

For People, For Policy: Journalists' Perceptions of Peace Journalism in East Africa

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Abstract

Compared to studies on peace-journalism content, little research examines journalists' perceptions of peace journalism despite theoretical suggestions that individuals influence content production. To address this relative disparity, this study examines the social conditions shaping journalists' perceptions of peace journalism using a hierarchy-of-influences perspective and data from 20 in-depth interviews with East African journalists, conducted between September 2020 and February 2021. Findings suggest that journalists generally understand peace journalism in one of two ways, each with distinct intended audiences, aims, and reporting interventions. Moreover, when examined alongside respondents' professional situations, these perceptions tend to be stratified by varying degrees of professional precarity.

Keywords

Peace journalism, conflict reporting, professional precarity, model importation

Interest in peace journalism has increased considerably in recent decades. Developed by Norwegian sociologist and peace researcher Johan Galtung in the 1970s, the peace-journalism model promotes non-violent solutions to conflict by correcting for the perceived value biases of contemporary war journalism (Galtung 2003). These value biases are reflected in a general preference for episodic, event-based reporting, official sources, and a narrative dichotomy of good and bad actors

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(Allen and Seaton 1999). Peace journalism aims to correct for these biases through an orientation toward the structural causes of conflict, opportunities for peacemaking, and multiparty interactions.

While research has examined the extent to which peace-journalism frames manifest in news content, far less work considers how journalists make sense of peace journalism (Doll and Moy 2021). This relative disparity matters to the extent that journalists' understanding of peace journalism has some bearing on the content that is produced and, subsequently, the progress made toward the larger normative goal of more peaceful societies. Using a hierarchy-of-influences perspective to center the individual as an agent in content production (Shoemaker and Reese 2014), the following study contributes to this end by examining how social conditions, namely organizational and professional dynamics, shape journalists' interpretations of peace journalism.

Peace Journalism Theory and Practice

Since its inception, peace journalism has undergone various conceptual developments, including efforts to define its contours. For example, peace journalism can be characterized as a practice in which “editors and reporters make choices—of what to report and how to report it—that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value nonviolence responses to conflict” (Lynch and McGoldrick 2005: 5). These decisions typically manifest in particular word choices, such as avoiding demonizing language, or in the way journalists construct narratives about conflict, like highlighting suffering on all sides. In response to critics who suggest these normative ambitions are antithetical to industry norms (Loyn 2007) or that they place an unfair burden on individual journalists (Hanitzsch 2004), proponents of peace journalism argue that recognizing and responding to journalism's power in constructing discursive realities is simply a prerequisite of good journalism (Kempf 2007; Lynch 2014; Youngblood 2016).

Beyond normative theorizing, existing scholarship on peace-journalism practice tends to coalesce around two themes. The first of these concerns how influences on multiple levels impact the production of peace-journalism content. One multi-influence typology identifies societal-, structural-, and individual-level factors impacting the conflict reporting process (Bläsi 2004, 2009). Examples of these influencing factors include the sociocultural context of conflict (e.g., Selvarajah 2021) as well as industry pressures facing journalists in particular environments (e.g., Irvan 2006).

The second line of research considers journalists' perceptions of peace journalism and the influence of such perceptions on practice. For example, interviews with journalists suggest they are more likely to support and practice peace journalism when they perceive their role as an active participant in societal well-being (McIntyre and Sobel 2018). Practitioners may even self-reflexively critique the media's own role in conflict when engaged in this work (Mitra 2016). In addition, and complementing what qualitative work exists, studies have quantified the study of journalists' attitudes through the development and use of survey instruments (Hussain and Ahmad 2021; Neumann and Fahmy 2016).

These two lines of research—multi-level pressures on the conflict reporting process and the influence of journalists' perceptions on practice—examine the relationship between practitioners and peace journalism, though both begin with the journalist and extend forward to implications for content production. However, it becomes equally important to look back farther still at what shapes individual perceptions to begin with. In neglecting to consider how perceptions are shaped, collective work may address what journalists think and what journalists do without developing a full understanding about which influences are important in shaping such results. To approach this puzzle, one must first understand the factors influencing journalists' perceptions of professional models like peace journalism.

Journalists' Perceptions and the Hierarchy-of-Influences Model

Several schools of thought contribute to how models for professional practice are adopted, including the influence of national press systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 2011), organizational dynamics (Amiel and Powers 2019; Breed 1955), and individual resolve or interpretation (White 1950). While these perspectives all provide valuable insights, most of which acknowledge the interplay of all three influences, of particular interest to this inquiry is the level of individual interpretation. Of course, the writing process of any individual journalist is not an isolated event; it is influenced by myriad factors such as gender, race, nationality, and other socio-structural forces that moderate one's decision making. For example, existing scholarship has considered how personal experiences with conflict (Bläsi 2004, 2009) and professional role conception (McIntyre and Sobel 2018) shape journalists' attitudes toward peace journalism. The present analysis concerns journalists' individual professional situations and how pressures at the levels of routines and organizational dynamics can contextualize practitioners' interpretations of peace journalism.

