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Africa's Reductive Images, Contesting the Sources, and New Generations as Passive Victims: A Reflection on Historical and Global Representational Practices*

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Abstract

The impacts of African 'reductive images' on the new African generation has become a growing concern. Though the entire Africa cannot be condensed into a homogenous feature, there has been a classic subject matter commonly discoursed as 'African image'. This subject is worrisome for its undesirable impact on contemporary African generations as bearers of negative images and 'passive victims'. There is a growing risk of pushing these generations into reduced 'self-conception' and 'role-perception' in the international spheres of dynamics where reputation matters a lot. In other words, such anxieties and acts of passiveness would lead Africa and Africans to be sidelined in global socio-economic shares. While this subject inscribes several arguable themes including 'reality versus image' and 'criticism versus misrepresentation', it sounds vital to discover and challenge its historical and global basis. In this regard, the hi/story of African 'reductive images' goes as far back as the start of slavery and colonialism. Since then, perhaps no image of a geo-cultural region has been as simply degraded as African one. This article attempts to make a reflective review on historical and global representational practices that, directly or indirectly, contribute to the reductive images of African continent. It mainly considers the practices of colonial exhibitions, missionary collections, Oriental and Eurocentric narratives, world information and communication dis/order, world mapping and spatial imagery, as well as developmental and humanitarian interventions. The article comes to confront these mis/representational practices and phenomena for their collectively injurious effects on the pace of African development. Essentially, there is urgent need for counter-strategies aiming at image restoration and promotion.

Keywords: Africa's Images, Colonial Exhibitions, Oriental And Eurocentric Narratives, World Information and Communication Dis/Order, Developmental and Humanitarian Interventions, Young Generations

* This article is taken from the author's PhD dissertation on 'The Construction of African Cultural Image'

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Afrika'nın İndirgemeci İmajları, Kaynakları Sorgulamak ve Pasif Bir Kurban olarak Yeni Kuşaklar: Tarihi ve Küresel Temsili Pratikler Üzerinde Bir Değerlendirme

Abdulaziz Dino Gidreta**

Öz

Afrika'nın yaygın indirgemeci imajı yeni nesil Afrika kuşakları üzerinde giderek artan bir endişe yaratmaya devam etmektedir. Afrika'nın tamamının aynı yapıda olduğu indirgenmezse bile "Afrika imajı" diye klasik ve meşhur bir söylem bulunmaktadır. Oluşturulan indirgemeci imajın 'pasif kurbanı' olan şimdiki Afrika kuşakları üzerinde oluşan zararlı etkilerden dolayı düşük imaj algısı endişe verici olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Yeni Afrika kuşaklarının, imajın büyük bir önem kazandığı uluslararası dinamik sahnede düşük bir 'benlik' ve 'rol algılamaya' gitme riskleri oldukça fazladır. Bir başka ifadeyle, düşük imaj algısının yarattığı kaygı ve pasif tutum, Afrika ve Afrikalıların küresel siyasal, ekonomik ve kültürel paylaşımında dışlamasına sebep olmaktadır. Afrika imaj konusunda 'gerçek ve imaj' ve 'eleştiri ve yanlış temsil' gibi tartışılabilir konular olsa bile, Afrika'nın indirgemeci imaj inşasına neden olan tarihi ve devam eden küresel fenomenler sorgulanmalıdır. Bu bağlamda, Afrika'nın indirgemeci imajların tarihi kölelik ve sömürgecilik dönemlere kadar geri döner. O zamandan bu yana, hiçbir coğrafik ya da kültürel grubun imajı Afrika'nın kadar kolay-kolay ve acımasızca zarar verilmemiştir. Bu makale Afrika karşı indirgemeci imaj inşasına katkısı olabileceği zannedilen tarihi ve devam eden küresel fenomenleri değerlendirmektedir. Bütün bu imaj endişeleri yaratmasına katkısı olabilecekleri varsayarak sömürge sergileri, misyoner koleksiyonları, oryantal ve Avrupa-merkezci anlatılar, dünya enformasyon ve iletişim düzensizliği, dünya haritanın inşası, kalkınma ve insani müdahale gibi pratikler üzerinde genel bir değerlendirme yapmaktadır. Afrika'nın kalkınmasına olumsuz etkilemesinden dolayı bahsedilen tarihi ve küresel temsili pratikler sorgulanması gerekir. İmaj restorasyon ve promosyon odaklı karşı -stratejiler gerektiğini de bu makalede vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Afrika'nın İmajı, Sömürge Sergileri, Oryantal ve Avrupa-Merkezci Anlatılar, Dünya Enformasyon ve İletişim Düzensizliği, Kalkınma ve İnsani Müdahaleleri, Genç Kuşaklar

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Introduction

There is a danger of homogenization in approaching the entire Africa as a single subject of analysis, since Africa is not a single cultural group, or even a nation. It is rather the most ethnically heterogeneous continent in the world (Blake, 2013). However, at a level of broader public dialogue and perception, there has been 'a single' matter that the entire African continent tends to share. That is 'image'. To mean, there is a common subject matter discoursed as 'African image' inscribing the historical and global representational issues of both portrayal and participation.

The issue of African image become a concern for its undesirable impact on Africa, and Africans as bearers of negative images and 'passive victims' (Pitchford, 2008). There is a growing risk of pushing Africans to a reduced self-conception and so a reduced 'role-perception' in international spheres of dynamics where image matters a lot. In other words, these anxieties and acts of passiveness would lead Africa and Africans to be sidelined in the global socio-economic shares.

Hence, there should be collective attempts to contribute to the solution of this continuing representational concern. One of these interventions can be bringing the subject matter into academic and public debates. With these grounds, this article endeavors to focus on a more preliminary aspect of the subject - historical and global phenomena. It is guided by a general question 'how has Africa been represented and involved in prominent historical and global representational practices'. The practices addressed in this context are practices of both portrayal and participation of African continent.

