African Journal Publishing

Infrastructures, Visibility, Resilience

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Introduction

More than 75 years since independence, African academic journal publishing is at an uncertain crossroads. This was not how Nkrumah envisaged Africa's scientific modernity. Speaking in 1964 at the laying of the foundation stone of Ghana's Atomic Reactor Centre, he offered an expansive postcolonial vision for an African science "that cannot afford to lag behind" (Nkrumah, 2007). The Reactor project was cancelled three years later.

Some hark back to a supposedly "golden age" of an emergent African academy in the early post-independence years, replete with scientific congresses, dynamic research departments, vibrant literary journals and new university presses (Yanney-Wilson, 1961; Eisemon, 1979; Sharp, 2019). Whilst there was significant progress in African independent and academic publishing prior to structural adjustment-enforced austerity, some of this nostalgia may be misplaced. Caroline Davis (2020) has shown, for example, how the Central Intelligence Agency CIA-funded front organizations promoted "new literary hubs being created across

Africa that promoted local management and local literary production". Many of these journals, from *Drum* to *Black Orpheus*, were indeed commercially successful, creating "an illusion of the creation of a decentralised, avant-garde small-press culture" (Davis, 2020).

The 1960s and 1970s are now a distant memory. Yet many of the challenges remain. Despite Nkrumah's early calls for the decolonization of knowledge production, research published on the continent, particularly in the humanities and social sciences (HSS), remains invisible and marginalized. Getting published in African languages, and in the other major languages used across the continent (French, Portuguese, Arabic), is much more difficult, and then much less visible, than publishing in English (Asubiaro & Onalapo, 2023; Asubiaro et al., 2024). With stop-start funding, many of the continent's scholarly journals are short-lived, making it difficult to sustain scholarly conversations, build intellectual community and curate knowledge.

Bourdieu bemoaned the unreflective "scholasticism" of his European peers (1990). By contrast, most African researchers are all too aware that their academic working conditions – and the lack of supportive research infrastructures – make it hard to write and publish, let alone edit journals or peer review. And yet, as Mbembe and Sarr insist, time is of the essence: "there is no reason to wait. We are our own witnesses. We must absolutely unite if we are to take back this essential task that we can't simply delegate to others – namely: reading, writing, deciphering, decrypting, sketching, and calling into question our age" (Mbembe & Sarr, 2023, p. 3).

Much of this has been said before. Hountondji was first to call out knowledge "extraversion", arguing that "African scholars are bound to remain permanent scientific tourists", given the need to move "from the margins to the heart of knowledge" (1990, p. 6). Nyamnjoh presented the African academic dilemma as one of "sacrificing relevance for recognition, or recognition for relevance" (2004, p. 333). The need to index African journals has been talked about since the early 2000s (e.g. Le Roux, 2006; Le Roux & Nwosu, 2006), whilst recognizing that not all indexes have equal credibility or financial stability. Since 2000, there have been repeated meetings, declarations and charters addressing the inequitable nature of global knowledge production; from CODESRIA's[1] electronic publishing and Open Access conferences in 2008 and 2016, to the UNESCO-supported Dakar declaration on Open Science in 2016, to the 2024 Africa Charter for Transformative Collaborations. The inequalities remain and, in many cases, continue to widen.

Ever since colonialism, Africa has been a landscape on which to project elaborate ambitious developmental, scientific and bureaucratic dreams (Geissler & Toussignant, 2020). African universities have often been key sites for these imaginaries: de Jong and Valente-Quinn call them "infrastructures of utopia" (2018). Their account of the ruined remains of Senegal's "University of the African future", a project initiated by President Abdoulaye Wade in 2000, portrays its unfinished construction and dilapidated infrastructures as "palimpsests of imagined Afro-futures" (2018, p. 333). The generative tension they describe between "the temporalities of ruination and regeneration" (2018, p. 348) are also visible in digital form. As technologies evolve and change, the African scholarly web accretes palimpsests of ambitious research futures. A multiplication of overlapping and different university journal portals and websites reveal a history of launches and relaunches. Publishing dynamism is punctuated by long periods of dormancy, and the digital traces become a matter for the bibliographic record-keepers (Zell, 2020; 2022).

