

University of Potsdam
Historical Institute
Professorship for Global History



Universität Potsdam

"The mightiest critic is the public voice. "

Anglo-African Newspapers in British West Africa, 1874-1914

Thesis

Submitted for the Degree of

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)

In History

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Date of Submission :

24.06.2022

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Published online on the

Publication Server of the University of Potsdam:

<https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-57524>

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:kobv:517-opus4-575241>

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Abstract

In ihrer Praxis wird die aus verschiedenen Disziplinen hervorgegangene *colonial discourse theory* häufig für ihre totalisierenden Tendenzen im Hinblick auf den Aufbau des von ihr untersuchten Diskurses und den innerhalb dieses Aufbaus herrschenden Machtverhältnissen kritisiert. Das Resultat dieser strukturellen Totalisierung ist eine komplette Entmachtung der von dem Diskurs betroffenen Subjekte, die folglich zu passiven Objekten degradiert werden, die nicht in der Lage sind, diesen selbst zu beeinflussen. Von dieser berechtigten Kritik ausgehend, untersucht die vorliegende Arbeit die Rolle kolonialer Subjekte in der Entstehung, der Verbreitung, aber auch der Hinterfragung und des Kritisierens des kolonialen Diskurses in der Frühphase des britischen Kolonialismus in West Afrika. Dabei werden drei für den Zeitraum zwischen 1874 und 1914 relevante Themen in den Fokus gestellt: Die Aschanti-Kriege, der Aufbau eines Bildungssystem und das Problem der „Europeanized-Africans.“ Um afrikanische Perspektiven auf diese drei Themenblöcke abzubilden, werden von der kolonialen Elite herausgebende Zeitungen als Quellmaterial konsultiert. Zunächst werden in den ersten beiden Themenblöcken die jeweiligen diskursiven Entwicklungen herausgearbeitet und gezeigt, warum die anfängliche Unterstützung der britischen Herrschaft durch die Eliten zum Ende des Jahrhunderts sukzessive abnahm. Letztlich kulminieren die in der Arbeit analysierten Tendenzen in die Entstehung des „African Regeneration“ Diskurses, der zwar das Narrativ des kolonialen Diskurses auf theoretischer Ebene umdrehen kann und Afrika als den „Zivilisierer“ Europas darstellt, auf struktureller Ebene aber ein ebenso totalisierendes Bild afrikanischer und europäischer Gesellschaften zeichnet.

In its practical outlook, the interdisciplinary-driven colonial discourse theory is often criticized for its totalizing tendencies regarding the structure of the examined discourse and the power relations prevailing in this framework. As a result of this structural totalization, the concerned subjects got disempowered and degraded to mere passive objects incapable of raising their voices within the discourse. Based on this justified criticism, this thesis investigates the role colonial subjects played in the emergence, the distribution, as well as in questioning and critiquing of the colonial discourse during the initial phase of British colonialism in West Africa. The focal point

lies on three themes relevant to the period between 1874 and 1914: The Ashanti Wars, the creation of an educational system, and the issue of the so-called "Europeanized Africans." Newspapers published by the colonial elite serve as the central source material in order to reconstruct African perspectives on these subjects. First, the discursive trajectory of the first two themes will be reconstructed and then shown why the initial support of the elite gradually declined towards the end of the century. Eventually, the analyzed tendencies culminated in the emergence of the "African Regeneration" discourse, which was able to reverse the colonial discourse's basic assumptions, at least on a theoretical level. Consequently, the Africans were displayed as the "civilizer" of Europe. On the structural level, however, this discourse likewise employed a totalizing picture of African and European societies, respectively.

1.) Introduction

In March 1874, the first issue of the West African newspaper *The Gold Coast Times* printed an article titled "Negro Capabilities and Possibilities" on the front page. Originally published in the British journal *The Cornhill Magazine*,¹ this article both recognises Africans' irresponsibility and acknowledges their vitality and resilience to be able to live under conditions and circumstances that other races would not have managed. To further elucidate his argumentation, the author also refers to the nearly extinct indigenous populations of New Zealand, Australia, and America, which are also subject to European colonialism.² By referring to this shared feature, the author not only subtly criticises the destructive output of colonialism on the people but additionally implies that colonialism would give the Africans new prospects for progress and elevation. Given their resilience, this enterprise would probably bear more fruits than colonial endeavours in other parts of the globe.

Twenty-two years after the publication of this article (July 1896), another Anglo-African newspaper, *The Lagos Weekly Record*, published an article under the title "European Civilization and the West African Tribes," in which the results of the encounters between European civilization and the natives living in West Africa were examined. Despite the Africans previously assumed resilience, the author warned that Africans were facing an existential threat. This existential threat was not caused by European's aggressive military expeditions or the installed systems of forced labour but rather by the widespread tendency among the natives to blindly imitate European civilization. Thus, "like the moth attracted by the light of the burning candle, he is inclined to rush towards to what is veritable death for him." In sum, the internalization of European habits is causing a physical and psychological degeneration of the West African natives, eventually resulting in the extinction of certain tribes in Africa.³

¹ The reprinting of articles originally published in Western newspapers was a common feature of the Anglo-African newspapers, a process labelled as "culling" by the editors, see Stephanie Newell, *The Power to Name: A History of Anonymity in Colonial West Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013), 55.

² *The Gold Coast Times*, "Negro Capabilities and Possibilities," March 28, 1874, 1-2. [CRL.com](#)

³ *The Lagos Weekly Record*, "European Civilization and the West African Native Tribes," July 11, 1896, 4. [CRL.com](#)

The juxtaposition of these perspectives put forward in those two articles, from the assertion of Africans' resilience regarding the prospect of colonialization and the progress stimulated by it to the warning about the existential threat engendered through the introduction of European civilization, exemplifies the trajectory of the African's response to the colonial discourse, which will be reconstructed and analyzed throughout this paper.

With the launching of Michel Foucault's seminal works concerning the intimate relation of discourse, knowledge and power, our way of understanding power, subjugation, and agency has altered, shifting our attention from the more visible articulations of power to the subtle elements of power resonating in language and practices of everyday life.⁴ For Foucault, power is primarily embedded within discourses, which exclude or include certain voices in practice and validates knowledge within its own epistemological settings, thereby constructing a framework that enabled the rendering of certain statements in specific historical contexts as true, respectively false.⁵ Edward Said was the first to apply this understanding of power to the colonial situation. His likewise seminal work *Orientalism* inaugurated the study of colonial discourse theory, which has since then resulted in the production of a vast amount of insight literature examining the colonial discourse and its consequences upon (post-)colonial societies and individuals.

Since the cultivation of this approach to analyze power relations in a colonial situation by focusing on its discursive nature, various scholars have applied it to divergent colonial settings, thereby acknowledging the relevance of the colonial discourse as a power exercising instrument. Thus, the administrative colonialization of the envisaged territory went in tandem with the colonialization of the mind and body of its inhabitants.⁶ Colonial violence was consequently not solely exercised physically but contained an epistemological component that compromised and delegitimized the colonized societies' cultures, values, and concepts.⁷ This

⁴ See Patricia O'Brien, "Michel Foucault's History of Culture," in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1989), 35.

⁵ See Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung des Diskurses*, trans. Walter Seitter, 16th ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2021), 11-17.

⁶ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, 8th edition (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), xi.

⁷ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 2nd edition (London a.o.: Routledge, 2005), 51.

epistemology was construed by a "series of rationalization"⁸ and marked by specific rhetorical patterns, which enabled European thinkers and policymakers to apply the basic assumptions of this epistemology to various non-Western societies. Thus, Said's concept of *Orientalism* can be adapted for other regions, although it illustrates the rhetorical figures, narratives, and tropes with which the "other" of the Orient was constructed and evaluated. This transition is possible because the basic structure of this narrative and the primary conclusions emanating from it are relatively similar. This similarity is also reflected in the term *Africanism* used to label the transition of Said's concept to African societies.⁹ The stability of this epistemology, in which the colonial discourse was embedded, relied upon the production and perpetuation of differences which served as a distinction marker between the self and the other.

