

Colonial and Post-colonial History: enhancing knowledge, capacity and networks in the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia

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Introduction

Unequal global structures profoundly influence inequalities in academic knowledge production. This is manifested in the under-representation of Majority World (Global South) publication in international peer-reviewed journals based in the Minority World (Global North). Whilst graduate education is available in the Majority World, the terms of appointment and promotion within institutions may depend upon networks that mirror wider social inequalities. This is partly because in some countries (e.g., India) candidates are required to publish an article before they can submit their PhD, and this can lead to significant confusion about the difference between journals published by university and other academic presses, and by private companies. Early career scholars are especially vulnerable to predatory (pay-to-publish) publishing (Collyer 2018, Raju et al. 2018). There are, of course, distinguished journals based in the Majority World, and a wealth of experience in publishing among mid-career and senior academics. Nonetheless, early career scholars who wish to publish in international journals may have English as an additional language and are far less likely to have access to informal networks of support. There are also significant knowledge gaps that constitute barriers to access (Collyer 2018).

The authors of this paper attempted to address this issue by securing funding from the [British Academy Writing Workshops 2021 programme](#) to work with 30 Early Career Researchers (ECRs), researching colonial and post-colonial history and associated disciplines, from the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Anderson is editor of the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Battell Lowman (now, former) co-editor of *Settler Colonial Studies*, Doyle editor of the *Journal of African History*, and Sutton of *South Asian Studies*. Anderson, Doyle, and Sutton acted as expert editor contributors and mentors, Battell Lowman served as Project Manager including designing and facilitating the workshop sessions. The programme was supported by three senior academics connected to the regions of interest - Mellissa Ifill (University of Guyana), Ali Usman Qasmi (LUMS, Pakistan), and Godfrey B. Asimwe (Makerere University, Uganda) – and incorporated scholars from Jamaica (Sonjah N. Stanley Niaah), Mauritius (Satyendra Peerthun), Botswana (John Makgala), South Africa (Rebecca Swartz), Kenya (Peter Wafula

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Wekesa), India (Aparna Balachandran) and Bangladesh (Momin Chowdhury). Together, the group undertook a year-long virtual workshop programme that aimed to build new transnational collaborative networks to create a new skills and knowledge base.

The overall aim was to address inequalities and systemic disadvantages to publication in international, peer-reviewed journals. The objectives sought to:

- (1) Demystify the process of publishing in international peer-reviewed journals, including providing clear guidance on submission, peer review, and response to reviewers' reports, including strategies that we hoped would enable researchers to develop rejected articles for publication.
- (2) Work closely with early-career researchers on an individual and team basis to provide training on writing abstracts, planning and executing articles, and developing special issues and special features.
- (3) Share knowledge of international funding opportunities, and enhancing networks of participation to enable them, including those which underpin collaborative publication.
- (4) Provide a toolkit of better understanding and practice for Minority World editors, with the aim of increasing Majority World participation and publication in international peer-reviewed journals.

Recruitment

The project sought to recruit 30 academics, including PhD candidates, from the DAC List of ODA Recipient Countries in the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia researching colonial and post-colonial histories and associated topics. It looked for people who would benefit from expert advice and mentorship to publish their first article in an international, peer-reviewed journal and the chance to network with peers and senior scholars in the field to develop future research collaborations.

A Call for Authors was circulated through the informal professional networks of the Editors and Project Advisory Board that included clear eligibility criteria, programme timeline, and details on selection and participation criteria. The application requested participant information and responses in 4 steps:

- 1) A Statement of Motivation (750 words) that explained the applicant's interest in the programme, their 'fit' and commitment to participating in the whole programme, and obstacles or barriers faced so far in academic training and development.
- 2) An Abstract of Planned Work (1 paragraph) that outlined the applicant's plan for turning part of their research into an article for submission to an international, peer-reviewed academic journal.
- 3) A 1-page CV including details of education, academic and academic-related employment, key research achievements, teaching, and collaborations.

- 4) Ideas for Funded Research Projects (1 paragraph) to provide brief insights into the applicant's ideas for future funded research and their familiarity with international funding processes.

Finally, applicants were required to complete an EDI form that was only seen by the Project Manager. It was used to identify applicants for follow-up with the Project Manager around necessary adjustments and otherwise to develop aggregated and anonymised EDI data used to evaluate whether the programme met its stated goals around equity, diversity, and inclusion and for project reporting. Once data was transferred from the applicants' EDI forms, those forms were deleted.

