



# Migingio Island Border Dispute in East Africa: A Comparative Analysis of Kenyan and Ugandan Newspaper Coverage

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**Abstract:** Drawing on agenda-setting, priming and framing theories, this study compares the coverage of Migingio Island ownership dispute in Kenya's *Nation* and *The Standard* and Uganda's *Monitor* and *New Vision* newspapers. Contents published in 92 issues, between March 1 and December 31, 2009, were studied. The analysis established that both Kenyan and Ugandan newspapers published the conflict mainly in their interior pages with both sides identifying an in-existent borderline as a cause. However, the Kenyan press published the issue more frequently and front-paged a few of its stories while blaming the Ugandan security forces as the main cause of the conflict. Skewed coverage pattern, arising from reporters' nationalistic behavior and desire to serve a domestic audience, was noticed. This has implications for conflict-sensitive reporting of interstate border conflicts in Africa.

**Keywords:** Migingio Island, border dispute, newspaper coverage, framing, content analysis, Kenya, Uganda.

## Introduction

The dispute between Kenya and Uganda over Migingio Island in Lake

Victoria has received media coverage worldwide since 2004. Birungi (2009: 40) notes that "the conflict over Migingio Island was

largely fanned by the growing media industry and improved information and communication technologies." Shaka (2013: 36) asserts that the coverage of the conflict "has sometimes been sensational, depicting Kenya and Uganda as being on the verge of war." Unimpressively, however, studies are either not visible or non-existent on *how* the media from these two countries have reported the conflict. This underpins the rationale for this study.

This research sought to compare the coverage of Migingo Island border dispute in the *Nation*, and *The Standard* from Kenya and Uganda's *Monitor* and *New Vision* newspapers between March 1, 2009, and December 31, 2009. The conflict escalated during this period, leading to more coverage of it by the media (Kisiangani, 2011; Muchege, 2017; Okumu, 2010; Shaka, 2013; Wekesa, 2010). A stoked conflict, especially the type that relates to international border disputes, is a natural attraction for newsmen (Omojola & Yartey, 2016; Morah & Omojola, 2011; Okorie et al. 2017).

In dispute situations, such as the one under investigation here, news media are expected to inform and educate the masses about the conflicts (Afaghani, 2011; Kiboi, 2016; Wafula, 2013). The news media should provide a balanced coverage that could make the

warring sit at the negotiating table (Che, Tanjong, Wantchami, Tabuwe & Bisong, 2016; Mutere & Ugangu, 2004; Ochichi, 2009). Balanced coverage of interstate border conflicts puts "pressure to bear on the media to go beyond the scope of national interests" (Mutere & Ugangu, 2004, p. 87). Concerning Migingo Island dispute, however, it appears journalists have pursued their national interests (Nyabuga, 2011). Nevertheless, such coverage is commonplace in interstate conflicts as reporters tend to skew their narratives in favor of their countries and target audiences (Che et al., 2016; Puddephatt, 2006). Various scholars have indicated that media can cause or even escalate conflicts through propaganda and misinformation (Afaghani, 2011; Mutere & Ugangu, 2004; Puddephatt, 2006). This work provides the opportunity to put this assertion to the test.

### **Significance of the Study**

The justification for this study is anchored on the need for Kenya and Uganda to peacefully resolve the Migingo Island dispute. Analyzing the contents of the dominant newspapers' reports can assist tremendously in facilitating that resolution. Knowing if the media have stoked or lessen the conflict in their reports is important to how both governments should act in the matter. Mumma-Martinon (2010:18)

notes that "tensions like the one in Migingo have a serious economic bearing on the region." Migingo Island dispute has serious negative political and economic effects on not only Kenya and Uganda but entire East Africa's integration efforts and cooperation. The media can help in restoring and keeping the peace.

Migingo Island row remains unresolved despite all the diplomatic efforts put in place, including carrying out joint surveys since 2013 (Gettleman, 2009; Omondi, 2014; Shaka, 2013; Warui, 2013). Policy makers will need to know the direction of media reporting to guide their decision-making process and make informed decisions in terms of diplomacy. This work is also important to media practitioners and scholars within Africa especially those interested in conflict reporting. Newspaper editorial managers can use the study's findings to develop or revise their guidelines for reporting border disputes.

### **On the Migingo Island Dispute**

This study focused on the conflict over the ownership of Migingo Island located on Lake Victoria, which measures about a half an acre in size (Warui, 2013) and how Kenyan and Ugandan media have reported it. The Island is situated 5.4 nautical miles (10 kilometers) off Kenya's Sori-Bay in Karungu division, Migori district (Birungi,

2009; Mnjama, 2012; Rossi, 2018). It has approximately 1,000 inhabitants (Kisiangani, 2011; Shaka, 2013; Sing'oei, 2009) with the majority of them being Kenyans of the Luo ethnic group.

