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Borrowing lenses from the West: Analysis of an African media representation of Western nations

Abstract

This study considers the representation of Western nations in Nigerian newspapers. It is conceived as a response to Western media portrayal of African nations, which has been researched severally. The outcome of this substantial body of research points to a negative representation of developing nations, which are characterized by poverty, violence, and instability. However, little or nothing exists on the counter-representation of Western nations in the African media, and this is the focus of our research. To this end, we employ quantitative content analysis to identify the tone and theme of the representation of Western nations in two newspapers based in Lagos, Nigeria. Our findings show that, although the tone of Western representation in the Nigerian media is complex, it is largely negative, and the theme focuses on the political and global power of Western nations. We contend that this pattern of representation reflects the existence of structural imperialism, particularly in the news reports of Nigerian newspapers,

almost all of which were dubbed from international news agencies. This leads us to argue that the representation of Western nations in Nigerian newspapers indicates the existence of borrowed lenses, with implications for the construction of knowledge on regional and global affairs.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, studies have shown that Western media representation of countries across Africa and Asia has been largely negative (Machira 2002; Ndangam 2002; Mahadeo and McKinney 2007; Williams 2011; Sanz-Sadibo 2014). These studies establish the notion that Western media portrayal of the developing world is filled with the frames of poverty, war, hunger, disease, and backwardness. This pattern of representation is also evident in how the Western media portray migrants from low- and middle-income countries (Berry et al. 2015). For instance, mainstream media in the United Kingdom has been known to stereotypically frame migrants from developing countries as criminals who come to plunder their host countries (Threadgold 2009). This dimension of framing has perhaps become more pronounced, given the rise of irregular migration from war-torn countries in the Middle East and Africa and right-wing extremism in the United States and Europe. While this pattern of representation of less developed countries and their peoples in Western media is well documented in the literature, far less is known about how the media in developing countries represent Western nations.

This limitation is reflected in a conceptual evaluation by Williams (2011), who shows that foreign correspondents of Western media establishments have promoted the

idea of a subjugated mentality where a master–subject relationship exists between developed and developing nations. Others like Said (2003) have developed the concept of *Orientalism*, particularly the 'us–them' narrative that points to the discriminatory way in which people in developed nations view others from developing nations (Sanz-Sadibo 2014). Thus, we suggest that interventions of scholars like Machira (2002) and Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) have considered how 'us' view 'them', but not how 'them' view 'us'. A few attempts have been made to remedy the situation but a direct investigation into African media portrayal of Western nations is still lacking. The few studies in this regard have only considered the assessment of African media representation of Africa (Gongo 2007; Wahutu 2017) or a general consideration of African media representation of the world at large (Igbinoba and Emenike 2011). Igbinoba and Emenike's (2011) study is focused not necessarily on how Africa views the West, but on how Africa views the world. The consequence is that they do not identify the ways in which the African media represent the West, having nothing to say about the particular themes in the reports they analysed.

Hence, our research is a response to the studies that have been done on the representation of Africa in the West. We aim to provide an understanding of how Western nations are represented in Africa by focusing on the reports of selected Nigerian newspapers. The outcome is instrumental in providing an African perspective to research on the representation of nations, particularly when it comes to responding to many studies on the representation of Africa in the Western media. Such a focus is important because, given the persistent negative representation of Africa in the Western media, it provides

insight on whether African media organizations align with or deviate from this pattern of reportage in their counter-representation of the West.

Consequently, we ask the following:

1. To what extent is the representation of Western nations in Nigerian newspapers positive, neutral, or negative?
2. What are the dominant themes used to represent Western nations in the newspapers?

In the sections that follow, we review the literature on the tone and theme of media coverage before considering the theories of framing and structural imperialism. Afterwards, we discuss our methodology, presentation of results, and a discussion of their implications.

Tone as a form of media representation

Our review of the literature heavily references studies on Western media representation of African nations and other developing enclaves. This is because of the dominant place that scholars from both developing and developed regions ascribe to this pattern of representation. As a result, we found nothing on the reverse representation of Western nations by the media in African countries – an indication of the current state of the field. The exception was Igbinoba and Emenike's (2011) study, which, as we mentioned earlier, falls short in addressing the gap. This means that our review focuses on the tone and theme of Western media representation of developing regions, particularly African regions, and we employ this in the Discussion section below to highlight the similarities and contrasts in the opposing patterns of representation. In terms of tone, Evers (2016) notes that media reportage can either be positive or negative or neutral, and words are

significant here, especially in largely text-based print publications. Generally speaking, tone is the overall outlook of a writer towards an issue, and it is closely related to mood (Scott 2016), which is the atmosphere conjured by a piece of writing, provoking certain emotional responses in the readers. It is this reference to emotion or affect that we identify with in our use of tone in this study.

