

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

WEEK SIX: Communication and change: Development and dependency communication system in Africa.

In this lecture, attempts have been made to connect dependency of Africa on foreign nations with development, underdevelopment, bad leadership and governance. Dependency theory holds that “the condition of underdevelopment is precisely the result of the incorporation of the Third World economies into the capitalist world system which is dominated by the West and North America” (Randall and Theobald, 1998), hence in development studies, dependency implies a situation in which a particular country or region relies on another for support, “survival” and growth (Emeh, 2013).

Learning Outcomes



1. Understand development, change, and African communication systems
2. Explain the relationship between underdevelopment and dependency.
3. Analyze the Dependency theory
4. Discuss the effects of Bad Leadership and Governance in Africa.

According to Njoku (2013), dependency and underdevelopment draws our attention to the stagnation, deplorable and peripheral condition of Africa, Asia, Latin America, in the international system. Africa, among other continents in the world, is seen as the poorest continent of the world. In the international system, the G8 (Group of eight) and other international organizations regard Africa states as “POOR” thereby seeing Africa as an incapable or handicapped continent.

Factors necessitating the phenomenon of underdevelopment and dependency in Africa, such as;

- i. The reckless and excess lust for foreign loan and aid: This has to do with a financial assistance granted to third world country in order to boost their economy and project them capable for international trade.
- ii. The domination of import over export trade: This is one of the major problems in Africa, or third world countries economy, since they tend to patronize more of the foreign goods over indigenous goods thereby bringing the implication of exploitation from the foreigners at the detriment of indigenous traders.

iii. Political Crisis and Corruption: Africa is conversant with the above, since it is married with different kind of political crisis ranging from military coups to party crisis and worst of all which is corruption since it is the end products of any political unstable nation.

iv. The failure of policies made by the government: Since policies made cannot be strictly adhered to them the problems in which that policy was made for has not yet been satisfied or settled, and in most cases these policies made are irrelevant to the countries or nations development agenda.

v. Lastly but not the least poor education: Here the level of education which is the key to every kind of success is too low and a times poor, in third world countries the education, sector is dominated with all manner of malpractices which includes bribery, strikes, indefinite closure of school, due to illegality in its operations, unaccredited academic structures and all other shortcomings etc. (Njoku , 2013)

Directions of News Flow in Relation to the Theory of Structural Imperialism and the World Systems Theory

This theory focuses on structural inequality and explains how it is an historical development brought about by, among other, constructions, colonialism and capitalism (Galtung, 1971). These factors are considered a major feature of the direction of flow, and contents of the international news. It is also recognized that inequalities in news flow relate closely to even greater inequalities and imbalances in the distribution of financial resources, communication resources and technology around the world. These phenomena are often attributed to historical factors such as colonialism and prevailing economic practices, including capitalism and its manifestations such as cheap labour (Nye, 2003).

The structures and processes involved in the flow of news globally have interested communication researchers since the 1950s. Many researchers through substantial data attested inequalities in the flow of information (Bornman and Schoonraad, 2001). Their research also resulted in the abstract conceptualisation of the structure and processes involved in information flow, as is evident in the use of terms like concentration of wealth, power and technology, the system of international relations and economic development, imperialism – media and cultural imperialism, dependency, and social construction of reality (Pludowski, 2001). But in order to offer explanations for

international communication phenomena, these communication research results have to be integrated by guidelines of theoretical models. The next few sections deal with some of the theories used to explain the direction and impact of the international flow of information, including news (Tomlinson, 1997).

Hierarchy and structural inequality, both important features of the **world system theory**, are universally recognised as major factors determining the direction of flow of news content in countries (Moisy, 1996). In keeping with the assumptions of world system theory the hierarchical positions of component units – and nation states in particular – in the global system have given rise to inequalities between developed and developing countries in both the quantity and quality of news flow and news coverage. In the early 16th century, developments in navigation, the concomitant expansion of world trade and the establishment of large national armies in Europe ushered in a new era of imperialism. This culminated in the colonial system of the 19th century when the European powers carved up the world into what were known as spheres of influence. These colonies, such as those in Africa and Asia, supplied the European powers with cheap labour and raw materials, which in turn gave impetus to the industrial revolution (Lesame, 2005).