The general purpose of this article is to bring the issue of African image into scholarly and public debates which would have further impacts on studies and policies. So specifically, the study aims to make a wide-ranging review and reflection on representational practices of early colonial exhibitions, missionary collections, Oriental narratives, and exotic depictions during slavery. It then considers representational tendencies and the position of African continent in the broader world information and communication order, in world mapping in the sense of spatial imagery, and in the practices of developmental and humanitarian interventions.

Method

An intensive study of African image could consider more precise study subjects, aspects of image, and bounded signifying practices. However, a general reflective analysis on the historical and global representational practices can serve as a supportive ground for specific study efforts. Accordingly, this article reviews various scholarly works including books, journal articles, e-magazines, online newspapers, web pages, blog posts, as well as visual elements like pictures and maps. It then discusses series of themes considered for reflection.

World Fairs, Colonial Exhibitions and Missionary Collections

Before a century or two from now, most affairs of the '*representation of others*' happened in the context of public communication in form of festivals, exhibitions, fairs and expositions. The fact that such public events were widely practiced representational media in the 19th century and early 20th century can be well linked to historical development of communication mediums from the physical-human, to mass media, and to virtual phases. At that period, even print and broadcast representational mediums have been quite insignificant. So inevitably the subjects of representation and misrepresentation happened in the context of proximate and physical human contacts in form of interpersonal, group and public interactions.

In the global and regional contexts, the impacts of cross-cultural exhibitions can be determined by their volume which again can be associated to event management capabilities. Obviously, in the imperial era, the entire power relation of the time was established on the simple division of colonizer and the colonized. And with all its accumulated affluences and influences, it was only the colonizer that could run large scale and international level exhibitions, mostly the colonized being the exhibited. Thus, it sounds helpful to examine the practices of European and American collection and exhibition of Africa together with their motives and possible impacts on the regenerations-crossed some '*reductive*' images of Africa.

In short, in intercontinental level, the cultural representation of others has been very much dominated by power-relations in the practices of world fairs and colonial exhibitions as well as the missionary collections of the 19th and 20th centuries. So here, the question 'what exactly were these world fairs and colonial exhibitions, and how did they exhibit the colonized, with what effect?' appears vital.

World fairs and colonial exhibitions were not as such limited events by category. They rather implied wide-verities of public events situated in the 'international' coverage of the time. They were very large-scale happenings that combined features of trade and industrial fairs, carnival, music festivals, political manifestations, museums, and art galleries. At these gigantic exhibitions staged by principal colonial powers, 'the world was collected and displayed' for grand motives (Corbey, 1993: 338-441). In particular, world fairs of the late 19th century attracted millions of visitors. The 1851 first world fair in Crystal palace, in London, attracted 6 million visitors; the 1878 the world fair in Paris attracted 16 million; and the 1900 Paris fair, still before the era of the cinema and television, attracted 50 million (Corbey, 1993: 339).

These fairs were created with 'unlimited trust in Enlightenment ideas and the rational constructability of the world' which is made based on the 'Western' self-image and standards (Corbey, 1993: 140-141). They were then characterized by the regulation of relationships

among rival powers; and economic interests went together with cultural and nationalistic ambitions. Mostly, they were compared to joyous ritual displays of richness and power 'where possessions were given away and even destroyed in great numbers to gain prestige and to outdo others' (Brooks, 2013: 71-81; Corbey, 1993: 339).

Simply, colonial displays justified imperialism through economics. Colonies were expensive trophies for imperialist nations and needed to provide raw materials and/or markets for the metropole. The desire, especially of new colonial powers such as Germany, Italy and Belgium, was then to prove to their citizens that they were indeed world powers (Korasick, 2005: 33). Moreover, one of the main targets of colonial empires was to use the exhibition opportunities to publicize colonial policies and to manipulate public attitudes toward the newly acquired territories.

Figure 1: The European Scramble For Africa



In this sense, for instance, according to Brooks (2013), the French colonial exhibits of 1889 were mainly claimed to be used for "civilizing the metropole". By displaying the empire's indigenous inhabitants and by offering visitors the illusion of traveling to the colonies, exposition organizers attempted to instill the notion of a Greater France.

Source: Schiffman, R. (2013). Hunger, food security, and the African land grab. Retrieved from <http://voiceseducation.org/node/7873>.

So surely, material culture displays in European museums of the late 19th century were devised to create desired effects on viewers (Korasick, 2005: 32). Serving as signifiers of imperial sovereignty, these objects were also meant as scientific research subjects. In this sense, they were manipulated to provide 'proof' of racial inferiority and justify colonial

interventions. In this way, the spectacles provided western audiences their first exposure to non-Western material culture.

Almost incomparable to other colonized regions, Africa has generally been hurt by colonialism and colonial expositions. African material culture had been on display in European collections for at least two hundred years by the 19th century (Korasick, 2005: 12). In this regard, the most common evidence for cultural racism is drawn from travel literature and material culture exhibits of the 19th century. Many written accounts were indeed filled with negative critiques of Africans. The depiction of the image of Africans as ‘cannibals’ and ‘idolatrourous heathens’ impacted the minds of the Western public. These images tended to provide a rationale for slavery, and eventually, a public excuse for colonialism (Korasick, 2005: 6).

By these, one can notice that colonial exhibitions told the story of mankind, in the very same narrative that accompanied and legitimized colonial expansion. They have simply shown “light against dark, and order against violence”. Particularly, according to Corbey (1993: 141), African colonies were exhibited as true personifications of “dark continent”.

The European and American display of Africa were different in process, but comparable in drive. The display of African material culture in the US differed from the displays in Europe (Korasick, 2005: 2). The US did not have actual imperial interest in Africa, and consequently, unlike the Europeans there were no displays featuring colonial trophies. However, like the European displays, the US museums magnified the primitiveness of Africa and the need for Western culture to modernize and raise Africans from their condition. This became one of the roots for the instigation of modernization paradigms of development communication (Chandra, 2004: 217). The American displays emphasized strangeness of the African objects, so foreign but accessible to American sensibilities. They were also informed by the science and popular biases of the time. They often depicted Africans as the lowest of savages (Korasick, 2005: 3). The only programmed message communicated together with the primitiveness of African societies was the emphasis on the economic potentials of the continent.

