The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press

The Influence of Global News Organisations

Michael Serwornoo

The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press is a comprehensive and highly analytical study of the impact of foreign news organisations on the creation of an image of Africa in its own press. Identifying a problematic focus on the Western media in previous studies of the African media image, Serwornoo uses the Ghanaian press as a case study to explore the effects of centuries of Afro-pessimistic discourse in the foreign press on the continent’s self-description.

This study brings together a number of theoretical approaches, including newsworthiness, intermedia agenda setting, postcolonial theory and the hierarchy of influences, to question the processes underpinning the creation of media content. It is particularly innovative in its application of the methodological frameworks of ethnographic content analysis and ethnographic interview techniques to unveil the perspectives of journalists and editors.

The Image of Africa in Ghana’s Press presents a vital contribution of the highest academic standard to the growing literature surrounding Afro-pessimism and postcolonial studies. It will be of great value to scientists in the field of journalism studies, as well as researchers interested in the merging of journalism research, postcolonial studies, and ethnography.
2. Benefitting from the State of the Art

This chapter summarises state-of-the-art research that has attempted to discuss the phenomenon of foreign news. The chapter begins with a description of foreign news and its usefulness to identity creation and recognition for both the reported nations and the dominant reporting nations. It offers useful definitions and conceptualisations and describes how Africa has been represented in the Western media — in particular, the use of negative images in this representation, which have become normalised over time. In turn, the chapter reviews the growing body of literature that argues that negative coverage of Africa in the Western press cannot be empirically supported (Nothias, 2017; Obijiofor and MacKinnon, 2016; Scott, 2015). It touches on how hegemony and representation of Others have become basic elements that the Western press uses to resist criticism and claim innocence. The effects of centuries of negative reporting on Africa and the continuing hegemony of foreign news production have contributed significantly to how Africans view themselves. This was illustrated with research that investigated the framework within which the African press was born and the influence of Northern news agencies on how the African press currently works.

The state of foreign news selection in Ghana is discussed with a focus on the history of journalism education in general, elements of colonial practice and the current liberalised media market. This chapter ends with a discussion on the way forward to improving foreign news coverage in and about Africa, along with the crucial opportunities and challenges new media technology offer in this regard.
Foreign News and its Usefulness

Even though foreign news is mostly evaluated negatively, as a false representation of reality, it nonetheless remains a dominant way for people around the world to inform themselves about each other, and to re-align events occurring across the globe to their local conditions. The usefulness of studying foreign news has mostly been grounded in research. Kwadwo Anokwa, Carolyn Lin and Michael Salwen (2003) refer to the increase in interaction among people and nations as a result of technology, and argue that in order to better describe this increase in interaction, researchers must examine the nature of communication and news among nations. This, in turn, will enhance international diplomacy and understanding of different nations. Melissa Johnson (1997) argues that “news about foreign countries matter because unrepresentative news can have a strong effect on media audiences” and “knowledge and conceptions about other nations, but positive exposure to mass media relates to positive images or accurate judgments about foreign countries” (p. 315).

Joseph Nye (2004) has hinted at the fact that soft power is also about power over opinion, especially in the current information era. Public diplomacy as an element of soft power relies on media communication to inform and influence the public (Guo and Vargo, 2017; Golan and Himelboim, 2016). T.-y. Ting (2010) holds the view that foreign news reporting has been influenced by a global consciousness — foreign news going global or going transnational — which re-established the genre’s contemporary appeal.

Definitions and Conceptualisations

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) description of the relationship between journalism and politics, while commenting on television, produced a definition that quite fits what we today call “foreign news”. Bourdieu described TV as:

a series of apparently absurd stories that all end up looking the same, endless parades of poverty-stricken countries, sequences of events that, having appeared with no explanation, will disappear with no solution — Zaire today, Bosnia yesterday, the Congo tomorrow (p. 7).
Supporting the illusory nature of foreign news, Bella Mody (2010) borrowed an allusion from Walter Lippmann to explain foreign news as our individual construction of a “picture in our heads” of distant places. These two descriptions reflect the understanding of Fergal Keane (2004) about his three decades career as a Foreign News Correspondent for the BBC World Service. He asserted that “since the end of colonialism, Western correspondents have stood in front of emaciated Africans or piles of African bodies and used the language of the Old Testament to mediate the horrors to their audiences” (p. 9). Foreign news on Africa should seemingly contain a sound bite from “white angels of mercy consisting of aid agencies, a brave white reporter and a backdrop of wretched African masses” (ibid.). Foreign correspondents and aid workers believed that, by doing so, the audience in Europe “related” better to the stories they were sending; “just as it’s always been and always will be, they [the readers or audience] think, but for the goodness of our brave reporters and aid workers” (ibid.).

The representation of Africa as a failed and passive site in constant need of foreign assistance has occupied other researchers (Nothias, 2012; B’béri and Louw, 2011). The representation is not only unhealthy, but perpetuates some values and stereotypes through a kind of register that supports the continuation of oppression by the Global North (Said, 1978). Daniel Bach (2013) argues that the news narrative of Africa as the next business destination is also “an invitation to call back the ghosts of explorers, soldiers and sellers who each in their own way once discovered Africa” (p. 11). Because foreign news is a “major source of gaining knowledge, for most citizens of developed nations, about the foreign others” (Mody, 2010, p. 3), it occupies a crucial space in our knowledge formation. Ines Wolter (2006) continued this line of thinking and explained that the way the West perceives and reacts to people from different parts of the world depends largely on how these countries have been reported in the Western media. Victoria Schorr (2011) adds that negative reportage on Africa has implications for the flow of finance, trade and tourism to the continent and this informs intercultural relations too. Schorr’s arguments were confirmed when audience research in developed nations suggested that media representations have an impact on how audiences in the Northern Hemisphere perceive Africa (Borowski, 2012). In Jo Fair’s (1993)
assessments of race in the construction of Africa’s media image in the USA, she contends that the Western public’s beliefs about the African continent, its people and countries, are largely informed by media-produced content, since no Western school system studies the continent in any significant form. Media coverage then remains a very useful element of education and a point of influence, relevant to understanding the representation of Africa among Western and non-Western societies, including African countries themselves. To Fair (1993), the problem is not just representation of Africa in the news media “per se, but the social implications and possible consequences for social representation and social reality are intimately entwined” (p. 1). She then argues that the historic exploitation of Africa was supported through the slave trade, colonial and postcolonial relations which continue to permeate Western representations of Africa with scope and complexity. Fair (1993) further suggests that representing some people as Others, and with negative images, serves to maintain and perpetuate social inequalities and “offer justification for the need to have colonised them” (p. 18).

Karikari (1992) suggests that the British colonial governments in Ghana, and other parts of Africa, used the Western press to propagate their agenda. This colonial tactic has not quite ended, according to D. M. Mengara (2001), since a predominantly racist view persists in the West about Africa, because the Africa we see today is European-made. Boulou Ebanda de B’Ber and P. Eric Louw (2011) contend that Africa has had no influence on or input into the negative and stereotypical representation it has received from Northern media organisations, and therefore does not have the ability to change the representation. With these arguments in mind, it is clear that media texts convey meaning and need to be handled in a manner that minimises negative portrayal. However, the investigation of international television news agencies by Chris Paterson (2011) drew our attention back to the concept of media imperialism, as he contended that the images we all share, and which substantially shape our political, economic and cultural lives, come almost entirely from two similar newsrooms in London. “This process of globalisation”, he said, “is also a process of imperialism which has been hugely ignored in the globalisation discourse for the past three decades” (p. 18). Paterson provided further instances of how one could explore the extent to which contemporary imperialism has evolved to include
US and China, and how these countries have been made especially visible through the activities of global media (Paterson, 2017).