Many border conflicts in Africa are traceable to irresponsible and inconsiderate demarcations by colonialists (Kornprobst, 2002; Mnjama, 2012; Rossi, 2018). Territorially, Migingo Island has been administered by Kenya since 1926 under the Kenya Colony and Protectorate (Boundaries) Order in Council (Muchege, 2017; Wekesa, 2010). Migingo Island conflict has been noticed since 2004 when Uganda deployed its forces on the Island and later in 2009 imposed a special tax on Kenyan fishermen (Gettleman, 2009; Kisiangani, 2011; Muchege, 2017; Okumu, 2010; Shaka, 2013; Sing'oei, 2009; Wekesa, 2010).

The waters around Migingo Island in Lake Victoria are rich in fish assets and resources while the Island serves as a landing site for fishermen from both Kenya and Uganda (Birungi, 2009; Mumma- Martinon, 2010; Warui, 2013). The conflict over Migingo Island has been fueled by the uncertainty over its ownership and unguarded statements by politicians from both countries (Omondi, 2014). Kisiangani (2011) notes that the Island's dispute was worsened by remarks by Ugandan

President Yoweri Museveni that Migingo Island was in Kenya but the waters around it were in Uganda, claiming, therefore, that Kenyan inhabitants on the Island would not be allowed to fish in a Ugandan territory.

### Statement of the Problem

Substantial literature focuses on the historical, political and legal aspects of Migingo Island dispute. However, there seems to be a dearth of in-depth research concerning how the media have covered the conflict and this challenge resonates in many similar disputes around the world (Tobechukwu, 2007). This study compares the coverage of the dispute in the *Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers from Kenya and Uganda's *Monitor* and *New Vision* in the period covering March 1, 2009, and December 31, 2009.

### Research Questions

1. What was the frequency of the coverage of Migingo Island dispute between March 2009 and December 2009?
2. What was the prominence of coverage given to Migingo Island?
3. What causes of the dispute were presented in the coverage?

### Literature Review

Mnjama (2012) traces border disputes in East Africa to colonial boundaries that were created without regard to the needs of the local

communities. This ended in the tribes being divided between the two states. The division has widened owing to the trans-border resources of high economic value (such as fisheries in the territorial Islands) that have added to the competing interests between the two sovereign states. Puddephatt (2006) holds the view that the media can, through partisanship, contribute to the violence in conflict situations or, by reporting objectively, can support the resolution of the conflict. Similarly, Afaghani (2011, p. 1) asserts that "news media play a central role in exposing conflict situations by bringing conflicting parties and disputed issues to light." However, the media can also cause or even escalate conflicts through propaganda and misinformation (Afaghani, 2011; Mutere & Ugungu, 2004; Puddephatt, 2006).

The primary role of the media in dispute situations is to inform and educate the masses about the conflicts (Kiboi, 2016; Wafula, 2013). In conflict situations, the media is expected to provide the public with complete, reliable and unbiased information that facilitates the resolution of the conflict (Ochichi, 2009). The way news media fulfill these functions through agenda setting, priming and framing can impact a conflict. Media coverage of conflicts shapes public opinions about them. MCK - The

Media Council of Kenya (2016, p. 1) - posits that “various audiences and stakeholders in conflict situations depend on the media for information, especially during conflict situation where dialogue is non-existent.”

According to Che et al. (2016), media coverage of conflicts should be balanced so that the audience can make informed decisions about the disputes. In agreement, MCK (2016) states that: “accurate, objective and reliable reporting of conflict by journalists is very important” (p. 3). In reporting conflicts, there should be diversity in the way story ideas are developed and reported and inclusiveness in choosing sources and giving voice to the voiceless (Mutere & Ugungu, 2004). Moreover, the need exists for journalists to have adequate knowledge of the conflict situation that they are reporting about (MCK, 2016). In summary, a journalist should adhere to journalistic principles of accuracy, objectivity, and fairness.

Migingyo Island ownership dispute coverage falls within “the issue of conflict in international shared water resources, which is highly political in its nature” (Mumma- Martinon, 2010, p.2) and is currently the subject of considerable international debate. Some scholars acknowledge that media coverage of Migingyo Island dispute has been sensational

and riddled with bias as some media outlets have been pro-Kenya while others have been pro-Uganda (Nyabuga, 2011; Shaka, 2013; Wafula, 2013). Media coverage of the Migingyo Island dispute shows that “journalists often resort to nationalistic, jingoistic and ‘patriotic’ rhetoric when it comes to territorial and sovereignty issues” (Nyabuga, 2011, p.142). This shows how journalists, as individuals and influenced by external factors, can produce and package news (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

Illustrating the negative language of the media coverage of Migingyo Island conflict, Nyabuga (2011, p.141) notes that Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni was “regularly described in Kenya’s media as an expansionist and even “blindly” ambitious”. Bias in reporting conflicts is reflected through systematic under-reporting or over-reporting of certain events and issues. It also includes journalists giving their opinions about the conflict situation. For instance, in the Migingyo Island dispute, media reports have been quick to analyze and give their opinions on which country owns the Island (Shaka, 2013). A study by Wafula (2013) has established that in Migingyo Island dispute coverage, journalists were often reporting from one side only, thereby eliminating objectivity as an ethical principle.