Sheafer (2007) points to this in differentiating between cognitive and affective elements in writing, noting that while cognitive evaluation deals with mental reasoning, affective evaluation deals with the feeling(s) evoked by a piece of writing, that is the tone. Affective attributes in the media are more often than not primed to be negative, and this is especially so for Western media representation of African nations and other developing countries for which media reports have remained consistently negative (Mahadeo and McKinney 2007; Machira 2002; Ogunyemi 2011). For instance, Bleich et al. (2020), in a comprehensive study of four major US newspapers from 1994 to 2018, found modest support for Afro-pessimism in the reports about Africa. This indicates that the reports were more negative than they were positive, with the negative reports becoming more noticeable in peak periods such as when President Donald Trump made racist comments about Africa. Gabore (2020) also shows that Western media reports on COVID-19 cases in Africa were more negative than positive, although they were overall more neutral. The same goes for the Australian media representation of the hosting of the 2010 Commonwealth Games by New Delhi, India. Osborne et al. (2016), in their study of how eight Australian newspapers interpreted New Delhi as a host city, found the tone of reportage to be overwhelmingly negative, centring on the 'threat' to safety that the city represented. Overall, negative stereotypes about the Games in Delhi were present in 43.8

per cent of the reports, surpassing the percentages of positive and neutral items (Mishra 2012).

Evidence suggests that this tonal representation in media reportage influences people's views and perspectives (Hall 1997). Evers (2016), for instance, states that research in many countries shows that asylum seekers and refugees (who tend to come from developing countries) are likely to be framed negatively, presenting them as a burden to the host nations (typically Western nations). Also, just as the media priming of the economy can be the basis of evaluating a president's performance (see Iyengar and Simon cited in Sheafer 2007), media framing in times of crisis such as during terrorist attacks in the West can be potentially influential in determining how people from countries like Syria or Ethiopia are viewed by the host population. In cases such as this, the tone used by journalists to describe other nations and peoples can have a significant impact on the acceptance or rejection of sometimes an entire community of people by host communities, as was the case in the treatment of Sudanese migrants in Australia (Majavu 2020).

Overall, the representation of African nations in Western newspapers reflects what the Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie, calls the danger of the single story.[1] This explains a situation where a particular country or region, despite its diversity, is known only by a singular narrative. In the coverage of the Ebola outbreak in 2014, for instance, Monson (2017) shows that the US media used 'otherization' to paint a single story of Africa as a continent of Ebola. This speaks to how people in the United States tended to view Africa as 'one country' plagued by Ebola, even though the disease was only present in a few countries in West Africa. In all, Monson (2017) points to

condescension in reports about the virus in Africa as the West only began attempts to combat the virus when it started infecting Americans and Europeans, a point that is further alluded to in Wilkerson (2020). Mishra also highlights the presence of a single story in the Australian press coverage of the New Delhi Games, stating that there was a tendency for the press to focus only on the poverty in New Delhi, even though the city has 'a very large middle class and upper class elites who enjoy all the modern technologies and amenities' (2012: 879). When this narrative is reinforced in media representation, its potential influence is heightened. In the case of the representation of African nations, this singular story narrative is tied to thematic depictions, which tend to be negative (Balch 2015; Threadgold 2009).

Dominant themes in the representation of nations

Having considered tone in representational discourse, we now turn to thematic depictions. While tone has to do with emotions, theme is based on cognitive assessment grouped as topics. In essence, media messages when framed carry within them certain themes that are passed across from sender to receiver. These themes help media writers classify issues under categories that theorist Alfred Schutz calls typifications (Baran and Davis 2009). In literary writing, theme is the underlying message that a writer conveys through their work (Notari 2017). Just as the tone of coverage of African nations tends to be negative, the themes embody the topical expression of this negativity. For instance, in their study, Berry et al. (2015) note that the dominant themes used by the British press to represent people who come from low- and middle-income countries were largely negative, including among others crime, humanitarian concerns, threats to communities and culture, and threats to national security. Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) also show

that the themes used to describe Africa in Western media reports were corruption, poverty, and tribal wars. These various codifications of the thematic analysis suggest that the overwhelming representation of developing nations is of a backward place and their peoples as a threat to the culture and well-being of Western countries.

