

Western Media Representation of Africa: The Role of Bad Governance

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Abstract

The Western media's depiction of Africa has long been entrenched in a narrow and conclusively negative narrative. Even in the digital age, mainstream Western outlets continue to present stories from Africa through a lens that perpetuates outdated stereotypes, portraying the continent as mired in a "dark age" characterised by archaic practices and perpetual strife. This persistent portrayal labelled "single story" by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, reduces Africa to a caricature of poverty, conflict, disease, bad governance, and corruption, neglecting the diverse realities and progress across the continent. However, despite ongoing critiques from communication scholars and researchers, there has been limited exploration of how Africa's governance failures, particularly the corrupt practices of African leaders contribute to and reinforce this negative media representation. This paper argues that the prevalence of bad governance in Africa bolsters the Western media's negative narrative. The paper draws on secondary sources to critically examine how Africa have been represented in the Western media and how corrupt practices by African leaders contribute to a climate that perpetuates stereotypes and sensationalizes issues within Africa. Furthermore, the paper proposes that addressing the root causes of bad governance is essential in challenging the Western media's biased portrayal of Africa. By promoting strong and proactive leadership that strengthens democratic institutions, African nations can begin to counteract the negative stereotypes perpetuated by Western media outlets. This shift towards a more balanced and nuanced portrayal of Africa is crucial not only for accurate representation but also for fostering international understanding and cooperation.

Keywords: Western Media, Representation, Africa, Bad governance

Introduction

The examination of Africa's portrayal in Western mainstream media has been a subject of scholarly investigation over an extensive period, resulting in notable criticisms regarding the prevailing Afro-pessimistic narrative and the discursive portrayal of Africa as a lesser "dark" continent (Mudimbe, 1988; Nothias, 2013; Scott, 2015).

The media give us ways of imagining particular identities and groups which can have material effects on how people experience the world, and how they get understood, or legislated for or perhaps beaten up in the street by others...this is partly because the mass media have the power to re-present, over and over, some identities, some imaginings, and to exclude others, and thereby make them seem unfamiliar or even threatening (Gill & Roy, 1999, p.15)

The aforementioned excerpt underscores a significant observation, namely, the pervasive influence wielded by the media in shaping public perceptions. Western media, through its consistently negative portrayal of Africa, has exemplified this power over the years, profoundly influencing perceptions of the continent. When not outright neglecting Africa, Western media often portrays it in a disparaging light, as noted by Salvkovic (2011). Consequently, their depiction of Africa tends to be marked by sensationalism, a penchant for emphasizing catastrophes, and oversimplification of crises, as highlighted by Palmberg (2001). Chavis (2011) further articulates how journalists with the stroke of a pen, derogatorily reduce Africans their continent and their descendants to mere caricatures plagued by disease, savagery, animism, pestilence, war, famine, despotism, primitivism, poverty, and ubiquitous imagery of suffering, such as children with distended stomach and flies in their food. In light of this context, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie coined her 2009 TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story" (Joda & Asemah, 2020), wherein she critiques these negative portrayals of Africa as incomplete, misleading narratives, akin to half-truths.

It remains disheartening that despite the passage of numerous years since the attainment of independence by African nations, the Western media persists in its negative portrayal of Africa. Even more disconcerting is the challenging prospect of envisioning an end to these misrepresentations soon, as observed by Poncian (2015). Ifeanyi (2013) cited in Joda & Assemah (2020), underscores the concerns raised by critics regarding the depiction of Africa in the media. These criticisms primarily target the Western entertainment and news industries, alleging a deliberate commercialization that perpetuates biased and subjective portrayals of Africa. Such representations, frequently marred by inaccuracies and exaggerations, are crafted to align with the commercial interest of media establishments, with the ultimate goal of attracting viewership and subsequently capturing advertisers' attention.

