The Media and the Search for Credible Conflict Prevention and Resolution Strategies in Cross-Border Conflicts in West Africa

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Abstract
This paper analyses the role of the media in excoriating a conflict and creating conditions for its resolution in situations where conflict seems inevitable. The paper argues that news media influences the outcome of conflict negotiations and resolutions. It adds to the search for credible strategies that the media can adopt by highlighting vital factors that are under-researched and the role the media can play in the liberal peace process agenda and alternative media's impact on cross-border social movements. The paper raises the following questions: (1) In what circumstances does the media advance conflict prevention and conflict resolution strategies during cross-border conflicts? (2) In what circumstances does the media exacerbate confrontational differences and fears of insecurity by fanning the embers of ethno-religious and cultural differences between "them" and "us"? (3) What mechanisms or strategies can the media adopt to foster conflict mitigation and resolution leading to peacebuilding?

Introduction: West African Borderlands in Focus

In the experience of the West African cross-border conflicts, the media's reports correspond to their "nationalistic" orientation or state-centric perspective irrespective of the cross-border ethnic and cultural relations. The content analysis of the report reflects not only state-centric notions but emphasizes the conflictual profile of the borders. The related but divided ethnic groups are treated as marginal or mere subjects in international relations. It is also instructive to note that earlier efforts aimed at conflict mitigation have propagated state-centric strategies as reflected in institution building, policy orientation and scholarship of the borders as "barriers", thereby creating a fortress mentality".

In addition, the paper contributes to emerging concepts of the borders as "bridges". This perspective or transnational paradigm is new to scholarship, and policy-making tradition in that, it recognizes the inherently bifurcated nature of the borderlands. In this regard, borderlands of proximate neighbours in West Africa (as elsewhere) have divided coherent cultural and at timesethnic groups, the sea bed, valleys, mountains and the indivisible natural resources, ecological zones, etc, and placed them into one or two antagonistic systems.This is attested to by the vibrant micro-integration processes and micro-diplomacy taking place at the grassroots along and astride the borders. The media can galvanize these processes and articulate a coherent strategy for conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding from the "bottom up". This is also in tandem with the realities of African history and the Pan-African idea of African Unity.

The paper contributes to the emerging body of literature on international boundaries scholarship on the trans-national paradigm or the bridge concept in analyzing the role of the new development in communication technology plays in cross-border social movements, security, peacebuilding and "bottom-up integration."Although the impact of social media has been apparent, it is under-researched and underutilized by border scholars and media experts

in the border phenomenon. It is suggested that in terms of theory and methodology for research in borderlands studies, global communication technology's impact on international relations in terms of the theoretical discourse on security, diplomacy, conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding and cultural relations cannot be over-emphasized. This is more so because the media and information communication technology deserve serious analysis because conflict, security, and cross-border social movements are influenced by media networks.

In this regard, the impact that communication technology is having on the global arena, the role of alternative media through the lens of Giddens's theory of structuration reveals how alternative media are increasingly being used to create a new public platform, to create an infrastructure for implementing the democratic principle of participatory political communication for socio-cultural innovation for positive change, and for empowering the civil body in ways that result in cross-border social movements. This provides a medium for international dialogue and for generating and disseminating unfiltered information (despite doubts about its certainty). This means that advances in information communication are proving to validate the claim of structuration theorists that technologically enhanced means of structuring social dialogue, of engaging the civil society in a public arena, plus increasing the extent of participatory political communication and deliberation can result in increased in security, a reduction of violent conflict and the realization of the democratic enterprise.

The West African region (including the Sahel) presents a cultural and economic continuum which is extremely rich in promises for the divided populations of those countries towards the free movement of persons and goods as was the pattern in the pre-colonial era. However, free movement, despite cross-border control, checkpoints, road blocks has been facilitated by the close-knit ethnic, social and religious relations along and astride the borderlands. This has given rise to the cross-border spread of all sources of economic criminality, illegal migrations, drug money and human trafficking, Boko Haram scourge, the rise of local second economies (or smuggling), and the spread of infectious diseases resulting at times in humanitarian tragedy. These situations undermine the safety and living conditions of the border-impacted populations and the opportunities for investments. Border conflicts usually have multifaceted causes and occur at first, within and spill over into other countries. The dynamic of human, social and economic relationships in the West African sub-region underscores the phenomenon sustained by arbitrary national territories which are more and more inclined to contain and control them.

The human dynamics which have to do with trade and commercial transactions, migrations and conflicts respond graphically to what border scholars have characterized as "safe havens" or camouflage for criminality, controlled by the upper-class players and the "border underworld" whose activities (at times clandestine) acquire a cross-border dimension. In these conditions, national governments are no longer able to control or contain the conflicts which affect them and the country is spared once a neighbourhood country is affected. Given the above, the erection of credible integrated communication and information strategy has now become urgent. The paper proceeds with section two which is the clarification of concepts used, and characteristics of the borderland. This is followed by section three which is an analysis of the role of the media, both the established media and the revolutionary impact of alternative media, can play in conflict prevention and resolution strategies within the context of an integrated communication and information strategy for West Africa. The fourth and final section summarizes the paper and suggests by way of recommendations the need for further and sustained research and strategic information presentation for West Africa which will enable the preservation of and resolution of cross-border conflicts in the sub-region.

Clarification of Concepts

The relevance of international boundaries to issues of peace conflict and wars, security and cooperation derives from their well-known roles as factors of conflicts and wars between proximate states. This image of a paradox presented by borderlands between states has been underscored by generations of border scholars of diverse disciplinary backgrounds.Raimondo Strassoldo, a sociologist of international boundaries has explained the "ambiguities" in terms of the fact that:

> Borders divide and unite, bind the interior and link the interior; they are barriers and junctions; walls and doors, organs of defence and attack. Border areas (borderlands) can be managed to maximize either of such functions. They can be militarized as bulwarks against neighbours or, made into peaceful interchanges (Strossaldo, 1979, p. 373)

In his famous Oxford Lecture in November 1902, Lord Curzon observed that "borders are indeed the razor edge which hangs suspended the modern issues of war and peace of death or life to nations" (Lord Curson 1902, p. 73). This binary view of borders was underscored by Star and Most in their study of borders in international interactions that "shared international boundaries are like a 'coin' with 'one side issuing with risk' and the other with opportunities in international interaction" (Star and Most 1976, p. 83).

