

# Kitabkhana

A Discussion with Kai Kresse, Lakshmi Subramanian, Goolam Vahed,  
Gail M. Presbey, James R. Brennan, and Anne K. Bang

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## Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading

By Isabel Hofmeyr

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## Introduction: Slow Reading in an Ever-Faster World

Gandhi's African-Based *Indian Opinion*

With her most recent book, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*, Isabel Hofmeyr makes a significant contribution to several fields of research within and beyond the wider field of Indian Ocean studies. This she has helped shape over recent years, from a South Africa–based perspective that engages largely with transnational connections to India and conceptually draws from discussions of Atlantic connections while building critical perspectives on colonial and postcolonial scenarios and the related social biographies of persons, projects, and texts.<sup>1</sup>

The following five commentaries engage in critical contextual discussion of *Gandhi's Printing Press*, teasing out and further problematizing some of its key topical, conceptual, and methodological themes from comparative perspectives that span regions and disciplines. Overall, these discussions convey a sense of the scope and wealth of ideas that Hofmeyr presents in her study of the South African–based Gandhi as moralizing educational editor and increasingly influential social activist; and they also provide complementary information on different aspects of his engagement while sketching out broader comparative horizons with a view to colonial India, East Africa, and the wider Muslim world.

From these angles, they also contextualize Hofmeyr's book within the larger field of Gandhi studies, with a view to the specific engagements relevant to their strands of discussion, by way of close readings of the research literature of Gandhi in South Africa, for instance, and through comparative reference to some of the recent biographically focused publications. Specific further internal points of debate in other subfields of Gandhi studies are not really main points of reference here. In addition to discussing the South African contexts of the production and reception of Gandhi's texts, the contributors sensitively follow Hofmeyr's main conceptual strands, those of printing cultures and the conceptualization and circulation of texts that address transnational publics across continents. The essays here go beyond

1. See Hofmeyr and Williams, *South Africa and India*. See also Hofmeyr, "The Complicating Sea"; Hofmeyr, "Universalizing the Indian Ocean"; and Hofmeyr, "The Black Atlantic Meets the Indian Ocean."

Anglophone (and Gujarati) sources and resources, involving related texts in Hindi, Swahili, and Arabic, thus placing the comparative discussion of the Gandhian South African publishing project emphatically within a wider multilingual world.

In previous work feeding into this book, Hofmeyr provided her own take on a conceptual positioning of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* and its South African readers,<sup>2</sup> while her recent research more widely speaking has been feeding into the fast-growing Indian Ocean research literature. Her writings offer original reflections on the Indian Ocean arena also as an intellectual space that provides opportunity to fundamentally rethink key terms for conceptualizing society in context, with a view to regional specifics and differences and a critical eye to global power relationships. Hofmeyr has commented on the "heuristic power" of thinking with the Indian Ocean, in order to fruitfully "complicate received paradigms and academic traditions."<sup>3</sup> Her involvement in collaborative research activities has also been significant, building and nurturing largely South-South oriented research networks in this growing field of trans-regional studies, resulting in a number of related topical publications.<sup>4</sup>

Her book on Gandhi's printing press project in South Africa builds and expands upon her earlier book, *The Portable Bunyan*, on the trans-regional flows, social impacts, and cultural translations and adaptations of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as a classic traveling text of Christian Protestant missionary work and education during the British colonial era.<sup>5</sup> While we can see affinities between these two books, in terms of method and the transnational perspectives employed, on text circulation and reading cultures in changing local contexts, in this new book Hofmeyr has pursued an original and exciting research agenda on Gandhi and his South African-based *Indian Opinion*: a newspaper addressing colonial subjects from the subcontinent in Africa and beyond, edited by a globally recognized figure of anticolonial resistance whose significance and appeal cannot be overstated. Apart from providing insightful explo-

rations on Gandhi's editorial techniques—of cut-and-paste collage, assemblage, and commentary in the presentation of translated and abbreviated educational (often moralizing) texts—Hofmeyr pursues this project also on the basis that Gandhi's English writings (and especially *Indian Opinion*) had not been explored as thoroughly as his biography and his Gujarati writings.

*Gandhi's Printing Press* is masterfully focused and well written, presenting arguments worked out from within Gandhi's texts, (re)read in context. The slow reading theme, which was developed by Gandhi himself, in conscious contrast to an ever-speedier world (of communication and transport), is particularly stimulating for us today, as all kinds of new-media advances and changes in human interaction are taking place. These are issues readily picked up by our commentators here. Also, the pronounced anticopyright attitude that Gandhi pushed for, as a kind of "early Wikipedian" (194), is examined from a contemporary perspective in Goolam Vahed's essay. Finally, Hofmeyr's rereading of the "colonial-born" category within the imperial social administration, for South Asians born on one side of the colonially ruled (British) Indian Ocean and traveling across, southward, to another, asks for reconsideration, as we can see in Lakshmi Subramanian's contribution.

The five commentaries on Hofmeyr's book presented here overlap and complement each other well, both thematically and with their disciplinary and regional perspectives. This makes for a rich and lively reading. Remarkably, four of our five commentators are historians, of South Asia (Subramanian), South Africa (Vahed), and East Africa (James Brennan and Anne Bang) and their respective related Indian Ocean histories. Our fifth contributor is a philosopher who has heavily invested in research on Gandhi and issues of justice and nonviolence (Gail Presbey).

First, Subramanian leads us into a contextualizing discussion of the colonial world linking up South Africa and India at the time of Gandhi's *Indian Opinion* and its involvement in passive resistance against the British authorities on South

2. See Hofmeyr, "Violent Texts, Vulnerable Readers."

3. Hofmeyr et al., "Introduction," 14.

4. See Hofmeyr and Williams, *South Africa and India*, and Hofmeyr, *Eyes across the Water*.

5. See Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*.

African soil (1903–14). She flags Hofmeyr’s use of the category colonial born as able to “simultaneously illustrate the vertical and horizontal linkages of empire and thereby disrupt its overly centrist basis.” This creates an ambivalent yet analytically intriguing “sense of messy entanglement” that can usefully be explored further. She also comments on Gandhi’s silence on the caste question—in which he differed from other Indian publishers in the diaspora—as something that Hofmeyr omits.

Vahed emphasizes specific takes of contextualization in the particular South African settings of Gandhi’s printing press project at the time. Giving us an additional sense of the kinds of mediating work that Gandhi performed in his presentation of translations and quotations in *Indian Opinion*, he focuses on the discursive creation of Indianness as a distinct category for colonial South Asian subjects who were deemed to be superior (within the colonial hierarchy of civilizations) to the supposedly more lowly African “natives.” Vahed takes issue with the implicit (and also explicit) racial tones that Gandhi used, claiming that more critical light could have been shed on this.

In contrast, Presbey presents a different understanding of Gandhi’s view of race in the South African context. From her reading of the sources, she shows that more could and should have been said on the ways in which Gandhi collaborated with leading African political activists, such as John Dube, the founding president of the precursor organization to the African National Congress (whose political newspaper was printed on Gandhi’s press before *Indian Opinion*), and Dr. Abdullah Abdulrahman, leader of the African Political Organization (whom Gandhi got to know well, and whose newspaper campaigned for the use of Gandhian methods in political struggle). Presbey’s second main point is that the historical contribution by women needs to be acknowledged, as well as their involvement in the running of Gandhi’s newspaper. There were African and Indian groups who in separate nonviolent protests in 1913 followed the example of the British suffragettes (that Gandhi also had highlighted in *Indian Opinion*), against new racial restrictions to full political participation. Through both Vahed’s and Presbey’s pieces, we obtain a richer picture of the relevant South African political networks and contexts.

Brennan provides us with an illustrative case of contrast and comparison from colonial Tanganyika, where a young, dedicated Gandhi supporter of Gujarati origin pursues his own printing press experiment in Dar es Salaam, pushing Gandhi’s cause. In his discussion of Gandhi’s editorial techniques, Brennan provides a pronounced pragmatic interpretation, relating them to the common practical needs of small and underfunded presses to collect, compile, and rehash bits of news from other sources while seeking to avoid responsibility for potential copyright infringements. Thus economic limitations and necessity rather than moral idealism are seen as the driving force of the textual shaping of *Indian Opinion*.

Finally, Bang brings home the point that the comparative resonance and inspiration of Hofmeyr’s book clearly go beyond the communal limits of language, ethnicity, and religion. For her, as a researcher working mainly on Sufi intellectual networks of the Hadrami communities spread around the southwestern Indian Ocean, Hofmeyr offers stimulating methodological and conceptual thinking on writing and textual circulation with a view to social change. Bang’s vivid comparative discussion linking over to the field of Islamic Arabic texts that are circulating and traveling in and across the Indian Ocean is insightful, to the point, and in itself stimulating, as she is reflecting upon the complex relationships among translations, transmissions, diffusions, and disseminations of texts.

Taken together, these five commentaries thoughtfully illuminate and underline the richness of *Gandhi’s Printing Press*. While engaging critically and fruitfully with it from diverse yet overlapping angles, they illustrate the wealth of this clearly written and concisely argued book, and they appeal to the reader to turn to further experiments in slow reading. ■■■■

—Kai Kresse

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## READING GANDHI

Lakshmi Subramanian

*Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*, by Isabel Hofmeyr, is a work of exemplary writing. It brings out lucidly and evocatively the story of Gandhi's printing experiences, intentions, and experiments in South Africa—a little-known story in India—to reflect on the articulation of Gandhi's meditations on sovereignty, national imaginings, and citizenship both as ideas and practices. In this work, the emphasis is very much on praxis, on the act of slow, deliberate reading and thoughtful reflection that Gandhi cultivated and adopted as key conditions toward the realization of truth that required a continual clearing of mental cobwebs. It was to this end that he adopted a range of textual practices as editor of *Indian Opinion* to craft a vi-

sion of India that was not of the "Greater India" variety yet adopted a range of affective elements to constitute Indianness.

A careful reading of Hofmeyr's work, however, reveals a number of dimensions that go beyond her stated concern, which is to look at Gandhi's textual practices in South Africa and to recuperate from that a more layered understanding of Gandhian ideas of sovereignty and Indianness with all its inconsistencies and contradictions. It is this feature that makes the book accessible and of interest to those in a variety of fields. It is at once an anatomy of a printing press and of a periodical, *Indian Opinion*, and it offers a close study of Gandhi's textual experimentation that aimed to create an unusual community of truth-seeking readers, as it is an attempt to conceptualize the social world of empire in the Indian Ocean, a world of interactions among ideas, institutions, and individuals that underscored a particular brand of cosmopolitanism. This feature Hofmeyr attempts to capture and theorize by the deployment of the category "colonial born," which conveyed a duality of identity that was seemingly more expansive and cosmopolitan than categories such as Indians overseas or Indians outside India. This brand of cosmopolitanism was not of Kantian provenance, but one of shared affect and sensibilities growing out of long periods of complex, and not always complementary, interactions in the space of empire, which was simultaneously territorial and not. The sharing of an imperial space was productive of a sensibility that found expression in a range of practices among immigrants that enabled a new kind of engagement with old ideas of sovereignty, citizenship, and national identities. These practices, of course, predated formal empire—a process that escapes Hofmeyr's scrutiny and to which I will draw attention below.

But let us for the moment understand the idea of the colonial born as Hofmeyr deploys it, and look at the context in which this idea as a journalistic category to accommodate immigrants emerged. Thanks to the scholarship of Mark Ravinder Frost, C. A. Bayly, Leila Fawaz, Nile Green, and Tim Harper, we have a clear sense of the way associational politics emerged in Indian Ocean port cities that over time coalesced into a vast network where ideas and information, personnel, and

even technology could circulate.<sup>1</sup> These generated important ideational initiatives of what one may call an Indian Ocean public opinion, one that set up a complex dialogue with notions of governmentality and citizenship rights and created a demotic public and transnational identities. Spearheaded largely by elite publicists—whose engagement was calibrated by diverse and often inconsistent considerations of intent, ideology, and experience—the formation of this opinion from the late nineteenth century involved a complex interplay of the print market and enterprise, of individual vision and collective responsibility, of nationalist compulsions and inchoate transnational aspirations. The creation of a public opinion went hand in hand with other significant sociological developments, namely a renewed interest among immigrant groups in religion, language, cultural practices, and consumption, all of which subtly and continuously changed registers of Indianness. Hofmeyr's narrative of one specific press and periodical and one rather special editor cannot, therefore, be detached from this larger story of the Indian Ocean public sphere and journalism. It is in that context that important questions come to the surface.

What, for instance, was the prehistory of formal print culture in Africa? Or, to put it more simply, what were the issues that immediately made for the staple of the early pioneers of printing and publishing? Did the experience of labor (forced) and that of capital (voluntary and promoted by British colonial expansion) provide an a priori agenda for editors, publishers, and contributors who could conflate, almost by default, issues of labor and its unfair treatment with national degradation, and of capital and enterprise with national pride and demand for imperial citizenship? Did participation in the global market for immigration—and the related services of interpretation and translation—provide a pool of readers, editors, publicists, and contributors an agenda for reflection? Did this in any sense work against earlier modalities of socialization and inclusive experiences of partici-

pating in a third space? These questions certainly arise if we recall how in spaces like the Straits settlements there had been an older, rich network of contacts and conversations, how the Hadramis and Chulias set up small outfits for preparing mercantile contracts and participating in a robust public sphere and doing so within an Islamic template.<sup>2</sup> One would assume that for East Africa, too, which had a rich history of multi-community interactions and of participation in what is now called legal pluralism, there would have been possibilities of collective reflection about community, ethnicity, and cosmopolitanism. I pose these questions not so much to interrogate empire as that enabling institutional and imaginative space to conceptualize difference and identity as to identify those specific elements that made up the agenda of most periodicals and whether this involved a complete break with earlier experiences. Did this result in a very distinct condition that could be encapsulated in the idea of the colonial born? It would appear that living and working in empire produced ambiguity as a necessary precondition to any subjectivity, an ambiguity Hofmeyr locates in the use of the category of the colonial born.

The deployment and amplification of this category is in fact one of the most striking contributions of the book, and it is of enormous help to any scholar trying to make his or her way through the dense and condensed prose of Indian Ocean journalism. Hofmeyr's management of the newspaper archive is highly skilled as she works her way through the output to make sense of the items that made up the periodical Gandhi edited, to find meanings revealed in the selection of themes, and to give us a narrative that helps us speculate on how editors and readers experienced politics from a location that they had begun to identify as their immediate home, but one that was physically severed from their original homeland. Was the paper's very selection of themes and the simultaneous weaving of concerns directed toward India and toward the immediate local situation included

1. See, for example, Frost, "Wider Opportunities"; Harper, "Empire, Diaspora, and the Languages of Globalism"; Green, "Saints, Rebels, and Booksellers"; and Gupta et al., *Eyes across the Water*, 3–7.

