The Nairobi Hub: Emerging patterns of how foreign correspondents frame citizen journalists and social media

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Abstract

A sizable portion of our everyday knowledge about sub-Saharan Africa comes from the work of international news reporters on the continent. The profession of foreign correspondent constituted itself around a group of privileged witnesses of history, often immersed in a mythological aura, but the emergence of digital media has established some tension around a destructuration-restructuration of the journalistic field. The rhetoric of the pro-am revolution signifies the end of an era for international journalism due to the rise of citizen journalism. This research assesses how professional international news reporters are repositioning themselves in a transforming communicative environment, and how they interpret their own occupation and the role of rising actors in the transnational mediasphere.

Keywords: citizen journalism, foreign correspondents, international news reporting, multi-dimensional network of correspondences, networked journalism, social media

Introduction

International news is a significant knowledge source about the 'foreign other' that can be conceptualised as part of continuing out-of-school lifelong education (Mody 2010). The news media build important foundations to facilitate an acquaintance with and understanding of international events for opinion leaders, decision makers and the public at large. Since most people are unable to directly access international events, they must rely on media reports about particular issues, and on the frames of reference within which these gain significance (Welch 1972).

International journalism is commonly understood as the production output of news media around the world and reporting about foreign countries, frequently denoting coverage by Western correspondents of countries other than their own (Chakars 2009); it can generically be defined as the news operations of a reporter covering events out-

side a country (Hamilton and Cozma 2009), while using sources in foreign countries to gather informational raw material (Hafez 2007).

The contemporary field of journalism is undergoing destructuration-restructuration, with new technologies working to counter previously successful formulas. This tension is causing transformation at the heart of journalistic production: 'News production (newsmaking) remains in the hands of professional journalists while the editorial function (op-ed) is dispersed through so-called "citizen journalism" on the Internet' (Demers 2007, 29). Digital media are considered to be levelling and even lowering the distinctions between professional and citizen media (Reese 2010), which brings to mind the old argument that 'anyone sending information from one country to another is a de facto foreign correspondent' (Utley 1997, 9).

The culture of foreign correspondents: An epistemological framework

Journalists' culture has been theorised as the interaction of their *ideas* (values, attitudes and beliefs), *practices* and *artifacts* (Hanitzsch 2007). This article addresses the epistemological dimension – objectivism and empiricism – as an inquiry into foreign correspondents' role perceptions, as well as their positioning within a multidimensional network of correspondences (Vicente 2012). In this sense, journalists are not detached from cultural considerations; they belong to a specific culture and to specific professional subcultures (Ginneken 1998). The newsgathering work of these professionals has been conceptualised in an ambivalent manner: between their 'fresh eyes' on the ground where they capture what permanently stationed reporters take for granted, and their recurrent focus on 'exotic' events, without being able to portray underlying processes or follow up contexts. Foreign correspondents' work has been described as a variance of cosmopolitanism and they are amongst the most celebrated transnational migrants of our time (Hannerz 2007). Also, their work may be regarded as cultivating cosmopolitanism in their audiences.

This article distinguishes between international journalism as a main thematic frame and international news reporting as a specific journalistic subculture and occupational category associated with particular fieldwork practices, pursuing what has been called *groundtruth* (Rosenblum 2010) – frequently, but not always, translated in a specific narrative format or genre: *reportage* or *feature* – in short: a distinct *profession*. While international news broadcasting is about transmitting *to* different countries, *to* different societies, *to* different cultures (Harding 2002), this study mainly concerns foreign correspondents: international news reporters *in* different countries, *in* different societies, *in* different cultures. Despite the acknowledged differences, a bridge can be established with cultural anthropology (e.g., Beliveau et al. 2011; Boudry 2007; Hannerz 1998; Stahlberg 2006) by adapting Geertz's (1973) words, by stating that anthropologists do not study villages (places), they study *in* villages.

A rising multidimensional network of correspondences

Contemporary journalism is currently undergoing a mediamorphosis (Fidler 1997). Any evaluation of this state of flux should, however, not be exclusively observed through the lens of technological developments, but crucially through qualitative aspects of newswork and news culture (Preston 2009). The computerisation and digitisation of all sectors of society (Deuze 2011) have led to the emergence of a convergent journalism (multimedia and cross-platform), and news content seems to be increasingly deterritorialised (Berglez 2008; Robertson 1997), complex (Urry 2003) and networked (Castells and Monge 2011). The combination of technology – particularly the Internet and its graphic interface, the World Wide Web – and the emergence of 'nonconventional journalists' is transforming long-held meanings and also the implications of eyewitnessing as a journalistic keyword (Zelizer 2007).

