
'FRANKLINS OF THE CAPE': THE SOUTH "AFRICAN COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER" AND THE CREATION OF A COLONIAL PUBLIC SPHERE, 1824-1854

Author(s): KIRSTEN McKENZIE

Source: *Kronos*, No. 25, Pre-millennium issue (1998/1999), pp. 88-102

Published by: [University of Western Cape](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41056429>

Accessed: 12/01/2015 21:52

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Western Cape is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Kronos*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

‘FRANKLINS OF THE CAPE’: THE *SOUTH AFRICAN COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER* AND THE CREATION OF A COLONIAL PUBLIC SPHERE, 1824-1854

KIRSTEN MCKENZIE
University of Queensland

When the first independent newspaper was founded in the Cape Colony in 1824 its editors were in no doubt of their forthcoming place on the historical stage. “What should hinder us”, wrote John Fairbairn to Thomas Pringle in 1823, “from becoming the Franklins of the Kaap?”¹ What was required in the colony, Fairbairn continued, in response to his friend’s plan for a publication to “enlighten South Africa”,² was the presence of “rational men”.

Herein lies the key to an understanding of the self-proclaimed place of the *South African Commercial Advertiser* in the development of a political culture at the Cape. It was a process which would bear fruit in a constitution for representative government which the colony received thirty years after Fairbairn had taken on the mantle of Benjamin Franklin - newspaper editor, patriot, scientific rationalist and “harbinger of liberty”.³ An analysis of the *Advertiser* in the first decades of its publication sheds considerable light on the nature of the public sphere as established in the colony during this period as well as on the ambiguous definitions of “the people” - definitions which in many ways would underpin the franchise of 1853.

From the 1820s onwards, a new political culture was gaining ground in both the metropole and the colonies. Associated with the economic transformations of an industrializing metropole and the rise of the middle class to political power in both Britain and its colonial dependencies, it can be designated by the term ‘bourgeois public sphere’. The press was intimately connected in both practical and symbolic ways with this new vision of political power which expressed itself in opposition to the aristocratic privileges of the *ancien régime*. While expressed in the language of universality, the bourgeois public sphere was also inherently exclusionary. This paper discusses the nature of this political culture as it was elaborated at the Cape and particularly as it was expressed within the pages of the *Advertiser* - a paper which set out to re-invent self-consciously the political culture of the colony.

The *Advertiser* was first published in 1824 in a climate of official hostility encapsulated in the person of the High Tory and aristocratic governor, Lord Charles Somerset, who suspended the paper only a few months after it had

1. John Fairbairn to Thomas Pringle, 2 March 1823. Quoted in J. Meiring, *Thomas Pringle: His Life and Times* (Cape Town, 1968), 80.
2. *Ibid.* Thomas Pringle to John Fairbairn, November 1822.
3. Schama, S. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (London, 1989), 44. Fairbairn continued to take Franklin as his model of conduct. See *South African Commercial Advertiser* (SACA), 13 October 1830.

commenced publication. The details of this encounter have been written up extensively elsewhere.⁴ After sustained government harassment and periodic suspension, the passage of Ordinance 60 of 1829 placed the colonial press under the protection of the law, although the Ordinance placed far more emphasis on “Preventing the Mischiefs arising from Printing and Publishing Newspapers” (as its title ran) than upon press freedom *per se*. The changing political climate heralded by the departure of Somerset and the promulgation of Ordinance 60 helped to encourage the foundation of other newspapers in the colony, although most were extremely short-lived.⁵ By the 1850s, the *Advertiser* was the longest-running paper published in the colony, followed by *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, which commenced publication in 1831.

Contesting Definitions of Power: Establishing a Colonial Public Sphere

The triumph of the *Advertiser* over Somerset was a portent of a wider victory at the Cape of a new vision of political life. The embryonic political culture of the bourgeois public sphere thus prevailed over an *ancient regime* model of power whose days were numbered throughout the British imperial world. The foundation of a free press in the colony was one mechanism in a range of developments which created in the public sphere the pre-condition for political representation. Cape promoters of this political culture, such as the *Advertiser*, took their cue from Europe - particularly from the contract theory of the Enlightenment.

In discussing the nature of this vision of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas remains an important and useful theorist, despite significant criticisms of his approach discussed below. He has defined the public sphere as a historically specific phenomenon, emerging in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the circumstances of a developing market economy. His concern was to determine what social conditions were necessary “for a rational-critical debate about public issues conducted by private persons willing to let arguments and not statuses determine decisions”⁶. The public sphere was bourgeois in cultural orientation, defining itself in opposition to the trappings of aristocratic power. The Habermasian conception of the public sphere has been defined as “a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed.”⁷ Thus the state was held accountable to an amalgamation of private persons coming together to form a public concerned with matters in the common interest. Power was no longer sited

4. For an account of the history of the dispute between the *Advertiser* and Somerset see Murray, R.W. *South African Reminiscences* (Cape Town, 1894), Cutten, T. *The History of the Press in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1935), Barry, R. A. *History of Printing in Cape Town 1784 - 1830* (Illinois, 1957) and Touyz, B.M. ‘The Cape Colony: The Struggle for the Liberty of the Press 1822 - 1829’ (BA Honours, UCT, 1977). de Kock, W. *A Manner of Speaking: The origins of the press in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1982). See also Meiring, Thomas Pringle and Botha, H.C. *John Fairbairn in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1984).

