

Divided by Borders, United by Crisis: Media Narratives, Historical Memory and the Communication Ecology of Insurgency in the Former British Cameroons Borderlands

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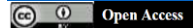
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how media narratives, historical memory and the communication ecology of the former British Cameroons borderlands explain the persistence of insurgency across historically connected territories in Nigeria and Cameroon. Anchored on Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974) and Collective Memory Theory (Halbwachs, 1992), the study adopted a qualitative historical and documentary research design. Data were generated from 65 documentary sources, comprising 9 colonial and United Nations archival documents, 18 peer reviewed journal articles, 12 scholarly books, 10 reports of international organisations, 8 policy documents and 8 newspaper/media publications. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, the documents were inductively and deductively coded into analytical themes. Findings revealed that historical memory (83.1%) remained the dominant communicative resource shaping borderland identity and media narratives; communication ecology (84.6%) emerged as the principal explanatory framework linking insurgency with transnational social networks and porous borders; while media narratives, historical grievances and colonial legacies collectively explained the persistence of parallel insurgencies across the former British Cameroons. The study concludes that enduring peace in the conflict affected communities of northwestern and southwestern Cameroon and northeastern Nigeria requires historically informed communication, cross border collaboration and community centred peacebuilding that transcend inherited political boundaries. It recommends a joint Nigeria Cameroon borderland communication framework, the integration of indigenous communication systems into regional security architecture, and sustained African regional support for historical memory, dialogue and borderland communication initiatives as pathways to lasting peace.

Introduction

Communication provides the thread that binds border spaces together because boundaries neither silence human interaction nor erase collective memory. Families separated by international frontiers continue to share languages, cultural practices, religious beliefs and economic activities through continuous interpersonal communication. Markets attract traders across national jurisdictions, religious pilgrimages transcend state authority, while digital technologies have further weakened the communicative significance of territorial distance. Borderlands therefore represent communication ecologies where official state narratives interact with indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, community memories, social media discourse and transnational information networks. In such environments, history remains alive because it is continuously reproduced through communication rather than preserved only within archival documents.

No continent reflects this reality more profoundly than Africa, where the geography of modern states emerged largely from diplomatic negotiations conducted thousands of kilometres away from the societies whose destinies were being determined. Between November 1884 and February 1885, representatives of fourteen countries, including Britain under Prime Minister William Gladstone, France

represented by Jules Ferry, Germany under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Austria Hungary, Russia, the Ottoman Empire and the United States assembled in Berlin at the invitation of Bismarck. No African ruler participated in the deliberations that subsequently shaped the political map of almost the entire continent. The General Act of the Berlin Conference institutionalised the principles of effective occupation and colonial acquisition, accelerating what historians describe as the Scramble for Africa (Pakenham, 1991). From the Atlantic coastline of Cape Verde and Dakar through Conakry, Freetown, Monrovia, Abidjan, Accra, Lomé, Porto Novo and Lagos to the Horn of Africa stretching across Djibouti, Mogadishu, Massawa and Addis Ababa, colonial partition fragmented kingdoms, emirates, chiefdoms and trading networks that had evolved over several centuries. Contemporary scholarship continues to identify the Berlin Conference as one of the defining historical moments whose consequences remain visible in Africa's political communication, interstate diplomacy and security architecture (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Nugent, 2023).

Among the colonial arrangements that continue to attract scholarly attention is the history of German Kamerun and its eventual partition following the First World War. Germany established Kamerun as a protectorate in July 1884 after agreements signed with local rulers along the Gulf of Guinea. Following Germany's defeat in 1918, the Treaty of Versailles deprived it of all overseas colonies, leading the League of Nations in 1922 to divide Kamerun between Britain and France. France received approximately four fifths of the territory, while Britain administered two disconnected strips known as Northern British Cameroons and Southern British Cameroons from Lagos through the colonial administration of Nigeria (Le Vine, 1964). Unlike French Cameroun, which developed distinct administrative institutions under French assimilation policies, British Cameroons became deeply integrated into Nigeria's educational, judicial, commercial and communication systems. Newspapers circulated through Enugu, Calabar and Lagos into Bamenda, Mamfe and Buea, Christian missions established schools across the territories, while commercial activities linked Maiduguri, Mubi, Yola, Mamfe and other communities through extensive road and market networks. These developments cultivated enduring social and communicative relationships that survived well beyond the colonial period.