Some authors suggest we are being confronted by the emergence of a new type of foreign correspondence (Hamilton and Jenner 2003; Livingston and Asmolov 2010). Even if not well understood, the modern elitist occupational culture seems to be challenged. Different groups have been experimenting with distinct proposals (i.e., different organisational and operational modes): *new professionals* (e.g. Global Post; Pro Publica), *citizen newsrooms* (e.g. Demotix; Nowpublic) and *aggregators* (e.g. Breaking Tweets; Global Voices Online; Ushahidi) (Zuckerman 2010, 69). A distinct media ecosystem, 'the sum of elements and relations among media or between media and their environment within [a] certain time and space' (Zheng and Wang 2008), is emerging.

Contemporary journalism culture and newswork (Deuze and Marjoribanks 2009) are clearly being compressed between tradition and change in the networked media ecosystem. Research into domains such as historical context and market environment, the process of innovation, alterations in journalistic practices, challenges to established professional dynamics, and the role of user-generated content has revealed that journalism practice and journalism studies need to reconceptualise relations between news production and reception, if desiring to make sense of the new phenomena at the heart of an online evolving information architecture (Mitchelstein and Boczkowski 2009).

The adaptation of Web 2.0 and its renewed production possibilities to newswork has paved the way for still emergent and evolving forms of mash-up journalism: the combining of resources from the social web with a journalistic purpose, thereby converging several sources and third-party contents in one new, complete service or application. These creations represent an open questioning of traditional news production principles and practices, while encouraging collaborative and cooperative work (Tejedor 2007). This new technical hybridity suggests a new social hybridity, as captured by renewed discourse on what it means to be a professional journalist, and has been condensed in the concept of the pro-am (professional-amateur): 'Innovative, committed and networked amateurs working to professional standards' (Leadbeater and Miller 2004, 9).

The pro-am considers user-generated content an informal economic activity, thus escaping conventional forms of measurement, governance and taxation, while 'not in opposition to professional or "producer media", or in hybridized forms of subjective

combination with it (the so-called "prosumer" or "pro-am" system), but in relation to different criteria, namely the formal and informal elements in media industries' (Lobato et al. 2011).

The socially networked Internet (Lewis 2010) represents the transformation from broadcast to self-cast, and from here progresses to a less asymmetrical mode of communication, i.e., from an exclusively one-directional flow (one-to-many) towards a more dialogic flow.

In recent years, online social networks have emerged as a new component of journalists' work (Portillo 2011), transforming online news production in newsrooms into more collaborative work. Studies show that a collectivist, high-context communication culture is more supportive of a collaborative work environment; consequently, this approach tends to make the news accurate and comprehensible to the public (Weiss 2008). Information aggregation, for instance from social media and online comments, is now considered a central task within networked journalism (Grueskin et al. 2011). These evolving participatory avenues in newswork resemble 'produsage', a more open participation of users in the co-production of news stories, and an arguably less hierarchical structure, where revision is a continuous process (Bruns 2008). It enhances the role of active users as gatewatchers in collaborative online news production (Bruns 2005), and that of readers as gatekeepers (Shoemaker et al. 2010).

Participation is consolidating as a norm in online journalism. It is now clear that the interpretation of professional journalism as cultivating occupational control and boundary work reveals a tension between the former news culture and a mediamorphosis that potentiates more open public participation (Hermida and Thurman 2008; O'Sullivan and Heinonen 2008). Convergence also reveals its face in effecting a distinction among professional journalists, in terms of the values held by traditionalists and convergers: those who want to maintain a hierarchical and authoritative relationship with the publics/audiences, and those who argue that users should be given a more active role in newswork (Robinson 2010).

Some segments of professional journalists align the evolving features of networked journalism with a concomitant fear of losing their authority, as a journalistic value, over the agenda of public discourse (Hayes et al. 2007). Others, meanwhile, enhance 'citizen participation, which resides at the periphery of mainstream newswork, to become embraced as an ethical norm and a founding doctrine of journalism innovation' while 'altering the rhetorical and structural borders of professional jurisdiction to invite external contribution and correction' (Lewis 2010, xi).

