INTERNATIONAL MEDIA REPORTAGE OF THE OUTCOME OF THE 2015 NIGERIA’S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: A STUDY OF BBC AND AL JAZEERA

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Abstract
This paper investigated the patterns of reportage of the outcome of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election on BBC and Al Jazeera. Situated within the framework of media representation theory, the study design was textual analysis. Findings indicated that the two stations portrayed the outcome of the election as generally credible; seeing it as an indication that Nigeria might be on its way to greater democratization. The study equally discovered some evidence of the influence of beliefs and biases of the gatekeepers of the two media houses about Nigeria on their report of the election’s outcome. The study recommended, among others, the strengthening of the reportorial capabilities of the local media with the view to matching the international influence of foreign media such as the BBC and Al Jazeera in reporting the nation to the world, as this is the only way to counter whatever prejudice that might colour the report of the nation by these foreign media houses.

Keywords: International Media, Reportage, Outcome, 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election, BBC, Al Jazeera

Introduction
A very important element in the nature of national image that a country gets is the nature of coverage she receives from the media. This is simply for the fact that the media are key agents that drive communication at the global level. Thus, Buck (1998, p.351 – 352) writes that “the mass media allow, for the first time, spontaneous emotional communication on a global level... Media by their very presence, may be creating the emotional basis for a global community.”

Thus, Nigeria and other nations of the Southern hemisphere have naturally been concerned about how their affairs are covered by the foreign media, particularly of the West. These developing countries have continued to agitate against what they see as underreporting and negative reporting by the West which possesses the bulk of the global mass media resources (finance, technology and manpower). This is what has become commonly referred to as the news flow debate. Agba (2002) elaborates on this as follows:

Countries of the South have been calling on the nations of Europe and North America to accept the establishment of a system that would abolish the exploitative North-South relationship and evolve henceforth an equitable system of economic relations between the developed and the developing countries. Hence... in 1976 the General Conference of UNESCO, held in Nairobi Kenya, also passed a declaration on the establishment of the NWICO (New World Information and Communication Order).

Nigeria in particular occupies a special position in this scheme of things considering that the global community has looked up to her as a potentially great nation and expectations have been on her to provide the most needed leadership in Africa in the face of the continent’s many political and economic challenges. Conscious of this fact, Nigeria has sought to carry herself with some dignity, priding herself as the “Giant of Africa” and adopting
the continent as the centre piece of her foreign policy (Nnoli, 1994, p.221). This way the nation has sought international respect and influence through policies and actions such as giving financial and technical aids to needy countries, participating in international peace-keeping operations at sub-regional, regional and global levels, and through playing active roles in international organisations.

However, the quest by Nigeria to gain a reasonable degree of global respect from these policies of hers has been adjudged by many a stakeholder as largely unproductive yet as a result of some negating factors tending to paint the nation black even in the face of laudable foreign policies. These factors include widespread corruption, political instability, internal strife, high rate of poverty, high rate of crime and general failure of leadership. Ndanusa (2008) writes on this situation as follows:

"Nigeria as a nation represents a very huge irony. It is one country richly blessed with human and material resources, which inexplicably, have failed to reflect in her political and economic fortunes. In fact, one may not be mistaken if he describes Nigeria as an entity inching towards the status of a failed state as key features of a failed state – weakness in rule of law, economic decay, weakening institutions, etc – are already manifest in their various stages of maturation. Little wonder a nation with all potentials to be great has been battling desperately to win and sustain a favourable image in the comity of nations."

In the aspect of political instability, Nigeria’s problems importantly have its source in, among others, electoral shortcomings. Allegations of violence and riggings have over the years invariably blighted Nigerian elections causing some image problems for the country (Nwankwo, 2009; Oluwole, 2009).

It is thus against this background that this research intended to investigate the manner in which foreign media (BBC and Aljazeera) have reported Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election.

**Statement of Problem**

Nigeria’s international image has been a matter of serious concern to the nation; and significantly, electoral failings have been a fundamental element in this problem. Worse still, efforts made so far to better the image fortune of the nation has apparently fallen short of the targeted impact (Nwankwo, 2009; Oluwole, 2009).

The foreign media’s coverage of the nation, as with other developing countries, has been alleged to be largely unfavourable (Nwosu, 1990; Uche, 1995, p.56; Opubor, 1998; Oluwole, 2009). This tends to frustrate the nation’s aspiration towards a better international image.

Unfortunately, the capacity of the local media to rescue the situation is hindered by limitations in technology, finance and manpower as against the over-abundance possessed by their Western counterparts in these respects. These limitations have left the local media dependent on these foreign outfits for news on Nigeria – a favour which they have not rendered with full sympathy and selflessness; hence what they give out as news are the biased views of their own governments about Nigeria (Agba, 2002; Nwankwo, 2009).

**Objectives of Study**

This study aimed at investigating the patterns of reportage of the result of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election by foreign media. Precisely, the following objectives were pursuit:

i. To discover the judgment of BBC and Aljazeera on the results of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election;
To assess how BBC and Al Jazeera framed issues relating to the results of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election; and

To find out the extent the reports of BBC and Al Jazeera on the results of the election were coloured by prejudice.

