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Covid-19 and Journalism: How have International Media Represented Africa During the Covid-19 Pandemic?

Abstract

Media scholars have long concluded that the coverage of Africa as a continent of disease, war and poverty stereotyped Africa and examples include the denigration of the continent with regards to diseases such as HIV-AIDS and Ebola, on frequent cases of famines and low levels of economic development. Against this historically problematic media representation, the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020 opened up a new avenue for academic debate about Africa's image in the international media. As fear about the virus grew, so too was the concern about Africa's representation. At the initial stage of the virus, predictions were that the pandemic would spiral out of control and wreak serious havoc in Africa. But, as time progressed, these predictions have not played out as expected and Africa seemed to have fared relatively well in comparison with its Western counterparts. But, what were the motivations behind these predictions? Could they have emanated from past tropes of international media representation of the continent? Covid-19 pandemic therefore provided an interesting opportunity to re-examine evidence that scholars have alluded to that Africa has been under-represented and mis-represented by the international media. To respond to these issues, this study used the theories of media representation and global flows and contra flows to find out if Africa was underrepresented and mis-represented in two international media platforms--the BBC and Aljazeera-- with regards to the coronavirus. Data was collected from April, May, September and October 2020, and subjected to discourse analysis to arrive at what pattern of representation of Africa emerged during this pandemic.

A major finding in this study was that different subjects have emerged as interest areas for different media platforms depending on the country under review. What is an issue for one country or media platform, could not be an issue for another. Therefore, it has been impossible to find an intersection point where two or three countries could dominate the headlines on any given subject. Overall, our finding suggests that international media coverage of Africa have not entirely been negative or, indeed, entirely free from past tropes of representation particularly during the early stages of the pandemic.

Declaration

I declare that this study is my own unsupported work. I therefore submit it for the award of a degree in Masters of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg South Africa. This work has never been submitted in the past for the award of any other degree or examination in any other university.

Abdul Samba Brima
30th day of April, 2021.

To Abdul Brima jr., and Sahr Philip Brima, with love.

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Chapter One

Introduction, Background, Aims, Objectives and Rationale

1.0 Introduction

As a global development of an epic proportion, the coronavirus outbreak has been covered differently in different countries and regions of the world. In particular, how the international media have responded to it in respect to Africa's representation is worth finding out. Scholars have long concluded that Africa suffers an image problem in the international media. Narratives about the continent being stricken with poverty, senseless wars and diseases all strike a chord. During this pandemic, for example, early coverage of the continent seemed to be headed towards the past tropes of international media reporting about Africa. But, what does that say about the motivations of the international media? This pandemic therefore opened up an inviting opportunity to undertake a media representation study that seeks to decipher how international media have reported on Africa. It will be a worthwhile venture to see whether the narratives about Africa have changed during this Covid-19 period or not and what patterns of representation have emerged.

When it first struck, the virus was considered a China affair. Not until what began as an epidemic in Wuhan, South of China, had crossed borders and soon was declared a global pandemic by WHO, did the international media start to treat it seriously. The facts and figures relating to the pandemic – fleshed out in the background section below – provide evidence of the impact of the pandemic. By February 2021, out of 110, 706,233 confirmed cases globally, 2, 451, 638 people had died of the pandemic (John Hopkins University 20 February 2021). The outbreak had spread across the world with the United States recording 28, 003, 903 and 495,693 deaths, the highest in the world (John Hopkins University 20 February 2021). Europe had recorded the highest number of confirmed cases and fatalities at 32,905,763 and 786,505 deaths. The Africa region, on the other hand, had only 3,834,297 confirmed cases with 100,847 deaths (Worldometer, 18 February 2021). But, from the beginning of Covid-19, projections about Africa were grim. Particular concerns were raised about the ability of the continent's weak healthcare systems handling a possible explosion of cases (WHO Africa Region 2 April 2020). Soon after, news headlines like; 'Why healthcare experts are so worried' (Mawathe, 2020); 'A ticking time bomb': Scientists worry about coronavirus spread in Africa' (Nordling, 2020), became rife in the international news. Fourteen weeks after Africa registered its first Covid-19 case, the virus reached a milestone with cases surpassing the 100, 000 mark (WHO Africa Region, 22 May 2020). This period reinforced concerns that the worst could yet happen. When cases reached the 100 000 mark in Europe, the fatality rate stood at 4900 as compared with Africa's 3100, (WHO Africa Region, 22 May 2020).

During this period, Africa had only recorded 1.5 percent of global Covid-19 cases and less than 0.1 percent fatalities, (World Economic Forum, 29 September 2020). Despite these milestones, controversies abound as to whether international media coverage considered these gains as worthy of recognition. But little evidence exists to back these claims. Against this statistical indication, it is important to find out media narratives that emerged on the coverage of the pandemic's African dimension. To this effect, Bunce, et.al (2008) observe that who tells Africa's story matters and has always been a matter of contestation. 'Research from the 1970s through to the 1990s demonstrated that international representations of Africa were narrow, laden with stereotypes, and highly dependent on Cold War frames and portrayals of an impoverished, often savage, "other"' (Bunce, et.al 2008 P. 20). Oluwakemi (2017) echoes this view by observing that there has always been a call for the proper representation of countries on the periphery in the international media. But, can a major global crisis in the magnitude of the coronavirus uphold some of the findings of past scholarship on Africa's representation? Scholars provide some of the underlying factors feeding into these representational considerations. For instance, Oluwakemi (2017 P.2) argues that 'the Western domination of world technology, media conglomerates and expertise, has led to a lopsided representation of Africa'. By the same token, Wainaina's (2005) description of the problematic language and images that authors and reporters use in portraying Africa in the global North clearly strikes a chord. This study examines coverage of Africa from an international media perspective drawing on the statistical evidence of the pandemic between Europe and Africa and the representational issues that scholars have long alluded to.

1.0.1 Background/Context

Branded as the continent with the most deplorable healthcare systems, lack of trained healthcare personnel, poor infrastructure, problematic medical supplies and lack of equipment, Africa's image in the international media during health emergencies has always provoked interest on a global stage. But, to understand international media representation of Africa today with regards to Covid-19, it is worthwhile going back in time to look at how other diseases affecting a large proportion of Africans have been covered. The two major diseases in these respects are Ebola and HIV/AIDS. Stavinoha's (2020) leading story in "The Conversation" mentioned that until the end of 1990s, millions of HIV-Aids deaths across sub-Saharan Africa were a "non-issue" for the British media. His analysis of the BBC News revealed that HIV-Aids in Africa was reported only 14 times between 1987 and 1995, and mostly in passing (Stavinoha 2020). In the same period, the Financial Times covered Aids only 18 times. The HIV-Aids disease burden however suggests that the coverage should have been more robust. By 1999, a staggering 24 million people lived with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, with prevalence rates in some countries rising above 20% (Stavinoha, 2020). Yet, the pandemic gained little or no attention in the British press. In fact, Stavinoha (2020) notes that the Economist drew the conclusion that: "The world is not going to rescue Africa from Aids. Only Africans can do that, by changing their behaviour" (Stavinoha 2020). Through this conclusion, it would seem that readers of the Economist were told that Africans were at fault for suffering from HIV-Aids. Poverty was also to blame, since 'those who could not afford television set found other ways of passing the evening (Stavinoha 2020). Maritzburg's (1998) headline story in the Economist reinforces the poverty narrative.

"In rich countries, AIDS is no longer a death sentence. Expensive drugs keep HIV-positive patients alive and healthy, perhaps indefinitely. [...] In developing countries, by contrast, the disease is spreading like nerve gas in a gentle breeze. The poor cannot afford \$10,000 a year on wonder-pills" (Maritzburg 1998).

Apparently, hidden under veils of racist sentiments (Stavinoha 2020), these types of media responses affect the way people of African origin are perceived. Indeed, they veer attention away from tackling the Aids pandemic and also undermine the public health capacities of African countries (Stavinoha 2020). Coverage of the HIV-Aids pandemic was followed by a devastating West African Ebola outbreak between 2014-2016. Stories of hopelessness through images of abandoned bodies etc., made news in the international media. Footages of infected patients waiting to die dehumanized the Ebola outbreak and indeed the African peoples. By contrast, however, a different type of media response to the same outbreak (Ebola) emerged in the United States (U.S).

A study by the University of Missouri-Columbia, found out that ‘news coverage of Ebola during the time it was in the U.S. focused on telling individual stories to humanize those affected’ (ScienceDaily, 18th April 2018). To this effect, researchers now suggest that reporters covering health crises should focus on human interest stories that share helpful information to have a greater positive impact on audiences (ScienceDaily, 18th April 2018). With the current coronavirus outbreak ravaging the world, would international media coverage be the same about Africa or would it be different from the HIV/Aids and Ebola examples?

When the first case of Covid-19 was reported in Africa, Nordling’s (2020) article in the Science Magazine reminded us of the electric wave of paranoia about the possible devastating effect the virus could wreck on the continent (Nordling 2020). News of borders closing, infected people quarantined, curfews imposed etc., heightened a sense of hysteria. In no time, attention shifted away from the pandemic itself in the international media to the weak healthcare systems, lack of equipment and infrastructure, and also the lack of financial resources to battle the outbreak. Gradual increase in cases, the unscientific and sluggish response of countries like Burundi, Tanzania, among others, made matters worse. It did not surprise therefore that headlines like: *‘Lack of Covid-19 testing undermines Africa’s success’*, (Soy 2020); *‘Africa didn’t dither but faces long coronavirus fight’* (Harding, 2020); continued in the international media. These types of framing became even more apparent after the WHO expressed trepidations in April 2020 that the pandemic was accelerating in Africa. Headlines like; *‘WHO sounds alarm at spread of coronavirus in Africa’* (Aljazeera, 20 July 2020), *‘Coronavirus in Africa: Outbreak ‘accelerating’ across continent’* (BBC News, 11 June 2020), etc., were prominent in. Months later, we saw a rather opposite twist to these predictions.

Let us return to the statistics partly provided in the introduction to establish the case for the need to study international media representation versus the reality on the ground. By September 2020, Makoni (2020) wrote in the Lancet that the continent had about 1.2 million symptomatic cases and 30,000 deaths, with a 2.4% case fatality which represented just 5% of global infections (Makoni 2020). This contrasts sharply with figures from Europe. By the end of January, South Africa’s National Institute of Communicable Diseases and Senegal’s Institute Pasteure were the only referral labs in Africa that tested samples from other countries on the continent (Makoni 2020). Today, all African countries can now diagnose for Covid-19, with 14 performing over 100 tests per 10 000 people (Makoni 2020). After a late 2020 reassessment of the continent’s readiness in coordination, surveillance, laboratory capacity, case management, and infection prevention and control, WHO rated Africa’s score to 78%, up from 62% six months before (Makoni 2020). These figures clearly show that not only are the predictions about Africa wrong, but that the continent has fought remarkably well in responding to the threats of Covid-19 in the face of very limited resources.

Therefore, the question at this point is what were the motivations behind the grim predictions about the continent at the onset of the outbreak? Have narratives in the international media about the virus devastating Africa changed? If so, how and what are the patterns? For example, the United States has been badly hit by coronavirus and worst still, it has also been blighted by one of the worst civil protests and political upheavals in its history. If we swap contexts and imagine that the U.S. situation happened in Africa, would the international media's response be different? The coronavirus therefore provides a perfect timing to conduct a media representation study that looks at how international media have represented Africa throughout this pandemic. This will help enrich our understanding of the globally held view that Africa's representation in the international media is often stereotypical and biased.

1.0.2 Rationale and Significance

As we saw in the background and context sections, predictions of coronavirus completely overwhelming Africa did not materialize. This is significant because it tells us that the basis for the predictions were misplaced. But then, where did these predictions come from and what fueled them? Answering these questions will provide important lessons to draw from in this study because 'how COVID-19 will end depends, in part, on the script that journalists write and their ability to tell stories that acknowledge pandemics are always rooted in the history of accumulated global inequalities [...]' (Stavinoha 2020). Indeed, particular concerns have been expressed about how the disequilibrium flow of information contributes to richer nations in the North exercising economic and political hegemony over the poorer ones in the South (Dayan 2007: 20). It is this lopsided flow that has led to many writers questioning the representation of countries on the periphery by the media in the information rich nations of the North. For example, how Africa is represented in the Western media has led to the coinage of terms like "Afro-pessimism" and the discursive construction of Africa as a dark and an inferior continent (Mahieu & Joye 2018). In literature, the labelling of Africa in 2000 as "Hopeless Africa" on the front page of *The Economist*, became the go-to example when it comes to the mediated representation of Africa. It then symbolizes widespread Afro-pessimistic narrative in the Western media (Mahieu & Joye 2018). While the representation of Africa in the international media has been considered pessimistic, there have been instances when the continent has been cast in positive light. Wekesa (2015) notes that the IMF, World Bank and African Economic Outlook (AEO) predicting robust economic expansion of over 5%, well over global average (IMF 2014, AEO 2014), is a testament to narratives changing about the continent for the better. Indeed, in recent times, there has been a shift in the Afro-pessimistic discourse about Africa to a more optimistic one gaining traction in academia. Mahieu & Joye (2018) observe that terms like "Africa rising," "the hopeful continent," and "new (Africa)" seem to be gaining momentum.

For instance, ten years after describing Africa as the “hopeless continent,” the Economist again labelled it as “the hopeful continent,” highlighting progress towards democracy, economic development, end of civil wars and improvement in technology (Mahieu & Joye 2018). But, the question still remains as to whether the continent will be cast in similar positive light during a development that has little positive dimensions as in the case of Covid-19. However, proper understanding of this issue requires us drawing on some theoretical discourses around global media flows. Thussu (2007) mentions that at a time when the political, economic and technological contexts within which media contents are produced and consumed are becoming increasingly global, the pattern of international flow of information needs reconsideration. He points out that media in the United States, Britain and France have strong international dimensions, whilst others largely follow a domestic media agenda within the borders of a nation-state. He notes;

“Given the political and economic power of the United States, its media are available across the globe, if not in English then in dubbed or indigenized versions. As its closest ally, Britain—itsself a major presence in global media, particularly in the field of news and current affairs—benefits from the globalization of Americana. These represent what might be termed as ‘dominant media flows’” (Thussu 2007: 34-35).