Previous research on international journalism, mainly from the 1970s to late 90s, mainly focused on the macro (systemic determinants) and meso (organisational) levels of analysis, and how these influence the final news content. This researcher shares Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen's (1998, 3) concern about foregrounding the significance of agency 'in the theorization of processes of globalization because we believe that without a grounded understanding of agency, such theorizing tends to grow nebulous'. In other words, this study mainly focuses on the most basic level of analysis, since 'the production of mass-mediated symbol systems is the work of individuals or small groups' (Whitney et al. 2004, 399).

This research forms part of a broader and ongoing study on the transformations in international news reporting from sub-Saharan Africa, undertaken in Nairobi (Kenya), Dakar (Senegal) and Johannesburg (South Africa). The exploratory findings presented here stem from two general lines of inquiry: How do foreign correspondents perceive their own professional culture in the face of a contemporary mediamorphosis? And how do foreign correspondents interpret and frame social media and 'citizen journalists'?

This article is based on a series of in-depth interviews with 18 foreign correspondents, conducted during two weeks of research in Nairobi. Respondents ranged from staff journalists to freelancers working for international newspapers (*Daily Telegraph*, *El Pais*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Trouw*, *TAZ*, *de Volkskrant*), magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*), radio (Capetalk Radio, RFI), television channels (CNBC Africa, France 24, N-24 TV, NOS, Sky News), news websites (BBC News, The Christian Science Monitor, Global Post) and news agencies (AFP, AP, IRIN News, Reuters). Distinct levels of experience in foreign correspondence are involved: from veterans (15–20 years of work) to novices (0–5 years). The interviews ranged in length from approximately 40 minutes to over two hours, and were mainly focused on life histories, perceptions of work, and the particular challenges posed by digital media – particularly the Internet – as well as career expectations. All interviews were conducted in confidence, and the names of interviewees have been withheld by mutual agreement.

The aim of this research was to observe 'how members of a specific culture attempt to make themselves a(t) home in a transforming communicative environment, how they can find themselves in this environment and at the same time try to mould it in their own image' (Miller and Slater 2000, 1). For this reason, the focus here is on the dynamics of positioning: How do foreign correspondents engage with how Internet media position them within networks that transcend their immediate location, and what is foreign correspondents' epistemological stance toward the work of pro-ams?

Following Hanitzsch (2007), observations will be articulated across levels of foreign correspondents' journalistic culture, i.e., their evaluation of professional worldviews and occupational norms, and how these determine their position amongst citizen journalists. An attempt is made to assess how people who are directly involved in the transformative processes taking place within international journalism – destructuration-restructuration – consciously identify with these processes (or fail to do so), through their own interpretations and practices.

The Nairobi Hub: Among foreign correspondents

Foreign correspondents' epistemologies: empiricism and objectivism

'*Nairobi is a gateway to Africa*,' says A., citing the long history of the Kenyan capital as a central basis for journalists covering not only East Africa, but often all of sub-Saharan Africa and even the continent as a whole. In itself, the assertion shows how professional international news reporting from sub-Saharan Africa has translated its pursuit of empirically-based reports into an objectified justification for establishing overseas bureaus, keeping local staff journalists or paying on a piece-by-piece basis for reports 'pitched' by freelancers in the field.

Regarding 'the means by which a truth claim is ultimately justified by the journalist' (Hanitzsch 2007, 377), the professional correspondents interviewed for this study highly value empiricism – particularly observation, evidence and direct experience – as a prescriptive occupational norm for fieldwork. As H., a freelance journalist, puts it: '*You can't fully understand a context just by reading books or by reading articles. You need to be there and you need to be making connections with the people you are writing about.*' This safeguarding of 'context' and of 'making connections with the people' is also referred to by B., an international radio reporter:

> *Nothing can replace someone on the ground who is able to meet people and to feel the atmosphere. That's how the information is coming; it is not about picking the phone, calling someone that will tell you if the answer is yes or no. It's also about feeling things and seeing things*.

This search for contextualised information positions foreign correspondents as working along contact zones, 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other […] the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations' (Pratt 2008, 7–8), i.e., areas of cross-cultural exchange and contestation.

International reporters need to be aware of the historical and socio-cultural backgrounds of the societies they cover. The ambiguity of these contact zones is expressively exemplified by K., a journalist working for a major international news agency: '*All foreign correspondents are translators. That's the value of having a foreigner and not a local journalist, because they* [foreign correspondents] *can translate for people back home.*'

Reflecting on these 'global narratives that are not monolithic but pluralistic, in which cultures are not arranged hierarchically' JanMohamed (1992, 112) frames the discussion between the notions of a syncretic border intellectual, 'able to combine elements of the two cultures in order to articulate new syncretic forms and experiences', and the specular border intellectual who, 'while perhaps equally familiar with two cultures, finds himself or herself unable or unwilling to be "at home" in these societies' (JanMohamed 1992, 97).

