

Global Communications

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The Image of Africa in Ghana's Press

The Influence of Global News
Organisations





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6. Postcolonial Trajectories of the Ghanaian Press

Discussing Actors, Conditions and the Power Dynamics

I present the findings of the ethnographic interview, which includes repeated in-depth interviews and newsroom observations designed with significant input from the ethnographic content analysis (ECA) to provide explanatory level meaning to the findings of the initial ECA. During the interview sessions, the journalists and editors were confronted with the results of the ECA. This reconstructive strategy provided the avenue to lead the journalists to appreciate their previous work, a practice they rarely undertake in their daily routines. This chapter deals with the qualitative weight of influence individual international news agencies carry as sources in the Ghanaian press. The mundane newsroom dynamics in terms of condition, actors and practices are analysed. I also offer insights into how intermedia agenda-setting preferences between the Ghanaian press and their foreign counterparts have evolved.

Qualitative Weight of Influence of International News Agencies

The weight of influence on a journalist's editorial decision-making habit cannot be exclusively determined by just what was written in the newspapers and counted through quantitative content analysis. This is because the written news is an ideological construct that can be better

understood when investigated beyond its manifest presentation of ideological influences on the journalists who created the news articles, and how these influences affected the entire news-making process. All four newspapers had reporter/editor roles which meant that the foreign pages were part of the special desks headed by page editors, who took full responsibility for whatever appeared on the pages. By this arrangement, the journalists served as reporters as well as editors, in some cases, for their foreign news pages. They made daily news selection decisions. They would receive recommendations from their colleague editors in the editorial conference; but generally, the buck stops at their desk and some of them had no editorial conferences at all. The following themes were unpacked from the interviews and observations.

Theme of Conceptual Substitution

This represents a cognitive processing feature displayed by the journalists through a persistent reference to the specific international news agency that had the most influence on them. The journalists cited the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC World Service) whenever they needed to refer to an international news agency in answering questions, even when these questions had even nothing to do with the BBC. For example: "If you take the BBC, for instance, they make sure they are covering almost everywhere" (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*). Another said: "When the BBC or other international news agencies are reporting this stuff, I can't complain" (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*). They gave responses to questions that had nothing to do with the BBC World Service and still managed to mention the British broadcaster as the yardstick.

The cognitive fixation of citing the BBC as the usual example also became metonymic, that is, while referring to all the international news agencies, the journalists used the BBC, which is just one of them, to represent the whole. Explaining his daily routines as the page editor, the journalist said, "With technology, most nights I go on my phone to the BBC and the next morning I have my stories because I have read them, I just go ahead and follow how things are breaking on from each of these networks" (Editor 3 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*). The use of the plural form (networks) later in the sentence displayed this metonymy. This conceptual substitution was not limited to only citing examples,

there were occasions where the journalists described their preferences by measuring other international news agencies with their perceived qualities of the BBC. They point frequently to the availability of resources to the BBC:

There is football in Italy and the BBC's team is there even during the campaign and everything because it's money. And someone needs to mobilize these resources and this is something common to the Western press that we do not have (Page Editor 5 — *The Daily Graphic*).

The act of using the BBC World Service's qualities as a measure of other international news media was common and coded across all the interviews. One journalist said, "I diversify my news sources a lot. I go to the likes of CNN, Al Jazeera based on where the news is happening but all in all, I go to the BBC first and see how others fall in line" (Editor 3 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*). These unconscious cognitive conceptual substitutions highly confirm the quantitative influence presented in the last chapter. The presence of the BBC's qualities in the subconscious minds of these journalists remains largely influential and confirms the British broadcaster's qualitative influence in addition to the enormous quantitative weight found. A comparable case is the Xinhua News Agency, which is well-cited as a source of foreign news, but which is hardly mentioned in any discussion as a benchmark for any qualitative influence.

Theme of Cultural Defeat and Domination

The theme of *cultural defeat and domination* was widely revealed by the data. This was the most coded theme under different sub-themes during the preliminary coding. Even though there were several admissions of bias by the Ghanaian journalists relating to slant and negativity on the part of the international news media against the continent, they ended up suggesting, in the face of the evidence, that they still had no alternatives. In some cases, they measured their alternatives with their perceived qualities of the BBC and other media from the Northern Hemisphere. For instance, in answering the question of whether there was any evidence of *Afro-pessimism* of any kind in the reportage towards Africa that was printed in their newspapers, two journalists answered:

Oh I know because, maybe, I am a senior journalist. I know that slanting, they have to continue keeping Africa's negative perception. It was a worrying thing; that is why we had to try and do some editing, edit out those that connote extreme negativity (Editor 5 — *The Daily Graphic*).

There is an old myth that nothing good comes from Africa and so they have to reinforce that. I know this because when they come to Ghana and visit the porch areas of East Legon, they won't take a picture of that, they will take negative ones like the slum of Agbogbloshie (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

Another one even asked me to join him watch a YouTube video, he said:

I watched an interesting introduction of the BBC's Andrew Neil on his show called "This Week" a day after the Paris attack. He recited the might of France as a world power. Compare that to the news a day after there is bombing by "Boko Haram" in Nigeria and you will notice the slant of how two different terrorist acts are described by the same media organisation (Editor 3 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*).