In the view of Gross, "international relations between two or more adjacent sovereign states are as a continuum 'with conflict at one and 'co-operation at the other.' This continuum can be stimulated in 'either direction', depending on the extent to which the border in question may be categorized as either 'closed' or 'open' (Gross 1973, p. 34). These ambiguities suggest that the range of policy choices open to decision-makers is limited only to two alternatives: "conflict or cooperation", "war or peace" and "death or life" to Nations. About the African experience, Zatman demonstrated that:

> Any African country can have boundary problems if it wants. The numerous mutations of African states' borders and the frequent irrelevance of their geographical frames and their economic, social and political lives make the continent more potentially susceptible to territorial disputes than any other …(Zatman 1999: 150).

The concept of security goes beyond military considerations. It must be construed in terms of the security of the individual citizen to live in peace with access to the necessities of life while fully participating in the affairs of the society in freedom and enjoying fundamental human rights. Whereas security was previously considered in predominantly strategic military terms, as the maintenance of territorial integrity or national sovereignty, it is now seen in a broader sense and inextricably linked to development. The lack of development undermines security. Cross-border security was perceived in terms of international security and synonymous with the absence of a military threat by state-centric scholars.

The United Nations (U.N) held to this concept and established "Collective Security". Its Charter rested on the idea that threats to peace cannot be other than threats of war, or armed aggression. The end of the cold war rivalry marked a change in the concept of security encompassing an absence of non-military threats. The real danger facing the world is no longer that of a major war involving national armies as hitherto, but more localized conflicts which are limited to a cluster of countries or proximate neighbours (Egunjobi 2004, p. 125). Most of these are not military confrontations between sovereign states but cross-border conflicts which have ethnic or separatist agenda, activities of militants, terrorists and insurgents across borders, with fundamentalist ideas (e.g Boko Haram in West and Central Africa) that threaten the existence of the nation-state; minorities seeking to unite with kith and kin across international boundaries.Perhaps it was these developments that compelled the United Nations Security Council on the 31st of January 1992, to define international peace and security as follows:International peace and security are not the results of the absence of

war and militating conflicts alone; non-military threats originate in the instability prevailing in the economic, social, humanitarian and ecological fields (Akindele 2000, p. 125).

Types of Borderlands

Oscar Martinez (1989, p. 397) identified three categories of borderlands interactions that generate conflicts and insecurity.

i.   Alienated borderlands
ii.   Co-existent or independent borderlands
iii.   Integrated borderlands

Alienated borderlands are functionally closed and cross-border interaction is absent. Cross-border relations are marked by tension even though the divided groups share a common ancestry (North-South Korea are a good example).Co-existent or independent borderlands are open and have stable border relations, and borderlanders engage in friendly cooperative ventures and share similarities in economic and social patterns of interactions (U.S. and Canada).Integrated borderlands exist where the economies of adjacent states are functionally merged and theyexist "unrestricted" movement of people, goods across the boundary. Borderlanders perceive themselves as "members of the same system", e.g.,in Western Europe where the policy of trans-border cooperation is promoted to mitigate the problems of the localities and marginal populations.

This is not to say that cross-border interaction automatically results in shared values and reconciled identities as the recent history of Western European borderlands reveals. For example, the persistence of a psychological German-Polish border and "exclusionary mentalities" is an important reason for the lack of cross-border interaction. Similarly, many borderland dwellers in the three borders area of Austria, Italy and Slovenia tend to dismiss suggestions of any cultural communion with or even geographical proximity to those on the other side of the border. They remain glued to their core status socially and spiritually and their economic activities, identity affirmation and essence of security, and this promote a binary distinction between 'self' and 'other', 'us' and 'them', here and there, 'inside' and 'outside' which have remained sharp defined by the borders despite the European Union policy on cross-border co-operation (Cathall &McCall 2013, p. 311).

In the U.S-Mexico borderlands, (where the North meets the South), the U.S. is vexed with Mexicans who migrate to the U.S to avail themselves of economic and commercial opportunities, and the U.S. promotes a policy of building walls to forestall/continue Mexican migrations. Martinez's classification between European and African borders reveals that African and Asian nations are still grappling with the problems of internal integration. They still guard their sovereignty jealously while trans-border cooperation is still low (Martinez 1989, p. 47). C.S. Momoh's (1989, p. 54) "Critique of Borderland Theories" divided borderland interaction into:

i.   Minimal borderland
ii.   Zero borderland
iii.   Maximal borderlands

The West African experience fits graphically into the maximal borderlands. There are related and divided ethnic groups. Hausa – Fulani, Fultuibe, Kanuri, Yoruba Kissi etc.

Contrary to the contemporary fix on the possibilities and limitations of globalization, with its emphasis on the power of instantaneous communication in virtual space, borders and conflict bring us right back down to earth since, they rest on disputes over territory, a place that is physical, tangible and durable. Moreover, territory and "territorial" imply acquisition, ownership, exclusion and protection, which in turn spark emotions of love, hate and violence (Berizen 2003, p. 4). According to Brendan O'Leary, "territory" comes from the verb terror, to frighten, and the noun "territorium", a place from which people are "frightened of". He also points out that territory and terrorism share the same etymology highlighting the intimate association between territory and violence (O'Leary 2001, pp. 5-6). The quest for association,

ownership, exclusion, protection and ultimately the human urge to exercise social and political power within a territory has necessitated its decimation by borders.