**Research Questions**

Following the above objectives, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What is the judgment of BBC and Al Jazeera on the results of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election?
2. How did BBC and Al Jazeera frame issues relating to the results of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election?
3. To what extent are the reports of BBC and Al Jazeera on the results of the election coloured by prejudice?

**Significance of Study**

This study would be of benefit to Nigeria’s electoral system. By furnishing data on the way local elections are viewed by foreign media, this study might have offered insight into how the nation’s elections are perceived from the outside; this way, making the electoral institutions better informed for improvement.

Similarly, the study would benefit Nigeria’s quest for an improved international image. The research would furnish insights that could guide media policymaking in the country with a view to effectively deploying local media resources towards enhancing the nation’s image.

The study would enrich scholarship particularly in the areas of international communication and political communication. It would add to the existing literature and possibly be a stepping stone for further studies.

**1.6. Scope of Study**

The study focused on three variables as follows: the judgment of foreign media on Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election; how these media framed issues relating to the results of the election; and the extent their reports on the results of the election coloured by prejudice. Also, though the findings were intended to be generalized to the international media as a whole, the study was restricted to BBC and Al Jazeera alone. Similarly, the study’s time frame was restricted to three weeks after the presidential election.

**Definition of Terms**

**Foreign Media:** Media houses that operate from outside Nigeria.

**Framing:** The manner in which the media construct or present issues and which may determine the nature of the audience’s perception of such issues.

**International Media:** Media houses that operate from outside Nigeria and whose content is consumed across nations.

**Issues:** Events or developments regarding a particular phenomenon.

**Judgment:** Perception or assessment made on or about something.

**Prejudice:** Biases which someone nurses about something or a people and which influences his/her judgment about them.

**Literature Review**
Most studies indicate that about 80 percent of the international news that flow through the newsrooms across the globe comes from the four major news agencies: Reuters, Agence France-Presse, United Press International and the Associated Press—and the international cable news networks—CNN and BBC. Of this, about 20 percent is devoted to developing countries, which count for almost three-quarters of world population. Furthermore, these agencies and news networks belong to the three permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—Britain, France and the United States of America.

The major Western media treat the culture of the industrialized nations as superior and place them at the top of this imaginary hierarchy, while the cultures of the developing nations are place at the bottom (Ostgaard, 1965). For instance, the 53 nations of the African continent are lumped together as one, while the continent is often portrayed as a “crocodile-infested dark continent where jungle life has perpetually eluded civilisation (Ebo, 1992, p.15).

Gross misrepresentation and imbalance in the international news flow gave birth to one of the greatest debates in the field of international communication in the 1970s and the 1980s—the New World Information and Communication (NWICO) debate. Developing countries under the banner of the UNESCO, moved a motion for the New World Information Order (NWICO) to address the issue of global inequality. The NWICO debate paid great attention to objectivity in trans-national flow of information, inequality in information and fairness in news distribution. Primarily, the nations of the South, which included all countries of the African continent, wanted a radical overhaul of the present international communication system. They wanted the world communication system to reflect the diversity and equality of all human races.

**Seeking Balance in a Continent Portrayed by its Extremes**

Africa is portrayed in the Western media by its extremes, observes Ugandan journalist Charles Onyango-Obbo, a managing editor with the Nation Media Group in Nairobi, Kenya. It has been suggested that these perceptions cannot be ignored and in fact have persisted over time becoming normalized, reflecting the point of view, mentality, values and interests of developed nations. Stories about civil wars, human rights abuses, government corruption, disease and poverty abound. The question of bias in the media coverage in many of the deliberations concerning national and international flow of culture and news has been attributed to the deployment of world communication technology and the management of world information resources clearly in the favour of developed countries, which quantitatively account for less than half of the world population (Eapen, 1996, p.XV and Okigbo, 1996, p.285).

Just as communication and technology have improved so has the coverage of difficult to reach and faraway places in some cases deteriorated. According to Roger Tatarian, former vice-president of United Press International (UPI), the imbalance in news flows between America and developing countries, African countries in particular, is due to the military, economic and political distribution in the world. The end of the cold war has led to the decline in the attention Western media have given to reporting in Africa. This assertion indirectly explains the reason why the news editors, policy makers and world business interests consider Africa as less important. The continent is:

> Viewed as a vast black hole fringed by Libya and South Africa. With the exception of these two countries, both propelled by extreme convictions, it is not a player in the great global power game. In short Africa is not deemed to be newsworthy (Fitzgerald, 1987, p.24).

The situation of imbalance of news flows naturally prompts a wish of an overhaul of the present international information system. Arguably, it is conspicuous that this imbalance, which is an economic and political issue,
undermines the essence of journalism and intercultural communications. Tokumbo Ojo strongly argues that this breeds cultural hegemony and “us and them” identity within the spectrum of world order and international communications.