Nevertheless, such images were not always received by the audience in the way intended. The reaction of the audience was often positive despite displays that were often overtly racist. From the audience, rather than focusing on the primitiveness of the objects, there was an appreciation for the aesthetics and craftsmanship of the pieces. According to Korasick (2005: 3), this visitor appreciation grew steadily, and by the first decade of the 20th century, “popular opinion moved these very foreign, non-representational, pieces from the status of curios to fine arts”, both in the US and Europe.

The idea here is that such historical trends of ‘showing Africa’ have then highly influenced the visitors’ ways of ‘seeing Africa’, and their further perception and attitudes towards Af-

rica. Still Africa is associated to these attributes in the minds of the international publics, well indicating us the transfer or reproduction nature of the gaze, through generations.

The primary source of information for the Western society about Africa in the 19th century was reports of missionaries. Missionary reports were also the main sources for the study and classification of primitive societies, while anthropology was only an “armchair” discipline. In addition, the information passed through church journals and newsletters. The most important exposure to the foreign culture was lecture tours undertaken by missionaries on leave from their positions (Korasick, 2005). According to Korasick, during the tours, audiences were captivated by accounts of Africans as the strange people and the dangers that the missionaries experienced. These lectures were illustrated with collected popular objects including masks, fetishes, tools and clothes; some were trade goods, gifts, and trophies (2005: 12). These objects were also considered as signs of success of the mission, and the collection practice illustrated the aesthetic sensibilities of the collectors who often developed an appreciation for the arts and crafts of the people they sought to convert and civilize.

Morally, missionary collections and exhibitions were not that different from other ‘non-spiritual’ forms. In the exhibitions, tens of thousands of visitors appeared to see Africans in the missionary exhibitions. Immorally, some exhibitions displayed African women with naked breasts, which the Church did not appear to be discomfited by, and in fact had no objection at all to the “exhibition” of human beings, either (Sanchez-Gomez, 2009: 671-692).

Although the United States was not actively involved in the colonization of Africa, it was the major exporter of Africans as slaves. The US has been introduced to the modern Africa through its missionaries. Missionaries, together with traders, were the important and early promoters of Africa to Americans, and commissioned to bring the light of Christianity to ‘heathen Africans’ and Mohammedans (Korasick, 2005: 1).

Missionaries and traders as promoters of Africa to America were often “collectors of the curios from their chosen regions of the world” to use them to illustrate lectures. According to Korasick (2005: 2), traders such as Karl Steckelmann and missionaries like William Henry Sheppard followed an established pattern of collecting objects for educational purposes as well as for aesthetic pleasure. The collections were not limited only to educational and aesthetic pleasures, most importantly, there was an aspect of propaganda behind the collections; and “depending on who the collector was the collection could convey messages of economic opportunity, African potential, or African barbarity”. Through their writings and lectures, “a vision of an exciting, dangerous, mysterious land” was intermingled with the hints of vast potential wealth and the spread of the Christian gospel” (Korasick, 2005: 2).

Post-1850 period witnessed the quick rise of photography, as another machinery of capturing and displaying the world. Corbey (1993: 363) notes that the unbiased and true character of photographic picture was stressed; and photos as unbiased copies of nature itself. The middle class industrial societies presented themselves honorifically in self-congratulatory studio portraits, hundreds of thousands of photos of their 'other races', criminals, prostitutes, the insane, deviants-functioned in the context of repression (1993: 363). Exhibitionary complex here implies the combination of material displays together with posters, photos, videos, on-person appearances, shows, and other more practices.

Oriental, Eurocentric and Exotic Portrayals

Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient (Said, 1978: 3). Said's study of the European construction of a stereotypical image of 'the Orient', was far from a reflection on what the Middle East looked like (Hall, 1997: 259). Orientalism was rather the *discourse* 'by which European culture was able to manage and produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period' (Said, 1978: 3).

Within the framework of Western hegemony over the Orient, a new object of knowledge emerged - 'a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personalities, national or religious character' (Said, 1978: 7-8).

Said's account of Orientalism parallels Foucault's idea of power/knowledge. Hence, as to Hall (1997: 60), through different practices of representation including scholarship, exhibition, literature, and painting, a discourse produces a form of racialized knowledge of the other deeply implicated in power.

Said intellectualizes 'power' in ways which emphasize the similarities between Foucault and Gramsci's idea of *hegemony*. In any society, not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others; the form of this cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as *hegemony*, an indispensable concept for any understanding of cultural life in the industrial West (Hall, 1997: 60).

The view of Orientalism has never been far from the idea of Europe which is a collective notion of identifying Europeans as against all non-Europeans. For Said (1978: 7), the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient is characterized by reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness.

There have been common attempts of limiting the oriental territory to the Arab-Muslim world, considering only North African countries into the debates. However, from the char-

acteristics of oriental narratives, their drives, impacts, as well as their shared functions with eurocentrism, we can claim to extend the oriental territory to the entire Africa.

Korasick contends that the negative imagery found in the oriental-historical literature and the consequential “othering” of non-Western cultures can be taken as a proof of ‘the hostile intent of the west towards the rest’. Accordingly, the common premise is that the Western world projected, undesirable, and “racist”, imagery on non-Western societies as justification to dominate and impose its rule (2005: 5).

Generally, Oriental literatures, either through exclusion or distortion, had especially publicized Africa as having no substantial historical values which in turn would mean no significant cultural values, based on connections between cultural history and cultural memory (Confino, 1997). Confino shows that the concept of culture has become for historians a compass of a sort that governs questions of interpretation, explanation and method (1997:1386 -1403).

Exoticism, another historically-inscribed idea and practice of misrepresentation of black masculinity and femininity, is also deeply situated in the historical practices of slavery, colonialism and imperialism. Hereunder, I attempt to briefly discuss the practices and impacts of exoticisms mainly based-on Hall's (1997: 262-264) accounts and reflections.