It is from these powerful media perspectives that this study is justifiable. As it does show that what comes of American and British media has the effect of being treated as true and incontestable fact about world affairs, including issues related to Africa during Covid-19. Another justification for this study emanates from the global flow of goods and services including informational and cultural flows. As captured by Thussu (2007), the U.S. and Britain continue their dominance of the media ecosystem over other countries on the global stage. On the other hand, transnational corporations, with the support of their respective governments, exert indirect control over the developing countries, dominating markets, resources, production and labor (Thussu 2007 P. 34-35). In the process, Thussu (2007) adds, they undermine the cultural autonomy of the countries of the South and create a dependency on both the hardware and software of communication and media. For Galtung (1971), flows reinforce and maintain a dependency syndrome. ‘The interests, values and attitudes of the dominant elite in the ‘peripheries’ of the South coincide with those of the elite in the ‘core’—the North. The core-periphery relations create institutional links that serve the interests of the dominant groups, both in the center and within the periphery’ (Thussu, 2007 P. 35-36). These observations in the flow of information led to the UNESCO’s New World Information and Communication Order (NEWICO) debate in the 1970s. UNESCO advocated for a radical shift in the flow of information in favor of poor countries. The debate was also a push to democratize the international communication ecosystem and rebalance information flows worldwide.

But then, whether the NWICO debate lived up to its expectations is something for another research. What therefore does the coverage of the pandemic show about the flow of information between the Global North and Africa in the second decade of the twenty first century? The main focus of this study is the representation of Africa by the international media and whether the past narratives about the continent have changed during this coronavirus crisis. Scholars such as De B'beri and Louw (2011) and Schmidt and Garret (2011) have pointed to Western media homogenizing Africa as a doomed place that is unable to govern itself. For them, this type of narrative pushes itself through selective and predictive media content. Indeed media content that displays reoccurring flow of themes like debt, disease, death and disaster, (Mahieu & Joye 2018). Understanding this pessimistic viewpoint about Africa, says Mahieu & Joye (2018), calls for referencing Said's theory of orientalism (1978) and Mudimbe's notion of Africanism (1988). They say that both authors have condemned the "ideologies of otherness" that came through during Western imperialism and European colonization (Mahieu & Joye 2018 P.38, citing Lugo-Ocando and Malaolu 2015, 86).

"...particularly, they demonstrated how Western discourses on non-Western parts of the world serve the West in maintaining its power by representing the distant "Other" as inferior. According to Mudimbe (1988), Africa has since the 1800s been assessed by the dominant Western "pre-existing categories of thought" (Grinker, Lubkemann, and Steiner 2010, 23), constructing a pessimistic view of Africa as "'passive' and 'hopeless' people waiting for 'us' (civilized Western society) to bring modernity through intervention in the name of progress" .

Another perspective that justifies this study is that African problems could be a source of the negative representation. It must be said however, that some of these past narratives about the continent cannot be construed to mean a consistently wrong account of Africa. As a continent, Africa has always had its lot of challenges--war, famine, diseases, poverty and hunger etc. One of the most prime examples of horror, a truth that hasn't auger well for the image of Africa was the 1994 Rwanda Genocide. "Here was, undoubtedly, one of the worst massacres of the modern world, in which, roughly 800,000 civilians were murdered by their neighbors, friends, family and government. There is no capacity for understanding how and why this could happen, especially no easy way for the general American or European population to comprehend such horror. The only explanation in the minds of many is the idea of evil" (Bork 2011:7). During this coronavirus pandemic, for instance, earlier responses and news emanating from some African countries reinforced these problematic representations. The truth of prioritizing politics over citizens lives in Burundi, Tanzania, and Benin and the mismanagement of the outbreak in Cameroon, Zimbabwe, etc., all served as clear reminders of the continent's image problems in the international media.

However, Bork (2011) contends that when evil becomes the only lens to explain such predicament, rather than a condition or phenomenon, explanations and understanding become inadequate. It is also true that these atrocities and governance challenges do not account for the entire continent's persona. What is more is that there does not seem to be much in the way of media exposure for Africa unless it has an element of tragedy to it (Bork 2011:7). In the context of Covid-19, we can argue, that even without data, Africa has suffered some degree of underrepresentation. Throughout the pandemic, not only has the continent been the least affected, but some countries like Mauritius can boast of ending the pandemic at a time when Western countries were struggling with it. Indeed, countries like Senegal have equally boasted of technological invention in response to the outbreak. Africa's most industrialized nation, South Africa, has also made lots of progress dealing with the pandemic, despite its significantly higher infections. Yet still, South Africa has been at the center of innovation and vaccine rollout in Africa. But whether these positive stories are given prominence in the international media remains very contestable. Therefore, Covid-19 opens up an opportunity to once again examine the evidence that scholars have produced to show that Africa has long been under-represented and misrepresented in the international media. To have a more current and accurate picture of how Africa is reported during this crisis, there is a need to undertake a media study that seeks to explain whether Africa's representation has been a continuation of past tropes or not.

1.0.3 Aim/Objectives

While the coronavirus crisis continues to infect and kill people, media coverage of it continues to provoke thoughts about issues of representation. This project therefore aims to study how Africa has been represented in the international media through the lens of the current coronavirus. It sets out to unravel this issue by analyzing the content of prominent international media organizations like the BBC and Aljazeera. These media houses have covered the continent significantly during this crisis. The aim of this research splits into two objectives. Firstly, the researcher will tease out whether international media representation of Africa has changed during this pandemic or whether it is a continuation of past reporting. The research will also find out what patterns of representation have emerged through this crisis and how they translate into global discussion about Africa's response to the pandemic.

1.0.4 Research Questions

The main research question is finding out whether international media representation of Africa has changed during this pandemic or it is a continuation of past tropes.

Other supplementary questions include:

1. How has international media framed discourse about Africa's response to the pandemic and what agendas have been set?
2. What trends and patterns of representation have emerged in the international media during this pandemic?

Chapter Two

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

As seen both in the background and rationale sections, Africa's representation in the international media has always triggered interesting debates among media scholars. Like many others before it, this research seeks an answer to international media representation of Africa but focuses on the coronavirus pandemic. However, an attempt at this topic requires a look back at bodies of literature that are relevant to this area. In this regard, the main bodies of literature this research will draw inspiration from are the global media flows, in particular, flows from the global north to the global south. Others include Africa's image in the Western media, the concepts of Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism, the Africa Rising Debate, as well as a review of contra flows. These will guide our understanding of how international media have long reported on Africa and whether the same pattern of representation has continued during this coronavirus pandemic or not.

2.0.1 Media Representation Defined

As discussed above, a global development of the magnitude of the coronavirus provides fertile groups for multiple representations of various regions of the world. It therefore behooves us to review past literatures on media representation as the starting point for applying its key concepts to the current study. A common sense usage of the term representation could mean an act of representing something that shows or describes. But, in the field of communication and media studies, the term has provoked lots of nuances and more complexities than a convenient generalization of it allows (Fourie, 2008; P. 198). As Fourie (2008) puts it, "representation is often explained as a performance of resemblance (as an act of image-making) or even imitation (Summers 1996:3). From this perspective, representation can mean the existence of or presentation of an idea or situation that mimics reality. From a cultural studies perspective, Hall (1997) posits that tremendous attention has been paid to the centrality of representations. He says that media studies itself is concerned in part with the variety of different texts and visuals which are transmitted by the media (Hall, 1997). Hall conceptualizes the different meanings of the term as captured below.

“The word has a kind of double meaning, even in its common-sense understanding. It does mean “to present,” “to image,” “to depict” – to offer a depiction of something else. And the word representation or representation does sort of carry with it the notion that something was there already and, through the media, has been represented. So the notion of something which images and depicts, and that which stands in for something else, both of those ideas are kind of brought together in the notion of representation” (Hall 1997 P. 5).

From the above, Hall (1997) explains that the idea of representation in media practices, represents topics, types of people, events and situations, thereby ascribing meaning to things. For him, representation is therefore “the ways in which meanings are somehow given to the things which are depicted through the images on screens or the words on a page” (Hall 1997). Gabore (2020) meanwhile describes the term as the “media’s creation of images about individuals, communities, places and countries, and recurring representation of the constructed identity” (Gabore 2020 P. 4). The main purpose of representation, Gabore (2020) adds, is to popularize hegemonic interpretations of politics and society.

We can see, from the various definitions, that the term representation embraces different nuances depending on contexts. But, from a media studies perspective, it predominantly highlights the power that media products (texts, audio, images etc.) have in influencing and shaping attitudes and mindsets. As explained above, this goes a long way in explaining the power relations that exist between the information rich global north and their counterpart in the south. To this effect, Mudimbe (1988), believes that since the 1800s, Africa has been represented by the dominant Western pre-existing categories of thought. Grinker, Lubkemann, and Steiner (20; 23), as quoted by Mahieu & Joye (2018), also note that these views have led to the construction of a pessimistic discourse of Africa as “passive and hopeless people waiting for “us”(civilized Western society) to bring modernity through intervention in the name of progress” (Mahieu & Joye 2018: 26). Therefore, Jarosz (1992), concludes that the metaphor, which labelled Africa and its people as the ‘Dark Continent’, remains a grim reminder of negative Western media stereotypes about the continent. During this Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, earlier predictions that the virus might overcome Africa seemed to have hinged on four dominant themes-- weak healthcare systems, poverty and the lack of resources, poor political leadership and lack of technological innovation and equipment—to denote the continent’s response to the pandemic.

In fact, the initial response of some African countries, validated some of these claims. We will explore these themes more closely in the methodology and data analysis sections to see how they have influenced international media coverage of the continent during this health crisis. But, when it comes to the representation of Africa, more recent narratives before the coronavirus about Africa in the international media seem to have adopted an optimistic approach. Mahieu & Joye (2018) say that more recent terms such as “rising,” “hopeful,” and “new” have been used to discuss Africa leading to optimistic and hopeful thoughts about the continent. This is one of the reasons why Gagliardone (2013), argues that China’s push to gain favorable media representation in Africa is a testament of the continent’s growing social and economic influence. Alongside these media initiatives, Gagliardone (2013) adds, the Chinese government and Chinese companies are expanding their presence in the telecommunications and infrastructure sectors. Other experts had said, long before the Covid-19 outbreak, that some of the world’s fastest growing economies are in Africa. This is partly due to an end to civil wars and economic boom across African nations. Many have also attributed this hopeful narrative to the burgeoning middle classes in African countries.

But, underneath this development paradigm remains the question of whether the “growth rates” bear any resonance for the vast majority of poor Africans. Therefore, the development rhetoric about Africa is a concept one must approach with caution. However, writers such as Nothias (2014) and De Beukelaer (2015) wonder whether the new narratives about the continent may be a testament to an emerging process of self-reflectivity and awareness from Western journalists. “Instances of positive reporting on Africa mostly occur when it has to do with the Eurocentric frame of economic growth and development. Accordingly, narratives of progress remain very dominant in these more positive representations, indicating that the discourse of Afro-optimism basically reflects the same framework as Afro-pessimism does” (Mahieu & Joye 2018: 26). In a similar conclusion, Escobar (2011) describes the development narrative used to discuss Africa’s progress as having the implication of naturalizing the idea that Africa is growing in similar ways as the Western civilized societies did. For Escobar (2011), neoliberal system functions as the key norm. This view is reinforced by Schmidt and Garret (2011) who posit that the postcolonial domination of West over Africa reflects itself through these representations. Thus, Schmidt and Garret (2011) conclude that this gives way to reinforcement of the bigger socio-political hierarchy of the West versus the rest.

2.0.2 International media flows

As discussed in the introduction and the rationale and significance sections, the focus in this study is to find out how international media have reported on Africa during this Covid-19 pandemic and what patterns of representation have emerged. However, further comprehension of these issues require an appreciation of the cardinal role that international media flows play. At a macro level, international media flow is rooted in the understanding of a world system whereby social, political and economic interactions are deeply dependent on communication flows (Wekesa 2020). Information, says Wekesa (2020), almost always flows from the core countries, in the north, to the semi-peripheral countries and then finally to the peripheral countries, in the south, where most African countries are located. Wallerstein (1976) talks of the power hierarchy that these flows perpetuate between the core nations of the north and the periphery ones in the south. “Powerful and wealthy “core” societies dominate and exploit weak and poor “peripheral” societies” (Wallerstein 1976 P. 3). In this imbalanced arrangement, Wallerstein points out, technology plays a key role in the appropriation of countries in the core or in the periphery. He notes:

“Peripheral countries are structurally constrained to experience a kind of development that reproduces their subordinate status. The differential strength of the multiple states within the system is crucial to maintain the system as a whole, because strong states reinforce and increase the differential flow of surplus to the core zone” (Wallerstein 1976 P. 3).

However, Wekesa (2020) observed that a more critical view of this concept accepts the assumption that “[...] governments, corporations, individuals and communities in the global north have far greater power as generators and conveyors of news and information compared to their global south counterparts [...] By contrast, however, the flow of information from the periphery through the semi-periphery to the core nations is quite negligible” (Wekesa, 2020 P. 3). Therefore, international flows can be understood from the view that countries of the global North own and control the world’s most powerful media conglomerates. They are therefore well positioned technologically to dominate global media flows. Meanwhile, scholars like Bornman (2017), think that when it comes to information flows, two main conceptual frameworks have been developed.