Mel Bunce et al. (2017) contends that the Northern press’s news construction of Africa as a business destination — as a claim of improvement — still constitutes a postcolonial critique. But for the economic standstill and ageing population in the Northern Hemisphere, Africa would not have enjoyed this tag that it rightfully deserved. The *Africa rising* discourse has other contexts too. For example, as a new economic giant (China) appears aggressively to compete with the Northern economic influences on the African continent; for this reason, Africa needs to be better presented in the West as a place for investments opportunities. Apart from the fact that this isn’t significantly different from the binary discourse of the Cold War, it is also contradictory to contemporary experiences of some journalists on the continent who are still faced with the *Old Testament* discourse, like Mohammed Amin recounted in an interview with Chris Paterson in 1995 (cited in Bunce et al., 2017, p. 2).

There’s a mentality. Nigeria — those elections a few years ago (1993) — and I was talking to my editor, wanting us to put in a crew in Nigeria. And the response was “Is there going to be trouble?” Well, my answer was, “There’s a reasonably good chance there will be trouble, but this is an important country. Should we not be covering the elections? If there is trouble, of course, we cover the trouble as well”. “Well”, they said, “... if there are dead bodies on the streets of Lagos we’ve got to go in there”. Now, you know, I am sick of that sort of an attitude! I wonder if the same editor would think like that if there are coming elections in Britain or France or America — that you’ve got to wait until there are dead bodies in the street... They think alike about Africa.

Again, Bunce (2015) claimed that local journalists’ involvement in the field of foreign news production presents a diversity that results in healthy power dynamics, reflecting what African news should look like. But Salim Amin dissent from this claim when he argued, in the same collected edition, that Al Jazeera’s launch was a perfect beginning with double capability and visibility on the continent compared to other international news media. However, the network was headquartered outside of the continent and “final decisions, on what the news must look like were taken by men and women with little knowledge of the continent” (Amin, 2017, pp. 96–97).
The growing need to cut cost in reporting on foreign countries has also resulted in a situation known in procurement terms as *sole-sourcing*. News *sole-sourcing* means buying agency material on specific items from one foreign news agency. This phenomenon significantly affects journalism’s cannons of objectivity and impartiality, per the analysis of Paterson (2011), because it contributes to the “reinforcement of the hegemony of the two powerful news agencies in London and that is inherently partial” (p. 13).

Stuart Hall (1986, p. 86) similarly argued that the “media’s illusive nature of presenting what it called an objective and impartial news, which usually either established a dominant ideological discursive field as a valid or partial explanation as comprehensive, remains contentious.” When news agencies are running as businesses and even engage in mergers and acquisitions as well as increasing the shareholders’ wealth, it becomes more difficult to accept that the views they express are free of interests and represent the public good. While the MacBride and Sreberny reports mentioned five dominant news agencies in the 1980s, Paterson (2011) confirmed the dominance of only two agencies, whom not even the mighty British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), with all its foreign correspondents, can do without for a week.

The debate to validate the global media’s power to influence foreign policy continues unabated. However, there is ample evidence presented by Piers Robinson (2002, p. 123) that media influences foreign policy. Robinson’s argument supports the claim that “the CNN effect is a factor in influencing policy-makers’ decisions to intervene during humanitarian crises.” In a rather critical approach, Eytan Gilboa (2005) contended that even though the CNN effect had been exaggerated, it did not affect the fact that the global news networks play multiple roles in policy-making, diplomacy and international relations, and that rigorous theoretical and methodological frameworks are required to better establish the roles and their effects. It is quite clear then that the reporting of Africa in the global media needs to be accurate and comprehensive to be able to attract the necessary attention the continent deserves in order to develop. Indeed, Vincent Price and Edward Czilli (1996) substantiate the fact that among the several factors predicting news recall, the intensity of foreign news coverage is a good predictor of an audience’s understanding of international affairs.
However, other scholars contest the direction of influence between the foreign media and Western foreign policy. Is it the Western media that drives US foreign policy or is the Western media driven by US foreign policy? Christian Fuchs (2010) supports the latter, arguing that the neo-imperialist project is significantly kept alive by the contemporary corporate transnational media, who act in line with US foreign policy. Hall (2013) makes the argument even more comprehensive when he stated that external participation in Africa has been dodgy with developed nations using international corporations in labour, resources, consumers markets and land to cover their real activities. However, Bunce et al. (2017) raised a thoughtful question: “Are these evolving interventions exploitative or cooperative, and does a discourse of neo-imperialism itself support a neo-colonial media image of Africa as a continent and one fifth of the world’s population incapable of autonomy” (p. 7).

The editor of *New African* magazine, Baffour Ankomah, suggests that political ideology, Western government foreign policy, economic interest and *historical baggage* are the major reasons why Africa remains negatively reported in the Western media. In this statement, Ankomah (2011) implies that the Western press is driven by Western foreign policy. He further highlights the central role played by American political ideology in Western media reporting on Africa. To quote a cover story of the *New African* magazine, he notes that:

if the western government foreign policy favours you, their media will favour you, their media will consider you, but if they are against you, then you cannot escape what Lord Beaverbrook referred to as a “flaming sword” which cuts through political armour (Ankomah, 2008, p. 12).

A classic example of Ankomah’s analogy is the claim by Kirsten Bookmiller and Robert Bookmiller (1992) that the coverage of the Algerian War of Independence, from 1954 to 1962, labelled supporters of the resistance as communist-friendly and as a result of these sensational labels, many Americans were prevented from understanding the real issues of the Algerian war. This strategy supports America’s foreign policy towards France. Public perception of Africa in countries where negative news is the order of the day remains negative, simply because, in most cases, the population exclusively relies on media information for understanding Africa.
As highlighted by Suzanne Franks (2006), an online BBC survey in 2004 reported a staggering 73% of its respondents in the UK were unaware of the Millennium Development Goals. The UK public’s lack of awareness of these goals makes it more difficult for them to demand better coverage from their public broadcasters, and, because there is no demand for increased or improved coverage, the media coverage of such development goals diminishes. This occurs because most audiences in Western countries do not understand the frameworks put in place to overcome the challenges within the Millennium Development Goals, especially poverty, and the progress that has been made in that regard in the Global South. This results in a vicious cycle where Northern media practitioners argue that they are gauging the taste of their audiences, as if the audiences are capable of evaluating their “news tastes” under these circumstances.

The absence of regular correspondents and news attention on Africa is not the only factor affecting the quality of foreign reporting on Africa; longer television documentaries, providing adequate context and balanced education, are also in decline. The Third World and Environment Broadcasting Project has tracked television coverage of developing countries between 1989 and 2003; they reported that Africa received the least television coverage in terms of documentary and education programmes (Dover Barnett, 2004). Western news media’s decision to focus on the Rwandan refugee crisis, as opposed to the Rwandan genocide, fits into a well-known, conventionalised understanding of Africa as a place where adverse events happen, and where Africans are in constant need of Western intervention and assistance (Girardet, 1996). The events reported on are homogenously negative in nature — a phenomenon referred to as “coup and earthquakes” syndrome by Mort Rosenblum (1979). A. L. Dahir (as cited in Akinfeleye et al., 2009) summarised the content of CNN and Reuters reporting on specific programmes and made allusion to what “the Nigerian journalist, Pascal Eze calls […] ‘PIDIC Perspective’: poverty, instability, disease, illiteracy, and corruption” (p. 452). To Dahir, it does not matter who hosted the programme; the images are still negative even when people of African descent host programmes on Western networks. There is rarely space for an alternative view of Africans. H. W. French (2017) wrote to The New York Times complaining of an extraordinary approach by the network
“to render black people of African ancestry voiceless and invisible”. He described their work on Africa as a “scene of misery: people whose thoughts, experiences and actions were treated totally of no interest” (p. 38). Over the years, Western journalists and media owners have defended themselves by resorting to the argument that they are catering to a perceived taste of their immediate Western audience who require context for them to understand the news on Africa (Hawk, 1992).

