Making News Outside Legacy Media
Cheruiyot, David; Wahutu, j. Siguru ; Mare, Admire; Ogola, George ; Mabweazara, Hayes Mawindi
Published in: African Journalism Studies

DOI: 10.1080/23743670.2021.2046397

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date: 2022

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):

Copyright
Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the “Taverne” license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment.

Take-down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): http://www.rug.nl/research/portal. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Download date: 08-10-2023
Making News Outside Legacy Media
Peripheral Actors within an African Communication Ecology

David Cheruiyot, j. Siguru Wahutu, Admire Mare, George Ogola & Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara

To cite this article: David Cheruiyot, j. Siguru Wahutu, Admire Mare, George Ogola & Hayes Mawindi Mabweazara (2021) Making News Outside Legacy Media, African Journalism Studies, 42:4, 1-14, DOI: 10.1080/23743670.2021.2046397

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2021.2046397

Published online: 30 Mar 2022.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1417

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Citing articles: 2 View citing articles
Making News Outside Legacy Media
Peripheral Actors within an African Communication Ecology

David Cheruiyot a, j. Siguru Wahutu b,c, Admire Mare d, George Ogola e and Hayes Mawindi Mabweazarad,f

aCentre for Media and Journalism Studies, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands; bDepartment of Media, Culture, and Communication, New York University, New York, NY, USA; cBerkman Klein Center for Internet and Society, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA; dDepartment of Communication and Media, Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa; eSchool of Arts and Media, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK; fGlasgow University Media Group, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK

ABSTRACT
One of the recurrent questions in journalism scholarship is whether journalism as a profession and institution can grow and thrive outside the traditional newsroom (especially, with the dominant agenda-setting media in most African countries being either state- or privately run press). In introducing this special issue, we revisit this pertinent question, while also considering the implications of today's digitally networked continent, and the question of the ever-expanding communication ecology that is a dynamic space for media production by both human and non-human actors. First, we acknowledge that the current peripheralization of journalism is a global phenomenon, and that digital technologies seem to reproduce similar trends and patterns in various journalistic cultures across the world, and therefore the increasingly connected continent cannot be understood in isolation. The case studies featured in our special issue show that digital technologies have clearly fast-tracked the changes in media production and intensified the disruptive effects of the operations of non-journalistic actors within the continent's communication ecology. We then argue that when carefully considered, these changes in media production and journalistic practices are merely part of a continuation of trends that preceded the digital age. Non-traditional ways of making news have been driven mainly by non-journalistic actors' perpetual need to challenge or question traditional actors, in media and politics, as the exclusive disseminators, the dominant voices, or the sole arbiters in spaces of deliberation within the communication ecology.

KEYWORDS
Communication ecology; journalistic fields; legacy media; media production; peripheral actors

Introduction
Globally, the media ecology has expanded widely, giving space to new actors, both human and technological, and hence the presence of, among others, data scientists, fact-checkers, algorithm-driven news platforms and applications in the traditional...
newsroom. Today, scholars acknowledge that non-traditional actors in the media ecology have had both disruptive and transformative impact on newsroom routines, organizational cultures and, inevitably, the very nature of journalism itself. These developments are currently the subject of growing intellectual inquiry in the field of journalism studies. However, within existing literature, scholars have paid insufficient attention to the significant range of actors who have long been active in Africa’s communication ecology through diverse forms of outputs, narratives and practices, as well as their possible implications to journalism as a profession and institution. Yet recent developments on the continent suggest there is an ever-expanding media ecology with a unique set of non-traditional producers, but also distinct practices that reveal the democratization of media spaces and technologies in ways that potentially influence media production and consumption (see, among many others, Mano 2007; Tully and Ekdale 2014; Bosch 2017; Willems and Mano 2017; Bosch, Wasserman, and Chuma 2018; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022; Mabweazara and Mare 2021; Omanga 2019).