On the one hand, international media flows positively affect development, growth, democratic good governance, and national cultures. But, on the other, concerns have been raised about structural inequalities and hierarchies that exist in global media flows (Bornman 2017). The emphasis here, as Bornman (2017) observed, is that international media flows are always associated with the workings of economic and political interplay as well as structural inequalities that often characterize contents, direction, and volumes of information. What appears to be a 'free flow of information' Tuyala (2015) points out, is in fact more of a one-way flow from the North to the South. He singles out the implications that this has on countries in Africa.

"[...] it is now a widely accepted fact that the portrayal of 'Africans' in North American and West European media to this day remains very restricted and one-dimensional. [...] Too often stories about the African continent and its inhabitants are dealing with topics such as starvation, corruption, disease, war, or any kind of exotic curiosities. Not only are the resulting stereotypes affecting the perception of the African people outside the continent, leading to prejudices and even far-reaching results like racism, but also the inner-African communication process remains limited, biased and distorted due to the lack of media self-representation. Both realities have multiple social and economic effects [...]"
(Tuyala 2015, P. 253).

This summary is particularly useful in the context of our understanding of Africa's representation in the international media. In particular, it will be interesting to see whether these long held narratives have once again emerged during this Covid-19 pandemic or not. As seen already, media representation leads to image making which are circulated by global media giants, particularly on television and, now, the internet. As such, these powerful corporations play a central role in setting up foreign media agendas and global discourse about international affairs. In the process, however, countries on the peripheries, with unequal media capacity to respond, often find themselves on the fringes. However, lots of attempts have been made in the past to address this imbalance in the flow of information. For example, the MacBride Commission that followed the NWICO debate, reported that 'a qualitative imbalance existed in media representation between countries of the global North and global South with content flowing in unidirectional, North-South direction,' (Oh, 2015 P. 12). This pointed to the need to strike a balance in the information flow between the richer countries and the poorer ones in the South.

Even without empirical evidence, we can conclude here that information about coronavirus has mostly been flowing from the richer countries to the poorer ones. Whereas Yaya et.al (2020) talk of Covid-19 ushering a climate of information uncertainty, Ogola (2020), says that much of Africa is trapped in an information framing crisis. For Yaya et.al (2020), information flows during this pandemic have put globalization under increasing threat. “Governments scramble to reduce their vulnerability to the virus by limiting global information flows, trade and people” (Yaya et.al 2020 P.2). The authors expressed concerns that the constrictions on movements, closures of borders and strict migration measures have had diverse impacts on the African population during this crisis. This is part of the reasons Ogola (2020) argues that the narratives around the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa is a complex one.

The debate about contra-flows

We have seen how international media representation of Africa has provoked thorough debate among scholars. In particular, a major area of contention has been Western media’s domination of information flows. It is in lieu of this situation that concepts such as contra-flows and de-westernization have surfaced and seem to have gathered momentum. These concepts emerged as a way to counter the deepening disparities in the flows of information between richer countries in the north and poorer ones in the south. It has been popularized by scholars looking at the rise of the BRICS from the perspective of communications, journalism and media. Media contra-flows, says Kavoori (2007) are ‘the semantic and imaginative referents for the institutional, cultural and political matrix of a world framed by processes of global cultural power and local negotiation: a world experienced through the identity politics of nations, individuals and cultures and negotiated through contestations of locality, nationality and global citizenship’ (Kavoori 2007 P. 45). According to Kavoori (2007), other equally important elements are often overlooked when we talk of contra-flows. He talks of the exclusion of alternate technologies (the internet, cell phone, gaming), divergent institutional arrangements (cross pollination between media and education industries) and capitalist strategies etc., which all play an important part in the flow of information. But, when it comes to truly demonstrating contra flows in the global south, Bornman (2017) observes that few media outlets do it as effectively as Al-Jazeera does. He highlights the headline “Move over CNN: Al-Jazeera’s view of the world takes on the West” as a typical example of how Al-Jazeera has stepped up to challenge western global media monopoly.

The Qatar-based media giant has redefined journalism in the Arab world and is a prominent demonstration of contra-flow in the global south (Thussu 2007 P. 22-23). Thussu summarizes Al-Jazeera's influence in the flow of information globally.

"By 2006, this pan-Arabic 24/7 news network was claiming to reach 50 million viewers across the world, undermining the Anglo-American domination of news and current affairs in one of the world's most geo-politically sensitive areas. If the live broadcast of the 1991 US military action against Iraq contributed to making CNN a global presence, the 'war on terrorism' catapulted Al-Jazeera into an international broadcaster whose logo can be seen on television screens around the world [...]" (Thussu 2007, P 22-23)

We can see that Al-Jazeera stands very strongly as the source of alternative voice for countries in the global south. As el-Nawawy (2008) notes, the station's English viewers found it to function as a "conciliatory media," media that is more likely to cover contentious issues in a way that contributes to creating an environment that is more conducive to cooperation, negotiation and reconciliation" (el-Nawawy 2008 P 1). Al-Jazeera's core group of staff members received training in a Western journalistic environment, which informs their output. These core staff were familiar with the Arab political environment, with all its nuances and intricacies – qualifications that made them "the natural ingredient in the recipe for Al-Jazeera's eventual success," (el-Nawawy2008). It is this critical mindset that has catapulted Al-Jazeera into a truly international voice that transcends the borders of countries in the global south alone. Indeed its capability of creating a niche for itself by identifying a market demand for serious and independent journalism, with content mostly dedicated to political matters that are of key concern to the Arab world and beyond gives it the leverage to challenge the hegemonic dominance of Western media (Nawawy 2008). In addition to Al-Jazeera, a few countries in the south have also managed to establish large media organizations including Chinese China Global Television Network (CGTN), Russia Today etc., all with the view of challenging the hegemony of CNN, BBC, and other Western media outlets. This means that the representation of countries in the global south is now more sanitized than it was before. But, it also means the democratization of world communication flows with countries on the peripheries now having a stronger voice on their own. However, due to a lack of an African media powerhouse, with a corresponding global dimension like Al-Jazeera, the continent still grapples with challenges when it comes to adequate representation on a global stage.

But, there has been a lot of pushback from an Africa perspective regarding international media representation of the continent. Concepts such as the 'Africa Rising' narrative have emerged as an attempt to show that Africa can no longer be viewed through the lens of war, disease, and starvation, but rather it should be a continent making significant progress in economic growth, education and science.

2.0.3 The Africa Rising Narrative

As indicated above, the African rising narrative is a story that has been told with an increasing air of optimism for the African peoples. The term has become the catchphrase for recent development discourse about the continent. Other similar phraseologies like 'hopeful continent,' 'Afro-optimism,' 'global frontier,' etc., have gained traction as the decorative metaphors used in describing the African renewal and economic rebirth. Wekesa (2015) says that underlying this narrative is the big question of whether the continent is on a renewal or is still backward and even retrogressing. Against the backdrop of a dreaded economic paralysis, much of the African nations had been identified as having some of the fastest growing economies before Covid-19 struck. Richard Dowden's frontpage article in *The Guardian* on "Africa's rising rage; middle classes call for revolution" (Dowden 2013) justifies the relevance of the Africa rising debate in this study. Dowden's main concerns are whether Africa's governance has really improved and whether the figures seen in the news correspond with the reality on the ground. Wekesa (2020) attempts an answer to the above question when he points out that the continent has been hailed as the region with the largest number of fastest growing economies globally with recent upward social, economic and political turn around sparking hope for renewal. The numbers of armed conflicts and violent regime changes, for instance, have subsided and a new middle class with appreciable levels of purchasing power is also increasing (Wekesa 2020 P. 12). Wekesa (2020) however notes that two schools of thought have emerged--the Afro-optimists and Afro-pessimists-- when it comes to debate about the Africa rising narrative. The latter dismisses the economic gains made by Africa as negligible and builds on the quicksand of commodity booms. They argue that Africa has failed to industrialize and that the youth bulge heralded as a key cog in the continent's development is a ticking time bomb given high levels of youth unemployment and illiteracy. However, the former celebrates new found areas of economic, political and cultural advancement (Wekesa 2020 P. 12).

Others such as Bunce, et.al (2008) contend that there have been important and profound alterations in the way Africa is represented since the publication of Hawk's *Africa's Media Image* and Wainaina's (2005) essay. They argue that since the cover story of an "Africa Rising" in the Economist in 2011, international print coverage of Africa shows signs of becoming more positive in tone and varied in its subject matter. "The exemplar of this new, positive reporting is the now-famous Economist cover image of a child flying a rainbow-colored, Africa-shaped kite, accompanied by the words, "Africa Rising" (Bunce, et.al 2008). The story talked about Africa's growing middle class, widespread technological innovation, and significant economic development. From then on, write Bunce, et.al (2008), a number of similar, positive articles followed in quick succession: TIME magazine, The New York Times, and other agenda-setting publications heralded a shift in both events and growth statistics "on the ground". Even in terms of representation in the newsrooms, Bunce (2014) says that many news outlets now hire local journalists in Africa to provide them with content instead of posting costly foreign correspondents. She notes that;

The result is that international news – an important source of images and texts in the semiotic construction of 'Africa' – is to a large extent, discovered and written by journalists from the region. News production today is a site of struggle where journalists from diverse backgrounds contest the way in which news events should be framed; and their news stories are consumed by an international audience who are themselves active in writing, commenting and disseminating news. It is in the webs of these relationships that the image of Africa is constructed, and imbued with meaning. (Bunce 2014, P. 2)

She however questions the extent to which this new found newsroom representation of African journalists amounts to key decision making. "But to what extent are local journalists able to challenge traditional representations of Africa? Faced with organizational pressures, and the intense editorial demand for news that sells in international markets, will local nationals simply replicate the writing of their Western colleagues?" (Bunce 2014, P. 2). By the same token, many African journalists, suggests Nyamnjoh, seek employment with foreign Western media and to be accepted, they have to think, see and write as Westerners do (Bunce 2014, P. 2). This implies that even though there are signs of improvement in Africans taking center stage in the representation of their continent, major challenges persist.

Critics of the de-westernization phenomenon argue that digital revolution may have boasted of contra-flows, but new forms of dominance exist. For example, Wekesa (2020) notes that flow of information from the global south still happens via digital platforms owned and managed by pro-western media companies. This proves tricky because it then means that the playing field is still not levelled. Therefore, the question of adequate representation for Africa is still largely a contestable affair. Bunce, et.al (2008), also draw on similar sentiment indicating that although the new narratives about Africa are positive in a way, but they potentially open up risks of perpetuating a neo-colonial sentiment by framing the continent “as a site for international intervention and resource extraction” (Bunce, et.al 2008). To sum up, the meaning and implications of these new forms of representations require further research especially during this coronavirus pandemic. Western media initially made projections that Africa is the continent to worry about, but these projections are yet to materialize. What these assumptions imply is that international media perceptions about Africa are still largely unchanged, narrow and laden with stereotypes.

2.0.4 Theoretical Framework

This research is situated in the broad conceptual frameworks of media representation and international media flows. While theories around global media flows, contra-flows, and globalization will be alluded to, the researcher will focus on media representation as the study's main theoretical framework.

Contextualizing Theory

As we saw in the literature review, many writers have long concluded that international media representation of Africa is laden with stereotypes. But, when it comes to the reporting on Africa during health emergencies, both the HIV-Aids and the Ebola outbreaks are examples to draw inspiration from. It however remains to be seen whether the international media's representation of Africa will be different from the HIV-Aids and Ebola examples during this coronavirus outbreak. This backdrop underpins the relevance of a representation study that seeks to understand how the continent has been reported on throughout this pandemic and what patterns of representation have emerged.

Therefore, the theoretical framework for this study is one in which each of the theories discussed under the literature review is used to explain each one of the research questions and their various aspects. The key research question is an attempt at "finding out whether international media representation of Africa has changed during this pandemic or it is a continuation of past tropes". This question is best answered by looking at how the international media have long reported on Africa. The direct theory applicable here is the media representation theory. In reality construction, says Erjavec (2001) as quoted by Gabore (2020), the media present a particular consideration of the situation and then report evidence to strengthen, legitimize and naturalize the interpretation. In this construction process, news media establish norms and common sense about people, communities, institutions and the world around in order to promote a specific worldview or ideology (Gabore 2020 P. 2). Since the publication of Christopher Hitchens's damning report about Africa in 1994, the continent has been viewed through the lens of a failed state. It is also true, as seen in the literature review, that lots of research has suggested that international media representation of Africa, particularly in the 1990s, was problematic.

This has led to arguments and counter arguments about the need for a proper representation of Africa. 'It has become a well-rehearsed argument that Africa has historically suffered in a multitude of ways from the prevalence of negative and stereotypical representation by the Northern media system over which the continent has no influence and no input' (Bunce, et.al 2008 P. 26). Indeed international media representation has always mattered because Africa has been understood as a continent unable to govern itself; one that is beset by armed conflicts, poverty, hunger and disease. The negative connotations through images and other forms, notes Wainaina (2005), have important implications for global flows. Pokharel (2015) says that Africa has been the origin of several epidemics and pandemics. This frequency of outbreaks has contributed to the stereotypical portrayal of the continent. Therefore, Pokharel (2015) concludes that Western media's representation of Africa typically revolves around images of jungles, animals, poverty, famine and suffering. Such imaging matters because when it comes to Africa, concentration is usually on the sensationalist and exotic stereotype (Schraeder and Endless 1998:29). For Kitzinger and Miller (1992), the Western media's coverage of the HIV/AIDS epidemic constructed Africa as a homogenous disaster-ridden "black continent". HIV in Africa, as they put it, was explained in terms of African culture, poverty, ignorance and promiscuity. They say that AIDS was associated with, and blamed on African sexuality that was "primitive" and "perverse" (Kitzinger and Miller 1992 p. 40). Today, theories of "Afro-pessimism" have gained traction in emphasizing Western media's negative portrayal of Africa. As Bunce, et.al (2008) note, what has followed from this is the emphasis upon how Western actors respond in saving Africa.