Consequently, the assumption of the superiority of European civilization, the unsuitability of non-Western societies for self-government, and the backwardness and savagery of the Africans became enshrined as sacrosanct truths.¹⁰ This discursive development, labelled as the constitution of a "regime of truths," was required to establish an overarching framework serving as a point of reference to validate certain statements, perceptions, and eventually colonial measures.¹¹ This reflects the recognition that "power creates truth and hence its own legitimation."¹² Within this process of truth construction, the differences assumed by it were interpreted as deficits that must be eradicated through colonialism. As a result, Europeans ascribed themselves to having a moral obligation to civilize the "other" by introducing European civilization to the non-Western world. This ideology was framed as the "civilizing mission," which eventually served as the justification for colonial conquest and subjugation.¹³ From a theoretical standpoint, this ideology enabled the

⁸ See George Balandier, "The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach," in *The New Imperial Histories Reader*, ed. Stephen Howe (London: Routledge, 2010), 27.

⁹ See Gaurav Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁰ Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 42-43.

¹¹ See Homi k. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 101.

¹² O'Brien, "Foucault's History of Culture," 350.

¹³ This assumed moral obligation of the Western world is still best reflected in Rudyard Kipling's Poem "The White Man's Burden", see Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," in *100 Poems: Old and New*, ed. Thomas Pinney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 111-113. <https://doi-org-1000034cq00e6.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/10.1017/CBO9781107279513>

juxtaposition of modern vs traditional, reason vs ignorance, teacher vs pupil and finally, dominator vs dominated.

However, this theoretical juxtaposition is a simplification of the complex colonial situation.¹⁴ Unfortunately, most literature that uses the colonial discourse theory as a methodological approach does not go beyond this simplified dichotomy. The accusation therefore that Said did likewise reconstruct a totalizing discourse that neglected the heterogeneity of Western images about the Orient and the responses of the discourses' concerned subjects is not without foundation.¹⁵ He created a framework similar to what he criticized previously, thereby denying any agency to colonial subjects themselves and degrading them to merely passive objects incapable of making their voice heard in the discourse.¹⁶

Distribution is also frequently neglected within the colonial discourse theory. Thomas correctly highlighted that the colonial discourse audience was primarily within Europe rather than within the colonial societies. As such, the construed deficits were not as holistically perceived and internalized by the colonial subjects as suggested by many post-colonial writers.¹⁷ Acknowledging the fruitful potential of these accusations, this work attempts to reconstruct the colonial discourse within a specific colonial situation regarding the role of colonial subjects in the formation and distribution of this discourse.

Given the long tradition of commercial interactions on the coastal shores, West Africa already had a westernized community consisting of individuals with a shared educational and religious background at a time when Britain was establishing and consolidating its rule.¹⁸ This Western-educated intelligentsia had internalized the colonial discourse about the superiority of Western culture, and thus welcomed the colonial grip of the British to stimulate progress in Africa. Accordingly, they used their plentiful newspapers to distribute the colonial discourse and the ideology of

¹⁴ See Balandier, "The Colonial Situation," 34-35.

¹⁵ See Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 46.

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 46.

¹⁷ Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 57.

¹⁸ Toyin Falola/ A.D. Roberts, "West Africa," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume IV: The Twentieth Century*, ed. Judith M. Brown (Oxford/New York: Oxford University, 1999), 515.

the civilizing mission, thereby rendering British rule necessary and a benefactor for Africans to advance on the stages of civilization.

However, the editors cannot be dismissed as mere agents of the colonial power alienated from their own cultural heritage since the self-fashioning of these newspapers clarified that they intended to communicate the perspectives and grievances of the colonial public to the British authorities. The newspapers therefore advanced to the most significant platform for critiquing certain aspects of British colonialism in particular and the implications and assumptions of the colonial discourse in general. Unfortunately, most media historians investigating this topic romanticized this dimension of the Anglo-African newspapers and approached the sources with a teleological gaze concentrating solely on the (proto-) nationalist features.¹⁹ However, given its vital role in distributing the colonial discourse while simultaneously criticizing specific aspects attached to it, I argue that the newspapers and correspondents were neither solely agents of the colonial power nor rigorous nationalists who rejected the colonial tutelage. Instead, one must examine their responses to the colonial situation and the colonial discourse in the specific socio-historical context in which it occurs.

This paper is divided into two parts to prove this dialectic of the newspaper editors in handling the colonial discourse. First, I will reconstruct the biographical background of the editors and show how the newspaper sphere in British West Africa functioned. In that context, I will investigate the emergence of a colonial public sphere with all its limitations. Second, I will analyze the African responses to specific issues, namely the Ashanti wars on the Gold Coast, the issue of education, and the problem of the "Europeanized African". The last issue will function as a structuring point of orientation since it resonated in the other issues as well. During my research, I will demonstrate and contextualize the participation of colonial subjects in the colonial discourse displayed and distributed through the newspapers. Although my perspective focuses on specific events and issues, the embeddedness of these in the

¹⁹ Newell cites among others the following literature in that matter: K. A. B. Jones Quartey, *A Summary History of the Ghana Press, 1822-1960* (Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing, 1974); David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963); Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* (London: Zed Books, 2005), see Newell, *The Power to Name*, 194, note 20.

general colonial discourse enables me to identify general remarks towards this discourse, thus shedding light on more general questions such as those of identity or comparisons between different colonial systems.

By displaying the trajectory of the newspapermen's response to the colonial discourse, I will remain within the framework of discourse analyses and demonstrate the *epistemological break or rupture* that led to the shift in paradigm within the colonial discourse and the perception of the ideology attached to it.²⁰ This study will focus on a period starting in 1874, which marked the close of the third Anglo-Ashanti war and the inception of British colonial expansion in West Africa.²¹ It will end in 1914 because the political developments in Europe and the beginning of the First World War sparked an increased loyalty among the elites, who hesitated to criticize the British Empire while it was at war with other European powers.²²

Within this period, I will illustrate the agency of colonial subjects, which had the opportunity to articulate their voice in the colonial discourse and analyze the socio-historical context that enabled them to do so. Using the newspapers for a colonial discourse analysis provides "a reading that is stretched between regimes of truths and their moments of mediation, reformulation and contestation in practice."²³ Thus, my approach seeks to contrast the colonial discourse theory with colonial subjects' actual discursive practice in West Africa. Eventually, such a research approach will generate a more nuanced and accurate picture of the colonial discourse and its power exercising and resistance-generating dimension in British West Africa.

²⁰ This concept of an *epistemological break* (rupture épistémologique) was first coined by French philosopher Gaston Bachelard to describe the radical break caused by the emergence of modern science regarding the previous production of knowledge. Althusser later used this concept to identify a rupture épistémologique within the Marxist ideology. Eventually, Foucault adapted the concept of discursive ruptures to analyze the epistemological breaks concerning prisons, sexuality, and the psychiatry. See Massimiliano Simons, "Beyond Ideology: Althusser, Foucault and French Epistemology," *Pulse: A History, Sociology & Philosophy of Science Journal*, no. 1, (2015): 68-69. <https://www-1ceeol-1com-10072462803b2.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/search/viewpdf?id=686928>

However, I will employ the same concept to identify and explain shift in paradigms and discursive alterations occurring within the colonial discourse of the colonial subjects.

²¹ Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Thought: 1860 to the Present* (Westport/London: Praeger, 1999), 29.

²² See Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, 4th impression (London: Hutchinson, 1976), 254.

²³ Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture*, 58.

