

# Challenges of Reporting Africa for an International Audience



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By

Levi Obijiofor and Richard Murray

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For

Nneka, Chidinma, and Chukwuka (Levi)

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

How is Africa portrayed in international news? What are the challenges that confront foreign correspondents on assignment in Africa and how do they navigate those difficulties? What is the nature of the relationship between journalists and governments in Africa? To what extent do foreign correspondents apply diplomacy in newsgathering and reporting? How do journalists and correspondents overcome anti-media legislation rolled out by various governments to defend the national security interests? In what ways have technological transformations affected the practice of foreign correspondence in Africa? These and other questions affecting the way Africa is reported for an international audience are examined systematically in this monograph. The authors adopt a holistic approach in analysing issues that inform how foreign correspondents approach their job in Africa. This book is unique in various ways. It is nuanced in critical examination of the ways Africa is reported in international news and how that reportage affects perceptions of the continent. It draws on the scholarship of comparative journalism to examine challenges that confront foreign correspondents in Africa.

### **Comparative journalism research**

While other scholarly works have examined different journalistic practices in Africa, particularly issues relating to media freedom in the continent, this book focuses on different cultural, social, political, legal, and structural conditions in which journalism is produced in different African countries. Rarely have scholars examined the impact of these factors on foreign correspondence in Africa. Comparative journalism studies that analyse the differences and similarities in journalistic practices are important essentially because they enhance our understanding of different countries and their journalism cultures (Blumler et al., 1992; Hanitzsch, 2009). Drawing on a most recent comprehensive and worldwide study of journalistic cultures that surveyed a total of 27,500 journalists in 67 countries (Hanitzsch, Hanusch, Ramaprasad, & de Beer, 2019), Hanusch

& Hanitzsch (2019) note significant differences and similarities in journalistic cultures, practices, ethical beliefs, and professional orientation among the journalists. The study confirms there is no one universal ideology that defines journalism across the world. The research found some general agreements as well as disagreements about forces that influence journalistic practices in different contexts. The authors acknowledge that these differences and similarities in journalistic cultures suggest there is value in undertaking comparative journalism research that allows researchers to question long-established beliefs, ideas, rules, and principles about the nature of journalism. Such research helps to expose ethnocentric assumptions and understandings of journalism that are often based on an individual country's experiences.

Hanusch & Hanitzsch (2019) state that comparative journalism research facilitates considerably far-reaching and culturally more perceptive understanding of journalistic cultures across the globe. They suggest that comparative journalism research recognises diverse forms of journalism that also question the dominant Western view of the discipline that has influenced not only the way journalism is practised but also the way the discipline is taught and researched in Western and non-Western contexts. Essentially, Hanusch & Hanitzsch advocate more than one view through which journalism practices and scholarship should be understood. They note: "Journalists' beliefs about their role in society and about the influences they perceived in their work were marked by large differences" (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019, p. 287). The study validates the view that journalists across the world hold certain common values and interpretations but there remain some major differences.

The authors argue, on the basis of the findings of their study, that the appeal of comparative research lies in the fact that it offers a more comprehensive understanding of diverse journalistic cultures. They highlight the importance of collaborative journalism research which they believe will play a significant role in shaping the future of journalism studies. As they point out: "Collaboration allows us to pool intellectual expertise and share scarce research resources. In an era of networked science, collaborative research may even become the norm rather than the exception" (Hanusch & Hanitzsch, 2019, p. 306).

## **Merits of comparative journalism studies**

Specifically, studies conducted to explore journalistic professional routines, editorial conventions and socialisation mechanisms show similarities in countries such as Brazil, Germany, Indonesia, Tanzania, and the United States (Hanitzsch, 2009). Other studies show differences that exist in the way journalists in different countries perceive their roles and the way they make news judgments in their professional practice (Deuze, 2002; Hanusch, 2008). Exploration of the similarities and differences that mark journalistic practices across cultures constitutes not only a valuable contribution to the scholarship of journalism studies but also an appreciation of the value of diversity in human societies. Hanitzsch (2009) argues that comparative studies have shown that “news production is contingent on the cultural, political and historical contexts that shape the journalist’s work” (Hanitzsch, 2009, p. 413), as no two countries share exactly the same culture. Scholarly interest in global journalism studies suggests a growing fascination for knowledge of journalism cultures and conventions around the world. While examples cited in this book draw on specific countries, the analysis transcends national borders. Hanitzsch (2009, p. 416) points out that, “National borders do not necessarily correspond to cultural, linguistic and ethnic divisions, nor do they correspond to a common sense of identity.”

