The coverage of Africa in Ghanaian newspapers: The dominant Western voice in the continent's coverage

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Abstract
A growing literature has emerged that is contesting the validity of Africa's negative Western media representation as a myth and empirically non-existent. This article examines how four national newspapers in Ghana reported the continent. About 13,228 corpus belonging to these top four national newspapers, over a period of 2 years, were quantitatively examined for sources utilised. Based on a 2-week constructed sampling technique, 180 articles reporting Africa were further analysed for the subjects and tone of the coverage, and the dominant themes of representation. The ethnographic content analysis revealed that the coverage of the continent in these newspapers is dominated by themes of war, crime, killings, crises, terrorism and omission of progress. The African story was mostly narrated through the subject of *politics* and with a predominantly negative tone. I argue that the continent's negative proxy self-coverage confirms the evasive spread of *Afro-pessimism* considering that Western global news organisations accounted for over 80 per cent of the reportage as sources.

Keywords
Afro-pessimism, coverage, ethnographic content analysis, foreign news, Ghana, global news, representation

The *otherness* of Africa and its people dates back to history. Feinberg and Solodow (2002) traces the continent's otherness to ancient Greece through poems and a statement that the popular philosopher Aristotle made an allusion to as far back as the 4th century BC: 'there's always something new coming out of Africa' (p. 225). Until the publication

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of UNESCO's MacBride Commission (1980) report, negative portrayal of Africa by the Northern media[1] was largely considered an allegation. Apart from the extensive literature on this subject from individual scholars (Fair, 1993; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Mody, 2010; Mowlana, 1985; Robins, 2003), the collected editions of Hawk (1992) and Bunce et al. (2017) have equally instigated varied interdisciplinary debates among journalists and researchers from different disciplines on the subject. Consequently, other key studies have sought to map out *Afro-pessimism* into various conceptualisations (see recent conceptualisation by Nothias, 2012). As a conceptual guide in this study, Afro-pessimism can be identified empirically using four indicators to be discussed later in the Method section.

De B'béri and Louw (2011) argue that the perpetual negative representation of the African people in Northern media has become a practical demonstration of links between 'ideological formations and discursive productions, which naturalise the images of and ideas about Africa in becoming common sense interpretations of the continent and its people. So, Africa has been fixed in an external gaze that ranks Africans badly' (p. 345). This complex representation of the continent does not only relate to how Africa is imagined and perceived by external people but also there is a deeply ingrained negativity, in the minds of some Africans, that has helped to produce negative impacts on the continent's future. A growing literature has however emerged that is contesting the validity of the continent's *otherness.* Nothias (2017) could not empirically support the major basis of Afro-pessimism in British and French newspapers; Scott (2017) resorted to an empiricist purity approach by arguing that the focus and designs of the studies confirming Africa's otherness are not representative enough to form the basis for the claim. Obijiofor and MacKinnon (2016) have argued that the claim of negative reportage on Africa cannot be upheld in Australia; Ojo (2014) found that the image has improved in Canada, and de Beer (2010) asked us to completely *deterritorialise* the binary news flow debate because semi-periphery nations look more impactful in the digital age than most core nations. Bunce et al. (2017) have also argued that the increasing levels of 'indigenous information flows, healthy cynicism and decreasing dependence on Northern sources' (p. 1) are leading to improved mainstream print coverage of Africa. The need to test these findings beyond Northern media, with empirical evidence, is the motivation behind this article. To this extent, the case of the coverage of Africa in the Ghanaian press can be understood from several theoretical perspectives: Hall (1997) – negative representation of a group eventually shapes the self-identity of the group; Fanon (2008) – submissive imitation; and Galtung (1971) structural theory of imperialism.

Ethnographic content analysis (ECA) is a hybrid method that draws from both quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture narratives and numeric descriptions of a text in order to deconstruct meaning from it (Altheide, 2000; Altheide and Schneider, 2013). This technique presents new ways of studying media content, considering that the researcher rather than the code sheet, occupies a central position in the entire analysis while the media text is also conceptualised as a *field*. The overarching idea in this current study is to trace the evolution of Africa's coverage from the continent itself with a comprehensive critical approach that accounts for the agency and details of the continent. To this end, this article offers an empirical examination of how four national newspapers in Ghana reported on African countries. The study focuses on the sources utilised, subjects,

tone of coverage and the dominant themes of representation. I argue that the continent's negative proxy coverage from Ghana confirms the evasive spread of Afro-pessimism, with Western voices accounting for over 80 per cent of the coverage as dominant sources.

