

Disrupted media - disrupted academy: Rethinking African J-schools

a discussion paper¹

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Introduction

It has become a commonplace that journalism is experiencing massive disruption. Traditional media are in decline as audiences move online, and there is much discussion about alternative revenue models. At the same time, trust in journalism is under significant pressure in a “post-fact” world. Social media have made it possible for almost anyone to have a voice. Communication has been democratized but it has also become easy for untruths to reach large audiences without the intervention of traditional filters of journalistic verification. The implications for journalism education have drawn some academic discussion, while journalism educators seek ways of adding more and more digital and social media skills into an already crowded curriculum². Less attention has been paid to the wider implications of a shrinking job market for journalists. The notion of journalism as a profession is fraying at the edges³, with profound implications that journalism schools need to consider.

Journalism in sub-Saharan Africa⁴ is facing these challenges along with the rest of the world, but the media landscapes in this region display some specific features which affect the ways in which change unfolds. The region includes 46 countries, and a wide range of different cultures, languages and traditions of journalism, so easy generalisation should be avoided. As the well-known website founded by former Shorenstein Fellow Sean Jacobs puts it with heavy irony, Africa is a country (<https://africasacountry.com/>). Though it is critical to remain mindful of the many differences, it is possible to identify some dimensions that are shared to a greater or lesser extent. It is essential to understand such regional specifics in developing strategies to safeguard and grow credible public information flows in countries that have very particular needs.

Though media environments are fragile, journalism and communication schools are practically universal. “Journalism education and training in sub-Saharan Africa is flourishing,” writes Alan Finlay in the introduction of a recent mapping⁵ study. The study counted a total of 127 teaching providers in 19 countries, though

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- 1 Thanks to Alan Finlay, Guy Berger, Harry Dugmore and members of the African Media Salon – Bob Wekesa, Hayes Mabweazara, Ivan Okuda, Admire Mare, David Cheruiyot and George Ogola – who all provided invaluable comments on an early draft of this paper. I am also grateful for the input and support of my adviser at the Shorenstein Centre, Tom Patterson, and the centre itself for offering me the fellowship that enabled this project.
 - 2 The popularity of a stream on “technological mutations” at the World Journalism Education Congress in Paris in 2019 illustrates the weight given these questions. (*Conference Proceedings: World Journalism Education Congress 2019: “Teaching Journalism during a Disruptive Age.”* Paris: WJEC 2020)
 - 3 See Wolfgang Donsbach, “Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education,” *Journalism* 15, no. 6 (2014): 661–77; Donica Mensing, “Rethinking [Again] the Future of Journalism Education,” *Journalism Studies* 11, no. 4 (2010): 511–23; Katerina Tsetsura and Dean Kruckeberg, “The Changing Nature of Journalism: A Sociology of Deprofessionalization” (5th World Journalism Education Congress, Paris: WJEC, 2019), 741–52.
 - 4 The focus here will be on sub-Saharan Africa, though Africa will sometimes be used as a shorthand for ease of reference. The countries of North Africa deserve special consideration, which is not possible here.

Finlay acknowledged that the exercise was limited. Journalism teaching comes in many shapes and forms and faces significant challenges, from resourcing to fundamental philosophical challenges.

The question at the core of this discussion paper is simple: what are the implications for African journalism schools of the international crisis facing journalism and the specific needs of local audiences? More specifically, what are the implications in terms of curriculum, target groups and modalities? Or more simply put: what, who and how should journalism schools teach in order to remain relevant? The paper will then take a step further and consider the argument for journalism schools taking on a wider view of their function. Are there additional roles they can or should play in safeguarding and building healthy public information systems, beyond the traditional function of producing the next generation of journalists? In countries where there are few active media institutions, those that do exist would seem to have a particular responsibility to look beyond their comfort zones. That becomes especially necessary where those comfort zones are in decline.

The Disruption of Journalism in Sub-Saharan Africa

It has become a familiar refrain: radical changes in the ways people get their news and information have undermined the business model underpinning traditional journalistic media. What is less well explored is the particular ways in which these changes are affecting African media. It is too easily assumed that journalism around the world can easily be read as an extension of experiences in the Global North. Zelizer writes: “... much received discourse about journalism was born of a particular place that did not reflect journalism writ large. That place – the Anglo-American imaginary – occupied a more central position in scholarly work than it did in the world.”⁶ The following will first briefly summarise the global crisis being faced by journalism, and then offer some pointers about African specifics.

The rise of the Internet giants, particularly Google and Facebook, has changed information ecosystems around the globe. Audiences increasingly go online to satisfy their appetite for information, while advertising money increasingly goes online too. This is not just a question of following the audience, it is also driven by the sophisticated targeting that advertisers can achieve on the platform giants. Users exchange detailed information about themselves for the capacity to live growing parts of their lives on the digital platforms, who turn the information into massive profits by offering advertisers targeted access to precisely defined audiences⁷. It is

5 “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa” (Johannesburg: Fojo Media Institute & Wits Journalism, 2021), 6, https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Mapping-Africa-Training-Centres-V6_09122020.pdf.

6 “Terms of Choice: Uncertainty, Journalism, and Crisis,” *Journal of Communication* 65, no. 5 (2015): 895.

7 Harry Dugmore, “Paying the Piper: The Sustainability of the News Industry and Journalism in South Africa in a Time of Digital Transformation and Political Uncertainty” (Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies & Open Society Foundation, 2018), 13, <http://themedialonline.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PAYING-THE-PIPER-The-sustainability-of-the-news-industry-and-journalism-in-South-Africa-in-a-time-of-digital-transformation-and-political-uncertainty.pdf>.

now possible to target an advertising campaign at single women in their early 30s who live in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, and enjoy off-road cycling and classical French movies. It is a profound irony that the platforms' global power is significantly based on their ability to focus more precisely and narrowly on segments of consumers than has ever been possible before.

The trend has, quite simply, eaten traditional journalism's lunch. The business model that sustained journalism for around a century in much of the world is in terminal decline, with closures and job losses now common. At the same time, the rise of social media has democratized communication, with some very positive effects. But it has also opened the door to a flood of disinformation, and made it much more difficult for consumers to distinguish reliable material from everything else. Robert W McChesney writes: "(W)orldwide, journalism is in a deep structural crisis. I will even go so far as to say it is in death spiral. We are witnessing the collapse of journalism before our eyes at breath-taking speed. The problem is very simple to explain: It is a structural crisis, the commercial system is collapsing, it is failing, and it is not coming back."⁸

These trends affect media in sub-Saharan Africa like the rest of the world, but the specific impacts are not always the same as elsewhere. In order to understand these impacts, it is necessary to consider some specific features of media environments on the continent.

Access to the Internet in Africa lags far behind the rest of the world, despite strong growth in recent years. According to 2019 figures from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Africa still has far and away the lowest rate of Internet usage of any world region: 28.2%, as compared to the world average of 53.6%. A map shows the continent dominated by countries coloured deep red, signifying those where over 75% of the population lack Internet access.⁹ Poverty, the comparatively high cost of data, and a lack of infrastructure are among the reasons why connectivity is still low in many countries. The ITU notes with concern the large and growing gender gap in Internet usage. Though the gap exists across the world, it is most pronounced in the Global South, with a difference of 33% between African men and women.¹⁰ Significantly, African Internet access is most often mobile, because of poor infrastructure. Sudan provides the most extreme example, with almost 75% of online traffic generated through mobile in 2020. However, mobile access also dominates in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Cameroon and South Africa.¹¹

Facts and figures provide a limited sense of the reality of Internet use in Africa. Though it is important to recognize the fact that many millions of people lack

8 "Journalism Is Dead! Long Live Journalism?: Why Democratic Societies Will Need to Subsidise Future News Production," *Journal of Media Business Studies* 13, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2016.1184919>.

9 ITU, "Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures" (Geneva: ITU, 2019), 2, <https://itu.foleon.com/itu/measuring-digital-development/home/>.

10 ITU, 4.

11 Statista, "Distribution of Web Traffic in Selected African Countries as of October 2020, by Device" (Statista, 2020), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/685188/african-countries-online-traffic-channel-share/>.

access, there are many examples of how the world-wide web has enabled dramatic changes in many cases in Africa. From activism to dating, from mobile money to support for culture and language, Africans have exploited digital opportunities to find new and unique solutions to a range of problems. One example from the world of media illustrates this well: in 2015, the Burundi government cracked down sharply on the independent media after political protests. Journalists from several independent radio stations – which until then had dominated Burundi’s media landscape – and other media fled into neighbouring Rwanda. Without access to frequencies or transmitters, they created Humura Burundi and Radio Inzamba, two radio services of a completely different type. Both produce news shows of between 20 and 30 minutes twice a day, one in French and the other in the national language Kirundi, and distribute them as long voice notes via WhatsApp groups. A 2016 survey by an international NGO found the two services reach 400,000 and 300,000 people respectively – evidence of real viral distribution, as WhatsApp’s limits on group size mean that this programming must be passed from hand to hand.¹²

In this and many other ways, African media have responded to the opportunities and challenges of digital disruption. Countries in the region vary widely, each with their own histories, economies, social structures, politics and media traditions. Furthermore, a lack of empirical research also suggests one should be cautious about making sweeping generalisations. The following will try to note some of the characteristics that make African media landscapes different to other parts of the world and consider what this might mean for the ways in which journalism is impacted by digital disruption. In most cases, these points are far from definitive, often simply suggesting directions for future inquiry.

The Economic Dimension

In many African countries, journalistic media have had to grow in stony ground. Weak economies have meant that commercial potential is limited, and this was the case long before the Internet made its presence felt. Most countries have simply not had a large enough middle class to pay for journalism — both as consumers and as targets for advertisers. The point emerges clearly from the “Media Sustainability Index” developed by the International Research and Exchanges Board, the most recent exercise of its kind.¹³ Forty (later 41) African countries were surveyed annually from 2007 to 2010 with scores for a number of objectives contributing to sustainability, such as free speech, professional journalism and diversity. For the objective dealing with media as business, scores were uniformly low, and declined over the four years. Only one country, South Africa, managed to achieve a score at the “sustainable” level – and that narrowly. Irex commented: “...it is clear that business management ... is the missing foundation for many other aspects of media health ... The news is strangled by lack of financing as much as by political intervention.”¹⁴

12 Franz Krüger, “Radio Life without FM: Exiled Burundian Radio Journalists Broadcast on WhatsApp,” *Jamlab*, June 30, 2017, <https://medium.com/jamlab/radio-life-without-fm-exiled-burundian-radio-journalists-take-to-whatsapp-cb28fadb6b83>.

13 Irex, “Media Sustainability Index 2010: The Development of Sustainable Independent Media in Africa” (Washington: Irex, 2011).

14 Irex, xi.

The extent and patterns of media deficit have important implications for various media platforms: in most parts of Africa, radio remains far and away the most important channel of communication.

As a result, media “density” in many countries is low.¹⁵ There are significant variations between countries, with density closely mirroring levels of economic development, as one would expect. Countries like Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana provide their citizenry with relatively wide choice. On the other end of the spectrum, an extreme case is provided by war-ravaged South Sudan. A 2015 survey – four years after it succeeded in separating from the Sudanese government in Khartoum to emerge as an independent state - revealed that fully a third of the population had never come into contact with any form of media, including radio.¹⁶ There are also significant differences within countries, with middle-class, urban audiences much better served than those in poorer and more rural settings. Residents of many capital cities enjoy good Internet access, dense cell phone coverage, a choice of TV and radio services as well as printed media.