When scholars analyse journalism practices in different societies or contexts, they are able to understand what is occurring in other cultures. As Wasserman and de Beer (2009, p. 429) point out, “While the political-economic context of journalism studies in Africa might differ considerably from some non-Western contexts like Asia, it might correspond with, for instance, Latin America, for both historical (such as the history of colonialism) and economic (as developing regions in the global economy) reasons.” Blumler et al. (1992) identify three ways through which comparative research in communication has contributed to knowledge. First, comparative research uncovers communication trends and problems that are not easily noticeable in the world. Second, comparative research has the potential to transcend “space- and time-bound limitations on the generalizability of our theories, assumptions and propositions” (Blumler et al., 1992, p. 3). Comparative research also facilitates examination of the implications of the discrepancies that exist in the way communication is structured in the global community (Blumler et al., 1992). Livingstone (2003, p. 479) recognises the principles associated with comparative research, namely: to improve knowledge of various countries; to scrutinise

scholarly inferences in different environments; to examine various ways audiences receive imported cultural products; and to improve cross-cultural understanding.

### **Drawbacks of comparative research**

Despite the advantages of comparative communication research, there are certain drawbacks. Comparative research is not without its complexities. Livingstone (2003, p. 491) argues that “comparative research is challenging because one must balance and interpret similarities and differences while avoiding banalities and stereotypes.” Another issue that hinders comparative research is that the scale of the differences being studied and their various components or elements tend to complicate the meanings that are derived. As Blumler et al. (1992, p. 13) point out, “Nations and cultures are not typically homogeneous; they often encompass different language and ethnic groups, regions, and social classes that are in symbolic and pragmatic competition.” There are also methodological and theoretical dilemmas involved in comparative research, such as the danger of universalising research approaches and theoretical frameworks that often ignore cultural distinctions or details (Hanitzsch, 2009; Livingstone, 2003).

### **Grappling with concepts: Who is a foreign correspondent?**

Precisely who is a foreign correspondent is not always explicitly defined in the literature. For Starck and Villanueva (1992, p. 2), foreign correspondents comprise “media personnel who report and interpret the actions and events of different societies for a selected audience of readers not native to the country.” They also suggest that a foreign correspondent is “a journalist in another country interested in the overall implications of an event, keeping history and background of the region in mind”. The foreign correspondent is also an “important gatekeeper in the flow and formation of international news” (Stark & Villanueva, 1992, p. 2).

Hachten (2003) states that previously, a foreign correspondent resided in a foreign country from where they sent letters or reports that are transported to media organisations in their home country by mail or ship. However, technological changes have affected that process so that computers and other technologies have fastened the process of conveying news from overseas news locations to newsrooms in the correspondent’s home

country. Additionally, Hachten (2003) notes that foreign correspondents of the 21st century are constantly in conversation with their editorial office, their editors, and other correspondents via the Internet and mobile phones. This instant communication has given foreign news that element of immediacy.

Based on research on foreign correspondents operating in Darfur (Sudan), Bunce (2011, p. 14) identifies a foreign correspondent as “any professional journalist producing news in English for publication in a second country.” This definition is problematic as it is not the language of broadcast or publication that defines who qualifies to be a foreign correspondent. For example, Vicente (2013b, p. 37) recognises foreign correspondents “as international news reporters *in* different countries, *in* different societies, *in* different cultures” (emphasis by Vicente, 2013a).

Additionally, Starck and Villanueva (1992) differentiate between a foreign correspondent and a war correspondent. They define a war correspondent as a journalist “primarily interested in the ‘hard news’ of military or crisis reporting for a limited period of time” (Starck & Villanueva, 1992, p. 2). This contrasts with the views of scholars who acknowledge – and often criticise – foreign correspondents’ emphasis on reporting crises in Africa (e.g., Hachten & Beil, 1985; Yu & Luter, 1964). This makes it necessary to include conflict or crisis reporters as part of journalists who work as foreign correspondents. This demonstrates how quickly the unassuming foreign correspondent can be transformed into a crisis or conflict correspondent. This is also reiterated by an increasing interest in what Cottle (2013, p. 234) describes as the role of the media in “bearing witness”. The role of foreign correspondents based in Africa in bearing witness is also mentioned briefly in works by Bunce (2015b) and Kogen (2019). If, indeed, media professionals have a responsibility to bear witness, then that expectation must have implications for the role of the foreign correspondent as unexpected crisis or conflict correspondent.

This discussion extends the definition of foreign correspondents to include ‘parachute journalists’ and war correspondents. It includes the challenges of photojournalists, as well as freelancers, recognising changes in the nature of the industry. In this regard, the definition is more flexible, recognising foreign correspondents as non-citizens reporting on events for foreign media in a country. It includes foreign correspondents working for all forms of media (print, broadcast, and online). The analysis does not extend to all who work in the field producing international news. Bunce

(2011, p. 4) includes an array of “(n)ew actors” in the field, including bloggers. Such bloggers may be local or foreign, based in the country they are writing about or commenting from a distance. Although the discussion presented here and in Chapter 5 places emphasis on ‘foreign’, other chapters in this monograph recognise the important work being done by reporters that Bunce (2011) identifies as “local-national foreign correspondents” who are reporters with citizenship of the country in which they operate but working in or reporting for a foreign media entity (Bunce, 2011, p. 5). Bunce (2015b, p. 44) also refers to “local ‘foreign correspondents’”, all of which are covered in different chapters in this book.