As constitutional reforms accelerated across Africa after the Second World War, the future of British Cameroons emerged as one of the most significant diplomatic questions before the United Nations Trusteeship Council. Between 1959 and 1961 extensive political campaigns, constitutional debates and diplomatic negotiations examined the future of both Northern and Southern British Cameroons. The United Nations eventually organised separate plebiscites on 11 February 1961 under Resolution 1352 (XIV), requiring voters to decide whether independence would be achieved through integration with Nigeria or reunification with the Republic of Cameroon. Neither territory was presented with the option of complete sovereign independence, a decision that has remained one of the most debated aspects of African decolonisation (United Nations, 1961). Northern British Cameroons voted to join Nigeria, while Southern British Cameroons chose reunification with the Republic of Cameroon. Although the plebiscites legally concluded the territorial question, they did not dissolve centuries of kinship, commerce, religion and communication that had connected communities across the region. Historians such as Konings and Nyamnjoh (2023) maintain that memories of the plebiscite continue to influence political discourse within both Nigeria and Cameroon.

The geography of contemporary insecurity presents a remarkable historical coincidence. Territories formerly constituting Northern British Cameroons, particularly present day Borno, Adamawa and parts of Taraba States, have become the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency since 2009, while the former Southern British Cameroons, especially the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, descended into violent separatist conflict from 2016 following disputes over constitutional reforms, language policy and political representation (International Crisis Group, 2024; United Nations Development Programme, 2023). Although the ideological foundations of these conflicts differ substantially, both occupy territories that once shared common colonial administration, educational systems, religious institutions and communication networks. This geographical convergence raises important scholarly questions concerning whether historical memory, communication structures and inherited colonial relationships continue to shape contemporary conflict dynamics within these adjoining regions.

Communication occupies a central position within both conflict environments because violence is sustained not only through weapons but also through narratives. Governments frame insurgency through the language of national security and territorial integrity, while armed groups construct counter narratives centred on exclusion, resistance, liberation or religious legitimacy. Traditional media, community radio, digital platforms, religious institutions and interpersonal networks continuously circulate competing interpretations of history and contemporary events. Entman's (1993) framing theory explains how communication influences public understanding by selecting particular aspects of reality while excluding others. More recent scholarship demonstrates that digital platforms have transformed historical memory into a strategic communication resource capable of mobilising emotions, constructing identities and sustaining political movements across national boundaries (Bennett & Livingston, 2020; Hoskins, 2022). Within the former British Cameroons borderlands, memories of colonial administration, the 1961 plebiscite, perceived marginalisation and state responses continue to circulate through both formal and informal communication channels, creating an environment where historical narratives and contemporary insecurity reinforce one another.

Statement of the Problem

The territories that constituted the former British Cameroons today lie within two sovereign states, Nigeria and Cameroon, yet they continue to share historical memories, ethnic affiliations, kinship ties, languages, cultures, religious traditions and patterns of social interaction that predate the 1961 United Nations plebiscite. Ironically, these historically connected territories have also become contiguous theatres of prolonged violent conflict, with Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province operating largely within the former Northern British Cameroons and the Anglophone armed conflict persisting within the former Southern British Cameroons. This geographical convergence raises fundamental questions that existing literature has not sufficiently addressed. Is this unity in crisis simply coincidental, or does it reflect deeper historical, geographical and communicative realities? Have the mountainous terrain, porous borders and transnational social networks provided favourable conditions for insurgency? Are these conflicts expressions of unresolved historical grievances and perceptions of collective injustice rooted in colonial restructuring and postcolonial state formation? Or are they sustained through communication processes that continually reproduce historical memory, identity and narratives of exclusion across generations? Although previous studies have examined these conflicts from security, political, religious, socioeconomic and humanitarian perspectives, little scholarly attention has been devoted to explaining why historically related territories on both sides of the Nigeria Cameroon border continue to experience parallel patterns of insecurity despite belonging to different sovereign states. This study therefore addresses this gap by interrogating the communication ecology through which media narratives, historical memory and shared borderland identities contribute to understanding the enduring unity in crisis within the former British Cameroons borderlands.

