

Representation of the Global South in Western News Media: A Postcolonial Analysis

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Abstract

The coverage of the global news still influences the understanding of the Global South by creating ideological presentations and asymmetries of representation. Based on the postcolonial theory and inspired by 32 empirical studies, this review highlights four common patterns in western media discourse, including the crisis orientation, economic dependency framing, visual stereotyping, and epistemic marginalization. These tendencies demonstrate how journalism adds power to historical hierarchies and in most cases the voices of the North will be heard and those of the locals will be underrepresented. The review identifies the structural processes that constrain complexity of narratives and symbolic inequality through thematic synthesis and data visualization. It is concluded with implications on media ethics, journalism training, and informatics teaching that suggest that decolonized structures and inclusive sourcing be the norm. The paper also brings together theory and cross-study results to help create a more critical awareness of how media systems also reproduce global power differentials, and how this could be reimaged in ways that put equity and epistemic justice first.

Keywords: Postcolonial media, Global South, Western journalism, media framing, epistemic exclusion

1. Introduction

The Global South remains a difficult and marginalized part of international media systems. Since the world is largely governed by news agencies based in the Global North, the Global South is often reflected as a colonialism and imperial discourse. Such representations tend to support the ideas of dependency, crisis, and cultural otherness, which leads to the misinformed flow of information in the globalized world, impacting the perception of the masses and international policy (Slater, 2014; Woon, 2016). Over the past few years, there has been a growing interest among scholars trying to question the manner in which Western media creates knowledge about the Global South, especially with regards to humanitarian crisis, economic issues, and technological advances (Wasserman, 2018; Gondwe, 2024). These are not just descriptive but they also play an active role in relation to how geopolitical relationships are framed, how economies are stratified as well as how cultures are narrated. As an example, the Global South has been depicted as an economically unstable region or constantly in need of aid, all of which legitimizes some financial interventions and weakens the native solutions and opinions (Khawaja et al., 2025; Rodny-Gumede, 2020).

The postcolonial criticism has become a critical tool to evaluate these imbalances, and it points to discursive practice as the agent of global media content. Media theories like framing analysis also assist in the discovery of the selection, highlighting, and downplaying of specific narratives to support those in power (Entman, 1993; Spivak, 2023). These frameworks provide us with useful means to know not just what is said about the Global South but also how and why such a representation is made in a certain way. Importantly, these media portrayals have implications beyond abstract discourse. They shape the way audiences, with special regard to Global North, react to issues such as foreign aid, development projects, and economic policy. Meanwhile, this type of coverage affects the perception of the Global South people regarding their representation, leading to internalized stereotypes and less involvement in world debates (Park et al., 2023; Douglas, 2025). The given

review article is an attempt to synthesize and critique the literature on the topic of the representation of the Global South in the Western news media through the postcolonial lens. It uses 32 most significant scholarly works, both theoretical and empirical, to offer an in-depth insight into the problem. These are specifically media narratives with economic and crisis reporting in mind and with a particular eye on the implications of media literacy and financial education. The purpose of this review is to critically review the dominant themes and patterns of western media portrayals of the Global South, to inquire into the usefulness of postcolonial theory and framing analysis as a methodological approach to analyze such representations and to establish how such representations have a wider implication on general knowledge, financial literacy, and the discourse of international justice.

2. Reclaiming the Narrative: Theoretical Perspectives of the Media and the Global South

The way the Global South is represented in the Western news media cannot be properly examined without strong theoretical tools that would capture historical and structural power. The review combines four main frameworks, such as postcolonial theory, media framing, ethical semiotics, and transcultural media, in an attempt to understand the ways in which the discourse about the Global South is constructed, transmitted, and received.

