by including photographs and pictures, using the larger newspaper format, and creating more space for contributions from readers, the content was similar to that published in the *Gazette*. There were fables and legends, ethnographic writings, and information about the movement of personnel around the territory, often written by the same people who contributed to the *Gazette*. There was more attention given to sport than was the case in the *Gazette*, generally at least one page per issue.

The pages of *Mambo Leo* similarly contained advice on good farming and healthcare practices, translations of government documents and speeches, and serializations of a range

29 Tanganyika Territory, *Blue Book for the year ending 1923*, p. 72; Tanganyika Territory, *Blue Book for the year ending 1938*, p. 157.

30 The annual subscription included postage, and was later reduced to 2 shillings. Advertisements cost 50 shillings per issue for a full page, and 20 shillings for a quarter page. In contrast, the *Dar es Salaam Times* cost 6d per issue and 25 shillings for the year in 1923, though *Mambo Leo* appeared monthly, and the *Times* appeared weekly: Tanganyika Territory, *Blue Book for the year ending 1923*, p. 72; Tanganyika Territory, *Blue Book for the year ending 1933*, p. 131.

31 Tanzania National Archives (hereafter TNA), 12871/II, 'Review of *Mambo Leo*'s activities July 1932 to October 1933', p. 4.

32 'Prix d'achat à Douala des produits', *Gazette*, April 1924, p. 2.

33 See Bjornson, *African quest*, for the later careers of many of the contributors.

of texts. The last included histories, biographies, African American folk tales, and the stories of *Robinson Crusoe*, *Sinbad the sailor*, and *A thousand and one nights*. *Mambo Leo* was longer than either of the Cameroonian papers, with a typical issue around twenty-four pages. It was more global in its orientation than the francophone newspapers, which tended to look largely to France. There was also more room for debate with the editor in *Mambo Leo*, through the news from the regions supplied by correspondents from the local area, through letters to the editor, and through responses by the editor to letters not published. The numbers of letters received was impressive: in 1933 the paper received between three and four hundred letters per month.<sup>34</sup> *Mambo Leo* also had a regular editorial column and a distinctive editorial voice, most notably that of the civil servant and Swahili scholar Frederick Johnson in the 1920s, but the editor was not named and continuity of tone masked regular changes of identity over the period.<sup>35</sup>

The importance of these newspapers, and others like them, was recognized at the time. In a review of African periodical literature in 1926, Edwin Smith remarked on the growing realization among colonial governments in Africa that there was a 'reading public among the Natives that can be influenced by the Press'. He referred both to the *Gazette du Cameroun* and to the Kenyan government's *Habari*.<sup>36</sup> Later scholars found in these newspapers the origins of national literatures, while at the same time recognizing that they were important places for the formation of new elites, and that they provided a space for communication between emerging elites and the colonial state.<sup>37</sup> More recently, *Mambo Leo* has attracted the attention of historians tracing Africa's intellectual history, for whom its pages offers insights into African thinking about race, identity, and civilization.<sup>38</sup> Yet, while it is tempting to see such newspapers as offering a rare and valuable source for African intellectual history, this is a particular kind of colonial intellectual history, one shaped by the power dynamics that produced the newspapers and by the forms of engagement proposed within them. In contrast, situating these newspapers in a global context suggests a slightly different history, one that contributed to a globalization of the subjectivities of individual readers. However, these publications also contributed concretely to the globalization of political orders, in the sense that public discussions taking place in these newspapers mirrored similar cases elsewhere, both in terms of form and content, contributing to the spread of conceptions of political society across the interwar world.

34 TNA 12871/II, 'Review of *Mambo Leo*'s activities', p. 3.

35 Alice Werner, 'English contributions to the study of African languages', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 29, 117, 1930, p. 524; Stephanie Newell, 'Something to hide? Anonymity and pseudonyms in the colonial West Africa press', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45, 1, 2010, pp. 9–22.

36 Edwin W. Smith, 'Some periodical literature concerning Africa', *International Review of Missions*, 15, 1926, p. 606.

37 Blaise Alfred Ngando, *La présence française au Cameroun, 1916–1959: colonialisme ou mission civilisatrice?*, Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 2008, p. 89n; Essoussé, *La liberté*, p. 54; Bjornson, *African quest*, p. 23; Thomas Geider, 'The paper memory of East Africa: ethnohistories and biographies written in Swahili', in Axel Harneit-Sievers, ed., *A place in the world*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, pp. 255–88; Derrick, 'Colonial elitism', pp. 122–3; Iliffe, *Modern history*, pp. 406–13.

38 Bromber, '*Ustaarabu*'; James Brennan, 'Realizing civilization through patrilineal descent: intellectual making of an African racial nationalism in Tanzania, 1920–50', *Social Identities*, 12, 4, 2006, pp. 405–23; Maria Suriano, 'Letters to the editor and poems: *Mambo Leo* and readers' debates on Dansi, *Ustaarabu*, respectability, and modernity in Tanganyika, 1940s–1950s', *Africa Today*, 57, 3, 2011, pp. 39–55.



## A place in the world

In interwar Nepal, until 1935, the government produced the only periodical available; nevertheless, in his study of the Nepali public sphere in the interwar period, Rhoderick Chalmers shows some of the ways in which an official periodical could serve to reshape public space.<sup>39</sup> In particular, he describes the way in which ‘its brief news reports from across the country, however politically innocuous ... provided a basic representation to the print community of the geographical extent and variety of the country’. Moreover, ‘the complementing of local news with reports from India and around the world initiated a new means of siting Nepalis within a regional and global context and providing information, however limited, by which readers might compare their situation with that of other peoples and countries’.<sup>40</sup>

In the *Gazette* and *Mambo Leo*, too, the form taken by the newspapers similarly contributed to the re-imagining of national space, and to increasingly standardized conceptions of what a newspaper was and how it should be engaged with. More so than the Cameroonian examples, *Mambo Leo*, like the government periodical in Nepal, also served to situate its readers in relation to a wider international community. The first section after the editorial was always ‘*Habari za dunia*’ (‘World news’). As in the case of the Japanese earthquake, with which we started, this news gave a strong sense of an increasingly connected world, in which the people of Tanganyika needed to know the affairs of far distant places, as much as the people of coastal Tanganyika needed to know the news of up-country areas. There was also a sense of an emerging international society. The ‘World news’ section often included reports of activities of the League of Nations. A series of articles explaining the role of the League of Nations in keeping world peace and improving the lives of people across the world was first run in 1930 and repeated in 1931.<sup>41</sup> Smaller-scale international societies also appeared in Tanganyika, such as the Tanganyika Society for the Protection of Animals, founded in 1931.<sup>42</sup> A poem appeared in praise of the society, and later editions included updates on its progress, as well as providing news from a sister society in Britain, thereby presenting the Tanganyikan branch as part of a wider movement of concern for animals.<sup>43</sup>