Balancing Act, a consultancy firm, has analysed the “media deficit” – where populations have either no or significantly less access to media - across the continent, and described its geographic distribution as revealed in media consumption patterns.¹⁷ Landlocked countries and those experiencing conflict tend to have higher deficits. Within countries, deficits are greatest in urban informal settlements, in rural areas and inland, away from generally more prosperous coastal areas.¹⁸ Deficits are the product of differences in income, education and of gender, and of access to relevant infrastructure.¹⁹ Language plays an important role. The continent has an enormous richness of linguistic diversity, but some minorities are so small and poor that they are left excluded from media altogether. In a country like Zambia, where some 72 discrete languages are spoken, English is used as a unifying language. Seven major vernacular languages have official recognition and therefore get space on the public broadcaster.²⁰

The extent and patterns of media deficit have important implications for various media platforms: in most parts of Africa, radio remains far and away the most important channel of communication. Its relatively low cost, its immediacy, the ease with which it accommodates many languages and the fact that it does not require literacy mean that radio services reach furthest into media-poor populations. By contrast, newspapers are far less important. Balancing Act cites a Ghanaian survey that found that only 1.5% of the country’s population rely primarily on newspapers for their information. By contrast, radio was the main source for almost 63% of respondents, TV for 25% and the Internet for just over 6%.²¹

The two most important factors shaping African media landscapes, then, are overall economic weakness and disparities between sectors of the population. As a re-

15 “More Media for Southern Africa? The Place of Politics, Economics and Convergence in Developing Media Density,” *Critical Arts* 18, no. 1 (2004): 42–75.

16 Forcier Consulting, “We’re Still Listening: A Survey of the Media Landscape in the Accessible Areas of South Sudan in 2015” (Internews, 2015), https://internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/Internews_SouthSudan_StillListening_2015.pdf.

17 “Africa’s Media Deficit and Access to Knowledge,” Briefing Paper (London, October 2016).

18 Balancing Act, 7.

19 Balancing Act, pts. 2 & 3.

20 “Languages of Zambia” (Translators Without Borders, Danbury, US), <https://translator-withoutborders.org/language-data-for-zambia>.

21 Balancing Act, “Africa’s Media Deficit and Access to Knowledge,” 16.

sult, the commercial model of media has never been as strong in African countries as in the Global North. Other players have played a disproportionately large role in sustaining information flows. Two deserve particular mention: the state and international donors. The state’s role will be discussed in the following section.

As for international donors, their involvement in African media landscapes has been extensive. Globally, a figure of \$650m has been estimated to be flowing into media development in developing countries annually.²² There does not seem to be a figure available for Africa’s share, but it is likely to be substantial. Support came from governments, international NGOs, foundations and others, many now represented in the Center for International Media Assistance (Cima). Support took a range of forms. As the wave of democratization on the continent gathered force in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Western governments exerted pressure on African rulers to liberalize the media. As time went on, direct support went to independent media, particularly community radio, policy development and standard setting, training programs, attempts to reform state broadcasting and the building of professional associations, self-regulatory bodies and other institutions.²³ Critics have said that this form of support simply aims to replicate a model of journalism that developed in the Global North and whose relevance to Africa is doubtful. At its sharpest, the criticism sees media support of this kind as a form of neo-colonialism, where countries and their media are judged against a “benchmark ... which under the umbrella of ‘modernization’ established industrialisation and US-style capitalist democracy as universals.”²⁴ Understandings of the role of journalism, ethical values like objectivity, organizational structures, legal frameworks and news values are all seen as deriving from the model.

More practically, there are concerns about the way in which funding creates dependencies and influences news agendas in ways that are not sufficiently respectful of local realities. Another concern can be added, and that is around the short-term outlook that often marks donor projects. The continent is littered with community radio and other media projects that were set up with generous donor support and then left to fend for themselves in circumstances where journalists could not hope to generate and sustain independent income streams. The donor, meanwhile, chalks up another success and moves to the next project.

Overall, discussion of the economic impact of the digital disruption on African journalism needs to take complex economic realities into account. Though the collapse of newspaper circulations in some cases is undeniable, it is far from clear that it can always be blamed on the Internet giants. A new report on the state of journalism in Malawi, for instance, highlights a rapid decline of newspaper sales, but blames the drop on disproportionate increases in the price of newsprint.²⁵ The extent of dependence on official funding, whether through direct subsidy for state-

22 Mary Myers, “Africa’s Media Boom: The Role of International Aid” (Washington: Centre for International Media Assistance, 2014), 2, https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/africa_s_media_boom_the_role_of_international_aid/.

23 Myers, 14–22.

24 Chris Paterson, Audrey Gadzekpo, and Herman Wasserman, “Journalism and Foreign Aid in Africa,” *African Journalism Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2018.1474121>.

Official involvement in the media goes beyond direct violations of media freedom. In many countries, state media play a central role in the information ecosystem, and often have far and away the greatest reach.

owned media or through official advertising, must also make a difference to an outlet's vulnerability to shifts in the commercial advertising market. Much more detailed analysis is necessary before one can make declarations on the business impact of digital disruption on Africa's media and is likely to deliver a complex picture with significant differences between countries, sectors and individual outlets.

The Political Dimension

Historically, newly independent African countries inherited from the colonial powers the machinery of communication (chiefly in the form of state broadcasters) and a taste for tight control. Post-colonial governments justified their preference for tight, centralised control over communication by the need to build their new nations. Few alternative sources of information were available for decades until a wave of democratization swept the continent in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At that point, media landscapes in many countries changed suddenly and dramatically. West African scholar Kwame Karikari describes a "media boom" that ended "near-absolute government control and ushered in a vibrant pluralism.... Suddenly, the streets of Africa's capitals were awash with newspapers.²⁶ The 'culture of silence,' imposed first under colonialism and then by post-colonial military dictatorships and autocratic one-party states, was rudely broken."²⁷ Besides the growth in print, broadcasting in many countries was liberalized, leading to an explosion of independent television and, even more strongly, radio.

As countries moved decisively away from authoritarianism, constitutional frameworks were crafted to include guarantees of freedom of speech and media and legal frameworks were liberalized.²⁸ The 1991 Windhoek Declaration encapsulated the new spirit. Drafted by journalists in the Namibian capital, the ringing declaration called for pluralist and independent media.²⁹ It was endorsed by UNESCO and has become a model for similar declarations in other parts of the world.

However, as democracies in various countries came under pressure, governments have found ways of reasserting control. The 2021 Press Freedom Index from Reporters Without Borders notes: "After a wave of liberalization in the 1990s, press freedom violations are now only too common."³⁰ Measures include the passing of

25 "State of the Newsroom Malawi 2021: Focus on Corruption," State of the Newsroom (Continuing Journalism Education & Wits Journalism, 2021), <https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Malawi-Son-Corrected-2-03-May.pdf>.

26 Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging* (London & New York: Zed Press, 2005), 48.

27 "African Media Breaks 'Culture of Silence,'" *Africa Renewal*, 2010, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/august-2010/african-media-breaks-%E2%80%98culture-silence%E2%80%99-0>.

28 Herman Wasserman and Nicholas Benequista, "Pathways to Media Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa: Reflections from a Regional Consultation" (Washington: Cima, 2017), 4, <https://www.cima.ned.org/publication/pathways-to-media-reform-in-sub-saharan-africa/>.

29 "Declaration of Windhoek on Promoting a Pluralistic and Independent African Press" (Unesco, 1991), <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000090759?posInSet=2&query-Id=3aebea3e-fcd3-4925-8e14-af9b9f4ec10d>.

30 "World Press Freedom Index" (Paris: Reporters Without Borders, 2021), <https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries>.

newly restrictive laws, arbitrary censorship, arrests and acts of violence against journalists.³¹

Official involvement in the media goes beyond direct violations of media freedom. In many countries, state media play a central role in the information ecosystem, and often have far and away the greatest reach. This includes state newspapers in some countries, but official broadcasting remains dominant almost everywhere, even where some private activity is allowed. “As things stand, only national, state-controlled broadcasters have the potential to provide news, education and entertainment to the broad majority of the population of most countries in Africa. They dominate radio and TV services in all aspects: with regard to technical reach, diversity of languages and popularity in terms of audience ratings.”³² Various attempts have been made to turn state broadcasters into more independent public broadcasters, with little success. In most countries, the state broadcaster continues to be run from within the ministry of information or similar, and its staff are employed – and see themselves – as civil servants.

In addition, African governments have used administrative and economic power to favor supporters and allies and oppose media seen as adversarial. Zimbabwe was very late in opening the airwaves to private players, but the small number of licenses issued all went to friends of the ruling Zanu-PF party.³³ Meanwhile, official advertising remains a key income source for private news organizations. In Rwanda, 85-90% of advertising revenue comes from the state, while it is estimated that 30% of Kenyan newspapers’ advertising comes from the state.³⁴ And authorities are not shy to exercise this power. In 2000, the Namibian government imposed an advertising ban on *The Namibian*, the country’s largest newspaper, which was to endure for ten years, while Kenya decided in 2017 to withdraw its advertising from private commercial newspapers in favor of a new government-owned title.³⁵ The Zambian authorities used a tax dispute to shut down that country’s biggest newspaper, the fiercely critical *Post*, in 2016.³⁶

The intensely political atmosphere around African journalism draws on an often-exaggerated belief in its influence and direct power over populations, drawing on modernization and hypodermic needle effects theories. Rulers in the immediate post-colonial period sought to control the media to build nations in circumstances of great fragility. Cameroon’s founding president Ahmadou Ahidjo said in 1980 that the objective of information was to “open bit by bit the minds to a just under-

31 See Unesco, “World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Regional Overview Africa 2017/2018” (Paris: Unesco, 2018) for a useful summary.

32 Hendrik Bussiek, “The Failed Reform of Public Broadcasters in Africa,” *DW Akademie*, 29 April 2016, <https://www.dw.com/en/the-failed-reform-of-public-broadcasters-in-africa/a-19223613>.

33 “World Press Freedom Index.”

34 George Ogola, “How African Governments Use Advertising as a Weapon against Media Freedom,” *The Conversation*, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/how-african-governments-use-advertising-as-a-weapon-against-media-freedom-75702>.

35 Ogola

36 “Zambian Editors Arrested Trying to Enter Newspaper’s Offices amid Tax Dispute,” Alert (New York: Committee to Protect Journalists, June 28, 2016), <https://cpj.org/2016/06/zambian-editors-arrested-trying-to-enter-newspaper/>.

standing of the problems of the modern world and the joy of an authentic national culture, (and) ... to develop in our compatriots an awareness that is as clear as possible of the role which everyone can and must play in nation-building.”³⁷ Such views easily lead to fears of what might happen if such a power was exercised by the wrong party. Indeed, there have been prominent examples of media fuelling destabilisation and worse. The Rwanda genocide gave the world what is probably the darkest example of hate media. The role of *Radio Télévision des Mille Collines* and other outlets in stoking the 1994 genocide has been much discussed.³⁸ Broadcasters stoked hatred by labelling the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus as cockroaches and provided specific direction to the killers. An estimated 500,000 people were killed. The commander of the UN forces at the time, Canadian Roméo Dallaire, writes: “The génocidaires used the media like a weapon. The haunting image of killers with a machete in one hand and a radio in the other never leaves you.”³⁹ Vernacular language radio stations in Kenya have also been accused of playing a role in ruinous post-election violence in 2007 and 2008.⁴⁰

As much as examples like these are often cited by those wanting to impose restrictions, a more recent and constructive expression of the belief in media power lies in UN-led initiatives to build radio networks in African conflict zones. As part of the UN peacekeeping mission in the sprawling and divided Democratic Republic of Congo, Radio Okapi was created in 2002 as a platform for reliable information and dialogue. More recently, Radio Ndarason Internationale has begun broadcasting in the Lake Chad area, reaching populations in four adjoining states with the intention of countering the violent extremism of Boko Haram. “Ignorance of the political, social and economic benefits of an inclusive, progressive society fuels much of the violence that racks the Lake Chad area,” writes David Smith, who leads the initiative.⁴¹ Significantly, the station broadcasts on several short-wave transmitters, a technology that is generally disappearing elsewhere.