Since World War II, imperialism has assumed new forms. The former colonies gained their independence. It was no longer so easy for the big powers to resort to military intervention to expand their hegemony. Nowadays, nation states tend to use economic and cultural methods to extend their power and influence. Not surprisingly, Third World countries refer to current practices in the world economy as “neo-imperialism” (Hamelink, 1990).

As a result of these new forms of imperialism, theories of imperialism have had to be reviewed. In his structural theory of imperialism, Galtung (1971) explains reasons for existing inequalities between countries. Just like the dependency theorists, he draws a line of differences between centre and periphery. However in his theory, he does not strictly focus on inequalities between nation states. He points out that one can also speak of a centre and a periphery within every state. Galtung (1971) explains the inequalities between centre and periphery as imperialism, which he defines as a relation of dominance between nations, especially between nation states. Stevenson (1999), in his definition of imperialism, puts the accent on the existence of an imperial centre, which exercises control over another territory. Hence, the study of imperialism focuses on the practice of

dominance and attitudes relating to the control or dominance of the centre over the other territory (Herman & McChesney, 1997).

In today's modern world, forms of direct control like military conquest which characterized the colonial era have largely vanished, however, nowadays, there are more subtle and sophisticated forms of dominance, which moreover extends far beyond the borders of individual countries. So imperialism nowadays often entails a broader structural relationship between an imperial centre and one or more nation states (Bagdikian, 1988).

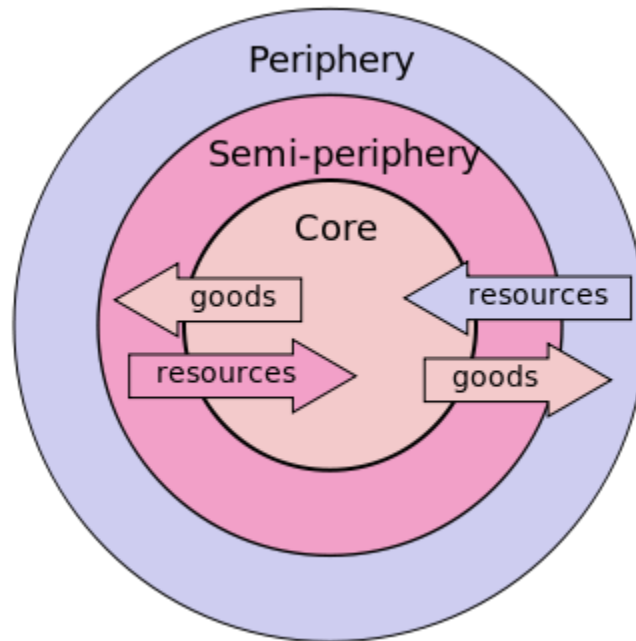
Distinction between Centre and Periphery

According to Galtung's (1971) in his structural theory of imperialism, it is believed that news flow in the global system is characterized by vertical flow from the centre to the periphery. If Galtung's model of structural imperialism is expanded to allow for the world system theory further distinction between periphery and semi-periphery (Shannon 1996), the model has the following implications (Chang 1998; Mowlana 1997):

- The largest percentage of news content reported globally every day derives from the centre. In other words, news from the centre dominates news coverage worldwide.
- In addition, there is a greater difference in the ratio of news exchanged between centre and periphery than in the ratio of news exchanged among nations at the centre. This means that there is a far more equal relationship in the exchange of news between countries at the centre than in the exchange of news content between centre and periphery (Alleyn, 1997).
- News content from the centre makes up a larger percentage of the news content of countries on the periphery than in the news coverage given to countries on the periphery in media at the centre.
- There is also very little or at times no exchange of news content between countries on the periphery.
- More news is exchanged between centre and semi-periphery than between centre and periphery. The semi-periphery thus acts as an intermediate zone between the three strata.

Research studies done by Mowlana (1997) generally affirm the arguments of Galtung (1971). According to (Mowlana 1997) news in developing countries is dominated by reports provided by the large international news agencies. McKenzie and Overton (in Mowlana 1997) found that the news flow to and from Australia still follows a colonial pattern in the sense that news from traditional sources predominates. Contrary to Galtung's assumptions, however, most

communication flow research studies have concluded that there is some news flow between African countries (the periphery).