In summary, the words and images used by the media come loaded with meaning. In the specific case of international media coverage of Africa during this Covid-19 pandemic (and as we saw in the background and context), the words and images portrayed Africa as a continent in grave danger. But, as we have seen, things have not panned out quite as predicted. In fact, the opposite has been the case, where Western countries suffered the worst of Covid-19. Therefore, a route to answering our main research question will be a reflection on the tropes and images that have been used in the past to describe Africa. As we shall see in the methodology section, collecting data from media reporting on Africa during this pandemic can help us respond to the issue of past and current trends of representation.

Our second question is “how has international media framed discourse about Africa’s response to the pandemic and what agendas have been set?” In this supplementary question, we argue that the theories of media framing and agenda setting will be used to arrive at specific representations. McQuail and Windahl (1981: 62) describe agenda-setting as the power of the media to focus public attention on specific issues. They say that the media place emphasis on particular events through news coverage thereby redirecting public attention to the importance of such events. By doing so, the media set the agenda for public attention and discussion, and consequently lay the foundation for some public opinion on particular issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). What this means for media representation is that the reoccurrence of a particular subject in the news over a period of time, automatically makes that subject prominent. However, McCombs (1997), says that agenda-setting does not necessarily imply that media platforms have agendas they are trying to push relentlessly. ‘It is merely a descriptive term, referring to the result over time of numerous day-to-day decisions by all the gatekeepers in a news organization, from the reporters in the field to the sub-editors and the editors’ (Fourie 2008 P. 239). But as Cowling & Mwale (2020) note, media effects theory had established that what the media thought was important the public equally thought was important. Therefore, early agenda-setting theorists found a greater semblance across news organizations on the agendas being set for public discussion. This points to a tendency for the media to have a shared understanding of what is newsworthy and what is an important public issue (Cowling & Mwale 2020 P. 68).

What this means in the context of our study is that bigger agenda-setting news organizations have far greater power to almost dictate what issues global audiences should think about. We could see during this pandemic that the flows of information about the virus have mainly been dominated by the agenda setting international media platforms. By extension, therefore, international media dominance of news leaves countries in the global South on the receiving end. What we have also seen is that the initial framing of discussions about Africa’s handling of the pandemic directed attention towards the continent’s inability to handle outbreaks. From the analysis thus far, we can conclude that framing, agenda-setting and media representation are interwoven concepts because they help audiences construct, interpret, and form an understanding of news events. By so doing, powerful international news media dictate how the global citizens connect with an issue, communities or nations.

Coronavirus therefore offers us an intriguing window to re-examine what predominant frames and agendas are being pursued by the international media when it comes to the representation of Africa. Our third and final question deals with the trends and patterns of international media coverage during the pandemic. To help answer this question, we will revert to the misrepresentation and under-representation thesis, as set out in the earlier phase of this report. We will try to find out how these two frames manifest in the content. As home to some 1.2 billion people across 54 nations, Africa remains inundated with negative stereotypes and is branded as the “dark continent” (Ekkanath 2018). Despite hopes of an “Africa Rising”, influenced by a rejuvenation in economic and technological prospects, international media coverage of the continent continues to warrant scrutiny. Ekkanath (2018) writes that what has emerged as a trend is the misrepresentation of countries on the continent. This is partly rooted in Africa’s protracted history of violence and governance challenges (Ekkanath 2018). As a consequence, ‘of the aggregate 6-9 percent of African coverage in the international media, over 60 percent of the focus revolves around terrorism, famine, disease, political conflicts, disasters and other calamities’ (Ekkanath 2018: 2). This misrepresented view, argues Bork (2011), is what many Americans and Europeans have of Africa and her peoples. ‘For many Americans, what goes on beyond their own borders is out of sight and out of mind. The concerns of global problems may not directly affect them and feeble attempts are taken to remain informed. A few hours a week with individuals like Katie Couric or the World section of the *New York Times* is enough to keep them in the know’ (Bork 2011 P. 6). Unfortunately, what this translates to is that the stories carried by international media tend to push the same narratives. The subjects appear to be an “undifferentiated mass of pathetic victims” (Bork 2011 P. 6). This paints a reflection of an Africa as a monolithic realm of despair, savagery, war and turmoil. The viewers of these stories take them for ultimate truth, informing their only understanding of the continent (Bork 2011 P. 6). However, these views cannot be construed to mean that the images and texts about Africa are always misrepresented. As the second largest continent, Africa has its fair share of tribulations, disasters, and other governance problems. But, the assumption that the state of affairs in Africa, that the Western world are accustomed to, is a “unitary landscape of unrelenting despair,” is disheartening and ultimately naive (Berkeley, 2001). It remains to be seen therefore, how these trends and patterns have manifested themselves through the lens of a global pandemic like the coronavirus.

Chapter Three

3.0 Methodology

In this chapter, we focus on finding answers to our main research question, which deals with “whether international media representation of Africa has changed during this coronavirus pandemic or it is a continuation of past tropes.” Similarly, we explore answers to the supplementary questions which seek to find out; “How international media have framed discourse about Africa’s response to the pandemic and what agendas have been set” as well as “what trends and patterns of representation have emerged in the international media.” As we have discovered in the previous chapters, international media coverage of Africa has always provoked debate that continues to divide opinions. But when it comes to the idea of representation, Bunce et.al (2008) highlight “Afro-pessimism” as the dominant narrative that international media have pushed. Afro-pessimism can be understood in many aspects, but Bunce et.al (2008: 18) identifies two aspects through which Afro-pessimism manifests itself in news content. There are those stories that deal predominantly with negatives: for instance, famine, disease, conflict, and poverty (Moller 1999). Secondly, there are others that speak of Afro-pessimism in relation to the tone of stories covered as well as the negative evaluation of events, issues and policy in Africa (Bunce et.al 2008:18). In this coronavirus outbreak, for example, coverage of Africa’s initial response focused on themes such as (1) weak healthcare systems, (2) poverty and lack of resources, (3) lack of technological innovation and equipment, and (4) Lack of political leadership to refer to the continent’s earlier attempts at fighting the pandemic.

1) Weak healthcare systems

The coronavirus pandemic once again exposed the long existing gaps in Africa’s health systems. The initial lack of access to testing was highlighted as hampering the continent’s efforts at saving lives. A Reuters survey in May 2020 found that there is less than 1 intensive care bed per 100,000 people across Africa (Hourel et.al 2020). A similar report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) concluded that healthcare systems across the continent are under-resourced, with lower proportions of available hospital beds, intensive care units, and health professionals than other regions of the world.

These fueled genuine concerns about the continent's ability to contain the virus. Thus in May 2020, the WHO sounded an alarm about the virus spiraling out of control in Africa. Thus headlines like: *Virus exposes gaping holes in Africa's health systems* (Reuters, May 7th 2020) etc., became common. It would seem that the continent was covered through this humanitarian and panic frames by the international media. In the data analysis section, we shall see how this actually manifested itself when it comes to the representation of Africa.

2) Poverty and lack of resources

Coronavirus has accelerated global poverty levels leading to deaths, illnesses and economic hardship. According to the World Bank, the pandemic is pushing about 40-60 million people into extreme poverty, with best estimate being 49 million (Mahler et.al 2020). According to the authors, the share of the world's population living on less than \$1.90 per day—is projected to increase from 8.2% in 2019 to 8.6% in 2020, or from 632 million people to 665 million people due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Mahler et.al 2020). Due to more people living close to the international poverty line in the developing world, low and middle-income countries will suffer the greatest consequences in terms of extreme poverty (Mahler et.al (2020). Sub-Saharan Africa will be the hardest hit region with 23 million people pushed into increased extreme poverty (Mahler et.al (2020). It did not surprise therefore to see many African governments struggling with poverty and hunger induced protests as the virus took hold of the continent. In Kenya, for instance, violent police crackdown on hungry civilians lead to deaths . Headlines like; *"Violently imposed lockdowns will not be effective and will do more damage than good"* (Al-Jazeera, 10th April 2020) made headline in the international news. Later we shall examine how these poverty frames played out in the international media and what pattern of representation emerged as a result.

3) Lack of technological innovation and equipment

Timely and credible information during a global health crisis like the coronavirus are the difference between life and death. Trusted information helps people make informed choices and how to protect themselves and their loved ones. A World Bank study on internet usage and epidemic risk for 180 economies suggests that countries with wider internet access and safer internet servers tend to be more resilient to epidemics such as COVID-19.

These countries have better infrastructure (such as energy, and transport) stronger governance and human development (such as health, nutrition and social protection) to cope with pandemics. Of the 193 United Nations member states, 167 countries provided information on their national portals, mobile apps or through social media platforms that covers outbreak statistics, travel restrictions, practical guidance on protection and governmental responses, (Jiang & Ryan 2020). But how has Africa done in terms of technology during this Covid-19 pandemic? Jiang & Ryan (2020) say that some African governments have used digital platforms to launch COVID-19 information services and debunk misinformation. In South Africa, the national health department set up a WhatsApp service to provide information to locals, from symptoms, prevention tips and testing information, (Jiang & Ryan 2020). In Nigeria, health authorities partnered with Facebook to send push notifications to users with information on symptoms and how to avoid infection, and with Twitter to elevate medical information from authoritative sources, (Jiang & Ryan 2020). The same can be said of Senegal, where a \$1 Covid-19 testing equipment that would provide result in ten minutes was being developed. However, controversies remain on whether these gains got the recognition on an international stage with too little reporting on progress made in technology to fight the pandemic in Africa. We shall see, in the analysis section, how Africa has been represented through this technology lens.

4) Lack of political leadership

Africa has also been tangled in a political leadership struggle to fight the coronavirus. From the beginning of the crisis, many African countries showed no direction in their battle against Covid-19. The east African countries of Burundi and Tanzania made international news headlines when the WHO warned of these nations using unscientific means of responding to the health crisis. In fact in Burundi, the WHO officials were expelled from the country at a time when the virus was beginning to peek in Africa. Thus headlines such as; *“Burundi expels WHO officials coordinating coronavirus response” (Al-Jazeera 14th May, 2020)*, *“WHO reps expelled ahead of polls set to go, despite COVID-19” (The Africa Report 18th May, 2020)*, were common in the news. Later, we shall see how some of these headlines contributed to the past tropes of international reporting on Africa and what representational challenges emerged as a result.

In this chapter, we shall focus on discourse analysis as the main research tool to properly appraise the four discursive issues raised above. Discourse analysis has been chosen to analyze findings of this research not merely because of its simplicity, but because of its applicability to the nature of this study. Our main question deals with concepts, themes, and tone of international media coverage in relation to media texts and their applicable social, political and historical contexts. Discourse analysis will help us interpret these relationships and the meanings they convey about Africa in relation to the coronavirus pandemic.

3.0.1 Discourse Analysis Defined

Discourse analysis as a research method emanates from the academic discipline of sociology (Spencer 2003 p. 200). This tool examines “the ways knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts” (Adolphus 2011). As a qualitative research tool, discourse analysis is concerned with examining how language functions and how meaning is created in different social contexts. It can be applied to any instance of written or oral language, as well as non-verbal aspects of communication such as tone and gestures” (Luo 2019 P. 1-3). Meanwhile, Grant *et al.* (2005) as referenced by Fairclough and Wodak (1997 P. 277) say that this tool is not limited to the production of meaning without relevant context. “Discourse is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration. Discourses are always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier, as well as those which are produced synchronically and subsequently.”(Adolphus 2011). What this means is that discourse analysis is particularly helpful where context plays an important role in the understanding of a given phenomenon. As Mankowitz (2005 P. 229) puts it, discourse analysis is particularly relevant when listening to people's own narratives of a situation. It aims at understanding how language is used in real life situations’ (Luo 2019, P. 1-3). In the context of media representation, discourse analysis becomes very useful because it helps us establish the relationship between media text, their context and how audiences ascribe meaning to things.

As discussed both in the literature review and theoretical framework, the representation of Africa in the Western media remains relatively marginalized as compared with other continents (Bunce et.al 2008 P. 80). The authors say that both globalization and migration are key influencers in the way places like Africa are represented by the international media. "Globalization and migration continue to encourage the interaction of different peoples and cultures. So the media portrayal of different parts of the world plays an increasingly important role in either discouraging or promoting respect for other cultures" (Scott 2009, P. 535). As such, the Western media have come under scrutiny for reinforcing stereotypes about Africa. Hence, argue Gruley & Duvall (2012, P. 29), recognizing voices that challenge stereotypical representation is critical to enveloping place images that are geographically accurate.

What these mean in the context of our study is that media contents (text, videos, pictures and audios) come loaded with enormous power. Oftentimes, notes Miles (2012), these contents enforce power dynamics and structured rules. Discourse analysis therefore helps us unpack these various dynamics of "oppressive discourses, such as marginalization and oppression, often accepted as norms" (Miles 2012, P. 1). By using this research method, we are able to shine light on the various representational discourses about Africa during this coronavirus pandemic. For example, some of the discourses we have seen already about Africa are connected with broad terms that are often used to depict the continent's weak fragile systems, poverty, corruption, etc. Also, the seeming lack of reporting on successes, too little reporting on progress made in Africa in responding to Covid-19, lack of acknowledgement of innovation on the continent, etc., are all instances that indicate mis and under-representation of the continent.

3.0.2 Scope and Limitation of the Study

International news organizations have been indispensable in the area of news flows especially during this coronavirus pandemic. Even without data, we can see that most of the Covid-19 information has been flowing mainly from the global north, the hub, to the global south, the periphery. In particular, while Africa was struggling to understand how to report on the outbreak, international news platforms were already far ahead in not only reporting on, but also understanding the pattern of acceleration of the virus. In this regard, three global media houses, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Cable News Network (CNN), and Aljazeera, stood out in relation to reporting on Africa.