State of the art: Africa's coverage within the continent

The media coverage Africa gets from the continent has rarely been researched and the few dated literature available has not offered a comprehensive overview of the issues. Mudimbe's (1988) outline illustrates ways in which Western interpretations of life in Africa have resulted in distortions for both Westerners and Africans. He emphasised how Western anthropological and missionary meaning-making have come to represent a way some Africans understand the world around them. Although quite philosophical, Mudimbe's analysis highlights the context within which this current journalistic analysis falls.

Nigerian newspaper coverage of foreign news has been linked to that country's foreign policy and socio-cultural ties (Nwuneli and Udoh, 1982). Nwuneli and Dare (1977) found that the recognition for 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 but with a reliance on Western news agencies. Alozie (2007) studied the pattern that dominated the coverage and analysis of the 1994 Rwanda crisis in two leading African newspapers: the *Daily Nation of Kenya* and the *Guardian of Nigeria*. He found that both newspapers 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' (Alozie, 2007: 226). Bosompra (1989: 58) argues that there was indeed a flow bias in international news in favour of the Northern Hemisphere as Lent (1976) earlier claimed. He added that 'the bias was reflected even in the African newspapers' dependence on Western news agencies for their news about African countries'. These and many other studies that investigated Africa's coverage (Obijiofor and Hanusch, 2003; Pate, 1992; Sobowale, 1987) hardly offered either a comprehensive analysis of the entire coverage or from whose perspective many newspaper organisations on the continent based their coverage. The literature on Africa's coverage within the continent is outdated and insignificant compared to the works that continue to be done on the coverage of the continent in the Western press. This study fills this vacuum with in-depth empirical evidence from four national daily newspapers in Ghana.

Historical and contextual antecedents of Ghana

Ghana's positionality as a rational case to investigate *Afro-pessimism* has few merits. As one of the pioneers of the Pan-African movement, Ghana provided a fertile ground for liberation thinkers across the continent to fight for self-rule. According to Dzisah (2008), 'Ghana is reputed to be the place where the early nationalist press in West Africa took firm root, from where it extended to other colonies' (p. 76). The country attracted the civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr., among others, who highly celebrated the nation's independence. Soon after independence, several initiatives were instituted by

Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, to promote the continent's story espe-cially through the introduction of Foreign Service Broadcasting, newspapers and the Ghana News Agency. Ibelema and Bosch (2009) argued that the dominance of the English-speaking West African press could be traced to the fact that it is hundred years older than their counterparts in East Africa and French-speaking African territories. Barton (2014) added that the first attempt to produce a newspaper for the whole of West Africa came from the Ghanaian statesman J. B. Danquah in 1931. The *West African Times*, even though founded by J. B. Danquah, was supplied by Reuters as a sign of the country's colonial ambivalence. Newspapers continue to be a source where radio and TV stations in the country 'cannibalise or scavenge news' (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014: 120). Karikari (1992) also recounted how the muzzling of the nationalists' press by the British government through the injection of an incomparable capital in the Mirror Group led to a steady decline in the propagation of nationalist discourses over time. These actions, orchestrated by Western media, have had dire consequences and influenced the dichotomies that exist between the era of the nationalists' press and today's press.

Understanding Africa's media coverage from within the continent

The coverage Africa gets from the continent's media has several possible explications. The first relates to the argument of Hall (1997) that representation does not entail a straightforward presentation of the world and the relationships in it. For Hall, *representation* is a complex notion that relies significantly on meaning, which emanates from shared perceptual maps. Hall demonstrates this using the argument that negative repre-sentations of a group of people over time, shapes the group's self-identity, which pro-gressively becomes dependent on how they have been seen by others. Mengara (2001) presents us with a more critical and potent approach to interpret Africa's self-identity with the argument that the continent's identity is a work in progress that was started over centuries ago as a European project. Golding (1977) had illustrated how influential trans-national Western media have supported the Eurocentric conception of Africa and ren-dered Africa's identity as a product of colonial manipulation. Some of these concerns have been established already in literature by Hawk (1992) through this summary:

> Africa is special because there is little common understanding between Africans and Americans to provide context for interpretation. Further, 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 contextual information with which to interpret the meaning of reported events. (p. 4)

The second perspective from which Ghana's coverage of Africa can be analysed is the postcolonial critique, which supports the argument that Africa's coverage in Ghana, just like the continent's global image, is constructed through a 'Western gaze' (Bunce et al., 2017: 2). This *Western gaze* according to Sawant (2012) is inevitably postcolonial because of the uneven meeting of two cultures, with one deemed superior and the other, inferior. Shome and Hegde (2002) added that 'the theory concerns colonial conditions and why those conditions are what they are today, and how they can be undone and redone' (p. 250).

