Framing Africa's Ability to Self-Govern:

An Analysis of Western media's representation of African nations during the

COVID-19 Pandemic

Shiko Njoroge

Advised by Shani Evans

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Abstract

The process of representation in the global media environment is implicated in complex and contested power relations over whose stories are told, how and by whom. Due to an array of geopolitical factors, Africa has become synonymous with famine, tribal war, hunger and poverty in the news discourse and public imagination of the West. The aim of this thesis is to analyze the circulation of information from Western news organizations about Africa's response to COVID-19 and how assertions on how COVID-19 will play out in the African context are implicated in Eurocentric discursive rituals that dismiss the momentous impact colonialism and present day neoliberal policies have had on Africa's diverse socioeconomic conditions. Through the analysis of articles published from *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, I argue that Africa's infamous narrative as a homogenous place of scarcity and incompetency were used to frame Africans as incapable of self-sufficiency and productive decision-making to fight against the emerging global pandemic. It is apparent that Africa's problem is not simply 'negative' storylines in Western media coverage, but that there is a lack of in-depth and nuanced reporting of the continent that includes all the historical specificites of Africa's diverse and dynamic story.

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Introduction: Coming to Africa

When I was 11 years old, my family made the decision to pack up our bags, sell our two-story house in the suburbs of Phoenix, Arizona and move to Nairobi, Kenya. Towards the end of what would be the first of many exhausting and endless 9,000-mile journeys, the jumbo plane was moments from touching wheels to tarmac. It was pitch black outside and my face was pressed against the ovular window staring at the blinking red and yellow dots below. "It looks just like a city!" I whispered. My mother turned towards me, brow slightly furrowed with an amused grin on her face, "Duh, Shiko, that's because it is." And so began my journey towards unraveling and unlearning every misconception and ignorant perception I had of the 'dark continent' that was cultivated with my particular middle school education.

For the next couple of years in Nairobi, I attended a private British system school in Nairobi on the outskirts of Kawangware- a low income and heavily populated residential area with substandard housing. I learned quickly about the nuances of Nairobi's socioeconomic setup- the disparity between the wealthy and the low income, the predominance of an upper middle class- all the ways a typical metropolitan area is stratified and diversely organized. In the beginning I felt like an outsider from within. I had a popular Kenyan name: 'Wanjiku' is so common that during a press release, former President Daniel Arap Moi used that name to stand in for the 'common folk' when dismissing the appeal for a newly amended constitution in 2010. He said cordially to the attendees, "Do you think *Wanjiku* understands what a constitution is?" My dad was Kenyan, born and raised. I looked Kenyan- I was Black and supposedly I had the wide forehead that many women of the Kikuyu tribe typically possessed. But I had missing gaps in my cultural knowledge. I wrote the date wrong, I incorrectly called a torch 'flashlight, I didn't

know Sheng[1]. And according to my classmates I sounded "white" when I spoke English and "American" when I spoke Kiswahili. I stood out like a sore *American*. Some of these eccentricities have faded with time after living there for 11 more years, but I still have an American accent and fellow Kenyans notice that kind of thing. It can make them wary of how familiar I am with their customs and lifestyle- creating this perceived 'me' vs 'them' dynamic. And sometimes I embody that belief system- there are moments where I'm faced with my own ignorance of a cultural practice and I leave feeling like a 50% Kenyan-culturally that is.

An important takeaway that I gleaned from having to deconstruct the concept of identity, nationality and the sense of belonging at such an early age, was a newfound appreciation for the effect media can have on one's perception of other places outside your homeland borders. And that there can be conflicting ideas about how you perceive your own country and how people without that patriotic bond perceive it. For example, I was confronted with my years of being indoctrinated with a core belief in nationalism, blinding loyalty and devotion to my country, once I moved to Nairobi and no longer had to rise every morning to say a pledge of allegiance 'to the flag of the United States of America' with a hand over my heart- all before I had even grasped the meaning of 'a republic'. Once in Nairobi, I realized that my friends had a reading of America that didn't really fit in with my understanding of 'home'. They saw the United States as a contributing factor to the governance problems in Kenya. They saw the richness and luxury displayed on MTV shows like *Cribs* and *My Super Sweet 16* (a show documenting teenagers, generally with wealthy parents, throwing lavish, excessive and expensive coming-of-age celebrations, which usually resulted in tantrums and spoiled child vibe hissy fits) as proof that

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[1] Sheng is a Swahili and English-based cant, perhaps a mixed language or creole, originating among the urban youth of Nairobi, Kenya, and influenced by many of the languages spoken there. While primarily a language of urban youths, it has spread across social classes and geographically to neighbouring Tanzania and Uganda.

Americans were only interested in benefiting themselves at the expense of other nation-states. They couldn't understand how American children could cry over receiving the wrong colored sports car when they had access to so much privilege and *things* already. This in turn, jaded their perception of 'developmental aid' from Western countries- philanthropists and donors coming in with their beige safari outfits on a mission to 'help' Kenya. Conversely, other friends believed that the wealth glorified on their screens and by their favorite celeb icon, could be the saving grace to their problems. They saw America as a land of opportunity and potential of the same financial success promised on the billboards, in the magazines and through the movies. When I was in the U.S. I was a 'latchkey' kid, living in a single-parent household at certain points in my life. My mother worked full-time and provided a well-balanced life for my brother and I, but if we had stayed in the U.S during my adolescence, I was never going to get a car on my 16th car, nevermind a shiny new sports car, this I knew for certain.

Pertinent to this study, is that the misconceptions of national perception went the other way as well. When you said the word 'Africa' in my typical U.S classroom, it conjured a very specific and stereotypical image of a place covered in savannahs and exotic wildlife. Other images of a Western conception of 'Africa' came from the very popular advertisements between my scheduled TV-watching sessions. These ads showed white celebrities in wide-brimmed hats crouching near little Black children in nondescript African huts, urging me to call the toll number on the bottom of the screen to give the children a new chance at life. The ads were always centering the ongoing prevalence of disease, famine and poverty in a homogenized Africa and the solutions to these problems seemed to only be found in the pockets of a benevolent and charitable Western outsider.

Several studies have been conducted on Western media representation of Africa (Fair, 1993; Staeheli & Hammett, 2013; Jarosz, 1992; Ogunyemi, 2011; Yanqiu & Matingwina, 2016). Fair (1993) reveals that the image of Africa and Africans with a set of extremely unfavourable attributes has been invented and constructed by racist media. According to this perspective, Western media frames Africa's representation and stories around poverty, conflict, disease, instability, and illiteracy. This negative portrayal of Africa creates widespread public perception of the residents of low-income countries (commonly referred to as "the developing world") as perpetual victims, inferior, and less than human (Rodney, 1978).

In Western media, Africa is not prioritized as an 'important place' in the same way other Western countries are. In the selection of news, journalists , editors and other media workers involved in the news production process sort and sift through incoming information, deciding what becomes news based on highly personal motives and organizational imperatives (largely meaning profit). The selection of news in American press creates a hierarchy in which news from other so-called 'developed countries'- these are countries that journalists sometimes refer to as elite countries is emphasized (Semmel, 1976; Adams, 1986; Potter 1987) because they have a cultural, economic and political affinity with the U.S.

Because Africa is perceived by journalists and editors as not newsworthy when compared to other countries where US geopolitical interests are stronger and because these same journalists perceive a lack of interest in Africa by the U.S. public, reporting news from African countries is not seen as profitable enough (Kimani, 2009). In other words, news from Africa doesn't sell. This creates low visibility for African stories, and when those few stories are discussed in a limited, narrow and reductive fashion, it creates a very distorted and inaccurate image of the space.

When COVID-19 was officially declared a pandemic in the beginning of March, 2020, it didn't take long for people to start predicting very bleak outcomes for the African continent. In an April 10th interview with CNN, Melinda Gates expressed her belief that the coronavirus pandemic will have the worst impact in the 'developing world'. She said she foresees bodies lying around in the streets of African countries. Her husband, Microsoft founder and CEO Bill Gates also had some choice words to say about Africa. One afternoon as I scrolled through my Facebook feed, I came across a video starring the wealthy philanthropist. In it, Gates proclaimed that "developing" countries don't have the large resources that "developed" countries do, and that there would be a need to get vaccines in Africa as quickly as possible to ensure that the needs of the 'at risk' populations were especially met. Alarm bells were softly going off in the back of my head, as his words seemed to rely on this prevalent and recurring imagery of a "Dark Continent".

The metaphor of the Dark Continent is a term used in Euro American discourse that points to a specific way that the land and people of Africa are constructed and represented to a Western public from the late 19th century to present day (Jarosz, 2017). This imagery relies on painting Africa as a space of Other and antithetical to an idealized conception of the West as 'superior' and 'more enlightened.' When international news coverage of Africa relies on this narrative, Africa is painted in a negative light and it becomes homogenized- national and cultural borders are ignored in favor of reinforcing a monolithic depiction of chaos, drought and disease. In doing so, mainstream American newspaper outlets such as *The New York Times* and the *The Washington Post* perpetuate a "mood of fatalism, or still worse, callous unconcern" (de Beer, 2010) in the eyes of an American audience. The metaphor homogenizes and flattens places and people, denies the actualities and specificities of various social and economic processes within the continent and obscures a nuanced explanation of the forces of cultural and economic

imperialism unfolding within Africa in its relation to Europe and America. Thus, the metaphor legitimates the status quo and perpetuates unequal relations of power (Orgad, 2012).

This negative imagery reveals how discourse can be a particular sort of 'violence' in the power it wields when it comes to geographic representation (McKittrick, 2011). McKittrick conceptualizes the racial and geographic violence that is bound up in narratives and codes about particular communities and geographies "that are condemned to death over and over again" (2011, 954) through a term she calls 'a black sense of place'. In her analysis, this terminology is used to interrogate how certain spaces have been defined as absolute otherness in the United States such as slums, sites of man-made disasters, prison and inner-city low-income regions which largely captures people of color, the impoverished, the criminalized and the ill. However, the term description can also be extended to those who occupy the 'third-world' category. When a 'black sense of place' is characterized as fostering suffering bodies, a place of scarcity, and importantly on the margins of whiteness, it becomes only logical that these places and their inhabitants are already condemned. They are seen as being on their natural progression to both social and physical death. They, meaning the non-white, non Western "others", therefore have nothing to contribute to society- intellectually or otherwise. Put differently, McKittrick summarizes that"it seems eerily natural that those rendered less than human are also deemed too destroyed or too subjugated or too poor to write, imagine, want, or have a new lease on life" (2011, 955).

Subsequently, social groups within a black sense of place, and relevant to this project that would be Africans, have a lack of power when it comes to the flow and movement of information and discourse. Rather than being in charge of it, they are on the receiving end- held captive by it. News coverage is not equally shared amongst nations. Instead, "there are core

countries [which] dominate the news flow and news about the periphery is more often than not "negative" (de Beer, 2010, 597). When Africa is not given space to direct their representation, the news flow model stays unbalanced and unidirectional. Africa and its people remain flat and simplistic.

With the history of these discursive practices in mind, I am interested in Western media coverage of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa; the circulation of information about particular national responses to COVID-19 as well as their assertions on how the pandemic will play out in the African context.The purpose of this thesis is to expand the conversation about the problematic image of the African countries in the international media and to try to understand why the coverage patterns of these countries are continually characterized by low visibility, stereotypes and broad and inaccurate generalizations (Yanqiu &Matingwina, 2016; Kimani, 2009; Allimadi, 2002).

In my thesis, I would like to reveal the way Africa is represented in Western journalism as it relates to COVID-19 and situate it in a context that reflects colonialism and alternative modes of domination and control. The tendency of the international media to cover the 'developing world' in this distorted way has a long continued history that started with the period of colonialism. The negative portrayal about Africa and the Africans as 'backwards' and 'inept' during the 19th and 20th century was used to justify the European colonial power's quest to dominate and exploit the people of their resources, labor, and land (Heldring & Robinson, 2012; Mulinge & Lesetedi, 1998). Many scholars emphasize the role of media coverage of Africa as an influential role in the persistence of this negative perception well into the 21st century (Silva, 2017; Chari, 2010; Jarosz, 2017). Africa to people who have never been there or interacted with

people from specific African nations can easily come to understand it as a place exclusively inhabited by impoverished people, terrorist and despotic leaders.

In order to do an analysis of Western media journalism coverage on COVID-19 in Africa and how that representation reflects narratives about African nations' agency and ability to address their own problems, I will be exploring the theoretical framework proposed first by Teun A. Van Dijk that analyzes news as a discourse. The notion of news media is primarily defined as a 'news item or news report i.e., a text or discourse on radio, on TV or in the newspaper, in which new information is given about recent events. In my thesis, I am mostly concerned with news in the press- news articles published in prominent US daily newspapers- *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* Using discourse analysis, I selected 61 articles from the two newspaper outlets combined that matched the keywords 'Africa' and 'COVID-19' or 'coronavirus' between March and December of 2020 to analyze how the journalists framed the actions and decisions made by African governments and the national response to the pandemic. I was also interested in the assertions made about the impact the pandemic would have on the continent based on the described socioeconomic and political conditions of specified African nations. Therefore my research question sets out to answer how two prominent US newspapers framed the potential impact of COVID-19 in African countries. Furthermore, how do these representations relate to dominant narratives about African's agency and ability to solve problems?

My specific area of interest for analysis is on the way stories and cultural events are framed in the news production process and how that process is implicated with power relations on a global scale. What belief systems, attitudes, and strategies are involved in news production? How do newsmakers represent and reproduce the social context of news production? What are

the deciding factors on what events are interpreted as news events? And finally, how are

narratives produced and reproduced and effectively sold as "truth"? I am interested in

interrogating the 'truth' that has been constructed and popularized in Western media to define the

capabilities of African nations.