During the era of slavery and the aftermath, at the center of ‘racial’ power exercised by the male slave master was the denial of some masculine attributes to black male slaves, including authority, familial responsibility and property ownership (Hall, 1997: 262). Accordingly, black men have adopted those patriarchal values such as physical strength, sexual expertise and being in control, as a means of survival against repressive and violent system of subordination. Slave masters often exercised their authority over black male slaves, by depriving them of all the attributes of responsibility, paternal and familial authority, treating them as children. Hall calls this as ‘infantilization’ (1997: 262).

In illustrating and contending the degrading of African femininity, scholars take commonly utilized historical - representational ‘case’ of an African woman, Saartje (or Sarah) Baartman, commonly known as ‘The Hottentot Venus’. Saartje was brought to England in 1810 by a Boer farmer from the Cape region of South Africa. She was then regularly exhibited for over five years in London and Paris (Gilman, 1985: 204-242, Hall, 1997 and Palmburg, 2001: 54-75).

In her early ‘performances’, she was produced on a raised stage like a wild beast, came and went from her cage when ordered, ‘more like a bear in a chain than a human being’ (Hall, 1997: 264).

She became famous among the public as a popular ‘spectacle’, commemorated in ballads, cartoons, illustrations, in melodramas and newspaper reports. She also became

famous among naturalists and ethnologists, who measured, observed, drew, wrote researches about, modelled, made waxen moulds and plaster casts, and scrutinized every detail, of her anatomy, dead and alive (Hall, 1997: 265 and Palmburg 2001: 57). Visitors were not only attracted by her size but by her protruding buttocks, a feature of Hottentot anatomy (Gilman, 1985; Hall, 1997 and Palmburg, 2001). Totally, Saartje offered the British public three kinds of sideshow stimulations: part freak, part savage, part cooch dancer (Palmburg, 2001: 56).

However, the degrading nature of her exhibition did not please everyone who witnessed it (Palmburg, 2001: 56). The exhibition in 1810 caused a public scandal in London inflamed by the issue of abolition of slavery, since she was exhibited to the public in a manner offensive to decency (Gilman, 1985: 213). As the pick of misrepresentation in the history of human representation, several scholars emerge highly critical of the portrayal of the Saartje Baartman (Gilman, 1985, Palmburg, 2001: 56-58, Hall, 1997: 265). Hall attempts to draw couple of discontents from The Hottentot Venus' case of representation including the marking of difference, reducing of her to an ordinary nature, a physical body and body parts.

According to Hall, there is high level obsession with marking '*difference*'. Saartje Baartman's difference was represented as a pathological form of 'otherness'. As she did not fit the ethnocentric norm applied to European women, and fall outside a Western classificatory system of what 'women' are like (1997: 265).

She was also represented and observed through a series of polarized conceptions like 'primitive', not 'civilized', and compared with wild beasts not to the human culture.

She was also subjected to an extreme form of *reductionism* - a strategy often applied to the representation of women's bodies, of whatever 'race'. She was literally turned into a set of separate objects, into a thing - 'a collection of sexual parts'. She underwent a kind of symbolic dismantling or *fragmentation*.

This naturalization of difference was signified, above all, by her sexuality. She was reduced to her body and her body in turn was reduced to her sexual organs. They stood as the essential signifiers of her place in the universal scheme of things (Hall, 1997: 266).

Generally, Hall notes that Saartje Baartman 'did not exist as a person'. She had been disassembled into her relevant parts. She was - turned into an object, '*fetishized*'. This substitution of a part for the *whole*, of a *thing* - an object, an organ, a portion of the body - for a *subject*, is the effect of a very important representational practice - *fetishism* (1997: 266).

Such an early dehumanization of the antecedents of the current Africa must be the base for the ongoing mis-conceptualizations of Africans as highly different from others, at least

physically. In fact, the vital point is not the physical difference, but the over-emphasis and repetition of that difference.

World Information-Communication Dis/order and International Media Practices

Analogously, we can remark the impacts of unbalanced World Information and Communication Order in contributing to the reductive image of African continent in various ways. The order implies the North-to-South power relationship in controlling media and communication industries. The common idea is that the North-West has far dominated the ownership and control of news and media industries, as well as other information and communication technologies. Most importantly, the West has been in control of major news agencies which have fed not only news also perspectives to the South.

Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, and the Reuters are among the foremost news media companies that have the restored capacity to manage massive information, knowledge control, and so the communication order of the rest of the world. And, any instances of internationally-strong media industry have been the Western media in their print and broadcast media forms. Africa has known names of The New York Times, the Washington Post, the CNN and the BBC as if they are all and always for Africa, while they make insignificant, and still commonly strategic coverages to Africa.

In the context of the continuing debate on participation in ICT development, the communication gap is associated with a 'digital divide'. Commonly, the divide is as comprehensive as to include the gaps both in old ICTs (radio and television) and new ICTs (the new media). In this regard, the digital divide has instigated the political, economic, and cultural divide. In fact, we can be exposed to separate arguments on whether these broader gaps have already been there in Africa and so they caused the digital gap; or if the digital gap has lately caused the socio-economic gaps. In fact, one thing which we can maintain is that the digital gap has catalyzed and broadened the developmental gaps that Africa had with the Western world.

At the center of the conception of information society lies the idea of knowledge control as power-determiner of our era, as the sequential substitute of the control of power through land and machine, of bourgeoisie and capitalist powers of the 18th and 19th centuries respectively. Compared to land and machine, any current supremacy is claimed to be established by control of knowledge. Due to their knowledge, trained people are quite more crucial for such supremacy games than land or machine. And, again it is only the north/west that has the comprehensive power to provide in-depth and quality education/training to millions of citizens of its own, as part of its technologically furnished sector-systems including education.

Thus, in all its historical forms, this world information and communication order has given the power for the 'west', to influentially impose its perspectives, and to construct and tell the perspectives of 'rest'. In this regard, despite the claims that African resources have been the founding grounds for the current economic affluence and influence of the north-west, the Western media have not given compensating attention to Africa. If any positive attempts can be mentioned, they are the compassionate documentaries which usually reduce Africa to the land of beautiful forests and wild animals.