Despite ongoing criticisms from scholars and researchers in the field of communication, there have been limited investigations into the extent to which Africa's governance failure contributes to and perpetuate negative media representations. The reality persists that contemporary Africa grapples with significant challenges such as bad governance, corruption, electoral malpractice, and

insecurity, as highlighted by Olawuyi (2018). These conditions inadvertently foster conditions of hunger, poverty, insecurity, and violent unrest, thereby generating news narratives for consumption by Western media outlets. Poncian (2015) astutely observes that economic and political turmoil in Africa, including intertribal conflicts, coups, and electoral irregularities, years post-independence, rekindles antiquated colonial stereotypes suggesting Africa's incapacity for self-governance. Ultimately, this underscores a leadership deficiency within the continent.

Therefore, this study contends that the prevalence of governance challenges in Africa actively shapes the negative narrative perpetuated by Western media outlets. Employing a critical lens and drawing from secondary sources, this study illuminates how the corrupt behaviours of African leaders, primarily lack of transparency and accountability contribute to a climate that perpetuates stereotypes and sensationalizes issues within Africa. This research is of significance as it addresses a gap in scholarly exploration concerning the influence of governance failures on media representations of Africa. The study advocates for robust leadership in Africa, emphasizing the need for equal negotiating and decision-making rights in international institutions. Such leadership is deemed essential in countering the biased portrayal of Africa propagated by Western media entities.

Literature Review

The negative depiction of Africa by Western media has garnered widespread academic attention. This literature review delves into various scholars' perspectives on the matter, examining their objectives, methodologies, and conclusions. By exploring the diverse approaches taken by scholars, this paper justifies its chosen angle in addressing this persistent issue.

In his study "Picturing Africa: The Figurative Framing of the Continent in Online News," Beni (2022) underscores the persistent negative portrayal of Africa in Western media. While acknowledging minimal positive shifts in this representation, Beni emphasizes the enduring presence of certain frames and themes, particularly violence, in depicting Africa. These recurrent themes have become pervasive framing metaphors and metonymies consistently highlighted in news coverage through visual imagery, constructing a narrative of Africa as inherently violent. Employing a multimodal approach, the study examines the metonymical framing employed by BBC Africa and CNN Africa in their reporting on the continent, revealing how they associate themes of violence with Africa. Given the complexity of violence as a phenomenon, their reportage offers an interpretive framework for readers to comprehend such intricate events.

Serwornoo (2021) addresses the ongoing discourse questioning the validity of Africa's negative representation in Western media, often labelled as a myth by emergent literature. Through his work, "The Coverage of Africa in Ghanaian Newspapers: The Dominant Western Voice in the Continent's Coverage," he empirically challenges this notion. Employing an ethnographic content analysis, Serwornoo examines the coverage of Africa in four national Ghanaian newspapers over a two-year period, focusing on the prevalence of the Western voice in the continent's representation. His findings reveal that over 80% of the reportage relies on sources from Western global news organizations. Notably, the coverage predominantly revolves around themes of war, crime and

violence, predominantly portrayed through political lenses and with a negative tone. Serworno argues that these results underscore the impact of Western media's negative portrayal of Africa, which consequently influences the representation of Africa in Ghanaian newspapers. This confirms the existence of Afro-pessimism in Western media and highlights the complicity of Africans in perpetuating this negative portrayal.

In their work "Towards Media of Africans, by Africans and for Africans," Adum, Emmanuel & Ojiakor (2015) contextualize the negative representation of Africa in Western media within the historical biases of civilization and colonialism. They argue that the legacy of the slave trade, colonialism, and racism has perpetuated negative narratives about Africa in Western discourses. The authors assert that the European notion of superiority constructed an image of Africa diametrically opposed to Europe, leading Western media to disproportionately highlight Africa's problems and disasters while neglecting positive developments. They emphasize the role of African journalists in countering these narratives, suggesting that the lack of effective response from African journalists contributes to the increasing prevalence of negative portrayals. Adum, Emmanuel & Ojiakor advocate for vibrant African media as crucial for the continent's development, emphasizing the importance of African journalists in accurately representing African stories and challenging Western biases.