Many letters and reports from up-country areas similarly conveyed a sense that the world was becoming more interconnected, and that Tanganyika must consider its place within this world. In the first issue of *Mambo Leo*, in January 1923, Martin Kayamba wrote that the recent war was generally known as the ‘British and German’ war, but it had in fact been a

39 Rhoderick Chalmers, ‘We Nepalis: language, literature and the formation of a Nepali public sphere in India, 1914–1940’, PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2003.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

41 See for example ‘Maelezo ya “League of Nations” yaani Ushirika au Mapatano ya Mataifa (A description of the “League of Nations”, or the organization or alliance of nations)’, *Mambo Leo*, September 1930, p. 147; ‘Ushirika au Mapatano ya Mataifa (The organization or alliance of nations)’, *Mambo Leo*, April 1931, p. 66.

42 ‘Chama cha Tanganyika cha kukomesha ukatili juu ya wanyama (Tanganyika Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals)’, *Mambo Leo*, July 1931, p. 116; Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, October 1931.

43 Poem by Salehe Kibwana, ‘Ukatili juu ya wanyama (Cruelty to animals)’, *Mambo Leo*, May 1932, p. 104; ‘Huruma na ukatili juu ya wanyama (Compassion and cruelty to animals)’, *Mambo Leo*, February 1933, p. 38. South Asian and European communities tended to be more enthusiastic about such societies than Africans were, and it was from them that the initiative came (my thanks to the *JGH* editors for this point).

war involving the entire world.<sup>44</sup> In March, a correspondent from Tabora in the west of Tanganyika expressed his pleasure that *Mambo Leo* was now reaching his region and that the newspaper was able to explain ‘what was being done in the world’.<sup>45</sup> While the Cameroonian newspapers focused more on the French imperial system than on the wider world, in both *Mambo Leo* and the *Gazette du Cameroun*, the collapse of commodity prices in the 1930s was explained as a worldwide phenomenon, and editorials sought to persuade readers that the global economy would recover and that they should not abandon their cash crops.<sup>46</sup> This was of course an obvious tactic to deflect blame from the colonial authorities, but its effect was nevertheless to frame local difficulties in a global context.

Local news similarly encouraged comparison within the territory, and a sense of events taking place within a wider world context. Such was the case with a news report that appeared in August 1923 in the ‘News of the towns’ section, which consisted of reports from around Tanganyika sent in by readers. The report was from Moshi, telling of a young wife who developed an insatiable appetite for the grass brought by her husband to feed their cows before departing, apparently having turned into an elephant. A few months later, an irate Nathaniel Mtui, a regular correspondent, wrote to complain. Visitors kept arriving in Moshi asking for details of this curious story. Mtui himself doubted its veracity, and called on the author to provide detailed information to allow the story to be investigated further. A later correspondent pursued the matter, telling those who might be tempted to send in stories that they had not themselves witnessed to remember that *Mambo Leo* was read throughout the world, and that the presence in its pages of untrue stories risked bringing shame on its community of readers.<sup>47</sup> While *Mambo Leo* might not quite have achieved the global reach suggested by this letter, it did extend beyond Tanganyika to readers in Zanzibar, Malawi, Burundi, and Kenya, who were apparently not put off by the prominence given to very local news.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time as the layout and content of newspapers sought to situate their readers both within their territories and within the wider world, the institution of the newspaper itself, and the act of buying and reading it, served to situate readers within a self-consciously modern world. For the didactic aim of training readers was also part of the aim of these newspapers, particularly *Mambo Leo*. The editorial voice of *Mambo Leo* set out both to win the confidence of readers and to guide them. The first editorial announced *Mambo Leo* as a stranger, the unknown heir of the German-era newspaper *Kiongozi*, who came humbly to seek acceptance among his readership. Very quickly, however, the voice moved away from that of humble newcomer.<sup>49</sup> In January 1925, the editor wrote that he had arrived as ‘your child’, but was now ‘your father and your friend’. Fathers had responsibilities, and so did

44 Letter from H. M. T. Kayamba, *Mambo Leo*, January 1923, p. 16. John Iliffe, *Modern Tanzanians*, Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973, pp. 66–94.

45 Letter from Clement Mtitimila, *Mambo Leo*, March 1923.

46 ‘Conseil au cultivateur indigène’, *Gazette*, May 1931, p. 6; ‘Pesa zimepotea na kazi hakuna (The money is gone and there is no work)’, *Mambo Leo*, December 1931, pp. 215–16.

47 Nathaniel Mtui, ‘News from the towns: Moshi Machame’, *Mambo Leo*, January–February 1923, p. 17; letter from Mtumwa Msakara, *Mambo Leo*, March 1924, p. 19.

48 TNA 12871/III, fo. 238, Acting Chief Secretary to Director of Education, 9 April 1934.

49 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, January 1923, p. 2.

children: 'I ask you to help me by every month bringing me news which benefits me and all the people of our country of Tanganyika.'<sup>50</sup> In the same vein, an editorial in April 1925 addressed renewed complaints about the Swahili used by *Mambo Leo*. *Mambo Leo* had become a place in which those entrusted with Swahili spelling and vocabulary reforms tried out their experiments, and the Swahili used was frequently different in both style and substance from that with which readers would be familiar. These experiments did not always prove successful, and some (such as the replacement of 'ch' by 'c') lasted a relatively short period. More generally, readers from the mainland had complained that the Swahili used in *Mambo Leo* was too difficult, but the editor responded by saying that, in matters of Swahili, he was host and they were the guests. Moreover, summing up one of the central aims of the spelling reforms, he declared that he was a father with many children, and he wanted to be understood by all of them.