After these clear admissions of bias by most of the journalists and editors regarding the international news agencies, they then highlighted their inability to do anything about the situation by stating that they simply do not have the resources to counter these biases, and so they replicate them:

Because we are picking stories from what the BBCs of this world have published, this is mainly what you will get. Sometimes we are not happy to be using all these negatives but that's what they have and the thing is that you aren't there where they covered the event. We do not have the opportunity or the resources to go and cover. Sometimes I wonder if that is all they can cover (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

One of them argued that the Ghanaian journalist's incapacity to have alternatives dates back to history. He said, "Even before the advent of the Internet we did not have any other choice, it was difficult to get foreign news except to listen to the BBC radio or VOA. We couldn't afford sending people around Africa" (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*). Other journalists described the BBC as the most prominent and credible media they knew growing up and, as a result, they have kept learning from the BBC until now. Considering the BBC as the leader of the press in the Northern Hemisphere, these significant praises also came with an admission of a lack of capacity in such a circumstance to be critical of

the British broadcaster's coverage. In describing his preferences for any international news agencies, the interviewee said:

I think besides knowing that other media houses exist, I have been used to the BBC from my infancy. My father in those days had this shortwave radio at one point in time and I switched between the BBC Hausa and English services all day. One is always learning and improving his English language by listening to them (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*).

This description, apart from being a genuine preference for the BBC, also represents cultural domination emanating from the fact that the BBC was the only alternative available at the time this editor was growing up. In fact, his next assertion was rather revealing. While discussing how he felt about the negative coverage of Africa that has been replicated in his newspaper, he defended the images and added that he did not even believe in the self-rule of the African:

I don't think I have any course to dispute any of the reports I hear on BBC because I still have this idea that we are not doing well as Africans and due to this sometimes *Yaw* [a Colleague] and I joke over this Kwame Nkrumah's position that the black man is capable of managing his affairs, I think I don't share in those positions because by and large they have messed up governance, the typical African leader tries to go beyond the constitution so that he will stay beyond what the standard tenure he is entitled to and it is like that in most countries in Africa (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*).

However, responding to the lack of diversity for the sources of foreign news as per earlier content analysis, the journalists made an outstanding admission that showed they are no longer capable of being critical of their childhood preference, the BBC:

I don't think it is good this way. The graph is quite lopsided. One has to spread one's net to other places maybe because we have put the BBC in that category, it has even become very difficult to critique their presentations which aren't good enough (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*).

Even though the journalists observed the practical examples of the negativity towards the continent from the press in the Northern Hemisphere and argued that they possess an African perspective; they also depended highly on the Northern press for the coverage of the continent.

Ambivalence towards Africa's Dependency on Northern Media

The dependence on international news media in covering Africa could easily be described from a simple essentialist point of view as some scholars have done using globalisation. However, equally fascinating is the claim by the journalists that an African perspective exists and which they, rather than others, possess. Well, as in the case of the journalists in Ghana, removing some negative adjectives and context elements from the news articles they borrowed from the Northern press was neither detailed nor a requirement of an in-house style guide. The Ghanaian journalists' level of wholesale adoption of "Britishness" because of colonial history is made evident in their comments. While explaining how much responsibility he could assume for the negative images they reproduced from the international media on Africa, one journalist accepted that his weakness is even magnified by his British surname and the boss who knew this, usually told him jokingly he was *British*. "I am maybe biased because I am '.....', so am 'British'. We do sometimes deal with this when the deputy editor calls me 'British' for using more BBC than others. Maybe I am really *British*" (withheld). Another journalist, while responding to lack of diversity in his sourcing of foreign news, explained that he shared the views the BBC carried on most issues because he and his readers are British-inclined:

It looks like a country like Ghana is British. Don't you think so; you know we worked with the British for many years as a colony. Because of that, we are British-inclined, we prefer the write-ups and views of the BBC to the rest (Editor 1 — *Ghanaian Times*).

After all these endorsements for the BBC, the journalists decided to associate themselves to the credibility of the British broadcaster not only by saying that they are *British* by worldview, but also pointing to the central role the BBC occupies in their daily selections; as one journalist said: "I use BBC a lot. Occasionally I used AP" (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*). Another journalist said, "I give priority to all international news agencies closest to the place of an event but all in all, I go for BBC first" (Editor 3 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*). Another journalist also said, "When I am beaten by time and I am quickly looking for news, I first go to the BBC because it's timely and reliable" (Editor 4 — *The Daily*

Graphic). One of them said, “I like the BBC because they are current and reliable. We look forward to their qualities becoming our values too” (Editor 1 — *Ghanaian Times*). In addition to these observations, another journalist had a stronger opinion:

You will go there because you don't have a choice, they are timely, you pick a story from BBC, compare it with others, at least, the facts won't change. You look generally, globally at what is happening because we share a worldview with them (Editor 5 — *The Daily Graphic*).

The ambivalence comes from the fact that soon after these admissions came the notion of African perspective, which they equally possessed as an element of resistance. It is crucial to state that the form of cultural domination recounted here looks like an essentialist perspective that does not embrace new forms of acceptance and appreciation of this reality. However, the Ghanaian journalists and editors did not only acknowledge biases against the continent in the news that come from the Global North, but they also established that an *African perspective* exists, which they constructed as different from what is communicated by the media from the Northern Hemisphere. An editor claimed that when the Ghana News Agency (GNA) had bureaus around the world, there were different views reported in Ghanaian press about Africa:

Because the journalists are based in those countries not only to cover war and catastrophe, they did cover the continent better, relating their observations to the Ghanaian context. Apart from understanding the context in which these things happen, they can relate them better to our local context (Editor 6 — *The Daily Graphic*).

Another editor related the *African perspective* to freedom. That is, the GNA represented freedom from the dominant view and projected an African side of the story. The editor of *The Daily Graphic* grew up as a young journalist in that period, and he remembered the *Ghanaianess* in GNA's reports when it had bureaus across the continent in selected strategic cities in the world. One of the page editors gave an example relating to children not wearing shirts. She established clearly that children walking around without wearing a shirt could not exclusively mean poverty, it could be an issue of temperature as well. Therefore, when she was writing about such a scenario, she would not be distracted like an American from New York visiting Ghana for the first time.