What, then, can be said about the impact of digital disruption on these deeply politicised media environments, where states remain deeply involved in the media? On the positive side, the Internet has provided new routes to circumvent official attempts to control information. Journalists who have fallen foul of their governments have been able to create new platforms for their work, often from exile. Some slight easing notwithstanding, the media remains heavily constrained in Zimbabwe, and a slew of news websites have arisen in response, including zim-

37 Quoted in Nyamnjoh, *Africa’s Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging*, 132.

38 See for instance Alan Thompson, *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond* (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019).

39 “The Media and the Rwanda Genocide,” in *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond* (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019), 18.

40 Keith Somerville, “Violence, Hate Speech and Inflammatory Broadcasting in Kenya: The Problems of Definition and Identification,” *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 32, no. 1 (February 1, 2011): 82–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2011.545568>.

41 “Radio as a Tool in Countering Violent Extremism: Case Study of the Lake Chad Basin and Boko Haram,” in *Media and Mass Atrocity: The Rwanda Genocide and Beyond*, ed. Alan Thompson (Waterloo, ON, Canada: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019), 579–96.

Overall, then, digital disruption has made official control of information more difficult in African countries, but also opened the door to new sources of pollution for information systems, much as elsewhere.

daily.com – which describes itself as the country’s biggest daily online newspaper – and newzimbabwe.com.⁴² The opening of new channels has, in turn, led governments to shut down the Internet at crucial moments like elections.

New media channels have been used for mis- and disinformation. In South Africa, a prominent business family, the Guptas, who stand accused of having benefited unduly from their close ties to Jacob Zuma during his presidency, engaged the prominent British communications firm Bell Pottinger to do damage control. The propaganda campaign used a range of tools on social media to attack critics of the family and of the Zuma presidency, including alterations to Wikipedia, the use of digital bots, trolling and fake social media accounts. The attacks included slurs against prominent editors. When the campaign was exposed as being centrally directed, Bell Pottinger was forced to withdraw and ultimately collapsed.⁴³

Overall, then, digital disruption has made official control of information more difficult in African countries, but also opened the door to new sources of pollution for information systems, much as elsewhere. Wasserman and Benequista write: “(T)he early hope that digital communication would disrupt the political polarization of media in sub-Saharan Africa has slowly given way to concern about new threats to pluralism in the digital media environment.”⁴⁴

The discussion to this point has tried to show the various ways in which African journalism is often fragile. Though commercial journalism often exercises disproportionate influence by virtue of its more independent position, its economic base is limited and therefore vulnerable to misuse by anyone with money. The state has played a major role in the media, through direct control, repression and the abuse of regulatory, licensing and other powers, while opposition parties have sometimes used similar techniques to instrumentalise journalism. “Media capture,” in the sense used by Schiffrin,⁴⁵ is all too common, and Mabweazara et al have identified the specific mechanisms and patterns of clientelism and patronage capture that are commonly used.⁴⁶

These realities must be taken into account when considering how digital disruption is affecting journalism on the continent. Simply put, the commercial model of journalism is not the norm in many African media landscapes, and rarely exists outside the larger urban centers. Most African audiences still get their information from state media, which are insulated from the business crisis to the extent to which they rely on public money. (In some countries, public media do rely to some extent on commercial income). Digital disruption is likely to affect the smaller

42 Dumisani Moyo, “Alternative Media, Diasporas and the Mediation of the Zimbabwe Crisis,” *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 28, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2007): 81–105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2007.9653360>.

43 Alex Eliseev, “The Gupta Scandal: How a British PR Firm Came Unstuck in South Africa,” *New Statesman*, July 20, 2017, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/observations/2017/07/gupta-scandal-how-british-pr-firm-came-unstuck-south-africa>.

44 “Pathways to Media Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa: Reflections from a Regional Consultation,” 7.

45 “Introduction to Special Issue on Media Capture,” *Journalism*, 2018, 1033–42.

46 “News ‘Media Capture’, Relations of Patronage and Clientelist Practices in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Interpretive Qualitative Analysis,” *Journalism Studies* 21, no. 15 (November 17, 2020): 2154–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1816489>.

urban, independent and commercial media more than those with the widest reach. However, more detailed empirical analysis is necessary to unpack the differentiated impact of digital disruption with confidence.

African journalism teaching is part of these landscapes, and the implications of digital disruption on the institutions conducting it must be considered in the same context.

Journalism Teaching in Africa

Journalism teaching has grown substantially over the past decades. In 1972, Scotton noted some 30 teaching programs⁴⁷ in Africa, two thirds of them in Southern Africa (excluding South Africa).⁴⁸ By 1986, UNESCO counted 36, but after the wave of media liberalization in the 1990s, another UNESCO study gathered data on 96 schools.⁴⁹ A recent study found “at least” 127 centers “in a preliminary scan of 19 countries ... where we only used reliable databases and sources.”⁵⁰ The distribution of teaching programs is unsurprisingly weighted towards those countries with more developed media landscapes. A 2007 study of East African journalism schools found that Kenya, with a sophisticated media, had a history of journalism teaching going back around 40 years and boasted the widest offering. Tanzania and Uganda also had substantial traditions of teaching, while other countries in the region had only recently set up programs. Sudan, Djibouti and Burundi lacked any university-based journalism programs.⁵¹ West Africa, Nigeria with its extremely busy media scene, boasted some 45 training institutes in the same year – a number that had doubled in just four years.⁵²

Journalism certification takes many forms, ranging from “certificates of attendance” for short workshops, often of dubious value, to certificates, diplomas and degrees, right up to MA and PhD level. At many institutions, journalism training sits close to, and is sometimes integrated into, public relations and related areas, often under the broader heading of communications. The relationship has benefits, in that wider communications programs attract larger numbers of students, which is financially helpful.⁵³ However, the lack of specialisation on journalism

47 To avoid getting sidetracked by debates around the difference between education and training and other terminological issues, I will refer generally to “journalism teaching” and to “journalism schools.” I do differentiate journalism from communication, mass communication and media studies, however, for reasons I will argue more fully later.

48 Quoted in Sharon M. Murphy and James F. Scotton, “Dependency and Journalism Education in Africa: Are There Alternative Models?,” *Africa Media Review* 1, no. 3 (1987).

49 Guy Berger and Corinne Matras, “Criteria and Indicators for Quality Journalism Training Institutions & Identifying Potential Centres of Excellence in Journalism Training in Africa,” *Unesco’s Series on Journalism Education* (Paris: Unesco, 2007), 4.

50 Finlay, “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 7.

51 Terje S. Skjerdal and Charles Muiru Ngugi, “Institutional and Governmental Challenges for Journalism Education in East Africa,” *Ecquid Novi* 28, no. 1–2 (2007): 177.

52 Folu F. Ogundimu, Olusola Yinka Oyewo, and Lawrence Adegoke, “West African Journalism Education and the Quest for Professional Standards,” *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 28, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2007): 193, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560054.2007.9653366>.

53 Finlay, “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 97.

International donors have played a significant role over the past decades, offering everything from short-term training courses on particular issues (like AIDS reporting, climate change and data journalism) to building long-term institutional and staffing capacity.

related skills weakens the graduates who do want to enter the newsroom. Nigeria's National Universities Commission has directed universities to differentiate the degrees they offer.⁵⁴

A wide range of organizational forms and many players are involved in teaching journalism. The state plays an important role in many countries, determining curricula and providing direct funding to universities and other bodies. In South Africa, state funding for disadvantaged students has played a significant role in shifting the demographic profile of journalism schools.⁵⁵ Public universities, colleges and schools have the longest history in most countries, and continue to play the biggest role in training the next generation of journalists. At the same time, they are often less likely to have the capacity to innovate and sometimes struggle to maintain links to the professional media. Private providers are a more recent arrival and range from “fly-by-night” colleges with fancy names and no substance to reputable centers that have a significant impact on the landscape. Finlay notes the prominence of faith-based universities, some of whom have leading and highly respected journalism programs.⁵⁶ Independent media houses have themselves become involved in journalism teaching, through entities like the Namibia Media Trust and Nigeria's Premium Times Center for Investigative Journalism, both of which are non-profit offshoots of commercial news publishers. In Kenya, both major publishing groups have invested heavily in training through substantial orientation programs for new recruits. Significantly, both do this in partnership with the Aga Khan University.⁵⁷ In many countries, commercial media contribute by accepting interns and advising on curricula.

International donors have played a significant role over the past decades, offering everything from short-term training courses on particular issues (like AIDS reporting, climate change and data journalism) to building long-term institutional and staffing capacity. A major Norwegian initiative ploughed substantial resources into Addis Abeba University between 2004 and 2007, sponsoring equipment, flying in instructors, and supporting higher degree study by local staff. It all fell apart, however, largely because a worsening political crisis led to tensions between the Ethiopian and Norwegian authorities.⁵⁸ Interventions of significant scale have frequently been linked to broader attempts to support democratization in target countries, as was the case with a USAID project in the early 1990s in Zambia.⁵⁹ This can cause difficult relations with African partners, who may experience this as a high-handed imposition of northern models. It also often relies on the accuracy of an assessment of the strength of a local democratic impulse. In the Ethiopian example, the impulse proved less certain than anticipated.

⁵⁴ Finlay, 94.

⁵⁵ Finlay, 51.

⁵⁶ 53.

⁵⁷ Finlay, 53–54.

⁵⁸ Téwodros W. Workneh, “Journalism Education Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Examination of the Norwegian Model in Ethiopia,” *African Journalism Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 9–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2018.1473269>.

⁵⁹ Folu Folarin Ogundimu, “Donor-Driven Initiatives and Media Training in Africa,” *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*; Thousand Oaks 52, no. 3 (Autumn 1997): 48–62.

The capacity to offer practical skills is seen as a critical marker of quality to prepare students for the job market. “(A)n indicator of the success of many centers was counting the number of students who were employed in media or communications roles after graduating.”⁶⁰ Schools seek out practitioners to teach relevant skills, and many publish and broadcast to campus and sometimes a wider audience in order to give students practical experience. The use of campus radio as a teaching tool is widespread, sometimes with an FM licence and sometimes online. In Malawi, both the Polytechnic and Chancellor College – divisions of the University of Malawi – run radio stations, and so does the Malawi Institute of Journalism.⁶¹ Some institutions also have TV stations – the University of Dar es Salaam has a TV station available across Tanzania via a multiplex operator – while others publish newspapers and magazines. The trend to digital has affected journalism schools, too, due to the high costs of printing. Both Rhodes University and Wits University in South Africa, have shifted their publishing activities online.⁶² Internships, sometimes called industry attachments, are very often integrated into teaching programs. Every second-year student at the Uganda Christian University spends time on an internship, an impressive achievement as it involves 100 to 150 students at a time.⁶³

In his review of the landscape, Finlay introduces the useful concept of “ecologies of teaching and training,” pointing out that it is important not just to look at individual institutions, but at how they relate and fit into the wider landscape. He points to the close relationship between the Mozambican branch of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA – an NGO operating across Southern Africa) and the Higher School of Journalism, between tertiary providers in Malawi, and the way in which Aga Khan University trains the recruits of the major publishers in Nairobi. “Rather than the impact of the training centers on journalism in general being confined to the work of a single center or initiative, it is the result of clusters of interactions between the centers and staff working at the centers,” he writes.⁶⁴

Issues and Challenges

Many journalism schools struggle with resources, particularly those needed for teaching practical skills.⁶⁵ Radio studios, for instance, are not only costly, but require upkeep. Even where donors can be found to support facilities, a lack of ongoing technical support may lead to equipment failure. A 2007 UNESCO study into journalism schools on the continent identified the needs of several “potential centers of excellence.” Time and again institutions identified resource needs: the University of Nairobi, Kenya, needed a new building, Makerere University in Uganda was at the time looking for donors for new radio equipment, while the University

60 Finlay, “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 73.

61 Finlay, 75.

62 Finlay, 77.

63 Finlay, 84.

64 56.

