Global Broadcast Media still relying on stereotypical narratives about Africa

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About this series

The Academic Fellows program has brought together 11 African academics based around the continent and the diaspora to investigate Africa’s narrative across a range of mediums and topics that include social media, arts reinstitution, the impact of Covid-19, and spoken word poetry. The program brings academic rigour and an evidence-based approach to African No Filter’s work to understand and shift harmful and stereotypical narratives about Africa. It forms part of a larger research agenda to understand narrative and its impact. It is co-funded by Facebook and supported by the African Union, AUDA-NEPAD and the New York-based Africa Centre.

About Africa No Filter

Africa No Filter is a donor collaborative that is working to shift stereotypical and harmful narratives within and about Africa. Through research, grant-making, community building and advocacy, our objective is to build the field of narrative change-makers by supporting storytellers, investing in media platforms and driving disruption campaigns. The donor collaborative is funded by Ford Foundation, Bloomberg, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Luminate, Open Society Foundations, Comic Relief, the Hilton Foundation, the British Council and the Hewlett Foundation.

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# CONTENTS

Executive summary .......................................................... ii
Key insights ................................................................. iii

1 Introduction ..................................................................... 1

2 Literature review ........................................................... 2
   2.1 Metaphors and expressions of Africa as the 'Dark Continent' 3
   2.2 'Africa rising': Global broadcasting narrative turning positive? 5
   2.3 "Constructive journalism": Beyond CNNI and AJE ............. 6

3 Methodology .................................................................... 7

4 Findings .......................................................................... 8
   4.1 CNNI coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa 8
   4.2 AJE coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa 10
   4.3 CGTN coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa 12
   4.4 Changing programmes, face and tone in international broadcasting 15
   4.5 Diverse Programmes at CNNI, CGTN and AJE ............... 16

5 Discussion ....................................................................... 17

6 Conclusion ....................................................................... 18

Endnotes ........................................................................... 19
Although international broadcasters are diversifying the content of their reports, adverse political and economic coverage largely buttresses Afro-scepticism and perpetuates negative stereotypical narratives. For example, the three broadcasters analysed in this study – Cable News Network International (CNNI), China Global Television Network (CGTN) and Al Jazeera Media Network (AJE) – continued to tell stories about Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe, using footage that mainly focused on crisis, failed governance and states, conflict and humanitarian emergencies. They told stories rooted in a single narrative dimension of failure and desperation, which lacked diversity; failing to tell stories about dynamic socio-economic and cultural progress. Such stories undermine the agency of Africans and confidence in African institutions, policies and systems, as well as investment in Africa, and therefore affect the livelihoods and well-being of the diverse African people.

Narratives propagated by global broadcasting media bear far-reaching socio-economic and policy impacts on African countries. Global broadcasting media are incredibly powerful and influential in setting the agenda: by presenting specific images and narratives as factual, they frame debates that reach millions of viewers and influence perceptions. The pervasive dominant role of AJE, CGTN and CNNI raises questions about their coverage and representation of the countries under study, particularly whether there are any notable narrative changes from traditional negative news and current affairs coverage.

This study looks at the coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe to understand what the three broadcasters said between 2018 and 2020. The study applied content and frame analysis of the news and current affairs content and identified the main themes and issues covered, to unpack what AJE, CGTN and CNNI reported and what narratives they propagated.

The study of mass media may help media practitioners to strive for objective dissemination of factual information and balanced, diverse, informed and nuanced narratives. Traditional research on global broadcasting media shows that they generally churn out negative narratives about Africa. Although recent research suggests that there are shifts in how these media cover African countries, few case studies exist to support this view and therefore, consensus is lacking.
International broadcast media CNNI, CGTN and AJE – reinforced Afro-pessimism in their coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe:
Politics, corruption, conflict, business and economic news dominated their broadcasts, and apart from a few isolated positive business stories, the chosen themes reflected the bad and the ugly, feeding into a negative narrative. Political news was dominated by gloom and doom, supported with images suggesting hopelessness.

Coverage of economic news and current affairs mostly presented economic progress as externally driven, with few economic success stories:
Most economic news and current affairs stories highlighted growing unemployment, economic frustrations, business challenges and mismanagement associated with poor governance and suggestions of growing economic crisis. For example, despite economic growth in Ethiopia, CGTN news focused on Chinese investment that was fuelling infrastructure development in the four countries.

CGTN told more positive stories than CNNI or AJE:
This more positive narrative of development journalism centred on successful projects between China and each of the four countries and highlighted economic gains for them. As such, coverage shone a light on economic progress based in cooperation. However, the narrative emphasised Chinese investment more than cooperative efforts in the four African countries.

CGTN and AJE had more diverse content than CNNI, covering sports, environment and conservation, art, fashion and music:
Although minimal, the coverage shone a light on African sporting excellence and endogenous innovations to preserve the environment, and showcased talent in art forms and fashion.

CGTN and AJE also had more African anchors, journalists, correspondents and analysts than CNNI:
The face of journalism – key sources, journalists and presenters – improved the public’s perception of CGTN and AJE coverage. In addition, AJE gave voice to ordinary people, capturing and telling their experiences in its news and current affairs stories, through real time interactive social media participation during its broadcasts.

CNNI told fewer stories about the four countries, compared to CGTN and AJE:
African countries remained marginal in CNNI, and when coverage was provided, it mainly focused on adverse political events.
INTRODUCTION

Many studies show that global broadcasting media propagate negative stereotypes and misconceptions about Africa, identifying the continent as a place where endless poverty, diseases, conflict, violence and poor governance are pervasive. Such problematic representation has raised concern from civil society and policymakers about the implications of African stories churned out by global broadcasting media. Global broadcasting media are powerful; they reach millions of viewers and frame political debates, setting agendas for policymaking by influencing global public opinions and perceptions. Furthermore, coverage by Cable News Network International (CNNI), China Global Television Network (CGTN) and Al Jazeera Media Network (AJE) has disproportionately grown to dominate the global television broadcasting space.

