



The Role of the Print Media in Conflict Reporting in Nigeria

Ibrahim Modibbo Hamman

Institute of Strategic Studies and Development Communication, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Corresponding Author: ibrahimmodibbo60@gmail.com

Abstract

The study seeks to find out the challenges faced by journalists in the print media in conflict reporting in Nigeria. The objectives are; to find out if poor training of journalists affect conflict reporting in some selected print media in Nigeria, to examine if the real-time processing of some selected print media affects conflict reporting in Nigeria, and to investigate if the high -cost of news- papers affect conflict reporting in some selected print media in Nigeria. Three research questions were raised from the objectives. The Study uses the Spiral of Silence theory and adopted the Survey method as its Methodology using the questionnaire. Sixty (60) respondents were selected with fifty-eight (58) respondents returning their questionnaire. Findings indicate that, the inability to access conflict zones directly impacts the quality of reporting. The findings further indicate that when financial constraints limit field reporting, the risk of incomplete or inaccurate coverage increases. The study concludes that, journalists be trained and allow to work and cover conflict affected area as these would help the print media in conflict reporting

Keywords: Role, Print media, Conflict, Reporting, Nigeria

Introduction

Basically, conflicts have been a global phenomenon and problem which Nigeria is not an exception. Conflicts could emanate from political, social, economic and religion factors which has a toll on human capital development with resultant consequences of death, disruption of social, religious, political

and other fundamental activities of a society.

Conflicts in the world at large and Nigeria in particular is a situation(s) in which the relationship between members of a group or individuals in a given society is characterised by lack of cordial, mutual suspicion and fear, and of course the tendency towards violent confrontation. In time of conflict, the

mass media plays fundamental role in influencing, shaping, controlling and sometime escalating the outcome of the problems in a plural setting based on multi-ethnic and multi-cultural differences.

For a very long time, the media has been central to reporting conflict in Nigeria as it plays fundamental roles in diffusing, reducing, escalating or containing conflicts in the country. However, a growing area of concern is its role in reducing the upsurge of conflicts within the last decade or so. Has the media failed in de-escalating conflicts, resolving critical issues of contention in its sensitive reportage of events, its agenda setting towards peace, progress and prosperity or did not also conform with its role of social responsibility for national cohesion and integration for development to strive for the common good of the people.

The mass media, especially the print is regarded as a powerful tool of communication in peace building and of course at a time of conflicts globally. It can either use its position as the fourth estate of the realm to promote peace and resolve conflicts or negatively initiate, sustain and escalate conflicts based on the interest of either ownership or gate keepers of the media. In conflict sensitive reportage of events, what is of paramount

importance is the ability of the media to manage peace in conflict situations.

According to Howard, (2008), Ozuhu-Sulaiman, (2013), Popoola, (2014), 2015, the media should at all times focus on restoration of peace rather than promoting violence. Thus, media should serve as an interventionist conveyor-belt for development purposes during conflict and that the media should stick to its ethnics and etiquette of the profession by averting conflicts and contribute towards peace building and conflict management.

Based on the submissions of Chukwuma, Diri and Oginibo (2015) Prolonged conflicts experienced in many African countries have aggravated poverty, human suffering, environmental destruction, displacement of humans and have created problems for both local and international communities. Many development communication Scholars are of the opinion that no development agenda can be meaningfully executed in the face of conflict situations. It became a bottleneck for development and enthrone monumental poverty in any given society.

The role of the print media in the Nigerian society is to be representative of the various perspectives and realities of the people. This is done through the

establishment of effective editorial policies and structures (Dauda, 2010, p.275). The country has a total population of over 200 million and is divided into 36 states and 774 local government areas. It has a federal system of government and is the continent's largest oil producer. The seat of power is in the capital Abuja, while the commercial nerve centre is in the city of Lagos.

According to Ishaku (2021:88), all societies of the world experience conflict at one point or the other. Even at individual level, conflict usually emanates as a result of differences of opinions and approach to issues. Thus, conflict is inevitable in every human society. Conflict in itself constitutes no social menace especially when the parties involved use it to improve their society (Ishaku, 2021a). But what makes conflict bad is when it becomes destructive and violent.