65 Charles Self, “Global Journalism Education,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2020, 13, <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-755>.

of Lagos, Nigeria had a printing press but could not use it due to lack of parts.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Finlay notes that some institutions manage to make a significant impact despite a lack of resources. The independent African Center for Media Excellence in Kampala, Uganda, has built up an impressive reputation despite having minimal facilities.⁶⁷

The common ambition to teach through real journalism exposes journalism schools to tensions. Radio and other platforms attached to journalism programs have to achieve educational ends while navigating institutional and sometimes national political sensitivities. In 2014, two student reporters from campus station Radio Salus in Rwanda were arrested for broadcasting material deemed to be insulting to the president.⁶⁸ And at the University of Zambia, the government in 2012 warned Unza FM it could be closed over reporting of student protests.⁶⁹ Many institutions adopt a cautious approach to avoid such challenges, though some do encourage vibrant, critical student journalism.

The question of quality of education is a vexed one, and the UNESCO study set out to identify criteria and indicators to measure institutions. In the absence of international accreditation standards for journalism teaching, the study found consensus among experts, media development organizations, and journalism schools for their suggested indicators. They were organized under four headings: curriculum and institutional capacity, professional and public service, external links and reputation, and development plan, strategy and potential.⁷⁰ The exercise aimed to create benchmarks for institutions to measure themselves against, as well as to identify potential partners for UNESCO and other media development bodies. Potential was recognized in a total of 21 institutions. The report notes that “institutions rise and fall,”⁷¹ and the picture now is likely to be quite different than at the time of the study. UNESCO’s exercise led to a five-year program to support the identified journalism schools.⁷²

Finlay notes the ways in which the continent’s colonial history continues to mark the journalism teaching landscape. There are few programs to build skills in indigenous languages, though these are prominent on many radio stations. In Ghana, news on community radio is translated “in the moment” from scripts written in English.⁷³ Most teaching across the continent takes place in the main co-

66 Berger and Matras, “Criteria and Indicators for Quality Journalism Training Institutions & Identifying Potential Centres of Excellence in Journalism Training in Africa,” 18–19.

67 “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 80–81.

68 Anton Harber, “Legacy of Rwanda Genocide Includes Media Restrictions, Self-Censorship” (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2014), <https://cpj.org/reports/2014/12/legacy-of-rwanda-genocide-includes-media-restricti/>.

69 “Unza Radio Faces Closure,” *Tumfweko*, September 5, 2012, <https://tumfweko.com/2012/09/05/unza-radio-faces-closure/>.

70 Berger and Matras, “Criteria and Indicators for Quality Journalism Training Institutions & Identifying Potential Centres of Excellence in Journalism Training in Africa,” 8.

71 Berger and Matras, 27.

72 Unesco, “Internal Review of the Potential Centres of Excellence and Reference in Journalism Education in Africa Initiative” (Paris: Unesco, 2013), http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/review_centres_excellence_rev.pdf.

73 “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 9.

lonial languages of English, French and Portuguese, and institutions in these linguistic zones remain closely linked to the related former colonial powers. Centers in francophone Mauritius, for instance, look to France for expertise rather than to institutions on the continent. Also, there is little contact or even knowledge across the continent’s language divide,⁷⁴ and there are few networks that bring African journalism teachers together. A new initiative led by Wits University with Sweden’s Fojo Media Institute is beginning to create a network under the name *Ajenda*, though its footprint is still very modest. (<https://wits.journalism.co.za/ajenda/>)

Fundamental Questions

This paper will not be able to do justice to the extensive critical literature that is available on journalism education in Africa and will only be able to note some major themes. Several factors have helped encourage interest in the topic in academic, professional and donor quarters. For one thing, it is a natural concern for anyone thinking about the media on the continent and the issues they face, particularly for academics themselves active in teaching the next generation of journalists. A key impetus came when South Africa’s Rhodes University hosted the World Journalism Education Council’s second congress in 2010 and arranged a preparatory colloquium for African journalism teachers in the year before. Several papers were written and published, many concerned with what was called “an African agenda for journalism education.”⁷⁵ In South Africa, a more recent impetus came from the student movement whose protests shook the country’s universities from 2015 onwards. Among their demands were for curricula to be decolonized, a call that led to soul-searching at journalism schools as much as in other disciplines.

The debates have covered similar issues as elsewhere in the world, like the balance between theory and practice, the effectiveness of various methods, how to integrate digital tools and others.⁷⁶ Possibly the strongest theme to emerge has been how to make journalism teaching appropriate to African conditions and circumstances. It has repeatedly been said that journalism schools draw on and impose a model from the Global North that is inappropriate to local circumstances. A 2002 UNESCO initiative to offer an alternative curriculum makes the point:

Communication education in Africa, like modern mass communication on the continent, is an import from West Europe and North America. The source of inspiration of teachers, curricula and textbooks is Western. Teachers are mostly Western educated, curricula are drawn from Western models and most textbooks are authored and published in the West and North America. Under these circumstances, communication training in Africa can hardly be said to be culturally relevant, although cultural inculcation was usually the main justification for its introduction and sustainability.⁷⁷

74 Finlay, 9–10.

75 Fackson Banda, “Towards an African Agenda for Journalism Education” (Prepcom for World Journalism Education Congress, Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 2009).

76 Herman Wasserman, “Journalism Education as Transformative Praxis,” *Ecquid Novi* 26, no. 2 (2005): 159–74.

77 Lewis O Odhiambo et al., “Communication Training in Africa: Model Curricula” (Unesco, 2002), 1.

It has consistently been difficult to define what exactly should be different. UNESCO's own attempt at creating a model curriculum was criticized for drawing on a global norm whose legitimacy is disputed.⁷⁸ Answers have ranged from very wide assertions of philosophical orientation, such as Hochheimer's spiritual call for a "journalism of meaning" which is better connected to the communities it serves,⁷⁹ to more concrete calls for the teaching of journalism in vernacular languages.⁸⁰ Ideas around development journalism have drawn a great deal of attention, and more recently there has been interest in ideas of constructive journalism, solutions journalism or sustainable journalism.⁸¹ What many of these approaches have in common is that they offer an alternative to the sense that traditional objective journalism – seen as the Global North's default position – "is not doing the job of what journalism could be."⁸²

Some recent engagements with these questions take a more integrative approach. So Dube's survey of journalism teachers finds general support for an approach that integrates African ideas with approaches from the Global North.⁸³ Rodny-Gumede presents her teaching approach for the Global South in terms of four useful assertions: "re-assertion of the role of journalism in democratic processes, the need for comparative studies and research-led teaching, journalism as active citizenship and journalism as a reflective practice."⁸⁴

There is little to quarrel with the call for journalism teaching to be framed in relation to local circumstances, though the discussion seems most useful when it identifies the concrete ways in which the context might change approaches. Self's recent survey of global journalism teaching practice takes useful steps in this direction.⁸⁵ The present paper represents an attempt to tackle one particular aspect. It seeks to understand the implications arising from the shape of the African media landscape, and specifically the fragility of journalistic professionalism, on teaching.

78 Ylva Rodny-Gumede, "A Teaching Philosophy of Journalism Education in the Global South: A South African Case Study," *Journalism* 19, no. 6 (2018): 749.

79 "Journalism Education in Africa: From Critical Pedagogical Theory to Meaning-Based Practice," *Critical Arts* 15, no. 1-2 (2001): 97-116.

80 Kwame Karikari, "What Would an Africentric Journalism Curriculum Look like?" (Curriculum workshop, Wits University, Johannesburg: Wits Journalism, 2017).

81 Theodora Dame Adjinn-Tettey et al., "Towards Sustainable Journalism in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policy Brief," Policy brief (Consortium to Promote Human Rights, Civic Rights and Media Development in Africa, 2021), <https://fojo.se/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/04/CHARM-TowardsSustainableJournalism-PolicyBrief2021.pdf>.

82 Alan Finlay, "Comment on Draft Paper," July 18, 2021.

83 "Rethinking Journalism Education in African Journalism Institutions: Perspectives of Southern African Journalism Scholars on the Africanisation of Journalism Curricula," *Afrika Journal of Politics, Economics and Society* 6, no. 1 (2016): 13-45.

84 "A Teaching Philosophy of Journalism Education in the Global South: A South African Case Study," 1.

85 "Global Journalism Education," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-755>.

Traditional markers that signalled a piece of journalism as distinct from other forms of communication have faded, and merchants of disinformation have become adept at misusing them to mislead.

A Disrupted Profession

The idea of being a profession rests strongly on the notion that there is a reasonably fixed body of knowledge that one needs to be a member. Accordingly, teaching courses and programs developed around the time that journalists began to aspire to the status of professionals. Along with codes of conduct, manuals and associations, courses began to emerge as “signs of professionalism” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁸⁶ The first journalism school in the US was founded in 1908 at the University of Missouri. Despite ongoing controversy about the value of university and other formal teaching over an apprenticeship model of learning on the job, journalism teaching has grown substantially and remains integral to the idea of journalism as a profession. Goodman and Steyn, editors of *Global Journalism Education in the 21st Century: Challenges and Innovation*, say the encyclopaedic collection “empowers journalism educators to strengthen the field of journalism by preparing students to ‘do journalism’ – as citizens and/or journalists – in the most effective, professional manner possible.”⁸⁷ It is clear that professionalism here is used in a deeply normative way.

And yet the disruption of business models has placed the professionalism of journalism under severe pressure. One of the elements of the established understanding of journalists’ work is that it is carried out in the context of a full-time job in a media house. Idealism aside, that is the future that draws young people to enroll in journalism programs. And yet the formal job market is shrinking rapidly in many areas. The Pew Research Center reported that employment in US print newsrooms dropped by around half between 2008 and 2019. Some of the loss was made up since 2014 by a slight rise in digital newsroom jobs, leading to a 23% decline across all media types.⁸⁸ In South Africa, Wits University’s annual State of the Newsroom report has chronicled the steady reduction of the news industry. Its most recent edition noted publisher Tiso Blackstar’s decision to close the tabloid *Sunday World*, the closure of magazine publisher Ndalo Media, and widespread retrenchments.⁸⁹

At the same time, journalists’ social position of authority over certain kinds of information has eroded. Everyone can join the information ecosystem, and it has become harder for audiences to distinguish what is reliable. Rather than finding news bundled into a familiar newspaper, people now often find an individual story that has been selected for them by an obscure computer algorithm, as pointed out in the UK’s official Cairncross report on the sustainability crisis. “This ‘unbun-

⁸⁶ Stephen J. A. Ward, *The Invention of Journalism Ethics: The Path to Objectivity and Beyond*, McGill-Queen’s Studies in the History of Ideas 38 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 207.

⁸⁷ *Global Journalism Education in the 21st Century: Challenges and Innovations* (Austin, Texas: Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, 2017), 3.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Grieco, “US Newspapers Have Shed Half Their Newsroom Employees since 2008,” *FactTank: News in the Numbers*, April 20, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/20/u-s-newsroom-employment-has-dropped-by-a-quarter-since-2008/>.