They have covered the continent extensively and continue to provide raw news continents about the outbreak throughout. This research therefore examines the BBC, and Aljazeera's coverage of four countries in Africa including; South Africa, Burundi, Senegal, and Kenya. These countries were chosen in terms of (1) geographical regions (south, east, west and central Africa), (2) population sizes, and (3) response to the pandemic. One of these platforms, the BBC, will serve as Western media (global north) representation of Africa and the Qatar based broadcaster, Aljazeera, will represent the contra-flow (global south) perspective of Africa. From the beginning of the pandemic, these media houses have done some of the most extensive and consistent coverage on Africa, giving us access to lots of available data to review. In addition, the BBC's representation of Africa, like other Western media houses, have long attracted questions on accusations of bias, stereotype and even mis or underrepresentation. Aljazeera on the other hand, is regarded as the global media that has the capacity to challenge the hegemonic dominance of BBC and other Western media giants. When it comes to the dominant narrative of international news flows, "developing countries have been portrayed significantly differently from Western countries in history, culture, social customs, and political systems. Thus these views have been shaped by the Western media as "the other", opposite to the West, which is considered more civilized (Said 1978).

As Thussu (2006) notes, "contra-flow of international news is based on post-colonial discourse, focusing on how developing countries use the news to shape their cultural identities and role in the international community" (Thussu 2006, P. 3). Al-Jazeera is therefore the perfect example of voice and, indeed, representation of countries in the global South. This study will primarily examine the contents (online publication of texts) produced by these platforms on coverage of Africa during this pandemic. The researcher picks out articles, news stories and opinion pieces covering the four countries mentioned above and focuses on the broad theme of Covid-19. Articles about these countries are collected twice per month (at the beginning and ending of the month) between the periods of April, May, September and October 2020. In all, 8 articles are collected from Al-Jazeera in April, 8 in May, 8 in September and 8 in October. This gives us a total of 32 articles for one media platform. Together, the process results in the total sampling of 96 articles to review for all media platforms between April, May, September and October 2020 as seen in Table 1.1. Stories are excluded if they are fewer than 50 words and cover other topics unrelated to Covid-19.

The time frames of April, May, September and October have been carefully selected because in April, for instance, the WHO raised concerns about whether Africa's fragile health systems will cope with a spike in Covid-19 cases. These concerns continued to be very real throughout the month of May as the pandemic reached a new milestone in Africa with cases exceeding 100,000 mark (Rummler 2020). Interesting, however, the predictions and concerns that Africa is the continent to worry about proved otherwise. In September, the same WHO commended the continent's handling of the pandemic and caseloads of the virus continued to be lower in Africa throughout October as compared with Europe. In the data analysis and findings section, an attempt will be made to see what changed from April, May, September and October about Africa's handling of the crisis and how the selected international media platforms responded.

Table 1.1: *Sample of articles collected in countries for April, May and September, 2020.*

	BBC	Aljazeera	CNN	Total
South Africa	2	2	2	6
Kenya	2	2	2	6
Burundi	2	2	2	6
Senegal	2	2	2	6
Total	8	8	8	24
April	24			
May	24			
September	24			
October	24			
Total	96			

Articles were coded for their subjects, from a total subject of 10 (see appendix). Those that addressed two subjects equally that dealt with how international media have represented Africa during this pandemic were also coded. This resulted in a total data set of 960 subjects. Twenty-four (24) of these were received from articles published by the BBC and 24 were from articles published by Aljazeera. A supplementary analysis of subjects from these platforms examines how international media have framed discourse about Africa's response to the pandemic and what agendas have been set. Therefore, a second analysis looks at the words and tone of articles used as a means of arriving at the different frames used to represent Africa. As Scott (2009) notes, news agencies provide important raw content of news and therefore, they continue to perform an important role when it comes to the framing of issues about Africa. "The headlines they select underline particular aspects of events or a story, and they place this in a wider context and provide analysis" (Bunce et.al 2008, P.19). Therefore, the researcher searched these platforms for stories that mentioned "Africa" in their headlines in relation to the general theme of Covid-19 in 2020 between the periods of April, May, September and October. Exclusions were made on stories that dealt with (1) subjects other than the coronavirus (the idea is to keep the focus on the pandemic and how Africa is represented in the international media); (2) they comprised obituaries and music reviews, (3) their lengths were fewer than 50 words, (4) in addition to Africa, they dealt with other regions in their headlines. This resulted in a sample of 288 articles as seen in table 1.2. Articles in this sample were coded for their overall words and tone (either positive, negative, or neutral/mixed) used to arrive at different frames and agenda to represent Africa.

Table 1.2 Samples of newspaper articles

	April	May	September	October	Total
CNN	24	24	24	24	96
BBC	24	24	24	24	96
Aljazeera	24	24	24	24	96
Total	72	72	72	72	288

Chapter Four

4.0 Data analysis

In the previous chapter, we sought to describe the processes of finding answers to our main research question which seeks to find out “how international media have represented Africa during this coronavirus pandemic and what patterns have emerged.” Our interest is to see whether the daily coverage of Africa has transcended beyond the dominant Afro-pessimistic narratives identified in the four discourses (weak health systems, poverty and lack of resources, lack of technological innovation and lack of political leadership) in the last chapter. According to our findings, all countries had different priorities at the onset of the crisis as each struggled with its own unique set of challenges. South Africa, for instance, was one of the first countries on the continent to impose strict Covid-19 lockdown. Soon after, stories of its economy disintegrating were making news headlines. In Kenya, harsh lockdown regulations forced poor communities to protest amid livelihood concerns. Interestingly, however, it was during this same period that countries like Senegal were recognized for attempting innovative ways of responding to the outbreak. In April, for instance, half (50%) of Al-Jazeera’s coverage on South Africa (SA) highlighted efforts at revamping the country’s weakened economy. In Senegal, the focus was on technological innovation (TI) with a 100% coverage of the country focusing on this subject. Meanwhile, in Kenya, about 50% of reporting was on conflict and protest (CP). A similar pattern of reporting was noticed by the BBC. For instance, from a total of 5.6% reporting on the economy (ECO), SA accounted for 17% of the coverage. Whereas in Burundi, the focus was on domestic politics (DP). Similarly, out of a 22.2% reporting on livelihood and food (LF) for all four countries, Senegal had about 33%, followed by Kenya on 25%, Burundi (20%) and SA (17%).

These figures go a long way to tell us about the priorities for all the countries under review during the month of April. While the focus was different for each of our four countries under review in April, we saw a trend emerging in May for both BBC and Al-Jazeera. For instance, we noticed that reporting on Burundi became associated with domestic politics (DP) and SA with the economy. For Kenya, the focus was on CP and LF. Also worthy of note in May was that some of the topics (Weak health system, poverty, corruption, lack of resources, deaths, conflict and protest etc.) all received considerable attention as we shall see in the tables and charts to follow.

In September and October, the focus of reporting remained pretty much the same for all countries except that there were slight variations in countries like Kenya, which had some of the highest reporting on the economy by Al-Jazeera in October at 40%. However, the pattern of reporting remained similar for all four countries with SA dominating on the economy (ECO), Burundi leading on DP, Kenya and SA leading on CP. Senegal remained on top for coverage on technology and innovation (TI), as well as vaccine and stereotype (VS).

4.01 How have international media represented Africa during this pandemic?

In terms of international media representation during this pandemic, our findings seem to suggest a nearly obvious trend. In April, we saw that focus shifted according to areas of priorities for each country. It was hard to see a pattern emerging because each nation struggled with its own individual problems. But as time went on, we saw a kind of consistency with regards to media representation. For instance in May, when the pandemic was beginning to peak in Africa, the focus of reporting was mostly on pre-existing topics (weak health systems, poverty and lack of resources, corruption, livelihood etc.) that represent past tropes of international reporting on Africa. Whereas between September and October, we noticed a shift. Reference to the above topics started to change for others that denote more positive reporting. This is probably unsurprising because Africa's handling of the pandemic was duly recognized in September by the WHO for making progress in innovation and surviving some of the scary predictions in May. This positive tone of reporting continued in October as cases and deaths remained under check across the continent, except for South Africa where cases and deaths were surging. However, while some countries recorded higher coverage on the economy and technology and innovation, which reflect positive reporting, others accounted for the highest coverage on topics like weak health systems, conflict and protest and livelihood and food (LF), which reflect negativity. For instance, in April, Aljazeera had a 28.6% reporting on LF across all four countries, as we shall see in tables 2.0, and 2.01. Kenya and South Africa each accounted for 50% coverage on the topic. From a 14.3% total reporting on the economy (ECO) by Al-Jazeera, only SA accounted for 50% coverage. When it comes to TI, Senegal accounted for 100% out of a 14.3% total reporting on the topic. Kenya remained the only country with 50% coverage on conflict and protest (CP) from a total of 14.3% reporting.

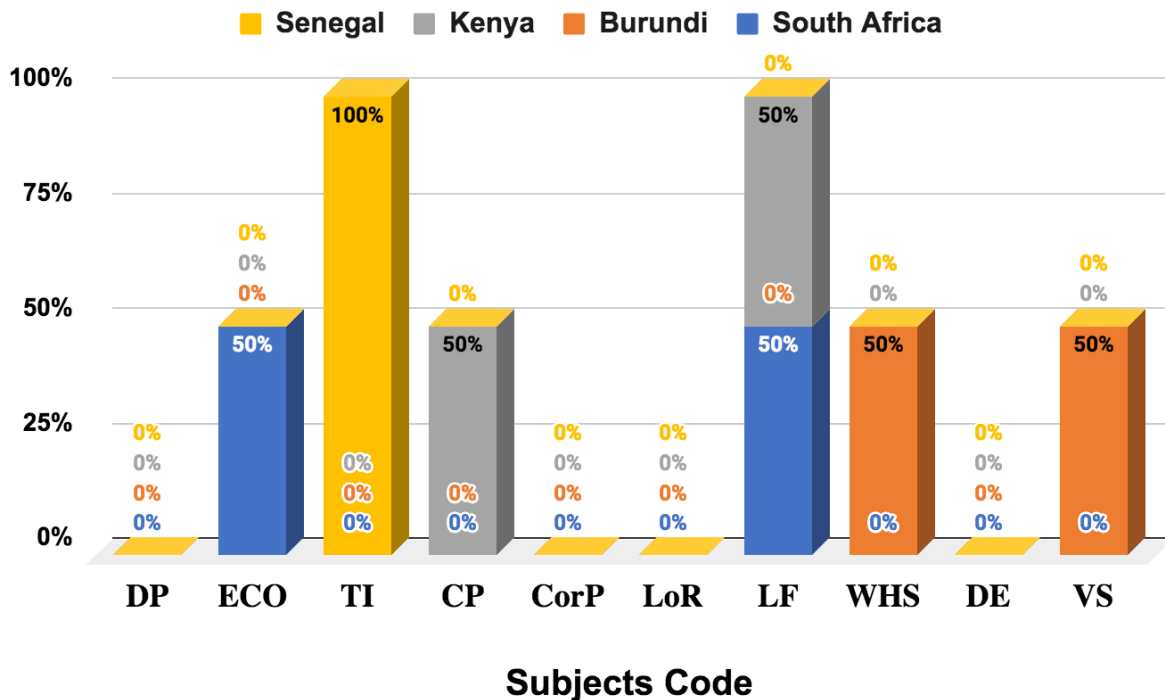
2.0: Aljazeera's April Coverage in table 2020

Subjects	Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
Domestic Politics	DP					0
The Economy	ECO	1				1
Technology/Innovation	TI				1	1
Conflict/Protest	CP			1		1
Corruption/poverty	CorP					0
Lack of Resources	LoR					0
Livelihood/Food	LF	1		1		2
Weak Health Systems	WHS		1			1
Death	DE					0
Vaccine and Stereotype	VS		1			1
Total:		2	2	2	1	7

Table 2.0: Aljazeera's April Coverage, 2020 in Percentage (%)

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
ECO	50%	0%	0%	0%	14.3%
TI	0%	0%	0%	100%	14.3%
CP	0%	0%	50%	0%	14.3%
CorP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LoR	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LF	50%	0%	50%	0%	28.6%
WHS	0%	50%	0%	0%	14.3%
DE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
VS	0%	50%	0%	0%	14.3%
Total	28.6%	28.6%	28.6%	14.3%	100%