A variety of non-journalistic (human and non-human) actors on the continent are now integrated into traditional news media in sourcing, data journalism projects, fact-checking, data analytics, among others (see Mutsvairo, Bebawi, and Borges-Rey 2020; Cheruiyot and Ferrer-Conill 2018; Mare and Munoriyarwa 2022; Moyo, Mare, and Matsilele 2019; Royston 2021). Some of these actors are expanding and complementing news production within legacy news media. For instance, technology experts and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) boost media production by providing funding for media innovations, support collaborative projects in investigative journalism, or train traditional journalists (Wright 2018; Moyo 2019; Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019; Royston 2021). These actors are increasingly supplanting and transgressing boundaries of journalistic practice, thereby (possibly) spawning new forms of journalism at the margins of traditional journalism. Indeed, extant scholarship within the field of journalism has recognized today’s complex dynamics of news production following the entry of these “strangers” or “newcomers” into the growing news media ecology (see, among others, Eldridge 2019; Baack 2018; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018; Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019).

This special issue, first, acknowledges that the transformation of journalism where news is increasingly detached from journalism, albeit coloured by local factors (Steensen and Westlund 2020), is a global phenomenon. It submits that the transformation of journalism is broadly seen as striking at the very heart of the ontology of journalism (Mutsvairo et al. 2021)—the obsession with the disruption and rapture of the very nature of journalism—particularly in terms of how we have traditionally understood it as a stable and normatively distinct profession with a clearly defined “professional identity and ideology” (Deuze 2005), orchestrated and policed by “mainstream journalists” as the sole arbiters. We consider the aforementioned conception of the transformation of journalism as limiting. Second, the special issue argues that studying how the profession is changing, requires that we consider how a growing communication ecology that transcends nation-state boundaries shapes our understanding of journalism today. Lastly, it considers that while sociopolitical, economic and cultural contexts shape journalistic practices and the profession (Mabweazara 2018), the disruptive effects of digital technologies seem to reproduce similar trends and changes in various journalistic cultures across the world.
A closer examination of such trends in journalistic cultures within Sub-Saharan Africa, not only highlights the dynamics that shape media production today, but also broadens our understanding of the “crisis” facing journalism in the twenty-first century, especially in countries least studied within the emerging field of digital journalism.

**Centrepiece of “peripheral” studies**

Our special focus is therefore the growing impact of non-traditional actors—which have often been referred to as “peripheral” actors in recent literature—in Sub-Saharan Africa (see Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019; Mabweazara and Mare 2021). Peripheral actors are considered as individuals or organizations that operate outside the boundaries of traditional journalism, but are part of the broader communication ecology in a specific journalistic culture. Their intervention could be through independent production of content or collaborative partnerships with traditional journalists and legacy news media, leading to new “fusions” in journalistic practices (Baack 2018; Usher 2019). These actors could be broadly categorized as *interlopers*, i.e. those challenging the journalism field such as bloggers or citizen journalists, or *intralopers*, those that complement legacy news media such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), data analysts or audience metric companies (Eldridge 2019; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022; Hermida and Young 2019).

Recent studies have explored new partnerships and collaborative practices emerging between technologists, data experts, users/audiences or citizens from the Global North and traditional journalists in African newsrooms, an example of an “entanglement” with possible implications, which are yet to be interrogated (Cheruiyot, Baack, and Ferrer-Conill 2019; Wamunyu and Siguru Wahutu 2019; Moon 2021; Moyo 2019). There are also indications that the previous notions of “citizen journalism” or “alternative” media have been too simplistic (Holt, Figenschou, and Frischlich 2019; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022), and thus insufficient in analysing the emerging participatory cultures in an increasingly connected Sub-Saharan Africa (Mabweazara and Mare 2021), and in an expanding digital networked environment (see Heinrich 2011). However, scholars recognize that the space in which these peripheral actors operate is predominantly elitist (Robinson and Wang 2018; Wahutu 2019), even though there are emerging examples of grass-roots/community media within urban poor or rural regions on the continent that remain understudied (Uppal, Sartoretto, and Cheruiyot 2019). Theoretically, scholars position peripheral actors in close proximity to traditional journalism, while also acknowledging that these “newcomers” elicit tensions within professional journalism (Eldridge 2019).

This special issue aims to broaden the understanding of the role and influence of peripheral actors in journalism. In plugging this extant research gap, the special issue also seeks to dispel widespread generalizations in which Anglo-American conceptions of “peripheral actors in journalism” are “applied with an underlying assumption of universality that neglects the specificities of the contexts in which they were conceived” (Mutsvairo et al. 2021, 1001). While there are undeniable global similarities, as we have already noted, it is equally true that the “emerging” and established journalistic practices are also “coloured by local factors across the globe” which result in practices that challenge Anglo-American conceptions “that generalise what are, in fact, diverse and complex...
[peripheral] newsmaking cultures” (Mabweazara 2018). In keeping with Mutsvairo et al., we contend that, “a more comprehensive theorisation of the field of journalism should dispel Euro-American generalisations […] that are often taken as all-encompassing” (2021, 1001).