5. During the suspension of the *Advertiser* in the 1820s, a number of other newspapers were established, but they soon ceased publication. Botha, *John Fairbairn*, 39, 44.

6. Calhoun, Craig. ‘Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere’ in Calhoun, C. (ed) *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1992), 1.

7. McCarthy, T. ‘Introduction’ to Jürgen Habermas *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by T. Burger, with the assistance of F. Lawrence. (Cambridge, Mass. 1989) Original German edition, 1962, xi.

within the body of the ruler of an absolutist state, but rather through the abstract and disembodied ideas of public opinion. As will be considered below, the establishment of a rational public sphere at the Cape by the *Advertiser* was set up against the notions of bodily display, aristocratic privilege and patronage which early nineteenth-century colonial governors encapsulated. The lack of an hereditary aristocracy in the colony did not affect the manner in which the public sphere set itself up as a new discourse of political power anathema to the system of patronage and oligarchy which had characterised colonial rule.

The criteria for the admission of a private individual into the domain of the public sphere depended upon a combination of property and education⁸ - in effect restricting the public to men of a certain class. As feminist critics of public sphere political culture insist, gender was central to its essentially exclusionary underpinnings. In the colonial context of the Cape, the issue of race complicated the definition.⁹ These restrictions were only compatible with the principle of publicity if equal chances for their acquisition were perceived to exist - all men had the *potential* to achieve access to the public sphere. This dichotomy between exclusion and inclusion established a central ambiguity in the conception of “the People”.

At the Cape, the notion of public sphere politics was inserted into a colonial context with a limited background in this kind of political organisation. The Cape authorities were well aware of what they considered to be the dangerous political implications in having a free press in the colony. The Dutch East India Company (VOC), had issued *placaaten* forbidding the establishment of independent publications in 1702, 1726 and 1744.¹⁰ During the First British Occupation, Francis Dundas, then acting-governor of the colony, drew an explicit connection between printing and the development of a culture of political discussion:

the establishment of a printing press I conceive to be more likely to produce evil than good effects, since the minds of the inhabitants are by no means prepared to exercise the freedom of discussion on almost any subject, particularly politics, concerning which they had been led to entertain very confused and erroneous opinions.¹¹

Cape Town in the 1820s was witness to socio-economic transformations associated with the control of the British over a formerly Dutch colony. The bourgeois public sphere as disembodied mechanism of control was part of a general change in notions of power which, as Clifton Crais has argued, shifted the focus from the body to the representation and production of knowledge about the dominated and thus reconceptualised the colonial state at the Cape.¹² The

8. Habermas, *Public Sphere*, 85.

9. For a discussion of ideologies of race as related to liberalism in Cape politics see Bank, A. ‘Liberals and their Enemies: Racial Ideology at the Cape of Good Hope, 1820 - 1850’ PhD thesis, Cambridge University, 1995. With reference to emancipation and the relationship of freed people to the colonial public sphere see Scully, P. *Liberating the Family? Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823 - 1853* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997).

10. Meiring, *Thomas Pringle*, 82.

11. Quoted *ibid*, 82.

12. Crais, C. *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa: The making of the colonial order in the Eastern Cape, 1770 - 1865*. (Cambridge, 1992), 87.

immigration of British merchants, the progressive lifting of government controls over commercial activity, the amalgamation of Dutch and British elites and the progressive power of an urban colonial middle class had all coalesced by the 1820s into a context favourable for the development of a public sphere along the lines described above.

The rising political aspirations of the urban middle class during the period from the 1820s to the 1850s came to be expressed through the new discourse of public sphere politics. It was from this group that papers such as the *Advertiser* drew their readership and to whom they addressed their instructions on the conduct of politics. To a certain degree, the press was associated with settlers of British origin at the Cape. The Cape Dutch, given the restriction on independent printing presses in their colony, had a far less developed relationship with print culture than their more recently arrived British contemporaries. Certainly one Cape Dutch newspaper later claimed that if anyone (except an Englishman) had suggested in 1823 that a private press could be started in Cape Town, he would have been shunned as a complete madman.¹³ Within the empire at large, the establishment of a free press could be associated with British identity and the rights of free-born Englishmen.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Cape Dutch were quick to seize the ideological advantages which a colonial press held out and *De Zuid-Afrikaan* made consummate use of the press to express its political beliefs, especially during the tense years preceding emancipation.

The clash between the *Advertiser* and Somerset was indicative of the manner in which two competing models of state organisation and political culture would struggle for dominance over the colonial - and metropolitan - world over the course of the following decades. Indeed, as Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper argue, the colonies “constituted an imaginary and physical space in which the inclusions and exclusions built into the notions of citizenship, sovereignty, and participation were worked out.”¹⁵ Somerset was part of a tradition of autocratic colonial potentates associated with the tenor of rule in the British empire of this period - one which was especially dismissive of colonial bourgeois aspirations.¹⁶ To them, the tenets of the rational public sphere were anathema. The campaign which took place against Somerset to establish a free press at the Cape (so celebrated by liberal historiography) was in fact part of a wider shift in mechanisms of power and the conception of politics in the colonial world.