This special issue of *Global Africa* is being put together at a critical moment for the diamond (free to read, free to publish) Open Access movement. For some in the policy community the promise of "open science" enabled by distributed digital infrastructures offers a more egalitarian academic future. The first global summit on diamond Open Access was held in Toluca in 2023, adopting a manifesto committing to science as a global public good. Yet the commercial value generated by datafication of academic communication, and the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), reinforces commercial publishing logics.

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1   Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa.

In this issue, we bring together six papers and seven authors, each with their own views on the best route forward. Our contributors hail from Africa, Europe and North America, and work across a range of sites and scales. Many look back at publishing journeys travelled as well as the online paths ahead. Several are journal editors or publishers, and so draw on hard-won practical experience. The first paper in the issue (El-Aroui) offers a continent-wide overview of recent publishing trends, drawing on data from the main citation indexes. The next (Mills & Asubiaro) offers an account of why these indexes tell us so little about the African research economy. The third paper (Hamdaoui) offers a historical analysis of humanities publishing in Morocco. Two others (Makulilo & Henry, Leedy) tell stories of individual African Studies journals, based in Dar es Salaam and Gainesville, Florida respectively. Finally Markey returns us to the question of data, arguing for the value it brings to researchers, editors and publishers alike. All offer reflections on the history and political economy of publishing African humanities and social science journals, the rise of commercial publishing, the opportunities presented by digitization and the challenges of sustaining scholar-led journals.

As you read these pieces, notice how our contributors pay close attention to the infrastructures, and the "infrastructuring", that underpin academic publishing. Making a noun into a verb is not just an academic affectation. It is a way to draw attention to, and complicate, the commonplace understanding of infrastructures as physical "stuff". Publishing infrastructures include computer hardware and publishing software, laser and digital printers and Wi-Fi connections, but also the human and social relationships that underpin the work of writing, peer-reviewing and editing. Following the work of STS scholars such as Star (1999), we cleave to an inclusive and more-than-human definition of infrastructures, seeing infrastructuring as embedded, learned and embodied. Star's understanding of the term came out of her work studying the scientific practices of a community of American biological scientists – worm specialists – in the very earliest years of the internet. She writes about the "incompatible platforms, recalcitrant local computing centers, and bottlenecked resources" (1999, p. 380) that her interlocutors experienced, themes that may feel all too familiar to those using open source publishing tools. Star describes the biologists' struggles with downloading files, and how she helped by scanning their quarterly newsletters to create a digital archive, but then faced incompatibility issues for those using Mac computers. All this helped her to "see infrastructure as part of human organization, and as problematic as any other" (1999, p. 380).

Those of us with memories of struggling with dated publishing systems from the late 1990s and early 2000s will relate to Star's account. Today, journal editors and publishers have to adapt to a rapidly changing set of technological standards and software in a world of cloud computing that demands DOI referencing and linking, Onix 3.0 (for book publishing), and metadata interoperability. The latest promises about AI can feel like irrelevant shadows or distant portents for those struggling to edit a journal with little resource and less spare time, a situation that is common in the African continent today; and yet we know that AI will determine so much future practice.

Writing about everyday life struggles in Johannesburg, Simone (2004; 2021) went further than Star, describing "people as infrastructures", as a way of emphasizing the importance of the urban collective, and the ways in which everyone's day to day activities created a "constellation of accompaniments to the eventfulness of urban life" (2021, p. 1343). This in turn echoes a recurring theme in African studies of "wealth in people" (Guyer, 1995). Similarly, publishing is a collective and coordinated achievement that adapts, changes and evolves. Publishing technologies have developed in tandem with increasing computing power, commercial competition, growing demand from authors, the speeding up of the research process, and a research integrity arms-race. In response, commercial publishers have grown their journals to vertically integrate their own research infrastructures (see Mills & Asubiaro, this issue). Clarivate's operations are a good example of this integration between research, data and citation indexes, competing to control the whole research and publishing lifecycle (Chen et al., 2019).

