Introduction

Lesley Cowling and Carolyn Hamilton

It has been an article of faith in modern societies that in order to live together, we need to talk to one another. The premise is that, through dialogue, communities can mediate different needs, solve pressing problems, decide on leaders and come to some consensus on issues that confront collective life. Public life is rich with activity: arguments expertly laid out in formal arenas, spectacles that unsettle our taken-for-granted convictions, and nuanced cultural engagements designed to provoke reflection. But this imagined foundation for how we live collectively seems to have suffered a dramatic collapse. All over the world, dialogue seems impossible across partisan politics and religious divides. Many societies appear to have lost the capacity to solve problems through talk – whether deciding on responses to international crises, such as climate change, human rights abuses and nuclear proliferation, or resolving local issues closer to home. This situation has evoked global confusion and alarm, with analysts unable to fully explain the multiple disruptions to public life. The future of public discussion as a mediating force in society cannot be taken for granted. And the stakes are high. Arguably, the greatest challenge of our times is how we address the global climate emergency in this context, a problem that requires collective engagement and decision-making on a global level.

Political philosopher Achille Mbembe delineates the end of a world in which the articles of faith of modern democracies have held sway. For Mbembe, politics is increasingly a street fight in which reason and facts matter less and less: 'Whether civilisation can give rise to any form of political life is the problem of the 21st century.'[1] Such concerns are becoming the substance of public conversations about a crisis that prevails across much of the world. Information, evidence and facts needed to inform decisions and choices cannot be relied upon.

Indeed, the recognised spaces of political life seem largely to have been ceded to global capitalism: states, their sovereignty eroded, are everywhere 'captured' by economic interests. 'Capture' refers to the reach of power into democratic institutions in order to make them vehicles to advantage political cronies and elites, rather than the broad 'people'.[2] The media, for so long considered the fourth estate of political life, are

overrun with stories of scandal, corruption and celebrity diversions, and swamped by a deluge of untested information and algorithmic data. In many societies, there is indignation, anger and outrage flowing from experiences of deep inequality in situations in which the underlying moral order promises formal equality.[3]

The idea of society existing for the mutual benefit of individuals and based on a presumption of equality has long dominated global social imaginaries of how we live together. 'Exactly what is meant by equality will vary, but that it must be affirmed in some form follows from the rejection of [the pre-democratic] hierarchical order.'[4] There is, however, a contradiction at the heart of modernity in that the free market, with its focus on the maximisation of profit, works against the realisation of an egalitarian society.

The extent of the failures in how we mediate collective life shows how crucial it is to understand the workings of the taken-for-granted and ever-present processes of public engagement, in all their multiple and sometimes unrecognised forms. Public engagements can, for instance, include expert discussions on health, gender and equity policies – the classic 'public debate' with its links to citizenship and democracy and the requirement for informed argument – but also social media battles over whether to vaccinate your child, protests against rape by women baring their bodies or photographic exhibitions and performance art.

In many societies, the very terms of debate about collective life are being contested. This has been starkly visible in global protests in the last decade, from the Occupy movement in the United States to the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) in France.[5] In South Africa, the #RhodesMustFall movement inaugurated what became a national demand for a free, decolonised, quality education in 2015 and 2016.[6] Student protesters made a point of challenging not only what the universities were doing in terms of curriculum and hiring policies, but also the terms on which debate and discussion could take place in and about the university. Where the universities sought to insist that debate should take place in designated forums, with points raised, listened to and argued with, protesters asserted that these forums were governed by white cultural norms, conventions and assumptions that prejudiced them and dismissed their concerns. Similarly, student movements in the United States have actively contested what discussions can take place in classrooms, through requests for trigger warnings on potentially upsetting content and tactics such as the circulation of recorded footage of lecturers on social media. Race and gender concerns – and issues of identity – are key to these contestations. In many cases, the very archives that are used to establish the histories that underpin contemporary analyses are challenged.

Many youth and social movements across the globe have disengaged from what they see as captured establishment processes, such as the 'mainstream media',

elections, debate and negotiation. This was evident in the rise of the Occupy movement, which described itself as 'a leaderless resistance movement' – 'the 99 percent that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1 percent'.[7] The loose association of diverse local groups that made up the movement shared concerns about how global corporations, political elites and financial systems disproportionately benefit a minority and shape outcomes that make a mockery of the very notion of democracy. The hallmark of the Occupy movement was the strategy of physically occupying spaces of power, such as the financial district in New York, rather than opposition through dialogue and debating. We have seen this repeated across the world (for another example, the *gilets jaunes*) and yet have little understanding of how such public engagements arise, how they play out and what they contribute.