Struggles for a free press in Australia were also intimately linked with the development of colonial politics. In Sydney the first prominent anti-government newspapers were run by a collection of lawyers with burning political aspirations and the legal expertise to push press freedom and government criticism as far as possible. The libel actions which the government

13. *Waarheid en Onpartijdigheid, of De Meditator in het klein. Eene Komplete Verzameling Der Inleidings-Artikels van het nieuwsblad de 'Meditator'* (Cape Town, 1838), iii [Truth or Impartiality, or 'The Meditator' in brief. A Complete Collection of the Leading Articles of the newspaper 'The Meditator'.]

14. *Sydney Gazette*, 6 February 1828.

15. Stoler, Ann Laura, and Cooper, Frederick 'Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda' in Cooper and Stoler (eds) *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997), 3.

16. Bayly, C.A. *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780 - 1830* (London and New York, 1989), 206.

instituted against the editors for their criticism of colonial officials became the theatre in which, through their defence, the editors could stage their criticism of the administration. In the detailed law reports which characterised the New South Wales press, they could then disseminate these ideas to a wide audience. Reporting on court proceedings could offer a serious threat to the status quo. It was in response to their coverage of a libel action involving the colonial government that Somerset suspended the *Advertiser* in 1824. In the absence of any form of the representative government they desired for their colony, the New South Wales editors used the press and the courts to construct a quasi-political infrastructure which one historian has argued was instrumental in transforming their colony from a penal to a free society.¹⁷ The mechanisms of power espoused by forces embodied in the autocratic governments of early-nineteenth century colonies in Australia and South Africa were undercut by the foundation of a rational public sphere, of which the establishment of a free press was one manifestation.

The Role of the Press in the Public Sphere

The role of the press in the Cape public sphere followed European antecedents. The free press had always played a central role in the elaboration of the bourgeois public sphere, the origins of which were embedded in the development of a literate culture in Europe. From the eighteenth century onwards, reading clubs and coffee houses had provided a social foundation for a distinct variety of bourgeois culture.¹⁸ John Fairbairn and Thomas Pringle came to the Cape via a crucible of this new world - the Edinburgh of the Scottish Enlightenment. The bourgeois public sphere was established upon the assumption of a written culture and orientated around language - the cultural institutions upon which it was based included coffee houses, clubs, reading and language societies, lending libraries, museums, lecture halls, journals and newspapers.¹⁹ The establishment of a literate culture was intimately connected to the elaboration of new social space:

Discursive space is never completely independent of social place and the formulation of new kinds of speech can be traced through the emergence of new public sites of discourse and the transformation of old ones. ... An utterance is legitimated or disregarded according to its place of production and so, in large part, the history of political struggle has been the history of the attempts made to control significant sites of assembly and spaces of discourse.²⁰

Like its European antecedents, the establishment of the free press at the Cape took place within the context of the development of these other aspects of public culture in the 1820s and 1830s, including a variety of clubs and reading rooms. Significantly, the new public library was for some time housed within the walls of

17. Neal, David. *The Rule of Law in a Penal Colony: Law and Power in Early New South Wales* (Cambridge, 1991).

18. Darnton, R. *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, (London and New York, 1990), 170. Habermas, *Public Sphere*, 31, 33. Stallybrass, P. and White, A. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London, 1986), 83 - 84.

19. Landes, J.B. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. (Ithaca and London, 1988), 39.

20. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 80.

the Commercial Exchange building, which became the focus for middle-class economic and social life in the city from 1822.²¹ The political struggle over these sites of discourse is indicated by the fact that Somerset not only sought to suspend the *Advertiser*, but also banned a literary society set up by Fairbairn and Pringle in 1824. The relatively high cost of newspapers and periodicals²² (the materials for which had to be imported) and the scarcity of foreign periodicals encouraged a communal reading pattern at the Cape. William Bird gave a caustic account of this process in his *State of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822*:

There are also, what are called in Europe, coffee-rooms, where stale newspapers and pamphlets are to be read. ... The subscribers to the rooms are numerous, but the newspapers and pamphlets are meanly and shabbily supplied. ... The charm of the society house lies in its situation, so prime for gossip, being in the centre of the heerenracht, traversed by everyone going to the parade, to the government offices, to the custom-house, or to the wharf; so that, between the hours of eleven and five, almost every one may be seen from the door of this house. ... The talk commences, and that which is, or is not being reported, gains currency for the day.²³

These observations were made two years before the publication of the *Advertiser* and the newspaper could therefore commence publication in an already-established embryonic public sphere, albeit based on foreign publications alone. The publication of a specifically colonial press represented a significant new development.

The literate public sphere culture of the Cape was sufficiently novel for Fairbairn, as editor of the *Advertiser*, to be at pains to explore the role of the press very directly in his editorials. These themes were particularly prominent in the first year of publication, a time at which Fairbairn had to tread especially carefully with regard to the *Advertiser's* relationship with the colonial government, but they returned intermittently throughout the period²⁴. In 1831, in response to some comments from an editor in New South Wales, Fairbairn set out at length his vision for the role of the press at the Cape:

A Newspaper, generally speaking, is principally intended to be a Record of Events. When there is room, the Editor gives his remarks and opinions upon them. In a country like this, where books are scarce, and in many places altogether unknown, these remarks may be extended to a much greater length

21. Meltzer, J. L. 'The Growth of Cape Town Commerce and the Role of John Fairbairn's *Advertiser* (1835 - 1859) MA thesis, UCT, 1989, 29.

