FRAMING COMPETENCE: AFRICAN WOMEN LEADERS' REPRESENTATION IN US NEWS MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the media representations of African women presidents (Ellen Johnson-Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Joyce Banda of Malawi and Sahle-Work Zewde) in two US newspapers: *The New York Times* and *Washington Post,* six months into their first terms in office. Addressing the dynamics of Western representation, this paper examines how the newspapers negotiated the representation of African women leaders through the lens of framing. Informed by qualitative content analysis, the findings indicate African women leaders were predominantly framed around competence, and stereotypes in ways that invoke socio-cultural concepts about marriage and domesticity as essential in women's upward mobility to leadership spaces. This paper makes the argument that such gendered representations normalize these stereotypes as the global standard for women leaders and symbolically annihilate women who do not meet such criteria. This study extends the

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body of literature by applying feminist media concepts on traditional media, specifically newspapers, and representation of the *Other,* thus merging concepts of framing, feminism and transnationalism.

Keywords: Women Representation, Leadership Competence, Newspaper Framing, Transnational Media, Female Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

On January 16, 2006, Ellen Johnson Johnson Sirleaf became first female president of Liberia and Africa's first. This was an achievement for all women regardless of race and ethnicity. First lady Laura Bush of the United States of America, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attended the inauguration ceremony in Liberia. This signaled solidarity, representation of state support and the American people in general and American women in particular. Six years later, Joyce Banda followed suit and became the president of Malawi and the second female president in Africa. Again, in January 2013, Catherine Samba-Panza was appointed interim president of the Central African Republic. Similarly, on October 25, 2018, Sahle-Work Zewde became Ethiopia's first female president after the approval of the country's parliament. Following her election, international media covered the event with social media audience (especially Facebook) sharing, commenting in general, and showing support in particular for Zewde's election.

In spite of the recognition of interconnectedness, multilateralism and transnationalism for women's advancement in the leadership space (Appadurai, 1996), few studies focus on areas examining the transnational media spaces that women leaders capture (Darling-Wolf, 2008). Hence, examining how female presidents are represented in the American news media provides a cross-cultural perspective on framing of women leaders in general and African women leaders in particular. A major critique of Western representation of Africa in their media is that it is stereotypical. Hence, questions regarding the transfer of such representations onto African women leaders in particular, need answered. Further, 'third world' feminists have been wary of Western feminists' appropriation (Jing, 2009; Queen, 2008; Mohanty, 2003) transformation (Queen, 2008) of their experiences, and expressed their exclusion from the monolithic representation of issues that inform feminism.

While some studies on women's leadership media representations focus on internal and/or national politics, others by international non-governmental organizations like the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), (Who Makes the News |6th Global Media Monitoring Project 2020-2021, n.d.) provides general global trends. According to the World Women 2010-Trends and Statistics, "Becoming the Head of State or Head of Government remains elusive for women, with only 14 women in the world currently holding either position" (WACC, 2010:111). Furthermore, while the patterns of success have been uneven (WACC, 2010), improvements have been made on the African continent. WACC's current monitoring report summary indicates "quantitative gains" but "qualitative losses" have been made (WACC, n.d.).

So far, modern Africa has had four female heads of state: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Joyce Banda of Malawi, Catherine Samba-Panza of Central African Republic, and Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia. Often, studies have tended to focus on Western women's representation in Western media rather than across nations (Fountaine & McGregor, 2002; Klaus & Kassel, 2007). Fountaine and McGregor (2002) applied the symbolic annihilation concept to examine gender representation in Australian politics revealing different aspects of the phenomenon occurring under different circumstances. Thus, answering questions about specific representation of women leaders in other nations' media space is critical.

Particularly, Queen (2008) through rhetorical genealogy has examined the relationship between transnational feminist activism and internet technology and found misrepresentations of the Association of Women of Afghanistan (a women's rights organization) in the US. However, transnational and globalized efforts that are geared towards taking account of women's experiences as a group in improving women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions necessitate a uniform level of attention and monitoring of the quality and quantity of women's media representation across cultures and national boundaries. In other words, the global efforts must be matched by research and surveillance that focus on the women leaders' transnational representation to ensure that efforts are not undermined by poor media treatment. Understanding African women leaders' representation in American news media then offers an important contribution to global feminists' efforts in seeking more representation for women worldwide. Thus, this study is a response to feminist scholars' call

for studies that address the "ways in which all of our knowledge is mediated – technologically, historically, geographically, culturally – and how profoundly that knowledge shapes, but also can be changed, by our encounters with others, down the block and across the globe" (Queen, 2008:215).