Hence, within such a global communication imbalance, we notice that Africa remained the most voiceless which has to be expressed by the passive voice "told" by others, than 'tell' itself. Regretfully, the telling has mostly concentrated in sniffing and discovering the selectively miserable aspects and moments of life in Africa. Repeatedly, the media improperly publicized the 'bad moments of Africa', mainly in the name of being critical about Africa in issues of democracy, corruption and human rights. However, these criticality and engagements have been subject to interests of the European states in certain African nations and regimes.

African scholars began to challenge that too much of reporting Africa has been conditioned by a view of its people as an eternally miserable smudge of blackness stretching across the decades. Harry (2015: 81) summarizes non-edifying adjectives used in describing Africa in the Western media: Dark Continent, hunger, famine, starvation, endemic violence, conflicts and civil war, political instability, AIDS, coups...etc.

Figure 2: Governing The African Continent Unitedly



In fact, one can observe a further function of the existing world information and communication order in giving the Western powers the legitimacy and the public excuse for a sustainable superiority and the administration of African continent through the claimed new international inter-governmental organizations. In this sense, there are growing critics targeting the UN for being highly dominated by Western interests over African affairs. Gradually, the west seems ambitious to take over the legitimacy for the making of major agendas about Africa in association with its developmental problems; and the discourse is constructed in a way that would re-assure the sustainability of African bad images.

Source: Debalke, T. (2016, February 02). Corporate council on Africa or corruption council for African authoritarian regimes? <http://ecadforum.com/2016/02/02/corporate-council-on-africa-or-corruption-council>.

The Construction of Africa in the International Media Practices

As the result of all the services of the world information and communication disorder, we find an over-domination and hegemonic character of the Western media in maltreating African continent. Thus, examining the general journalistic procedures and practices of these media sounds highly helpful to our discussion here. In the misrepresentation of Africa in the Western media, Mezzana (2005) attempts to summarize various research works to come up with the following representational and signifying characteristics, over which I attempt to reflect too.

- **Selection/omission:** Reports on African continent have been subject to high level selection and/or omission of news items over Africa. The selection and omission has happened in consistent with their required “agenda setting” intentions. According to McCombs and Shaw (1979) agenda setting is a deliberate attentiveness on, and repetition of, certain news items and provision of newsworthiness for the events. According to McCombs and Shaw (1979: 176) in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play important parts in shaping the reality. And, readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue based on the amount of information in a news story and its position.
- **Decontextualization:** Decontextualization is the reporting of information without considering or emphasizing its historical, social, political, cultural or economic contexts. At this particular point, in the Western media construction of Africa, there has been high level skepticism in considering the impacts of colonialism and slavery on the current developmental delays and image concerns of African continent.

- **Sensationalism:** There has always been high sensationalism in reporting Africa. The reporting of African continent has been very much characterized by crisis, coups, wars, revolts, famines, epidemics, despair, migration, and if possible episodes of cannibalism.
- **Dramatization:** There have also been common tendencies of describing events, processes and relations in terms of dual conflicts between individuals (usually leaders) and groups.
- **Generalization:** The attribution of certain characteristics to the entire Africa.
- **Dehumanization:** Dehumanization is elimination of the actors, in favor of entities or abstract processes or stereotypes.
- **Personalization:** On the contrary, there are also trends of excessive individualization like in cases when national governmental leaders are put in the attention, and the role of civil society is put in the shade.
- **Binary oppositions:** The use of simple binary oppositions to describe complex situations; for example, primitive vs modern. This is comparable with Hall's (1997: 265) reflection on the European portrayal of Saartje Baartman or commonly named as The Hottentot Venus, African woman displayed in various European museums. Saartje was represented and observed through a series of polarized conceptions like 'primitive', not 'civilized', and compared with wild beasts not to the human culture.
- **Synecdoche:** Synecdoche is the use of a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole; for example, when populations such as the Maasai are used to represent the entire African continent.
- **Abuse of terms:** There is also high-level abuse of specific terms; for example, the excessive use of words like "tribal", "primitive", "animism", "savage", or "jungle". There is, for instance, a collective identification as "Africans" for realities referring to a continent comprising 54 sovereign states.

African Continent in World Maps and Spatial Imagery

Geo-politically, through maps and map-manipulation, there have been attempts of 'othering', distasting, contracting, and marginalizing the African continent. One of the most significant map-political issues is the 'taken-for-granted' reception of the world map which commonly puts Europe at the center of the world. In particular, there are claims that European explorers deliberately put Europe at the center of the world, while every different mapping of the world could put every other region at the center. In fact, there are current attempts of re-mapping the world map, mainly by contending regional powers.

Figure 3: The True Size of African Continent

The daily mail's news article appeared with the heading 'Africa as you've never seen it before: Clever comparison shows it's really as big as China, India, the United States AND most of Europe put together' (Turvill, 2013).

Source: The true size of Africa. (2013, n.d.). Inside/Out. Retrieved from <http://insideout-paper.org/the-true-size-of-africa> (2013).

Yet, as the most silenced and voiceless in this regard, Africa did not have strong denunciations and reclaims at this point. Africa has long been shown as the land of 'others' who have not been part of most of 'the rest'. In common world maps, African has been shown as far from the rest, 'the far land'; as having quite less size than its actual size; and as separate or marginalized land from the world.

There have not been significant contestations in disclaiming such spatial distortions, let alone claiming Africa as the center of the world, with a very big size only next to Asia, connected to Europe and Asia by land, and to other continents by ocean. One of the nearest distances from Africa to Europe is the 90km short passage from Morocco to Spain. While there are multiple intersections to Asia, again one of the nearest distances from Africa to Asia is the short passage between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. And concerning size, we see that Africa is bigger than even the size of the sum of USA, China, India, and most of Europe.

However, within the global politics of mapping situated in spatial discourses, there have been tendencies of 'othering', distancing, contracting, and marginalizing the African continent. Africa has been depicted as the land of 'others' who have not been part of 'main world', 'the far land', and 'small land 'separated from the 'center.