2.) The Anglo-African Newspapers sphere

The first African-owned newspapers in colonial West Africa were established during the 1850s in Sierra Leone and Gold Coast, with Lagos following in the 1880s.²⁴ Most of these early newspapers had their origins in missionary circles, who provided the printing machines and trained their African attendees to use them.²⁵

The consolidation of British rule after the victory against the Ashanti in 1874 coincided with the consolidation of the newspaper sphere, thus increasing the number of newspapers on the West coast and their publication frequency. During the initial phase, the editors were usually sympathetic toward the new political developments and supported the proscribed tutelage to introduce Christianity and Western civilization to the natives. Consequently, they embraced the colonial discourse that justified this political endeavour rather than questioning it.²⁶

However, this affiliation with Western civilization strongly contrasts with the British colonial policy and sentiment toward the educated and westernized Africans. For many Britons, as missionary John Harris indicated, the educated African "was only a worse evil than the primitive savage."²⁷ As a result of this disregard and economic considerations, the British developed the concept of indirect rule that advanced to the common feature of British colonialism in West Africa.²⁸ The government, consequently, applied little effort to introduce Western civilization and Christianity; rather, this colonial elite "adopted the civilizing mission as their own."²⁹ To understand this contrast and seeming ambivalence, it is necessary to analyze the socio-historical circumstances that led to the formation of the colonial elite since this context determined their early responses to the colonial discourse.

²⁴ Robert W. July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought: Its development in West Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 345.

²⁵ See Fred I.A. Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880-1937* (London: Longman Group, 1978), 73.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 36.

²⁷ John H. Harris, *Dawn in darkest Africa: with an introduction by the Right Hon. the Early of Cromer honorable* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1912), 107. <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/nb7um5ra>

²⁸ See Hensbroek, *Political Discourses*, 33.

²⁹ Philip S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville/London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 36.

2.1) Background of the Colonial Intelligentsia

Indian psychologist Ashis Nandy suggests that colonialism's victory and relative stability were enabled by the inauguration of new secular hierarchies undermining the traditional order. This made the system launched by colonialism seem more equal in terms of social mobility.³⁰ Thus, the cultural aspect attached to colonialism introduced new social norms and priorities in the colonized society that successively gained acceptance. This resulted in a dyadic relationship between ruler and ruled in which the former regarded himself as the stimulator of progress, and the latter embraced this self-perception, thereby deeming the system of colonialism necessary, at least temporarily.³¹ Moreover, this notion also reflects the internal stratification of the colonized society caused by the colonial situation, such as the division between the elite, having received education and being located in the urban centres, and the uneducated, rural-based mass of the natives.³²

As implied in the last phrase, the new secular hierarchies were primarily entangled with the issue of education. Educational efforts were mainly provided by the missionary societies rather than the colonial government, and those activities preceded formal occupation in West Africa.³³ It was this missionary education that formed the basis for the elite's shared background intertwined with Christianity and a Western lifestyle.

This missionary breed colonial elite was mainly located in the urban centres at the coastal out shores. They shared a common group identity based on a common language, Western education, Western clothes, and the promotion of Western and Christian values.³⁴ In one way or another, most were affiliated with trade,³⁵ and since the prospect of British rule was equated with increasing commercial activity, this affiliation was a further reason for the elite's early support.³⁶ However, from a political perspective, they envisioned only a temporary form of British rule that would prepare the natives for self-government and install a system of central political administration

³⁰ Nandy, *The Inimical Enemy*, ix.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² See Balandier, "The Colonial Situation," 34-35.

³³ See Crowder, *West Africa*, 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 384.

³⁵ See Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 24.

³⁶ See July, *Origins*, 350.

in which this elite would obtain a leading position.³⁷ In addition to that envisaged political future, their embracing of the civilizing mission must be interpreted against their biographical background. By means of their Western education, affiliation with Christianity, and commercial activities with the British, they advanced to the peak of the new colonial society marked by the new secular hierarchies and social priorities. Consequently, they thought that British colonialism would provide the transition of this social mobility to other Africans, thus launching a new era characterized by a parliamentary political system and a community prospering through commercial activities.

With increasing visibility of the social mobility achieved through education, the demand for education grew frequently.³⁸ However, parallel to that development, British colonial policy was increasingly informed by the preference for indirect rule, thereby granting political privileges to the hereditary chiefs in order to keep the educated African outside the political administration.³⁹ For many elite circles, colonial occupation soon marked a setback rather than any political progress since they were pushed out of every higher position within the colonial administration.⁴⁰ The relevance of this for the newspaper sphere cannot be overemphasized because this absence of political representation and participation motivated most newspaper editors to found and structure their papers in a way to compensate for this political shortcoming.

As a result of this trajectory, the newspapers advanced to the most crucial medium to criticize the way British colonialism was implemented. West Africa had a pioneering role in that matter not because here the elite was keen on importing Western political ideas, values, and concepts "but because they were the first to face the European confrontation and to produce a public space in which this encounter could be discussed."⁴¹ The newspapers exactly represented this public space.

³⁷ Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁰ Crowder, *West Africa*, 9. In 1875 Lagos, for instances, Nigerians had various political positions, such as the head of police, the registrar for the supreme court, and the head of the post and telegraph offices, see *ibid.*, 9.

⁴¹ Van Hensbroek, *Political Discourse*, 3.

The concept of the public is relevant to my inquiry because it determines the impact that newspapers could exercise upon the colonial society. In that regard, questions of production, circulation, and colonial censorship must be considered as well. Therefore, the next chapter will reconstruct the West African newspaper network, their vision of a colonial public, and the struggles attached to the newspaper production and distribution.

2.2) The West African Newspaper Network

Published in 1919 and thus being outside of the scope of this research, the following statement from Lugard nevertheless encapsulated the argumentation of the colonial government for pushing out the Western-educated portion of the colonial subjects from any political platform: "the interests of a large native population shall not be subject to the will of a small minority of Europeanised natives who have nothing in common with them and whose interests are often opposed to them."⁴²

However, this statement conflicted strongly with the editors' self-ascribed vision for their newspapers, in which the issue of representation was of key relevance. As emphasized by almost any newspaper, their intention was not to advocate partisan perspectives and interests attached to a specific group, rather to "represent in our columns the views of all sorts and conditions of men, irrespective of creed, colour or race [...]."⁴³ That representation was required due to the lack of political representation was further stressed by the editors and marked for many the motivation to launch a newspaper, as clarified by *The Gold Coast Times*: "We have undertaken the task of representing the interests of the country, not for the love of mere fault-finding, because we have nothing else to do, but for the people's lack of representative men and municipal institutions [...]."⁴⁴

To determine the editors' success in their intention to represent all subjects of the colonial society, a careful reflection upon the concept of the public sphere is required. This is because it was this public that the editors sought to represent and in which

⁴² Frederick Lugard, *Nigeria: Report by Sir F. Lugard on the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria* [1919] (Malborough: Adam Matthew Digital, 2007), 19. <https://nl-1sub-1uni-2goettingen-1de-1007278280263.erf.sbb.spk-berlin.de/id/reportbysirflugardontheamalgamationofnorth-ernandsouthernigeria1919>

⁴³ "Prospectus: The "Gold Coast Leader", *The Gold Coast Leader*, June 28, 1902, 2. [CRL.com](https://www.crl.com)

⁴⁴ *The Gold Coast Times*, February 23, 1875, 2. [CRL.com](https://www.crl.com)

the colonial discourse was embedded. In that matter, Habermas' definition of the public sphere remains the central point of reference for investigating public spheres in various settings. Habermas analyzed the emergence of a public sphere in 18th century Europe and defined this sphere as "a non-hierarchical environment in which consensus was built through processes of free, rational dialogue between bourgeois citizens [...]." ⁴⁵ Apart from this idealistic definition, this concept cannot be holistically applied to the complex colonial situation marked by the asymmetrical power relations it engendered.

Despite this distinctness, as rightly pointed out by Newell, "nothing could be closer to West African newspapermen's definition of the role of the press [...] than Habermas' utopian model of the public sphere." ⁴⁶ The editors attempted to produce a public sphere and defined it in striking similarity to Habermas's definition. ⁴⁷ Accordingly, they frequently stressed that the newspapers were the sole platforms for public discussions, in which thoughts and wishes could be exchanged, disregarding the social position of its participators. ⁴⁸ The editors employed various tactics to ensure that the newspapers functioned as a platform for status-free public discussions. An essential feature in that matter was the relative openness of the columns. Correspondents frequently send letters and articles in which assumptions of the colonial discourse and the conduct of British colonialism in Africa and elsewhere were questioned and criticized. The newspapers only played a moderating role and ensured in almost every issue, perhaps for the colonial government, that "we do not hold ourselves responsible for the opinions which may be expressed by our correspondents." ⁴⁹ Correspondents sometimes responded to other readers' letters, rejected their views, expressed further support or delivered so far unconsidered arguments to put forward a different perspective.