In this section, I have established the qualitative weight of influence on the Ghanaian journalists by describing holistically how the newsroom processes work to promote the dependency syndrome of the Ghanaian press on foreign media especially the BBC. I have equally established the significant resistance, with the claim of an *African perspective*, which remains only as an idea because performative options for the practice of resistance available are still mild. I will later establish whether this reliance on foreign media is a form of globalisation or a new form of domination. I will account for the nuances that might arise between globalisation and domination.

Conditions Shaping Foreign News

The circumstances surrounding the news selection processes, the working order of the group, and the actors involved, all together, shape the whole foreign news selection processes providing the framework of operation. These include profitability, economic rationality coupled with advertising bias, routine technological challenges and proximity of journalistic ideology.

Profitability of the Media House

All four newspapers argued that their commitment to foreign news had a positive relationship with profitability which represents the amount of money they make in excess of expenses, variable material cost and other overhead costs. However, their arguments were individually unique. *The Daily Graphic*, the *Ghanaian Times* and *The Ghanaian Chronicle* newspapers argued that even though they would generally increase the support for the foreign news should their profit margins improve, they also suggested that the cost involved in covering the continent comprehensively cannot be accommodated within their current circumstances — an era marked by cost-cutting as a means to either ensure good returns on investments. They suggested that with technological advancements, they do not see how they would defend the high expenditures involved in foreign news coverage when expenses have become the only option left to positively increase profit and shareholders' worth.

According to them, foreign pages have been made *premium pages* for advertising due to the results of market research, which indicate they are among the top read pages. However, the advertising revenue cannot be spent exclusively on the foreign news desk. The newspaper recommends that journalists rely on international news agencies as a way to cut costs. They argued that dwindling national sales as a result of general national economic slowdown does not in itself allow for discussion on foreign engagements.

By their nature and purpose, these newspapers seem to be arguing that they are first and foremost national daily news platforms, and, as a result, they consider foreign news as a *service* to their readers. An editor responded to the question of how foreign news contributed to profitability in this manner:

Not precisely but this is a local paper so our focus basically is about what we do as a people in Ghana but we don't also live in an island unto ourselves, particularly in the globalised world where you want to know what is happening to others so that it does not affect you (Editor 6 — *The Daily Graphic*).

When confronted again about his worries regarding the dwindling pages for foreign news, another editor repeats his notion of localisation, in which he then rendered foreign news as a service for the readers:

I'm saying that basically, this is a local newspaper and therefore your focus is on what we do as a nation to be able to provide the news that people require to contribute their quota to nation-building. As I said in the globalised world you want your readers to also have a feel about what is happening around them (Editor 9 — *Ghanaian Times*).

It is clear that he and other editors who have spoken in a similar sense are constructing globalisation as the reason that has underscored their continued commitments to foreign news. Others have cited the migratory flow of Ghanaian people across the globe as the major reason why they must maintain foreign news.

The kind of globalisation described here by the journalist is a one-way traffic phenomenon of excess importation over export. This imbalance could be seen equally in journalism, as the Ghanaian press only receives its information from abroad. There is a lack of active two-way interaction in the ideal notion of globalisation. But through globalisation, migratory

flows and other international interactions, different dimensions of proximity mappings and reconstructions have evolved. These proximity issues have forced the Ghanaian newspapers to remain committed to foreign news. In the height of the economic hardships and cost-cutting strategies that are currently implemented by these newspapers, they are but left with only one option, they argued: *depend on international news agencies*.

The *Ghanaian Times* newspaper provided an argument to support their claim of a positive relationship between commitment to foreign news and profitability. They argued that due to their origin as a Pan-African newspaper, any improvement in profit and economic situation could trigger a reduction in their reliance on international news agencies even though they consider the foreign pages purely as a *service* to their readership. But for finances, better coverage of the African continent from the viewpoint of local reporters with a Pan-African perspective was crucial for their newspaper.

Some page editors disagreed with the top management argument on *institutional commitments*. The journalists felt their organisations had not created appropriate environments for the development of originality. They explained that the organisational level failures had exacerbated the situation of dependency on international news organisations. Managements of the selected newspapers have relied on the argument of cost-cutting as a measure of improving profit in an era where newspaper sales are fast dwindling. In such a scenario, no commitment is made towards journalist's comfort to report from abroad. Talking about their experiences in reporting on elections in neighbouring Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, the journalists recounted this feeling:

I covered elections in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The resources that the big international news agencies released and what our own have is very intimidating. Ours was limited. To go and speak to someone and language limitation and lack of resources. I cannot afford dinner or go to the Café with my sources. I even had to return quickly because my money was finished (Editor 5 — *The Daily Graphic*).

It is evident from these foregoing arguments that journalists working for *The Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* newspapers believe their newspapers could do better in providing support for their coverage of at least neighbouring countries. This opinion is different from the

uniform view held by both management and journalists of the two other newspapers, who attributed their reliance on international news organisations to lack of resources. In the case of the *Ghanaian Times* and *The Ghanaian Chronicle*, both management and journalists agree that they are resource-strapped.

Economic Rationality and Advertising Bias

The decision of making foreign news pages *premium advertising pages* emanates from an economic rationality that favours advertising. Audience research results have varied uses, however, in most cases, the intention is to use the audience as baits for advertising. While the management of the newspapers find information gather through research about readers a useful data to sell to advertisers, many of the journalists felt that was wrong. *The Daily Graphic* newspaper, for instance, previously dedicated two to three pages to foreign news. Now the newspaper dedicates only two half pages. While the page editor found this unhelpful, the managing editor argued that the newspaper needed the money and he explained that the reduction in pages dedicated to editorial content was due to cuts on the number of pages the newspaper prints as a form of cost-cutting strategy. It became difficult for the journalists to maintain a balance of daily tragedies and triumphs on two half-pages compared to three full-pages they had before. This advertising bias means that most stories on the foreign pages needed to be shortened to the extent that they even lost the original context information they came with.