The editor provided explanations as to why some letters could not be published. For example, one editorial response stated that *Mambo Leo* was not a suitable place to carry out arguments over wage rates.<sup>51</sup> From the beginning, the editor made clear that there was to be no discussion of religion in *Mambo Leo*, and more than once the editor informed correspondents that their letters could not be printed because they were overly concerned with religion.<sup>52</sup> There were exceptions, however: a year after the excitement of the Ghanaian intellectual James Aggrey's visit to Tanganyika as a member of the Phelps Stokes Commission had died down, one of his speeches was printed. It was introduced with a few words of explanation of the numerous Christian terms in the speech, and with an expression of hope that Muslim readers would enjoy it too.<sup>53</sup> Insulting others was also banned, and while there was certainly debate – which at times was relatively heated – the editor regularly stepped in to halt disputes, or to inform readers that their letters could not be published because they merely encouraged conflict.<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere, we see readers policing fellow readers to ensure that the newspaper remained a place of civility. In November 1934 Samuel M'Pouma wrote to *L'Éveil* to criticize those who had written to the newspaper under pseudonyms as a means of carrying on their personal quarrels.<sup>55</sup> If they wanted to do that, he wrote, they should go to court. It was not appropriate content for *L'Éveil* and it brought the people of Cameroun into disrepute.

In *Mambo Leo*, newspapers were described as a universal phenomenon that represented a developmental stage. In September 1929, the editor told his readers that 'when you buy *Mambo Leo* and when you bring us news and questions, you follow the example of other nations in the world who relied on newspapers as one way of achieving progress'.<sup>56</sup> Readers agreed, and berated those who failed to recognize *Mambo Leo*'s worth. In 1926, a correspondent

50 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, January 1925, p. 1.

51 'Sanduku ya Posta (Post Box)', *Mambo Leo*, February 1926, p. 316.

52 'Sanduku ya Posta', *Mambo Leo*, December 1925, p. 275.

53 'Hotuba ya Dr Aggrey (Speech by Dr Aggrey)', *Mambo Leo*, February 1925, p. 27.

54 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, August 1924, p. 1.

55 Samuel M'Pouma, 'Lettre à Monsieur le Directeur de l'Éveil des Camerouniens à Douala', *L'Éveil*, 25 November 1934, p. 3.

56 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, September 1929, p. 1133.

in Kahama wrote a short article for the ‘News from the towns’ section under the title ‘Positive progress’. When *Mambo Leo* was launched in 1923, he wrote, only seven people in Kahama bought it. Now, that number had reached 180, proof that Kahama was progressing – though his joy was tempered with criticism of those who could read but did not buy *Mambo Leo*.<sup>57</sup> Others complained that Tanganyika was lagging behind its neighbours. A letter published in October 1925 noted that in Uganda there were six newspapers, whereas Tanganyika had only one. Even that one newspaper was not, according to this correspondent, sufficiently respected. In many places, no one read *Mambo Leo*. In his district, he wrote, there were thousands of people, but only 350 people subscribed to *Mambo Leo*.<sup>58</sup>

M’Pouma’s attack on those misusing the newspaper, and many of the other letters discussed, had a very local context and pursued personal disputes. Viewing them from a global perspective, however, we can see that the content and organization of these newspapers, as well as the institution of the newspaper and the act of engaging with it, either as a reader or as a contributor, served to situate readers in a global context. They were encouraged to think comparatively, and to conceive of print as something with a potentially global reach. Moreover, if a newspaper was understood to be a universal stage of development, buying a newspaper was itself an act of taking one’s place in the world. But if newspapers contributed to a global imaginary, they also contributed to a globalization of concepts.

## The globalization of ‘progress’

The interwar world was one in which new forms of international society were in the process of creation, and this was an international society that shared a broad political language, implying a set of assumptions about the nature of political society and a shared set of keywords. This brings us to the second way in which our case studies point to a world becoming more connected, in that, like other loyalist and official newspapers, as well as papers that were more critical, they operated within the assumptions of interwar liberalism, in which concepts of ‘progress’ were central.

The importance of liberal currents of thought to interwar public spheres is becoming increasingly apparent, as detailed case studies of diverse parts of the world accumulate. Once again we might look to Asia for a comparative example, this time to Malaya, dominated in the interwar period by two newspapers: *Utusan Melayu*, published between 1907 and 1921, and *Lembagu Melayu*, which appeared between 1914 and 1931.<sup>59</sup> Both took an editorial line that was essentially cooperative and respectful towards government, while also advocating the importance of Malayan progress through self-help.<sup>60</sup> Milner situates *Utusan Melayu* within a wider moment of global liberalism, describing the steps taken within its pages to redefine community, race, and nation, in a mode informed though not prescribed by currents of liberal thought. In *Utusan Melayu*, as in other newspapers from Japan to the

57 ‘Maendeleo mema (Positive progress)’, *Mambo Leo*, July 1926, p. 427.

58 Letter from S. P. T. Kiobia, ‘Mwenzangu, geuka msomaji wa *Mambo Leo* (My friend, become a *Mambo Leo* reader)’, *Mambo Leo*, October 1925, pp. 233–4.

59 William R. Roff, *The origins of Malay nationalism*, 2nd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 158.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Middle East, the echo of Samuel Smiles is distinctly audible. Hard work was praised not only for itself but for its contribution to individual liberty, with arguments such as ‘every person who works hard for himself and looks after his dependents’ is able to become ‘a person who ... is praised’.<sup>61</sup> More broadly, the paper described and advocated new modes of conceptualizing the relationship between individual and society, and between the individual and the state.<sup>62</sup>

In these newspapers, too, this nexus of ideas provided an over-arching narrative, within which the news, didactic articles, and letters that were printed took on a wider significance. They celebrated new forms of political society brought by European rule and financed by the prompt payment of taxes, while also encouraging both individual and collective endeavour to build the future. They also encouraged comparative thinking, comparing those who had progressed already, or had progressed further, with those who sought progress. In both *Mambo Leo* and *L'Éveil*, editors devoted extensive space to defining what they understood by these terms, and did so in terms of the values and practices just described.

