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African Broadcast Media Participation in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding: An Examination of Practices Across Nine Countries

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on interview data from nine African countries and explores how the broadcast media participate in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa. The study found that the media's news and current affairs programs largely contributed to the resolution of various forms of conflict, including domestic and marital disputes, community conflicts rooted in history, and political conflicts. However, political influence manifested through ownership, control, and censorship; resource limitation and the lack of expertise to provide depth and accuracy to conflict reporting – conceptualized as the PER framework – influenced how media organizations mitigated conflicts. The study further identified public education as a key strategy employed in de-escalating conflicts.

KEYWORDS

Conflict management; peace journalism; broadcast media; peacebuilding; Africa; civil wars

Introduction

Conflicts have been inevitable throughout history and across different societies as a result of the struggle for control over opinions, interests, and needs of individuals, groups, and countries.¹ Africa, for instance, has a turbulent history marred by numerous conflicts, many escalating into violence with dire consequences. Countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Congo, and Rwanda have endured prolonged periods of internal strife, resulting in immense human suffering and socio-economic setbacks. Büscher² argues that violent conflicts such as the heavy fighting in South Sudan's capital city of Juba; post-electoral protests and brutal killings in Bujumbura; bombings in the city of Bamako, Mali; and violent urban uprisings in Congo's cities of Goma and Kinshasa; confirm two tendencies: that conflict is rife in Africa, and that urban centers represent critical arenas in and over which violent conflicts occur.

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Conflict that is not managed harms society and can lead to unanticipated consequences like war, the loss of life, and other outcomes that put especially women and children at risk of the intricacies of displacement.³ For example, the Taliban conflict in Pakistan claimed the lives of about 80,000 people.⁴ In Karachi, Pakistan, the ethno-political conflict that occurred between 2007 and 2015 resulted in the deaths of as many as 15,000 people.⁵ Between 500,000 and one million people died during the Rwandan genocide.⁶ The conflict between the Government of Burkina Faso and JNIM, an al-Qaida-loyal jihadist group, has been growing in intensity since it was first recorded in 2018 and is now classified as a war, resulting in more than 1,600 battle-related deaths in 2022.⁷ The escalation of conflict can also have adverse effects on the socioeconomic development of the affected people. Therefore, conflict situations need to be resolved to avoid the unpleasant consequences that accompany them.

The media, as part of its role to inform and educate the public, owes it a duty to manage how information on conflict is disseminated to people, as that can influence public action and policy.⁸ Nonetheless, the media can also negatively serve as a platform to exacerbate the intensity of conflict to degenerate into war through the publication of false information to instigate hate.⁹ As an illustration, Muinde¹⁰ argues that hate speech by certain political officials and community leaders that was projected by some local media outlets led to the escalation of the dispute between Rendille and Gabbra communities in Kenya.

The media can also neutralize and elevate conflict discourse¹¹ through the ideals of peace journalism to create peaceful coexistence between parties in conflict. Thus, the media, serving as a third-party in resolving conflict through their reportage, is quite indispensable in contemporary conflict resolution strategies.¹² Thus, where conflict exists, the intervention of a free and unbiased media can have a significant impact on managing the conflict situation.¹³

Despite the importance of media in conflict zones, current scholarship on this subject primarily focuses on themes such as media's potential to exacerbate tensions or fuel violence¹⁴; coverage of elections including post-election violence¹⁵; role perception of election reporting and coverage¹⁶; newspaper coverage of conflicts¹⁷; and perceptions about peace journalism.¹⁸

Additionally, a significant amount of research on the media's participation in peacebuilding and conflict resolution focused on elections, with little regard for other situations in which they play that role. Demarest and Langer¹⁹ also contend that African conflicts are highly represented in quantitative datasets, while Hanitzsch²⁰ argues that the idea of peace journalism ignores the many structural constraints that shape and limit the work of journalists, necessitating a study like this to explore the challenges media organizations and practitioners face in their coverage and advocacy for peace and conflict resolution.

Consequently, this paper, through the lens of the peace journalism framework and qualitative techniques, examines how the African broadcast media participates in conflict resolution by finding out the dominant

forms of conflicts covered, coverage challenges, and strategies that the media adopt to mitigate conflicts. The research questions of the study are: (1) What are the dominant forms of conflict covered by the broadcast media within the African continent? (2) What are the challenges that the African broadcast media face covering conflicts and serving as advocates of peace and conflict resolution? (4) What are the best strategies that the broadcast media adopt to mitigate conflict within the African continent?

In the next section, the literature review and theoretical framework grounding the study are discussed. This is followed by a discussion of data collection methods, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. Subsequently, we discuss the findings and draw some conclusions.

Literature review and theoretical framework

Peace journalism framework

Lynch and McGoldrick²¹ define peace journalism (PJ) as an editorial choice for society “to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict.” Four of PJ’s main characteristics are its orientation toward peacebuilding, truth, people, and solutions.²² Hanitzsch²³ argues that PJ aims to explore the background of conflict formation to make conflicts appear transparent to the audience. The philosophy of PJ is strongly committed to the prevention of violence and war and focuses on the creativity of conflict resolution as well as peace-building efforts.