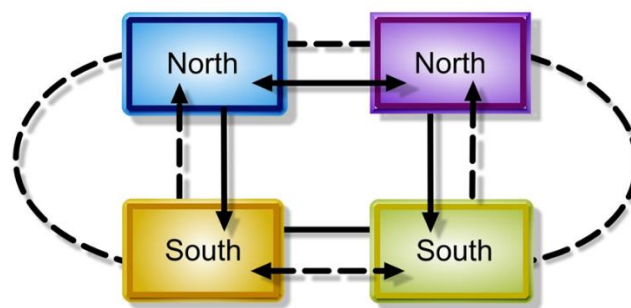
Centre-periphery flow

Source: <https://medium.com/@gabbyturner/inequity-of-development-in-the-core-and-periphery-d824cd04de71>

Distinction between North and South

A second approach of news flow between countries is based on the assumption that news flows vertically from northern to southern countries. At the same time, there is also horizontal flow between the various countries in the North and those in the South. Although some news does flow from South to North, its volume is far smaller than that of the flow from North to South. (Bagdikian, 1988) Global North include the United States, Western Europe, Canada, outer regions of the European Union, developed regions of Asia as well as Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand Global South mostly comprises of nations from Africa, parts of developing Asia including Middle East and Latin America. Another significant feature of news flow in the world system is known as **circular flow**. This comprises news events in the South, which are gathered by journalists from countries in the North and dispatched to northern news agencies (Galtung,

1971). These agencies process the information and then send it back to media in the South. For example research has indicated that most international news in Latin American newspapers is dominated by news content from North countries. In addition most of the world largest news agencies concentrate on news content which they believe will interest people from developed countries, for example in the U.S such interests relate to issues of elitism, wealth and political matters. Moreover Western Europe and North America have always been given great attention in news coverage whereas Eastern Europe and developing countries receive very little attention of news coverage (Dayan, 1992).



North-South flow

Diagram representation courtesy of Sage Publications

Centre and Periphery Communication Interactions

Global information flow studies involve a lot of understanding of communication interactions between the centre and periphery. Galtung (1997) distinguishes these interactions through outlining five forms of imperialism, which include: *economic imperialism, political imperialism, military imperialism, communication imperialism and cultural imperialism*. However this term paper will focus majorly on understanding how interactions between the centre and periphery has participated in communication imperialism

Communication Imperialism

According to Ambrose (1993) Communication imperialism requires in the first place that the centre should have the industrial capacity to develop and manufacture the latest information, communication and transport technology. Galtung (1997) uses the patterns of news flow between

the centre and periphery to explain the power of news content in influencing foreign culture from the developed nations to developing nations. First, most of the world's largest news agencies are located at the centre and controlled by countries known to be powerful and wealthy. Hence most of the global news content transmission relies heavily on feudal communication networks dominated by the centre (Golan , 2010).

In addition, news content about the centre makes up a far greater percentage of news on the periphery than the vice versa. Research has indicated that countries from the centre pay very little attention on reading news content from each other, especially not across the borders of power blocs (Capella, 1997). They also read more about the centre of the power bloc they belong to than about other centres. Another dimension of understanding communication imperialism has to do with division of labour in the field of communication. Just the same way nations in the periphery provide raw materials, which are used in manufacturing processes at the centre, they also produce news events, which are converted into news at the centre (Chang, 1998). Primarily professional international journalists who view events through the eyes of the centre do this. The process is then completed via communication channels in which events are filtered by a series of gatekeepers who adapt the message to fit the general pattern of the agenda and perception of the centre.

Factors Influencing the Global flow of information.

According to Chang (1998) the hierarchical and structural position of a country in the world system is a key determinant of the direction of news flow. But the world systems theory does not explain the fact that states on the periphery occasionally occupy a prominent place in media at the Centre. Hence there are other factors that influence the global information flow, which Chang calls *filters-affecting international news coverage*.