Mabel Berezin observed that "territory is social because… persons inhabit it collectively; political because groups fight to preserve as well as to enlarge their space; and cultural because it contains the collective memories of its inhabitants. Emotion is the constitutive dimension of territory. The feeling of "mine", not yours, ours, not theirs, colours social and political space (Berzelin 2003, p. 2). Cultural practices, such as the naming of streets and the erection of monuments to commemorate national heroes, national victories, and national defeats and "old freedoms" serve to steep a territory in national communal memory re-enforcing the relationship between national territory and communal emotion and identity (Berzen, 2003, pp. 9-10).

Territories become sacred places engrained in the communal memory by the communication curtain of cultural practices. "Emotional entrepreneurs" nourish this relationship by, for example, communicating a legacy of past grievances (Bechevad and Nicolaidis, 2010, p. 6). Thus, the defence of territorial borders or the desire to rent them asunder has, more often than not, resulted in violence, injury and death because of the potent brew of social, political, cultural and emotional forces at work. Liam (O'Dowd, 2002) observed that "typically, change in the territorial location of borders has not been a democratic process but rather, a product of wars, invasions, diplomatic settlements and the balance of power and coercion. This conception of borders reflects the historical fact that border construction does not rest on a democratic imperative, but is consolidated when they become identified with the popular national emotion of the victor, which was pervasive to the end of 1945.

"Conflict entrepreneurs" are central to this process of violent conflict construction. The political elites (conflict entrepreneurs) have the power and influence to combine social mobilization with a separating ideology in pursuit of conflict (Jackson, 2009, p. 180). Nationalism is the ideology that is most often charged with the construction of violent conflict. Nationalism is a territorially driven ideology, its main purpose is to acquire, and defend its territory, for state building and the creation of state borders as separative defence barriers. Borders are regarded as epiphenomenal whose role and function are dependent on the core characteristics of the states. For political geographers, the characteristics of borders are fundamental influences on the way society develops and on the political options open to it (Anderson M. 1997, p. 27).Borders can be analyzed (and in normative political theory criticized) in the same way as other political institutions and processes. They do not simply end on maps where one jurisdiction ends and another begins. Borders between states could be regarded as important institutions and processes established by political decisions and regulated by legal texts. The border is the basic political institution, no rule-bound economic, social, or political life in advanced societies could be organized without them.

This primordial character of borders is embodied in public international law by the Vienna Convention, 1978 on State Succession. When a state collapse; the agreement concerning its borders remains in force. Borders also define, in a legal sense, the identity of individuals because the conditions for claims to nationality and the exercise of rights of citizenship are defined by them. Within its borders, the state is a sovereign jurisdiction, and the Webarian doctrine of the monopoly of the legitimate use of force on its territory is still universally recognized. The doctrine implies that states have absolute control over their territories and can impose their control at their borders. The claim of the modern state to be "the sole, exclusive right of all powers and prerogatives of rule" could only be realized if its borders were made impermeable to unwanted influences. But this view of the border of a sovereign state is not part of an immutable natural order (Scott1978, p. 92).

Borders are part of political processes with definite defining dimensions and are instruments of government policy in that some governments attempt to change them to their

own advantage or national interest. For example, to encase natural resources for the sole use of the state and this at times generate conflict between proximate states. The policies and practices of the state are constrained by the degree of *de facto* control the government exercises over the border. The capacity of government in the contemporary world to control much of the traffic of persons, goods and information across their borders is changing the nature of how states exercise over their borders.

The border is the basic marker of national identity. Borders are part of political beliefs and rights about the unity of the people, and at times about the natural unity of the territory. Those 'extended communities or acumens" (Asiwaju 2000, p. 29), concerning nations divided by international boundaries, often have profound historical roots linked by the ideological bonding of nationalism. These communities or acumens transcend the confines of the state and myths of origin, regional, continental and hemispheric unity also marked boundaries between friend and foe. (Connar, 1969, p. 29) asserts that myths of unity can be created or transformed with remarkable rapidity during wars, revolutions, irredentism and political upheavals.

The term "frontier" and "borders" have been used by scholars interchangeably. Political geographers define frontier as "a border region or zone or tract which forms a belt of separation, contact or transition between political units. The second meaning is the one in which the term is taken as a synonym of boundary, a frontier is defined not as a border region or zone, but as a "widths" line of demarcation between states. "Frontiers" are areas that existed before the introduction of a boundary. On the other hand, borderlands are areas near an international boundary and are usually disadvantaged areas in terms of their location as the farthest point and are marginal to the core areas of their states. They have been "neglected" by their core states development strategies, and they lack investments and modernity.

Borders between neighbouring states require an understanding that exceeds nationalistic histories and ethnocentric considerations. The limits where many things must start and stop need to be studied not just because they exist, but because they are a paradox that isolates and unites. They constitute walls and gates, barriers and bridges of contact and measures of communication. International boundaries are linear points of contact between countries, cultures and societies that provide unique opportunities to observe the best and the worst in human nature and the exercise of statecraft. (Hanson Kristol and House 1992, p. 14) analysis on the concept of the border is a natural territory in which economic and social life is directly and significantly influenced by the proximity to an international boundary. House identifies an open border, regional, intermediate and border regions, while DiTeda (1982) identifies borders in economic terms – where marginal cost (agricultural produces) are equal to the selling cost. In other words, the economy of the border regions can bring income situations positive or negative for one side or the other (House 1980, p. 45). Magafey (1977) locate borders as areas where alternative economic systems known as "informal", "underground", "parallel", "un-recorded" or "second" economies thrive alongside official economies. Courlet (1988, p. 13) in his analysis submitted that the "open border" is where conflict is predominant and does not function as a barrier between two or more economic systems.In this context, economic development and integration will no longer be determined by the political-institutional differential of belonging to this or that country, but eventually by the comparative advantage of "border areas" on both sides of its borders. (Ratti and Baggi 1980, p. 58) posited that surpassing the concept of the "bordering" areas and proceeding to that of the "transbordering" economies was the objective of Europe in 1993-9 boundaries or open Europe. Given the European Union (E.U) objectives, the border effect is no longer that of a barrier but a screen, that of contact.Luspha's study of the U.S-Mexico borderlands of the border underworld reveals that borders are "creators and facilitators of crime and criminality" (Luspha 1985:78). Asiwaju's illuminating study of Nigeria-Benin and Bonchuk's Nigeria-Cameroon indicate the involvement of the legitimate business and "criminal" sectors in the

cross-border economy in contraband naturally involve that community with the corrupt and criminal (Asiwaju 2000; Bonchuk 2010).