However, as pointed out by critics of Habermas's concept, his definition of the public sphere neglected the internal inequalities of European society regarding gender and social position, which undermined the notion of a debate marked by the absence of

⁴⁵ Newell, *The Power to Name*, 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁸ See for instance, *The Gold Coast Times*, November 17, 1877, 2. CRL.com

⁴⁹ *The Gold Coast Times*, March 28, 1874, 2. CRL.com

hierarchy.⁵⁰ In that matter, the editors employed other instruments to blur the boundaries of a hierarchical society. The essential feature to ensure a status-free debate was the use of anonymity.⁵¹ Correspondents employed various name-de-plume to disguise their identity, whereby the arguments gained more relevance than the name and social status of the author delivering them. The editors, thereby, construed a relatively egalitarian platform in which discussions based on arguments rather than the participants' status could occur.⁵²

Naturally, the use of anonymity contained another intention: protecting the correspondents against the colonial government to assure that they could publish their criticism. The envisaged censorship laws, consequently, targeted to oblige the editors to expose their correspondents' names and the newspaper's proprietors.⁵³ Employing censorship laws to restrict the local press, however, was more difficult than imagined by many governors, and the elite regarded themselves as citizens of the British Empire and thus insisted that they were entitled to freedom of expression.⁵⁴

The governors nevertheless regularly intended to adopt censorship laws but were restricted by the colonial office and the humanitarian circles of British society.⁵⁵ Moreover, legal prosecution of a specific journal or journalist would likely be interpreted as a sign of weakness rather than strength.⁵⁶ Legal prosecution was thus rare, and the governors seldom adopted strict censorship laws, and if such laws were established, they were reluctant to apply them in full range.⁵⁷ Omu concludes in that

⁵⁰ See Newell, *The Power to Name*, 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵² See *ibid.*, 34-35.

⁵³ See Fred. I. A. Omu, "The Dilemma of Press Freedom in Colonial Africa: The West African Example," *The Journal of African History* 9, no.2 (1968): 286-288. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/179564>

⁵⁴ For instance, by examining the methods of French rule in Porto Novo, the author of an article in *The Lagos Weekly Record* stated: "The English are acknowledged to be the best colonizers, and the secret for their success lies in the great consideration invariably shown by them to the people whom they undertake to govern, affording them at the outset the full liberties and privileges of British subjects," see "French Rule in Porto Novo," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, September 12, 1891, 2. [CRL.com](http://www.crl.com) This quote not only indicates the elite's assumption of possessing the full rights of British liberty, which included the liberty of the press but also demonstrated that the elite preferred the British colonial system over the French counterpart since the latter did not transfer such liberties to their colonial subjects.

⁵⁵ Omu, "The Dilemma," 281.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 280.

matter that the press was *de jure* controlled but *de facto* free,⁵⁸ which ensured the critical potential of the newspapers.

However, there were other problems attached to the production of newspapers, significantly in terms of economics, and most newspapers were short-lived because they were not profitable enough. Editors had to cover the printing and distribution costs and compensate their correspondents. The central source of revenue for newspapers was advertising, which is reflected in the space made available by the editors for various advertisements.⁵⁹ Of course, revenues from sold issues were another source of income. Zachernuk estimated that the prominent newspapers sold approximately 1500 issues per week.⁶⁰ However, this number does not reflect the scope of readership. Borrowing newspapers was typical, and the newspaper frequently addressed this issue and urged for subscribing since "There are many who could easily do so [...] who content to borrow the paper from their next-door neighbours."⁶¹ Moreover, the newspapers were usually not consumed in a private place but instead read aloud before illiterate Africans so that the scope of the audience exceeded the literate buyers.⁶² Still, this should not be overestimated. The majority of the colonial subjects still had no access to newspapers, and the colonial public sphere was thus still restricted mainly to the elite circles.⁶³

As an interim conclusion, it can be stated that the editors were able to construct a colonial public sphere in which the colonial discourse could be distributed, questioned, and challenged, at least to a certain degree. That the editors intended to represent this colonial public and communicate their grievances and criticism to the authorities is further reflected in the motto of *The Gold Coast Nation*, from which the title of this thesis is borrowed: "The mightiest critic is the public voice."⁶⁴ They could provide a platform that, although restrictions are required, was in its vision very similar to Habermas's definition of a public sphere. Despite these limitations in terms of

⁵⁸ Ibid., 279.

⁵⁹ Omu, *Press and Politics*, 87.

⁶⁰ Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 52.

⁶¹ "The End of our twelfth year," *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, August 29, 1896, 5. [CRL.com](#)

⁶² Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 53. He estimates that actual readers/receivers outnumbered the sold issues three to ten times, see *ibid.*, 53.

⁶³ See Newell, *The Power to Name*, 36.

⁶⁴ See for instance, *The Gold Coast Nation*, March 28, 1912, 1. [CRL.com](#)

actual representation and egalitarianism, the newspapers provided historians with valuable sources that enables to grasp and analyze the African voice within the colonial discourse in its practical setting.

3.) Colonial Discourse Practice

As indicated in the introduction, most literature affiliated with colonial discourse theory tends to establish a framework in which the colonizers seem to be the sole possessor of this discourse, shifting it holistically to the colonized. Within this framework, the colonial subjects are degraded to sole objects of reception and internalization without possessing any agency, which leaves no space for acts of resistance within the discourse. However, as rightly suggested by Desai, this discourse's functioning must be analyzed in its practical realization rather than in theoretical elaborations.⁶⁵ What becomes visible through this approach is a process of negotiation rather than a one-sided emanation and one-sided absorption.⁶⁶

Colonial discourse literature seldom consulted newspapers as historical sources, which is odd, given their ability to tackle the justified accusations displayed in the introduction.⁶⁷ The value of newspapers as historical sources is additionally construed through the rarity of African voices in the colonial discourse caused by the lack of records⁶⁸ that can be compensated by consulting newspapers in that matter.

Nandy argues that finding an alternative frame of reference that implies the moral inferiority of the colonizers and undermines the shared perspective of the necessity of colonialism for the stimulation of progress was the primary threat to colonialism.⁶⁹ The construction of this alternative frame of reference resulted from a gradual

⁶⁵ See Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*, 114.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁷ Loomba listed public and private records, letters, trade documents, government papers, fiction and scientific literature as the central sources for studies concerned with colonialism, see Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 8. Although some scholars like Emma Hunter or Stephanie Newell concerned themselves with the issue of newspapers, their focal point lays more on other aspects, such as the use of anonymity, or the analytical methods to study public spheres in different colonial settings see Newell, *The Power to Name* and Emma Hunter/Leslie James, "Introduction: Colonial Public Spheres and the Worlds of Print," *Itinerario: Journal of Imperial and Global Interactions* 44, no. 2 (2020): 227-242. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0165115320000248>

⁶⁸ Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*, 124.

⁶⁹ Nandy, *The intimate Enemy*, 11.

process, which will be reconstructed in the following pages. Furthermore, the events that caused the epistemological ruptures will be identified, and their relevance displayed.

In the first part of this chapter, the discourse concerning the Anglo-Ashanti wars will be analyzed not only because it marked the beginning of British expansion in West Africa but because it was with that issue that the internal tension between the natives reluctant toward the episteme of progress and the educated elite embracing and advocating this episteme becomes tangible.

3.1) The Anglo-Ashanti Wars: "The Black Man's Burden."