Setting up and infrastructuring digital journals is demanding. Even with open-source publishing tools, such as Open Journals Systems software, a journal editor needs reliable and secure web hosting facilities, a knowledge of technical standards, reliable submission and editorial work flows, and a commitment to the hard work that goes into sustaining and updating these tools. Editors also have built relationships with librarians, sustain their personal research networks in order to

attract strong submissions and peer reviewers, involve editorial boards, as well as supporting and mentoring early career researchers. And then there are the challenges of dissemination, creating the metadata that is key to article findability, and getting indexed. These tasks are far harder for editors based in African institutions than for their Northern counterpart. The latter may well have access to significant institutional support (see Leedy, this issue), and in many cases university presses and commercial journal publishers look after the technical aspects of metadata production and subscription administration, as well as providing a revenue stream to support editors or writing workshops.

Many of these issues are best exemplified through individual journal case studies. Contrast the fortunes of media studies journal *Africa Media Review* and *Critical Arts* over the last four decade. *Africa Media Review* was launched in Nairobi in 1984 by the African Council of Communications Education, a network originally set up in 1976 to support journalism training across the continent. In its launch issue, the Editor in Chief, based at the University of Lagos, promised that *Africa Media Review* would challenge African intellectuals to develop communication tools to address Africa's developmental problems (Ugboajah, 1986). After 11 years, it went into abeyance, to be relaunched by CODESRIA in 2004 with a new editor. It lasted nine years in this second incarnation, and only its archival traces remain. In contrast, *Critical Arts*, set up by a small group of South African media scholars in 1980, set out to develop a "radical perspective on the arts" inspired by Marshall McLuhan's work, albeit focusing on "media and communication in a Third World context" (Critical Arts Collective, 1980). More than forty years later, this editorial vision has evolved into a broader commitment to "South-North" dialogues and transdisciplinary epistemologies within Cultural Studies. It was co-published by UNISA Press in conjunction with Routledge from 2002 to 2005, and then by Routledge alone, providing it with a regular funding stream to support editorial assistance. Indexed from 2009 in Scopus and from 2011 in Science Citation Index (SCI), this helped boost its international visibility. It now publishes 6 issues a year, with has a diverse international editorial board and author profile.

The question of visibility is addressed across this special issue. Analyses of the visibility of African academic work date back to the early 1970s, as scholars began to use SCI data to compare the citation of research across different world regions. Rabkin et al. (1979) found that research in zoology and botany being carried out at Ibadan and Nairobi was, perhaps surprisingly, disproportionately visible and cited in Britain and across the region, at least comparable to that in other "peripheral Commonwealth universities". They acknowledged the significant efforts made by both countries to develop their own science cultures, but paid less attention to the legacy networks created by an expansive British "empire of scholars" (Pietsch, 2013). Later studies (Wayt Gibbs, 1995) suggested that the indexes were undermining the impact and quality of journals across the global South.

Research visibility now revolves around metadata, ensuring journals are findable by the portals and search engines that scholars use. Libraries and information scientists have repeatedly called for African centered indexes and data infrastructures (Le Roux & Nwosu 2006). An African index has long been the dream of information scientists like Nwagwu (2010) and Asubiaro (see Mills & Asubiaro, this issue), but such initiatives are hugely expensive and demanding to build. Visibility is enabled by both the technical infrastructures generating metadata, and by the social relations expressed through citation networks. Decisions about which work to read and acknowledge are social or political as well as academic. The creation of an African citation index may not necessarily change deeply entrenched geographies of credibility and reputation (Mills & Robinson, 2021).

Making research visible and findable in a digital age requires universities and publishers to produce detailed "metadata": contextual information about an article, including its title, the authors, date of publication, copyright and licensing status, and more. The concern about visibility is heightened by the growing volume of published articles – 40% of the articles published in Web of Science-indexed journals have never been cited (Chen et al., 2019). Publishing infrastructures enable but also exclude. Ever more metadata is being generated through, and required by, research aggregators and publishing platforms, from Crossref (for reference linking and Google Scholar) to Clarivate (for Impact Factors), Elsevier (for Scopus), EBSCO and JSTOR (for aggregation and distribution). Some of these require journals to meet evolving technical and publishing standards and infrastructures

– including issuing DOIs and other digital identifiers. Even DOIs, a technical standard introduced by the commercial publishers, centralize control over publishing practices, requiring complex registration processes and payments (Okune & Chan, 2023).