2.1 Postcolonial Theory: Deconstructing the Global Gaze

The postcolonial theory criticizes the ongoing empire in the production of knowledge, cultural representation and world discourse. The idea of Orientalism presented by Said (1978) unveiled how the western cultures created essentialized images of the non-western Other, whereas Spivak (2023) came up with the idea of the subaltern, those whose structural agency or voice was denied. Such views continue to dominate the study of media representations that perpetuate tropes of underdevelopment, dependency or cultural backwardness. These theories have been modified under the new scholarship to meet the demands of media research today. Glück (2018) and Alahmed (2020) point out that western paradigms still prevail in the analysis of media in the world, and local voices are frequently sidelined. Mutsvairo et al. (2021) share similar sentiments about the need to broaden journalism epistemologies to accommodate non-Western epistemologies that oppose dominant narratives. It is based on this theory that exploration of the manner in which certain stories are framed is made.

2.2 Framing Theory: Making Meaning in the News

Framing theory offers an opportunity to decipher how news content affects the interpretation through emphasis on some elements of a story. Entman (1993) indicates that the frames characterize problems, cause, and morality as well as the solution. Gondwe (2024) and Willems (2014) demonstrate that such frames tend to pathologize the Global South due to the focus on chaos, dysfunction or weakness. In order to synthesize the interaction of these perspectives, Table 1 below represents the relationship between the key frameworks employed in this review.

Table 1: Integrated Conceptual Framework for Media Representation Analysis

Theoretical Lens	Core Concepts	Key Scholars	Media Application
Postcolonial Theory	Orientalism, Subalternity, Internalized Bias	Said (1978); Spivak (2023); Glück (2018); Alahmed (2020)	Examining narrative tropes like crisis, saviorism, and passivity
Framing Theory	Problem-Solution Frames, Causal Attribution	Entman (1993); Gondwe (2024); Willems (2014)	Identifying story structures around disaster, aid, and development
Semiotics & Media Ethics	Visual Encoding, Moral Authority	Bashir & Yasmin (2024); Rao & Wasserman (2007); Chiumbu (2016)	Analyzing how images reinforce hierarchies and ethical asymmetries

Transcultural/Decolonial Media	Media Flows, Epistemic Resistance	Li & Wekesa (2022); Ponzanesi (2020); Mutsvairo et al. (2021)	Understanding the digital turn and postcolonial redefinitions
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This framework guides the thematic coding of reviewed literature, offering a layered method to study not only content but also its broader implications in media education and global policy discourse.

2.3 Semiotics and Ethics in Visual Representation

News images tend to be very influential in the perception of the people. Visual semiotics or the study of how meaning is established through images assist in revealing symbolic hierarchies inherent in photojournalism. Bashir & Yasmin (2024) demonstrate how images of the Global South countries tend to be pictures of suffering bodies, disorganized setting, or overemphasized emotional clues that contribute to othering. In the same manner, Chiumbu (2016) criticizes the construction of the visuals of African labor struggles to suppress the problem of systemic inequality, and Wasserman (2006) focus more on the moral inequality of the priorities of whose narratives are highlighted through visual means. These critiques display the necessity of morality not only in content production but also in editorial decision and design. Through semiotic analysis, this review appreciates the fact that visual frames are not neutral-they contain cultural codes and political messages that determine audience reaction, particularly when they are reinforced with already built narrative frames.

2.4 Transcultural Media and the Decolonial Turn

Since digital media is transnational, recent theoretical frameworks focus on transcultural communication and the decolonial turn. The frameworks examine the processes through which stories are bargained, hybridized or fought over across cultures. Li & Wekesa (2022) state that asymmetries are revealed in even the apparently globalized flows through transcultural studies, whereas Ponzanesi (2020) proposes the concept of digital diasporas as resistant spaces of knowledge. Rodney-Gumede (2020) also states that both transitional and postcolonial circumstances should be taken into consideration when speaking about comparative media systems in relation to representation and ethics. In combination, these perspectives resonate with the demands to de-Westernize the study of journalism and promote plural epistemologies in accordance with the realities of the Global South (Iqani & Resende, 2019; Nothias, 2018). In this review, these insights help inform the study of the way in which the chosen studies address representation that goes further beyond the binary West-South distinctions and recognizes the fluidity of media landscapes.