Peace journalism has gained popularity in recent times owing to the growing significance of studies that attempt to understand how journalists report news that seek to promote a more constructive and nonviolent understanding of conflicts. It is intended to improve conflict coverage by challenging traditional news values.²⁴ Hence, “peace journalism research positions itself as a normative approach by prioritising peace as its central value.”²⁵ From this perspective, PJ can be identified as a special mode of socially responsible journalism. Hanitzsch,²⁶ defines PJ as:

A special frame of journalistic news coverage that contributes to the process of making and keeping peace respectively, to the peaceful settlement of conflicts (p. 484)

In a similar lens, Lynch and McGoldrick²⁷ explain that PJ is a form of journalism committed to exploring root causes of conflict to “create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to conflict” (p. 6). The foundation of peace journalism is the normative premise that it should take a more proactive approach than traditional war journalism,²⁸ concentrating on the structural causes and long-term effects of violence in a comprehensive manner.²⁹

While the PJ framework provides the opportunity for the media to assist in conflict resolution through editorial decisions that explore the causes and find

solutions that lead to peace, it is not without critique. There is a contention that peace journalism is associated with the epistemological foundations of strong, causal, and linear media effects.³⁰ Hanitzsch further argues that PJ's assumptions to help resolve disputes peacefully and its potential impact are limited because the media are an independent medium whose primary role is to offer social cohesion, while politics and the military are better suited to actively resolve disputes peacefully.³¹ Since there may be conflicts between journalistic norms, societal divisions, violence, and state interference, the journalistic norms of objectivity and the watchdog role appear to be detrimental to what is feasible and desirable in practicing peace journalism in times of political instability.³²

Since journalists may already be engaging with peace journalism through a self-reflexive critique of the media's role in conflict coverage,³³ there appears to be an efficacious individual approach to gradually altering established norms and values by integrating peace journalism principles into daily journalistic practices.³⁴ This has led to the suggestion that peace be included as "the 11th news value",³⁵ raising concerns that peace journalism could be categorized as advocacy or public relations. The concerns stem from the fact that peace journalism is thought to be at odds with established theories of news values and how objectivity is traditionally understood.³⁶

The PJ framework is significant to the current work because it helps the media as an institution; and their practitioners, as hosts/moderators and reporters, to understand the philosophies and norms underlying mediation as well as develop the necessary fundamental skills in conflict management; and more importantly, situate them as third-party players in conflict resolution. Similarly, PJ can significantly contribute by motivating journalists to depict conflicts in unique ways. Furthermore, one of the contributions this article aims to make is addressing the issue of PJ failing to consider the limitations that journalists experience, which Hanitzsch³⁷ also raises.

Media engagement in conflict resolution

The establishment of UN-led nations and other international organizations drew more attention to the role the media plays in promoting peace and resolving conflicts.³⁸ In Africa, the media has played a significant role in conflict resolution since the 1960s, when most of the countries on the continent gained independence. It is for this reason that Ekeanyanwu³⁹ asserted that African journalists and media outlets have used their platforms to promote peace, unity, and democracy on the continent. Significantly, in Rwanda, the media played a crucial role in promoting reconciliation and peace after the genocide by providing a platform for open dialogue and healing.⁴⁰

Evans⁴¹ indicates that the role of the media can take two different and opposed forms. Either the media takes an active part in the conflict and has

responsibility for increased violence, or stays independent and out of the conflict, thereby contributing to the management of conflict and alleviation of violence. However, in some cases, the media has been blamed for triggering conflict.⁴² Awobamise et al.⁴³ examined media reportage of conflict during the 2007, 2013, and 2017 Kenyan presidential elections and found that the media triggered conflict to worst scenarios instead of playing a mediating role. Similarly, Mensah et al.⁴⁴ assessed the role of the media in conflict management in Tuobodom, Ghana, and found that the media triggered most of the conflicts through their reportage. Although the media has been crucial in fostering peace and recovery, it has also frequently been used to promote propaganda and false information, escalating conflicts.⁴⁵

Notwithstanding, the role of the media in conflict resolution in Africa cannot be overstated, as they can potentially be a powerful tool for conflict management and are instrumental in shaping public opinion, disseminating information, and promoting peace-building efforts.⁴⁶ In a period of high tensions that could lead to conflicts, the media is encouraged to report sensitively,⁴⁷ implying that journalists and media organizations present stories with appropriate prudence and moderation in a way that promotes the development of a climate supportive of national harmony, amity, and peace.⁴⁸

In recent years, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa have undergone significant transformations, with the media playing a crucial role in disseminating information and influencing public opinion.⁴⁹ The media landscape in Africa is diverse, with traditional and new media platforms such as newspapers, radio, television, and social media all contributing to these efforts by providing a platform for dialogue, promoting tolerance, and fostering understanding among different groups. Concurrent with this, in Kenya's post-election violence, the media used their platforms to call for peace.⁵⁰ This action has been validated by Obonyo and Fackler,⁵¹ suggesting that in times of violence, the media could play a crucial role in ensuring national well-being while putting competition and other commercial and political interests on hold.

A large portion of the literature on peace journalism has examined the media's role in peacebuilding or inflaming conflict, while the PJ framework provides the lenses to study how the media prioritize peace as a normative news value and thereby contributes to the process of peaceful settlement of conflicts. However, there is minimal research on the challenges the media face while carrying out this function. Accordingly, this study makes a significant contribution to both the literature and PJ framework by shedding light on the challenges that the African media face in championing conflict resolution through peace journalism and proposes the best strategies that the media could adopt

to mitigate conflict within the African continent. Overall, the study broadens the scope of the PJ framework and the literature by outlining potential obstacles to peace journalism, especially in Africa.

Methods

To understand media engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa, this study adopted a qualitative research approach based on semi-structured interviews with 18 broadcast media practitioners from nine African countries (See [Table 1](#)). Applying a qualitative research approach is appropriate if a phenomenon that needs to be explored and understood has little research done on it.⁵² The researchers' curiosity was piqued when they discovered that little qualitative study was available on broadcast media participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa. Respondents were purposively sampled, a technique commonly employed in qualitative research.⁵³ We purposively selected participants who were hosts of broadcast programs aimed at conflict resolution and peacebuilding. They were seasoned broadcasters with not less than five years of experience and were in active service. The participants consisted of 10 females and eight males.