Franks (2005) describes the loss of interest by foreign news media in Africa as driven by three principal forces. Firstly, the overall way Africa is perceived as a story is, secondly the changing priorities in reporting news and thirdly the wider trend of the disappearance of TV current affairs. Reflecting on journalists’ relentless focus on Africa’s misery, BBC foreign correspondent Fergal Keane describes the ‘Africa’ of the international camera as a continent of two stories. In the first, smiling Africans in white jackets serve ice cold drinks to Western tourists at safari lodges. This is the Africa of spectacular wildlife, wonderful sunsets, and genial locals seen through windows of air-conditioned mini-buses. The Africa in which the majority of Africans live is kept at a safe distance, or glimpsed, again through bus windows, on one of those newly popular “township tours.”

**Negativism as a News Value**

Among Western broadcast journalists, negative or ‘conflict’ news is an unquestioned news value. On a general note, one must ask why negativism is given prominence in media coverage of events. The media has the knack to select stories that can sell and omit those that cannot; then they report those selected in a way that makes them sell well. The result is the trend of crisis-driven journalism of churning news faster, going for the quick and headline-seeking superficial coverage that seized on the outrageous, the dramatic and the exceptional without bothering to place it in its proper context (Michira, 2002: web document). Hilaire Avril, who writes for IRIN, the U.N.’s humanitarian reporting services, protests over journalists who ‘parachute’ in to do one story and then leave.

**(Mis)Representations: Ignorance or an Ideology?**

A number of scholars have identified ignorance as one of the professional shortcomings that damage the credibility of western media reports on Africa. The Africa continent—with its 53 individual countries—is often referred and presented in the West, especially in America, as if it were one large country. A misconception that ignores the fact that Africa is in fact, a continent which is made up of independent sovereign countries, which are in turn inhabited with peoples of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds—over 1500 languages and dialects.

Franks (2005) argues that the diminished appetite for news from Africa reflects an overall decline in involvement with the continent. Consequently, this has resulted in a breeding ground for ignorance about the reality on the ground in the true African society. In a BBC online survey in 2004, a staggering 73 percent of respondents had never heard about the Millennium Development goals. If no one is interested, then the drift in Western media coverage is not surprising. As Gordon Brown pointed out in a speech to the BBC World Service Trust conference:

> If six thousand people in Europe died of malaria (as they do every day in Africa) the media would not just report the disaster; they would look for signs of negligence, for culpability, failures of science and technology and governmental corruption (24 November 2004). (Franks, 2005,p.130).

The crisis in Rwanda in 1994 highlighted the lacunae in media perceptions of Africa. When the killing began, it was difficult for editors to grasp what was happening and they chose initially to ignore it. The ignorance was compounded weeks later when the Hutu killers arrived in the refugee camps in Eastern Zaire. There was an unseemly rush by both journalists and aid agencies to places like Goma to tell terrible tales about poor fleeing refugees. For days there were misleading reports where journalists who knew little about the background, missed
the point that the camps were not ministering to fleeing Tutsis but full of the recent killers and their relatives (Franks, 2005, p.131).

Witnessing a history of misleading Western reportage, it is legitimate to argue that the images of Africa in the Western Media are by and large, images of misrepresentations (James Michira, 2002: web document). Excerpts from novels, screenplays, movie reviews, and screen advertising demonstrate vast propaganda our societies have witnessed during the past fifty years as “savage” place in need of conquest, “colonization”, and Christianity (Maynard, 1974, p.IV). Like anthropologists and explorers of the colonial era, the Western media “are empowered to paint an image of Africa by listing its deficiencies with respect to Western norms (ibid, 1992: 9). Ama Biney (n.d.) makes the point that “Misinformation about Africa has become a growth industry in the West.”

One wonders where objectivity and fairness, which are the hallmark of journalism, come into play, and what reality is being reflected when the Western media choose to take a discourse that sustains negative portrayal of Africa and other developing countries. Michira (2002: web document) puts it bluntly in this way:

There has been, for a long time now, a systematic trend of misrepresenting Africa in the West, and the powerful Western media has been responsible for this. The Western public has been exposed to these patterns of misrepresentations, which in turn have been solidified into stereotypes or generalizations about what Africa is all about.

**Ideology of News Selection, Reporting and Production: Stories Lack Context**

John Seamann, a veteran Africa expert at *Save the Children Fund*, in his view about the nature of political analyses given to Africa says:

...when I watch the media in the Middle East with all its limitations I get some detailed analysis, the people talking to camera know something about the region...whereas Africa gets rather slight coverage, it is intermittent without permanent representation and internationally Africa is not taken seriously. It is like the old joke, if somebody towed Africa off into the Atlantic and sank it, nobody in Europe would notice for a week. It has no great trading connotation, it has no armies, it has no political effect (BBC History Seminar, 16th November 2004).

There is a plethora of literature on how Western media coverage of Africa and other developing countries is distorted and framed in negative concepts. When sub-Saharan Africa is covered in the news it is uniformly as a tale of disaster and conflict. There is rarely much context or background in the reports (Franks: 2005). A critical look at African related stories that appeared in both The New York Times and Washington post from the end of March to mid-August 2000 showed that seventy-five out of all 89 published articles were negative in content. The news were presented as tribal conflicts with strong metaphors and imagery of “savages” and “beasts” in which people with the “hearts of darkness” are killing themselves for no reason or dying of AIDS. Similarly, a study of US television network coverage of Africa between 2002 and 2004 found that “the majority of stories about African nations focused on negative and highly deviant issues such as conflict and disasters both natural and human caused” (Golan, 2008,p.53).