Aim and objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate how media narratives, historical memory and the communication ecology of the former British Cameroons borderlands explain the persistence of insurgency across historically connected territories in Nigeria and Cameroon. The study sought to:

1. Examine how historical memory and shared borderland identities are communicated through media narratives within the former British Cameroons borderlands.
2. Investigate how geographical features, transnational social networks and media narratives interact in shaping the communication ecology of insurgency across the former British Cameroons borderlands.
3. Determine how historical memory, communication ecology and media narratives provide explanations for the persistence of parallel insurgencies within the historically connected territories of the former British Cameroons.

Research Questions

1. How are historical memory and shared borderland identities communicated through media narratives within the former British Cameroons borderlands?
2. How do geographical features, transnational social networks and media narratives interact in shaping the communication ecology of insurgency across the former British Cameroons borderlands?

3. How do historical memory, communication ecology and media narratives explain the persistence of parallel insurgencies within the historically connected territories of the former British Cameroons?

Literature Review

Mustapha and Meagher (2020), in their study titled *Overcoming Boko Haram: Faith, Society and Islamic Radicalization in Northern Nigeria*, investigated the interaction between social structures, religious networks and local environments in sustaining or mitigating insurgency across northeastern Nigeria. The study sought to explain why particular communities proved more vulnerable to extremist mobilisation despite sharing similar political conditions with neighbouring areas. Guided principally by Social Network Theory and conflict transformation perspectives, the researchers adopted a qualitative multiple case study design. Data were drawn from documentary evidence, interviews, community engagements and previous field investigations conducted across the Lake Chad Basin. Participants were purposively selected from affected communities, religious organisations, civil society groups and security stakeholders. Findings revealed that insurgency was sustained not only by difficult terrain and porous borders but also by dense communication networks linking families, traders, religious leaders and displaced populations across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. These networks facilitated the circulation of information, narratives, resources and ideological messages that transcended national frontiers. The study concluded that counterinsurgency strategies should move beyond military operations to incorporate community communication systems, local institutions and cross border social relationships. It recommended strengthening community based communication structures, regional cooperation and strategic engagement with trusted local actors to counter extremist narratives.

Pelckmans (2022), in the article *Borderlands, Mobility and Insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin*, examined how mobility, border crossing and communication among frontier populations influence insecurity within the Lake Chad region. The study aimed to understand the relationship between borderland livelihoods, transnational movement and violent extremism. Drawing on Borderland Theory, the researcher employed an ethnographic design involving long term field observation, interviews and documentary analysis conducted in communities located along the Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger borders. Respondents were selected purposively because of their long residence and active participation in cross border trade and community life. Findings demonstrated that the same communication routes used for commerce, pastoral migration and family interaction also became channels through which rumours, propaganda, recruitment messages and security information travelled rapidly across national boundaries. The study established that borderland communication systems neither created insurgency nor remained neutral to it; rather, they significantly shaped how communities perceived threats, negotiated security and responded to state interventions. The study recommended that border governance should integrate indigenous communication practices, community intelligence and cross border cooperation into regional peace building initiatives.

Demarest, Godefroidt and Langer (2020), in their article titled *Understanding News Coverage of Religious based Violence: Empirical and Theoretical Insights from Media Representations of Boko Haram in Nigeria*, explored how religious demography, historical experiences and newsroom practices influenced the framing of Boko Haram by Nigerian newspapers. The study sought to determine whether media representations differed according to regional and religious contexts. Framing Theory provided the theoretical foundation, while the researchers adopted a mixed methods design comprising quantitative content analysis and qualitative interviews. The population consisted of newspaper reports on Boko Haram together with practising journalists in Nigeria. The study analysed 711 newspaper articles published between April 2014 and March 2015 in *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian*, while twenty six journalists were recruited through snowball sampling for semi structured interviews. Findings revealed that historical experiences, religious demography and political context significantly shaped the construction of media narratives. The study concluded that media framing is inseparable from collective historical memory and prevailing communication environments. It recommended conflict sensitive journalism that provides historical context capable of promoting public understanding instead of reinforcing social divisions.