Generally, most societies around the world are overwhelmed by destructive and violent conflicts which have continued to rob them of progress and development. This situation is pronounced in Africa especially taking into account the destructive conflicts that engulfed the continent ranging from the Rwanda genocide to the conflicts in the Middle East

To Saragih and Harahap (2020), print media is the oldest media available on earth. Print media originated from the media called *Acta Diurna* and *Acta Senatus* in the Roman Empire, then developed rapidly after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press until now has various forms, such as newspapers, tabloids, and magazines. Print media are all printed goods that are used as a means of delivering messages as mentioned previously, various print media in general.

Statement of the Problem

The role of print media in reporting conflicts in Nigeria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is crucial. Nigeria as a nation has been afflicted by a variety of conflicts, which have continued to impede the country's development goals. According to Abdullahi and Saka (2007), since the return of democracy in May 1999, there have been over a hundred conflicts in Nigeria that were motivated by politics, ethnicity, and religion. This figure continues to increase at an alarming rate, making the function of the mass media, especially newspapers, even more demanding.

In the light of these practical problems, this study intends to assess the challenges faced by select print media in the reportage of conflict in

Nigeria and to provide solutions for reducing this scenario.

Objectives of the Study

- (i) To find out if poor training of journalists affect conflict reporting in some selected print media in Nigeria
- (ii) To examine if the real-time processing of some selected print media affect conflict reporting in Nigeria
- (iii) To investigate if the high -cost of news- papers affect conflict reporting in some selected print media in Nigeria

Research Questions

- (i) How has poor remuneration of employees affected conflict reporting in some selected print media in Nigeria
- (ii) Do the real-time processing of some selected print media affect conflict reporting in Nigeria
- (iii) To what extent has the high -cost of news- papers affect conflict reporting in some selected print media in Nigeria

Conceptual Review Conflict

Generally, conflict entails struggle and rivalry for objects to which individuals and groups attach importance. These objects can either be material or non-material. The material objects may include scarce resources like money, employment, and position including political ones, promotion in both the private and public organizations. The non-material objects include culture, tradition, religion and language (Osaghae, 2001, cited in Ishaku, 2021). Conflict can be defined as disagreement, clash, collision, struggle or contest between two or more parties (Folarin, 2013). Putnam and Shoemaker (2007) see conflict as a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes; a situation in which it is difficult to choose. However, violent conflicts sometimes take ethnic or religious colouration, and at other times political or regional colouration, depending on what the people involved want to achieve.

Media Objectivity and Bias

Two terms are central to this study: bias and objectivity. Bias and objectivity have been adopted in many journalism studies, and many different conceptual definitions have been given to these two terms. Much controversy exists over the concept of bias and

objectivity, and the effectiveness of using these constructs as theoretical tools to analyze the ideological functioning of media is increasingly being questioned (Hackett, 1984; Entman, 1989; Lichtenberg, 1991). To better conduct the study, it's necessary to have a standard definition for "bias" and "objectivity."

Print Media

Starting from woodblock printing in 200 CE to digital printing that is currently in use, printing has definitely come along way. It is a process of using ink on paper to show us images and text by using a printing press. The primary use of print media is to spread information about daily events and news as it is the fastest way to reach the public. Apart from that, it provides a lot of entertainment to the readers. It may be magazines or newspapers that cover all the stories and articles that generate a lot of interest in the minds of the public. Another important use is that of advertisements, as print media is quite inexpensive and can target a huge population at once. This thesis as against popular opinion identified the types of print media (Different types of Print Media, n.d.).

Review of Empirical Studies

Moreso, Ofem (2018)

assesviewpoints of reporters on the challenges of newspaper reportage of the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria (2006-2007).sed the The Guardian, The Vanguard and The Niger Delta Newspapers were purposively selected for the study due to both their national and local outlooks in the coverage and reportage of the conflict.

In-depth interviews were conducted on two (2) correspondents each from the three (3) selected newspapers making a total of six (6), while four (4) respondents from each of the newspaper making 12 were selected for questionnaire administration. Results obtained identified ownership (41.7%) and media protective interest (33.3%) as the primary challenges faced by the media in the reportage of the Niger Delta conflict. The actions of the Ijaw Youths, militant activities (41.7%), killings (25%) and hostage taking (16.6%) considerably affected the nature of reportage during the heat days or periods of the conflict.