⁸⁹ Alan Finlay, “State of the Newsroom 2019/20: Before/After” (Johannesburg: Wits Journalism, 2020), 7, https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/State-of-Newsroom_2019_2020_30112020.pdf.

The newsroom remains an important part of the organization of journalism, as a crucial factor in relaying and approving information as “news.”

dled’ experience has implications for the visibility of public interest news and for trust in news.”⁹⁰

Traditional markers that signalled a piece of journalism as distinct from other forms of communication have faded, and merchants of disinformation have become adept at misusing them to mislead. The NGO First Draft talks of an information environment that has been polluted by disinformation, and where “it has never been harder to know what to trust, and never easier to be misled.”⁹¹ Trust in news media has been steadily declining: a 2020 survey of 38 countries found only six where more than half of respondents trusted the news media “most of the time.” And the best performing country on this metric, Finland, managed a paltry 56%.⁹²

The Dutch scholar Mark Deuze has done considerable work in thinking through what is becoming of journalism. Writing together with collaborator Tamara Witschge, he argues that journalism is becoming “post-industrial, entrepreneurial and a-typical.”⁹³ The industrial age of news, in which it was dominated by a small number of commercial producers able to keep competitors at bay, is dying or dead.⁹⁴ Instead, journalism is produced in a much wider range of organizational forms, such as non-profit entities or advocacy groups. It is often in the hands of individuals outside full-time employment, from freelancers to bloggers. The pattern, familiar from the creative industries more widely, sees people working increasingly as freelancers, in a way that is “individualized, precarious and networked.”⁹⁵ Entrepreneurialism becomes much more important, not just at the level of enterprises facing a wide range of challenges, but for individual journalists too. This shift brings opportunity for individuals, but also significant insecurity and stress.

The newsroom remains an important part of the organization of journalism, as a crucial factor in relaying and approving information as “news.” The remaining jobs tend to be senior, and editors work with a growing number of temporary workers and freelancers, as well as new disciplines. Entry-level positions are often unpaid, restricting access to people who can afford to spend time working for free.⁹⁶ The typical organizational form becomes less of an organized hierarchical structure, and more of a network that forms and reforms around particular projects, involving a number of different specialists and also, often, the public.⁹⁷

90 Frances Cairncross, “The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism” (London: UK Government, 2019), 6, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779882/021919_DCMS_Cairncross_Review_.pdf.

91 First Draft, “Our Mission” (First Draft), accessed March 31, 2021, <https://firstdraftnews.org/about/>.

92 “Share of Adults Who Trust News Media Most of the Time in Selected Countries Worldwide as of February 2020” (Statista, 2021), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/308468/importance-brand-journalist-creating-trust-news/>.

93 “Beyond Journalism: Theorizing the Transformation of Journalism,” *Journalism* 19, no. 2 (2018): 165.

94 Christopher William Anderson, Emily Bell, and Clay Shirky, “Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report” (Columbia Journalism School, 2012), 1.

95 Deuze and Witschge, “Beyond Journalism: Theorizing the Transformation of Journalism,” 173.

96 Deuze and Witschge, 172.

97 Deuze and Witschge, 172–74.

Working without the benefits of a full-time job, increasing numbers of journalists must work in new ways that go “beyond journalism,” they argue:

In this precarious setting – where newsrooms become networks of loosely affiliated competitor-colleagues, news organizations retool towards an enterprising mode of production, access to the profession is increasingly exclusive, and individual journalists are held responsible for market success (and failure) – to be a professional, working journalist means having to go beyond journalism.⁹⁸

A 2012 Tow Center report highlights the opportunities that arise: “...the journalism industry is dead but ... journalism exists in many places.”⁹⁹ News organizations remain important but need to see themselves no longer as in control of a pipeline that delivers news to consumers, but as participants in an ecosystem, working with a range of social actors, from crowds to machines.¹⁰⁰

Approaches such as these provide valuable insight into the changing nature of journalism in the Global North. A clearer analysis requires a wider definition of journalism, which goes beyond institutions and individuals who see themselves as journalists. If, as the Tow Center report says, journalism is everywhere, then there is a need for an understanding that includes forms that do not see themselves as journalism. A useful starting point is the definition by Barnhurst and Owen. Journalism, they say, is “a constellation of practices that have acquired special status within the larger domain of communication through a long history that separated out news-sharing from its origins in interpersonal communication.”¹⁰¹ Donsbach identifies the key roles that separate journalism from communication as the establishment of a shared reality and validation: “...we needed a social role that ascertained truth and distinguished ‘intelligence from gossip.’”¹⁰² Such an approach suggests a normative element: clearly, the quality of the information that is shared matters a great deal. It matters both intrinsically – validation must be reliable, and a sense of reality can only be shared if it stands scrutiny, to use Donsbach’s approach – and for the sake of the necessary relationship of trust.

Accordingly, a new understanding of journalism can be suggested, placing practice at its center, rather than notions of a traditional profession. At the same time, a normative sense of public service is essential. The definition suggested here is for journalism to be seen as **a set of communication practices that serve the public interest in reliable information and civic discussion**. Ethics, standards and a sense of public service exist to assure journalism’s performance of its social obligations. Understanding journalism in this way opens the door to the inclusion of people who do not see themselves as journalists. On the other hand, it draws a clear distinction to PR and kinds of communication whose purpose does not include the same normative understanding of public service.

98 Deuze and Witschge, 176. Emphasis in original.

99 Anderson, Bell, and Shirky, “Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report,” 76.

100 Anderson, Bell, and Shirky, sec. 3.

101 Quoted in Donsbach, “Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education,” 664.

102 664 & 665.

Within such an approach, institutions and individuals who work full-time in journalism remain of central importance, as they continue to exercise substantial influence over information ecosystems. However, they must give up a sense of monopoly. A South African math teacher, Sukan Naidoo, has gained a significant following on Twitter by publishing daily summaries of national COVID statistics that pull together official figures, with graphs and some commentary. (<https://twitter.com/sukan2503>) His daily posts frequently lead to a back and forth with various other Twitter users about figures, trends, policy and the like. There is no indication that he sees himself as a journalist, with his profile simply declaring that he is a “lover of all things stats” (and, endearingly, that he “once solved a Rubik cube”). And he is certainly operating outside a recognizable media organization. Yet I would argue that this is journalism, as it presents important and reliable information to a wider audience. I will return to important implications for teaching journalism.

The other point to be made about the post-industrial argument advanced by Anderson et al,¹⁰³ Deuze¹⁰⁴ and others is that it is situated firmly inside a Global North perspective. Deuze’s celebration of a “monitorial citizenship” which has audiences newly empowered, choosing information as consumers browse supermarket shelves, and his call for a “liquid journalism” in response, reflects a reality that is remote for many Africans.¹⁰⁵ When he and Witschge describe news work being carried out in settings beyond the traditional office and including “atelier-style offices of editorial collectives and journalism startups and in free Wi-Fi café environments,”¹⁰⁶ the description comes directly from a European city. You can practically smell the designer coffee. Freelancers in these environments may live a more precarious life than their predecessors, but the kind of precariousness experienced by many African journalists is of a completely different order. There, the Wi-Fi is rarely free, commission payments are low and uncertain and there is no social net. We need now to look a little more closely at the profession of journalism in Africa.

... and in Africa

The economic and political environment described earlier has put many obstacles in the way of professionalism in African journalism. On the one hand, the institutional framework for journalism as a profession exists in most countries. Training institutions, professional organizations, codes of ethics and, less commonly, self-regulatory bodies, are widespread. The Donald W Reynolds Journalism Institute at the University of Missouri has collected codes of conduct from 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa (<https://accountablejournalism.org/ethics-codes/africa>), though it is not clear how current the collection is. Some countries have multiple codes, including some from specific organizations or for specific groups and circumstances. Tanzania, for instance, has separate codes for broadcasters, managers and editors, photographers, news agency journalists, advertisers as well as one on the coverage of children. The Media Council of Tanzania is particularly

103 “Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report.”

104 “Beyond Journalism: Theorizing the Transformation of Journalism.”

105 “The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism for a Monitorial Citizenry,” *International Journal of Communication*, no. 2 (2008): 848–65.

106 “Beyond Journalism: Theorizing the Transformation of Journalism,” 173.

The lived reality of many African journalists is far from the professional ideal, however. State-owned broadcasters and newspapers are often integrated into government departments, leaving their journalists as civil servants who must accept close supervision by political appointees

active, not only offering the usual function of complaint resolution, but engaging in advocacy around media freedom and other issues, organizing training and encouraging excellence through award schemes.¹⁰⁷ A visit to their website shows a very active organization whose various activities are dedicated to strengthening journalistic professionalism. (www.mct.org.tz)

African journalists tend to see their role strongly in professional terms. The Ghana Journalists Association, founded in 1949, lists as its first objective “to promote professionalism and high journalistic standards.”¹⁰⁸ The massive *Worlds of Journalism* study has surveyed journalists’ attitudes around the world, including several African countries. Typical were the findings from Kenya, where role understandings among the journalists surveyed overwhelmingly favored professional approaches. The prevalent role description was that journalism exists to “report things as they are.” Perhaps unsurprisingly in a country where the media have sometimes been accused of fomenting inter-communal tensions and even violence, educating the audience and promoting tolerance also featured strongly. Political partisanship around supporting or opposing government featured right at the bottom of the table.¹⁰⁹

The lived reality of many African journalists is far from the professional ideal, however. State-owned broadcasters and newspapers are often integrated into government departments, leaving their journalists as civil servants who must accept close supervision by political appointees. Writing about Cameroon, Nyamnjoh points out that this is “unduly harmful to creativity and frustrating to talented broadcasters, who are likely to give up entirely, or to become absorbed by the bureaucratic machinery.”¹¹⁰ In response, some moonlight for foreign or local private media, where the work may be more satisfying, he writes. As the state media sector dominates the information ecosystem and offers most jobs, this dilemma faces many journalists on the continent.

Those reporting for the independent media live precarious lives. Pay is uncertain and job security rare, and many journalists are engaged in an unending struggle just to make ends meet. Employment is often in media organizations whose own struggle for survival is unremitting. In a survey of Nigerian journalists, respondents described pay that is poor and may remain unpaid for many months, having to use their own resources in newsgathering and frequent job hopping.¹¹¹ Such poor employment conditions can make journalists vulnerable to corruption, and plays a significant role in the phenomenon of “brown envelope journalism.”¹¹² Sometimes,

107 Franz Krüger, *Media Courts of Honour: Self-Regulatory Councils in Southern Africa and Elsewhere*, Fesmedia Africa Series (Windhoek, Namibia: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009).

108 GJA, “About the Ghana Journalists Association” (GJA), accessed May 6, 2021, <https://www.gjaghana.org/index.php/2017-02-08-22-10-27/about-the-ghana-journalists-association>.

109 Levi Obonyo and Hesbon Hansen Owilla, “Journalists in Kenya,” *Worlds of Journalism* (Munich, 2017), 3, https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/36375/1/Country_report_Kenya.pdf.

110 *Africa’s Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging*, 152.

111 Julian Matthews and Kelechi Onyemaobi, “Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South,” *Journalism Studies* 21, no. 13 (October 2, 2020): 1836–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1797524>.