2. See Subramanian, "Commerce, Circulation, and Consumption."

in what Hofmeyr calls the colonial born? What did colonial born imply? How was it different from the other appellations that came into vogue at a time when more than three million Indians spread over a belt that ran around “the Equator from the North Atlantic over the Indian Ocean to the South Pacific”?<sup>3</sup>

In one sense the use of the word *colonial* in several hyphenated terms and titles (the *Colonial-Indian News* is an example) was part of an emerging vocabulary to depict the reality of the Indian immigrant outside India and was not in any way a simulacrum. “Indians outside India,” “Overseas Indians,” and “Indians Abroad” were all terms that came into vogue in the public domain, especially in journalism, and were intended to convey two things: (1) the reality of an identity that harked back to India not only as a map space but also as a civilizational entity, to which the subject belonged, and (2) the reality of an external-colonial regime of power that not only defined a subordinate status but also gave the subject bearer a recognized and even legitimate location within a larger space. The idea of location was, of course, much more explicit in the other terms that were used, but *colonial* had many complex connotations. Thus, as Hofmeyr argues in the book’s introduction, the use of the colonial born as an analytical concept can do many useful things. For one, it can simultaneously illustrate the vertical and horizontal linkages of empire and thereby disrupt its overly centrist bias. There is a sense of messy entanglement in the idea of the colonial born—of being a subject within an empire and of being sovereign within a domain that could not be encapsulated exclusively in territoriality. It was this idea that Gandhi experimented with, adopted, and amplified quite assiduously, even if as a preparatory exercise in trying to craft a distilled and lucid idea of Indianness.

How was colonial born (Indian) different from, say, Greater Indian? Greater India, as we shall have occasion to reflect on later, was a concept that was floated by Indian intellectuals seeking to validate ancient India’s cultural influence in countries in Southeast Asia, and it became thereafter an idea around which hypernationalist aspirations coalesced. The idea had multiple public

lives, including a journalistic one, and was often invoked to emphasize the value of the labor of Indian emigrants. How the idea of the colonial born was different from that of the Greater Indian is a question that one could ask of Hofmeyr’s larger formulation, for if Gandhi was in fact trying to project a particular sense of India and to craft a responsible Indian reader who would thoughtfully probe into issues of sovereignty and selfhood, then the question of abandoning the aggressive intent of the Greater India idea would become important. It is a question that merits some consideration, especially if we consider how Gandhi through the pamphlet publication scheme and *Indian Opinion* persevered in creating India through the prism of epics suitably adapted for multiple audiences, multiple scripts, multiple languages—Gujarati, Tamil, Hindi, and English (although this was jettisoned later)—though surprisingly not specifically concerned with caste. Equally conspicuous was the absence of the African and his representation as being outside the civilizational order. But even more striking as a strategic device was Gandhi’s minimal definition of an Indian, who in theory was someone who simply pursued the truth and practiced self-rule. This strategic leap was exemplified in the *Hind Swaraj*, which Hofmeyr analyzes incisively and elegantly.

But for the moment, let us examine the value of the colonial-born category in understanding both the printing press experiment of Gandhi and the dense web of journalistic matter not just of *Indian Opinion*, but of all papers in Africa and elsewhere that superficially resemble *Indian Opinion*, even if their editors were not as enamored of slow reading as Gandhi. As an explanatory category, colonial born was useful in reconciling and adjusting to difference, while doubling as shorthand for particular varieties of social practice. This was especially and immediately visible in the world of print and journalism. In the case of Gandhi’s experiments, at a very practical level, the setting up of the press and paper in the Phoenix ashram involved simple, quotidian adaptations and borrowings—of personnel and technical skills and of forms like the pamphlets—and plugging into a larger repertoire of available material, and in the

3. Rajagopal, preface to *Indians Overseas*.

process deliberately employing radical ideas about copyright. Predictably, like other periodicals of the times, the layout of *Indian Opinion* was a collage of dense summaries, didactic articles, and bylines on visits by celebrities and famous individuals. This was not unusual—a look at other contemporary dailies and weeklies, even those that were not sympathetic to Gandhi's cause, adopted the same format, and one suspects that this was inevitable. And yet Hofmeyr's reading brings out what was different about *Indian Opinion* and this seems very much to lie in the way Gandhi thought of reading and editing practices. The contrast is immediately clear when one looks at a periodical like P. S. Aiyer's *South African Chronicle*, a weekly in Tamil and English (published every Saturday), which in its June 27, 1908, editorial stated how in its English column it was proposing to publish "a racy commentary on the current news of the week."<sup>4</sup> Here the emphasis was on a zestful summary that could command the reader's attention, while for Gandhi, the emphasis was on a slow process of reading, thinking, and debating that would also, as Hofmeyr says, "de-instrumentalize time." Thus *Indian Opinion* "specialized in uneven reading surfaces across which one could not hurtle" (90). Just how this actually worked, of course, is harder to recuperate and something that Hofmeyr does not follow up on.

Yet another point of sharp contrast between *Indian Opinion* and other periodicals was of course the very idea of India that Gandhi helped summarize through pamphlets. Gandhi's vision did not match the trope of Greater India that dominated journalism in the 1930s and 1940s. Developed originally by Indian scholars in collaboration with French Indologists, the idea represented one of the many ways of imagining Indic civilization, on the idea of India as a source of a great pan-Asian mission of overseas cultural diffusion in ancient times.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi emphasized and encouraged enterprise, especially those initiatives that fostered cultural and ethical exchanges embodying the spirit of Indian civilization, spreading ideas not in the spirit of aggression and conquest but in that of dif-

fusion, of a peaceful and benevolent imperialism. The idea moved into the journalistic circuit as well, often invoked by editors and consumed by a considerable number of readers. Interestingly, even if predictably, the idea of Greater India as a political category in journalistic circles was intended to convey pride in Indian settlement overseas, which was underwritten in many cases by enterprising men of capital. The pride was, however, not unqualified; in fact, it was punctuated by a deep sense of regret and reflection on the part of publicists and editors on the plight and wretchedness of Indian labor—giving way to the same ambiguity that Hofmeyr notes in her use of the words "colonial born."

The public and multiple lives of the Greater India idea offer a useful counterpoise to the idea of India that Gandhi summarized through his pamphlets. For editors like Bhavani Dayal (editor of the *Hindi*) and Banarsidas Chaturvedi (editor of the Hindi monthly *Vishal Bharat*), Greater India was a useful category to make sense of the dual aspects of Indian migrations—of successful enterprise and of degraded labor. Thus, writing on the duties of Indians toward overseas Indians for the February 1928 issue of *Vishal Bharat*, Dayal referred to two notions of Greater India, one that he extolled and the other that he abhorred. The former quite predictably alluded to the precolonial network of Hindu-Buddhist cultural connections and continuities across the Indian Ocean while the latter embodied the reality of colonial subjugation, when Indians were in his words, "moved by the foreign state and merchants who sacrificed them for their own trade interests." As a result, India became "known as the coolie country and Indians as the Coolie race." The redemptive note in this otherwise damning indictment was provided by "one gain[,] namely, that more than twenty lakh Indians who had settled in colonies outside and having attained prosperity beyond their imagination had done India proud."<sup>6</sup> Obviously this was not the kind of pride that Gandhi was after—for him, the mission had been to configure an Indian, making use of whatever building blocks that could be as-

4. *South African Chronicle*, June 27, 1908.

5. Bayly, "Imagining Greater India," 703–5.

6. Sanyasi, "Vishal Bharat ke Prati Bharat ka Kartavya."

sembled or dispensed with, and this included, notably, the understanding of the epics, the tradition of devotion, and the unflinching quest for truth. Caste, of course, was a casualty in this exercise again quite unlike the case with other periodicals and editors. Hofmeyr skirts this issue, as the caste question does not really feature in her treatment of the Gandhian experiments. Whether this was a defensive strategy to protect a beleaguered people overseas is debatable (103), and in hindsight it would certainly appear that other editors and publicists following Gandhi were more robust in their indictment of caste and tried to consider options to work against it.

If Gandhi chose to remain silent about caste, the others in their attempts to resolve their anxiety about the degraded status of the wretched Indian coolie preferred to articulate a new language of material success for the immigrant, which was seen as the route to empowerment. During the repatriation crisis, the caste question came into play as Chaturvedi and Dayal bitterly spoke against the abuses that laborers faced on their return to their country of origin. Dayal himself, born to an indentured laboring couple who were able to buy back their freedom, was horrified during a visit to India by the hold that caste had. The *Hindi*, which he edited, spoke strongly against the onerous hold that caste had over poor immigrants. The July 7, 1922, issue carried an important write up on the cruelty and violence of caste while the October 1924 issue elaborated on the advantages of being colonial born, these mostly to do with better access to education, which gave the immigrant greater ability to adopt European standards of living.<sup>7</sup>

Anticaste views were articulated most explicitly in the course of the repatriation crisis, when Dayal and Chaturvedi authored a major report on the immigrants who returned.<sup>8</sup> The way out of this crisis, they claimed, was to demand the rights of imperial citizenship and use their opportunities. It was in this spirit that the editors urged their read-

ers and Indian emigrants to give up the reputation they had earned of being able to survive on the smell of an oily rag. On August 28, 1925, the *Hindi* carried an appeal from Lala Hardayal to Indian brethren overseas, wherein he urged Indian emigrants to maintain their individuality and protect and promote their language. They should simultaneously adopt a high standard of living and “eschew their old habits of primitive simplicity and contentment. Civilisation breeds new needs and leads to a higher plane of life all around. A civilized community needs music, pictures, furniture, books and other appurtenances of advancing culture. Earn money but also spend it well. Work hard but also enjoy life and make the best of it. Love and cultivate art and science and show to the world we are a civilized people.”<sup>9</sup>

For Indian publicists in India, however, the issue was more rhetorical; it was an expression of their own anxiety to question the image of India as the land of cheap labor and uncivil habits. So when T. K. Swaminathan, secretary of the Indian Colonial Society, Madras, said, “You must be proud of India, proud of her culture and civilization, proud of the high character of her men and women. It is not in these vital respects that I ask you to take yourself away from our moorings. Be Indians in your outlook upon life, be Indians in your religious tendencies, in your spiritual aims. But in material circumstances, in outward ways, in adaptiveness to the new conditions, there is no need at all, why you should refuse to be moulded by your environment,”<sup>10</sup> what he had in mind was to persuade the emigrants to participate as fully as possible in the public sphere of the colonies, which required endorsing a way of life that was seen as universally up to the mark in terms of material well-being and comportment.

Do we see these expressions as major deviations from the ideal reader and the utopian space that Gandhi had imagined and attempted to script through his pamphlets and his *Hind Swaraj*? The

7. “Address by Dr. A. H. Gool, Deputy President of South African Indian Congress and A. Ismail, Secretary,” *Hindi*, October 1924.

8. The *Indian Review*, edited by G. Natesan, carried several features on the Repatriation scheme and its failure. In 1931, it remarked

on the failure of the scheme and how it had brought untold misery to ignorant Indians who had returned to India and whom Dayal had found languishing in the slums of Calcutta and Madras. The scheme was seen as “selfish and immoral”—selfish on the part of the leaders of the remaining colonial Indians and im-

moral “on the part of Indians because they had not yet exercised the ‘moral courage’ to take those immigrants back into Indian society and into their caste” (“Indians outside India,” n.p.).

9. See *Hindi*, no. 17, August 28, 1925.

10. See *Indian Emigrant* 1, no. 1, August 1914.

answer would probably be a qualified yes. Not that this in itself detracts from the novelty of Gandhi's experiments, as Hofmeyr's reading of the *Hind Swaraj* brilliantly brings out. She looks closely at the dialogic form that Gandhi adopted, which helped bring up the ambiguities of the colonial situation embodied in the figure of skeptical and questioning reader. Yet Gandhi seemed to think that resolution lay in the constant conversation between a skeptical reader and a plodding editor with a slowness to take sides. It is entirely to Hofmeyr's credit that this dimension is brought out by subjecting Gandhi's textual practices to a strikingly original reading, thereby setting an example of how a large and often unmanageable archive can be both mined and undermined. ■■■■

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### GANDHI, INDIAN OPINION, AND THE MAKING OF INDO–SOUTH AFRICAN IDENTITY, 1903–14

Goolam Vahed

Isabel Hofmeyr's absorbing new study, *Gandhi's Printing Press*, focuses on Mohandas K. Gandhi and *Indian Opinion*, the newspaper that he founded in 1903, and, through it, on broader questions of political activism and global media flows in the Indian Ocean world of the early twentieth century. *Indian Opinion* was initially based in Durban and from 1904 at the ashram (spiritual hermitage) that Gandhi established in Phoenix, just north of Durban. Among the striking themes of this study are slow reading, which Hofmeyr works out at length, and Gandhi's racial prejudices toward Africans at a time when Africans' own political activism was developing in parallel with those of Gandhi and other Indians, as well with those of the so-called Coloured population, within a context of the militarized consolidation of white power. Hofmeyr alludes to this context but does not engage it in depth, most likely because it is not her primary concern.

Although I have used *Indian Opinion* extensively for research purposes over several decades, *Gandhi's Printing Press* forced me to think of its contents and the purposes for which it was deployed in very different ways. I first encountered *Indian Opinion* on microfiche in the course of my PhD research in the late 1980s. As anyone who has used this format will testify, the image is tiny and difficult to read without digital magnification. This was compounded by the fact that the machine at the University of Durban-Westville Documentation Centre was not always available, and even when it was, it regularly switched off as a result of overheating; the film had to be manually wound and rewound; it was very costly to copy pages; and read-

ing was a strain on the eyes. As a doctoral student faced with the constraints of time and finance, I had little option but to speed-read and jot down snippets of information. While *Indian Opinion* is now available on CD and some issues can be accessed online via Digital Innovation South Africa, my subsequent research on specific issues, such as cricket, education, or satyagraha, followed the same pattern of speedily scanning the newspaper.

In contrast, Gandhi emphasized slow, contemplative reading of *Indian Opinion* by receptive minds. He set a standard for how one should read *Indian Opinion*: no “macadamized” reading; absorb slowly and digest what is read. This was Gandhi’s ideal reader. As Hofmeyr writes, Gandhi “sought to slow down reading and textual production more generally. He favored hand printing and encouraged a style of reading that was patient, that paused rather than rushed ahead. He interspersed news reports with philosophical extracts, and he encouraged readers to contemplate what they read rather than to hurtle forward” (4).

Slow reading, Gandhi believed, “created small moments of intellectual independence” for readers (4). Gandhi slowed down the printing process itself by using manual labor instead of an oil machine to free printing “from the hasty tempos and alienation of industrial production” (65). In time, he put an end to jobbing printing and even advertisements except those that promoted social projects (65).