When the editorial team of *Mambo Leo* sought to express ideas of progress, they employed two sets of terms. They might refer to ‘*Afrika ya kesho*’ (‘Tomorrow’s Africa’), following the title of an article published in 1923. Written by an author styling himself *mwenyeji wa inchi* (‘a native of the country’), it called on Africans to seek progress so that they would be ‘equal to other people’. Alternatively, the editors used the term *ustaarabu*. This word’s etymology reflected East Africa’s connections with the Arabic language and the Indian Ocean world, but it was now employed to new ends.<sup>63</sup> Its history was associated with coastal civilization and the means by which a coastal elite distinguished itself from up-country people. However, as Katrin Bromber has argued, the pages of *Mambo Leo* employed the term didactically, investing in it a new meaning, one associated with the modern West. Tellingly, the League of Nations was at one point described as ‘The General Meeting of Civilized Nations’ (*Mataifa yenye ustaarabu*).<sup>64</sup> A series of articles redefined *ustaarabu* in terms of government and membership of political society. *Ustaarabu* was, the editor wrote, ‘knowledge of everything which is profitable for the nation and its people and also the world’.<sup>65</sup> By 1939, it could be rendered broadly as ‘knowledge of things necessary for a civilized life, civilization’, and these attributes were now accessible not only to those living at the coast but also to all the territory’s inhabitants.<sup>66</sup>

The second issue of *L'Éveil* similarly had a lengthy article on the first page entitled simply ‘Civilisation’. It explained that there were many types of civilization, those of Europe, of

61 Anthony Milner, *The invention of politics in colonial Malaya*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 125.

62 Milner, *Invention of politics*, p. 128.

63 ‘*Afrika ya kesho*’, *Mambo Leo*, January 1923, pp. 9–11; Bromber, ‘*Ustaarabu*’, p. 67.

64 Bromber, ‘*Ustaarabu*’, p. 67; ‘*Habari za dunia* (World news)’, *Mambo Leo*, December 1923, p. 3.

65 ‘The past or the present: which is better?’, *Mambo Leo*, September 1925, p. 194.

66 Frederick Johnson, *A standard Swahili–English dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939, p. 436; Randall L. Pouwels, *Horn and crescent: cultural change and traditional Islam on the East African coast, 800–1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 72. Earlier in the nineteenth century, the concept of ‘civilization’ was rendered by the term *mwungwana*, which was associated with rank and with freedom as opposed to slavery: see Brennan, ‘Realizing civilization’; Jonathon Glassman, *Feasts and riot: revelry, rebellion, and popular consciousness on the Swahili coast, 1856–1888*, London: James Currey, 1995, p. 17.

America, and of Asia, but that the article would focus on the European variety in general, and the French subset of that variety in particular.<sup>67</sup> In describing what constituted ‘European civilization’, the emphasis was on personal disposition as much as material wealth, in particular a love of work for its own sake, not simply as a source of wealth. More than this, ‘civilization’ was characterized as a commitment to the freedom of women, children, and slaves, to combating suffering through medical knowledge, and to investing in long-term projects, which would stretch beyond individual lifetimes. The contrast between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarism’ was explicit, and a transition from one to the other advocated.

Both examples contrasted a world before the arrival of Europeans, which was characterized by disorder and violence, with a new world order, in which government, taxation, and law brought peace, progress, and prosperity.<sup>68</sup> A clear chronology was imagined, of moving from a disordered past to a progressive future, in which moral virtues were as important as material wealth or education.<sup>69</sup> But while this narrative conceived of colonial rulers as the agents of change, the task of achieving further progress was understood to rest with individual and collective endeavour. As Ernest Manfred Nonos wrote in *L'Éveil*, ‘the whites have staked out the route, now it’s up to us to clear and pave it’.<sup>70</sup> In the pages of these newspapers, as elsewhere, European editors and African contributors sought to give practical content to a narrative of progress.

To this end, the pages of *Mambo Leo* were filled with inspiring biographies from around the world, of men such as Booker T. Washington or David Livingstone, translated by British colonial officials such as the Swahili expert Frederick Johnson, or by African civil servants. In the case of Booker T. Washington, his life story fitted very well into government policy, and particularly the emphasis on agricultural education, which came to dominate education policy after 1925.<sup>71</sup> Yet it was not agricultural education but rather the general appeal of an image of self-betterment and progress that seems to have sparked an interest in Booker T. Washington. Samuel Chiponde, a government interpreter and President of the African Civil Servants Association, translated Washington’s *Up from slavery*. He enthused about the book, and encouraged anyone who could read English to read it in the original. The editor of *Mambo Leo* welcomed the translation, and hoped that it would help the people of Tanganyika to recognize that ‘they could achieve progress just as Booker T. Washington achieved progress’.<sup>72</sup> Readers were enthusiastic and complained when the next instalment failed to appear, while later editorials could draw on examples from Washington’s life to teach particular lessons.<sup>73</sup> In response to the regular complaint that no office jobs were available, the editor told readers that, if they could not find a job as a clerk, they should

67 ‘Civilisation’, *L'Éveil*, 10 August 1934, p. 1.

68 On tax, see Antoine Logmo, ‘Pourquoi paie-t-on l’impôt?’, *Gazette*, July 1935, p. 4; Swedi Farjallah, ‘Kodi (Tax)’, *Mambo Leo*, February 1925, p. 26.

69 ‘Impressions du chef supérieur Charles Atangana’, *Gazette*, July 1935, p. 1.

70 Ernest Manfred Nonos, ‘Ne fais tort à personne’, *L'Éveil*, 10 November 1934, p. 1.

71 John Iliffe, *Modern history*, p. 321; Timothy Parsons, *Race, resistance, and the Boy Scout movement in British colonial Africa*, Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004, p. 125.

72 ‘Booker T. Washington’, *Mambo Leo*, May 1926, p. 377.

73 Response to S. B. Simba of Pemba, *Mambo Leo*, October 1926, p. 493.

consider the life of Booker T. Washington and embrace farming.<sup>74</sup> A standardized comparative vocabulary was appearing, and in this case it was one that stressed pan-African identities and role models. In a similar vein, one article recounted the story of an insurance firm in America, which had been founded by an African American and was now a hugely successful enterprise.<sup>75</sup>

Other biographies presented Christian heroes and encouraged links within the British empire, such as those of David Livingstone or Richard Burton.<sup>76</sup> David Livingstone seems to have attracted particular interest, no doubt in part reflecting the importance attached to him in missionary preaching on the history of Christianity in Tanganyika. He first appeared in 1923, in a long-running series providing a recent history of Africa. In 1925, an article by Yakobo bin Mhina argued that David Livingstone and Christianity had brought freedom and civilization to Africa. The next month, a lengthy serialization of his life story began. Then, in January 1927, a letter signed 'Rafiki' ('Friend') explained that funds were being raised in Scotland to build a museum in memory of David Livingstone. Rafiki called on Tanganyikans to contribute, and on the editor to tell them how to do so, so that 'our name of Tanganyika' would not be missing from the list of those who had contributed.<sup>77</sup>