Chapter 1

Evolutionary Trajectory of Western Perceptions about Africa: Literature Review

The news coverage in the mainstream media, films about Africa and those featuring the

Africans, as well as advertisements about Africa are generally regarded to be biased against

Africa as they overemphasize negative issues at the expense of the positive developments

(Poncian, 2015). Global media plays a role in creating representations of ourselves and our

nation-states as well as other nation-states. These representations are created along power

hierarchies and challenges arise when dominant media platforms create representations of the

nation that are different from the way the nation perceives themselves (Orgad, 2012; Tsikata,

2014; Bassil, 2010). Scholarship around media suggests that another divisive, often problematic,

quality about the globalization of mass communication is the institutional desire to maximize

profit and appeal to a mainstream audience, which sometimes comes at the expense of

invalidating the voices of nations and peoples in lesser positions of power (Fursich, 2010;

Tsikata, 2014; Hansen, 2011). The extent to which the less powerful and politically marginal can

obtain media access, affects who gets to tell which stories and what versions are legitimated as

truth. These marginalized camps are usually labelled as deviant "Others". And in the case of the

African continent, there is ample research that shows Western reporting framing it as a chaotic

space beyond relief and in constant need for support by the West (Fursich, 2010; Said, 1978;

Lule, 2005).

I am interested in investigating how these claims hold up in light of the COVID-19 global pandemic that is affecting every nation in some shape or form. Reporting of events in the African space are mostly skewed in a way that fits into existing frames of these representations that can be insensitive and rely on stereotypes that were introduced during colonialism to justify European pursuits for exploitation and control. In my thesis, I would like to bring in a postcolonial theoretical framework into conversations around the Western discursive practices used to frame Africa in international journalism as it relates to COVID-19. Do we witness the same lack of cultural and historical awareness and sensitivity needed to bring fully-developed African stories to a global audience in a moment that demands transnational understanding and support.

In many studies of news production, the notion of news values has been used to explain the selection of news items, their chance of being published or the actual depiction of news stories as a way to demonstrate how the discourse is inextricably linked to sociocultural context (Breed, 1955, 1956; Gans, 1979; Robinson & Tuchman, 1981; Golding & Elliott, 2008). News values are a set of guidelines or criteria used to identify what material will make the best story. Essentially, these values decide which stories will be the most attractive to their readership and what information or angle will be the most 'newsworthy'(Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Galtung & Ruge, 1965). A newspaper outlet has a limited number of pages and only so much time to report the day's events, and so the job of a news editor is to be selective and filter out the information that lacks that newsworthiness quality. Some typical news values that help influence what gets picked are: impact, close proximity to home, human interest, conflict and how current it is (Staab, 1990). News does not neutrally reflect social reality or empirical facts at all. It is a social construction. Events and facts do not have 'intrinsic importance' but become important because

they are selected by journalists who adhere to a culturally and ideologically determined set of

selection criteria (Broersma, 2010; Staab, 1990). Through media, journalists are part of a highly

impactful symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed.

Subsequently, the meaning behind these realities can have material consequences on how people

are treated, understood and navigate politically, economically and socially in the world (Orgad,

2012).

Framing theory deals with "how texts are structured so as to present a specific reality (i.e.

to frame events in a way that makes sense of those events" (Olugboji, 2020, 19). Specifically,

framing deals with how the media selects, emphasizes, and/or excludes stories and information

as a means of presenting a perceived reality in order to make the information more digestible to

their targeted audience. And as such, what the journalists and editors deliberately choose to

include, exclude and emphasis within the storytelling process is largely dependent on their own

positionality and point of reference. This makes the storytelling process very political and

subjective.

Intensifying globalization has led to an increased interconnectedness between economies

and nation-states and one way it has impacted media communication is via the emerging news

style that is global journalism. This style of media developed out of the need for more people to

know about the world- reporting on issues that transcend national boundaries (de Beer, 2010;

Berglez, 2008; de Beer and Merrill, 2013). Global journalism seeks to cultivate a transnational

culture of news and expose the complex relations between different social realities, however

there is much debate on the effectiveness and equity in constructing a global culture (Berglez,

2008; Reese, 2010). Once again, imbalanced power relations are implicated in shaping whose

stories are told, how they're framed and who has the authority to tell and frame those stories in such a way.

What is Globalization?

The body of international journalism research is a contested landscape with differing opinions on the degree of impact globalization has had on the systematic structure and practices of journalism (Williams, 2011). And among those who do believe journalism has been affected by the process of cultural globalization, many are pessimistic of the consequences, claiming the forces of homogenization will lead to a domination of Western capitalist culture over media (Nothias, 2016; Rantanen & Jiménez-Martínez, 2019; Reese, 2010). This belief holds that there will be a reduction in cultural diversity, as nations across the globe slowly morph into a singular identity that exclusively upholds Western customs, ideas and values. The process of cultural homogenization through the domination of the Western (read American) capitalist culture is also known as "McDonaldization" and has been criticized as a form of cultural imperialism and neocolonialism (Wolf, 2001).

Globalization is the process of a growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures and populations through the exchanges of human beings, goods, services, capital, technologies and cultural practices globally (Scholte, 2005; Williams, 2011)). This has led to the increased intermingling of cultures globally as more people become aware of events that are occurring elsewhere, in different parts of the world.

Globalization is a highly debated concept with a 'wide array of claims and counterclaims' (Scholte, 2005). Some skeptics say that it is a myth- that the increased global exchange is not necessarily leading to a greater connectivity or dialogue amongst nations involved (Hafez, 2007; Martell, 2007). While others are convinced of its existence. Among the believers that

globalization is actually breaking down national boundaries thus creating some degree of homogeneity; there is disagreement on the consequences of this spread of homogeneity. Most agree that globalization along with the internet have created a new deterritorialized space for news media and political discourse that overrides geography (Steger & James, 2019). However, while some see this as an avenue for increased opportunities for non-mainstream, citizen-based news sources, there are those who stress the negative outcomes of a 'less diverse and more homogenous' world by implicating the already existent power dynamics across nation-states (Williams, 2011). They worry that the growing interconnectedness is determined by a few major players- particular the U.S and Western Europe- rather than the many countries with less geopolitical power (Mustapha et al., 2011; Rantanen, 2012). The fear is that those already dominant world powers will be able to impose their own agenda on the world 'with a diminution of national identities and sovereignty' (Williams, 2011, 6). This pessimistic view that the cultural identities of most nations will be undermined by more dominant Western influence is in direct conflict with what global journalism sets out to achieve. Global journalism is said to be invested in investigating how people and their actions, practices, life conditions etc. in different parts of the world are interrelated (Berglez, 2008). One of its defining characteristics is to break down the concept of a national outlook in media that places the nation at the center of things when framing stories and social realities (Beck, 2005, 111). The aim in doing so, is to avoid cultural stereotypes, practices of other-ing and West-centrism framework. The idea that globalizing media rituals will result in the creation of a Westernized monoculture complicates our appreciation of assertions that global media has the ability to bring an outsider 'foreign' experience into the homes of other nations and generate a better understanding between people, cultures and countries.

Global Journalism in the News

Traditionally the nation-state had an influential role in determining the practice of journalism (Burgh, 2009; Berglez, 2008). The process of obtaining and covering news was divided into a foreign-domestic binary. Through this binary everything happening outside the home state had the implication of alien, strange and unfamiliar (Berger, 2009). This formed the mentality that something that was happening to a 'them' living outside country lines had nothing to do with the 'us' living within (Berger, 2009). Berglez (2008) argues that the concept of global space, developed within global journalism, tends to transcend this. In global space, no singular space over-determines the current news coverage. Because of globalization and technology there is no longer a need for specialized foreign correspondents. The internet as a platform for news consumption means foreign news-gatherers do not need to travel to another country to report on events. Online local reports around the world have become sources of international news.

Those with a positive approach to globalization associate this new form of global journalism with democracy 'and the potential to advance a 'more engaged and active citizenship' (Reese et al., 2007, 237). They also believe that global journalism contributes to social transparency and acts as a pinnacle of change, which is at the heart of globalization optimists' "hopes for democracy" (Gingrich, 2019). Thus, within global space, journalism's role in society is to act as a monitor of power and provide the audience with the kind of information that will help them self-govern (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2019). This means that citizens of African nations should be able to read stories about themselves that are influential in building their own autonomy against more entrenched social institutions.

One proponent of global journalism is Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan who developed the notion of the global village to highlight the positive influence a more connected

consumer platform of media would have on news production and global camaraderie. (Reese, 2010) The global village notion suggests that through the daily production and consumption of media, images and content by a global audience, individuals will get involved in complex communities of networks stretching worldwide. This in turn, generates a community of single mindedness, operating simultaneously in a shared cause of social change. Within the global village framework, individuals transcend the micro, meso-, and macro- dynamics of their physical settings, and with the aid of electronic media and other new technologies learn more about cultures and cultural perspectives outside their own, all while maintaining diverse relationships. (Reese, 2010).

However, many argue against McLuhan's ideology and what it promises. Williams (2011) argues that 'the global village' is imbalanced in terms of values, ideas and lifestyle, and is instead overwhelmingly shaped by Western values. Other scholars have also argued that despite the optimistic claims that global journalism is capturing the reality that we are embedded in communities beyond the ones we live in, physical place hasn't ceased to matter for globular processes entrenched in economics, politics and sociocultural events (Reese, 2010). And what's more, certain places particularly the U.S. and Western Europe, still hold essentialized importance and centrality in the global geography, making them 'global hotspots' and highly favored in corporate mainstream media (Reese, 2010; Ojo, 2014; Kimani, 2009). In fact (Williams) suggests that most of the time, international reporting in Western media systems are produced for domestic audiences, not for the regions in question (2011).

New technologies, such as digital/online media platforms ,although intended to promise a more egalitarian, participatory and progressive structure, have contributed to familiar structures of inequity and commercial exploitation (Berglez, 2008). Looking at the stereotypical

representation of "Africans suffering' through coverage of national disasters, epidemics and poverty- all popularized tropes- highlight how journalists play a vital role in orienting (or not) the Western spectator towards the "Other" in need (Bassil, 2010). When a disaster takes place in countries far from Western Europe or the U.S., the physical but also psychological distance leads to a situation in which the perception of the event is almost exclusively shaped by the media (Jacobson, 2003). This psychological distance has the potential to block engagement, identification and even attention in both an emotional and practical way (Joye, 2015). Stories that involve foreign events and foreign actors are often simplified for an American readership who has little or no direct knowledge of "political terrains or actors in the distant country" (Ojo, 2014,7). This means editors will often adapt international stories to domestic concerns and interests to ensure readers at home can relate to the coverage- framing the events in a version that fits their prior understanding of the place and people. (Orgad, 2012; Golding and Elliot, 2008). This can leave the American audience with a feeling of indifference for the actual cultural specificities of the African nations and the nuanced and complex ways events are shaping the lives of Africans themselves. Hence, the continual practice of making the unfamiliar *familiar* and the global *local* debunks the idea that global media has created a global village – a singular community that transcends nation lines – with homogeneous worldviews.

   In his book *International Journalism*, Kevin Williams provides the analysis that among the proponents of globalization's impact on international journalism, there are two factions: 'positive globalizers' vs 'pessimistic globalizers'(2011). As proponents, the two groups both agree that the process is breaking down national boundaries and creating some degree of homogeneity across cultures. They however, have differences on whether the imposition of hegemonic values, usually Western, is detrimental or beneficial to the craft of journalism. The

positive globalizers associate the cultural transfer with modernization theory. They believe it to be an integral and beneficial influence on the development of Africa, Asian and Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s. Since journalism in these regions was modeled after the US, British or European newsroom structures and norms, there is a standardization of news in practice and values that they appreciate (2011). This, in their eyes, has facilitated the development of international journalism and generated an interconnectedness between peoples and nations. They don't deny that British and American news organizations, agencies and newspapers dominate the flow of news around the world due to the hegemony of Anglo-American model of traditional journalism. Moreover, they do not interpret this domination as a negative outcome and instead see it as a way to develop a sense of global belonging "where people are coming together to create world cosmopolitan citizenship" (Williams, 2011, 6).

Those with a pessimistic viewpoint on globalization's impact on global journalism associate the Western transfer of values with cultural imperialism. By using a post-colonist analytic framework, they remember that colonialism was a primary defining experience for most people, nations and communities and individuals in encountering each other on a global level and see media scholarship once again as a landscape dominated by Anglo-Ameriacan thinking (Williams, 2011). They see the imposition of Western values in mainstream journalism as inappropriate to the conditions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. For example, Hugo de Burgh highlights the range of conventions, practices and values that differentiate between journalism in different cultures. He believes that "how journalism operates… is a product of culture" that should be protected and maintained (2009, 15). Currently, however, international journalism is determined by Anglo-American news values and practices which include using English as the world language, the concentration of academic and textbook publishing in Britain and American

and the long tradition of journalism training and research done in the U.S.- because it is

privileged as a legitimate source of knowledge over other places. (Josephi, 2005). Hugo and his

fellow authors argue that by prescribing the Anglo-America model as the only valid way of

practicing the profession, the diversity of other journalism traditions have been ignored or

neglected (2009).

COVID-19 and global connections

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes, unsettling multiple

facets of our existence. The COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the coronavirus pandemic, is

an ongoing global pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute

respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The virus was first identified in December

2019 in Wuhan, China. And on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization officially

declared it a global pandemic. With more than 160 million confirmed cases and more than 3.3

million deaths worldwide, as of May 2021, COVID-19 has been one of the most deadliest

pandemics in history (Li et al., 2020). It is the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918

Spanish flu pandemic. The virus is highly contagious because it rapidly spreads and continuously

evolves in the human population. Because of global shutdowns of markets and non-essential

services, social distancing practices to reduce the amount of cases and the global consensus of

many countries and regions to impose quarantines, entry bans and other travel restrictions, there

has been both a negative economic and social impact felt throughout the world. The pandemic

has also affected the political landscape of multiple countries- elections have been rescheduled

due to fears of spreading the virus. In the U.S. there was an increased awareness of the social

phenomena of police brutalities that disproportionately affected Black Americans, resulting in

large scale protests in at least 200 U.S cities (Edwards, 2020). This national demand for social

justice led to international support, and through social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, you could see photos and video footage documenting citizens from over 60 other countries protesting in solidarity against racism, police brutality and the arming of police.

With COVID-19 impacting all parts of the world in unique and similar ways, there is a growing need once again to reexamine media communication standards and the role journalism plays on the international stage. Coverage of pandemic in Africa requires a globally focused approach – conventional Western understandings of the space as homogenous and 'backwards' will be inadequate and inappropriate. Western foreign correspondents have an obligation to find the humanity in the stories they are uplifting; to represent the everyday human experience with all its complexities and diversity, rooted in historical accuracies, without alienating the people of their stories to their Western audience. As lives are continually impacted by these representations, journalists who are committed to accurately reporting on Africa must actively work to deconstruct narratives that do a poor attempt at capturing the agency and humanity of African citizens.