Hofmeyr sketches the overall framework within which Gandhi transmitted his message. He was not an impartial journalist but an active social reformer who sought to advance change through the material that he published. In Hofmeyr’s words, *Indian Opinion* “was hardly a newspaper at all” in the conventional sense but more a journal or periodical that is usually published, distributed, and consumed at a slower pace and has longer relevance (14–15). The transnational news and extracts chosen by Gandhi and his team has created “one of the great intellectual archives of the world” (72). Each issue of *Indian Opinion* contained excerpts from thinkers of the time such as John Ruskin, Henry Thoreau, W. E. B. DuBois, and others; reports on the political, religious, economic, sporting, educational, and cultural affairs of Indians in South Africa, India, and other colonies;

and extracts from books by diverse authors such as the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, Irish author and philosopher Edmund Burke, Persian poet Omar Khayyam, and South African author Olive Schreiner. The biographies of people like Garibaldi and Socrates, extracts from well-known writers like the Orientalist Max Muller, the serial that Gandhi started on the Prophet Mohammed, which was discontinued when his Muslim readers objected to its particular slant, and the articles on health that appeared as Gandhi sought to connect health to the kinds of people he wanted as satyagrahis, or truth-seekers, were all aimed at social reformism. On the other hand, limited space is given in *Indian Opinion* to women’s issues, caste, the indentured, and certainly to African and Coloured struggles.

Gandhi wanted to form a community that extended outward from his ashram and was defined by its patient attentiveness. Readers were implored to “read and reread” the material, to “concentrate,” “pay very close attention,” and “ponder” what they were reading (128). In addition to articles on literature, politics, and general affairs, *Indian Opinion* published articles or extracts on moral principles by which Gandhi wanted people to live. Through this format Gandhi implored readers to read slowly, think about, understand, and implement these lessons in their own lives. According to Hofmeyr, Gandhi’s juxtaposing of ethical extracts and news clippings made “ethical discourse ‘news’ and slowed down news reports to the pace of philosophy” (71). Gandhi wanted to resist the empire’s industrial pressure for speed through focusing on “slowness as a philosophy and on ways of doing things at the rhythm of the body.” He regarded reading for “hasty abstraction” as depraved (139).

Gandhi’s message of slow reading and proper digestion is particularly relevant in our age of instant digital communication. For example, many universities in the global South have become places of mass production where scholarship and teaching are increasingly tied to revenue generation. Investing time in the kind of slow reading advocated by Gandhi, and even in a project such as Hofmeyr’s study of *Indian Opinion*, would be regarded as lost productivity. In the audit culture that predominates at such institutions, with their obsession with measurement, there is little market

value in writing in a critical and theoretically rigorous manner that contributes to public debates and provides alternative perspectives of the world. Unlike *Indian Opinion*, which tried to teach ethical lessons, the standardization of the curriculum due to market considerations provides few opportunities to produce informed, critical, and active citizens. Gandhi was both a critical educator and an active political citizen; it is very challenging to be these in a commodified education sector.

In contemporary publishing, high prices often make journals unaffordable to most academics and students in Third World institutions. Yet academics are forced to publish in prestigious journals in order to climb the academic ladder. *Indian Opinion*, of course, did not depend on the academic tenure system, and Gandhi's position on copyright was "No rights reserved,"<sup>1</sup> which enabled the newspaper and its contents to be circulated freely. He ignored copyright regulations and stopped including advertisements, thereby "constructing an ideal reader freed from the addictions of the markets and the dictates of the state." The lesson we may draw from Gandhi is that there should be more open access to scholarship, so that researchers in poorer areas of the world would be able to build their knowledge base, to engage with and build on existing work, and to publish their research, which is often publicly funded but rarely available to the public. Hofmeyr writes that Gandhi, if he lived today, would have "been a Wikipedian, a free knowledge activist" (160).

But like academics today, Gandhi was forced into compromises. While he is evoked as a man of the peasantry, Gandhi was mostly an urban figure—living in London, Durban, Johannesburg, and the big cities of India. He visited villages to mobilize for political purposes while his ashrams "were simulated rural communities . . . free of the social contradictions that actual villagers faced."<sup>2</sup> Gandhi's major benefactors in India, such as Ratan Tata and J. B. Petit, owned cotton mills or engaged in other industrial activities. He also accepted donations from the maharajahs of Bikaner and My-

sore and the nizam of Hyderabad. Yogesh Chada reminds us that Gandhi "preferred to ignore what the industrialists and maharajahs stood for, and accepted the gifts gratefully."<sup>3</sup> And Gandhi used the railways when it suited his needs. When the 1913 strike broke out in Northern Natal, he had to traverse the country rapidly, and during a six-day period he spent seventy-two hours on trains, moving across Natal and the Transvaal.<sup>4</sup>

Gandhi also utilized modern technology when he required it to further his political agenda. Joseph Doke's biography of him was sent to a friend from his London days, Pranjivan Mehta, who was based in Rangoon, to publish and distribute.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi himself sent copies all over the world, with steamships and other modern inventions speeding up their movement. This helped Gandhi's transformation into a global figure. Tolstoy wrote that the biography gave him "the possibility to know and understand [Gandhi] better."<sup>6</sup> Gandhi sent Henry Polak on a tour of India and got G. A. Natesan of Madras to publish Polak's *The Indians in South Africa: Helots within the Empire and How They Are Treated* in order to popularize their plight. Natesan also published Polak's short biography of Gandhi, *M. K. Gandhi: A Sketch of His Life and Work*, which claimed that "in this generation, India has not produced such a noble man—saint, patriot, statesman in one."<sup>7</sup> Gandhi was adept at using modern methods to popularize himself and his cause.

*Indian Opinion's* other important aim was to unite the diasporic Indian community in South Africa and forge "Indianness." According to Hofmeyr, Gandhi's triad put satyagraha first, then India, and then empire. The "diverse collection of Indian communities" in South Africa, divided as they were by religion, ethnicity, language, experience, class, region, and birthplace, "made a miniature version of India visible [to Gandhi], with a clarity not conceivable in the vastness of the subcontinent itself" (10). Readers of *Indian Opinion*, "deterritorialized diasporic subjects . . . on the peripheries," could make themselves "a sovereign

1. This is the title of Hofmeyr's conclusion. See 153–63.

2. Sarkar, "Gandhi and Social Relations," 175.

3. Chada, *Rediscovering Gandhi*, 166.

4. Lelyveld, *Great Soul*, 113–14.

5. See Doke, *M. K. Gandhi*.

6. *Indian Opinion*, May 8, 1910.

7. See Polak, *The Indians in South Africa*, and Polak, *M. K. Gandhi: A Sketch*.

part of India not through territorial belonging or abstract rights but through reading (and reproducing that reading) in a system of free circulation” (157).

Benedict Anderson’s concept of print capitalism, which postulates that the emergence of the printing press under capitalism facilitated the circulation of ideas and languages, and that this was crucial for the emergence of nationalism, is relevant.<sup>8</sup> *Indian Opinion* worked to shape the perceptions of elite Indians among mainstream white society as well as the attitudes and behaviors of Indians themselves nationally and transnationally.

The Gandhian vision, as it sought to embrace diasporic Indians, forge a modern Indian identity, and claim affinity with “Europeans” as Aryans and imperial citizens, was conspicuous in its exclusion of Africans on the question of civilization and who belonged to it. It is striking that while *Indian Opinion*’s focus was global, there is so little on the local environment with regard to Africans. Hofmeyr writes that “Gandhi had neighbours like John Dube with whom he wanted little to do” (23). While Gandhi’s Phoenix Settlement was in close proximity to Dube’s Ohlange Institute, “the leaders of these two remarkable communities kept their distance and met rarely. . . . Both expounded different versions of ‘race pride’ with Dube involved in redeeming ‘Africa’ and Gandhi in nurturing ‘India’ ” (157). Hofmeyr adds that Gandhi and Dube, “each involved in creating his own miniature ‘continent,’ defined themselves in opposition to each other, admiring each other’s projects from afar but deprecating each other’s ‘people’ ” (10). Catherine Corder and Martin Plaut have recently attempted to revise this perception by indicating contact between the Phoenix and Ohlange communities; Hofmeyr’s overall picture of the relationship, however, correct in my view, remains one of minimal contact.<sup>9</sup>

According to Hofmeyr, “Influenced by hierarchical ideals of civilisationism, Gandhi defined Africa as outside the pale of India and empire. In so doing, he installed Africa as a boundary of India” (10). While such attitudes may have been

par for the course at the time, they require interrogation in part to question the status of Mahatma bestowed on Gandhi (none other than Nelson Mandela was quoted as saying, “You [India] gave us a lawyer and we gave you a Mahatma”). The complexities of Gandhi’s South African years have been smoothed out to serve present political expediencies, ignoring Anne Coombes’s urging that we seriously consider how best to represent national history through cultural institutions and monuments.<sup>10</sup> Elites, on the other hand, tend to invent stories and historical figures to reconcile competing interests in transforming societies. Coombes wants us to go beyond a simple binary between apartheid and resistance; nevertheless, Gandhi has been reinvented as an icon of nonracialism and as one of the foremost fighters against segregation.<sup>11</sup>

Gandhi spoke of the inner truth of an individual as more important than empire and nation. He inserted “truth” (or satyagraha, passive resistance, soul force) as the third term in his vision of “India” and “empire.” Purification of self, and learning to rule one’s self, was a “precondition for broader ideals like India and empire” (3). So what was Gandhi’s inner truth as far as Africans were concerned?

Gandhi believed that only whites and Indians could be equal imperial citizens. His 1896 *Green Pamphlet*, which highlighted discrimination against Indians, objected to their being “classed with the natives of South Africa—Kaffir races.” This theme ran throughout Gandhi’s life in South Africa. He complained that Indians were made to use the same entrance as Africans at the post office in Durban. “We felt the indignity too much and . . . petitioned the authorities to do away with the invidious distinction and they have now provided three separate entrances for natives, Asiatics and Europeans.” Gandhi was irate that “the sons of this land of light [India] are despised as coolies and treated as Kaffirs.”<sup>12</sup> He emphasized that “both the English and the Indians spring from a common stock, called the Indo-Aryan” and demanded equality on this racial commonality and as imperial citizens.<sup>13</sup> Not only did Gandhi think

8. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

9. Corder and Plaut, “Gandhi’s Decisive South African 1913 Campaign.”

10. Coombes, “Memory and History in Settler Colonialism,” 8.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Gandhi, *Green Pamphlet*, 8, 17, 20.

13. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 1:192–93.

of Africans as inferior, he also joined the British forces as stretcher-bearer Sergeant Major Gandhi during the violent suppression of the Zulu in 1906. The Zulu press was critical of Gandhi's action, and the politics surrounding his involvement in the conflict continue to have negative consequences.

Gandhi was to discover that his faith in the British Empire was misplaced. With the raj safely tucked into its purse and its influence spreading across the globe, the British Empire was seeking to consolidate its hegemony in South Africa. Unlike most other colonial outposts, here the British had to contend with another white "race," the Boers, who desired to live outside and beyond the power of the British. Where Boer and Brit did find common ground was their agreement to keep "black" as an underclass, and they worked out an arrangement that suited British economic interests and the Boer quest for political power. This necessitated the brutal dispossession of land from African people and a system of labor that turned the African worker, in Schreiner's words, into "a vast engine of labour . . . not a man, but only a tool."<sup>14</sup>

It is against this backdrop that *Indian Opinion* detailed the impact of racist laws against Indians, a people that the newspaper felt could make a positive contribution to the building of a new South African nation. Gandhi's strategy was to claim the rights of Indians as British subjects and to keep Africans out of the equation despite the fact that they were indigenous to the land and could also claim rights as British subjects. There is little in *Indian Opinion* to suggest that Gandhi was witness to one of the most brutal systems of labor and political exploitation to be found anywhere in the world at the time, a system that turned Africans into cogs in the white man's laboring machine. As Talat Ahmed points out, Gandhi did not "extend his sympathy to the majority African population of South Africa and was initially horrified that Indians were placed on the same level as Africans."<sup>15</sup>

The early Gandhi described Africans as

"lazy," echoing white settler sentiments. He stated at a meeting in Bombay in 1896 that whites in Natal sought to degrade Indians to the level of "raw kafir, whose occupation is hunting and whose sole ambition is to collect a certain number of cattle to buy a wife with, and then pass his life in indolence and nakedness."<sup>16</sup> A decade later, an editorial in *Indian Opinion* referred to a speech by John Dube in which he said that Africans had the capacity for improvement if given an opportunity. The newspaper, in contrast, suggested that "a little judicious extra taxation would do no harm; in the majority of cases it compels the native to work for at least a few days a year." The editorial then turned its attention to the Indian, who "is in striking contrast with the Native. While the Native has been of little benefit to the State, it owes its prosperity largely to the Indians. While Native loafers abound on every side, that species of humanity is almost unknown among Indians here."<sup>17</sup>

As Jeff Guy and Norman Etherington, among others, have shown, Africans were a "productive people" whose "productive resources were just too strong to be either outpaced or undermined,"<sup>18</sup> and who were subject to "a heavy burden of taxation without representation."<sup>19</sup> Africans' refusal to work for ultra-low wages fed into the mythology of the lazy African. Gandhi failed to recognize this or acknowledge African resistance to the colonial wars of dispossession across Southern Africa, the brutal system of migrant labor that forced them from their homesteads deep underground into the mines of South Africa, the closed compound system on the mines for single males that controlled all aspects of their lives, the curfews and pass laws that curtailed their movement,<sup>20</sup> and the competitive challenges for the colonial market from independent black producers, which brought antagonism from white farmers and state pressure long before the assault on Indian traders.<sup>21</sup>

The Imperial Brotherhood that Gandhi was seeking to forge excluded Africans. In a letter to Jan

14. Quoted in First and Scott, *Olive Schreiner*, 258.

15. Ahmed, "Gandhi: The Man behind the Myths."

16. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 2:74.

17. "The Relative Value of the Natives and the Indians in Natal," *Indian Opinion*, September 9, 1905.

18. Guy, *Theophilus Shepstone*, 341.

19. Etherington, "The 'Shepstone System,'" 174–75.

20. See Van Onselen, "Crime and Total Institutions," 63.

21. See Bundy, *Rise and Fall of the African Peasantry*.

Christian Smuts, then South Africa's minister of defence, on June 30, 1914, Gandhi expressed his hope that with limits placed on further Indian entry into South Africa those Indians already in the country would be granted the same rights as those enjoyed by whites. There was no mention of Africans.<sup>22</sup> As Surendra Bhana argues, Gandhi sought to “reassure whites by creating distinctions between the ‘Indian’ and the ‘Kaffir’ other as the true savage. Indians came from a civilisation that was consistent with all the colonial markers of acceptability. The ‘Kaffir’ was the real source of white fears.”<sup>23</sup>

Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion* in 1903 that Indians “believe as much in the purity of race as we think they [the whites] do, only we believe that they would best serve these interests, which are as dear to us as to them, by advocating the purity of all races, and not one alone. We believe also that the white race of South Africa should be the predominating race.”<sup>24</sup> Rather than being seen as one of the first anti-apartheid fighters, Gandhi should perhaps be seen as one of its early ideologues. Reflecting on Gandhi's attitude toward race, Patrick French wrote that “the point is not that someone born in the nineteenth century should be expected to have twenty-first-century racial attitudes: it is that, even by the reformist standards of his own time, he was regressive. Gandhi's blanking of Africans is the black hole at the heart of his saintly mythology.”<sup>25</sup>

Africans hardly appeared on Gandhi's radar in South Africa. His views on race and nation are contentious and even distressing to some of his supporters, and this is an aspect with which *Gandhi's Printing Press* underengages, though Hofmeyr is fully aware that “‘race-making’ projects like those of Gandhi's and Dube's shaped ideas of Africa and India wrought in relations, and, in opposition, to each other. . . . These undertakings form an important strand in shaping ideas about ‘race’ that . . . were not the sole prerogative of European policy makers” (68). In concurring with Hofmeyr, one can argue that while the dominant narrative of Gandhi's South African years continues to por-

tray him in a heroic light as a pioneer of anticolonial nationalism and architect of nonviolent popular politics, more work needs to be done around the fact that Gandhi's political imagination was almost wholly within the horizon of empire (even the masthead of *Indian Opinion* consisted of the Indian Ocean in the middle, a crown above, and Union Jack behind),<sup>26</sup> that he engaged in a conservative defense of race and class privilege, that his definition of civilization and who belonged to it was very narrow, and that he held extremely racist views about Africans.