More than 50 applications were emailed to the Project Manager, who managed the selection process, and were reviewed asynchronously by the three Editors. Decisions were made at a selection meeting with the Editors and Project Manager. The process began with identification of applications on which the Editors were agreed (yes/no/maybe), then mixed decisions were reviewed section-by-section (yes/no/maybe) to arrive at a proposed cohort. Key in the stated selection criteria was that priority would be given to applications with robust publication plans, to applicants from groups underrepresented in their particular regions/contexts, and to those able to commit to participation in the whole programme.

The proposed cohort was then reviewed for fit with the project goals and parameters and the proposed cohort EDI demographics were compared to the applicant pool EDI information to ensure equity in the selection process and cohort diversity. The Call for Authors also included a Statement on Diversity and Representation, which was based on the excellent work of the Programming Historian⁵ which affirmed the project's commitment to diversity and insistence on a harassment-free space for all participants. Finally, the Editors reviewed and agreed the successful applications. The Project Manager notified successful applicants by email, and also emailed unsuccessful applicants thanking them for their interest and asking permission to retain their contact details for any further opportunities for this or similar programmes.

The successful applicants became the 30 programme Authors, with the group spanning variation in caring responsibilities, disability, sexuality, age, and gender. It was not possible to recruit equally from the three project regions with the result that the final Author cohort was from the project region in the following proportions: 42% sub-Saharan Africa, 55% South Asia, and 3% Caribbean.

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<https://programminghistorian.org/en/about#:~:text=Diversity%20Policy,%2C%20religion%2C%20or%20technical%20experience> (last accessed 20 June 2022).

Accessibility and Inclusion

From development through delivery, the creation of an accessible and welcoming environment was a key project priority. The Call for Authors included a COVID-19 statement that outlined efforts by the programme team to mitigate negative impacts of the pandemic including recording presentations, informal catch-up sessions, and delivering the programme online only. This statement also included acknowledgement of the very real and uneven toll the prolonged pandemic experience was and continues to take and directed any issues or inquiries to the Project Manager for compassionate and creative support.

Workshop materials were circulated in advance wherever possible, visual materials included descriptions, and the Project Handbook previewed and recorded programme details to help Authors prepare for sessions and know what to expect at each meeting, with updated versions of the Handbook circulated regularly. In the online meetings, contributions could be made orally or in written form using the Zoom chat function. The Project Manager read the latter aloud as not all participants were able to access the chat and similarly, any visual materials that had not been circulated in advance were described orally during the session.

The Project Manager was the central point of project communication and was aware (from EDI forms and follow-up discussions) of participant access needs and therefore able to tailor materials and communications effectively. This also allowed the Project Manager to track upheavals and issues experienced by the participants and to provide individually appropriate care and support throughout the programme. The Handbook asked everyone involved in the project to use inclusive language, to engage respectfully with all other participants, and to raise any concerns or questions swiftly and in confidence with the Project Manager.

This project was conceived as an opportunity to bring journal editors and international ECRs seeking to publish in international academic journals for the first time in an explicitly supportive, welcoming, and non-hierarchical environment. In support, participants used their first name (or preferred name) instead of titles or honorifics and Editors modelled compassionate and open expertise in the content and style of their presentations and contributions. A 'Getting To Know Us' pack was compiled and circulated before the first international meeting, which included a page contributed by each participant with their name, project role, name they prefer to be called, pronouns, a 300-word 'about me', 200-word summary of research/their draft article, and a photograph they liked of themselves. The pack was a living document and participants could make changes to their page at any time. The pack was also confidential to the programme members and not shared in any form beyond the group. Further, the Editors' pages were shared as an early example, which helped to set an open and welcoming tone by including personal interests alongside their academic introduction. All participants were asked to join the meetings with their

Zoom name showing as: their preferred name, their pronouns, their project role (i.e., Author, Editor). These preparations and clear boundaries supported the successful creation of a connected, safe, and effective working atmosphere based on principles of equity and relationality.

Workshop Programme

The programme comprised 5 international online workshops. Each workshop was 3 hours, which allowed for hourly breaks to support accessibility, and time for a mix of presentations, activities, discussions, and break out groups. Workshops were run by the Project Manager, which reduced the labour and time commitment for the Editors who were able to focus on their expert contributions (formal and informal) to the sessions and connecting with the Authors. A shorter pre-programme meeting was held for all participants to make initial in-person introductions, to explain the programme, and to make space and time for questions or clarifications in advance of the first workshop.