This approach joins efforts to complicate an academic tendency that takes news content as a given and, instead, foregrounds influences on the construction of news content. Led notably by Shoemaker and Reese (2014), the hierarchy-of-influences model illustrates the ways that news content can be influenced by societal-, structural-, and individual-level factors. In the model, the individual occupies the centermost field of influence, followed by routine practices, media organizations, social institutions, and social systems (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 9). However, the model does not presuppose a linear top-down interpretation of these levels; instead, the model intentionally leaves the boundaries of these levels and their interactions "underspecified" to encourage researchers to identify relative influences, both from the top-down and bottom-up (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 246).

In most cases, researchers compare some number of these hierarchal levels as discrete influences on content production. In contrast, this study investigates how the hierarchy's levels—namely routines, organizational dynamics, and the individual—interact with one another to create perceptions that journalists then bring to content.

After all, practitioners embody the pressures felt by other levels in the hierarchy when approaching news production. Thus, rather than consider how the hierarchy's levels may result in material constraints on the production of peace journalism—such as how lack of resources may inhibit travel to particularly rural conflict zones—this study considers how those same pressures shape interpretations of information, like the practices introduced by peace journalism.

In this context, professional routines can be defined as “styles of thought from an endless pattern of norms in response to common situations” (Shoemaker and Reese 2014: 165). Institutionalized norms like attending press conferences, following breaking news, and the inverted-pyramid story structure—often associated with episodic conflict—run counter to the contextualized reporting associated with peace journalism. In fact, peace journalism has been critiqued as fundamentally at odds with news values such as conflict and timeliness (Hanitzsch 2004) and journalistic rhetorical conventions like storytelling frames (Fawcett 2002). Journalists are socialized into these norms or routines, ostensibly providing boundaries around appropriate professional actions and interpretations.

Organizational dynamics are closely related to routines, though individual media professionals and routines are typically subordinated to the larger organization and its goals. Media organization characteristics, including structure of positions, ownership, target audience, market competition, and profitability, provide the institutional environment within which individuals and their routines must negotiate professional practice (Shoemaker and Reese 2014). Here, journalists cite issues such as time constraints and lack of resources as impediments to conflict-sensitive coverage like peace journalism with likely implications for how journalists' might interpret the model's viability (Rodny-Gumede 2016).

These organizational and professional pressures are often exacerbated for journalists occupying particularly precarious professional positions. Much of the work on precarity in journalism has been conducted in western contexts (Matthews and Onyemaobi 2020) and focuses on precarious employment, which can be defined as “work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income, and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements” (Vosko 2010: 2). In media work, precarious employment often encompasses young or entry-level reporters who may move in and out of journalism as freelance, contract, or part-time workers (Cohen et al. 2019).

As well, professional precarity can be extended to the organizational level with impacts on individuals. Rises in digital news and media convergence have placed increased pressures, such as declining circulation and financial insecurity, on community media houses in more rural areas (Abernathy 2018). This resource uncertainty can have impacts on news decision making (Arenberg and Lowrey 2019), indicating that editors or managers at small, rural media houses may also operate under a kind of professional precarity associated with their respective leadership positions in these organizations. While this type of organizational precarity is not typically captured in conversations around precarious employment, such a perspective suggests that professional and organizational pressures may be experienced unevenly by individuals

depending on the type of organization they work for as well as their position within that organization.

Understanding how professional influences shape journalists' perceptions of peace journalism is especially important in the context of East Africa. Though some efforts to disseminate peace journalism—such as journalist workshops—are hosted in the United States and Western Europe, these trainings are by and large directed toward contexts in the Global South. This tracks with a longer history of journalism model exportation, whereby models for practice are exported to contexts where journalism professionalization is thought to be particularly malleable (Golding 1977). However, because peace journalism has emerged in a mainly Euro-American academic context, there is reason to believe that its principles may not be extended to contexts like East Africa without modifications (Mabweazara 2018; Shaw 2009). This study engages this tension by examining peace journalism as individuals understand it in the contexts in which they are situated.

In addition, East Africa presents a geographic area where circumstantial factors often play a large role in conflict reporting given endemic resource uncertainty. As others have argued, conflict situations are complex and the peace- versus war-journalism binary can be reductive by not accounting for limitations and uncertainties in the field (Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al. 2016). This has prompted further disaggregation of peace journalism and, in particular, a proposed continuum between level of security threats and the escalation of coverage (Hussain 2020). Given these realities, East Africa provides a valuable context to consider journalists' interpretations of a practice like peace journalism, contributing to larger conversations around the professionalization of journalism across space and time. Thus, the primary research question asked is:

RQ: How do professional and organizational dynamics influence journalists' interpretations of peace journalism in East Africa?