The Ashantis, an African kingdom that emerged in the 17th century as an alliance of Akan-speaking people, and the British shared a long history of military conflicts.⁷⁰ In 1863, the Ashanti inflicted a humiliating defeat on the British, which stimulated debates about a complete withdrawal from the West African coast in the British parliament.⁷¹ However, in 1874 the situation changed dramatically. The Fanti federation, an 1870 established federation encompassing various tribes located in present-day Ghana, faced an invasion by the Ashanti and the British intervened to terminate their ongoing struggle with the Ashantis.⁷² Accordingly, the British marched towards Ashanti's capital Kumasi, destroyed it, and established their formal rule on the Gold Coast without declaring the Ashanti region a protectorate.

The Anglo-African press on the Gold Coast being still nascent in 1874, covered and broadly commented on the war. In general, the victory was celebrated as one of "right over wrong, that of civilization over barbarism."⁷³ However, *The Gold Coast Times*⁷⁴ called for the government to end the "ever-changing policy" and reconsider its position on non-annexation. In that context, the signed treaty between the British and the Ashanti is labelled as a "waste-paper" since it dealt not with the pressing questions: "What impulse will it give to education, to commerce, to the opening of

⁷⁰ See J.K. Fynn, "Ghana-Asante (Ashanti)," in *West African Resistance: The military response to colonial occupation*, ed. Michael Crowder (London: Hutchinson, 1971), 19-20.

⁷¹ See Van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses*, 32.

⁷² See Chris Peers, *The African Wars: Warriors and Soldiers in the Colonial Campaigns* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2010), 66.

⁷³ "The Fall of Coomasie viewed from a political standpoint," *The Gold Coast Times*, April 29, 1874, 3. CRL.com

⁷⁴ *The Gold Coast Times* is the only regional newspaper available for this time period.

the interior to legitimate enterprise, and the exploitation of the country's inland, with the view of ascertaining its resources and capabilities."⁷⁵ The dissatisfaction with the expeditions' results reflected the elite's commercial interests in this region, which is also indicated by the demand to open up the interior for legitimate trade.

During this period, the political future of the Ashanti was not yet determined and different solutions were discussed. In June 1874, *The Gold Coast Times* issued three possible solutions: a firmer grip upon the Ashanti, forging the colony and the protectorate into a dominion or applying decent measures for self-government. Regarding a complete withdrawal from the region, the author feared "the Protectorate to relapse into its former state of barbarism."⁷⁶ On the last pages of the same issue, articles from British newspapers dealing with this issue, too, were cited. An article from *The Standard* stated the moral obligation of Britain to maintain its position in West Africa since a withdrawal would mean that "the negro loses his last chance of elevation in the scale of civilization." In contrast to that, the printed article from *The Morning Post* contained a completely reversed perspective: "It is wrong in principle to force our civilization and our religion at the point of the bayonet [...] the sooner we escape from it, the better it will be for us and for Africa."⁷⁷ By reprinting this article, the editor provided crucial information about the debate concerning the political future of their country. He further indicated the heterogeneity of the colonial discourse in the West, with one side arguing about the moral obligation to civilize the African and the other side referring to the immorality of achieving this through means of violence.

In 1875, the government still had not applied measures to satisfy the demands of the press. Consequently, the press urged to adopt such measures significantly concerning commercial activities, which should be facilitated through infrastructure provided by the government. The therefore employed rhetoric mirrored the colonial discourse to a striking degree: "With free access into the interior, the light of civilization must penetrate further inland, bringing its teeming thousands within its beneficent rays."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *The Gold Coast Times*, April 11, 1874, 3. [CRL.com](#)

⁷⁶ *The Gold Coast Times*, June 28, 1874, 2. [CRL.com](#)

⁷⁷ "British Policy on the Gold Coast," *The Gold Coast Times*, June 28, 1874, 4. [CRL.com](#)

⁷⁸ *The Gold Coast Times*, February 23, 1875, 2. [CRL.com](#)

As the covering and commentating upon the Anglo-Ashanti war in 1874 indicates, the elite community welcomed the colonial grip of the British to see Africa developed in terms determined by Western civilization and values. This enthusiastic support was caused by their affiliation with Western culture, which derived from their personal affiliation with missionary education and commercial activities. The latter also contributed to the supportive stance since the British could act as a peace provider in the region, thus increasing the possibilities for commerce.

Twenty-six years later, however, the situation changed dramatically. In April 1900, the first rumours about new disturbances in the Ashanti region reached the press. According to these rumours, the British Governor Hodgson demanded the sacred Golden Stool from the local chiefs to dethrone king Prembeh, who was still received as the valid king despite being captured by the British and held in Sierra Leone.⁷⁹

The rumours quickly turned out to be true, which sparked outrage among the newspapers. In May 1900, *The Gold Coast Aborigines* published the speech in which Governor Hodgson called for the Golden Stool: "Where is the Golden Stool? Why do I not sit on the Golden Stool? Am I not your king? But whether we have the Golden Stool or not, we have the might."⁸⁰ The editors assured that "the demand was most ill-timed and couched in a most ill-advised language" and rendered the conduct "most un-British like." Having thought the governor would come to receive the grievances of the Ashanti, the insulting manner has now triggered a rebellion, which is likely to throw back the country "perhaps for a decade."⁸¹

In addition to the insult, the press emphasized that the Ashanti were forced to live under the brutal yoke of the British after another successful expedition in 1895: "The militarism, the system of oppression that was upheld there was most galling, and one often hears the people say they would rather have back the cutting of their throats."⁸² In contrast to the celebrating tones in 1874, the editors implied that British conduct in Ashanti was worse than the practice of human sacrifice, which was used as one justification for military invasion. Eventually, regarding the unnecessary of the current

⁷⁹ "Disturbance in Ashanti," *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, April 21, 1900, 2-3. CRL.com

⁸⁰ *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, May 16, 1900, 4. CRL.com

⁸¹ "Ashanti," *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, May 16, 1900, 3. CRL.com

⁸² "Ashanti," *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, May 30, 1900, 3. CRL.com

disturbance, a reader letter again expressed the hope that "time will soon come when natives will have equal voices in the council."⁸³

The quest for the Golden Stool and other similar instances in other colonies triggered a response diametrically to the discourse distributed in 1874. An article in *The Gold Coast Aborigines* labelled in allusion to Kipling's poem about the civilizing mission "The Black Man's Burden" expressed these discursive alterations most comprehensively. After having exposed wars similar to that fought against the Ashanti, such as the American war against Spain over Cuba and the Philippines, or the Transvaal war, the author delivered a striking deconstruction of the colonial discourse and the civilizing mission:

"The white man has created himself a burden, and colossus wise, he shoulders up the responsibility of civilizing, whether they wish it or not, the dark races of the world, and for this purpose, throws his powerful arms around the necks of his proteges, and does not mind if he throttles them out of every zeal for their advancement. This is the black man's burden."

This quote demonstrated that the conduct of the British toward the Ashanti and other imperialist forces' similar actions in other parts of the world led to a reconsideration of the rarely questioned colonial discourse and its episteme of progress. The author clarified that the civilizing mission is motivated by economic considerations rather than humanitarian intentions. Eventually, to further underline his argumentation, he asked: "if these things were not so, how comes it about that after a century's contact with Great Britain, the people of the Gold Coast have not a voice in the Government of their own country?"⁸⁴

As indicated by this trajectory, Hudgons' quest for the Golden Stool stimulated a response by the elite reversed to the response delivered in 1874. As a result, there was no celebration regarding the assumed civilizational progress engendered by the British invasion after the expedition in 1900. The British and Governor Hudgson, in contrast, became regarded as an obstacle to progress in Africa, which exemplified the reversal of the colonial discourse's narrative. Similar events in other colonies evinced the elite that British colonialism was informed by economic rather than humanitarian

⁸³ Quasi Mensah, *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, May 30, 1900, 4. CRL.com

⁸⁴ "The Black Man's Burden," *The Gold Coast Aborigines*, July 21, 1900, 2. CRL.com

motivations, indicating that local events were interpreted in a global context. Furthermore, the elite commenced questioning the civilizing mission in general by acknowledging that the interests of the black people were of no concern when Europe decided to export its civilization to Africa. Africans, as a consequence, now have to suffer under colonial powers' aggressive rule disguised as a mechanism to stimulate progress.