Findings from the in-depth interviews showed that the geology (nature of terrain) of the conflict area, issue of trust from the militants and security forces exerted considerable influence on the selected newspapers

failure to perform the required effective mediation and intervention role in the conflict.

Herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria and its implication on peace-oriented journalism

Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017) examined selected newspapers' (The Punch, Vanguard, Daily Trust and Leadership Newspapers) **framing of herdsmen-farmers conflicts in Nigeria and its implication on peace-oriented journalism**. Within literatures, few studies have been done to examine empirically the implication of newspapers frames on peace-oriented journalism in respect to persistence herdsmen-farmers' conflicts in Nigeria.

In this line, the study content-analysed N=100 samples of news stories on herdsmen-farmers conflicts in selected newspapers, while focusing attention on the dominant frames used in the conflicts and its implications on peace-oriented journalism. The study reveals that solution-oriented frames are most featured. Reports on Herdsmen-farmers conflicts are more violent, specific and narrowed featuring words like 'killers' herdsmen', 'gun-carrying herdsmen', 'Jihadist herdsmen', 'greedy farmers', 'intolerable farmers' and so on.

These words are more typical of war-oriented journalism than peace-oriented journalism that favours non-violent approach to conflict, broad, all-encompassing and multi-dimensional reportage. It therefore, recommends that operators should be more conscious in their choice of words in reporting herdsmen-farmer's conflicts rather than employing words that can be more divisive, stereotypic and conflict inciting.

Tita, Tanjong, Wantchami, Tabuwe and Bisong (2016) investigated to understand how the Cameroon print media has contributed to informing and educating citizens of Cameroon about the ongoing cross border conflicts. The Post Newspaper and Cameroon Tribune from July 2014 to December 2014 were content analyzed to examine the level of prominence, the angle and proximity of the stories covered on the said cross border conflicts. Findings reveal that the coverage of these conflicts by Cameroon Tribune and the Post Newspaper focused on the Cameroon Government's intervention in the cross-border conflict (27.0%) and on the perpetrators of the conflict (21.4%). This is indicative of more military focused and immediate action reporting than on the widespread and more englobing humanitarian cost of conflicts.

Apuke and Omar (2022) extended previous studies by examining both media reporting and conflict victims' viewpoints on the coverages. They used a mixed method approach, which combined a quantitative content analysis of news reports and semi-structured interviews with the conflict victims. The results suggested that both analyses revealed consistent findings.

Three key findings were obtained: low prominence, lack of objectivity, and excessive use of negative language/framing of the conflict. Theoretical implications suggested support for the assumption of Agenda Setting Theory in discussing the influence of the media on news prominence and news sources used and Social Responsibility Theory in explaining the journalists' lack of objectivity and excessive use of negative framing when reporting the conflict. The managerial implication includes our recommendation for conflict reporting in Nigeria to embrace peace journalism.

In addition, Omenugha (2020) examined how newspaper managers in Nigeria secure their future in the new dispensation in view of the challenges posed by new media technologies. The research is anchored within various theories: Technological Determinism (TD), Disruptive Technology (DT),

Diffusion of Innovation and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and puts forward the "Techno-Human Dynamism" model, as it seeks answer to the main research question: Adopting a mixed qualitative research approach - Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the study focuses on four major Nigerian daily newspapers - The Sun, The Nation, The Daily Trust and The Daily Times - as well as the newspaper readers of these daily newspapers.

Three managerial personnel of each of the selected newspapers were interviewed, while Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of four sessions comprising six discussants each were conducted among newspaper readers in each of four purposively selected cities - v Aroma junction (Awka, Anambra), Ojota junction (Ikeja, Lagos), Sky Memorial junction (Wuse, Abuja) and Rumukoro junction (Port Harcourt, Rivers) - across the country.