While these themes are not new, there is a need for a sustained examination to establish just how consistent his thinking was during his South African experience and, in particular, to interrogate to what extent this was a result of his innate biases and the extent to which his actions were influenced by larger historical forces that defined the possibilities of political action. The strategy of commemorating Gandhi as an anticolonial hero, with a statue built in his honor in Pietermaritzburg, a street named after him in Durban, and the old court house in Johannesburg renamed Gandhi Square, has not served Afro-Indian relationships, which remain tense in the present juncture. The making of this relationship in the colonial period needs to be examined critically rather than glossed over. As Antoinette Burton warns, “the will to color-blind account of solidarities between African and Indians in the service of a transnational or global history of political resistance is in danger of disappearing important and often painful histories of racial dis-ease . . . between communities of colour on the ground.”<sup>27</sup>

*Gandhi's Printing Press* is a beautifully written and thought-provoking book that underscores the significance of *Indian Opinion* and the printing press in Gandhi's South African project. Hofmeyr draws parallels with print cultures in Southern Africa as well as the subcontinent, highlights the role of the Phoenix Settlement in sustaining Gandhi's movement, which, during this formative period, was both national and imperial in outlook,

22. See Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 14:190.

23. Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy*, 30.

24. “The Labour Question in the Transvaal,” *Indian Opinion*, September 24, 1903. In Gandhi, *Collected Works*, 3:255.

25. French, “*Gandhi before India*.”

26. See pages 68–69 for a photo of the masthead.

27. Burton, *Brown over Black*, 14.

and emphasizes the part played by various printed forms, including periodicals and pamphlets, in forging Indianness, the idea that the people of the subcontinent constituted a *praja*, that is, a nation. Gandhi's South African journey forged the idea of India, and *Indian Opinion* was important in stimulating others to imagine that they were part of this entity.

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## GANDHI'S MANY INFLUENCES AND COLLABORATORS

Gail M. Presbey

It is understandable why many in this fast-paced world of ours would be fascinated by an earlier world when things were slow. The slow food movement, for instance, now challenges the fast food nation, as we want to savor the moment in taste, nutrition, and conversation. In *Gandhi's Printing Press*, Isabel Hofmeyr paints a picture of this earlier world, where news traveled by post and arrived by ship. In South Africa in the early twentieth century, people would gather at the dock in anticipation of receiving the news, and Gandhi would string together these pieces of mail to create his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*. But already back then,

Gandhi lived a hectic life in a hurried world, and he also harkened back to an earlier time, to those who came before him who wondered if there was more to life than grasping bits of daily news. As Henry David Thoreau said in his reflections on life in the United States (published 1854), the laying of the transatlantic cable (only begun in 1854, completed in 1858) may not be the blessing it seems, because why must we know that “Princess Adelaide has the whooping cough”? Wouldn't it be better, Thoreau maintained, to concentrate on reading the Bhagavad Gita?<sup>1</sup> Thoreau devoted a whole chapter of his book to propounding a philosophy of reading much like what Hofmeyr calls Gandhi's “slow reading.” Gandhi wanted to publish not only bits of relevant news, but also insights of profound writers like Thoreau, John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy, and Socrates, and he wanted people to cherish these excerpts (and condensations) by saving them and reading them over and over again. And so, Hofmeyr points out, to think that Gandhi published a “newspaper” might be to misunderstand, if we presume his format was the same as what we consider newspaper formats today. (And even today, newspapers are considered by some to be old-fashioned, as people turn to Twitter and the Internet for their instant news).

But where did this train of ideas start? While he drew upon Thoreau's philosophy of reading and quoted him in *Indian Opinion* in 1911 (89–91), Thoreau could not have been the original source of this philosophy of reading. First of all, Thoreau claims that Egyptian and Hindu philosophers had earlier found timeless wisdom, and he references by name a Persian and Urdu poet from Delhi, Mīr Camar Uddīn Mast, as the source of his philosophy of reading.<sup>2</sup> Surely the idea of condensing great insight into short phrases which must then be taken to heart—or as Hofmeyr points out, quoting Gandhi's use of metaphor, must be “‘imprinted’ and ‘engraved on the [reader's] heart’ ” (131)—is part of a long tradition of spiritual reading in India. As a contemporary author

describes the popular Tamil ethical treatise, the *Thirukkural* (*Thiru* meaning sacred and honorable, *Kural* meaning brief, concise, abridged), written by Thiruvalluvar (born 30 BCE in Mylapore, now part of Chennai, and part of India's Dravidian heritage) composed 1,330 “pithy” rhyming couplets whose “brevity” reveals the poet's “genius.”<sup>3</sup> Certainly the form encouraged easy memorization. Thoreau said in 1849 regarding the *Laws of Manu* that its wisdom is so concise it “renders many words unnecessary.”<sup>4</sup> Gandhi's favorite, the Bhagavad Gita (translated as “Divine Song”) is also a brief, eighteen-chapter, seven-hundred-verse work, written mostly in couplets, which Gandhi eventually carried on his person at all times. He read the Bhagavad Gita in 1888–89 (in Sir Edward Arnold's 1885 English translation) at the age of twenty while he was a second-year law student in England.<sup>5</sup> While Gandhi was embarrassed to admit that he had not read it earlier in India, he surely read it before he read Thoreau and Ruskin, the two sources of his philosophy of reading on which Hofmeyr dwells. In South Africa in 1903 he joined the Seekers Club (consisting of Christians and Theosophists) and together they read the Bhagavad Gita. At this point Gandhi decided he wanted to memorize the text, and he did so while cleaning his teeth as part of his ritual morning bath.<sup>6</sup> Gandhi started *Indian Opinion* a few months later.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps Gandhi's exposure to the concise and pithy sayings in Hindu scripture is the source of his emphasis on what Hofmeyr calls “slow reading.” At the very least we can say that Gandhi was attracted to Thoreau's account of reading because it resonated with Hindu ideas and practices of spirituality with which he was already familiar. Hofmeyr does, however, allude to ways in which Hindu devotional practice may have influenced Gandhi's style, citing Gandhi's oft-mentioned phrase that he places the text before the reader, pointing out that offering the text has suggestions of a gift, of ceremony, and emphasizes the need for the gift's reception (151). She also notes that *Indian Opinion* occasionally pub-

1. Thoreau, *Walden*, 67, 393–94.

2. See Thoreau, *Walden*, 130, 131, and Stein, “The Yoga of Reading,” 482, 490–91.

3. George, “Compassion and Forgiveness in Ancient Tamil Literature,” 231, 233.

4. Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*, 127.

5. Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, 29.

6. *Ibid.*, 66.

7. *Ibid.*, 67.

lished large portraits of movement heroes and that Gandhi suggested that readers would hang these on their walls and reverence them, using the daily gazing as an opportunity to recommit themselves to the cause. There are similar practices in popular Hindu worship.<sup>8</sup> Hofmeyr notes that Gandhi's question-and-answer format, which he developed in the newspaper and used later in *Hind Swaraj*, uses Gujarat traditions of dialogue as a literary form (146).

Yet what was the precedent for launching *Indian Opinion*, in June 1903, and closely thereafter establishing the Phoenix farm in 1904? Gandhi mentioned both Tolstoy and Ruskin in his article "Ourselves" as sources of his inspiration for starting the farm community (although he did not begin his personal correspondence with Tolstoy until October 1909).<sup>9</sup> But there are other important precursors. Hofmeyr mentions that in 1898 Gandhi visited Mariannhill, founded by the Trappists and dedicated to meditative prayer and manual labor (57–58). Anil Nauriya noted that Mariannhill was about fourteen miles from Durban, and that about 1,200 Africans lived at the mission there. Gandhi was impressed with the way that the school there stressed dignity of labor and taught practical trades like sandal making, a skill that Gandhi later introduced in his own settlements.<sup>10</sup> *Indian Opinion* published an article on Mariannhill's activities on October 8, 1904, just before Phoenix Farm was bought.<sup>11</sup>

To succeed, any book on Gandhi has to find a way to narrow its scope, since Gandhi wrote so much in his long life and has had so many books written about him. So it is of necessity that any one book on Gandhi's particular activities must leave many other aspects outside its focus. Still, it seems to me that there were some missed opportunities to highlight some significant aspects of the historical narrative related to the early years of *In-*

*dian Opinion*. Especially in this day and age, when the major historical narratives, including those regarding South Africa, focus on men and their movements, why not include key nonwhite agents of history? Why not include women when they were indeed crucial actors in history?<sup>12</sup> In this vein, I seek to complement and contextualize Hofmeyr's account and delve into the complex race and gender relations of the time period, which had more cross-race cooperation and a larger role for women than one would imagine from reading Hofmeyr's excellent but necessarily limited account.

Hofmeyr says Gandhi's and Phoenix farm's neighbor John Dube, who would later become the first president of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), which was renamed the African National Congress (ANC), "kept [his] distance and met rarely" (57). While she acknowledges community exchange between the two-hundred-acre Ohlange Native Industrial Institute and Phoenix Farm regarding experiences of healing and religion at Isaiah Shembe's Nazarite Church (all three in Inanda, although it's important to note that Shembe did not locate his church in Inanda until 1910<sup>13</sup>), she notes that the African and Indian communities were more often competitors for the same scarce resources and jobs. Although she states that Gandhi wanted "little to do" with his neighbor John Dube and that they had an "arm's-length relationship" (22, 10), how does she account for the important fact, mentioned in her own book without additional comment, that the early editions of Dube's newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal: Ipepa la Bantu* (*Sun of Natal: The Black People's Paper*), first published on April 10, 1903, several months before *Indian Opinion*, were printed by Gandhi's press, that is, the International Printing Press (IPP)? (56).<sup>14</sup> Could it have been a mere matter of convenience, of press for hire?

In 1903 it was still controversial, and even dangerous, for Africans to express their desire for

8. See Fuller, *The Camphor Flame*, 57–72.

9. M. K. Gandhi, *Indian Opinion*, December 24, 1904, 3. In subsequent references *Indian Opinion* is abbreviated *IO*. English translations of *IO* articles that appeared in Gujarati are noted as such and taken from *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, abbreviated as *CWMG* in subsequent references. Titles of translated articles are taken from *CWMG*. Articles that orig-

inally appeared in English are taken directly from *Indian Opinion*.

10. Nauriya, *The African Element in Gandhi*, 14–15.

11. See Mesthrie, "From Advocacy to Mobilization," 110, and An English Protestant [pseud.], "Educating the Native: A Visit to Mariannhill Monastery," *IO*, October 8, 1904, 2.

12. Rassool, "Rethinking Documentary History," 28–30; Healy-Clancy, "Women and the Problem of Family," 454–55; and Ginwala, "Women and the African National Congress," 77.

13. Heuser, "Recovered Narratives of an Inter-Cultural Exchange," 89.

14. See Hughes, *First President*, 103–4.

education and advancement, as Dube did in his first editorial in his first issue. He announced that the goal of his paper was to encourage comradeship, reduce suffering, reject lies, speak out when truth needs to be told, and encourage self-improvement.<sup>15</sup> Hofmeyr says that in the years covered by her book, African and Indian presses worked “in isolation from each other” (40), unlike the later era of cooperation that began in the 1920s. I would think that Gandhi's press helped Indian-African race relations when it extended its services to Dube's publication, even if only temporarily.

Hofmeyr does explain that since the IPP's establishment in November 1898, it published general job printing (invitations, for instance) as well as the monthly Theosophical Society magazine and a newspaper called the *Volunteer* (49). Publication of *Indian Opinion* began on June 4, 1903, two months after Dube began publishing with IPP.<sup>16</sup> As a reader, I would have liked to learn more about what led Dube to the IPP for his printing needs.

According to Hofmeyr, strongly united white printers defended their turf using “racial protectionism” and “white laborism” (54). But what about a survey of African-owned presses of the time? Hofmeyr says there were only a “minute number” of them (39). According to Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie, Dube's newspaper was just one of many publications by black South Africans who were looking for outlets to criticize the British colonial government. Dhupelia-Mesthrie mentions five other African-owned newspapers published around the same time as Dube's, and then explains, “Gandhi belongs to this generation of rising black journalists and editors who were all committed to improving the position of black people especially at a time when whites were moving towards forming a Union of South Africa within which blacks had such limited rights.”<sup>17</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi suggests that the title *Indian Opinion* was a derivation inspired by the newspaper founded in 1884 by John Tengo Jabavu, the title of which translated into English is *Native* (or *Black*) *Opinion*.<sup>18</sup>

Here's another interesting parallel. Gandhi, with Mansukhlal Nazar, started his newspaper in June 1903. Hofmeyr goes on to mention that Dube received his own hand press in June 1903 so that his paper could be printed at Ohlange (56). Soon, Gandhi decided he wanted to move his press to a rural location, to be supported by a rural community. Albert West, who took over from Nazar, and Gandhi scouted for suitable land and found the Phoenix plot near Ohlange. They bought it, moved the press there, and published their first *Indian Opinion* issue from Phoenix on December 24, 1904.<sup>19</sup> Hofmeyr emphasizes that Ohlange's motto, “to teach the hand to work, the brain to understand, and the heart to serve,” could just as well have described Phoenix Farm's spirit and intention (56). While the inspiration for moving the press to a rural community has usually been attributed to Gandhi's reading Ruskin, the parallelism and timing would suggest that Gandhi may have been influenced by Dube's example.<sup>20</sup>

In “Recovered Narratives of an Inter-Cultural Exchange,” Andreas Heuser contends that those who downplay Gandhi's connections to African and “Coloured” (those of mixed race, considered a separate category under South African law) communities of his day and instead emphasize Gandhi's reluctance for formal alliances across races (as does Hofmeyr)—and his strategic reasons for preserving his energies for the struggles facing Indian communities—can't account very well for how satyagraha nonviolent methods became popular in Africa and were soon embraced and enacted by many African communities.<sup>21</sup> Of course there are ways to account for such widespread influence that avoid Heuser's characterization of Gandhi's role. For example, Elleke Boehmer states that both Gandhi and Sol Plaatje, whom she argues showed little interest in each other, had a common source of inspiration for their nonviolent political actions: the suffragettes of Britain.<sup>22</sup> But there are other cases where Gandhi clearly interacted with, influenced, and was influenced by his non-Indian contempo-

15. Davis, “Qude manikil,” 83.

16. Hughes, *First President*, 105, 108.

17. Dhupelia-Mesthrie, “The Significance of *Indian Opinion*”; see also Hughes, *First President*, 105.

18. R. Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man*, 107.

19. *Ibid.*, 110.