## Framework

This study is anchored on the agenda-setting, priming, and framing theories. Agenda setting theory is useful in explaining how the process of news story selection for publication impacts the media audiences (Alao, 2018). According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the media set the agenda for public opinion by highlighting certain issues and thereby telling people not what to think, but what to think of. This is attained by the media selecting what content to publish, where to publish it (placement) and the type of language (framing) to use in the articles. In this study, the agenda-setting function of media coverage was determined based on the frequency and placement of stories in newspapers. The agenda-setting system postulates that “the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it” (Alao, 2018, p.4). The theory also assumes that “media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues” (Alao, 2018, p.4). Ochichi (2009, p. 13) expatiates on this, noting that, “the mass media influence their audience by the type of stories they consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space they give those articles.”

Beyond agenda setting is the media’s power to *prime*. According

to Iyengar and Kinder (1987), priming involves a situation in which news media attend to some issues and not others, thereby altering the standards by which people evaluate issues. On priming, McQuail (2010) argues as follows:

Reference is sometimes made (especially in political communication research) to ‘media priming’ effects, as a more specific aspect of agenda-setting. The idea of priming originated in social learning theory and the study of effects in aggression. It also has a long history in election campaign research in the attempts by politicians to be associated with the issues on which they have the strongest reputation (p. 514).

Just as is the case with the agenda-setting function of the media, priming could have made the newspapers under investigation cover some issues and ignore others concerning the border dispute. This may have altered the way opinion leaders and citizens of the two countries evaluated the conflict.

Framing is concerned with how news stories are packaged in the media (Nyambuga, 2011; Shah, Watts, Domke & Fan, 2002). In conflict situations, Afaghani (2011, p.19) asserts that “the framing of events and issues emphasized by the media has an amplified effect on the people who are participating in the

conflict". Through framing, the media organize "complex news stories around distinctive arguments and themes while concurrently downplaying others, journalists help to shape an issue's deeper meanings and implications for the public" (Shah et al. 2002, p.343).

The framing theory posits that "media content which is transmitted to media audiences is influenced by journalistic norms and the world view of individual journalists" (Nyambuga, 2011, p.109). This postulation may help explain why journalists from the Kenyan and Ugandan newspapers had different news frames for Migingo Island row. As Che et al. (2016) argue, journalists in a bid to protect their national interests create biased news media coverage of conflicts, a view supported by Puddephatt (2006).

MCK (2016, p. vii) notes that there is a need for journalists to "provide background information and context on conflicts in an accurate and credible frame." It is assumed that the editors of the newspapers studied may have chosen to highlight certain aspects of the dispute and de-emphasize others using deliberate frames. These frames were those favoring their national interests and domestic audiences' needs. As some authors have noted (Shoemaker and Reese, 2014; Omojola, 2008a; Omojola, 2008b) have acknowledged, the audience as a

driver of advertising can influence news media content.

### Methodology

This study analyzed articles on Migingo Island dispute published in the daily and weekend editions of the *Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers from Kenya and *New Vision* and *Monitor* from Uganda from March 1, 2009, to December 31, 2009. The selection of the four English language newspapers was informed by their wider circulation and their position as a significant component of the dominant media in the two countries (Alina, 2013; Nyabuga & Booker, 2013).

The *Nation* and *Monitor* are privately-owned and published by the Nation Media Group, a leading media conglomerate in East Africa. *The Standard*, which is also privately-owned, is published by the Standard Group. *New Vision* is owned by the Government of Uganda (Alina, 2013). Citing the 2010 Media Barometer Report, Alina (2013) notes that though *New Vision* faces some challenges owing to the hyper-competition of the media industry, it nonetheless remains a respectable government mouthpiece.

The content analysis involves a population of 1,224 issues. Kerlinger, cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2006, p. 127), defines content analysis as "a method of

studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner to measure variables." The randomized sample size for this research consists of 92 issues - 23 from each of the four newspapers. The unit of analysis is every article covering Mgingo Island dispute and it wouldn't make any difference whether it is news, features, letters to the editor, editorials or opinion articles (Ochichi, 2009). Added to these genres in the study are cartoons, photographs, advertisements, and commentaries. Data were collected by the researchers using a coding sheet. The data, with inter-coder reliability of 0.7 was analyzed to generate the descriptive statistics. As Wimmer and Dominick (2006) have noted, counting is crucial in content analysis, which is why frequency distributions contingency tables and bar charts are prominent in this work. The contents that captured the conflict are categorized as follows:

- *Frequency of newspaper coverage of the dispute.* This was determined by counting the total number of news reports on Mgingo Island dispute in the newspapers analyzed.
- *Size of newspaper story:* This variable which represents prominence of news articles indicates the size of newspaper articles: very small (below 2

square inches), small (2- 4 square inches), medium (4-6 square inches), big (6-9 square inches) and very big (above 8 square inches). The bigger the size of a story, the more prominent the story was deemed to be.