The Barefooted, Hungry and Thirsty African: Representation of the "Other" in Western Media

Representation in the media such as film or print journalism is not a mere mirror of reality; it is a social construction of a collection of realities- realities that normalize specific world views and ideologies. Cultural-critical media scholars are especially interested in studying the idea of representation. Jamaican- born culturist scholar, Stuart Hall, was influential in conceptualizing that representations are constitutive of culture, meaning and knowledge about ourselves and the world around us. (Hall, 1997).Within this paradigm, representations are embedded with ideological connotations that are "caught up in interplay of knowledge and

power" (1997, 48). From a Foucauldian perspective on knowledge production, certain representations can work in specific institutional settings, i.e journalism, to regulate the conduct of others and negatively influence their political and social decision-making. Representation becomes a mechanistic tool to produce and sustain social and political inequalities.

This realization pushed many cultural studies scholars to focus on the problematic Western representation of "Others" in media text such as newspaper articles and advertisements (Said, 1978; Shohat and Stam, 1994). Ample research shows that Western reporting of the Global South is almost exclusively triggered by crisis, catastrophe and natural disasters, thereby re-emphasizing an image of the 'developing world' as perpetually needy(Ojo, 2014; Kimani, 2009). This relates to coverage of African nations' individual and specific responses to handling and managing COVID-19 and informs us how Africa in this situation could be reported in Western press. Will African nations be framed as if they are in a constant state neediness or will there be breakage in the conventional narrative of foreign reporting which has concentrated on crisis and catastrophe, by presenting a more positive/constructive and fully-realized image of the "Other"

Africa has become synonymous with famine, tribal war, hunger and poverty in the news discourse and public imagination of the global north (Allimadi 2002; Soyinka-Airwele and Edozie 2010) However Tokonbo Ojo (2014) suggests that there has been a decline in news from and about Africa by Western media since the end of both the Cold War and apartheid rule in South Africa. Ojo uplifts the concept of international worthiness to explain why U.S and Western European countries and more recently China dominate global news. In order to have greater prominence on international news agenda, a country or region "must hold significant economic and political power that extends its reach and influence globally." (William, 2011; Ojo, 2014)

Because the African continent is perceived as low importance with limited global political power, and despite the abundant size of territory, population and resources, it is only considered newsworthy when "there is a sniff of military intervention, political conflict or distress or a prominent political event occurs" (Ojo, 2014, 45). Such coverage is superficial because "the stories are generally detached from contextual understanding of socio-cultural, political and economic factors underpinning them" (46).

Another topic prevalent in African coverage by Western journalism is HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Public discourse about AIDS in Africa is typically clouded by "the persistent, pernicious, presence of racial stereotypes, moralistic reasoning and xenophobic policies" (Jarosz, 1992, 112). Since 2012, AIDS as a storyline has dropped slightly in popularity but central to these stories were discursive tropes on internal deficiencies in culture, habits and people's way of life, 'for which externally generated "solutions" must be devised' immediately (Ojo, 2014, 51). "Human vulnerability was theatrically packaged for global visibility through the moralizing media gaze, to capture the moral imagination of a Western audience to endanger altruistic action" (Ojo, 2014, 52). This idea that the solutions can only be generated externally due to inadequacies, and lack of faith in the capabilities within the African continent, speaks to the ideological foundations of global/Western aid and Western governments foreign policy doctrines that rely on a Global South's dependency.

The existing research suggests that to combat the narratives of the African continent as a negative space filled with marginally distant 'others' who are morally different and isolated from the Western world, journalism should be more focused on showing diversity of linguistic, cultural and social values in African's everyday lives (Ojo, 2014). Ojo (2014) surmises that if there was more established collaborative partnership between African media outlets and Western

media organizations, international stories would transform from superficial coverage that reinforce public apathy and ignorance to ones that were well-researched and analytical-informing and educating the general public for the better.

Many studies support that Africa in Western media coverage has continued to be shaped by negative perceptions and representation such as civil war, hunger, corruption, scarcity and disease that degrade it as socially and culturally backwards and economically stagnant, but some scholars have dismissed the claim that Western media perpetuates stereotypes about Africa. Martin Scott (2017) argues that the widely held assumption that we know how Africa is portrayed in the media is in fact a myth. He believes that the notion that Western media wrongly misrepresents Africa has been overstated. He writes that many studies that depict Western representation of Africa as negative were often "vague and inconsistent in their ontologies of Africa" (2017, 205). In "The Myth of Representations of Africa" he does a comprehensive scoping review of research into US and UK media coverage of Africa published between 1990 and 2014 to reveal that existing research has a remarkably narrow focus (2017). His concern is that studies investigating Africa's representation are heavily focused on a small, select number of countries and that there is a widespread vagueness surrounding which representations of Africa are understood to contribute to the construction of Africa.

He continues that studies that explore Africa in its entirety are consistently muddled with studies solely focused on singular nations. According to Scott (2017, 206) "By failing to specify what the term Africa actually refers to, claims can be made about what research shows about how Africa is represented in the media without the need for a comprehensive review of evidence to support them." Scott argues that when all studies of representation of specific localities within Africa are assumed to contribute equally to the construction of Africa without any questioning or

pushback, the research falls into the same traps of hegemonic discourse that it fails to avoid. Scott points to moments where scholars don't offer more critical, precise, qualified and transparent analyses and accounts of research in Africa's representation which consequently supports the idea that "it is legitimate to make generalisable claims about how Africa is represented in the media" (207). He concludes with these words "in writing about worlds, we must pay attention to our rhetoric, as well as the rhetoric of others" (208).

However, given the fact that Western media has negatively portrayed Africa for centuries, I think that it would be careless to disregard or discredit legitimate examples of media coverage representing Africans in problematic ways. Additionally, Scott's research doesn't hone in on the gaps of historical specificities when framing African nations in Western media or the ways Western media discursive practices avoid bringing up the ways African nations' continued struggle against imperialism has impacted their present socio-economic conditions. This rhetoric is equally narrow, reductive, vague and consequently problematic and thus demands further exploration.

Chapter 2

Positionality and Methodology

Despite never setting foot in the world's second largest and most populous continent, many Westerns have an image of Africa that has been constructed based on sources like school textbooks, the news media, church mission reports and the entertainment industry, all produced by fellow Westerners (Allimadi 2002; Soyinka-Airwele and Edozie 2010; Ojo, 2014). That image can be riddled with stereotypes that are essentially negative portrayals of Africa, degenerating the African into a savage not yet fully evolved. Njogu Kimani draws attention to the reality that throughout various histories, Africans have created and recognized linguistic and

cultural distinctions and yet reports on Africa present it as a monolithic continent in constant

disarray. When describing Africa, he says "they are no more culturally monolithic than the

peoples of the West, and it therefore should not be surprising when there is political conflict

among them" (2009, 77).

Common perceptions of European–African relations have been framed by false

impressions that Europeans from the earliest times have found people of Black complexion

savage and inferior. However, racism is institutional, not natural. It is a discursive and legal

discrimination used to ensure the domination of a specific group of individuals against others

(Bassil, 2011).The Dark Continent imagery was a 19th century invention that occurred in an age

of British ethnocentrism and national pomposity. (Bassil, 2011) Prior to the second half of the

19th century, British images of Africa were fluid, ambiguous and contested. Colonialism altered

the relationship between 'black Africa' and 'white Europe', with the emerging metaphor

identifying an entire continent as Other and unknown. The entire geography was depicted as a

stain on the earth's surface. A darkness in need of enlightenment by English colonization

(Milbury-Steen, 1980). And therefore such a view proved to be a very convenient and powerful

discourse for empire builders to exploit, to legitimate conquest and colonize. These depictions

have undergone a transformative makeover, of course. Journalism would suffer today if it

continued to express in explicit terms Africa as a "primeval, bestial, reptilian or female entity

needed to be tamed, enlightened, guided, opened and pierced by white, European males through

Western science, Christianity, civilization, commerce and colonization." (Jarosz, 1992, 108).

After WW2, the fantasy of Africa as a geographical landscape in need of westward expansion

transformed under the paradigm of modernity and economic development. The discourse of

modernity and development is predicated upon highly unequal relations of power between the so

called 'developed' and so called 'under developing world'. These unequal power relations are deeply rooted in the colonial past and relations of dependency arising among imperial powers and their colonies, colonial administrators, national elite and indigenous people (Rodney, 1972). Under this framework of analysis, Africa is infantilized and it becomes the responsibility of the wealthier nations to determine its needs and the solutions to those unmet needs.

Conversely, in this paper, I approach Africa as a prosperous space with even more potential. I see it as an important and vital region of the world with citizens who are actively working to bring creative and innovative ideas to its markets. Some of the fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa. And it is home to fifty-four unique countries with over thousands of languages, cultures, diverse ecosystems and peoples.

As a Kenyan-American who has lived in Nairobi for over a decade, I am familiar with the lightness and joy that one African city has to offer and the way people are determined to enrich their own lives and the lives of others through strong community bonds and traditional beliefs that kinship extends beyond blood ties. I believe that Africa- as a heterogenous region-is prosperous in a way that encompasses more than mere material aspects. I think that it's crucial when analyzing the African space, to leave behind Western and Eurocentric ideologies about progress and development- that are usually only concerned with economic growth and productivity. Instead, one should consider the importance of social and psychological aspects of the well-being of a nation's citizens. The aim here is to imagine how Africa could be envisioned and represented in a more uplifting and genuine manner, if we didn't equate gross national product to success and ability.

For many years, the World Bank has produced and used income classifications to group countries. The low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high income groups are each associated

with an annually updated threshold level of Gross National Income (GNI) per-capita, and the low and middle income groups taken together are referred to in the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and even the United Nations (UN) as the "developing world" (Serajuddin & Hamadeh, 2020). The issue with this term as well as the term "Third World" (in contrast to 'developed nations' and 'First World') is that they each connote this imagined binary of superiority and inferiority amongst the nations. When people in 'developed countries' like the U.S hear those word, their immediate assumption about the people that are from there, is that they live very different lives, they are debilitated by poverty, that maybe they aren't as hardworking or determined and that they don't have the same value as other more well-off humans (Berger, 1994; Escobar, 2012) When in reality, these countries have a history of having their resources taken from them. It's why the term "low resources" is also an inadequate term that fails to represent the historical realities. These are not countries that innately lack the wealth of Western nations. These are countries whose resources were stolen by Western nations. American global health physician and writer Dr. Abraar Khan puts it succinctly "There is no 'Third World'. There were the oppressed and the oppressors" (Silver, 2021). While countries in the 'developing country' category may in fact, need to develop better health care systems, better educational infrastructure, better access to clean water and other resources to its people, that scarcity was *not* developed out of a lack of trying and it didn't happen within a vacuum.

That is why, throughout my paper, I choose to abstain from referring to African countries with these terms. When journalists use these words, I put them in quotation marks to uphold accurate data collection, but I hope to explore through my data analysis chapters why this assumed hierarchy between countries fails to hold countries in "the West' who have taken and exploited for years accountable. "The West" or "the Western world" are a cultural and political

term that includes the regions of the world that linguistically and culturally originated from

Europe, and today is influenced heavily by the U.S (Escobar, 2012).

Data Collection

The first part of my research included collecting 61 news articles from prominent

American newspaper organizations *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. I was

interested in how Africa's image is constructed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and

the way the African government and their public's responses were framed. Therefore I reviewed

each newspaper's database online and screened the articles they published from March to

December of 2020 to find articles that matched the keywords 'Africa' and 'COVID-19' or

'coronavirus'. I then sorted them in an Excel spreadsheet. To keep the data collection focused, I

omitted articles that didn't mention national response or provide assertions on the projected

impact COVID-19 would have in the African continent.

The New York Times was selected for this study because it is regarded as one of the most

authoritative sources of news and information in the United States and Western world at large. It

is regarded as a paper of record, meaning that it has immense influence on public opinion and

sets the agenda for other media globally. *The New York Times* is therefore regarded as the most

respected news medium. When an issue is newsworthy, other US news organizations take a cue

from the New York Times (Dearing and Rogers 1992, Melkote 2009).

Likewise, The Washington Post is an American daily newspaper published in

Washington, D.C; the federal capital of the U.S . It is the most-widely circulated newspaper

within the Washington metropolitan area, and has a large national audience. Founded in 1877,

The Washington Post has been running for over 140 years and has won 69 Pulitzer Prizes, the

second-most of any publication (after The New York Times) for its employees' editing, criticism

and reporting work over the last century (PR, 2020). The publication is one of the leading daily

newspapers in the United States, and its circulation figures are good considering the decline of

print media in recent years (Watson, 2020).

Data Analysis

I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) to study the written language used in these

articles to specifically see how values, beliefs or assumptions about the continent are made. I'm

approaching this analysis from the Foucauldian understanding that there is power in what is

accepted as truth and what is validated as knowledge. Many critical discourse analysts

investigate the version of knowledge which has become accepted as truth and 'taken for granted

ideas and categorizations' and find that they are produced and reinforced by the hegemonic

discourses (Fairclough, 2014). CDA aims ultimately to make a change of "the existing social

reality in which discourse is related in particular ways to other social elements such as power

relations, ideologies, economic and political strategies and policies" (Fairclough, 2014, 178). So,

one of the aims of this paper is to analyze how COVID-19 in Africa is reported and present an

additional presentation of reality that pays attention to the specific historical context and national

policies that shape the way African nations are performing during this pandemic.

I will provide an analysis of these primary sources by also drawing on existing literature

from post-colonist scholars. Postcolonialism is a critical-theory analysis of the history, culture,

literature, and discourse of imperial power (predominantly Euro-American) that examines the

social and political power relationship that sustains colonialism and neocolonialism ideologies.

