THE CULTURAL NEXUS IN THE SINGLE STORY: WESTERN MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF AFRICA AND ITS EFFECTS ON AFRICA'S CULTURAL SECURITY

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Abstract
This paper adopts both the notion of the single story and the psycho-cultural theory to show how the global media space, especially of the Western breed, has predominantly mediated the media space and has become a colossus on the negative profiling of Africa as the continent of poverty, disease, wars, ignorance, corruption; a region of failed states and consequent lawlessness. This has become the single story out of Africa. The paper argues, that there is a cultural nexus to the negative depiction of Africa and it is deeply rooted in the notion of cultural hegemony and cultural security. The paper concludes that this media bias against Africa fulfills the strategic objectives of colonialism, global capitalism, and cultural segregation of Western neocolonialist imperialism that represent Africa systematically as (1) a place of "darkness" and "tribalism"; (2) it presents Africa as a homogenous entity; and (3) that it relies predominantly on Western cultural orientations as a civilized people against those of Africa.

Keywords: Cultural nexus, single story, Media Representation, Cultural security

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Introduction

The Western media has been accused by states in the periphery as the promoter of the notion of cultural hegemony and this can be explained in pure historical relationships and sociological orientations so far established as the cultural nexus between the West and Africa. This implies, that there is a historical cultural orientation to the disposition of the Western media against the continent of Africa and its peoples. It has been argued by Ahearne,(2014), and more rightly too, that the new phase of colonialism known as neocolonialism and globalization as it relates to Western cultural hegemony deploys subtle strategies that are the direct opposite of settler colonialism and yet, fulfills the same intent and purposes of settler colonialism.

Whereas settler colonialism deploys elements of coercion and outright military conquest through wars in extreme cases of resistance from the colonized, neocolonialism, globalization and capitalism deploy subtle bilateral, political diplomacy and economic institutions/policies such as UNO, IMF/World Bank, WTO, and so on to cunningly maintain a Western political, cultural and economic stranglehold on Africa and other countries in the marginal space of the world. It must be noted that the Western media is the propagandist arm of Western capitalism and cultural imperialism.

Conceptual Clarification

Cultural Nexus: Nexus is a generic word that means to show a connection between two things. In the present usage, cultural nexus will, therefore, mean the cultural connections between the Western media and Africa as it relates to persons, or events especially those that are or is part of a chain of causations. The History and Etymology for the word nexus are sourced from Latin, meaning a bond, tie, from nectere; to bind.

The Single Story: The phrase 'single story' is a coinage by Nigerian-born author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Adichie uses the phrase "The Single Story" to describe the overly simplistic and sometimes false perceptions formed about individuals, groups, or countries. ...

The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. The single story is created by showing a certain group of people as one thing over and over again, and that is what they become in the perception of others. The delivery and format of "The Dangers of a Single Story" are indispensable in enabling people of all abilities to benefit from it. Adichie argues that mainstream narratives, especially about Africa by the Western media reduce 'others' to damaging stereotypes, which become internalized and must be challenged.

Media Representation: Media representation is how media texts deal with and present gender, age, ethnicity, national and regional identity, social issues, and events to an audience. Media texts have the power to shape an audience's knowledge and understanding of these important topics either positively or negatively. Overall, representation is the act of speaking on someone's behalf or depicting or portraying something.
Cultural Security/Insecurity: Generally, Culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts. Cultural security is a philosophy and a way of operating that ensures, that all individuals and groups are treated concerning their unique cultural needs and differences, while cultural insecurity is the anxiety around artistic taste, the fear that one's tastes are not sufficiently legitimate, or distinctive, or cool, depending on context. Its relations with social class and status are well-attested.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts psycho-cultural theory as its analytical framework. Psycho-cultural theory as propounded by S.A Faleti (2006) explains the intransigence of group conflicts and provides socially rooted processes that bring about shared dispositions, and motives for individual and group behaviours. These dispositions do threaten the identity and invoke a high sense of insecurity. According to the theory, psychological, religious, and other cultural contradictions are the basis for insecurity and conflicts. Ani (2012) opines that 'in psycho-cultural

conflicts, passion for the protection of one's identity, religion and culture overwhelms reason and inflames conflicts behaviours. Marc Howard Ross, drawing on psycho-cultural interpretation theory, defines ethnic identity as originating in "shared, deeply rooted worldviews" that shape group members' relationships with others, their actions, and their motives. Ethnic identity cannot be changed, only made more tolerant and open-minded.