Employing the thematic method of data analysis, the study found that Nigerian newspapers, like their counterparts elsewhere, are already experiencing the disruptive impact of new media technologies in all major areas of their operations including content, human resources and revenue. These disruptive impacts appear to be strengthening rather than merely

weakening the newspaper organisations. The newspapers in response to them have become more creative, more ethical - volatising factual, accurate, investigative and analytical reporting. The study recommended that Nigerian newspapers should endeavour to keep pace with the technological innovations driving today's newspaper industry while boldly considering other response strategies that have worked elsewhere - including journalistic co-operatives, mergers and conglomeration - towards arresting the dwindling fortunes of the industry.

Suleman and Owolabi (2021) examined the Print media and the Challenges of Stereotyping in Reporting Conflict Issues in Nigeria. The paper investigates how the print media stereotype Fulani ethnic group in Nigeria. The underpinning theories for the study are social responsibility theory and standpoint theory. It adopts a qualitative desk-based research method to gather and analyze available print and published secondary data to investigate the problem.

The findings revealed that the rate at which some of the Nigerian press report Hausa-Fulani herdsmen and farmers' clashes is detrimental to the image of the Fulani tribe and if care is not taken could cause permanent hatred for the Fulani tribe. The study

concludes that the press plays an important role in our contemporary society as it shapes ideology and influence people's world views and how we perceive issues. Therefore, the press should be sensitive to stories that could cause hatred for any sect of society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is best explained by Noelle Newman's Spiral of Silence Theory. The Spiral of Silence Theory is rooted in public opinion, propaganda and the rise of dominant opinion leading to its consequent effects on least held opinion. The study also examines the challenges of reporting ethno-religious conflicts and identifies variables which impinge on the reporting of the aforementioned. During conflict reporting and indeed its management, one shade of opinion rises over the other due to intervening variables which projects and gives it more strength and dominance. Furthermore, the study is also explained by the disruption theory. In the disruption theory social media and technological advancements which ought to make reporting more efficient are perceived as stumbling blocks, especially to journalists in developing countries like Nigeria

Methodology

The study uses survey research design will be adopted over other research methods like content analysis as the graphics study, experimental research and case study because the survey research design helps measure, or describe, attitudes and opinion of respondents concerning the contributions challenges of newspapers in reporting sensitive conflict in Nigeria. However, the floors of the sudden such design must be noted. Wimmer and Dominic, (2011) note the various disadvantages inherent in the survey research design as follows: difficulty in obtaining a representative sample; inability of the respondents to provide honest answers to questions posed; inappropriate wording or placement of questions in the questionnaire and; decline in response rates. Despite these flaws, the southern research design is more useful than constant analysis is this study because it is relatively inexpensive when considered in terms of the amount of information it generates, and by using this method a lot amount of information was will be gathered from different people with ease.

This may not be the case with other research methods. Also with other research designs which are bound by

geographic constraints or boundaries, the survey can be conducted anywhere. Also the survey research methods are reasonably accurate, especially when the sampling is done correctly. Furthermore, results obtained from survey can be generalized because the sample population is large and representative of the research population. In addition, survey research can be used to investigate problems in a realistic setting. This means that problems can be examined where they exist or happen rather than in laboratory or in an artificial condition. The aforementioned benefits of the service design will inform usage of this method in the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents quantitative and quantitative data collected through the questionnaire. In the field study, sixty (60) copies of questionnaire where is administered to respondents in the following establishments: State owned and private owned newspapers in five states located in central Nigeria.

However, while collecting copies of questionnaire back from the respondents only 58 were retrieved from the 60 copies of questionnaire that were administered two were found wrong filled thus invalid for analysis these details are presented in particular below

Table 1: Demographics

Response	...	Kaduna	Niger	Benue	Plateau	Kogi		Total	%tage
Gender									
Male				9	8	9	8	43	74.13793103
Female				1	4	3	4	15	25.86206897
Total								58	100
Marital Status									
Single				1	1	2	2	7	12.06896552
Married				7	10	9	8	43	74.13793103
Divorced				2	1	1	2	8	
Total								58	100
Age									
21-28				1	0	1	1	3	5.172413793
29-38				2	5	2	1	12	20.68965517
39-48				5	6	5	5	28	48.27586207
49-58				1	1	2	4	11	18.96551724
59 & above				0	1	2	1	4	6.896551724
Total								58	100
Highest Educational Qualification									
SSCE				0	0	0	1	1	1.724137931
Diploma/ Profnal.				3	2	3	3	14	24.13793103
BSc/HND				6	5	7	5	29	50
MSc & above				1	5	2	3	14	24.13793103
								58	100

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Table 1 presents a distribution of respondents according to the following demographic matrices: gender, marital status, age, and highest educational qualification. From the table, 42

respondents representing 74.13 percent of the total population are male while , 15 respondents representing 25.86 percent of the total population are female.