Among other subjects, the special issue tackles questions whether these “new actors” challenge, reinforce or redefine journalism (as a profession); the implications of peripheral news production to legacy news media; how these new actors shape the news, as well as how they re-orient the role of journalism in an increasingly connected Sub-Saharan Africa. We first address the question whether peripheralization of journalism is an entirely new phenomenon on the continent, and what this means for the study of these non-traditional actors today.

**New, or merely “peripheral”?**

Ibrahim Shaw reminds us that before contact with imperial powers, journalism in Africa “took the form of oral discourse, using communication norms informed by oral tradition and folk culture with communal storytellers (griots), musicians, poets, and dancers playing the role of the modern-day journalist” (2018, 36). This “romantic reconstruction of the pre-colonial” (Nyamnjoh 2005, 91), albeit problematic in potentially projecting “a static and exceptionalistic” (Shaw 2018, 37) picture of the African communication ecology, points to a unique repertoire of communication forms and a distinctive grounding of “African journalism” that was disrupted and relegated to the “periphery” by colonialism when it ushered in a Global North style of journalism.

Although this unique pre-colonial grounding of African journalism in oral discourse, creativity and other forms of local agency has clearly remained central to African communication ecosystems as noted by scholars like Mano (2007), it is arguable that journalism in Africa has been in continual flux from the moment missionaries showed up on the continent and sought to publish newspapers that would work to both proselytize and expand their reach. With each subsequent epoch, different actors have been viewed as key or peripheral actors in the field depending on whom state actors viewed as integral to their mission. Both in and out of the continent, the contestation of whom is “peripheral” has also often been contestation over the definition of journalism and by extension, the profession (see, among others, Belair-Gagnon and Holton 2018; Eldridge 2014; Örnebring 2013; Zelizer 2017; Mabweazara and Mare 2021; Waisbord 2013). Embedded in this definitional struggle of who is central and who is peripheral is the more significant battle over what counts as journalism (Reese 2021, 2).

With this in mind, we borrow from Barbie Zelizer, who suggests that thinking of journalism as an interpretive community may be more beneficial than thinking of it as solely a profession (Zelizer 1993, 219). Zelizer reminds us that this would allow scholars to think of journalists as actors who “come together by creating stories about their past” (223). With this as a starting point, we argue that the notion of “peripheral actors” needs to be rethought, both for analytical clarity and accuracy in capturing how African journalism fields have evolved over the decades. Part of what we see as the epistemological morass, for example, is the fetishization of “novelty” which leads to assumptions that those defined as “peripheral actors” exist because the technology exists. The understandings of “peripheral actors” within scholarship from the Global North do little to provide
analytical clarity as to how to think about them within the context of how African journalism fields have historically operated.

Zelizer’s (1993) approach, for example, allows us to articulate better how, in the 1920s, indigenous newspapers in Kenya, for example, were keen on ensuring that the contributions of their audiences were “for the most part, integrated into the newspapers” (Musandu 2018, 181). Musandu tells us of when H.C.E. Downes (the colonial government’s press officer) visited a “spartan office that housed editors of five African newspapers”, he saw “an extraordinary crowd of khaki overcoated gentlemen sitting in the background” whom the editor told him were “correspondents” (Musandu 2018, 179). Downes later discovered that they were “the most avid letter writers to the newspapers, not conventional journalists” (Downes in Musandu 2018, 179). In British West Africa, Newell informs us that African newspaper editors encouraged readers to become key actors in textual production, thus making readers active shapers of the agenda in the newspapers (Newell 2013, 14).

Gerald Horne also captures this in his telling of a story in which independence activist Jomo Kenyatta (who later became Kenya’s first president) narrated to C.L.R. James how in 1921, “Kenya nationalists unable to read would gather around a reader of Garvey’s newspaper” and “listen to an article two or three times. Then they would run various ways through the forest, carefully repeating the whole, which they had memorised, to Africans hungry for some doctrine which lifted them from the servile consciousness in which Africans lived” (Horne 2009, 27). Contemporary versions of this are epitomized by Mare’s (2013) work on social protests in Southern Africa and Thulani Tshabangu’s article (in this edition) on institutionalizing of citizen journalism projects within legacy media.