Data and Method

Data for this study come from 20 in-depth, semi-structured virtual interviews with East African journalists between September 2020 and February 2021. This method is supported theoretically by Shoemaker and Reese's (2014) hierarchy-of-influences model, which situates the individual—including their perceptions—as an important influence on the production of news content. The questions included in the interview protocol (see online Supplementary Information file) follow from the theoretical assumptions introduced by the model and my research question—namely, that professional influences shape how individuals perceive a model like peace journalism. Interviews serve as an ideal methodological tool to help reveal more latent emotions, providing opportunities for respondents to reflect on understandings that may not be evident in behavior (Lamont and Swidler 2014). Given their proximity to individual experience, professional dynamics are readily accessed by journalists themselves as compared to

the impacts of larger media systems or social orders and provide a strong conceptual foundation from which future studies may examine more pervasive institutional forces. Moreover, information gleaned from interview-based studies contextualizes a corpus of peace-journalism research which has, to date, primarily included various forms of qualitative (e.g. Milioni et al. 2015; Ogenga 2012) and quantitative (e.g. Gouse et al. 2019; Lee, 2010) content analyses.

Interview participants. Respondents were limited to journalists from East African nations partner to the EAC intergovernmental organization, including Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. In addition, respondents were eligible to participate if they had attended at least one institutionally sponsored peace-journalism training. Based on the study's principal interest in how professional and organizational dynamics shape social reception of peace journalism, it was critical that research subjects began with some baseline exposure to peace journalism from which to build their understanding. Trainings ostensibly provide the tools, both conceptual and practical, necessary for the practice of peace journalism, but this is predicated on the assumption that journalists interpret peace journalism's normative goals and interventions receptively and with some consistency. Of course, journalists can be exposed to professional journalism models in other ways, though trainings provide an empirically important space to explore reception, as these workshops typically represent a first pass at model importation.

The parameters for the training were left capacious, in order to reflect the range of real-world trainings available to journalists, including workshops sponsored by international, domestic, private, and public institutions. However, trainings were to be delivered under the auspice of an organizational unit, such as a media non-profit or professional association, to establish some level of institutional oversight. To ensure this consistency across training messages and principles, I triangulated content by reviewing training documentation either from the interview subjects or directly from sponsoring institutions.

Situating this study in East Africa reflects both practical and conceptual considerations. Pragmatically, East Africa, as opposed to a single nation state, expands the purposive sample population while retaining some shared socio-political realities. Although peace journalism has received increased attention in recent years, the reporting model remains a relatively specialized and unfamiliar approach to most journalists (Rodny-Gumede 2016). Under these circumstances, identifying multiple peace-journalism trainings with enough willing participants for the study within a single country becomes difficult, if not unachievable.

However, casting too expansive a sampling net poses a similar challenge if respondents operate in wildly different socio-political environments. Limiting the study to East Africa and, in particular, those countries belonging to the EAC provides a reasonable compromise. The EAC region has some shared histories of armed conflict and many of the area's national press systems developed under similar experiences of colonialism and twenty-first century independence. As such, situating the study in East Africa presents a geographic region where peace-journalism trainings may be delivered with some relative sense of similarity.

Sampling procedure. Initial sampling came from journalists ($N = 12$) who participated in the 2017 East African Peace Journalism training workshop in Kisumu, Kenya, using contact information provided by workshop organizers. Additional respondents were recruited using snowball sampling from participants' professional references. This recruitment approach produced respondents from four of the six eligible East African countries—Kenya (5), Rwanda (1), South Sudan (4), and Uganda (10)—across five peace-journalism trainings between 2009 and 2021. Uganda is home to the East Africa Peace Journalism Foundation and has been a popular target of peace-journalism training efforts, which helps contextualize the resulting sampling distribution.

Selecting respondents using a purposive strategy allowed me to maximize range in order to achieve the variation needed to analyze differences in interpretations across professional situations (Weiss 1994). Within the first dozen interviews, participants' responses to questions became appreciably predictable based on characteristics sampled for, including professional position and employer organization. From here, recruitment continued until it was determined that little to no new information with respect to the research question would be gleaned through additional interviews.

Data collection. Interviews were conducted virtually via web-based video service platforms Zoom and WhatsApp. Given that respondents all attended their respective peace-journalism trainings in English and most came from English-language media outlets, interviews were conducted in English. Additional language translation or other language assistance was not necessary aside from carefully assuring cross-cultural conceptual understanding of select terms and ideas.