Newspapers' mediation of women presidents' representation and how they shape audiences' knowledge across regional blocks and on the globe present opportunities for locating specific nature of mediated intersectionalities. The framing process, which leads to selection of events for representation in media tends to direct perception towards particular interpretations. According to Verloo (2005), a frame is an interpretation scheme that structures the meaning of reality. Still, Entman's (1993:56) explication of the specificity of frames when he states, "A frame in communication can be defined only to a specific issue, event or political actor" necessitates a focus on women presidents' media presence. Consequently, this study seeks to uncover the specific frames that were deployed in the coverage of three African women presidents namely; Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Joyce Banda, and Sahle-Work Zewde in the event of their assumption of office as key political actors in transnational media.

The main objective of the study is to analyze how African women presidents are framed in foreign print media space. Determining the amount of coverage given the presidents is one objective. In addition, the study seeks to identify and discuss major frames and provide understanding as to when and why they are used. To achieve these objectives, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What frames did US newspapers use to represent African women leaders?

2. a. What are the differences in the use of frames identified?
    b. What are the reasons that may account for the differences?

3. To what extent are African women leaders symbolically annihilated?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Leaders' Competence Representation in Media

Women's leadership styles and their qualification for the public spaces they occupy have been the focus of news stories and often reflect the socio-

cultural gendered expectation of family (Azanu, 2012). The general trend is that news stories present their leadership style and competence as contentious, casting a shadow on their competence (Azanu & Ofori-Birikorang, 2016; Kaneva & Ibroscheva, 2012a; Macharia et al., 2010; McGregor, 2000). Whereas women have been noted to display different leadership styles sometimes more effectively, particularly in corporate management spaces, the representation of these leadership styles often becomes problematic in the partisan political arena (McGregor, 2000; Kaneva & Ibroscheva, 2012a). Studies indicate women found to display traditional feminine style are deemed to be weak while those who 'adopt' traditional masculine leadership style are harshly criticized for being aggressive and unfeminine – double-bind (Azanu & Ofori-Birikorang, 2016; Macharia et al., 2010).

News media's focus on women's achievement of entering the leadership arena can also be problematic. Fountaine and McGregor's (2002) study of press coverage by New Zealand daily and Sunday newspapers and leading business and management magazines over a period of six weeks focused on the appointment of a female to a top corporate position in New Zealand. The study found that news was framed mainly around gender and age as a primary theme. In addition, issues of marital status and child-bearing were found to devalue and trivialize the rise of women to the top. In contrast to other studies, evidence was found to support the idea that female journalists framed news differently from their male counterparts. The study is relevant because it identifies episodic frames (Iyengar, 1991) which provide an important perspective on framing and symbolic annihilation theories, which are relevant to the focus of this study.

In entertainment media, women as leaders remain contentious. Motsaathebe (2009) evaluates gender stereotyping in the South African top soap opera, *Generations* that showed representations of women in leadership but again, the traditional stereotypes surfaced. Grounded within feminist communication theory, the study, through analysis of video recordings and surveys examines the handling of portrayals of women and men. The article sought to determine whether females were perceived as successful in traditional male roles. Hidden stereotypes that support the media depiction of women as weak despite the shift to portrayal of women in higher echelons of power were found. Contributing to discourse on gender role and women's leadership representations within the media, the study in addition to providing the South African perspective, also presents perceptions of South

African audiences on locally produced soap operas. There was evidence to support incidental learning indicative of reversal of the reflection hypothesis (Andersen & Taylor, 2011).

