

Imperial Communications

Máire ní Fhlathúin

University of Nottingham

The Bible Society Cleanings.
Various source media, 19th Century UK Periodicals



A CYCLING TOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA.
BY THOMAS WOODVILLE HARKER.

ii. HE vrou is indeed the helpmate of her husband in every way, would be useless. I do believe the American poet at some time or other must have had visions in his dreams of this portion of the globe, for has he not written:—

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Baptisms at San Salvador. [FEBRUARY, 1899.]



JANUARY 1, 1890.] THE MISSIONARY HERALD.

CALABAR COLLEGE, KINGSTON, JAMAICA.

THE following graphic letter from S. B. Burton, Esq. F.R.G.S., of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, will be read with great interest:—

"Newcastle-on-Tyne, December, 1894. Royal Mail s.s. *Eden* on July 18th last.
"DEAR MR. BAYNES,—The request "On the twelfth day out we passed

Changes in technology over the course of the nineteenth century had the effect of enabling faster travel and more efficient communication between the different areas of the British Empire. Sail power was supplemented and eventually replaced by steam during the 1830s and 1840s, so that transatlantic crossings, and the long ocean voyages from Britain to South Asia and the Pacific, could be made in days rather than weeks, and weeks rather than months. Journeys by sea between Britain and India became easier still with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Railways made possible fast overland journeys across the great land masses of Canada and India in the second half of the century. The construction of telegraph networks enabled almost instantaneous inter-continental communication in the 1860s and 1870s.

As the peripheries of the empire came closer to the imperial centre and to one another, and the dissemination of information became cheaper and more efficient, the role of the periodical press changed. At the beginning of the century, periodicals and newspapers (the two less distinguishable at this point than they became later on) had the primary aim of carrying information – news, cultural forms, practical knowledge and intellectual ideas – from Britain to the centres of colonial administration, whence it was further despatched to outlying regions of the colonies. By the end of the century, news was quickly and easily obtained, and the periodicals had diversified accordingly. Expanding both in number and in size, and often concentrating on areas of special interest to clearly-defined readerships, they created and maintained information networks of particular kinds – missionary, literary, scientific and commercial – across

the empire. They also served another and equally important purpose: reflecting the particular commercial, political and cultural interests of individual colonies, in material produced increasingly by local writers and aimed at local readers. By doing so, they fostered the individual culture and character of what were becoming – in the case of the white settler colonies at least – increasingly autonomous political and cultural entities. In this respect, the changes in the periodical press over the century mirror the changing nature of the empire.

The colonial periodical press

Periodical publishing developed along broadly similar trajectories across the empire, despite the disparate characteristics and conditions of the different colonial regions. Initially, the colonial periodical marketplaces were peripheral to British print culture in every respect. The metropolitan periodicals exported to the colonies competed with local publications, and were generally cheaper and superior in print quality, as well as containing the sought-after news from home. Where titles were locally published, they still depended in large part on material reprinted from metropolitan sources. Some, such as the *Oriental Observer of Calcutta* (1827-39) and *Sam Sly's African Journal* (1843-51) were in content newspapers with some literary material; while others, like the *Australian New South Wales Magazine* (1833-4, revived 1843), tried to serve the broadest possible readership with material of general interest. Other titles were sponsored by associations such as learned societies, as in the case of the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1832 onwards), or missionary organizations. The latter produced some of the longest-running titles in India,

including the *Bengal Catholic Expositor* and its successors (1839-64), and the *Friend of India* (1835 onwards).

The range of titles and subjects covered by the colonial periodicals expanded in the course of the century, drawing on the larger readerships created by increased colonial immigration, and enabled by improvements in print technology. Where an adverse economic climate, and the relatively high cost of paper, had hampered the business of periodical publication during the first two decades, technological innovations – notably the introduction of steam-powered rotary presses from the mid-century onwards, and the invention of linotype to replace hand-setting – made printing quicker and cheaper. At the same time, increasing migration from Britain to the colonies created a larger and therefore more profitable readership for local publications. General interest titles expanded in size; news-based publications added more literary and other cultural material. In the niches of this growing market, more specialised publications flourished for longer periods than had previously been achievable.

Literary periodicals had always been a common, though normally short-lived, feature of the colonial marketplace; now titles like the *Calcutta Review* (1844 onwards) and the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, later the *Cape Quarterly Review* (1857-62, revived 1877-83) established a stronger presence. Satirical titles on the model of the *London Punch*, which was imitated across the empire, producing in Australia the *Melbourne Punch* (1855 onwards) and the *Queensland Punch* (1878-93); and titles aimed specifically at female readerships,

like the *New Zealand Graphic and Ladies Journal* (1890 onwards). In this last periodical, as in others produced towards the end of the century, illustrations played an important part in attracting readers and advertisers. The range of the periodical press, and the diversity of its titles, mirrored the expansion and the increasing sophistication of colonial society and culture.

Imagined communities

The periodical press was responsible for publishing much of the information on which communities and individuals depended. Periodicals provided a conduit for the transmission of “home” news, metropolitan cultural forms and political debate from the centre of empire to the colonies, sustaining British-influenced colonial self-identification. From the beginning, however, they also facilitated the daily or weekly circulation of news and commercial information, locally produced and consumed; and increasingly played an important role in the process of cultural consolidation that enabled individual colonies to develop distinctive regional identities, even as they simultaneously maintained political and affective links to the “mother country”.