20. See Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*, 59–60.

21. Heuser, “Recovered Narratives,” 92.

22. Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Post-colonial*, 5, 163.

raries in the African context. Gandhi admitted that Africans were engaged in extensive noncooperation with pass laws, taxes, and other facets of colonial rule long before he came along with his specific satyagraha methods. He only attempted to improve upon the methods.<sup>23</sup>

While Hofmeyr notes that Gandhi wanted “little to do” with Dube (22), Heather Hughes, in her biography of Dube, suggests that the two men did not meet until August 1905 because of each one’s pressing schedule, which involved much travel away from Phoenix and Ohlange. But she says that the first meeting (organized by businessman Marshall Campbell) resulted in each having a favorable impression of the other. Campbell had taken conference attendees from Cape Town via mail boat to Natal, where they visited a sugar refinery Campbell owned and then were hosted for a meal at Mount Edgecomb, where the Inanda singers performed. Campbell asked Dube to give a speech, which Gandhi wrote about in *Indian Opinion*.<sup>24</sup>

Mesthrie catalogs the many places in *Indian Opinion* where Gandhi covers stories of racist injustices suffered by Africans or makes celebratory comments when a struggle is decided in their favor.<sup>25</sup> The paper included Dube’s speeches, often praised Dube and the work at Ohlange,<sup>26</sup> and also commended the election of Walter Rubusana to the Cape Provincial Council in 1910.<sup>27</sup> *Indian Opinion* reprinted stories from the black press, including the newspapers *Imvo Zabantsundu* and *Ilanga lase Natal*.<sup>28</sup>

James D. Hunt, in his article “Gandhi and the Black People of Africa,” admits that Gandhi did not, like Dr. Abdullah Abdurahman, try to gather together a coalition of various racial groups in a united movement. Gandhi often claimed that Indians’ legal position in South Africa, and there-

fore their problems and their possible solutions, were different from those of Africans. He admits that Gandhi seems unconcerned or unmotivated to personally become involved in righting the wrongs against the Africans in South Africa, as he concentrates on Indian problems (and Mesthrie gives voice to a similar estimation). But Hunt still insists that it is wrong to suggest that Gandhi imagined passive resistance as a method for the Indian community only, or that Dube was unknown to Gandhi. Hunt mentions the collaboration in publishing Dube’s newspaper and notes that Gandhi wrote approvingly of Dube in *Indian Opinion*. Hunt adds that when Gandhi showed Gopal Krishna Gokhale around South Africa in 1912, he brought Gokhale to Ohlange on November 10, when he had a chance to talk to Dube at length. Hunt also mentions the many ways in which Gandhi cooperated with Abdurahman, an encounter that I will return to below. These kinds of robust connections between Gandhi and other leaders in KwaZulu Natal are also covered by Anil Nauriya, who points out that Gandhi suggested in a speech at Germiston, Transvaal, on June 7, 1909 (summarized in *Indian Opinion* on June 12, 1909) that Native Africans use the method of “soul force” to gain redress of their grievances. Nauriya also documents Gandhi’s avid interest in legal questions regarding African ownership of land.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, Hofmeyr has noted that Gandhi was sometimes quite sensitive about the links between caste discrimination in the Indian context and racism (85, 106). She notes that Henry Polak wrote against racism in a pamphlet published by IPP (116–17). But Hofmeyr cautiously balances accounts of Gandhi and his followers’ antiracist commentary with accounts of their faux pas and derogatory remarks about Africans. She further

23. See M. K. Gandhi, “The Duty of Transvaal Indians,” *IO*, October 6, 1906, *CWMG* 5:383–84.

24. See Hughes, *First President*, 108–13; Reddy, *Gandhiji’s Vision of a Free South Africa*, 19; R. Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man*, 110, 144; and “The Kaffirs of Natal,” *IO*, September 2, 1905, *CWMG* 4:398–99.

25. See Mesthrie, “From Advocacy,” 110. For coverage of the case of Magato, an African who had been ejected from the first class car of a train, see *IO*, March 23, 1912, 100. See also

“Natives and Land in the Transvaal,” *IO*, April 15, 1905, 1, and “Native Land Tenure,” *IO*, July 29, 1905, 490–91, which discuss a legal decision allowing Africans to purchase land in the Transvaal.

26. *IO*, editorials of November 30, 1907, 496; March 6, 1909, 104; and February 10, 1912, 46–47.

27. “A Notable Event,” *IO*, September 24, 1910, 313.

28. *IO* reprinted material from *Imvo Zabantsundu* on April 29, 1905. On June 8, 1912, *IO* reprinted an editorial from *Ilanga lase Natal*. See Mesthrie, “From Advocacy,” 110.

29. See Hunt, “Gandhi and the Black People of South Africa,” and Mesthrie, “From Advocacy,” 111. For more on the connections between Gandhi and KwaZulu leaders, see “From Our Own Reporter,” *IO*, June 12, 1909, cited in Nauriya, “Gandhi and Some Contemporary Leaders from KwaZulu Natal,” 57, 67.

notes that Dube and Gandhi were both wary of each other's race and engaged in "race-making projects" (11). Indeed, many of Gandhi's remarks and ideas deserve criticism.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, some authors have erred by waxing too romantic about Gandhi's practice of eschewing social barriers. For example, Girja Kumar says that at Phoenix, Mohandas and Kasturba Gandhi became "heads of a joint family of brown, white, and black and had persons of European, Indian, and African extraction on its roll."<sup>31</sup> As J. N. Uppal explains, Gandhi's "extended family" at Phoenix Farm included some Tamil- and Hindi-speaking Indians, two Englishmen, "one or two Zulus[,] and a few Gujaratis." Hunt clarifies that the Zulus at Phoenix were hired laborers, and while there was a black family at Tolstoy farm, they were squatters and not participants of the Tolstoy community.<sup>32</sup>

Despite some exaggerated accounts of racial harmony, a more sober account of contact and camaraderie is more likely. Enuga S. Reddy has provided an overview of the criticisms of Gandhi's seeming provincialism and counters with an attempt to understand the context and to set the record straight on Gandhi's contribution to and encouragement of nonviolent resistance beyond the Indian community. Hofmeyr is not alone when she engages in this narrative of the insular Gandhi; the attempts to debunk this portrayal have gone on for decades, with Hunt's article in 1989, Reddy's response to this "provincial" theory of Gandhi published in 1995, and Nauriya's book-length treatment in 2006 and recent article in 2012.<sup>33</sup> Heather Hughes notes that despite Reddy's optimistic assertions about friendliness between Dube's and Gandhi's communities, one can nevertheless find both Gandhi and Dube expressing in the pages of their respective newspapers some political views that show that the two communities are at odds with each other on many topics.<sup>34</sup> But the Indian and African communities still supported each other

in crucial ways. Hughes even says, "Dube's *Ilanga* simply could not have survived without the regular and loyal support of the Hafferjees, Randerees, Glowhoosins, and Essops who advertised generously in every edition. The story of Indian and African interdependence in South Africa has yet to be properly told."<sup>35</sup>

Now I want to turn to the question of women in Gandhi's movement and their role in *Indian Opinion*. At his law firm, Gandhi was helped by his "secretary," Sonja Schlesin. Schlesin not only "virtually ran the publicity and business side of satyagraha," but also wrote moving speeches on the suffragettes (which Gandhi read aloud at a meeting) and refused to sit in train cars reserved for whites, thereby courting arrest. Gandhi called her the "watchman and warder" of his office and of the movement.<sup>36</sup> Gandhi himself mentions that she managed all the accounts and finances and, especially relevant to Hofmeyr's chosen topic, edited articles for *Indian Opinion*.<sup>37</sup>

Gandhi had already invoked the suffragettes of England as role models for his own movement in several news articles in *Indian Opinion*. Indeed, Hofmeyr does mention in one sentence Gandhi's inclusion of the suffragettes as well as the African women of Bloemfontein as examples of passive resistance, and she references two articles, one of July 22, 1911, and the other of April 1, 1914 (120). The rest of that section devotes much more space to Ruskin and Socrates as Gandhi's role models. But in fact Gandhi makes reference to the suffragettes much earlier,<sup>38</sup> suggesting that indeed these women may be more direct role models for Gandhi's satyagraha than Ruskin and Socrates.

To tell the next part of this story, which involves the African and Coloured women of Bloemfontein and their resistance to the pass laws, I must first develop the account of Gandhi's relationship to Dr. Abdurahman, and to his newspaper, *APO*. As Julia Wells explains, Dr. Abdullah Abdurah-

30. Hofmeyr cites critics like J. H. Stone; see, for example, 175n18.

31. Kumar, *Bramacharya*, 92.

32. Uppal, *Gandhi: Ordained in South Africa*, 202; Hunt, "Gandhi and the Black People of South Africa," 10–11.

33. See Hunt, "Gandhi and the Black People of South Africa"; Reddy, *Gandhiji's Vision*, 49, 129–41; Nauriya, *African Element*, 13; and "Gandhi and Some Contemporary African Leaders from KwaZulu Natal," 67.

34. See Hughes, *First President*, 108–11.

35. *Ibid.*, 111.

36. R. Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man*, 155, and M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, 165–66.

37. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, 165. See also Paxton, *Sonja Schlesin*, 10, 16, 24.

38. See *IO*, December 22, 1906, *CWMG* 6:158, and "The Brave Women of England," *IO*, June 29, 1907, *CWMG* 7:27. For a related story see "S.A.B.I. Committee's Advice," *IO*, July 6, 1907.

man, the Coloured leader of the African Political Organization (APO) in Cape Town, had followed closely the developments of Gandhian satyagraha since Gandhi's first protests in 1906. Abdurahman began the *APO* newspaper in 1909 and used it to promote the idea that Indians, Coloureds, and Africans should join together and use Gandhian nonviolent methods to effect change in South Africa. The *APO* was popular in Bloemfontein. The black community there was very diverse, made up of fourteen different African and Coloured groups.<sup>39</sup> As Mohamed Adhikari explains, Abdurahman dominated *APO* from 1905 to 1940 and wrote most of the editorials for the newspaper.<sup>40</sup>

According to Uppal, Gandhi got to know Dr. Abdurahman as they sailed together for four weeks on the RMS *Kenilworth Castle* to England. Both of them went to England, landing there on July 10, 1909, to influence the outcome of the draft constitution of the newly proposed Union of South Africa.<sup>41</sup> Neither won much support for their efforts in England. Hunt explains that Gandhi and Abdurahman were both in the House of Lords' Strangers' Gallery listening to the Parliament debate on whether the new South African Union Parliament should be restricted to whites. "After the failure to alter the Act, Gandhi recommended that Abdurahman take up passive resistance and invited him to lunch to talk it over. He promised to get him a copy of Thoreau's essay on Civil Disobedience. A few weeks later Abdurahman suggested in his newspaper that the Coloured adopt the Indian strategy of passive resistance, and Gandhi wrote an article for The *APO*."<sup>42</sup>

Abdurahman filled *APO* with stories covering Gandhi's imprisonment in November 1909. In the issue of December 4, 1909, Abdurahman invited Gandhi to write an article for *APO*. Gandhi described his tactics as "the greatest and yet most harmless force anybody can wield with per-

fect safety and a clear conscience," suggesting that it could be used by "illiterate natives."<sup>43</sup> Abdurahman even began and coordinated an "Indian Passive Resistance Fund."<sup>44</sup> On February 26, 1910, Abdurahman wrote about Gandhi's "long and stubborn" resistance in his newspaper, and said, "If the Coloured people will but follow the same line of conduct without flinching, success will come to them."<sup>45</sup> In the June 1, 1912, issue, Abdurahman specifically encouraged women to use passive resistance as a means to getting the pass laws repealed. I want to point out that Gandhi only begins his plans to involve Indian women in a satyagraha protest after March 14, 1913, which is nine months after Abdurahman advocates involving women.<sup>46</sup>

The account of the Coloured and African women of Bloemfontein's protest against the enforcement of pass laws in their town has been covered in detail by Julia Wells's book and Frene Ginwala's and Nomboniso Gasa's articles.<sup>47</sup> I want to draw attention to the timing to clarify that Gandhi did not use his newspaper to encourage women to engage in civil disobedience until May 1913, well after Abdurahman did so in his publication (in June 1912). The Indian women who participated in Gandhi's 1913 satyagraha did so in September 1913, months after the women of Bloemfontein, of whom eighty had been arrested on May 29, 1913. Before Indian women's imprisonment in the September 1913 satyagraha, at least thirty-four of the Bloemfontein women had spent several months in prison, receiving sympathetic attention in a variety of newspapers and thereby garnering much support for their movement. Even Gandhi's newspaper chimed in with its support, with coverage of the developments in the July 5 issue and front page coverage in the August 2 *Indian Opinion* announcing the "Native Women's Brave Stand" against the pass laws.<sup>48</sup>

In Dr. Abdurahman's presidential address on

39. Wells, *We Now Demand!*, 57.

40. Adhikari, "Voice of the Coloured Elite," 131.

41. Uppal, *Gandhi: Ordained in South Africa*, 281; also see Hunt, "Gandhi and the Black People of South Africa," 14.

42. Hunt, "Gandhi and the Black People," 14.

43. M. K. Gandhi, "What Is the Transvaal Struggle?," *APO*, December 4, 1909, 7.

44. Hunt, "Gandhi and the Black People," 14.

45. Abdurahman, "Persecution in Pretoria: Passive Resistance," *APO*, February 26, 1910, 5.

46. *Ibid.*; M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, 251–56; Abdurahman, "Curfew Bell at Johannesburg, Passes for Native Women," *APO*, June 1, 1912, 10.

47. See Wells, *We Now Demand!*; Ginwala, "Women, and the African National Congress, 1912–1943"; and Gasa, "Let Them Build More Gaols."

48. See Gasa, "Let them Build More Gaols," 137; Mesthrie, "From Advocacy," 117; and "Native Women's Brave Stand," *IO*, August 2, 1913, 1. See also "Native Women Passive Resisters," *IO*, July 5, 1913, 163.