112 Berhanu Lodamo and Terje S. Skjerdal, “Freebies and Brown Envelopes in Ethiopian Journalism,” *Ecquid Novi* 30, no. 2 (2009): 134–54.

media employers rely on journalists accepting bribes as a kind of subsidy for their business. One Nigerian publisher “is known to tell journalists that by giving them an employment letter and his newspaper’s identification card, he had already given them a ‘meal ticket’ and so they did not really need salaries and allowances from him,” a reporter said.¹¹³ Nyamnjoh writes: “Newspaper publishers have capitalised on the helplessness of some job-seekers, who have not been guaranteed regular salaries. This has inevitably led to ‘prostitution’ by journalists or to what one may term a hand-to-mouth journalism, if not a journalism of misery. Any bit of money can lure a journalist to write anything”¹¹⁴

Even without the extreme of direct bribery, there is no question that poor and often delayed pay has a directly negative effect on autonomous African journalism. Stories outside of capital cities often remain unreported simply because there is no money to travel. And international funders are easily able to affect the news agenda by supporting their interests through reporting trips, training courses or other interventions. Even if these are important and valid areas of concern, like health issues, the environment or investigative work, foundations should remain aware of the underlying conditions that make it so easy to buy media attention.

The sense of vulnerability encourages not only an industry of foreign support, but sometimes a siege mentality where African journalists devote considerable effort to keeping “unqualified” people out – a form of boundary work¹¹⁵ with a particularly existential edge. In some cases, governments have been able to use this impetus to push for greater control over the media, including over journalism teaching. In Kenya, complaints about sub-standard courses emerged in 2009, partly in the wake of shock over post-election violence that was fuelled by local media. The country’s legal system already ties the ability to work as a journalist to formal qualification. In 2009, the Journalist Association of Kenya called on the government to “tighten journalism training,” and Esther Kamweru, then chair of the statutory Media Council of Kenya, was quoted as saying: “The situation is so serious that people are graduating with diplomas in film production and they cannot even switch on a camera.”¹¹⁶ This is not the only example on the continent of arguments of professionalization being used to advance government control with the support of journalists themselves.

Matthews and Onyemaobi make the point that the kind of “precarious professionalism” experienced by journalists in the Global South is significantly different to the phenomenon described as being a result of digital disruption in the Global North. Journalists in more affluent countries are faced with the loss of stability and security as legacy media houses cut costs in response to the business crisis. Many are forced into a relatively new or expanded journalistic gig economy. But for many African journalists, instability is not a new experience. It has different roots and has been baked into their experience for a long time. “(I)nstability appears to be

113 Matthews and Onyemaobi, “Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South,” 1844.

114 *Africa’s Media: Democracy & the Politics of Belonging*, 73.

115 Seth C. Lewis, “The Tension between Professional Control and Open Participation: Journalism and Its Boundaries,” *Information, Communication & Society* 15, no. 6 (2012): 836–66.

116 Quoted in Guy Berger, “How to Improve Standards of Journalism Education,” *African Communication Research* 2, no. 2 (2009): 273.

Journalism Schools do their graduates and wider society a profound disservice by continuing to focus on journalism as a profession when the very notion is unravelling and contested.

ingrained in the foundations of the institutional life of journalists” in the Global South.¹¹⁷ This has profound implications for African journalism schools. Their graduates need to be prepared to face a harsh environment that is often not conducive to the realisation of ideals of independent public service.

From Crisis to Opportunity for African Journalism Schools

Albert Einstein is credited with the saying, “In the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity.” For African journalism, elements of the crisis have been described above. I have argued that it is a long-running crisis with deep and complex roots. Such structural crises easily become invisible and come to be regarded as simply the way things are. Digital disruption of African journalism comes on top of underlying challenges and is refracted through them in particular ways that require careful thought and, not least, additional empirical research. The enterprise of African journalism teaching needs to understand the nature of the crisis and find the opportunities that arise.

I have argued that the ways in which ideas of journalistic professionalism are unravelling in the Global North find their echoes in Africa, though in different ways and due to older challenges. Journalism work on the continent takes many different forms, but it is often extremely precarious and rarely matches the standard expectation of a full-time job for an independent and commercial organization. And yet this is at the core of the approach taken at most journalism schools, creating a serious mismatch. Garman and Van der Merwe have pointed out the gap between graduate numbers and available jobs in South Africa. They count some 13 institutions who graduate around 1,731 journalism majors a year, while there are only around 4,000 journalists in employment.¹¹⁸ Clearly, this is a fundamental problem for journalism teaching. Karikari points out that the economic weakness of independent media in many countries constrains their ability to employ graduates.¹¹⁹ As a result, journalism schools see many graduates moving into jobs at international NGOs and big companies. “The defection from journalism to public relations is a well-known phenomenon in African journalism education.”¹²⁰

Journalism schools do their graduates and wider society a profound disservice by continuing to focus on journalism as a profession when that very notion is unravelling and contested.¹²¹ We need to move beyond Deuze’s assumption that “journalism within the context of professional education and industry training means the preparation of students for a career working in news media organizations ...”¹²²

117 Matthews and Onyemaobi, “Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South,” 1842.

118 “Riding the Waves: Journalism Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Journalism & Mass Media Educator* 72, no. 3 (2017): 308.

119 “What Would an Africacentric Journalism Curriculum Look like,” 6.

120 Terje S. Skjerdal, “Teaching Journalism or Teaching African Journalism? Experiences from Foreign Involvement in a Journalism Programme in Ethiopia,” *Global Media Journal African Edition* 5, no. 1 (November 2, 2011): 41, <https://doi.org/10.5789/5-1-56>.

121 Mensing, “Rethinking [Again] the Future of Journalism Education,” 513.

122 “Global Journalism Education: A Conceptual Approach,” *Journalism Studies* 7, no. 1 (2006): 21.

However, new opportunities become apparent if one moves towards an understanding of journalism as a practice. We now need to unpack some of the practical implications that emerge.

Who to Teach

If we pay attention to the many ways in which journalism gets done in Africa today, we become aware of a much wider range of groups who need and want skills and teaching. There are groups on the periphery who can and should be supported. Strategies can then be developed to meet their needs.

1. Young people who want to become full-time journalists

Nothing said so far should be understood to mean that this core group of students is no longer important. They will remain central to journalism education, as careers in journalism will remain attractive and important to young people. The forms of those careers are changing, but they will not disappear.

However, schools should consider ways of streamlining their offering to ensure there is a better match between the numbers of graduates and employment opportunities. Smaller numbers create the opportunity to focus more sharply on journalism, as opposed to more general communication, and to ensure that journalism graduates emerge with a set of skills that are tailored more closely to the specific practice of journalism. Two South African programs, at the University of the Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch University, offer journalism purely at post-graduate level. Selection for entry is rigorous and takes careful account of aptitude and interest in journalism, not just academic results. As a result, they produce smaller cohorts of graduates who are better equipped to move into newsrooms. Issues of affordability need to be acknowledged. In many cases, economics demand larger programs to ensure sufficient income through student fees. Large undergraduate programs as well as the inclusion of cognate programs such as strategic communications are the result. Where this is the case, ways should be found to differentiate journalism streams from others.

2. Working journalists

An obvious second target group consists of those already working in journalism, as constant change fuels a demand for upskilling. In a difficult job market, journalists look for opportunities to strengthen their chances for employment by obtaining higher qualifications and by learning more specialized and newer skills. Several African journalism schools already offer “professional advancement” or “mid-career” programs, also sometimes referred to as “further” or “continuing” education, in addition to their core full-time offering. The University of Ibadan in Nigeria offers short programs on topics including development communication, investigative journalism, newspaper production, advertising and business communication. Wits University in Johannesburg and the Aga Khan University in Nairobi are two other universities with a strong focus on providing higher degrees to working journalists through part-time study. Management and leadership are areas of ongoing interest, though offerings in this field are fewer.¹²³

¹²³Finlay, “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 88–89.

Short courses on specific topics are often offered by non-profits like the Namibia Media Trust and the Premium Times Center for Investigative Journalism in Nigeria.¹²⁴ Funders interested in particular topics often finance relevant courses. UNICEF may fund a course on reporting children, while the German Heinrich Böll Foundation, linked to that country's Green Party, may fund a course on environmental reporting.

There is clearly room for an expansion and refinement of offerings aimed at working journalists. A range of well-constructed courses and programs can only contribute positively to African media ecosystems.

3. Community and local media

A large and poorly understood media sector in Africa consists of local and community media, particularly radio stations. A new study arrives at an estimate of upwards of 2000 community radio stations in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa,¹²⁵ though unevenly distributed. With strong public support, South Africa has around 200 functioning stations (<http://localvoices.co.za/community-radio/>), while countries like the Kingdom of eSwatini have yet to legalize any. Most profess a community service and non-profit ethos, some are run by religious groups (the Catholic Church is very active in some countries) or the state, while others become vehicles for local politicians. Almost all are marked by a constant battle for survival: they are economically the most marginal of all African media, serving poor communities in remote areas. In some areas where even state broadcasters do not reach, they represent the only formal source of information available.

Community radio has attracted significant donor attention, and training initiatives have often been part of support packages. BBC Media Action works with some 40 community radio stations in Zambia, mostly through ongoing mentoring around public interest programming. Some short courses have been held.¹²⁶ Universities and other formal journalism schools have been less prominent in providing offerings for community media. There are some exceptions: the University of Dar es Salaam has created an online diploma program specifically aimed at community media, in reaction to a new Tanzanian law requiring all journalists to have a diploma.¹²⁷

The challenges in designing appropriate teaching offerings for journalists on African community media are substantial. Their marginal and remote position makes them hard to reach, while often poor basic schooling and high staff turnover must be taken into account. An initiative by the University of Zambia created a certificate program aimed at community radio, but the program collapsed as the target group could not pay fees and funding could not be found.

Clearly, community and local media are an important target group for journalism teaching, not least because they play such an important role in reaching the most marginal audiences. There are examples that have been shown to work, and

¹²⁴ Finlay, 90.

¹²⁵ Jacob Sabelo Ntshangase, "Mapping Community Radio in Sub-Saharan Africa" (Johannesburg: Wits Journalism & Fojo Media Institute, 2021), 61.

¹²⁶ Vanessa Mweemba, "Supporting Independent Radio in Zambia," *BBC Media Action Blog*, February 11, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/bbcmmediaaction/entries/7626aa17-d98e-4c99-8f06-1639de612c23>.

¹²⁷ Finlay, "Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa," 91.

journalism schools need to put some thought into developing effective ways of serving this need. Donor interest in community media can be leveraged to overcome some of the difficulties.

4. Start-ups and innovators, non-profit and diasporic journalism

And then there are all those building new kinds of journalism practice outside mainstream media houses. There has been strong growth in non-profit journalism entities in several countries, usually funded by foundations. In South Africa, these include organizations devoted to investigative, health, environmental, grassroots and other areas of reporting. Many have developed a publishing model that has moved away from the idea of relying exclusively on its own platform. The Bhekisisa Center for Health Journalism, for instance, publishes its material on its own website, (<https://bhekisisa.org/>) but also through a range of mainstream and newer publishers. In addition, newsletters are published — founding editor-in-chief Mia Malan often unpacks new developments around the COVID pandemic in detailed Twitter threads (<https://twitter.com/miamalan>) and is frequently an expert guest on radio or television stations. Success in this kind of multi-platform publishing requires considerable agility. Anton Harber, convenor of judges for the Taco Kuiper Awards, the country’s premier award for investigative journalism, has noted how non-profit newsrooms have come to produce the strongest work in the field as mainstream newsrooms have declined.¹²⁸ In many ways, journalistic gravity in some countries has shifted to entities of this kind. Investigative journalism has become something of a growth industry, driven by evidence of impact and donor interest. A recent mapping study identified some 42 such centers in Africa, including units attached to traditional publishers, universities and many independent, non-profit entities. (<https://aijc.africa/the-investigative-journalism-hubs/>)

Where media freedom is still constrained, diasporic media is an obvious response, as noted above. An initiative to launch an independent commercial radio station in Zimbabwe, Capital Radio, was quickly stopped by the government in 2000. One of the initiators fled to London and created Short Wave Radio Africa, which broadcast on SW into Zimbabwe for 13 years, despite government attacks, jamming and threats.¹²⁹ It was forced to close in 2014 when donor funding dried up.¹³⁰ Internet platforms offer obvious opportunities to reach into restricted societies, and are certainly cheaper than SW radio. The online *Zambian Watchdog* has been a thorn in the side of that country’s authorities for several years, though its journalism has sometimes been challenged. (www.zambianwatchdog.com)

Developing teaching offerings for this wide variety of people, organizations and approaches requires thought. Programs aimed at working journalists like full qual-

¹²⁸ “A Fresh Approach Is Needed to Drive Our Investigative Reporting Forward ...,” in *Structured/Unstructured: State of the Newsroom 2018*, ed. Alan Finlay (Johannesburg, 2019), 50, https://journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/State-of-the-Newsroom-report-2018_updated-20190709.pdf.