Fanon (2008) had argued that in an attempt by some coloured persons to escape the association of Blackness with evil, they don a White mask, or think of themselves as universal subjects equally participating in a society that advocates an equality supposedly abstracted from personal appearance. This is done through internalising, or 'epidermalising' cultural values into consciousness, which results in a fundamental disconnection between a Black person's consciousness and their body. Under these conditions, some Black persons are necessarily alienated from themselves. They put up a notion of internalised oppression known generally as epidermalisation of inferiority (Fanon, 2008) and this has caused some people of colour to accept their domination and oppression as being the *natural order of things*. Fanon did not stop articulating this point. In *Wretched of the Earth*,[2] he made a new appeal:

> Come, then, comrades, the European game is finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe. (Fanon, 2001: 251)

Apart from the fact that the colonised feels good imitating the coloniser, there is also practical challenge of the feudal system of interaction mentioned poignantly by previous scholars (Galtung, 1971; Mowlana, 1985; Wallerstein, 1974), which remains active till date. Elements such as language, educational differences and the treatment of news purely as a business product have prevented the South from interacting among themselves. Some of these reasons have hugely promoted the high level of dependence on foreign values and which also confirms the hegemony around the world as per Paterson's (2011, 2017) account.

Methodology

The multiple-case analysis involving four newspapers was employed using ECA. As a qualitative content analysis technique, ECA incorporates both numerical and qualitative features that allow the researcher to conceptualise the text (news articles) as a field for a more detailed analysis (Altheide, 1987, 2000; Altheide and Schneider, 2013).

Afro-pessimism, which is the element under investigation, suggests that Africa has little or no prospect of positive developments (Evans, 2011: 400; Schmidt and Garrett, 2011: 423). This can be a difficult concept to explain because it is enormous in nature (see recent conceptualisation by Nothias, 2012). In this study, there are four parameters adopted to empirically evaluate the concept. First, like Bunce (2017), Chaudhary (2001) and Moeller (1999), stories that focused exclusively on events that naturally are negative, such as famine, disease, wars, poverty and killings were coded negative. Second, when the tone of the reportage of an event or policy style is negatively evaluated on the whole, ignoring positive aspects that are equally crucial. Third, the omission or silence on some parts of a complex reality either consciously or inadvertently because of lack of native knowledge or the adoption of simplistic posture in reporting complex issues (Hawk, 1992; Mody, 2010; Nyamnjoh, 2017). Fourth, the negation of positive stories with the existing unrelated contextual background information.

Table 1. Overview of sources of foreign news in Ghanaian press.

Sources	Articles	%
BBC World Service	7720	58.36
Others	1404	10.61
AP	954	7.21
Xinhua	717	5.42
Reuters	591	4.47
Unsourced	587	4.44
CNN	531	4.01
AFP	471	3.56
Own reporter	253	1.91
Total	13,228	100

Source: Serwornoo, 2018.

To determine the manifest elements such as *subject* and *tone* of the coverage, a codebook was designed and tested, which included deductively generated categories based on previous frameworks (Chaudhary, 2001; Stevenson, 1984) and categories inductively revealed by the data. The dominant themes through which the African stories were told was qualitatively coded using Altheide's *tracking discourse* technique and MAXQDA software. The unit of analysis was foreign news – defined as news events that occurred outside of Ghana and analysed using the following *thematic spaces*: headline, lead, paragraph and byline. I conducted a census on all the editions of the top four national daily newspapers in Ghana for the counting of bylines of foreign news which include *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* (public newspapers); and the *Chronicle* and *Daily Guide* (commercial/private newspapers) over a 2-year period (January 2011–December 2012). Further analysis seeking to track the *subjects, tone* and *themes* was conducted using a 2-week constructed sampling approach. The analysis was undertaken in line with the 12 steps of Altheide (2000) but with a predominant use of key-words-in-context and constant comparison strategies of analysis (Dierckx de Casterlé et al., 2012; Miles et al., 2014). The newspapers studied in this research represented 92 per cent of daily newspaper circulation in Ghana (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014).