Due to its non-representative design, this study does not purport to offer an exhaustive description of the subject under investigation. However, its strength rests in “the ‘micro-level’ analysis” and the insights it offers from media practitioners, and the academic platform on a subject where little research has been done.⁵⁴

Table 1. Participating media stations.

Code assigned	Type of media station	Country of Africa
Participant 1	Regional Radio	Ghana
Participant 2	National Television	Ghana
Participant 3	Community Radio	Botswana
Participant 4	Regional Television	Botswana
Participant 5	Regional Radio	Burundi
Participant 6	National Television	Burundi
Participant 7	National Television	Kenya
Participant 8	Community Radio	Kenya
Participant 9	National Radio	Sierra Leone
Participant 10	National Television	Sierra Leone
Participant 11	Community Radio	Nigeria
Participant 12	Regional Television	Nigeria
Participant 13	Regional Radio	Rwanda
Participant 14	National Television	Rwanda
Participant 15	Community Radio	Somalia
Participant 16	Regional Television	Somalia
Participant 17	Regional Radio	Libya
Participant 18	Regional Television	Libya

Source: Authors.

Country selection

The countries (see [Table 1](#)) were selected due to their history of various violent incidents that caused disturbances.⁵⁵ The countries provide an opportunity for a comparison of more severe conflicts and less severe ones, based on the most similar systems design approach within the five main regions of Africa (East, North, Central, West, and South). The next paragraphs of this section discuss the rationale for settling on the countries represented in the study.

Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya represent critical arenas of socio-spatial and political productions of violence and war.⁵⁶ Obermeier and Rustad⁵⁷ argue that as a result of several Islamic State victories and territorial expansion efforts, Nigeria became the most dominant non-state actor in Africa, recording three state-based conflicts in 2022. In Ghana, the farmer-herder conflicts in the Asante-Akim North municipality, which is conterminous to the Kwahu Afram Plains, have led to several curfew declarations.⁵⁸ Conflicts in these areas have been linked to local-level politics, including the allocation of land to outsiders for cattle herding without proper institutional frameworks to guide the coexistence of farming and herding.⁵⁹ Similarly, Ahmed and Kuusaana⁶⁰ describe the situation in Northern Ghana as particularly complex due to perceptions of land grabbing and the challenges posed by water availability, complicating herding practices. They note that herders, often labeled as Fulani, are perceived locally as “dangerous, murderous, and violent” (p. 132).

Libya has been in a state of near-permanent political instability and violence ever since an international coalition overthrew the regime of the previous leader, Muammar Qaddafi, in 2011.⁶¹ Botswana also faces land disputes brought on by post-colonial socioeconomic and demographic changes.⁶² Furthermore, Sierra Leone has experienced one of the longest conflicts in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), resulting in 50,000 estimated deaths and significant damage to the nation’s social and physical infrastructure.⁶³ The Somalian government has had to fight the “Al-Shabaab militia since 2008, which has – except in 2013 – consistently been categorised as a war”,⁶⁴ with death records exceeding 3,000.

Selection criteria for interview participants

The participants selected for the study were seasoned broadcast media practitioners who are demonstrably active in the African media landscape. Thus, the participants were chosen as a result of their deliberate efforts to ensure peace in their catchment areas by broadcasting social programs from their stations. They were equally accessible and willing to participate in the study.

Due to the difficulty in recruiting participants for the research, one of the study’s acknowledged limitations is the recruitment of only two participants from each country. However, these participants occupy strategic positions in the media

sectors in the countries and provide in-depth and expert views and rich information on the African broadcast media participation in conflict resolution. This is consistent with Townsend and Saunders⁶⁵ argument that qualitative inquiry is less about sample size and more about the richness of the information gathered. Lincoln and Guba⁶⁶ suggest that findings from a few participants with in-depth knowledge can be applied to similar contexts, even if they do not statistically represent a larger population. Table 1 above provides profile of the participants.

Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were conducted between August and December 2023 via telephone. Many methodological studies point to logistical conveniences and other practical advantages of telephone interviews, including enhanced access to geographically dispersed interviewees, reduced costs, increased interviewer safety, and greater flexibility for scheduling.⁶⁷ In addition to benefits related to convenience, several studies emphasize the methodological strengths of conducting qualitative interviews by telephone, such as perceived anonymity, increased privacy for respondents, and reduced distraction (for interviewees) or self-consciousness (for interviewers) when interviewers take notes during interviews.⁶⁸ The interviews were conducted in English, and each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes on average.

Data analysis procedure

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed using the data analysis method proposed by Charmaz,⁶⁹ which involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data simultaneously to identify different themes and the relationships between them. During this process, we performed three coding analyses: open coding, focused coding, and axial coding. We examined the data line by line, segmenting it into small, meaningful units. These segments were then assigned initial labels (codes). For example, references to conflicts within communities were coded as “community conflict.” Discussions about struggles between different social groups were coded as “social conflict.” Mentions of political disagreements were also coded as “political conflict.”

Additionally, observations regarding obstacles in resolving conflicts, such as “government interference,” were coded as “political influence.” Instances where the lack of resources or expertise was noted were coded as “expertise/resources.” Suggestions for educating the public on conflict issues were coded as “public education.” Descriptions of roles played by mediators in resolving conflicts were coded as “mediating roles.” These codes were provisional and were used to identify recurring patterns. The aim at this stage was to capture everything that might be relevant, without focusing so much on categorization.

In the focused coding phase, the authors refined and condensed the initial codes into broader categories based on patterns and similarities observed in the data. The authors identified the most significant or frequent initial codes and grouped them into more cohesive categories. For instance: codes related to different types of conflict, such as “community conflict,” “social conflict,” and “political conflict,” were grouped under the broader category of forms of conflict. Codes related to obstacles in conflict resolution, such as “political influence” and “expertise/resources,” were also grouped under challenges associated with conflict resolution. Similarly, codes related to methods of resolving or reducing conflict, such as “public education” and “mediating roles,” were grouped under strategies to mitigate conflict.

