



## Is there an opportunity for ethnic journalism in indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana? A study of Fafaa Radio

Modestus Fosu & Ufuoma Akpojivi

To cite this article: Modestus Fosu & Ufuoma Akpojivi (2021): Is there an opportunity for ethnic journalism in indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana? A study of Fafaa Radio, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, DOI: [10.1080/01434632.2021.1900203](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1900203)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1900203>



Published online: 16 Mar 2021.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 162




[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



# Is there an opportunity for ethnic journalism in indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana? A study of Fafaa Radio

Modestus Fosu<sup>a</sup> and Ufuoma Akpojivi <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Integrated Communication Sciences, Ghana Institute of Journalism, Accra, Ghana; <sup>b</sup>Media Studies Department, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

## ABSTRACT

This study broaches a conversation on ethnic media and journalism in Ghana by asking whether a case could be made for the practice of ethnic media/journalism, focusing on Fafaa Radio (Fafaa), a private commercial FM station in Dzodze, Ghana. The study occurs at the backdrop of apparent disquiet about the communication of ethnic or tribal matters in Africa's public spaces because of its potential or evidenced-based implications for divisiveness and conflicts. Using in-depth interviews with key purposively selected media practitioners of the station and document analysis, the study addresses issues relating to Fafaa as an ethnic media outlet. The study occurs within an interpretative analytical approach underpinned by sociological imagination and normative considerations about professionalism in local and national contexts. The finding is that whilst Fafaa largely fulfils the characteristics of ethnic media, it is debateable to say it practises ethnic journalism since the practices are almost analogous with the conceptualisation of community media by the regulatory body, the National Communication Authority (NCA). The analysis further suggests that the orientation of Fafaa as potentially ethnic, serving an Ewe community, influences the practices and professionalism of the station's journalists. The study concludes that conceptualisation and education are needed to legitimise ethnic media.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 17 November 2020  
Accepted 3 March 2021

## KEYWORDS

Ethnic media; indigenous language; Fafaa FM; development; Ghana

## Introduction

Ethnic journalism, as a type of journalistic practice and/or concept of study, has received scant attention in Africa. The reasons are not difficult to surmise. The continent's historical past, which witnessed well-organised nation-states whimsically bounded into countries by colonialists left the countries, particularly south of the Sahara, with difficulties in uniting motley lots of ethnically differentiated nation states into countries with one destiny. Almost every country in sub-Saharan Africa has over 50 ethnic identities, many of whom had hitherto distrusted, despised and been antagonistic to one another (Robinson 2016), a tendency that has persisted even to this day. And, with a continent scared by devastating ethnic or tribal conflicts (Musvosvi 2010; Chigudu 2019), anything that evoked tribal or ethnic sensibilities was, and is still, deemed inconceivable and unwelcome.

In Africa, there exists a long tradition of research that relates ethnicity or tribal effusions to conflicts (Musvosvi 2010; Chigudu 2019), underdevelopment (Ilorah 2009; Venkatasawmy 2015), peace and reconciliation (Bowd and Chikwanha 2010), identity (Bannon, Miguel, and Posner 2004),

among others. Lentz (1995) also provided a useful historical analysis of the research trajectory on tribalism and ethnicity in Africa. Yet, very few such studies exist on the communication of ethnic manifestations in the media. In Ghana, besides Ofosu-Mensah Ababio (2012), who investigated how linguistic identity relates to ethnic or cultural identity, few studies have investigated issues relating to identity, ethnicity, and inequalities even in the Ghanaian public service (Asante and Gyimah-Boadi 2004). Thus, not surprisingly, the concept of ethnic media or ethnic journalism appears not to have been broached, not to talk about establishing it in the literature on Ghana.

This is not to suggest that ethnicity or tribalism has not been exploited for political capital or for some other gratification in Africa. There is ample evidence about individuals and groups playing the ethnic card for parochial political and/or economic gains, leaving inevitable consequences on the wider society (Bannon, Miguel, and Posner 2004; Bratton, Gyimah-Boadi, and Mattes 2005). In fact, Nyamnjoh (2005) eloquently established Africans' avowed penchant for congregating around ethnic belonging rather than on national consciousness. Nyamnjoh's work is essentially on journalism in Africa, and it suggests unequivocally that ethnicity is deeply ingrained in African journalism, whether openly acknowledged or not.