The task of transforming, resolving or militating conflict and transforming the borders into poles of development is one informed by an extensive theoretical debate in academic literature. An end to organized conflict is often seen as the starting point for a conflict resolution process in which communication strategy plays a significant role. The absence of clearly defined norms and standards for dealing with the causes and manifestations of conflict in African countries contributes to the lack of an effective response mechanism. Although the inviolability of borders has been upheld as a norm since the founding of the Organisation of African Unity (now A.U); similar norm-building should occur on issues such as democratization, sovereignty and border delimitation and demarcation. Thereis broad consensus that conflict prevention, the management or resolution in Africa requires that Africans themselves act as a rudder, guiding peace processes forward and walking with local disputants to bring about resolution. The family of conflict reduction strategies to achieve this purpose – prevention, management, resolution, and transformation, related to different moments in the life of a conflict when preventive diplomacy measures can be effective. Conflict is an adversarial relationship between two or more adversaries. Conflict, it should be remembered, is a necessary inevitable and often useful part of human relations. Whenever two parties cannot accomplish related goals at the same time, there is conflict, and whenever there is change, conflict is likely to be involved.

Conflict should be able to deal with on the political level, but when pressure and resistance are too strong, it escalates into violence. Conflict prevention focuses on efforts to keep conflicts on the political level and to deal with the causes that might press it on to violence (Dennis J.S 1999). Conflict management deals with violent conflicts which diplomatic efforts seek to reduce to the political level. Conflict prevention (or preventive diplomacy) can be accomplished by many agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, from the U.N through regional organizations to member states, and from global non-governmental organizations to private institutions. Since preventive diplomacy deals primarily with state action, its primary agents are states and interstate organizations.

"Conflict resolution" means different things to different people. For many, including diplomats, the term means processes designed to achieve "negative peace", the prevention, cessation, or absence of war or hostilities in general. Negative peace, however, does not go far enough; it is one part – albeit, often an essential part of a larger process that is rarely attempted, and rarely achieved, by traditional diplomacy. "Positive peace"; is the elimination of the underlying structural causes and conditions that have given rise to the violent conflict which negative peace processes seek to contain. "Negative Peace" deals with symptoms of underlying problems, "putting out fires", while "positive peace" deals with the underlying "combustible" problems themselves. Thus, identifying common interests, or common values between contending parties can lead to the attainment of conflict resolution. Conflict transformation is a more recent term used to indicate the establishment of new positive relationships among the former contending or conflicting parties.

The task of transforming, resolving or ameliorating conflicts is one informed by an array of theoretical debates in the literature – e.g. Bercovitch, Kremenyuk, and Zrtman 2009, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Maill 2011, Wanestern, 2012. An end to organized political violence is often seen as the starting point for a conflict resolution process. It represents a window of opportunity for negotiating a political settlement to the conflict and remedying structural injustice. Unfortunately, conflict resolution strives for reconciliation between conflictual parties and the creation of a primarily integrated society (Ramsboham, Woodhouse and Maill 2011, p. 246). In understanding conflict resolution, Peter Wallerstein states that conflict resolution is a social situation where armed conflicting parties in a (voluntary) agreement resolve to live peacefully with – and/or dissolve their basic

incompatibilities and henceforth cease to use arms against one another. Dissolving incompatibilities between competing parties can happen in several ways, e.g. horse trading depending on the nature of the conflict episode.

Conflict transformation tends to articulate a more multi-level, multi-sectorial and long-term approach to structural change and international, national and local political and cultural processes. For Cordula Reimanu, conflict transformation refers to outcomes revealed as forms of direct cultural and structural violence (Reimanu 1997, p. 50). Here the peacebuilding below advocated by John Lederach in his "Approaches to Building Peace Pyramid Model", is that sustainable peace requires a peace process to be firmly embedded in the grassroots leadership of the local community (Lederach 1995:26).

Even though this model has been criticized as also being subject to the same constraints as elite-level-peace building, it is now generally accepted not only by peacebuilding theorists but border scholars who utilize the grassroots level of analysis of cross-border conflicts. The media continue to be a primary source that the public turn to for information on vital issues affecting their lives. Experts in communication stress the fact that the media are not only providing information but shaping the way people perceive issues and influencing how individual policymakers respond to issues. Mass media forms, particularly newspapers and television, are potentially more potent forms because they reach into homes and they are proven social mobilization capabilities. However, this capability has served war efforts and ignited conflict tensions arguably more than help ameliorate them as well as inform, and educate, mass media forms can too easily be drawn to the pornography of violence and suffer from a tendency to offer spontaneous, unreflective and partisan commentary on a conflict in their content analysis (Ramsbothan, Woodhouse and Maill 2011, pp. 390-361). Due to the revolution in communication technology in the global arena, alternative media are increasingly being used to create new platforms for information. If properly utilized, these platforms promise positive change in erecting a cross-border information strategy for generating and disseminating information from the grassroots and across borders.

The media's interests in their reports have focused on issues from the state-centric perspective (i.e. relations between states). This approach also informs policy direction and scholarship on boundaries as barriers or lines of separation between states. This is also in consonance with notions of state sovereignty, nationalism, diplomatic history, and inviolability of the state's jurisdictional and administrative competence in international law. This perspective reflects a fortress mentality of "us" and "them" thereby generating cross-border conflicts and wars in pursuit of the state's national interest. The transnational paradigms (or grassroots level of analysis) are new to both an academic discipline and policy formulation and are closely related to Lederach's building peace pyramid model and Giddens Structuration Theory. This perspective focuses on divided but related local populations, and coherent cultural areas, in specific border regions with vibrant cross-border interactions. The research challenges that this perspective poses have given rise to research questions not only in Africa but elsewhere of the border-impacted groups. The search for credible conflict prevention and resolution strategies in cross-border conflicts is thereby premised on this perspective.