In respect to most communication authors there is a difference of two groups of variables in international news coverage. (Dayan, 1992) The first group is about extra-media or context related factors, which have to do with the origin of international news content and the relationship between certain contextual factors that have no direct bearing on the nature of newsworthiness of a given content. The assumption in this group is that international news coverage is determined partly by the context-both national and international-within, which an event occurs. However it is assumed

that notwithstanding contextual factors, certain attributes of the event itself determine whether or not it is in international news (Chang, 1998)

Context-related or Extra-media Factors.

Research studies have concluded that the following factors have little bearing to the news event itself play a role.

Structural and Hierarchic Status of a Country in the World System.

According to Chang (1998), what is done or said on the periphery or semi periphery usually carries little weight in international news media. An additional factor like that of event related factors – are usually required for events in these countries to make the front pages of global media. For them, the best chance of attracting the world's attention to what they say and do is when one or more countries at the Centre notice them, and so to speak, see to it that that global media focuses on them.

In addition, conflict with countries at the Centre can make the global media focus on periphery or semi-periphery states, this is not because the periphery or semi-periphery is considered important at that time but because of the news value of conflict between prevailing and emerging forces in the world system (Boyd-Barret, 1998). Therefore for countries in the periphery of semi-periphery the way to get to the global media is via the countries at the Centre. The prevalence of countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran in the international media is because of the involvement of a Centre country-the US-in the conflict.

Economic Variables

A study done by Rosengren (1974) indicated that economic variables have a greater influence on international news coverage as compared to most factors that have direct bearing to the event itself. Economic variables greatly influence the quality, quantity, availability and dissemination of news in different ways. For example the media in a given country is likely to give preference to news about the country's trade partners, if a country has high oil production or high gross domestic products, the chances of this states being featured in the news(by countries at the Centre) are increased (Golan, 2010).

In addition, economic factors are also key in determining the availability of technological and other infrastructure of newsgathering and dissemination in a particular country. In most developing countries limited technological infrastructure has made it a challenge for these countries to gather news and get it to international networks in time. Availability of infrastructure also influences the presence of foreign news correspondents-this explains why international journalists from the Centre will not stay long in a country with limited and primitive infrastructure. A country's economic strength also determines whether the country has the ability to maintain news media, which can compete with the rest of the world's media in regard to quality, advertising and remuneration of journalists (Chen, 1998). The influence of economic factors is also evident in the fact that countries at the Centre of the core and news flow are rich ones with a large gross domestic product and fairly large populations.

Political and Ideological Factors

Political and ideological factors influence both the contents and international flow of news. In any country the extent of media freedom also has a direct impact on censorship, control over foreign correspondents entering and leaving the nation, and the control over the import and marketing of news content. In addition, official or unofficial perceptions of the value of certain news items and the function of the news in a given political system directly affect the news flow in a given system. A higher value is evident to news from countries enjoying more media freedom, thus the politicians from these countries have a major impact on the flow of news. With the advent of the Internet many had argued that the time for strict media censorship was over, however in countries like the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have developed measures to strictly control the international flow of news. A good example is China which has developed 'Great Firewall of China, which is used to filter news content and makes it difficult for citizens in the country to get news from outside their borders. In 2011, the citizens of Egypt started calling for the resignation of their president Hosni Mubarak, in a move to apparently minimize the chances for similar calls for reforms in their country, the government in China tried to block that information of the uprising in Egypt, trying to stem the flow of international news to China. In Saudi Arabia the government filters out what it refers to as 'dangerous content' from the Internet.

Social and Cultural Proximity.

Cultural, religious and other differences greatly impede the flow of international news. In addition Language, problems of translation and ethnic attitudes and prejudice are the main factors that impede international news flow (Giffard, 1998). For example nations speaking the same language are more inclined to exchange news content than countries speaking different languages. Thus countries in Africa which use the English language are more likely to have news exchange among themselves than exchanging with Francophone African countries. Other important social cultural factors are the extent of migration between the states and the historical relations between the states. Another factor could be religious diversity. According to Golan (2011), countries with a lower religious diversity than home nations would receive coverage.

Geographical Proximity.

Geographical proximity among nations is a factor that greatly influences the flow of news among states, when distances are quite small people often regards news from the neighborhood countries as local news and accord it great prominence when reporting it. For instance people from the American content prefer being feed with news about other countries in their continent and region rather than news from a further field. According to Kim and Barnet (1996), geographical distance plays a lesser function in international news flow. This implies the distance is no longer such an important factor that influences international flow of information.