Novels could also provide inspiration. Translations of *Robinson Crusoe* appeared in both *Mambo Leo* and *L'Éveil*, but in the latter it was accompanied by a gloss from a reader who identified himself as a 'Cameroonian'. He reflected on the lessons that could be drawn from the story, and linked the tale of Robinson Crusoe directly to Africa, with Africa playing the role of Friday and the Europeans the role of Robinson. He wrote: 'Thanks to the arrival of the Europeans in Africa the African of our time has been saved just as Friday was by Robinson.'<sup>78</sup> His evidence was very similar to that offered by Europeans in defence of their rule: they had brought order where there had once been violence and disorder. Now, Cameroonians could travel across the country using the new railways, exchange their goods, and use the proceeds to build durable houses and buy European clothes. An imaginary dialogue with an ancestor returned from the grave similarly celebrated the change that had occurred in the proceeding fifty years, and the work of France in coming 'to civilize us', bringing an end to violence and disorder and establishing peace.<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, positive examples from closer to home, in the form of autobiographical accounts by Tanganyikans of the progress they had made over their lives, served as a reminder of the virtues of individual endeavour and self-reliance.<sup>80</sup> At times such reminders

74 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, September 1930, p. 145.

75 'Kumpuni kubwa la mtu mweusi (A large African American company)', *Mambo Leo*, August 1924.

76 'David Livingstone', *Mambo Leo*, October 1925, pp. 223–5; 'Richard Burton: Habari za Mwingereza mtangulizi aliyevumbua Tanganyika (Richard Burton: the story of the first Briton to discover Tanganyika)', *Mambo Leo*, September 1926, p. 463.

77 Letter from Rafiki, 'Bwana mganga [Dr] David Livingstone', *Mambo Leo*, January 1927, p. 560.

78 Oscar Pokossy Ng'ombe, 'Réflexions d'un Camerounien à propos de l'histoire de Robinson Crusoe', *L'Éveil*, 10 October 1934, pp. 3–4.

79 A. M. Mpressa, 'Tout est changé', *L'Éveil*, 25 September 1934, p. 7; A. M. Mpressa, 'Tout est changé', *L'Éveil*, 10 October 1934, p. 4.

80 'Cecil Matola anatumuhadithi habari za maisha yake (Cecil Matola tells us his life story)', *Mambo Leo*, August 1929, p. 1124.

were more direct. To one correspondent who complained that his area still lacked a school, the editor responded with the example of a chief who had taken the initiative of building a school, and was rewarded for his enterprise by receiving the first teacher who became available.<sup>81</sup> Self-help and self-reliance would bring their rewards.

Work and the benefits it offered constituted a regular theme.<sup>82</sup> Letters from readers contrasted their own work ethic and their belief that hard work could bring reward with the attitudes of their fellows who thought that only luck could bring prosperity. An article by Salehe Kibwana described his experience of reading *Mambo Leo* in public, and being asked to explain its content and purpose to two passers-by, neither of whom could read and both of whom doubted that prosperity could come through work.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, accounts from up-country areas told of the wealth acquired by following *Mambo Leo*'s agricultural advice and planting cotton.<sup>84</sup> In the *Gazette*, similar accounts appeared. Within the 'News from Cameroun' section for March 1924 was news from Edéa, where the inhabitants had, it was reported, followed the administration's farming advice, worked hard, and reaped the rewards. The news item concluded: 'you see that through work you can become a rich man, a man who can dress well and clothe his family, who will be able to eat meat and fish to have a strong, healthy and powerful body'.<sup>85</sup> The same theme was taken up by contributors. Henri Loé, a government clerk working in Edéa, described a ceremony held by the governor to honour nine local people. They had, he wrote, achieved this recognition not by belonging to an important family but simply by working hard, and others could join them if they too followed the administration's farming advice and worked hard.<sup>86</sup>

In *Mambo Leo*, as in other newspapers in the interwar world, editors and readers alike considered reading clubs and voluntary work to be central to the task of creating modern subjects.<sup>87</sup> If it was in the nature of human society to progress from disunity to unity, associations were the motor of this process. The November 1924 issue reported on the foundation of two clubs where the rich would help the poor and the literate would teach the illiterate; the result would be unity and trust.<sup>88</sup> Others made use of the letters page, stating that they had just arrived in Dar es Salaam and were looking for the clubs that they had heard so much about in the pages of *Mambo Leo*.<sup>89</sup> Such clubs were locally based, but they also connected people. When the Governor visited the Tanganyika Territory African Civil

81 Editor's response to 'Masikitiko ya watu wa Kahama (The sorrows of the people of Kahama)', *Mambo Leo*, October 1924, p. 21.

82 See, for example, an advertisement for *Mambo Leo* that appeared in April 1924, p. 18; Pierre Ebelé, 'Le travail: la différence entre les gens travailleurs et les paresseux', *Gazette*, May 1929, p. 3.

83 Salehe Kibwana, 'Afrika ya kesho, mbona twapingana nayo? (Tomorrow's Africa: why do we oppose it?)', *Mambo Leo*, June 1924, pp. 5–6.

84 Kibwana bin Kiwamba, 'Morogoro', *Mambo Leo*, October 1924, p. 13.

85 'Nouvelles d'Edéa', *Gazette*, 15 March 1924, pp. 1–2.

86 Loé Henri, 'Fête de la décoration à Edea, 23 Decembre 1924', *Gazette*, 15 August 1925, pp. 1–2.

87 Cf. Roff, *Malay nationalism*, pp. 178–88; William Roff, *Bibliography of Malay and Arabic periodicals published in the Straits Settlement and Peninsular Malay States, 1876–1941*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 17.

88 'News from the towns', *Mambo Leo*, November 1924, p. 11.

89 Letter from Khalfani Amiri, *Mambo Leo*, April 1926, p. 360.



Service Association in Tanga in 1923, he told them that, 'if a member wants to know what is happening in the world, he can come to the club and read the news in the newspapers'.<sup>90</sup> Such virtuous behaviour was explicitly contrasted with the less virtuous alternative of relying on rumour and gossip.