The Borders of West Africa and the Challenge of the Transnational Paradigm

Sixteen (16) Sub-Saharan countries constitute the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS). There are thirty-six (36) corresponding international boundaries, twenty-seven (27) of which are located entirely within the sub-region. Out of the remaining nine (9), five (5) – i.e Mali, Algeria, Mauritania, Nigeria – in Western Sahara, Niger – Algeria and Niger – Libya is shared with respective states in the North African sub-region, the other four, Niger, Chad – Nigeria – Chad Nigeria – Cameroon and Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea are shared with states in the central African region. Apart from shared international boundaries, West

Africa is further linked with North and Central Africa as well as East Africa and the Horn by shared positions of maritime states along the contiguous region to the Atlantic seaboard. Despite the numerous variables shared by these proximate states. Asiwaju (1964:47) laments that:

> The border regimes have remained turbulent giving rise to incidents of conflicts, mutual distrust and antagonism other than mutual understanding, deliberations and cooperative determination… the problem has been truly endemic and carries with it adverse implications not only for international peace and security but for regional integration.

Causes of Border Conflicts include:

1. Resource-based conflicts over minerals, surface and underwater and land hunger.
2. Technical problems arising from lack of survey/demarcation leading to uncertainty as the position of the borders or lack of maintenance of border vistas or disappearance due to the human activity of farming, mining/deforestation, etc.
3. Political instability leads to civil wars, generating refugee fluxes and causing strains in cross-border relations. The Liberian, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, and Mauritania wars and cross-border conflicts, generated severe refugee fluxes that caused this phenomenon.
4. Ecological/Environmental refugees, desertification, drought, and cattle diseases generate cross-border strains due to a large number of refugees or illegal migrants across borders.
5. Insurgency/Terrorism, particularly the Boko Haram insurgents who use the borders as sanctuaries or safe havens along and astride borders, Chad, Niger, Cameroun, Nigeria; are good examples.
6. Liberal/Neo-Liberal economic policies such as structural adjustment programmes lead to economic disparities, values accompanied by unemployment, smuggling, lack of economic development, and youth restiveness.
7. Colonial inheritance: different legal systems, e.g. conflict of laws and languages at the state-centric official level, leading to translation problems and nationalist feelings of "them" and "us". This communication problem appears problematic at the state-centric level and the grassroots. Fulani, Hausa, "pidgin", Yoruba – Egun, etc are spoken and widespread and this is assisted by a wide range of socio-cultural and religious institutions with Islam providing the cement for interaction.
8. The above challenges are complimented by money laundering, drug and human trafficking, illegal exploitation of natural resources including oil bunkering, armed robbery and kidnapping, auto theft, smuggling of, and proliferation of light and small weapons, ICT fraud, and again regional instability and tensions arising from undemocratic practices, bad governance, resource injustice and faulty electoral processes.

These challenges represent threats to the state's border relations and require not only a collaborative security regime to contain them but an integrative strategy for information dissemination. Robert Jervis (1928:34) asserts that a collective security regime requires not just the norms, principles and expectations that facilitate security cooperation but also, structural terms of cooperation sometimes in an institutional setting. This suggestion is in tandem with global functionalists who argue that the nation-state is too small to cope effectively with problems of security and economic welfare.Modern communication technology and the growing sense of the earth's ecological fragility have underlined the increasing "obsolesce" of state boundaries. Cooperation in security and information management is more of a security dilemma.

The Media and Conflict Reporting

This section focuses on conflict analysis of media reports and Gidden's structuration. An understanding of how the media report conflict may bring about the resolution or conflict escalation. It is therefore imperative that the media should report balanced and unbiased information to enable the audience to make informed choices about the conflict and the impact the conflict is having on the political, economic and social life of the countries affected and their citizens therein. By content analysis, we meant (Holsti 1969, p. 2) a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages that portray "negative" neutral or "positive" signals to the audience. The history of cross-border conflicts in West Africa which have been riddled with political and economic strife has generated discourse on regional conflict whereby security threats cut across borders (Giroux Lariz and Squitamatti 2009, p. 23; Buzan and Waever 2003, Lake and Morgan 1977), also, Wallesten and Sollonger 1988) have examined regional conflicts based on the historical experiences of proximate neighbours. The question to ask is *In What Circumstances Does the Media Exacerbate Conflict Reporting that Leads to Conflict Escalation?* It could be said that the media coverage of conflict around the world has heightened conflicts due to their tendency to misinform or manipulate the citizenry about what happened during conflicts, thereby leading to conflict escalation.

Media reports of international conflicts – Iraq-Afghanistan-Central African Republic-Nigeria-Cameroun-Liberia-Sierra-Leone, Cote d'Ivoire crisis revealed the human side of journalists who take sides on issues. This conforms to terms expressed by Lance Bennet and Shanto Iyergar 2008:710) that members of particular groups – ethnic groups, religious groups, community groups or those who feel a strong sense of national identity – (even across borders) tend to think along leaders who shape the opinions of the groups. They are content with the opinions or perspectives given to them by "gatekeepers" who set opinions for people under their influence.During the Bakassi Penisula crisis when five navy ratings were killed in Cross River State by Cameroonian Gerndames, and the recent ICJ ruling over the border dispute between Nigeria – Cameroun, the media on both sides responded with bellicose reporting urging both sides to war. The reports against the ICJ decision resulted in Nigeria's reluctance to comply with the implementation. The media in Nigeria and Cameroun played a negative role in the settlement of the process of this border dispute and in informing the public.