Based on content analysis, this study looked at the narrative on Africa that emerged from CNNI, CGTN and AJE coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe between 2018 and 2020. We selected four African countries in the east and southern regions that receive the most global media coverage, and drew out national and regional perspectives on what stories were told. The stories told and the subsequent narratives matter because they influence the views and perceptions of the global publics, policymakers and key actors; hence they affect business flows, finance, trade and tourism. Therefore, this study identified where the broadcasters relied on stereotypical narratives about Africa and where they diverged, as a gateway to understanding whether media’s representation of the African continent is fundamentally changing and improving. Positive reporting about news and current affairs in African countries provides a foundation for changing the African narrative to one that is more positive, nuanced and dynamic, and that can objectively represent the continent.
Global media refers to mass communication on a global level, with a global reach, allowing people across the world to share and access the same information, facilitating exchange of ideas. The use of satellite and internet have transformed traditional television, making access easy to news and media products. These innovations have allowed broadcasting channels such as AJE, CGTN and CNNI to reach millions of global viewers in real time, increasing the exchange of information and ideas. While the changing mediascape has the potential to shift the African narrative, at a closer look, the shift in the image and representation of African countries at AJE, CGTN and CNNI continues to be marginal.

Technological convergence transformed the role and impact of global broadcasting by the already powerful media houses such as AJE, CGTN and CNNI, extending their reach through television sets and various online media and social media platforms. The integrated use of television broadcasting with new digital technologies has transformed the role and impact of broadcasting, making media products widely accessible and interactive. This has made media such as AJE, CGTN and CNNI accessible through cell phones, various electronic gadgets and social media, allowing real time engagement and audience participation and increasing the power and reach of global broadcasting media. The emergence of electronic or digital media paved the way for new integrated interactive media forms such as the social media platforms YouTube, Twitter and Facebook (among others), and a range of online media platforms, for example Zoom, Google Meet, Skype and many others. These changes have allowed for online presence and interactive feedback with viewers, thus shifting the flow of information at media such as AJE, CGTN and CNNI from its linear centre, and amplifying the role of these television channels to increase their reach and interactivity with the audience, and their societal influence at home and abroad, including in African countries.

AJE, CGTN and CNNI share extensive global penetration and reach, allowing their flow of news and current affairs to cover much of the world, including Africa. The convergence of new media technologies, such as satellite, computers and cell phones has allowed simultaneous live streaming
of broadcasts, including on social media platforms, driving the powerful media conglomerates to instantaneously reach a wide range of viewers with diverse cultures, in their homes. While this has created new opportunities, it has also engendered new contradictions, and in some cases worsened the skewed broadcasting, exchange and consumption of news and information products, including how they are processed and impact communities.

The new media technologies have consolidated the development, power and impact of mega broadcasting media houses with round-the-clock global broadcasts. International television news and current affairs have become widely accessible through satellite TV broadcasting, enabling the distribution of news and current affairs across nation-state borders, and amplifying the mass distribution and flow of information. However, the uneven mediascape and control has perpetuated lopsided narratives and products with adverse implications for shifting the broadcasting media’s narratives about Africa. While the advent of new media technologies has created opportunities for Africans to tell their stories, it has conversely reinforced the unequal control and lopsided flows of information from the Global North to the South and within the Global South, in reality further perpetuating the marginalisation, exclusion and muzzling of African voices.

Recent research suggests that there are changes towards fair, objective, balanced representations of African countries; narratives that are appreciative of African agency, and that produce dynamic and diverse stories from the continent. However, the shifts, if any, seem to be ambiguous. Much of the news and current affairs about Africa remains stuck in the old narrative, with the shift in both content and representation of Africans in global media still marginal, contestable, and largely skewed. Hence this research sought to shed further insights into the coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe by CNNI, CGTN and AJE.

Several perspectives can be teased from the debate on how Africans are reported in global broadcasting media. For the purposes of this study, we sum up these various views into three broader perspectives, informed by a brief literature survey and supplemented by our data.

### 2.1 Metaphors and expressions of Africa as the “Dark Continent”

In texts about Africa – whether they are historical court judgements, policies and laws, missionary journals, the tales of early colonial travels, imaginative fiction or photographs and illustrations – Africa is seen both literally and metaphorically as the “dark continent”. These stories and themes filtered into mainstream Western media without question, influencing news and current affairs frames and stories and defining norms in telling stories about Africans. Thus, contemporary global media news coverage of Africa is still rooted in colonially invented tribe, race, tradition and myth. Stereotypical postures, propelled by biased reporting, have fuelled marginalisation and overgeneralised single-story narratives about diverse, nuanced and complex experiences.

As a result, Africa is pervasively reported in negative terms, in a pre-set reporting template into which news reports are forced to fit. The main themes paint contribute to sustained Afro-pessimism, with reporting focused on natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies; conflict, violence and civil wars; corruption, poor governance and leadership, and political instability; hunger and famine; and romanticisation of “primitive Africa” as exotic jungle or plains teeming with wildlife. Furthermore, the continent is neglected or geographically marginalised, particularly by Western media such as CNNI.

For example, stories from CNNI have regarded Ethiopia as homogenous, buckling under the burden of famine, AIDS, corruption, a low
standard of living, and humanitarian crisis. The tone of CNNI reports, news, themes and sources focused on negative stories. Research on stories told by CNNI about Kenya suggested that it was a poor and violent society, with words and phrases such as “violence/protests”, “absence of democracy and rule of law”, “election irregularities”, “credible/free and fair elections”, “peace/calm”, dominating reports on elections. In 2015, Kenyans slammed CNNI on social media for referring to the country as “a hot bed of terrorism”.

Zimbabwe experienced a Western media blitz during the 2000s. The government of Zimbabwe banned CNNI from reporting in the country during this period, for allegedly advancing a Western agenda to remove the government. CNNI stories on Zimbabwe in the 2000s were a repertoire of human rights violations, breakdown in the health sector, poor governance, elections disputes, violence, and socio-economic and political crisis. These reports were negative, biased and adverse, and generated narratives of crisis, humanitarian implosion, and hopelessness, with farm invasions running a demonising narrative of the country. The narrative pushed by CNNI conflated with US foreign policy, which advocated for the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe, and the need for leadership change.