Analysis and Discussion

What were the sources utilised in telling the African stories?

The aggregate quantitative view of the *sources* utilised for foreign news articles within the four selected Ghanaian newspapers are presented in Table 1:

The analysis here is taken from the perspective of the four selected Ghanaian newspapers, which then means that the researcher is inductively demonstrating how this particular case gives us leads into a wide continental problem of Afro-pessimistic articulation of the continent's image. The BBC World Service remains the single most cited source for foreign news in Ghana, followed by Associated Press. The BBC's influence dates back to the colonial era and remains strong even today. This has been made largely possible

Table 2. Composition of subject of coverage in the Ghanaian press.

Category	Articles	%
Politics	130	72
Social	13	7
Economy	12	7
Personality	9	5
Cultural	8	4
Disaster	6	3
History	2	1
Total	180	100

Source: Serwornoo, 2018.

through conscious efforts by the British broadcaster to remain useful on the continent by establishing relay stations, thus occupying the sub-consciousness of many an African audience (Serwornoo, 2019). AP's influence emanates basically from the two private newspapers, who have US-trained managers and editors. Xinhua News Agency is the third single-most cited source for foreign news in Ghana. About a decade ago, the Chinese news agency did not appear as a source in any of the literature but now emerges as a strong contender to justify Paterson's (2017) inclusion of China as a dominant actor in what he called the *new imperialist nations*. It is important to note that Xinhua's aggregate performance is slightly above Reuter, AFP and CNN and its influence is in the two most circulated public newspapers in Ghana. The use of 'Own reporters' in covering foreign news in Ghana is less than 2 per cent of the total foreign news articles over the period under study. This signals a sweeping dependence on global news organisations for the coverage of the continent. This 'Own reporter' category also included *Ghana News Agency* articles and articles from foreign reporters of the four newspapers. It is crucial to note that Unsourced foreign news category in the Ghanaian press is not widespread practice because it is largely related to either the issue of the design or one single newspaper (*Daily Guide*) contributing more than 68 per cent of the total error (Serwornoo, 2019). The *Other* category included all foreign news organisations that were not sourced consistently enough to warrant a space on the code sheet. The dominant news agencies in this category included Al-Jezeera, Nigerian and UK newspapers.

What are the subjects of the coverage?

The coverage predominantly concentrated on political reports as shown in Table 2. This has rendered a bigger part of it negative since political reports focus on figures of causalities of political conflicts, disagreement of parties, corruption and war. The lack of stories covering history, economy, culture and tourism shows the depth that was given the coverage. Mostly, reports were shallow and often written in comparison with elite European and North American democracies. Table 2 shows the frequency of stories on the following subjects: politics, social, economy, personality, culture, disaster and history.

Table 3. Quality of the coverage of Africa.

Direction of stories	Total	%
Positive	27	15
Neutral	9	5
Negative	144	80
Total	180	100

Source: Serwornoo, 2018.

The two stories that related to history over the 2-year period were about the Egyptian pyramid. Personality-related stories did not mention a single African celebrity except political leaders. The eight stories categorised under *Culture* were not entirely positive. The *Africa rising* discourse, which has been very much discussed in the current literature, requires contextualisation due to these findings because Bunce et al. (2017) had earlier hinted that Western investors needed new markets for their resources during the financial crisis, hence the growth of Africa rising discourse which had less potency for any image changes. Economic and social issues in Africa did not just get reported enough in the Ghanaian press, not even the few that were reported in the Western media organisations (Nothias, 2017; Obijiofor and MacKinnon, 2016; Ojo, 2014) were repeated.

What is the tone of the coverage?

The coverage African countries get in the Ghanaian press was not different from the negative portrayals that existed in the literature about the continent from the Western media. Table 3 presents an overview of the coverage of Africa in terms of the tone, per the definitions of Chaudhary (2001: 33–34) and Obijiofor and Hanusch (2003) and the conceptual definitions set out in this paper on page eight.

About 80 per cent of stories relating to Africa fell in the *Afro-pessimism* label. They reported crisis, war, famine and regional political disputes and ignored largely improvements in these conditions. In considering angles that were either excluded or never mentioned, the loud silence on the reconciliation of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto become a typical case in point. This was never covered in a positive light within the period and the stories that related to them mostly concentrated on their trial at the International Criminal Court and its implications for their victory as president and vice. The fact that each of these two leaders came from the opposite side of the political divide in the Kenyan election that had resulted in violence was never mentioned in these stories. Nelson Mandela's hospitalisation and appointments of some Africans to eminent United Nations positions were some of the other positive stories reported.