Yet, ethnic or tribal effusions may not be fundamentally bad, for which reason this study argues for affirmative ethnic or tribal communication. We conceptualise this to mean ethnic or tribal expressions devoid of the 'power' and identity connotations that undermine, ridicule, divide or create antagonism with other groups. This study argues for a positive understanding of the concepts to mean espousing the uniqueness and other progressive features of a group (Musvosvi 2010). This understanding connotes unity in diversity and pluralism, which is a key pillar of any democracy. Ghana's Pan African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST) may, for example, illustrate this point. It is a yearly festival that showcases and celebrates the unique arts and cultures of the various ethnic groups of the country to create a collective, shared platform of unity in ethnic diversity. Thus, ethnic journalism should not be construed one-dimensionally to refer to the historical baggage of ethnic-led violence and divisiveness; this type of journalism may be good or bad depending on the practitioners' ideologies, motivations and practices.

From the above, this study broaches ethnic media and ethnic journalism in Ghana as an unexplored reality, focusing on radio broadcasting. It strives to start a conversation on the topic to discover: whether there are manifestations of ethnic journalism in Ghana; whether journalistic practices of Fafaa FM (CLR) dispose the station as an ethnic media outlet and its practices as ethnic journalism; and the extent to which CLR journalists exhibit professionalism and satisfy the socio-cultural and political needs of its served community. To achieve these objectives, the study was guided by the social responsibility and alternative media models (McQuail 2010) in a qualitative study that drew data from interviews with four key media workers at CLR (a station that appears to serve the Ewe ethnic group of the station's orbit) and an analysis of the editorial policy document of the station. The outcome of this initial study should provide impetus for more studies towards a comprehensive understanding of issues relating to ethnic media and ethnic journalism in Africa.

## **Contextualising ethnicity, language and ethnic journalism**

The key concepts and terms framing the discussion of this paper could be distilled by briefly examining the ethnic, linguistic and media environment of Ghana. Ghana's ethnic composition represents a complicated spectre. Scholars such as Owu-Ewie (2017) and Ansah (2008) have indicated the difficulty in pinning down the exact number of ethnic groups in Ghana. The Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2013) estimated about ninety-two different ethnic groups, classified broadly as Akan, Mole Dagbani, Ewe, Ga Adangbe, Guan and Gume (Gurma). All these groups speak languages that have sub varieties or dialects spoken by distinct subgroups within the broad ethnic groups. Asante and Gyimah-Boadi (2004) provided a detailed breakdown of the ethnic and linguistic complexities of the country, a structure that has remained largely unchanged in current times (see Owu-Ewie 2017; Ansah 2008). Of the current national population of about 30

million, the percentage distribution of these language-based ethnic groups is as follows: Akan, 49.1%; Mole Dagbani, 16.5%; Ewe, 12.7%; Ga Adangbe, 8%; Guan, 4.4%; all the others, 6.2% (Asante and Gyimah-Boadi 2004; Ansah 2008). These groups are language based, so they also represent various language and dialect groups, thereby making the country typically linguistically diverse (Ansah 2008).

Linguistically (and discounting English, a non-native language occurring mostly as an L2 in the country despite its high status and dominance as the country's official language), Akan has assumed a hegemonic linguistic position in Ghana. This arguably renders the other Ghanaian languages minorities in that respect. Akan has the most speakers in the country, commanding the greatest share of the language economy: it is spoken in almost all parts of the country as a first, second or third language. Besides native Akans, whose educated people speak Akan and a variety of English, many other Ghanaians speak or understand Akan and at least one other native language and a variety of English. Thus, Akan provides a fluid linguistic overlap for most Ghanaian communities, occurring as a medium for popular culture, business, news and other purposes. The implication is the discreet transfer of its culture across its native boundary, even if disliked by the other ethnic groups.

Consequently, Akan remains undoubtedly the most influential native language in Ghana, acting as a *lingua franca* (Guerini 2008). Apart from being taught across all the education levels of Ghana up to the university (with a few other languages), it is also the face of indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana. For example, about 90% of local language radio stations broadcasts exclusively, or in part, in Akan (see Akpojivi and Fosu 2020). In fact, an Accra-based radio station, *Peace FM*, has for the past decade consistently been the most listened to station in the country, beating all English language stations (see Akpojivi and Fosu 2016). As the language of popular culture, the majority of local music, movies, and drama productions occurs in and selling the cultural values of the language. Consequently, much of the literature on indigenous language broadcasting in Ghana have overwhelmingly focused on stations that broadcast in Akan (see Akpojivi and Fosu 2016; Gadzekpo, Yeboah-Banin, and Akrofi-Quarcoo 2020).