Scholars studying the media ecology in Africa may need to consider different approaches to think through the disparate actors in contemporary journalistic fields. One such approach may be Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory. It would provide scholars a lens through which to think about and understand the journalism profession as a space with different actors all working towards constructing knowledge. One key advantage of field theory is that it does not have “a priori determined confines” (Buchholz 2016, 34) and is not static, which allows scholars to expand or contract the boundaries of analysis and determine which actors make up the “field”. This enables scholarship to move “beyond the newsroom and toward a larger news ecology”, which the authors in this volume manage to achieve (Usher 2017, 1119). Finally, it allows us to heed Mabweazara’s call to carefully articulate “how journalism practice in Africa is mitigated by localised factors” (2018, 3). A field approach would categorize the different actors in Gerald Horne’s story (about the news-reading freedom fighters in Kenya) as part of the journalism field.

We tell these stories here not because we find them merely interesting but because we think they are illustrative. African journalism fields have historically had porous boundaries and have included actors that are not viewed as traditionally journalistic in the Global North. But also because they capture the frustration we feel about the conflation of peripheral actors with digital actors. Perhaps due to the pressure of publishing, or because—to paraphrase Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999)—Global North’s scholarship particularities and concerns have been imposed, ahistorically, upon African understandings of periphery and centre, scholars of African journalism fields have been in a rut. We continue to see an intellectual fascination with digital peripheral actors as “novel” challenges
with little engagement with their evolution and history within the continent. Much like in the discourse and analysis of “fake news”, we see a transposition of the periphery and its definition onto African journalism fields. The result of this has been a preponderance of technology-oriented perspectives of who these actors are with little to no acknowledgement of their longevity before the digital and technological revolution. A final example of this lack of historicization is scholars that view digital peripheral actors as relying on anonymity and pseudonymity in their engagement with journalism fields in Africa. Yet, anonymity and pseudonymity have a long history in what was once referred to as British West Africa, where indigenous newspapers were “filled with the writings of untraceable authors using invented personae” (Newell 2013, 2). Today, anonymity and pseudonymity are discussed as if they have only been made recently possible by digital platforms.

**Genres of peripheral journalism(s) in Africa**

Journalism in Africa has often been theorised from the prism of Global North’s epistemology, ontology and methodology largely due to its colonial ancestry (Shaw 2009, 2018). Thus, the actors, organizational routines, cultures and practices of journalism in Africa are viewed using a professional gaze that often fails to acknowledge the sociocultural dynamics within which it is practised, consumed and distributed. In short, journalism in Africa is seen as taken-for-granted practice that is similar to other journalism practiced in other social contexts. Such a conceptualization of journalism as a professionalized, codified and routinized practice has inadvertently led to lip service being paid to the role of informal, popular forms of communication (Mare 2020). It is too limiting. It creates an imagined boundary where professional journalists are considered to be the only authoritative storytellers within a specific communicative ecology as well as reinforcing ahistorical conceptualizations of peripheral news actors in journalism as discussed in the preceding section. It has cultivated what Nyamnjoh (2015) calls “an incomplete” narrative about the existing forms of journalism in Africa. As a social practice, journalism is diverse and context-specific in its manifestation. Broadening our conceptualization of journalism beyond the daily routines and practices of professional journalists and digital peripheral actors allows us to bring traditional and emerging peripheral actors in African journalism fields into the mainstream journalistic equation.