(Darian-Smith, 1996; Mishra & Hodge, 2008; Young, 2016). This includes social/cultural and

political narratives about the former colonized . The way this theory is most appropriate for this project is that it can be utilized to look at political and aesthetic representation and consider the role of imperialism and colonialism in shaping those representations. I seek to unveil ideologies underlying the different practices in the representation of social actors in the African context and investigate whether they rely on racial biases and feelings of superiority based on Western supremacist ideologies. Essentially, I am investigating whether the language and framing devices used to characterizes the potential impact COVID-19 will have in the African space are related to the practiced use of discourse that paints Africa as ineffective and incompetent. In this regard, I hope to answer how this representation relates to dominant and broader narratives about African's agency and ability to solve their own problems.

Chapter 3

The Discursive Practices of American News When Framing Africa

My findings suggest that the news stories covering African nations' responses to COVID-19 as well as their ability to handle the global pandemic predominantly mentioned the central themes of poverty, inefficiency within government and the instability and fragility within healthcare systems across the continent. I argue that embedded in these representations are unequal power relations that both rely on and legitimate hegemonic relations of domination and oppression such as racism and imperialism. By ignoring a legacy of unbalanced power relations that started during the colonial era and manifest today as cultural imperialism, African places and people are historically frozen in time. Meaning they are first shown as places in opposition to Western modernity, capital and technology so later they can only be understood as places that are dependent on a Western outsider. Originally this 'savior' was the colonial administrator, today

it's a person or organization belonging to the so-called developed world- usually in the form of

aid organizations. (Rodney, 1972; Jarosz, 2017). And finally, these media accounts that rely on

dark continent imagery that exoticized Africa and remove humanity from its people often justify

or celebrate dominant international and national political and economic agendas. (Jarosz, 2017)

Painting Africa as significantly different served British imperial interest in the 19th century and I

argue that how the West interprets Africa in the current moment of COVID-19 serves the

political agenda of domination by the West today.

     When analyzing how the American newspapers discursively represent Africa, I

developed some questions that further my investigation to uncover the patterns and themes that

are used to frame Africa's ability to handle the COVID-19 pandemic. What is the tone of stories

reported by the selected newspapers? Is the tone negative? Ample research on international

news coverage shows that western reporting of the Global South is largely based on a

constructed opposition of a 'primitive' Africa versus the 'modern' West (Ojo, 2014; Fair, 1993).

Or is the tone more positive and affirming? This would support the literature that proposes there

is a new framing device to represent the continent known as the 'Africa is rising' concept. This

concept suggests international news has adopted new alternative journalist approaches that report

on Africa constructively by offering holistic coverage of issues without relying on Othering and

stereotype- perpetuating tactics (Yanqiu &Matingwina, 2016; Nothias, 2014). These furthering

questions will serve to either confirm or disprove some of the themes developed in literature

around coverage of Africa in global journalism including how Africa has become synonymous

with famine, tribal war, hunger and poverty in the news discourse and public imagination of the

Global North (Allimadi 2002; Soyinka-Airwele and Edozie 2010), how Africa has been

homogenised as a single entity (Nothias, 2018), and that Africa alongside the 'developing world'

is in need of saving by the West (Fursich, 2010).

A place of scarcity: no food, no water, more worries

When examining the headlines of articles in *The Washington Post* and *The New York*

Times relating to COVID-19's impact in Africa, I found that in 11.5% of the articles the

headlines contained the word "hunger" or "starve." Previous studies have demonstrated that

headlines serve generally two main functions: to summarize news stories in precise language

(Andrew, 2007; Dor, 2003) and to 'hook' the reader into reading to the very end (Bell, 2003;

Dor, 2003; Molek-Kozakowska, 2013).

Analyzing headline data as well as the news article content allows me to look at how

journalists grab the audience's attention when the subject matter pertains to an African setting.

The phenomenon of news media caring more about generating headlines that attract attention

rather than seeking to inform readers is considered problematic because strategies employed in

the endeavour to channel the audience's attention are closely associated with sensationalism and

tabloidization (Lee, 2020). Another consequence of news media being market-driven and

prioritizing eye-catching and somewhat flashy headlines is that they may lead to inaccurate

perceptions of the circumstances on the part of readers- overall cultivating a misinformed

readership and content that is neither objective nor accurate (Lee, 2020).

One *Washington Post* article published on April 20, 2020 has the headline "Lockdowns

will starve people in low income countries" (Jaminson, 2020). Although broadly speaking about

what it classifies as "developing nations"- "countries where their inhabitants are surviving on $3

or less per day with no savings or social safety nets"- , the article goes on to preface that most

sub-Saharan African countries fall into this category. The author argues that Uganda and Liberia are examples of countries where sheltering in place is a luxury most can't afford and "hunger, not disease, tops their worries."

These statements that suggest entire African countries will be devastated by food scarcity set out to address how these countries are at an increased vulnerability for the disease- outside of just catching the virus. Government actions to combat the spread of the virus such as imposing state-mandated curfews, closing national borders, and shutting down local business operations, will result in devastating results because as Washington Post journalist Carolyn Logan writes "hundreds of millions of Africans live in households with limited reserves of money, food and water, and may be unable to feed themselves while observing a sustained lockdown" (Logan, 2020). The articles go on to suggest that for many African citizens, the new restrictions can mean a choice between protecting public health and ensuring their own daily survival. However the delivery of this dichotomous dilemma falls short because there is no discussion on the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds within the specified nations.

Additionally, the article mentions the presence of food scarcity, informal housing conditions and unemployment rates, yet none of these vulnerabilities are unique to low-income countries or African nations. A couple articles from both newspaper outlets quote the World Health Organization's regional director who warned of the social and economic devastation in Africa, as confirmed cases and deaths were rising. In these articles there is a disproportionate focus on these conditions as specific plights of Africa- and Africa alone. Food insecurity has been described by the World Food Programme's executive director as a looming hunger pandemic that will affect the global community. And health system failures and underpreparedness are as much a problem in African countries as they are in the U.S.

Furthermore, even when a minority of journalists made a distinction between the different economic statuses within African countries, there was still an emphasis placed on the limitedness of resources throughout the country. Instead of providing nuance by highlighting how some nations may be better equipped than others in handling the pandemic. This claim demonstrates the narrative popular in Western discourse that relies on predicting doom in the African setting which is based on a framework that sees Black spaces (and specifically African ones) as spaces without and therefore their outcome can only lead to devastation if not death. Additionally, there is no nuance given to the way certain spaces may be better equipped than others in handling the pandemic. Journalists duo Edward Carpenter and his nephew Charli Carpenter write that many African nations suffer from conflict and civil war and that these pre existing conditions could exacerbate the potential for the deadly disease beyond what is already seen in stable, wealthy countries."Even some stable African countries have high poverty rates and minimal access to health care, which create a tinderbox for pandemics" (Carpenter & Carpenter , 2020).

Out of the selected newspaper articles from *The New York Times*, 60% of the headlines were pessimistic in tone about the impact coronavirus would have on the African continent-suggesting the outcome would be detrimental with little hope of salvation. These headlines use words like 'vulnerable', 'unprotected' and 'poor' to describe the citizens and characterize the viral outbreak as an 'emerging threat', 'killer' and something that will 'batter' the African middle class and push others into deeper poverty. These claims demonstrate the narrative popular in Western discourse that relies on predicting doom in the African setting which is based on a framework that sees Black spaces (and specifically African ones) as spaces without and therefore their outcome can only lead to devastation if not death.

While a quickly spreading virus with no known cure at the time and a plethora of

fatalities under its belt is sure to garner somber reporting and predictions of the possible worse

outcomes, Africa already has a history of suffering under the "bad news syndrome" of

international, global media coverage (Golan, 2008; Hawke, 2004; Saidykhan, 2009; Saul, 2002).

Those claims in the headlines are most likely sensationalized to arouse certain emotions in their

audience- the word choice is dramatic and eye-catching, however by overemphasizing a demise

to come, the continent's image in the West continues down the lane of negative type-casting of

Africa, which can reinforce a mood of hopelessness for the Western reader. Other effects of the

predominant image of Africa as chaotic, unruly or destitute is to create disinterest or passive

unconcern for a Western reader that is frankly tired of reading the same cycle of bad news from

the continent. And as long as African journalists and media centers are not given space to be

vocal about these representations, there is no platform to contest this unidirectional and

unbalanced news flow model of Western news coverage of Africa.

Painting Africa as a Monolith

With regards to the recurring themes of poverty and scarcity in resources, while 7 out of

the 61 articles have the words hunger or starve in the headline, a review of the articles' content

reveals that 48% of the articles in the *The New York Times* had stories that mentioned food

insecurity, lack of adequate food supply and phrases that characterized citizens as being unable

to afford food. Thirty-four percent of *The Washington Post* articles included these same terms.

While 6 out of 61 articles or 9.3% of the articles use terms poor or poorer nations in their

headlines, there were additional article headlines that mentioned economic instability and

referenced the vulnerabilities of extreme poverty, without using the words "poor" or "poorer,"

Some examples of those types of headlines are as follows: "Coronavirus is Battering Africa's Growing Middle Class" (Dahir, 2020), "In World's Most Vulnerable Countries, The Pandemic Rivals the 2008 Crisis" (Bearak & Slater, 2020) and "The Pandemic Nearly Broke this Kenyan Mom of Five. Then She Found Blessing" (Bearak & Ombuor, 2020). A *NY Times* article "The Other Way Covid Will Kill: Hunger" characterizes the COVID-19 virus as only the latest plague to wreck South Sudan and other poor countries who are already suffering from other plagues including "absolute poverty, lack of clean water and malnutrition (Goodman et al., 2020). By characterizing these nations as places with such stark poverty that will only become exacerbated by the global pandemic, these journalists create an image of the continent on the brink of collapse.

Max Bearak, 27, is a white American male journalist who is currently based in Nairobi as *The Washington Post*'s sole staff correspondent in sub-Saharan Africa. He previously covered the Ebola outbreak in Congo and Boko Haram in Niger and he has written 13 of the 31 Washington Post articles I selected for my data analysis. He, among others, consistently refers to the African region as home to the "world's working poor" or as 'poorer nations'. The African countries and people that belong to them are characterized as having suffered disproportionately from hunger and health complications in the pandemic. Bearak writes that due to their dire socio economic conditions prior to the pandemic, some African citizens are facing the trauma "that deepening poverty inflicts on family bonds (2020)." This provoking and dramatic diction depicts the nations as inadequate and unable to provide public services such as clean water or access to food nationwide. When the journalists use terms such as 'poorer nations' to fully encompass the living conditions in African nations they harken back to colonial ideologies that see African peoples as 'primitive' or in today's vernacular unable to be self-sufficient. Therefore the

conclusion is made that these nations are perpetually dependent on aid from foreign intervention. As Said suggests in his 1978 book *Orientalism*, European imperialists used propaganda alongside brutal intervention to establish whites as superior to other peoples around the world. The mechanism of propaganda required ideological framing and a certain discourse that supported the belief that the colonial subjects were subpar humans, subordinate to the white race. The result was a construction of the inferior colonial African (Said, 1978). What makes this colonial discourse so powerful-even today- is its ability to traverse time and embed itself in our contemporary discourse- but in a new disguise, practically unrecognizable. Researchers have noted that discourse of imperialism and "exploitable savages in need of socio-economic and religious salvation" (Andreasson 2006, 978) have transformed into the rhetoric of contemporary globalization. A rhetoric that still supports and defends the framework of Western superiority in opposition to a subordinate "Other" (Lalvani 1995; Mayer 2002, Bonsu, 2009)

Karen Attiah, a Ghanian-American writer and editor for the Global Opinions of *The Washington Post* calls out the hypervisibility of 'rampant poverty' and 'lack of effective governance' in previous articles predicting dire COVID-19 outcomes in Africa as an extension of the 'dark continent trope' in her article "Africa has defied the covid-19 nightmare scenarios. We shouldn't be surprised." (Attiah, 2020). She writes that as the United States approaches 200,000 deaths, the West seems largely blind to Africa's success or the learned experiences Africans and their governments have had with previous pandemics and viral diseases, including Ebola and AIDS. Instead she argues that other American journalists appear adamant to recycle corrosive narratives that depict Africans as incompetent and incapable of effective policy-making. She provides that their tone would have you believe that "the world, [according to] the experts, should prepare to offer aid, loans and debt forgiveness to African governments — in

other words, they should prepare to save Africa" (Attiah, 2020). Interestingly, while Attiah sees

Africa's diverse and robust experiences with previous epidemics as a beneficial source of

experiential knowledge, the majority of other journalists use the prevalence of other diseases on

the continent as a justification to further portray Africans as being in a constant state of

helplessness. Helplessness was reflected in journalists' descriptions of Africa as "unsanitary",

"famine-stricken" and "fighting several infectious diseases.

By characterizing the suffering and resource scarcity as concerns not only felt by the

entire continent but also by entire nations without any specificity given to certain regions or

diversity among the socio-economic statuses of its citizens, the journalists create a reductive and

simplistic image of the African space. There is no consideration to the economic growth

prevalent in African nations. No mention of economic prosperity or class divisions within the

city and rural areas. Palesa Morudu writes about South Africa's approach to the pandemic as

extremely cautious when referring to the imposition of strict lockdowns in early March (People

were prohibited from going to work apart from essential services personnel). And she warns that

there may have been serious problems with South Africa's approach because the economic

freeze has subsequently "increased hunger and hardship." (Morudu, 2020). Julian C. Jamison

says policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa must be attuned to the needs of their citizens who in

addition to facing the potential immediate fatalities from COVID-19 are at equal risk of mortality

from " malnutrition, psychological distress, extreme poverty and sociopolitical unrest that

lockdowns and economic disruption can cause" (Jamison, 2020).

Economic disparities within African countries is a concern, much like for every nation,

and those living in lower socioeconomic conditions do encounter higher levels of job and food

insecurity with economic shutdowns and limited mobility, but in these articles there is no

mention of households that don't fit this description of "living on less than $5 a day" (a statistic Bearak uses in another article showcasing the battering effects of the pandemic for six families around the world including one single-parent household in the infamous slum of Kibera, Nairobi.) By failing to report on those middle and upper class households that have savings or occupy jobs that weren't affected by lockdown, only a single story is told about Africa. One that centers poverty and a complete lack of academic, intellectual and professional know-how. Having access to reliable internet and technologies to be able to operate over Zoom, continue work, and financially provide for yourself and family is a privilege not all can afford, but to ignore those lived realities is to paint Africa as un-evolved and not resilient. Though the continent has shown its comparable abilities to approach the pandemic, journalists continue to underestimate the inherent capacity that African countries have to adapt, develop, and succeed by relying on these reductive narratives. Therefore these postcolonial representations of Africa reify colonial constructs in the present day.