The situation at the *Ghanaian Times* is even worse because the advertising department are able to keep demanding space, until the two pages dedicated to the foreign news are depleted. The practice taking the space dedicated to editorial content for advert occurs because advertisers want to place the advertising on the foreign news pages. The editorial committee at the *Ghanaian Times* has had to sometimes fight for just a half-page for the foreign news.

The *Daily Guide* newspaper has an interesting layout where most leads are squeezed on to the front-page, and continue onto other pages. The editor explained an experiment he conducted to check the foreign page readership significance:

We attached very big importance to readership of foreign news because a lot of people [are] like me [in that] I started my journalism or newspaper reading from there [...] from reading foreign stories; so I also believe that a lot of people read it [foreign news]. The reason why we got to know that people read the foreign stories is that there was a time [when] we place[d] some ads there and I think it was very disgusting, several people called that they don't want to see the ads there (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*).

The advertising bias is a condition that cannot result in an improved balance of the tone of coverage because editorial content has to be rejected for advertising. This is closely linked to limited space in journalistic and persuasive writing where the author is expected to put useful information right within the *lead* to win readers to read further. This concept, when married to cuts in printable pages, results in severe limitations to contextual information provided for each foreign news story published in the Ghanaian press.

Routine Technology Challenges

There are a plethora of technical difficulties confronting the newsrooms, including congested networks, slow Internet speed, malfunctioning computers and lack of multimedia work stations. These challenges are visible to any observer who enters these newsrooms. But the challenges have been normalised in a manner that renders them of no effect. However, a closer look at this phenomenon provides a very interesting framework for the workings of foreign news editorial decision-making (news selection).

First, congestion on the network at *The Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* begins sometime around 13:00 GMT. The page editors of these newspapers are also responsible for other domestic pages, and this preoccupies them in the morning especially because foreign news stories on international news agencies are not usually developed enough to be followed in the morning. By the time they are ready to search for foreign news, most reporters would have returned to the office from their assignments to prepare reports for an editorial conference at 14:00 GMT. These congestions largely limit the diversity of the searches the foreign page editors make. Under these circumstances, the foreign page editors turn to their trusted international news networks and this provides an

environment where some specific agencies become most often cited. One editor said:

You go through all those hustles sometimes and because of the challenges the end result can be affected. Assuming that the machines or computers work faster and we don't have all these IT problems, you could go to certain sources to get news items that are faultless, sometimes others might not even know where this thing is and so there is some challenge (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

The second issue is Internet speed. Depending on the services available, the journalists are forced to leave the premises of the organisation to search for a good Internet connection in the city centre. They then upload their stories on a flash drive and bring them to the newsroom for editing. In this scenario as well, diversity is highly affected. It was noticed that the page editors know that the Internet challenges are a frequent issue and, as such, they save some news items in the morning when they arrive so that they can work on these if they encounter Internet issues later in the day. These issues are even complicated by the lack of multimedia workstations in the newsroom, making it impossible for them to record rolling 24-hour international TV stations or monitor radio with the view of writing their news from the broadcast news reports.

Intermedia Agenda-Setting Preferences

The press in Ghana has demonstrated distinct preferences for different international news agencies, with the exception of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, which was popular across all four selected newspapers. CNN performed very badly in the public press while Xinhua News Agency was the second single most cited international news agency. Contrary to the public press, the Xinhua News Agency scored zero in both private newspapers. The *Daily Guide* and *The Ghanaian Chronicle* never cited the Chinese news agency for any of their items over a period of two years. Rather, they used CNN significantly, which ranked in third position. These differences require a better explication. In this section, I provide these through four themes: Chinese soft power constructed as South–South cooperation; historical background built on a colonial relationship; and informal individual influence built on previous staff contact.

Chinese Soft Power Constructed as South–South Cooperation

China has emerged in the past five decades as a competing economic force in the world. But the entry of China into international news distribution competition with the Northern media organisations was less anticipated. One page editor alluded to this surprise in these words while interrogating the amount of influence Xinhua News Agency carried as a source:

When you want to go to Asia they [Xinhua News Agency] have something good, but the BBC is an entity by itself, due to years of experience and the influence [...] the English language has throughout the world. Xinhua for instance, I didn't know this; I'm surprised (Editor 3 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*).

While explaining Xinhua's influence, another page editor linked the agency's influence to the emerging global power of China:

So, it depends on where the news is coming from and over here in Ghana most people are not really interested, excuse me to say, in the eastern bloc like China, Japan and others. I pick the Chinese stories especially when they have problem with the Islands with Japan and others. I'm trying to bring people's attention to it and the fact that China is growing. At a point, I will think of it because I want detailed news from China to support my position that China has become a super-power. Maybe I might go to Xinhua in the future (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*).

However, the journalists working for the newspapers that cited Xinhua News Agency most rationalised the Chinese soft power influence as an act of South–South cooperation. The framework of this cooperation is the desire of the periphery nation to disrupt the feudal system of interaction developed at the centre by communicating among themselves more. The argument is that cooperation among the developing nations within the Global South is long overdue. One editor explained their reason for signing the reuse agreement with the Chinese Embassy on behalf of Xinhua News Agency:

We have some kind of collaboration with Xinhua, which is a Chinese news agency, except that it not very regular, but it can be better; that's the only way, as I said, we don't have the resources to go to Asia. Even covering some neighbouring countries is difficult, [let alone ...] talking about [places] far away in Asia. So the only way is to have some collaboration.