3. Methodological Framing and Analytical Orientation

This section describes the conceptual and analytical steps adopted in this literature review. It explains how sources were identified, read and grouped into thematic clusters that lend themselves to the larger theoretical objectives of the study. The approach does not prioritise exhaustiveness, but conceptual rigor and depth of interpretation, in accordance with the norms of narrative review scholarship in interdisciplinary media studies.

3.1 Criteria for Conceptual Source Inclusion

The review is constructed on a well-selected list of scholarly sources that have been chosen due to their references and application to the postcolonial theory, media framing, and discourse representation of the Global South. The texts were included in case they critically addressed ways in which news narratives express structural asymmetries of power, more specifically, in economic, crisis, or visual reporting. Classic texts (e.g., Said, 1978; Spivak, 2023) were combined with the modern explanations (e.g., Higgins et al., 2015; Gondwe, 2024) to strike a balance between the theoretical heritage and the current school of thought. Instead of using comprehensive keyword-searching procedures, the sources were selected according to their analysis value in answering the questions of

the review and their theoretical path. There was also a concern of making it diverse in terms of geographical emphasis, disciplinary pedigree and methodological inclination.

3.2 Interpretive Engagement with Literature

Each source was examined as a theoretically grounded text, with particular attention to its conceptual assumptions, analytical language, and methodological orientation. Attention was focused on how questions of representation, agency and narrative authority were framed in works, rather than what they reported. This enabled an indulgent interpretive exercise within textual, visual and epistemological levels of media criticism. By drawing upon the theoretical knowledge of cultural studies, ethics of journalism, and digital diasporas (Ponzanesi, 2020; Mutsvairo, 2021), the review transcends the scope of the traditional content analysis to adopt multidimensional apprehensions of the manner in which the Global South is represented and envisioned in the international media flows.

3.3 Thematic Organization and Analytical Categories

An inductive reading strategy informed the analytical synthesis of the review and took a developing thematic structure of coding. There were four major thematic categories that were constructed by repetitively reading through the texts: crisis framing, economic dependency, visual and ethical framing, and epistemic exclusion. Although these themes are different, they are also interrelated in that they share assumptions regarding Global South as othered, lacking, or externally defined. In order to demonstrate this structure, Table 2 includes an integrated coding matrix that indicates each thematic domain, related discursive indicators, and example studies.

Table 2: Coding Matrix of Dominant Themes in Media Representation Studies

Analytical Theme	Interpretive Focus	Discursive Indicators	Illustrative Sources
Crisis Framing	News depiction of the South as unstable or perpetually imperiled	“Violence,” “chaos,” “emergency,” “failing state”	Khawaja et al. (2025); Alam (2021)
Economic Dependency	Construction of economic inferiority and financial helplessness	“Foreign aid,” “donor nations,” “IMF,” “underdeveloped”	Gondwe (2024); Alahmed (2020)
Visual and Ethical Framing	Use of imagery and moral tropes to define cultural or political narratives	Victim imagery, dichotomous visuals, moral binaries	Bashir & Yasmin (2024); Rao & Wasserman (2007)
Epistemic Exclusion	Silencing or marginalization of Southern voices and knowledge systems	Absence of local sources, expert dominance from Global North	Glück (2018); Rodny-Gumede (2020)

These categories are the starting point of the following part where they are discussed in terms of empirical and theoretical input of the reviewed literature.

3.4 Positioning the Review within Critical Inquiry

This review is located on the crossroad between postcolonial critique and media discourse analysis at the intersection of historical awareness and structural interrogation. It has an orientation which privileges critical reflection over generalization and synthesis over summary. The theoretical framing is consistent with the literature that attempts to deconstruct the global knowledge structures not only in terms of what gets told, but also in terms of who has the right to tell it (Li & Wekesa, 2022; Rodny-Gumede, 2020). With the framing of ethics, epistemics, and symbolics as the most salient dimensions of media framing, the review surpasses binary geopolitical camps and enters into the multiplicity of the realities of the construction of the Global South in the international news media.