One of the defining elements of these regional identities was the interaction between colonial and indigenous cultures and languages. In southern Africa, periodicals were frequently bilingual (Dutch and English); while the presence of two main languages in colonial Canada – French and English – resulted in a parallel division between francophone and anglophone publications, with a very few bilingual titles. In early nineteenth century Calcutta, Ram Mohan Roy and the financier Dwarka Nath Tagore were both involved in the

ownership of British-edited newspapers, and the Calcutta press carried material in translation from vernacular papers. Across the empire, the varying directions taken by the periodical press reflect the local adaptations made by British settlers in response to the conditions in which they found themselves.

The periodical press also reflected the class, ethnic and gender make-up of colonial societies, elements which varied to some degree from one region of the empire to another. The strong literary character of the periodical marketplace of British India, for example, owes something to the predominance within the colony of the civil and military employees of the East India Company, drawn from the professional middle classes which normally provided literary periodicals with their editors and contributors.[1] In New Zealand, by contrast, relatively low levels of literacy formed one of the obstacles to the development of the press until well into the second half of the century.[2] The English-language periodicals of Canada responded to the varying origins and cultures of specific readerships within the broader anglophone community, a product of the over-representation of Irish and Scots emigrants in the British colonial diaspora, with a range of different titles marketed to different religious and ethnic groups. A Catholic readership, largely of Irish origin, sustained a variety of titles such as the *Catholic Citizen and its successors* (1854 onwards), including both religious and general-interest content. The British community in India was relatively less diverse, but its periodical press was characterised by the involvement of indigenous contributors (including the editor and poet H.L.V. Derozio), whose numbers increased over time in line with greater Indian participation in Western-style

education. Women were in the minority in colonial societies, though gender ratios varied across different colonies and regions, and their growing participation in the metropolitan press, particularly in literary publications [3], was not reflected in the colonies until late in the nineteenth century. Emma Roberts, who edited and contributed to the *Oriental Observer* in 1830-1, was a notable exception to the general trend: in Australia and Canada, women did not assume editorial roles before the 1850s. Female participation in the press became more widespread in the final decades of the century, with the appearance of more periodicals aimed at female readerships.

Colonial societies became increasingly complex as they grew in size, shaped by the policies of regional administrations but also by the activities of a burgeoning commercial sector, and by the social and political changes that accompanied increases in settler populations. Although government contracts provided an important source of revenue for papers, particularly in the early years, clashes between the agenda of the colonial administration and that of the press engendered a sometimes fraught relationship between them. J.S. Buckingham, the editor of the radical *Calcutta Journal* (1818-23), found himself banned from the East India Company's territory, and censorship continued to be an obstacle to the press in India until 1835. Across the empire more generally, censorship and government control of the press similarly became less restrictive in the course of the century.

As colonial populations increased, commercial advertising revenue became an important source of funding for the press. When writing was a more or less exclusively amateur occupation, and editors (with the exception of those in charge of the main daily newspapers) combined their duties with other professions, the supply of local material tended to be erratic, one of the reasons for the remarkably short lives of many of the early periodicals. A larger revenue income enabled the press to function on a more commercial and professional basis. Periodicals began to focus to a greater extent on material produced by colonial writers in response to issues of local concern. This new emphasis on the local role of the press was particularly evident in Australia: by the last decades of the century, the *Sydney Quarterly Magazine* (1883-92) 'saw its chief purpose as the encouragement of a distinctively Australian literature'.^[4]

While the press in Canada was affected by the country's proximity to the United States of America, facing competition from American titles for readers and advertising revenue, the editorial policy of some publications had a comparable effect: the *Literary Garland and British North American Magazine* (1838-52) paid for the work it published, and its contributors included Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, alongside other prominent writers.^[5] News and reprinted matter from Britain continued to make up much of the periodicals' content; but while imported texts provided a model for colonial readers, they were not consumed without question, becoming instead the occasion for informed critical discussion in editorials and readers' letters. In 1830s India, for example, the value of Letitia Landon's poetry (a mainstay of colonial

literary periodicals) was debated in the periodicals of Calcutta; while Harriet Martineau's *Cinnamon and Pearls* (1833), one of the tales from *Illustrations of Political Economy*, dealing with the economic conditions of colonial Ceylon, elicited responses from the *Ceylon Gazette*, among other titles. ^[6]

In enabling such cultural dialogues, as well as in its reporting of the quotidian business of colonial communities, the periodical press shaped the conditions under which its readers lived, creating and maintaining the lines of connection and communication between individuals that enabled individual consciousness to be overlaid with collective identities. In Canada, New Zealand and Australia, the 'imagined communities' (in Benedict Anderson's formulation) thus constituted were new nations in the making; the émigré community of British India is less easily characterised, its residents defining themselves in opposition both to the colonized peoples of their temporary home, and to the "mother country" where they would eventually return. In all the regions of the empire, the periodical press reflected back to its readers their own view of themselves, as well as inspiring and reinforcing their material, social and political aspirations.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.34.
- ² See J. Reginald Tye, 'New Zealand', in *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire*, eds. J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. Van Arsdel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp.209, 212.
- ³ Richard Cronin, *Romantic Victorian: English Literature, 1824-1840* (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.97.
- ⁴ Elizabeth Webby, 'Australia', in *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire*, p.32.
- ⁵ N. Merrill Distad and Linda M. Distad, 'Canada', in *Periodicals of Queen Victoria's Empire*, pp.76-7.
- ⁶ On Landon's poetry, see the *Calcutta Magazine* (vols i-ii, 1830) pp.517-47; and the *Oriental Observer*, 27 June 1830. *The Bengal Hurkaru* reprinted correspondence on Cinnamon and Pearls from the *Ceylon Gazette* and the *Government Gazette*, as well as adding its own contributions: see the issues of the last two weeks of March 1834.

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