Ndangam (2002) highlights this in a thematic analysis of Western media rhetoric on Africa, noting that the dominant theme of reports on Africa was on the nuances of international involvement in local conflicts, the complexities of ethnic relations in the Great Lake region, and the legacy of colonialism that the continent is burdened with. Machira (2002) also underscores the dominant themes associated with Africa in the Western media. One of such is the representation of Africa as a homogenous entity – something closely related to the single-story narrative we touched on earlier. This portrayal presents Africa as a continent of 54 nations and hundreds (if not thousands) of ethnic groups as a country. The theme of the Dark Continent is also associated with Africa as can be seen thus: 'News or reports [in the Western media] from Africa paint the picture of heathen peoples who thrive in backward traditions and practices, superstitions, as well as weird outdated and repugnant rites like female "circumcision"' (Machira 2002: para. 9). Other themes that are used to describe Africa include starvation, political instability, and diseases.

Mahadeo and McKinney (2007) support Machira's (2002) findings, noting that the themes of representations of Africa have focused on negative stereotypes. According to them, the dominant themes that have been used to represent Africa in media reportage emphasize political and financial corruption. As a result, the focus is on how Western nations can help eradicate corruption in Africa. Another theme that they identify concerns

reports showing that 'Africa has become synonymous with poverty' (Mahadeo and McKinney 2007: para. 12). Africa is also portrayed as a continent of wars that are 'tribal'. The reason for the overwhelming usage of these themes is attributed to a lack of contextualisation of happenings of this nature in Africa. The issue then is not whether or not these reports are true but that they are reported in a manner that depicts Africa as a place where only negatives apply. This pattern is also reflected in the way people from low- and middle-income countries are represented. In this regard, Threadgold (2009) notes that Western media reports on people from low- and middle-income countries are usually framed around themes related to panic about migration numbers, crime, and cultural differences. McAuliffe and Weeks (2015) also probe into European and Asian media coverage of migration, showing that for developed countries, reports were more negative, while for developing countries in Asia, reports were more neutral. However, there were non-neutral reports for Asian countries, which were more likely to be negative, and the themes followed this same pattern.

Majavu (2020) also shows that the Australian press overwhelmingly associates Blackness with criminality, just as is the case in the United States (Wilkerson 2020). This thematic representation, according to Majavu (2020) has led to the popular belief in Australia that Black immigrants cannot be integrated into Australian culture, with discriminatory undertones suggesting that Africans (particularly the Sudanese) do not have what it takes to live normal community life as White people do. Osborne et al. (2016) also berate the Australian press for its representation of the Delhi Commonwealth Games. They note that the themes in the press articles that they reviewed included references to a threat to the personal safety of the athletes, with mentions of terrorism,

filth, danger, and illness. Another major theme was the threat to the institution of the Commonwealth, partly because of the perception that the Games were being held in a developing country. The Australian media generally viewed the event as a 'shambolic chaotic disaster' (Osborne et al. 2016: 215), and this is symbolic of the consternation that the Western press have regarding the notion that mega-sporting events are now being hosted by developing countries (Osborne et al. 2016). Mishra (2012) expands her focus to include coverage of the Games, not only in Australia but also in New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom. She found that the press in the West labelled the Games as 'shame games', and that the news included jokes (something unusual in news reports) as the Western media made fun of India, signifying a superior–inferior relationship and showing how 'us' view 'them'. The point that we refer to here is not whether this pattern of coverage represents the facts but that the representation of this sort tends to follow the single-story narrative.

The studies reviewed above focused on Western media coverage of developing countries and their peoples, and the fact that no work was found on the portrayal of Western nations in the African media leaves a gap to be filled. One major concept that explains this counter-representation is structural imperialism. This is what we discuss next as we consider the relationship between the media in African and Western countries, and how the media in African countries represent the West.

Structural imperialism: Inequalities in media representation of nations

Structural imperialism, as a theory, explains how African nations as the Periphery relate with Western nations as the Centre. For this study, it explains the dominant representation accorded to Western nations in the African media. Johan Galtung (1971),

in propounding the theory, states that the world is a binary contraption of the Centre (Western nations) and the Periphery (developing nations), and that inequality exists in the way in which one interacts with the other. Galtung's theory relates to the relationship between nations, but it can also be applied to media organisations, since 'the press is written and read by the centre in the Periphery' (1971: 93). This suggests that the media elite in developing nations are aligned with their counterparts in developed nations, perpetuating what Galtung (1971) calls a 'harmony of interest', and this alignment is what makes imperialism structural. This is particularly so for the media in major cities of developing countries, cities like Lagos, Johannesburg, and Nairobi. These cities are the centre in the Periphery, and they typically serve as media hubs. According to Galtung (1971), they tend to be aligned with the media centre in the Centre; that is, the media in major cities in Western countries.