Mahieu & Joye (2018) conducted a study titled "Beyond Afro-pessimism and -optimism? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Africa by Alternative News Media" to transcend the Afro-pessimistic and Afro-optimistic narratives commonly found in mainstream media representations of Africa. Their focus was on analyzing the alternative identity of MO* magazine in its coverage of Africa. The research reveals that MO* Magazine adopts an Afro-optimistic discourse, albeit with a critical approach. The magazine utilizes positive terminology like 'rising', 'hopeful', and 'new' to depict Africa, while also acknowledging the existence of poverty and underdevelopment on the continent. Notably, the magazine's alternative ethos is evident in its emphasis on the Global South, geographic diversity, editorial approach, and the depth of analysis provided in its articles. It actively incorporates diverse perspectives and voices often overlooked by mainstream media, presenting comprehensive analyses through lengthy articles.

Slavkovic (2011) attributes the negative depiction of Africa in Western media, characterized by portrayals of a "dark continent" plagued by disease, corruption, hunger, and perpetual tribal conflicts, to several factors including commercialization of the media sector, media monopolies, economic interests, colonial prejudice and ignorance. He argues that diseases, conflicts, famine, and traditional practices are entrenched in a colonial metaphor that resonates with Western audiences. Slavkovic contends that the global hierarchy and the dichotomy between the "Western World" and the "Third World," along with its political and economic ramifications, contribute to the imbalance in media reporting. Furthermore, he suggests that the media's bias leads to the omission of Western political structures and multinational corporations' involvement in exploiting Africa's natural resources, supporting dictatorial regimes, and exporting weapons to crisis regions. Slavkovic posits that only strong leadership in Africa, capable of demanding equal negotiating and decision-making rights in international institutions, can mitigate the negative portrayal of Africa.

He emphasizes that removing the burden of dependence is crucial for Africa to be portrayed more positively in the media Slavkovic (2011).

Poncian (2015) offers a fresh perspective, contending that while the West has historically perpetuated a negative image of Africa, Africans themselves have also contributed to the continuation of this perception. He delves deeper into the role played by Africans in reinforcing Western negative perceptions about Africa. Poncian identifies factors such as wars, political instability, corruption, and mismanagement of financial resources as key contributors to the persistence of negative perceptions. Ultimately, Poncian concludes that Africa's trajectory of development hinges upon Africans' self-perception and their efforts to shape how they are perceived by the West.

In all of this literature, one thing stands out, Africa have been portrayed negatively in Western Media. So, while extant literature provides valuable insights into the Western Media representation of Africa and how the inactivity of African media (journalists) and Africans generally play active roles in perpetuating negative representation of Africa in the media, notable gaps persist. Limited scholarly attention has been directed towards comprehensively understanding the roles of bad governance, particularly leadership in Africa exacerbating Western media's biased representation. This paper aims to address these gaps by offering a focused examination of the corrupt practices of African leaders in Africa and their role in Western media's representation, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse on the representation of Africa in Western Media.

Western Media Representation of Africa: A Historical Overview.

In your text, treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Do not get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, and over 900 million people who are too busy starving, dying, warring, and emigrating to read your book. The continent is full of deserts, jungles, highlands, savannahs and many other things, but your reader doesn't care about all that, so keep your descriptions romantic, evocative and unparticular(Wainaina, 2005, cited in Ezeru, 2022, p.10)

The provided excerpt is derived from Binyavanga Wainaina's satirical essay "How to Write About Africa," wherein he humorously critiques the clichés and stereotypes often perpetuated by Western writers, journalists, and reporters in their coverage of Africa. Despite many Westerners never having visited Africa, they maintain a mental image of the continent shaped by various sources such as textbooks, news outlets, church mission reports and entertainment media, predominantly produced by individuals from Western backgrounds (Hawk, 1992). These depictions serve as the lens through which Westerners interpret media portrayals of Africa. Franks (2005) further elucidates that popular Western perceptions of Africa often align with the notion of the "dark continent," characterized by primordial irrationality, tribal chaos, civil unrest, political instability, pervasive corruption, ineffective leadership, hunger, famine, disease, particularly AIDS and other negative tropes, Franks (2005)

The origin of the negative portrayal in media can be traced back to foundational sources within Western culture (Wa’Njogu, 2009). In the fifth century BC, the Greek Historian Herodotus penned his work ‘Histories’, which served as a cautionary narrative regarding Africa (Adum et al., 2015). In this narrative, he recounts the tale of "Five Nasamonians – enterprising youths of the highest rank" who ventured into southern Libya. They encountered fruit trees and began to help themselves, only to be captured by "men of small stature, all of them skilled in magic" who took them for enigmatic and nefarious purposes (Gates, 2012, as cited in Adum et al., 2015). “Histories” depicts Africa as inhabited by savage and even non-human beings, juxtaposing the Greeks and Caucasians as the pinnacle of creation (Wa’Njogu, 2009).