What are the dominant themes of representation in the coverage of Africa?

In this section, I deconstructed the dominant themes of representation used in the coverage of Africa through close engagement and interpretation of the news articles. The

Table 4. Frequency of dominant themes – January 2011 to December 2013.

Dominant themes	Frequency	%
War, crime and killing	114	31.75
Crises	95	26.46
Terrorism	45	12.53
Colonial memory	23	6.41
Democracy and lack of press freedom	18	5.01
Irresponsibility	15	4.18
Development and progress	14	3.90
Diseases and disaster	13	3.62
Human rights, women and children abuse	12	3.34
Unrelated negative context	10	2.79
Total	359	100

Source: Serwornoo, 2018.

foreign news articles were extensively coded using both inductive and deductive approaches. That is to say that the 180 corpora sampled from the four newspapers were coded all together 359 times. In all, 10 dominant themes were deconstructed with their corresponding frequency and percentages. The total amount of the coded segment of the articles was as well calculated to provide some descriptive view of the intensity of coding as shown in Table 4:

These were the dominant themes of representation, not necessarily because of their frequency but their uniqueness in the literature either as predominant or novel findings.

The theme of war, crime and killing. This theme included reports of war and fighting, war crimes trials and discourses, abduction and ransom cases, issues relating to drugs and religious intolerance and its resultant consequences. Where the crimes resulted in killings, the deaths were initially coded as 'killing' and later combined with the 'War' and 'Crime', due to the blurring nature of these three categories. This theme remains the most dominant style of representing Africa in the Ghanaian press. The rampant use of words such as civil war, killed, death, fierce fighting and fleeing from war crimes was visible in all the four newspapers simply because they had virtually similar sources. Examples of some coded segments are as follows:

> MORE THAN 100 people are confirmed dead in fierce fighting on Thursday in the capital of the Central African Republic (CAR), Bangui, UN officials say. (Code# W1)

> Two schools were attacked at the weekend, with at least 16 students and two teachers killed. Military spokesman Lt Col Sagir Musa said the militants behind those attacks had used satellite phones to militants following recent attacks. (Code# K5)

Apart from these examples, which covered war, war crimes and killings generally, there were other stories that related to the crimes of piracy along the West African coast and issues of hard drugs.

Relying on postcolonial critique demands that this study questions and reframes the portrayal in these news articles not only by what was written but also by what was ignored. Significant in this category of omission is the fact that in all these articles coded under the theme of *war, crimes and killings*, none of them assessed the improvements in any of these wars within the continent. The picture painted, therefore, looked as if no such improvements exist. The lack of articles discussing improvements on the continent with regard to this theme remains problematic, not only because such stories were ignored but also due to the fact that the prominence given to fighting when they erupt is not replicated when improvements occur.

The theme of crises. This is the second most widely used theme in telling the African story. Subcategories coded under this theme included economic crisis, political crisis, regional crisis, refugee crisis, migration crisis, controversies, corruption and power-drunk leadership. Significant within this theme is political crises on the continent especially in Egypt, Zimbabwe and a few dotted cases in Central Africa. The fighting underway in Central Africa was constructed as a regional crisis.

It is factual that the crises in Central Africa have gone on for decades with substantial causality figures, but the news reports highlighted much of the escalation at the expense of progress being made. Due to the frequent failure of negotiations and deals, new attempts at peace negotiations were trivialised by journalists. This act of trivialising attempts at peace-making painted a picture of an unending crisis. These are examples of coded segments regarding this theme:

> SEVENTY generals in the Egyptian armed forces are to be retired, the government has announced. The move comes weeks after President Mohammed Mursi replaced the defence minister and the chief of staff. (Code# Cr4)

> MALIAN INTERIM President Diouncounda Traore has appointed a new PM, less than 24 hours after his predecessor was forced to resign by the military. Mali's Prime Minister Cheick Modibo Diarra resigns on state television. Mali PM Cheick Modibo Diarra resigns after army arrest. (Code# Cr6)

Reporting crisis falls squarely within the journalistic ideology of how news should be viewed. News has a rudimentary structure that must be followed in a manner that journalists cannot deviate from. Even though journalists could dig deeper to the root causes of crises, they rarely do it and that leaves most reports on crisis situations hanging on the day or week the event occurred.