Interview questions prompted participants to draw from their memory of peace-journalism trainings from as early as 2009 and as recently as 2021. Studying journalists' experiences with peace-journalism trainings long after they have occurred is analytically central to this study, as it allows enough time passed to avoid grandiose claims typically associated with recency bias (Hogarth and Einhorn 1992). Respondents who recently attended a peace-journalism training were given especially careful attention in the analysis, focusing on applied definitions—or examples of how abstract concepts have been or could be applied to their work—rather than verbatim definitions. In addition, respondents identified a piece of news content that they believed represented a peace-journalism approach and walked through these stories during the interview. This exercise further illuminated the dimensions of peace journalism that journalists found most salient.

Table 1 presents basic descriptive information about respondents, including gender as expressed by sex, country, relative location within the country, professional position, and employer. Relative location is categorized as either "urban" or "more rural" with urban referring to capital cities and "more rural" corresponding to other areas outside of respective capital cities. Respondents' positions are categorized by current or most recent position in the media industry, though some journalists were unemployed or had recently transitioned out of journalism by the time of the interview.

Data analysis. Interviews ranged from 21 min to one hour and 33 min, with an average interview length of 51 min. Transcripts were thematically analyzed and

Table 1. Information About Respondents, Including Gender as Expressed by sex, Country, Location, Position, and Employer.

Gender	Country	Location	Position	Employer
Female	Kenya	More rural	Editor and radio presenter	Religious, community
Male	S. Sudan	Urban	Freelance reporter	N/A
Male	Uganda	More rural	Editor	Private, community
Male	Rwanda	Urban	Editor	Public, government
Male	Kenya	More rural	Freelance reporter	N/A
Female	Uganda	Urban	Multimedia journalist	Private, conglomerate
Male	Kenya	More rural	Station manager	Private, community
Female	Kenya	Urban	Reporter	Public, university
Female	Uganda	Urban	Director/coordinator	Private, non-profit
Male	Uganda	Urban	Head of communications	Private,
Male	Kenya	More rural	Producer	Private, conglomerate
Male	Uganda	More rural	Regional correspondent	Private, conglomerate
Female	Uganda	More rural	Freelance reporter	N/A
Male	Uganda	More rural	Radio broadcaster	Private, community
Female	Uganda	Urban	Senior journalist	Private, conglomerate
Male	S. Sudan	Urban	Reporter	Religious, network
Female	S. Sudan	More rural	Head of programs	Religious, community
Female	Uganda	More rural	Freelance reporter	N/A
Male	Uganda	More rural	Freelance reporter	N/A
Male	S. Sudan	More rural	Producer and freelance	Public, government

organized in qualitative analysis software Dedoose, where hand coding was conducted at the semantic level with the goal of organizing such data to be interpreted in a more general sense (Braun and Clarke 2006). Based on the project's theoretical orientation, codes pre-determined at the outset include professional routines, organizational dynamics, and perceptions of peace journalism. Examples of indicators for professional routines and organizational dynamics included references to daily workflow and newsroom structure. Examples of indicators for peace journalism perceptions included participant-provided definitions as well as applied references to how peace journalism should be produced or can be characterized.

From the coded information, I observed differences in how individuals discussed peace journalism, particularly with respect to emphases placed on the intended audiences, aims, and associated reporting interventions. I then organized these themes—audiences, aims, and interventions—and examined them for patterns of interpretation across respondents. I noted that perceptions of audience, aims, and interventions tended to travel together. More specifically, when a respondent articulated an intended audience for their peace-journalism content, they likewise discussed the same or similar aims and interventions as others who shared their same sense of audience. From here, I created two labels – “people-oriented” and “policy-oriented” – to represent the two dominant perceptions of peace journalism, as characterized by like

audiences, aims, and reporting interventions. I then categorized participants into one of these two types—people-oriented or policy-oriented—based on which the majority of their responses best matched. Finally, I examined these categorizations alongside information related to professional-structural dynamics to understand how their professional situation may (or may not) correspond to perceptions of peace journalism.

After indexing data on professional-structural dynamics, I created an additional code for precarity, including precarity at both the individual and organizational levels. While closely related to the professional-structural dynamics that I coded for from the beginning, the code for professional precarity developed out of the analysis process and became important to interpreting the study's findings. In particular, the concept of precarity helped explain the distinction between two primary interpretations of peace journalism and why some journalists' may be partial to one understanding over another.

Findings

Journalists with a more *people-oriented* understanding of peace journalism perceived its content as produced for community groups to promote victim-centered healing and local reconciliation using narrative peace framing. In contrast, a *policy-oriented* interpretation perceived content as geared toward more removed audiences of urban, elite decision makers with the goal of prompting third-party intervention, with a reporting emphasis on word choice. These two interpretations of peace journalism—people-oriented and policy-oriented—are inherently linked insofar as people are affected by policies and policies are enacted by people. There are no pure or extreme manifestations of these interpretations, and respondents naturally referenced some aspects of both perspectives in their responses. However, in all interviews, one understanding generally dominated the other with respect to the audiences, aims, and interventions articulated. The following paragraphs present these two types in detail.