- *Placement of newspaper story:* This variable which denotes the significance of news reports indicates where an item appeared in the newspaper, namely: front page, inside pages and back pages. Front page placement means very important stories, back page stories are next in prominence and stories in the interior pages are least in the order of importance.
- *Type of newspaper article:* This is operationalized as the genres namely news, features, editorials, letters to the editors, commentaries, cartoons, pictures, and advertisements.

### **Findings**

Two hundred (200) newspaper stories were coded and analyzed in this study from the sample size of 92 issues obtained from the four selected newspapers in Kenya and Uganda published between March 1, 2009, and December 31, 2009.

### ***Frequency of Coverage Given to Mgingo Island Dispute***

Out of 200 articles on Migingo Island dispute, 71.5 percent and 28.5 percent were from newspapers published in Kenya and Uganda respectively. Figure 1 shows that news stories were the main genre

(77.5%) used to present the dispute in the four newspapers analyzed. The least used genres were editorials and letters to the editors as each was represented by 2 percent.

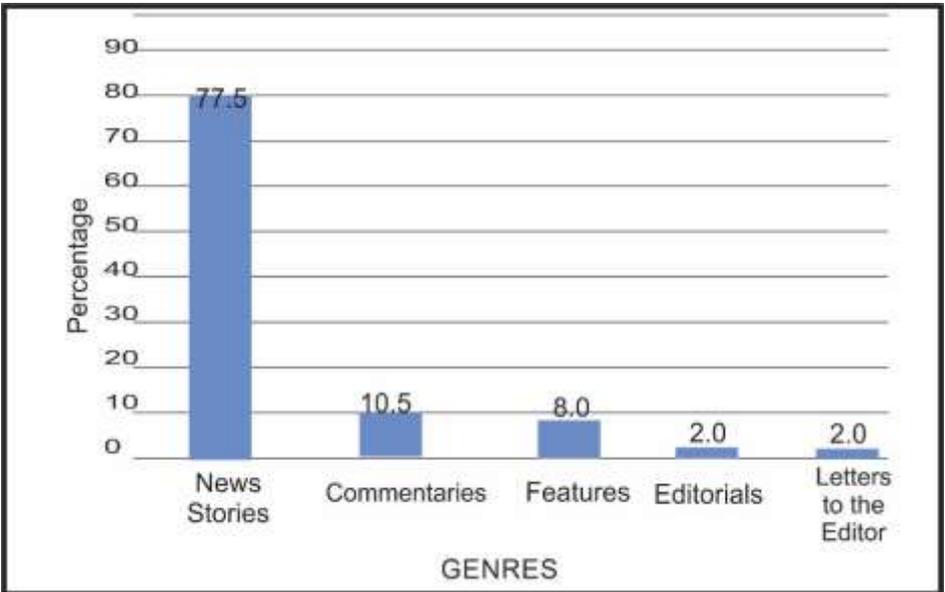


Figure 1: Distribution of newspaper stories on the conflict by genres

Table 1 shows that out of 155 news stories on Migingo Island dispute, 72.9 percent and 27.1 percent were from newspapers from Kenya and Uganda respectively. As observed in Table 1, 57.1 and 42.9 percent of commentaries were published in the Kenyan and Ugandan press correspondingly. Feature stories from the Kenyan press and the

Ugandan press accounted for 81.3 percent and 18.7 percent of features on the conflict. All editorials on the conflict were published in the Kenyan print media. Three-quarters of all the letters to the editors were from the Ugandan press while the Kenyan newspapers were represented by a quarter of these letters.

Table 1: Distribution of newspaper stories by genres

Genres	Newspapers from Kenya			Newspapers from Uganda			Total	
		<i>Nation</i>	<i>The Standard</i>	Sub-total	<i>Monitor</i>	<i>New Vision</i>		Sub-total
News stories	n	75	38	113	16	26	42	155
	%	48.4	24.5	72.9	10.3	16.8	27.1	100.0
Commentaries	n	10	2	12	6	3	9	21
	%	47.6	9.5	57.1	28.6	14.3	42.9	100.0
Features	n	7	6	13	3	0	3	16
	%	43.8	37.5	81.3	18.7	0.0	18.7	100.0
Editorials	n	2	2	4	0	0	0	4
	%	50.0	50.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Letters to the editors	n	1	0	1	3	0	3	4
	%	25.0	0.0	25.0	75.0	0.0	75.0	100.0
Total	n	95	48	143	28	29	57	200
	%	47.5	24.0	71.5	14.0	14.5	28.5	100.0

Table 2 reveals that news stories accounted for 79 percent of all the articles about Migingo Island row in newspapers from Kenya as compared to 73.7 percent from Uganda. Commentaries comprised of 15.7 percent of articles published in newspapers from Uganda in comparison to 8.4 percent in the Kenyan press. Feature stories

accounted for 9.1 percent of articles in Kenya in contrast to 5.3 percent in Ugandan print media. A total of 2.8 percent of articles in the Kenyan press were editorials compared to nil from Ugandan newspapers. Letters to the editors were 5.3 percent and 0.7 percent of articles in newspapers from Uganda and Kenya.