Overall, Galtung (1971) observes that there exist five types of structural imperialism: economy, politics, military, communication, and culture. This study is most concerned with communication imperialism. Here, the Centre is responsible for creating communication technology and the Periphery is left with little choice but to rely on the Centre, resigned to the fact that it cannot catch up in the race to develop communication technologies. Beyond hardware, the global news flow is also controlled by the Centre. Due to this imbalance, Periphery nations are more exposed to news from Centre nations than vice versa. Structural imperialism further suggests that the media in Periphery nations do not cover other nations that are in close proximity the same way they do Centre nations. This implies that those in Periphery nations know more about Centre nations than they know of their neighbours. It shows that international news coverage,

and, by extension, the representation of nations revolve around the terms set by the media in Centre nations. Hence, the existence of structural imperialism by design. When it comes to the representation of Western nations by the media in Africa, this imperialism becomes heightened since the African media generally relies on the apparatus of the West to cover the West. Galtung (1971) points to this apparatus and shows that in no way is the reliance on the Western apparatus more evident than in the dependence of the media in Periphery nations on international news agencies for global news. These international news agencies are dominated by the Big Three (*AFP*, *AP,* and *Reuters*), with strong ownership ties in France, the United States, and the United Kingdom. They play a major role in policing global news flow.

> Machira alludes to the existence of structural imperialism in the media, noting:
>
> The media is owned exclusively by Western corporate giants whose financial and technological wealth allows them to dictate not only what is reported about the whole world, but they also determine what is reported (or rather 'exported') to the African media about Africa and the world in general.
>
> (2002: para. 32)

The implication of this is that African media organizations likely represent Africa and the West the same way the West represents Africa and itself. Galtung further observes that journalists in Periphery nations have been trained 'to see events with Centre eyes', and that a 'chain of communication' has been set up to filter and process 'events so that they fit the general pattern' (1971: 94). If African journalists have been trained to see with 'Centre eyes', then in what manner are the nations and peoples (of the Centre) being represented by the African media? Does this mean that Centre nations effectively dictate

how they are represented by the media in Periphery nations? We consider these questions in the findings, but before this, we outline our methodological approach.

METHOD

For this study, we used Lagos-based newspapers to stand for the Nigerian press. Nigeria is important in this case because, coupled with the fact that it is the most populous country in Africa, it has one of the most robust media systems on the continent (Gicheru 2014). We focused on Lagos because it is the central media hub in Nigeria. Also, we opted for newspapers because print texts, due to their permanence, are readily available. We acknowledge the limitation that this has, particular in terms of the wider African context, but our study is an initial consideration of the representation of Western nations in the Nigerian media, and further research that involves the media in different African nations is needed to build on ours. For the study, quantitative content analysis was used, and it has also been used in similar studies (Threadgold 2009; McAuliffe and Weeks 2015). This method is particularly relevant for determining the thematic content of each report which calls for systematic ways of deconstructing media content to discover meanings which might have been (un)intentionally infused in recorded information. It also allows for the fragmentation of text into constituent parts which can be counted before reassembling at the interpretation stage to examine what co-occurs in the text, the purpose, and implications (Anders et al. 1998).

The meanings of communication texts can be latent or manifest (Baxter and Babbie 2004). Manifest meaning is visible on the surface, while latent meaning is the underlying message transferred to the audience in subtle ways. We use both latent and manifest meanings in our analysis.

Population and sampling

The study's population included all daily general-purpose newspapers circulating in Lagos in 2017, 14 newspapers in total (Nigerian Press Council [NPC] 2017). However, our sampling frame included thirteen newspapers. This was because the NPC data had not been updated to reflect realities at the time. For instance, we removed two newspapers (*Daily Champion* and *The Moment*) from the list because they had gone extinct. Therefore, the sampling frame of thirteen newspapers for the content analysis included *This Day*, *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *Daily Sun*, *Vanguard*, *National Mirror*, *The Nation*, *Independent*, *Business Day*, *New Telegraph* and *Nigerian Pilot.* The last two newspapers were based in Lagos but had not been included in the NPC database. Others such as *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* were outside the scope of this study because we categorized them as Abuja-based newspapers.