Workshop 1 – How to Publish Your First Article (16 July 2021)

Professor Clare Anderson, editor of *The Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, delivered a presentation explaining the process of publishing in international academic journals, step-by-step. This included insights into the meanings and implications of the editorial decisions authors were likely to receive, academic journal workflow and working contexts, and strategies for identifying journals to approach for publication. In the second part of the workshop, Dr Deborah Sutton, editor of *South Asian Studies*, and Professor Shane Doyle, editor of the *Journal of African History* shared their insights into the process of academic journal production, and their top tips and strategies for successfully placing an article. The final section focussed on questions and discussion about researching journals and understanding obscure or implicit knowledge often assumed to be possessed by authors during the publication process.

Workshop 2 – Anatomy of an Article (29 July 2021)

Dr Deborah Sutton drew on her extensive editorial experience to ‘dissect’ an article to identify and understand its component parts, and how these fit together. This workshop focussed on the structure and construction of scholarly articles about colonial and post-colonial histories to fit the expectations and requirements of international peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Workshop 2 built on the understandings developed in Workshop 1 about the processes of journal publishing to help Authors think forward – strategically and effectively – to shaping their own research for submission.

Writing Support Groups

Authors were put into small groups by the Editors and Project Manager with the intention that these small groups would come together several times (separate to the Workshops) to support Authors to put

into practice the strategies learned and developed thus far. Efforts were made to group thematically, so that Authors had points of connection despite their different regional expertise. Groups were given the suggestion to use their first meeting to introduce their research and article and discuss their choices of journals to target. The groups could also follow up on the Workshop 2 activities and discuss the article they ‘dissected’ for that session, and to consider how that might help develop effective structures presenting research for submission to an international peer reviewed academic journal. It was suggested that the second meeting could helpfully focus on the structure of the draft articles, and further meetings to discuss writing-in-progress, share strategies for overcoming challenges that arose, and give and receive peer feedback and support.

Workshop 3 – Work-in-Progress: Feedback, Support and Peer Review (1 November 2021)

This session focussed on feedback and support in the direction of preparing Author articles-in-progress for submission to an international academic journal. Authors were asked to reflect on their experience so far and to share (so far as comfortable) anonymously using a web tool which provided the basis of the first discussion. The second section, “No Scholar is an Island: Experiences and Development of Collaborative and Supportive Writing Practices” featured reflections from the Editors on their experiences, failures, and successes with collaborative academic writing. The final part of Workshop 3 asked, “Are You Ready to Submit?” or more specifically how to know when work is ready to submit to an international peer-reviewed journal.

Workshop 4 – Feedback and Next Steps (2 February 2022)

Workshop 4 turned to the experience of receiving feedback on research articles. Specifically, it examined the process of receiving reports and decisions from international scholarly journals, with the help of expert and personal insights from the Editors. This session covered: the submission and feedback processes authors are likely to encounter when submitting work to international academic journals, developing a clear understanding of the implications and next steps for each of the editorial decisions likely to be received, and best practices for communication at each stage with the journal. The final section made use of break out groups to consider how to deal with and implement critical feedback from journals, and plan next steps for the articles-in-progress.

Workshop 5 – International Funding & Final Feedback (10 May 2022)

The subject of the final Workshop was International Funding, which plays important gatekeeping and facilitating roles in conceptualising and undertaking research, and was a required component of the British Academy programme. Alan Ashton-Smith, Research Development Manager at the University of Leicester, generously presented an introduction to international funding, an overview of schemes, terminology, and how to identify opportunities (focussed on funding available in connection with the UK

and EU), and opportunities for collaboration relevant to the programme Authors. The Editors also shared their insights and experiences with international funding, and tips for using networks to identify opportunities and overcome challenges. Workshop 5 ended with Author feedback on the programme, and closing reflections from the Editors, including what journal editors/teams can do to address the impacts of systemic inequality in academic publishing.

Programme Additions

Project resourcing created capacity that allowed the Editors and Project Managers to make additions to the workshop programme. Three additions were made in response to interests, needs, and issues raised by Authors and discussions in previous sessions and to provide additional support towards achievement of the project's goals.

One-to-One Author and Editor Chats

The Editors made a short informal meeting available to all Authors to discuss their work in December 2021. Authors were invited to select the date and time slot for a 15 to 30-minute discussion that best suited them using an online tool. These meetings were intended to replicate the kinds of informal chats an author might have with a journal editor at a conference or event. Following the intentions and goals of this workshop programme, the broad subject of these meetings was moving towards submission of original research articles to large, international, peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

Editor Review and Feedback on Article Drafts

All Authors were invited to submit a draft of their research article for individual written feedback. Articles were distributed among the Editors in light of their expertise and capacity and each provided useful and relevant feedback which was hoped might provide an experience of expert peer review (perhaps an Author's first) in a constructive and supportive environment.