Nevertheless, all the ethnic groups and their languages, no matter how small, are legally and equally recognised. Article 17 sub section 2 of the current Constitution of Ghana spells out that:

A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status. (17)

Article 26 sub section 1 adds:

Every person is entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the provisions of this Constitution. (The Constitution of Ghana 1992, 24)

The Constitution further makes provision for any native language to be used in parliament, provided there is an interpreter available to translate it into English, which is the official language of the Ghanaian Parliament.

From the above, we attempt a description of ethnic media and ethnic journalism in Ghana. We argue that media organisations in Ghana, particularly radio stations, that broadcast predominantly in a local language other than Akan and whose programmes and content focus on the immediate cultures and needs of their community may fit the bill of ethnic media. Since the concept of ethnic journalism has received little research attention in Africa, an attempt to operationalise it in this study would defer to global perspectives. The concept has been ascribed different meanings, most often likening it to local language journalism or in some instances as community radio, i.e. media designed to serve the wellbeing of a particular community. The subtle correlation between media organisations and their journalistic practices cannot be missed in such viewpoints. The idea is that ethnic media produce or practise ethnic journalism. Thus, in Ghana and following Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach (2011), ethnic media may be said to be media produced for the interest of a particular ethnic community and 'ethnic journalism is the practice of journalism by, for, and about ethnic groups' (Lecheler, Matthes, and Boomgaarden 2019, 691).

One of the major identification criteria for ethnic media has been media produced by and/or for racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities (Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach 2011), to seek the fundamental interests and wellbeing of the group through (ethnic) journalism (Lecheler, Matthes, and Boomgaarden 2019). According to Şahin (2017), ethnic journalism serves linguistic minorities within a local community whose views and ideas are not reflected in mainstream media or community media. Ethnic journalism is therefore unique due to its complexities and procedures because it is targeted at ethnic minorities and this, to a large extent, will influence the journalistic practices which usually recognise the historical and (re)constructed socio-political, economic and cultural realities of that ethnic community (Lazarte-Morales 2012).

This study approaches ethnic media and journalism from the perspective of Lazarte-Morales (2012). Lazarte-Morales sees ethnic journalism as journalism that emphasises the ‘cultural and social traits that distinguish minority groups from mainstream culture, reinforcing construction of these groups as different, exotic, and creates a representation that they want to buttress’ (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1995; cited in Lazarte-Morales 2012, 1). This conceptualisation suits this study for two primary reasons. Firstly, CLR broadcasts predominantly in Ewe, which is a minority language in radio broadcasting. The point is that, within the politics of language in Ghana, Akan is the majority language; it is powerful politically, economically and socially, and dominates the broadcasting industry. Secondly, the Dzodze community, together with the environs which CLR serve, is a relatively small community located with limited opportunities. Being, removed from the economic and political hubs of Accra and Kumasi, the station and its socio-political, economic and cultural realities may not feature adequately in the mainstream media. CLR could be an ethnic minority radio station that seeks to address the immediate needs of its community.

### Indigenous language radio in Ghana: a brief background

The media landscape in Ghana has significantly transformed thanks to the deregulation of the media and communication sector in the early 1990s, following the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. Before 1993, and focusing on radio, the broadcast news industry was mainly a state monopoly with rigid state enforced regulation against private media ownership. The state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) – television and radio services – at the time operated largely in English language. Although GBC Radio 1 consistently allocated airtime to broadcasting in indigenous languages (Ansah 2008), the opportunity was almost negligible. The broadcasts occurred in just a few of the indigenous languages – Akan, Dagbani, Ewe, Ga, Nzema, and Hausa – out of the country’s over 70 indigenous languages and ethnic groups (Ibid.). Remarkably, GBC Radio1 still allocated airtime to broadcast in English, which was the exclusive broadcasting language of GBC Radio 2. The fact that GBC 1 devoted just a few short programmes to each of those local languages meant that a bigger chunk of GBC’s overall broadcasting time was reserved to English. As such, there was little opportunity at the time for private ownership of media to account for ethnic media. The deregulation empowered by the 1992 Constitution opened the airwaves for active participation by the private sector (see Ahmed 2012), leading to a proliferation of not only media organisations, but also local language broadcasting networks across Ghana, starting from 1996.