Eventually, the accumulation of these events, the war for the Golden Stool, the Transvaal war, the American war over the Philippines, and finally, the continued exclusion of the elite from political institutions caused the shift in paradigm concerning the colonial discourse and the civilizing mission so far mainly propagated by the elites themselves. Although the encountered ruptures altered the colonial discourse to a striking degree, no alternative framework was suggested yet in the context of the Ashanti war. The emergence of alternatives to Western civilization, however, slowly occurred in the education debate.

3.2) Education: "Can they say anything to shape the ideas of humanity in the direction of progress?"

As indicated in the second chapter, the issue of education was central to the new secular hierarchies generated in colonial societies since education enabled colonial subjects to obtain positions as clerks, teachers, lawyers, and merchants. Consequently, the subject of education was frequently debated in the newspaper sphere. In the context of these debates, further discursive alterations occurred, which contributed to the emergence of an alternative that became preferred over the importation of European civilization.

That education was for the elite more than just a means to acquire higher societal positions becomes visible even in the earliest debates about education in the press, which a reader letter published in 1877 in *The Gold Coast Times* exemplifies. The author of the letter stressed the importance of education and gave sophisticated suggestions for the parents, who should observe and evaluate their children's progress in educational matters daily so that eventually, they are able "to send them to High Schools or even to England." Significantly the latter is displayed as an utter necessity for Africa to achieve progress, and since most Britons are unwilling to come to Africa to educate the Africans, the continent's advancement relies upon "her own sons and

daughters." Therefore, the youth should desire to obtain their education in the metropole to supply Africa with African doctors, engineers, scientists, and other professionals contributing to civilizational progress. The author, however, continued to criticize parents who provide education for their children only for their own benefits, whereby the general advancement of the country is neglected. Since not everyone can become a clerk and merchant, as argued by the author, the diversification in terms of professions is essential for the prosperity of the colony. Significantly the latter remark illustrated the elite's intention to foster the emergence of a community in a political sense marked by efforts of collective intentionality. This consideration also demonstrates the elite's social engineering attempts. Eventually, the letter is signed with the name "A Native,"⁸⁵ which should probably indicate the author's affiliation with the natives of West Africa despite his preference for Western-style education.

Illustrated by this letter, early debates surrounding the issue of education tended to stress the importance of a Western-style education, which should at best be obtained in England. English, naturally, was regarded as the best language for instruction. However, this sympathetic attitude towards the introduction of a Western-style educational system must be interpreted against the zeitgeist of the early stages of British colonialism, which was marked by an atmosphere of departure and a spirit of optimism among the elites.⁸⁶

This spirit of optimism from the earlier stages of British colonialism is encapsulated in the debates about the Ordinance on Education issued in 1882 in Lagos and the Gold Coast. An article in *The Lagos Observer*, commenting on the Ordinance, stated that this Ordinance is based on the English educational system, which convinces the author of the prospected success of the measure. However, not every newspaper welcomed this introduction of a Western-style education system. The author referred to a religious contemporary in which the proposed means of the Ordinance were dismissed because it suggested the use of English and the acquisition of English literature. After having exposed this contemporary as being part of a "discipline of quasi philosophers" who "descant, frequently, upon 'the aspirations of our people,'"

⁸⁵ "Education on the Gold Coast," *The Gold Coast Times*, December 5, 1877, 2. CRL.com

⁸⁶ Van Hensbroek labeled this stage of the elite's mindscape as "Mid-Victorian Optimism," see Van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses*, 32-43.

he asked them: "How, then, do they propose to place the rising generation [...] in rapport with the progress of modern thought, with the science and philosophy, the literature and culture of modern civilization?"⁸⁷

Three issues later, under the section "By The Way," a short statement is printed in which the author urged for the employment of Yoruba in educational institutions: "principals, governors, schoolmasters, let not a word of English or French be heard in your seminaries. Tailors, relinquish the European Fashion and adapt your selves to *agbadas*. We are all determined to be Yorubas."⁸⁸ This statement indicates the vital discussion concerning the proposals of the 1882 Ordinance and the openness of the press, which provided the platform for exchanging arguments from both perspectives. It reflected further the intimate relationship between education, language, and identity. While the correspondents of *The Lagos Observer* welcomed an education based on Western principles and the use of English, the school of the quasi-philosophers warned that such a system would threaten their traditional Yoruba identity and replace it with an identity built around a Western lifestyle.

Towards the close of the century, more voices in support of the proposals of the quasi-philosophers became visible within the colonial discourse. For example, in 1896 Lagos, when a training college and industrial institute that intended to focus more on the local conditions and natives' elements opened, an article in *The Lagos Weekly Record* commented that this facility was likely to compensate for the "unsatisfactory results thus far produced on our youth by foreign training." Although having a focal point on industrial training rather than book learning, the author insisted that also intellectual contributions should derive from it. He pointed out the numerous inquiries that have to be carried out in Africa, which Africans themselves can only do. By implementing these inquiries, they can deliver answers to the pressing questions pertaining among intellectuals in Europe and Africa regarding the Africans: "Can they produce any effect upon the thoughts of the world? Can they say anything to shape the ideas of humanity in the direction of progress and thus do something to lift up

⁸⁷ *The Lagos Observer*, July 20, 1882, 2. CRL.com

⁸⁸ *The Lagos Observer*, August 31, 1882, 4. CRL.com

the human race?"⁸⁹ By asking these questions, the author reversed the basic narrative of the civilizing mission and the juxtaposition within the colonial discourse, which regarded Europeans as the teachers and Africans as the pupils. However, an African response to that question had not yet fully emerged.

As elucidated in this chapter, the discourse concerning the issue of education was affected by a trajectory similar to that in the context of the Ashanti wars. Initially, the elite likewise welcomed the introduction of an educational system based on Western principles. With the 1882 adaption of the Ordinance on Education in Lagos and the Gold Coast, however, the first voices appeared that rejected Western education and insisted on including native elements, especially the use of vernaculars as the language of instruction. Although initially rejected by many of the elite, more voices occurred during the turn of the century, which expressed the dissatisfying results thus far produced by foreign learning. In relation to the problem of the "Europeanized Africans," the foreign education system resulted in Africans being alienated from their cultural heritage. This notion indicates the importance of education for the distribution and internalization of the colonial discourse. Eventually, by discussing that issue, the elite soon responded to the question of what Africa could teach the world.

3.3) "The Europeanized-African": "Put the aborigines well in front."

The elite delivered various responses to the political and discursive developments in the British colonies. As rightly argued by van Hensbroek, the lack of record and research in African intellectual history resulted "in the reinvention of positions that were already excellently formulated by African precursors."⁹⁰ These positions, later reinvented by post-colonial thinkers such as Fanon, were precisely the African response to the problem of the "Europeanized African." Additionally, these responses constituted the alternative frame of reference that, in congruence with Nandy's suggestion, posed the main threat to colonialism and the colonial discourse. Through this alternative frame of reference, the shared perspective that rendered colonialism necessary for progress in Africa diminished. The new discursive responses, therefore,

⁸⁹ "The Lagos Training College and Industrial Institute," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, July 4, 1896, 4. CRL.com

⁹⁰ Van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses*, 2.

went in tandem with a reevaluation of Western civilization in general and a re-appreciation of African civilization in particular.

The first indicator of this discursive development is a reader letter published in *The Lagos Observer* in April 1887. In this letter, signed with "A Lover of His Country," the author examined the effects of European civilization upon the African and stated that "we are told by competent authorities that the European system of civilization [...] tends [...] to enfeeble our manhood and destroy our race, and yet the subject has never been generally considered in all its serious bearings." According to the author, the problem is that in West Africa, the common conception of civilization "seems to be a simple copying after or imitation of European excellence." The natives, consequently, wear European clothes unsuited for the African climate merely to imply the civility of the wearer. Significantly this habit caused physical damage, which is illustrated by a juxtaposition of the life duration of natives in the interior and the civilized natives, with the former having greater longevity than the latter. To show an alternative to this trajectory, the author referred to India as an example of a culture faced with similar threats, which could maintain the primary aspects of its cultural identity, such as language, dress, and customs.⁹¹

As implied by this reader's letter, the African response to the colonial discourse, which rendered the unreflective importing of European civilization undesirable, occurred relatively early but was not accompanied by serious discussions. However, in the following years, significantly towards the close of the century, new discursive responses in a similar fashion were published more frequently.