Indeed, the newspaper itself was described as an association, and was treated by regular correspondents as a club, not dissimilar to those springing up elsewhere. In *Mambo Leo*, readers communicated with each other through the letters pages and by sending news from the districts, and often continued conversations through its pages over many months. The deaths of those who wrote frequently were announced with due solemnity. Others turned textual connections into face-to-face connections: one regular correspondent recorded his joy when a fellow correspondent turned up in his home town eager to meet him.<sup>91</sup> In the *Gazette*, certain names appeared regularly, and some writers addressed each other by name. For instance, one piece was described as a 'letter from Ebongue Samuel, *écrivain-interprète* in the Abong Mbang district to Bekombo Kouoh François, *écrivain-interprète* in Dschang', and began, as a personal letter would, with the salutation 'My dear friend'.<sup>92</sup>

Hard work, inspiring biographies, and the celebration of associational culture were not simply goods in themselves; rather, taken together, they constituted a conception of how societies could progress. These terms provided a common language for talking about change and progress, and it was a language that, in translation, connected contributors to *Mambo Leo* and the Cameroonian newspapers with others across the colonial world. Dissenting voices, such as those who did think that luck would bring good fortune, were not welcomed in these public forums.

Even if the terms of debate were circumscribed, there was some room for considering what constituted progress, and how it might be achieved. Correspondents in Cameroun debated whether bridewealth should be further regulated or simply banned, and whether one or more African languages should become an official language, and if so which one.<sup>93</sup> In Tanganyika, correspondents criticized those who learned English and forgot their own languages, or who thought that copying Europeans was the way of progress.<sup>94</sup> Martin Kayamba's book celebrating the wonders he had seen in Europe was criticized in a letter from Sikeria Nyamuko, a chief in Musoma, on the grounds that Kayamba seemed to be suggesting that only Europeans had large buildings and large churches. He asked whether Kayamba thought 'that there are no churches in Africa?'<sup>95</sup>

These newspapers thus constituted a space in which common languages developed between colonial officials and the emerging African elites who chose to engage in the

90 'Chama cha [Association of] "Tanganyika Territory African Civil Servants Association", Tanga 1923', *Mambo Leo*, March 1923, p. 9.

91 Letter from Handhuruni Saburi, *Mambo Leo*, February 1933, p. 48.

92 Letter from Ebongue Samuel, *Gazette*, January 1931, p. 5.

93 Robert Mincoulou, 'Faut-il régler la dot?', *L'Éveil*, 10 December 1934, p. 1; Gustave Moundamé, 'Faut-il régler la dot?', *L'Éveil*, 25 January 1935, p. 2; 'Une enquête sur les idiomes du Cameroun', *Gazette*, June 1934, p. 1; Richard Eitel Valentin M'Bappe, 'Quelques mots sur les langues du Cameroun', *L'Éveil*, 25 December 1934, p. 1.

94 Letter from Zuberi Kajembe, *Mambo Leo*, August 1928, p. 933.

95 Letter from Sultani Sikeria Nyamuko, 'Mashahidi wa Tanganyika waliokwenda Ulaya (Observations of those Tanganyikans who went to Europe)', *Mambo Leo*, March 1933, pp. 70–1. See also Iliffe, *Modern Tanzanians*, p. 93.

public sphere. These languages helped create political subjects but also connected Africans to wider debates about what constituted progress. While the realm of debate was circumscribed, these same vocabularies would be turned to more critical ends, notably in Tanganyika's first independent African newspaper, *Kwetu*.<sup>96</sup>

## Creating imperial subjects

While official and loyalist newspapers could thus contribute both to new forms of global imaginary and to the globalization of political concepts, we need to think carefully about the limits to globality and about an implicit association between new institutions of civil society and the idea that such institutions would necessarily serve to hold power to account. For, as suggested above, these were institutions tied to state power, and to its creation and extension. This can be seen in more detail by looking at the role of *Mambo Leo* as a public forum.

The liberal idea of the press as a mode of speaking truth to power, and holding power to account, found echoes in these newspapers, for example in *L'Éveil*. While the *Gazette* seemed to define its functions throughout the period as primarily educational, when Schneider's *L'Éveil* was started in 1934, it presented itself not only as a space in which Africans could air their ideas, but also as a channel of communication between Europeans and Africans that would help prevent misunderstandings on both sides. A contributor to a later issue went further, writing that, in the fifty years that Cameroun had then spent under European rule, 'it had never been permitted to express itself in a free and clear way by means of the press', but that the mandate could now join its neighbours in having such a medium.<sup>97</sup> A letter opposing anti-French propaganda cited as evidence that Cameroonians were not oppressed the fact that the pages of local newspapers were open to Africans, and that they used that space to enthuse about French rule.<sup>98</sup>

Reflecting on *Mambo Leo*'s purposes in the early 1930s, officials in the education department described it as one of the few means of directly hearing 'native thought'.<sup>99</sup> There was some truth in this claim. *Mambo Leo* did increasingly come to be understood by readers as a means by which Africans could engage directly with the state, at a time when they were usually expected to express their grievances via the mediation of their chiefs or district officials.<sup>100</sup> Letters sent to *Mambo Leo*'s editor were investigated. For example, a letter sent in 1934, warning of food shortage and a risk of starvation in the sub-chiefdom of Ngote, Ihangiro, prompted a tour and further enquiries by the District Officer, and a report reassuring the Chief Secretary, passed on to *Mambo Leo*, that all was well.<sup>101</sup>

96 Nicholas Westcott, 'An East African radical: the life of Erica Fiah', *Journal of African History*, 22, 1, 1981, pp. 85–101.

97 Jean Bwemba, 'Un petit conseil aux Camerouniens, rédacteurs de l'Éveil des Camerouniens', *L'Éveil*, 25 November 1934, p. 2.

98 Christian Epanya, *L'Éveil*, 25 January 1935, p. 1.

99 TNA 12871/II, 'Review of *Mambo Leo*'s activities', p. 4.

100 Iliffe, *Modern history*, pp. 318–25.

101 TNA 12871/II, fo. 421, letter from T. John Batamzi, 'Hatari za Njaa (Danger of hunger)'; TNA 12871/II, fos. 255–7, Acting Provincial Commissioner, Bukoba to Chief Secretary, 8 October 1934.