Okoro and Odoemelam (2013), in their study *Print Media Framing of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: A Content Analytical Study of The Guardian, Daily Sun, Vanguard and ThisDay Newspapers*,

examined the dominant frames employed by Nigerian newspapers in reporting the Boko Haram insurgency. The objective was to identify the patterns through which newspapers constructed public understanding of insurgency. The investigation was anchored on Framing Theory and adopted a content analysis design. The population comprised reports on Boko Haram published in four national newspapers, while the selected newspapers were purposively chosen because of their national reach. Newspaper editions were systematically sampled and analysed, with inter coder reliability determined using Holsti's formula, producing a reliability coefficient of 0.86. The findings showed that policy response frames predominated in *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* and *ThisDay*, whereas *Daily Sun* relied more heavily on ethnic and religious frames. The researchers concluded that the framing choices of newspapers significantly influence how audiences interpret insurgency, responsibility and possible solutions. They recommended greater adoption of peace journalism and socially responsible reporting capable of reducing conflict escalation and strengthening national cohesion.

Forcha (2021), in the study titled *Visual Framing of the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis in Newspapers*, examined how visual images were employed by the Cameroonian press in constructing public understanding of the Anglophone crisis. The study sought to identify the dominant visual frames utilised by public and privately owned newspapers in reporting the conflict. It was anchored on Framing Theory and adopted a quantitative content analysis design. The population consisted of newspaper reports on the Anglophone crisis published during the period under investigation. Through purposive sampling, 216 newspaper articles containing 174 accompanying photographs were selected and analysed. The findings revealed two dominant frame systems, namely pro government and anti government perspectives, from which eleven salient visual frames emerged. While privately owned newspapers devoted greater attention to images depicting violence, destruction, casualties and political actors, state owned newspapers largely emphasised peace, national unity, government intervention and the restoration of normalcy. The study concluded that visual communication significantly influences public interpretation of conflict by directing attention towards particular realities while downplaying others. It recommended that media organisations should employ balanced visual reporting capable of promoting informed public discourse, reducing polarisation and strengthening peace building initiatives within conflict affected communities.

Fai and Stubbs (2024), in their article titled *Journalism and Secessionism: A Contextual Analysis of Reporting in the Cameroon Anglophone Crisis*, investigated how Cameroonian newspapers framed the Anglophone conflict within the broader context of secessionist movements in Africa. The study aimed to determine the dominant thematic frames employed by state owned and privately owned newspapers, assess the prominence accorded to the conflict and evaluate the level of journalistic independence in reporting the crisis. Guided by the evolving rhetorical approach to Framing Theory, the researchers adopted a qualitative content analysis design. The population comprised newspaper reports on the Anglophone conflict published by selected state and private newspapers. Two newspapers were purposively selected because they represented contrasting ownership structures and editorial orientations. Findings indicated that both newspapers devoted substantial attention to themes of violence and conflict resolution, although privately owned newspapers provided broader contextual explanations relating to marginalisation, identity and historical grievances, whereas state owned media emphasised national unity, constitutional order and government responses. The researchers concluded that media ownership and political context significantly shape the framing of conflict and influence public understanding of secessionist movements. They recommended strengthening editorial independence, professional journalism and context sensitive reporting capable of supporting peaceful conflict transformation rather than deepening existing divisions.

Theoretical Framework

This study was principally anchored on Framing Theory as advanced by Erving Goffman (1974) and subsequently developed for communication research by Robert Entman (1993). The theory explains that the meaning individuals attach to events depends largely on how those events are selected, organised and presented within communicative processes. Frames define problems, identify causes, assign moral responsibility and suggest possible remedies, thereby influencing public interpretation of social realities. The theory is particularly appropriate because the insurgencies in the former British Cameroons borderlands are interpreted through competing historical and contemporary narratives advanced by

governments, media organisations, local communities, international actors and non state groups. To enrich this perspective, the study was further informed by Collective Memory Theory, principally associated with Maurice Halbwachs (1992), which argues that societies preserve and reconstruct the past through shared memories transmitted across generations by social institutions, cultural practices and communication. Within the former British Cameroons borderlands, memories of colonial administration, the 1961 plebiscite, cross border kinship, perceived marginalisation and postcolonial governance continue to shape identity and political consciousness through interpersonal communication, religious institutions, traditional authority, legacy media and digital platforms. The integration of Framing Theory and Collective Memory Theory therefore provides a robust explanatory lens for examining how media narratives interact with historical memory within the communication ecology of the former British Cameroons to influence perceptions of identity, legitimacy and the persistence of insurgency across historically connected territories.