Amid these disruptions, the old ways of mediating collective life – through public discussion of one kind or another – seem to be falling away, overtaken by a new order of public spectacle, combativeness, hate speech and even violence. Autonomous media networks operate as 'echo chambers' or 'filter bubbles', in which information and opinions targeted to the participants' entrenched beliefs are circulated.[8] In the current 'post-truth' environment, cherry-picked data and misinformation are used to achieve political outcomes. However, there are also strong attempts by various institutions and the established media to push back against this trend.

These features of the contemporary condition have elicited much comment and a flurry of research on issues such as social media practices, fake news and Internet-based political interference, as well as how they fuel populist movements and enable new forms of popular protest and direct action. This book takes a step back from concerns about current social media ills and their political effects to examine critically the underlying dynamics of public engagement and how they operate, both in the now and over a longer stretch of history. In so doing, it does some of the groundwork necessary to begin to think in new ways about active, thoughtful, diverse participation in political and public life.

Among the multiple approaches that attempt to theorise public discussion, the concept of the public sphere has been compelling in its evocation of a circle of citizens debating the way forward for a nation. Jürgen Habermas was a foremost exponent of the idea of *öffentlichkeit* – perhaps best translated from the German as 'publicness' – as an enabling process of democracy, a space between the people and the state in which public opinion is formed.[9] In his configuration, citizens of nations and of the world debate – in public – issues important to their communities, express their concerns, marshal evidence and arguments to persuade others and hold the powerful to account.

Regarded as an enabling process of democracy, the idea of the public sphere has animated a wide range of social processes and underpinned many state institutions. Some argue that the system of democracy depends upon it. As Geoff Eley pointed out in 2002, it has long provided a key rationale for the operations of civil society: 'In contemporary discourse, "the public sphere" now signifies the general questing for democratic agency in an era of declining electoral participation, compromised sovereignties, and frustrated or disappointed citizenship. The term is called upon wherever people come together for collective exchange and expression of opinion, aiming both for a coherent enunciation and the transmission of messages onward to parallel or subordinate bodies.'[10] Habermas later became a proponent of deliberative democracy, the idea that problems can be solved by 'the better argument' and that certain kinds of debate are crucial to the process of discussion.[11]

However, as has been vividly demonstrated across the world, the ideal does not live up to its promise. Discussion does not necessarily lead to solutions; public opinion does not necessarily influence the state; collective exchange does not result in the exertion of democratic agency. On closer inspection, the very concept of the public sphere seems inadequate to capture the range of discussions and public engagements that go on in contemporary democracies and their entanglement in operations of power. The notion of the public sphere, with its focus on debating forums, proves to be a narrow lens on how ideas emerge, develop form, gather charge and spread. This book widens the focus to include the workings of public engagements in other settings and forms, looking at the ways in which ideas move and how the networks in which they circulate are produced. To understand the dynamics, we try to get up close and track the circulation of ideas, big and small, in action in social and political life. This approach allows us to describe processes that seem instrumental to recent developments – the apparent collapse of what has long been thought of as the public sphere.

The idea of the public sphere was theorised on the back of European historical developments and political philosophy, and emerged as a normative ideal in the development of those democracies. The chapters in this volume offer alternative ways of thinking about publicness in contemporary society, which are theorised from outside Europe and the United States, but are relevant well beyond the authors' specific locations, mostly in southern Africa. What we offer is not just a set of 'southern' facts glossing 'northern' theory, but fresh theorising based on events, experiences and thinking that differ significantly from those – mostly from Europe– that gave rise to public sphere theory.

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This book extends the initial work by a research project, the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life, which ran from 2004 to 2008 at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.[12] In the early 2000s, the utopian romance of liberation and reconciliation that had characterised the first decade of the new South African democracy had given way to an acrimonious discourse of exclusions: questions of who was an 'authentic' citizen, who had the right to speak, and about what, dominated (and inhibited) public discussion. These debates – fuelled by the combative presidency of Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela's successor – were marked by suspicion, ad hominem attacks and assumptions of bad faith. South African public deliberation seemed to be increasingly corralled by the very institutions set up to facilitate it.[13] Simultaneously, President Mbeki's self-conscious intellectualism and his insistence on criticising the established figures and forms of public discussion raised taken-for-granted processes of public engagement for consideration.[14]

The researchers in the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life were interested in what these manifestations could mean for South Africa's democracy and the ideals of public discussion that underpinned it. The project investigated the conditions that promoted or disabled complexity in public deliberation in South Africa. The research was informed by the need to grapple explicitly with the challenges of extreme inequality and legacies of racial discrimination – which had seen the centuries-long sidelining of black intellectual publics – in a democracy founded on an idea of social equality.[15] This resulted in a conference in 2008 and two volumes of the journal *Social Dynamics* in 2009 and 2010.[16] The articles on a range of engagements and forms (talk radio, documentary photography, debates on witchcraft, museums, anti-privatisation forums, discussions of same-sex equality) recast questions of publics and the operations of public deliberation within the context of a post-colonial state. The research findings showed the limits of notions of the public sphere and counterpublics, and drew attention to the range of elements at play in convening – or corralling – what was imagined as the public sphere, in the process excluding certain voices and forms of engagement and foregrounding others. They also revealed the extensiveness of other forms of public engagement circulating in and out of, and beyond, the constrained public sphere. The research drew attention to the ambiguity and mobility of these public interventions.[17]