The theme of development and progress. This theme was consciously created to make room for positive news reports because I assumed there would be some good number of stories relating to development and progress, especially in this era of the *Africa rising discourse*. Subcategories coded under this theme included discoveries, positive African heroes, growth and development, and balanced stories with development agenda. At least, a discovery story and a *balanced* story were found. But the majority of the stories here related to Nelson Mandela of South Africa. Significant among the stories was the $64.3 million loan facility from Botswana to Zimbabwe that was reported on the website of NewZimbabwe.com and printed

in the *Chronicle* newspaper in Ghana. Reuters reported the last progress-oriented story which announced the increase in oil production by Libya as a result of some stability in the country. The following includes examples of coded segments:

> NIGERIAN AGRICULTURE Minister Akinwumi Adesina has been named Forbes African of the Year for his reforms to the country's farming sector. 'He is a man on a mission to help Africa feed itself', said Forbes Africa editor Chris Bishop. (Code# DP3)

> Libya aims to raise its oil production to 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) next year, overtaking the output before last year's war, as it banks on the return of foreign companies. (Code# DP4)

The subcategories captured under this theme did not all carry any positive pictures but had some optimism that crises and challenges would end or would be handled properly. Generally, these stories were too little to paint a holistically positive picture of the continent. An example is this extract:

> Government efforts and preparedness will be further enhanced to ensure the security of lives and property of all Nigerians, irrespective of their locations within the country. On the issue of intelligence gathering, the presidential aide said: 'The government has acquired and deployed highly sophisticated security equipment', adding that members of the security agencies have received and continued to receive adequate training 'such that our intelligence gathering capacity have witnessed a monumental increase in capacity to gather information'. (Code# DP7)

Throughout the entire period of the study, this was the only message of reassurance and hope carried in the Ghanaian press regarding the efforts of Goodluck Jonathan's government to fight Boko Haram insurgency. All the efforts at fighting the insurgency were not reported that much – they were rather questioned and trivialised – making it seem like Nigeria just could not deal with the Islamist insurgency.

The theme of human rights, women and children abuses. The subcategories of this theme include human right abuse in general, and women and children abuse in particular. The stories coded here involved executions, court judgement that promoted abuse of people's rights in authoritarian states and abuse of women and children in particular. Abuses that resulted in 'killings' were coded twice to show the non-mutually exclusive nature of the themes. These are some of the illustrations of coded segments under this theme:

> CAMPAIGNERS in Egypt say the problem of sexual harassment is reaching epidemic proportions, with a rise in such incidents over the past three months. For many Egyptian women, sexual harassment – which sometimes turns into violent mob-style attacks – is a daily fact of life. (Code# HWCa3)

> The Islamists have also recruited hundreds of children as young as 12 in an effort to boost their ranks after fighting in northern Mali forced nearly half a million people to flee earlier this year. (Code# HWCa4)

The picture painted by the news articles for the entire period ignored many positive things either done by women and children or done to them. It neither gives any sense of

normal growth of children on the continent nor does it portray women doing any extraordinary stuff. They were all made to look like victims.

The theme of democracy. This theme contained both positive and negative coverage of the continent. It dealt with issues such as peaceful and non-peaceful elections on the continent and an assessment of the reasons why most sitting African presidents die. Others included lack of freedom of expression, lack of press freedom, military take-overs, leadership challenges and international sanctions against countries like Zimbabwe. One particular story coded under this theme discussed four countries and it was evident that an attempt to discuss these unique countries together would always be a recipe for the error of generalisation or homogenisation. The case of political succession for Nigeria's Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was violent free. The analysis in question ignored these unique successes and put Nigeria together with other countries only because they all lost ruling presidents:

> In Zambia, in Malawi and Ghana and in Nigeria, the death of the presidents was followed by a constitutional succession with a minimum of violence and dispute, and I think this is a very encouraging sign for Africa's development. (Code# D1)

This is supposed to be a positive assessment but it is not quite positive since there is a significant difference between minimum violence and complete absence of violence as was in the case of Nigeria. The following are illustrations of some coded segments:

> The anti-pornography bill, which also outlaws overtly sexual material (including music videos, was voted (through after a short debate). When Simon Lokodo, Uganda's (ethics and integrity minister, proposed the legislation earlier this year he said that women who wore 'anything above the knee' should be arrested. (Code# Dpf2)

In these quotations like others, the stories showed a doubt for the capacity of Members of Parliament to discuss a law that limits press freedom either in late-night sittings or with a very short debate. But in real-life situations, there are usually several reasons why parliamentary debates run into the night. Other extracts include,

> THE European Union has suspended sanctions against 81 officials and eight firms in Zimbabwe. The decision followed a 'peaceful, successful and credible' referendum on a new constitution earlier this month, the EU said in a statement. However, sanctions will remain in force against Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe and 10 of his top aides, EU sources said. (Code# D6)

None of these articles provided an explanation for why press freedom is quite problematic in some African states, most of whom are in either transition, transformation or crises.