However, the tendency for issues to be misrepresented in media resulting in seemingly positive but insidious representation remains important to women leaders' representation in transnational media spaces (Kaneva & Ibroscheva, 2012b). For instance, Kaneva and Ibroscheva (2012c:7) examined women's representation in official daily newspapers of the Communist Party from the 1950s to the 1980s in Bulgaria. Focusing on three years (1956, 1971 and 1981) within the study period that marked high political activity and achievements for women in politics, key findings indicated 30 % (representing 226 of the 757 photographs analyzed) representation of women in the party press. More importantly, the authors assert that it is ". . . an overall pattern of symbolic underrepresentation, of women in *Rabotnichesko Delo . . ."* which does not match the realities of women's participation in economic and political life in socialist Bulgaria. In addition, the study found symbolic annihilation of motherhood while emphasizing women's primary role as caregivers: nurses, teachers and librarians. The overall effect found in the study indicated the following trends: limited representation of women as members of the labor force and political functionaries; limited aesthetics of image for women's identity formation; propagation of modern images of women that supported the illusion of emancipation from domesticity leading to symbolic glorification. However, Kaneva and Ibroscheva (2012d:14) point out that "symbolic glorification of the socialist woman worker activist — a model and an ideal that was admired by feminists in the West" – shows the continued marginalization of women despite the seeming positive portrayal. Specifically, particular positive representations that may signal advancement for women may not reflect the reality of women's advancement into the public arena outside of the depictions in the media space (in this case, Bulgarian women, which was low). Again, the inability for audiences within transnational spaces to perceive this phenomenon as negative or having negative effect is what makes symbolic glorification relevant for examining women's representation in transnational media spaces in further studies. Besides, this is critical for understanding highly nuanced current women's representations that may go undetected particularly within transnational spaces.

Global News and Women Leaders' Representation

This study is premised on the concept that news is socially constructed in the sense that, like any product, news is manufactured within time and space, nuanced and layered and born out of editorial decisions by media professionals to serve the interests of society in a socially responsible fashion. For instance, newspaper content, from the constructivist point of view, reflects the way journalists and news institutions work within and interact with the larger social structure (Dunwoody & Griffin,1999; Gans, 1979). For an event (organized or through a force majeure or a natural phenomenon) to achieve selection as news, several factors spanning a number of studies are identified. They include relevance; proximity; negativity; recency; timeliness; and, novelty (Lester, 1980; Turner, 1982). In addition, Branston and Stafford (2006) list personalization, narrativisation and visual imperatives as factors. Essentially, news values are determined by journalists and editors. In other words, news values are what journalists and editors deem to be newsworthy and may differ from one news organization to another. These factors that inform choice (or rejection) of specific issues or events by news editors as newsworthy in the process of performing their 'gatekeeping' role, acquire legitimacy through reinforcing certain aspects of social reality rather than mirror society. It follows then that the expectation to have news coverage of the women leaders under study in American news media is reasonable. This is because the news value of three African women leaders bears semblance to the characteristics of news values described particularly within the study period of six months following their inauguration into office.

According to Hall (2003:89), the social reality reinforced comprises ''those images, concepts and premises which provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and 'make sense' of some aspect of social existence''. Thus, they help form the opinion of the audience akin to what is represented as news. Indeed, Hall (2003:90) cites attitude to race as a part of the social context with the media defining ". . . race . . . [as], what meaning the imagery of race carries, and what the 'problem of race' is understood to be''. Through this study, it is expected that a sense of frames used in the coverage of African women leaders within transnational media space will be got.

Darling-Wolf (2010:360) says that "Aside from downplaying the negative impact of the spread of an increasingly commercial model of news production, celebratory accounts of broadly defined ''Western'' news serve

to distract from continuing problems ranging from injustices at the national and regional levels to cross-cultural misunderstanding". Thus, with the three African women under study achieving celebratory feat, it follows then that news about them will catch the attention of foreign media houses.

METHODOLOGY

News articles from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were selected for analyses as they are among the newspapers with highest circulation in 2022 (*Leading Print Newspapers U.S. by Circulation 2022, 2023.),* and considered national newspapers of record (Alieva, 2023).

The New York Times is a renowned American newspaper established in 1851 by the journalist/politician Henry Jarvis Raymond, and a banker George Jones. Its mission as stated on its website is to seek the truth and help people understand the world. It is one of the most influential and widely read newspapers in the world. *The New York Times* is traditionally considered as liberal and provides extensive coverage on various aspects of the African continent, including politics, economy, culture, and more. The logical corollary expectation is that The New York Times will give positive empowering representations of African women leaders achieving novel feat.

Similarly, *The Washington Post* is a prominent American newspaper that was established in 1877. It is reputed as one of the leading newspapers in the United States, known for its in-depth reporting and investigative journalism. In terms of ideology, the Washington Post is a slightly left-of-center, with a focus on liberal and progressive viewpoints. One of its main guiding principles is to tell all the truth as far as it can learn it, (Graham, 1998). *The Washington Post* has a long history of covering Africa in general and African-American women. Consequently, understanding ways in which the three African women leaders were represented in a US newspaper deepens the understanding about reportage of women in leadership positions in Africa in transnational news discourses.