A decade later, we have the advantage of a longer view. We can see how analysis of the workings of public intellectual engagement and public discussion in the early 2000s prefigured what is needed for investigating public engagement, not only in South Africa, but also globally. Indeed, it is the contention of this book that many of the processes of public engagement that we currently think of as new were

operating before the mid-2000s, but were contained by the overarching dominance of the institutions and operations of what is imagined as 'the public sphere'.

In this volume, we ask *how* ideas about mediating collective life emerge, gather force, become potent, enforce or challenge the status quo, hibernate, disappear or get routed. We look at how this has happened historically and how it is happening now. We draw primarily on insights and materials from Africa for their capacity to speak to global developments. Concepts and methods first developed by the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life emerge as useful to the analysis of publicness elsewhere. The exercise in theorising the southern African experience in the 2000s proved prescient in revealing the extent of the 'capture' of public engagement. It continues to be productive in generating insights into activity beyond the imagined public sphere and its linked counterpublic spheres. In certain cases, the value of theorising off 'southern' conditions lies in how that focus highlights features of publicness shared with Europe and the United States, which are less visible in those contexts and are sometimes passed over, but which emerge in a sharply etched way in former colonial and settler societies such as South Africa.

The Constitution of Public Intellectual Life grappled with, and moved beyond, the Habermasian notion of the public sphere as a space between the people and the state in which public opinion can be formed. Although the notion of public sphere operationalises public institutions, media, legal jurisprudence and national protests, the unitary space that the term 'public sphere' conjures in the imagination dissolves when looked for in the physical world. And, all the time, 'offstage' as it were, other processes of publicness are taking place, other concerns are being mobilised for debate.

The Constitution of Public Intellectual Life project thus abandoned the 'public sphere' as a static spatial concept, paying attention rather to how ideas and public engagement *move*, sometimes gathering enough potency to burst into wider significance, sometimes coalescing in spaces or forms, sometimes part of media that constitute publics. Rather than a 'sphere', with its connotations of a unitary and fixed physical space, the project conceptualised publicness as a capillaried network in which ideas are constantly circulating.

The first four chapters of this book lay out the key concepts and theoretical moves that underpin its arguments, while the chapters that follow demonstrate how notions of publicness and public engagement play out in both historical and contemporary circumstances. The book does not aim to be comprehensive in its coverage of the spaces and forms of contemporary public engagements. Rather, its combination of conceptual and methodological discussions and case studies offers an opportunity for rethinking and theorising public activity. It is our hope, as editors, that the book

provides an analysis of public engagements and their dynamics which is so urgently needed today to rethink the mediation of collective life.

The opening chapter by Carolyn Hamilton and Lesley Cowling locates the public sphere as a normative idea at the heart of how democracy is imagined to work. The power of the public sphere as an imaginary can be seen in the ways in which ideas of civil society and the public sphere have been crucial to global experiments in democracy, which surged after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. As Dilip Gaonkar writes of that time: 'If civil society was made up of nongovernmental institutions that create a buffer between the market and the state, the idea of the public sphere seemed to identify and promote those institutions that were crucial for the development of democratic debate and will formation.'[18]

The chapter argues that what is imagined as the public sphere is actively *convened* in a way that shapes the nature of public deliberation and the extent of this convening is what drives counterpublic positioning. Because the public sphere is a key social imaginary, people whose issues are marginalised in the core sphere constitute themselves into counterpublic spheres in order to have an impact in the core public sphere. But ideas of the public sphere and of counterpublics can be conceptually limiting, obscuring how engagements move across time and space, and the processes by which ideas are launched, circulate and are engaged with in public life. Engagements *can* appear to take place in spheres – whether unitary or subaltern, or even multiple 'sphericules' operating separately from each other – but when they are tracked, they are seen to be working in wide-ranging, networked ways.[19] Our purpose in this book is not to overturn ideas of spheres and counterpublic spheres, but to bring to the fore networks of circulation of ideas across time and space, in order to grasp what they effect, and how they in turn are affected, and to understand what this means for public engagement.

This book identifies forms of engagement that happen well beyond what is imagined as the public sphere or as a counterpublic sphere. It shows how the concept of circulation, drawn from Michael Warner, opens up public engagement and the creation of publics for analysis.[20] Such 'publicness' involves a complex set of processes. The first chapter argues that publicness is by nature moving and dispersed, circulating through networks, fragmenting into 'capillaries' and sometimes thickening into nodes of public engagement. The idea of 'capillaries' references Michel Foucault's notion of capillaries of power for a reason.[21] If we are to understand the function of public discussion as a form of democratic engagement, we need to grapple with issues of power.