Peace Journalism for People

Audiences. Those with more people-oriented understandings of peace journalism imagined consumers of their content to be communities or individuals directly experiencing conflict. Some respondents referred specifically to victims of violence, as Kenyan journalist Kenny Senyange¹ did when saying, "Among the people who are going to consume your news, some of them may be victims of these unfortunate events" (Freelance journalist, 24 September 2020). Other respondents discussed communities in a broader sense, as Kenyan journalist Olivia Mwenge reported: "My biggest thing about journalism is our responsibility to community. We pick the graphic images, but then how does that affect whoever is consuming this content?" (Former television reporter, 6 October 2020). For both Kenny and Olivia, as well as those who share their perspectives, peace-journalism content is geared toward communities and individuals experiencing conflict, and this explicitly or implicitly drives their conflict coverage.

Aims. A people-oriented interpretation also presents distinct goals for the intended impact of content. Respondents categorized into this group often emphasized community-oriented responses in the aftermath of conflict, such as village-level reparations. For instance, Ugandan journalist George Liku described peace journalism as a way to “communicate justice” to victims. He went on to add, “We are looking at community togetherness, the community project... That the family not lose hope after the violence” (Radio editor, 29 September 2020). Others shared the goal of “making a community feel better” (Ugandan freelance reporter, 28 January 2021).

In addition to post-conflict healing, some identified the goal of ending conflict from within the community, as opposed to third-party intervention. Kenyan journalist Sicily Kalu described a story she wrote that prompted local communities to willingly surrender their weapons without the help of an outside mediator (Radio broadcaster, 29 September 2020). Similarly, Kenyan journalist Stephen Odhiambo suggested that peace journalism is a tool to help communities understand their circumstances and make peaceful decisions. He explained, “As a community radio station, we are supposed to empower this community to understand where they are and how are we going to help them so that they are able to make decisions” (Radio manager, 17 September 2020).

Reporting interventions. Lastly, those with a more people-oriented understanding of peace journalism emphasized narrative story angle, as opposed to word choice or specific speech patterns, when describing their reporting strategies. For example, Kenyan journalist Kenny Senyange described a headline he wrote emphasizing calls for peace. Kenny explained that the headline was later changed by an editor to say “Seven people have been killed after the community invaded the neighboring community and attacked them” (Freelance journalist, 24 September 2020). Kenny’s anecdote illustrates a shift in story angle, moving from his focus on assurances of peace instead to the invasion’s death toll. Similarly, Stephen Odhiambo emphasized the importance of storytelling saying, “So we are asking them now, can we now change the narrative? Can we change the conversation that we speak about peace?” (Kenyan radio manager, 17 September 2020).

Both Stephen and Kenny’s examples refer to story framing and narrative. Of course, framing is often determined by smaller language and text decisions, though these more mechanical writing choices were not the focus of these journalists’ reported operational approaches to peace journalism. Instead, the people-oriented interpretation promotes story framing that is somewhat explicit in its orientation toward peace with a goal of facilitating community-level reconciliation for victims of conflict.

Peace Journalism for Policy

Audiences. In contrast, a more policy-oriented understanding perceives peace-journalism content as received by urban, elite audiences typically removed from direct conflict. Ugandan journalist Patricia Gwitaba illustrated this perspective when explaining that her goal is to minimize stereotypes and stigmatization: “I just wanted to bring out the resilience in the people who go through conflict and tell

people in the city that these people have moved on. There's no need to keep tying them to the war" (Multimedia journalist, 27 September 2020). Similarly, Wilson Ibrahim articulated a desire to illuminate the unseen suffering of his countrymen saying, "It's their voice we have to bring as journalists so that [others] can see how their people are suffering" (South Sudanese reporter, 29 January 2021). Journalist Serge Abara specifically pointed to government elites as his intended audience, saying he sought "government feedback" from his peace-journalism content (Ugandan head of communication, 29 October 2020).

Aims. While a people-oriented understanding of peace journalism emphasizes community-level responses, a peace-journalism-for-policy perception sees conflict mediation as a more top-down enterprise. For example, Ugandan journalist Patricia Gwitaba suggested that peace-journalism content can be used "to make or to decide on a policy decision" (Multimedia journalist, 27 September 2020). Similarly, Ugandan journalist Serge Abara covered a dispute over a fertile piece of land between two ethnic groups and described his report's impact saying, "People were conflicting for the swamp... When [the story] ran on the station, it forced government officials to come and cool the situation. There was an intervention" (Head of communication, 29 October 2020). This type of government intervention reflects a more institutional understanding of peace journalism's intended impact. Compared to journalists who foreground local efforts with their peace-journalism content, those with a more policy-oriented perspective ask: "What is the voice of the government on this issue? How are they planning to bring peace among these two communities?" (South Sudanese reporter, 29 January 2021).