One possible response to the issue of the "Europeanized African" and the associated importation of Western civilization was finding a middle way that does provide the preservation of African concepts and values while inserting Western concepts and values suited for the African life. An article in *The Lagos Weekly Record* tried to argue for such a mingling approach. Initially, the article again stated the devastating effects of European civilization upon the colonial subjects, which translated into an ongoing disintegration of African societies and impaired the longevity of the natives. This

⁹¹ A Lover of His Country [pseud.], *The Lagos Observer*, April 16, 1887, 3-4. CRL.com

process of alienation results in "a chaotic and hybrid pile, which is neither European nor Native, but is equally disappointing from the standpoint of either of both."

To counteract this development, the author suggested that only those elements of European civilization should be adapted, which do not harm the social equilibrium of native society. In that matter, the article referred to Japan: "We might borrow a leaf from Japan – Japan has only exercised the selective and accumulative faculties. She has no barren product of hybridization." However, to enable such a preservational approach, the Africans have to revert to their cultural heritage. In that regard, the author points out a new movement of African self-realization, which is emerging in West Africa, that contributes to enabling such a mingling approach.⁹² The relevance of Japan as a positive example cannot be overemphasized. In the Meiji era, Japan modernized by importing certain aspects of Western civilization while consolidating its traditional power institutions. It could thus successfully transform from a rural-based society into a central organized industrial state within a few years.⁹³ Furthermore, the reference to Japan, like the reference to India, elucidates the global awareness of the elite, who frequently reached out to other regions for inspiration or identification of similar events and tendencies that influenced their thoughts on specific subjects.

However, the movement of African self-realization mentioned in the 1904 article existed before this publication. This movement, as previously indicated, went in conjunction with a reevaluation of the formerly praised Western civilization and delivered an answer to the question of what Africa has to teach to the world. Interestingly, the emergence of this discursive response was enabled through the construction of a discourse concerning Western societies that structurally mirrored the colonial discourse that constructed Africa as the "other" in European minds.

In 1897, *The Lagos Weekly Record* published an article titled "As Others See Us," in which an alternative to importing European civilization is delivered. After exposing authors like Richard Burton for their one-sided depiction of Africans, the author

⁹² "The Clash of Cultures," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, August 27, 1904, 4. CRL.com

⁹³ See Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan's Meiji Restoration in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 217), 207.

stated that their accusations were not without foundation. This foundation was the odd manner of some wealthy Africans of the prior generation, who acted like Europeans because they acquired money. However, the author warned, "One of the most pernicious impressions for the so-called civilized African to overcome is that he is not a European." To terminate this trajectory, he suggested a diametral approach to what was until then assumed to be the preferred development of Africa: "The work of reform for us is back to the fathers – a backward but upward move." The aborigine is now at the new forefront of civilization in Africa. Eventually, the article closed with a strong statement: "Put the aborigines well in front, which means, go back to the simplicity of your fathers – go back to health and life and continuity."⁹⁴

In this article, the author reversed one central assumption of the colonial discourse: the differences that characterized the "other" were not deficits that had to be eradicated but rather desirable properties which the Africans should prefer over the superficial life of European civilization. The re-appreciation of their African heritage was further reflected in the public announcements of name changes, in which people with Western names publicly declared their switch to African names.⁹⁵ However, the accompanied renouncement of European life is better demonstrated in other articles.

The most important contribution in that matter was the work of Edward Blyden. His "Africa Life and Customs" was initially published as an article series in *The Sierra Leone Weeks* and demonstrated that African civilization has, in many instances, solutions for the problems deriving from European civilization.⁹⁶ For example, in his third article, Blyden explained why the African marriage system is better than Europe's. In Europe, the risk of not getting married runs high since the arranged marriage system is not as popular as in Africa. Meanwhile, in Africa, the arranged marriage system is a crucial factor in the social fabric and ensures every woman gets a responsible husband.⁹⁷ This discursive development, labelled as "African Regeneration" discourse by van Hensbroek,⁹⁸ placed the African customs and institutions that were rendered

⁹⁴ "As Others See Us," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, June 5, 1897, 4. [CRL.com](#)

⁹⁵ See for instance, *The Lagos Weekly Record*, August 4, 1900, 6. Here Benjamin S. Sheppard declared that he will change his name to Benjamin A. Dado-Alaba. [CRL.com](#)

⁹⁶ See van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses*, 50.

⁹⁷ "African Life and Customs, Nr. 3," *The Sierra Leone Weekly News*, October 5, 1907, 4-5. [CRL.com](#)

⁹⁸ See van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses*, 43-53.

pejorative in the colonial discourse over the customs and institutions introduced by the civilizing mission. By delivering his juxtapositions of European and African civilizations, Blyden enabled Africans to perceive the latter's benefits.

In the following years, more voices occurred that preferred the African way of life over the European counterpart. Western voices, too, played a vital role in the formation of this discourse. For instance, in 1911, *The Lagos Weekly Record* published an article named "West Africa's Peril," in which quotations from Edward Morel were mobilized to display the superiority of African social life. According to Morel, the African's life is in congruence with nature and has thus an existing system of morals since "Human, which is of nature, is, as nature itself, moral." The half-naked African girl is more modest than the extravagant lady walking on Bond Street. These statements from Morel and other sources cited in the article lead to the conclusion that African institutions are "models of that perfection attainable by man." They enable the people to live a simple, nature-orientated, and spiritual life without the corruption of the mind caused by the desire to possess and enrich oneself.⁹⁹ Again, the author reversed the colonial discourse's narrative and placed African civilization and its moral system over that of European civilization, which was construed in the colonial discourse as the champion of morality.

Other events convinced the elite further of the immorality of European civilization. An article in *The Lagos Weekly Record* entitled "Europe and Africa" demonstrated this moral inferiority by stating: "The attitude of Europe towards Africa in recent years, is unquestionable one of wholesale aggression and violence." He referred to the atrocities perpetrated in South Africa and the Congo to elucidate this point. Regardless of the various atrocities committed toward Africans in different colonies, the Africans maintained their inner humanity and continued to exercise the golden rule of the Bible, "which teaches men to do unto others as he would have others do unto him." Eventually, considering this preservation, the author suggested that "perhaps [...] the African must devolve the duty of teaching Europe that higher form of practical Christianity of which she shows to be so palpably lacking in her attitude to Africa."¹⁰⁰ Here

⁹⁹ "West African's Peril," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, June 10, 1911, 4. [CRL.com](#)

¹⁰⁰ "Europe and Africa," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, May 22, 1909, 4-5. [CRL.com](#)

again, the juxtaposition of the colonial discourse that depicted Europe as the educator and Africa as the to be educated is reversed. Regarding current events in the colonies and the conduct of colonialism in general, the elite suggested that Africa should educate Europe on the actual Christian values and spirituality.