As a result of the large amount of literature relating to negative portrayal of Africa by media, otherwise known as ‘Afropessimism’ (illustrated in Chapter 2), it is also necessary to provide a definition of this term. de B’béri and Louw (2011, p. 335) state the concept of ‘Afropessimism’ “is an important issue for all Africans as well as for anyone interested in African development and socio-cultural analysis”. They argue the concept has “gained widespread currency in the global mass media” (de B’béri & Louw, 2011, p. 338). For purposes of analysis, ‘Afropessimism’ is understood as a prevailing perception of negativity towards Africa as a continent, as well as individual African countries. A contrast to this is found in the ‘*Africa Rising*’ narrative (Marsh, 2016, p. 67; Nothias, 2012, p. 60). Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that this book focuses on foreign correspondents reporting on Africa, including the challenges they face on the job.

## **Scoping the work of foreign correspondents in Africa**

In 1992, Starck and Villanueva noted few studies that address public perceptions of foreign correspondents and the methods they adopt on the job. Thirty years on, there seems to be little change. Although criticisms of the work of foreign correspondents abound, works dedicated to documenting the challenges faced by foreign correspondents – perhaps the rationale for the work they produced – are difficult to find. It is perhaps for this reason that some scholars choose to either extend or narrow their research focus to incorporate foreign correspondents in their work. Further, key authors in the field are emerging. Among these are Bunce (2015a, 2015b, 2011 & 2010), Hannerz (2007 & 2002), Madrid-Morales (2021 & 2016), Nothias (2020, 2018, 2014, 2013 & 2012), and Vicente (2013a & 2013b). Research by Bunce, Hannerz, Nothias, and Vicente is particularly valuable because they include details about the practices and processes involved in the work



of foreign correspondents in Africa rather than focusing only on the outcomes. Madrid-Morales' research, however, is of note because of its exploration of the impact of China and Chinese foreign correspondents on Africa.

Research conducted by Vicente (2013a) is of key interest. Of specific note is Vicente's (2013a) work that includes an online survey of 124 foreign correspondents working in 41 countries in Africa. This is supplemented by interviews with 43 additional individuals based in three African cities (Dakar, Johannesburg, and Nairobi). It is the single largest study dedicated to investigating the practice of foreign correspondence in Africa. The survey specifically asked questions relating to what Vicente (2013a, p. 14) calls "constraints", including matters relating to technology, deadlines, ethics, and culture. Similarly, Vicente's (2013b) work with foreign correspondents based in Nairobi is essential reading for anyone interested in the practical challenges facing correspondents in their work. Although other scholars have engaged directly with foreign correspondents or have been foreign correspondents themselves, the importance of Vicente's work cannot be underestimated.

In a departure from common writing on crisis, a fascinating work by Nothias (2014) focuses on British and French media coverage of an international event (the football/soccer World Cup held in South Africa in 2010). Nothias has produced some of the most comprehensive works on foreign correspondents in Africa. Collectively the research is well considered and endeavours to understand the practice of foreign correspondents, as well as the individuals who populate the profession. The research is nuanced and does not rely on mass generalisations or characterisation of foreign correspondents. Indeed, this is something he warns against in a 2018 work, urging scholars to reconsider "what we think we know about how Western journalists write about Africa" (Nothias, 2018, p. 1154). The assertion is based on analysis of French and British reporting on 24 African countries. The analysis includes 282 news articles that were supplemented by interviews with foreign correspondents based in two countries (Nothias, 2018). He discovered that a large amount of scholarship presented generalisations of the practices of foreign media in African countries. A work published in 2020 is an excellent example of the development in the area, as Nothias (2020) provides case studies of foreign correspondents based in Kenya and South Africa, utilizing a frame of "postcolonial reflexivity". This book views the works of Nothias as essential reading.

Hannerz's (2002) project on foreign correspondents and foreign correspondence in which he expresses interest in investigating the work of foreign correspondents, including "the constraints under which they work" (2002, p. 59), makes an immense contribution to this monograph. He has produced several works under the project and in addition to the exploration of the work of foreign correspondents from various countries, the embedding of the practice into theory offers a means of contextualising foreign correspondence in a way that is meaningful for several academic disciplines. Works by other scholars such as Arregui, Thomas, and Kilby (2020), Kogen (2019 & 2015), Lemke (2020 & 2018), and Rodny-Gumede (2016) are also noteworthy. These are all reviewed in Chapter 5 of this book.