A news story that discussed Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Joyce Banda and Sahle-Work Zewde found online was selected using purposive sampling method (Bertrand & Hughes, 2005:199) and using "the entire universe of articles" available from the period of study (Valeda, 2002:147). The method of sampling is applicable because news stories on the women are few. The

period of study is the first 6 months of their first terms in office. For Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the period of study is January 16 to June 2012, for Banda April 7 to October 2012 and for Sahle-Wok Zewde, October 25, 2018 to April 2019. News articles were obtained through a keyword search in Lexis Nexis. A keywords search using 'Ellen Johnson Johnson Sirleaf' within the publications of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* was done. Out of the results, news articles falling within the six-month study period were selected. The procedure was repeated for Joyce Banda and Sahle-Wok Zewde for consistency and rigor. News stories that only mentioned (or alluded to) the woman leader in the headline with no information in the body text were excluded from the sample. For instance, one *Washington Post* article did not state the Ethiopian president's name but referred to her as "a female president" (the only story that reported her presidency). It is important to note that the story also used a captioned photograph even though her name was not directly mentioned in the article.

Altogether, 56 news articles (40 - *The New York Times* and 16 - *The Washington Post)* were systematically coded and analyzed for themes or patterns (Foxwell-Norton, 2017). With the paragraph as the unit of analysis, the news articles translated into 634 paragraphs. Multiple close reading of the news articles was done and some content categories were developed based on the interpretations and themes that emerged in each article or news story (Pickle et al., 2002). The emerging themes were categorized. First, categories were assigned to the paragraph and then new categories were created or collapsed in a second coding process with informed frames. While frames were counted, qualitative content analysis rather than quantitative, allowed for meaning making of the phenomena under study from an interpretive and natural approach bringing a sense of what meanings people bring to them (Lincoln & Guba, 2002). In this way, the themes lend themselves to incremental enrichment enabling improvement and refinement (Jensen, 2013).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings of the study are presented through descriptions and analyses of data from the newspapers. First, the frames on the coverage of the individual woman leader are presented separately. This is followed by a discussion of the frames. It must be noted that even though the search with the names of

the presidents as key words produced the selected articles, a close reading revealed that not all the paragraphs were dedicated to the president in some cases. For example, the search yielded a quiz ("How much do you know about these women who run the world?" 2015) which begins with the following paragraph, "Sahle-Work Zewde just became Ethiopia's first female president. She is the only female head of state on the African continent. However, Ethiopia is not the only country with a female leader. How much do you know?" (Gharib, 2015), followed by five questions. Beyond the paragraph, there is no mention of Zewde. Hence, the distribution of the news articles by newspaper and president is presented in tables to provide a bird's eye view of the actual number of news stories and paragraphs dedicated to each president even though this is not a quantitative study.

Table 1

News articles dedicated to presidents by Newspapers

	Johnson Sirleaf	Banda	Zewde
The Washington Post	9	6	1
The New York Times	30	9	1
Total	**39**	**15**	**2**

N=56

Comparative Cumulative Distribution of News articles used to cover African Women Presidents in Two U.S. Newspapers: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, January 16 to June 2012; Banda, April 7 to October 2012; Zewde, October 25, 2018 to April 31, 2019
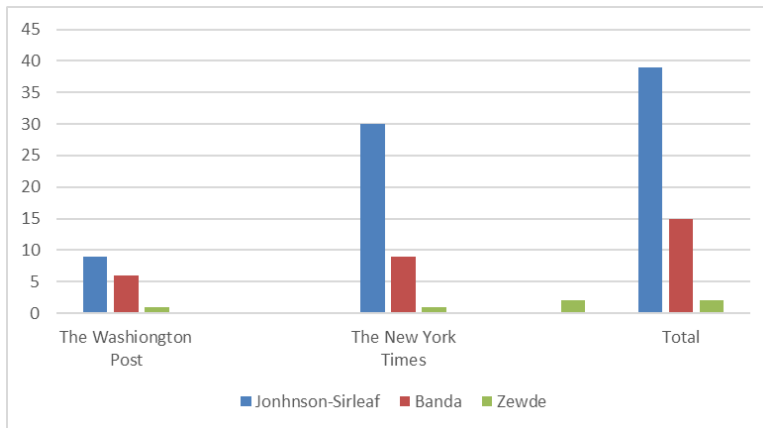
Figure 1: Bar graph of the distribution of news stories by two U.S. newspapers: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, January 16 to June 2012; Banda, April 7 to October 2012; Zewde, October 25, 2018 to April 31, 2019