Informal Sessions (August – October)

These short online sessions were open to all project members and were a combination of mini-workshops and support and connection sessions led by the Project Manager. Authors were welcome to attend any sessions for which they had capacity and were useful or supportive to their needs at the time. Brief notes from each session were added to the Project Handbook. Session titles:

- 1) Tips for Accessing Academic Publications Online at Low/No Cost
- 2) History and Theory
- 3) Self-Reflexive Writing
- 4) What's In A Name? Titles for Academic Articles

5) Referencing and Citational Justice

Author Feedback

Feedback was solicited regularly from Authors, including short anonymous surveys after the first three meetings (Pre-Programme, Workshop 1, and Workshop 2), informal comments during meetings (oral and in the Zoom chat), and via email.

Feedback early in the workshop programme indicated strong appreciation for the collaborative approach and the enjoyability of the meetings (Author emails 23 July 2021 and 31 July 2021). The Workshops were described as “very instructive, insightful” (Author email 31 July 2021), and this was underpinned by the “heartwarming” experience of mutual support, especially from senior scholars towards very early career researchers (Author email, 5 August 2021). The additional informal sessions were also warmly appreciated and it was noted that these “seem to offer a wonderful source of respite during the otherwise difficult times that we are living in” (Author email, 10 August 2021). In the post-meeting survey held after the Pre-Programme Meeting, an Author reflected, “The meeting 1 went very well in terms of how wonderfully inclusive it was in trying to engage all of the participants in getting somewhat acclimatized to the event. Also the atmosphere maintained by the delivery heads and project manager being light and at the same time giving out necessary information was quite encouraging”. Another Author shared, “The pre-meeting was welcoming which eliminated every form of nervousness I had before the meeting. Now I am confident to engage colleague authors and experienced researchers and to contribute to knowledge production through publication.” This feedback shows the success of the project’s goal to create connected, safe, and effective working atmosphere based on principles of equity and relationality, which relied on resourcing and attention both in the pre-workshop phase and during programme delivery.

Anonymous short surveys held after the first three programme meetings helped to ensure clarity and effectiveness in communications and programme delivery. They also indicated significant and positive shifts in Author confidence in their knowledge of international peer-reviewed academic journals in terms of journal processes, article construction, and engagement strategies. Free text feedback in the surveys identified the value of the Editor and expert presentations. For example, “The presentation by Clare Anderson offered a systemic analysis of the processes of publication-covering many of the dilemmas, ambiguities, and hindrances that are faced by us (the early career researchers). The sessions so far have been extremely helpful and I am looking forward to the upcoming meetings. Thank you!” (Workshop 1 post-meeting survey). The same survey indicated a strong appreciation for smaller group activities during the workshops and the chance to learn from the Editors through conversation and questions. Surveys also indicated that Authors were building their own informal networks with one another (having connected in small-group activities) from Workshop 1.

Feedback was the focus of the final session of Workshop 5 and indicated key project strengths. Authors indicated that it was very useful to learn about the “nuts and bolts of publishing”, publication strategy, and that Editor feedback was generous and very helpful. Several Authors shared that the workshop programme helped build their confidence, which supported them in achievements including: the award of a 2-month international fellowship, PhD submission, a revival of research passion; an international PhD studentship; and submission of articles to international peer-reviewed academic journals. At the project conclusion, 5 articles had been published or accepted for publication and 12 were submitted or about to be submitted to international academic journals. More broadly, the opportunity to collaborate and build networks with other authors, appreciation for the programme’s approach and expertise, and some sadness that the programme was ending as it had been so enjoyable and effective. One Author comment underlined the value and importance of this project. They wrote: “Very grateful to have been a part of this workshop. From starting clueless, wanting to write and get published to actually understanding how it works, finding the motivation to write, I think I owe a lot of my progress to this workshop. Thanks Emma, the editors and all the authors, my support group members. This space has helped me work on my fears surrounding the world of academia.”

Editor Feedback

To gather detailed feedback at the end of the programme, the Project Manager interviewed each of the Editors. Questions focussed on their reflections on participation in the project, and the wider issues of the structural and systemic issues that marginalise and exclude Majority World scholars. The Editors explained their motivation to make time and to contribute to this project as based on awareness of structural disadvantages that they had gained from their editorship experiences. They also identified a very strong sense that journal editors have the potential to be supportive and nurturing of authors in ways that challenge these issues and support individual Majority World researchers.