Lemke's recent work on French foreign correspondents in Ivory Coast (2020 & 2018) is a rare insight into a specific group of foreign correspondents working in one country. Single country assessments are not the only way of offering more precision to the field. Rodny-Gumede's (2016) and Arregui et al.'s (2020) focus on a specific practice in journalism – Peace Journalism – demonstrates the ways in which this type of focus can also add value to the field. To do this, Rodny-Gumede interviewed 17 foreign correspondents working for 15 different media organisations. Although all correspondents were based in Johannesburg, the organisations and the cultural backgrounds they represent include British, French, German, and Swedish, as well as the US. Arregui et al. (2020) included analysis of media coverage of specific events in Kenya. This is supplemented by interviews with both foreign and local correspondents. Kogen's (2019 & 2015) works examining US coverage of food insecurity (including hunger and famine) in Africa adopt content analysis as well as interviews with correspondents. These works are indicative of the varied approaches scholars can take toward investigating a single theme.

Recognising that foreign correspondents have been deemed responsible for negative portrayal of Africa in the news, accounts by individuals who have worked as foreign correspondents often reveal some of the more immediate challenges (and opportunities) for those working in that profession. This would include a seeming hierarchy of correspondents which may be detected in Connell's (1982, p. 17) somewhat scathing review of the "globe-trotting journalist". Connell spent some years in East Africa as a 'freelancer' and criticises those foreign correspondents attached to organisations. Lending further credence to such a hierarchy is

Smith's (2004) observations related to reporters who were 'parachuted' by Irish media agencies into various countries (including Rwanda, among others). It is believed that these parachute journalists were despised by "...'(r)real' foreign correspondents..." (Smith, 2004, p. 84). Also related is the reporting of differences in practice felt by locally based foreign correspondents in Kenya who compared their work to "visiting journalists" (Bunce, 2010, p. 522). However, it is useful to temper such observations with the views of correspondents working for established media organisations, as well as scholarly research from 'non-foreign correspondent' academics. The latter of these is an expanding field of research but one which can be challenging due to reluctance by foreign correspondents to engage with academics (Hannerz, 2002).

## **Struggles for independent journalism and media freedom**

One of the critical issues of concern to journalists in Africa is continuing violation of media freedom. Media freedom is highly contested in Africa as it is in other parts of the world. The topic is covered in various chapters of this monograph. When former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged world leaders to remember the right of journalists to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media" (United Nations, 2006a), he was simply reminding all member countries of the UN of their obligation to uphold the spirit and letters of Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Similarly, former UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura (who served from 1999 to 2009) said during a World Press Freedom Day address, that the "World Press Freedom Day is an opportunity to remind the world of the importance of protecting the fundamental rights of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, as stated in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (United Nations, 2006b). Matsuura went a little further. He identified the direct relationship between freedom of expression and socio-economic development. He said: "Independent, free and pluralistic media have a crucial role to play in the good governance of democratic societies, by ensuring transparency and accountability, promoting participation and the rule of law, and contributing to the fight against poverty."

Some scholars take on this point, arguing that a positive relationship exists between media freedom and the growth of democracy in Africa and other countries. In his book – *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* – Nyamnjoh (2005a) highlights the uncompromising and direct

relationship between media freedom, democracy, and socioeconomic development of Africa. He argues that democratisation and socioeconomic development of Africa cannot take place in a vacuum. The news media are central to a culture of democracy in Africa. His main argument is that African journalists are like their counterparts in other parts of the world – they reflect the society in which they operate. Unfortunately, more than five decades after many African countries attained political independence, the struggle for media freedom has persisted. It is an ongoing battle between journalists – advocates of free and independent media – and political leaders who want to govern perpetually. African leaders want an uncritical press that will allow them to govern with minimum dissent. In some countries, journalists are still treated as interlopers.

For African journalists to perform the job assigned to them, they must be free to tell the truth, to report daily events without hindrance, political intimidation, harassment, and threats to their lives. These are just some of the constraints that confront African journalists in the 21st century. For example, increasing attacks on Nigerian journalists at one time forced Jean-Francois Julliard, former secretary-general of Reporters Without Borders, a global non-governmental organisation that promotes media freedom, to warn that “Nigeria is not a safe place for journalists to work and ranks only 145th out of the 178 countries in the Reporters Without Borders world press freedom index” (Reporters Without Borders, 2009). In fact, the organisation said it “registered 42 press freedom violations in Nigeria in the first half of 2009 and found that, for the most part, police officers or local officials such as provincial governors were responsible” (Reporters Without Borders, 2009). The ability of African journalists to hold political leaders to account depends to a great extent on the degree of freedom they have. Across Africa, there is an uneasy relationship between journalists and the state which has resulted in situations in which journalists are regularly arrested, abused, bashed, threatened, intimidated, jailed, and sometimes killed. It is an unhealthy relationship that has persisted since the dawn of independence in the continent. It started during the colonial times and continued even after the end of colonialism. All these show that African journalists are still encumbered by considerable barriers placed by various governments, political leaders, security agents, and discontented groups. This book examines the various obstacles that diminish the ability of foreign correspondents in Africa to uphold their professional obligations in the 21st century.