I know that other countries in Asia have very strong news agencies that we can collaborate with. And I'm sure in the spirit of South–South cooperation it will be useful to do what we have done (Editor 6 — *The Daily Graphic*).

Another editor doubted the concept of South–South cooperation, but nonetheless argued that it is far better than the Northern media domination currently reigning:

We need to even have collaboration among ourselves but rather we're having to collaborate with Xinhua, a Chinese news agency. They have approached us for collaboration so that they would be sending us their items and we also send the[m] items. But so far we have only been receiving. That isn't too good but because of their focus on development news, they look far [more] charitable than the Northern media organisations (Editor 8 — *Ghanaian Times*).

The response from the Ghanaian newspapers who have cited the Chinese news agency significantly within the period of the study has so far been mixed but favourable. The journalists refused to describe Chinese influence as another form of domination and lack of diversity in their sourcing of foreign news. They rather insisted on the concept of South–South cooperation as the major reason for their choice. This cooperation is inherently imperial because the Chinese news agency sells their material around the world, but in this case, they offered it for free in the name of cooperation, where the Ghanaian newspapers are expected to file news items for them as well. After signing the agreement, the Ghanaian newspapers are yet to be commissioned to file news items for their Chinese counterpart.

China also offers advantageous training programmes for staff of these two newspapers to spend time in China improving their journalistic skills. The Ghanaian side of this South–South cooperation has been to receive Xinhua News Agency materials. The unequal power arrangement demonstrated by the cooperation is not different from the existing feudal interaction instituted by Northern media. Considering that the Chinese soft power activity of offering news items for free is only operational with two newspapers, one could argue the activity has been successful. Assuming, the agreement is extended to the top ten newspapers in Ghana, we could witness another case of domination which would be rationalised within the concept of South–South cooperation.

Historical Background Built on Colonial Relationships

Scars of the colonial past have never left the colonised states. Examples include language and education. These two elements have rippling effects on others, like trade cooperation and worldview. Some journalists identify this inextricably complex past as the underlying reason why intermedia agenda-setting relationships and preferences look the way they do today:

Yes, it does; we have a large population of Ghanaians in Britain and they are there because of the colonial time. Between us [Ghana and Britain], at a certain point you didn't even need a visa to go; so, anything about Britain in your paper will attract readership and the same cannot go for news items about Ireland, Finland or Denmark (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*).

One of the journalists questioned if they could claim independence when their media institutions were directly built on the colonial past, even well after independence:

I think it's a British influence. Britain colonised this part of the world and the broadcasting system itself was started by the British. I know of a radio station called radio ZOY that is the pioneer[ing] radio station in the country and I think the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) signature tune was what they were using in those days when they were rebroadcasting; so we have grown up [...] used to the BBC. We consider anything which emanates from the BBC as the truth sacrosanct. Even *Graphic* newspaper was a British newspaper that was nationalised with no ideological changes (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*).

The journalists seem to argue that the historical past did not allow for better reflections afterwards on how journalism should be practiced independent of colonial influence. Therefore, British institutions and ideas continued even after independence because the educational system itself was built on the British model and more Ghanaians had studied and lived in the UK than anywhere else. This well-established relationship and institutional culture have become quite compelling to resist by struggling Ghanaian newspapers.

Some of the journalists also suggested that the trust in the BBC among the population is high and any association with that brand's values is highly ranked. The British broadcaster does not have any agreement

with newspapers but their rebroadcast radio agreements throughout the country are quite symptomatic of their effort to maintain a hold on this historical advantage via influential institutions. They have led *posh journalism* training either through the British Council or by themselves. Most of these journalists had their childhood experiences dominated by British institutions and practices even before their journalism education. This engagement and familiarity with the BBC's style of reporting remains influential:

They were my preference because of their language and style of writing. [...] I was also using part of their articles to do my write-ups when I was writing general news. It has helped a lot. So coming to the foreign desk was not so much of a challenge. I was reading these agencies even before I went into journalism. There have been news organisations like the BBC and VOA [Voice of America] who broadcast in Ghana but I like to compare and contrast because of language and content of news coverage (Editor 1 — *Ghanaian Times*).

One editor traced his experiences from the Ghana Army (GA) to the current inextricable historical bond that exist between Ghana and Britain. He argued that historical relationships are more potent than agreements. To him, these remain relevant and evident because most institutions of the state are yet to free themselves of these practices. Another journalist added that, in addition to these relationships, the international news agencies maintain a compelling continuous presence on the continent. The Western international news agencies seem to be the ones largely covering the continent, even though their coverage itself has been described as insignificant:

Yes, there has been some postcolonial domination, especially with the BBC and Reuters still dominating the Africa scene for newsgathering [...] Their presence and prominence still on the continent has [...] enhanced the type of stories that will shape or reshape society and history whether positively or negatively (Editor 1 — *Ghanaian Times*).

The evolution of intermedia agenda-setting relationship between the Ghanaian press and their international counterparts seemed to be built largely on the historical past and its subsequent entanglements that are visible today, including migration and institutional training that is also dominated by institutions from the Northern Hemisphere.

Informal Relationships Built on Personal Contact

Contacts that journalists met during conferences, meetings and by working together on assignments remain a major determinant of intermedia agenda-setting relationships. I label this set of relationships as informal relationships because there are no formal agreements involved. This happens to be a major source for news about Nigeria in the Ghanaian press. The editor and news editor of the *Daily Guide* both started their journalism careers in Nigeria and they maintain a good relationship with former colleagues who have become major sources of Nigerian news for the newspaper. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of *The Ghanaian Chronicle* worked in Nigeria and still maintains contacts there, which his newspaper relies on for news items. Such informal relationships built on contacts of an employee as the determinant of the intermedia agenda-setting relationship represent a more effective way of telling the African story for two reasons: first, the journalists claim that the stories received were contextually more appropriate and are factually and culturally accurate because they were written with Ghana in mind. The *Daily Guide* editors illustrated this with the following examples:

When the ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] human rights court in Abuja, Nigeria, ruled on the case involving the death of a Nigerian student that occurred in Ghana, we got the story the very second the ruling was made. We beat even the BBCs of this world to it (Editor 7 — *Daily Guide*).