Aljazeera's April Coverage, 2020 Chart View



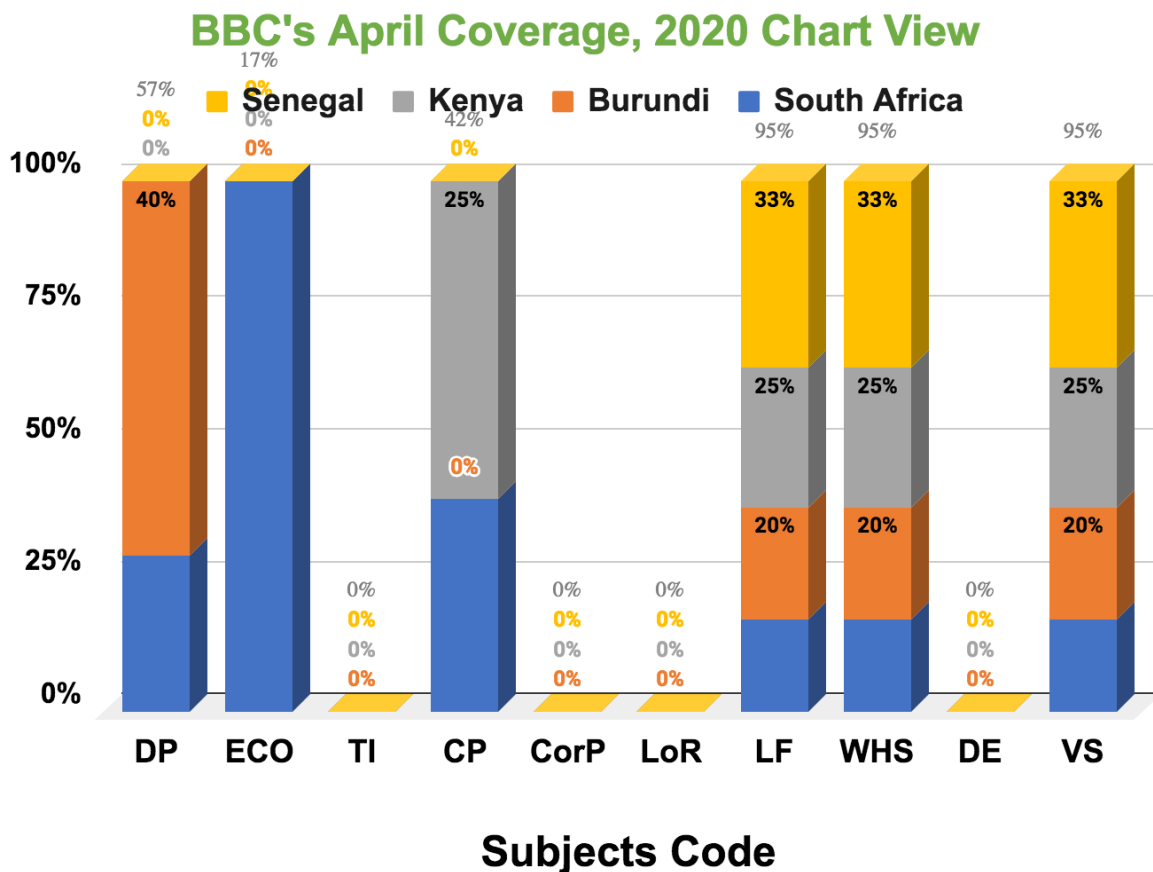
There were some noticeable differences in reporting on the various subjects between Al-Jazeera and the BBC within the same period, as we will see in tables 2.02, and 2.03. For instance, while Alj-Jazeera accounted for 14.3% total reporting on WHS, the BBC had a total of 22.2% coverage on the same subject with Senegal accounting for the highest at 33% followed by Kenya (25%), Burundi (20%) and SA (17%). Whereas Al-Jazeera had no score on DP, the BBC had a total of 16.7% reporting on the topic. From this, Burundi had 40%, followed by SA at 17%. Again, there was a sharp difference in coverage on vaccines and stereotypes (VS). The BBC reported 22.2% on this topic for all four countries. Senegal accounted for 33% of the reporting, Kenya 25%, Burundi 20% and SA 17%.

Table 2.01: BBC's April Coverage in table 2020

Subjects	Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
Domestic Politics	DP	1	2	0	0	3
The Economy	ECO	1	0	0	0	1
Technology/Innovation	TI	0	0	0	0	0
Conflict/Protest	CP	1	0	1	0	2
Corruption/poverty	CorP	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of Resources	LoR	0	0	0	0	0
Livelihood/Food	LF	1	1	1	1	4
Weak Health Systems	WHS	1	1	1	1	4
Death	DE	0	0	0	0	0
Vaccine and Stereotype	VS	1	1	1	1	4
Total		6	5	4	3	18

Table 2.01: BBC's April Coverage in Percentage (%) 2020

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	17%	40%	0%	0%	16.7%
ECO	17%	0%	0%	0%	5.6%
TI	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
CP	17%	0%	25%	0%	11.1%
CorP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LoR	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LF	17%	20%	25%	33%	22.2%
WHS	17%	20%	25%	33%	22.2%
DE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
VS	17%	20%	25%	33%	22.2%
Total	33.3%	27.8%	22.2%	16.7%	100%



What these show in terms of media representation are that even within the two media platforms (BBC and Aljazeera), the topics of interest were different for each outlet. For instance, while the BBC recorded nothing on TI, Aljazeera had a 14.3% coverage on the topic with Senegal accounting for 100% of the reporting. Despite the fact that priorities were different between the two media house under review, even at this early stage, we could see a patten emerging in terms of representation. Topics such as conflict and protest, weak health systems, livelihood and food as well as corruption were more prominent in the BBC's coverage of Africa, which reflect negativity and humanitarian reporting. On the other hand, Al-Jazeera covered more stories dealing with the economy, innovation in technology, which are often associated with growth and positivity. Although it was difficult to draw a final conclusion at this stage of the pandemic, it was interesting to see these divide in the choices of topics covered by both media houses.

4.02 How have the international media framed discussions about Africa and what agendas have been set?

Here, we shall focus our analysis on the four discourses--weak health systems, poverty and lack of resources, lack of technological innovation and lack of political leadership—identified above to see how both media houses framed discussions about the continent and the agendas that were set.

4.02.1 Weak health systems

From our findings thus far, there is anecdotal evidence indicating misrepresentation of Africa by the global North media--the BBC. For example, some of the discourses we have seen are connected with topics that are often used to depict the continent's weak health systems, poverty, corruption, lack of resources, food, livelihood, domestic politics etc. Also, the seeming lack of reporting on successes, etc., are all instances that indicate underrepresentation of the continent. More concerning, however, was the sounding of the alarm bell by the WHO in May 2020, that the pandemic would overwhelm Africa's weak health systems. It was interesting to see how the international media responded with headlines including; *"The coronavirus could devastate Africa: The continent's governments are not well-prepared to fight a pandemic"* (The Washington Post 18 March, 2020). *"A Nightmare Scenario: Coronavirus Could Devastate Africa"* (U.S News 26th February, 2020). *"Covid-19 Exposes Healthcare Shortfalls"* (Reliefweb 8th June, 2020) etc., were all over the international media. These types of news framing were indicative of the past tropes of crisis reporting on Africa. For instance, in May, there was an obvious pattern that emerged particularly for Al-Jazeera's coverage of the continent. All ten subjects received a considerable amount of reporting across all four countries. We could however see that while certain countries continued to dominate on some topics, (ECO, CP, CorP, LF, WHS and VS), six of the ten topics got more attention as we shall see in table 2.2. For example, the ECO, CP, LF, WHS and VS, all received a 13.5% total reporting for Al-Jazeera in May across the four countries. What remains a puzzle, however, was the seeming lack of corresponding coverage of how well the continent's so called weak health systems have done throughout this crisis. Despite the scary predictions at the onset of the outbreak, Africa's health sector seems to have coped very well in responding to the pandemic, despite its lack of resources, manpower and equipment. This has a lot to say about the motivations of the international media and their agenda when it comes to reporting on Africa.

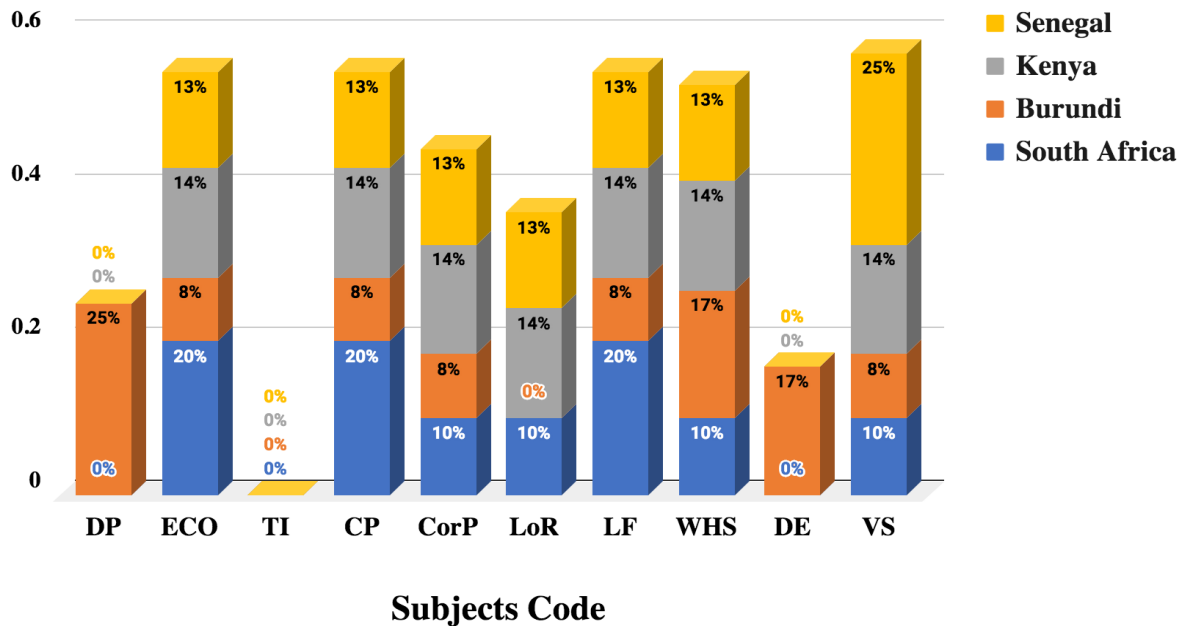
Table 2.02: Aljazeera's May Coverage in Table 2020

Subjects	Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
Domestic Politics	DP		3			3
The Economy	ECO	2	1	1	1	5
Technology/Innovation	TI					0
Conflict/Protest	CP	2	1	1	1	5
Corruption/poverty	CorP	1	1	1	1	4
Lack of Resources	LoR	1		1	1	3
Livelihood/Food	LF	2	1	1	1	5
Weak Health Systems	WHS	1	2	1	1	5
Death	DE		2			2
Vaccine and Stereotype	VS	1	1	1	2	5
Total		10	12	7	8	37

Table 2.02: Aljazeera's May Coverage, 2020 in Percentage (%)

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	0%	25%	0%	0%	8.1%
ECO	20%	8%	14%	13%	13.5%
TI	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
CP	20%	8%	14%	13%	13.5%
CorP	10%	8%	14%	13%	10.8%
LoR	10%	0%	14%	13%	8.1%
LF	20%	8%	14%	13%	13.5%
WHS	10%	17%	14%	13%	13.5%
DE	0%	17%	0%	0%	5.4%
VS	10%	8%	14%	25%	13.5%
Total	27.0%	32.4%	18.9%	21.6%	100.0%

Aljazeera's May Coverage, 2020 Chart View



4.02.2 Poverty and lack of resources

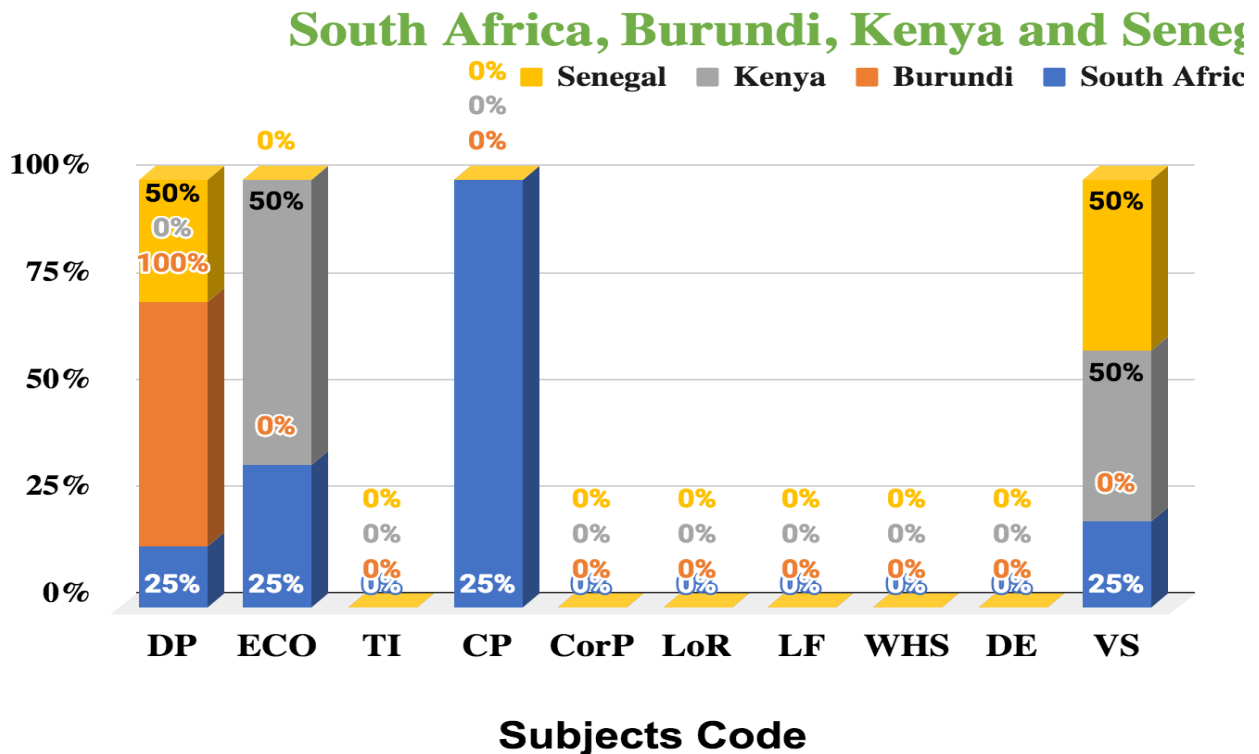
Throughout the continent, the poverty narrative pushed itself through protests that met with strong police resistance and in some countries, leading to deaths. Suffices to say that continent leaders were caught off-guard and therefore ill-prepared to respond to the Covi-19 outbreak. With its fair share of poverty and governance challenges, it was difficult for many African nations to balance between imposing lockdown restrictions and providing for the survival of their people. In no time, protests erupted across the continents as police resorted to the use of violence to enforce lockdown regulations. This was easy to see in countries like Kenya where reporting on livelihood challenges, conflicts and protests consistently dominated international news headlines. While the findings here are not entirely strange for some of the subjects, they are very strange for others. When it comes to reporting on deaths (DE) for example, it is unsurprising that no reporting was done on the subject during this month. At this point of the outbreak, Africa had just reached the 100,000 mark of infections with ostensibly low death rate as compared with Europe. There was seemingly less attention on technological innovation in Africa by the global north media. The fact that there was no reporting in the BBC on CP, when protests were erupting in Africa due to livelihood concerns, was totally strange.