4. Patterns of Representations: Decoding Media Discourses of the Global South

This part summarizes the prevailing discourses that govern how Western news media portray the Global South both in terms of thematic tendencies and using critical postcolonial observations. Based on 32 studies, four interconnected areas of representation can be discussed, including the crisis imaginary, economic dependency, visual stereotyping, and epistemic gatekeeping. Tables and figures are employed to present the important findings and provide comparative perspectives across the researches.

4.1 Crisis Imaginary: Creating the Global South as Constantly Suspended

The most common framing mechanism that is identified in the reviewed literature is crisis-centered narratives. The global south in media portrayal shows a lot of war, poverty, natural calamities, and political instabilities. The stories are not often framed in terms of longer histories of colonialism, structural violence, or problems of local governance, which gives a picture of regions always on the verge of emergency (Alam, 2021; Khawaja et al., 2025). There is a vast variety of crises that is reported; floods, pandemic, coups, insurgencies and so on but they are usually presented as indicators of a failed system or as backward institutions. These kinds of stories contribute to the belief that Global South cannot take care of itself without being externally controlled. Figure 1 shows the combination of these types of crises with theoretical concerns in scholarly discourse.

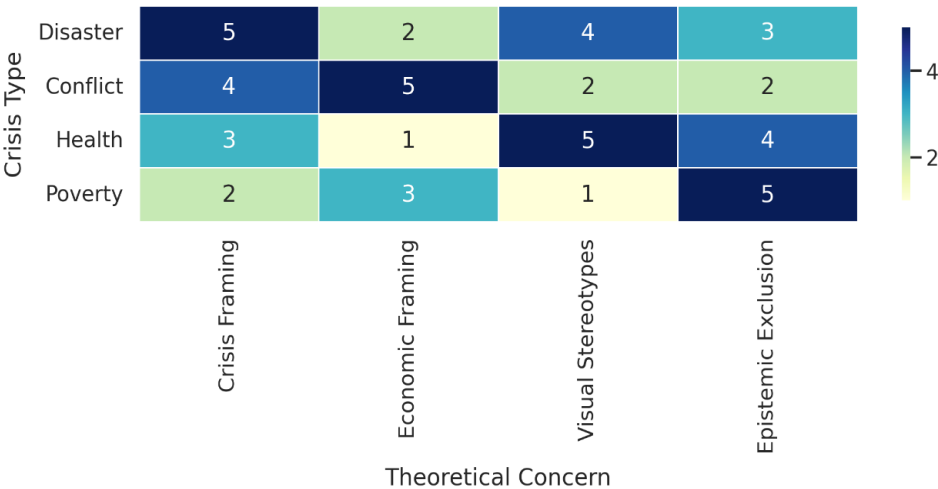


Figure 1: Thematic Emphasis Across Crisis Types

Figure 1 indicates that the most common theory that disaster and conflict are analyzed using is the framing theory and postcolonial critique. In the meantime, a visual ethic and epistemic exclusion are more related to such issues as health and poverty. That implies that various crises are constructed not only in the media but also in the academic world based on their symbolic strength and geopolitical consequences.

4.2 Dependency Discourse: Global South Economic Subject

The other significant theme is the depiction of the Global South as economically recessive or structurally incompetent. The economies of such regions are usually portrayed by the Western media as always teetering on the edge of a potential collapse, with the help of the world financial institutions holding them together. Such loans as development loans, IMF bailouts, and donor funding are the most discussed, whereas endogenous economic reforms are hardly credited and never explored thoroughly (Gondwe, 2024; Alhassan & Chakravartty, 2011). Instead of emphasizing innovation, or the resilience of the domestic economy, such narratives imply that financial solutions should be introduced by somebody outside of the country, i.e., mostly in the Global North. This has not only

implications to journalistic fairness but to the way finance and policy are taught and viewed around the world. Table 3 summarizes the variety of economic framing methods.