22. Hattersley, A.F. *An Illustrated Social History of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1969), 140.

23. Bird, William. *State of the Cape of Good Hope in 1822* (London, 1823), 149 - 150.

24. The *Advertiser* was wont to place so much emphasis on the importance of the press to the reinvention of Cape society that its rival, *De Zuid-Afrikaan* when founded in 1830, was at pains to declare itself opposed to what it called "free-press humbug". 9 April 1830. For examples of the emphasis on a free press see SACA 15 August, 22 August, 2 September, 14 October 1826, 18 April 1829, 4 November 1835, 28 March 1838, 13 February and 16 November 1839. The role of the press received great emphasis in the *Advertiser's* account of the uprisings in Paris in 1830, a bourgeois revolution received with great sympathy by the middle class of Cape Town, who organised a public dinner to celebrate it. SACA, 23 October 1830, 30 October 1830, 10 November 1830. Closer to home, in the anti-convict agitation of 1849 - 1850, the important role of the press in the colonial public sphere was upheld at the public dinner held to celebrate the victory over British attempts to send convicts to the Cape - a campaign in which Fairbairn was intimately concerned. *Cape Town Mail*, 16 March 1850.

than would be becoming in other circumstances, unless the Editor happened to be one of those gifted individuals who are destined by nature and education to enlighten their species. ... We write for those chiefly who have few other opportunities of hearing *Principles* discussed either with knowledge or candor.²⁵

Despite Fairbairn's self-conscious modesty, he evidently saw himself as a guide to the public mind of the Cape, the maturity of which was by no means considered complete. Eliza Fairbairn gave a more poignant description of the personal cost of her husband's self-appointed role as reformer of colonial life: "I am all alone [she complained to her sister in England] at least Mr F does nothing but go to sleep when he comes home or sigh & groan over the sins of mankind."²⁶

Fairbairn's earnest vision of the editor-as-social-reformer was satirised in the opening issue of the more light-hearted *Sam Sly's African Journal* in 1843, when the editor, William Sammons, declared that the purpose of his paper was "simply to instruct the young, reform the old, correct the town, and castigate the age".²⁷ Fairbairn clearly considered a colonial newspaper to have certain distinct characteristics - part of which was the guidance of readers in the proper manner of conduct in the public sphere. This in part accounts for the frequently didactic tone of Fairbairn's editorials. The example cited above continues with a discussion of how the Cape public should react to the press and provides instruction on the art of conducting a public discussion through the printed medium in an acceptable manner - one in particular which avoided "personal allusions".²⁸ Interaction in the public sphere required the assumption of a particular discourse, and Fairbairn was at pains to set out the terms of debate. At issue was the definition of the appropriate methods by which those deemed worthy of the public domain should conduct themselves. Newspaper correspondents had to present the role of disembodied argument and reject the trappings of physical power:

Let us not come before the most grave and majestic Public to make sport like gladiators, or to tilt at each other's reputations like vain and ambitious Knights; let us appear wigged and gowned, as it were, with courtesy and mutual oblivion, being known only to the Judges and to each other, as nothing more than embodied Propositions, Proofs, and Arguments.²⁹

Those who sought access to a place in the public sphere were to be constrained by its discourse. The inclusive definitions of "the People" which the bourgeois public sphere held out in opposition to an autocratic past was tempered by the essentially exclusive character at its essence.

25. SACA, 16 April, 1831.

26. University of Witwatersrand, Fairbairn Family Papers, A663. Eliza Fairbairn to Mary Christie, 9 March 1838.

27. *Sam Sly's African Journal*, 20 May 1843.

28. SACA, 16 April 1831.

29. SACA, 2 February 1831.

Exclusions from the Public Sphere: Gender, Class and Race

Bird's discussion of communal reading and coffee-house culture given above is significant in the claims he makes that "every one can be seen from the door of this house".³⁰ For whilst everyone might be seen from the door of the house, the ability to cross the threshold was strictly controlled by means of subscription lists which limited subscribers to the ranks of propertied men.³¹ Subscription lists were commonly used in middle-class social life in Cape Town - not only in coffee houses, but also at the theatre, at balls and for clubs and societies. These mechanisms for connecting the respectable and excluding the dishonourable were sufficiently entrenched in the city for Charles Etienne Boniface to write a satirical play, performed in 1834, in which the drama was based upon the consequences of exclusion from a subscription list.³² The *Advertiser* gave notice of various subscription lists and saw itself as having a very definite role in bringing appropriate people together to form groups of mutual interest focused on aspects of colonial improvement.³³ Subscriptions ruled the organisation of social activities and laid down the limited conception of the public. Thus the *Advertiser* could define the public as "the majority of the wealthy and intellectual inhabitants of the country."³⁴ Mutual associations were considered to be the training ground for colonial politics and essential to the establishment of a notion of the public at the Cape:

That the People here are as ready to unite for the accomplishment of special objects as any people upon earth, is now obvious to the most careless observer. ... In this way a Community ripens for *Self-Government* in the widest sense of the term. On this ground we hail with pleasure *every New Association*, whose objects are not manifestly absurd, as an additional proof that the Inhabitants are getting more and more into the feelings of the social state.³⁵

The political culture of the bourgeois public sphere at the Cape, although expressed in the language of universality, was exclusionary by its very nature. Colonial projects, argue Cooper and Stoler, show up "the fundamental contradictions inherent in bourgeois projects and the way universal claims were bound up in particularistic assertions."³⁶ This central dichotomy in the conception of the public sphere is demonstrated by Habermasian theory - which elides crucial points of exclusion in the definition of the public sphere such as gender. Habermas has been criticised both for an over-statement of the divisions between a political public and a domestic private sphere and for a failure to

30. Bird, *State of the Cape*, 149.

31. Bird lists the terms of subscription to the coffee house as nine rix dollars per quarter. *Ibid.*

32. South African Library, MSB 2 C.E. Boniface Collection. *Clasius Stupidibus Bavianus: Het Proces om een Komedie Lootje*.