In axial coding, the authors explored the relationships among the categories identified during focused coding to develop coherent themes and subthemes. During this process, the authors ensured that the relationships among the categories were clear and that the themes and subthemes comprehensively represented the data. This step solidifies the thematic structure that the data supports.

Ethical considerations

For purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, the names of participants and people mentioned during the interaction are not revealed, following the agreement reached with the participants. In qualitative research, assessing the credibility and dependability of the data is essential.⁷⁰ The researchers ensured this by cross-examining all codes generated against what each researcher obtained, agreeing on the dominant codes without any bias (inter-coder reliability) as well as practicing reflexivity throughout the research process.

Findings and discussion

The findings of the study are discussed below. It covers forms of conflict the broadcast media organizations of the countries under study cover, the challenges associated with their coverage of conflict and attempts at resolving conflicts, their role and the strategies employed to mitigate conflict within the countries that they cover.

Forms of conflict media organisations cover

The African media has been a dynamic entity that mirrors different cultures, languages, and socio-political contexts across the continent. The media’s role in shaping public opinion, fostering dialogue, and influencing change cannot be overemphasized. However, this vibrant media environment is not immune to conflicts, reflecting the complex challenges faced by African societies.

Managing or championing conflict resolution requires understanding of the various forms of conflicts that can emerge. Likewise, the types of conflicts experienced inform how peace journalism is practiced. While the practice of peace journalism was dominantly related to coverage of elections including post-election violence in previous studies,⁷¹ this study has established that PJ is also employed outside of election and/or post-election violence to address other political issues as well as community and social conflicts. The findings of the study demonstrate how the various conflicts that Africa faces take many forms. **Figure 1** provides a breakdown of the specific types of conflicts under the three primary conflict categories that the African media cover.

The various conflicts categorized under the three major headings are discussed in media outlets' news and current affairs segments and are also featured in social media programs. While social programs primarily address social conflicts (marital, domestic, and gender-based violence [GBV]), news and current affairs programs typically focus on political and community conflicts. In instances where the news and current affairs programs cover social conflicts, they tend to cover GBV and land disputes. We go into further depth about each type of conflict that the findings of the study yielded.

Social conflict

Social conflict occurs when two or more actors oppose each other in social interaction, reciprocally exerting social power to attain incompatible goals and prevent the opponent from attaining them. For this study, social

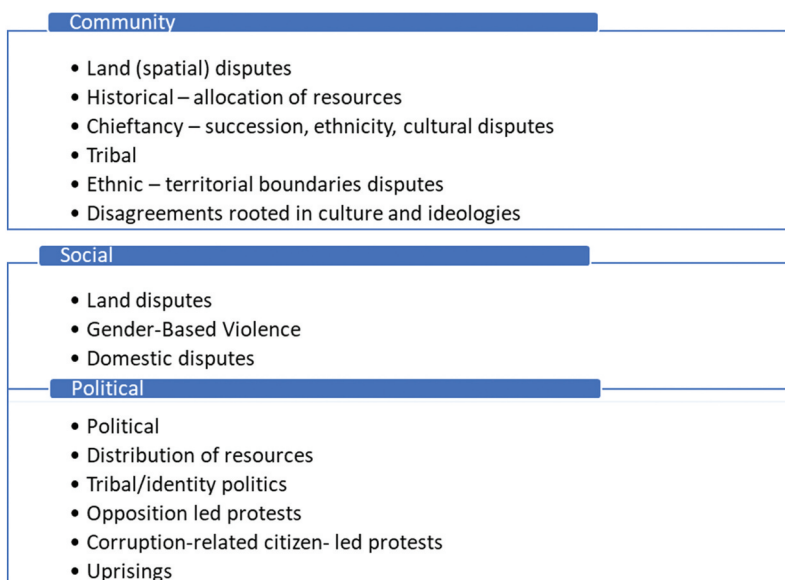


Figure 1. Types of conflicts covered by the African media. Source: Authors.

conflict is narrowed down to include domestic conflicts which focus on family, relationships and marriage. Most conflicts are ingrained in social relationships, like the case of Darfur which recorded social conflicts resulting from ethnic and religious disputes⁷² as well as the intricate way that historical, physical, cultural, political, and economic elements mix to feed the flames of interstate aggression (Obasesam, 2016). They can, however, be unpacked to reveal important patterns and structures on which effective conflict management programs could be based. La Mattina⁷³ affirms that domestic conflicts are a widespread phenomenon. Society is composed of diverse groups which portrays a sense of cooperation, but there is a continual struggle for power between social groups as they pursue their interests. One intriguing dimension that contributes to social conflict is premised on temperament and personality traits, which Participant 1 spoke about:

Well, broadly speaking, the conflict that we have is more from a social perspective typically focusing on family, relationships, and marriage. The outcome of some of these conflicts have been gender-based violence. Because of personality traits and other biological characteristics, individuals differ from one another in terms of opinions, attitudes and beliefs. When people meet within this social context, opinions are bound to crash and that could result in social conflict.

The study found that marital conflict is common among many African societies. This conflict results from the fact that when couples progress in their marriage, emotional and desire outbursts are inevitable as suggested by an interview participant: *My media station manages marital conflicts through some of our social programmes. This form of conflict has become destructive and turns couples against each other instead of looking at the problem (Participant 13)*. The description of conflict in marriage as “destructive” connotes fierce tensions between parties which may have deadly consequences if not resolved, such as divorce, which Obeng et al.⁷⁴ indicate is on the ascendency. This trend reflects a significant shift in the dynamics of relationships within the cultural landscape, signaling evolving challenges and complexities faced by couples in their marriages.