September 29, 1913 (published in *APO* on October 11, 1913), during the annual meeting of the APO, he suggested to his members that the Indians' conscientious passive resistance was worth emulating. He went on directly to mention and commend the actions of the women of the Free State who resisted the unjust pass laws and went to prison. He then told his listeners that these methods should be adopted and tried on a large scale, asking his listeners to imagine their success if only "200,000 Natives on the mines" were to refuse to pick up their tools, and if the farm laborers refused to gather the harvest; in this circumstance, "the economic foundation of South Africa would suddenly shake and tremble with such violence that the beautiful white South Africa superstructure which has been built on it would come down with a crash."<sup>49</sup> Within the next two months, Gandhi and the women in his movement organized a massive labor strike. Hofmeyr notes that Gandhi mentioned the anti-pass campaigners, considering them part of a universal satyagraha movement (120). But the story of how these newspapers, and therefore these diverse communities of activists, supported each other by encouraging solidarity, mutual learning, and role modeling is not part of Hofmeyr's focus, and so readers might not know about these significant developments.

As if to prepare the ground for the new step of women's direct involvement in Gandhi's satyagraha actions, the April 19, 1913, issue of *Indian Opinion* carried an in-depth story on Emmeline Pankhurst, a famous suffragette.<sup>50</sup> In "The Campaign," Gandhi mentioned his strategy of courting arrest over two issues: the need to repeal the three-pound tax and the need to change the marriage law, an issue he considered to have a direct impact on women's reputation,<sup>51</sup> but there was no specific mention of women participating directly in the protest. On May 4, the Transvaal Indian Women's Association, via Schlesin, sent a telegram to Jan Christian Smuts that stated that they considered the new law an indignity, and if the government

didn't amend the marriage law, the women would be ready to suffer imprisonment. Gandhi reported the telegram's message on page one of *Indian Opinion* on May 10, 1913, in an article called "Indian Women and Passive Resisters," adding, "We congratulate our plucky sisters who have dared to fight the government." But it is important to note that by the end of May, just after these publications relayed the intention of Indian women to court arrest, it was the women of Bloemfontein who first took this step. The Indian women would only do so months later.

The women in Gandhi's movement rose to the occasion and led with bravery. Their story is more widely covered, as in Gandhi's own account,<sup>52</sup> Reddy's 1995 account, and more recently, Rajmohan Gandhi's 2006 account and Ela Gandhi's 2013 account.<sup>53</sup> Eleven Tamil women wanted to join the struggle, even though six of them had young babies and one was pregnant.<sup>54</sup> A group of sixteen people from Phoenix Farm, including Kasturba and three other Gujarati-speaking women, were jailed for entering the Transvaal without permits and sentenced to three years of hard labor on September 23, 1913. The Tamil women who had courted arrest twice but had not been arrested went to Newcastle and began to tell the workers there about the protest against the £3 tax. The workers decided to go on strike. Gandhi said he was not prepared for such a development, but he considered it a good one. The Tamil women were arrested and sentenced (October 21, 1913) to three months' imprisonment. They were kept in Martizburg jail, where the food was terrible, and their health suffered. A sixteen-year-old woman, Valliamma R. Munuswami Mudaliar, suffered a fever while in jail and died a few days after her release.<sup>55</sup>

Many people were particularly upset to hear that women were imprisoned. Gandhi recounts that Sir Pherozeshah Mehta spoke in Bombay Town Hall, saying that his "blood boiled at the thought of these women lying in jails herded with ordinary

49. Abdurahman, "1913 Presidential Address,"

54. See also Abdurahman, "Variant Views," *APO*, February 26, 1910, 6.

50. M. K. Gandhi, "Mrs. Pankhurst's Sacrifice," *IO*, April 19, 1913, *CWVG* 13:81. For details on women's reputation, see Mongia, "Gender

and the Historiography of Gandhian Satyagraha," 141.

51. *IO*, May 3, 1913, *CWVG* 13:112.

52. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, 255–64.

53. See Reddy, *Gandhiji's Vision*; R. Gandhi, *Gandhi: The Man*, 171–82; and E. Gandhi, "The 1913 Women's Marches."

54. M. K. Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, 253.

55. *Ibid.*, 258–59.

criminals.”<sup>56</sup> Gandhi noted that “the women’s imprisonment worked like a charm upon the laborers of the mines near Newcastle.”<sup>57</sup> Soon, the number of strikers grew from 78 to 5,000.<sup>58</sup> Gandhi then encouraged the striking mine workers to proceed from Newcastle, Natal, to the Transvaal border, where they would court arrest for trying to cross the border. Gandhi was arrested on November 11 and sentenced to nine months of hard labor. While he was in prison, Reddy explains, the strike “soon involved some sixty thousand Indians in the largest general strike that South Africa had seen.”<sup>59</sup> Hofmeyr, who mentions that there were strikes and that striking workers courted arrest in the 1913 campaign, does not mention the involvement of women satyagrahis or that Schlesin helped keep the newspaper going during this time (29).<sup>60</sup>

In her unique contribution to scholarship, Hofmeyr introduces us to the nuances of the newspaper in a far-flung colony in the age when readers were encouraged by Gandhi to read slowly and deeply. She fills us in on the community that surrounded Gandhi and the role it played in supporting the newspaper. Yet the participation by women of all races as well as Coloured and black South African men in leading, modeling, and shaping the movement of resistance to pass laws and other racist legislation, including the role of their newspapers as well as street protest, might have been integrated more into the main narrative. I offer these remarks to supplement Hofmeyr’s fascinating account by providing additional information in portraying the newspaper in its historical and social context.

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60. See also Kumar, *Bramacharya*, 112.

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## PRINT, READING, AND PATRONAGE IN THE COLONIAL-BORN PRESSES OF THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN AFRICA

James R. Brennan

*Gandhi's Printing Press* offers a stimulating literary historical appreciation of Gandhi's publishing endeavors during his years in South Africa (1893–1914). The book's brevity belies its ambition. Over five highly original and accessible chapters, Isabel Hofmeyr offers new pathways to reconstruct a deterritorialized, diasporic print culture; to reinterpret Gandhi's signal political texts; and to incorporate South Africa and the wider Indian diaspora in Africa to counter narratives that have long been overdetermined by Gandhi's biography and India's course to independence. This essay examines Indian diasporic print culture, in order to both appreciate the magnitude of Hofmeyr's contribution and to challenge some of the book's generalizations. In particular, it considers the wider political economy of print in which Gandhi's printing press operated; the reception and agency among the readers of Gandhi's print products; and the comparable if considerably more modest print figure from East Africa, in order to draw out important continuities and divergences among these diasporic printing presses. By examining Hofmeyr's Gandhi in light of the Indian newspaper landscape of East Africa about which I am familiar, I hope to draw some comparisons about the purpose and meaning of print and reading culture between these two Indian diasporic contexts.

### Intention, Extemporization, and the Reader

The heft, power, and brilliance of Gandhi's legacy is such that, as with Beethoven, one might simply conclude that "posterity capitulated."<sup>1</sup> Subsequent figures could never measure up. He casts an impos-

1. See Ross, "Deus Ex Machina."

sible shadow over descendants and scholars alike. Uma Mesthrie thus aptly titles her biography of Gandhi's son (and her grandfather) Manilal *Gandhi's Prisoner*?<sup>2</sup> Ramachandra Guha's recent biography of Gandhi breaks significant historiographical ground simply by avoiding, at least partially, the telescoping of Gandhi's South African years with those of the nationalist Mahatma in India that typifies most accounts.<sup>3</sup> Hofmeyr's approach is similarly fresh, interpreting Gandhi's work not as that of protonationalist hero, but rather within two related contexts: (1) the material business of the artisanal "colonial-born" presses of the Indian diaspora within the British Empire, and (2) the more ethereal textual circulation between metropolitan India and its (sub)imperial peripheries.

One of the book's cardinal virtues is how it maps new ways to situate and understand the print work of Gandhi during his years in South Africa. Hofmeyr uses the term *colonial-born press* to define the striking line of Indian diasporic print works that dot the East African littoral from Durban to Mombasa. These were often shoestring operations attempting to fulfill both entrepreneurial and philanthropic works for small but engaged local populations. Hofmeyr acknowledges but wisely does not embrace the Indian Ocean World as a meaningful arena for this print activity, as it is the modern rhythms of steam and telegraph, rather than the hoary monsoon seasons, that determine the nodes and networks of Indian printers, in which Johannesburg, Nairobi, and London loom too large to insist on oceanic determinations. In her characterization of these colonial-born presses, Hofmeyr is sharply attuned to the fragile and ramshackle nature of the enterprises themselves, which survive through constant extemporization and ad hocery. And yet, this insight too often fades from view when attention shifts to Gandhi's characterizations of his own print work.

The most revelatory chapter is the book's second, which offers a business and labor history of the International Printing Press (IPP) in Durban. Opened in 1898, IPP survived from a multiplicity of sources—its premises were subsidized by a

wealthy Durban businessman; it regularly took on "jobbing" orders and other grubby tasks to maintain revenues. And it eventually became Gandhi's printing press through the power of his editorial voice and, increasingly, his shareholding stake and role in decision making. Hofmeyr is sharply alive to the ironies of Gandhi's printing experiment in her evaluation of IPP after it had left Durban for the communal Phoenix settlement. In its attempt to better conform to Gandhi's ideals of slow and thoughtful labor, it became a "training ground for satyagraha and for prison" (64). She shows how four Zulu women actually carried out the most routinized and physically difficult labor (66–67), belying the commune's antihierarchical conceits. But where Hofmeyr so ably demonstrates the extemporizing nature of such colonial-born presses in general, her acceptance of Gandhi's ethical pronouncements effectively transforms IPP and his newspaper, the *Indian Opinion*, into an otherworldly venture. Gandhi's canniness does not get its due—nor, for that matter, does the ubiquity of news by extemporization that characterizes the wider world in which the *Indian Opinion* had to navigate in order to survive.

By the early twentieth century, the production of international news in colonial territories like South Africa was largely done through informal exchanges among newspapers. It is true that the largest and best-capitalized newspapers formalized exchanges into associations that sought to exclude smaller rivals to gain market shares, as happened with the creation of short-lived syndicates led by the *Cape Times*, *Cape Argus*, and *Rand Daily Mail*. To both counter and make peace with such syndicate strategies, Reuters's Cape Town agent (and future company director) Roderick Jones established the South African Press Agency in 1910, with Reuters taking majority ownership.<sup>4</sup> Yet smaller and less well-capitalized papers did not simply capitulate; they continued to exchange news informally with one another and with the wider British Empire. Several metropolitan newspapers in Britain, for instance, found themselves worryingly dependent on provincial white South

2. See Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner*?

3. See Guha, *Gandhi before India*.

4. See Silberstein-Loeb, *The International Distribution of News*, 171–74.

African papers to supply them with coverage of critical events throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras.<sup>5</sup> Even further still on the margins, small papers in British India and West Africa regularly made a practice of clipping and repackaging news, often undated, into columns to distill international news in ways relevant to readers.<sup>6</sup>

Gandhi's creation of columns for "Indian mail" and "English mail" in the *Indian Opinion*, which similarly distilled a cacophonous range of news items that traveled by post rather than by wire into manageable form, followed in the well-worn paths of other extemporizing newspapers. Hofmeyr heaps much interpretive burden on these practices, declaring them intentional editorial strategies to slow reading, create fresh new genres, and reconfigure meanings of time and space within the empire. *Indian Opinion* columns like "Durban Notes" and "Our London Letter," she argues, portray these cities as "best captured in forms that metaphorically amble along the usual pathways of circulation rather than hurtling along via telegram and telegraph" (82). But the practice of synthesizing informal exchanges of dated news into presentable copy was quite unremarkable; even the largest South African newspapers continued to feature ship-bound as well as wire-bound news and commentary in their daily productions, often without adequate source and date referencing.

Where Gandhi differed from other editors was in his ambitious moralization of these practices. The *Indian Opinion*'s defiant masthead announcement, "No Rights Reserved," understandably draws Hofmeyr's attention to Gandhi's larger views on property, law, and industrial development. But this announcement, along with the *Indian Opinion*'s stubborn refusal to give dates and bylines to their items, would be better viewed as simultaneously satisfying two separate sets of demands—the ethical Gandhi's proselytization of antiproperty ideals; and the lawyerly Gandhi's efforts to avoid detection of pilfered news items from Reuters and other businesses that made their living from distributing news and reserving their rights.

Employing the blanket credit of "the exchanges" to combine separate snippets from various newspapers not only creates "multiple senses of time," as Hofmeyr argues, but also disguises potential copyright infringements (83). This is not to dismiss Gandhi's editorial work as a monument to casuistry; rather, it is simply to point out that the *Indian Opinion* operated, and indeed thrived, within the logistical and legal confines of a semipirical political economy of news. Seeking and maintaining revenues from nationalist endeavors had to coexist with their ethical ends. As Hofmeyr points out, Gandhi steadfastly refused to lower the price of his later newspapers, *Young India* and *Harijan*, even after the satyagraha campaigns had transformed them into best sellers ripe for more effective pricing. She accepts Gandhi's rationale that the price should not be lowered, for the "cover price represented a form of commitment from the reader who had a responsibility and a role to play in the production of the newspaper" (133). Both his rationale and pricing, it seems, have been proved effective.

Key aspects of Hofmeyr's presentation of historical context are shaped by Gandhi's signature criticisms of modernity. This is particularly true for the wider premise that the fin-de-siècle media age was one that traded greater speed and volume of information for decreasing capacities to process it meaningfully. Among the core assumptions that Gandhi asserts and Hofmeyr accepts is that the late nineteenth century was a period not just of increasing connectivity and rapidity of communications, but one in which the reader's mind found itself overwhelmed by this "vertiginous acceleration" in which "ever-briefer media genres like the headline, summary, and extract speeded up tempos of reading" (4). The advent of a new electric global communication infrastructure and concomitant explosion of print periodicals during the nineteenth century was undoubtedly dramatic, but this does not necessarily induce superficial readings by what Gandhi terms "macadamized" minds—inorganic thought processes that equate speed with efficiency—any more than the telegraph itself induced metahistorical changes such

5. See Potter, *News and the British World*, 36–86.

6. For India, see Natarajan, *A History of the Press*; for West Africa, see Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*.

as the rise of so-called objective news prose, monopoly capitalism, imperialism, and the “annihilation of space and time,” as has been suggested.<sup>7</sup> This is Thoreauvian conviction rather than demonstrable experience. Gandhi’s own response to this perceived crisis provides the book’s subtitle, “slow reading,” in which the reader accepts the pace of the human body and must rely solely on himself or herself to process information in order to achieve intellectual independence. To demonstrate the full implication of this line of Gandhian thought, Hofmeyr employs a literary device, the “Reader,” which stands at the somewhat problematic center of the book.

The book’s most arresting and creative arguments rest on what the reader could or should take from Gandhi’s editorial and authorial strategies. Hofmeyr correctly notes that the reader has disappeared from Gandhian scholarship (126). To rectify this, Hofmeyr posits an abstracted Reader to have been Gandhi’s intended audience: someone literate in English and Gujarati but lost amid the surfeit of information and ideas conveyed by revolutionary pamphlets and capitalist newspapers. Hofmeyr contextualizes, though too briefly, the Reader in time and place. “Since the ideal reader was an imperial citizen,” she explains, “he or she would have been accustomed to reading within the time-space continuum of empire, a skill in part built up through regularly negotiating the textual weave of exchange papers” (86). The Reader exists in history as well as text, for he or she is also a “deterritorialized diasporic subject” who, from the peripheries, can “make himself or herself a sovereign part of India not through territorial belonging or abstract rights but through reading” (157). Gandhi’s solution was to use techniques, particularly didactic dialogue and repetition, to instill self-control, persistence, and patience in the Reader.