Other letters were dismissed out of hand, but some, on further investigation, were found to be true.<sup>102</sup>

Yet, if *Mambo Leo* could be a route of complaint for those unhappy with local authorities, published editorial responses to letters and debates behind the scenes demonstrated very clearly the ways in which editors sought to use the institution of *Mambo Leo* to shape opinion, and to bind readers tightly to the British imperial system of which they were now a part, albeit as a mandate rather than a colony. This was particularly apparent in relation to commentary on the previous imperial power, Germany, for, if the interwar period was on one level characterized by the growth of international society, this went alongside continued imperial competition, which became starker as depression and economic crisis gave way to the shadows of impending war. In 1924, the editor of *Mambo Leo* decided to respond to a letter complaining that life had been better under the Germans, on the grounds that this was a commonly heard complaint. The editorial argued that such ideas rested on short memories, as people had forgotten that the reason for the present difficulties was not British rule but the effects of the war, and that high prices were a global phenomenon. These newspapers thus situated the mandatory territories within the world, as we have seen, but they also situated them very clearly in relation to the mandatory power, arguing that the cause of the war had been the desire of the German emperor to dominate the world.<sup>103</sup> Tanganyikan subjects were reminded that they had now left the German empire and become part of a British imperial family. Though readers might see events such as Empire Day as irrelevant to them and to their lives, Tanganyikans and others in the British empire all shared one father and 'we are therefore all members of one family'.<sup>104</sup> Readers were encouraged to use newspapers to look around the world and see what others were doing to celebrate Empire Day.<sup>105</sup>

Praising the endeavour of the French administration was a common rhetorical trope in the *Gazette*, particularly at the ends of articles and in accounts of speeches, and such praise served to link Cameroun's destiny clearly with that of France. French national days of celebration and commemoration were always reported, particularly 14 July and 11 November, just as they were in newspapers destined for settler audiences.<sup>106</sup> Speeches delivered by chiefs at important moments, such as the opening of a new section of railway line, would praise the work of France in bringing development to Cameroun and would end with the words: 'Long live France! Long live Cameroun!'<sup>107</sup> Reports included under 'News from Cameroun' would praise the progress made by the French in developing educational and medical facilities. One typical homage to French rule, from the clerk-interpreter Guillaume Jemba, ended with an appeal to fellow Cameroonians to appreciate the French administration's work, and in return to 'submit ourselves to their orders and scrupulously

102 E.g. TNA 12871/II, fos. 242–3, J. M. Mwigulila, 'Lawama na chuki juu ya watoza kodi ya kichwa (Reproaches and resentment towards the collectors of head tax)'.

103 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, June 1924, p. 1.

104 'Siku kuu ya Empire Day (Empire Day public holiday)', *Mambo Leo*, May 1925, p. 102.

105 'Siku kuu ya Empire Day', *Mambo Leo*, June 1923, pp. 2–3.

106 Antoine Essomba, 'La fête de la victoire à Doumé', *Gazette*, December 1925, p. 1. See also ANOM/BIB/POM/924C, *L'Écho du Cameroun*, 15 November 1937, p. 1.

107 Toco Moumé, 'Une fête chez les Yaoundés', *Gazette*, January 1926, pp. 1–2; Charles Atangana, 'Discours prononcé par Charles Atangana', *Gazette*, May 1926, p. 2.

follow their advice'.<sup>108</sup> In the increasingly competitive environment of the 1930s, articles in *L'Éveil* explicitly contrasted the limited progress made under German rule with the rapid progress achieved under French administration, in so doing indicating the advantages of continued French, as opposed to German, administration.<sup>109</sup> These newspapers served to create not only political subjects but also imperial ones.

*Mambo Leo* was always emphatic that it was not censored.<sup>110</sup> However, when in 1938 the Acting Provincial Commissioner of Dodoma wrote to complain about a letter that had been published without first checking the facts, R. W. Blaxland, then editor of the newspaper, responded by noting that Provincial Commissioner seemed to have misunderstood the relevant sentence, but then went on to make an important point about censorship. While he agreed 'that some censorship is essential', he argued that, in fact, 'more articles of political interest should be included in the paper, if only to counter the anti-British propaganda which will reach the natives to an increasing extent with the dissemination of the knowledge of English'.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, while editors denied censoring content, they did not deny that the letters selected for publication were chosen very deliberately. When in the early 1930s the number of letters received were so great, and as a consequence the proportion published so small that district officials reported that some had stopped writing to *Mambo Leo* on the grounds that their letters were not published, the editor was reminded by officials of the need to ensure that important letters did not slip through the net.<sup>112</sup> Care was also taken in the choice of subject matter addressed in editorials and articles. As rumours increasingly circulated that Germany wished for the return of her colonies, officials recognized that *Mambo Leo's* silence on the subject was taken as evidence that there might be truth in the rumours.<sup>113</sup>

Moreover, the language used was carefully policed, not only in regard to the style of Swahili but also to avoid encouraging certain political ideas. This was again apparent in relation to the question of Germany, when the idea of publishing something about the Saarland plebiscite of 1935 prompted concern that it be made abundantly clear that the *wenyeji* (literally 'natives', but the term was often used to designate Africans in colonial discourse) in question were Europeans, and that the *wilaya* ('districts') were in the Saar, lest readers begin 'wondering if Tanganyika Territory will have a "plebiscite"'.<sup>114</sup> Officials did not wish to encourage the idea of holding plebiscites in Africa.

If the interwar world was divided between empires – increasingly so as the 1920s gave way to the 1930s – new public spaces also served to create new exclusions within territories. We have already discussed the ways in which the dominant discourse created exclusions and ensured that some voices were not heard, but at times we see signs of more direct modes of exclusion.

108 G. Jemba, 'Les bienfaits de l'administration française au Cameroun', *Gazette*, December 1924, pp. 1–2.

109 Robert Minkoulou, 'Civilisation française', *L'Éveil*, 10 September 1934, pp. 2–3.

110 Editorial, *Mambo Leo*, March 1927, p. 583.

111 TNA 12871/III, fos. 578–9, 'Response from editor, *Mambo Leo*'.

112 TNA 12871/II, 'Review of *Mambo Leo's* activities', p. 3.

113 TNA 12871/III, fos. 607–8, letter from the editor of *Mambo Leo* to E. E. Sabhen-Clare, 15 November 1938.

114 TNA 12871/II, fo. 285, W. F. Page to the editor of the *Mambo Leo*, 30 January 1935. The news item was eventually not printed.