Out of this lot, two newspapers, namely *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* were randomly selected. The analyzed reports covered six months from January 2017 to June 2017; all the reports that we found to be specifically focused on Western nations during the six-month period were analyzed. We interpreted Western nations to mean the United States, Canada, Western Europe (particularly the United Kingdom, France, and Germany), Australia, and New Zealand. The instrument used for data collection was the coding guide. This is a standard format for the presentation of outcomes under content categories, which is at the heart of content analysis, serving as a guide for data collection and analysis (Baxter and Babbie 2004). The content categories for this research were tone and dominant themes. The unit of analysis was individual stories or reports. Hence,

editorial items ranging from news, editorials, opinion articles, and feature stories were studied.

Variables measured

The independent variables were newspapers, by-line, and editorial items. Newspapers were coded as *The Guardian* or *Vanguard*. Editorial items were coded as news, feature, opinion, or editorial. By-line, in particular, was used to measure the extent to which the newspapers relied on their journalists in representing Western nations.

The dependent variables included tone and dominant themes in the newspapers selected. The elements comprising tone were predetermined before data collection began. They include positive, negative, and neutral. The tone of the reports was measured based on the words used. For thematic content, the elements were determined during the analysis process. The themes include terror-prone, world police, affluence, disaster-prone, migrant intolerant, advanced, politically active, and other. The thematic content was also measured based on the words used.

Reliability

Two coders (one of them being the lead author) carried out the intercoder reliability test. In all, 29 stories (10%), out of a possible number of 286 stories, were used for the test. The 29 stories used for the reliability test were part of the stories analyzed in this study. The outcome of the intercoder reliability test for the tone category using Holsti's (1969) method was moderate reliability of 0.52. For the theme category, the outcome was a reliability of 0.41. Although the reliability figures are relatively low, we suggest that the study is relevant as it provides an initial consideration of the field and serves as a basis on which further work can be done.

RESULT

On the first research question, the portrayal of Western nations in the selected newspapers was more negative, less positive, and far less neutral. Findings in Table 1 show that *The Guardian* reported more negative stories with 50.8%, compared with *Vanguard*'s 41.8%. *The Guardian* also had more positive stories (36%) compared with *Vanguard*'s (31%). *Vanguard* had the upper hand in the neutral category, devoting 27% to reports that were neither positive nor negative, while *The Guardian* devoted 13% of its reports to neutral stories. Findings further show that 45.8% of the reports in the selected newspapers portrayed Western nations negatively. This is significantly high when compared with the percentage of positive (33.2%) and neutral reports (21%).

Two reasons account for the high percentage of negative representation of Western nations in the selected newspapers. One is the news story factor. In this regard, it is helpful to note that 43.9% of all news stories that we sampled were negative reports as opposed to 33.9% which were positive and 22.2% which were neutral. Based on this, one might argue that the newspapers are 'talking back' to the West as seen in the relatively high number of negative reports. However, a closer look reveals that news stories account for almost all (99%) of the 78.7% of reports without by-lines. Our coding shows that the news stories without by-lines were published verbatim from global news agencies, particularly *AFP* and *Reuters*. This means that the newspapers in their 'news reports' simply regurgitated news items of the West about itself, whether negative, positive, or neutral.

In all, 78.7% of the reports had no by-lines, as can be seen in Table 1. Negative reports without by-lines also account for 43.6% of all the stories and this is far higher than positive and neutral reports without by-lines.

Table 1: Tone of reports cross-tabulated with newspapers, by-lines, and editorial items.

| Variables | | Tone | | | | | | Total | |
| | | Positive | | Neutral | | Negative | | | |
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Newspaper	The Guardian	46	35.9	17	13.3	65	50.8	128	44.8
	Vanguard	49	31	43	27.2	66	41.8	158	55.2
	Total	95	33.2	60	21	131	45.8	286	100
By-line	With by-line	20	32.8	8	13.1	33	54.1	61	21.3
	No by-line	75	33.3	52	23.1	98	43.6	225	78.7
	Total	95	33.2	60	21	131	45.8	286	100
Editorial items	News	78	33.9	51	22.2	101	43.9	230	80.4
	Feature	3	30	5	50	2	20	10	3.5
	Opinion	11	26.2	4	9.5	27	64.3	42	14.7
	Editorial	3	75	0	0	1	25	4	1.4
	Total	95	33.2	60	21	131	45.8	286	100