This stereotype persisted over time, and in the mid-1800s, Charles Darwin reinforced it in the context of his theory of evolution. Originally, the title of his seminal work was “The Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection,” or “The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life” (Wa’Njogu, 2009). Subsequent editions omitted the latter part of the title, likely in response to its racist implications. However, it remains evident that, according to Darwin, Africans were perceived as evolving differently and therefore did not belong to the category of ‘favoured races’ with the same status as Europeans (Wa’Njogu, 2009).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European explorers emerged as primary purveyors of media imagery depicting Africa. It was during this period that the well-known metaphor of the "Dark Continent," commonly utilized in Western media to characterize Africa, originated (Jarosz, 1992, as cited in Oguh, 2015). Their narratives often portrayed Africans in a disparaging light, with accounts frequently exaggerating tales of African savagery to enhance book sales, as noted by Allimadi (2003). One notable example is the work of the renowned Welsh journalist and explorer Oguh M. Stanley in 1878 (Oguh, 2015). Stanley published an account of his expedition along the Zambezi River titled ‘Through the Dark Continent’, wherein he wrote: "I felt my heart suffused with purest gratitude to Him whose hand had protected us and who had enabled us to pierce the Dark Continent from east to west and to trace its mightiest river to the ocean bourne" (Oguh, 2015, p. 6).

Joseph Conrad quickly came up with his famous novel in 1899 (Oguh, 2015), “Heart of Darkness”. In his words, "Africa has become a place of darkness . . . And as I looked at the map of it in a shop-window it fascinated me as a snake would a bird – a silly little bird" (Oguh, 2015, p.7). In his critical analysis of Joseph Conrad’s "Heart of Darkness," Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe vehemently argued in his 1977 work "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s 'Heart of Darkness'" that Conrad's novel depicted Africa as "the other world," diametrically opposed to Europe and its civilization. Achebe contended that Conrad's portrayal characterized Africa as a place where human intelligence and refinement were ultimately derided by prevailing bestiality (Oguh, 2015). Wa’Njogu (2009) further posited that the writings of nineteenth-century authors laid the foundation for twentieth-century Western journalists and academics to perpetuate negative depictions of Africa during both the colonial and post-colonial periods.

By the early twentieth century, these adverse depictions had become deeply ingrained in the Western perception of Africa. Much like the explorers who shaped their understanding of Africa

based on the works of Herodotus and Darwin, twentieth-century Western journalists derived their stereotypes from the accounts penned by these explorers. These stereotypes continue to influence Western perceptions of Africa, serving as the framework for media coverage, both overtly and implicitly (Wa'Njogu, 2009).

In the mid to late twentieth century, Oguh (2015) observed that the portrayal of Africa in The New York Times from 1955 to 1995, as investigated by Schraeder and Endless (1998), demonstrated that "73 per cent of all articles provided negative images of African politics and society" (p.7). Furthermore, Oguh highlighted that researchers found a notable increase in negative imagery over time, with negativity prevalent in 67 per cent of articles in 1955, escalating to 92 per cent in 1985 and reaching 85 per cent in 1995. Similarly, Biko et al. (2000) conducted a study analyzing coverage of Africa in The New York Times and The Washington Post between March and mid-August 2000, revealing that out of 89 stories, 84 per cent were deemed 'negative' (Oguh, 2015).