Against those who requested the use of Arabic script, the response was curt: 'It is not possible to publish *Mambo Leo* in Arabic script'; rather, 'If people want to progress, they must learn Roman script'.<sup>115</sup> A response to a question from Shawish Asmani bin Salim of Zanzibar hinted at the gradual exclusion of a coastal intelligentsia. In his reply, the editor wrote: 'In the past we used to receive news and poems from the Swahilis and Arabs of Mombasa, but they now they hardly send any.'<sup>116</sup> Contribution to the Cameroonian newspapers was, except for the brief period when *L'Éveil* experimented with publishing in African languages, restricted to the very small numbers literate in French, and the decision to try to publish in African languages is indicative of the limited potential audience of francophone readers and writers, even in 1935.

While correspondents to *Mambo Leo* celebrated the fact that it was open to all, whereas in the past knowledge could only be acquired at a price from the elders, in reality it produced new forms of exclusion based on gender, education, and economic means.<sup>117</sup> The imagined communities of readers and correspondents were primarily male. Women did occasionally send letters, and in 1931 a writer from Bukoba complained that women used to contribute to *Mambo Leo* but had now disappeared from its columns.<sup>118</sup> The Swahili scholar Alice Werner had an occasional presence on its pages, particularly when one of the Swahili poems that she had collected on the coast was published; and a nameless female doctor responded to comments that few facilities for female education were available in the territory with an article on the subject.<sup>119</sup> Writers in the *Gazette* occasionally addressed *lectrices et lecteurs*, female and male readers.<sup>120</sup> In general, however, the assumption driving most of the conversation was that the newspaper was a male space. Women tended to appear either in stories about unfaithful or dishonest wives, going to extreme lengths to extract wealth from their husbands, or in letters and news articles as objects of development.<sup>121</sup>

Creating a realm of civil debate therefore rested on excluding not only those whose contributions did not fit the overriding discourse, but also those who had neither the education nor the financial resources to participate in the written public realm. Exclusions emerged even within the community of correspondents to *Mambo Leo*. One group of men from Lindi reported being told that a reading club was not appropriate for them, and that they would do better to start a smaller-scale burial society.<sup>122</sup>

## Conclusion

Across much of the interwar world, there was a proliferation of increasingly connected public spheres, as political subjects employed new technologies and newly standardized

115 'Majibu kwa waandikaji (Answers to correspondents)', *Mambo Leo*, January 1929, p. 1018.

116 Response to Shawishi Asmani bin Salim, 'Sanduku ya posta', *Mambo Leo*, December 1932, p. 271.

117 Letter from Ali bin Hemedi, *Mambo Leo*, January–February 1924, p. 23.

118 Letter from Joseph M. B. Tibeiya, *Mambo Leo*, September 1931, p. 172.

119 Bibi Daktari, 'Shauri jema kwa wazazi (Good advice to parents)', *Mambo Leo*, September 1925, p. 195.

120 Moumé Etia Isaac, 'Réflexions', *Gazette*, May 1931, p. 5.

121 Tangu Yasima, 'Un effort encore à faire pour le relèvement de la femme indigène', *L'Éveil*, 10 August 1934, p. 6 (reprinted from *L'Étoile de l'A.E.F.*); 'A propos de l'éducation féminine', *L'Éveil*, 25 September 1934, p. 5; Martin Mvogo, 'Ne confiez rien à une femme', *Gazette*, July 1930, p. 5. See also Newell, *Readings*, pp. 7–8.

122 M. B. Mohamed Abdallah, *Mambo Leo*, June 1924, p. 17.

vocabularies to communicate among themselves and across distances. Yet, as we increasingly discover the modes of connection that were once forgotten, there is a risk of forgetting those who were less connected: those Cameroonians who did not join Garveyist movements or petition the League of Nations; those Tanganyikans living in rural Morogoro who had never visited the coast and had no access to connections across the Indian Ocean world.<sup>123</sup> This close reading of official and semi-official newspapers from Cameroun and Tanganyika in the interwar period has served to reintegrate some members of such groups into the history of the interwar period, but in doing so has served to remind us of the limits to globality, and that we must be wary of celebrating the emancipatory potential of this moment.

By looking at newspapers that were not explicitly products of global connection, we find similar processes at work to those shaping other public spheres across the colonial world. For readers of these newspapers, the very act of reading a newspaper offered them a sense of taking part in a universal activity, and print itself implied connectedness, reaching out across continents. Newspapers also served to standardize vocabularies and concepts with which to think about progress and change, as well as the question of what it meant to take one's place in the modern world. Such vocabularies would later be turned to more critical ends by political activists opposed to colonial rule, but that was hardly anticipated at the time of their development. This is an important reminder that people across the world engaged in these global processes even when they were not in a position to establish anti-colonial presses, or where organizing on a transnational basis was difficult, and thus helps us to reintegrate some of those left out by new global histories.

However, the history of these publications also indicates that globality did not imply uniformity. The form taken by these newspapers was shaped by divergent histories, forms of connection, and imperial contexts, which these newspapers in turn sought to reinforce. They may have situated readers in the world, but they also situated them in relation to the French and British imperial systems.

Nor should we straightforwardly link institutions of civil society with a role in limiting state power. As we have seen, the institution of the newspaper was a standardized print form, which brought particular middle-class cosmopolitans into an imagined conversation with each other and with a wider world. It therefore helped create the basis for future forms of political engagement. By focusing on the colonial press, however, we are reminded of the political agendas at play in the creation of new public spaces, and these case studies also reveal the local nuances that underlie global processes. They remind us that we should not assume a necessary relationship between institutions of civil society (such as the newspaper) and a critical stance. Such institutions could and did serve to reshape political subjectivities in interesting ways, even in the absence of political space, but they did so in relationship with the state, and in ways that also served to strengthen state power.

The history of the roots of global civil society is thus as ambivalent as the political preoccupation with civil society in the present. Very often, calling for greater participation of 'civil society' in contemporary Africa invites the participation of the articulate and educated, to the exclusion of the rest.<sup>124</sup> Civil society can strengthen state power as much as limit it.

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123 Joseph, 'The German question'.

124 Harri Englund, *Prisoners of freedom*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006, p. 8.

The same is true of global networks of civil society. In the present as in the past, then, engagement with universal modes of understanding political society must coexist with an understanding of the diverse implications of very local power dynamics.

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