Another act of defence is the Talloires Declaration, a conference held in France, to denounce UNESCO’s promotion of New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The conference stated that “Press freedom is a basic human right” (p.16). Kaarle Nordenstreng (2010) offers two explanations to refute that declaration. First, the subject under international law from which “the right to freedom of opinion and expression” emanates is the individual (everyone) not the media (press). Second, the human right, which is invoked here, “comes with duties and responsibilities and could not be exercised in a manner that is dangerous to the interest of the international community” (p. 10) and preservation of peace and security. The popular “vast wasteland” speech by Newton Minow in 1961 to the American Federal Communication Commission (FCC) conference brings two elements to the fore that established the responsibility required of reporters in most Western democracies:

First, what you gentlemen broadcast through the people’s air affects the people’s taste, their knowledge, their opinions, their understanding of themselves and of their world — and their future. Second, the people own the air. And they own it as much in prime evening time as they do at six o’clock Sunday morning. For every hour that the people give you ... you owe them something. And I intend to see that your debt is paid with service (p. 14).

Minow is asking for American journalists to be responsible about the quality of their service to the American people. Nordenstreng (2010) and H. Eek (1997) however, have asked for an extension of these principles to foreign countries or foreign Others. Nordenstreng (2010) argues that even though “NWICO was attacked as a curb on media freedom, in reality, the concept was designed to widen and deepen the freedom of information by increasing its balance and diversity on a global scale” (p. 3).
This section has explored some of the arguments regarding NWICO, the MacBride and Sreberny-Mohammadi reports. It also highlighted some of the defences Western journalists and institutions raise against the new world order request and how inconsistent their defence is in relation to international law. The next section describes the opportunities presented by the Internet and the digital era as a way of dealing with foreign otherness.

Opportunities in the Digital and Internet Era

The digital age brought with it a number of promises regarding how foreign coverage, both in the press in the Northern Hemisphere and the within the African continent, could improve. Many of these promises to tackle problems in foreign news reporting and journalism relied on ideas about the ease of the Internet. A prominent problem to arise was the issue of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, resulting in the closure of foreign news bureaus. Levi Obijiofor and F. Hanusch (2011) describe the lone person reporter — an individual equipped with the necessary digital regalia to cover events around the world — as the innovation that will transform foreign news in many ways, both positively and negatively.

The sharp decline in foreign news around the world has been well established in media studies literature (Altmeppen, 2010; Wolter, 2006; and Franks, 2005). The most disturbing dimension of this phenomenon is that it counters scholars’ predictions that the digital age would offer increased opportunities for wider global coverage. Indeed, Simon Cottle (2009) has expressed dissatisfaction with the capacity of journalists and media organisations to capture diverse issues of global concern. While the impact of technology is clearly visible in multiple ways, it has nonetheless defied the expectations of role allocation that occupied researchers at the beginning of the Internet era.

Rachel Flamenbaum (2017) describes how Ghanaians negotiated the social media terrain in a manner that puts the Africa rising discourse to positive use and engenders agency. She argues that a conscious effort took place to represent Ghana and Africa positively and with optimistic interpretations of experiences that have habitually been negated throughout history by Western countries. To Flamenbaum, the notion
of New Ghana seems to reject the enduring narratives of negativity and economic failure that pervade postcolonial West Africa, both inwardly and outwardly. However, the fact that this social media activism has not become prominent on mainstream media demonstrates the limited extent to which this positive agency over narrating Africa has travelled beyond the continent.

Coverage of African News

The coverage of news in Africa has been investigated with varied perspectives and from different geopolitical positions. Harvey Feinberg and Joseph Solodow (2002) examine the long legacy of Africa’s negative image through an exploration of the adage “always something new coming out of Africa”, the origins of which can be traced to ancient Greece. They demonstrate that the phrase, which Aristotle made allusion to, was a proverb originating in Greece no later than the fourth century BC. As such, as Feinberg and Solodow argue, the phrase can be used as evidence for the long history of Africa’s Otherness.

In line with the arguments of this book, the following sections will deal with the reporting of Africa in the press in the Northern Hemisphere, and the African press itself. This contrast will reveal the wide evolution of the systemic Afro-pessimism concept, especially in the African continent itself. This is not to argue that African journalists are not doing better than their Western counterparts in covering the continent, but rather that the present state of affairs is in part accounted for by centuries of domination, resulting in an endemic dependence syndrome. This argument is substantiated by the findings of this book.

It is also useful to highlight recent research finding that the coverage of Africa in Western countries was not as negative as previous researchers have argued; Obijiofor and Mairead MacKinnon (2016) argue that the concept of negative representation of Africa in the Western media could not be empirically supported in the case of Australia. They claim that the Australian press “devoted a modest amount of coverage to African news. All four regions of the continent received coverage” (p. 41). Meanwhile, Martin Scott (2009, 2015) argues that because studies asserting the prevalence of Afro-pessimism had barely covered North Africa, Francophone Africa, non-news genres, non-elite media and
radio content, it is problematic for such studies to propose generalised conclusions regarding the nature of media coverage of Africa. He contends that the “assumption that representations are dominated by Afro-pessimism, for example, maybe accurate — but it is not currently substantiated by the existing evidence” (p. 191).

**Reporting Africa in the Press in the Northern Hemisphere**

Several aspects of the coverage of Africa in the dominant media of the Northern Hemisphere are presently examined. The most significant aspects are the nature and amount of coverage, and the possible reasons accounting for the nature and amount of coverage. Specifically, coverage is insignificant in terms of number, but significant in terms of negativity and stereotypical representation — a concept that has become known as *Afro-pessimism*. In this section, I review scholarly works conducted on the reasons for the nature and amount of coverage Africa receives in the Northern press.

The term *Afro-pessimism* suggests that Africa has little or no prospect of positive development (Schmidt and Garrett, 2011, p. 423; Evans, 2011, p. 400). *Afro-pessimism* can be very difficult to explain because it is an expansive concept. In this book, I adopt four parameters in order to evaluate it. The first parameter — in accordance with Bunce (2017), Anju Chaudhary (2001) and Susan Moeller (1999) — is subject matter: stories that focus exclusively on events that are negative in nature, such as famine, disease, wars, poverty and killings. The second parameter is the tone of the reportage, that is, when an event or policy is negatively evaluated on the whole, whilst ignoring positive aspects that are also crucial to the discussion. The third parameter is the omission or silence on some parts of a complex reality, either consciously or inadvertently, either because of a lack of native knowledge or because the media or reporting body in question adopts a simplistic posture in reporting complex issues (Nyamnjoh, 2017; Mody, 2010; Hawk, 1992). The fourth parameter is the negation of positive stories by framing them against an outdated or unrelated contextual background. For example, when Nigeria’s new commitment to democratic changes of government is discussed as a positive, within the same reporting story, there is context material stating that “Nigeria is that West African country where 200
girls have been abducted by Boko Haram”. Even though this is factual, one wonders what it is doing in a story recounting a positive event about Nigeria’s democratic changes.