Some Few Instances Of The Single Story Out Of Africa

In a celebrated case of the instance of media bias, racism, and white supremacy by the Western Media, a recent job posting by the New York Times looking to fill the position of Nairobi bureau chief continues to spark outrage over Western media's skewed coverage and portrayal of Africa. According to the advertisement, the right candidate would have an opportunity "to dive into news and enterprise across a wide range of countries, from the deserts of Sudan and the pirate seas of the Horn of Africa, down through the forests of Congo and the shores of Tanzania." The advertisement went on to describe the region as one that offered crucial story leads, including terrorism, the scrambling for resources, and tussles between dictatorships and democracy. "There is also the chance to delight our readers with unexpected stories of hope and the changing rhythms of life in a rapidly evolving region," it further read.

Beyond the Twitter war under the hashtag someonetellNewyorktimes that was sparked by furious Kenyans on Twitter, commonly referred to as #KOT (Kenyans on Twitter) and famed for viciously defending the East African country and mocking the Western media's ignorant and ill-conceived nuances on Kenya and Africa, the job advertisement has rekindled talk on the role the western Media played in shaping the perception of Africa as a dark continent only known for poverty, corruption, diseases, and conflict. One school of thought posits that the Western media is Africa's number one enemy, and whose reportage is guided by tired and

colonial-era stereotypes as well as external sources (as opposed to ones from within the continent itself).

At the beginning of 2016, following the deadly terrorist attack at a supermarket and a hotel complex in Kenya's capital that claimed 15 lives and left over 30 persons injured, the New York Times ran photos of victims covered in blood, drawing the ire of Kenyans who criticized the publication for publishing insensitive information and practicing double standards, arguing that the media house would not publish such images if the attack happened in the West. The backlash was backed by Kenya's media regulator which gave New York Times an ultimatum to pull down the images from its website or have its correspondents deregistered. The publisher stood its ground, insisting that it was guided by its internal editorial policies.

Again, in the same Kenya, when the former U.S.A President, Barrack Obama, was to make his maiden trip to Kenya as commander in chief, the Cable News Network (CNN) carried a story on the security threats the president was exposed to, and terming Kenya a hotbed of terror. Kenya citizens picked up an online war-christened #someonetellcnn, which saw 75,000 tweets sent in a single day. These tweets eventually elicited an apology from the network's management.

In the recent Ethiopian Airlines plane crash that killed all 157 passengers, major Western media houses highlighted the names and countries of victims from the West but failed to mention those from African countries, including Kenya which lost 32 citizens (the largest death toll for any country in the crash). A Turkish Radio Television (TRT) World news anchor insinuated, that the Ethiopian national carrier had a poor safety record, a claim that was disputed by an aviation expert who affirmed that the airline was safe and trusted.

The narrative of Africa as a hopeless continent has been sustained over the years. University of Stanford media scholar Toussaint Nothias indicated in his analysis that between 2007 and 2012 when he reviewed more than 282 articles that appeared in British and French newspapers, there was a pattern of portraying Africa through

terms such as 'darkness' and 'tribalism'; Nothias highlighted that such terms were not used to describe communities in the west.

Dr. Maxwell Kihara a communications expert cited by Ahearne (2009) argues that the numerous cases where the international media is quick to profile Africa in bad light depict subtle racism and an extension of neocolonialism. "It is a clear sign of a generation of media that has predetermined mindsets guided by a narrative they only know about from the history books. Africa has made huge strides in innovation and has produced some of the biggest icons globally yet those receive little or no coverage. Why is there no balance in coverage by the Western press?" Kihara asks rhetorically.