Developmental and Humanitarian Interventions

After the last remnants of European empires in Africa and Asia were crumbled in the 1950's and 1960's, a dominant question in policy and academic quarters was how to address the 'abysmal disparities' between the developed and underdeveloped worlds (Chandra, 2004). Accordingly, development views have their roots in the mid-century optimism with the prospects that large parts of post-colonial world could eventually "catch up" and resemble the Western world. Thus, originally, development meant the process by which third world societies could 'look like' Western developed societies as measured in terms of the political system and economic growth (Chandra, 2004: 214).

Although plenty of theories and concepts emerged during the past fifty years, studies and interventions have fundamentally offered three different dialogues and answers to the problem of underdevelopment. One position has argued that the problem was largely due to the lack of information - modernization model; the other one suggested that power inequality was the underlying predicament- dependency model and the third one stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities and democratization and participation at all levels - participatory model (Chandra, 2004: 215). According to Servaes (2007: 93) participatory model views ordinary people as key agents of change or participants in development, and for this reason, it focuses on their aspirations and strengths. Here in our case of African image, it becomes helpful to reflect on the impacts of modernization view regarding how Africa should have developed.

The early generation of development communication studies was dominated by modernization paradigm. Different scholars state their views about this paradigm (Servaes, 2007: 93; Servaes, 2002; Chandra, 2004; and Tomaseilli, 2007). Modernization view sees underdevelopment as a product of internal cultural barriers, rural backwardness and lack of technology (Tomaseilli, 2007: 300). Servaes notes that the modernization paradigm considers underdevelopment in terms of perceptible, quantitative differences between rich and poor countries (Servaes, 2002: 19-20). Thus, development meant bridging the gaps by means of imitation process between traditional and modern, retarded and advanced, barbarian and civilized sectors and groups to the advantage of the latter. Consequently, the measures of progress were GNP, literacy, industrial bases, urbanization and the like; all quantitative criteria.

As the problems of underdeveloped world were believed to be information, communication was presented as the instrument that would solve it. The emphasis was put on the

media persuasion activities that could improve literacy and, in turn, allow populations to break free from traditionalism. As to Chandra the media were both channels and indicators of modernization; they would serve as the agents of diffusion of modern culture, and suggested the degree of modernization of society (2004: 217). In African case, hence, the diffusion of the 'modern culture' had to be done by magnifying the primitiveness of Africa and the need for Western culture to modernize and raise Africans from their conditions (Korasick, 2005: 2).

With the same line of thought, Tomasseli states that the modernization 'cure' propagates vast doses of top-down communication injected through major infrastructural investments in mass media and communications technologies, aimed at replacing traditional values, introducing technical skills, encouraging national integration and accelerating the growth of formal education. However, Tomaseilli adds that modernization approach was uniformly a failure in Africa; and so it perpetuated dependency (Servaes, 2007: 304-305).

As the economic root has totally remained the essence of the modernization paradigm, "non-economic" factors including attitude change, level of education, mass media and institutional reforms were later initiated, as thinking about modernization did not solve problems (Servaes, 2002: 19-20). According to Servaes, referring to the advocated unilineal and evolutive perspectives, and the endogenous character of the suggested development solutions, critiques argue that the modernization concept is a veiled synonym for the 'Westernization', namely, the copying or implantation of Western mechanisms and institutions in a third world context (2002: 20).

There are common allegations that humanitarian works have also misused their assignments in Africa. They mis-produced large number of immoral contents (mainly pictures and videos) about Africans as severely and constantly starved. Such acts were based on their claimed intention to maximize foreign fundraisings which then were highly criticized for partiality, dishonesty and mis-management.

Most importantly, the convergence of the Western media narratives and their humanitarian encounters in Africa produced excessively contested images in terms of morality, which then have impacted the image of African continent. Let's take the case of the story of Sudanese toddler whose story had been propagated as indicator of continuously miserable life in Africa. The incidence has become famous mainly after the photo was sold to The New York Times, one of the giant Western media companies.

It was in March 1993 that photographer Kevin Carter made a trip to southern Sudan, where he took the iconic photo of a vulture preying upon a south Sudanese toddler near Ayod (now in South Sudan). Carter said he waited about 20 minutes, hoping that the vulture would spread its wings, which it did not. Carter snapped the haunting photograph and chased the vulture away (Selwyn-Holmes, 2009).

Figure 4: Iconic Photo of A Vulture & A Child



The photograph was sold to *The New York Times* where it appeared for the first time on March 26, 1993 as ‘metaphor for Africa’s despair’. Carter came under criticism for not helping the girl. “The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene (Selwyn-Holmes, 2009).

Source: Selwyn-Holmes, A. (2009, August 12). Vulture stalking a child. Retrieved from <https://iconicphotos.org/2009/08/12/>.

Carter eventually won the Pulitzer Prize for this photo, but he couldn’t enjoy it. “I’m really, really sorry I didn’t pick the child up,” he confided in a friend. Consumed with the violence he had witnessed, and haunted by the questions as to the little girl’s fate, he committed suicide after three months (Selwyn-Holmes, 2009).

The story of the girl has been a major case of discussion well-facilitated by the ‘international’ media. The case then was a famously circulated point of debate for journalistic ethics in communication faculties across the world (it was during my journalistic ethics class that I myself first known the case).

Consequently, driven by NGO’s fundraising ambitions and their encounters publicized by their fellow media, the practices of foreign humanitarian interventions exaggeratedly depicted poverty, hunger, disease, and natural disasters in Africa. They misused their assignments in Africa mainly by producing or reproducing ethically improper even intolerable contents for the purposes of ‘fundraising’. Besides developmental practices, the humanitarian activities have not yet been engaging local cultural values.

Motives for Misrepresentation of Africa: Common Allegations

We witness enduring chains of historical and global representational practices, operating together, to cause the misrepresentation of the African continent. Surely, all these practices must be ignited by implicitly inscribed interests through such explicit systems of misrepresentation. In this case, we can at least reaffirm the classic assumptions that projected effects of these chains of practices is to keep African continent directly or indirectly ruled, for future takeover of natural resource alongside all global supremacy competitions and hegemonic proud.