According to the MacBride Commission Report—*Many Voices, One world*—which is produced from the NWICO debate, distortion of news...occurs when inaccuracies or untruths replace authentic facts, or when a slanted interpretation is woven into the news report...through the use of pejorative adjectives and stereotypes...This occurs where events of no importance are given prominence and when the superficial or the irrelevant are interwoven with facts of real significance (MacBride et al., 1980,p.157-158). In spite of this glaring fact, the
Western media have not deviated from their distortion of news and “use of the pejorative adjectives and stereotypes” two decades after the MacBride report was published.

As the world becomes “globalized,” it is the primary responsibility of mass news media as a source of information for the world to give an accurate, balanced, and realistic picture of the world. By reporting those aspects of African life deemed important to Western readers, the media select stories according to the Western values. As a result, African successes for instance, measured according to African values are never reported. Press coverage in the context of the world event marginalise things uniquely African (Hawak, 1992,p.7). Also, much of the reportage on civil society Africa for example, tends to assume that its manifestation would necessarily reproduce conventional Western patterns, and its standard democratic functions. Such assumptions and the Western model that feed the assumption, however, are increasingly being challenged.

The ideology of news reporting operates at various levels, including how news events are selected and framed, the language in which the news is framed and the meanings given to the events. It is in the process of selecting certain events and rejecting others, and in the process of explaining the selected events that journalists define social reality and also shape the way the public perceives that “reality”. “By choosing certain events, emphasizing certain ‘facts’, and giving stories a certain tone, the news media structure and define reality,” Fair (1993,p.13) points out.

Lack of context is one of the problems that have undermined Western media reporting of Africa. It is no secret that the needed contextual information about Africa is glaring in most news reports presented by the Western media. Hawak (199,p.4) identifies factors such commercial and financial considerations of editors, the personal opinions of editors and correspondents, and press restrictions of host governments are some of the reasons that underpin lack of context in stories about Africa. The consequence of this style of reporting is that, over a number of years, the mental and psychological image of Africa that is presented by Western media to Western media audiences is that Africa is a failed continent ravaged by political instability, economic backwardness, extraordinary famine and drought, poverty, diseases and culturally primitive ways of doing things. The contextual background and the underlying sources of these problems, including how the West contributed to the underdevelopment of Africa, are conspicuously missing from Western media coverage of Africa

**Afro-Pessimism: Africans Paying the Price**

It has been mentioned earlier on that sometimes ignorance serves to maintain the ideology that underpins the negative portrayal of Africa in the Western media. For example, when Western media report about events involving a group of say, Ghanaians or Senegalese, Western media find it easier and simplistic to refer to them generically as “Africans”. However, when Italians or Portuguese are reported in the news, the Western media identifies them accurately as citizens of Italy or Portugal and not as Europeans.

The ideology of Afro-pessimism, which is propagated consciously by the Western media, has been used since colonial times to describe Africa and Africans. This ideology is designed to underline the superiority of Western cultures over the “Other,” that is, people from less developed economies or people from lower status cultures. This ideology makes use of a country’s level of economic development as an index for distinguishing “superior cultures” from “inferior cultures”.

So far it has been established, but not conclusively verified that when one reads a story in the foreign media or eavesdrops on foreigners talking about Africa, there are high and credible chances that it will be a rueful tale of doom and gloom. Derek Warren, now at DFID and formerly with Oxfam, worries about the danger of misreporting. He describes one journalist who attended the press conference in Sudan on the “Darfur Crisis” and
then the briefings in Addis Ababa. Yet the only story that made her paper was one about the prime ministerial plane being despatched to Nairobi to fetch prawn sandwiches.

News from poor countries does not often make the headlines and when it does it is nearly always bad news. The only regular exception is celebrity or royal visits. A DFID report (Viewing the World, 2000) examined both the attitudes of broadcasters and audiences towards TV reporting of the developing world. And the conclusions showed that coverage was usually related to famine, war, terrorism and catastrophes. Not surprisingly this was also the impression that audiences had picked up—it was all gloom and disaster.

**Discourses that Underpin the Construction of Africa’s Image in the Western Media**

To understand how Africa is framed in the Western media, it is essential to examine also the image of Africa in the “Western Mind”. One is certain to find upon examination that this image that sustains Western discourses about Africa. ‘Africa’ in the Western mind cannot endure outside Western discourses…for it is within these discourses that the West confirms the ‘Otherness’ of Africa it has created, argues Fair (1993,p.10). Africa’s media image as it exists in the American press has been formed, informed, reformed within these Western discourses in which the meaning of ‘Africa’ is made. Within news stories occurs a reproduction of hierarchy and domination reworked and updated.