An important proposition of this book is that any analysis of publicness must cross fields and intersect disciplinary approaches in order to grasp the complexity

of what is at play. The second chapter, by Carolyn Hamilton, Litheko Modisane and Rory Bester, exemplifies this in the way it describes networks of engagement that cross not only in and out of what have been conceptualised as spheres (the public sphere, counterpublic spheres and subaltern spheres), but also fields (the media field, art field, cultural field, and so on). It shows how visual forms, such as films, documentary photographs and exhibitions, contribute to public debate, revealing how they extend beyond so-called public spaces of cinemas, exhibition venues and discussion panels, engaging with many who never enter those spaces. Such forms create, and then flow along, capillaries of public engagement that criss-cross multiple terrains, in a manner radically different from how the deliberative operations of a public sphere are conventionally conceptualised.

Chapter 2 develops a methodology for tracking the circulation of both the visual forms and the many ways in which they are taken up over time. It shows how such forms constitute publics and operate in public life in ways not readily recognised by theoretical approaches focused on written texts and news media, as well as those that deal with audiences or reception. It is an implication of this chapter that its insights are not confined to visual forms, but that they apply equally to verbal forms.

Looking deliberately at the circulation of ideas in the 1980s and 1990s, before the rise of the Internet age, chapter 2 reveals capillaries of engagement in action that challenge arguments about informal webs of engagement being the result of new media forms of communication. It is one of a number of chapters with substantial historical reach that are helpful in offering perspectives on claims about what is actually novel in contemporary developments concerning publicness and what is now either simply more obvious or more vexed.

The concepts of the public sphere and counterpublic sphere outlined in chapter 1 are essentially ideas about how public deliberation works now, even though it is acknowledged that such spheres have their own histories and change over time. In the established literature, these concepts are typically described using spatial metaphors, as rounded and inclusive, or scattered into separate sphericules, or as spaces for communication.[22] By way of contrast, chapter 2 offers conceptual and methodological tools for looking at how, *across time*, certain engagements take shape beyond what their initiators might have imagined, changing in the process and shaping public life. The variety of processes involved exceed the boundaries of any static deliberative public spheres at any particular points in time: public life is always shaped both by its specific histories and future possibilities. The approach thus focuses attention on the temporalities of publicness. The chapter's long historical reach allows for a conceptualisation of the ways in which ideas germane to the mediation of collective life move in and out of archival states. This invites

theorisation of the relationship between archive and public discourse beyond the limited notion of history servicing political agendas. The chapter thus inaugurates the distinctive focus of the volume of paying attention to both the (multi-) mediatisation of public deliberation and the role of archives in public discourse.

In relation to current crises, the production and circulation of fake news and the manipulation of public opinion have come under intense scrutiny. A host of new studies and investigations have identified a variety of ways in which covert agents or commercial interests – operating online – shape public discussion.[23] Commentators have flagged the diminished gatekeeping power of established news media, and the rise of competing social media forums, as the cause of many current ills in public discourse.[24] Media research has also shown changes in the business model of news organisations, in how journalists function and in how audiences are constituted.

Chapter 3, by Lesley Cowling and Pascal Newbourne Mwale, argues that the so-called mainstream media are still influential in shaping both the dynamics and content of public discussion in ways that are not well understood. A subject little discussed in journalism scholarship is how opinion, analysis and the dynamics of debate are produced. For the most part, analyses assume that the same procedures and processes produce news as produce opinion or commentary, both in traditional news products and online journalism. Chapter 3 probes these assumptions, showing how forms of media production create interventions in broader public discussions, set the agenda for what is discussed and, importantly, shape how it is discussed.

Cowling and Mwale argue that normative perspectives on public deliberation direct the established media to provide a space for debate in society and allow the participation of a range of diverse voices and views – in effect, to operate as an organ of the convened public sphere – and that many media still operate according to those norms. The chapter shows that senior journalists take this on as an important responsibility and opinion, analysis and debate are actively produced through the routines and processes of newsrooms. This means not only allowing a range of issues, voices and positions into media debate, and excluding others, but also paying direct attention to the dynamics of how the debate takes place, a process the chapter characterises as 'orchestration'. Orchestration, and the way newsroom gatekeepers and routines generally shape the dynamics of debate, have previously been little recognised in the journalism literature.