Table 2: Comparison of Kenyan and Ugandan newspaper articles by genres

Genres	Kenyan newspapers		Ugandan newspapers	
	F	%	F	%
News stories	113	79.0	42	73.7
Commentaries	12	8.4	9	15.7
Features	13	9.1	3	5.3
Editorials	4	2.8	0	0.0
Letters to the editors	1	0.7	3	5.3
Total	143	100.0	57	100.0

### Prominence Given to Newspaper Coverage of Migingo Island Conflict

Figure 2 illustrates that newspaper stories published on Migingo Island dispute comprised of various sizes as

follows: very small (6.0%), small (26.0%), medium-size (38.5%), big (20.0%), and very big (9.5%). The bigger the size of a newspaper article, the more prominent the story was deemed to be.

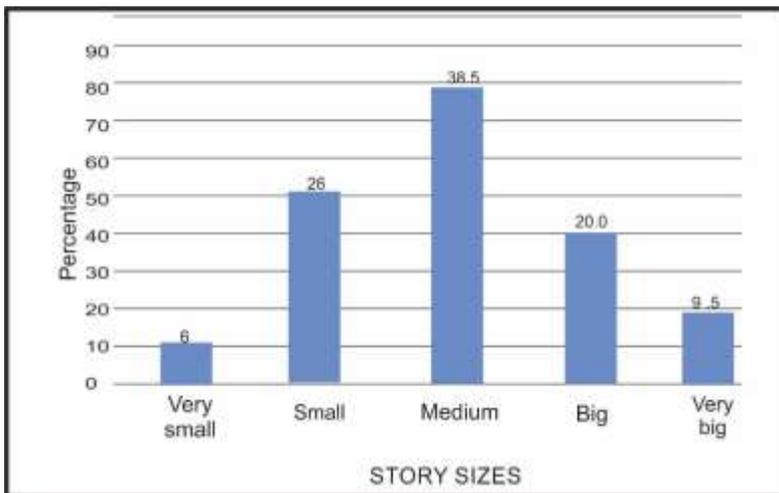


Figure 2: Distribution of newspaper stories on the dispute by size

From Table 3, it is visible that 58.3 percent of all articles classified as very small were from newspapers in Uganda in contrast to 41.7 percent from the Kenyan press. A total of 76.9 percent and 23.1 percent of small-sized stories were published in newspapers from Kenya and Uganda respectively. Medium-sized stories accounted for 74 percent and 26

percent of newspaper stories from Kenya and Uganda respectively. Some 65 of big-sized stories were from Kenya as compared to 35 percent from Uganda. Very big-sized stories from print media in Kenya accounted for 78.9 percent as compared to 21.1 percent for newspapers from Uganda.

**Table 3: Sizes of newspaper stories**

Story sizes	Kenyan press				Ugandan press			Total
	<i>Nation</i>	<i>The Standard</i>	Sub-total	<i>Monitor</i>	<i>New Vision</i>	Sub-total		
Very small	n	4	1	5	7	0	7	12
	%	33.3	8.3	41.7	58.3	0.0	58.3	100.0
Small	n	35	5	40	5	7	12	52
	%	67.3	9.6	76.9	9.6	13.5	23.1	100.0
Medium	n	41	16	57	9	11	20	77
	%	53.2	20.8	74.0	11.7	14.3	26.0	100.0
Big	n	9	17	26	4	10	14	40
	%	22.5	42.5	65.0	10.0	25.0	35.0	100.0
Very big	n	6	9	15	3	1	4	19
	%	31.6	47.4	78.9	15.8	5.3	21.1	100.0
Total	n	95	48	143	28	29	57	200
	%	47.5	24.0	71.5	14.0	14.5	28.5	100.0

Table 4 reveals that 12.3 percent of all stories published in Ugandan newspapers were categorized as very small as opposed to 3.5 percent from the Kenyan press. Some 28 percent in the Kenyan press were classified as small as compared to 21.1 percent from Ugandan media. Nearly 40 percent of all Kenyan press stories on

Migingo Island dispute were medium-sized in comparison to nearly 35 percent in the Ugandan newspapers. Ugandan big-sized press reports on the conflict were 24.5 percent more than the 18.2 percent in the *Nation* and *The Standard* from Kenya. Very big sized stories accounted for 10.5 percent of all articles on the conflict

published in the Kenyan press as opposed to 7 percent in the Ugandan press.

Table 4: Comparison of Kenyan and Ugandan newspaper articles by sizes

Story sizes	Kenyan newspapers		Ugandan newspapers	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Very small	5	3.5	7	12.3
Small	40	28.0	12	21.1
Medium	57	39.8	20	35.1
Big	26	18.2	14	24.5
Very big	15	10.5	4	7.0
Total	143	100.0	57	100.0

As seen in Figure 3, Migingo Island controversy stories were placed in the newspapers as follows: inside

pages (89.5%), front pages (9.0%), and back pages (1.5%).