Post Mandela’s presidency, CNNI coverage of South Africa mainly focused on crime, corruption, and failed political leadership and governance. Such reports suggested that, like other African countries, South Africa was teetering towards a failed state, and was not safe for individuals, investment and tourism, which stood to grow during the soccer world cup.

Few case studies about CGTN and AJE are available in the literature, but research on CGTN coverage of African countries suggests that this broadcaster’s stories have been centred on propagating China’s soft power and on extending China’s ability to stay abreast of events in Africa through its network of bureaus and correspondents. In general, Chinese media has tended to broadcast positive news stories about Africa. In this regard, Chinese media ran an alternative, positive narrative about Africa from the African perspective. Reportage from Chinese media, including CGTN, also sought to manage the image of China in Africa, in the face of widespread Western criticism. However, such journalism tended be uncritical, lacked objectivity (in the sense of being biased towards China), and failed to hold African leaders’ officials accountable.

Given the lack of country case studies about AJE coverage, aspects of its narratives and stories about Africa were gleaned from research into its coverage of the whole continent. AJE advances empathetic journalism rooted in the quest to tell the human story in Africa, providing “a voice to the voiceless”. Its storytelling takes a problem-centred approach, providing in-depth interrogation of issues. However, the case of Zimbabwe shows that AJE dwelt on the same major themes as CNNI, although its approach sought to shine a light on the conditions of ordinary people. The main stories about Zimbabwe since the 2000s focused on the socio-economic and political crisis, conflict and humanitarian costs. AJE used negative frames of political instability and conflict, war and coups, premised on a discourse of human rights, democracy and governance. This is further illustrated in the use of terms such as “coup” and “dictatorship” in reporting the removal of Mugabe in 2017.

Nevertheless, AJE is comprehensive in its reliance on African journalists, anchors, analysts and sources of news, and thus effectively creates room for Africans as newsmakers and provides a deeper, balanced context for telling stories that are potentially more informative and balanced,
than stories told by Western correspondents who report from capital cities or embark on short visits to cover particular issues.

### 2.2 “Africa rising”: Global broadcasting narrative turning positive?

The term “Africa Rising” was coined to explain the rapid economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. The Africa rising narrative gained currency during the 2000s, associated with improved governance and democratisation of African states, fast economic growth, rising incomes, an emerging middle class, comparative peace, greater availability of mobile phones and the Internet, increase in African consumer spending as well as a growth in entrepreneurship, suggesting the rise and emergence of the African continent from its dark past as argued by the *Times* and the *Economist* magazines.

The view that Africa is rising drew attention to the skewed flowed coverage of the African continent by global media which primarily focussed on adverse news. During the launch of One World with Zain Asher, Asher stated that Africa should be given equally inclusive space in its coverage to showcase stories from the continent, focussing on both challenges and successes, relying on a roster of regular contributors and analysts with expertise across global affairs as well as an inside knowledge of the African continent. Her view resonates with two critical issues with respect to how Africa is covered in international media, the need to report its success stories instead of only covering negative stories, and the call for international media to present informed stories whose sources are well informed about the African continent. Both CGTN and AJE referred to the need to provide alternative African media coverage to Western and global media – particularly to CNNI – by reporting diverse, unbiased news reflective of dynamic African experiences.

Probably, the realisation and recognition of Africa’s rising economic status triggered the change in global media’s approach. Some economists cemented this view in public discourse by identifying Africa as a potential source of billions of dollars. The “Africa rising” discourse ushered calls for change in the African narrative, which resonated with much of the global media. While African policymakers and political leaders rallied global media to cover Africa in a positive light, media giants such as *Time* magazine and *The Economist* also ran with the new narrative, feeding into Afro-optimism. Trends shifted to notably positive economic reporting and technological innovations in different parts of the continent.

A higher representation of African media practitioners also started to change the face of international television. African anchors and journalists capable of drawing on their African social experiences could tell more balanced and contextualised stories, thus beginning to address the domination of global television by Western or foreign professionals, whose stories often lack depth and nuance.

These changes were reflected in CGTN and AJE, as well as CNNI, which all introduced more programmes focused on Africa. CNNI programmes such as *Inside Africa, African Voices, Change Makers, Marketplace Africa* and *African Start-Up* aimed at shifting the African narrative by telling diverse positive stories. However, while these changes have been significant, more should be done to report comprehensively and objectively. Although there are more programmes covering African politics and economics on all three channels, the representation of African countries continues to be skewed, as it is determined by stories chosen by senior management, most of whom are not Africans, and or lack in-depth experience with the continent. Hence, countries like South Africa and Nigeria have dominated coverage. The “Africa rising” perspective has been driven by the West,
under pressure to compensate for decades of negative global media coverage of Africa. This calls for positive reportage that recognises Africa as home to vastly different countries, with huge, diverse populations with different social, cultural, political and economic experiences. It calls for the recognition of African agency, tapping stories through African participation – for what has been termed “constructive journalism”.

2.3 “Constructive journalism”: Beyond CNNI and AJE

A push towards “constructive journalism” in the last decade calls for unapologetic positive news about African countries, centred on African agency. Constructive journalism entails reporting solution-focused news, rather than focusing on negative and conflict-based stories, giving stories more context and background and reporting what is going well, to engender a deeper understanding while creating a realistic view of the world. Instead of just highlighting an issue, constructive journalism addresses what the audiences can do with the information, how they might act on the issue; hence it triggers agency in resolving issues. Constructive journalism inspires news reportage that avoids negative bias and is oriented towards the public, solutions, action and the future.