## **General overview, aims, and objectives**

Against the background of the preceding review of the literature, this monograph examines factors that shape how foreign correspondents report Africa for an international audience and the diverse challenges foreign correspondents encounter in covering Africa, as well as how that reportage affects the continent's image in the international community. The book explores the strategies adopted by foreign correspondents to juggle the demands of their job such as objective news reporting, balance, truth-telling, as well as the political, religious, cultural, business, and technological lenses through which the continent is reported, including African governments' inclination to constrain journalists' freedom to report objectively. Other challenges include but are not limited to threats to journalists' safety; growing violation of media freedom, anti-media legislation that impedes public interest journalism; Freedom of Information (FoI) laws; government/corporate cronyism; ownership pressures; balancing competing national and foreign interests, and so on. The book takes a thematic approach to understanding the contemporary international news environment in context and in flux.

Despite emerging scholarly work dedicated to media in and about Africa, Nothias (2020, p. 251) states "there has not been sustained scholarly attention into foreign correspondents in Africa and how they approach issues of media representation and stereotyping". This is curious given the importance placed on foreign correspondence in the continent and on studies of media representations of Africa. It has been argued that "(f)oreign media coverage of a country has huge implications, as the coverage can portray the country from either a negative or positive dimension, and this in return could affect the perception of foreign audiences about the country" (Ezeah & Emmanuel, 2016, p. 31). Given the importance attached to foreign correspondents across cultures, it is logical to expect the work and lives of foreign correspondents in Africa should be accorded equal attention. Questioning the challenges foreign correspondents experience in the field is one way of providing background into the processes of production of news about Africa. Bunce (2015a, p. 16) recognises a lack of "production studies of foreign correspondents at work in Africa". The limited studies on the practice and lives of foreign correspondents working in Africa are part of the motivations for producing this book. Such studies are important. Thus, this book serves as a part of a larger area of enquiry and therefore contributes to the growing scholarship on foreign correspondence in Africa. The evolving nature of the work of

foreign correspondents reporting on Africa provides the space to closely examine the current terrain of foreign correspondence, the critical issues that affect those who work in the field, the persisting debate over the appropriateness or unsuitability of using Western or non-Western correspondents to report African news, and the changing platforms of foreign news reporting in general. Regardless of the nature of topics examined in this book, it is important to acknowledge that this book is limited to works produced in the English language. Some of the key questions examined in the book include but are not limited to:

- a). What are the key factors that shape how Africa is reported and consequently how the public understands and perceives the continent?
- b). What are the major challenges foreign correspondents face in reporting African news and how do they circumnavigate those difficulties?
- c). Does the location of foreign bureaus in Africa influence the nature of coverage of the continent?
- d). To what extent do dwindling resources determine the amount of coverage given to Africa?
- e). Why is negative news the dominant form of African news reported in mainstream and online media?
- f). How can the Internet and other digital devices help foreign correspondents to improve the coverage of Africa in international news?

These questions and more constitute concerns that have persisted for more than half a century. They also represent an agenda and direction for future research on foreign correspondence in Africa. Beyond these questions, there are also gaps that need to be filled to enhance understanding and knowledge of the work of foreign correspondents in Africa. If we don't have an adequately informed understanding of factors that constrain foreign correspondents reporting Africa in various contexts, we won't understand how to interpret the kind of journalism that is produced in the continent, particularly the relationship between journalism and the state, and the varying levels of press freedom. Overall, this book contributes to knowledge of journalism in Africa in general and, specifically, foreign correspondence in the continent.

In recent years the international news industry has been under attack. The much talked about digital disruption has had the effect of weakening

journalism and the role of journalists. One area where journalists have come under attack is through government legislation. This has limited the capacity of journalists to practice their craft and in many cases resulted in the criminalisation of journalism (MEAA, 2018). This monograph also examines how creeping and re-imagined legislation is affecting the work of foreign correspondents in Africa. The issues examined in the book are significant because journalistic practices in Africa, particularly the factors that influence how the continent is reported in international news, have received little research attention and focus. Josephi (2010) notes that countries with limited press freedom have been rarely examined in the literature. This is what distinguishes this monograph from others that look at journalism practice in Africa. The book covers an important and timely subject in the age of digital technology. The issues discussed in this book have theoretical, practical, and policy significance.