The second reason why negative reports on Western nations are higher in the sampled stories is what we find in the opinion items. Here, we see that 100% of the articles were written by columnists, meaning all opinion articles had by-lines. Hence, negative reports account for 54.1% of all reports which had by-lines. When it comes to opinion articles, the negativity percentage increases, as seen in Table 1 where 64.3% of opinion articles portrayed Western nations negatively. This is no longer about reports of the West by international news agencies that the newspapers copied, but about the projection that the newspapers gave to the West in their representation of it. A major reason for the high percentage of negative opinion articles on the West was the policy

actions of President Donald Trump, particularly the move to ban nationals of seven

Muslim countries from coming to the United States.

On the flip side, feature stories were more positive (30%) than negative (20%).

This finding, however, is tempered by the fact that only ten feature stories (3.5%) made

up the total. The editorials sampled in the selected newspapers can be viewed likewise. In

all, four editorials in the newspapers focused on Western nations. Out of this figure, three

editorials (75%) portrayed Western nations positively as against one (25%) which

portrayed them negatively. The data on feature and editorial reports as can be seen in

Table 1 indicate that, for these categories, happenings in Western nations have not been

of particular interest.

On the second research question, two themes were dominant in the portrayal of

Western nations in the selected newspapers. They are *Politically Active* and *World

Police*. *Politically Active* here means the making of statements and arguments on policies

and politics mostly by leaders and statesmen, while *World Police* is the perception of the

West as guardian and arbiter of global affairs (see Table 3 for a description of the

themes). Table 2 shows that 29.7% of all the reports portrayed Western nations as

Politically Active. This was followed closely by *World Police*, taking up 27.3% of all the

reports in the newspapers. When combined, these two themes account for more than half

(57%) of all the reports sampled.

Table 2: Thematic content in the selected newspapers and their editorial items.

Variables		Theme (%)								
		TP	WP	Affl	DP	MI	Adv	PA	Oth
Newspaper	*The Guardian*	6.2	35.2	2.3	1.6	6.2	10.2	32	6.2
	Vanguard	8.2	20.9	3.8	2.5	17.7	6.3	27.8	12.7

		TP	WP	Affl	DP	MI	Adv	PA	Oth
	Total	**7.3**	**27.3**	**3.1**	**2.1**	**12.6**	**8**	**29.7**	**9.8**
	N	**21**	**78**	**9**	**6**	**36**	**23**	**85**	**28**
Editorial items	News	8.7	23	3.9	2.2	13.9	7.8	30.4	10
	Feature	0	70	0	10	0	0	20	0
	Opinion	2.4	40.5	0	0	9.5	7.1	28.6	11.9
	Editorial	0	25	0	0	0	50	25	0
	Total	**7.3**	**27.3**	**3.1**	**2.1**	**12.6**	**8**	**29.7**	**9.8**
	N	**21**	**78**	**9**	**6**	**36**	**23**	**85**	**28**

Note: TP = Terror-Prone, WP = World Police, Affl = Affluence, DP = Disaster-Prone, MI = Migrant Intolerant, Adv = Advanced, PA = Politically Active and Oth = Other.

Others made up the numbers. The theme *Migrant Intolerant* was the third highest, making up 12.6% of the reports, indicating that the portrayal of the West as being hostile to migrants is important enough to warrant third place but not important enough in racking up the numbers. This is followed by the representation of Western nations as *Advanced* (8%), meaning the representation of the West as having a superior lifestyle worthy of emulation. The theme *Terror-Prone* followed with 7.3% of all the reports. Reports which portrayed Western nations as being prone to terrorism featured terrorist (threats of) attacks in Europe. This was followed by *Affluence*, which made up 3.1% of the reports, and *Disaster-Prone,* which made up 2.1%. *Other* as a theme accounted for 9.8% of the reports.

Table 3: Description of themes.

Themes	Description
Advanced	Western political discourse and lifestyle are shown to be worthy of emulation
Affluence	Where Western nations are described as places inhabited by wealthy people
Disaster-Prone	News on the occurrence of natural disasters and fatal accidents
Migrant Intolerant	Where the West is portrayed as trying to prevent the flow of migrants from developing countries
Other	Themes on general issues such as the environment, health care, and partnerships
Politically	News and commentary on political events, arguments, and bickering in Western nations

Active	e.g. Brexit
Terror-Prone	Dominated by news of terror attacks against European countries such as Britain and France
World Police	Where the West is portrayed as the leader and protector of the world and arbiter of global affairs

Table 2 also shows that for *The Guardian*, the dominant theme was *World Police*, which took up 35.2% of the reports sampled in the newspaper. For *Vanguard*, however, this theme was the second most dominant with 20.9% of the reports. The theme *Politically Active*, which was the second most dominant for *The Guardian* with 32% of the reports, was the most dominant for *Vanguard* with 27.8%. Also, the third most dominant theme for *The Guardian* was *Advanced* (10.2%), which for *Vanguard* was the fifth with 6.3% of the reports.