However, constructive journalism may lead to partial, uncritical reporting that lacks objectivity and leads to a mistrust of news sources; for example much reportage from China has simply parroted government pronouncements and activities. As practised by CGTN and Chinese media in general, constructive journalism has promoted relations between African countries and China, fostering positive media cooperation with African governments, and focusing on positive development in Africa. Such journalism has strengthened China-Africa diplomacy and cooperation, and presented China as a great friend and development partner that stimulates economic growth and creates socio-economic opportunities, particularly in Africa. Although CGTN and Chinese media report positive stories about African countries, they fall short of holding African leaders accountable.

Critics of constructive journalism have complained about such uncritical coverage of African governments and bias towards China, and have called for the reportage of African experiences as they are, highlighting the realities of the continent, its challenges and progress within the context of the diverse African experiences beyond mere government interactions. For media practice, the challenge is to reflect true experiences in an objective, balanced way, without romanticising the African narrative; to tell African stories in a critical way, without being negative; and to address the issue of African agency in a manner that does not subordinate the roles and voices of Africans to external voices and players.
METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology implemented through video content analysis. CNNI, CGTN and AJE were chosen because they are the most dominant broadcasting media houses in the world. In Africa, CNNI is the most popular media house from the Global North, while CGTN and AJE are the biggest broadcasting media houses from the Global South and claim to provide an alternative voice to CNNI.

The four countries under study were chosen from the southern and eastern regions of Africa, to render regional and national insights into narratives about Africa by global broadcasting media. During the period under study, global media also reported on these four countries more than other countries in these regions.

The data sample was generated through purposive sampling of news, documentaries and current affairs reports on Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe by the three media houses, mined from their websites and YouTube. The data was organised chronologically, divided between news stories and current affairs, which included interviews and documentaries. The main themes were initially categorised as “political”, “economic” and “society” (stories that did not fit the two other categories). Under “society”, such sub-themes as sports, music and art were generated.

All news, current affairs stories covered by CNNI, CGTN and AJE on Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe between 2018 and 2020 were downloaded. Data was then transcribed into print reports, which were then repeatedly read and organised into the main themes. The data generated from the news, current affairs and documentaries was analysed thematically, focusing on perceptions and views, and gaining insight into common stories about the four countries and the implications thereof. The research also considered the face of global television, by looking at presenters, journalists and sources where possible.

The analysis identified frames (whether stories covered during the period under study were positive or negative); how much each country was covered; and how diverse the themes, stories and narratives were. The researcher identified the main messages and what they said about each of the four countries.
FINDINGS

The research findings were based on the texts, main themes and stories broadcast on the countries under study by the three media houses. Findings are arranged according to media house, with the most dominant themes being highlighted and discussed. Political news and current affairs were defined as content related to the coverage of governments, political power and civil society. Political and economic issues intersected, with stories emphasising how they impacted on each other.

4.1 CNNI coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa

CNNI gave less coverage of the four countries than either CGTN or AJE, and there were comparatively fewer on Kenya and Ethiopia than Zimbabwe and South Africa. While South Africa generally takes a bigger share of international news coverage because of its perceived role as Africa's biggest democracy, with the biggest economy in the continent, at the time Zimbabwe was widely covered because of its socio-economic and political crises.

Stories about Kenya and Zimbabwe carried political themes and focused on gay rights, elections, political polarisation and violence reinforcing traditional common stereotypes associated with traditional Western media reportage of the African continent. CNNI also carried two interviews with the presidents of Kenya and Zimbabwe. The interviews were however overshadowed by the issue of abuse of gay rights in both countries. CNNI also covered stories about the Ethiopian Airlines plane crash in 2019 which focussed on the tragic crush, loss of life and technical failures, aligned to the many challenges faced in African countries. The stories on the tragedy said that Ethiopian airlines were not safe for international lives and risked human lives. In 2018, CNNI ran stories about South Africa which said radical white South Africans were inspired by Trump, highlighting farm murders, divisive racism and suggestions that whites in South Africa threatened terrorism, because, in their words, they faced “genocide” on the farms.

Apart from the Ethiopian plane crash, CNNI stories about Ethiopia centred on its young president, who was presented as having captured Africa's imagination. However, the broadcaster also reported that, although President Abiy Ahmed promised to protect freedoms of expression, his government had continued to shut down the internet: “during the past month...there have been several nationwide internet blackouts, leaving friends and families disconnected, businesses unable to operate, and journalists prevented from reporting on events. Recent developments have left many in Ethiopia sceptical about the durability and sincerity of Abiy’s reforms”.

The interviews held by CNNI with the presidents of Zimbabwe and Kenya, separately hosted by Richard Quest and Christen Armanpour, focused on adverse issues in both countries. Although other issues were raised, in both interviews, the respective presidents' rejection of gay rights dominated. This part of their interviews was also reported in the main news as a major human rights concern in both countries. None of the other important issues discussed during the interviews was mentioned. During its prime evening news, CNNI dramatically reported the President of Kenya saying that “gay rights is of no importance to Kenya”.

Global broadcast media still relying on stereotypical narratives about Africa
In both interviews, the interviewers displayed a linguistic repertoire that was partisan, leading, negative and biased. They chose phrases such as “election scars”, “fighting over elections”, “Kenya at crossroads”, “narrow elections”, “victory”, “gravely concerned with beatings”, “part of the old regime”, “massacre”, “violations of human rights”, “abuses”, “longest serving president”, “impulses”, “gang”, “massacre”, “turbulence”, “the worst of the worst”, “no rule of law”. They gave a negative impression of Mugabe and questioned whether Mnangagwa would be a “unifier” or “divisive”. These interviews told stories of uncertainty, conflict and adverse conditions, reflecting typical Western media broadcasting that reinforces Afro-pessimism and invokes colonial metaphors of Africa as a dark continent.

Amongst few positive reports about Kenya, CNNI reported that Christian Chinese immigrants fleeing persecution in their home country, enjoyed religious freedoms in Kenya. However, much of CNNI reporting highlighted how Kenya was failing to contain terrorist attacks; extensively covering the storming of a hotel in a suburb of Nairobi by gunmen. While covering the visit of former US President Obama to the home of his ancestors, Kenya, CNNI juxtaposed his visit with the threat of terrorism. This led to widespread criticism of the broadcaster for stereotyping the country and labelling it as a continental base for terrorism.