Table 2

Paragraphs dedicated to presidents by Newspapers

	Johnson Sirleaf	Banda	Zewde
The Washington Post	262	87	22
The New York Times	135	111	17
Total	397	198	39

N=634

Comparative Cumulative Distribution of Paragraphs in News articles used to cover African Women Presidents in Two U.S. Newspapers: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, January 16 to June 2012; Banda, April 7 to October 2012; Zewde, October 25, 2018 to April 31, 2019
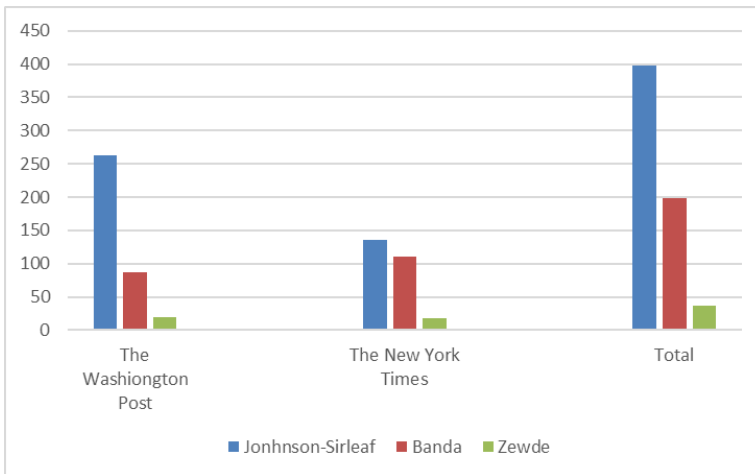
Figure 2: Bar graph of the distribution of paragraphs of news stories by two U.S. newspapers: Johnson Sirleaf, January 16 to June 2012; Banda, April 7 to October 2012; Zewde, October 25, 2018 to April 31, 2019

This paper addresses the frames that were used in US news discourse by *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* in the coverage of three African women leaders. *The Washington Post* covered Ellen Johnson Sirleaf using the following frames: 'competence and progressive approach to leadership', 'fashion sense', 'security and foreign intervention', 'age', 'motherhood', and 'modesty'. *The Washington Post* covered Joyce Banda using the following frames: 'competence and progressive approach to leadership', 'modesty' and 'age'. For Zewde, both newspapers under study used, 'competence and progressive approach to leadership', 'symbolic leadership' and 'legitimization frames.' *The New York Times* covered Joyce Banda using the following frames that included 'foreign aid', 'age'*,* 'motherhood', 'modesty', and 'competence and progressive approach to leadership'. *The New York Times* covered Ellen Johnson Sirleaf using the following frames including 'competence and progressive approach to leadership', 'physical appearance', 'education', 'security and foreign intervention', and 'West African collaboration'.

Coverage of the three women leaders by *The Washington Post* was uneven. While one news article comprising nineteen paragraphs was dedicated to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, another one dedicated only three paragraphs on the day she took over the presidency of Liberia. Comparatively, the number

of paragraphs decreased in the case of Banda and went further low with respect to Zewde. An explanation could be the historical familiarity of Liberia to the United States on one level, and the sense of familiarity of the U.S. media with Johnson Sirleaf (who had had American education) and international career on another (journalistic proximity). Indeed, in most of the news stories covering Johnson Sirleaf, the frame of competence based on her American education was apparent. Another reason could be the close association of the United States with the founding of Liberia as a state for freed slaves who were relocated from the US. For Banda, an explanation for the relatively lower coverage could be the circumstances under which she became president. Banda took over the reins of governance by virtue of her position as the vice president after the sitting president died and, in line with the constitution of Malawi and, by virtue of her position as the vice president, Joyce Banda became the de jure president. Even lower is the coverage of Zewde with a story by *The Washington Post* within the period of examination. *The New York Times* gave coverage to Zewde with a single story. In this case, the lack of novelty of Africa's first female president as an element of news worthiness perhaps accounts for the low coverage.

A major trend in the approach used by *The New York Times* in the coverage of Johnson Sirleaf was the emphasis placed on Charles Taylor in the stories that mention her. Predominantly, the stories featured the extradition of former Liberian president Charles Taylor and the need for Charles Taylor to face charges in the UN-backed War crimes Tribunal in Sierra Leone. In most of the stories, Johnson Sirleaf was relegated to the background and mentioned when there was the need to determine the state of affairs regarding processes in the indictment of Charles Taylor. The trend continued after Taylor had been arrested signaling a change to depict the role she played in securing the arrest and indictment of Charles Taylor.