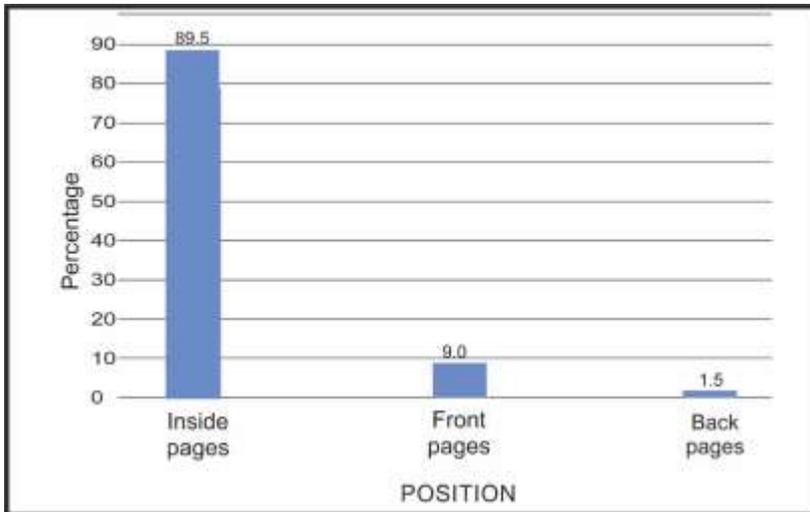


Figure 3: Distribution of Migingo Island dispute stories by positions of placement

Table 5 illustrates that front-page stories in the press from Kenya and Uganda were equal at 50.0 percent

each. As seen in Table 5, all the stories placed on back pages were published in newspapers from

Kenya. A total of 73.2 percent of articles placed in inside pages were from newspapers from Kenya in contrast to 26.8 percent from Uganda.

Table 5: Placement of newspaper stories

Position	Kenyan print media			Ugandan print media			Total	
	<i>Nation</i>	<i>The Standard</i>	Sub-total	<i>Monitor</i>	<i>New Vision</i>	Sub-total		
Front pages	n	5	4	9	0	9	9	18
	%	27.8	22.2	50.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	100.0
Back pages	n	2	1	3	0	0	0	3
	%	66.7	33.3	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Inside pages	n	88	43	131	28	20	48	179
	%	49.2	24.0	73.2	15.6	11.2	26.8	100.0
Total	n	95	48	143	28	29	57	200
	%	47.5	24.0	71.5	14.0	14.5	28.5	100.0

Table 6 reveals that 15.8 percent of all stories in Ugandan newspapers were published on front pages as opposed to 6.3 percent from the Kenyan press. Stories placed on the back pages were 2.1 percent of

all the articles published in the Kenyan print media. Inside page stories constituted 91.6 percent and 84.2 percent published in the Kenyan and Uganda press respectively.

Table 6: Comparison of Kenyan and Ugandan articles by positions of placement in the newspapers

Position	Kenyan newspapers		Ugandan newspapers	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
Front pages	9	6.3	9	15.8
Back pages	3	2.1	0	0.0
Inside pages	131	91.6	48	84.2
Total	143	100.0	57	100.0

### Newspaper Presentation of Causes of Migingo Island Dispute

Various reasons were advanced in the newspapers regarding the causes of Migingo Island conflict. From Figure 4, it can be seen that a total of 63.2 percent of the newspaper articles identified the un-demarcated Kenya-Uganda

border in Lake Victoria as the cause of the conflict. The second cause of the dispute was noted as Uganda police/military brutality against Kenya citizens on Migingo Island (25.4%). Kenyan police brutality against Ugandans was the least identified cause of the dispute at 1.4 percent.

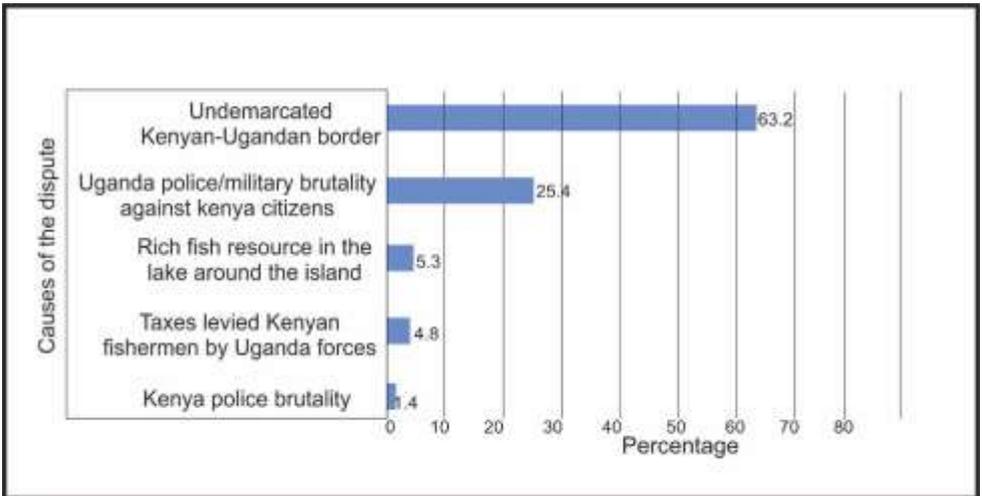


Figure 4: Causes of the conflict as covered in the newspapers

Table 7 shows further that the main cause of Migingo Island dispute was the undefined Kenya-Uganda border in Lake Victoria as published in newspaper articles from Kenya (60.6%) and Uganda (39.4%). Some 83 percent of newspaper articles from Kenya noted the cause of the conflict as Uganda police/military brutality

against Kenyans on Migingo Island. This is in contrast to the 17 percent for the same cause published in the Ugandan press. Rich fish resource in Lake Victoria around Migingo Island was a cause of the conflict identified by 72.7 percent and 27.3 percent of the stories in Kenya and Ugandan newspapers respectively.