No Clean Water

  The New York Times and *The Washington Post* construct Africa as a distant and remote "Other" during a global pandemic that has no respect for national boundaries, through the emphasis of inaccessibility to clean water and a general lack of resources. In *The New York Times* article titled "10 African Countries Have No Ventilators, That's Only Part of the Problem" Ruth Maclean, the West Africa bureau chief for The New York Times based in Dakar, Senegal, writes about the "scarcity in basic supplies to treat the sick and slow the spread of disease", including soap and water (2020). Maclean supposes that a widespread shortage of clean water in these countries limits Africans' ability to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Maclean notes that

clean running water and soap are in such short supply and "only 15 percent of sub-Saharan

Africans had access to basic hand-washing facilities in 2015" (2020).

Published on March 22, 2020, an article in *The Washington Post* "Millions of Africans

lack access to clean water. This makes coronavirus a bigger threat" opens with the sweeping

statement that "Africans don't have access to clean water" (Han & Howard, 2020). Another

Washington Post article writes that in Africa the struggle to find clean water hinders the fight

against COVID-19 with people packed in urban neighborhoods, where police and soldiers

enforce stay-at-home orders, the lockdown can not work because of an ongoing water crisis. The

journalist Danielle Paquette, makes the prediction that Africa could become the epicenter due to

resource scarcity. She writes about Africa in broad-terms, "they have little to drink or for hand-

washing" (2020).

In these statements, the journalists rely on the traditional, stereotypical trope used in

representations of Africa that there is widespread inaccessibility to resources, mainly clean

water. In an attempt to justify the use of stereotypes when writing about Africa, Stephanie

McCrummen, who was based in Nairobi for *The Washington Post*, argues that it is easy to write

what people expect (2020). This justification only asserts that these stereotypical depictions are

as much, if not more, about reaffirming and reinforcing widely believed and familiar ideas in

order to comfort the reader than about delivering stories that are varied, nuanced and perhaps

challenging to the readers' preconceptions. However, by associating a real and problematic

concern for large populations within African countries with the entire African continent, Western

media downplays the role of local populations and national governments in providing solutions

and mobilization efforts to correct these issues.

One article writes that while lockdown is intended as a measure to reduce the outbreak of

COVID-19 and prevents its transmission in the affluent world, it represents a race against death

to survive among many in Africa (Maclean, 2020). Once again, although the word 'poor' isn't

used, there is a distinction being made between affluent countries and countries in Africa

suggesting that the whole landscape is burdened with a lack of. The article continues to explain

that curbing the spread of the virus will be made difficult in Africa due its social practices

including the impact of traditional greetings and poor sanitation. Washing hands with soap

becomes difficult when 'clean water is scarce'(Maclean, 2020). When the journalist writes that

Africans will continue to perform handshakes and other greetings in light of the highly

contagious pandemic thereby making it harder to control COVID-19 in those regions, she is

either suggesting that Africans have a general lack of caution and will be unwilling to modify

their behaviors to follow CDC guidelines for proper safety decorum or that they remain ignorant

and uninformed of the direct consequences. Either way, Africa is propelled back into that 'Dark

Continent' framing that sees it as a place of darkness- absent of enlightenment when it comes to

science and other fields of knowledge production. The framework that Africa is a place that

questions science is a popular portrayal that is also used to explain Africa as an 'underdeveloped'

space in opposition to the 'developed' nature of countries like the United States. The assumption

is that Africa is still on its way to progressing into its fully evolved state- economically and

culturally. With the aid and support of the developed world from international organizations such

as the UN or the U.S Agency for International Development, Africa can be 'corrected' onto a

new path for growth. Another assumption embedded in this framework, is that through the

modernization of its 'backwards economies', the 'people of the poor countries' are rescued from

their poverty (Escobar, 2012).

Another effect of this statement is it identifies Africans as illogical and uncritical thinkers. In Maclean's article on water scarcity and Africans being more susceptible to disease, there is no mention of the multiple ways governments across the continent were implementing COVID-19 safety protocols to instruct their citizens on proper guidelines and protocols. That not only were citizens being warned to minimize their personal interactions and contact but many African countries shut down their borders- closing all ports of entry and instituting lockdowns. Failure to include these calculated measures suggests that African countries were not responding and engaging with the media and outpour of information- that was happening on a global scale. And also that there were no knowledgeable sources within the continent contributing to the broader intellectual and scientific discoveries being formulated and reformulated on a daily basis when it came to best practices to control the virus.

In a Washington Post article written on March 22, journalists Brian Howard and Kangwook Han use the now familiar generalizing tagline "Africans don't have access to clean water" as the introductory sentence (2020). They point to poor infrastructure as the cause for this limited access. In the article, they go on to provide a survey with 34 African countries- although no mention is made of the number or demographics of people questioned- to show that more than half (52%) of Africans surveyed have to go outside their compound to get water. In five of the 34 surveyed countries, water infrastructure is only accessible to one-quarter or less of the population. They conclude that inadequate infrastructure is a problem across the continent and that "parts notoriously suffer from inadequate water and sanitation" (2020). In this article, they make their claims based on evidence that only represents 34 out of 54 nations or 62% of Africa's population and yet continue to make broader claims about 'Africa' in its entirety. The survey leaves out essential data from the other 20 countries yet still tries to erroneously suggest it has

provided a fully detailed depiction of the space. And furthermore by using words like "Africans" and phrases such as "parts of Africa", the journalists ignore the fact that Africa is made of independent countries and thus presents Africa as an homogenous entity. What is missing from this depiction is the fact that Africa is inhabited by diverse countries varied in their economy, polity and government, leadership, culture and social structures.

Many articles are quick to mention the lack of resources in many African countries such as medical supplies or access to running water, that will make it harder to stop the spread of COVID-19 and potentially keep the continent "vulnerable to epidemics for decades to come" (Carter, 2020). And yet, few point to how years of global inequality and post-colonial forces of domination as well as bureaucratic institutions have contributed to the inability of African governments to provide public services such as clean water and clean sanitation facilities to their citizens. In doing so, they fail to show how this scarcity is reinforced by Western globalization.

Inefficient and Untrustworthy Government

Throughout the articles, another emerging theme used to frame Africa as a place of Otherness and incapable of handling the pandemic was to suggest that many countries were already economically compromised by corruption, maladministration and poor political leadership. Through a continued emphasis on failing government intervention before and during the pandemic, the journalists persistently make the claim that lockdowns and other COVID-19 safety protocols implemented in the West will be derailed and rendered useless in African countries that are plagued by social unrest and crime- prolonging the existing poverty, starvation and inequality.

An article published in *The Washington Post* titled "Many Africans distrust their governments. How will that affect their coronavirus response?" (Logan & Gyimah-Boadi, 2020) draws attention to citizens' scarce resources and then relates it to the shortcomings of African governments to meet the needs of their citizens. Logan and Gyimah-Boadi write that the coronavirus pandemic is challenging governments in Africa, just as it is around the globe, but specific to the African space is a history of public distrust in their leaders. The journalists continue to say that many Africans already assess their public officials skeptically "wary of corruption, coercion and inadequate care for ordinary people's physical, social and economic welfare" (Logan & Gyimah-Boadi, 2020). A *NY Times* article "Kenya's Health Workers, Unprotected and Falling Ill, Walk Off Job (Dahir, 2020) reports on a situation where doctors in public hospitals in Nairobi are frustrated because they haven't been paid, some for as long as six months. They are also frustrated and at risk because they don't have enough personal protective equipment circulating around, and many have had their medical insurance recently cut, despite the overwhelming surge in COVID-19 cases. The article continues to emphasize this frustration and distrust from health workers by exposing a particularly heinous scandal: "Frustration among health workers peaked after a recent television expose accused dozens of business leaders and government officials of corruption, alleging that they stole about $400 million in funds allocated to fight the pandemic" (Dahir, 2020). The article reports that coordination between the national government and Kenyan counties has remained ineffective and left smaller government-owned hospitals to fend for themselves. Dahir ends his article with the quote from co-executive director of the East Africa Sexual Health and Rights Initiative, Dr. Stellah Bosir, to suggest that due to its government's ineptitude "Kenya's health care system has always been one major disaster away from collapsing"(2020).

An argument that could be made in defense of these stories' framing is the fact that there *has* been a history of corrupt actions made by public officials as there was a redistribution of funds that only deepened the large divide between the wealthy and poor in Kenya. To not report on this $400 million scandal would be dishonest and antithetical to the goals of international media coverage, one could argue. More on this point, Poncian (2015) stated that Africans, rather than Westerners, are to blame for the portrayal of Africa in Western media. The author stated that although war, political instabilities and corruption does not define Africa in its entirety, the fact that these events still occur, negatively affects the perception of the continent and determines what types of stories are used to characterize the continent. However these negative attitudes towards Kenyan political culture and even the real life examples of mismanaged government highlighted in the articles are not specific to African countries. Despite these arguments, what is clear is that Africa is not the only continent where war, conflict and corruption occur on a large scale.

Statements made about South Africa, like the one in *The NY Times* article "South Africa's Big Coronavirus Aid Effort Tainted by Corruption" "Charities and ordinary citizens say that they have been left to fill in the gaps created by the government's failure" (Chutel, 2020) could just as easily be made about the United States and their citizens. Americans have always had a healthy skepticism about government. Throughout American history, there have been periods when Americans needed government to solve problems and recognized that government played a crucial role. In present times, it seems like there is a bipartisan view that the government has become a part of the problem- that the government system is damaged and unable to provide the solutions its citizens need (Stevens, 2019). Yet when discussing Africa, these same concerns are framed as a confirmation of pre-existing stereotypes e.g. failing

governments, which are then accepted as truths by the American public. America and other

places that deal with political conflict are not labeled 'hopeless', 'helpless and

'dependent'(Ogazi, 2010) in the way the African continent is. By giving undue attention to the

calamities in Africa and making it appear unique to the region, Africa continues to be presented

in Western media as a place of lack and need rather than potential and opportunity.

Moreover, the selection of news items relating to the recognizable stereotype of African

corruption is further simplified by the "de-contextualization" of events. This type of reporting

strips facts about Africa of any historical, social, political, cultural or economic information

(Kimani, 2009). The majority of the articles that focus on corruption and mismanaged

governments write about citizen's distrust of political authority in a vacuum. They oversimplify

the phenomenon of political tension in African leadership by failing to provide the historical

legacy of colonialism and specificities of Western imperialism. Literature has supported the

findings that corruption has become one of the most notoriously persistent social problems

afflicting African countries today- existing in both government and non-governmental

institutions. However when American journalist Amy S. Patterson writes in her Washington Post

article "The Coronavirus is about to hit Africa. Here are the big challenges"(Patterson, 2020) that

surveys show that people in Africa tend to place greater confidence in traditional or religious

leaders than government officials because "corruption within public services [has] deepen[ed]

people's suspicions of government health actions, and undermine[d] health-care access" (2020)

she provides no detail of the historically rooted causes of the phenomenon- particularly those

associated with colonialism. Traits of bribery, coercion and "fraudulent antisocial behavior"

were common in British, French and other colonial rulers and these behaviors carried into the

post-colonial era (Mulinge & Lesetedi, 1998). The significant ways through which historical

events of colonialism could be linked to the emergence of corrupt practice in African politics today will be discussed later in greater detail.

Out of 31 *Washington Post* articles, only 2 bring attention to Africa's colonial legacy and how the actions of a former colonial government played a role in shaping the post-colonial government's structure and shepherding in the well practiced corruption in Africa's official offices. Both articles are written by Kenyan journalist and author Patrick Gathara. In the article published May 7, 2020 he writes about how the Kenyan government's efforts to control the coronavirus pandemic have treated it less as a public health issue than a problem of law of order by allowing police force to enforce the state-mandated curfew by any means necessary (2020). Gathara calls this decision flawed as the officers are unschooled in the principles of public health: "Rather than encouraging compliance, officers have resorted to type, employing the blunt implements of brutality and arrest to expand opportunities for the extraction of bribes" (2020). Gathara explains that these misguided actions result in perverse and dangerous outcomes, where police force people into crowded vans and cells under the pretext of enforcing social distancing rules, arrest motorists for failing to wear masks even when alone in their vehicles, and drag families from their homes for not wearing masks indoors. Gathara also highlights that citizens may be reluctant to compile with government policies in the first place, not because they are lacking in personal discipline, as the government had suggested with that exact language, but because they may have legitimate reasons for distrusting state authority. He articulates, "In Kenya, on the other hand, more than a century of humiliation, oppression and robbery — first by the British colonial authorities and then their successors in the independent government — has not left the populace so sanguine about the role of the state in public affairs" (Gathara, 2020). By calling out Kenya's period of colonization, Gathara establishes a causative relationship between

African's distrust in government and the methods employed by the colonial authorities to subdue and control the colonised people. Similarly in his second article, "Kenya's coronavirus strategy is straight out of the colonial playbook" (Gathara, 2020), very early on in the pandemic, Gathara astutely warns that given the potential harm, the Kenyan government needs to start treating its citizens as partners rather than problems and talk to the public rather than just order people around. This statement is in direct response to the government's gameplan of using its daily briefings to announce increasingly stringent "directives, bemoan a lack of cooperation and threaten dire punishments to the disobedient. Gathara summarizes that "like its colonial predecessor, the government has offered little in the way of articulating its plans and thinking"(2020). In both articles, Gathara belabors the point that government practices of exhortations, threats and punishments will continue to color the Kenyan citizens' response to their leadership and that these practices are only a continuation of the practices entrenched in the political landscape of Kenya during its colonial regime. The two articles are particularly important when viewed against the extensive examples of selected American articles that fail to include the historical context of African nations' public affairs and the presence of a corrupt culture.