Indeed, the most direct discussion of reading comes from Gandhi’s own didactic theorizing on what makes or does not make a good reader. Such hyperconsciousness to audience, however, seems to lead quickly to solipsism and overdetermination. *Hind Swaraj* explicitly posits Gandhi as “editor” and London-based Indian expatriates as

his “readers.” In *Indian Opinion*, Gandhi distinguishes between those Gujarati readers who pretend to be asleep from those who are genuinely asleep (128–31). The book’s reading experiments, thus, are primarily those in Gandhi’s mind, intermediated by Hofmeyr’s constructed Reader. What seems needed to develop these ingenious insights is a sort of subaltern study of Indian diasporic print culture—perhaps along the lines of Jonathan Rose’s *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*—in order to capture those experiences beyond Gandhi’s normative exhortations on how to read and his more general editorial dirigisme. More modestly, a greater sense of reception, from letters, other correspondence, or advertising, might have fleshed out the constructed Reader to his or her interests, limitations, and aspirations.

#### **The Greater India of a Lesser Gandhi:**

##### **V. R. Boal and the *Tanganyika Herald***

But what about the Indian diaspora in Africa after Gandhi? Hofmeyr correctly observes that “as India became more national, the diasporic fringe lost much of its value and at times turned into something of a political liability,” for diasporic figures continued to “articulate ideas of Indians as more worthy claimants of imperial rights than other groups like Africans” (157–58). India’s transformation from free textual circuit to bounded political territory constricted the intellectual possibilities of Gandhian-type printing presses, while giving new vital political energy to the actual newspapers Gandhi produced in India. Gandhi’s own well-known distance from African political struggles during his years in South Africa might be viewed as either a straightforward indulgence of civilizational superciliousness or, more charitably, as Gaurav Desai has recently suggested, symptomatic of his enduring conviction concerning “the political rights of indigenous versus immigrant communities,” in which Indians best deployed their political energies by identifying and supporting the nationalist political struggles of indigenous majorities.<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi left behind an inspiring but impossible model for nationalist print entrepreneurs of the Indian diaspora to adopt. An example of

7. See especially Carey, *Communication as Culture*, chap. 8.

8. See Desai, “Gandhi as Allegory.”

one such aspiring but “lesser Gandhi” was Vrajlal Ramji Boal. Born, like Gandhi, to Gujarati-speaking Hindu parents in Kathiawar, Boal settled in Tanganyika (now mainland Tanzania) in the latter days of the First World War after earlier visits to Zanzibar and the German-controlled mainland. He worked as a dancer in a theater group but left upon gaining employment as a clerk. He entered politics as a secretary to the territory’s Indian Association, and in 1928 he launched the Anglo-Gujarati daily newspaper *Tanganyika Herald*, along with a printing business, Herald Printing Works. His business partner was B. U. Thacker, a successful bank clerk whose son R. B. Thacker would later become famous for serving as the main printer for the Tanganyika African Nationalist Union (TANU) and its leader, Julius Nyerere. For his staunch support of Gandhi, through newsprint and general “Greater India” activism Boal came to be known, according to Special Branch, as the “Young Gandhi of Tanganyika.”<sup>9</sup>

Like Gandhi, Boal relied heavily on the patronage of wealthy Gujarati merchants, the most visible being Mathuradas Kalidas Mehta.<sup>10</sup> While tensions among Indian professionals, large merchants, and smaller shopkeepers existed, such tension never jeopardized the diasporic community’s larger political solidarities, which would be far more divided over issues of religious communalism.<sup>11</sup> In South Africa, by contrast, Gandhi by 1909 had lost support of the larger Indian merchants, who faced financial ruin from association with his satyagraha campaigns. As Hofmeyr shows, he began instead to develop a more inward-focused and sharply anticapitalist, anti-industrial political philosophy (127). Boal’s *Tanganyika Herald* would reflect and at times energetically pursue communal divisions in its editorial policy, but this policy never challenged the political consensus of East Africa’s Indian merchants, without the support from whom it could not prosper.

Boal’s editorial work was considerably less didactic than that of Gandhi. Editorials were di-

alogical but in conversation with adjacent print items, often letters to the editor or news summaries, rather than stand-alone meditations with a single Reader. The intended audience for his newspaper was threefold. First, East African Indians were hectored to challenge local discrimination and lend support to Indian nationalist enterprises in India, East Africa, and wherever else Indians lived under British rule—which he and others collectively termed *Greater India*. Second, British colonial officials were shamed into taking action to end discriminatory policies and, more tangibly, to meet Indian security needs in the face of “native” African criminality. Third, the *Tanganyika Herald* circulated in India, and nationalist readers there were asked to support Indian causes in East Africa, “to awaken India to take care of her sons living abroad,”<sup>12</sup> in the process creating a political space that connected diaspora with homeland.<sup>13</sup>

As a colonial-born press that emerged from regular steamship routes, the *Tanganyika Herald* generated much enthusiasm for Indian nationalist figures passing through the port of Dar es Salaam. When Gandhi’s son Manilal stopped for a brief port call in 1932, he was mobbed by a raucous crowd of admirers.<sup>14</sup> Yet despite these transnational linkages, most news and editorial items were mobilized to address decidedly provincial politics—lobbying for more favorable commercial regulations, fixing roads, cleaning streets, and making towns safe. Boal’s *Tanganyika Herald*, like Gandhi’s *Indian Opinion*, sought abstract justice, but it differed by investing far more of its energies in securing obtainable colonial protections. It was very much a newspaper of Dar es Salaam, and urban micropolitics occupied several columns each week. Boal loudly championed the cause of Indian retail shopkeepers in the largely African neighborhood of Kariakoo, for example, who complained that African and poor Arabs (Shihiris) blocked access to their shop entrances in order to hawk their wares.<sup>15</sup>

As a local issue of both editorial concern and reader interest, crime had no rivals. Sentiments of

9. Entry for Vrajlal Ramji Boal, September 1958, in “Asian Who’s Who,” National Archives of the United Kingdom, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 141/17862. See also Brennan, “Politics and Business,” 49–50.

10. *Tanganyika Herald*, July 9, 1938.

11. For an overview see Brennan, “South Asian Nationalism in an East African Context.”

12. *Tanganyika Herald*, March 2, 1935.

13. On this general point see Aiyar, “Anticolonial Homelands.”

14. *Tanganyika Herald*, October 1, 1932.

15. *Tanganyika Herald*, April 1, 1939.

nervous self-preservation outstripped Gandhian injunctions to treat crime as a disease. Boal amply documented the patterns, tactics, weapons, and actions of African criminals, to warn readers and to lobby the colonial government for greater protection. “For the shop-keepers there are only two ways of dealing with these *badmashes* [rogues],” he explained, to be “prepared for a fight,” and to know that they would always have to phone the “charge office for police assistance.”<sup>16</sup> Boal even waxed nostalgic for the far fiercer tactics of German colonial policing, when one could “fearlessly sleep with the doors of his house wide open and no dishonest native could escape the eyes of German police.”<sup>17</sup> He regularly hectorated his British official readers to take action against African “loafers” whose only visible means of support had to come from crime, and who in turn had erected a “Native Raj” of unchecked criminality in the Indian commercial area of town. Yet for all this scare-mongering, Boal also sympathized with the condition of urban unemployment, and he returned to Gandhian values to explain the issue. He stipulated that Africans stole out of hunger, but he defined “hunger” as a disease of Western civilization, which included not just desire for food but “the desire of the town native to buy good wearing apparels, to use cycles and taxis, to see cinemas and to enjoy such amenities of the western life which necessitate large recurrent expenditure.”<sup>18</sup> It was incumbent on the colonial government not only to reduce this unemployment, but to further take into account the non-Western religious hardships suffered by African residents—who were overwhelmingly Muslim—by calling a halt to urban “round-ups” of tax defaulters during the month of Ramadhan.<sup>19</sup>

Gandhi had provided the example of a sadhu editor, the holy ascetic newspaperman, upon whom Boal and other like-minded Indian print figures in East Africa modeled themselves. Boal commemorated the life of M. A. Desai, editor of the short-lived but precociously nationalist *East African Chronicle*, as reflecting the ideals of renuncia-

tion and determination of sadhus and fakirs who had held positions in ancient India “far greater than that of even Kings and Sovereigns.”<sup>20</sup> Boal himself boasted of being “practically penniless” when he finally left East Africa for retirement in India.<sup>21</sup> But the community he represented was led not by sadhus and fakirs but by wealthy merchants and, increasingly after the Second World War, the East African-born and more politically agile children of these merchants, who quickly intuited the inevitability of African majority rule and adjusted their politics accordingly. Boal, by contrast, proved essentially heedless to Gandhi’s call—later made official state policy by Jawaharlal Nehru—to prioritize indigenous political rights. In 1952 he retired to Rajkot, India, where he published a weekly paper called, rather defiantly, the *Greater India*, only to return to Tanganyika in 1958 without having disavowed the subimperial sentiments that had long suffused notions of Greater India.<sup>22</sup> For the print career of this lesser Gandhi had been to serve firstly as a community advocate, both rewarded by and reliant upon that community’s political and financial support. Boal’s career-long defense of equal rights in colonial East Africa had, from the perspective of the nationalist-era 1950s, appeared too often to have been about defending the privileges of an immigrant racial minority.

For Gandhi, reading was a political act of expanding one’s imagination. He wanted to create followers, as both his heavy-handed didacticism and organizational savvy made plain throughout his career. But he also hoped to create intellectual conditions in which other print activists might organically evolve toward a higher set of values that would counter the suffocating speed of the modern world. This process is best unlocked through the sensitive and imaginative literary approach that Hofmeyr gives to Gandhi’s editorial work in South Africa. But other print activists among the Indian diaspora in Africa were more tightly bound to both the patronage and the ideals in which a Greater India had thrived from the 1910s to the

16. *Tanganyika Herald*, January 21, 1939.

17. *Tanganyika Herald*, June 11, 1932.

18. *Tanganyika Herald*, November 20, 1937.

19. *Tanganyika Herald*, December 7, 1935.

20. *Tanganyika Herald*, July 9, 1932.

21. Vrajlal Ramji Boal, interview by Robert Gregory, July 2, 1973, Bombay, copy in author’s possession.

22. Entry for Vrajlal Ramji Boal, September 1958, in “Asian Who’s Who.” See also Brennan, “Politics and Business,” 60–61.

1930s. For such print figures in East Africa like Boal, reading was an existential act of defense and survival within an unjust colonial hierarchy. Securing specific rights within specific territories mattered more than abstract transnational notions of liberation.

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## PONDERING THE TEXT AS CHANGE MAKER

Anne K. Bang

According to Isabel Hofmeyr, one of Gandhi's favorite words was "ponder," in the sense that the reader ponders a text slowly, carefully, and repeatedly. Hofmeyr's new book, *Gandhi's Printing Press: Experiments in Slow Reading*, takes its subject seriously and ponders the ways in which a text produces, or aims to produce, change. As Hofmeyr's careful examination shows, the texts printed by Gandhi and his team in the periodical *Indian Opinion* and a series of pamphlets printed at the International Printing Press (IPP) were clearly intended to produce change, first and foremost in the individual reader. Through slow and repetitive reading (pondering), the reader was to become a *satyagrahi*, or truthseeker, intellectually independent and free to make his or her own choices. The production and reproduction of a text—in part or in its entirety—was for Gandhi not only a question of mere reprinting, but also a recirculation of the particular text's inherent potential for change, of the person, the society, the body politic, the culture. For Gandhi, "change we can believe in" was synonymous with "text we can print"—regardless of copyright and with sovereign disdain for orderly presentation of genre and form. Gandhi, of course, was neither the first nor the last to realize the potential that texts have for instigating (social, political, cultural, religious, moral, or spiritual) change, nor was he the only person to use the medium of print in order to bring about change.

In the nineteenth century, emblematic texts were produced in Europe and beyond that carried potential for radical change: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), and Qasim Amin's *Tahrīr al-mar'a* (*The Liberation Women*, 1899), to mention a few. In the twentieth century, autocrats and totalitarian regimes of all political shades realized this potential and consequently banned, or even burned, texts for their inherent power to challenge existing order, hierarchies, or worldviews. Social, political, religious, or cultural reform may be openly advocated or implicitly condoned in text, and as Hofmeyr demonstrates, Gandhi's agenda seems to have lain somewhere between the political and spiritual, in the

process turning “printing into a kind of religion” (65). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nationalism, arguably, can most directly be linked to the circulation of printed text, to the point where nationalism and nation building almost can be viewed as by-products of the printing press.<sup>1</sup> Hofmeyr’s study also brings out very clearly how the IPP aimed to print the imperial subject, and how these efforts implicitly portrayed the Indian as more worthy of imperial rights than others, notably Africans (157). Incidentally, this echoes the campaign of Comorians in colonial Zanzibar not to be categorized as “natives,” printing their arguments in pamphlet-style texts (which, like some of Gandhi’s pamphlets and periodicals, are hard to find in public collections).<sup>2</sup>

Hofmeyr’s study is also inspiring for the study of another type of text that circulated the Indian Ocean in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the Islamic scholarly text, be that the massive tome of jurisprudence or the small leaflet containing devotional prayer or the names of God in poetic form. This was a period of change, with new populations becoming Muslim and established Muslim communities taking on new practices, new interpretations, new teaching methods, and new ways of becoming “good Muslims.”<sup>3</sup> These changes have been interpreted in different ways; as a consequence of expanding European colonial power, of shifting local hierarchies and political and economic contexts, and—not least—of the increased circulation of Islamic text, as well as the introduction of new texts into an existing *bildungskanon* that was increasingly globalized.<sup>4</sup> If we accept the latter (the text as change maker), we must also ponder the questions that Hofmeyr addresses in her study: What is the tentative link between the printed (or handwritten) matter and the change taking (or not taking) place? What is the link between the author and her own ability to agitate the cause expressed in the text, and actual change? And what is the position of the editor of change-oriented texts?

The reader, too, is an active partner in the process, interpreting the “glitches” in the text where he or she inevitably reads his or her own preexisting views, regardless of how diligently they follow Gandhi’s advice of pondering.

### The Islamic Text in the Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Indian Ocean

What Hofmeyr has shown in her detailed study of Gandhi’s IPP is that there are many modes of text making, including cutting, quoting, collating, and reediting already published text (with or without the consent of copyright holders). Her discussion also shows very clearly that this reworking of published text, in fact, was a very common mode of text production and has continued to be so outside the Western world.