Table 7: Causes of Misingo island dispute as presented in the newspapers

Causes	Kenyan newspapers				Ugandan newspapers			Total
	<i>Nation</i>	<i>The Standard</i>	Sub-total	<i>Monitor</i>	<i>New Vision</i>	Sub-total		
Un-demarcated Kenya-Uganda border	n	49	31	80	25	27	52	132
	%	37.1	23.5	60.6	18.9	20.5	39.4	100.0
Uganda police/military brutality against Kenyans	n	35	9	44	9	0	9	53
	%	66.0	17.0	83.0	17.0	0.0	17.0	100.0
Rich fish resource in the lake around the Island	n	5	3	8	2	1	3	11
	%	45.5	27.3	72.7	18.2	9.1	27.3	100.0
Taxation of Kenyan fishermen by Uganda police/military	n	6	3	9	0	1	1	10
	%	60.0	30.0	90.0	0.0	10.0	10.0	100.0
Kenya police brutality against Ugandans	n	1	2	3	0	0	0	3
	%	33.3	66.7	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Total	n	96	48	144	36	29	65	209
	%	45.9	23.0	68.9	17.2	13.9	31.1	100.0

*Note.* The total number is 209 which is more than the 200 articles on the dispute due to more than one reason being advanced in some newspaper stories.

In Table 7, it is shown that 90 percent of newspaper stories from the press in Kenya identified the tax levied the Kenyan fishermen by the Uganda police/military as a cause of the conflict compared to the 10 percent of stories from Ugandan papers. All stories from the Kenyan

newspaper reports identified Kenya police brutality against Ugandans as a possible cause of the conflict. None of the newspapers from Uganda blamed the Kenya police. Considering the 209 items, 66 (31.6%) accused the security forces (police and military) of the Misingo

Island dispute. Out of the 66 articles analyzed, 56 (84.8%) and 10 (15.2%) were from Kenyan and Ugandan press respectively.

Table 8 reveals that the undefined Kenya-Uganda border in Lake Victoria was identified as the cause of Migingio Island dispute in 80

percent and 55.5 percent of all stories in the Ugandan and Kenyan press. Nearly 31 percent of the Kenyan press reports attributed the dispute to Uganda police/military brutality against Kenyans. This contrasts with 13.9 percent of all stories in the Ugandan newspapers.

*Table 8: Comparison of the causes of the dispute as presented in Kenyan and Ugandan press*

Position	Kenyan newspapers		Ugandan newspapers	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Un-demarcated Kenya-Uganda border in Lake Victoria	80	55.5	52	80.0
Uganda police/military brutality against Kenyans	44	30.5	9	13.9
Rich fish resource in the lake around the Island	8	5.6	3	4.6
Taxation of Kenyan fishermen by Uganda police/military	9	6.3	1	1.5
Kenya police brutality against Ugandans	3	2.1	0	0.0
Total	144	100.0	65	100.0

*Note.* The total number is 209 which is more than the 200 articles on the dispute due to more than one reason being advanced in some newspaper stories.

As observed in Table 8, 6.3 percent of all articles published in the Kenyan newspapers blamed the Uganda police/military for the tax imposed on Kenyan fishermen. This contrasts with the 1.5 percent analyzed in the newspapers from Uganda. All stories that identified the brutality of Kenya police against Ugandans were drawn from the Kenyan print media. In total, 39 percent of all stories in Kenyan print media blamed the security forces for

the dispute compared to 15.3 percent from the Ugandan press.

### **Discussion of Findings** ***Frequency of Newspaper Coverage of Migingio Island Dispute***

The majority of newspaper stories on Migingio Island row were covered in more genres in the Kenyan press than the Ugandan print media even though the most visible in both cases was news. While it is true that the press in both countries has performed their surveillance and

information functions in reporting the conflict, the data gathered indicate that the Kenyan press sought to set the agenda on the dispute as an issue of importance in their country given that Kenya has occupied the Island since independence in 1963. This Kenyan posture portrays Uganda as the aggressor (Muchege, 2017; Shaka, 2013; Warui, 2013; Wekesa, 2010). The portrayal may have motivated the Kenyan press to report the conflict more than their Ugandan counterparts. On the flip side, the Ugandan press, upon considering the ownership of the island in dispute which skews more to the Kenyan side, may have found it necessary to downplay the salience of the dispute as their reports seem to suggest.