The state-centric political economic approach to social formation that supports the liberal peace strategy is a variation of the democratic peace concept in that it advocates democratization, the rule of law, human rights, free and global markets and a neo-liberal approach to development. Emphasis is on the structure as opposed to the agents. It tends to accentuate the role of power, resources, and governance as the means for accomplishing its agenda. In this respect, the established media tend to support the agenda usingthe supervision of the activities of the subject population based upon control and ownership of the media (Giddens 1991, pp. 57-63). The proponents of the liberal peace approach overlook the significance of multi-level communication processes. Theyoverlook the factors that support participatory democracy and the role of communication as the post-dynamic force.It is ideal that the media act as a mediating force between social agents and social systems, and as a public platform in which civil society can be engaged, voicing, and acting as tools of transparency while holding the authority accountable. That is why the media is an essential component of the infrastructure of peace. Actively engaging civil society is a key component of this principle. The fundamental principles that promote democratic peace act as a factor in the infrastructure of peace when one apparent conflict of interest between agents is effectively mediated by the discursive structures of the system in a way that creates solidarity (Giddens 1984, pp. 24-25).

Balanced reporting (Tenjona 2011; Wassanga 2007), believe that balance is achieved by presenting facts supported by evidence as well as by presenting "both sides" of an issue.

Most of the media outfits are publicly owned and tend to report what pleases their masters. It is not surprising to read or listen to what the government plan to do in other to prevent a crisis. "Little" is done by checking or cross-checking facts about casualties in conflicts or analyzing in detail the humanitarian crisis and problems affecting refugees. The media need to understand not only conflicts but the root causes of the conflict to avoid labelling grudges and portraying such groups as the generators of conflict or certain religious groups as facilitators of conflicts.

Furthermore, the media and the security forces need to find common grounds of understanding with each other and avoid suspicion since all of them are working towards the attainment of the democratic peace agenda. Regarding national security and the fight against insurgency across borders, the action of terrorist usually attracts media attention, as timely news, suggesting also that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. The information about Boko Haram activities on acts of terror is derived from the media (Muazu 2014).Though the media is not the only source of information as individuals with access and competence to information and communication technologies also send information on terrorist activities. Despite this, the modern media remain important sources because of the professionalism they bring to news reporting. Issues relating to the accuracy, objectivity and neutral presentation of information remain grave concerns. The United Nations Development Declaration stressed the need to "ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information.

However, reporting insurgents usually attracts higher media patronage, as viewers, listeners, readers and insurgents alike, gain publicity for their objectives and affairs. The framing of insurgents in the negative helps to influence public opinion against them by presenting them as demons, evil and criminals adding to the negative effects of their activities. Killing and making videos, displacement of persons, taking over territory and imposition of an extreme form of Islam, and promoting hatred and confrontation against them; this results in a backlash against journalists or their organization. Insurgent activities and responses from society presentan opportunity for their analysis and commentaries, which if to be balanced should avoid sentimentalism in their reports. The coverage of conflicts insurgency or terrorist acts is not the sole preserve of the local media alone as the international media also play important roles. The experience of 9/11 engendered the Western media using their powerful reach to report on insurgency, terrorism and its impact on state building. The Western media is usually concerned about the safety of their nationals and investments. In most instances, their news reports are in line with the projection and protection of their national interest and supporting their local clients against hostile governments thereby involving propaganda sensationalism, especially during civil strife and conflicts involving ethnic groups. They recognize that groups like Boko Haram that claim to represent Islam may pose a danger to their citizens in foreign lands. There is a global concern, driven by the West, of the spread of terrorism across the globe and in Africa and the Maghreb and West Africa attract their attention and presence. They tend to get information and decimate the same before the local media due to their resources while the local media is constrained by limited resources, government control and security in reporting on issues of conflict and security.

In what circumstances can the Media Reports prevent Conflict Escalation from leading to Conflict Resolution?

Cross-border conflicts can best be ameliorated if media reports reflect on the transnational perspective of the conflicts. The globalization process according to Giddens can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant communities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. For example, a revolution in communication technology has ushered in global networks – Twitter, Facebook, emails etc. Livingstone (2009, p. 11) and Giddens (1991, p.

80) assert that communication systems facilitate progressive social movements when they engage civil society in a way that results in a socially contracted means for protecting the interest of individuals by instituting the common good plus by implementing a means by which to put into effect the principles for realizing liberal democratic and sustainable peace.

The basis of structuration is that agents and structures interact to generate using communication processes that are defined in liberal societies as deliberative democracy, the power to reconcile the seeming differences within diverse societies, between different interest groups and between states and levels of society. Viewed against the cross-border conflicts in this region, what is needed is for resolving the stalemate that results from the causes of the conflicts from the entrenched posture of the elites/policymakers who view events from a state-centric position and the local people who share similar socio-cultural linguistic affinity and desire security for their continuous existence. Creating an interactive civil society in which the general population is engaged and contributes to establishing foundations for social transformation could be persuasive enough to see militants, insurgents or "conflict entrepreneurs" abandon their trade for want of amnesty. The paper argues that the peacebuilding process is enhanced when structuration is employed to mediate progressive social development and to create structures that enable the actors within the system to establish an infrastructure that is necessary for generating sustainable beneficial outcomes for the systems and its agents (Sinclair and Stuert 2007:189).

Strategies for Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution

When Europe emerged from the experience of World War II, its raison d'etre being the prevention of further inter-state wars and economic regeneration in a devastated post-1945, Europe, European economic integration was the obvious choice. The borders that war had drawn were accepted by the founding fathers of European integration. War as the means of future border change was rejected in favour of the alternative: interdependence between states and regional cross-border cooperation (Hass 2002). The Economic Community of West African States was founded in 1975 with similar objectives in mind after the experience of the Nigerian Civil War. Although economic development was at the forefront of this cooperation, cross-border contact gave expression to the shared borderland culture of the region in which a culturally coherent region was divided by the different colonial masters but did not obliterate the cross-cultural contacts still present in the region. This does not suggest that cross-border cooperation results in shared values and reconciling conflicting identities. Nevertheless, it is now generally accepted by advocates of the transnational perspective, that the engagement of the grassroots is an essential component of a peace-buildingendeavour. This is particularly the case in border conflicts where borderlanders are, more open than not, on the periphery of the state and geographically remote from the central government but still in contact with each other in their peculiar environment (Bonchuk 2003).