Reporting interventions. Finally, journalists with a more policy-oriented interpretation identified peace-journalism content primarily by use of specific language and conventions in text. Patricia Gwitaba emphasized word choice saying, "For me, the words you use to describe and the words you use to tell your story matter a lot" (Ugandan multimedia journalist, 27 September 2020). This held true for a number of other respondents, including Rose Kawala who explained: "[Peace journalism] made me more conscious about the words that I use and the words that you sometimes take for granted" (Kenyan senior journalist, 26 January 2021). A more policy-oriented interpretation perceives peace journalism as a way to draw attention to conflicts using deliberate and careful language in order to prompt outside intervention. This emphasis on third-party or policy solutions stands in contrast to the more community-level and victim-centered perspective of the people-oriented understanding of peace journalism.

Interpreting Peace Journalism: A Professional-Structural Perspective

Examining interpretations of peace journalism alongside respondents' professional situations provides one lens for understanding these distinct perceptions and, in particular, demonstrates that layered perceptions of peace journalism tend to move along a professional-structural continuum. More specifically, journalists in relatively stable reporting positions, such as staff reporters in urban areas, displayed a more policy-oriented understanding of peace journalism. Conversely, respondents in relatively

precarious reporting positions (e.g., freelance journalists or entry-level employees) or who worked in small, community media houses (e.g., station managers or reporters in very rural areas) generally assumed a more people-oriented interpretation with a goal of facilitating community-level resolution.

For example, Kenny Senyange and Olivia Mwenge spoke about victims as consumers of news content and responsibility to community, and both work under unstable professional conditions. At the time of interviews, Kenny worked as a freelance journalist in a rural area and Olivia was employed outside of journalism, citing intense media market competition in her country. Kenny explicitly cited professional constraints when implementing peace journalism into his work saying, “Even after the training, I met some challenges because the editors were not thinking the way I was thinking” (Kenyan freelance journalist, 24 September 2020). Moreover, journalists in more precarious professional positions typically pointed to story framing as important to their approach. Olivia illustrates this phenomenon saying, “[With a peace-journalism approach], you’re more deliberately propagating a certain narrative... The biggest thing is how we frame certain people” (Former Kenyan television reporter, 6 October 2020).

In contrast, journalists working in more stable, bureaucratic professional environments—characteristic of larger, urban outlets—tended to understand peace journalism as a tool to prompt outside intervention and were more likely to characterize peace journalism with respect to specific text and language decisions. For instance, Serge Abara, who reported on the dispute over the land boundary, serves as the head of communications of a large media house in an urban area. In speaking about the goals of peace journalism, he said: “The end result we wanted is government action—we wanted action.” While discussing how his team packages content to prompt such action, he emphasized avoiding hate speech. He reportedly directs his team: “Do not just pick propaganda from the government... We eliminate hate speech” (Ugandan head of communication, 29 October 2020).

Table 2 shows the distribution of individual attributes across the three dimensions of journalists’ interpretations of peace journalism—audience, aims, and reporting interventions. Employers categorized as “major news organizations” include media conglomerates and larger syndicates like news networks or wire services. “Non-major news organizations” reference smaller, community-based stations, usually located in rural areas. For purposes of this table, respondent categories are mutually exclusive, and respondents were categorized based on their dominant orientation toward audiences, aims, and interventions. Respondents who could not be definitively categorized in one of the three dimensions were not included in that dimension’s count.

Table 3 presents the distribution of individual attributes across the two understandings of peace journalism. Respondents were categorized as having either a more people-oriented or more policy-oriented understanding of peace journalism based on their dominant orientation toward peace-journalism audiences, aims, and interventions. For example, a respondent who emphasized a community audience and local resolution though focused primarily on word choice would be categorized with a people-oriented interpretation. As illustrated, attributes associated with more precarious professional

Table 2. Distribution of Individual Attributes Across Perceptions of Peace-Journalism Audiences, Aims, and Interventions.

	Audiences (n = 18)			Aims (n = 20)			Interventions (n = 19)		
	Victim	Elite	Total	C-B	OI	Total	SN	TC/WC	Total
<i>Job title</i>									
Freelancers or unemployed	8	0	8	7	0	7	6	0	6
Reporters or editors	5	5	10	8	5	13	7	6	13
<i>Employer</i>									
Major news org.	2	4	6	3	4	7	3	4	7
Non-major news org.	11	1	12	12	1	13	10	2	12
<i>Geographic location</i>									
Capital or major city	1	5	6	2	5	7	1	5	6
Non-major city	12	0	12	13	0	13	12	1	13
<i>Gender</i>									
Male	8	3	11	10	2	12	9	3	12
Female	5	2	7	5	3	8	4	3	7

Note: C-B = Community-based resolution; OI = Outside intervention; SN = Story narrative; TC/WC = Text conventions and word choice.