Framing Competence

Competence and Progressive approach to leadership frames

Three similar but distinct framing strategies were deployed in the coverage of the three women leaders. The 'competence and progressive approach to leadership' frame was found in the coverage of both Johnson Sirleaf and Banda but with different framing strategies; and, the 'competent for leadership' frame was found in Zewde's coverage.

An important finding is the use of titles in the coverage of the women leaders. The discrepancy in the use of titles (Ms., Mrs., President, Leader) in addressing the women leaders is one that cannot be overlooked in either newspaper. It is important to note the context within which these titles are used as they invoke issues of competence. In all the news stories that *The Washington Post* covered Joyce Banda, her name was preceded by the title President. It is only in one story that she was not referred to as leader, an even more powerful title. Within the frames in which the title President was deployed are those of 'progressive approach to leadership' to her work as president. Particularly, Banda was referred to as President in the context in which she had successfully applied a progressive approach to the reduction of AIDS infection rate in Malawi. The progressive approach frame was also used to report Banda's announcement to reduce her salary by 30% as part of a strategy to deal with the dire situation she met upon taking over the presidency following the death of her predecessor Bingu wa Mutharika on April 5, 2012. Other themes like the 'aggressive approach' and 'proactive approach' also informed the 'progressive approach to leadership' frame.

However, the use of 'President' to address Johnson Sirleaf was minimal. In fact, the title was used only twice in all the stories that were dedicated to her coverage. There were, however, similarities in the framing strategies used in the deployment of the title. Like Banda, the title 'President' was used when some major action was taken on the part of the woman leader. The following is an example of the framing strategy in the case of Johnson Sirleaf:

> President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said Thursday that she supported a bid to move the war crimes trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor from neighboring Sierra Leone to The Hague and that Taylor's dignity and rights must be guaranteed as the case advanced. (Timberg, 2006, para. 1).

Another theme that informs the 'progressive approach to leadership' frame for Banda is the 'unconventional approach to leadership' frame. Actually, the article that used the word renegade in its title *(In Malawi, a renegade tries reform)* outlines Banda's leadership style as a departure from the traditional leadership style prevalent on the African continent. Other themes found in the article that strengthened the 'progressive approach to leadership' frame include 'reformist path', 'principled leadership', and 'a new kind of African

leader'. The articles describe Banda as different, and ahead of other African leaders (predominantly male) in terms of leadership qualities.

It is clear that there is a shift in the use of the competence frame from coverage of Banda to that of Johnson Sirleaf. In the case of Johnson Sirleaf, the themes that informed the 'competence and progressive approach to leadership' frame comprise 'education', 'international work experience', 'courage' and 'politician'. The following quote illustrates the use of these themes:

> The second is Johnson Sirleaf herself: Harvard-trained economist, former World Bank and U.N. official, and democrat. She espouses an anti-corruption, socially inclusive vision that aid officials can only dream of finding in most poor countries. Courageously, for she still has many followers, she has asked that former dictator Charles Taylor, now in Nigeria, stand trial for his crimes. (Hiatt, 2006, para. 15)

It is also important to note another aspect of the competence frame in the case of Johnson Sirleaf. Rather than a frame of competence based on actual achievements, like in the case of Banda, there is a significant reliance on belief of assurance of future performance that informs Johnson Sirleaf's competence frame as a leader. Again, the persistence of this particular competence framing strategy in almost all the news stories of Johnson Sirleaf points to nuanced forms of framing women leadership competences. In addition, key markers including "hero", "pioneer" were deployed in the competence frame as it pertains to Johnson Sirleaf - perhaps for becoming the first African woman president.

For Zewde, 'symbolic leadership', 'international work', 'legitimization', and 'qualifications' informed the 'competence for leadership' frame. The news stories placed emphasis on the symbolic nature of her presidency giving the overall effect of the need for legitimization of the leadership role conferred upon Zewde. The analyses of both newspapers' stories, thus, revealed the 'legitimization' frame underpinned by themes of expertise, education and feminist support deployed through overwhelming use of quotes from women activists and state officials (rather than Zewde's own words) as if to prove her competence for the position. Whereas the use of quotes to establish journalistic credibility is important, the particularities of the quotes

are even more so. For instance, the *Washington Post* story used Zewde's words in only one out of the eight paragraphs dedicated to her as seen here:

> In remarks in Parliament after she took her oath of office, Sahle-Work emphasized the importance of respecting women and the need to build a "society that rejects the oppression of women." She also promised to work for peace and unity in the country. (Schemm, 2018a, para. 4).