Chapter 3 shows that orchestrating in particular ways produces certain kinds of public discussion, sometimes coming close to fulfilling normative ideas of 'debating' in a rational, critical way. Orchestration also constitutes publics, excluding some sectors of society and certain ideas, in ways not taken into account by public sphere theory or media scholarship. On the other hand, a failure to orchestrate can lead

to what Mwale has called 'babelisation', a form of talk that has people talking over and at each other and that fails to address the issue under discussion in a substantive way.[25] Babelisation is often cacophonous, confusing and disabling of discussion. Sometimes the cacophony benefits no one, but at other times it can assist certain parties to be heard or allow something entirely new to move into view, noisily constituting new publics and even new lines of deliberative activity. The chapter thus argues that how opinion is produced facilitates certain kinds of debate and, over time, the routine production of opinion and debate creates publics.

The Internet and social media platforms have been significant over the last 20 years in enabling new publics to be formed and creating possibilities for audiences formerly on the receiving end of opinion to participate in discussion. In chapter 4, Indra de Lanerolle argues that the many technologies now incorporated into social life not only create new publics and allow new voices to be heard, but have also created different public practices, sometimes at the expense of other kinds of practices. Mass communication, traditionally operating as public, and interpersonal communication, thought of as private, now interact in an unstable relationship to each other. Exploring the role of 'hashtag publics' in the #FeesMustFall student movement, he highlights what he terms 'fluid publics' and suggests that this fluidity requires us to consider stepping beyond thinking of publics and counterpublics to looking for the ebbs and flows of publicness in the networked life of individuals and groups.

In chapter 5, the first of a series of chapters that help us to gain a historical view of the dynamics of publicness, Litheko Modisane shows that the kinds of features of publicness De Lanerolle identifies in contemporary social media have long been constitutive of publicness. He does this through a discussion of the media and Nelson Mandela as the 'Black Pimpernel' and how Mandela shifts in and out of public view through the media. He shows that the production and circulation of ideas about Mandela – the 'Mandela myth' – can be traced to the late 1950s and early 1960s, not the late 1970s as, he notes, is often claimed. Specifically, this chapter explores how press presentations of Mandela as the elusive Black Pimpernel, as sometimes larger than life and as sometimes absent – 'now we see him, now we don't'– generated extensive public discussion. This mediation of Mandela, uneven though it was, and his relative absence from public life, reinforced the power and reach of his persona. Modisane alerts us to the way in which issues of pressing public significance coalesce around public figures. These figures, while often important political actors in their own right, can also operate as devices for the staging of public discussions about broader issues. As the Black Pimpernel in the press, Mandela became a point of seepage between racially separated black and white deliberative publics, each

curtailed in their activities by repressive legislation in late 1950s and early 1960s South Africa. Modisane marks how apartheid negated blackness to the point of reproducing it as a sign of absence. He shows how a double absence – the absence constituted by apartheid's negation of blackness as well as the specific absence from public life at this time of the fugitive Mandela – entered Mandela into the imagined public sphere that apartheid reserved for white citizens. The chapter thus develops the counter-intuitive point that absence can generate publicness – and indeed public potency – just as surely as presence.

Using the racially exaggerated conditions of apartheid, Modisane not only contributes a historical case study to an understanding of the nature of wider global absences of black life in the social imaginary of the public sphere. He also reveals something of how the presence of absence becomes a mode of breaching powerful public sphere exclusions. It does this in a manner that resonates with and offers a theoretical foundation for understanding how the presence of absence has moved issues of race, racism and blackness into the heart of contemporary public deliberation.

The public potency of absent presences resonates with the concept of incubation put forward in chapter 2. This concept recognises how hidden, cloistered or stored things, in one form or another, can in fact be active and even powerful in public life. The act of caching is an endorsement of the thing stored as being of potential future worth. The forms of storage are multiple: publication in books, e-records of various kinds, status-laden art and other collections and, most overtly, in archives. While commentators have had much to say about the role that media play in public deliberation, the role of archives and records and what they do in public life is surprisingly under-theorised.

Against the backdrop of contemporary debates about the nature of truth and facts in public debate, chapter 6 grapples with the role of archives and records as arbiters of truth and their relationship to public discourse. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, archives have lost their status as neutral repositories, their capacity to authorise certain forms of knowledge and not others coming under fierce scrutiny. Challenges over the credibility of many established archives and other forms of records feed the politics of the current post-truth era and the way in which that politics engages with the past.

The chapter uses three case studies – Mandela's prison archive, the long history of the manuscript of a classical text (Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*) and the record of the narrations of a nineteenth-century African in KwaZulu-Natal (Socwatsha kaPhaphu) – to think about how archives operate in public life. It theorises the relationship between archives and public discourse, whether in the

form of absent or present archives. Rather than seeing archives as either neutral repositories of fact or the products of political bias, Carolyn Hamilton elucidates the role of archives in shaping public, political and academic discussion, and the role of public, political and academic discussion in shaping archives. Whereas for a long time archives have been understood to be banks of evidence drawn on to support or refute claims in debate, Hamilton posits a different understanding of the relationship between archives and deliberative activity, one of mutual constitution across time of archives and public, political and academic discourse and practice. Challenging long-standing assumptions about archives as inert storehouses, Hamilton positions them as key actors in the constitution of public life.