Yet, a large part of the immediate post-deregulation period saw a transformation only in private ownership of media houses but not in linguistic and cultural access and diversity. The media organisations continued to broadcast largely in English even up to the mid-2000s. Ansu-Kyeremeh (2007) noted with disappointment how, following the deregulation, the media industry was ‘pervasive with foreign influence’, in means, process, and content. Blankson (2005), whilst supporting this position, revealed how media practitioners spoke in American accent, with the content heavily foreign. Most Ghanaians were therefore still excluded from direct access to media discourses since they did not have linguistic access.

It was not until the entry of *Peace FM* into the media industry in 1999 that a real change in the media scene began. This was because this commercial radio station broadcast predominantly in

Akan, a local language spoken by over 80% of Ghanaians either as the first or second language. Akpojivi and Fosu (2016) noted that the formulation of the Guidelines for Local Language Broadcasting Policy of 2009 motivated a significant shift in the broadcast industry as many more media organisations started broadcasting in indigenous languages. In fact, every community in Ghana today receives at least one radio transmission, whilst many communities in Ghana, outside of the various metropolises, have at least a radio station sited in the community. There are currently about 380 FM radio stations in operation in Ghana (see 3rd Quarter NCA industry data 2019), most of which broadcast in indigenous languages.

Whilst opportunity has been created for access and participation in Ghana's media and political spaces (Fosu and Akpojivi 2015), other ethnic implications and supposedly unexplored issues immediately come to mind. The first is whether the country's linguistically and ethnically diverse broadcasting trends imply a new development in journalism types and journalists' professional roles and practices. Another issue is whether a case can be made for the existence of ethnic media and/or the practice of ethnic journalism in Ghana.

The above queries flow from two positions. Firstly, Akpojivi and Fosu's (2020) have argued that ethical norms of English language media productions or journalistic practices are different from indigenous language media practices because of the incompatibility of both practices within the unique context of Ghana, an observation confirmed by Gadzekpo, Yeboah-Banin, and Akrofi-Quarcoo (2020). And secondly, professional norms may differ across indigenous language media in terms of journalists' professional roles in their organisation, community and society. Yet, there has been a lack of knowledge on these issues, especially on journalists' professional practices in a highly contested linguistic, economic, political and ideological geo-media sphere like Ghana.

Radio is being used in this instance because of its continuous dominance in the media space as the most accessed and influential medium in, not only Ghana, but also in Africa (Myers 2008). Whilst many radio stations in Ghana such as Latenu FM, Obonu FM and other GBC regional sub stations may broadcast in local languages, their set up, ownership, practices, targeted audience and ideology may not reflect ethnic media as characterised earlier. Thus, Fafaa Radio (CLR), a commercial FM station located in Dzodze (about 168 kilometres south east of Accra), served as an initial data source because its location, ownership, practices, programming and targeted audience seem to suggest a hypothetical case for it being an ethnic media organisation practising ethnic journalism.

## Conceptual framework and methodological underpinnings

Proceeding from the normative perspective of what is expected of the news media (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956), this study adopts two normative models to guide the analysis: the social responsibility or public interest and the alternative models (McQuail 2010). These models provided a framework for analysing CLR as a potential ethnic media and to discover its journalists' professionalism and the needs of the Ewe community in and around Dzodze. As McQuail (2010, 185) explains, the social responsibility model (SRM) goes beyond the freedom of expression to include obligations to society that transcends self-interest. Ostini and Fung (2002, 42) put it thus: 'the social responsibility model is based on the idea that media have a moral obligation to society to provide adequate information for citizens to make informed decisions'. This moral obligation of informing the citizens means that the needs of the community which the press serves must be met, as this would consequently liberate and empower citizens. For the alternative media model (AMM), McQuail (2010, 186) notes that it covers a 'range of non-mainstream media, with different aims'. This model emphasises 'grass-roots organisation, participation and community, shared goals between producers and audiences ...' Importantly, the AMM promotes activities that address the rights of subcultures alongside their unique values, understandings and commitment to a real sense of community. These models may be criticised as being too Western-oriented and not recognising the realities of other countries, such as their economic conditions (see Ostini and

Fung 2002). However, the models provide critical analytical signposts for an understanding of the relationship between the media and the Ewe community within the station's coverage area.

## Methodology

Since this study was interested in understanding ethnic media and journalists' professionalism, a qualitative approach was adopted to address the study's concerns (Silverman 2016). Data was collected in March 2020 through semi-structured in-depth interviews with the news editor and 3 purposively selected journalists of the station. The station is a relatively small one and these four participants constitute the immediate permanent employees working as journalists on account of having been involved in journalistic activities for at least five years, and as advocates because they championed the interventionist ideological stance of the station. The participants were deemed to have had adequate vocational experience and knowledge about the editorial policy and journalism practised at the station, thereby making them suitable to provide data for the study. Since the participants wanted anonymity regarding their opinions in the study, we used the representation in the table below to designate them in the work.