¹²⁹ Dumisani Moyo, “Contesting Mainstream Media Power: Mediating the Zimbabwe Crisis through Clandestine Radio,” in *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*, ed. Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga, and Dumisani Moyo (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011), 53.

¹³⁰ Gerry Jackson, “SW Radio Africa Has Now Closed” (SW Radio Africa, August 11, 2014), <http://www.swradioafrica.com/2014/08/11/sw-radio-africa-has-now-shut-down/>.

ifications as well as short skills courses have obvious value. In addition, journalism schools can offer direct support for innovation itself. Two programs are currently known to do this: Wits University’s Jamlab (<https://jamlab.africa/>) and the Aga Khan University’s Media Innovation Network (<https://mediainnovationnetwork.org/>). Both offer media start-ups mentoring support in an incubation model. Start-ups trying out unconventional models are working on the often lonely frontiers of innovation, and can benefit from research support, networking and opportunities to share experiences. With a little flexibility, journalism schools can make a real contribution.

5. *Accidental journalists*

Some individuals drift into journalism from unexpected directions, and can be described as “accidental” journalists. In the early period of the COVID crisis, a US frozen meat company, Steak-Umm, attracted attention when it used its Twitter account to fight misinformation. An interview with Jeff Jarvis makes it clear that Nathan Allebach, the person running the account, does not see himself as a journalist,¹³¹ and yet his work adds real value to the information ecosystem. I have previously cited the example of the South African math teacher Sugan Naidoo, who has taken it upon himself to post regular statistical updates about the pandemic. Some people are content to stay accidental, others try to turn their interest into a start-up or full-time occupation. The African Tech Roundup, for instance, an online news, analysis and consultancy service, began with the simple interest in technology of founder Andile Masuku (<https://www.africantechroundup.com/>). There are also NGOs and other groups who behave increasingly in a journalistic way, seeking to inject reliable information of public interest into the public discussion though they do not see themselves as journalists. They could also be described as accidental journalists.

Accidental journalists are potential students, though offerings need to be carefully crafted as they may not think of the possibility of studying journalism as such, and because they are not likely to be able to study full time. However, courses in specific craft skills like video-editing and data visualization may appeal.

What to Teach

But what should curricula for these non-traditional students look like? Respondents in Finlay’s study identified a number of areas as important, ranging from basic writing, editing and language, to gender, ethics and specialist knowledge.¹³² I suggest that the important areas of focus can be clustered under a few headings.

1. *Old skills*

There are some fundamental skills whose relevance remains undiminished. Anyone wanting to do journalism, however understood, needs to be able to gather information, interpret and verify it and convey it clearly to an audience. This includes

131 A conversation with Steak-umm’s Twitter voice, Nathan Allebach, interview by Jeff Jarvis, May 11, 2020, <https://buzzmachine.com/2020/05/11/a-conversation-with-nathan-allebach-steak-umms-voice/>.

132 “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 46–49.

interviewing, evaluating sources and their reliability, corroborating and verifying, and writing and other technical skills needed to make material available on various platforms. Some of these are practical skills, others are intellectual - ways of thinking about information that pick out what is interesting and important to a wider public and makes sense of it. On a continent that is as profoundly multilingual, language must get particular attention. Competence in a range of different languages, including particularly indigenous languages, is important.

2. *New (technical) skills*

Journalism teachers often respond to the challenge of a changing media environment by cramming more and more subjects into an already crowded curriculum. The proceedings of the 2019 congress of the World Journalism Education Council in Paris, running to an overwhelming 1,208 pages, are dominated by technical issues. Papers deal with podcasting, artificial intelligence, data journalism, algorithms, mobile journalism, twitterbots, data visualization and much else.¹³³ Unquestionably, these are important issues, and students need to learn the technical skills necessary to use a wide range of tools and platforms for journalistic purposes. However, the fact that the list is so large, and that it keeps growing, suggests that the emphasis should be on the ability to keep learning new skills as they arise. “The instructional goal should be the strengthening of students’ adaptive capacity...”¹³⁴

3. *Basic values and ethics*

A strong sense of what journalism is for must be at the center of journalism teaching, no matter who it is aimed at. Journalism needs to be seen in terms of public service to the social need and right to reliable information that supports civic discussion. And that implies the need for understanding the importance of a relationship of trust with audiences and for a set of ethics to safeguard that trust. This is not a new argument. It can be found in much of the literature, where the need to go beyond an instrumentalist or purely vocational approach is often highlighted. Deuze argues for the “centralization of ethics and critical reflection on journalism and the role of individual journalists in society as the benchmark for all coursework.”¹³⁵ Mensing, who has done more than most to unpack the implications of the unravelling of ideas of professionalism for teaching, says: “In the same way that the goal of engineering programs is not to prepare students for their first jobs at large engineering firms, but to build safe roads and bridges, the goals of journalism education should be about building functioning communication structures in communities.”¹³⁶ And in a South African context, Rodny Gumede lists as the first assertion of her teaching philosophy “the reassertion of the role of journalism in

133 WJEC, *Conference Proceedings: World Journalism Education Congress 2019: “Teaching Journalism during a Disruptive Age”* (Paris: WJEC, 2020).

134 Donsbach, “Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education,” 669.

135 “On Media and Entrepreneurship as Ways of Being in the World: A Challenge to Journalism Education,” in *Global Journalism Education in the 21st Century*, ed. Robyn S. Goodman and Elanie Steyn (Austin, Texas: Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, 2017), 323.

136 “Rethinking [Again] the Future of Journalism Education,” 516.

Graduates must be enabled to ask the hard questions of journalism itself, including the systems that deliver information to citizens.

democratic processes.”¹³⁷ Fundamental ideas of journalism as public service may be generally accepted, but they always need to be applied with close attention to the context, as Rodny-Gumede argues.¹³⁸ Many African contexts are hostile to the ideal, and students need to be prepared to defend it against several kinds of attack in the real world.

Ideas of public service are clearly normative and set the practice of journalism apart from other forms of communication. Though cognate areas of communication have their own legitimacy and place, they should be kept structurally distinct. The Nigerian move to separate journalism from other cognate disciplines, mentioned above, is a positive move. University administrations often want to grow numbers for financial reasons, but this should be resisted. It is perfectly possible to offer other kinds of communication programs in the same school, and there are benefits of cross-subsidisation, but the differences in nature should be kept clearly in mind.

In an African context, that sense of purpose needs to include a strong awareness of information inequalities, which are significant obstacles to Mensing’s ideal of “functioning communication structures.” Thoughtful, critical journalism must be aware of, and willing to address, the structural and other factors that keep some voices on the margins, as discussed in the description of the African media landscapes above. That may mean simply taking the extra trouble to ensure people from informal settlements are asked for their views on government policies. Graduates must be enabled to ask the hard questions of journalism itself, including the systems that deliver information to citizens.

Gender issues arise particularly sharply, both in content and in the workplace. The South African NGO Quote this Woman+ says that only 20% of news sources quoted in the news are women, and it makes a database of women experts available to news organizations to “broaden the news agenda.” (<https://quotethiswoman.org.za/>) Other issues of coverage arise, such as the reporting of gender-based harm. The #MeToo Movement has done a great deal to raise awareness of the issue, including in countries like South Africa where violence against women is widespread. Journalists have had to consider new ethical issues as a result.

In media organizations, men hold most of the reporting positions, although women make up most students in journalism schools.¹³⁹ Senior positions are also dominated by men. A young Swazi woman journalist said journalists in the Kingdom of eSwatini generally enjoyed poor social status, but “(i)n the case of women the situation is even worse.”¹⁴⁰ The NGO Gender Links has done considerable work in highlighting gender issues in the media. Over three years in the early 2000s, it worked with the Polytechnic of Namibia, to integrate gender into the journalism curriculum. Areas of focus included diversity of sources, community journalism, language use and a gender policy for the institution itself.¹⁴¹ Such examples can be extended and adopted by other journalism schools.

137 “A Teaching Philosophy of Journalism Education in the Global South: A South African Case Study,” 750.

138 747–49.

139 Finlay, “Mapping Journalism Training Centres in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 68–69.

140 Quoted in Fackson Banda et al., “Contextualising Journalism Education and Training in Southern Africa,” *Ecquid Novi* 28, no. 1–2 (2007): 160.

4. Readiness for a new kind of work: precarious, post-industrial, networked

If students are facing a world where full-time jobs are scarce, they need to be equipped with a specific set of skills. It is easier to assert the point in a general way than to identify what those skills are. The Tow Center paper on post-industrial journalism provides a useful list of things that journalists “need to know.”¹⁴² They mention specialist knowledge, data literacy, understanding metrics and audiences, coding, storytelling and project management. They also list soft skills, including a mindset of entrepreneurialism and innovation, being networked, and presence, or “persona,” which includes the way journalists construct and maintain a good reputation. One could add negotiation skills for African journalists who need to deal with difficult employers on both financial and content issues, as well as with difficult sources and obstructionist officials.

The list of attributes is a useful starting point. Others are available, such as those identified by Donsbach,¹⁴³ while further ideas can be distilled from elsewhere in the literature. Three broad areas can be identified: first, the new journalist needs new digital competencies, some of which have been identified above as “new (technical) skills.” That is the relatively easy part. Second, the new journalist needs to be able to operate as an individual in an entrepreneurial, freelance world. That includes practical skills like pitching, negotiation, financial planning, and project management, as well as less tangible skills, such as being able to manage a personal reputation across multiple platforms and projects. Individual reputation becomes more important as journalists are less strongly associated with an individual media platform.¹⁴⁴ Third, and perhaps most complex, the new journalist needs to understand a new, networked way of doing journalism that engages extensively with audiences, curates as well as reports. Such an approach situates the journalist squarely in the community,¹⁴⁵ but with a need to maintain an independent, authoritative reputation.

Considerable further work would be necessary to think through the areas identified in an African context, and even more to develop suggestions for new curricula. Some of the areas identified are relatively easy to teach, other much more difficult or even impossible as they shade into personal attributes. Thorough development of these points is beyond the scope of this paper, which can do no more than point out the need.

How to Teach

Modes of teaching different kinds of students and new areas of competence certainly need to go beyond the traditional lecture. It was never a particularly ef-

141 Colleen Lowe Morna and Pauliina Shilongo, eds., *Gender in Entry Level Journalism* (Johannesburg & Windhoek: Gender Links & Dept of Media Technology, Polytechnic of Namibia, 2004).

142 Anderson, Bell, and Shirky, “Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report,” 30–40.

143 “Journalism as the New Knowledge Profession and Consequences for Journalism Education.”