While most stories were negative, there were a few positive exceptions, particularly those related to sports and technology. For example, CNNI covered the Rugby World Cup tournament, profiling rugby talent from Zimbabwe and looking at challenges faced by players; it also reported on a 15-year-old Zimbabwean girl who became very successful in motorsport, defying gender stereotypes and marginalisation of women. Focusing on the impact of technological innovation in Kenya, Richard Quest reported how M-pesa, a mobile banking service, had revolutionised money transfers in the country, making it easier and efficient and setting Kenya ahead of its African competitors.

The broadcaster’s stories about South Africa dramatised the circumstances of the white farming community in South Africa as dire and quoted people from the community as saying they faced a genocidal threat (although the reporter did say this was an exaggeration). Suggestions that white minority racists threatened terrorist violence in South Africa were emotive, and raised concerns about security and stability in the country. Linking the South African story to violent agitators connected to former US President Donald Trump exaggerated the story and created a false connection between two totally different contexts and situations.

Other key stories about South Africa played into the negative stereotypes reinforcing Afro-scepticism, focusing on such issues as corruption, natural disasters, violation of rule of law, the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. This showed South Africa as a country facing deep crisis, hence such reports reinforced negative perceptions.

On a more positive note, CNNI also widely reported the arrival of Prince Harry, Meghan and Archie in Cape Town for the first leg of their 2019 Africa tour, profiling Cape Town and South Africa as attractive to high profile visitors, and therefore popular tourism destination. CNNI also featured the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, Prof Marwala, in an episode of CNN Marketplace Africa, shedding some light on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in the market in Africa, its potential economic impact in South Africa and the role of the University of Johannesburg in developing and using AI. While the tech-innovation story represents a pattern of positive tech-journalism in Africa, such stories remain few. Most CNNI stories gave an adverse representation of the countries under study.
4.2 AJE coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa

Despite AJE covering many stories on a wide range of themes – including political and economic, as well as sports, arts and culture – adverse political and economic issues dominated; hence, much of the reporting had a negative slant. The stories were spread between hard news and current affairs debates with panellists that comprised mostly local nationals as analysts and reporters, as well as panellists from other African countries. The deployment of African panellists, journalists and anchors crucially shifted the presentation and face of international broadcasting, showing Africans as present and not merely the subjects of reports. Fundamentally, it shifted the narrative from foreign international correspondents, who filed stories lacking context and deeper understanding of the issues – a common criticism of Western broadcasting media was that it flew only foreign correspondents into newsworthy spots.

In Zimbabwe, AJE widely covered the 2018 elections, highlighting the polarised elections campaign, torture, human rights violations, repression, harassment of opposition activists, beatings and police brutality and abductions. AJE reported that, “the army had supported Mugabe, and had vowed not to allow the opposition to rule the country, noting that previous elections under Mugabe, “were marred by violence, voter intimidation and fraud” . In the same report, AJE cited opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, who complained that the government perpetrated violence. The report also cited human rights organisations as saying that the army wielded a powerful veto and was implicated in violence, thus projecting electoral processes in Zimbabwe as disputable. AJE also covered the legal challenge to Mnangagwa’s victory, which left the question of his legitimacy hanging during his tenure.

After the elections, between 2018 and 2020, AJE stories about Zimbabwe included coverage of demonstrations against government, government crackdowns on civil society, strikes over rapidly declining political conditions and economic issues. Further, AJE reported on government failure to address more than two decades of economic crisis. Stories focused on corruption within the state and declining economic conditions, such as severe shortages of foreign currency, fuel, electricity, water, food and basic commodities. Other stories focused on and job losses and unemployment, eroding wages, industrial difficulties, high taxes and labour unrest. Linked to the poor economic conditions were stories on poor health conditions in Zimbabwe, such as the outbreak of cholera in 2018 and the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. AJE claimed that the government was opportunistically using Covid-19 regulations to contain festering dissent, thereby infuriating the opposition and civil society, who responded by organising more strikes. The intertwined stories of political and economic crisis portrayed a gloomy picture of a country in dire straits, feeding into Afro-scepticism and pessimism.

Positive AJE reports reflected the dynamism and resilience shown by Zimbabweans, including their notable efforts to mitigate poaching through community participation, and their use of new technologies to preserve the environment and wildlife threatened with extinction. A 2020 AJE report focused on the use of drones to deter potential poachers from national parks, the mainstay of the tourism industry in Zimbabwe.

The coverage of South Africa by AJE focused on rising unemployment due to declining employment opportunities in the mining sector; xenophobia, exacerbated by socio-economic inequality; the scourges of growing racism, protests, violence, murder and high crime rates; increasing extreme poverty; poor infrastructure and service provision; vandalism of public property; forced evictions of illegal shack dwellers; and the problem of drug use and trafficking. Although AJE many diverse stories on South
Africa, the dominant stories focused on profile corruption – including the looting of billions of rands of Covid-19 funding, and the ANC’s internal decline. AJE reported that, “Zuma was forced from office by his own party, the African National Congress, when almost a decade's worth of corruption, bribery and racketeering allegations finally became too great to ignore”, saying that corruption was systemic, embedded and a deadly business that had fuelled more than 200 politically motivated killings in the past two years due to political turf wars amongst ANC politicians.

In other stories, AJE reported on a diplomatic tiff with various African countries – especially Nigeria – because of widespread xenophobic attacks, in which Nigeria had to airlift their citizens back home. Despite the negative reportage, AJE contextualised stories; for example, it explained the continuing historical structural legacy resulting in hostile racial divisions and growing inequality, as well as unresolved land reform, suggesting the government had failed to solve these problems and had betrayed the Mandela legacy.

However, more positive stories included AJE coverage of the launch of the first Covid-19 vaccine pilot in South Africa in 2020, the success of Cape Town's “Ceasefire” intervention by local community workers to mitigate the scourge of drug abuse and trafficking and resultant violence, and increased access to education, human rights and free basic healthcare since 1994 when South Africa attained democracy.