The Western media coverage of Africa, Africans and African issues has always been problematic, because these media reports are informed by Western ideas, ideology and political positions. Beverly Hawk (1992) explains this broadly:

Africa is special because there is little common understanding between Africans and Americans to provide context for interpretation. Furthermore, unusual historical relations have shaped knowledge regarding Africa. These repertoires of knowledge, symbols and prior structuring of Africa are a Western creation. Where African news is concerned, then, American readers are in special need of contextualised information with which to interpret the meaning of reported events (p. 4).

Hawk (1992) added that the simplest way to communicate the African story in a comprehensible form, in limited space, is by reductionist colonial metaphors familiar to the reader, especially that of the tribe and collective “Africa”. The resulting media image is a “crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilisation” (p. 9). According to S. Franks (2005), the stories should fit into the usual frames of famine, disaster and bizarre traditional practices for it to make it in the Western media. Paddy Coulter, former head of communications at Oxfam and now with the Reuters Foundation, called for the need to sustain good reporting on Africa when he admonished journalists as follows:

We need to break out of the cycle where editors complain that there are never any good ideas about Africa and producers claim that editors are never interested anyway. The challenge is to come up with imaginative and challenging ideas so that Africa continues to command serious coverage in years to come (Franks, 2005, p. 134)

Coulter’s expression is an example of self-reflection and reflexivity; two crucial self-questioning elements that he and most other journalists lack during their training and practicing career. Mody (2010) highlights these concerns by asking, “whose version does the foreign news ‘represent’, anytime it is reported, what does it emphasise and what is it silent on?” (p. 13). According to Mody, journalists are limited by the conditions under which they work (deadlines, threats to their life, political hurdles
and lack of language capacity) to answer those questions. Apart from the lack of reflexivity, “journalists forget either knowingly or unknowingly how stereotypes and myths which have under-girded colonialism remain unchallenged by both the Western media and the journalists themselves” (Mody, 2010, p. 3; Harth, 2012, p. 2).

David Slater (2004) argues that the West has not only failed to engage in self-reflection of its dark past, but it also has virtually no counter-representation from the developing countries. According to Amy Harth (2012), during the Cold War — where there was the representation of ideas and counter-representations based on individual bloc ideologies — African countries were engaged in liberation movements for the establishment of the right to self-determination. Harth further establishes that this preoccupation of the African people was even misreported as the ensuing conflicts were mostly constructed as proxy wars between the USA and the USSR within the Cold War paradigm. Harth (2012) contends that the overwhelming success of colonialism continues “to cause the Western media to perpetuate unquestioned ingrained stereotypes and myths that were created in order to justify colonial conquest and racially-based exploitation and these account for the continued under-representation and misrepresentation of Africa in the Western media” (p. 3). Francis Nyamnjoh (2017) calls for plurality in the perspectives on Africa, since such plurality recognises that the single Northern media perspective — with its exclusive prerogatives — is inherently misrepresentative of Africa because, like any other identity, the African identity is a work in progress.

The issues omitted or not reported are equally essential. One way to shape stories about Africa, to conform both to current policy objectives and to the conventional understanding of most US readers, is simply not to report them. “The single most common form of media misrepresentation” regarding the developing countries “is omission” (Mody, 2010; Parenti, 1993, p. 192). Hawk (1992, p. 6) continues by noting that “Africa is truly ‘covered’ by the Western press in the sense that important stories go unreported”. There is also the neglect of the power of global corporations to investigate important issues like food, mass killings and crises (Shiva, 2009; Tunstall, 2008). Keane (2004) requested to see from his colleague journalists in the Western media, stories of resilient African newspapers, broadcast media and civic
Benefitting from the State of the Art

society working hard to improve the continent’s fortunes. The story of Salim Amin, son of the famous cameraman Mohamed Amin of Nairobi, paints a pathetic picture of these omissions. He argues, “We cannot sell anything positive about Africa even though we do plenty of positive stories, on subjects other than war and disaster, but they are mainly for an African audience now, because we cannot move them internationally” (BBC History Seminar, 24 November 2004 cited in Franks, 2005, p. 133).

Oliver Boyd-Barrett (2004) argues that the over-reliance on official sources in foreign news reporting results in the neglect for causes, processes and consequences of events. Mody (2010, p. 16) supports this notion and further explains that “lack of ideas and explanations about root-causes obfuscates understanding that could lead to real change.” Mody argues that the coercion from the West, which interrupted the indigenous development of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, has its impacts on modern-day difficulties in the colonies. Discussing the troubles of the colonies, such as poverty, only from the perspective of civil war, corruption and incompetent institutions, is to say that colonisation, class relations, divide and rule, exploitations and structured injustices never existed, or if they did exist, they had no impact on the continent’s path of development. Mody (2010) establishes that “hunger, disease, death and illiteracy are symptoms of a more basic structural cause that is historically situated and globally interconnected...” (pp. 16–17).

Walter Lippmann (1922, p. 30) reasoned that there are images that limit journalists’ access to facts, such as:

- artificial censorship, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meagre time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs,
- the distortion arising because events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world....

Lippmann’s assertions explained the shallow manner in which Western journalists tackle the reporting of complicated issues in Africa. However, all too often, the journalists appear to have a good idea already of the portion of these complications that relates to the contribution of colonialism and interconnectedness of the world today. Lippmann termed this as the pictures inside that so often mislead men in their dealings with the outside world. Even though Lippmann’s main
concern was with the *Self and Other*, these are the issues that have taken a macro shape in today’s geopolitical debate.

The American journalism author, James Carey, substantiates Lippmann’s assertions. He maintains that the idea of *explanation* is inconsistent with the profession of journalism’s insistence on *facts*. No matter how useful explanation will be to a text, journalists are not interested because they do not have the space or time, and someone else must vet their work using simple objective and mechanistic rules. Boyd-Barrett (2004) defers from Carey’s position, arguing that the propagandist and selective nature of US war reporting, could not be the result only of journalism’s insistence on facts, but also ideology. Harth (2012) and Mody (2010) claim that the colonial hangover and geopolitical terrain of twenty-first century reporting are contributory elements to this debate. Joanne Sharp (1993, p. 491) gave a broader view to this discussion when she argued that the “mass media provide the context within which elite geopolitical texts are produced, disseminated and received.” To her, this is crucial because the rippling effects of these press images, and public discourses on them, eventually get established as conversational wisdom. Garth Myers, Thomas Klak and Timothy Koehl (1996) investigate Western media coverage of Rwandan and Bosnian wars and demonstrate that, through such practices mentioned by Sharp, “many unequal power relationships are articulated, reinforced and perpetuated” (p. 22).

Frames with which Western media cover Africa have not improved because the actors have not changed. News agencies, according to Mody (2010) and Paterson (2011), have become hegemonic in nature, and are relied on by most Western news organisations to an extent unlike anything before. Bunce et al. (2017) observe a few improvements when comparing two time periods, which presents a hopeful look at the future; however, no consistent picture of change exists among the dominant Northern media organisations.

At this point, I will review some specific studies on the coverage of Africa in the Western media. The claim that Africa is hardly covered in the Western press has been established by many scholars (Galtung and Ruge 1965; MacBride, 1980; Sreberny et al., 1985; Hawk, 1992, Fair, 1993; Franks, 2005; Mody, 2010). However, one insightful approach to confirming these studies was the study conducted by Myers et al. (1996),
using comparative research that analysed US newspapers’ coverage of civil wars in Bosnia (Europe) and Rwanda (Africa). Rwanda recorded 560 articles and Bosnia 14,114 articles within the same period. Bosnia was covered twenty-five times more than Rwanda, irrespective of the magnitude of the conflict in Rwanda. The articles on Bosnia were twice more elaborate on strategies and tactics than the ones on Rwanda. There was significantly less/almost no usage, in many cases, of the terms “tribal” and “ethnic” in the description of the Bosnian war, while the Rwandan reports were filled more than forty times with these terms. Myers et al. (1996, p. 36) contends that the “US press depiction of Bosnia’s war is that it is a logical and considered outcome of historical events while Rwanda’s war is simply centuries-old tribal savagery.” These negative frames, according to Myers et al. (1996), were constructed by the “US press almost entirely from non-Africa sources who depicted Africa as a timeless and placeless realm of ‘tribal’ conflict, the repository of deep-seated US fears of African ‘Others’” (p. 21).