The remaining chapters speak to critical issues raised in the opening chapters, some drawing on the methodology set up by chapter 2, some combining concepts from across the chapters, some using the current context to think about future possibilities, a number looking at historical cases in their own right and others exploring historical depth in even the most contemporary instances.

In chapter 7 Susana Molins Lliteras focuses on a particularly ancient archive, the iconic African manuscript collection in Timbuktu, Mali. This chapter attends to how archives other than those of 'Western civilisation' have functioned in public life in the past and the role they play in contemporary public deliberations. In the same way as the discussion in chapter 6 of the records about Socwatsha kaPhaphu draws attention to deliberative processes and networks of communication that existed in sub-Saharan Africa prior to European colonialism, chapter 7 foregrounds the existence of a long-standing and geographically extensive Islamic public domain. The chapter sets itself the task of understanding the role of the Timbuktu archive as an international and African cultural treasure and as the object of attack by the al-Qaeda-linked rebels in 2012. Molins Lliteras offers a detailed account of the complex dynamics of the manuscripts' multiple roles in public life, dating back to the 1200s. She looks at how the manuscripts themselves, as well as ideas about them, were mobilised across centuries in determining what collective life looked like, conferring status on some people and denying it to others, substantiating claims about identity and sustaining long-distance networks and relationships, garnering in the process enormous public potency. The Timbuktu archive is still used to enable conversations about local identities, a wider African identity and African epistemologies, and is under attack because of its potency and for its promise of always opening to alternative narratives beyond any prevailing orthodoxy.

The final three chapters focus on forms and modes of contemporary public engagements. In chapter 8 Camalita Naicker draws attention to the mobilisation of an entirely different kind of archive, an archive of past political praxis,

in contemporary public engagement. She focuses on the 2012 massacre of 34 mineworkers at Marikana, South Africa, and its aftermath. The chapter tracks the public life of this event to reveal how the political discourse and practice of the miners was reframed by the press and by academics. The miners and their concerns were entered into public discussion first via media coverage of the protest action, strike and massacre and, secondly, through activists and academics who wrote papers and made documentaries about these events and their subsequent effects. The mining communities were made visible through the narratives of the news media that picked up on sensational and dramatic elements, such as the use of what are termed traditional weapons and medicines (*muti*), and then by academics, who inserted the story into a larger narrative of worker struggles, eliding aspects such as the use of *muti* and the symbolic practice of 'going to the mountain'.

Naicker shows that two forms of collective action were not seen by the media or academics and were then not made visible and discussed in public life. The first of these concerns how the miners organised themselves when they felt their union was no longer representing them, drawing on legacies of protest engagements, with deep roots in what was for a long time the underdeveloped, rural, ethnic homeland of the Transkei. The second form of collective action is how the women of Marikana subsequently organised themselves and the kinds of community and political structures they set up in the area. This chapter argues that the case of the Marikana miners demonstrates the extent to which certain kinds of protest and publics are excluded from the convened public sphere and even counterpublic forums, which seem unable to recognise and accommodate ways of addressing social issues outside liberal public sphere approaches. Naicker thus offers a glimpse of what Cowling and Hamilton conceptualise as a sequestered public sphere, characterised by vital forms of engagements and attempts to mediate collective life through reference to matters deemed, in the convened public sphere, to be irrelevant and atavistic in contemporary democratic politics.

In chapter 9 Nomusa Makhubu examines how 'art-rage' confronts both the limits of an inherited archive and the boundaries of an authorised public sphere. The chapter engages with the raw sentiment of racial exclusion in South Africa that has been cloaked by post-liberation rhetoric of reconciliation, diversity and inclusiveness. Makhubu looks at the kinds of reconciliatory decisions that were taken about existing symbols and art in public spaces in the early post-1994 years and at how the politics of reconciliation have since come under review. She details how student leaders first sought, unsuccessfully, to engage the university in discussion about the artworks on display and about racial alienation in the institution. Angry student demonstrations in 2015–2016 then targeted public visual symbols and eschewed

university proscriptions on the subject and on the conduct of debate. Focusing on protests and actions concerning the University of Cape Town's art collection, the chapter argues that the art that is contested and the art that is created to contest become potent discursive sites for the uneasy discussions and unconfronted truths about post-apartheid South Africa.

In the final chapter, Anthea Garman notes that South Africa is going through a moment of political rupture, not so much with the apartheid or colonial past as with the immediate democratic past, which has failed to deliver on its promises. The resulting battles that have played out in public, Garman contends, are marked by a generational divide, wide use of social media to enter debates, a focus on who says what and why, intersectionality, the privileging of experience and emotions in discussion and demands for redress.