The book differs from existing titles because it is focused on Africa. It examines methodically the challenges foreign correspondents navigate in reporting Africa, including diverse legislation, weak infrastructure, poor transportation systems, impediments created by socio-cultural practices and traditions, ethnic conflicts, religious tensions, dwindling economic resources, negative perceptions and stereotypes, technological changes and challenges, etc. When people say that 'Africa is not a country', they highlight the point that Africa is not homogeneous. This fact is evidenced in the topics discussed in the chapters. The authors look at international journalistic practices in a non-Western context and contrasts those traditions to the existing environments in Western democratic countries. The perspectives examined in the book are therefore not driven by professional journalism practices established in the West. The authors believe a more in-depth focus on how Africa is reported and the contemporary challenges foreign correspondents face in reporting the continent are important and make significant contributions to the scholarship of global journalism, as well as public knowledge and understanding of Africa. The book is therefore inclusive and truly international in scope. It looks at issues that are rarely considered when examining how Africa is reported in international news. Another rationale for this book is that it integrates major theoretical approaches in international journalism with practical contexts. Our teaching experience informs us that students are interested in how theory relates to practice. This book will satisfy that appetite and demand. Additionally, this monograph is distinctive but different from other texts because it

recognises and analyses the transformations in journalism caused by technological changes.

## **Challenges affecting the reportage of Africa**

The tasks for journalists reporting on Africa have never been easy. Across the world, journalists have an obligation to provide members of their society with important news and information to enable them to make informed decisions about their welfare, their security, and their lives. Through informed dissemination of news and information, journalists facilitate popular participation in civic deliberations that deepen the culture of democracy in different countries. Therefore, in every country, journalists are at the forefront of social and political change. A docile media imperils democracy. Similarly, an uncritical press in Africa contributes to the political, economic, and social underdevelopment of the continent. It is the responsibility of journalists to scrutinise political leaders, including those who aspire to lead. The press, after all, is an important institution of society. Conceptualisations of truth or fairness or balance in news reports are always open to interpretations, especially definitions provided by people who have limited or no knowledge of the standards of journalism practice. In an environment in which media laws restrict independent journalism practice, what gets published or rejected is always at the mercy of the censor. That does not mean the censor is always right or that the censor's worldviews are reflective of universal standards.

## **Images of Africa in Western media**

Beyond all these and looking at how Western media report events in Africa, the literature suggests the coverage of Africa in international news is one-sided, skewed, prejudicial, and incomplete. In fact, Nigeria's award-winning author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2021) said "to tell only one part of a story is essentially to lie. A story is true only when it is complete." She cautioned about the "danger of a single story" (2009) in an address she presented in 2009 during a Technology, Entertainment, and Design (TED) talk that now covers many topics. In that speech, she might have been referring to global media's skewed portrayal of Africa, African people, and events in Africa. It is this narrowmindedness that feeds the misconception by sections of the media and the public that Africa is a country rather than a continent of 54 independent countries. Merchant (2013) presents historical insights into the origins, aims, and operational structure of the TED talks.



In her public speeches, Adichie (2021 & 2009) raises issues around misrepresentations of Africa. Those misrepresentations symbolise distortions of African identity and history, including misrepresentations of a people's culture, ways of living, values, and spirituality. For many years and decades, Western media organisations made it their duty to determine how non-Western countries should be depicted in foreign news. This is partly due to the history of colonialism in which the coloniser appropriated the right to chronicle the history of colonised people. The coverage of non-Western countries in international news is skewed. It is influenced by the history of the uneven relationship between the West and non-West in which colonised people were demonised while the colonisers positioned themselves as the knowledge dispensers. In that environment, the colonisers are seen as the all-knowing 'superiors'. In this context, this book aims to correct history, particularly the lies that were told (and are still being told) about the ways, cultures, and lifestyles of African people. Consequently, this book is intended to stir critical thinking about Africa and to sensitise the global community to how the 'single story' about Africa has influenced perceptions people have about the continent.

Misrepresentation of any kind is dangerous because it destroys the mirror through which every generation looks at itself and its ancestors and draws inspiration, strength, ideas, thoughts, energy, and motivation for moving forward and overcoming challenges in life. Keane (2004) notes one consequence of this pattern of distorted portrayal of Africa is the damage it has caused to the people's sense of confidence, their identity, and the possibilities that abound for their countries. He refers to changes occurring across Africa to underscore the point that Africa is not a hopeless continent full of tragic stories, diseases, poverty, famine, natural disasters, and poor governance. In countries such as Liberia, South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria, an active civil society has emerged to scrutinise political leaders, to hold them to account, and to expose corruption. Other transformations in the continent include the rise of human rights organisations and independent newspapers that are helping to improve governance and bolster civil society.