For both newspapers, however, *Terror-Prone* was the fourth most dominant theme, with 6.2% for *The Guardian* and 8.2% for *Vanguard*. For *The Guardian*, *Migrant Intolerant* and *Terror-Prone* tied at 6.2% of the reports. The fifth most dominant theme for *Vanguard* was *Advanced*. Both newspapers had *Affluence* and *Disaster-Prone* as their least dominant themes in the sixth and seventh ranks, respectively.

The cross-tabulation of editorial items and themes in Table 2 further shows that the themes associated with news aligned to a large extent with the total thematic distribution. The only variance in their ranking was in *Terror-Prone* where it was fourth most dominant for news but the fifth most dominant for the total, and *Advanced* where this was the fifth most dominant for news but the fourth most dominant for the total. This further proves the influence that news items had on the findings, evident also in the number of news items that made up the total sample.

Opinion, however, did not go along this pattern in the strictest sense. The dominant theme here was *World Police* followed by *Politically Active* and then *Migrant Intolerant*, *Advanced*, and *Terror-Prone*. *Affluence* and *Disaster-Prone*, which came last for news, had no entry in the opinion category. Editorial and Opinion turned out divergent thematic contents, even though these are few. They, however, align with the general finding, which shows *Politically Active* and *Terror-Prone* as the dominant themes in the representation of Western nations by the selected newspapers.

A word or two has to be said about the theme *Other*. This theme accounted for 9.8% of the reports ranking fourth and coming ahead of *Advanced*, *Terror-Prone*, *Affluence*, and *Disaster-Prone*. However, it offers little to our analysis and was largely included to make up the numbers (286 reports in total). The themes that made up *Other* include climate issues, health care, inequality and abuse, and economic partnerships. Since the reports on these sub-themes were few, and their presentation as thematic findings would have been unwieldy, they were merged into *Other*.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we set out to determine Nigerian media representation of Western nations, aiming to present a counter-narrative to the representation of Africa in the Western media. Studies have been conducted on the portrayal of African nations by Western media, but we did not find any on African media representation of Western nations. By delving into the representation of the West, our study fills this gap. To this end, two Nigerian newspapers were selected for analysis and published editions between January and June 2017 were reviewed. Two research questions were outlined with regard to the tone and themes used to represent Western nations in these newspapers. Our findings

indicate that the reports in Nigerian newspapers on Western nations tilted towards negativity. In all, 45.8% of the reports in the newspapers sampled portrayed Western nations in a negative tone, as opposed to positive, 33.2%, and neutral, 21%. In terms of dominant thematic content, the highest in the reports sampled was the theme *Politically Active*, which accounted for 29.7% of the reports. This was followed by *World Police*, *Migrant Intolerant*, *Other*, *Advanced*, *Terror-Prone*, *Affluence*, and *Disaster-Prone*.

These findings indicate one thing: Nigerian newspapers tend to focus on the politics and influence of the West, and the representations of these are usually negative. They also indicate that the counter-representation of the West in the Nigerian press mirrors the representation of Africa in the Western press, at least in terms of tone. The themes in our findings do not reflect those in the literature on Western media representation of African nations (Mahadeo and McKinney 2007; Machira 2002; Ogunyemi 2011; Mishra 2012; Bleich et al. 2020), but this is to be expected. It was unlikely from the start that the themes in Nigerian media representation of the West would be dominated by hunger, poverty, disease, and war, considering first that the geographical peculiarities are unique in themselves, and second that these are not the likely issues that public consciousness associates with Western nations, not minding that Western nations have their fair share of them. The themes in our findings were also based on Migration, Terrorism, and Disasters, reflecting current happenings at the time (i.e., 2017). For instance, migration featured as a theme largely because of the move by President Trump to ban nationals of some Islamic countries from entry into the United States, and terrorism featured because of the attacks in Europe. We argue that this focus on particular events happening at a specific time means that the thematic representation

of Western nations is not constant and will likely shift if reports of another period are analyzed. This is in contrast to the representation of Africa in the Western media, which has remained largely consistent, focusing on themes that reflect backwardness and inferiority. Still, there are some issues in the representation of Western nations in the newspapers that are likely to remain constant; these are themes that portrayed Western nations positively. They include *World Police*, *Affluence*, *Advanced*, and *Politically Active*. Hence, while the negative representation of the West is likely to be variable and events-based, the positive representation of the same is likely to remain constant.