More than any other international broadcasting channel, AJE extensively covered the Ethiopian civil war, focusing on ethnic conflict, war and the consequent humanitarian crisis, such as the plight of uprooted communities who faced displacement and loss of livelihoods, health and education opportunities. AJE reported “nearly one million displaced in Ethiopia ethnic violence” and without protection from government to secure their livelihoods.

Reportage suggested that Ethiopia was sliding backwards under President Abiy Ahmed, after a promising start, and questioned the controversial handling of protests. Further, it focused on the plight of Tigrayan refugees fleeing to Sudan, serious human rights abuses and restrictions on humanitarian access, and fears of war crimes amid reports of extrajudicial executions and massacres.

It also intertwined the political analysis with economic reporting, showing economic prospects declining, the shortage of foreign currency and the need for massive Chinese investment. Several stories also highlighted multilateral disputes between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt over the construction of the Nile Dam and its slow pace of completion. The stories suggested the dam was not providing benefits for affected communities and also covered the African Union's mediation role, as well as the mysterious death of the Ethiopian engineer in charge of construction.

In positive coverage of Ethiopia, in 2018, AJE reported on Sahle-Work Zewde's appointment as Ethiopia's first woman president, a remarkable feat for a woman in the country. It also reported on Eritrea-Ethiopia peace negotiations which culminated in the restoration of peaceful relations between the two countries, including Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's landmark visit to Eritrea, and the visit of an Eritrean delegation to Ethiopia. In 2019, AJE covered reports on the signing of a peace deal between the Ethiopian government and former Ogaden rebels. Reportage also included the turning of a former jail into a museum, highlighting historical human rights violations that included torture, rape and abuse. Business ventures and environmental issues were also highlighted, including communities utilising coral reefs, the environmental campaign to block the Lamu Port-
South Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor from going ahead, and ocean conservation by fisherman who turned into reef rangers.

In Kenya, the main issues covered by AJE were the scourge of Al Shabab and frequent violent terrorist attacks. AJE highlighted how gun violence was resulting from an estimated 750,000 pistols and rifles in private hands and how this created instability because the police and military had far fewer guns. Corruption stories were also common; for example, one story uncovered how millions of dollars meant for much-needed hospital equipment were misappropriated in a 2015 deal. Further, AJE reported that $90 million had been looted from the youth fund, and that Covid-19 funds had been misused, thus aggravating unemployment. In its coverage of the Covid-19 pandemic corruption, AJE reflected a picture of crisis because hopelessness for low-paid workers on flower farms, in which Kenyans were experiencing food insecurity and starvation due to the impact of lockdowns on jobs and livelihoods.

Positive coverage included stories about Kenya’s pilot scheme to export crude oil to capitalise the country’s reserves, with a view to opening the fuel industry; as well as a government initiative to generate geothermal energy for electricity, to reduce carbon emissions – 43% of Kenya’s electricity supply comes from geothermal power, even as millions of Kenyans still depend on trees to make charcoal. Further, AJE reported positive moves by President Kenyatta to ban plastic to limit ocean pollution and help the country develop a vibrant blue economy, i.e. and economy that preserves, regenerates and sustainable exploits the marine environment. The same story also reported government efforts to combat international poaching, efforts at environmental conservation to protect the world’s oceans, while enhancing domestic economic participation and entrepreneurship. For example, AJE highlighted that Kenyan fisherman were working with the government and United Nations-Habitat to monitor and protect fish stocks.

4.3 CGTN coverage of Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa

CGTN covered more stories than CNNI and AJE, and coverage was notably different in that most stories about the four countries were mainly positive. They portrayed the positive impact of relations with China, Chinese-funded infrastructure projects in Kenya and Ethiopia, and good bilateral relations between China, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Even when CGTN covered negative stories, they were presented as challenges which governments were making efforts to resolve. Apart from China’s relationships with these four countries, CGTN also reported on the relations between the four countries in this study and other multilateral and bilateral relations amongst African countries, including economic, diplomatic and political cooperation as well as addressing emergencies. Accordingly, reporting focused on the role of governments, with little reporting on communities, including Chinese communities, in these countries.

Although CGTN reported on elections in Zimbabwe, it focused on political due processes, unlike CNNI and AJE, which focused on adverse human rights and humanitarian issues. It gave positive coverage to meetings between Zimbabwe and Botswana to realign their relations, stating, “Zimbabwe and Botswana are entering a new era of relations after the first state visit in a decade”.

CGTN covered President Mnangagwa’s visit to China, where China committed to providing an assistance package to Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is one of the closest allies of China in Africa and has benefitted from millions of dollars of Chinese investment in the past decade. It further gave positive coverage to Mnangagwa’s meetings at the World Economic Summit in Davos and the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister to sub-Saharan Africa highlighting the good relations between...
the government of China and African states. In contrast to CNNI which highlighted mostly negative issues during its interview with Mnangagwa, CGTN afforded Mnangagwa’s visit to Davos positive coverage, portraying his engagements as successful. Zimbabwe is dealing with long term international isolation since the imposition of Western sanctions in the 2000s. Mnangagwa has attended all the Davos meetings since he came to power in 2019 to use the meetings of the World Economic Forum to reengage the Global Western international community. Much of the media from the Global North, like CNNI, continue to present Zimbabwe as a pariah state.

CGTN also positively reported that the government of Zimbabwe was expanding the dam network to boost hydro-electric power in the country. Zimbabwe faces severe shortages of electricity. These stories showed that the Zimbabwean government was making political and economic progress hence rebuilding the economy. Although the country continues to face severe economic and political challenges, the message from CGTN reportage is that the government is following important policies to improve the situation.

On South Africa, CGTN reported flourishing relations between South Africa and China on business, health, cyber-security and cultural exchanges. For example, in one story it announced that a Chinese automaker is building South Africa’s largest vehicle factor and that the project would benefit the whole African continent.