Perhaps it was these pervasive depictions of Africa that led the editors of the Economist to characterize the continent as the "hopeless continent" at the outset of the 21st century (Oguh, 2015). This adverse portrayal has persisted to such an extent that Africa continues to be perceived through a negative lens. Reflecting on the perpetuation of this negative image of Africa, Adichie remarked:

If all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner . . . (Adichie, 2009)

Sadly, the negative representation of Africa has persisted even in the 21st century. However, it is important to acknowledge that the phenomenon of bad governance in Africa has also played a significant role in perpetuating this negative portrayal (Poncian, 2015). This sentiment is echoed by Olawuyi (2018), who asserted that despite the Western media's pessimistic depiction of Africa, the continent continues to grapple with prevalent issues such as bad governance, corruption, electoral malpractices and insecurity. Central to these internal challenges includes political instability, corruption and conflicts, which contribute to Africa's unfavourable image, is the problem of bad governance, spearheaded by African leaders (Poncian, 2015). Consequently, there is a pressing need to examine the issue of bad governance in Africa and the role played by corrupt African leaders to substantiate this assertion.

A historical overview of the emergence of bad governance in Africa.

Amid celebrations and aspirations for a promising future, numerous African nations achieved their political independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, initiating ambitious nation-building endeavours. Initially, significant strides were made by these countries: per capita GDP in sub-Saharan Africa exhibited a growth rate of 2.6 per cent annually between 1965 and 1974 (World Bank, 1994, as cited in Adesida, 2001), accompanied by notable enhancements in social indicators such as life expectancy, mortality rates, and school enrollments (UNDP, 1990, as cited in Adesida,

2001). However, this optimism was short-lived, as the initial aspirations soon waned. Multiparty states swiftly transformed into one-party systems, with several nations succumbing to successive collapses as leaders adopted despotic tendencies, and military coups installed dictatorial regimes (Meredith, 1985, as cited in Adesida, 2001).

Poncian (2015), referencing Adedeji (1999), highlights that within the span of four decades from the 1960s to the 1990s, approximately eighty instances of violent governmental changes occurred across forty-eight sub-Saharan African countries, primarily attributed to political crises and conflicts. Moreover, Poncian underscores that at the onset of the new millennium, eighteen countries were embroiled in armed rebellion, while eleven were grappling with severe political crises, with nineteen others experiencing varying degrees of political stability. Regrettably, some of the nations initially categorized as politically stable regressed into the category of unrest (Bujra, 2002, as cited in Poncian, 2015).

Adesida (2001), referencing Tunde (2000), observed that amidst political and economic upheavals, discussions concerning Africa's future was predominantly pessimistic. Many viewed Africa's political and economic shortcomings as evidence of the incapacity of Africans to govern themselves. Some experts even envisioned a future marked by recurrent crises, with a few openly advocating for the reassertion of colonial control over certain African nations by Western powers and/or their administration by multinational corporations or the United Nations (Adesida, 2001). Poncian (2015) further contends that the primary cause of these challenges lies in the poor leadership exhibited by African leaders, highlighting internal deficiencies rather than external manipulation as the root of Africa's predicament.

The preceding discussion elucidates the origins of poor governance in Africa and implicitly underscores the factors contributing to the emergence of political instability, violence, and related phenomena as pervasive framing metaphors in Western media portrayals of the continent. The present inquiry aims to delineate the role of poor governance in perpetuating the representation of Africa by Western media outlets.

Western Media Representation of Africa: The Role of Bad Governance

In analyzing the role of poor governance in perpetuating Western media portrayals of Africa, our analysis primarily centres on the issue of corruption among African leadership, contributing to negative perceptions of the continent. Attah-Poku (2013) characterizes African leaders and their leadership styles as "wicked, cruel, timid, greedy, corrupt, deceptive, deceitful, incompetent, disloyal, and short-sighted" (p.99), underscoring the pervasive nature of corrupt practices within African governance structures. The deleterious ramifications of corruption manifest in widespread poverty, political instability, and violence. As early as 2002, it was estimated that Africa incurred losses amounting to \$148 billion, equivalent to 25% of the GDP of African states, annually due to corruption (Blunt, 2002, as cited in Poncian, 2025). More recently, the Economic Development in Africa Report 2020, published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), highlights that Africa experiences an annual loss of approximately US\$88.6 billion, accounting for 3.7 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP), owing to illicit financial flows

(UNCTAD, 2020). Poncian (2015) underscores the pivotal role of African leaders in perpetuating these corrupt practices, arguing that the persistence of negative perceptions about Africa in the 21st century primarily stems from internal factors rather than external influences. Therefore, our examination focuses on instances where corrupt African leaders actively contribute to the exacerbation of negative representations by the Western media.