Moreover, there is also the issue of journalistic error. M. Robins (2003) analysed the coverage of the Sudanese Lost Boys by top US newspapers, and found that the stories were presented out of context and many of them contained discrepancies in the details of Sudan’s civil war. Robin’s study indicates that “rather than showing an increased sensitivity to international news, many newspapers just recycled incomplete images of Africa that fit into the American expectations and dominant foreign policy discourse in that country” (p. 45). Erroneous and negative press coverage of Africa is fundamental to the knowledge of the citizens in those Western countries where these publications are made. In a public attitudes survey, Deborah Lader (2007, p. 3) reports that “47 per cent of UK citizens use newspapers as a source of information about the lives of poor people in Africa.” The results from Andrew Darnton’s Public Perceptions of Poverty (PPP) study show that while tabloid readers were, on average, less likely to agree with the statement “we need trade justice, not free trade” (Darnton, 2005a, p. 12), broadsheet readers were, on average, more likely to be “very concerned” about poverty in poor countries (Darnton, 2005b, p. 6). Although the correlation between press coverage and audience understanding suggested by these studies does not prove causality, it does give a strong indication of the influence of Western media portrayal of Africa on the citizens of their respective countries.
In 2007, the President of Rwanda, Paul Kagame, admitted: “the constant negative reporting of Africa kills the growth of direct foreign investment. There have been suggestions that this is meant to keep Africa in the backyard of the global economy” (Ankomah, 2008, p. 146). In essence, some studies have linked Africa’s negative media image to the perception of the continent held by some people and institutions in the Northern Hemisphere. H. M. El Zein and Anne Cooper (1992) examined The New York Times’ coverage of Africa for roughly two decades. They found that Africa constituted 15% to 20% of all international news coverage and over half of the continent’s countries were never mentioned at all. For those mentioned, 53.8% to 87.7% of the coverage related to crises. Africa received extremely little front-page coverage except in a few cases concerning brutal warfare. Due to the concepts of “pack and parachute journalism” (Fair, 1993, p. 9) and the growing hegemony in global newsgathering, this particular example is unlikely to differ from the situations elsewhere in most Western nations. The Voluntary Service Overseas’s Live Aid Legacy studies, cited in Scott (2009), investigated the nature of the negative portrayal of Africa and found that perceptions of Africa were markedly different from perceptions of other areas of the developing world. The study identifies that negative frames found in Africa consist of poverty and famine, and these conditions are understood to be the result of circumstantial and “natural” factors.

A. S. de Beer (2010) launched a new conversation, arguing that, due to globalisation, news media content could no longer be pinned to a territory or to previous binary concepts as national/international, core/periphery. Beer argues for a disruption of these binary categorisations, both because these binaries do not exist in reality, and because the assumption that Africa is predominantly reported as a hopeless continent is itself changing, especially as a result of the significant progress that has been reported in the work of Minabere Ibelema and Tanja Bosch (2009). In line with this thinking, Scott (2015) suggested that Africa’s “negative” representation in the US and UK press has little empirical evidence supporting it. To him, the claim that the coverage is characterised by essentialisation, racialisation, selectivity, ethnocentric ranking and predictions lacks a typology until fairly recently (see the typology of Afro-pessimism in Nothias, 2015). He further refers to
the body of literature making such claims as reliant on “widespread vagueness surrounding the ontologies of Africa and the ways in which representations of Africa are understood to contribute to the construction of Africa” (p. 206). Toussaint Nothias (2017) provided further empirical support for Scott’s work through textual analysis of British and French newspapers – complemented by interviews. He found that the claims about the coverage of Africa being systematically tribal and dark, relying predominantly on Western voices and homogenous in portrayal, are not empirically supported.

Reporting Africa in the African Press

This section provides a review of previous studies that have focused on how the African press reported the continent, as a whole, and some events in particular. The coverage African countries receive from each other reflects in some instances their foreign policy. John Lent (1976, p. 181) argues that foreign news reporting in developing countries depended on their ties with the superpowers, colonial background, relationship with neighbouring countries, economic infrastructure, governmental stability and professional training of journalists. Due to those factors, countries in Western Europe and North America have become a “semi-permanent” option for these developing countries. Nigerian coverage of foreign news has been linked to the country’s foreign policy and socio-cultural ties (Nwuneli and Udoh, 1982; da Costa, 1980). O. E. Nwuneli and O. Dare (1977) found that the recognition of the People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) government by Nigerian federal government led to an increase in the volume of news about Angola in the Nigerian press around that time. In addition to this foreign policy move by the Nigerian government, the Nigerian press also depended heavily on foreign news agencies for their coverage, confirming Lent’s (1976) assertion regarding proxy coverage through colonial- and superpowers.

Emmanuel Alozie (2007) studied the pattern dominating the coverage and analyses of the 1994 Rwandan crisis in two leading African newspapers: the Kenyan Daily Nation, and the Nigerian The Guardian. He found that both papers attempted to explore the background and implication of the crisis more than their Western counterparts. This success was attributed to their “greater understanding of the underlying
matters that affect the continent” (p. 226). The proximity of Kenya to Rwanda and their national interest in the crisis resulted in prolonged coverage and a deeper background, compared to Nigerian coverage of the crisis.

The Framework of the African Press

In this section, the conceptual explication of how the African press reports itself is introduced. This is followed by a discussion of the influence of transnational global news media on the African press, the goals of Pan-African News Agency (PANA) press, the relationship between new media technologies and foreign news, and previous research on how selected African media reported some countries on the continent.

The colonial domination of the African continent for centuries significantly shaped the way people on the continent and elsewhere formed their identity. To Frantz Fanon (2008, originally published 1952), this resulted in a situation where the colonised lost the possibility for autonomous cultural identity, and where legitimacy can only be gained through the taking on of Western ideals. Stuart Hall (1997) equally demonstrated that negative representation of a group of people affects the group’s self-identity, which becomes shaped by how they are seen by others.

In the light of these assertions, coupled with Galtung and Mari Ruge’s seminal findings (1965) — that a feudal interaction structure keeps dominated nations in the periphery, with little or no communication within or between these nations — no analysis of the African press should ignore the powerful impact of the past, and the way in which it re-enacts itself even today. This lack of news flow among African countries, coupled with an increasing conglomeration within the international news agency sector, makes the African news organisations even more vulnerable, than their European counterparts, to depending on agency materials for much of their work. Nyamnjoh (2017) explains that the call for African perspectives is not a claim that African journalists will escape stereotypes and misrepresentations when reporting the continent; it is rather a call to recognise that other views exist.

One of the uses of investigating foreign news flow among African countries, as in this study, is to show how Africa has been affected
by both the psychological mechanism described by Fanon and the hegemonic conglomeration of the foreign news agency sector (Paterson, 2011). These perspectives on coverage have thus far been absent from the discussion, as previous studies (Akinfeleye et al., 2009; Pate, 1992 and Sobowale, 1987) concluding that African media were doing no better than their Western counterparts failed to investigate the predominant sources employed by the African press in these reports, and the roots of journalism education on the continent. Equally crucial is the economic capacity of the African press and the worldwide growing hegemony within the foreign news sector.