> *Despite I'm here for so long, it's my [national] background, it's where I was raised, where I grew up, those are the glasses I'm looking at Africa. So, I can be the ears, the eyes, the nose of the people who read my newspaper here. I can help explain them what I think it's relevant for them to know because it may have not just an impact in Africa, it may well have a worldwide impact.* (Excerpt from interview with E., a veteran freelance journalist)

> *I think foreign correspondents add, for better or for worst, the narrative of what is happening to news. We take a bunch of stories and facts and – I think this may be well controversial – we produce the narrative of what is happening. I think the value that is added comes from being someone from the outside who is trying to put the pieces together in a much broader sense, step back and looking for everything, and has an editor in the [central bureau] who is doing exactly the same thing. [...] Foreign correspondence is different from being a journalist in your home country, you are two quarters reporter and one quarter columnist or analyst.* (Excerpt from interview with W., a journalist working for an international news magazine)

From these excerpts, a tension arises among foreign reporters between preserving what can be perceived as an ability to build news reports from a detached stance ('outsider perspective') and the needed personal immersion ('two quarters reporter and one quarter analyst') in order to build a body of knowledge *on* and *within* a distinct culture. In other words, 'while the rules of objective journalism prohibit reporters from making subjective interpretations, their task demands it' (Pedelty 1995, 7).

This distinctive epistemological ambiguity (the 'translation') is suggested by an attempt to balance empiricism and objectivism, where 'the observer and the observed are seen as two distinct categories, and it is assumed that reality, in principle, can be perceived and described "as it is" and tested against the "genuine reality"' (Hanitzsch 2007, 376).

Although foreign correspondents based in Nairobi strongly underline the importance of 'being there', they recognise that despite its prescriptive strength as an essential first step in what can be understood as 'quality news reporting', nowadays they often find themselves unable to honour that professional commitment:

> *In order to understand the story you have to be there. One of my focuses here is to cover Somalia. We have a tight policy when it comes to go to Mogadishu. And it's a nightmare! How am I supposed to understand Mogadishu without being able to go there? I don't know what the place looks like. I don't know the people. I can't even mentally draw the city outlines. If I did, even not being there, if a blast goes on I could write a more colorful piece.* (Excerpt from interview with L., a journalist working for a major international news agency)

> *I had to give up on fantastic stories because we just don't have the money to do them. […] I had in the last couple months ignored deadly attacks in Northern Kenya by Al Shabaab-linked groups because we couldn't pay stringers 40 dollars to send us the story! I mean, I'm really talking about 40, 50 dollars apiece. So we ignored it. […] Our subscribers can't pay anymore for our services and we can't charge them more, because we know they are suffering.* (Excerpt from interview with H., a journalist working for a major international news agency)

It is therefore important to note how, in daily news routines, organisational circumstances can be perceived as a noticeable constraint to the correspondents' work by the journalists themselves. In this regard, two major structural convictions, among foreign correspondents based in Nairobi regarding international news reporting, are noteworthy. The first is a general recognition of a *de facto* degradation of the economic support structure: this pattern is not only expressed by the staff of major international news media, but crucially by a large number of freelancers who struggle daily to pay not only costs relating to their work (airfare, accommodation, translator, etc.), but to sustain themselves in the profession while producing news. Second, is the acknowledgement of an ongoing (often seen as irreversible) transformation in the material basis (technological) of the profession.

Dynamics of (re)positioning: Boundary-work

Here, positioning refers to 'strategies for surviving or succeeding in these new flows and spaces' (Miller and Slater 2000, 20) that characterise the network society (Castells

1999, 2000, 2007, 2011). This study investigates whether foreign correspondents are reconceptualising their role, and departing from their interpretation of social media and citizen journalism, here theorised as a 'rupture' (Appadurai 1996) in the precise sense that developments in microelectronics 'offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds' (Appadurai 1996, 3). In other words, a qualitative understanding is sought of how foreign correspondents position themselves within a transforming communicative environment.