Apart from the economic and national interest discourses that are inherent in the way Africa is covered or ignored in the US media, discourses of non-professional values which editors and reporters rely on to make decisions about African news events that should be covered or ignored are noteworthy. In the mind of Western journalists, there seems to exist a hierarchy of cultures: “primitive” cultures versus “civilised” cultures or countries of low status cultures as against countries of high status cultures. Shockingly, these non-professional rules have a major influence on how news events from Africa (region of low status cultures) are framed by Western journalists (from high status cultures). Fair (1993,p.9-10) further explains that:

> The values and routines that go into producing news stories represent cultural conventions, rules, and codes that serve to construct boundaries of meaning. Within the news text, the journalist as a storyteller, relies upon ideas and images drawn from dominant interest, thought, and meaning but evoked as ‘fact’.

Michira (2002) has outlined seven themes through which the negative stereotyping of Africa is achieved with the Western media discourse.

- **“Africa as a homogenous entity”**: Under this generic term, Africa is depicted as a country, making it easy for the Western media to use generic terms to refer to events in specific African countries, as if one problem in an African country is symptomatic of problems in all African countries.

- **Africa as a ‘Dark Continent’**: Michira (2002: web document) argues that this ideology depicts Africa as a region without a history, a region in which “backward traditions and practices, superstitions, and weird outdated and repugnant rites are prevalent.

- **“Africa the Wild Jungle”**: This illustrates how western media show extraordinary interest in animal life in Africa rather than pay attention to the lives of the people of Africa. Michira argues that when Western media show interest in Africa, it is only because animals are threatened, not because the people of Africa are threatened by human or natural forces. This is obviously an exaggeration but in his words, the “the US press gives more attention (and hence coverage) to the lover of animals in Africa that the African people in a phenomenon that has come to be called “Animalization of Africa”. Animal Planet and Discovery Channel are examples of a host of documentaries that devote their attention to the wild Africa and “Safari” adventures, rather than the people of Africa” (Michira, 2002).
• “Hunger, famine and starvation”: these are perhaps the most common and familiar concepts and images through which Africa has been represented to rest of the world. The constant showcase of images of impoverished African women and children are used to cast Africa as a continent ravaged by poverty and diseases.

• “Endemic violence, conflict and civil war”: Michira acknowledges that many Africa countries have suffered from internecine civil wars, often ethnic religious-oriented, internal or cross-border such as the Angolan civil war, the Rwandan genocide, etc. He points out however, that Western media coverage of war and conflicts in Africa “are often crisis-driven in such a way as to imply that Africans are naturally savage, warlike, violent and steeped in primordial tribal feuds”

• “Political instability and the coup cycle”: Political instability is a direct consequence of endless wars and conflicts in Africa. Michira (2002) argues that when the Western news media highlight conflicts and instability in Africa, they convey the underlying message that Africans are incapable of governing themselves, that “Africans cannot embrace democratic principles of governance”

• “Africa and AIDS”: Michira believes that the grim images of the sick and dying people of Africa are presented by Western media to suggest that it is Africa’s problem, not “ours”, because Africans have refused to change their sexual practices, including their “backward cultural and religious traditions that make talking about sexuality and AIDS a taboo”. Western media thus construct the AIDS epidemic in such a way as to suggest that Africa is confronted with the possibility of annihilation “unless the Western governments and humanitarian agencies come to its rescue”

Why the Western Media Hide the Truth

As mentioned earlier, developing countries under the banner of the UNESCO, moved a motion for the New World Information Order (NWICO) to address the issue of global inequality. The situation of imbalance naturally prompted the wish of the nations of the South, which included all countries of the African continent, for a radical overhaul of the existing international communication system.

Although the case was well presented, the realization of the demands was a tall dream. First, the implementation process was not well defined. Secondly, the censorship and media accountability clauses of the NWICO were too ambiguous. Furthermore, in many circles, the NWICO demands were seen as purely the sole views of the South’s elites. In short, the NWICO did not reflect the views and concerns of the masses in the South.

Granted these were legitimate concerns, they could be dealt with or resolved through a grassroots educative initiative and democratic process if there was true commitment of all parties involved in the debate. However, rather than negotiating these loopholes, the industrialised North quickly capitalized on them and trivialized the NWICO debate.

We cannot permit attempts to control the media and promote censorship under the ruse of a so-called ‘New World Information Order,’ President Ronald Reagan was quoted in the New Your Times of September 22, 1987.

It was a perfect excuse for the US and others of the industrialized North that already had the fear that their “hegemonic and monopolistic ownership and control of international communication systems and pattern of information flow were about to be destabilized and disestablished (Uche, 1996: 2) with the NWICO. Britain and the United States revoked membership of the UNESCO and walked out of the NWICO debate. Since both countries were (and still are) the largest financiers of the UNESCO, the withdrawal weakened the political and financial strength of the organization. Therefore, the NWICO debate suffered a big blow. As at the time of
writing this essay, the United States has returned to the UNESCO about five years ago. Great Britain rejoined on 1\textsuperscript{st} July 1997. In a practical sense, the NWICO debate was a failure. But on paper, it was a success.