Altogether, the 'legitimization' frame was established using twelve (12) paragraphs from state officials, feminists and women's rights activists in the case of the *Washington Post.* The following illustrate examples of the paragraphs:

> In a patriarchal society such as ours, the appointment of a female head of state not only sets the standard for the future but also normalizes women as decision-makers in public life," tweeted Fitsum Arega, the prime minister's chief of staff and de facto government spokesman." (Schemm, 2018b, para. 3).

The *New York Times* also used the same quote above.

Again, both newspapers deployed the 'legitimization' frame using quotes from gender activist and feminist:

> "Sehin Teferra, co-founder of the feminist Setaweet movement, said the appointment is important because gender equality in Ethiopia is generally "abysmal," with "very high levels of violence against women." (Schemm, 2018c, para. 12).

> We need a bold leader who actually sees women beyond being mothers and sisters but be inspirations and let others become role models," Ms. Selam said (Ahmed, H & de Freytas-Tamura, 2018a; para. 14) and there is still a long way to go, cautioned Blen Sahilu, a lawyer and women's rights activist, because, especially in rural society, women are not seen as leaders. (Schemm, 2018d, para. 16).

Furthermore, rather than the clear use of 'competence and progressive approach to leadership' frame for Banda, the 'symbolic leadership' frame characterized the presentation of information about Zewde's appointment. For example:

> The position of president is ceremonial in Ethiopia, with executive power vested in the office of the prime minister. But the appointment is deeply symbolic and follows up on last week's cabinet reshuffle. Half the ministers in the government are women in Africa's second-most populous country (Schemm, 2018e, para. 2)

> *The New York Times* took a similar approach:

> Though the position of president is considered largely ceremonial, involving opening Parliament and appointing ambassadors, the decision to place Ms. Sahle-Work in the role carries significant symbolic weight, said Selam Musse, a gender and media consultant based in Addis Ababa, the capital. (Ahmed, H & de Freytas-Tamura, 2018b, para. 4).

Overall, the two newspapers' coverage of the three women leaders' rests on 'competence and progressive approach to leadership,' and 'symbolic leadership' frames. Together, the frames evoke competence when juxtaposed with the usual negative coverage of women leaders.

Traditional and Non-traditional Frames

The traditional framing of women leaders around family, marriage and physical appearance was evident in the coverage of Johnson Sirleaf and Banda but absent in the coverage of Zewde. It was more prominent in *The Washington Post* than was the case in *The New York Times* articles. In both newspapers, the frame of maternalism is prominent. It is informed by the use of key words including 'grandmotherly,' 'children', 'mother', 'marriage' particularly in the coverage of Johnson Sirleaf by *The Washington Post.* However, this frame was not prominent even though it was used in the coverage of Banda. *The New York Times* however barely used the maternalism frame in its coverage of both Johnson Sirleaf and Banda.

A major frame that emerged in the coverage of Johnson Sirleaf is that of dress style synonymous with media attention to women's appearance. An entire article was dedicated to cataloging her dress style on her visits to important places, particularly in the US. In contrast, an entire article was used to catalogue Banda's achievements since taking office as president. Interestingly, Johnson Sirleaf's style of dress was described by the author as 'political,' informed by a style that is 'dramatic,' 'old fashioned mother-of-the-church,' and 'not especially chic.' While the attires she wore to important places (namely session of US Congress, the Oval Office, UN Security Council) were given prominence, there was no mention of her speeches at the venues while the article acknowledged the dire situation of her country Liberia. This type of representation in this case signifies silencing her voice and reinforces the media stereotype of women appearing as passive, and an object of the male gaze. Further, we suggest that this amounts to trivializing her position as president of a country.

The non-gendered use of the 'care' theme that often signals the 'women as nurturers' frame is worthy of note:

> The message she sends is that principled leadership for the benefit of the people is the right thing to do," said Jeanine E. Jackson, the U.S. ambassador to Malawi. "She cares about the people, while a lot of African leaders are more caring about themselves. (Raghavan, 2012a, para. 4).