Table 3: Framing Elements in Economic News Reports

Framing Feature	Discursive Patterns	Representative Sources
Financial Deficit Framing	“Dependent on IMF loans,” “fiscal breakdown”	Alahmed (2020); Rao & Wasserman (2007)
Aid as a Savior Discourse	“International rescue,” “donor-led recovery”	Khawaja et al. (2025); Willems (2014)
Local Economic Silencing	Exclusion of regional economists or planners	Gondwe (2024); Moyo (2020)
Technocratic Imposition	Reliance on Western models of fiscal discipline	Iqani & Resende (2019); Ashfaquzzaman (2024)
Risk Construction	“Fragile markets,” “corruption-prone governance”	Nothias (2020); Rodny-Gumede (2020)

Table 3 does not only show repetition of vocabulary, but also power imbalance when it comes to defining what should be considered credible financial discourse.

4.3 Visual Economies: Aesthetics of Sympathy, Power, and Simplification

The visual image is important in the construction of the knowledge of the unknown areas. The western media often use the emotionally overloaded image, suffering children, desolated landscapes, or violent protesters, which position the Global South either as helpless or volatile (Bashir & Yasmin, 2024; Chiumbu, 2016). Although such visuals may create emotional appeal, they are not specific and contextual, making whole cultures and communities symbolic roles. In order to understand the prevalence and criticism of these tropes, Figure 2 plots the connection between the emotional salience of a trope and the quantity of scholarly research devoted to it.

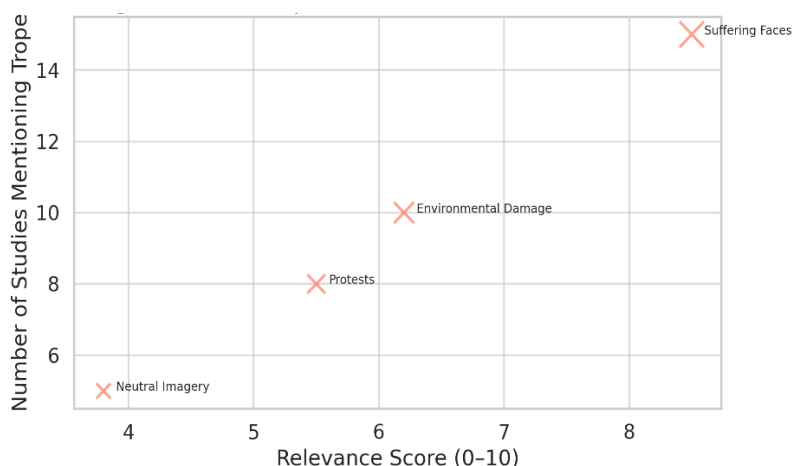


Figure 2: Visual Tropes — Salience vs. Academic Attention

As can be seen in Figure 2, faces of suffering are massively visible in the media and scholarly studies. Conversely, the empowerment or culturally-nuanced imagery is still under-examined, which is capable of changing the narratives.

The following Table 4 gathers the most widespread types of imagery and their symbolic roles to sort these visual patterns even further.

Table 4: The Visual Symbolism and the Emotional Framing of Media Coverage

Image Category	Symbolic Function	Emotional Register	Contextual Usage
Suffering Children	Victimhood / Innocence	Sympathy / Guilt	Disaster, Conflict Reports
Devastated Infrastructure	Breakdown of Order	Shock / Pity	Natural Disasters, Civil War
Protest Scenes	Chaos / Disruption	Anxiety / Distrust	Political Unrest
Cultural Exoticism	Otherness / Difference	Curiosity / Distance	Feature Stories, Documentaries
Community Gatherings	Collective Agency (rarely shown)	Hope / Resilience	NGO Campaigns, Local Spotlights

4.4 Epistemic Gatekeeping: Whose Voices Matter in Global Journalism?

The last theme relates to the institutionalization of the Global South marginality in media sourcing. Even in cases when local communities are the topic of stories, Western media sources cite Western diplomats, think tanks, or global NGOs as their key sources, pushing regional scholars, local non-governmental organizations, or local activists to the periphery (Glück, 2018; Mutsvairo et al., 2021). This does not only lead to a limited view but also a replication of power structures in the creation of knowledge. Figure 3 indicate the distribution of quotation frequencies according to source type.