One crucial element in informing ourselves about one another is education. Since most African countries do not study the continent well enough within their school systems or through exchange programmes, a palpable knowledge gap exists across the continent itself that plays into the idea of relying on the former colonial master’s news about the continent. Kuselwa Gongo (2007), in analysing South Africa’s *Sunday City Press* newspaper, in the light of the paper’s repositioning as distinctly African, concludes that *City Press* could not uphold the ideals of the African Renaissance and African nationalism in its reporting of Africa since much of what it reported only related to Africans in South Africa: “the huge knowledge gap about the continent among the South African reporters and editors was a major defect” (p. 147). In a speech to the Editor’s Forum of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development), former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, asked African journalists to report on Africa especially effectively, because they were first Africans to become journalists, and it is paramount to put an end to the dangerous state of unknowing about the continent (Mbeki, 2003).

**Western Education and Media Assistance**

Diffusion of modernisation and innovation and its spread around the world can be traced to different forms of dependence by most developing countries on their developed counterparts. The relatedness of journalism training to the lingering Cold War diplomatic strategy of influence and spread of democratic governance has been established in media studies literature (Miller, 2009; Becker and Tudor, 2005). Ellen Hume (2004) argues that the developed nations came to appreciate, based on the
experience from Eastern Europe, that “providing assistance to local, independent media is a vital way to promote freedom and democracy” (p. 110). Some scholars have traced this continued support for the media in developing countries to historical antecedents. Thomas McPhail (2006) argued that the world communication system we live in today is “an outgrowth of prior colonial patterns reflecting commercial and market imperatives” (p. 13). In fact, media culture is “transnational” in that it operates on a global scale, and is being produced by transnational media-conglomerates who have a good understanding of the linkage between the “logic of media and the logic of transnational capital” and the “satisfaction transnational elites” stand to get (Rønning, 1997, pp. 13–15).

James Scotton and Sharon Murphy (1987) argue that the adoption of the American model on the African continent was partly due to the choice of sponsors of journalism training on the continent at the time. Winston Mano (2005) holds the view that transnational media organisations undermine various democratic processes in Africa, but often these disruptions are covered by their exercise of a positive influence on media development across the continent (Barker, 2008). These arguments represent reinforcements of previous positions held by scholars on Africa’s historical entanglements. Walter Rodney (1981) posits that the aim of British colonial education, which is still prominent in African universities, was to turn the African into a “fair-minded English-man” (p. 248). Ali Mazrui (1978) asserts that whether the education be British or French, the “African might, therefore, be regarded as the reflections of the total cultural orientations of the countries which ruled them” (p. 12). The fact that the African artists can be noticed from their colonial background is evidence of “the phenomenon of cultural dependency in all its ramifications” (p. 13).

Scotton and Murphy (1987), referring to Mazrui and others’ line of argument of Mazrui, contend that “African students even at the university level were taught to be critical of all values they have learned previously in the African setting” (p. 13), which results in the disowning of previous African values and taking on new Western ideals as a sign of being educated. They argue that journalism education programmes in Africa are largely patterned directly on those in Europe and the United States to an extent that these programmes could be moved to the US,
for example, “without changing texts, curriculum, or instructors” (p. 12). They also argue that the resistance to the adoption of a complete American model in the newly independent African states, staged by Britain and France, through the offer of various journalism training programmes in Europe were rather damaging, because it resulted in a competition over influence, rather than prioritising the development of the African press.

The lack of change reported by Scotton and Murphy can be traced in the argument of Terje Skjerdal (2012) that the African journalists today “regard themselves as members of a wider professional community beyond the continent while simultaneously maintaining a local identity” (p. 649). This provides a hint of the new space, which is partly Western and partly African. However, this conceptual hybrid space is characterised by a lopsided relationship. J. K. Domatob (1988) argues that the lopsidedness of this power relation is evident in the heavy dependence of sub-Saharan African media on neo-colonial status quo with regards to “training, policies, technology, news values, language, and advertising” (p. 151). Domatob further argues that an attempt to decolonise the Western model of communication and the “ideology of dependence remains difficult” (p. 171). The application of Western media practices in the African context unequivocally represents a reinforcement of neo-colonialism (Banda, 2008a) and undermines and misrepresents local culture (Sesanti, 2009).

Nancy Holm (2016) maintains that the entire Bologna Process to standardise journalism education across Europe has contributed to the formation of best practices, which she argues, always conflicts cultural values. In her case study of Denmark, Holm posits that the acceptance of Anglo-American on-camera presentation styles violates deeply-held Danish cultural values. She further asserts that cultural values matter and journalism educators need to pay attention to them even in the era of globalisation. According to Guy Berger (2014), “the ethos is one of journalism schools worldwide that relate to media experiences and educational recipes, which are assumed to be applicable worldwide” (p. 33). Berger concludes with this underpinning argument that journalism education around the world is not same and, as such, African institutions teaching journalism have begun defining their own specificity, with regards to excellence, in this heterogeneous communication field. This leads us to our next section, which discusses how technology is affecting
dependence on Western agencies and shaping foreign news reporting worldwide. By answering some of the rhetorical questions posed by Obijiofor (2009, pp. 51–52), we will be better placed to understand the context we are dealing with:

... how have technological changes such as Internet impacted the image of Africa in the western media and to what extent have African news organisations been able to source their news without relying on multinational news agencies?

**New Media Technologies, the Internet and Economic Rationality**

William Hachten (2004, p. 87) sets the tone for this sub-section:

If Africa is to develop economically and politically in the coming years, Western news media must do a better job of reporting events there. But even more important, African nations must acquire free and independent news media of their own — news systems that utilize the new information technologies communication satellites, global television, high-speed computer exchanges — that most of the world now uses.

Hachten’s advice is ever more important because the “internet and the application of information technologies have caused far-reaching changes within work processes and routines in most industries around the world especially digitalisation of value chains and content have demanded a strategic change in perspectives within the media industry” (Zerdick, Picot, Schrape et al., 2001 cited in Schoeder and Stovall, 2011, p. 23). The Internet and its applications have had an influence on organisations, contents and journalists. The Erich Brost Institute’s research into German foreign correspondents in the USA reveals increased use of emails and VoIP phoning, frequent visits to employer’s websites, regular monitoring of online fora and access to their field of news by their editors in Germany. These present real changes in the way foreign correspondents have worked over the years (Hahn, Lönendonker, and Schröder, 2008). Hachten and Scotton (2012) assert that technology is one of the crucial elements that has caused substantial changes to the gathering of foreign news. “In the nineteenth century, the news was collected by reporters who later used telephones, and then the telegraph to transmit them. For news from abroad, the press relied on journalist’s letters carried by ships and then later by telephones, comsats and now Internet” (pp. 170–71).
They add that foreign newsgathering today requires the journalists to work with and rely on several other non-media professionals. According to Mark Deuze (2008), journalists are either sceptical or supportive of new changes occurring in the newsroom because such “changes in the institutional and organisational arrangements of their work in the past had resulted mostly to downsizing, lay-offs, less staff, budget and resources cut” (p. 8). However, “early adopters in the newsroom are excited if the changes help them in the way they do their work” (p. 9).

Catherine McKercher (2002) argues that technological convergence and corporate concentration must be understood usually as an opportunity for media owners to acquire new sources for profit, extending their grip on production and distribution of news. Even though some scholars hold the view that technological changes have influenced the practice of journalism for the better, others disagree and Deuze (2008, p. 4) sees the end of journalism in sight, especially as becomes increasingly entwined with other forms of communication such, as public relations and advertising:

The boundaries between journalism and other forms of public communication — ranging from public relations or advertorials to weblogs and podcasts — are vanishing, the internet makes all other types of news media rather obsolete (especially for young adults and teenagers), commercialization and cross-media mergers have gradually eroded the distinct professional identities of newsrooms and their publications (whether in print or broadcast), and by insisting on a traditional orientation towards the nation, journalists are losing touch with a society that is global as well as local...