Table 2.03: BBC's May Coverage in Table 2020

Subjects	Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
Domestic Politics	DP	1	2	0	1	4
The Economy	ECO	1	0	1	0	2
Technology/Innovation	TI	0	0	0	0	0
Conflict/Protest	CP	1	0	0	0	1
Corruption/poverty	CorP	0	0	0	0	0
Lack of Resources	LoR	0	0	0	0	0
Livelihood/Food	LF	0	0	0	0	0
Weak Health Systems	WHS	0	0	0	0	0
Death	DE	0	0	0	0	0
Vaccine and Stereotype	VS	1	0	1	1	3
Total		4	2	2	2	10

Table 2.03: BBC's May Coverage in Percentage (%) 2020

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	25%	100%	0%	50%	40.0%
ECO	25%	0%	50%	0%	20.0%
TI	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
CP	25%	0%	0%	0%	10.0%
CorP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LoR	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LF	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
WHS	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
DE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
VS	25%	0%	50%	50%	30.0%
Total	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	100.0%



4.03 What trends and patterns of representation have emerged in the international media?

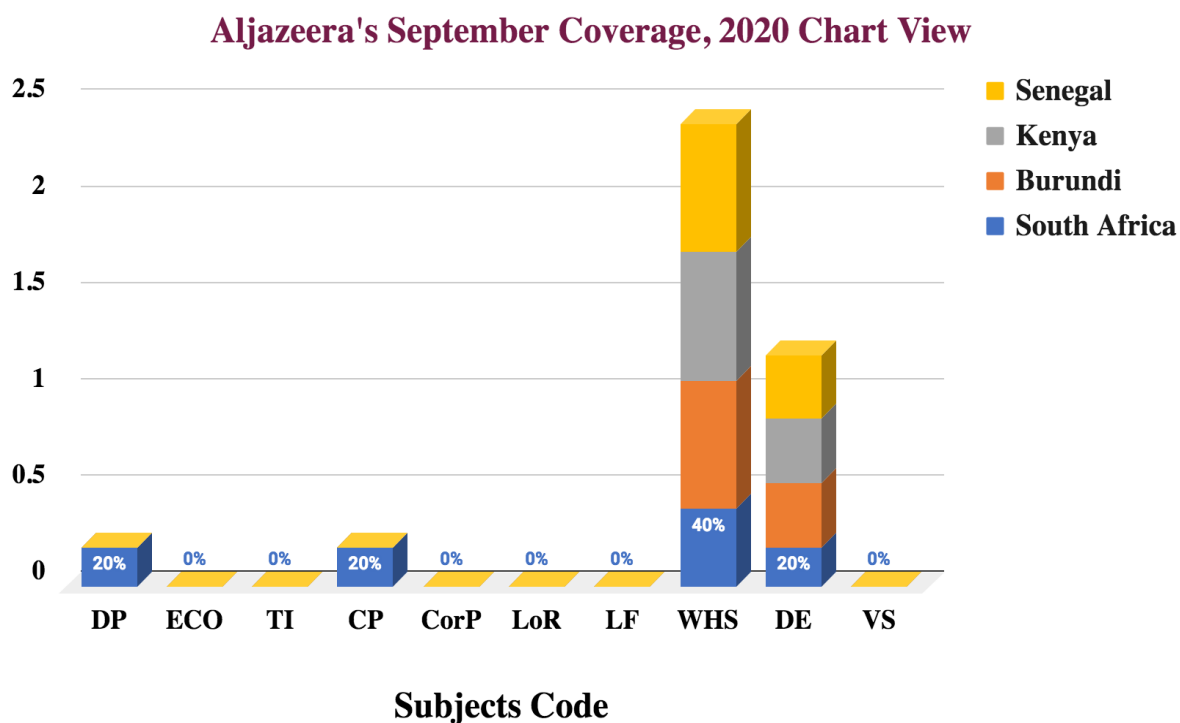
Already in May, we saw a consistent trend and pattern of representation emerging in the international media. For instance, when we talk about DP, Burundi comes to mind. In the case of the economy, it is South Africa. When it comes to technology and innovation, we think of Senegal. For Kenya, it is either CP or LF, and all the remaining subjects received mixed attention. Beside the mention of these topics, between Aljazeera and the BBC, we also saw some noticeable variations in the topics that were prioritized in May. For example, while WHS, CP, CorP, LoR, were almost none issues for the BBC in May, these were extensively covered by Aljazeera. For the BBC, the focus in May was on VS and DP. For Aljazeera, it was about reflecting on the general outlook of Africa's response to the crisis. But, to critically appraise what trends and patterns of representation emerged about Africa during this pandemic, we also need to look at the discourses of lack of political leadership and lack of technological innovation through the data from September and October.

4.03.1 Lack of political leadership

When it comes to the discursive analysis of Africa's handling of the pandemic and what trends and patterns emerged with regards media representation, we could see that DP and VS were top of the agenda for the BBC in May. No doubt that this was the case because May was a period when bizarre events happened in some Africa countries. In Burundi, for example, the WHO experts were asked out of the country for what the government called unacceptable interference into national matters. The country was again planning on going ahead with a controversial election amid concerns of an escalation in coronavirus cases. We saw stories such as; *"Burundi holds presidential election amid coronavirus outbreak"* (VOA News, 20th May 2020), making headlines. International media agenda about the country was therefore framed around the government prioritizing politics over citizens' lives. It was during this same time that countries like Madagascar were boasting of herbal cure for coronavirus. Soon after, international news headlines like; *"Madagascar president's herbal tonic fails to halt Covid-19 spike"* (BBC, 14th August 2020), became topical. The frames through which these narratives were pushed reflected long held stereotypes about the continent. They tended to propagate negative connotations associated with herbal concoctions in Africa to denote Madagascar's cure for the pandemic. On the other hand, while Aljazeera made it its business to push the narratives around the continent's challenges in responding to the crisis by highlighting topics like WHS, CP, CorP, LoR etc., these subjects were a non-issue for the BBC. In September, however, an interesting finding for Aljazeera was that both DE and WHS got the highest number of reporting with WHS accounting for 57.1% and DE 28.6% reporting respectively. From the 57.1%, Senegal, Kenya, and Burundi each received a coverage of 67% on WHS with SA accounting for 40% on the same subject. Out of the 28.6% total reporting on DE by Aljazeera, Senegal, Kenya and Burundi each recorded 33% coverage and SA again received the lowest with 20%. Interestingly, when it comes to reporting on ECO, TI, LoR, LF, CorP and VS, Aljazeera had no reporting on these subjects in September as we shall see in 3.0. Another noticeable change in Aljazeera's September coverage is that both DP and CP received a 7.1% reporting and in both cases, SA accounted for the only coverage at 20% for both instances.

Table 2.04: Aljazeera's September Coverage, 2020 in Percentage (%)

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	20%	0%	0%	0%	7.1%
ECO	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
TI	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
CP	20%	0%	0%	0%	7.1%
CorP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LoR	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LF	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
WHS	40%	67%	67%	67%	57.1%
DE	20%	33%	33%	33%	28.6%
VS	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
Total:	35.7%	21.4%	21.4%	21.4%	100.0%



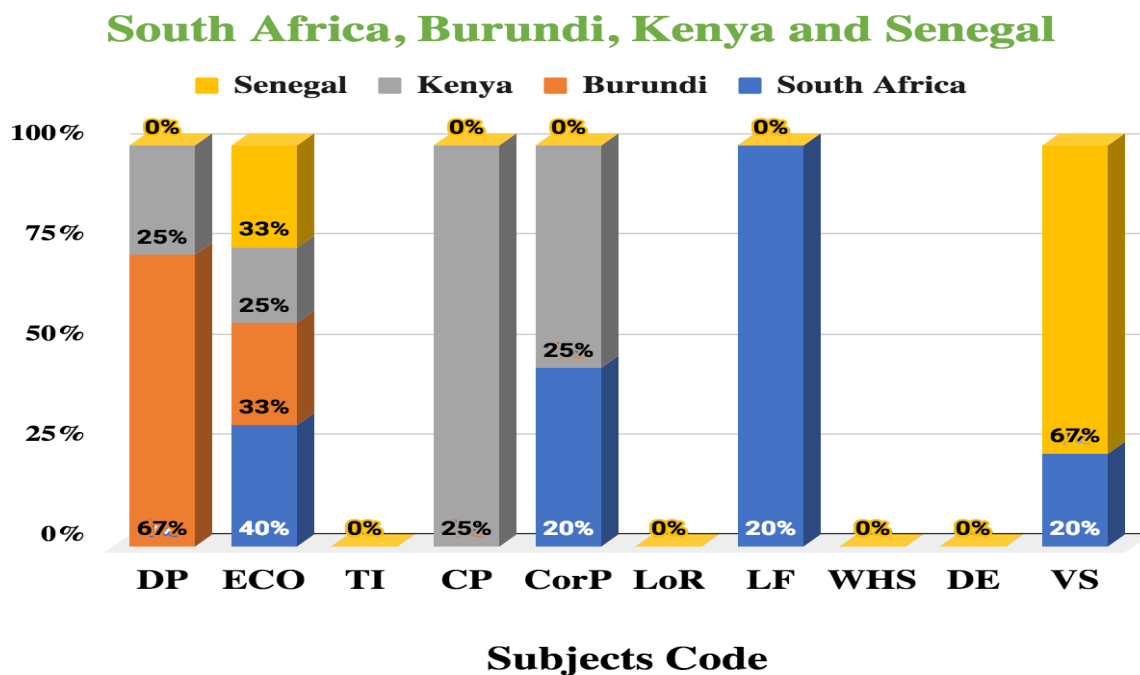
For the BBC, on the other hand, we see that the ECO got the highest coverage at 33.3% in total for all four countries. We also see that SA maintained its place with 40% of the BBC's reporting on the country highlighting this subject. This was followed by Burundi and Senegal with both having 33% coverage and Kenya 25%. Meanwhile, DP and VS again got considerable attention by the BBC at 20% each for all four countries. From this total, Burundi continued to dominate on DP with 67% of the BBC's reporting on the country focusing on this subject. As table 3. 1 shows, reporting on LF and CP both got a total of 6.7% coverage for all four countries with SA having 20% on LF and Kenya receiving 25% on CP.

4.03.2 Lack of technological innovation

Interestingly, while no country received any coverage on TI in September for both the BBC and Al-Jazeera, Senegal did get a 33% coverage on the subject by Aljazeera in October. This was an interesting finding because for the first time in a long time, African countries were leading in innovation when it comes to responding to a health emergency. As discussed above, online platforms made it possible for millions of students in Africa to access education during lockdown while also helping to contain the virus. According to Jiang & Ryan (2020) African governments used digital platforms to launch COVID-19 information services and debunk misinformation. Countries like South Africa, Nigeria, used social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook etc., to provide much needed information about the outbreak. However, what this study has found is that there is little or no corresponding coverage on these technological gains in Africa . Equally so, the lack of acknowledgement of innovation on the continent raises valid questions about the motivations behind some of the grim predictions and reporting on the continent by the global media.

Table 2.05: BBC's September Coverage in Percentage (%) 2020

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	0%	67%	25%	0%	20.0%
ECO	40%	33%	25%	33%	33.3%
TI	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
CP	0%	0%	25%	0%	6.7%
CorP	20%	0%	25%	0%	13.3%
LoR	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LF	20%	0%	0%	0%	6.7%
WHS	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
DE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
VS	20%	0%	0%	67%	20.0%
Total	33.3%	20.0%	26.7%	20.0%	100.0%



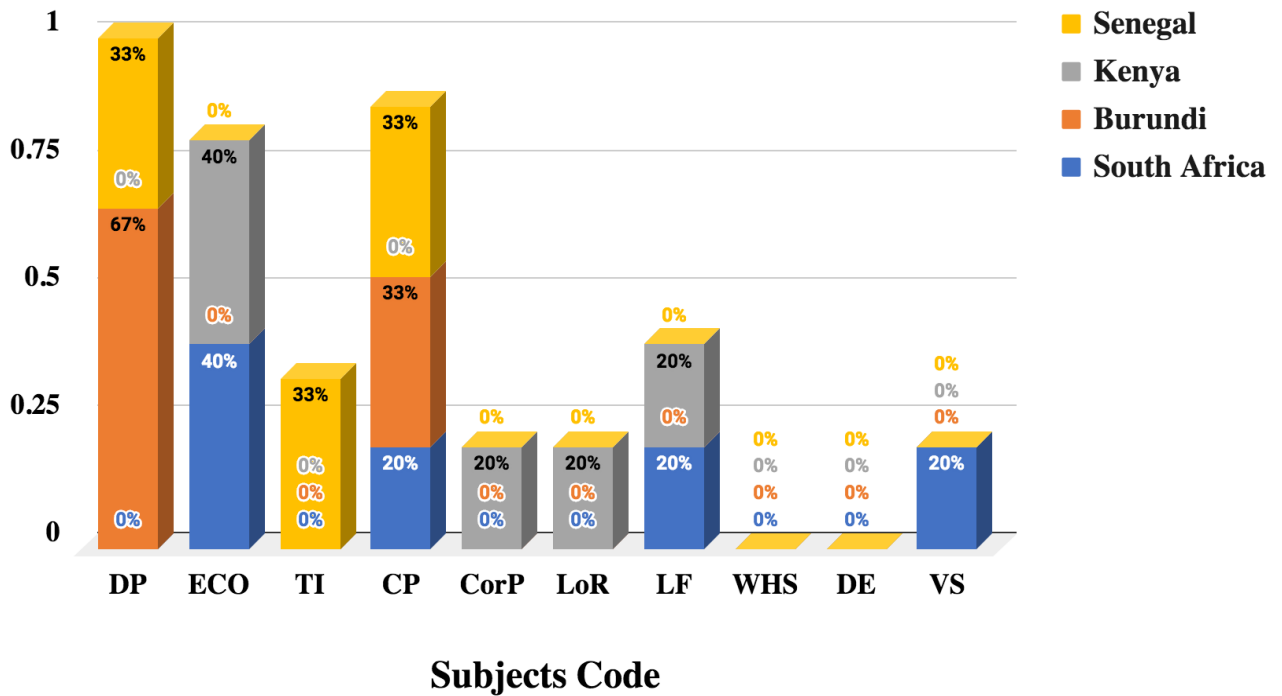
When we look at the trends and patterns of reporting from September to October, we can see that there is not much alteration in the attention that all four countries received on some subjects.