Western media have been accused of only being interested in crisis reporting on the African continent, which it also fails to contextualise, thus creating an image of Africa where nothing works (Alozie 2007). Several journalists create a framework that African nations are limited in their capacity for policy and decision-making when they continue to make predictions that actions imposed by national governments will only exacerbate existing social inequalities. In a *NY Times* article titled "Africa Braces for Coronavirus, but Slowly", Ruth Maclean suggests that that the preventative actions to slow down the viral spread made by African governments

(such as curfews and partial lockdowns) even before the continent's first reported cases arrived were at times strict and in other cases inappropriate to the socio economic plight of many Africans (Maclean, 2020). When discussing African nations, Maclean outlines that "many countries have high formal unemployment rates, with people relying on small-scale farming and informal trading to make a living. In those countries that have implemented measures such as lockdowns, which have brought economies to a standstill and that "many thousands of jobs have been lost, resulting in a growing population who have no reliable source of income" (Maclean, 2020). Another article also reveals the economic impact of COVID-19 prevention measures in African countries, citing that the suspension of informal economic sectors such as street vendors and small informal shops would result in a reduction in per capita income and increase pressure on fiscal policies and debt- "all which can lead to financial recessions or depressions"(Abi-Habib, 2020). Similarly, Danielle Paquette (2020) specifically addresses how Nigeria's state mandated lockdown has led to an increase in unemployment for many and how without any system of welfare already in place, most Nigerians can't afford to eat if they miss a day of paid labor.

Firstly, although the article goes on to reference the specific circumstances of four countries: South Sudan, Congo, Senegal and Nigeria, the headline broadly mentions "Africa" and throughout, the article makes claims that generalize the pandemic's impact on the whole continent, thereby presenting Africa as a homogenous entity- where one nation's problems become characterized as a problem that is affecting the entire continent's population. For example, the article mentions a 22 year old man who sells perishable goods on a street corner in Dakar who, because of the lockdown, is losing customers and savings. "I have nothing to eat — just this milk," said Diallo, who said social distancing has disastrously slashed incomes"

(Paquette, 2020). Immediately after bringing our attention to this unfortunate situation, Paquette

broadens the discussion with a statistic. "About 135 million people worldwide, mostly in Africa

and the Middle East, are already "marching toward the brink of starvation (2020)."

Secondly, these articles focus on the negative effects of African nations shutting down

parts of their economy and stopping the production of non-essential goods and services, which is

to be expected, but in turn avoid acknowledging that the various African governments called for

these mandatory closures and border shutdowns to limit the increased rates of morbidity and

mortality that they were witnessing in other parts of the world. Essentially, to increase the

number of saved lives. Although a few select articles have an affirming tone that highlights the

good that came out of these government actions such as a *NY Times article* (September 22, 2020)

that states that Kenya's response to the outbreak by suspending international flights early,

conducting tens of thousands of test and imposing a partial lockdown on areas reporting high

cases like Nairobi, may have "helped suppress numbers" (Dahir, 2020). The majority of the

articles represents these decisions as government failures, painting Africa's leadership as

incompetent and irrational.

And in this situation, the decisions made are not irrational nor isolated, as many countries

throughout the world decided to limit economic activity in order to practice social distancing and

flattening the curve per the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) international

guidelines. The U.S. is also expected to see a 22.3% to 60.6% decrease in the U.S. GDP and a

23.3% to 58.4% decline of employment over a 2 year period due to the combination of

mandatory closures and partial reopenings of businesses. Causing about $850 to $900 billion

U.S. GDP losses in the more severe scenarios (Rose et al., 2021). It is true, the idea that several

African nations may see a rise in unemployment rates due to these policies or that schoolchildren

in Kenya public schools will have to start the school year over again, because the education officials made an attempt to address the educational inequalities between students who had access to online learning and those who did not by "scraping out the school year for all" (Dahir, 2020) is unfair and undesirable, to say the least. But by framing these government responses/solutions (to quite frankly very complicated and nuanced conundrums) as 'heedless' or 'irresponsible' or 'unusual', perpetuates the assumption that Africans can't self-govern. Instead of framing the successes of lowering the rates of morbidity COVID-19 cases due to massive shutdowns, the journalists depict Africa as fumbling and in a perpetual status of crisis-mode. This depicted incompetency, and inability to deliver solutions in turn, helps to justify the narrative that only through Western intervention can the 'dark continent' be truly saved… from itself.

And if the reason, the majority of the articles are choosing to hyper-focus on the detrimental and negative consequences of African nations' lockdown measures is based on belief that African countries can not afford to mimic practices made in more advanced economies due to their large size of an informal economy and disproportionate dependency on exports of commodities compared with Western markets, then the articles misrepresent the situation by leaving out the historical context behind African's governments' low fiscal capacity as compared to wealthier nations in the West. Some articles point to the African government's failure to provide adequate safety nets to catch the marginalized people in their country from falling through the cracks into food and water deprivation. However, there seems to be very little explanation given in the articles on the origin of this scarcity-especially as it relates to the relationship between Africa and the West. Instead, the reader is left to draw conclusions based on

popular assumptions about Africans and their government as incapable of taking care of their

people and meeting their own needs.

Fragile Healthcare Systems on the brink of collapse

Between February and December of 2020, *The New York Times* and *The Washington*

Post increasingly made reference to the "fragility" of the healthcare systems in Africa in their

representation of the nations' capacities and capabilities in handling the ongoing pandemic.

These articles suggest that the healthcare infrastructure in what they refer to as 'developing'

countries was debilitated or 'burdened' before the introduction of the coronavirus and therefore

logically would be strained and perhaps overpowered by this new wave of disaster. In a *NY*

Times article "Nigeria Responds to First Coronavirus Case in Sub-Saharan Africa," Maclean

highlights that Nigeria acted quickly with their response to the official announcement that

COVID-19 was a pandemic and that the Nigerian health system had gained a reputation for

efficiently containing cases during the Ebola epidemic in 2014. And yet in the next line, creating

a confusing and contradictory tone, she articulates that public health officials have warned that

the coronavirus *could* be devastating in Africa. Maclean explains that Africa is a "continent with

relatively weak health care and disease surveillance systems" (Maclean, 2020). She continues to

suggest that despite healthcare providers efforts, the virus could spread at "breakneck speed"

because of the spread of "unfounded rumor' and 'old wives tales such as water laced with ginger

and garlic' can cure coronavirus symptoms amidst sound advice like washing hands" (Maclean,

2020). By sandwiching this affirming instance of clear level headedness and positive outcomes

for Nigeria's past experience with the Ebola crisis between dire predictions due to

unpreparedness (within the public health sector) and unsanitary and baseless behavior (from the

public) Maclean continues to rely on the narrative that Nigeria and other African countries are places of scarce resources and above all, lacking in the know-how to create solutions that address their most pressing needs. And by situating the spreading of rumors as an equal to the healthcare providers- as if they are competing sources of reliable information for the general public, she identifies Nigerians as illogical and uncritical thinkers. This could have been an opportunity to highlight the ways Africans and their governments have gained knowledge on effective policy-making related to viral contagents due to their shared experience with viral diseases including AIDs and Ebola. But instead, because the rumors are described as 'unfounded, while the advice to wash hands is described as 'sound' and the public is painted as unwilling to follow 'sound' reasoning, this pushes the narrative that Africans can not be trusted to choose the right course of action and that they are unable to understand science. Implicit in this discourse, is the idea that Africans don't behave rationally and that they have yet to catch up with the West's civilized and more evolved state of thinking.

Several articles harp about the lack of resources within the healthcare facilities including ventilators, personal protective equipment for the medical providers, oxygen tanks. The journalists use this exposed scarcity to suggest that African countries have failing and struggling infrastructures that will leave them defenseless in the event of uncontrollable surge of COVID cases. In *The New York Times*, Ruth Maclean and Simon Marks write that "South Sudan, a nation of 11 million, has more vice presidents (five) than ventilators (four)" as an extreme example of how these glaring disparities are the reason why "people across Africa are steeling themselves for coronavirus, fearful of outbreaks that could be catastrophic in countries with struggling health systems" (Maclean & Marks, 2020). Once again, the journalists conflate a

specific scenario in one African nation with the entire continent, blurring the national border lines and sensationalizing the predicament to intensify how much in crisis 'Africa' is in.

True to the headline: "10 African Countries Have No Ventilators. That's Only Part of the Problem", the two writers provide the statistic that there are 10 countries with absolutely no ventilators for the public, while other countries are struggling to find enough hospital beds for their hospital's intensive care units. These claims are followed by the statement that there are efforts to get more ventilators across the continent through aid and that Jack Ma, Chinese billionaire, plans to donate 500 to the continent (Maclean & Marks, 2020). Here a connection is drawn between Africa's finite resources and their public healthcare facilities in jeopardy and the potential arrival of foreign aid. Aid either from the West and more recently China is framed as an expected and relieving problem-solving option for Africa's perpetual neediness.

Maclean and Marks continue with a warning that the crisis has proven that Africa needs to be more self-reliant. "The brutal withdrawal of the U.S. of its contributions to the W.H.O., and the management of the crisis more globally, is a stark reminder that Africa's faith in multilateralism has become untenable" (2020). In another NY Times article, "Covid-19 Outbreak in Nigeria Is Just One of Africa's Alarming Hot Spots", the same journalist Maclean quotes Adia Benton, American medical anthropologist at Northwestern University, when speaking on Sierra Leone "Everyone doesn't feel like the health system is made for them to get better in… often, people go to a hospital to die" (2020). Maclean concludes that "it wasn't supposed to be this way" because in 1978 the Health for All initiative was launched at a United Nations conference with a goal to tackle the gross inequality in global health between "developed and developing nations" (2020).

A *Washington Post* article "The risk of rich countries neglecting poorer ones during the pandemic" (Tharoor, 2020) similarly provides that a usually reliable solution to Africa's extreme poverty problem is falling short in light of the global pandemic. Tharoor explains that "The United Nations has launched an emergency $2 billion humanitarian response plan for the world's poorest countries, but donor funds are trickling in too slowly. The U.N World Food Program made its own $350 million appeal, but it has only received a fraction of that from donors" (2020). While possibly done unintentionally, this narrative that Africa has a history of relying on aid intervention to get them out of a tough pickle is embedded within ritual discursive tropes in Western media of an Africa with internal deficiencies in culture, habits and lifestyle. In what has become a universal norm in news presentation, human vulnerability takes center stage in the African setting as Western media concentrates more on crises and reports less on the political and economic advancements in these areas (Kimani, 2009; Jackson, 2005). The negative implication is that the entire continent is depicted as being on the fringes of modernity, and is thereby totally dependent on Western aid. Hence Africa is reduced to a homogenized space associated with "powerlessness, passivity, ignorance, hunger, illiteracy, neediness, oppression and inertia" (Bankoff, 2001, 23).

Although there are a plethora of examples of journalists highlighting the critical status of the healthcare system and inaccessibility to resources within the continent, there is a gap of information pointing towards the source of these social inequalities and 'glaring' global disparities- particularly as they relate to a Western hegemonic control of distribution. On February 18, 2020, Amy S. Patterson wrote in "The coronavirus is about to hit Africa. Here are the big challenges." that years of donor-promoted market-based reforms that cut public health budgets and capped salaries have meant less funding for primary health care (2020). She

continues that the "resulting staff shortages, facility overcrowding, medication shortages and poor patient care in most African public health systems exacerbate people's unwillingness to rely on available medical services "(Patterson, 2020).

Right after presenting a scenario in Egypt where some hospitals are overflowing and doctors are complaining about shortages of protective equipment, Declan Wash writes in a *NY Times* article that "many low- and middle-income countries, now grappling with surging cases, are also struggling to balance public health against the realities of poverty-stricken societies." (Wash, 2020). Out of the 30 selected *NY Times articles* it is only in an April 9th issue that the reporter, Jane Bradley, draws attention to the reality that 'developing nations' in Latin America and Africa cannot find enough materials and equipment to test for coronavirus, partly because the United States and Europe are outspending them. (Bradley, 2020). Bradley mentions how the United States and European Union countries are sometimes paying up to triple the market price to acquire the scarce medical equipment, "with poorer countries losing out to wealthier ones in the global scrum for masks and testing material" (2020). Bradley quotes Dr. Catharina Boehme, Chief Executive Officer of FIND (Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics) since 2013, who says that for poorer countries (in reference to countries in Africa, Latin America and East Asia) the competition for such highly demanded resources has rapidly devolved into an arm-twisting exercise. "Some governments", she explains "have even offered to send private jets, and certain countries in the Global South can't offer private jets" (Bradley, 2020). This article is crucial to highlight especially in conversation with previous articles that suggest the lack of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers and other medical resources amidst the pandemic are direct consequences of fragile social infrastructures and an overall failure of government well-executed expenditure and decision-making. This article, conversely, is exposing a current

global hierarchy with an unequal distribution of power and capital that leaves Africa consistently

outmatched when up against powerhouses like the United States and Western European countries

.   In a *Washington Post* article titled "The next two weeks will decide Africa's fate on the

coronavirus", Devi Sridhar introduces Africa as a continent that bears the brunt of fighting

several infectious diseases, including tuberculosis, AIDS and malaria (2020). So immediately,

Africa is framed as a space that is prevalent with disease and hardship. Sridhar goes on to

suggest that the prevalence of disease is largely connected to inadequate healthcare in African

nations that can't generate financial support for their institutions: "Primary health care is often

barebones, and many countries struggle to reach WHO- recommended health spending targets to

provide essential health-care packages" (Sridhar, 2020). African nations are being characterized

as unable to provide basic necessities for their citizens and as particularly inefficient in

comparison to the ways Western countries have provided for their citizens. In this same article,

the journalist mentions that while the United States has committed nearly $3 trillion in economic

stimulus packages to help the poor and small business, "economic stimulus packages and support

have been weak or nonexistent in developing countries" (Sridhar, 2020). The journalist criticises

the absence of big spending initiatives to revitalize the economy in order to help those in need in

the African space, but what is left out of these critiques is how colonialism has affected Africa's

economic development or how present day neocolonialist practices have carved out a growing

disparity in resources and wealth between the West and Africa. Though countries in the West

have also been ravaged by the virus, they were in a more advantaged socioeconomic prediction

than African nations prior to the pandemic due to a history of Western exploitation and a pattern

of unbalanced control of trade and supply that started during the colonial regime and remains

today (Settles, 1996). It is concerning that the healthcare systems in several African nations were

struggling even before the arrival of a fastly spreading virus with no known cure and yet many articles failed to interrogate the causation behind these pre-existing conditions. Therefore, they are unable to demand the West to take responsibility for these inequalities outside of an aid-dependent- framework.