Zuckerman (2004) makes an important point about the mutual obligations that bind media organisations and their audiences. "To encourage news organizations to report on forgotten stories, readers and viewers will have to demonstrate that they care about these issues. But for viewers to care, they will likely need to know a great deal more about these nations" (Zuckerman, 2004, p. 53). Onyango-Obbo (2004) takes a different but

helpful view about how Western media coverage of Arica could be improved:

If Western media coverage of Africa failed in decades past because of being steeped in a cynical and, some argue, racist tradition, then today's 'improved' version fails because it also is not a balanced portrayal. Africa, the continent, is a collection of nations that are pretty much like others elsewhere in the world, struggling with successes and with failures, and there should be no special type of journalism reserved for its coverage. The patronizing reporting one witnesses today is as bad as the condescending work of the past. What the African continent needs is good journalism, one that tells the stories as they are reported and observed (Onyango-Obbo, 2004, p. 8).

Another key issue examined in this book is the extent to which digital technologies have facilitated greater or lesser coverage of Africa in mainstream and online media. The issue is relevant because of growing optimism that technological transformations have helped journalists to acquire new skills, and to do things better and more efficiently in the workplace. How has technology impacted the portrayal of Africa in international news? Will technological changes and the subsequent increase in available information in the media imply an increase in the variety of African news available in different media outlets? The book examines the similarities and differences in the way African news is reported by foreign correspondents in mainstream and online media. For example, Wu (2007) examined international news reported in two US-based online news sites – *cnn.com* and *www.nytimes.com* – and their traditional flagships – *The New York Times* and the Cable News Network (CNN). He found that “international news output from the online media does not seem to deviate much from that of their traditional counterparts” (Wu, 2007, p. 549). He concluded that, “the overall picture of the world presented by the websites reflects their traditional media counterparts well” (Wu, 2007, p. 549).

It is important to examine the extent to which technological developments have transformed the way African news is reported. Hamilton and Jenner (2003, p. 137), both of them former foreign news reporters, note that, “Traditional foreign correspondents no longer exercise hegemony over foreign news.” They argue that “technology-driven changes are reshaping international news flows by lowering the economic barriers of entry to publishing and broadcasting and encouraging the proliferation of nontraditional international news sources. The audience – now fragmented and active – is far better able to choose and even shape the news”

(Hamilton & Jenner, 2003, p. 132). They cite Bloomberg News as an example of a non-traditional wire service that sells news directly to the public, arguing that the Internet has facilitated the creation of special foreign news ‘wires’ by media organisations. Hamilton and Jenner (2003, p. 134) also contend that “anyone overseas can now become a foreign correspondent, whether carrying press credentials or not” and they can report news on the web or gather updated news for other consumers, as long as they are equipped with “camcorders and computers”, and as long as they are able to post images and text on web sites. In essence, new technologies have made it easier and less complicated for anyone to work as a foreign correspondent.

Although the concept of “do-it-yourself-journalism” (e.g., blogging and other variants of citizen journalism) is proliferating, Hamilton and Jenner (2003, pp. 136-137) caution about the consequences of that practice: “Internet international news provided by untrained and unsupervised journalists, however, can flood public discussion with error, rumor, and disinformation that is often difficult to sort out from the authentic and factual.” It is against this background that chapters 2 and 5 examine the various influences at work (institutional, cultural, political, social, economic, and financial, etc.) that inform the coverage of Africa in international news. For example, practising and former foreign correspondents such as Amanpour (1996), Hess (1996), Hoge (1997), and Utley (1997), and journalism academics such as Wu and Hamilton (2004), Wu (1998), and Riffe et al. (1994) identified certain factors that affect the coverage of foreign news, including factors that account for declining media audience, decreasing audience attention to foreign news, and declining media interest in foreign news. Factors cited include high costs, indifference by foreign news editors, lack of experience by foreign news reporters, television news emphasis on dramatic images that leave out important contextual and background information, changing audience tastes and new trends of foreign reporting (e.g., the demand for shorter stories along with emphasis on human interest stories that focus on the lives of people), and the emergence of the Internet which has displaced or diluted foreign news services formerly provided by wire services, press associations, and syndicates (see also Perlmutter & Hamilton, 2007).

It is perhaps against this background that editors of *Media Studies Journal* (1999, p. xiii) state that the challenge involved in foreign news reporting is particularly overwhelming because “Journalists’ portraits of another country are usually influenced by the questions, concerns and conceptions

they bring from their own land.” As d’Haenens (2003, p. 5) notes, the criticisms levelled against foreign correspondents tend to focus on “their lack of background knowledge, the limitations of their cultural and social background (mostly male, middle class, politically and culturally westernized), the limited time devoted to the topic on which they are supposed to give an in-depth report, etc.”

### **Short profile of authors**

A major strength of this book is the cross-cultural background, professional experience, and teaching skills the authors bring with them. The authors have between them more than 30 years of professional journalism practice, as well as years of teaching and conducting research in international journalism in universities in Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and elsewhere. Specifically, there are few monographs that address the challenges experienced by foreign correspondents and ‘local-foreign news workers’ in reporting Africa for an international audience. Some of the existing books are either generic or tend to focus on certain regions in Africa. Additionally, the authors of this book are international in their practical and theoretical orientations. Associate Professor Levi Obijiofor, the lead author, is an African who grew up in the continent but studied and worked in various countries in the West. Dr Richard Murray, the second author, has a similar background. He is from New Zealand but studied and worked in Australia, New Zealand, India, Nepal, and South Korea.