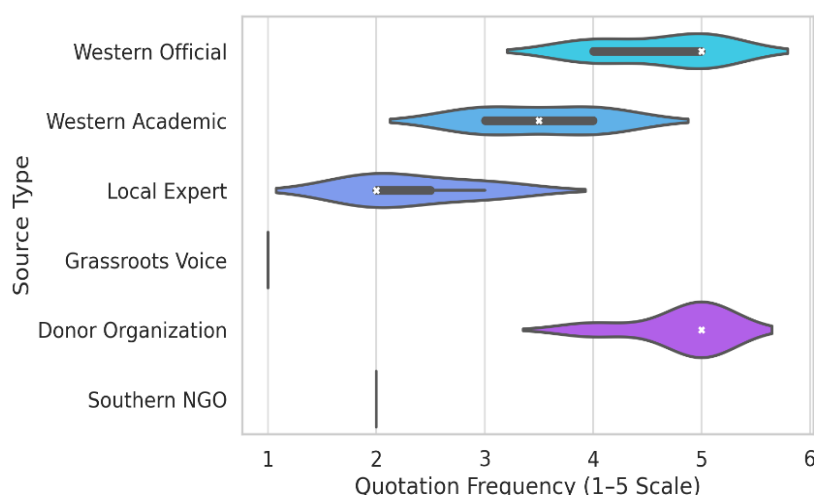


Figure 3: Quotation Intensity by Source Type

The focus of the media on the donor agencies and western institutions is evident. Such bias is also in line with editorial standards and funding patterns in international journalism. Such trends are further discussed in Table 5 that gives a qualitative overview of sourcing frequencies in studies.

Table 5: Relative frequency of quotation by the source type in the Western Media

Source Type	Frequency in Reports	Commonly Quoted In
International NGOs / Donors	High	Mutsvairo et al. (2021); Rao & Wasserman (2007)
Western Government Officials	High	Iqani & Resende (2019); Glück (2018)
Western Academics / Think Tanks	Moderate to High	Li & Wekesa (2022); Ponzanesi (2020)
Local Experts / Scholars	Low	Bashir & Yasmin (2024); Chiumbu (2016)
Grassroots Community Voices	Rare	Willems (2014)
Global South Civil Society	Rare	Often unquoted or omitted

The statistics indicate not only a reporting bias but also a deeply rooted epistemic framework which naturalizes the marginalization of the Global South perspectives.

Discussion and Implications

In this review, four prevailing frames of Global South in the Western news media have emerged: as a land of constant crisis, economic dependency, visual spectacle, and epistemic marginalization. The said patterns are not accidental but are part of long-standing journalistic traditions and ideological arrangements that determine the flow of knowledge in the world. The Global South is shaped by a crisis-oriented discourse that further solidifies the idea that areas of the Global South are unstable, suffering and vulnerable. Such stories can seldom relate such events as natural calamities or political unrest to the bigger global forces of colonialism, exploitation of the environment or international policy failures. This has also been criticized by Alam (2021) in the case of Bangladesh description, as well as Khawaja et al. (2025) who pointed out the humanitarian tropes adopted by western media to discuss the Pakistani floods without going further to structural issues. Economic coverage follows a parallel logic. Global South economies are often represented by the Western media as ineffective and reliant on foreign advice or financing. The innovations in the domestic economy, fiscal policies, and regional development processes have been commonly ignored in the favor of the donor-centered or IMF-related stories. Both Gondwe (2024) and Alahmed (2020) have shown how economic policies developed in Africa are neglected or even disregarded, whereas the Western technical interventions are portrayed as objective and rational. This continues to further a view of economic immaturity which fits into older developmentalist paradigms.