An illustrative case in point is the misappropriation associated with the tenure of General Sani Abacha, who held power as Nigeria's military ruler from 1993 to 1998. Dr Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, former Nigerian Finance Minister, highlighted the significance of Abacha's illicit gains as emblematic of the impediments corruption poses to economic development and poverty alleviation within a nation. In her 2012 publication titled "Reforming the Unreformable," she expounded on the magnitude of Abacha's corruption, contending that it eclipsed most other instances of malfeasance in Nigeria due to its brazenness. In her words:

In the five years of Abacha's rule, an estimated US\$3 billion to US\$5 billion of Nigeria's public assets were looted and sent abroad by Abacha, his family and associates. These sums amounted to a substantial part of Nigeria's public assets - 2.6 to 4.3 per cent of the 2006 gross domestic product and 20.6 to 34.4 per cent of the 2006 federal budget. At the upper end of the range, the amount stolen is larger than the 2006 education and health budgets combined (pp. 84-85)

Iweala (2012) further elucidated that according to estimates by the World Bank, the magnitude of funds associated with Abacha's misappropriations could have facilitated the provision of antiretroviral drug therapy for a cohort ranging between 2 to 3 million individuals afflicted with HIV/AIDS over a decade or supplied 200 million insecticide-treated nets. The extent of the embezzlement was underscored in media reports dating back to as early as 2000, as evidenced by headlines in The New York Times such as "Luxembourg Freezes Loot Abacha Took from Nigeria" (2000) and "Nigeria to Recover \$1 Billion from the Family of Late Dictator" (2002). The introductory lines of its 2006 report emphasized the significance of this issue. It says:

Nigeria has invested the \$500 million stolen from the state coffers by the 1990's dictator, Gen. Sani Abacha and his family and returned to the Nigerian government by Switzerland in roads, power, health, education and water, according to the World Bank, which monitored the spending to ensure that the money was not stolen again by officials again. In a report, the bank said it was the first time that looted resources had been returned to an African country (The New York Times, 2006)

The headline of the aforementioned report, "Nigeria: Loot Returned not Misspent," implicitly posits a prevailing presumption regarding Nigerian leaders' proclivity for the misappropriation of public funds. Likewise, a critical examination of the terminology employed by The New York Times, notably "Invested" and "Monitored," serves to affirm the negative perspective already harboured toward Nigerian officials. The assertion "monitored the spending to ensure that the money was not stolen again" subtly insinuates a pervasive lack of trust in the integrity of Nigerian officials, presupposing a propensity for theft. Furthermore, it implicitly reinforces the Western

stereotype suggesting African incapacity for self-governance without external oversight and intervention. In this manner, the perpetuation of a negative portrayal of Africa in Western media is sustained.

Similarly, Iweala (2012) recounts an incident on September 15, 2005, wherein Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, the governor of the Nigerian State of Bayelsa, was apprehended at London's Heathrow Airport and subjected to interrogation by officers of the London Metropolitan Police's Specialist and Economic Crime Unit on suspicion of money laundering. Subsequently, he was escorted from the airport to his residence in the Paddington district of London. A search conducted at his residence yielded the discovery of currency amounting to the equivalent of £920,000. On September 28, 2005, he faced arraignment on three charges of money laundering. Beyond the funds uncovered within his domicile, additional allegations implicated him in the unlawful transfer of £475,000 to another account, resulting in cumulative charges exceeding £1.8 million. Despite maintaining his innocence, the governor was granted bail pending trial. However, he absconded from the UK while on bail, purportedly disguising himself as a woman, and sought refuge in Nigeria, where constitutional provisions confer immunity from prosecution upon governors, presidents, and vice presidents during their tenure in office. This incident was subsequently reported by The New York Times on November 5, 2005. Here:

Nigeria's long sordid history of corruption continues with a new scandal as Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, governor of a small oil-producing state, flees money laundering charges in Britain by donning dress and wig to match false travelling documents; Nigerian Leaders are believed to have stolen or misspent \$400 billionLong associated with rampant corruption and kleptocratic governments, Nigeria has a year in long associated with rampant corruption and kleptocratic governments, Nigeria has a year in year out gotten one of the worst scores in Transparency International's world corruption perception index....Corruption touches virtually every aspect of Nigerian life, from the millions of sham e-mail messages sent each year by people claiming to be Nigerian officials seeking help with transferring large sums of money out of the country, to the police who routinely set up road blocks, sometimes every few hundred yards, to extract bribes of 20 naira, about 15 cents, from drivers (New York Times, 2005)

The above excerpt highlights the notable presence of a condescending tone regarding Nigeria. The assertion, "Long associated with rampant corruption and Kleptocratic governments..." encapsulates a pre-existing negative portrayal of Nigeria in the media, bolstered by the conduct of Nigerian political figures. This indicates a firmly entrenched image of Nigeria within media narratives. Furthermore, there is a discernible tendency towards exaggeration evident in the portrayal, as illustrated by the broad extension of Diepreye's money laundering activities to encompass police officers and the entire Nigerian populace. The declaration, "Corruption touches virtually every aspect of Nigerian life..." underscores the pervasive nature of corruption within Nigerian society. Therefore, it is unsurprising that on May 10, 2016, the British Broadcasting

Corporation prominently featured the assertion by David Cameron, the former British Prime Minister, characterizing Nigerians as "fantastically corrupt..." as a headline in its news coverage (BBC, 2016).

In Malawi, the issue of corruption among its leadership remains a significant concern, tarnishing the nation's reputation on the global stage. This is evidenced by a report featured in *Foreign Policy*, a prominent US-based magazine, on May 21, 2021, titled "How Corruption Derails Development in Malawi: Promises of Good Governance Haven't stopped politicians from Raiding the public purse in one of the World's poorest countries" (*Foreign Policy*, 2021). Furthermore, a notable incident exemplifying this pervasive issue occurred when the former director of the Blantyre Anti-Corruption Bureau, Reyneck Matemba, was apprehended for allegedly accepting a bribe of \$10,000 in exchange for a contract to supply food to Malawi's police service (*Voice of America*, 2022). Subsequently, on August 8, 2022, *Voice of America's* online news platform reported on this development under the headline "Malawi Former Anti-Corruption Chief Arrested Over Graft" (*Voice of America*, 2022). Such occurrences not only erode public trust but also reinforce negative stereotypes, including the perception of Africans as inherently corrupt and irrational. The irony of a figure tasked with combating corruption being implicated in corrupt activities starkly contradicts the principles associated with their former position, thus perpetuating negative portrayals of African leadership in Western media.

Similarly, the Blantyre Anti-Corruption Bureau in Malawi detained Dr. Saulos Klaus Chilima, the nation's vice president, on allegations that between March 2021 and October 2021, he received pecuniary benefits totalling \$280,000, along with other items, from Malawi-born British businessman Zuneth Sattar. These alleged benefits were purportedly granted to Dr Chilima in exchange for his facilitation of contracts awarded by the Malawian government to Xaviar Limited and Malachite FZE, two entities associated with him. It is noteworthy that Zuneth Sattar is currently under investigation for suspected corrupt activities in both the United Kingdom and Malawi. Subsequently, in response to these allegations, President Chakwera revoked all powers vested in Dr. Chilima (*The Africa Report*, 2022). This incident garnered international attention, with *Reuters News* reporting on November 25, 2022, under the headline "Malawi vice president arrested over corruption, says graft watchdog" (*Reuters*, 2022) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) similarly covering the event with the headline "Malawi's Vice President Saulos Chilima Charged with Corruption" (BBC, 2022).