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative historical and documentary research design. Consistent with this design, data were generated from archival documents, scholarly publications, newspaper reports, reports of international organisations, colonial records and official policy documents. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure, documents were read repeatedly, coded inductively and deductively, categorised into recurring themes and interpreted within the context of the three research questions. A total of 65 documentary sources satisfied the inclusion criteria for analysis. These comprised 9 colonial and United Nations archival documents, 18 peer reviewed journal articles, 12 scholarly books, 10 reports of international organisations, 8 policy documents, and 8 newspaper and media publications. The documents were subsequently coded according to recurring concepts relevant to the objectives of the study. Similar expressions, themes and historical patterns were merged into broader analytical categories.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: *How historical memory and shared borderland identities communicate through media narratives within the former British Cameroons borderlands*

Theme	Documentary Sources (n=65)	Frequency	Representative Documentary Evidence	Communication Interpretation
Historical memory	UN Reports, Colonial Records, Journal Articles, Books	54	References to the 1961 plebiscite, British administration, League of Nations Trusteeship and colonial integration	Historical events remain dominant frames through which present realities are interpreted.
Shared border identity	Colonial Reports, Ethnographic Studies, Books	47	Shared ancestry, cultural festivals, traditional institutions and kinship networks	Identity continues to transcend political boundaries.
Cross border kinship	UN Reports, Border Studies, NGO Reports	41	Families living across Nigeria and Cameroon, intermarriages and traditional leadership structures	Communication is sustained through family and community interaction.
Common language	Linguistic Studies, Historical Documents	36	Fulfulde, Kanuri, Ejagham and other indigenous languages spoken across borders	Indigenous languages facilitate uninterrupted communication despite international boundaries.
Religious networks	Church Records, Islamic Studies, NGO Reports	33	Shared churches, mosques, pilgrimage routes and faith organisations	Religious communication reinforces transnational social cohesion.



Media framing	Newspapers, Television Reports, Journal Articles	49	Conflict framed as terrorism, separatism, insecurity or humanitarian crisis	Media influence public understanding through selective framing of events.
Colonial legacy	Historical Monographs, Archival Records	45	Administrative integration under British rule before 1961	Colonial experience remains a recurring communication reference point.
Collective memory	Historical Narratives, Oral History Studies	44	Persistent references to the plebiscite and postcolonial state formation	Communities continue to interpret contemporary conflict through remembered history.

The documentary evidence demonstrates that historical memory constitutes the principal communication resource through which borderland communities understand their identity and present circumstances. The recurrence of references to the British administration, the 1961 plebiscite and cross border relationships across diverse documentary sources indicates that collective memory continues to shape media narratives and public discourse within the former British Cameroons.

Table 2: How geographical features, transnational social networks and media narratives interact in shaping the communication ecology of insurgency across the former British Cameroons borderlands

Theme	Documentary Sources	Frequency	Representative Documentary Evidence	Communication Significance
Porous borders	UNDP, ICG, AU Reports	52	Unregulated crossing points and weak border enforcement	Facilitates movement of both people and information.
Mountainous terrain	Maps, Security Reports	38	Mandara Mountains and forest corridors	Physical geography limits surveillance and enhances concealment.
Transnational mobility	Migration Reports	49	Seasonal migration, refugee movement and commercial activities	Sustains interpersonal communication across borders.
Communication networks	Community Studies	51	Traditional rulers, market associations, religious institutions	Local communication structures remain highly influential.
Cross border trade	ECOWAS, AU Documents	40	Livestock, agricultural produce and informal commerce	Economic interactions strengthen communication ties.
Refugee movement	UNHCR Reports	34	Population displacement into neighbouring states	Humanitarian movement expands communication networks.
Community intelligence	Security Reports	29	Local surveillance and early warning mechanisms	Indigenous communication contributes to local security.



Media communication	Newspapers, Radio, Digital Platforms	43	Radio broadcasts, online media and social networking platforms	Information flows increasingly transcend national borders.
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Data in the above table show that geography alone does not account for insurgency. Rather, physical terrain interacts with communication networks established through trade, migration, kinship and religious institutions to create a communication ecology capable of transmitting information, ideology and collective responses across the Nigeria Cameroon frontier.

Table 3: How do historical memory, communication ecology and media narratives explain the persistence of parallel insurgencies within the historically connected territories of the former British Cameroons?