Community conflict

The study found that conflict invariably arises as communities evolve as a result of social, economic, and cultural forces. From historical, tribal, ethnic, chieftaincy, land and disputes over the allocation of resources to disagreements rooted in cultural or ideological disparities, these conflicts serve as crucial indicators of the underlying tensions and competing interests within communities as reflected in what an interviewee said:

My country has witnessed multifarious dimensions of conflicts typically rooted in history. We had a situation after colonial rule where some ethnic groups ruled for

a long time. And after 14 years, another ethnic group wanted to part into the ruling system but those ruling didn't allow that. As a result, we've had many conflicts for over 19 years due to misunderstandings between these two ethnic groups. (Participant 6)

The legacies of these conflicts, ranging from colonial struggles to post-independence civil wars, continue to influence the lived experiences of Africans in various ways. Büscher⁷⁵ indicates that the issue of land is central and remains a vital aspect of local livelihoods, identity and citizenship. Given the significance of land in improving the livelihoods of Ghanaians, conflicts frequently arise during its acquisition. A participant argued that these disputes emerge when disagreements surface regarding ownership, usage rights, and the distribution of resources among different communities:

Land disputes have deep historical roots, dating back to the colonial era. Some of the land disputes that come to our [media] desk are centred on ownership disputes, grabbing, encroachment, and historical grievances. These conflicts arise when multiple parties claim ownership of the same land. (Participant 15)

Montalvo and Reynal-Querol⁷⁶ affirm that ethnic polarization has resulted in the likelihood of conflicts and civil wars. In a society marked by ethnic diversity, the likelihood of ethnic conflicts increases, potentially escalating to the severity of a civil war. This results in a security dilemma where two or more groups, lacking trust and harboring fear and animosity toward each other, may feel compelled to launch preemptive attacks. In such a scenario, the perception that institutional constraints cannot ensure protection further reinforces the belief that initiating an attack is necessary for self-preservation.

Ethnic conflicts are prevalent in many African countries, typically involving distinct groups of people with varying dialects who occasionally engage in disputes over territorial boundaries. (Participant 8)

Collier and Hoeffler⁷⁷ argue that countries in which one finds "ethnic dominance" are more prone to major civil conflicts than those highly homogeneous countries where one group forms more than 90% of the population or those highly fractionalized countries where each group comprises less than 45% of the population. Bates and Yackovlev⁷⁸ studied the relationship between ethnicity, economic modernization, political participation, and civil violence in 46 African countries during the period 1970 to 1995 and found that ethnic dominance increases the risk of war.

Chieftaincy stands out as a significant source of conflict in most African countries, primarily stemming from disputes related to the succession of thrones, often revolving around ethnic and cultural issues, as indicated in the comment: *Chieftaincy conflicts have become one of the challenges that we [media], deal with in contemporary times. These conflicts typically emerge during the enskinment process.* (Participant 4)

Political conflict

The African continent has witnessed a range of political conflicts, including civil wars, coups, and governance crises, each leaving a lasting impact on the political landscape and the lives of its citizens, as highlighted by a participant:

Within the African context, political conflict is prominent. For example, In Nigeria, you've got the North-South divided because of politics. We have similar issues in Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Kenya, where, for example, regardless of your political affiliation, the tribal link is so strong. Zimbabwe is not left out where you have conflict that is strictly down party lines. These are few examples within the African continent where there are political conflicts. (Participant 12)

The consequences of these decisions persist, influencing power dynamics, resource distribution, and identity politics. The roots of political conflicts in Africa stretch back to the era of colonization, where arbitrary borders were drawn without regard for existing ethnic, linguistic, or cultural affiliations. As African nations emerged from the shadows of colonial rule, the quest for political stability and effective governance has become a defining struggle, shaping the course of the continent's modern history. A participant submitted that issues of governance, transparency, and accountability are central to political conflicts in Africa:

The biggest conflict we have currently in Africa is political conflict where the government and opposition are in conflict in terms of how the country is being run. In the past few weeks, there have been a number of conflicts in my country. It's a battle between the government and the opposition. Currently, there have been some teams that have been set up to try to resolve that conflict. (Participant 7)

Challenges such as corruption, weak institutions, and autocratic rule contribute to citizen dissatisfaction, sparking protests, uprisings, and power struggles. Yirenkyi-Boateng⁷⁹ avers that political conflict can take many different forms, but it frequently involves violence between political parties, attempts by politicians to hold onto power for as long as possible, attempts by politicians to use ethnic and religious divisions in their nations to intimidate opposition groups to gain power, and disputes over corruption, mismanagement, and discrimination in the distribution of public resources. Also, corruption increases the chances of political conflicts as citizens demand a transparent and accountable government.⁸⁰

Notably, it has also been demonstrated that, in situations where ethnicity is a factor, there are definite similarities between the political and community forms of conflict. This is because ethnic divide has the potential to influence political and community conflicts, and to some extent, social conflicts.

Challenges associated with conflict resolution

Within the continent, where cultural, political, and socioeconomic complexities abound, the media becomes both a witness to and a participant in the resolution of conflicts. However, the media grapples with significant challenges that often hinder their ability to effectively resolve conflicts. This study identified political influence and expertise/resources as the main challenges that the broadcast media encounter in their quest to resolve conflicts through their reportage and programming. This is similar to Arregui et al.'s⁸¹ study that also found political, economic, cultural, resources and journalistic practice as the practical constraints that make PJ's operation difficult to realize.