In Africa, peripheral actors are considered as individuals or organizations that operate outside the boundaries of traditional (professional) journalism, but are part of the broader communication ecology in a specific journalistic culture. As we have noted above, these actors include musicians, satirists, griots, graffiti artists, cartoonists, bloggers, social media influencers, comedians, and so forth. Some of these peripheral actors have always relied on anonymity and pseudonymity to make their point in the broader public sphere. In authoritarian and semi-authoritarian contexts, where spaces of news engagement and information flows are restrictive or largely “captured” by political and economic forces, peripheral actors often engage with mainstream news and information through memes, jokes, gossip, rumours, cartoons, Photoshopped images and satire circulated via SMS or platforms such WhatsApp Messenger (Mabweazara and Mare 2021; Ogola 2019). In some cases, these peripheral communicative channels have been used to break news or leak information deemed to be in the public interest. Thus, in contexts where invited spaces of news engagement are constrained, peripheral actors can serve
as the “voice of the voiceless by offering subtle avenues of expression” (Mano 2007, 61). Because of their “open-ended” nature—anonymity and editable formats—jokes, memes, subvertisements and cartoons can also serve the “journalistic” function of “communicating daily issues in ways that challenge the powerful and give a voice to the disadvantaged” (Mano 2007, 61). These genres of peripheral journalism have significantly lowered barriers for African publics to participate and engage directly with current affairs and mainstream news, including challenging dominant media narratives. Thus, popular communicative platforms such as jokes, cartoons, subvertisements, music, satire, memes, humour and Photoshopped images can be conceptualized as genres of peripheral journalism in their own right (Mare2020; Mabweazara and Mare2021). Our argument here is that peripheral actors have always been part and parcel of the burgeoning African journalism fields. While we acknowledge the role that digitization has played in opening up new spaces for these peripheral actors’ content to go viral, it is important to emphasize that journalism in Africa has always existed beyond the narrow confines of professionalized and routinized practice.

(Re)thinking “peripheral journalism”

The range of contributions in this special issue seeks to unpack the possible implications of the practices, ideologies or visions of non-journalistic actors within a growing communication ecology on the continent. The running thread within these contributions are the perpetual tensions that arise when non-journalistic actors, mostly employing digital technologies, engage in media production. While the contributors in this issue show that forms of organizations and practices are emerging through the activities of these non-traditional actors and are becoming significant within the continent’s media ecology, what is clear is that the logics of (traditional) journalism are still largely upheld by these “newcomers”.

These empirical contributions highlight two significant implications of the practices and narratives of these non-journalistic actors, which we consider noteworthy in understanding the transformation of journalism on the continent. First, we see these actors challenge but also expand journalistic practices—what several scholars have referred to as interloping and intraloping (Eldridge 2018; Holton and Belair-Gagnon 2018). These new actors challenge the mainstream media in a variety of ways such as through initiating alternative citizen engagement models, implicitly challenging the legacy media’s focus on the elite. At the same time, these actors expand journalistic practices through, for example, providing marginalized voices with platforms to participate in storytelling practices within their communities. The authors also show that these actors engage in collaborative practices with professional journalists and mainstream news organizations thus reinforce traditional journalistic practices, and diversifying spaces for news production and consumption. Second, our contributors show that professional journalism could be changing in ways we are yet to comprehend as these non-journalistic actors promote “fusion” of skills, culture, practices or roles (Usher 2019; Baack 2018) within the newsroom and in auxiliary or non-traditional media production spaces. What we see emerging, therefore, are new configurations (cf. Baack 2018) which possibly reveal to us new ways of rethinking journalism again, as Peters and Broersma (2016) remind us. These works also show that non-traditional actors constantly co-opt journalistic practices, norms and
rules and then apply them in their operations and media production, which makes us then questions whether traditional journalism—as a profession and the institution—is merely transforming or shaping into something we are yet to understand.

In his article, Danford Zirugo shows that while oppositional to traditional journalistic practice and routines, non-journalistic actors that practice genres such as political satire, still take the journalism as frame of reference. Zirugo studies how reporting routines of a satirical show in Zimbabwe, founded by comedians, compares to conventional journalism. Zirugo argues that political satire’s "alternativeness as a form of journalism lies in its journalistic role performance". In his qualitative analysis of role performance within Zimbabwean political satire show, *The Week with Cde Fatso*, Zirugo finds that traditional journalistic roles such as watchdog, civic and interventionist roles are present in the content of the satirical show. What this implies is that when the traditional media, particularly in authoritarian states, fail to fulfil traditional roles such as the watchdog role, non-journalistic actors like satirists could step in and fill this void.

While examining the contribution of satirical shows to Nigeria’s communication ecology, Jude Ogbodo calls for a rethink of our normative understanding of what constitutes journalism in Africa. Ogbodo argues that within the context of countries such as Nigeria where political constraints have historically frustrated the growth and role of a free press, several peripheral actors such as satirists have provided important spaces and tools for ensuring executive probity and accountability. However, he notes that they still occupy a “liminal space” in the broader journalism ecosystem. Using popular satirical shows in Nigeria, *Paranan Mock News* and *Keepin it Real with Adeola* as illustrative case studies, he demonstrates how these shows intersect with investigative journalism, strategically narrated through humour and jokes to spotlight and interrogate state failure and other social problems in Nigeria.