Theme	Documentary Sources	Frequency	Representative Documentary Evidence	Analytical Implication
Communication ecology	Communication Literature, Media Reports	55	Interaction among traditional, interpersonal and digital communication systems	Communication environment influences conflict persistence.
Media narratives	Newspapers, Broadcast Media	50	Terrorism, separatism, state security and humanitarian framing	Different frames shape competing public interpretations.
Historical grievances	Historical Studies	48	Colonial partition, political exclusion and constitutional debates	Historical memory remains politically relevant.
Colonial legacy	Archival Documents	47	British administrative integration and the 1961 plebiscite	Colonial experiences continue to shape identity.
Political exclusion	Governance Reports	46	Perceived marginalisation and unequal representation	Feelings of exclusion are reinforced through communication.
Identity construction	Borderland Studies	44	Shared history and cultural continuity	Identity remains stronger than political boundaries in many communities.
Collective memory	Oral Histories and Historical Literature	43	Community recollections of the British Cameroons	Shared memory provides continuity across generations.
State legitimacy	Government Documents and Policy Reports	37	Public perceptions of governance and state authority	Legitimacy is continually negotiated through communication processes.

The documentary evidence demonstrates that the persistence of parallel insurgencies cannot be explained by geography, religion or politics in isolation. Instead, communication ecology emerges as the central integrating factor through which historical memory, identity, media narratives and perceptions of legitimacy interact across historically connected territories. This finding supports the

argument that the former British Cameroons remain united not politically but through enduring communicative, historical and socio-cultural processes that continue to shape responses to conflict.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study demonstrates that historical memory constitutes the dominant communicative resource through which the former British Cameroons borderlands continue to construct and interpret identity across the Nigeria Cameroon frontier. This finding extends to the empirical observations of Okoro and Odoemelam (2013), whose analysis was principally concerned with the framing patterns adopted by four Nigerian newspapers in reporting Boko Haram. Whereas their study established that policy response, ethnic and religious frames dominated newspaper coverage, the present investigation reveals that those frames themselves derive meaning from a much older communicative reservoir sustained by collective memory and historical consciousness. Likewise, Demarest et al. (2020) demonstrated that historical and religious contexts influenced newspaper framing of Boko Haram, yet their investigation remained largely within contemporary journalistic practice. By integrating colonial records, United Nations archival documents, historical monographs, policy reports and contemporary media literature, the present study establishes that historical memory functions not as a peripheral variable but as the principal communication infrastructure linking communities that have remained politically separated since 1961. Consequently, the communication ecology of the former British Cameroons possesses a historical depth largely absent from previous empirical investigations, thereby explaining why narratives of identity, exclusion and belonging continue to resonate across sovereign borders more than six decades after constitutional separation.

The second finding indicates that insurgency within the former British Cameroons cannot be adequately explained by physical geography, political exclusion or socioeconomic conditions when considered independently. Documentary evidence revealed that 52 documents (80.0%) identified porous borders as a major enabling condition, 51 documents (78.5%) highlighted communication networks, while 49 documents (75.4%) emphasised transnational mobility across the Nigeria Cameroon frontier. These findings both corroborate and deepen earlier studies. Mustapha and Meagher (2020) correctly identified the importance of community networks, religious institutions and border interactions in sustaining or mitigating violent extremism across the Lake Chad Basin, while Pelckmans (2022) demonstrated that mobility and frontier livelihoods significantly shape insecurity within the region. However, the present study departs from these investigations by demonstrating that communication ecology provides the conceptual bridge through which these seemingly independent variables converge. The evidence suggests that mountainous landscapes, forest corridors and porous frontiers do not generate insurgency by themselves. Instead, they facilitate the operation of long established communication systems comprising family networks, traditional authorities, commercial exchanges, religious organisations and increasingly digital communication platforms through which narratives, intelligence, rumours, ideological messages and collective memories circulate. This explains why geographically disconnected but historically connected territories continue to exhibit similar patterns of instability. The study therefore advances communication scholarship by shifting analytical attention from geography as a physical determinant to communication ecology as the mediating structure through which geographical realities acquire strategic significance.