In addition to the many ways these changes affect journalists, journalistic news itself faces some problems concerning credibility and accountability. However, Joanne Yau and Suliman Al-Hawamdeh (2001) argue that credibility issues usually affect less established media houses, while transnational news organisations — such as the BBC, CNN and The New York Times — have migrated their traditional media credibility to the digital front. These influential traditional news media organisations (CNN, CNBC, Bloomberg and the BBC) continue to be more influential because they “have made it their business to make sense of the world for readers and viewers via various strategies to manage attention and present information” (p. 9).
A study on Nigeria and Singapore reports as low as 28% of journalists stating that new technologies have promoted ethical journalism. Also crucial to this study is the way these technological changes play into the preceding arguments of the coverage of Africa by African journalists. According to Obijiofor and Green (2001), these avenues of sources available to the African journalists include the official websites of renowned newspapers both in developed and developing countries, television, radio and the web. The problems presented by these technological opportunities are equally enormous for journalists in developing countries. Obijiofor and Hanusch (2003) report that, due to lack of training and re-training of journalists in Africa, the know-how to effectively apply these technologies are greatly hindered. Coupled with this is the sheer lack of access to computers and the Internet. Investigating the impact of new technologies on newspaper journalism practice in Nigeria and Ghana, Obijiofor (2003) reports that the technologies have improved rather than harmed the quality of newspapers and this was a view held by almost 90% of the respondents; “One major aspect of that improvement is that new technologies help journalists to save time in their work. Other improvements in quality of newspapers include the accelerated speed of production, enhancement of newspaper aesthetics through colour photography and ease of crosschecking spelling errors with the aid of the spell check software” (p. 54). Another aspect of Africa’s image that received attention in this study is the influential role of Western media. Relating this to technology provided a basis on which to discuss whether or not new technologies have improved Africa’s image in the Western media. Frances Harding (2003, p. 69) argues that the visual images of Africa in the Western media are the way they are because of two factors: “First, the development of technology and subsequent access to it; and second, the ideology and ethos that inform the use of the technology.” Drawing on the media in several countries on the continent of Africa and in the UK, Harding traces the different ways in which the media produces and presents visual images of Africa. She further argues that there are similarities and differences between the distinct technologies; each produces its own images of Africa, and these differ greatly. One could argue that African countries have the ability to challenge the war-ridden images, with which they are frequently represented, using technology.
The decreasing cost of satellite receiving dishes, broadband, and equipment required for broadcasting have, according to Samuel Fiest (2001), led to major changes in broadcasting and print media. On broadcasting, he believes “digitalisation has already begun to dramatically shrink the size of broadcasting equipment. Modern transmission requires only a few suitcases of gear” (p. 710). On print media, Fiest argues,

a photographer or journalist for that matter can file their stories from anywhere around the globe either through wireless telephone or satellite phone and those images can be published in a newspaper or magazine, or it can be published immediately on a Website (ibid.).

Closely related to this technological revolution is the cost involved in maintaining a foreign bureau and how the technology renders most journalists redundant by offering better approaches to achieving the same goals. Hachten and Scotton (2012, p. 176) reported between “$150,000 and $250,000 per annum as the cost of maintaining a foreign news bureau.” They argued that it was not surprising that the higher this cost rises, the more predominant the reliance of both African and international news organisations on wire services will become. Susanne Fengler and Stephan Russ-Mohl (2008) reasoned in a similar way when they described “journalists and media owners as rational actors seeking to maximize materialistic and non-materialistic rewards (e.g. attention, reputation, fringe benefits) and these explain why, how and under what kind of restrictions journalists trade information for attention with their sources, calculating risks and benefits” (p. 667). By these arguments, it is clear that the decision of what to publish and how to publish it is no longer a major journalistic decision, but rather one that is strongly driven by economics. Obijiofor and Hanusch (2012), and Fengler and Russ-Mohl (2008) have all mentioned “pack journalism” and “parachute journalism” as concepts that have become permanently part of the journalism profession in response to cost-cutting. In “pack journalism”, due to limited resources to cover events and the pressure to meet deadlines, journalists resort to cross-checking facts and omissions from other journalists and, eventually, there is only one account of an event. Franks (2005) and Wolter (2006) believe that flying a journalist to a country to cover an event as it occurs, and leaving immediately or
a day after, has greatly destroyed the quality of foreign news reporting. The movement of the journalist so quickly to the next hotspot means all improvements in the last issues covered are not reported. In the era of cost-cutting, it has also become much clearer that the harsh economic conditions under which the media constructs its messages have impacted either the messages themselves or the processes. Researching readership taste provides a great tool for participation from the readership and an opportunity by the journalists to improve their targeted delivery of messages. According to Achal Mehra (1988, p. 2) readership surveys or market research are normatively designed to enable a newspaper to:

- identify the profile, needs and desires of its readers...
- Market research companies routinely compile newspaper readership profiles, including distribution of readers by age, sex, income levels, occupation, education, race, household size, and consumption patterns. Using advanced statistical techniques, like factor analysis and demographic tables, it is now possible to locate and define clusters of customers. It is also possible to develop the psychographic profiles of readers. The information is critical to advertisers making decisions on placing ads for particular products in a newspaper. But the information is also a gold mine for editors as well to identify the interests of their readers.

In turn, Rüdiger Schulz (2008) draws a distinction between readership research as media advertising research — where the ultimate purpose is for advertising — and editorial readership research — which is closely linked with academic reception studies aimed at gaining fundamental insights into readership/audiences. He underscores the far-reaching economic significance of media advertising research as a basis for its dominance. The major reason why such surveys are conducted is improvement in newspaper sales.

**Influence of Transnational Western Media on the African Press**

Arguing that there are influences on the African media regarding the way they report themselves is not an exaggeration looking at the enormous donor-driven activities on the continent. However, in the midst of these challenges, Charlayne Hunter-Gault (2008) calls for a change in both the way the continent is covered currently and a movement away from the distortions of the past with a resolve to write “Africa’s new news” (p.
Fundamental to this goal is journalism education and newsroom socialisation across the continent. However, these two core-training processes are rooted in Western concepts and supported by Western donors. Eventually, this makes any attempt at paradigm shift almost impossible. Scotton and Murphy (1987) argued that religious and social customs and African languages except Swahili were banned or suppressed by Western actions or pressures. The independent African states left behind by colonialism could no longer communicate in the same languages and this resulted in the “African languages themselves largely becoming irrelevant in the areas of government, education and mass media” (p. 12). Ghana and Tanzania nationalised foreign-owned newspapers immediately after they became independent states, due to their perception of foreign ownership being incompatible with independent states and the fear of influence on the African media. However, they still maintained Western language and technologies.

The historical influence of the BBC World Service mentioned by Peter Golding (1979) remains enormous, and is still relevant going forward. According to Scotton and Murphy (1987), there has been remarkable inactivity to change journalism education programmes in Africa which have been largely modelled directly on those in Europe and the United States. The efforts of the African Council on Communication Education (ACCE), the only continental organisation of journalism educators, has attempted to make African journalism training relevant to Africa’s social and cultural situation with a view that this results in African values playing the dominant role in African mass media. Within the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education, most Africans qualify to be called educated since any group of socialisation in schools, homes, family and communities that brings about learning is acceptable as a form of education (Thompson, 1981). But according to Mazrui (1978), even university students under colonial rule at one point became the instrument to promote and control change.