The fact that the newspaper reports on Western nations were largely negative can be viewed from the predominance of international news agencies such as *AP*, *Reuters*, and *AFP*, which are domiciled in Western nations. Galtung (1971) makes a case for structural imperialism, noting that the media in countries of the Periphery (of which Africa is a part) rely on global news agencies for reports on areas outside their immediate vicinity. The suggestion is that newspapers in Africa depend on these news agencies for reports on Western nations. We agree with Galtung (1971) in this regard, seeing that almost all of the news reports on Western nations in the newspapers were without by-lines and were attributed to global news agencies. Hence, we submit that Nigerian media representation of Western nations reflects Western representation of the West – evidence of borrowed lenses. Our argument is buttressed by the fact that out of the few news reports which had by-lines of reporters, 57% of them portrayed Western media positively. Still, the figure in question is too small to make any substantial inference. This is because, in total, only seven out of the 230 news reports in the newspapers had by-lines, meaning that approximately 97% of news reports had no by-lines. However, opinion

articles that all had by-lines tilted towards the negative portrayal of Western nations, indicating that the negative portrayal of Western nations was not just about Western media representation of the West, but also Nigerian media representation of the West. Nonetheless, this should be interpreted in the light of the happenings at the time as we noted earlier, not least the negative feeling in Nigeria on the comments and person of Donald Trump, which dominated most of the reports.

We further argue that the reliance of the Nigerian press on international news agencies presents a major handicap for the former. The reliance is noticeable in the media of other African countries, pointing to continent-wide evidence of structural imperialism, at least in terms of the coverage of foreign affairs. For instance, our findings align with Wahutu's (2017), which show that as much as 60% (119 out of 196) of reports on the Darfur crisis in the Kenyan press were sourced from international news agencies. In another more extensive study covering the period between 2003 and 2008, Wahutu (2018) found that the percentage of news sourced from international news agencies rose to 69%, while 5% had no identified source. This implies that beyond relying on international news agencies to report news on the West, African media organizations largely depend on these agencies to report happenings in neighbouring countries. As a consequence, it is likely that the African media also frame issues and events in neighbouring countries through Western lenses, with a corresponding implication for the construction of knowledge on the continent.

What then accounts for this reliance on international news agencies? One major reason is tied to the lack of resources which is needed to station correspondents and media outposts all over the world. Wahutu (2017) points to this, as one of the journalists

they interviewed highlighted inadequate funding as the reason why media organizations in Africa rely more on international news agencies. This underscores the need for substantial investment in foreign news coverage, an investment that is crucial for an accurate picture of the representation of Western nations in the African press – one that is not borrowed from Western lenses.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that the counter-representation of Western nations in Nigerian newspapers was more negative than positive, and thus reflected Western media portrayal of Africa. But this was where the alignment ended. The dissonance became evident when we considered the themes of Nigerian newspaper representation of the West. Themes that had negative undertones tended to be event-specific, focusing on issues like migration, while positive themes were based on more persistent topics like general politics. Also, our finding that Nigerian media coverage of Western nations was largely dubbed from international news agencies suggests that an original coverage of Western nations does not exist. What exist as foreign news – which is typically focused on Western nations – reflects how the West views itself and not how the Nigerian media represent the West. Therefore, we submit that to understand how 'them' view 'us' as opposed to how 'us' view 'them' (see Said 2003) in the Nigerian media, emphasis should be placed not on news reports but on other forms of journalistic expression such as opinions and editorials. In general, our findings lend credence to Galtung's (1971) structuralism imperialism theory, suggesting that little has changed in the media balance of power between Western and developing nations. There is therefore a need for the African media more broadly to rise to the challenge of covering the West, not through Western lenses, but through

Africa's. The over-reliance on international news agencies should be checked. No doubt, this means that more resources will need to be invested in foreign news coverage, including local media coverage of neighbouring states within Africa.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Note

1. Chimamanda Adichie gave the speech titled "The danger of a single story" at a Ted Conference in 2009.