### **Impact of COVID-19**

The completion and publication of this book has been adversely affected by difficulties brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic that undermined businesses, research activities, domestic and international travel, teaching, mental health of journalists, academics, and other people. The book was originally contracted to be produced in 2020 but travel restrictions, international border closures, mandatory quarantine and isolation requirements, social distancing protocols, and other health protocols spawned by COVID-19 affected the timely completion of this book in 2020. The authors could not travel to Africa to interact with and interview foreign correspondents in the continent. The years 2020 and 2021 proved particularly challenging to researchers across the globe. Many research projects were postponed or cancelled owing to international travel restrictions. The authors are grateful to the Commissioning Editor of this

book, Adam Rummens, for his thoughtfulness and understanding of the difficulties that confronted the authors. For further insights into the impact of COVID-19 on journalism practice across the world, see Posetti, Bell, and Brown (2020).

## **Outline of chapters**

Chapter 2 examines the various ways Africa is constructed as news in international communication. It starts with an analysis of the theoretical framework of the world system theory (Wallerstein, 1974) that explains how international news flow is affected by global geopolitics. The theory provides insights into a world system in which countries are classified into three different layers, namely core, periphery, and semi-periphery tiers that are founded on political, economic, cultural, and historical characteristics. The world system theory reflects the differences among nations that account for the relative political, economic, military, and technological power and influence that some countries wield over others. The theory provides an important framework for understanding the lack of visibility of Africa in international news, as well as why and how Africa is reported and portrayed negatively in international news, and why news about the continent is often overlooked. Chapter 2 also examines in detail the factors that influence media coverage of Africa, including misrepresentations of the continent. The factors include limited presence of foreign correspondents in Africa, location of major multinational news agencies, high costs of establishing and maintaining foreign posts, as well as poor infrastructure, corruption, volatile supply of electricity, high cost of hotel accommodation, complexities of air transportation, and bad roads. The chapter presents two case studies that look closely at how Western media covered the crash of the Ethiopian Airlines in March 2019 and foreign media coverage of the murder of British soldier Lee Rigby in 2013 that was incorrectly attributed to two Nigerian citizens. The two men who committed the horrendous crime were in fact UK citizens.

The frosty and adversarial relationship between journalists and state officials in Africa is examined in Chapter 3. That relationship is worsening rather than improving. The chapter presents incontrovertible evidence depicting how media freedom is violated in Africa, and how journalists are regularly abused and sometimes murdered. The chapter notes the environment for journalism practice in Africa is unappealing. Journalists are constantly in danger. Their freedom is severely restricted. One implication of this ominous situation is that journalists in Africa are unable

to carry out their duty as the watchdogs of society. The chapter identifies and analyses various obstacles that weaken the ability of journalists to scrutinise state officials and uphold their professional obligations. If journalists are constrained, the viability of democracy is jeopardised. However, if citizens are ill-informed about political matters, if they do not make efforts to express their views, if they detest their political representatives and have little regard for democratic values, the future of democracy will be threatened (Voltmer, 2010).

Chapter 4 analyses the role foreign correspondents play as diplomats in international news reporting. It discusses news gathering as an art that requires application of diplomacy. It argues that foreign correspondents are expected to deal with government officials and citizens even-handedly, and learn to develop reliable sources. They must recognise when sources are furnishing them with accurate and inaccurate information. Above all, foreign correspondents are expected to manage everyday challenges they encounter on the job. It is the role of the foreign correspondent to sift through the maze of information and to differentiate fact from fabrication. Foreign correspondents, like other journalists, must be alert all the time. The chapter argues that news sources, like interpreters that assist foreign correspondents operating in unfamiliar territories, have their own agenda, as they present their own view of social reality. This is one of the challenges that confront foreign correspondents as they interact with state officials, news sources, interest groups, individuals, organisations, lobby groups, and other news agencies.

In Chapter 5, the authors take a closer look at foreign correspondents in Africa, with special focus on their lives, times, living conditions, and challenges on the job. The chapter examines the challenges facing foreign correspondents in Africa. The difficulties affect foreign correspondents in various ways regardless of their country of origin, the media platform on which they work, their sociocultural background, their level of education, years of experience, age, or gender. Some of the challenges include covering multiple countries, with associated visa and travel permit problems, as well as the practice of using correspondents based in Western capital cities to cover events in Africa. Other problems relate to logistics, proximity, administration, travel, accommodation, costs, communication, gender and sexual harassment, and others that impede the work of foreign correspondents and the quality of their reports. All these and more constitute a part of the melange of difficulties that confront foreign