33. SACA, 12 November 1831.

34. SACA, 26 October 1831. Extract from the *Courier*, 14 July 1831.

35. SACA 14 December 1831.

36. Cooper and Stoler, 'Between Metropole and Colony', 3.

discuss the masculinist nature of this model of political culture.³⁷ It is important to stress that these concepts of private and public were “ideological constructs” specific in time and space rather than immutable divisions of the world.³⁸ Notions of the public and private, and of appropriate gender roles, were persistently contested at the Cape.³⁹ However it might be undercut in practice, the discourse of the gendered separation of spheres, which an influential press was at pains to support, was fundamental to Cape politics.

The masculinist nature of the public sphere requires greater attention - being what Marion Aveling has called “the gendered political person lurking behind [the] universal political man.”⁴⁰ Carole Pateman has stressed that the civil society constructed by the formation of a public sphere was fundamentally based upon a division between a masculine public and a feminine private sphere. The public is not sexually neutral, for the very definition of the public is based upon the exclusion of the private, feminine sphere.⁴¹ The public sphere was therefore an essentially masculinist construction:

Participation in the public sphere is governed by universal, impersonal and conventional criteria of achievement, interests, rights, equality and property - liberal criteria, available only to men. An important consequence of this conception of private and public is that the public world, or civil society, is conceptualized and discussed in liberal theory (indeed, in almost all political theory) in abstraction from, or as separate from, the private domestic sphere.⁴²

Middle-class men at the Cape, as elsewhere in the colonial world, sought to erode the patriarchal control of the imperial state, encompassed in the person of an autocratic governor.⁴³ As Fairbairn put it, what was needed in the colony was the presence of “rational men”.⁴⁴ The move to a legislative assembly was premised upon a social contract of rule by mutual consent for those admitted to the public sphere. Pateman has stressed the ‘fraternal’ nature of this contract - for it was open only to men who premised their claim to political representation upon their power over women and children.⁴⁵ Joan Landes has seen in the French Revolution the defining moment in the construction of a masculine discourse

-
37. See Fraser, N. ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’, Eley, G. ‘Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century’ and Ryan, M. ‘Gender and Public Access: Women’s Politics in Nineteenth-Century America’ in Calhoun, *Habermas*. Also Pateman, C. *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge and Oxford, 1988) and *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Cambridge, 1989), and Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*.
 38. Davidoff, L. and Hall, C. *Family Fortunes: Men and women of the English middle class, 1780 - 1850* (London, 1987), 33.
 39. For an account of the cracks which appear in the facade of Cape politics regarding separate spheres see McKenzie, K. ‘Women’s Talk and the Colonial State: the case of Sir John Wylde’. Paper presented at an Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender and Colonialism, University of the Western Cape, January 1997. For the contested meanings of gender roles and public and private spheres expressed by white settlers, freed people and the colonial state in the process of emancipation see Scully, *Liberating the Family?*
 40. Aveling, M. ‘Imagining New South Wales as a Gendered Society, 1783 - 1821’ *Australian Historical Studies* 98, October 1992, 4.
 41. Pateman, *Disorder of Women*, 3.
 42. *Ibid*, 121.
 43. For a discussion of this issue in New South Wales see Aveling, ‘Imagining New South Wales’, 11.
 44. John Fairbairn to Thomas Pringle, 2 March 1823. Quoted in Meiring, *Thomas Pringle*, 80.
 45. Pateman, *The Disorder of Women*, 43.

which depended upon women's domesticity and silence in public life.⁴⁶ Over the course of the next half century, middle-class masculinity in Britain, for example, came to be crucially defined in terms of an involvement in political life, particularly in formal associations.⁴⁷

At the Cape, Pamela Scully has argued that the *Advertiser's* notion of masculine freedom (and ultimately of masculine political rights) as embodied in emancipation, was based on the subordination of women and children to male authority.⁴⁸ Women's role in this new order lay in the socialisation of future citizens - a view which was expressed in the Cape colonial press.⁴⁹ The domestic sphere was the context for the instillation of proper civic virtues. It was also to provide a "privatized haven" from the public world for middle-class men.⁵⁰ From the last quarter of the eighteenth century onwards, an idea of the middle-class family, crucially influenced by the tenets of Evangelical thought, was elaborated in Britain and it is this domestic ideology which would come to have a crucial impact upon the social world of Cape Town.⁵¹ It was characterised by a desire to separate home and work, and masculine and feminine spheres, and was thus inseparable from the development of a colonial political culture.⁵² Women provided the audience before which middle-class men enacted the social transformation of the Cape and the control of a disorderly underclass:

For them [women], infinitely more than for ourselves, we think, and speak, and act. For their tranquillity and domestic happiness we labor to reform - all orders of men, from the highest to the lowest - to relieve them from the terrors of the midnight robber, the keen disgust occasioned by the sight of servile intoxication, and all the dangers that flow from moral disorder in the population by which they are surrounded.⁵³

Significantly, this editorial was written in response to the disorder which resulted when women attended a public temperance meeting in the hitherto masculine domain of the Commercial Exchange. While women were included by some male organizers who felt they were particularly concerned with the issue of temperance, those who opposed temperance used the presence of women to disrupt the meeting by bringing up topics deemed unsuitable for feminine ears.

46. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 2. She connects this explicitly to the rejection of the dominant role of female aristocrats in salon culture in the late eighteenth century.

47. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 416.

48. Scully, *Liberating the Family?*, 1.

49. *African Journal*, 6 February 1851.

50. Hall, C. *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History*. (Oxford and Cambridge, 1992), 60.

51. An extensive literature exists upon the elaboration of domestic ideology in Britain during this period. See Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, Poovey, M. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago and London, 1984) and *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago, 1988). Petersen, M.J. *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1989), Tosh, J. 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class: The family of Edward White Benson' in Roper, M. and Tosh, J. (eds) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London and New York, 1991) A slightly earlier literature is represented by Lawrence Stone - *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500 - 1800* (Cambridge, 1977).

52. Pamela Scully has discussed the influence of these ideas of gender, the family and the public sphere on the experience of emancipation at length in *Liberating the Family?* The implications of social contract theory and conceptions of the public and private spheres made the position of "the working wife, and especially the black married freed woman" particularly ambiguous, 7.

53. *SACA*, 1 February 1832.

The affair ended in uproar with criticism of the inclusion of women voiced by the opponents of temperance. Once more, Boniface had his finger on the pulse of the city and used the incident as inspiration for his scurrilous play *De Temperantisten* (The Temperantists) in which gender-role inversion is used to mock the temperance campaign.⁵⁴ Fairbairn was consequently at pains to point out the proper role of the sexes with relation to the public sphere. The Cape press used notions of ‘manliness’ generally to express ideals of political virtue, and more particularly to appeal to men to take up their place in the public realm during moments of crisis.⁵⁵

Thus definitions of the rational public sphere depended explicitly upon those which it excluded. The ‘public’ as defined by the *Advertiser* was circumscribed not only by gender, but also by class. Its racial aspect might be more subtly articulated - especially in earlier decades - but was nevertheless increasingly present.⁵⁶ Thus the *Advertiser* discusses the importance of protecting middle-class women from the dangers of a disorderly underclass, but does not make explicit the fact that this social division existed in a racially divided world. Within the pages of other publications could be found fears of “black Democracy”⁵⁷ - but these were not the norm. When subscription lists failed in the policing of social boundaries, the coercive power of the state could be employed. Theatre audiences were controlled by subscription lists, but the police could also be stationed at the doors of the building to “keep all black boys out”.⁵⁸ Coffee house culture was premised upon an opposition to disorderly sites of assembly, such as taverns and the street. They combined a degree of accessibility which could be deemed democratic, with a cleansed discursive environment. This was an environment in which men could interact according to “norms of sobriety and polite social interchange: the norms, in fact, which are the absolute precondition for the establishment of a ‘democratic’ domain of verbal exchange without violence and without the privileges of rank.”⁵⁹

The *Advertiser’s* notion of “the people” was set up against both an idea of aristocratic patronage and, at the other extreme, a disorderly underclass. While it put forward a vision of inclusiveness, the middle-class subjectivity upon which this notion of the public was based was in fact constructed through the lineaments of exclusivity. In its definition of the ‘people’, the paper rejected both the power of “Aristocratic Patrons”⁶⁰ as well as what it called “crazy speculators in democracy”⁶¹ and “the many-headed mob”.⁶² In the context of the disturbances

54. Boniface, C.E. *De Nieuwe Riddeorder, of, De Temprantisten. Klugtig Blijspel in Vier Bedrijven*. (Cape Town, 1832) with Introduction and notes by F.C.L. Bosman, and notes on Boniface’s use of Afrikaans be J.L.M. Franken. (Johannesburg, 1954).

55. SACA 28 May 1831, during the anti-slavery debates. *De Zuid-Afrikaan* 14 June 1833, editorial and letter from ‘T’ in the context of the Sir John Wylde scandal. *Cape of Good Hope Observer*, 22 May 1849, reporting a speech of John Bardwell Ebdon during the resistance to transportation to the Cape.

56. For an account of Fairbairn’s shifting attitudes on race see Bank, ‘Liberals and their Enemies’, 349 - 351.

57. Letter from ‘An Anti-Convict Man’, *Sam Sly’s African Journal* 6 December 1849.

58. Elks, K.D. ‘Crime, Community and Police in Cape Town, 1825 - 1850’ MA thesis, UCT, 1986, p.66 Archival Reference: *Government Gazette*, 17 July 1829; 1/CT 6/16 20 September 1831, case of Adam.

59. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 96.