Second, the relationship is built on *giving and taking*, allowing their Nigerian friends to also source news from Ghana through them. This reciprocal relationship is useful for reporting the continent. *The Ghanaian Chronicle* newspaper, for example, is trying to convert the CEO's influence in Nigeria into a standing agreement with *Vanguard* and *THISDAY* newspapers in Nigeria. They have even launched a Nigerian page as part of their foreign news. This page is exclusively dedicated to news from Nigeria because they feel that the sizeable Nigerian community in Ghana deserves more attention. To the editor, the decision to keep a Nigerian page was exclusively based on a market research. In this case, newsworthiness in neighbouring countries means next to nothing. The decision of where to cover in Africa is entirely based on economic

reasoning of free news and converting available readership in Ghana into a market.

Journalists' Perspectives on Africa's Media Image in the Ghanaian Press

In this section, I reconstruct, from the perspective of the journalists, why Africa's media image remains negative in the Ghanaian press. I recount the reasoning behind the entire African media image construction in Ghana through three themes: economic hardships and the cost-cutting rationale, proximity of journalistic ideology and the persisting unequal encounter with the Global North. In the first theme, I will discuss economic hardship and its consequent cost-cutting rationale as a major reason, from the perspective of the journalists, which continues to influence the coverage of Africa in the Ghanaian press.

Economic Hardship and Cost-Cutting Rationales

The editors and journalists interviewed are very much aware of the economic hardship the newspaper industry is faced with around the world in the twenty-first century. This notion can even be traced in some of the quotations in Chapter 7, in the section dealing with *conditions of coverage*. However, there is the need to explain how this is linked to the coverage the continent receives in the media. The Ghanaian journalists claim that economic hardships have triggered low newspaper sales and a dwindling advertising income as a result of general corporate austerity in all industries. An editor explained this while responding to the question of whether resources matter in the coverage of Africa:

Of course, yes! Resources matter a lot and we know. Yet, unfortunately for us in this part of the world newspaper business has become a very difficult one because of resources. First, patronage has gone down, currently because of the economic hardship people can no longer afford to buy newspapers (Editor 9 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*).

This view, widely held view by journalists, implies that there is a declining income capacity to deal with the proper running of even domestic pages. The editor explained, like three other editors, that the

hardships were so severe that they had to close down several district offices:

In my newspaper's perspective, resources are our problem because at the moment we have to cut down on our regional correspondents because of lack of resources. We used to have two reporters in the city of Tema; some of them we have to even close down their offices because of resources. So, the major problem why we at the *Chronicle* cannot extend our reports to other parts of the African continent is because of resources (Editor 9 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*).

They equally placed this economic hardship theme within a complex scheme of affairs that made it more complicated to deal with. To them, technology and competition within the newspaper industry itself are so fierce because the readership purchasing power cannot match the price tags of newspapers. One editor answered the question of whether the Ghanaian newspapers can ever be free from relying on the Northern press organisations in newsgathering about the continent:

No, I don't think so because we don't have the resources. In the first place, the government doesn't give us a subsidy to subsidize the media. Number two, people don't even buy newspapers anymore because of economic hardships which are denying free-market support for newspapers. Today we are selling newspaper GH¢2.50 per day and when you look at it, people are earning a minimum of GH¢9.00. Assuming somebody decides to buy four newspapers, that will [cost] GH¢10.00, which is more than the minimum wage. So, it's affecting their purchasing power when it comes to the newspaper and then again because people will listen to the radio news reviews, they are not motivated to buy. I think that is the fact, a combination of lack of resources and introduction or the influx of technology (Editor 3 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*).

One significant cost-cutting strategy introduced by all four newspapers in response to the economic hardship was shortening the number of pages of their newspapers. This resulted in limited space for editorial material. One editor described the issue of limited space as an economic strategy because the cost of printing has become burdensome and new technologies have made alternatives to newspapers more common.

Some of the page editors recounted how economic hardships affected the way they reported Africa. However, they disagreed with the idea that improvements in economic fortunes of their newspapers might lead to a better institutional commitment to foreign news. They

argued lack of institutional support for editorial activities including foreign newsgathering, is a management choice to some level. They pointed to management fixation with an increase in profit through cost-cutting measures. The page editors of *The Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* expressed the feeling that management's commitment to making resources available for editorial activity is weak. They argued that improvements in economic hardship will not change their situation that much.

The claim of journalists that they mirror society implies they cover both the triumphs and tragedies of each day in equal or near-equal proportions. This ideal notion of mirroring society becomes very difficult in the face of limited editorial space. The page editors lamented the phenomenon of limited space and how it renders their coverage lopsided:

We have a limited space of one page and we must divide it between Africa and the world. You can't just put Africa news alone when there is also a crisis in Asia. If we have had more space or even if we had one full page for African news and one full page for world news, we can carry a lot of stories and even [with] this one page dedicated to both Africa and world news, we still have to take part of it for advertising; how do we capture triumphs and tragedies in this situation? (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*).