Furthermore, 7 respondents representing 12.06 percent of the total population are **single**, 43 respondents representing 74.13 percent of the total population are **married**, 8 respondents representing 13.79 percent of the total population are **divorced**. A significant number of respondents by 48.27 percent are **married**.

With regard to age: 3 respondents representing 5.17 percent of the total population are within the **21–28** age bracket; 12 respondents representing 20.68 percent of the total population are within the **29–38** age bracket; 28 respondents representing 48.27 percent of the total population are within the **39–48** age bracket; 11 respondents representing 18.96 percent of the total population are within the **49–58** age bracket; while, 4 respondents representing 6.89 percent of the total population are within the “**59 and above**” age bracket. A significant

number of respondents by 48.27 percent are within the **39–48** age bracket.

With regard to disaggregating the statistics according to **highest educational qualification of the respondents**. 1 respondent representing 1.7 % of the total population holds an SSCE ; 14 respondents representing 24.13 percent of the total population hold diplomas or professional certificates; 29 respondents representing 50 percent of the total population hold first degrees or Higher National Diplomas; 14 respondents representing 24.13 Percent of the population nation Masters degrees and above.Each of these demographic variables are significant in determining how they might influence coverage of sensitive conflicts. However, this study does not explore the extent to which these variables can influence the coverage of sensitive conflicts by newspapers in Nigeria.

Table 2: Influence of publication costs on the reporting of sensitive conflicts

Response	F	
Hampering field reporting, Limiting access to reporting on sensitive conflicts & reliance on news agencies	29	1.724138
Financial constraints especially limitations in funding investigative journalism on sensitive conflicts	3	5.172414
Dwindling advertising revenue, potentially leading to self-censorship in reporting on sensitive conflicts	7	12.06897
Newspapers with limited resources are less likely to use cutting edge technology as they struggle to gather accurate information and provide diverse	6	10.34483

perspectives

Inaccessibility to news sources and lack of indepth analysis and breadth and depth.

4 6.896552

Inability to face the competition

8 63.7931

58 100

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Table 2 presents a distribution of respondents according to their opinion regarding influence of newspaper production costs on reports of sensitive conflicts from the table 29 respondents representing of the population indicated that increased publication costs will lead would hamper field reporting limit access to reporting of sensitive conflicts and the reliance on news agency semicolon free respondents representing 5.17% of the total population indicated that increased publication costs would lead to financial constraints especially limitations in funding investigative journalism during sensitive conflicts seven respondents representing 12.06% of the total population stated that increased publication cost of newspapers will lead to a dwindling of advertising revenue potentially leading to self-censorship in the reporting of conflict six respondents representing 10 point 34% of the total population indicated that increased publication costs would lead to a shortage of resources among newspapers and this will make them less likely to use cutting

edge technology as able to struggle to gather accurate information and provide diverse perspectives for respondents representing 6.89% of the total population indicated that increased publication costs will lead to inaccessibility of new sources and lack of depth analysis breadth and depth in newspaper coverage of sensitive conflicts finally eight respondents representing 63.79% of the total population indicated that increased publication costs will make newspapers in unable to face the competition thus quality will take a nose dive

Most respondents by - percent of the total population will indicated that increased application cost will hamper field reporting limit access to the report offensive conflicts and will end up in the reliance on news agencies while the least number of respondents by 6.89% said stated that this would lead to increase in accessibility to new sources and lack of death breath analysis and analysis by these newspapers.

Table 3: Most significant problem caused by newspaper owners which affects the reporting of sensitive conflicts in Nigeria?