ECOWAS should strengthen its peacebuilding strategy by extending its agreements on governance and engaging local borderland grassroots communities, in any ongoing peacebuilding strategy. Past experiences have shown that these communities have been "neglected" in such strategies and treated as marginal or mere subjects in international relations. It is imperative to note that overcoming the psychological hold on borders as dividing lines of separation between "self and others", 'us and "them", "here and there", and "inside" and "outside" which have been fortified by conflict memories and separate political, economic and cultural development under, first, the colonial systems, and now the post-independence governments, or "inheritance elites" is no easy task. Somewhat paradoxically, borderlands in search of stability and security may be especially averse to the challenges of the new perspective, the transnational paradigm.

The adoption in January 2005 by ECOWAS of the concept of "Border Area" (pays-frontier) originally developed by Mali defined as "a geographical space astride the borderland between two or more neighbouring countries inhabited by people with socio-economic and

political relationships is an eloquent testimony for the need for a trans-national perspective strategy from the "bottom-up". Perhaps, the European Union Convention on Territorial Administration empowers the local communities to engage on issues that affect their development with the permission and supervision of their core states is an appropriate model in this regard (Bonchuk2009).

The United Nations, worried by the cross-border conflicts in West Africa in a Report on "Integrated Strategies for Sensitive Border Areas in West Africa on Border Problems", and cooperation with the government in the region-initiated projects in four cluster countries in that respect (i) Guinea/Cote d' Ivoire/Liberia/Sierra Leone/Guinea (ii) Mali/Burkina Faso/Cote d'Ivoire/Ghana (iii) Mauritania/Mali/Niger (iv) Senegal/The Gambia/Guinea Bissau (Forestiere 2004, p. 339). In the workshops that followed, participants supported the initiative and emphasized the need for an effective communication strategy to inform populations and protect them against the risk of, and spread and dissemination of criminality and insecurity. The borders share the same forms of criminality earlier noted with additions of fake roadblocks, undeclared goods, preferential treatments, unjustified withholding or refusal of passage right, bribery, arbitrary seizures, collision with state agents and concealments.

There is some disjuncture between the theoretical advocacy of peacebuilding from below and difficulties in developing practical ways of engaging people at the grassroots in conflict prevention activities. Regions in conflict need to adapt communication strategies to inform their populations on critical issues to take them along. Information is key and where the people are illiterate, radio programmes in local languages can be a ready channel to reach out to the populace. However, although community-based radio can be very useful in conflict prevention, several issues present problems: What is to be broadcast? Who is going to do it and under whose supervision? Where is it to be done? The need to use community radio to inflame ethnic tensions is a possibility. However, if programmes are selected with broad community participation, it then deals with unity and not division and can assist in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In this regard, local languages predominant in the borderlands e.g. Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Kissi and "pidgin" could be used to promote peace, exchange information and cultural values across borders. The establishment of a regular network for effectiveness for community radios can result in the usefulness of community radios. After the ICJ ruling over the Bakassi border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, from the onset, the Nigerian media strongly responded against the ICJ decision; influencing the Nigerian government's reluctance to comply with and implement it. The media played a negative role in that process and in informing the public, the public was poorly informed, and the local people are still confused as to where they belong. Community radio programmes in local languages such as Efik, Ibibio, Ejagham and Boki can better inform the public (Bonchuk 2003).The media can help in harmonizing programmes and implementing mechanisms by publishing post-conflict agreements between parties as this will generate more confidence in peace processes. This conforms to the liberal peace agenda of political participation and mobilization for peace processes. The media can also help bring about the social reintegration of psychological traumas among children and women including former fighters and repentant insurgents by advocating amnesty to encourage those still in arms to surrender.

There is an urgent need for capacity building of the media and civil society for more effective dissemination of information for the sake of conflict prevention and conflict resolution. The conditions of work of the journalist depend on the international conditions where they are based. More often than not, the media are run by more or less unskilled stakeholders who can only afford to satisfy their material needs by favouring the highest bidder. This affects the quality and competence of the stakeholders and improvement of activities of the media should be strengthened. Despite the context of political and media

pluralism in West African countries, it is worth mentioning that the media are often seen as instruments of propaganda in the hands of the ruling class. Being regarded as government property and they rarely play an active role in electoral campaigns. This is an issue that needs to be addressed and reviewed for it reduces the impact on information dissemination and freedom of the press.

One of the basic principles for the empowerment of the media is the freedom of expression and thought and the free flow of information. The government, the media and NGOs can collaborate with UNESCO to develop, promote and implement legislation on communication to meet the needs of the populace. The laws on the press are often ill-adopted and may result ina conflict of laws as the history of the sub-region entails. It is necessary to work closely with governments to modify them. In a politicized environment where people belong to a political party (and the media is perceived to be controlled by political authorities), the media are hardly independent. The media should develop partnerships with U.N information units to "disarm the pens and microphones" and free the media to become part of the conflict prevention and conflict resolution process. Although the situation of the media varies from one country to another, a communication strategy would aim to prevent the media from being trouble and conflict mongers and to help them become part of the peace process instead. The communication strategy should be based on the responsibility of the media and the security of the journalist's duty to provide accurate information and the right to free information. The governments should provide enabling legislation and involve them and protect their roles and responsibilities in preventing conflicts by instituting a Consultative Action Plan by law officers/agencies and UNESCO (2005, pp. 1-48).

International NGOs that are involved in post-conflict countries, U.N agencies and the media must establish an information and best practices sharing framework through an integrated approach. The U.N. missions and agencies could help prevent the media from conveying hate messages and should organize a counter-offensive against their influence within the population. The use of successful and charismatic stars – as ambassadors of peace can help drive the process. The journalists in the region should be granted work permits and other relevant instruments.