**Foreign Correspondence: How Can the Balance Be Restored?**

An important gap in the way that Africa is reported is not just the disappearance of regular correspondents, but also how African’s report each other in the local media. The image of Africa that was (and is still) depicted in Western media could be traced to Africa’s colonial history and Africa’s relationship with the West, in particular relationships developed with Europe over years and centuries of colonial rule. History must be visited in order to understand the roots of Afro-pessimism, the subtle subjugation of African cultures and values by West European values and practices (Fair 1993,p.10). Anyaegbunam (1993) for example, traces the origins of the ideological struggle between Africa and European colonizers. He explains that:

Both physical and intellectual confrontation between Africa and the West have been common occurrences since the mid-17th century when Europe began to colonize, re-invent and re-name Africa” in an attempt to reshape Africa to fit European ideological agenda and the African image the colonisers wanted.

Today, while the struggle for political independence has subsided in Africa, there are struggles against ideological and intellectual domination. Grimly, the way forward is fuzzy, especially to the question of restoring the balance in the news about Africa which is not an easy task. What is clear though is that the solution lies in the hands of Africans. It is Africans alone who, with a firm resolve, can solve the problem of misrepresentation. Fergal Keane, a BBC special correspondent who has reported on Africa for over two decades says he is:

A disenchanted member of the television Africa corps tired of hearts of darkness coverage that reduces every African problem to questions about tribalism or native corruption and refuses to recognize sprouts of hope where they exist.

He argues for a reporting paradigm in which Africans tell their stories and help viewers, listeners and readers “recognize the energy and vitality of this continent.” This paradigm would create a sustained reality that is reflective of what is actually happening within the African social context. Thus, it avoids a contrasting reality based on a foreign journalist’s “sceptical” view and assumption?

One should not totally abhor foreign correspondence per se. Today, while traditional Western foreign correspondents are decreasing in number at many news organisations, their work is not becoming extinct, but is “evolving into new forms,” argues John Maxwell Hamilton, dean of the Manship School of Mass Communication at Louisiana State University and a former foreign Correspondent. What must be frowned at is the kind of journalist who “parachutes” in to do one story and then leaves.

The absence of adequate local media coverage is a challenge that has to be tackled within the media development framework on the continent. As a direct response to this inadequacy, some international nongovernmental organizations have assumed the role of independent, private media companies to ‘fill the information gap.’ In the process, there seems to be an ‘illusory’ alleviation of the misrepresentation problem. However, since these NGO’s are foreign controlled, their allegiance is indisputably non-African. Hence, it is essential that African’s have control of the ownership of the media organisations as well as the coverage of African stories. Geoffrey Nyarotah, founding editor of the Daily News in Zimbabwe’s only independent daily newspaper (which has ceased publication), describes how much better coverage of Africa would be if more African reporters told the stories to Western audiences. The difference would be staggering if African news agencies, such as PANA, are
resourced enough to gather and transmit positive African reports to hungry external news agencies, and in the process serve as a global mouthpiece for the whole continent.

On 12 June 2004, in one of his farewell speeches as British prime minister, Tony Blair, seeing the sun setting slowly on his political career, gave vent to some of his inner feelings, this time not on education but on the media.

The fear of missing out means today's media more than ever before, hunts in a pack. In these modes, it is like a feral beast, just tearing people and reputations to bits. But no one dares miss out ... The final consequence of all this is that it is rare today to find balance in the media.

**Summary of Review**

This literature review has taken a look at the representations of Africa by the Western media with a focus on events that have occurred subsequent to the independence of sub-Saharan Africa. The African media landscape has gone through several transitions post-NWICO, especially in the light of technological advancements in the rest of the world, the advancement and acceptance of democracy to some satisfactory levels, as well as a blooming private media sector in ‘emerging’ economies on the continent.

Against the background of skewed relationships that existed in Africa between European colonial administrations and African people, and the difficulty that Africa faces in freeing itself from the relationship of unequal partnership, it is not surprising that inaccurate reports about Africa and the biased perceptions of Africans, cultivated during colonial times, have formed the basis for the way Africa is framed in media reports. In the absence of deeper knowledge, understanding and appreciation of African cultures and traditions, contemporary Western journalists continue to draw on distorted images of Africa provided by their explorer-journalist ancestors. African media have also not had an impact on the world scene due to the lack of skill and funding. However, there also lies the underlying effect of how Africans report (negative?) news about each other, which is amplified by the international news networks.

In the 21st century, Western media are still serving their audiences old images of Africa in new glasses, a case of old wine presented in new bottles. Michira recommends greater efforts by governments and the private sector to break the monopoly the Western media conglomerates enjoy through ownership, production and distribution of media products. This is a valid recommendation but how it can be achieved and whether it can be achieved remains a thorny issue.

It has been over 30 years since the curtain was drawn on the NWICO debate. Several developing countries and regional organisations have heeded the call to set up their own news agencies with the aim of covering more news events about their countries and region. The objective was not only to increase the quantity of news about developing countries but also to pay more attention to positive news (often referred to as “development news”). Whether or not these objectives have been achieved remains unanswered. Hachten (2004, p.87) offers some valid suggestions about how Africa can overcome the existing problem misrepresentation and achieve both economic and political transformation:

> If Africa is to develop economically and politically in the coming years, Western news media must do a better job of reporting events there. But even more important, African nations must acquire free and independent news media of their own—news systems that utilize the new information technologies—communication satellites, global television, high-speed computer exchanges—that most of the world now uses.
It is not good enough to say Western audiences aren’t interested in Africa. It is a chicken and an egg situation. If there was coverage, people would become more interested.