In that context, the elite likewise constructed a simplified picture of Western societies, which is best illustrated by the last article that will be analyzed in this paper. The article entitled "The Anglicized African and his Relation to his People," urged for a re-alliance of the Anglicized African with his own people. By appearing direct to the concerned portion, he stated: "no man has said the last word for the world, and it may be that the despised life customs of the African will, after all, prove to be the most potential for good for man." He continued by describing the effects of European civilization, which installs a spirit of constant dissatisfaction because the European can get no material content and is always thriving for more than he has. However, the author assured that "human life means more than rushing towards money," and the simple life of the Africans proves to produce more happiness than the convenient life of Europeans, who, with their lifestyle and principles, nearly effaced God with its people. Here the Africans should intervene and teach Europe the spirituality, which is lost due to the excesses of European civilization.¹⁰¹

As indicated in this last chapter, the elite's response to the colonial discourse altered dramatically toward the close of the century. This alteration was caused by the ruptures displayed throughout this paper. However, although this new "African Regeneration" discourse served a liberation purpose and enabled the elite to re-appreciate their African heritage and question their acquired identity strongly associated with Western civilization and the British Empire, it was likewise based on a simplified picture¹⁰² operating on two levels. While, according to this discourse, the Africans live a spiritual-orientated life, in which metaphysical desires are placed above material satisfaction, are the Western societies characterized by their spiritual emptiness, moral corruption, and constant rush toward more possession. Therefore, the later response of the elite lacked an understanding of the complexity of African life and construed a

¹⁰¹ "The Anglicised African and his Relation to his People," *The Lagos Weekly Record*, October 19, 1912, 4. CRL.com

¹⁰² See Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 77.

similar totalizing picture of Africa "as the spiritual and pastoral counterpoint to Europe's industrial atheism."¹⁰³

Moreover, a likewise totalizing picture of Western societies was required to enable such a perspective. From a theoretical standpoint, this discourse employed the same tactics as the discourses labelled as *Orientalism*, respectively *Africanism*. In allusion to these concepts, such a discursive picture is frameable as *Occidentalism*, a phenomenon mainly associated with the ideology of states like Iran.¹⁰⁴ The employment of the same discursive instruments that enabled the emergence of the colonial discourse served the same intention: constructing an "other" to enable the constitution of a stable identity in contrast to that other. This identity formation *ex negativo* does validate the notion that the power embedded in discourses is pervasive since to subvert that power, one can never move outside of these discourses,¹⁰⁵ which elucidates the dialectic attached to this process of subversion. The elite, too, needed a totalizing discursive picture in which Europe was imagined as a homogenous entity characterized by spiritual degeneration and corruption of the mind. Eventually, this picture enabled the elite to reverse the colonial discourse's narrative and place the Africans in the position of educators for Europe. To achieve this discursive reversal, they had to recognize the essence of the colonial discourse: difference. However, the differences were no longer regarded as deficits but as valuable differences that should be maintained rather than eradicated. Following Nandy, this discursive development implied the moral inferiority of the colonizers and diminished the shared perspective regarding the preferable way of progress in Africa.

4.) Conclusion: Another Story of Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism

This thesis attempted to tackle the justified accusations against colonial discourse theory by overthrowing the generalization that prevailed in this approach and by indicating the agency colonial subjects possessed in the formation, distribution, and

¹⁰³ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰⁴ See for example, Shalaleh Zabardast, "Flourishing of Occidentalism in Iran after Cultural Revolution," *Journal of Gazi Academic View* 9, no.17 (December 2015), 216-217.

<https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=685051>

¹⁰⁵ See Derek Hook, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power* (Basingstoke a.o.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 101.

alteration of the colonial discourse in British West Africa. By employing this theoretical approach in a specific socio-historical context, I essayed to analyze the colonial discourse in its practical setting, thereby acknowledging that this discourse was not a one-sided emanation from the colonizers to the colonized but instead embedded in an ongoing process of negotiation. However, given the specific West African context regarding the civilizing mission, which was conducted by the colonial elite and the missionaries rather than by the colonial administration, I showed how and why the civilizing mission changed and eventually reversed, at least from a theoretical perspective. Thus, I indicated that the colonial elite were neither solely agents of the colonial power nor vehement nationalist but that their discursive response was determined by the socio-historical context in which it occurred.

To achieve this analytical task, newspapers, often neglected by colonial discourse literature, served as the central source material. Regarding the rarity of African voices that can be detected in the colonial discourse, this source corpus enabled me to grasp and analyze the participation of colonial subjects in the colonial discourse that had the opportunities to do so. In the West African case, it was the colonial elite that, due to their shared background related to missionary education and commercial activities, had the opportunity to distribute, participate, and challenge the colonial discourse via their newspapers. However, the delivered responses cannot be framed as representative since most colonial subjects had neither access to newspapers nor the opportunity to participate. The editors nevertheless frequently encouraged every educated native to participate in their endeavor to construe a colonial public sphere in which the development in the colonies could be commentated on, debated, and questioned.

This colonial public sphere was defined by the editors in striking reminiscence to Habermas' definition of a public sphere. They achieved the functioning of a debate marked by the absence of hierarchical structures through the use of anonymity. Moreover, the relatively easy censorship laws and the reluctance of the governors to apply them ensured that the press could advance to the most critical medium in British West Africa. The colonial public sphere produced by the newspapers, although in a limited sense, enabled the emergence of new discourses as responses to the

colonial discourse in West Africa. A further contribution to the emergence of critical responses was the assumption that since the elite were colonial subjects of the British Empire, the liberties enshrined in the British constitution, significantly the liberty of the press, pertained to them too. Therefore, the elite preferred the British system of colonialism over that of other colonial powers.

With that context in mind, I analyzed the African responses to three relevant themes: The Ashanti wars, education, and the problem of the "Europeanized African" and could detect similar tendencies in the first two subjects. For instance, concerning the Ashanti war in 1874, the elite initially welcomed the subjection of the Ashanti and justified their gaze with rhetoric that mirrored the colonial discourse and the civilizing mission to a fascinating degree. With the quest for the Golden Stool and the associated rebellion in 1900, the elite, however, renounced British conduct and questioned the humanitarian motives the Britains proscribed themselves.

Likewise, regarding the issue of education, the elite initially urged the colonial government to introduce a state-supported educational system based on a Western curriculum. With the adaption of the Ordinance on Education 1882 in the Gold Coast and Lagos, the first voices, labelled as a "school of quasi-philosophers," stressed the importance of establishing an educational system that includes native elements. Although initially rejected by most elite members, toward the close of the century, more articles in favor of the proposals of the "quasi-philosophers" occurred.

The early support for British colonial measures, the accompanying distribution of the colonial discourse, and the conduct of the elite's civilizing mission were caused by their biographical background, having placed them at the peak of the new colonial society marked by new secular hierarchies. However, the ruptures identified throughout this work, such as the quest for the Golden Stool, the Transvaal war, similar imperialist wars, atrocities committed in the Congo, and the generally aggressive proceeding of European colonial powers in Africa, led to a reconsideration of the previously embraced episteme of progress orientated on Western civilization. Still, the most significant rupture that triggered discursive alterations was the continued exclusion of the elite from any political institution.

Eventually, this development culminated in the emergence of the "African Regeneration" discourse, through which the "Europeanized African" problem sought to be solved. With a tremendous reminiscence of later post-colonial writes, the elite acknowledged that blindly imitating European values and manners caused a process of alienation resulting in a physical and psychological degeneration, which, therefore, must be reversed. To establish the African civilization as a valid alternative to its Western counterpart, the elite likewise produced a totalizing discourse that depicted Western societies as marked by spiritual emptiness and a constant preference for material satisfaction over spiritual needs. In that context, the colonial discourse's narrative reversed, and the elite argued that Africa had to teach Europe the spirituality it lost.

Despite the similar simplifications of the "African Regeneration" discourse, it was this discourse that enabled, following Nandy, the emergence of an alternative frame of reference that abolished the aspects of the colonial discourse shared by the elite and European colonialists. Although this development did not translate into any political outcome, it marked a crucial stage of the elite's mindscape, especially regarding the reinvention of their positions by later post-colonial thinkers. Thus, the discursive developments reconstructed in this paper paved the way for later nationalist and self-realization movements in Africa. Finally, the whole trajectory reconstructed in this paper could be labelled in allusion to Nandy as another story of loss and recovery of self under colonialism.

The study of colonial print cultures is gradually gaining more importance in historical inquiries concerned with colonialism. Newspapers, however, are still seldom used as a broad source material corpus. Given their accessibility for scholars worldwide, more research into that fascinating aspect of colonial history is likely to follow in subsequent years. Thus, if scholars recognized the limitations of these sources in terms of representativity, the newspapers will prove to be invaluable sources to detect African perspectives on other subjects, such as jurisdiction, slavery, religion, corruption, diaspora connections and many more.

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