Respondents	F	%t age
Lack of investigative journalism	3	5.172414
Inaccurate representation of facts	2	3.448276
Limited coverage of minority perspectives	13	22.41379
Suppression of dissenting opinions	22	37.93103
Ownership-driven narrative bias	12	20.68966
Poor output from reporters	6	10.34483
	58	100

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Table 3 presents a distribution of respondents according to the most significant problem caused by newspaper owners which affects tpaetporting of sensitive conflicts in Nigeria. From the table, 3 respondents representing 5.17 percent of the total population Lack of investigative journalism, 2 respondents representing 3.44 percent of the total population indicated Inaccurate representation of facts, 13 respondents representing 22.41 percent of the total population Limited coverage of minority perspectives, 22 respondents representing 37.93 percent of the total

population indicated Suppression of dissenting opinions,, 12 respondents representing 20.68 percent of the total population Ownership-driven narrative bias while, 6 respondents representing 10.34 percent of the total population Poor output from reporters

Most respondents by 37.93 indicate Suppression of dissenting opinion, while few respondents by 3.44 percent of the total population indicated inaccurate representation of facts as the most significant problem caused by newspaper owners which affects reporting of sensitive conflicts in Nigeria.

Table 4 Most significant way political inclination and ideology of newspaper reporters affect reporting of sensitive conflict

Establishing an independent editorial board	3	5.172414
Strengthening media regulatory frameworks	2	3.448276
Providing training on ethical journalism	13	22.41379
Encouraging whistleblower protections	22	37.93103

Promoting media ownership transparency	12	20.68966
Facilitating collaboration with international media	6	10.34483
	58	100

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Table 4 presents a distribution of respondents according to the most way ownership affects reporting of sensitive conflicts in Nigeria. From the table, 3 respondents representing 5.17 percent of the total population indicated Establishing an independent editorial board,, 2 respondents representing 3.44 percent of the total population indicated Strengthening media regulatory frameworks, 13 respondents representing 22.41 percent of the total population Providing training on ethical journalism, 22 respondents representing 37.93 percent of the total population indicated Encouraging whistleblower protections, 12 respondents representing 20.68 percent of the total population indicated Promoting media ownership transparency, while, 6 respondents representing 10.34 percent of the total population indicated Facilitating collaboration with international media. Most respondents by 37.93 percent of the total population indicated Encouraging whistleblower protections, while few respondents representing 3.44 percent of the total population indicated Strengthening media regulatory frameworks as the most significant way political inclination and

ideology of newspaper reporters affect reporting of sensitive conflict

Discussion of Findings

The Nigerian newspaper industry faces a critical challenge with increased production costs, particularly in the context of reporting on sensitive conflicts. The vast and diverse landscape of conflicts within Nigeria demands robust field reporting, requiring journalists to access remote and potentially dangerous areas. However, the financial constraints imposed by high production costs hinder this crucial aspect of journalism.

One consequence of this financial strain is the limitation on reporters' access to conflict zones. Nigeria's complex conflicts, whether related to ethnic tensions, insurgency, or other socio-political issues, necessitate on-the-ground reporting for accurate and comprehensive coverage. The inability to deploy reporters to these areas hampers the industry's ability to provide in-depth, firsthand accounts, leading to a potential reliance on news agencies. While news agencies play a crucial role, overreliance on them may compromise the diversity and depth of reporting, as agencies often provide generalized

information without the nuanced context that local reporters can offer.

Conclusion/Recommendations

- Given the diverse ownership structures in Nigeria, promoting transparency is critical. Clear disclosure can help build trust among readers, ensuring that the public is aware of potential biases and affiliations that may influence reporting on sensitive conflicts.
- Inadequate training, particularly in fact-checking procedures, poses a risk to accurate reporting in Nigeria. Establishing mentorship programs within newsrooms is essential to address skill gaps, ensuring that reporters are well-equipped to navigate the challenges associated with reporting on sensitive conflicts.
- In Nigeria, where the stakes can be high in reporting on sensitive conflicts, fear of repercussions due to poor training can stifle reporters. Mentorship programs can play a crucial role in providing support and guidance, empowering reporters to navigate these challenges with confidence.
- In conclusion the study recommends that journalist be trained to encourage them in reporting conflicts,

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