The third finding provides perhaps the most significant contribution of this investigation by explaining the paradox embedded within the title of the study, namely, *Divided by Borders, United by Crisis*. The documentary analysis revealed that communication ecology recorded the highest frequency of occurrence (55 documents; 84.6%), followed by media narratives (50; 76.9%), historical grievances (48; 73.8%), colonial legacy (47; 72.3%) and political exclusion (46; 70.8%). Unlike previous empirical studies, which examined Boko Haram and the Cameroon Anglophone conflict as distinct phenomena, the present study demonstrates that both conflicts occupy historically contiguous territories whose shared communicative heritage predates the emergence of modern Nigeria and Cameroon. Forcha (2021) and Fai and Stubbs (2024) convincingly established that media ownership influences the framing of the Anglophone conflict, while Demarest et al. (2020) and Okoro and Odoemelam (2013) similarly demonstrated framing differences in Nigerian newspapers covering Boko Haram. Nevertheless, none of these investigations interrogated why two ideologically unrelated insurgencies should emerge and persist within territories formerly administered as a single British colonial space. By synthesising evidence from

colonial archives, League of Nations and United Nations records, International Crisis Group reports, UNDP assessments, border studies, communication scholarship and media analyses, the present study identifies communication ecology as the missing explanatory variable. The findings suggest that the former British Cameroons remain connected through enduring historical memory, transnational identities, linguistic continuity, kinship structures, religious affiliations and media narratives that continually reproduce shared perceptions of identity, legitimacy and exclusion. The significance of this contribution lies in its interdisciplinary integration of communication studies, history, borderland studies and international relations into a unified explanatory framework capable of accounting for the persistence of parallel insurgencies within historically connected territories. In doing so, the study moves beyond conventional security explanations and offers a novel communication-centred interpretation of why territories divided politically since 1961 continue to exhibit remarkable convergence in contemporary patterns of conflict.

Conclusion

The realities confronting the former British Cameroons borderlands present one of the most profound paradoxes in contemporary African history. Although the territories that once constituted a common administrative space under British rule were politically separated in 1961, the communities of Bamenda, Mamfe, Buea, Kumba and Kumbo in Cameroon, together with Maiduguri, Mubi and Jalingo and their surrounding communities in Borno, Adamawa and Taraba States of Nigeria, continue to share far more than an international boundary. They remain connected by history, kinship, culture, language, memory and, regrettably, by the enduring burden of violent conflict. Thousands of lives have been lost, millions displaced and generations of young people have watched their hopes diminished by crises whose persistence defies conventional political and military explanations. History repeatedly demonstrates that societies often inherit conflicts they neither initiated nor desired. Across different epochs and civilisations, individuals and institutions have sown the seeds of discord, only to leave succeeding generations to harvest mistrust, displacement and violence. Such a legacy represents one of humanity's greatest injustices. The former British Cameroons exemplifies this painful reality, where unresolved historical experiences, competing narratives and fractured political relationships continue to reverberate through contemporary communication systems and conflict environments. If history can be transmitted through communication, so too can reconciliation, mutual understanding and the rebuilding of trust. Media, educational institutions, religious organisations and traditional authorities therefore possess a collective responsibility not only to recount history but also to reshape its meaning in ways that encourage coexistence rather than division.

Thus, the future of the former British Cameroons borderlands cannot rest solely on military victories or political settlements. Lasting peace requires a deliberate commitment to communicating history responsibly, preserving shared humanity and nurturing relationships that transcend inherited boundaries. Learning to live together and, indeed, to leave behind a legacy of justice, understanding and peaceful coexistence remains one of the noblest responsibilities of every generation. For the peoples of Bamenda, Mamfe, Buea, Kumba and Kumbo, together with those of Maiduguri, Mubi, Jalingo and the wider communities of Borno, Adamawa and Taraba States, the pursuit of a secure, dignified and flourishing life is no longer simply an aspiration; it is an urgent historical necessity. Only through such a commitment can these historically connected lands cease to be united by crisis and instead become united once more by hope, shared purpose and enduring peace.

Recommendations

1. Governments, media organisations and regional institutions in Nigeria and Cameroon should develop a joint borderland communication framework that promotes historically informed, conflict sensitive and peace oriented media narratives capable of strengthening shared understanding while countering divisive and extremist messaging.

2. Cross border security initiatives should integrate indigenous communication systems, traditional institutions, religious networks and community based information structures into intelligence gathering, early warning mechanisms and peacebuilding programmes in recognition of their strategic role within the communication ecology of the former British Cameroons borderlands.

The African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Economic Community of Central African States and relevant academic institutions should support collaborative historical memory and

borderland communication projects that preserve shared heritage, address competing narratives of exclusion and foster sustainable dialogue among historically connected communities across the Nigeria Cameroon frontier.

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