CGTN also reported on the meeting between the South African delegation at Davos and Chinese business magnate, investor and philanthropist Jack Ma, free cyber security training provided to the South African government and the Covid-19 medical supplies China donated to South Africa highlighting positive relations between South Africa and China. Further coverage emphasised positive relations between other African countries and South Africa, especially highlighting how South Africa continued to help Mozambique and, during the visit of President Kenyatta to South Africa, it emphasised the growing relations between Kenya and South Africa.

In line with its posture to give more diverse coverage of African stories, CGTN reported stories on culture, sport, conservation efforts and innovation. It also covered positive stories about Chinese populations living in South Africa, showing that they enjoyed cordial friendly relations with South African citizens. For example, in the Year of the Dog, CGTN reported on the celebrations by the Chinese communities in South Africa, in which South African populations participated.

Further, CGTN provided coverage of soccer, rugby and tennis, and positively profiled South African achievers such as the South African restaurant which won an award for making the best pizzas in Africa. Sports journalism provides positive news content popular with diverse populations. CGTN covered a range of diverse positive stories such as conservation efforts to save pangolins, the transfer of a tiger from Europe back to South Africa, the invention of a South African video game, focussing on local tech- innovation, and ground-breaking research in which South African female researchers produced the largest, state-of-the-art, 3D printer. These stories demonstrated that South Africa in particular, and Africa in general had many diverse stories beyond negative
stories which characterise traditional Western reportage about the continent.

CGTN also reported some negative news, although such stories were fewer, possibly to strike a balance in its reportage. The few negative stories about South Africa highlighted the high crime rate and xenophobic attacks in 2019, which resulted in a diplomatic tiff between South Africa and Nigeria. However, crime and xenophobia attacks also affected Chinese immigrants and citizens living in South Africa, hence the stories reflected that South Africa is a risky country. CGTN said crime statistics revealed a worrying 57 murders a day, which suggested that South Africans were living in a war zone.

In coverage of Covid-19, CGTN also highlighted how lockdowns created supply chain shocks that affected the economy, and by extension Chinese interests in South Africa. CGTN also ran a story that blamed the South African education system for growing unemployment and sought to deflect allegations that the Chinese brought workers from China to work in their projects in Africa. Thus, CGTN played a role of defending Chinese interests by blaming unemployment on the educational system.

Further, several stories about elections focused on the players, the challenges the ANC faced, post-election economic prospects, issues around land reform, growing unemployment and lack of economic growth. In these stories, CNNI argued that the South African government faced a socio-economic crisis as it failed to address these problems, but still took an optimistic tone, acknowledging the problems, but arguing that the government was addressing these issues, some of which emanated from the historical legacy of the country. In line with the posture of CGTN to highlight close friendly relations between China and ruling party governments, its coverage propped the ANC ruling party and indicated that the ANC would retain power.

In its coverage of Kenya, CGTN highlighted the progress and benefits of cooperation with China, including the launch of the Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC) Kenya government skills project; the Lamu Port project; and the Standard-Gauge Railway (SGR) project, connecting Nairobi and Mombasa, and dubbed East Africa’s longest railway line. Stories also indicated how Chinese firms were creating employment in Kenya and Kenya’s consequent GDP growth from 5.25% to 5.75% in 2018, and 5.9% growth in 2020. However, it also reported that Kenya’s economic prospects were slowing down, based on a 2018 World Bank report, and high taxes were crippling Kenya’s trade in second-hand clothes. On the other hand, the demand for tofu in China was fuelling a soyabean boom in Kenya.

In other stories, CGTN reported that Chinese descendants had lived in Kenya for more than 600 years and that Kenyans took part in Chinese festivities, such as the Chinese spring festival gala. It also ran stories on one of the oldest bars in Kenya, which continued to be popular with tourists; the Afro-bubble-gum festival; sports; and a ventilator invented in Kenya.

Regarding coverage of Ethiopia, CGTN reported on the Nile Dam regional cooperation, regional security and Covid-19 – including support from China towards fighting the pandemic and how well China took care of Ethiopian students who were stuck in lockdown in China. In line with its emphasis on development and cooperation, CGTN covered International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that Ethiopia was overtaking Ghana as Africa’s fastest growing economy. Development projects were highlighted, such as the Chinese-built Ethiopia–Djibouti railway line, the Chinese mission to the AU, and the launching of Ethiopia’s first satellite into space – with the help of China.

Despite disputes over the Nile Dam between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt, CGTN coverage focused on diplomatic cooperation, such as
mediation by South African President Ramaphosa and the meeting of government ministers from the three countries. It also highlighted a meeting between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, to bolster security in the region, and that President Aimed of Ethiopia had received the Nobel Peace Prize for ending conflict with Eritrea. However, in reporting on the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, CGTN emphasised the advance of federal troops on the Tigray capital, Mekelle, to restore the rule of law. Reporting on a meeting between the Ethiopian government, United Nations officials and civil society to commemorate the United Nations Day for Peace, CGTN said that the government of Ethiopia was committed to ending conflict and violence in parts of the country. This type of coverage again showed how CGTN coverage aligns with Chinese interests in creating a positive view of African governments.

4.4 Changing programmes, face and tone in international broadcasting

On all three channels under study, there was an increase in programmes about Africa, and, in general, more prominence was given to coverage on the continent – particularly by CGTN and AJE. In news bulletins and prime current affairs programmes, The Stream and Inside Story, AJE provided coverage on all four countries under study. CGTN, which runs a fully dedicated 24-hour Africa focused news channel, featured all four countries on its current affairs programmes, thus broadcasting more content, news and current affairs on the countries under study and hugely improving the reportage, participation and representation of African countries in international broadcasting news.

CNNI continued to rely on international correspondents and journalists in covering the four countries, but AJE and CGTN shifted to include more African journalists, commentators and analysts, especially drawing from those born or resident in the country or sub-region they were reporting on. Showing the presence of African faces and voices in telling the African story has improved the image of television broadcasting in general. These home-grown journalists bring authenticity, telling grounded, well-informed stories that are rich in context and nuance, and counter the stereotypical framing that reinforces Afro-pessimism and negative, uninformed reporting.