Ronit Ricci has raised a related discussion for the Indian Ocean world of text, although, unlike Hofmeyr’s, her discussion also includes manuscript reproduction.<sup>5</sup> Ricci’s study traces the influx of the Arabic language and literary tropes into Malay, Javanese, and Tamil over time. She points to the emerging production of Arabic texts and their subsequent circulation in these regions, and she compares this to Malay, Javanese, and Tamil modes of literary expression. At the same time, she relates the role of Arabic in non-Arabic speaking settings to shifting relationships local and global, literary and vernacular.<sup>6</sup>

Both Ricci and Hofmeyr raise questions that are central to the study of Indian Ocean Islam and its changing expressions and practices. What is the relationship between translation, transmission, diffusion, and dissemination when it comes to religious texts? With reference to manuscript and printed books, we can trace reformist ideas that originated elsewhere but that were interpreted, reformulated, adapted—and understood—locally.

For this to happen, an element of translation is almost always present, as the Islamic world of the Indian Ocean encompasses multiple languages.

But, the idea of translation also implies a no-

1. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

2. See Walker, “Identity and Citizenship.” See also an early printed version of the history of Comorians in Zanzibar in Saleh, *A Short History*.

3. See Becker, *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania*, and McIntosh, *The Edge of Islam*.

4. See Loimeier, *Between Social Skills and Marketable Skills*.

5. See Ricci, *Islam Translated*.

6. See *ibid.*, 156.

tion of textual genealogy that makes little room for analysis of the process as multidirectional—as if there exists somewhere (usually in Arabia) an ur-version of a text that then goes through various stages of dilution. Rather, says Ricci, what happens is that the text goes through various stages of understanding—of words, but also of the role and function of the words. Viewed from this perspective, a textual or literary network becomes more a network of cultural practices than one that should be traced with a view to genealogy.

Closer study of textual circulation may well show, in the case of East Africa, that regional nineteenth-century authors had as much impact as those who copied texts from Middle Eastern (often Ḥaḍramī) originals. The most influential scholars of late nineteenth-century East Africa wrote mainly in Arabic, but they also showed a strong interest in translation and in the Arabic language itself—its grammar and syntax and how this could be most precisely rendered in Swahili. In fact, in the late nineteenth century, Islamic scholars in East Africa seem to have paired their efforts to teach Arabic with a parallel movement toward translation into Swahili. The Zanzibar Qadi and scholar ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Amawi (d. 1896), for example, produced much of his unpublished text in Swahili *ajami*, including a dictionary of Islamic historical narratives in both Arabic and Swahili.<sup>7</sup> In this manuscript, al-‘Amawi has made specific notes on exactly how words should be rendered to convey the real meaning of the story. In Ricci’s argument, the scholars of the East African coast were not merely translating but creating narratives that in turn were imbued with meaning in Swahili, harvesting from the so-called big tradition of Islam. They drew from the big “cosmopolis” of Islamic scholarly literature, which had its origin in Arabic, but of which retellings existed in a multitude of languages by the time printing presses emerged. These retellings were partly oral, and partly in manuscript form. They gradually appeared in printed form as print-

ing presses landed in the port cities of the Indian Ocean.

We can envision a constant harvesting from this tradition, in many ways similar to the harvesting undertaken by Gandhi and his staff on the IPP. In the Indian Ocean Islamic world this took place first as manuscript copying; the student in Islamic colleges copying down lines of prayer (*du‘a*, dhikr) or extracts from jurisprudence, Sufi manuals, or theology. These were then copied and copied again until the collection of extracts took the form of a compendium and thus part of a curriculum. In addition, entire books and volumes were copied—The Quran, *ḥadīth* collections, Sufi texts, grammar and language texts, and of course, volumes of jurisprudence (*fiqh*).<sup>8</sup> In essence, this is not so different from the process Hofmeyr describes taking place in Gandhi’s printing press, except that Gandhi’s harvesting is both broader and more eclectic. As Hofmeyr also shows, Gandhi recommended that his readers copy again the texts that they found useful or instructive: “Read them, mark the important passages and then finally copy them out in a notebook” (93), much in the same way that a Sufi disciple would copy an *ijaza* (certificate) or a particularly important text of spiritual advice.

It is also worth noting that the Q&A form Gandhi employs in the *Hind Swaraj* echoes that of the Islamic institution of *istifta’*, where a person or a group seeks a ruling from a learned mufti, or issuer of fatwas. By the late nineteenth century, these, too, were becoming printed, often in journals edited by a new breed of Islamic scholars and intellectuals—and thus also reaching an audience far beyond the original two interlocutors. A good example of this is a case originating in Gandhi’s neighborhood, in Transvaal, South Africa. In 1903, a group of Muslims turned to Muḥammad ‘Abduh in Egypt, then head of the Dar al-Ifta and widely known also for his work as an editor and publisher of the journal *al-‘Urwat al-Wuthqa*.<sup>9</sup> Together

7. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Amawi, unpublished manuscript, in private ownership, Zanzibar. For a presentation of parts of this manuscript, see Hoffman, “In His (Arab) Majesty’s Service.”

8. For an analysis of what type of text was copied in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lamu, see Bang, “The Riyadh Mosque Manuscript Collection in Lamu.” For a further study of the role of owners, buyers, and copyists, see Bang, “Localizing Islamic Knowledge.”

9. See Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State*, 123–30; Sedgwick, *Muḥammad ‘Abduh*; and Skovgaard-Petersen, “The Global Mufti.”

with fellow Egyptian Rashid Rida, who edited the journal *al-Manar*, he typified the new breed of Islamic scholars, who relied on their own judgment rather than established jurisprudence, and who were open to new technologies and media. Their journals were widely distributed, from Indonesia to Morocco. In East Africa, too, scholars were subscribing to these journals and starting publishing ventures of their own.<sup>10</sup>

The act of the Transvaal Muslims is remarkable in itself, as it demonstrates the ways in which Islamic ideas and notions of “correct” Islam were becoming globalized in the early twentieth century. By this point in time, Muslims were increasingly seeking authority beyond that of the immediate, local, and familiar, and in the process increasingly favoring textual renderings of authority over oral—first in manuscript and then, increasingly, in print. The Transvaal Muslims had three questions for the Egyptian shaykh: Is it lawful to eat meat prepared by Christians? It is lawful to wear Western-style hats? And is it lawful for a Shafi‘i to pray behind a Ḥanafi imam, given that the Transvaal are a very small community of Muslims? It is easy to see that the questions from Transvaal reflected the situation of this particular community as a minority in a predominantly Christian society. ‘Abduh’s fatwa was clear: yes, to all three questions. While ‘Abduh’s rulings are interesting from the point of view of Islamic jurisprudence, the story of the Transvaal fatwa is all the more relevant to this discussion, as it is closely linked with the Islamic printing culture emerging in the early twentieth century. The fatwa was printed (most likely by some of ‘Abduh’s opponents) and read not only by the Transvaal Muslims, but also by Muslims in Egypt, where it caused an uproar, especially the ruling that meat prepared by Christians is lawful. The first print of the fatwa was headlined “How can that be declared lawful which God has declared unlawful?”<sup>11</sup> Heated polemics followed, not in the higher echelons of the Dar al-Ifṭā, but in Egyptian dailies, journals, and periodicals, includ-

ing *al-Manar*, which had a wide readership. Opinions came from far beyond Egypt or Transvaal and were published in pro- and contra-‘Abduh journals and papers. The queries of the Transvaal Muslims, seemingly rooted in their particular position as a small minority community, had in fact become a debate in a Muslim printing sphere that was increasingly going global.

In her book, Hofmeyr also offers a reflection on how the Internet age and social media have created a new generation of readers who read “bits and pieces” rather than the long narratives typified by the novel (150–60). Reading style, in other words, has come very near full circle. This, too, is an inspiration to the study of Islam, where present-day social media has created a type of reading that is almost immediately followed by commentary. The reader, in other words, is not only the editor of his or her own reading, but also the critic or commentator. On Islamic websites, an almost real-time exegesis takes place in groups where people in different locations read the same texts at the same time. Recitations of well-known prayers and *dhikr* can also be followed on Facebook, YouTube, and various Islamic websites. The *Ratib al-Ḥaddād*, which is a supererogatory prayer widely recited in East Africa and Southeast Asia, is now recited in new communities that exist solely within social media.<sup>12</sup> Several Facebook pages and other websites are devoted to its recitation, interpretation, and explanation, often streaming both the recital itself and explanatory lectures. The comments left by viewers reflect that this type of real-time retellings (to follow Ricci’s analysis above) are perceived as either useful (from the point of view of learning) or bringing blessing (from a devotional perspective). In that sense, the relocation of text to the Internet, where it is often accompanied by sound, seems to have actualized the dual nature of the production of the text. Does the rise of new media for this type of recitation lead to what Eickelmann and Anderson called “fragmentation of authority,”<sup>13</sup> or does a field emerge where each be-

10. See Ghazal, *Islamic Reform and Arab Nationalism*.

11. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam*, 127.

12. The *Ratib al-Ḥaddād* was composed by the Hadrami ‘Alawi poet and Sufi saint ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Alawi al-Ḥaddād (d. 1719). In many communities in East Africa, the *Ratib* is recited every Thursday after sunset or evening prayer. Facebook has several pages devoted entirely to dis-

cussions of the *Ratib al-Ḥaddād*. There are also a number of websites run by ‘Alawi organizations, such as *Alhaddad.org* and *baalawi.com*.

13. See Eickelmann and Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World*.

liever finds gratification both in the form of learning (from a perceived authority) or in the form of *baraka* (from a perceived spiritual authority)—thus continuing both the discursive tradition that emphasizes scriptural learning and that which emphasizes devotional and esoteric fulfillment?

### The Pamphlet: Permanently Provisional?

Hofmeyr's discussion of the pamphlets printed by Gandhi's printing press is both commendable and interesting from a comparative perspective. The pamphlet, small and unassuming, is still a favored medium of the multifaceted Islamic press, printed locally—or in India, Southeast Asia—and sold on makeshift tables outside mosques. Contrary to manuscript collections, that even in East Africa have been subject to surveys and merited entries into the big-tradition encyclopedias like *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*,<sup>14</sup> the pamphlet has passed under the radar of historians and heritage scholars alike. The world of the pamphlet is indeed fleeting, as Hofmeyr describes for those that came off Gandhi's press; even the first print of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* is now unavailable in public libraries. Nonetheless, the Islamic pamphlet has been ubiquitous ever since it first was printed, but it has not always been unassuming. The Germans in Tanganyika found it so unnerving that they sent orientalist C. H. Becker to find out "what books come into the hands of local mwalimus and so exercise a direct influence on the intellectual life of our colony [Tanganyika]."<sup>15</sup> Becker's report went some way to assuage the leadership of the Tanganyika colony, recently shaken by the Maji Maji revolt and the "Meccan letter affair," both of which imbued local Muslims with anticolonial sentiment.<sup>16</sup>

Hofmeyr raises the timely question, "What kind of intellectual histories emerge if these [pamphlets] are bundled together?" (101). Gandhi, as Hofmeyr shows, urged his readers to bundle the pamphlets in the literal sense, into binders, thus creating bodies of text that in total formulate a vision of change. Hofmeyr's question, however, is not

easy to answer when it comes to the circulation of Islamic pamphlets in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—or even today. Normal methodological approaches, such as reception studies, are nearly impossible, as most pamphlets were the subject of neither debate nor discussion. Most were simply printed for recital and were well-known *du'ā's* (prayers) or dhikr (litanies, often with a Sufi content). Examples of early printed prayers are the *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt*<sup>17</sup> and the *Rātib al-Ḥaddād*.<sup>18</sup> In the case of the *Rātib*, we do not know when the first printed versions of *Rātib al-Ḥaddād* were available in East Africa, or where they came from.<sup>19</sup> Most likely, the first pamphlet copies were printed either in India or Indonesia, where presses were producing lithograph copies of related material as early as 1875. It is also not entirely clear when the first editions appeared from an East African printer. What is known is that by the latter half of the twentieth century, the *Madrasat al-Nur al-Islamiyya* in Malindi printed several broadly circulated editions of this widely recited evening prayer. Pamphlet printing of the *Rātib al-Ḥaddād* seems to have taken place significantly earlier in South Africa, where a translation into Afrikaans in the Arabic script appeared as a pamphlet already in 1910.

Other pamphlets were pedagogical, often reproducing well-known texts on how to pray, perform the fast, or follow rules of ritual purity. One of them was the *Risālat al-Jāmi'a*, a simple treatise on the five pillars of Islam, authored by the eighteenth-century Ḥaḍramī scholar Aḥmad b. Zayn al-Ḥibshī (d. 1733). This was printed in Batavia (Jakarta) from the 1870s, and in the 1920s, the Zanzibar Government Printer ran off copies for use in the government schools—with Swahili translation in the Latin script.

We simply do not know who bought these pamphlets, nor even how they were transported from one location to the next (beyond the fact that in the Indian Ocean port cities they were in all likelihood transported by boat). They were printed. That's all we know. Furthermore, at the

14. See Roper, *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*.

15. See Becker, "Materials for the Understanding of Islam."

16. See Martin, "Muslim Politics and Resistance to Colonial Rule."

17. *Dalā'il al-khayrāt wa-mashāriq al-anwār fī dhikr al-ṣalāt 'alā al-nabī al-mukhtār*, by Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Jazūli (d. 1465).

18. *Rātib al-Ḥaddād*, by 'Abd Allah b. 'Alawi al-Haddād (d. 1719).

19. See Bang, *Islamic Sufi Networks*, 143–62.

current state of research, we have no knowledge of the number of copies printed, nor of distribution channels or financing.

Having lived so long under the shadow of the more prestigious manuscripts—and partly also of the printed book—it is high time for the Islamic pamphlet to become the subject of investigation. The potential perspectives are numerous. A fruitful path of research would be a focus on language and translation—issues that very much parallel Hofmeyr’s study of Gandhi’s multilingual press. Prayers and religious instruction often were translated (or at least given as commentary on the margin or the opposing page) into vernacular language. In South Africa, this could be Afrikaans in the Arabic script; in East Africa, it could be Swahili *ajami*. Another direction of investigation would be to trace which authors and texts were being printed and circulated, much in the same way as classical philology approaches the manuscript tradition. Do new texts come in, or are new media being used mainly to reproduce known texts? Finally, in future studies, the economy of reading, writing, and printing would be interesting to map, through surveys of ownership, donations, and financing. Luckily for the historian, owners often noted their ownership in the leaflets. Sponsors of print frequently had their name printed on the front page, following the sentence “*alā nafaqa*,” indicating their altruistic motive for funding.

#### Ocean of Texts

Print, printing history, text production (of all types, as Hofmeyr shows), text circulation, translation, reproduction: these fields are the mainstay of intellectual history. In turn, as Hofmeyr also demonstrates very clearly, the potential of the text as change maker means that its production and circulation also have repercussions on political, legal, social, and cultural history, including the history of colonialism and decolonization, as well as the emergence of political elites in the Indian Ocean area. Here, several other studies can be envisioned that parallel Hofmeyr’s book and provide a broader understanding of the wide diversity of change-making texts traversing the ocean in this period. The study of Islamic texts is but one.

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