In their paper, Nqobile Ndzinisa, Carolyne Lunga and Mphathisi Ndlovu show that we need to pay attention to the expanding configurations of changing practices within Africa’s expanding news ecology. They take the case of the Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE), a digital start-up founded by a former traditional journalist, whose strategy is to innovate new forms of storytelling that employ art and activism or “artivism”. CITE trains young people in digital storytelling and provides a “collaborative space” for users in Zimbabwe’s Matabeleland region. It creates a digital public sphere where "subordinated communities" participate in production of content but also deliberation about local sociopolitical issues in Matabeleland. What plays in CITE’s favour is its participatory nature and closeness to the political elite, who are both news sources and participants in political debates generated through the start-up’s platforms. CITE is both counter-hegemonic (challenging traditional journalism ideologies) and innovative in engaging communities in local collaborative practices of story-telling in digital space. Non-journalistic projects like CITE provide an opportunity to rethink traditional professional ideologies or forms of journalism such as civic journalism.

In “Making news with the citizens!”, Thulani Tshabangu examines the news production processes in a Zimbabwean news media organization. Focusing on the role of “peripheral actors” in media production, Tshabangu argues that their participation was enabled not just by technology but by explicit policies by a citizen journalism project within the Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) group. Thus AMH, much like indigenous newspapers of yesteryear, is engaged in a deliberate effort to put audiences at the centre of
the news-making process through “structured, unstructured, hybrid, and digital” and thus ensuring a multidirectional knowledge construction and consumption processes. AMH appears to be working to ensure homology between production and consumption spaces at the surface level. Tshabangu’s contribution does point to some issues with AMH’s approach. Due to the gendered nature of the digital divide, this space is dominated by men. In addition, in an echo to Musandu (2018) and Neff and Benson (2021), Tshabangu ends their piece by reminding us that despite citizen participation in news production, it is vital to remember that, in totality, the news-making process served the interests of AMH’s ownership. Tshabangu’s work reminds us that even as scholars focus on “peripheral actors”, the interests of the organization’s owners should also be scrutinized to understand and excavate how media owners view and interact with “peripheral actors”.

Job Mwaura finds that traditional journalism still shapes practices, norms and values of emerging forms of citizen journalism. Mwaura takes the case of a citizen journalism project in Kenya to interrogate the dependencies between legacy media and non-journalistic actors. In his ethnographic study at Kibera News Network, a hyper-local news website run by an urban poor community in Nairobi, Mwaura finds that citizen journalists largely embrace professional values and traditional practices. In their news-making practices, however, these citizen journalists challenge the elitism and exclusionary approaches of legacy media. Instead, their news production employs participatory practices while their storytelling seeks to promote voices of excluded citizens in their reporting. Mwaura argues that in the digital age, citizen journalism’s value lies in its capacity to reinforce journalism, but it also exposes the inadequacies of legacy news media. What Mwaura’s case study shows are the interdependencies that could exist between traditional and non-traditional actors which could shape both the legacy news media and the common understanding of citizen journalism (cf. Mutsvairo and Salgado 2022).

Focusing on the mediation of COVID-19-related news and information, Wishes Mututwa and Admire Mare analyse how professional journalists and peripheral content creators produced and circulated locally specific public health information at the peak of the global pandemic. The article employed a mix of in-depth interviews with mainstream and peripheral actors as well as qualitative content analysis of news articles published by Zimbabwe’s daily, The Herald, and Twitter posts published by peripheral actors—including public intellectuals, social media influencers, everyday users—popularly known as Twimbos (or Zimbabweans on Twitter). Mututwa and Mare find that professional and peripheral journalistic actors complemented and competed against each other in their bid to produce and circulate credible and truthful information about COVID-19. Their article provides new evidence of how peripheral journalistic actors played an instrumental role in educating and providing life-saving information about the pandemic as well as exposing multiple government failures in handling the pandemic. It argues that in order to map and understand emerging identities of storytellers in Africa, we need to acknowledge the role of “gate crashers” in the ever-evolving hybrid journalistic field. Peripheral actors (in the form of Twimbos) critiqued and shone the spotlight on official misinformation and disinformation packaged as truthful and credible information.