Political influence

The study found that the intertwining of media and politics in many African nations creates a complex system where the media's role in conflict resolution is influenced, shaped, and, at times, constrained by political actors and agendas. The relationship between the media and politics is intricate and symbiotic. However, in an era where the media has emerged as the final bastion in fulfilling the watchdog role of accountability, echoing Ogbondah's⁸² observation that among the various institutions in Africa, the media stands out as a resilient force that vocalizes opposition against official corruption and the misallocation of developmental resources. Consequently, the media has become the target of presidential criticisms⁸³ prompting political officials and corporate entities to devise strategies to influence the media to their advantage.⁸⁴ Governments and political entities often wield significant influence over media outlets, impacting editorial decisions and framing of news. This intertwining of interests poses a challenge to the media's independence and impartiality, as one participant alluded to:

Let me use myself as an example. In one of the media stations where I worked, I was to cover a story that was going to affect the sports minister. The editor told me plainly that his people are in power and I cannot publish this. You see? It tells you how politics has permeated the media. So, if it's about the media space, then it is about the [political] power. (Participant 9)

Arregui et al.⁸⁵ found that in Kenya, ownership and economic constraints were closely related. This is because most media organizations were either owned by political families or received the majority of their advertising from the government, leaving the media open to pressure from the powerful which can result in self-censorship, thereby impacting conflict coverage. Similarly, in this study, political influence manifests in various forms, including ownership, direct control and censorship of media content as seen in the comment:

Unfortunately, because of media ownership, politics has found its way into the media landscape in Africa. Some of the media stations are owned by politicians and others are

also funded by people who have direct affiliations with political parties. As a journalist, you want to satisfy your employer for them to know that you're serviceable. So, if your employer belongs to Party A, definitely you carry Party A stories. So politics have permeated the media space to a large extent. Politics will always permeate the African media unless we check the ownership strategy. (Participant 18)

Governments may employ regulatory mechanisms, restrictive laws, or intimidation tactics to curb dissenting voices, limit investigative journalism, and control the narrative surrounding conflicts. Such measures undermine the media's ability to provide a complete and unbiased account of events. Similarly, journalists often face threats to their independence when political actors attempt to influence their work. Violence against journalists such as intimidation, harassment, and even death can deter them from pursuing investigative reporting⁸⁶ or presenting alternative perspectives on conflicts, contributing to a climate of self-censorship.⁸⁷

Expertise/resources

The study revealed that the ability of media outlets to effectively navigate the complexities of conflict and contribute to peacebuilding efforts is often hindered by constraints related to both expertise and resources. This finding resonates with the view of Green and Armstrong⁸⁸ who argue that the multifaceted nature of conflicts demands people with specialized knowledge to effectively handle it. However, many media organizations in Africa face a shortage of journalists and analysts with the necessary expertise in conflict resolution, diplomacy, and international relations as a study participant argued:

Well, gone are the days when conflicts were isolated and could be addressed in isolation. Today, conflicts are interconnected, often spanning across multiple domains. Take a regional dispute, for example. It may involve historical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors. To resolve such a conflict, you need individuals who possess specialised knowledge in history, cultural studies, economics, and international relations, just to name a few. (Participant 14)

The interviews also pointed to the lack of the necessary training to report on conflict-related issues, leading to inaccurate reporting and sensationalism. This dearth of specialized knowledge limits the depth and accuracy of conflict reporting.

Adequate conflict reporting also requires financial resources to support fieldwork, fact-checking, and the deployment of journalists to conflict zones. However, many media organizations in Africa struggle with financial constraints, impacting their ability to sustain a robust and independent reporting apparatus. This limitation restricts their reach and influence in shaping public opinion on conflict-related matters. Participant 11 indicated that:

Adequate conflict reporting involves much more than just sitting behind a desk and writing a story. It requires financial resources to conduct fieldwork, and most importantly, to deploy journalists to conflict zones.

Lerew⁸⁹ argues that media outlets lack the resources to cover conflicts comprehensively, leading to a lack of diverse perspectives and a focus on sensational stories.

Strategies used by the broadcast media to mitigate conflict within the African continent

Before the strategies used by the broadcast media to mitigate conflict are discussed, we provide below a graphical representation of the three primary obstacles: political influences, expertise knowledge and resources (shortened as PER) – to the effective practice of peace journalism for convenience of reference and comprehension, and to illustrate the structural relationships among the factors highlighted (See [Figure 2](#)). The PER model/framework invariably speaks to the specific requirements for the successful practice or deployment of peace journalism in Africa.

The model above shows that the conditions for successful peace journalism practice in conflict environments are media/editorial independence, skilled and knowledgeable human resources, including journalists and editors, as well as financial resources to fund the coverage of conflicts. We believe that while the study's findings may be limited to the selected African countries used in the study, it could be the case in other African countries with comparable media ecosystems and political contexts.

Despite the challenges identified above, the media deploys public education and mediating roles as key strategies in resolving conflicts and peace-building efforts. This is in recognition of the detrimental implications of conflict which poses a widespread threat to individuals, communities, and nations, with its effects extending across various dimensions. The efforts of

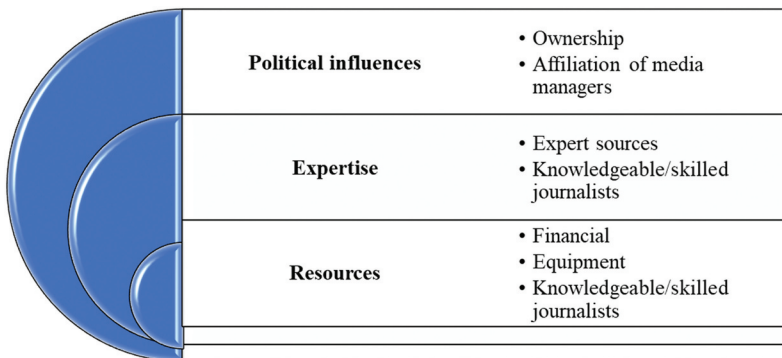


Figure 2. Per framework. Source: Authors.

journalists to be part of conflict resolution inures to the benefit of journalism practice as conflicts serve as hostile environments for journalists who are faced with risks and dangers including death, injury, harassment and imprisonment. So, whether stemming from interpersonal disputes, communal tensions, civil unrest, or international wars, the repercussions of conflicts invariably resonate deeply and infiltrate every aspect of human endeavors, casting a negative impact on both national and global communities.