The use of the word 'care' usually associated with 'soft' to describe her 'tough' drastic moves to cut cost is one that is ironic yet effective to the 'competence and progressive approach to leadership' frame. Again, 'care' is equated to principled leadership, another effective rhetorical move that strengthens Banda's competence as a leader. In other words, 'care' is used in a sense that does not denote the stereotypical use that informs framing women around nurturing (Gallagher, 2001). Indeed, Banda is portrayed as caring enough for her people to take drastic decisions. 'Care' then assumes a masculine characteristic by its association with 'drastic decisions'.

The frame of modesty was also deployed in a manner that made its non-genderized mode apparent. Mainly, the modesty frame was informed by Banda's refusal to be extravagant in comparison to her predecessor. The following provides an illustration of the 'modesty' frame:

> Unlike Mutharika, an economist known for his lavish lifestyle, Banda hates staying at luxury hotels and usually travels with a small entourage. She only recently moved into the presidential palace, after her supporters insisted that it would send a signal that a female president was equal to a male one. (Raghavan, 2012b, para. 13).

In contrast, Johnson Sirleaf, also framed around modesty had it informed by her dress style with particular attention to her headdresses. However, the pressure for Banda to conform to the prevailing leadership style on the continent cannot be overlooked. The frame was absent in the coverage of Zewde.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the juxtaposing of traditional and nontraditional frames in trans-national news discourse with specific application to women presidents is an important dynamic. While non-traditional frames are positive and the traditional frames point to negative stereotypes, the overall effect of the juxtaposing invokes the following meanings: female presidents must qualify as mothers, wives, have good education, dress well, be caring, and be an 'iron lady' (in the case of Johnson Sirleaf). Analyses of trans-national news discourse on Zewde revealed an absence of traditional gendered framing around marriage and family but a strong presence of a framing strategy supported the 'legitimization' frame that informed the 'competence' frame. The prescribed qualification by news media for women leaders (Johnson Sirleaf and Banda) omits other groups of women who may not meet the traditional criteria.

However, the absence of frames of maternalism around family, marriage and physical appearance in the coverage of Zewde, on some levels, resolves the issues raised with the coverage of Banda and Johnson Sirleaf. While the two newspapers under study did not include any information about Zewde's family life, a search outside the data sources for this study shows very few websites included scanty information about whether she is married or not. For example, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs website of the Ethiopian government had one line about her family as follows: "Ambassador Sahle-Work is married and a mother of two sons." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ethiopia, 2018, para. 9). The omission of familial information in the coverage of Zewde is significant as it projects the woman leader as capable and constitutes a shift in the news discourse on women leaders in general.

Critically, questions arise: What accounts for this type of coverage? Given that the Zewde article was published after those of Banda and Johnson Sirleaf, is this a new development in journalistic standards to incorporate recommendations from research on news discourse? This could well be a journalistic courtesy to Zewde upon request. In every day reportage, it is public knowledge that some duty bearers may request journalists to keep family issues out of public discourse. These questions indicate the need for further studies of news discourse on African women leaders. Thus, while the specificities of Zewde's frames provide some light at the end of the tunnel of women's news media coverage, it is important to reiterate the point that the nature of coverage of Zewde may well be the result of a request on the part of Zewde. Alternatively, or rather, intuitively, this may be put down to improved journalistic standards on the coverage of women leaders. Furthermore, this finding must be understood in the light that only two stories (one each) was dedicated to Zewde within the study period.

The non-gendered shift in 'care' and 'modesty' frames is an important finding. The non-gendered use of 'care' and women as nurturers to signal the use of unconventional approach to leadership (in the case of Banda) constitutes a shift from its gendered use. However, this finding must be seen in light of its limitation as an outcome of analyzing news content. Future studies may include interviews with the journalists to the research design to have a multi-perspective and understanding of this shift to make a conclusive argument.

Overall, the framing of Banda as competent was based on actual performance while Johnson Sirleaf was based on anticipated performance. Banda was portrayed as working on the ground (in Malawi), while Johnson Sirleaf was usually covered whilst away from Liberia, in international space. While on the surface, *The Washington Post* gave Johnson Sirleaf more coverage, the quality of representation was better for Banda in terms of her portrayal as a competent leader and president.

On the other hand, the use of stereotypes in subtle ways that invokes socio-cultural concepts about marriage and domesticity as essential in women's upward mobility to leadership spaces were present in US news discourse.

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