60. SACA, 17 September 1831.

61. SACA, 12 October 1831.

62. SACA, 21 September 1831.

attendant upon the debate over emancipation, Fairbairn claimed that the Cape context was antithetical to political action by the masses:

Public Meetings at the Cape differ very much in character from Public Meetings in England and Ireland, when political questions are to be submitted to the unqualified mass of the people. Here only men of property and education, holding a respectable rank in society, and personally known to all their fellow citizens, assemble, or presume to make their voices heard. We have no fear of tumult, rash or discreditable resolutions, or any of the vexatious movements by which demagogues too often succeed in embroiling the wisest counsels, and bringing contempt on the best of causes. Such persons in this Colony are most effectually extinguished, whenever the respectable portion of the community are permitted to assemble and express their opinions freely.⁶³

This exclusivity was tempered with a vision of potential inclusion through education, a central ambiguity in the definition of the public. The *Advertiser* attacked objections given in Britain to the Reform Bill with the argument that education gave the potential of all to gain access to the public:

They [the critics of the Reform Bill] pretend to suppose that those who were born blind could never be made to see - that rich and poor were natural distinctions - that mankind was created in classes, and not as individuals ... Late events in more than one civilized country show that the mass of the people can and will assert their just claim to respect, and that virtue as well as knowledge ... has taken up her abode in the mind of an educated population.⁶⁴

Yet the Reform Bill, with which the *Advertiser* identified its efforts at social reform at the Cape, was no mass democratic movement. Rather, it sought to weld the middle class to an existing political system, creating a powerful alliance with the aristocracy. Like the public sphere itself, the Cape colonial project was centred around tensions between “notions of incorporation and differentiation” with regard to race.⁶⁵ The idea of the public enshrined in the 1853 constitution was one based on the rights of propertied men, rather than on race, but, ironically, black enfranchisement was enacted against the background of hardening attitudes towards race and a strengthening alliance between British and Dutch which obviated any threat from black voters.⁶⁶

Within the pages of the *Advertiser* the formation of sites of rational public discourse can be contrasted with a perception of a disorderly city which threatened to slip outside middle-class control. Aspects of the moral and physical landscape of the city were persistently troubling to an attempt to project an image of civilising progress and the establishment of a rational public sphere - as Mary Douglas reminds us, “dirt is essentially disorder”.⁶⁷ The *Advertiser* presented a

63. SACA, 25 May 1831.

64. SACA, 12 October 1831.

65. Cooper and Stoler, ‘Between Metropole and Colony’, 10.

66. Bank, ‘Liberals and their Enemies’, p. 371 - 2. Keegan, T, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*, (Cape Town, 1996), 214 - 215.

67. Douglas, M. *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London, 1966), 2.

vision of bourgeois self-confidence juxtaposed with bourgeois anxiety as editorials extolling the role of Cape Town as an enlightened city ripe for political reform⁶⁸ are surrounded by letters complaining about lack of street lighting,⁶⁹ pigs on the rampage⁷⁰, packs of stray dogs roaming the streets after dark⁷¹, and a city “infested” with a disorderly underclass⁷², kept only in intermittent check by a drunken, inefficient police force⁷³. During times of sanitary crisis, fears for the health and safety of the elite could coalesce with racial and religious anxieties - as with white attitudes to the Cape Muslims in the smallpox epidemic of 1840.⁷⁴

The Press and Colonial Identity

Despite this inherent ambiguity in the Cape press between the ordered and disorderly city, the formation of a distinctively colonial press was extremely significant in the potential it allowed for the Cape colonists to project an image of their colony to the wider imperial audience. A free press gave writers the power of language to construct a social reality in the eyes of the world. This was of central importance in the creation of the colonial identity upon which claims for political representation were based. Political rivalries in both Australia and South Africa were played out violently in the press partly because the nature of colonial politics before representative institutions meant that British political allies and public opinion needed to be influenced as much as, if not more than, the local audience. The press was a vital means of getting the ear of London on divisive issues and thus colonial newspapers addressed themselves quite explicitly to a dual audience - local and metropolitan - as well as keeping one eye on the general imperial perspective.⁷⁵ The pages of the *Advertiser* indicate the spread of information through the British Empire by means of newspapers, from which information was culled liberally by editors. As well as discussing the news from Europe and the wider world, the Cape newspapers carried substantial extracts from the papers of Britain and from elsewhere in the colonial world, as did their equivalent in other colonies. Editorials in the *Advertiser* could be prompted by discussion of Cape affairs in newspapers as far afield as Bengal⁷⁶ and New South Wales.⁷⁷ That these early nineteenth-century colonial newspapers were in one sense publications of the British imperial system as a whole, was recognised in a libel case in Sydney in 1826 when a plaintiff maintained that

68. SACA, 7 January 1824, 14 January 1824, 15 December 1830, 28 May 1831, 20 July 1831, 14 December 1831.

69. SACA, 5 March 1831.

70. SACA, 5 March 1831.

71. SACA, 22 August 1826, 29 August 1826, 9 October 1830, 8 December 1830, 10 December 1830.

72. SACA, 8 June 1831.

73. SACA, 29 August, 1826. The connections between moral and material filth in the city are highlighted by the ambiguous duties of the police force who were responsible for both moral and physical policing in the city, neither of which task they performed particularly efficiently. See Elks 'Crime, Community and Police in Cape Town 1825 - 1850'.