AJE made the most effort to employ journalists from the four countries or African continent, for example, Cathrene Soi reporting from Nairobi, Haru Mutasa reporting from Harare, Fahmida Miller reporting from Johannesburg, and Mohammed Adow reporting on Kenyan and Somalia. Employing reporters who are indigenous to the regions or countries they report from, who are familiar with local languages, and who have experience of journalism in the continent not only improves the content of stories that are broadcast but also boosts some of the best African journalists and journalism.

While African audiences of AJE can identify with its stories through the anchors and reporters who mirror their images and experiences, this is not so for CNNI and CGTN. CNNI lags in diversifying its anchors and journalists to include Africans born and living in the continent. While CNNI hosts, such as Zain Asher and Ellen Giokos, and a string of African correspondents may reflect the broadcaster’s intentions to include more Africans, it still relies heavily on Western international correspondents and anchors. CGTN, broadcasting from Nairobi, has probably moved far ahead in terms of including African anchors, correspondents and journalists. However, it remains dominated by Chinese officials in critical decision-making positions.
4.5 Diverse programmes at CNNI, CGTN and AJE

There is growing evidence of awareness of the need to broaden and diversify content, programmes and coverage of Africa at CGTN, AJE and CNNI, to include a more positive focus.

CNNI runs such programmes as Marketplace Africa, Inside Africa, African Start-Up, African Voices Change Makers, Africa View, in addition to One World and segments of the main news. This shows an awareness to provide more dynamic and positive coverage of the continent. Coverage of the four countries under study was, however predominantly based on the interviews with the Presidents of Zimbabwe and Kenya. Some clips from these interviews were featured on the main news, albeit highlighting controversial issues. President Kenyatta’s response to the issues of gay rights was featured as breaking news overshadowing other important matters discussed during his interview with CNNI in the program Marketplace Africa. During the launch of the CNNI programme, One World, its African-born anchor, Zain Asher, said,

“from Nairobi to New York and Paris to Pretoria, One World will capture the conversation beyond the headlines in the US, Asia and Europe and showcase stories from across Africa. The show will feature a roster of regular contributors and analysts with expertise across global affairs as well as an inside knowledge of the African continent to complement CNNI’s newsgathering on the ground... One World will offer viewers an approachable, inclusive space where diverse voices dissect not only the day’s top stories but more importantly the challenges and successes in Africa and beyond. Everyone watching this show will have a stake in the global conversation."

However, coverage of the four countries under study was not reflected in One World.

AJE programmes such as Africa Investigates, Innovate Africa, Africa on the Move, The Stream, Africa Direct and Inside Story covered all four countries under study – mainly during the main news and the main current affairs programmes, The Stream and Inside Story. More importantly, the two current affairs programmes took an interactive form, engaging with audiences through social media platforms linked to YouTube and Facebook, thus allowing them to engage, participate and give feedback to the main issues being debated.

CGTN Africa programmes included Africa Live, Global Business, Sport, Talk Africa, Faces of Africa and Special Coverage. Through Africa Live, CGTN regularly brought news about the four countries under study, and the African continent, to the global space. In contrast to CNNI and AJE, CGTN is the only channel that offers fully dedicated African news coverage.
DISCUSSION

A legacy of Afro-pessimism dominated the reportage of political news and current affairs in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ethiopia and Kenya, especially at CNNI and AJE, despite efforts to refocus and shift to more diverse stories and positive media representations of African countries. Coverage by these broadcasters predominantly focused on political news and current affairs, especially political and economic crisis, conflict, corruption, human rights violations, election disputes and misgovernance. Their narratives showed a minimal shift from the Western stereotype that African politics is inherently problematic.

By contrast, CGTN took an uncritically positive posture in reporting on inter-Africa state relations and cooperation between China and the four countries under study. Using constructive journalism, CGTN was cautious about reporting negative news, and mainly covered the many development projects involving China and the four countries under study. Despite this leading to more positive and diverse coverage, most stories were about Chinese business engagement and diplomatic cooperation with the African countries, and thus they showed African events as externally driven. While CGTN's development journalism does provide opportunities for telling diverse, dynamic interesting stories, it should also maintain objectivity and balance.

CNNI and AJE's stories highlighting adverse politics took the lead, but they were not the only, and not always the most important stories. As argued in the literature review, such media coverage frames Africa as pervasively entangled in war, poverty and diseases such as Ebola, HIV and Aids, and more recently, Covid-19. The narrative developed by CNNI and AJE was dominated by coverage of poor leadership and weak governance; mostly corrupt, repressive, failing or failed states; and gross human rights violations, senseless violence, and humanitarian emergencies, triggered by conflict and natural causes in the four countries under study.

However, some positive reports were dropped between negative ones. Reportage of sports and business news, current affairs, technological innovations, fashion and art showed the countries under study as dynamic and progressive and culturally rich and complex, taking the narrative beyond that of static hopelessness.

AJE and CGTN maintained coverage of the four countries through dedicated African programmes and content, resulting in less marginalisation and exclusion of Africa from global media than in the past. Further, the data revealed a changing face of broadcasting about Africa, with more presenters, journalists, correspondents and analysts being African – often based in their own countries and familiar with local contexts. However, CNNI trailed with narrower programming, fewer stories, and greater reliance on foreign correspondents.
CONCLUSION

The coverage of Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa and Ethiopia by CNNI, AJE and CGTN was dominated by political and economic stories, which were generally negative. The main themes covered by CNNI and AJE, and their linguistic repertoire and tone played into a negative portrayal of the countries under study, typical in global media reportage on African countries. Although there was a recognisable shift towards diversifying coverage, it was diminished by a focus on political and economic crises. While CGTN defined a more positive posture with its form of development journalism, its approach raises questions about objectivity and holding African governments accountable. More work is needed by global broadcasting media to support a shift towards narratives on Africa that are objective, balanced, informative and representative.
ENDNOTES


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