In “The rise of peripheral actors in media regulation in South Africa”, Rofhiwa Mukhudwana examines how social media mobs push the boundaries of traditional journalistic accountability, especially through their persistent and ubiquitous criticism of traditional
journalistic practice and news professionals. While diverse in interests and participatory modes, subversive and divided, Mukhudwana considers these social mobs as alternative agents of accountability. In their critique of news journalism, these non-journalistic actors push the limits of accountability discourse within the South African news ecology. These mobs expose journalistic failures, blunders and even complex sociopolitical issues that emerge through traditional news reporting, for example, racism and classicism within the news media in South Africa. Mukhudwana argues that these actors possibly bolster traditional media accountability mechanisms. While of course, social mobs are unregulated and prone to forms of “dark participation” (Quandt 2018) that pose a threat to journalistic safety and freedom, Mukhudwana’s paper shows that they succeed to discursively engage the public in a range of journalistic mistakes and inadequacies, and possibly promote reforms within (traditional) journalistic practice.

Wambui Wamunyu examines the entrance of non-traditional actors into journalistic practice in a digitally disrupted Kenyan newsroom. Wamunyu’s article explores the idea of trust/mistrust within the context of the interactions between various actants in the emergent news ecology. Adopting the actor-network theory, the article focuses on the tensions and struggles over journalistic “truth” within a Kenyan FM radio station when “adhocratic” digital actants collide with the more disciplined hierarchical structures and routinized actor practices of the traditional newsroom. The article argues that new entrants/actors had to demonstrate value to gain trusted entry into the news actor network. Only then were the actants—both human and technological—incorporated into the routines of journalistic practice to become a trusted part of the actor network. Overall, the article demonstrates that non-traditional actors who may be deemed “peripheral” or “outsiders”, as they are enrolled into the actor-network, can (eventually) become accepted and trusted actants in an actor-network, leading to their being black-boxed into the journalistic practice.

Finally, in his article, “What is news?”, Edwin Tallam takes an age-old debate and rethinks it in the context of mobile phone usage in Kenya by young people participating in media production, arguing that news consumption is a “complex multi-layered process enmeshed” in both online and offline networks. Taking a sociology-of-knowledge approach, Tallam reminds us that foundationally, the journalism field is engaged in constructing knowledge about society. What is unique about Tallam’s work is that its shows that journalism provides audiences the voice to determine which part of this constructed knowledge they view as vital in their everyday life. Ergo, “what is news?” as defined by the consumers rather than by the producer is a nifty way to leverage Bourdieu and investigate whether there is homology in Kenya’s production and consumption spaces. Specifically, the possibility of homology depends on the primary mode of information consumption in a country where most of the audience is aged under 40. Tallam ends their article by informing us that while the news works to influence how audiences construct the social world, it also complicates the social relationships in this social world.

**Concluding remarks**

African journalism has always been a broad church but one in which certain actors have been framed as different, effectively Othered. These actors have routinely been denied agency and thus deleted from conversations and as legitimate actors on the continent’s
information ecosystem. To be sure, such actors have existed including in mainstream journalistic platforms such as newspapers. For example, fiction columns, a popular narrative form across the continent that draws on a cultural nomenclature of censor, including through the use of humour and satire, have been among some of the most resilient features of the newspaper in Africa. In Kenya, Wahome Mutahi’s *Whispers* was arguably one of the best known such columns. In South Africa there was Todd Matshikiza’s *With the Lid Off* and Casey Motsisi’s *On the Beat* and *If Bugs Were Men*. In West Africa Nelson Otta, using the pseudonym Coz Idapo, wrote *West African Whispers* (see, among others, Ogola 2017). These were culturally styled forms of “journalism” that have widely been regarded liminal and judged normatively against a set of values and practices unique to journalism traditions in the Global North. Our emphasis in this special issue therefore is to recentre some of these “Othered” actors and forms of communication as significant in our understanding of African journalism. By peripheral actors here, therefore, we are not suggesting journalistic liminality; quite the opposite. We are calling attention to the need to reimagine agency in African journalism, one that recognizes not only the new actants but their resilient antecedents too.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

**ORCID**

David Cheruiyot [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4774-4643](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4774-4643)

j. Siguru Wahutu [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4285-6048](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4285-6048)

Admire Mare [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9329-4030](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9329-4030)

**References**