Attributes of the population.

Communication research studies have assumed that the larger a countries population, the more communication it is likely to have with other nations, the more it will have news production and the more it will import news. According to Kim and Barnet (1996) most countries with large populations occupy a key position in the international flow of news. Another factor considered to affect news flow is the literacy levels of a country's population (Bagdikian, 1988). Literacy levels does not only affect people awareness and perception of the world outside but also determine the news the media produce and also import to feed their citizens.

Content of International News.

Despite the fact that with the advent of internet and globalization compression of temporal and spatial differences, given that most people are not able to travel to every corner of the world to get

first hand news, hence our perceptions of the world happenings are greatly shaped by global media. Paterson (1998) regards the role-plays in global news-and global news agencies as the major force in shaping people's perceptions of events happenings all over the world. His main reasons for these views were the following:

Global news agencies determine and set the agenda for international news, for instance they decide in which region to deploy resources for news covering, where to station foreign correspondents and where to allocate those stories for coverage. These global agencies decide what stories will get covered and how to disseminate them to their target clients. In addition the international media agencies have the power to decide the nature and amount of audiovisual and the nature of content that will accompany a given story (Alleyn , 1997).

The influence of global agencies on decision-making in this regard is even greater in the case of nations on the periphery and semi-periphery. Research has indicated that ideological component is a factor considered by global agencies when choosing to disseminate information, whereby they analyze the world's perception on given events (Dayan, 1992).

Hierarchy, Dependency and Imperialism in the International Flow of News.

Hierarchy, dependency and imperialism summarize the explanation of why some nations are more dominant in regards to control of global information flow. Most of the world's largest global news companies are all found in North America and Europe and are located in the world's richest countries: Great Britain, France, the USA and Germany.

Hierarchy factor is evident in the fact that a handful of world's global agencies supply news to client's – including national news agencies from different countries all over the world (Boyd-Barrett 1998). This hierarchy in its turn leads to dependency. According to Mowlana (1997), the most visible form of dependency is quantitative, that is the extent to which nation states and national news agencies around the world are reliant on the large agencies to get volumes of events and happenings considered to be important and hot. This form of dependency relates not only to news on international events but also to news about their own geopolitical region (Golan, 2010).

For example an analysis, which was done of three international crises in four Norwegian newspapers in the 1960s, revealed that more than 87% of the news items analysed were provided

by the large global news agencies (Mowlana 1997). A content analysis of the leading newspapers in Kenya, India, Lebanon, Japan and Norway from 1961 to 1968 showed that at least half the international news items came from these big agencies. Almost ten years later, in 1977, an analysis of 14 Asian newspapers showed that over 75% of non-local news about Third World countries was provided by the large news agencies. And in Latin America, an analysis study of 16 dailies in 14 countries found that 80% of international news came from the “big four”. Another study by Meyer (1989) showed that between 56 and 76% of international news items in the daily newspapers of three African countries (Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Zambia) and Buenos Aires derived from the big global news agencies. Meyer found, moreover, that African countries rely on the large agencies even more heavily than Latin America. Latin American countries made greater use of their own regional services and also received news from smaller agencies like the Spanish EFE and Inter Press Service, an organisation specialising in development news (Ambrose, 1993).

Meyer (1989) describes the large global news agencies’ almost absolute control over the range of world news as imperialism or neo-imperialism. This form of imperialism permits the USA, Great Britain and France to exercise all but total control over news flow. There are also signs of vertical news flow from the periphery to the centre, which in its turn disseminates the news to the rest of the periphery. In some respects, the international flow of news could also be described as neo-colonial. Thus, the British Reuters largely controls the flow of international news to Britain’s erstwhile colonies in Africa, while news flow to and from South American countries is mainly via the USA.

Electronic colonialism theory

Whereas imperialism theory focuses on the world history of imperialism and forms of imperialism in the current age (Galtung 1971), electronic colonialism theory draws a parallel between the colonial history and the current situation in the world (McPhail 2010). However, whereas imperialism theory acknowledges the existence of imperialism in various domains, electronic colonialism theory focuses specifically on communication and media practises.