In that regard, professionalism is clearly noted in foreign correspondents' self-narratives as a crucial point between who is – and, normatively, shall be kept – within or outside the profession's boundary. As previously noted, occupations claim and compete for jurisdiction over work areas (Abbott 1988; Larson 1977; Schudson and Anderson 2009), in a demarcation process which attributes selected characteristics to specific institutions – in this context, interpreted as practitioners, methods, stocks of knowledge, values and work organisation, for the purposes of constructing social boundary-distinguishing activities (Gieryn 1983; Ginneken 1998):

> *I'm a professional. I've studied and I have been trained to do this. I'm supposed to stick to some professional principles. If I am caught breaking those I can be kicked out. Otherwise, some citizen journalist who blogs, who happens to be in one place and capture something with a phone: it´s information, it´s the same raw material that I work with, but it's not a product in the same way […] in the sense they are less accountable. They are just offering more raw material.* (Excerpt from interview with JM., a newspaper correspondent)

> *We still need professional observers. The problem with citizen journalists is that there are no consequences for false reporting. If I report something that is wrong I get fired. If citizen journalists report something that is wrong, so what? That's why there's no substitute for professional observers.* (Excerpt from interview with H., a journalist working for a major international news agency)

> *[It's] the difference between a guy in Somalia with a mobile phone, passing information for a wider readership and a guy in Nairobi using it ... his sources, phoning them to check them, and then sending the information on. So, it's verification, it's experience, it's legal training, it's access.* (Excerpt from interview with P., a long-standing newspaper correspondent)

> *As journalists we were trained to not even assume that your name spells like that, but to check. Even if you're having a telephone interview you have to ask the person to spell his name. But now everybody is a journalist, everybody is a photographer and they just put out the stuff. I think it really poses a real challenge. And the trap in which journalists can fall into is to use this information as if it has been verified, information that they pick up on Twitter. I even found journalists who see Wikipedia as the Bible for information. It's only supposed to be a starting point to your search.* (Excerpt from interview with A., a television journalist)

It is evident that in the process of creating a social boundary between professional journalists and citizen-generated media, formal training, technical expertise (e.g., verification methods), personal and/or institutional reputation, access and an internal regulation/monitoring system to ensure accountability are suggested as differentiating factors:

> *In the old days, a newspaper was a newspaper. And if you were an audience member and had something to talk about, the newspaper was closed, you couldn't get in there. And so there was a clear divide: it was on the newspaper, it was done by professional journalists. Then came the Internet, the bloggers, and the bloggers or these guys who just have opinions on stuff they talk in the Internet. But now the professional media has migrated to the Internet as well. There is no clear distinction between who is a professional journalist, who is a citizen journalist, who is a blogger, who is a crazy guy who's just talking shit at home, living in his mom's basement, watching TV all day and you can't tell who these people are. So, I think that the distinction between professional journalists and everyone else is eroding.* (Excerpt from interview with M., an online new media correspondent)

Professional norms and rules not only construct a specific culture, but are also constructed and validated within that particular culture and its subcultures. It seems reasonable, then, to suggest that in the midst of uncertainty ('distinction is eroding'), professional international news reporters' symbolic system works to conserve information on/from online social networks and citizen journalists. In a transforming communicative environment, the preservation of international news reporting as a self-defined subculture corresponds to the defense of using acceptable occupational modes aimed at generating and validating information from raw material. Boundary-work among Nairobi-based foreign correspondents is rooted in practitioners' epistemological assumptions:

> *I did some stories on the Nuba, but it was having little attention in Twitter and the guy to follow was a guy seated in New York, who had did a lot of work in Sudan and had some contacts. That I find annoying but also instructive. If people really rely on Twitter for their news – I don't know if people really are, or if the media elite is relying on Twitter … here's a great discrimination in the media on who is using and who is not using the media. If someone is a regular user, even if it is not on the ground, they're really more interested in promoting that person rather than promoting local news stories.* (Excerpt from interview with W., a journalist working for an international news magazine)

> *I'm not often on Facebook or LinkedIn to find news there! 'Get out of your glass house and get out there! Meet the people. Go and buy the fruit and talk to the lady how much the petrol price went up and things like that.' Then you get a relevant view of what the country is.* (Excerpt from interview with L., a senior editor working for an international news service)

Some professional reporters view the evolving features of networked journalism with the concomitant dread of losing their authority as guardians of a specific form of truth validation, as a journalistic value, over the agenda of public discourse (Hayes et al. 2007). Meanwhile, others enhance 'citizen participation, which resides at the periphery of mainstream newswork, to become embraced as an ethical norm and a founding doctrine of journalism innovation', while 'altering the rhetorical and structural borders of professional jurisdiction to invite external contribution and correction' (Lewis 2010, xi).