Yet, Anderson Asiimwe, a journalism lecturer at Victoria University in Uganda, cited Nussbaum, (2011) and argues that critics of the Western press are being unfair and are afraid of facing the uncomfortable truths about Africa. "Even local news is awash with stories of tragedy and chaos in Africa. Journalism in the West as is the case with Africa is guided by the maxim 'if it leads it bleeds. Bad news sells everywhere. What we need is for the African media to be patriotic to their continent," Anderson says, insisting that the gap in coverage of the positive side of Africa is because the African media, which has the ability and the knowhow to tell the African story, is not doing so.

For Dr. Kihara, the remedy is to have international media hire local journalists in African bureaus seeing as they understand the region better. "What is the use of hiring a Westerner to come and cover African affairs? Why not hire local journalists who know the dynamics of Africa, the cultures and ways of life which they will then package into a story that moves beyond mere reportage to analysis and is also unbiased?" he asks.

Critical Analysis of the Single Story by Western Media Representation of Africa

The global media and cultural space are not as fluid as given. It is inhibited by constant contestations and struggles about cultural supremacy and hegemony by various civilizations. The West and America are leaders in this race for cultural supremacy and their media

outfits such as CNN, BBC, Dutchwelle, Reuters, etc have been programmed to fit into the quest for cultural hegemony. This is because their media coverage of news items, documentaries, and other programs portray their continent as the best in terms of governance, economy, politics, culture, freedom of expression, religion, fashion, education, and so on, while Africa is portrayed as lawless, a compendium of failed states, disease, poverty and ignorance and so on and this has become the single story out from Africa. The strategic cultural implication of this Western media orientation is obvious, namely, the Western population has been sociologically socialized into this cultural orientation and consequently has internalized it from the impressionistic age to maturity and it becomes a permanent cultural bias deeply rooted in the psyche of an average Westerner against Africa.

In June 2010, for example, Time magazine published graphic pictures of a naked woman from Sierra Leone dying in childbirth. Not long after, CNN did a story about two young Kenyan boys whose family is so poor that they are forced to work delivering goats to a slaughterhouse for less than a penny per goat, thus, reinforcing the sense of economic misery in the country, and ultimately, a region, Between May and September 2010, the ten most-read US newspapers and magazines carried 245 articles mentioning poverty in Africa, but only five mentioned gross domestic product growth of some countries in Africa.

Reporters' attraction to certain kinds of African stories has a lot to do with the frames of reference they arrive with. Nineteenth-century New York Herald correspondent Henry M. Stanley wrote that he was prepared to find Zanzibar "populated by ignorant blacks, with great thick lips, whose general appearance might be compared to Du Chaillu's gorillas." Since the Biafran War, a cause célèbre in the West helped give rise in the late 1960s to the new field of human rights. Western reporters have closely tracked issues like traditional female circumcision and in the 1980s, the famine in Ethiopia that had as much to do with politics as with drought set a pattern of stories about "starving Africans" that not only has not been abandoned but continues to grow. According to Steven S. Ross, (1981) then a Columbia journalism

professor, between 1998 and 2002 the number of stories about famine in Africa tripled. He maintained that in Kenya, where he was a Peace Corps volunteer in the late 1960s and where he returned to live four years ago, The New York Times' description of the Kenyan post-election violence in 2007 as a manifestation of "atavistic" tribalism carried echoes of Steven and other early Western visitors. According to Karen Rothmyer (2011), the main reason for the continued dominance of such negative stereotypes may well be the influence of Western-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international aid groups like United Nations agencies. These organizations understandably tend to focus not on what has been accomplished but on convincing people how much remains to be done. As a practical matter, they also need to attract funding. Together, these pressures create incentives to present as gloomy a picture of Africa as possible to keep attention and money flowing, and to enlist journalists in disseminating that picture.