Demonstrations, protests, and wars, to a great extent, plunge nations into a state of anarchy and disrupt the social order. Some studies⁹⁰ confirm that conflict has the potential to destabilize peace within a country, hinder policy-making, lead to political instability, and contribute to increased homelessness and poverty. The foregoing discussion reveals the urgent need for the media to adopt pragmatic approaches to mitigate conflict within the African continent, despite the challenges they encounter.

Public education

The study revealed that the broadcast media can engage in educational campaigns that promote understanding and tolerance among different ethnic, political, and cultural groups. By highlighting shared values and fostering a sense of unity, the broadcast media can contribute to reducing intergroup tensions and conflicts. Jameson and Entman⁹¹ corroborate this finding indicating that one of the core functions of the media is to inform and educate the public, especially on issues relating to conflict. Similarly, Teresa⁹² affirms that irrespective of the violence and instability that has bedeviled the African continent due to conflict, the active role of the media especially in providing education that shapes public opinion and promoting peace-building efforts cannot be overemphasized. As a way of fulfilling this peacebuilding role, the media provides the platform for expressing views through their editorial voice and debates as portrayed in the comment:

The responsibility of the media is to provide a platform for expressing views. We [media] also provide a platform where the public can also interrogate some of these issues with no malice. Obviously, there are certain controls that we put in place to make sure nobody makes any inflammatory statements. I think media allows for all sides of the stories to be heard, to be seen, and, most importantly, to be interrogated, because media should not only be a bullhorn for certain messages but be a mirror that allows for a reflection towards peacebuilding in society. (Participant 2)

This finding resonates with the PJ framework which identifies the causes and seeks solutions to conflicts by providing a platform for people to express their views. The theory is strongly committed to the prevention of conflicts and focuses on the creativity of conflict resolution. Hanitzsch⁹³ argues that the PJ

framework aims to explore the background of a conflict formation in order to make conflicts appear transparent to the audience.

The media needs to be in touch with the pulse of society through their programs geared toward ensuring peace in their catchment areas and beyond. This can be done through their well-designed programs that interrogate and hold people accountable as a participant shared:

It is important to hold leaders in our country accountable by inviting them to our [media] stations to share their views. This allows the public to actively participate in the interrogation of issues. Conflict does not spring up overnight. It occurs over some time. Media stations should have their finger on the pulse of society to identify where potential conflict may arise and allow for open, frank, and fair conversations. (Participant 5)

A participant also believed that the broadcast media can also create awareness of conflict by using their editorial voice to create compelling stories geared toward peacebuilding as indicated by a study participant:

The media [broadcast media] should use their editorial voice to sensitise the people on the need to ensure peace at all levels. So I think that's one of the ways that the media should engage in as a way of resolving conflicts. (Participant 16)

Editorial voices can shape public opinion by providing analysis, context, and perspectives on complex issues. By presenting well-reasoned arguments and encouraging critical thinking, the media contributes to a more informed public discourse, reducing the likelihood of polarized views that can escalate conflict. This finding resonates with the PJ framework. According to Lynch and McGoldrick,⁹⁴ the PJ framework provides editorial choice for society to consider and value nonviolent responses to conflict. Four of PJ's main characteristics are its orientation toward peacebuilding, truth, people and solutions.⁹⁵ This approach helps journalists to effectively provide the right approaches toward ensuring peace in the continent through their broadcast.

While some may agree with this assertion, there are numerous and well-established criticisms of peace journalism that contest the idea that the media's main duty is to promote peace.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, if other significant players in society, such as law enforcement organizations, politicians, and community leadership, also fulfill their obligations, then this type of advocacy could yield some positive effects.

Mediating roles

The study revealed that one significant avenue through which the media contributes to conflict resolution is by assuming mediating roles. In promoting global affairs, conflicts and disputes often arise, demanding key approaches to foster resolution. Rather than merely reporting events, media outlets can actively engage in the mediation process by offering

unbiased perspectives, and promoting understanding among conflicting parties. The media serves as a mediator in resolving conflicts, emphasizing its potential to bridge divides, encourage constructive discourse, and ultimately contribute to the cultivation of peaceful solutions in a continent marked by complex geopolitical challenges as reflected in a comment by a participant:

The media is a powerful tool that can make or unmake. So when there is a misunderstanding, people have confidence in us [media] and talk to us. We listen to both sides and give room for settlement. When we realise that the issue is beyond us, we refer the disputants to the necessary experts such as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practitioners depending on the issue at stake. (Participant 10)

The PJ framework helps media practitioners to understand the philosophies and norms underlying mediation as well as develop the necessary fundamental skills in conflict management; and more importantly, situate them as third – party players in conflict resolution. Nelson et al.⁹⁷ and Owsiak⁹⁸ contend that third-party involvement in conflict resolution is indispensable. Galtung⁹⁹ indicates that the PJ framework will better equip journalists to portray conflicts in a different manner than that to which they usually ascribe. In this direction, the PJ framework is seen as a motivator of peace.

Since every conflict is distinct, various approaches may be more suitable for specific circumstances hence the need to choose the appropriate strategy to resolve it. On the dialogue front, the media resolve dispute between parties as a study participant said:

Through some of our [station's] social programmes geared towards conflict resolution, we [media] invite the parties involved and engage them in dialogue. This involves open communication. We find out what the problem is and talk to both parties. (Participant 3)

This illustrates the creation of the public sphere where the fourth estate [media] represents a platform that bring citizens together to discuss matters that enhance their wellbeing. Though the media does not have summoning powers backed by law, society's honoring its invitation at such crucial times is largely civil and a demonstration of the acceptance by the public as its advocate and mediator. Thus, dialogue emerges as a powerful tool for resolving conflict because it enables feuding individuals to air their views. For example, Okuthe¹⁰⁰ emphasizes that dialogue is a tool for conflict resolution and the basis of peace-building and human reconciliation. Furthermore, Okuthe¹⁰¹ indicates that dialogue acts as an appropriate and robust design to solve complex problems and provide the choices and options needed as the basis for decisions. The conversational nature of “open communications” builds empathy, helps promote peaceful resolution of conflicts, and prevents further harm.