**Theoretical Framework**

To place this research in a proper theoretical framework, the representation theory was chosen. The theory is an attempt to explain “the construction in any medium (especially the mass media) of aspects of ‘reality’ such as people, places, objects, events, cultural identities and other abstract concepts. Such representations may be in speech or writing as well as still or moving pictures” (Media Representation, 2013).

Representation theory points to how identities (Class, Age, Gender and Ethnicity) are represented (or rather constructed) within the text but also how they are constructed in the processes of production and reception by people of varying demographics. The theory holds that the media do not simply reflect/mirror “reality”, they create or re-present a new reality. Orlebar (2009) gives the following postulations of the theory:

- Semiotics foregrounds the process of representation.
- Reality is always represented - what we treat as “direct” experience is “mediated” by perceptual codes. Representation always involves ‘the construction of reality’.
- All texts, however “realistic” they may seem to be, are constructed representations rather than simply transparent “reflections”, recordings, transcriptions or reproductions of a pre-existing reality.
- Representations which become familiar through constant re-use come to feel “natural” and unmediated.
- Representations require interpretation - we make modality judgements about them.
- Representation is unavoidably selective, foregrounding some things and backgrounding others.

A key concept in the representation theory is stereotype. Groups are prejudicially assigned certain labels based on gender, ethnicity, class and age while they are being projected by the media. According to Orlebar (2009) stereotype “limits meanings assigned to groups, shapes perceptions of that group and leaves out/over-generalizes meaning.”

Hence, in portraying people, the media usually draw from existing racial, gender, class, ethnic and age prejudices. All this brings about stereotyping which has been the crux of the matter in the way the western media project Africa. They tend to associate the continent with all sorts of negativity in contradistinction with the West which is an epitome of civilization and progress (Anyaegbunam, 1993; Agba, 2002). Therefore, within the framework of the representation theory, we are able to understand how the societal biases and stereotypes could shape representation of Africa amongst Western media gatekeepers on a significant and sensitive issue like the 2015 presidential election.

**Methodology**

Methodology is defined as “a set of methods and principles used to perform a particular activity” (Hornby, 2001, p.546). In other words, it is a set of systematic steps applied in executing a given task so as to achieve the set goals. In this chapter, the methodology for the study is discussed under the following sub-heads: research design, population of study, sample and sampling technique, unit of analysis, instrument for data collection, measurable variables and method of data analysis.
Research Design
Research design “is the plan for a research project (which) provides guidelines which direct the researcher toward solving the research problem and it may vary depending on the nature of the problem being studied” (Akuezuilo and Agu, 2002, p.79). Similarly, Asika (1991, p.27) opines that research design means the restructuring of investigation aimed at identifying variables and their relationships to one another. It is an outline on scheme that serves as useful guide to the researcher in his efforts to generate data for his study.

For this study, textual analysis was adopted as the study design. This was chosen in order to observe the underlying meanings of text as represented by the news coverage of the Nigeria’s presidential election outcome.

Period of Study
This study covers a three-week period between March 30 (which was the date of announcement of the presidential election results) and March 20, 2015 (which was three weeks after).

Population of Study
The population of study is all the international broadcast stations transmitting from outside the shores of Nigeria. These include both public and private broadcasters.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure
Two broadcast stations were purposively selected as follows: the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) located in London, United Kingdom and the al Jazeera network located in Doha, Qatar. The two stations were selected for two reasons. First, they rank amongst the most influential media houses in global news broadcasting; the BBC is the largest broadcast house in the world and is acclaimed as being remarkably objective while al Jazeera is the most influential international broadcaster in the entire Arab world (Ojobor, 2002). Second, the choice of the two stations makes for some balanced representation because while the BBC is western and public, al Jazeera is non-western and private.

Unit of Analysis
The unit of analysis here was news story. Thus all news stories relating to the outcome of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election became the basis of the analysis.

Method of Data Analysis
The method of data analysis was qualitative. News stories were analysed textually discover underlying patterns as relevant to the objectives of study. The research questions were answered by interpreting and making generalizations from the patterns observed.

Data Presentation and Analysis
Data presentation and analysis were done under three selected themes to reflect the objectives and the variables being investigated by the study. These themes are:
- Judgment on the outcome of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election
- Framing of issues relating to the outcome of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election
- Presence or absence of prejudice in the results of the election result

Framing/Judgment on the outcome of the Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election
The media houses under study appear to have reported the outcome of the presidential election in some positive light. They seem to have been impressed that an incumbent president lost election in African country. Al Jazeera, for instance, notes that “Victory for Buhari marks the first time in Nigeria's history that an opposition party has democratically taken control of the country from the ruling party.” In the same vein, this “is a hugely significant moment in Nigeria's turbulent history. Never before has a sitting president been defeated in an election.” The station optimistically observes that:

*The whole process is a sign that democracy is deepening in Nigeria and may be a tonic to other countries in Africa. People can start to believe that it is possible to remove politicians through the ballot box. The two media houses freely employed the words “historic” to describe the victory of General Muhammadu Buhari at the polls.*

Similarly, both media houses repeatedly highlighted the phone call made by President Goodluck Jonathan to General Buhari conceding defeat and congratulating him for his victory. This they portrayed crucial to the peace that followed the elections as against the predicted violent outcome.