These approaches, Garman argues, do not add up to a simple rejection of certain views, but a repudiation of established 'regimes of truth' that underpin what is sayable and who can say it. As with the preceding essay on 'art-rage', chapter 10 draws attention to evasions of the forms of convening public sphere activity and to rejections of accepted modes of the orchestration of debate. Garman suggests that an emphasis on listening, rather than a right to speak, can be a powerful contribution to public engagement.

The last three chapters describe the mutability of protests and their associated public interventions, as groups that formed around the issues have dispersed, fragmented into contesting groupings, mutated into different forms of protest, or moved into the mainstream and were absorbed. The unexpected emergence of such public interventions, their ability to dominate attention and take centre stage, and then their seemingly mysterious disappearance, indicate how fluid and unpredictable contemporary public engagements can be. However, in certain instances, such contestations draw attention to specific issues that fail to attract attention in the convened and counterpublic spheres, sometimes getting them onto the public agenda. The fragmentation of the student groups of 2015–2016 into a number of contesting groupings arguably kept alive an ongoing conversation about race, gender, class and identity concerns.[26]

The collected chapters in this volume remind us of the range and extent of normative ideas about debate and deliberation: as having facing protagonists, as rational-critical, as backed up by agreed-upon forms of evidence and as taking place in an identified set of locations, recognised debating forums of various kinds. They also indicate how hegemonic understandings of deliberative democratic processes are being challenged in ways that extend well beyond what is imagined as the public sphere, or even any counterpublic spheres. However, looking at public engagement

across a long sweep of history, the chapters also indicate that what may appear at first to be features of public engagement specific to contemporary times were in fact present and important in earlier times. To make this point is not to ignore processes of change in the dynamics of public discussion, something that the long view also enables us to identify.

The chapters in this book look in new ways at how what goes as fact in public deliberation is established and contested. In showing us how the media orchestrate debate, and how particular records of the past are shaped and reshaped, mobilised or eschewed in processes of public engagement, the chapters move beyond normative ideas of the impartiality of media, of records and of knowledge to understand their imbrication in public processes and political struggles. In so doing, they offer a perspective on the violent reactions of insurgent publics in denigrating media, burning archives and shutting down campuses, a revolt against the carefully convened public sphere and its claim to be the site of the mediation of collective life.

Where the imagined public sphere suggests a central arena, with the attention on citizens actively deliberating, this book shows that absences, silences, listening, pauses, incubations, engagements not only through words but also through visual images and even bodies, networks of circulation both prescribed and uncharted, manual and web-enabled – and a host of other activities beyond any acknowledged public sphere – are critically important aspects of how we engage in the mediation of collective life. It is a contention of this book that this is not a new phenomenon, though the conditions that make it stand out so sharply are new.

The inherited imaginary of the public sphere, with its emphasis on publics debating the way forward for their particular societies, bounded by the national formations in which they operate, and making decisions based on shared information, still propels a range of state processes and institutions. As Charles Taylor has noted, the idea of the public sphere knits together disparate discussions through the understanding of the participants that they are involved in a greater, collective discussion, which has a bearing on their collective life.[27] However, at this moment of social and political rupture, participants may no longer accept that they are part of a greater, collective discussion or that a shared moral order exists. 'When people are expelled from their old forms, through war, revolution, or rapid economic change', breakdown occurs. To find their way, societies must transform their practices and connect them to new principles so as to have a viable social imaginary.[28]

It is no longer possible to proceed without paying close attention to the ruptures of collective engagement currently under way. This book suggests that we need to reimagine public deliberative activity, understanding it as a range

of sometimes unpredictable processes in capillaried networks that reach far beyond local and national concerns, processes that are no longer dominated by established institutions or bound by legacy conventions and processes. The public engagements once excluded from or contained by the convened public sphere have burst into visibility, actively competing with the old order and changing the ways we think public debate should operate. This is 'Babel unbound'. Multiple forms of publicness range across the globe. And it is more important than ever for us to understand them.

NOTES

[1] Achille Mbembe, 'The Age of Humanism is Ending', *Mail & Guardian*, 22 December 2016, accessed 22 October 2019, https://mg.co.za/article/2016-12-22-00-the-age-of-humanism-is-ending.

[2] In South Africa, the term 'state capture' refers to state institutions being increasingly controlled by business interests and political cronies close to the ruling party.

[3] On equality, see Charles Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', *Public Culture* 14, 1 (2002): 91–124. On anger, see Pankaj Mishra, *The Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Allen Lane, 2017).

[4] Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', 92.

[5] See http://occupywallst.org and https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/03/who-are-the-gilets-jaunes-and-what-do-they-want, accessed 22 October 2019.

[6] Sandy Ndelu, Simamkele Dlakavu and Barbara Boswell, 'Womxn's and Nonbinary Activists' Contribution to the RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall Student Movements: 2015 and 2016', *Agenda* 31, 3–4 (2017): 1–4.