Participants and their designations		
Participant	Position	Designation in study
1	CEO/journalist/presenter	P1
2	Ag. Manager/news editor	P2
3	Journalist/presenter	P3
4	News anchor/reporter	P4

'p' stands for 'participant'

The editorial policy documents of CLR were also content-analysed, and ideas that speak to the issue being investigated were integrated into the overall analysis to enhance the findings and conclusions. A critical interpretative approach was used in the data analyses, alongside a sociological imagination embedded in a critical interpretative approach, which provided insights into the significant media and journalism realities of the local society. To fully grasp these data and analytical designs and the eventual findings and conclusions, we present a brief profile of CLR and its geo-social and cultural environs.

## Fafaa FM (CLR) and its served community: an overview

Fafaa FM, also known as Crystal Lens Radio (CLR), is a small radio station located in Dzodze, the district capital of the Ketu North District. The name, 'Fafaa', is an Ewe word, which means 'peace'. The station began operation in 2013, licensed as a commercial radio on 100.3 MHz. The owner, Mr. Emmanuel Vortepé Ketaman, is a media practitioner who has been involved in media work for over 13 years and worked as a journalist/presenter at the station. The primary targeted audience of the station is the Ewe ethnic group, who happens to be the dominant ethnic group of Dzodze, where the station is located, and the other territories within the coverage of the station (see below). There are other people of different ethnic backgrounds living in the catchment area of the station but may not be the direct target of the station since they may not be able to understand the Ewe language of the station. The non-Ewes are in a far minority in terms of the population of the area. Other radio stations, such as Denyigba Radio, Dzigbordi FM, and Nyatefe FM operate within Fafaa FM's orbit and carry affiliated signals in English and Akan from other stations in Accra such as Peace FM and Adom, FM. These stations thus function as community radio stations, targeting all inhabitants of the area, Ewes and non-Ewe alike.

The motivating ideology for establishing the Fafaa Radio is 'information for intervention' (P1, Personal Communication, March 2020). The station's language policy is predominantly Ewe. However, the station carries news bulletins in English from Joy FM (an English language commercial

station based in Accra) at 6 AM, 12 PM and 6 PM to provide national and international news to its audiences. The station's media activities are regulated by its Editorial Policy statement. The Policy stipulates the purpose, vision, mission, editorial and news quality, among other provisions expected of the media house.

Concerning reach, the station's signals can be received in almost all parts of southern Volta Region, spanning Ketu North, Ketu South, Keta, Angloga, Akatsi North and South, and on affiliated stations such as Justice FM in Tamale. The natives in these areas are mostly Anlos, a sub-group of Ewes distinguishable from the Ewes in other parts of the region such as Peki, Kpeve, Kpando, Hohoe and so on. Whilst the Anlo Ewe is markedly different from the Ewe of the other Ewe sub-groups in terms of accent and in few cases vocabulary, the various dialects are mutually intelligible.

The location of the towns largely determined the dominant occupation of the people. Thus, those towns along the sea such as Keta, Dzelukope, etc. have most of the inhabitants being fisher folks, whilst those in the hinterland like Akatsi and Dzodze are mostly farmers of crops such as maize, tomatoes, cassava, shallot and green pepper. The people in these areas largely practise traditional religion. The belief in the harming and avenging powers of deities and other spiritual forces is strongly ingrained in the Ewes, who often search for spiritual protection. Whilst statutory government structures and institutions exist, the people are more prone to seeking redress unconventionally with the chiefs, deities, or radio stations rather than, for example, with the police and the courts.

The station has a foundation called 'Duamenefa Foundation' aimed at providing social intervention to the people of the area. The foundation supports one of the station's major radio programmes called 'Duamenefa mianor', in Ewe, literally meaning 'the town should be peaceful for us to live in'. The radio station is well known in the whole of the Volta Region as a proven development-oriented broadcasting outlet.

## Findings and discussion

This study set out to investigate whether a case could be made for ethnic media/journalism in Ghana. It was also to discover the professional ethos of journalists of the Fafaa Radio and the extent to which they think they meet the needs and aspirations of their audiences and host community. CLR provided interview and Editorial Policy data for this preliminary study to set the tone for further investigations on the topic. The four participants were Ewes and hailed from the locality of the radio station. Even though all had had some on-the-job training in journalism and had been practising for some years, two had obtained a diploma in journalism whilst the others had other tertiary-level qualifications. The findings are presented subsequently.

