



Pictures of Africa in our minds. And in media



The Economist @EconMEastAfrica · 4m

Getting eaten by cheetahs and lions are just two of the perils of building railroads in Africa [econ.trib.al/8ldHeuW](https://www.economist.com/tribal/article/2017/08/14/cheetahs-and-lions-are-just-two-of-the-perils-of-building-railroads-in-africa)



What could possibly be problematic about this twitter post?

It did not happen, it is just social media marketing, not journalism (article itself was factually correct).

But did you actually find it unbelievable or improbable?
Quite probably not. Why?

Our stereotypes and idea of African continent itself allows us to easily accept this idea.

That structure already exists there. In our minds.



This example spots light on **certain discourse, structure, which we use to build our idea of Africa** (it is similar with other parts of our planet).

Africa in our minds (not exhausting list)

1. **The picture drawn of Africa is over-simplified** – in several ways and directions.
2. **Wars and conflicts dominate media coverage.**
3. **Diseases and famines are, obviously, omnipresent in Africa.**
4. Migration from Africa to Europe is seen as a big threat and migrants from Africa are seen as those trying to get *our* social benefits – while **migration of Europeans is *different***
5. In general it is presented – and understood and perceived – as **tribal, primitive, unable to use technologies, opposite of modern, inherently unsuitable for democracy, without history, etc.**

1.

**The picture drawn
of Africa is
over-simplified**

The picture painted of Africa in European media (generalisation) is rather homogeneous.

Countries are rarely differentiated, Northern Africa (and especially Egypt) as an exception.

Subsaharan Africans are **presented as poor and in desperate need of help**, unable to solve problems by themselves.

Usage of idioms such as “the poorest of the poorest”, who are “living in clay huts and/or slums” are common, aiming to show dependency of Africans and their supposed underdevelopment.

Case study – I gave a lecture for EU journalists during their trip in Kenya, and I spoke about the opportunities to cover in Nairobi.

Startup industry, tech industry, fashion industry, growing middle class, etc. – I was told “OK, OK, but will we see the poor?”

They have promised it to their editors, who have expected that.

2.

**Wars and
conflicts
dominate media
coverage.**



News factors like negativism, crime, corruption, crises and violence, wars and conflicts, are emphasized although many African countries live in peace.

It does not seem to be attractive to spot light on political development in African regions (we hugely depolitisate stories from African continent).

Foreign correspondents do no longer work on the spot but only come to Africa in case of crises.

Disinterest in Africa leads to a distorted image.

So-called parachute correspondents often have a very euro-centered perspective on conflicts and locals are not able to get a word.

Media coverage serves to perpetuate differences between North and “the Others”. Findings show that from about 50 % to more than 80% of media coverage on Africa is classified as negative; and most of this deals with military conflicts.

We will, however, speak also about the opposite extreme of this approach.

3.

**Diseases and
famines are,
“obviously”,
omnipresent in
Africa.**




“If we take our cue from the images in the mass media, then too often we learn everything about how an African dies, but nothing about how he lives.” (Henning Mankell, 2006)

Ebola threat was largely covered, but media largely ignored when African countries coped relatively successfully with covid.

And when actually Europe could also learn from Africa – something we can hardly imagine here in Europe.

The repeated images of starvation and misery might be responsible for a desensitisation of the public.

The media also potentially activate a stereotyped dichotomy of the global society in either merciful givers and or thankful takers.



4.

Migration of
Europeans is
different

Though the number of migrants from Africa takes up only a small percentage of all immigrants to Europe, they dominate the public discourse about irregular migration to Europe.

One of the common frames expresses the fear of Europe is being invaded by African migrants.

Migrants are portrayed as a danger to the CE societies.

Even the quality media tend towards framing “migration as a threat”. Other extreme is dream scenario (nothing in between).

Media disregard the fact that the main share of migration from African states takes place within the Africa. And another share of Africans move also to the Middle East, etc. – Europe is not the center of the world. Furthermore many migrants to Europe are highly qualified – we cannot imagine qualified people coming from Africa.

Motivations of migrate – are similar everywhere around the world, being it Slovakia or Senegal (we do not speak about refugees) –, but we do not take this motivation as real or comparable. We cannot imagine that – again, lack of imagination.

5.

**Tribal, primitive,
unable to use
technologies,
archaic, etc.**



What does this picture tells us about Africa?

We tend to see African continent from “folklore” perspective, and understand it as a picture of (continent’s) society as a whole. So we might think that meeting e.g. Maasai warriors (it is not really important that Maasais are native only for Kenya and Tanzania) is common in Africa.



And what about this one tells about Europe?

If we do it, it can lead to...

...our
image of
Africa like
this ...



...you know,
tribal people
and education
does not go
together...

...and
not at
all like
this...



...apropos –
tribes...

Recycling of visuals nevermind the context

by the way

← → ↻ iclglobal.org.ng/2021/04/16/capacity-building-for-the-orphans-and-vulnerable/

Aplikace M G A B W F OneDrive x docházka

 **International Centre for Leadership
& Human Capacity Development**

16
Apr



**Capacity Building For The Orphans and Vulnerabl
e**

Googled key word
„Nigerian children“

And what was the
result of the
verification via
Google Lens?



Friends Of the Children Uganda - Photos | Facebook
facebook.com



About Us
healthy-child-outreach-organisation.yolasite.com



ISANO Organization - Life is no easy to the child...
m.facebook.com



Timothy Nyondo Foundation - Home | Facebook
facebook.com



Northern Reflections: 01/07/18 - 01/08/18
norre.blogspot.com



REACH OUT Outreach - Home | Facebook
m.facebook.com



New AMASA KIDS Center - Posts | Facebook
m.facebook.com



Voice of the Girl Child and Vulnerable People F...
facebook.com



Lilly Foundation - Posts | Facebook
facebook.com



Divine Hope Orphanage Home Of Mercy - 善良 ...
m.facebook.com



Hope raised international - Home | Facebook
facebook.com



Virtual Homes Network - Startseite | Facebook
de-de.facebook.com



Noble Stars Academy - Home | Facebook
facebook.com



REACH OUT Outreach - Home | Facebook
m.facebook.com



Catch them Young | International Centre for Le...
iciglobal.org.ng



Another examples of (non)perception of African continent

Like this...



Or like this...



Another examples of (non)perception of African continent

Like this...



**Or like
this...**





Case study 2 – Journalist has covered automotive industry in Kenya, she brought her own pictures – skyline in Nairobi, city centre, factory etc.

She was asked by editor where the hell are pictures from Kenya, poverty, shanti towns, beggars, etc.

Case study 3 – Football coverage – either African Cup of Nation or World Championship in South Africa.

Media presented it as chaotic and not like in Europe, chants and behaviour of fans was often presented as tribal, etc.

But, for instance, data on effectiveness of matches during African Cup of Nations did not prove it right.

And think about behaviour of fans in Europe...



Speakers' reflection

How do you perceive pictures of Africa in European media?

What are the typical frames and stereotypes you find about Africa in European media?

...and elaborate on that – can you name something – frame or stereotype – what makes you the most disturbed when you saw it in coverage?

It can be also related to ethical issues – e.g. no hesitation to put pictures of seminaked kids into articles.

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