Table 3. Distribution of Individual Attributes Across People-Oriented and Policy-Oriented Perceptions of Peace Journalism.

	Interpretation of PJ		
	People-oriented (N = 13)	Policy-oriented (N = 7)	Total (N = 20)
<i>Job title</i>			
Freelancers or unemployed	7	1	8
Reporters or editors	6	6	12
<i>Employer</i>			
Major news org.	2	5	7
Non-major news org.	11	2	13
<i>Geographic location</i>			
Capital or major city	1	7	8
Non-major city	12	0	12
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	8	4	12
Female	5	3	8

positions, such as freelancing, working at non-major news outlets, or working in a rural areas, tended to have a more people-oriented understandings of peace journalism. Those occupying less precarious positions, characterized by more senior positions in large, urban organizations, generally displayed a more policy-oriented perception of peace journalism.

In working under precarious conditions, journalists with more people-oriented understandings of peace journalism are often closer to the communities they cover, both with respect to physical proximity and interpersonal ties. This positioning may explain the heightened interest in victim experiences. In addition, increased resource uncertainty in precarious positions also means that reporting interventions may need to be more explicit or direct in order to have the intended impact. Reporters covering large areas or particularly rural places may not have the time or resources to conduct long, drawn-out conflict coverage and, for this reason, must assert appeals for peace more blatantly.

These pressures are ostensibly alleviated to some extent for journalists in less precarious positions. Journalists in this category typically report for more urban audiences situated outside of conflict zones and are generally closer to seats of power, enabling a more direct line of communication for making policy-related suggestions. In addition, respondents with policy-oriented understandings of peace journalism are more likely to work in managerial or editorial desk positions, pulling them farther away from conflict reporting happening on the ground. These media professionals exert most influence over the written reports they review and may focus their attention on specific word choice and language, rather than reporting decisions that have already been made by the time a draft appears on their desk. Rose Kawala articulated this explicitly saying, “I was always the last person to read the story before it would go; I was the last gatekeeper which meant I always had an opportunity to change and edit” (Ugandan former senior journalist, 26 January 2021). Rose’s experience illustrates how one’s professional position, including relative level of precarity, can shape the ways in which individuals interpret and look to implement peace-journalism practices into their day-to-day work.

All 20 interview participants are categorized as having either a more people-oriented or policy-oriented interpretation of peace journalism, though this number reflects one exception to the patterned understandings observed across the sample. Despite occupying a relatively precarious position as a freelance investigative reporter in an urban area of South Sudan, the individual held a predominantly policy-oriented perception of peace journalism. For example, he described his goals for peace journalism as having an “influence on the decision of the government” (South Sudanese freelance journalist, 25 September 2020). One explanation for this exceptional position may come from the respondent’s self-identification as an investigative reporter. Investigative journalism is particularly concerned with holding powerful elites accountable and, as such, can manifest in especially adversarial orientations toward government officials. Thus, an internalized sense of investigative duty may transcend more patterned understandings of peace journalism based solely on professional position.

Discussion and Future Research

Although the conceptual approach of this study is not to test respondents understandings of peace journalism against particular normative criteria, it is worth noting that both people-oriented and policy-oriented understandings are grounded in normative peace-journalism principles, particularly as forwarded by McGoldrick and Lynch's (2000) 17 good practices in covering war. For example, the 17 good practices list, a guide with reporting conventions to avoid as well as alternatives, is not tailored to specific types of content or audiences (i.e. writing for a local media house versus a national syndicate). Thus, both elite and community audiences, as well as victims, are ostensibly relevant recipients of peace-journalism content.

Regarding aims of peace journalism, conflict resolution is located at several levels. Reporters should "ask questions to politicians about ideas put forward by grassroots organizations" (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000: 33), suggesting that policy-level action and engagement is valuable. However, practitioners should also "avoid greeting the signing of documents by leaders... as necessarily creating peace" (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000: 32). Reporters are instead encouraged to define problems and provide solutions based on civilian needs. However, this guidance stops short of being overly prescriptive about the level at which these solutions should develop and, indeed, solutions from multiple levels are often needed.

Finally, both narrative framing as well as specific text mechanics are incorporated into peace-journalism instructional materials. As several interview respondents noted, reporters are encouraged to avoid language that is victimizing, imprecise, or demonizing (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000: 31–32). However, framing guidance is also provided. Recommendations include revealing "areas of common ground" (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000: 31) and minimizing stereotyping and stigmatization, as Ugandan journalist Patricia Gwitaba highlighted when destigmatizing victims for urban audiences.