Africa is a large and diverse continent; individual countries vary in infrastructure, economy and leadership among other things. When Western media representation continues to portray Africa as monolith and characterize it as a place with a single story based on corruption, scarcity and neediness, this portrayal remains inaccurate, incomplete and ahistorical- doing a disservice to Africa's position and access to power in the global scale. Additionally these misinformed depictions of Africa discourage the agenda of international media coverage to inform the public with evidence-based facts and to lessen prejudice and stigma through accurate and timely coverage (Williams, 2011). This study is important in adding to the discourse around the role journalism plays in shaping Africa's image-especially to a Western audience whose understanding of Africa may be wholly defined by Western media coverage. My findings have shown that the media framing of infrastructure in the Africa setting as well as nations' response to the emerging global pandemic in *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* has largely relied on persistent narratives of Africa as a place of scarcity and ineptitude. Consequently, they have largely obscured the realized consequences of cultural imperialism and a legacy of unbalanced power relations that continues to arrest the continent's potential and capabilities.

Chapter 4

Interrogating The Impact of Colonialism on African Socio Economic Development

The goal of this chapter is to provide a more comprehensive, more complicated history of the African continent by highlighting dynamics such as the legacy of colonization and Africa's diversity that are largely absent for the press coverage detailed earlier. Without these components the narrative created by the journalists' discursive rituals when reporting on Africa are inaccurate, misleading, ahistorical and oversimplisitc. Within my selection of articles, most journalists from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were not sensitive to cultural nuances in covering stories set in African countries and therefore failed to explain the historical and cultural significance of national policies or the actions, beliefs and concerns of the public. A more sinister consequence of these gaps of information in the discourse and news framing, is that the representation does not recognize the way Western hegemony has played a role in producing some of the social conditions in African nations. Such scenarios such as famine and extreme poverty are instead painted as inevitable symptoms of a 'hopeless' Africa that cannot embrace the responsibilities of self-governance or self-reliance.

Ignoring the Legacy of Colonization

The immense economic inequality across the globe is a direct outcome of a multitude of historical processes, one of the most important of which has been European colonialism. The imposition of colonialism on Africa altered its history in fundamentally and long withstanding ways. The African economy was significantly changed by the Atlantic slave trade through the process of imperialism and the economic policies that accompanied colonization. Prior to the late 19th Century "Scramble for Africa," or the official partition of Africa by the major European

nations, African economies were advancing in every area, particularly in the area of trade (Settles, 1996). Interestingly, during the 19th century, Marxist, like Lenin, believed alongside the colonial administrators that European colonization would have positive effects on the African economic development by bringing it closer to capitalism and therefore one stage higher on the evolutionary continuum of human socio-economic progress (Heldring & Robinson, 2012). And yet much of our literature today supports the claim that the era of colonization is to blame for the social and economic ills of the former colonies, including persistent poverty and poor leadership.

The aim of colonialism is to exploit the physical, human and economic resources of an area to benefit the colonizing nation. "European powers pursued this goal by encouraging the development of a commodity based trading system, a cash crop agriculture system, and by building a trade network linking the total economic output of a region to the demands of the colonizing state" (Settles, 1996, 3). There are still some differentiating views in the literature on the impact colonialism had, and that because it was such a heterogeneous phenomenon, its impact may be more ambiguous than a straightforward stated 'negative' one. For example, Manning (1974) suggests that Europeans were able to bring technology, such as railways and mining techniques thereby integrating their colonies more fully into world trade. He mentions how agriculture and mining exports expanded in industry size after the scramble for Africa commenced (1974). However as Heldring & Robinson (2012) reveal the rates of economic growth were extremely modest if not subpar and those claims don't take into account how African living standards deteriorated with the ceasing of their land and control over their rights including ownership. So while the Atlantic slave trade, which existed in Africa for over three hundred years, introduced to the continent a new sophisticated systems of credit and exchange that stimulated the trade industry and further development, one result of the increase in

international trade was that indigenous African economy was subordinated to the interest of Europe. In his conclusion, Settles makes a perceptive point: "thus we see early developing a pattern of Africa as a source of raw materials, in this case labor, and as only a consumer of goods"(1996,4).

As a system designed for suppression and total control, colonialism was also invested in taking the power away from traditional African rulers and destroying their power base. Colonial powers instituted trade controls that limited the mobilization of colonial imports- restricting Africans' freedom to choose where to market their own goods (Heldring & Robinson, 2012; Mulinge & Lesetedi, 1998; Ocheni & Nwankwo, 2012). They were only allowed to import from the colonizing powers and export to that same market and thus European rule completely undermined their existing economic power structures "and made Africa totally reliant upon Europe for their economic destiny" (Settles, 1996, 9). Colonialism was successful in integrating Africa into the world's economic system, however Africans were unequal partners and lacking in true autonomy. Under colonial economic policy, Africa was exporting all its resources with no equal return in wealth or financial independence.

The European colonial regime lasted in Africa for about eighty years, but the infrastructure that was developed during that period was designed to exploit the natural resources of the colonies and the negative impact of that is still experienced today. The policies of colonialism forced the demise of African industry and created a reliance on imported goods from Europe. "Had native industry been encouraged and cultivated by the colonizing powers, Africa would probably be in a much better economic and technological position today" (Settles, 1996, 11)

In "The Other Way Covid Will Kill: Hunger " when Peter S. Goodman writes that South Sudan was already one of the world's poorest countries with "80 percent of its roughly 11 million people living in a state of absolute poverty" (Goodman, 2020) or when Simon Marks in "Africa, Intertwined With China, Fears Coronavirus Outbreak details that the WHO organization predicts it will need $675 million through April to assist poor countries in Africa and Asia with "weak public health systems"(Marks, 2020), these journalist must be critical in examining how years of exploitative policies made by European colonial regimes have undermined infrastructures in African nations and made it inaccessible for them to generate that kind of funding in the way other Western countries are able to. These disparities and presence of scarcity can no longer be framed as isolated scenarios untethered to a history of oppression.

Ongoing effects of colonialism in structure of African government

The literature also proves that another consequence of colonialism is its ongoing influence on the structure of African governments. Many of the news stories highlight the corruption within governments of specified African nations and outline the impact its existence will have on the public's response to COVID-19 policy and state-mandated guidelines. Lynsey Chutel, for example, writes in a *NY Times* article, that as South Africans cope with hunger in the pandemic, government efforts at delivering relief floundered amidst widespread allegations of fraud and mismanagement. She supplies that "funds meant for unemployment are making their way into pockets of political cronies" (Chutel, 2020). These journalists seem to expose these corrupt practices in order to hold these African governments accountable, but fail to interrogate how systems of bribery and exploitation were institutionalized by European colonial

administrators during colonialism. What is excluded from the journalists' discourse is the historically rooted causes of the emergence and staying power of corruption in African nations.

They must examine the role played by colonialism and the ways its legacy has continued to influence virtually all African countries long after independence was granted. Scholars have proposed that the political authoritarianism of the colonial state is a direct source of the authoritarianism that has plagued Africa since independence (Young, 1994). Heldring & Robinson (2012) exemplify this transitioning of dictatorial power from white leadership to Black leadership through polarizing figure Robert Mugabe. Having dominated Zimbabwe's politics for nearly four decades, Mugabe was a controversial figure. He was praised as a revolutionary hero of the African liberation struggle who helped free Zimbabwe from British colonialism, imperialism, and white minority rule, but the actions of his later years in presidential office garnered him the reputation of a dictator who ruined the country (Maclean, 2010). Some of his actions included redistributing land that had been given to white people to black Zimbabweans who were also holding political office or a part of his inner circle as well as holding unfair elections where he was able to manipulate the outcome to ensure his victories. "It is impossible to conceive of Robert Mugabe and the way he and his supporters have run Zimbabwe since 1980 without thinking how Ian Smith[2] and the whites ran and structured the society prior to 1980" (Heldring & Robinson, 2012, 17)

Another way to reveal how the historical events of colonialism are linked to the emergence of corrupt practices in African politics is by focusing on the introduction of monetary

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[2] Ian Douglas Smith GCLM ID (8 April 1919 – 20 November 2007), born to British immigrants in Selukwe, was a Rhodesian politician, farmer, and fighter pilot who served as Prime Minister of Rhodesia (known as Southern Rhodesia until October 1964 and today known as Zimbabwe) from 1964 to 1979. He was the country's first premier not born abroad, and led the predominantly white government that unilaterally declared independence from the United Kingdom in November 1965, following prolonged dispute over the terms.

tax promoted by colonial governments into a pre-colonial African economic space. "The introduction of a monetary tax - namely, the hut and later poll tax was a very significant way by which colonial governments fostered the growth of corruption" (Mulinge & Lesetedi, 1998, 18) Most colonial governments, particularly those led by the British, enforced compulsory tax in order to meet the cost of administration and generating cheap African labor used to further develop the British empire. To collect tax from the African laborers, colonial governments mostly relied on local African leaders and chiefs. It is through this system that corrupt behavior was encouraged. To motivate the chiefs to generate as much tax revenue as possible, colonial administration allowed them to retain a portion of it. For example, in Bechuanaland (now Botswana) the dikgosi (chiefs or kings) were granted 10% of the total tax collection. With these kickbacks, people in high positions were able to acquire private property and a standard of living removed from the average worker. As Mulinge & Lesetedi (1998, 19) put it, colonial chiefs "were implicitly encouraged to use their positions to amass wealth and demonstrate thereby that it paid to cooperate with Europeans.

Contemporary African politicians and administrators have adopted the power structures associated with colonial chiefs- appointed by the Europeans- to perform their desires and conform to their agenda. This includes authoritarianism and a lack of respect for law and due process (Heldring & Robinson, 2012). Many bureaucratic administrators in African nations use their position of power to amass illegal wealth. Presently, Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer reported that in 2019, more than half of 47,000 citizens in the 35 countries surveyed believe their nation is becoming more corrupt – and that the government isn't doing enough to tackle the problem. "More than one in four people who answered the survey had paid a bribe to access public services from healthcare to education in the previous year" (Whiting,

2019). Corruption is hindering Africa's economic, political and social development, and as long as Western media fails to examine how Africa's colonial past has impacted the government corruption and mismanagement that characterizes most African nations during the post-colonial period, then the West can continue to evade the responsibility of correcting their destructive and exploitative policies that robbed resources from African people; all for their own selfish, capitalist, colonial expansion. This is not to say that Africans don't have responsibility to resist corrupt behaviors and envision a future where there is economic prosperity for the masses and not the few. Butt by ignoring the impact of a colonial past, the American journalists erroneously depict Africans as ethically or socially inferior, intellectually incapable, lazy and ill-motivated.

The persistent causes of underdevelopment and poverty within the African space.

The journalist characterize African nations by their impoverished conditions or 'poverty-stricken societies', lack of funding in the public health services and 'fragile' and 'vulnerable' communities and yet ignore the ways powerful states of the West and that of China as well as global financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have continued to exploit Africa and helped perpetuate the poverty.

"For almost five centuries, European empire builders employed different strategies and tactics in Africa to make money through the ownership of human beings, exploration, evangelization, colonization, commercialization, banditry, robbery and theft" (Asafa, 2015, 78). Other actions performed by European colonial powers include abusing indigenous Africans and stripping their economic and natural resources and transferring them to European colonial settlers, their descendants and their African collaborators. And today, Africa continues to be exploited by foreign intervention with organizations such as the World Bank and the

International Monetary Fund. Critics have argued that the policies and programs enacted to address debt and control inflation in African countries, ended up increasing unemployment, poverty and overall impeded on the sustainable development of these nations. Reportedly World Bank projects have continued to undermine the development of democratic institutions, health economies and well managed environments throughout Africa. Today, sub-Saharan Africa owes some $350 billion to the World Bank, making it Africa's single largest creditor. Founded in 1944, the World Bank Group (WBG, or Bank) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF, or Fund) are twin intergovernmental institutions that are influential in shaping the structure of the world's development and financial order. Led by renowned economist John Maynard Keynes, the World Bank and its sister institution IMF claim to be invested in creating a world of peace and prosperity (Adams, 1992). However Keynes didn't have faith in the public's ability to bring about constructive change itself, and so through deficit financing the organizations spawned several projects to mine and invest in Africa's natural resources for a promised prosperous and better future. These projects largely failed, leaving millions displaced and lands depleted. As countries exhausted their mineral resources, cut down their forests, eroded their soils, polluted their aquifers and hunted their wildlife to extinction, the economies that depended on that now declining capital began to decline as well (Adams, 1992).

What is now indisputable is that the impact of deficit financing on Africa only deepened Africa's debt crisis. Today, Africa's total external debt is estimated at 106 percent of its aggregate gross national product. Presently, Africa is transferring more money to already rich northern creditors than it received in new loans and grants from those same creditors, an occurrence known today as "net negative transfers." Curiously, (Adams, 1992) suggests that these debilitating environments of debt burden provide the necessary vehicle for the corruption

within national governments mentioned in many of the articles. In an attempt to help these African 'less-developed' economies participate in the economy despite having a technically negative GDP, the World Bank provided structural-adjustment loans so those African countries could pay for their imports, "freeing up monies for other uses, including debt repayment" (Adams, 1992, 103). And not surprisingly, these new loans have only made the economic situation worse for the borrower.

The scarcity in resources and lack of funding needed to address 'fragile healthcare systems' mentioned in these articles failed to provide scrutiny of how the World Bank and IMF have removed a huge degree of financial autonomy from African governments and consequently undermined the growth of democratic institutions.

Subsequently by continuing to frame aid and foreign intervention as the only real answer to Africa's economic conditions, they support this failing system of amassing debt that leaves Africa economically dependent and chained to foreign capital from the West and now more recently China. This seemingly never-ending transaction of World Bank loans and credits, only seems to be leaving African governments more powerless and vulnerable to exploitation. Claude Ake, African scholar and advisor to the World bank on African affairs affirms that "Aid is not the answer. If aid disappeared, Africa would have to take the idea of self-reliance more seriously… and when you take the idea of self-reliance more seriously, you cannot ignore democracy" (Adams, 1992, 116).