Africans themselves readily concede that there continues to be terrible conflict and human suffering on the continent. But what's lacking, say media observers like Sunny Bindra, a Kenyan management consultant, is context and breadth of coverage so that outsiders can see the continent's whole—its potential and successes along with its very real challenges. "There are famines; they are not made up," Bindra says. "There are arrogant leaders, but most of the journalism that is done does not challenge anyone's thinking."

Africa's Cultural Insecurity From A Single-Story Perspective

There is a misunderstanding about Africa held by the west. It is ignorance regarding a whole continent full of entirely different peoples, places, customs, and cultures, yet, for many, it is all lumped into one big monolith. Two examples of this ignorance are seen through the media's representation of Africa through the film as well as the West's attitude toward intervention in the African conflict. Much of the Western notion of Africa is left from Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness. His book and its famous title have remained the quintessential definition and description of Africa for over a century. It seems to be the common go-to for the characterization of Africa. Its racist sentiment and colonial-

euro point of view lack any real representation of Africa and its people. It is better to read as a book about evil regardless of its African setting and the darkness in all of humanity. Even some of the greatest minds in the Western tradition like Arendt have fallen victim to the book's mix-imaging of Africa. Her continual reference to Africa as the "Dark Continent" and its people as "savages" falls in line with the media's representation of Africa today and the Western press is so fixated on this sociological bias. What we can learn from this about the West and its people is that all of us are susceptible to thoughtlessness. This ignorance held about Africa by the West opens the door for evil to live in different forms. One form of evil was the inaction of the West in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide.

The genocide has been rightly termed ''the triumph of evil" and from the horror stories and testimonies, it must be a source of concern and wonder how such evil could happen. Much like the complicity of Conrad's character Marlow, who remains silent about the horror and evil committed by Belgians in the Congo, the West held itself back from the action in 1994. This was a fearful, selfish and thoughtless evil. Some have concluded that only evil human beings or animals can carry out the events of Rwanda in 1994. Richburg (1997) believed that fully evolved humans do not carry out genocide like the one in Rwanda. Beliefs and sentiments like this are insufficient. What happened in Rwanda was horrible and tragic; the actions of so many individuals were and still are unexplainable. However, if more people knew the history of Rwanda and what took place before the genocide they would have a richer understanding of the events in 1994. During the 1994 Rwandan genocide, also known as the genocide against the Tutsi, members of the Hutu ethnic majority in the east-central African nation of Rwanda murdered as many as 800,000 people, mostly of the Tutsi minority. Started by Hutu nationalists in the capital of Kigali, the genocide spread throughout the country with shocking speed and brutality, as ordinary citizens were incited by local officials and the Hutu Power government to take up arms against their neighbors. By the time the Tutsi-led Rwandese Patriotic Front gained control of the country through a military offensive in early July, hundreds of

thousands of Rwandans were dead and 2 million refugees (mainly Hutus) fled Rwanda, exacerbating what had already become a full-blown humanitarian crisis.

The context of the holocaust in Rwanda would give an individual pause before deciding only purely evil people carry out genocide. When one learns of the background and gains more contextual understanding he or she can see that the evil of Rwanda, was a fearful, selfish, thoughtless, or banal evil. Just like the fear, self-interest, and thoughtlessness of the West in its lack of assistance to the people of Rwanda. Just because the U.S. and its allies did not hold the proverbial machete over Rwanda, they certainly held its fate, and more importantly, hold much of the responsibility for what took place.

Conclusion

Learning, the building of consciousness, the creation of values, and the development of operational rules for problem-solving have been influenced by the concentration and commodification of western culture transposed by the dominant Western media into the African consciousness. Cultural production and dissemination are increasingly monopolized by the values, tastes, and mechanisms present at the dominant core. The consequences of this discontinuity are twofold. One is the obvious inability of the existing paradigm to deal with its concrete circumstances, which may lead to a breakdown in the chains of signification (meaning) in the cultural paradigm. Yet, there is also the possibility of a quite contradictory effect: the recycling of the same ideas into new rhetoric, while retaining the fundamental tenets of the existing mold. So far, this latter entropic tendency has prevailed.

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