Limited editorial space, which has been caused by economic hardship, is largely a reason for the negative coverage of the continent because the balance between triumphs and tragedies cannot be achieved within such limitations of space. This situation gets even worse when the journalists attempt to place three to four stories on a page. Based on the space available, this leads to unnatural cuts in the length of the story. Sometimes, this is even left for the page designers, with no journalistic training, to do. These sporadic cuts of stories result in the situation where the context of the story is significantly altered. A few experiments witnessed during the newsroom observation showed clearly that the original journalistic pieces being relied on mostly by the Ghanaian journalists are written with a particular structure in mind. For example, bare facts relating to casualties are usually stated in the lead, where the questions of who, what, where, when and how are answered. This is followed with more details on the event, before the background is given to provide context for the entire narrative. From

my observation, the cuts in the story length do not respect original structural thinking behind the story and this renders the stories more negative. One editor recognises this as a major disadvantage. She said to keep the original structural outlook requires a technical reconstruction, which is difficult and, in some circumstances, is unavoidable. She spoke about this while responding to why there was unsourced news in their quality newspaper:

Sometimes I take a story from the BBC and a similar story from Reuters and while cutting I would have to re-write the whole story myself for it to make sense, and, in that case, the story does not belong to either of them [the BBC or Reuters] (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

This same limited editorial space prevents the page editors from using features. The genre of features provides details and ideas about a phenomenon and even how it can be resolved but such genres are sparingly used because the journalists need to rework the whole feature story to fit into the space that might be available at the time they are going to print. It is evident that the practice of cutting stories to fit limited editorial space renders some of the stories negative. Taking four stories that had been abridged during my newsroom observations for analysis, I discovered the elimination of contextual background had affected the outlook of the story largely. A typical rewrite of the story also presented several shortcomings, since this reconstruction does not occur within a framework where the Ghanaian journalists can call the original authors for clarification. Much of what a re-write does is to speculate the meaning of the original text as it is. Apart from the contextual difficulties explained, there is also the challenge of medium mismatch. The page editors usually access the online version of their favourite international news agencies. The parameters and requirements of these stories as per the online medium is different. I realised that, usually, the BBC World Service online uses animations, drawings, pictures, artistic impressions and reading and comprehension aids (such as *fact boxes*, *things to know*, etc.). The original authors have the liberty of developing the African story in a very creative manner because they have space and reading aids to keep readers' interest online. This is the opposite for a Ghanaian press bedevilled with limited space and a lack of similar reading aids in a printed sheet. This affects medium requirements and advantages. What is eventually published is a deconstructed reuse of foreign

news articles. Even though this remained an isolated case because the experiments were not widely conducted, a senior page editor with ten years of experience at the foreign news desk accepted that the challenge of medium re-alignment can be tedious, and eventually that affects the selection of stories that are rendered complicated online with animations and artistic impressions.

Proximity of Journalistic Ideology

The concept of what *journalistic news* should look like is usually known among journalists practising in different newsrooms. Due to this common knowledge, journalists borrowing news from each other seem to be reluctant in making changes to the original frames communicated. When the page editors were confronted with the results of the content analysis regarding Africa's negative coverage, they recounted how their professional routines cannot allow them to make significant changes in the stories they borrowed:

I always countercheck with the other sources. I pick a BBC news [story] and I always read from Reuters, I want to check with the AP (Associated Press). I want to check, so I go to Yahoo, a source we do not even subscribe to, just to find out whether they are a true reflection. You have been to the editorial conference and you saw the heat there. If you change a story significantly and other editors discover ... you will have to produce evidence or facts for the changes and where you got them (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

Journalistic stories are structured according to some rules that have not really changed enough over the years. Basically, these rules have become *constructs* and to be seen as professional, one must respect these rules. What is required of a journalist to change a theme that is already communicated to him/her by another journalist is evident from the journalists commissioned to cover the same event, especially when they come with conflicting reports. Sending reporters across the continent rarely happens. On the issue of repetition of negative slant from the Northern press, one editor said:

When we choose news that is slanted, we just do a little editing, but mostly they too [journalists in the Northern press] know the slant. They have perfected that act; journalists from developing countries cannot go

against it and rewrite the whole story. We don't do enough rewriting of their story... We just pick them most often. We know that there is a slant but where is the evidence before the editorial board? (Editor 2 — *Daily Guide*).

Because journalistic news is an account of someone who has witnessed an event, it becomes difficult for another journalist, who possesses canonical proximity to this ideological construct, to attempt a change. One page editor provided a clearer picture of this:

Because we are picking stories from what they have produced this is mainly what you will get. Sometimes we are not happy to be using all the negatives but that is what they have and the thing is that you are not there. We do not have the opportunity or the resources to go and cover and those who cover portray the stories differently. This is what they are giving us. Sometimes you wonder is that all that they can cover but our profession demands evidence if you attempt a change or it amounts to some propaganda (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

This *proximity in journalistic ideology* coupled with *limited resources* represents a major blockade to any form of resistance to the negative images communicated by the dominant press from the Northern Hemisphere. The major way to resist negative frames communicated by foreign news agencies is to commission one's own reporters, at least in the major cities in Africa. One editor explained how relieved he felt when a reporter of their newspaper lived a short while in China and reported from there for the newspaper.

Some of the editors appealed to some of the journalistic ideological constructs to defend their coverage of Africa. They argued that news must be negative to attract readership, a concept most journalists share. The British-embeddedness and dominance in the Ghanaian education, language and journalism training as earlier established have led to comparative proximity of views carried in media from the Northern Hemisphere. This near sacrosanct reception of news from the Northern press means that the editors share some proximity in the understanding of the news they borrow.