Innovation in professional dynamics

News innovators among foreign correspondents tend to regard journalism less as a proprietary occupation and more as an open-source practice to be shared: while actively proposing solutions to the professional-participatory tension, they look to preserve fundamental ethical principles, discard outdated practices and recognise participation as a new, normative ethical principle:

> *I have mixed feelings on this because I am a real advocate for citizen journalism from the countries they are writing about. And it's really patronizing Western media send their reporters parachuting to other countries and expect them to have the best reports. It's so nonsensical because you have this people incredibly knowledgeable, they live in the country, they know all the contacts, but they are kind of not trusted I guess, so they are often used as fixers, but actually I think they must be integrated more.* (Excerpt from interview with A., a freelance journalist)

> *Kenya only has 9pm news bulletin, so when the bulletin comes other channels have to work different angles. Because if something happens at 3 o´clock, which is very late for television, chances are it has been sent by SMS, it has been tweeted, facebooked, by so many people they all know the story. You have now the challenge to come with a different angle to the story, to make it relevant. Otherwise you sound just like everybody else.* (Excerpt from interview with N., a television journalist)

Amongst informants – particularly those who can be perceived as 'innovators' – the use of online social networks tends to be interpreted as highly beneficial for newsgathering routines:

> *I think in terms of access of information Twitter is invaluable. […] It's now my second news source after the wires. But having telling you that I can't say I've got amazing stories out of it.* (Excerpt from interview with P., a long-standing newspaper correspondent)

> *We need to monitor Twitter. We increasingly get tips out of Twitter, just from reading the dialogue, we learn a lot from it. For instance, sometimes we see Al Shabaab talking about an air raid. We call our guys in Mogadishu and ask them to do their own checks.* (Excerpt from interview with L., a journalist working for a major international news agency)

> *I think that social media has given us an avenue. You know, being present, being felt, and reaching up the young and upcoming audience who is not used to the conventional way of pursuing news. […] They are very important. […] These web citizens are proving to be very important sources for news and the outputs that we have. They are really helping us. We have to admit that they are not professionals, so they break so many rules and sometimes there's the risk of defaming people. They are faceless people; we don't know who they are. So, they can get away with that very easily. I can't get away with that very easily. I'm confined by the law and regulations of the media. So we are really in our toes running to beat them in their game.* (Excerpt from interview with U., a radio and online news media correspondent)

The perception of online social networks as a new, available tool for collecting information is balanced with clear concerns about seated journalism, non-stop deadlines and 24-hour news cycles:

You can easily spend a whole day monitoring information and never write a new story, so… it's something the media world to be aware of. The information flowing is huge. I think it must be assumed that we need multiple levels of filtering. You can't be doing investigative journalism and being monitoring social media. It is impossible at all, at least do it well and I don't think there's this recognition right now on attention. (Excerpt from interview with W., a journalist working for an international news magazine)

I think things like Twitter have made this 24 hour newsroom go virtual and global, and everyone is trying to tweet news before than everyone else, regardless where you are in the world. […] All this stuff is coming from people who may not be trained, may not have angles… all that you need is a savvy editor to pull everything together and they have the story. So, you passed from needing the person on the ground, the fixer or the stringer, a comprehensive team of 5 or 6 people at least to this one person pulling on all this stuff. Media houses, for instance in London, now bring in people whom they call 'content producers', so they are not journalists anymore. What they are doing is picking content, put it online, adding the necessary photos, editing a video, embed it on the page, putting in all the metadata, tweeting, linking and it is just like this virtual competition for who can get the most hits, I guess, individually, which is sad because newspapers are really the benchmark of quality. (Excerpt from interview with A., a freelance journalist)

Discussion

The article has presented exploratory insights into ongoing transformations in international news reporting from sub-Saharan Africa. Interviews with foreign correspondents based in Nairobi suggest some uncertainty in terms of how reporters view the future of journalism as a profession. As one informant made clear, the field is 'repositioning and we are not driving it. This is just happening to us.' Given such occupational fluidity, what partially seems to be at stake (from practitioners' point of view) is how to retain tested and acceptable 'filters' and 'translators' in international news reporting.

Even if correspondents do not necessarily frame the work of pro-ams as competition to professional news reporting – some suggest the two are complementary – very strong boundary-work is in place to try to preserve certain core foundations of the job; notoriously, its epistemological paradigm based on empiricism and objectivism.

Professional reporters strongly tend to view themselves as defenders of credible public information based on their methods of collecting and verifying facts and allegations. Concomitantly, there is a tendency from more convergent sectors to regard citizen journalism and social media as relevant partners in the process of perceiving and narrating the 'Other'.

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