Main tenets of electronic colonialism theory

Similar to dependency theory, electronic colonialism theory also focuses on forms of dependence in the relationship between the periphery and the centre (McPhail 2010). However, the focus falls

on the dependent relationship between the periphery and the centre that results from the importation of communication hardware (technology) and foreign-produced software (eg, television programmes, films and internet content) that is also associated with the need to import skills associated with both hardware and software (engineers, technicians, and so forth). These imports are never neutral. They carry with them a set of foreign norms, a foreign language (mainly the English language) as well as a foreign culture (an American-Western culture) that alter local cultures, languages, norms, habits and socialisation processes. Thus communication imports can lead to the rejection of or changes in indigenous cultures (Bornman, 2017).

Theorising the international flow of information and Africa

According to Bornman (2017), stated that while reading the previous sections you have been thinking of the situation of Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa or the region in which you are living. Although a theory such as dependency theory was formulated with the Latin American experience in mind, Africa's disadvantaged position in the information economy of today as discussed earlier in the notes comes to mind when the main tenets of dependency theory, the structural theory of imperialism and electronic colonialism theory as well as the notion of hierarchy in world systems theory. The problems that Africa experience are often ascribed to historical processes of imperialism and colonialism as proposed by the structural theory of imperialism and electronic colonialism theory. During the colonial period and its aftermath Africa has also become the target of the development initiatives moulded by the modernisation paradigm of the West. The woes of Africa are consequently also ascribed to the failure of these development initiatives and the fact that Africa has remained dependent on the West in numerous ways (Bornman, 2017).

African leaders and elites in particular, contribute substantially to the problems that the continent and its people experience. Major corruption by governmental officials is regarded as one of the main factors that lead to the underdevelopment of Africa (How African leaders ... 2007). For example, money intended for development projects is often siphoned off by government officials. Largest parts of Africa play a peripheral role in the global information economy and that many African countries are in a dependent position with regard to the centre and the semi-periphery (Bornman, 2017).

Summary



- i. Critique the flow of information globally as influenced by 'core nation' news agencies and communication industries to the receiving 'periphery nations' causes media and communication dependency to the center by the periphery.
- ii. Industrially less developed countries export raw materials to highly industrialized countries for processing and then purchase back the more costly finished products. Notably lacking is the exchange of data, news, information, cultural programs and products, and persons among developing countries.
- iii. Communication technologies and international policies. There is a broadly shared perception of a growing overall gap between industrially developed and developing countries in the way they are able to create, process, and apply the information needed for economic, political, and cultural development.
- iv. Research supports the observation that the growth of technology in developing countries is not necessarily increasing the access of all peoples to information, nationally or internationally. On the contrary, there is a great disparity between the poor and the rich.
- v. Trends in national policies. The debate and writings on communication and information issues during the last ten years have stimulated governments in both industrialized and developing countries to adopt national policies, and in some cases comprehensive plans, to respond to problems brought about by advances in computer and telecommunications technologies and to protect vital national interests. Developing countries, in particular, view their dependence on foreign firms and transnational actors as evidence that the important basis for national decision-making is now located outside their national boundaries.
- vi. Electronic colonialism and cultural imperialism: focuses specifically on communication and media practises.
- vii. Imbalance in communication research. As research on the international flow of information has expanded during the last ten years, with its most dramatic growth taking place at the beginning of the 1980s, it has been accompanied by several new lines of inquiry. In fact, the last five years can be characterized as the most active period of international communication research in history. There is no doubt that the debate on new world information and communication order in various international fora, including UNESCO, has been primarily responsible for this growth.
- viii. The fact that "the vessel of sovereignty" is leaking, and in some instances may even be sinking, is now beyond doubt. Nations may act as though they are in control of their full national rights, the erosion of sovereignty through communication technology and new transnational actors is paralleled by the growing constraints on freedom of national action and the increasing responsibility of international organizations. As the locus of decision-making is continuously

transferred from national to international and transnational levels, a growing number of issues will have to be settled in an international environment, otherwise, conflict is inevitable. The problem of national policies versus international policies and considerations become crucial not only in the sphere of communication technology but also in the set of related global issues connected directly with the nature of information flow and the quality of communication.

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