One major journalistic construct that has hardly received any critical interrogation is the perception of journalists about readership taste. The editors seem to argue that readership taste of news about Africa is an element that drives them in their selection. The appeal to readership

taste as the reason for publishing seemingly negative and sensational news is largely a construct. It has never been critically questioned by the journalists because they do not cite any scientific study for it. They are usually appealing to common sense understanding within the professional ideology that the news must reflect the readership taste, which they are sure is negative and sensational. In answering the question of why Africa's image remained negative, one page editor answered:

I think we choose stories not because we intend to effect changes in our societies, but we choose them based on what we think will attract people to them. And, by and large, we are looking at negative stories. I mean you come up with a story and your publishers will not be in tune with it because it will not attract readers, readers will not buy the paper. There will be a reduction in sales. Why? Because it isn't negative (Editor 1 — *Ghanaian Times*).

Senior editors who participated in editorial meetings, where stories were selected, justified their selection based on their years of experience and the claim that they are most familiar with their readership's taste. They argue that this is a taste for bad news and sensationalism. Another page editor recounted his frustrations about how some readers call his boss to complain about the lack of sensational and bad news. He argued that stories involving human interest and soft news are not very much welcomed by the readership.

Publishers and editors have been cited as people who monitored the taste of readers enough to determine what it is that the readers want. In answering the question of lopsidedness between reported triumphs and tragedy in daily news reports, a page editor revealed the publisher's *power* in the interpretation of readership taste. Apart from the fact that there are some isolated cases when the readers have asked for explanations for a certain disaster, there seems to be an established idea among the editors that the readers want to read something sensational and negative. This notion is an *ideological construct* that permeates the practice of normative journalism as per the responses so far extracted. Throughout the ethnographic interview, the journalists and their editors have supported the argument of appealing to the *common-sense notion* about news being negative. In all occasions where I asked for evidence of readership taste, they have not provided proof. They argued that they

do not need to do any research to show this. One editor responding to the lack of balance between negative and positive stories on the continent captured the notion vividly in this way:

In journalism, we have something we call “bad news sells”. Now, as a continent, we’re supposed to project the positive side of our continent to Africans and to the rest of the world to know the good things that we do but unfortunately, we keep doing it the same way the foreign news does to us. We have always been criticising them that they don’t project the positive side of Africa, yet those of us here too do the same thing because of the basic fact that they believe that bad news sells (Editor 9 — *The Ghanaian Chronicle*).

The readership taste has not been investigated carefully because some aspects of it are generally known. The idea that negative reporting is preferred to positive reporting is not debatable, according to journalists. This is a universal journalistic ideology that they seem to have accepted without questioning. Sometimes they argued that progress isn’t visible around the West African sub-region, and the readers know this through experience; they argued that this is why they are usually negative in their writing.

Unequal Encounters with the Global North

The journalists recounted the instances in history where they reported from the perspective of their reporters, the ones from the bureaus of Ghana News Agency across the African continent and in selected European and North American cities. They laid a strong claim on an African perspective produced by the agency. One editor said:

It is difficult now for us. In the past, the Ghana news agency had bureaus in Kenya, London and New York and we were able to write from an African perspective (Editor 5 — *The Daily Graphic*).

Another suggested this same difference and the need to send out their own reporters. The page editor recounted the experience of reporting an election in Togo alongside the international media from the Northern Hemisphere, and questions why what she wrote was so different from what they wrote. And she asked where the journalists working for the

Northern press saw the things they wrote the next day. It looked to her that those journalists were following a template. She recounted:

Africa should be covered by Africans to every large extent, not completely though. We should be able to attend if there are resources for major events. We should try and get or be represented. [When] I was in Lomé to cover Togo's elections, we didn't see much foreign press there and in fact, they hardly covered the elections. We covered the elections and then, sometimes, I wanted to compare what I had with them... you don't even see it [the news story] there. They [foreign press] will say that [it is] a small country in West Africa, [but] they don't even know where it is. If they are lucky, they will say, West Africa; they even say that it's in East Africa, sometimes (Editor 3 — *The Daily Graphic*).

Another page editor extends the claim of an African perspective by calling for action to make this a reality, because dependence on the media from the Northern Hemisphere cannot produce stories that reveal the continent's uniqueness. This is how he puts it:

In communicating the African foreign news, it's about Africans themselves taking the initiative of writing their own stories, instead of relying on other networks, because if we continue to depend on other networks, we will disseminate only third-party information. So how can this happen? Unless we have our unique news agency that befits Africa, we will not have to rely on other networks, but I see it as a challenge on my continent (Editor 1 — *Ghanaian Times*).

The journalists seem to support affirmative action, of a sort, in reporting on Africa. This involves a conscious effort to be positive and respectful when writing the African story:

I am an African; if I am writing something about Mali or Somalia, or sometimes about children, I will not go there, look at the dirty clothes of the children and pitch my story there. I will not do that. The feeling exists first as an African, whether I like it or not. I want to use something else. Why would I want to show an African child in [...] tattered dress? I understand that kids in tattered clothes aren't the only kids around, and [their tattered clothing] does not necessarily mean they are from poor homes (Editor 4 — *The Daily Graphic*).

The feudal system that prevented South–South interaction is still active and limits African journalists in reporting the continent largely. The New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) report

and Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge (1965) have both mentioned this as an element that aggravates dependence. In fact, the world information order, according to the journalists, is strongly linked to the economic order. As such, the never-improving economic situation of the continent, coupled with conflicts of all kinds, has resulted in the closure of national initiatives developed to deal with this. They mentioned especially the Ghana News Agency and PANA press.

The journalists, on the whole, seem to me to be saying that dependence largely accounts for the negative images they reproduced. But at the root of this dependence is a lack of economic resources needed to cover the whole continent. One page editor said:

Because we are picking stories from what they have produced this is mainly what you will get. Sometimes we are not happy to be using all the negatives but that is what they have and the thing is that you are not there. We do not have the opportunity or the resources to go and cover and those who cover portray the stories differently. This is what they are giving us. Sometimes you wonder if that is all that they can cover (Editor 4, *The Daily Graphic*).