In fact, this could also be associated with capitalist's intention of the need for sustainable consumer, for economic and cultural products. For a producer to produce there must be a consumer to consume. Marx claims, even to the extent that, a consumer is a producer by the sense 'it' supports the producer to produce, by consuming (1976).

Suddenly also, there emerged the humanitarian intervention curiosity, accompanied by the discourses of establishing a seemingly continuous role for the 'supporter' and the 'supported', the 'giver' and the 'receiver'. In general, the recurring motive behind all these practices could be to provide a rational and public excuse for slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the ongoing capitalist - consumerism.

After all these series of collections, displays and narratives, the international public continued to conceptualize Africa as land of several troubles, and the people as 'missing' something else. And regretfully, there is quite inadequate public consciousness and/or willingness to conceptualize these contested images of Africa together with the root-causes - that colonizers originally exploited African resources, and then almost unarguably, they themselves introduced and propagated series of prejudiced and stereotypical 'phrases' about Africa.

Such a publicly taken-for-granted image could damage the self-selling, competition and integration efforts of Africans in the international spheres, in a world where image continues to play most of the crucial life games. Thus, any conceptualization of life-difficulties in Africa should be integrated with the imaginations that African continent is uninterruptedly changing in spite of the aforesaid chain of historical wrongdoings upon its resources, and most vitally upon its image.

In other words, the current Africa has numerous developmental obstacles and delays. Yet, most of the narratives on African developmental disconnections with the rest of the world have been pessimistically discoursed, and the grand causes have not been articulated.

African New Generations as Passive Victims

There have been chains of damaging effects of these historical and global misrepresentational practices and phenomenon. Certainly, African reductive images will have cognitive effects on subsequent African generations, as carriers of reductive images and thus as passive victims. Self-conception and self-perceptions of Africans can be threatened by what has been produced and propagated. Some Africans might tend to internalize what others say about what they are (*self-conception*), evaluate themselves or give self-attitude based on what others say about what they are (*self-perception*) and act or behave the way they perceive themselves (*role-perception*).

In these triple connections of *conception-perception-role*, for example, in the overstatement of Africa as conservative, non-innovative, old-minded, Africans might develop a self-image of passive recipients of the Western 'civilized' life values. Thus, unconscious ordinary Africans will now conceptualize themselves as incapable and non-innovative; perceive themselves as having a reduced performance and capacity as compared with Western citizens; and develop a passive role in the global dynamics.

This can be connected to Fanon's (1967) attempt of applying Lacan's theory of mirror stage in the effort to explain the reproduction nature of images, and self-images in particular. Fanon claims that black people's subjectivity is formed by the recognition of themselves through the images reflected on mirror, through the Other's eye. Fanon's psychoanalytic interpretation on the construction of the inferior blackness seems to contribute to the "active" reconstruction of the blackness, not to the "reactive" response to Other's gaze (1967). Such a cognitive crisis will result in a further damage in self-presentation or self-selling tendencies of Africans in the international socio-political, cultural and economic dynamics. This clearly will have a cumulative effect in delaying African pace of socio-economic development.

African can also be subject to invisibility, ignorance, delegitimization and pessimism. As far as the media coverage is concerned, as the result of African countries' reductive images, there is a direct effect that has already resulted in the *invisibility* of Africa in the media. There is a tendency of non-covering African countries that do not hit the headlines most. There is also a gradual *ignorance* to the human aspect of life-development in Africa. By spearheading the idea that African crisis is 'natural' and the 'good news' are exceptions, minor attention is paid to African societies and their current potentials (Mezzana, 2005). The negative and reductive images will then facilitate the *delegitimization* of African political, economic and social actors (Mezzana, 2005). There is also a consequential and widespread development of *Afropessimism* at the overseas (Okigbo, 2002, as cited in Mezzana, 2005).

The collective effects of the misrepresentation of Africa could surely hinder international cooperation and interventions by making governments and enterprises reluctant to invest in Africa. This could particularly happen due to wrong generalizations, like in taking the entire Africa as region of insecurity, while there are several African countries that have never experienced clashes since decolonization. At the operational level, an immediate effect of Africa's bad images could involve implicit and evident proposals to recolonize the continent, like in forced spread of the Western development models. Mezzana (2005) calls this as 'enlightened recolonization'.

Counter-Strategies and Propositions

Having examined historical and global factors that have facilitated the grounds for the misrepresentation of African continent, now there should arise certain proposals to discover possible strategies and solutions. Hereunder, I attempt to point out some of such ideas interacting with Mezzana's (2005) propositions and Hall's (1997) counter-strategies that he proposed particularly against racial prejudices.

The stereotypes over Africa must be deconstructed using scientific and educational tools. Widespread teaching and research activities will be helpful. Sensitization and education programs, particularly involving the Western public, are required at various levels to promote the desire to have in-depth and qualified information about African continent.

Media's approach towards Africa must be revised, and their informative strategies should be realigned to consider trends, contexts and positive events occurring in the continent. As to Mezzana (2005), it is also advisable to select correspondents who have lived and worked in Africa, or those who intend to stay some time. Or, Western journalists better be trained to improve their understanding of life in Africa including African history and culture, in addition to separate trainings on methods of selecting and handling news on Africa, the ways to treat cultural diversity and to exert social responsibility. Similarly, in order to exploit the new media for the promotion of African images, African ICT sector should be given special policy emphasis. The ongoing foreign assistance to the development of African ICT should be enhanced.

NGO's should carry out specific trainings and sensitization programs to prevent the tendencies of damaging African image in the course of their developmental and humanitarian collaboration. There is also a need for networking among Africans, Africanists and friends of Africa. It will be highly helpful to involve "friends of Africa" no matter where they are and what field they operate in, as long as they commit to spread of a more exact image of the continent (Mezzana, 2005). Obviously, a special role can be played by members of the African diaspora. And, a real and proper international ombudsman should be

set up to represent a benchmark for analysis and accurate intervention on the image of Africa. Although such an idea was proposed back in the mid-1980s, no clear figure was created, not even a network of actors.