For instance, when it comes to reporting on DP, Burundi had the same score of 67% by Al Jazeera in October, much the same pattern of reporting on the subject by the BBC in September. Not much shifted for the ECO as well. Again, like the BBC in September, both Kenya and SA got significant levels of reporting at (40%) each on this subject by Aljazeera in October.

Table 2.06: Aljazeera's October Coverage, 2020 in Percentage (%)

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	0%	67%	0%	33%	18.8%
ECO	40%	0%	40%	0%	25.0%
TI	0%	0%	0%	33%	6.3%
CP	20%	33%	0%	33%	18.8%
CorP	0%	0%	20%	0%	6.3%
LoR	0%	0%	20%	0%	6.3%
LF	20%	0%	20%	0%	12.5%
WHS	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
DE	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
VS	20%	0%	0%	0%	6.3%
Total	31.3%	18.8%	31.3%	18.8%	100.0%

Aljazeera's October Coverage, 2020 Chart View

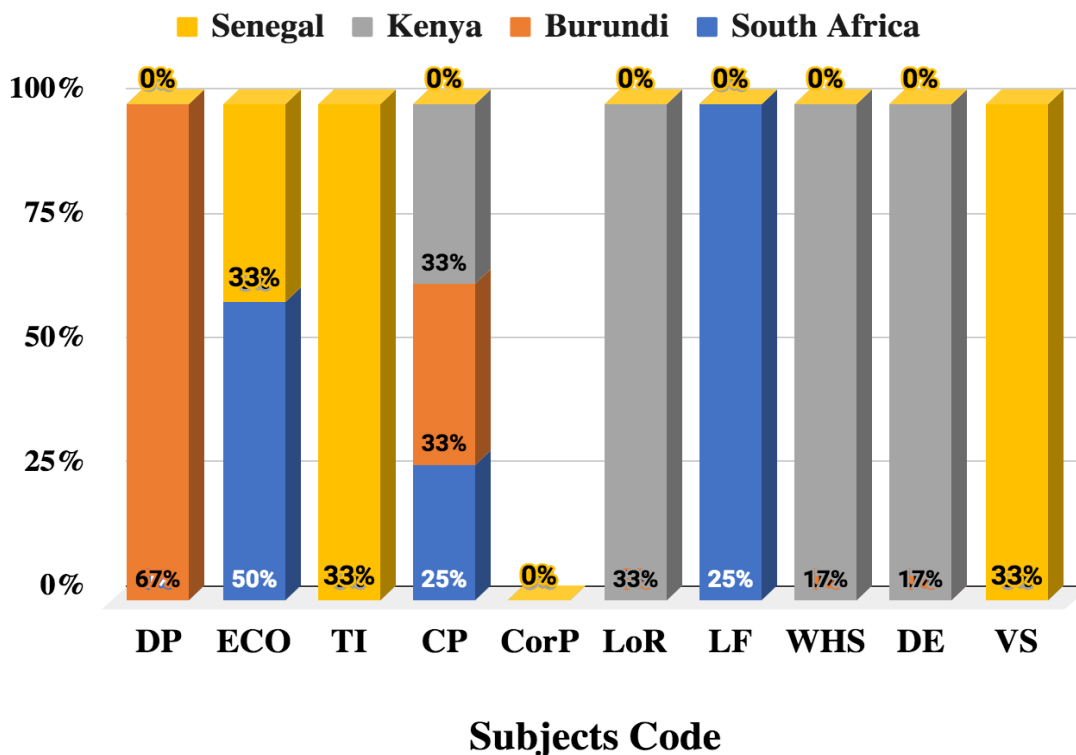


Meanwhile, data for the BBC in October leads us to the same conclusion as above with 67% of reporting on Burundi focusing on DP as seen with Aljazeera within the same period. But, we do see a slightly higher percentage of reporting on the economy with a total of 18.8% and SA having the highest at 50% followed by Senegal on 33%. The BBC had a considerable reporting on CP with a 25% total for all four countries and both Burundi and Kenya accounted for 33% each with SA having a total of 25% coverage. Senegal maintained its place with reporting on TI at 33% from a total of 6.3% coverage on the subject by the BBC. The same 6.3% total reporting is seen across LF, WHS, DE and VS with Kenya having the same score (17%) on both WHS and DE. While Senegal had 33% coverage on VS, SA had 25% on LF. Table 3.3 below explains more.

Table 2.07: BBC's October Coverage in Percentage (%) 2020

Subjects Code	South Africa	Burundi	Kenya	Senegal	Total
DP	0%	67%	0%	0%	12.5%
ECO	50%	0%	0%	33%	18.8%
TI	0%	0%	0%	33%	6.3%
CP	25%	33%	33%	0%	25.0%
CorP	0%	0%	0%	0%	0.0%
LoR	0%	0%	33%	0%	12.5%
LF	25%	0%	0%	0%	6.3%
WHS	0%	0%	17%	0%	6.3%
DE	0%	0%	17%	0%	6.3%
VS	0%	0%	0%	33%	6.3%
Total	25.0%	18.8%	37.5%	18.8%	100.0%

South Africa, Burundi, Kenya and Senegal



Chapter Five

5.0 Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

As far as representation is concerned, we cannot emphasize enough the point of perceived or even existing bias and stereotypes in the Western media about Africa. Throughout this study, we have seen arguments and counter arguments about how Western media have always dominated the global flow of information and how this has culminated into a lopsided representation of Africa. We have also seen how this problematic flow has resulted into a perceived bias of the continent. Our study has revealed that there is no one way of looking at media representation of Africa during this pandemic. This point is well echoed by Bunce et.al (2008), who say that the representations of Africa are diverse and multi-dimensional. “Even within one publication, content can range from texts and images that are reductive and stereotypical through to those that are challenging, self-reactive, and critical,”(Bunce et.al 2008 P. 36). This is quite true as we have discovered. The stereotypical narratives through which the continent was covered by the international media during the 1990s and early 2000s have changed almost completely. As Mahieu and Joye (2018) note, more positive words like “hopeful,” “rising” and even “new” etc., are now used to refer to Africa. This has resulted into what Nothias (2014) identified as the Afro-optimistic discourse.

Our findings tell us that during this pandemic, different subjects have emerged as interest areas for different media platforms depending on the country under review. For example, even though SA has suffered the worst of Covid-19 infections and deaths on this continent, yet, the focus in terms of international media coverage has mostly been on the country’s economy. Headlines like: *“Reopening South Africa’s economy may be especially painful”* (Aljazeera, 1st May 2020), *“South Africa’s president unveils \$60bn plan to boost economy”* (Aljazeera, 15th October 2020) etc., have been very common in the international media. In Burundi, the focus has been on domestic politics. In Kenya, it has been conflict and protest and in Senegal, technology and innovation have been leading the headlines. As we can see, what is an issue for one country or media platform, is not necessarily an issue for another country or media platform. Therefore, no intersection point has been identified where two or three countries dominate the headlines on any given subject. However, we have also seen scant evidence of past tropes of international media representation during the early stages of the pandemic.

Our study tells us that the representation of Africa by Aljazeera, for instance, focused more broadly on topics like the economy, technology and innovation, which often denote positivity. On the other hand, the BBC concentrated more on topics like WHS, LF, VS and DP, which are often associated with negativity. This is an interesting point indeed, as it goes a long way to tell us that, for the global North media, the focus of reporting on Africa during a health emergency often takes a humanitarian or crisis dimension just like in the case of Ebola and HIV/Aids. This could be seen through the early predictions of Covid-19 overwhelming Africa's weak health systems as seen in the news headlines below. *"Public health experts: Coronavirus could overwhelm the developing world"* (Washington Post, 1st April, 2020), *"Africa's fragile health systems rush to contain coronavirus"* (The Guardian, 20th May 2020). Indeed, these predictions went beyond mere Covid-19 numbers. Other factors like poor political leadership, corruption and poverty were highlighted as factors that could be decisive in the continent's response to the outbreak. But, as we have seen, things have not panned out the way they were predicted. However, our findings suggest that more Afro-optimistic narratives have emerged as the dominant frames through which Africa has been reported on during this pandemic. This is reflected through more reporting on topics like technology and innovation, the economy, which are associated with development. The headline below is very indicative. *"Senegalese engineering students fight coronavirus with inventions"* (Aljazeera, 13th May 2020). We must, however, note that while the representation of Africa has been positive overall, the same argument cannot be said of other news platforms that were not captured in this study. Even with the BBC and Aljazeera, there were times when the focus of reporting shifted from country to country.

5.01 Emerging trends and patterns of representation

In terms of trends and patterns of representation that have emerged in the international media, our data tells us that in April, it was hard to see a particular trend sprouting. Countries around the globe were struggling to understand the new Covid-19 affliction. In May, however, it was easy to see a pattern emerging with all countries having specific focus areas. As stated already, when it came to reporting on topics like the ECO, SA started to dominate the trend of reporting across both the BBC and Al Jazeera. On the other hand, coverage on Burundi focused on domestic politics (DP), while in Senegal, attention was on technology and innovation (TI) and in Kenya, it was mostly conflict and protest (CP) or the lack of resources (LoR).

Interestingly, these same patterns of reporting remained almost unchanged in September and October, albeit minor variations in the reporting on certain subjects between both media houses. For instance, while Al Jazeera had no reporting on three subjects, CorP, LoR and LF, in September, the BBC had a 13.3% total reporting on CorP. Kenya accounted for 25% and SA 20% of the total coverage. Again in September, we saw that most of Al Jazeera's reporting was on WHS and DE with 57.1% total reporting on the subject. Kenya, Senegal and Burundi accounted for 67% coverage each and SA 40%. On DE, Al Jazeera had a 28.6% total reporting and Senegal, Kenya and Burundi again accounted for 33% each with SA on 20%. This was however not the case with the BBC with both WHS and DE receiving no coverage for all four countries. What these figures have shown is that at no point between September and October did we see one or two particular subjects dominating the headlines for both media platforms. If anything, both media houses had their own priority topics for all countries. The only noticeable patterns that remained very consistent from April to October were coverage on both the economy and domestic politics with both SA and Burundi dominating proceedings on these subjects.

5.02 Africa's representation during Covid-19 pandemic

Based on our data, we can see that in May, the focus areas were very different between Al-Jazeera and the BBC. While the Qatar based media giant had an all-round reporting on Africa with subjects like ECO, CP, WHS, LF and VS dominating headlines across all four countries, it was a totally different complexion for the BBC. While Al-Jazeera did a holistic reflection of Africa's successes and challenges in responding to the outbreak, for the BBC, reporting was based on a selected number of topics. This speaks to an interesting dimension in terms of media representation. Topics like DP and VS were mostly associated with negativity as far as the beginning of the pandemic was concerned. As explained earlier, countries like Burundi and Madagascar were mostly in the news for both political instability and herbal remedy for Covid-19. The BBC gave prominence to these topics over others like technology and innovation and the economy, which denote positive reporting. There could be good reasons for this. As some African countries prepared to organize political rallies amid the pandemic, so too were talks about herbal cure, conflicts erupting over livelihood concerns. All these culminated into an image problem for the continent, thus reinforcing concerns that the pandemic could get worse in Africa.

In conclusion, although the international media representation of Africa during this pandemic has been favorable, both in terms of tone, images and topics, there are still doubts about true Afrocentric discourse about the continent. Mohmoh (2003), says that true Afrocentric discourse is still lacking in Western media as African voices are absent or treated with a misplaced tendency towards political correctness on behalf of the Western journalists (Van Aelst and Votquenne 2003). However, Scott (2017) warns that creating a single narrative about what previous literature has shown us about the representation of Africa can be problematic. Hence, the reason why we conclude here that the representation of Africa during this pandemic has not been dominated by any particular (positive or negative) narrative. If anything, there is a more middle level compromise that has emerged with mostly neutral language and tone of writing and reporting.

5.03 Limitations of the study

Clearly, one limitation of the study was a need to cut down the timeframe, countries and number of media outlets under review. This was done to have manageable samples. The selected international media organizations (BBC and Aljazeera) have helped us look at coverage from the perspectives of the global North and the global South across four countries in Africa. Attempts have also been made in the data analysis and findings section to shed light on events that received unusual and or excessive attention from these media houses in connection to Africa and the coronavirus crisis. But, whether our chosen months of April, May, September and October 2020, were representative enough of a broader picture of international media reporting on Africa during this pandemic is something for another research. However, this project has endeavored to reduce the possibilities of irregularities by attempting to analyze a broad sample of data over a four months period (the starting, which is the most critical period, and the later part of the pandemic when knowledge about the crisis was gaining momentum).

Appendix

Domestic Politics

The Economy

Technology and Innovation

Conflict and Protest

Corruption and Poverty

Lack of Resources

Livelihood and Food

Weak Health Systems

Death

Vaccine and Stereotype

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