Such evidence suggests that both people-oriented and policy-oriented understandings of peace journalism are broadly consistent with existing guidance on its practice. However, my findings indicate that journalists tend to find some interpretations more salient than others. I suggest that one way perceptions are differentiated is by degree of professional precarity and that while journalists may agree to peace journalism's main principles in the abstract, the extent to which they can approximate such goals varies according to how they perceive their professional situation.

These findings contribute to existing work on journalism professionalization processes by examining how individual perceptions of models are shaped by social conditions. More specifically, this work suggests that professional-structural dynamics, such as professional precarity, may correspond with particular ways of processing new information. Such insights extend discussions regarding how models like peace journalism are transposed across contexts and the ways that media practitioners negotiate the myriad influences on their work.

Regarding implications for peace journalism, the findings suggest that journalists who understand peace journalism as more policy-oriented tend to occupy mid-to-high

managerial positions in bureaucratic, urban institutions and may be less likely to be reporting on conflict situations in the field. These individuals generally imagine peacebuilding as a top-down endeavor. On the other hand, media professionals doing the most active field reporting, often occupying more precarious positions, perceive peace journalism to be a more bottom-up mechanism for peacebuilding. In this case, peacebuilding is inspired in part by intentional peace framing of stories, akin to what some have called “active” peace journalism, or the “coverage of suggestions and initiatives for peace” (Lynch 2008: 99). This is in contrast to more passive peace journalism, where peace is retained only as an external value of reporting (Kempf 2007).

In both people-oriented and policy-oriented perspectives, understandings of peace journalism take into account the professional ethos and working conditions of the industry, aligning with those who have characterized peace journalism as following from a critical realist theoretical tradition (Lynch 2015). That is, journalists practicing peace journalism must still negotiate existing structures to perform their work. These findings suggest that perhaps the most suitable or appropriate peace-journalism trainings should tailor content for the type of professional position media practitioners occupy, acknowledging the different realities and affordances of such positions. This might entail peace-journalism editing workshops for supervisors, who primarily oversee the work of others, and providing journalists in the field with tangible peace-journalism tools, such as interview guides or safety training.

In addition to informing the specific practices of peace journalism, insights generated around professional precarity—and, in particular, the ways the concept can be expanded to include organizational dynamics like rural versus urban environments—respond to calls for more thoughtful scholarly attention to precarity in the Global South (Matthews and Onyemaobi 2020). More specifically, rather than presume that precarity is best evaluated as a measure of full and permanent employment, which does not always map onto the realities of regions like East Africa, this study considers other professional-organizational dynamics that may offer more or less stability to journalists. These findings then contextualize and confirm important limitations of transposing Western scholarship to new contexts.

Beyond peace journalism in East Africa, a hierarchy-of-influences approach toward understanding individual perceptions can inform journalism research writ large. Many efforts to study journalism professionalization focus on institutional-level changes or conditions, such as press system norms or organizational environments. While it is clear that interventions on these levels matter, this project advances the argument that these institutional conditions must be examined alongside perceptions—and the antecedents of such perceptions—of individuals. In the context of peace journalism, curbing institutional pressures to attend peace-journalism trainings or gain related skills represents only partial progress toward model adoption if individual interpretations of such model principles continue to be stratified by the same or similar institutional influences. In short, equal access to knowledge may not translate into comparable uses or interpretations of that same information.

With respect to future research, the project's theoretical orientation implicitly assumes that influences like professional precarity are forces acting upon individuals who then find themselves in precarious situations. In fact, decisions to get involved in precarious work may be deliberate, as with entrepreneurs or those with sufficient resources to take professional risks. For these individuals, precarity might not be experienced with the same pressure as one who has been impacted by the same influences unwillingly, suggesting that the objective appearance of precarity is perhaps less important than one's perception of it. As well, this theoretical perspective takes influences like professional precarity as stable when such pressures may be temporary. Future studies should examine journalists' perceptions longitudinally to better understand whether changes in professional precarity lead to shifts in perceptions over time.

Finally, this study adopted an orientation toward continual bias checking, with the hope of mitigating heteronormativity biases that come from entering spaces as an outsider (Zohrabi 2013). Despite these considerations and efforts to address them, there may be perceptions of peace journalism and reflections about journalism practice more generally that I could not access based on my social position. Here, it cannot be overstated that my interest in perceptions of peace journalism is not in whether individual journalists fulfilled criteria put forth by theorists in other contexts or whether trainings were causally effective. Instead, this inquiry concerns peace journalism as individuals understand it in the contexts in which they are situated. It is for this reason that these findings are not broadly generalizable, even while we might expect to see similar processes at work under comparable social and professional circumstances. To make broader generalizations, a larger randomized sample is needed.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1. All respondent names have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout.

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