From the framing theory perspective, it appears that the Kenyan press covered the conflict to advance the country's national interests and bring it to the attention of their publics. Even though the Ugandan press reported less, their coverage could not have been at variance with Uganda's national interest. Several scholars have noted journalists' tendencies to protect their national interests in the Migingo Island dispute (Nyabuga, 2011; Shaka, 2013; Wafula, 2013). It, therefore, makes sense to accept the recommendation of Mutere and Ugungu's (2004) that journalists should also consider other nations'

interests when reporting their countries' border issues.

The inadequacy of the coverage of Migingo Island row through feature stories, editorials and commentaries raises a fundamental concern on the depth of reporting of the dispute. This suggests that newspaper articles could not provide their audiences with a detailed discussion and assessment of the dispute to enable them to have informed opinions about the matter. This inadequacy is traceable partly to the knowledge deficiency of journalists and editors about the dispute at hand (MCK, 2016, Nyabuga, 2011). Furthermore, the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya could have distracted writers' attention from the conflict as coverage of politics and government took the center stage of reporting.

### ***Prominence Given to Newspaper Coverage of Migingo Island Dispute***

The size of newspaper stories indicates the emphasis placed on them by publishers. Almost two-thirds of all the articles on the dispute were categorized as medium to very big. This finding points to the newspapers' desire to cover Migingo Island row. This is a reflection of the importance the newspapers placed on the dispute within the agenda-setting theory perspective. With the majority of the newspapers publishing news stories,

it was expected that their story sizes would be smaller compared to features and commentaries.

The emphasis placed on a newspaper report is indicated by its location in the publication. Stories on front pages are considered more important to the editor compared to those inside or at the back. Both the Kenyan and Ugandan press published their stories mainly in the interior pages. To a certain extent, this finding indicates that though the dispute was covered in the newspapers significantly, headlining it was not a priority of the editors. This may mean that the dispute was facing stiff competition from other news stories. Media commercialism which makes income generation preponderant may have also worked against the coverage of the dispute as a rational publisher would prefer to publish stories that are attractive to readers and advertisers. (Afaghani, 2011; McQuail, 2010; Nyabuga, 2011).

### **Causes of the Dispute as Presented in Newspapers**

Several causes were noted in the Migingogo newspaper stories. Top on the list was the undefined borders inherited from the colonialists (Kornprobst, 2002, Mnjama, 2012). Next was the alleged misbehavior of the countries' national security forces. The Kenyan press frequently blamed the Ugandan security forces

for the conflict. This sharply contrasted with the Ugandan newspapers which had fewer stories that accused the security forces from Uganda. The uncertainties surrounding the rich fish resources in Lake Victoria waters (around Migingogo Island) as well as the nationalistic tendencies and need to attract a domestic audience (Nyabuga, 2011) were also identified as causes.

Framing and priming behavior of the editors impact these newspapers' positions on the causes of the conflict. In priming, for instance, the mass media pay more attention to some issues than others which may be equally important, thereby altering the standards by which people evaluate those issues (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The Kenyan press alleged in their reports that the conflict was escalated by Ugandan forces deployed to intimidate and tax Kenyans (Gettleman, 2009; Kisiangani, 2011; Muchege, 2017; Okumu, 2010; Shaka, 2013; Sing'oei, 2009) while neglecting those causes that indict Kenya. This is subjective coverage that recognizes national interests and neglecting the ethical principles of the profession (Afaghani, 2011; Nyabuga, 2011; Puddephatt, 2006; Shaka, 2013; Wafula, 2013).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The coverage of Migingo Island dispute in Kenyan and Ugandan newspapers revealed notable similarities and differences. Newspapers from both Kenya and Uganda presented Migingo Island conflict through news stories and small to big-sized articles. The undefined border between Kenya and Uganda in Lake Victoria was identified as the main cause of the conflict in both the Kenyan and Ugandan press. National security forces were also blamed in both the Kenyan and Ugandan dominant media. On the differences, the Kenyan press frequently covered Migingo Island dispute more frequently than the Ugandan newspapers. In particular, the Kenyan press blamed Ugandan security forces as the cause of the conflict. This was in contrast with Ugandan newspapers which had few stories accusing the security forces from Uganda. The coverage of the dispute was influenced by the agenda-setting, framing, and priming behaviors of the newspaper gatekeepers. Two upshots of these behaviors were the journalist's nationalistic tendencies and the crave to satisfy their domestic

audiences. The following recommendations are made:

- Reporters covering interstate border conflicts should learn to conduct in-depth research on the issues and actors involved from all countries in the row. This would make them knowledgeable about the conflicts. Furthermore, media houses should invest more in the financial and human resources necessary to support in-depth research and reporting of conflicts.
- Continuous professional training of journalists on conflict-sensitive reporting or peace journalism should be prioritized.
- In reporting border conflicts, media professionals should not blindly advance national or local interests or respond sporadically to them. Adherence to the ethical principles of accuracy, objectivity, and fairness are key to conflict journalism practice.
- As gatekeepers, East African journalists need to integrate the notions of community-building and consensus-building into their practice to promote harmony.

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