Another strong tool to construct the hierarchies of knowledge is visual representations. The visual narrative is characterized by emotional images, especially suffering bodies, disorganized protests, or polluted sceneries. These pictures are not only too much but they lack connection with the actual sociopolitical circumstances they are set in. Bashir & Yasmin (2024) described the moral symbolism of such imagery as such, and Chiumbu (2016) stated that such aesthetic simplification supports the discourse of savagery and helplessness. In the meantime, the positive or normal representations of life in Global South are either non-existent or viewed as exceptional. Sourcing practices further compound the problem. Even when covering exclusively Southern issues, western media still make much use of Northern diplomats, experts and NGOs. This shuts out vital local voices and restricts the scope of valid voices. This epistemic gatekeeping is representative of the structural disparities across journalism and the global academia, as demonstrated by the works of Glück, (2018) and Mutsvairo et al. (2021), as it is the knowledge produced in the South that is secondary or anecdotal as opposed to authoritative. The implications of these findings are multifaceted. Within the framework of education, especially within media and informatics programs, unquestionably there is a need to place postcolonial approaches in the foreground and instruct the students to think critically about representation. All journalists ought to be trained in inclusive sourcing, context-sensitive framing and ethical storytelling practices that acknowledge the agency and expertise of the Global South actors. Although thematic synthesis gives a substantial evidence of structural patterns in representation, this review has limitations. It is founded on a narrative as opposed to systematic review approach and confined to English-language, peer-reviewed publications. It fails to address how people receive or make sense of such depictions and does not address social media, alternative journalism or AI-created media, all of which are gaining momentum in dictating how a story is told in the world. Future studies are supposed to examine the comparison of these frames in Northern and Southern media systems. It would also be worth researching how audiences of the Global South process and react to such representations, especially in the diaspora and transnational context. The number of emerging studies on transcultural journalism (Li & Wekesa, 2022; Dithlokwa & Cann, 2023) implies that this trend is under pressure, yet empirical research is scarce. A closer study of the role of AI technologies and digital platforms in magnifying or undermining the present representational hierarchies would be also of timely relevance. This review confirms that representation is neither a neutral nor aesthetic issue,

representation is a place of power. The voice to be heard, the face to be witnessed, and the perception to be accepted all remain under the postcolonial order that has to be questioned, reorganized, and eventually destroyed. To be heard in its own terms, the Global South has to be heard on its own terms and not in a mediated form of others.

Conclusion

Based on postcolonial theory and the recent studies on communication, this review has critically analyzed the nature of how the global south is framed in Western news media. By identifying four of the most important representative patterns, crisis narratives, economic dependency, visual reductionism, and epistemic marginalization, the fact that they are not merely depictions of external realities but are rather the products of historical, political, and institutional pressures is established. Throughout the paper, a study of academic literature in various regions and fields demonstrates that Western media continuously give the greatest emphasis to sensationalism as opposed to context, donor-driven policies instead of local knowledge, and image-driven emotion instead of story integrity. The patterns help create a global information environment in which Southern voices are screened, downplayed, or even absent, in ways that are sometimes subtle yet very powerful. The consequences of these representational imbalances are far-reaching. They have an effect on the level of popular awareness, scholarly paradigms, media literacy, and government policy. To the audience of the Journal of Informatics Education and Research, this review provides understanding of the interconnection of news discourse with the systems of knowledge construction, digital communication, and international pedagogy. It highlights the importance of merging essential media literacy, postcolonial criticism, and inclusive approaches to the learning curriculum and journalistic practice. Although the review has provided a detailed synthesis, it is also open to additional research, comparative, empirical, and interdisciplinary, that could enhance knowledge of the role that representation plays in creating global inequality. In the last analysis, the production of more accurate and fairer media narratives of the Global South is not only a matter of journalistic duty, it is also an academic and civic task.

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