The theme of colonial memory. Stories coded under this theme invoked colonial memories in a negative way. The issues covered in such stories included the horrible history of the continent and stereotypical depictions of the continent as the haven of wild animals and deposit of natural resources. Some of the articles portrayed the continent as donor-dependent, usually waiting on their saviours from the Northern Hemisphere. Offers of reparation came so

late after real beneficiaries have all died, with the particular case of Mau-Mau fighters in Kenya reported following the announcement by the British foreign secretary at the time.

Colonial demarcations of natural resources and boundaries have remained a real worry for most Africa nations. The specific case reported was the feud surrounding the River Nile involving Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. These are some coded segments:

> In June, UK Foreign Secretary William Hague said Kenya's Mau Mau fighters would receive payouts totalling $32m (£20m) as compensation for being tortured during colonial rule. (Code# CM1)

> FIRST reinforcements to French force in the Central Africa Republic (CAR) are in a bid to restore peace after a rebel takeover. Mainly 200 troops have deployed, with another 500 imminently following former rebel forces who have reportedly been leaving the capital, Bangui, as the troops arrived. (Code# CM3)

The threat to freeze aid to countries that have anti-homosexual laws does represent the fact that those countries are practically unable to run without aid and would be forced to repeal those laws if aid was removed. The quest to freeze aid by dominant aid-giving Western countries evokes the notion that Africa has little prospect for development on its own and will remain for the foreseeable future on aid. This perspective is Afro-pessimistic and envisages no positive changes anytime soon.

The theme of terrorism. This theme is an extension of the theme of *war, crime and killings*. It is operationalised as deaths resulting from terrorism and terrorist activities in general. It is the third most dominant theme because of activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Somalia and Kenya. *Killings* resulting from these extremist Islamist groups were coded 45 times under this theme. Terrorism activities in Southern Libya and Mali were also reported. The most outrageous notion depicted under this theme was that the activities of Boko Haram in Cameroon and Chad meant the continent was seriously threatened by activities of Islamists although Chad and Cameroon had successfully stopped the insurgency. These are some extracts of the coded segments:

> It has been reported that scores of gunmen suspected to be members of the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram, set fire to three churches and border posts in Gamboru Ngala, a border town 140 kilometres from Maiduguri, the Borno State capital. (Code# T1)

> RADICAL Islamists in control of northern Mali are becoming 'increasingly repressive', Amputating limbs, whipping people in the streets and stoning to death a couple accused of adultery, a human rights group says. (Code# T3)

The theme of poverty, disease and disaster. This is one of the deductive themes with which coding started. Items coded here include natural disasters, poverty and diseases such as HIV/AIDS and the six killer diseases in Africa. The data revealed that these were not popular themes of representation under which the African story was narrated. It is, however, imperative to state that diseases and disasters are opportunistic subjects which are reported as and when they happen. Assuming that a major disaster or disease outbreak had

happened around the period under review, the study would have recorded a significant amount of stories under this theme. The following are some of the coded segments:

> Rescue operations became more difficult after night fell, South Africa mall roof collapse traps dozens. TWO PEOPLE have died and about 40 are feared trapped after a roof collapsed at the construction site of a South African shopping mall, paramedics. (Code# PDD2)

Accidents that were as a result of unforeseen natural disasters were coded under this theme. Findings from government investigation regarding disasters were never cited throughout the coding. This could not be because there were no such reports and space to publish findings; they were used mainly as a context element to show how bad the situation looks. Evolving stories attracted attention only when bloodshed or causalities continued.

The theme of irresponsibility and negative context. These two themes revealed by the data were inductively coded. Items coded here described instances when actions and decisions of African authorities were considered irresponsible governance, indiscipline, lavish spending, destruction and misuse of state resources. Some protests on the continent were constructed as the failure of the African government to improve the living standards of their people. Kenyan authorities were accused of ignoring security information offered them before the *Westgate Mall* attack by Al-Shabab. Therefore, in the heat of the attack, where news reports needed to show solidarity to the people of Kenya and victims, they were heavily engrossed in the blame game.