Sports and creative arts are two potentially most fruitful areas of activity through which people can engage in cross-border intellectual dialogues. The emotional appeal of football is an especially useful resource to garner for conflict prevention purposes. Football peace projects can be established across the borderlands given the fact that West African nations love the game. Creative networks, involving museums, visual arts, music and theatre can be established to convey peace messages. For (Woodhouse 2011, p. 349), dimensions of feelings, emotions, imagery and imagination, which are stimulated when peace/conflict are the subjects of the visual and other arts, are important but under-utilized reservoirs and motivations for conflict resolution. Similarly, music has been cited as a valuable medium for promoting peace, though like sports, it can also excite passions that fuel conflict and violence. Music ventures, theatre and film provide opportunities for exploring conflict transformation even though their appeal may be limited to non-aligned audiences. Popular artists can be mobilized to perform across borders utilizing peace messages as instruments for peace, early warning signals and conflict resolution.

Journalists in the region should be granted work permits and other relevant instruments to move across borders to share information on practical terms, network, and engage in conflict prevention and conflict resolution in seminars/workshops. Efforts should be made by their professional bodies across borders to develop practical approaches for their activities to become sustainable and stop the endless dependence on external funding and support which are not sustainable and unpredictable.

The international community – the institutions and agencies of the U.N. have a responsibility towards the border-impacted populations in terms of protection of their rights

and conflict prevention. Journalists and media who help understand the countries' institutions should also receive appropriate training and enjoy protection from these institutions. An integrated communication strategy that will be successful among the population should be predicated on a "Bottom Up" approach – a structuration – transnational paradigm in which the communities are motivated in political, and democratic discussions and can achieve sustainability.

Recommendations

The media and community-based radios are powerful means of conflict prevention if the resources are available and the political will to establish them as this will directly reach the most vulnerable populations and minimize the risk of cross-border conflicts at the grassroots. The internet and the new revolution in communication technology (alternative media) play a critical role in information dissemination and sharing with the most remote groups particularly when state-centric policies muzzle the media. The media and stakeholders should improve on their resources and their journaliststo achieve sustainable and free information and in order not be used to spread conflict. To achieve this laudable objective, a practical "Plan of Action" should be put in place to:

1. To establish a coordination framework/network consistent with the goals of peace and conflict prevention, encourage media networking
2. Ensure that the journalist is more professional, assuming that their vulnerability derives from the poor condition of living which exposes them to the dictates of their material needs (or stomach infrastructure).
3. The protection of journalists from persecution and forceful disengagement in their assignments
4. Develop strategies that are based on partnership with the U.N agencies and NGOs – a strong partnership with the Western media without compromising on any front, but to ensure security for the journalist in their countries and their independence of local "conflict entrepreneurs: or stakeholders
5. Network of journalists such as community-based radios in border areas, as effective means to disseminate information
6. Capacity building of journalists to produce information and use local culture channels, for mass information; joint productions in local languages, popular theatre, light operas, oral testimonies, commercials, sketches, football competitions due to the wide appeal, music concerts and charismatic stars to convey peace messages, provide early warning signals towards conflict prevention.
7. Recognize the influence of local readers, influence on populations, for local peace topics for sensitization.
8. Mass mobilization through structuration would form inclusive participation on discursive participating democratic principles. Target the youth and women to develop topics related to love for, patriotic acts, and confidence for their countries, provision of basic skills for the youth to enable their gaining employment and educate them on anti-social behaviour e.g use of drugs etc.
9. An implementation monitoring committee and collaboration of the media with the assistance of the U.N agencies on preventive/proactive measures rather than a reactive measure when a conflict breaks out and sometimes too late to contain when it escalates
10. ECOWAS to coordinate community radios along the borders with African Union Cross-Border Programme Support. Involve these radios in election campaigns to create the conditions of fair access of candidates to the media.
11. Establish bilingual schools along and astride the borderlands to teach local and foreign languages for cross-border communication. Universities to establish collaborate and train students on boundaries based on the emerging concept or the

"new thinking" on boundaries as "bridges" rather than "barriers". This will reflect in border research, cross-border management of shared resources and policy making in support of the A.U and ECOWAS cross-border initiative, and strengthen the development of a strategy for the media and conflict prevention in West Africa.

Conclusion

The primary argument of this paper is that the media can create conditions for conflict prevention and conflict resolution and can also exacerbate cross-border conflicts. The characteristics of borders and borderlands including the causes of border conflicts were indicated through the lens of conceptual clarification. It is indicated that the established news media represent a source of information that the public has relied on for what they expect is reliable information about important issues. However, the fact that the media have increasingly specialized content that it appeals to a particular audience has resulted in news that is presented in a way that reflects the state-centric perspective of a particular interest group.In addition to the extent to which the media and the authorities are aligned, the news media protect the interest of those representing the decision maker's power and resource. The established media tend to reflect the governance state-centric aspects of the liberal peace agenda but inhibit the more inclusive multilevel aspects of conflict resolution.

The paper indicated that members of particular groups who feel a strong sense of identity tend to think along similar lines regarding issues about others and are influenced by the readers who shape their opinion or tend to follow the perspective of their leaders. Because the alternative media provide a platform for a much broader segment of the society it has demonstrated that it can be a means for establishing a significant aspect of an infrastructure for peace. Alternative media is a structural mechanism where civil society can actively engage in the constructive dialogue process.The role the alternative media plays provide insight into the cross-border conflict amelioration process conforms with the transnational perspective and Gidden's Structuration model. It was indicated that alternative media provide a platform in which governance, power and resource concerns that are central to the state-centric perspective can be reconciled.

Reconciliation of these dimensions requires inclusiveness of the multi-level integrative approach to conflict prevention and conflict resolution to peacebuilding which engages more of the total public in the process. The transnational perspective converges with the structuration model to provide an interface between state-centric and international relations theory practice and strategies to address conflict, security and peace. It means that the peacebuilding process works best when based on principles that assume democratic peace (i.e. power mediated from "top-down") should be mediated using a multi-level infrastructure for peace, to co-create, using deliberative constructivist processes, a constituted social structure. This provides the infrastructure for peace because they provide a means by which conflicting interests are effectively mediated by discursive structures which transform the region's claims and diverse interests into solidarity (Giddens 1984, p. 29). By way of recommendation, the structures that can enable the evolution of credible conflict prevention and resolution strategies in cross-border conflicts are indicated.

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