However, unlike Al Jazeera, the BBC did not fail to portray ethnicity and religion as a key determinant of the outcome of the polls. The station, for instance, notes that “Much of Gen Buhari’s support was in the north, in particular the north-east.” Contrarily, the Al Jazeera appears to lay more emphasis on failure of governance (as mainly represented by corruption and insecurity) as the major factor that determined the election’s outcome.

Generally, the two media houses saw the elections as relatively credible. This is evident in the fact that they did not lay much emphasis on irregularities, rather dwelling more on the unprecedented nature of the outcome.

**Presence or absence of prejudice in the results of the election result**

The reports by the two media houses appear to readily emphasise the nation’s past democratic failures, corrupt institutions and economic woes. Added to this is the underlying sentiment that Nigeria is incapable of conducting a free and fair election. Thus, even as the reports appeared to celebrate the 2015 presidential poll as a success, they tended to suggest that the said success was an exception. This is evident in statements such as “there have been widespread fears that the election will be rigged by the ruling party”, “fears were rife that the election would be followed by violence and bloodshed as witnessed in the aftermath of the 2011 election won by President Jonathan”, “Ethnic and religious tensions pervaded the nation in the build up to the election given Nigeria’s bitter past electoral experiences,” etc.

The above statements which were typically present in the reports analysed could be said to have been informed by an underlying belief that Nigeria is incapable of conducting free and violence-free elections. The Al Jazeera, for instance, suggested that Buhari had won the election simply because it was not rigged. This sentiment is echoed through the voice of the news source quoted immediately after this suggestion was made. He was one Antony Goldman described as “a business consultant with high-level contacts in Nigeria” who said that “There are probably lots of reasons why the PDP might have lost, but I think the key one is that the elections just haven't been rigged... If you leave it to the Nigerian people they will be ready to make big decisions and to make Nigeria look something more like a conventional democracy.”

Similarly, the BBC described as “shocking” the fact the President Jonathan had called to congratulate General Buhari and concede defeat. The underlying sentiment obviously is that Nigeria is a nation condemned to post-electoral bickering and perhaps violence.
Generally, the editorial slant of the reports by the two media houses on the outcome of the Nigeria’s presidential election appears to have been influenced by their existing beliefs and biases about Nigeria’s electoral culture. Over the years, Nigeria’s elections have been reportedly characterized by riggings and violence and it might only have been predictable that this perception would colour reports about any election to be held in the country.

Findings
The above textual analysis of the reports by BBC and al Jazeera of the outcome of Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election would lead to a number of findings. First, the stations portrayed the outcome of the election as generally credible, seeing it as an indication that Nigeria might be on its way to greater democratization. However, the BBC framed the outcome of the election as having been determined by ethnic and religious loyalty. There is also evidence of the influence of beliefs and biases of the gatekeepers of the two media houses about Nigeria on their report of the election’s outcome. While they were positive about the credibility of the process that resulted in the outcome, they tended to view it as untypical of Nigeria’s electoral culture.

Summary and Conclusion
This paper investigated the patterns of reportage of the result of the 2015 Nigerian presidential election on BBC and Al Jazeera. News stories were selected across three weeks of March 30 to March 20, 2015. Located within the framework of media representation theory, the study design was textual analysis. Findings indicated that the stations positively portrayed the election’s outcome as resulting from a fairly credible process, but that the BBC however framed it as a product of ethno-religious loyalty. It was also found that the two stations were influenced by their perceptions about Nigeria’s past electoral performance in covering the last presidential polls.

Based on the foregoing, it might be concluded that the BBC and Al Jazeera gave the election’s outcome a positive coverage. However, the BBC’s framing Buhari’s victory as a product of Northern cum Islamic sentiments and the Al Jazeera’s silence on same would suggest the influence of Western and Arab sentiment cum interest in the reports.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations are hereby made:

• There is need to strengthen the repportorial capabilities of the local media with the view to matching the international influence of foreign international media such as the BBC and Al Jazeera in reporting the nation to the world. This is the only way to counter whatever prejudice that might colour the report of the nation by these foreign media houses. Such strengthening would come through well guided media policies that would focus on technological and human resources development in the media sector.

• This study should be repeated with the view to improving on whatever shortcomings the instant effort may have accommodated. Also, the scope of the study could be expanded by integrating more variables and increasing the sample size for more rounded and more accurate results.

• A content analysis counterpart to this research could also be pursued. The aim this time would be to discovering with statistical accuracy the patterns of reportage of the outcome of the 2015 Nigeria’s presidential election in foreign media. This way a more complete picture as to subject of this study could be achieved.
REFERENCES