The second part of this theme concentrated on the use of past negative events as context to most new stories. For example, the Nigerian government managed to seize gunmen who had abducted a French man. In providing a context for this story, more negatives were recounted than the progress of the Nigerian government and this ran through other positive stories within other themes.

Theoretical and practical implications and limitation of the study

The practice of journalism, its global character and routine nature have been further entrenched by the borrowing of journalism education into many African countries from selected Western powers. Theoretically, it has become quite visible to see traces of Fanonian concept of epidermalisation. This does not mean that all the resemblances to Western media coverage seen in the way these four Ghanaian newspapers have covered Africa are wholly submissive. It could be that the symbiotic nature of Ghanaian journalistic practice with Western ideologies remains too strong to allow us to see the resistance and subversive points of departure. It is imperative that future applications of the Fanonian concept of epidermalisation to journalism recognise the universalistic nature of the practice and how that blurs the researcher's ability to notice traces of resistance. This remains a weakness that this study sought to improve.

It is also crucial to state that applying reflexive strategies such as member checks and pre-coding reviews were quite useful in ensuring that the trustworthiness of the data analysis process was intact. The entire coding process was submitted for the scrutiny of senior researchers due to the researcher's central position in the process of analysis.

The first phase of this study relied significantly on the content of the newspapers with interviews and observations expected in the second phase. Although the ECA provides an avenue to speculate about the latent meaning of the text in the newspapers, many of the issues raised by the manifest content analysis (sources utilised) remained unresolved with strong empirical support. This re-echoes the position in the literature that content analysis must be supported with interviews or surveys in order to give meaning to either the manifest numbers or frequency, which by themselves are unable to indicate why they look the way they do.

Conclusion

The coverage of Africa in four national newspapers in Ghana falls largely into the concept of *Afro-pessimism* with a predominant concentration on the subjects of politics and to some extent on dying economies and social vices. The themes of war, crime, killings, crises, terrorism, and omission and negation of progress dominated the coverage and the eventual tone was largely (80%) negative. Although the findings were not compared directly with previous coverage in Ghana, these results amply indicate that Africa's media coverage in the Ghanaian press is as negative as it is around the world. But it is crucial to note that the coverage we have seen in the Ghanaian press is predominantly constructed from the perspective of Northern global news organisations led by the sweeping influence of the BBC World Service. The BBC's singular influence, for instance, is enabled by the complex colonial and postcolonial trajectories that have lingered and promoted the British foreign broadcaster as the ultimate reference for most professional journalists in Ghana (see Serwornoo, 2019).

The claim of improvement reported by Bunce et al. (2017) and Ojo (2014) is not supported in the Ghanaian press. The contestation of Nothias (2017) and Obijiofor and MacKinnon (2016) that the claim of negative representation of Africa could not be supported in certain Western countries is not valid when applied to Ghana's coverage of Africa, which represents a non-elite media with a corpus of 13,228 news articles over a period of 2 years. Serwornoo (2019) illustrates that the reliance of the Ghanaian press on the media from the Northern hemisphere to report on Africa is not likely to produce different images from what exists in the Northern press. I hereby argue that *Afro-pessimism* is not a myth but a real challenge. The concept's evasive spread around the world now defines how Ghana's four national daily newspapers covered the continent.

Although not representative of Africa, this study points to a continent-wide problem that previous critical researchers have pointed to (Bosompra, 1989; Mudimbe, 1988). Hall's (1997) postulation that a group's self-identity could be shaped by how they have been seen by others over time is partly valid because of the shared and common perceptual maps many of the Ghanaian journalists have with their Western counterparts in selecting the news. The growing hegemony in foreign newsgathering reported by Paterson (2011, 2017) intensified *Afro-pessimism* in the coverage of Africa in the Ghanaian press with the replications of negatives themes. The coverage does not recognise Ghana's leadership in the pre- and postcolonial struggles of the African continent.

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Notes

1. The use of Western media is essentialist exaggeration since the media referred to in this notion is usually a selected few from Western hemisphere from parts of Europe and North America. Bunce et al. (2017) used Northern media or media from the Northern hemisphere for this reason too.
2. The *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 2001) although the last book of Frantz Fanon, was translated into English before *Black Skin, White Mask* (Fanon, 2008), which was published earlier but in French. This explains my statement that Fanon did not stop the appeal.

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