How important is it for small scale publishers to build their own publishing infrastructures? And given rapidly changing technical standards, are calls to build a new, community-owned Open Access African publishing infrastructure realistic? There are precedents in other world regions, most notably Scielo and Redalyc Latin America (Nwagwu, 2010). Can Africa's university-hosted journals develop sustainable "diamond" Open Access publishing models without the backing of well-resourced libraries and university presses? Okune et al. (2018) are optimistic about the development of "inclusive knowledge infrastructures" across the continent. They call for publishers across the global South to use "tools, platforms, networks and other socio-technical mechanisms that deliberately allow for multiple forms of participation amongst a diverse set of actors, and which purposefully acknowledge and seek to redress power inequities within a given context" (Okune et al., 2018). This vision emerged from the Canadian and British-funded "Open and Collaborative Science in Development Network", that ran from 2014 to 2017, and supported 12 open science projects organized around development goals, with a strong focus on cognitive justice. It is perhaps easier to be confident and ambitious when working within an international research network. The challenge will be finding resources to support long-term infrastructuring across the continent.

The third theme we address in this special issue is journal resilience. Again, this is an infrastructural question. African universities rightly prioritize teaching and employability in the context of large cohorts of students, leaving little time or funding for academic research (Rachik & Bourquia, 2011). Researchers have learnt to multi-task and become generalists, pursuing consultancy research as a necessary "side hustle", though this knowledge is rarely published in an academic form. With few sources of support, African scholarly publishers work on a shoe-string and struggle to get by: many journals have a short life span. More than 20% of journals hosted on the AJOL platform are inactive, having not published an issue for at least a year. This reflects the precarious working cultures faced by academics in many African universities, lack of resources to sustain such journals and/or lack of suitable article submissions. In the digital age, the challenges of updating websites may also reflect a consequence of negotiating an unequal international science system.

Editing and publishing academic journals is hard work at the best time, but much harder in resource-constrained environments. Poor internet access, a dearth or loss of publishing management and editing skills, the outsourcing of copy editing, proofreading and typesetting, as well as the cost of meeting "Northern" publishing integrity standards, all take their toll. High quality research and publishing require time, skills, mentoring and resources. Yet some African and African-focused journals, editors and communities have successfully negotiated these demands. What lessons can be learnt from *The African Review* (*TARE*) and *African Studies Quarterly (ASQ)*, as well as the journals supported by Taylor & Francis? And what resources and support can commercial publishers provide for supporting and building regionally-oriented knowledge ecosystems across the continent? The contributors speak to all these questions and more.

An unspoken theme across these articles is whether scale and size are routes to resilience and visibility. Implicit in our attention to "global" visibility is the assumption that African infrastructures need to be seen from afar. Yet as we discuss elsewhere (Kitchen, Mills and Ail forthcoming), in relation to African independent book publishing, "small" can be "beautiful". Does resilience depend on scaling up, or is there a case for "scaling small" as Adema and Moore (2021) put it? Questioning the conventional wisdom that organizational growth is driven by "economies of scale", these writers ask if it is possible to create sustainable community-led publishing projects through "mutual reliance, care and other forms of communing" (2021, p. 27). This growth, Adema and Moore argue, leads to a loss of context and diversity. Instead they propose to "nurture scale" through "intentional collaborations between community-driven projects that promote a bibliodiverse ecosystem while providing resilience through resource sharing and other kinds of collaboration" (Adema & Moore, 2021). They offer an appealing vision of a non-hierarchical infrastructural collective. Adema and Moore question Global North definitions of reputable knowledge, and ask whether calls to work at a "global scale" reinforce unequal geographies and center-periphery relations. Yet the communities

they envisage rely on having resources to share and time to collaborate, and are perhaps more feasible at universities such as Cambridge (one of the wealthiest and most prestigious universities in Europe, with a renowned and well-resourced University Press and Library) and Coventry (a UK university with a pioneering Centre for Post-Digital Cultures and track record of innovative publishing experiments) where Moore and Adema are respectively affiliated, than at higher education institutions in Conakry or Calabar.