Analyzing results in light of the PJ framework, this study elucidates the kinds of conflicts that journalists from broadcast organizations in nine African nations cover and attempt to mitigate, the obstacles they encounter when doing so, and the various approaches they take to accomplish such objectives. The PJ framework seek causes and solutions to conflicts and gives voice to the views of all rival parties. The PJ philosophy is strongly committed to the prevention of conflicts and war and focuses on the creativity of conflict resolution. However, the literature reviewed and findings of the study show that although the media plays a significant role in conflict resolution, there are some challenges that the African media face in resolving conflict through peace journalism.

Importantly, the key factors identified as influencing whether peace journalism is practiced or not are: political influences, expertise knowledge and resources, as indicated in [Figure 2](#). The political influence stems from ownership of the media and close affiliations of media managers with political actors. Political influences on the media have significant implications on the coverage, editorial decisions, and the framing of news stories around conflicts as accounted for in this study.

Media outlets in the nine African countries that were included in this study cover comparable social, community, and political conflict types. These categories always show up regardless of whether the conflicts are caused by land disputes, ethnic tensions, or governance issues. In addition, media organizations in these countries face comparable challenges in their efforts to resolve conflicts. Some of the challenges are the lack of knowledgeable human resources, including experts, limited financial resources and media ownership. Political influence is also a major challenge, with governments and political entities often exerting control over media outlets.

In terms of the differences, while the broad categories of conflict are similar, the specific types of conflicts vary by country. For instance, Nigeria, Ghana, and Somalia have experienced more severe ethnic conflicts due to historical grievances, while Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Libya, Botswana, and Sierra Leone face more intense political conflicts driven by contemporary governance issues. Additionally, Botswana and Ghana face land disputes. Significantly, in all contexts, the mediating role of the media, serving as a source of public education serves as a third – party player in conflict resolution by creating a platform that brings citizens together to discuss matters that enhance their peaceful co-existence.

We submit that the challenge of influence from owners and political actors connected to media outlets has implications for the autonomy required in journalism practice. This has also been argued by Arregui, Olivera & Cheruiyot¹⁰² that as ownership, political influence and resources pose a challenge to the practice of peace journalism, self-censorship could become more commonplace, endangering journalism's independence.

The findings of Lohner et al.¹⁰³ also highlight dilemmas, ambiguities, and context-specific values that journalists must navigate in uncertain times. They also found conflicts between journalistic standards and what can be accomplished in situations of violence, political unrest, societal divisions, and state intervention. In the context of this study, the conflicts studied may not have been as severe and widespread, possibly making such tensions yet to be realized or experienced. However, it is important to note that where conflicts occur within highly volatile environments, journalistic standards may suffer while practicing peace journalism. Ultimately, the detrimental effects on professionalism foster role polymorphism, putting journalists in a difficult position where they have to decide between maintaining the watchdog function and fostering peace as Arregui, Olivera and Cheruiyot¹⁰⁴ found in Kenya.

Conclusion

The heterogeneity of conflicts in Africa, ranging from social and community disputes to complex political struggles is highlighted in the study. It is evident that the broadcast media, through their reportage, serve as a reflection of Africa by influencing public opinion and contributing to the resolution of conflicts. The discussion on forms of conflict in Africa highlights the significance of understanding the background and dynamics of these conflicts, emphasizing the role of the media in shaping perceptions and fostering dialogue. Social conflicts, including domestic and marital disputes, reflect the relationships within African societies. Community conflicts, rooted in historical, tribal, and chieftaincy issues, underscore the complexities faced by diverse communities. Political conflicts, deeply entrenched since the era of colonialism, continue to shape the political landscape of African nations.

Despite the media's pivotal role in conflict resolution, this study identifies significant challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Political influence manifested through ownership, control, and censorship, poses a threat to the media's independence and impartiality. Moreover, the lack of expertise and resources limits the depth and accuracy of conflict reporting, contributing to sensationalism. Nevertheless, the paper identifies strategies employed by the broadcast media to mitigate conflicts within the African continent. Public education emerged as a key approach, with the broadcast media engaging in campaigns that promote understanding, tolerance, and unity among diverse ethnic, political, and cultural groups. Mediating roles play a crucial part, where the media actively engages in the mediation process, offering unbiased perspectives and encouraging constructive discourse among conflicting parties.

In adopting these strategies, the media plays a crucial role in shaping a more harmonious and peaceful African society. The study emphasizes the need for the media to be proactive in conflict prevention, understanding the pulse of society, and providing platforms for open, fair, and frank

conversations. Ultimately, the findings of this study offer important contributions to the literature on the role of the media in conflict resolution. The study also provides important insights into the complex interaction between the media and conflicts in Africa, highlighting the need for continuous efforts to enhance the media's capacity for effective conflict resolution in the region through training and other capacity-building initiatives. Future research may analyze how the African media examine bias in conflict reporting.

We argue that the distinctive framework of peace journalism is a method of journalistic news reporting that promotes the processes of bringing about and upholding peace as well as the peaceful settlement of conflicts, which will be fully realized if challenges that impede its implementation are realized. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on peace journalism and extends the peace journalism framework by identifying the challenges (PER) that impede the successful implementation of peace journalism in Africa. It is hoped that by offering this PER framework, systemic solutions could be found to enhance the media's role in conflict resolution in Africa.

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