The recurring motif within these cases underscores the prevalence of blatant corrupt practices among African leaders. This observation aligns with Tafi Mhaka's (2022) discourse featured in an opinion piece on *Al Jazeera* titled "Corruption; Africa's Undeclared Pandemic." Mhaka contends that a pandemic of corruption is rampant in Malawi and across the African continent, with African leaders and high-ranking civil servants serving as principal perpetrators. He articulates this sentiment, stating:

Indeed, from Malawi to South Africa and Zimbabwe, from Angola to Mozambique and Namibia, in countries across Africa high-ranking civil servants and their

relatives, in cahoots with industry and business leaders, seem to have long been shamelessly stealing from the long-suffering masses (Mhaka, 2022)

Delving deeper into his analysis, Mhaka (2022) substantiates his assertions regarding the active complicity of African leaders in perpetuating corruption across the continent by citing specific instances. One such example involves the corruption allegations levied against South Africa's former President Jacob Zuma, alongside numerous former ministers and CEOs of state-owned enterprises. Their alleged orchestration of state capture aimed to benefit the affluent Gupta family and enrich themselves. This scheme was meticulously planned and executed, as highlighted by the findings of South Africa's Chief Justice Raymond Zondo in the final report of the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, released on June 22. The report concluded that the ruling African National Congress party, under Zuma's leadership, not only condoned but actively facilitated corruption and state capture. (Mhaka, 2022). Additionally, South Africa has been grappling with efforts to reclaim millions of dollars lost due to questionable contracts associated with the nationwide COVID-19 pandemic response in 2020 (Mhaka, 2022).

Similarly, in Zimbabwe, allegations have been levelled against businessman Kudakwashe Tagwirei, an ally of President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is accused of accumulating \$90 million through a dubious central bank transaction (Mhaka, 2022). In Mozambique, former President Armando Guebuza's son, Ndambi Guebuza, former Finance Minister Manuel Chang, and several other high-ranking members of the governing party face accusations related to the misappropriation of loans totalling \$2.2 billion, intended for maritime surveillance, fishing, and shipyard projects (Mhaka, 2022). Moreover, in Namibia, former Fisheries Minister Bernhardt Esau and former Justice Minister Sacky Shanghala are implicated in accepting bribes amounting to millions of dollars from an Icelandic fishing company (Mhaka, 2022).

In light of the conspicuous instances of flagrant corruption involving African leaders, which invariably contribute to the impoverishment of the masses, one needs not question why Western media persists in portraying Africa negatively. What impedes the West from perpetuating stereotypes of poverty, political instability, rampant corruption and a purportedly irrational populace, thus perpetuating a narrative wherein Africa is consistently depicted as reliant on Western intervention?

Building upon this precedent, it becomes evident that a comprehensive understanding of the negative portrayal of Africa by Western media can be readily discerned. On December 23, 2017, The New York Times reported on a meeting held in the Oval Office aimed at advancing President Trump's immigration agenda, during which Trump reportedly made disparaging remarks about Nigerians, suggesting that once they had experienced the United States, they would not return to their homes in Africa (Punch Online, 2018). Similarly, on January 11, 2018, The Washington Post documented another instance during a White House meeting on Immigration Reform, where President Donald Trump referred to African nations as "shithole countries" (Punch Online, 2018). These remarks made by Trump serve as poignant examples of the negative perceptions harboured by the West toward Africa. Instances of this nature contribute to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes within Western media representations of the continent. Moreover, beyond the

prevailing bias evident in Western media, African leaders themselves are actively involved in exacerbating this situation. Consequently, Poncian's assertion (2015) regarding the central role of African leaders in this tumult holds weight.

Conclusion

Having elucidated the detrimental impact of the negative portrayal of Africa in Western media alongside the compounding effect of corrupt practices by African leaders, a salient query naturally arises: Can Africa effectively address biased and unjust media coverage? Furthermore, is there a viable pathway toward enhancing the media image of Africa? The affirmative response to these inquiries is unequivocal. However, the attainment of such objectives necessitates proactive engagement from African leadership. Primarily, there must be a concerted effort among African leaders to fulfil the imperative of effective leadership. This entails a resolute commitment to rectify the continent's media image. As observed by Slavkovic (2011), the cultivation of robust leadership structures within Africa is imperative. These structures should advocate for equitable participation and decision-making rights within international institutions. By establishing frameworks conducive to such goals, the eventual outcome will not solely comprise a Western media portrayal of Africa in a more favourable light but will also engender an Africa that commands undeniable attention and recognition.

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