There is an emerging critical literature on datafication (Sadowski, 2019), and the commercial use that publishers can make of user meta-data. Taylor & Francis now has a suite of 60 Africa focused journals, enabling it to attract more African authors, as well as offering bundle "pay to publish" programs in commercial or mega OA journals and the F1000 Research platform.[2] Pooley describes "surveillance publishing" as a practice where a publisher "derives a substantial proportion of its revenue from prediction products, fueled by data extracted from researcher behavior" (Pooley, 2022). Lamdan, in an extended analysis of Elsevier, which now calls itself an "information-analytics business", and its owner RELX, calls it out as a "data cartel" (Lamdan, 2022). Mirowski (2018) goes further to dismiss the open science movement *tout court*, seeing it as means for companies to create integrated research infrastructures and re-engineer science along the lines of an Amazon-style platform, whilst claiming to be opening up science to the broader public.

Measuring what counts?

The first two papers in this issue explore what citation and ranking data, generated by these commercial infrastructures, reveal, and do not reveal, about African research. Mhamad-Ali El-Aroui makes use of scientometric data generated by Web of Science and Scopus to track two decades of academic publishing by researchers based across the continent, if not necessarily in publications or journals based *on* the continent. He shows the very different levels of "productivity" between African nations. South Africa has long had an energetic publishing culture, partly thanks to publication subsidy model that dates back to apartheid-era science. Universities across North Africa – and especially Egypt – expect their senior researchers to publish in "top" (by which they mean both indexed in the Science Citation Index *and* ranked in the top two quartiles in their fields) journals if they want to be promoted. Researchers from across the continent, from Nigeria to Ethiopia, are forced to choose between publishing "internationally" or engaging national and regional research communities (Omobowale et al., 2014; Ssentongo, 2020). These policies have progressively undermined the status and quality of long-established "local" journals (Mills et al., 2023).

El-Aroui's analysis of research growth highlights the productivism of South African researchers in terms of both research volume and impact, particularly in Humanities and Social Science (HSS) publishing, as well as the growth of Egyptian scientific research. He also comments on the relative positions of Nigeria (declining) and the three Maghreb countries (increasing). El-Aroui highlights how some countries' researchers have an accelerating publication "output", such as Ethiopia, whilst others (including Ghana and Kenya) have a more stable growth rate. What El-Aroui's analysis does not discuss is the low proportion of outputs published in journals based in these countries. The article also highlights the relative invisibility of Francophone and Lusophone language publishing. Senegal appears as one of the continental leaders in terms of the number of researchers per capita but lacks visibility in terms of scientific impact. In his analysis, El-Aroui is blunt about the invisibility of HSS research published in indexed journals from the continent: "All the other African countries [except South Africa] (including Egypt and the Maghreb) seem to have invisible HSS ecosystems either because of immaturity or because they are using alternative or non-indexed channels of research-output dissemination".

In a paper that extends this issue of visibility, David Mills and Toluwase Asubiaro ask why African journals are so much less visible than others within the global science system, and how this impacts African research. Developing a critical history of citation indexing, they return to the original decisions Eugene Garfield made about which journals to include in the first Science Citation Index.

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2   https://www.tandfonline.com/openaccess/f1000.

His rationale for indexing a select group of "core" journals was largely made on financial grounds, and the first index had almost no journals from the global South, and none from Africa. Over time this negatively impacted the reputation of many journals in Latin America, Africa and India (Wayt Gibbs, 1995). In the 1990s, the Science Citation Index was digitized, allowing citation data to be mined and analyzed in much greater depth. The creation of the first university rankings in 2003 amplified the reputational importance and commercial value of the indexes. Today, Web of Science and Scopus have ever-more rigorous selection criteria, using citation data to inform selection decisions. As a result, journals published in the global peripheries, in small fields, or in languages other than English, struggle to get indexed. In 2023, if one excludes South Africa, only around 60 of the 30,000 plus journals indexed in Web of Science were published from Africa south of the Sahara. Mills and Asubiaro explore why citation indexing matters for publishers and researchers. They ask if the solution is to create an alternative African citation index, or if there are other ways to promote the visibility and discoverability of African journals.