[7] See http://occupywallst.org, accessed 22 October 2019.

[8] See Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* (London: Penguin, 2011); and Seth Flaxman, Sharad Goel and Justin M. Rao, 'Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, S1 (2016): 298–320.

[9] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 301.

[10] Geoff Eley, 'Politics, Culture, and the Public Sphere', *Positions* 10, 1 (2002): 219–236.

[11] Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera, 'Introduction: Tracing Radical Democracy and the Internet', in *Radical Democracy and the Internet: Interrogating Theory and Practice*, ed. Lincoln Dahlberg and Eugenia Siapera (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8.

[12] This book draws on ideas and research developed in the collaborative work of the core group of the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Research Project and the continuing work of the Public Life of Ideas Network. See http://www.apc.uct.ac.za/apc/projects/constitution, accessed 22 October 2019.

[13] Carolyn Hamilton 'Uncertain Citizenship and Public Deliberation in Post-apartheid South Africa', *Social Dynamics* 35, 2 (2009): 355–374.

[14] See *ANC Today* online at http://www.anc.org.za/docs/anctoday/2005/at02.htm#art1 and http://www.anc.org.za/content/anc-today-volume-5-no11-0, accessed 30 January 2018.

15   For scholarship on black intellectual life in the colonial and apartheid eras, see Khwezi Mkhize, 'To See Us as We See Ourselves: John Tengo Jabavu and the Politics of the Black Periodical', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 44, 3 (2018): 413–430.

16   Conference: Paradoxes of the Postcolonial Public Sphere: South African Democracy at the Crossroads, University of the Witwatersrand (2008); *Social Dynamics* 35, 2 (2009) and *Social Dynamics* 36, 1 (2010).

17   Carolyn Hamilton, Lesley Cowling and Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Introduction', *Social Dynamics* 35, 2 (2009): 346.

18   Dilip Gaonkar, 'Towards New Imaginaries: An Introduction', *Public Culture* 14, 1 (2002): 2.

19   Todd Gitlin, 'Public Sphere or Public Sphericules?' in *Media, Ritual and Identity*, ed. Tamar Liebes and James Curran (New York: Routledge, 1998), 168–174.

20   Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

21   Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 39.

22   Peter Dahlgren, 'The Internet, Public Spheres, and Political Communication: Dispersion and Deliberation', *Political Communication* 22, 2 (2005): 148–150.

23   A William and Flora Hewlett Foundation report reviews scholarship on six topics: online political conversations; consequences of exposure to disinformation online; producers of disinformation; strategies and tactics of spreading disinformation; online content and political polarisation; and misinformation, polarisation and democracy. The report cites more than 340 studies, as of March 2018. See Joshua A. Tucker et al., *Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature* (Menlo Park, CA: William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, 2018), accessed 12 January 2019, https://hewlett.org/library/social-media-political-polarization-political-disinformation-review-scientific-literature/. A number of in-depth journalistic investigations have also detailed covert and commercial interests operating online. See, for example, Craig Silverman, 'How Teens in the Balkans are Duping Trump Supporters with Fake News', *BuzzFeed News*, 3 November 2016, accessed 13 January 2019, https://www.buzzfeed.com/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo?utm_term=.flPZEnRRa#.vbmW27EEp; Daniel Swislow, 'The Distributed Denial of Democracy: Coming Together to Address Anti-democratic Trolling and Disinformation Online', *Medium*, 9 November 2016, accessed 13 January 2019, https://medium.com/@dswis/the-distributed-denial-of-democracy-23ce8a3ad3d8; and Laurence Alexander, 'Social Network Analysis Reveals Full Scale of Kremlin's Twitter Bot Campaign', *Global Voices*, 2 April 2015, accessed 13 January 2019, https://globalvoices.org/2015/04/02/analyzing-kremlin-twitter-bots/.

24   See, for example, Katherine Viner, 'How Technology Disrupted the Truth', *The Guardian*, 12 July 2016, accessed 28 February 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/jul/12/how-technology-disrupted-the-truth.

25   Pascal Newbourne Mwale, 'The Babelisation of Debate on GM Maize via the Media in Southern Africa in 2002', *Social Dynamics* 36, 1 (2010): 112–121.

26   For more on the student movements and their dynamics, see Ndelu, Dlakavu and Boswell, 'Womxn's and Nonbinary Activists' Contribution'; Musawenkosi Ndlovu, *#FeesMustFall and Youth Mobilisation in South Africa: Reform or Revolution?* (London: Routledge, 2017); and Leigh-Ann Naidoo, 'We Shall Not be Moved or Led Astray: The Emergence of the 2015 Student Movement', *New Agenda* 60 (2015): 12–14.

27   Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', 113.

28   Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', 99.

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