Associating Hall's counter-strategies and positive strategies can also be helpful here in this context. Under the title 'Contesting racialized regime of representation', Hall (1997: 269-275) proposes three counter-strategies particularly against racial stereotypes: reversing the stereotypes; balancing of positive and negative images through difference acceptance; and contestation of representations.

The first of Hall's strategies is 'Reversing the stereotypes' in which he suggests three sub-reversions (1997: 270-272). *Reversing by entry* - integrationist strategy where he says blacks could gain entry to the mainstream, even at the cost of adapting to the white image of them and assimilating white norms of styles looks and behaviors. *Reversing by normalization* - is like in the revenge films that began to show that blacks are as normal people as whites, and as moral-players and heroes as them. *Reversing the evaluation of stereotyping* - the simple re-encoding or re-interpretation of extreme stereotypes into positive intentions can be a calm way to change the stereotypes. For instance, changing the prejudice 'blacks are poor' by 'blacks are motivated by money'.

The second strategy is the celebration of differences by 'the attempt to substitute a range of 'positive' images of black people, black life and culture for the 'negative' imagery which continues to dominate popular representation' (Hall, 1997: 272). According to Hall, this approach has the advantage of ensuring the balance, underpinned by an acceptance and celebration of difference. 'It inverts the binary opposition, privileging the subordinate term, sometimes reading the negative positively: 'Black is Beautiful'. It tries to construct a positive identification with what has been objected. It greatly expands the range of racial representations and the complexity of what it means to 'be black', thus challenges the reductionism of earlier stereotypes' (Hall, 1997: 272). In fact, Hall fears the dangers of homogenizing all non-white cultures as 'other'. And it will give ways for the diversity of misrepresentation.

The third counter-strategy, through the contestation of representation and gaze, 'locates itself within the complexities and ambivalences of representation itself, and tries to contest it from within'. According to Hall, it is more concerned with the forms of racial representation than with introducing a new content. 'It accepts and works with the shifting, unstable character of meaning, and enters, as it were, into a struggle over representation, while acknowledging that, since meaning can never be finally fixed, there can never be any final victories.' (1997: 274).

Accordingly, instead of avoiding the black body, because it has been so caught up in the complexities of power and subordination within representation, Hall shows that this strategy positively takes the body as the principal site of its representational strategies, attempting 'to make the stereotypes work against themselves'. This strategy also makes elaborate play with 'looking', hoping by its very attention, to 'make it strange', or, to de-familiarize it, and so make explicit what is often hidden - 'its erotic dimensions'. For example, 'to laugh with rather than at his characters' (1997: 275).

Findings

This article attempted to examine historical and global contexts in the construction of Africa's image at the overseas. It is revealed that African image has been distorted, in one or another way, in the course of world fairs and colonial exhibitions, missionary collections, Oriental and Eurocentric narrations, and exotic depictions during slavery. The imbalances in the world information and communication order, as revealed by few Western media domination and misrepresentation of Africa, biased spatial imagery in world maps, and inappropriate developmental and humanitarian interventions have also negatively affected Africa's image in general sense. In media reporting African affairs have been omitted or selectively emphasized, decontextualized, sensationalized, dramatized, generalized, dehumanized, personalized, contradicted and abused by language.

From this brief reflection, one can comprehend that the implicit purposes of these mis/representational practices tend to be the desires to keep African continent directly or indirectly ruled by global powers, possibly for hegemonic competitions. Capitalism's need for sustainable economic and cultural consumer, strategic significance of humanitarian roles and role perceptions, and the search for rational and public excuses for past and ongoing immoral practices like slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism could be implicit motives too.

African reductive images will have negative cognitive impacts on subsequent African generations, and globally there will be high probability for Africa to be subjected to more invisibility, ignorance, delegitimization, pessimism, and recolonization. Scientific and educational tools like researches and trainings are vital to deconstruct Africa's prejudices. Sensitization and education programs should particularly target the foreign public. International Media's strategies must be realigned, and Western journalists and NGO's should be trained to improve their practices. Reversing the stereotypes, accepting differences, and contesting misrepresentations are also believed to contribute.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The reflection here in this article does not intend to be an accusation of the Western generation for all that has happened to African continent. Only, it sounds supportive to offer a historical and global contextualization of the construction of African image, for any further analysis and projection of interventions. This article attempts to reveal that African image has been reduced, in one or another way, in the course of world fairs and colonial exhibitions, missionary collections and exhibitions, Oriental and Eurocentric narrations, exotic depictions of slavery, the imbalances in the world information and communication disorder as revealed by the Western media over domination and misrepresentation of Africa, biased spatial imagery, and inappropriate developmental and humanitarian interventions. The Western media reporting of African affairs has been subjected to selection and omission, decontextualization, sensationalism, dramatization, generalization, dehumanization, personalization, binary oppositions, synecdoche and abuse of terms.

The overall purposes of these mis/representational practices could be associated with the desires to keep African continent directly or indirectly ruled for global competitions and hegemonic proud, the capitalist's intention of the need for sustainable economic and cultural consumer, the strategic significance of the humanitarian role of the 'supporter' and the 'supported', and the search for rational and public excuses for the Western slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and capitalist exploitations. African reductive images will have cognitive effects of self-conception, self-perception and role-perceptions on subsequent African generations. In various forms, Africa has already been subjected to invisibility, ignorance, delegitimization, pessimism, and 'recolonization'.

In fact, there should be counter-strategies and propositions including the efforts to deconstruct Africa's prejudices by scientific and educational tools. Widespread teaching and research activities will be helpful. Sensitization and education programs particularly involving the Western public are required. International Media's strategies must be re-aligned to consider trends, contexts, success stories and other positive events occurring in the continent. Western journalists and NGO's should be trained to improve their understanding of life in Africa and the possible impacts of negative images that their intervention trends could create over Africa. And among the helpful counter-strategies against racial stereotypes could be the efforts to reverse the stereotypes, balance the positive and negative images through difference acceptance, and contest mis/representations. With this aspiration, broader research projects should follow. As part of reconstructing African image at overseas, as in case of my ongoing research project, it could be helpful to consider the potentials and applicability of Africa-engaged overseas cross-cultural practices, as possible counter-strategies and interventions.

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