The third article starts with striking data on the Moroccan research system, contrasting the growth in its "international" research productivity – as signaled by El-Aroui – with the paucity of Morocco-based humanities publishing. Yousra Hamdaoui explores this contradiction through a history of Morocco's universities and research funding, attending to the impact of repeated changes in policy and university reforms. The country's own publishing capacity has suffered as a result, with university presses largely dormant. Very few Moroccan journals are internationally indexed (Scopus indexes only three, all science journals). More positively, she offers an insightful case study into the fortunes of the Moroccan history journal *Hesperis Tamuda* and the book publisher as *En Toutes Lettres.* Hamdaoui ends with suggestions for rebuilding Morocco's humanities and social sciences publishing ecosystem.

Scaling small? Journal and publisher case studies

Next this special issue provides three case-studies of African and Africa-focused, scholarly publishing initiatives. The first is *The African Review* (TARE), a journal launched at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1971, and the second is *African Studies Quarterly* (*ASQ*), a pioneering Open Access online journal started at the University of Florida in 1997. The third is an analysis of publishing data generated by the 15 African studies journals published by Taylor & Francis. Together these papers can be seen as exploring the question of when and how scholar-led journals and initiatives can be sustained, as well as the opportunities offered by commercial partnerships, such as those forged by Brill-De Gruyter, as well as Taylor & Francis.

TARE was founded by the Department of Political Science of the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) in 1971. It set out to offer a radical African analysis of African politics, and attracting leading postcolonial scholars. Today the journal covers globalization, development, and African affairs, addressing the North-South knowledge divide. For most of its life, it has relied on a small board and a single editor, with little or no professional publishing support. Alexander Makulilo and Rodrick Henry describe how, despite the demands this placed on the editor, it continued to attract submissions from around the world. In June 2019, TARE signed an agreement with Brill to take over the publishing of TARE, strengthening the quality of its production, indexing, visibility and global distribution. UDSM retains ownership of its copyright and journal editorial activities. Makuliko and Henry argue that the future of strong African journals depends on collaborations with established publishers, in this case, based in the global North.

ASQ, founded by the African Studies Center at the University of Florida Gainesville in 1997, was a pioneering diamond Open Access journal, long before the term was even invented. In his paper, Todd Leedy talks frankly about the technical and social obstacles the editorial team have surmounted over the past quarter century. Initially, the challenge was working out how to publish to the new web, and getting "ahead of the curve", all the time paying close attention to the "human" infrastructure – authors, editorial staff and graduate student labor. In the early days the journal team encountered skepticism about the online-only format and the resultant lack of subscription income; the lack of

digital connectivity in Africa, as well as uncertainty about impact and recognition. In retrospect, *ASQ* was far ahead of its time. Leedy notes how more than 75% of *ASQ* submissions from 2021 to 2022 originated from Africa-based scholars. The journal has negotiated rapid changes in the academic publishing environment as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, and with university support *ASQ* looks set to continue to be an important venue for African Studies research.

The final paper, by Madeleine Markey, who works for Taylor & Francis, explores the role that a large commercial publisher like Taylor and Francis can play in sustaining an African publishing ecosystem. She offers expert insight into the information that large publishers can glean from different forms of author and readership data generated from its collection of 15 African Studies journals. The paper itself is an example of the crucial, yet high quality, data such interlinked commercial publishing companies own, generate and harness for further growth. Most publishers and researchers, not only in Africa, would be hard pressed to deliver comparable data, as it depends on expensive software (such as the Scholar One journal manuscript interface, a service provided by Clarivate), as well as staff with the skills in statistics and analysis to make use of such data. Markey further shows how publisher data can provide valuable feedback for authors, editors and publisher alike, highlighting geographical inequalities in submission and acceptance, and how these findings can be used to promote great publishing equity and author diversity.

Which way now?

What futures beckon for African academic journal publishing? Some of the contributions (El-Aroui, Makuliko & Henry, Markey) offer a vision of the continent being more integrated with, and contributing to, "global science". They implicitly recognize the necessity of today's commercially-owned publishing infrastructures for enabling scientific communication. Others (Hamdaoui, Leedy, Mills & Asubiaro) make the case (whether explicitly or implicitly) for properly resourced and supported African-focused scholarly ecosystems. All would perhaps agree on the need for vibrant African research, knowledge and publishing ecosystems.