Journalism education was one of the areas that the European academics could not easily infiltrate from the start because journalism, according to Karikari (1992), was a liberation tool mostly in Ghana where other intellectuals within the sub-region converged to push for self-rule. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the Eastern Nigeria political leader and editor of the West African Pilot, and Kwame Nkrumah, former President of Ghana,
had used the press already as a tool for liberation movements before independence and were favourable to an American vocational style of journalism education. Nkrumah established American-style journalism education at the Ghana Institute of Journalism in 1958, but Azikiwe wanted Nigeria’s first programme closely linked with a university. The structure, staff and much of the curriculum, including the journalism programme, were imported from the American universities almost completely without any changes (Okafur 1971 as cited in Scotton and Murphy, 1987, p. 14). The American model of journalism training at the university level became highly popular and even as early as 1935 journalism training had begun at the American University in Cairo. Later, the Universities of Cairo and Dakar started their own journalism training programmes that were modelled upon the American system. “It was inevitable that mass communications and journalism would have a Western structure in all its facets across Africa” (Scotton and Murphy, 1987, p. 15).

It was unfortunate that African approaches to reaching large audiences, such as through the chief’s Speakers (the Gongon beater) in Ghana (the Gongon beater is the man who broadcasts the Chief’s messages to the local community using a metallic instrument, a stick and his bare voice), was not quite integrated into this new curriculum. According to Golding (1977), the adoption of the American journalism training model itself amounted to an ideological transfer. Golding describes several transfers from Western nations to newly independent states, especially professionalisation.

Professionalism, to Golding, is a form of “integration into a dominant global culture of media practices and objectives as developed in the media of the advanced societies through three mechanisms: institutional transfer, training and education, and the diffusion of occupational ideologies” (p. 294).

Golding (1977) contends that “more specific ideologies appear as models of good practice and implicit statements of acceptable and unacceptable standards which are mostly contained in programme materials imported from overseas media” (p. 299). As the colonies continue to broadcast these programmes for years, both the audiences and the staff in the developing countries became bound to emulate them in style, philosophy and format. This is what Golding (1977) refers to
as “professionalization becoming imitation” (p. 299). Two debatable professional ideologies inherent in all the transfers over the years include impartiality and objectivity of broadcasting in its provision of news. Therefore, the so-called public broadcasters on state payroll under Ministries of Information or Communication were made to work under a system where the broadcasting institution was expected to completely separate itself from the state.

According to Scotton and Murphy (1987), the professional values of objectivity and freedom from government restraints appealed to journalists in various social settings. This is perhaps because it provides autonomy at a minimum risk, but journalists in most African countries barely recognise that they are enjoying such autonomy because of the general public and not because of themselves. Another interesting ideological position put forward by Daniel Patrick Moynihan requires journalism to be antagonistic by all standards. He argues that:

It is the mark of a democracy that its press is filled with bad news. When one comes to a country where the press is filled with good news, one can be pretty sure that jails are filled with good men (cited in Hachten and Scotton, 2016, p. 208).

While these assumptions turned into best practices that the African press had to imitate as a sign of professionalism, this was merely one of the numerous approaches available. Francis Kasoma (1996) describes it as a “tragedy facing African journalism that the continent’s journalists have closely imitated the professional norms of the North” (p. 95). Anya Schiffrin (2010) adds that the challenges facing the media in sub-Saharan Africa are enormous and therefore likely to render journalism training by the plethora of foreign organisations less effective. However, because donor-driven training does not pay attention to the enormity of the challenging context within which the journalists in Africa work, they tend to ignore elements that can make the trainings effective. Again, Schiffrin’s argument about whether or not the programmes of assistance have any objectives is quite revealing.

The influx of these competing actors, programmes and ideological socialisation on journalism training, coupled with the lack of a harmonious African model of journalism training, led Skjerdal (2012) to argue for a continuing debate regarding the independence of Africa’s media. The growing influence of Chinese engagement on the African
continent seems to include the media as well. H. D. Wu (2016) confirms that China’s attempt to promote deep bilateral diplomatic and economic relations has resulted in the provision of their own content and points of view since 2009. Analysing the case of South Africa, Wu describes the limits and potential of China’s engagement in public diplomacy. Herman Wasserman (2016) argues that increased influence of China on the African media space is not only limited to the spread of Chinese state press (Xinhua News Agency, China Daily, China Central Television and China Radio International) but includes flows and contra-flows of private media capital in South Africa. According to Wasserman, China’s initiative to spread soft power through its media in South Africa is highly constrained for several reasons from the perspective of the journalists. He contends that:

Soft power initiatives could potentially be amplified by journalists if they were to use Chinese media as their sources because this would allow local stories to be framed by Chinese perspectives. However, this would not happen if journalists did not consume Chinese media or if the Chinese perspective on news events were rejected (Wasserman, 2016, p. 18).

The argument both Wasserman and Wu seem to be engaged in are anchored on the assumption that the consumption of Chinese media by South Africa journalists would amount to soft power success for China. This study offers empirical evidence that contributes to the debate about China’s soft-power influence in Ghana.

Daya Thussu, Hugo de Burgh and Andin Shi (2018), with their comprehensive exploration of the Chinese media in general, cite an estimated $7 billion set aside to be injected into external communication and expansion of Chinese broadcasting networks around the world. These investments are aimed at “promoting China’s views and vision to the wider world and countering negative portrayals of the country in the US-dominated international media” (Thussu et al., 2018, p. 2). However, the intense commercialisation and injection of private capital into the Chinese media coupled with an ambitious quest to compete globally has pushed the Chinese government to transform their subsidised public media from being a “financial drain into a profit-making global industry” (Hachten and Scotton, 2016, p. 114). Xin Xin (2017) added that Xinhua’s financialisation, via Xinhuanet, is a state-administrated initiative that supported Xinhua’s own business ambitions. Having
been successful in raising very large private capital, a state player like Xinhuanet’s financialisation does not alter the control of the state on Chinese news media output at the moment. This may, however, change in the future because private shareholders who have invested huge sums of money could soon be expecting returns which might drive the entire Chinese media sector toward a Western capital model.

The inauguration of the Pan-African News Agency (PANA) in the 1980s marked the beginning of the continent’s commitments to sharing a common approach to discuss problems and signs of progress. It also, according to J. J. Haule (1984), marked “ideological differences between them and their Western counterparts” (p. 113). This approach, in principle, is not different from the European Union television channels, whose broadcasts are aimed at telling Europe’s stories of hope, despite the several financial crises, and Brexit, that have hit them in recent times. PANA is equally a response to the badly-needed balance in world information flow, and to correct the qualitative and quantitative shortcomings of news circulation within the continent (UNESCO, 1981). However, according to Haule (1984), PANA Press has not achieved the needed influence that was initially predicted of its activities. As a result, the African press still reports Africa from the perspectives of Western news agencies. The very economic tag that news has taken seems to be the major issue PANA could not overcome. The resource-rich countries have devoted resources to covering Africa that far outweighs PANA’s budget.

Summary

This chapter reviewed previous literature touching on the core issues of how both the Western and African press report the continent. The chapter established the usefulness of foreign news and its historical antecedents and debates on Afro-pessimism. The determinants of foreign news coverage were broadly discussed and linked to why Africa remained largely uncovered. The performance of the African press in covering the continent was also reviewed and related to how the continent was covered by the Western press. The influences of transnational news agencies, technology, colonial history, education and the emerging effects of Chinese soft power or public diplomacy were described as
elements difficult for the African journalists to resist because they have unconsciously internalised these elements of socialisation.