144 Anderson, Bell, and Shirky, “Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report,” 34.

145 Mensing, “Rethinking [Again] the Future of Journalism Education.”

fective vehicle for learning, whose main utility lay in the possibility of reaching large numbers of students with minimal cost and effort. Universities have their own “industrial model” of education which should be rethought.¹⁴⁶ New modalities need to be chosen that are fit for purpose, both in that they are designed to achieve their educational outcomes and in that they suit the circumstances of student groups.

Crucially, it is useful to think in terms of modules that can be taken on their own by people interested in a particular skill, not only those who are keen on a full qualification. It should be possible for a working or accidental journalist, or somebody working in a start-up, to do a short course on data journalism or visualization, for example. These potential students may not have the time to devote to study towards a full degree. If such a module can also be turned later into a credit towards a degree, that adds an additional possibility that is likely to be attractive.

Resources are an ongoing issue for African journalism schools. However, the wider approach I have proposed should be able to add useful income streams. Depending on the specific financial models used at various institutions, fee income from individuals taking shorter modules can be useful. Some employers have funds available for staff development and are often more likely to spend the money with a university than elsewhere. Also, donor funding for media development is available in many countries, and journalism schools should be able to access it by offering targeted courses. Media development donors need to be persuaded that despite often difficult bureaucracies, the right kind of university entity can make a very good partner. In addition, possibilities for networked teaching could be explored to help with resource constraints, as Berger points out.¹⁴⁷

The following will identify different forms of teaching. They are generally familiar, and so the discussion will be brief.

1. Full-time study

The need for traditional programs of full-time study towards a degree will remain strong as long as there are young people wanting to become journalists. Though there is a constant need to evaluate methods and content, the basic form is right for this student group.

2. Part-time study

Courses for other groups of students generally need to be designed around their working lives. That means arranging for classes after hours. It may also involve courses offered on a “block-release” basis – full time for a short period, on the assumption that people can take a week or two off from work to attend. If part-time study is leading to a qualification, it is usually stretched over a longer period.

3. Remote teaching

The COVID crisis has forced universities and other educational institutions to move quickly to remote teaching. Often, this has meant simply shifting a one-way,

¹⁴⁶ Alan Finlay, “Comment on Draft Paper,” July 18, 2021.

¹⁴⁷ Guy Berger, “Comments on Draft Paper,” August 18, 2021.

lecturing style to an online platform like the ubiquitous Zoom or Teams. More effective use of online tools requires considerably more thought, preparation and work than was often possible under the circumstances. More appropriate tools for African j-schools include Whatsapp with its low need for expensive data, and some schools have made innovative use of it. Hopefully additional refinements will occur.

The obvious advantage of online formats is that students from further away can be reached, and guest speakers can be brought in from anywhere in the world. At the same time, students can more easily study with remote institutions, which can require journalism schools to compete in an international marketplace. In African contexts, it may be possible to use remote teaching to reach students in far-flung areas, and this has been done in some cases. However, there are also disadvantages, in the loss of personal contact and in the greater difficulty of teaching practical skills. Also, data costs, uncertain connectivity and electricity supply are significant constraints in many areas.

Overall, remote courses are likely to increase in importance for journalism schools, as they will in education more widely. A considerable amount of work will be necessary to ensure their design and use plays to their strengths and minimizes the weaknesses. Often, blended models may deliver the best of both worlds.

4. Practical skills

Doing journalism is best taught by doing journalism. The range of important skills may be changing and growing, but the “teaching hospital model” is still widely used. Most African institutions aim also to place students in internships with media houses to deepen their practical knowledge, as noted above. For more specific skills taught in short modules, hands-on practice is no less important. Where collections like the one emerging from the Paris conference of the WJEC are strong, it is in the wide range of innovative exercises and projects that were developed to give students practical experience.¹⁴⁸ In the African contexts, such attempts sometimes run into problems around a lack of resources and political or institutional sensitivities, as discussed above.

Some of the suggestions made here for new potential student groups, curriculum and modes of teaching are already being implemented at various journalism schools, both in Africa and elsewhere. Doubtless, further research would find additional examples of forward-thinking, innovative teaching practice. The argument of this paper is that best practice for journalism schools now demands a coherent offering that addresses the needs of journalism in a broader sense than before. The emphasis is on coherence – the teaching offering needs to be planned with an eye to both overlap and difference between various student groups. Some courses can be attended by disparate groups, others will be of specific interest to one sector. Of course, plans must be developed with an eye to local context. The funding, institutional, political, and other aspects of the environment will dictate what is possible. It must also be emphasised that developing such an approach will take time and agility, with adjustments being made as circumstances and demands change.

¹⁴⁸WJEC, *Conference Proceedings: World Journalism Education Congress 2019: “Teaching Journalism during a Disruptive Age.”*

If we see journalism schools as part of larger information ecosystems, their potential impact can go far beyond training the next generation.

Beyond Teaching Journalism

In South Africa, the democratic transition of the mid-1990s brought calls for the “transformation” of all aspects of society, to fall in line with a new democratic and non-racial order. Though the term is often used loosely and has been much debated, it continues to have considerable force in public debate. In the context of scholarship on journalism education, the debate has been shaped by pressures for the transformation of both tertiary education and of the media.¹⁴⁹ Wasserman has been among those who urge the need for social relevance: “(J)ournalism education in South Africa today needs to equip students to contribute to the continued transformation of South African journalism” which in turn is understood as “journalism that has the continued development of a democratic society, in the fullest sense of the idea, as its goal.”¹⁵⁰ Similar calls can be found elsewhere in the literature. Rodney-Gumede refers to the need to ground teaching in a view of journalism as “active citizenship.”¹⁵¹ Banda identifies “impact on journalistic practices in the newsroom and socio-political change in the wider society” as an issue that journalism education needs to discuss.¹⁵² And the importance of an external orientation is recognized in UNESCO’s criteria for quality journalism teaching, which include professional linkages and a broader social role.¹⁵³

In line with the fundamental argument of this paper, I argue that social relevance must be seen more widely than simply in the kinds of new journalists produced for the working world. If we see journalism schools as part of larger information ecosystems, their potential impact can go far beyond training the next generation. There are other muscles that can be flexed, and smart leadership will seek broader opportunities and encourage their use. Indeed, the best schools already do so. The need is particularly acute in Africa, where information ecosystems are often weak, as described above. In several countries, journalism schools stand out prominently in landscapes with few other media entities of any description. As such, their potential impact on the quality of journalism is disproportionately large.

What is needed is a deliberate strategy that responds to the needs, constraints, and opportunities of a particular context. It needs to be a strategy that integrates an orientation to scholarship with an awareness of the needs of journalism practice, both as industry and in other forms, and does this with a view to a simple and fundamental question: what can we do to improve journalism?¹⁵⁴ Various tools are available.

1. Research

Research is usually part of academic work, and there is an enormous need for more and better research into African journalism, particularly empirical work. There is still not enough hard data on the real ways in which African journalism is taking

¹⁴⁹ Wasserman, “Journalism Education as Transformative Praxis,” 162.
¹⁵⁰ 163.

¹⁵¹ “A Teaching Philosophy of Journalism Education in the Global South: A South African Case Study,” 754.

¹⁵² “Towards an African Agenda for Journalism Education,” 7

¹⁵³ Berger and Matras, “Criteria and Indicators for Quality Journalism Training Institutions & Identifying Potential Centres of Excellence in Journalism Training in Africa,” 9–10.

place, how it is changing, and how it is not. Undoubtedly, there are real practical challenges, but they seem to have encouraged some journalism academics to take refuge in hyper-theorised papers that add little by way of actual understanding. This is not the place to discuss what a research agenda could look like, just to signal that there is a significant opportunity that is inadequately utilized at present.¹⁵⁵

2. Public role

Journalism schools can contribute to public discussion of media issues, including the defence of media freedom, to policy development and the like, as acknowledged in the markers of excellence developed by UNESCO.¹⁵⁶ This should include critique of media practice: at the time of writing, South Africa was amid an extensive discussion of a story that claimed a Pretoria woman gave birth to ten babies, which would be a world record. The story turned out to be false, and journalism academics have been prominent in the public discussion of the implications of the lapse of standards that allowed the story to be published.¹⁵⁷ Journalism teachers usually have the professional and academic standing and knowledge to speak credibly. Their position outside the immediate industry gives them freedom and authority. Interventions in the public arena can take many forms, from quick comments on the issues of the day to public-facing events and carefully researched submissions to policy-making processes.

3. Practical journalism

Journalism schools often play a role as publishers, often in order to provide their students with an opportunity for practice. As outlined above, a campus newspaper or radio station can sometimes end up playing an important journalistic role. For the school, it means navigating complex institutional, economic, and broader political dynamics, but undoubtedly adds credibility and influence. It also allows for experimenting with new approaches and formats in a way that is difficult for private media for whom the struggle to make ends meet looms large. Some schools offer direct grants for investigative journalism projects or support media innovation. If well designed, projects of this kind can keep journalism schools in touch with the practical realities and add to other aspects of their work.

¹⁵⁴See Wasserman, “Journalism Education as Transformative Praxis” for a discussion of how the three directions can be integrated through the concept of praxis.

¹⁵⁵See Chris Atton and Hayes Mabweazara, “New Media and Journalism Practice in Africa: An Agenda for Research,” *Journalism* 12, no. 6 (August 1, 2011): 667–73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405467> for some useful suggestions.

¹⁵⁶Guy Berger and Corinne Matras, “Criteria and Indicators for Quality Journalism Training Institutions & Identifying Potential Centres of Excellence in Journalism Training in Africa,” *Unesco’s Series on Journalism Education* (Paris: Unesco, 2007).

¹⁵⁷See for instance Herman Wasserman, “Tembisa 10: Car-Crash Journalism,” *News24*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/fridaybriefing/herman-wasserman-tembisa-10-car-crash-journalism-20210617>.

The very fragility and precariousness of the information ecosystems they inhabit opens opportunities for African journalism schools.

Conclusion

The reality of African journalism is rich and complex, defying easy generalisations. Long-standing economic and political challenges mean that the impacts of digital disruption cannot be assumed to play out the same way on the continent as they do elsewhere. Against this background, journalism teaching needs to take a hard look at itself.

Globally, journalism teaching is closely linked to ideas of journalism as a profession, though those notions are under severe pressure as journalists' position of authority over news fades. Some international debates are very helpful in understanding this shift, including ideas around a turn to post-industrial¹⁵⁸ or liquid journalism.¹⁵⁹ However, the reality of journalism in Africa has been precarious for longer and in more profound ways and for different reasons than is being noted in the Global North.

The very fragility and precariousness of the information ecosystems they inhabit opens opportunities for African journalism schools. Moving from an understanding of journalism as a profession to one that regards it as a practice, makes visible the different ways and places where journalism is produced. New kinds of potential students can then be identified, as well as some new (and many old) subjects that need to be taught. These suggest a need for some new modes of teaching. In addition, journalism schools need to look beyond teaching and make more extensive use of tools at their disposal, such as research, a greater public role and involvement in practical journalism. Arguably, understanding journalism as a practice that takes many forms opens a promising line of thought for journalism schools in the Global North also. They also need to confront the complex impacts of digital disruption, though the detail of an agenda for them is likely to differ.

African journalism schools should be the intellectual home of journalism on the continent. There are both practical and principled reasons to build the expanded role that would make this a reality. Practically, continued relevance in a complex, small and shrinking job market requires a wider vision. Also, some assistance with chronic resource constraints can be found through accessing some of the media development funding available from international sources. The argument of principle rests on the obligation to play a socially responsible role. In Africa, that means making a meaningful contribution to the overall health of information ecosystems. ✕

158 Anderson, Bell, and Shirky, "Post-Industrial Journalism: Adapting to the Present: A Report."

159 Deuze, "The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism for a Monitorial Citizenry."

About the Author

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