Several of my selected articles exposed the lack of funding in African government to provide economic safety nets for their citizens during the national lockdowns and articulated that the governments failed to allocate resources towards bolstering their economies and societies during the pandemic. While, only a handful address the commercial debt many of these countries

are faced with- that limits their abilities to help those in need. Only 2 out of 30 *New York Times*

articles even mention African nations being burdened by debt with 1 mention of the IMF.

African debt payment plans are mentioned 4 separate times throughout the 31 *Washington Post*

articles. Only one article "The risk of rich countries neglecting poorer ones during the pandemic"

(Tharoor, 2020) mentions that Ethiopia's prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, had argued for the

complete cancellation of debt in lieu of the plan provided by the Group of 20[3]'s plan to "freeze

the debt payments of dozens of poorer nations, at least temporarily. The minimal coverage of the

IMF, World Bank and other present Western organizations that stunted Africa's economic

growth creates the conclusion that the wealth disparity between Africa and the West is the result

of poor governance and careless leadership. What is missing from this conclusion is an

interrogation as to why the existing infrastructure in African nations is 'fragile' and 'vulnerable'

as the journalists detail. Western countries, and in particular the world's dominant power, the

United States – according to cultural imperialism theorists – exploited African countries to serve

their own economic and political interests. Well beyond the period of colonialism, current day

ideological frameworks such as Euroamerican paternalism proved to be a convenient and

convincing discourse to justify programs and systems such as IMF and USAID that help

maintain Africa's dependency on the West (Bassil, 2011). These American articles don't appear

interested in analyzing the root cause of extreme poverty in regions in Africa, the weak and

underfunded social infrastructures or corruption within government because it would mean

examining U.S neoliberal policies that are beneficial for America's societal formation but

detrimental for the African economic and political landscape. The result of America's monopoly

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[3] The G20 (or Group of Twenty) is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors from 19 countries and the European Union (EU). Founded in 1999 with the aim to discuss policy pertaining to the promotion of international financial stability. The G20's primary focus has been governance of the global economy. It seeks to address issues that go beyond the responsibilities of any single nation.

of power, resources and its dominant control over the flow of media information is depicted as a reward due to its own efficiency and skill. While Africans, lacking in access to food, medicines, energy and even water, are depicted, to put it plainly, as failures- ones in need of charity. Although journalists wrote in some moments that highlighted the individual agency and voices of active participants from different African nations during the pandemic, they still predominantly relied on a Western understanding of the notion of development to criticize Africa's socio-economic conditions and paint the continent as systemically failing to meet the challenges of modernity and social progress (Andreasson, 2006).

Conclusion

Re-constructing the Africa's Image in Western Journalism: The 'Promising' Continent

"The last four or five hundred years of European contact with Africa produced a body of literature that presented Africa in a very bad light and Africans in very lurid terms. The reason for this had to do with the need to justify the slave trade and slavery. [...] This continued until the Africans themselves, in the middle of the twentieth century, took into their own hands the telling of their story" Achebe (2000)

Based on these analyses, it has become clear to me that the representation of Africa by Western media during the global pandemic is at best negligent and at worst deliberately negative. Moreover, whatever the intent behind the journalists' framing choices of African's capabilities, the results are systematic and emblematic of a larger concern. The narrative of 'Africa in crisis' sells. News, like any other commodity, is subject to commercial imperatives. Simply put, "the need for profit maximization influences the determination that events are newsworthy"(Kimani, 2009). The implication, then, is that Western correspondents in Africa look for news stories that are easy and convenient to gather, and that will be attractive to viewers. As a result, American

journalists will choose sensationalized and familiar news stories of corruption, famine and conflict. Stories that, frustratingly so, allow a Western audience to continue to imagine an 'Africa' that is far removed from their lives, their politics, their social positions. As Stuart Hall explains, we rely on representation to make sense of the world and this reliance is implicated in power relations. When Africa and its people are illustrated as distant "others" in their suffering and chaotic lives, their distress becomes a spectacle that can be packaged as a commodity- one consumed during your morning newspaper read over a cup of piping hot joe. These inaccurate and ahistorical representations are methodically determined to find a narrative that maintains the ignorant claim that those in the West i.e. Americans are just 'built differently' than the African "Other". This conclusion, in turn, deflects any responsibility for institutional forces such as globalization and Western imperialism to be held accountable for the depicted social inequalities.

The result, at best, is that Western correspondents deculturalize news from Africa by stripping it of its social relevance and value. At worst, the context provided is drawn from the negative stereotypes that have long influenced the Western image of Africa and its peoples. Furthermore, African stories are disadvantaged because of the strongly held Western belief in a particular hierarchy of international social relationships that places the cultures of industrialized nations such as the U.S at the top, and the cultures found in Africa nations at the bottom. As Kimani explains, "the further apart two nations stand in this hierarchy, the greater the imbalance in the flow of news between the two nations, to the disadvantage of the nation in the lower level of the hierarchy"(2009, 79).

African countries were constantly referred to as 'developing countries' in the articles or 'low-income countries' and 'poorer nations' as a way to quantify how they measure up against Western countries that are commonly referred to as 'developed countries'. This suggested that

the West, unlike the entire African continent, have reached the pinnacle of civilization and social

progress. But what does 'development' even mean, and who gets to define it or set the standards

for success? The discourse around development is inherently political and entrenched in power

dynamics- ones that favor the West and Western supremacy ideologies. Take the U.S- a country

that claims 'developmental scales and high achieving economic performance. According to

contemporary development theories, the U.S is moving in the right direction with their high mass

consumption and capitalist free market economy and yet as of June 2020, the United States has

the highest rate of incarceration in the world- with 655 prisoners per 100,000 of the national

population locked away. This systematic mass incarceration that disproportionately condemns

Black people and other people of color is in fact a huge contributor to the country's overall GDP,

and so here we see an example of how a society's government can have higher tolerances for

socioeconomic inequalities if it means acquiring more wealth in material terms (Andreasson,

2006).

To me, it appears hypocritical for the American journalist to rely on tropes of poverty,

famine and scarcity to assign Africa to a stage less advanced than the West's position in this

imagined evolutionary development scale (Bond, 2006). When Africa is framed as a place of

distant "Others" who are forever stuck in a historically backwards and less evolved state, than

representations that show them as perpetually in crisis and in need are understood as natural,

unproblematic and expected even. The Western/American reader therefore thinks to herself "of

course, Africa is struggling to find funds during a pandemic needed to help those in informal

housing and provide essential safety equipment for the healthcare workers on the frontlines, they

have corrupt and poor leadership and have always been plagued with conflict and social unrest."

These ahistorical representations remain unchallenged and accepted as incontestable truths for

the large percentages of American readers who have never engaged with the African context

outside of what they consume in America's mass media.

Additionally, these issues are detached from the historical and contemporary relations

between the West and the Africa space. In addressing the government's failures, the problems of

scarcity or the fragility of societal infrastructures, there was little to no initiative from the

journalists to explore how these supposed differences among the so called 'developed' and

'underdeveloped' came into existence through very real historical processes that involved

Western domination and control. Many of the articles stressed how African governments's

COVID-19 safety protocols such as national lockdowns, curfews and social distancing measures

were drying up work and income, disrupting agricultural production and likely to increase the

number of people going hungry and facing starvation. One reason a journalist gave for why these

protocols are deemed successful in Western parts but no so in the 'developing countries' in

Africa is that food distribution and retailing is organized and automated in richer countries, while

systems in 'developing countries' are labor intensive making their supply chains more vulnerable

to COVID-19 and social distancing regulations (Dahir, 2020). In my opinion, this analysis feels

superficial, stopping just before it investigates the main contribution to Africa's vulnerable

supply lines. According to neoliberal economics, a system that is glorified by the United States,

export production is a surefire way to create prosperity and national economic growth. Yet

because the reality is that Africa is involved in unequal exchange in trade- only increasing its

trade deficit- the exports economy for many African countries remains another mechanism to

extract major profits from Africa and transfer them into the pockets of other more dominant

global players. More than two-thirds of Africa's trade is with developed countries and nearly

80% of African primary exports is natural resources, compared to the 16% for the 'advanced

capitalist economies'(Andreasson, 2006). This dependency on natural resources as the primary product export is problematic not only because prices can be volatile and there has been a downfall price trend for many natural resources in the past 20 years (Bond, 2006) but also because mineral production requires a lot of capital. Therefore, in the case of African nations' market-economies, there is less funding and incentive for other areas of infrastructure such as education and public health.

Mining houses have been central to looting Africa for at least a century and a half, and the depletion of minerals and other non-renewable natural resources have had extremely negative consequences. Not only are large sections of Africa looted of their natural wealth by Big Oil (Bond, 2006) but also this 'Scramble for Africa' 2.0 also brings other social devastations caused by mining operations: In his, "Seeing Like an Oil Company," anthropologist James Ferguson details the effects this exploitative trade has on human life's worth, indigenous people's traditions and culture, and aesthetics of the natural environment- the costs for which can not be quantified. "At every point in the fossil fuel production chain where your members "add value" and make profit, ordinary people, workers and their environments are assaulted and impoverished. Where oil is drilled, pumped, processed and used, in Africa as elsewhere, ecological systems have been trashed, peoples' livelihoods have been destroyed, and their democratic aspirations and their rights and cultures trampled" (Bond, 2006, 15).

The U.S. and other parts of the West have historically used imperialist tactics to further enrich themselves at the expense of African labor and capital. Painting Africa as an impoverished space is not only reductive but it's inaccurate. The wealth of Africa is unquestionable and undeniable compared to other continents in the globe- this is self-evident through the West's increasing interest in Africa even after colonialism ended. Having access to

the continent's natural resources- such as oil and mineral exports- continues to play an important role in the West-Africa relationship following decolonization. Inequality between Africa and Europe is due to the imbalance of trade and reciprocity in terms of imports and exports. And organizations and NGOs strategies developed by Western actors to address issues of debt and aid are superficial and ironically or *conveniently* huge perpetrators to the problem of financial instability within African nations.

If Western countries are still not ready to begin the important and necessary conversation of reparations for Africa's history of being exploited and subjected, then we desperately need media Western coverage to hold some accountability. Every story that mentions hungry children and political tensions within public office can't afford to exclude the historical legacy of a continent looted and how past colonial actions have transformed into new imaginative forms of exploitation- usually under the guise of aid and diplomacy. Africa has endured countless injustices including forced trade, slavery that uprooted around 12 million Africans, "land grabs; vicious taxation schemes; precious metals spirited away… the 19th century emergence of racist ideologies to justify colonialism; the construction of settler-colonial and extractive-colonial systems… Cold War battlegrounds—proxies for U.S./U.S.S.R. conflicts—filled with millions of corpses; other wars catalyzed by mineral searches and offshoot violence such as witnessed in blood diamonds and other precious metals and minerals, poacher-stripped swathes of East, Central and Southern Africa now devoid of rhinos and elephants whose ivory became ornamental material or aphrodisiac in the Middle East and East Asia; and societies used as guinea pigs in the latest corporate pharmaceutical test" (Bond, 2006, 7).

When the consequential impact these atrocities had on the African continent are left out of the conversation in such blatant ways, the politics around Western intervention and

domination and antipathy towards the lives of local and indigenous cultures is excused, or worse

celebrated. What I am asking is for these media accounts produced, manufactured and structured

in the Western political space to stop justifying neoliberal political and economic agendas. I am

asking them to interrogate how past tropes and narratives used to define Africa were written with

the colonial mentality and therefore are stuffed with many lies, big misrepresentations and

injustices that demean and silence the voice of the African peoples. I'm asking them to use a

large magnifying lens when covering Africa to identify the ways Africa's 'underdeveloped'

conditions of today that they report on are intrinsically related to the 'developed' conditions of

wealthier nations such as the U.K and the U.S. That there is an ongoing legacy of plundering

resources, mainly through unfair international trade or by instigating and funding violent

conflicts between African nations that result in Western free markets amassing even more

resources (Hahn 2007; LeBron and Ayers 2013). All of these points should be examined in order

to correct an overused degrading depiction of Africa as unable to succeed outside of Western

surveillance, control and influence.

Today's discourse about the African experience in Western media is directly influenced

by the discourse used to justify white Europeans colonialism in the past, and the reason this

discourse exists today even after colonialism and slavery came to an end, is because Europe still

has the upper hand over Africa in terms of power. For example, currently, Africa does not have

any meaningful say in the proceedings of international organisations such as the International

Monetary Fund (IFM) the World Bank (WB), the United Nations (UN) and World Trade

Organisation (WTO). Organizations "which have always been serving Europe in stark contrast to

disserving Africa" (Bond, 2006, 6).

Instead of relying on the Western public and its media to develop a deeper understanding of Africa's political climate and issues revolving it- and the diversity that 54 countries have to offer, solutions for adding more depth and honesty to the African stories begin with toppling the current infrastructure of 'unidirectional' flow of stories with Americans dictating African experiences. In order to make meaningful change to the way Western media covers Africa is to increase the exchange of information between African and Western journalists. Well-funded businesses such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* should invest in bringing journalists and scholars from every part of Africa to the U.S. on extended working visits where they can educate and inform American journals on cultural specificities and historical trajectories of the nations they wish to report on. News organizations can also benefit from hiring more African journalists, so they can be the ones writing these stories, so they can give them the nuance and care they deserve. I found in my research that it was the Kenyan journalist writing about Kenya that took the time to draw a connection between current leadership and the impact the colonial regime had on weakening political infrastructure in Kenya. It would also be encouraging to see more Western/American journalists build connections and contacts with journalists in the respective African nations' press. These contacts could provide important and necessary perspectives on events as active participants of those societies.

As far as the discourse used to frame future reporting of Africa, these news companies could adopt new journalist rituals that offer more holistic coverage of issues, and actively work to disregard well-practiced stereotypes that may be familiar but are simply reductive. Instead of looking for a news angle that depicts situations and peoples as backwards and uncivilized and incapable, journalists should be more comfortable with alternative perspectives that celebrate accomplishments in the African space and highlight victories and stories of empowerment. These

stories could be revolutionary and sensational, in the sense that they would be so different from the usual package of hardship, defeat and downfall. Giving African's the ability to frame their own stories and experiences for representation that isn't limiting or pessimistic allows them to create their own new media themes, framing devices and tropes that grants them the freedom to be fully realized social actors that are cognizant of their past and optimistic and eager for their future.

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