Positive impacts on the Editors were also identified in this feedback. Connecting and working with other journal editors was highlighted, as opportunities and capacity for journal editors to come together are comparatively rare (especially between editors of different journals). Deep satisfaction about making implicit knowledge about journal publishing and article construction explicit and directly useful to early career authors throughout the programme was also identified. The chance to connect with ECRs in a supportive, welcoming, and structured environment for the shared goals of the programme supported enjoyable interactions and opportunities for valued mutual learning. Editors were also struck by the direct and devastating effects of the pandemic for many of the Authors over the course of nearly a year, and their continuing determination to actively participate in the workshop programme and publish their work for an international audience.

Importantly, interactions with Authors created a cumulative picture about how (global minority, Anglophone) academic journals are perceived, and certain characteristics of those perceptions among Majority World ECRs. Discussion of the pressures on Minority World early career researchers to publish (such as the requirement of the University Grants Commission of India to publish before submitting the PhD) was illuminating, as were insights into the experiences of the Authors in their interactions with international journal editors, including the high levels of emotional difficulty involved. Most powerfully, the Authors shared a sense and suspicion of discrimination and unfairness with publishing in academic journals, that it was mysterious and accessible only through secret means. There was a sense that academic publishing is part of a much more discriminatory environment that almost meant that there was no point in early career Majority World Authors making the attempt. This experience of exclusion is connected to lack of transparency in Majority World journal and academic publishing processes. It is also connected to forms of exclusionary practice built into Minority World journal publishing. Language was identified by the Editors as inhibiting journal publication of Majority World scholars at a fundamental level – the privileging of white, Minority World language variants (i.e., British English, American English) continues to further white, Euro-American power in the academy. Insistence of global minority reviewers that research must involve consultation of colonial archives held in distant centres like London in order to publish on global majority people and places is also a form of embedded exclusion. The depth of Author experience and understanding of exclusion made a strong and lasting impact on all the Editors and underscored the urgent need for further work at several levels.

Conclusion

Interactions with Authors in the international meetings, workshop activities, and one-to-one engagements strengthened the recognition that Minority World scholars have the most immediate, urgent, intimate familiarity with the materials connected to research based in those parts of the world. This makes the publication of such work of urgent importance to scholarly disciplines and journals. Working to address the impacts and dynamics of structural marginalisation and exclusion of Majority World researchers from Minority World academic journal publication is therefore critical.

Editors have a key role to play in ensuring that their journal processes and communications support equity, based in understanding that parity of treatment incorrectly assumes everyone has parity of access and opportunity (and is unfair). This includes using sensitive review processes, compassionate communication, and providing detailed information on the journal's publication process (including general timelines, decisions, and FAQs). Transparency is key. Editors may have capacity, their own or that of members of a journal team, board, or network, to support individual Majority World authors. This can take the form of ensuring all editorial decisions are accompanied by detailed constructive feedback, suggesting next steps for locating the best place to publish, or identifying other opportunities for

publication. It is increasingly the case that journal editorship is undertaken in addition to (over)full workloads, and that capacity for additional editor responsibilities or additional support may be necessarily quite limited. Publishers and funding bodies also have key roles to play.

For publishers, we recommend training for journal teams (academic and administrative) and financial support to create additional capacity for editors to engage supportively and constructively with international authors. Critically, we recommend two-way conversations between editors and production managers on issues of structural inequality and to consider how journals situate their practices in relation to it. For example, reviews of global distributions of authorship and readership, in relation to the provision of subscriptions to Minority World institutions, etc.

In the case of funders, ongoing and new programmes of support for this type of direct intervention with international authors remain welcome. However, after successful initiatives and nuanced analysis of the systemic marginalisation and exclusion of Majority World authors from Minority World academic journal publication, it is time for funders to aggregate these efforts and take an active role addressing and ameliorating this situation. For example, the British Academy could commission a review of its funded workshop projects to establish both successful initiatives and to identify insights that might be used to inform aspects of other collaborative funding schemes aimed at Minority/Majority World collaborations.

This project involved 30 Authors from South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean and three Minority World Editors and resulted in significant successes in demystifying all stages of journal publication, from writing to acceptance. It also gave rise to positive interactions and relationships, the development of supportive peer networks, and strengthened resilience to an unfair system. It also underscored the much wider need for interventions like this programme. Thousands of Majority World early career researchers are facing similar obstacles to academic publishing. Editors, publishers, and research funders all have responsibilities to address the lack of transparency, training, and support faced by Majority World ECRs.

Works Cited

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