74. SACA, 15 April 1840 and 23 May 1840, when, during a public meeting about the epidemic, it was claimed by certain speakers that Muslims were resisting vaccination.

75. A South African example of this is the rivalry which took place between the *Advertiser* and *De Zuid-Afrikaan* during the debates over slave amelioration and emancipation in the early 1830s. On this phenomenon in New South Wales see O'Malley, P. 'Class formation and the 'freedom' of the colonial press. New South Wales 1800 - 1850' *Media, Culture & Society* Volume 7, Number 4, October 1985, 430 - 431, 433.

76. SACA, 20 April 1831, 13 October 1830.

77. SACA, 16 April 1831.

accusations made against him in the *Sydney Gazette* “might be read in England, at the Cape, and in India; in all of which places he ... was well known”.⁷⁸

In the context of colonies competing for imperial resources, including free emigrants, it was necessary for the Cape to project an appropriate image of itself to the outside world. This was also of importance in the attempt to establish representative institutions in the colony - which depended ultimately upon the attitude of the mother country. In the first year of its publication the *Advertiser* indicated a colonial resentment at being placed under the critical eye of imperial travellers who then took it upon themselves to present the Cape to the wider world:

We have seldom seen in writing a good description of Colonial life ... The truth is, a country can be faithfully described by none but its own inhabitants. ... Till books are written and printed in the Colonies, they will continue to be misrepresented, misunderstood, injured, and insulted. For the world at a distance, however good natured and kind in one or two particulars, deals in the main with every man, and every set of men, according to the inward respect and deference they entertain towards them.⁷⁹

Analyses of imperialist travel writing have stressed the objectification and denial of agency of those who peopled the landscapes that were subjected to the invasion of their gaze.⁸⁰ By contrast, the *Advertiser* could give a different vision of the Cape, asserting that in “the vast Continent of Africa, *the Cape of Good Hope* is the only respectable and flourishing Settlement of Civilized men.”⁸¹ Fairbairn clearly saw himself and his paper as being at the head of a civilising process at the Cape, believing, as the epigraph adopted by the *Advertiser* claimed, that “The mass of every People must be barbarous where there is no Printing.”⁸² The existence of a free press was claimed as a mark of status by other colonies as well. The press of New South Wales contrasted itself with that of the Cape before 1829 when the ordinance protecting colonial newspapers was passed. The *Sydney Gazette* slighted the social development of the Cape upon the grounds that its press was under stringent government control:

whilst we think lightly of Colonists so cramped, when compared with our own enviable condition, we cannot help pitying our Editorial Brethren, who have to prosecute their labours with that yoke, and subject to that servitude, after which we shall never aspire.⁸³

A free press was linked explicitly to social and political development as well as to the status of colonies relative to one another. When news of the new Charter

78. *Australian*, 26 January 1826.

79. *SACA*, 10 March 1824.

80. Pratt, M.L. ‘Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow saw in the land of the Bushmen’ *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn, 1985), 120 - 121 and *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, 1992), 33.

81. *SACA*, 31 October 1832.

82. Attributed in the paper to Samuel Johnson.

83. *Sydney Gazette*, 1 February 1828.

of Justice, which reformed the Cape legal system, reached Australia in 1828, the *Sydney Gazette* was pleased to predict a general improvement in the political situation in the Cape Colony, as it related to the free press:

We rejoice when we see the dawn of English Freedom breaking forth in any part of the world, and we think that the day is not far distant when the Colonists of the Cape will enjoy the blessings of a Constitutional Free Press - which renders Australia pre-eminently conspicuous in the eyes of Africa and Asia, and even in some parts of Australasia.⁸⁴

In the fiercely competitive world of the British Empire, where a finite pool of metropolitan resources and free emigrants were fought over by rival imperial dependencies, a colonial press was vital in both a practical and a symbol sense. The press could act as a mouthpiece for political interest in the colony, and present it before both the mother country and the general imperial system in a suitable light. It was also an indication of the dissemination of the rights of free-born Englishmen in the colonial world - institutions deemed important in weighing up the advantages of settlement or investment.

Conclusion

The Cape constitution of 1853 was based upon a definition of the public which centred on the rights of propertied men. I have argued that such a constitution was impossible without the prior establishment of a political culture in the colony - one which was based upon the tenets of the bourgeois public sphere. A free colonial press was vitally necessary for the elaboration of this forum of political life. It was part of a general shift in ideas about power, society and the state which transformed the colonial world in the first half of the nineteenth century. The enfranchised of 1853 were based on a vision of 'the people' which the *Advertiser* had put forward during the previous three decades as it instructed the Cape in the art of conducting colonial politics in a new form. Those excluded from the ranks of the public - women, and a mostly black underclass - remained disenfranchised. The establishment of a free press was inseparable from the development of this political culture at the Cape - a fact which contemporaries across the political spectrum recognised. The press allowed for the expression and dissemination of ideas in an unprecedented manner - not only within the colony but also in an imperial perspective. The establishment of a free press was thus part of a general shift in the operation of colonial power systems during this period. It saw the beginning of the end of an autocratic *ancient regime* style of government based on patronage and the establishment of rule by fraternal social contract based on a bourgeois concept of the public sphere. It was not the meek, but Fairbairn's "rational men" - a suitably circumscribed in definition - who would inherit this new earth.

84. *Ibid.*, 6 February 1828.