Debates about the future become polarized around questions of infrastructure, resourcing and scale – small may be beautiful but is it sustainable? Are "community-led" (which is usually taken to mean "not-for-profit") publishing initiatives more vulnerable at a moment of accelerating technical change and growing adoption of AI tools? Questions of scales become increasingly confusing. At a global level, well-resourced governmental actors – such as the European Union – have begun to promote a vision of "local" community-owned Open Access communication infrastructures. The diamond Open Access movement has a similar vision of non-commercial Open Access. Yet the "scale" of investment in research and development by the major commercial publishers, and their increasing reliance on the value generated by data analytics, makes this an unlikely scenario in the short to medium term. Many of these companies are located and regulated within Europe and America, employing many staff and generating tax revenues. Professional associations and scholarly societies are reliant on the profits generated by commercial publishing contracts to support their work, and academics throughout the world publish in their indexed journals. Whilst there have been a few high profile defections of journal editorial teams from the large commercial publishers, broader attempts to boycott publishers such as Elsevier have floundered.

The global diamond Open Access "movement", invigorated by its first "global" summit and the 2023 Toluca manifesto, is the latest incarnation of the Open Science project. The Open Science vision of a decolonized non-commercial academic publishing commons (Meagher, 2021) is attractive to many, but few dwell on the financial implications of this transition.

Commercial publishers, having successfully transitioned their journals to APC-funded "gold" Open Access, are also experimenting with fee-free Open Access, potentially returning the sector to a subscription-based funding model. Brill and Sage are amongst those trialing "subscribe to open". The North American university-hosted and sponsored journal portals (such as Project Muse and JSTOR) first promoted journal digitization in the 1990s. They too are now exploring the potential to scale support for no-fee OA journal publishing. The Canadian Public Knowledge Project's Open

Journal Systems (OJS) publishing software is now being used by more than 30,000 Open Access journals around the world. Across Africa, there are new diamond Open Access portals, such as the University of Cape Town founded African Platform for Open Scholarship.

In 2024 Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) carried out a major survey of no-fee Open Access African journal publishing (EIFL, 2024). The results from 200 journal respondents revealed a community of editors working under burdensome financial and human resource constraints. 65% published fewer than 20 articles a year, and most (60%) relied on volunteer labor. Only 45% had any institutional funding, which was why 40% reported feeling very financially insecure. Only 30% had an annual budget. 53% were listed in AJOL, confirming the value of that portal, but only 10% were indexed in Web of Science. In Africa, the diamond Open Access "movement" remains precarious and insecure.

There are many questions left unresolved. Will Francophone and Lusophone African journals and scholarly communities be able to sustain their profiles and reputations in an Anglophone academic publishing environment? Can academic publishing in Africa's many other languages be protected, sustained and developed? What are the consequences and costs of complying with technical and integrity standards (from DOIs to web hosting services) defined by Northern-controlled publishing infrastructures (Okune & Chan, 2023)? Do international publishing collaborations – whether commercial and institutional – strengthen Africa's own publishing capabilities? Might the models of community-owned publishing infrastructures developed across Latin America work in Africa? What about the national language and journal citation databases developed in China and Malaysia? And which are the most pressing priorities when resources are scarce: access or quality, discoverability or citations? And finally, on what basis, and where, should journals from the continent be published and disseminated? Outside South Africa, the continent lacks medium-large sized journal publishers or comparable university presses with journal publishing programs. Our special issue can only hint at answers, but the questions are live and important.

African governments and research funders will ultimately determine which road the continent's research systems now take. The dilemmas facing its universities are well known (Olukoshi & Zeleza, 2004; Arowosegebe, 2023), but the solutions are less clear. Analyzing the strategic plans of ten new African universities, Soudien suggests that their imaginations are constrained by the models offered by "older and elite" universities, and that there is "little critical attention paid to the local" (2023, p. 196). Innovative visions are inevitably risky. Ambitious Open Science "manifestos", "transformative charters" and "global diamond alliances" may become tomorrow's ruined utopias. National science strategies need to be properly resourced and supported (Moja & Okunade, 2023). Without sustained government or donor financial support, or investments from other sources, the dreams and hopes for Africa's university presses, libraries and independent publishers will come to little. Tempering ambition with realism, the first step is building resilient publishing infrastructures.

Acknowledgements

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