### Ethnic media and journalism practice in Ghana?

The data indicated that CLR is exhibiting characteristics of an ethnic media, for which reason it could be described as an ethnic media. The station was established by an Ewe who recognised and intended to use the power of radio and communication to empower marginalised people in his area. The station was thus to provide interventions that serve the interest of the station's catchment area, a point eloquently expressed in the mission and vision of the station:

The Mission of Fafaa 100.3 Fm is to deliver fresh and compelling content for intervention with special focus on the seven pillars of the society, i.e. Religion, Family, Governance, Education, Media, Arts and Business ... (Fafaa FM, n.d., Editorial Policy, 1)

Similarly, the Vision Statement, as captured in the Editorial Policy is:

[T]o generate authentic information for Intervention ... and to collaborate with relevant stakeholders to save the vulnerable of the various communities whose right and privileges are being trampled upon religiously, socially and economically ... (Fafaa FM, n.d., Editorial Policy)

It appears that the station was established because media discourses and their content in Ghana were overwhelmingly in languages and about cultures other than Ewe, thereby proscribing many Ewes in the station's catchment area from directly identifying with and participating in the national media agenda. Thus, the objective of the station, as captured in its mainly locally focused news bulletins and other media activities, is to bring socio-political and cultural empowerment to the Ewe people, to safeguard the Ewe culture and to seek the wellbeing of the people. The website of the station ([www.fafaafm.com](http://www.fafaafm.com)) has the slogan, VOICE OF THE EWES, which amply affirms the ethnic orientation of the station. Thus, its programming and content are primarily to be '... credible, accurate, fair, valuable, stimulating and relevant to the station's audiences' (Fafaa FM, n.d., Editorial Policy, 2), that is, the Ewe community. As noted by Lecheler, Matthes, and Boomgaarden (2019), the literature on ethnic media and journalism maintains conceptualisation of ethnicity marked by contexts of limited access to media production. As the people's radio, content is aligned with the community and its welfare, thereby making the people owners of the station since it is essentially about them and their tribe. The Editorial Policy is emphatic that:

Fafaa 100.3 FM's Management and the Board of Directors will consult on a regular basis with the Fafaa 100.3 FM's Community Advisory Board for advice and community feedback regarding Fafaa 100.3 FM's Programming.

And as one participant put it: 'So, people trust us; they feel they are part of the station' (P1, Personal Communication, 2020).

The station also aims to safeguard the Ewe culture through emphasis on and use of predominantly Ewe language in its broadcasting. One of the major manifestations and carriers of culture is language, and a media outlet actively propagates and preserves the language and culture it broadcasts in. This is eloquently indicated by some of the participants: according to P2, 'We only want to serve our Ewe people, that is why we're doing everything in Ewe' (Personal Communication, 2020). Similarly, P3 added that 'The reason behind using Ewe language is that, we're in Eweland, we are **catering** for those who can listen to what we are saying ... That is why when it comes to Fafaa FM, we have so many programs with different Ewe names: Agoo, Enyonyoge, Afeamenefa, Eletorhe' (Personal Communication, 2020). By broadcasting in Ewe, the cultural values of the ethnic community are promoted. P3, whilst eluding to this posited 'But we are trying to promote our language. Do you get it? That's why when you come to town, they tell you that 'Oh, I'm going to listen to Agoo'. 'I'm going to listen to Enyonyoge' (Personal Communication, 2020). Indeed, whenever any language apart from Ewe is used on the station, it is translated into Ewe.

From the above, the ideology of inclusiveness and belonging ('we') and the aim of promoting the Ewe language and culture are clearly expressed. The ideologies pushed by the station would resonate with all Ewes anywhere in Ghana and beyond. It is therefore not surprising that some of the local programmes are received and patronised by Ewes in far-flung areas outside the district of the station. Rajagopalan (2001, 23) argues that within languages, loyalties to a particular language has often acted as a powerful force since widely spoken languages are powerful, with allegiance and have loyalties attached to them. That is, people identify with a language due to its political or economic attributes that the speaker of that language derives. As Rajagopalan puts it, the central purpose and condition of any language is to be recognised as a political force, as 'linguistic identity is a function of the political climate prevailing in given societies at specific historic moments'.

Furthermore, ethnic media are unique in their programming as they behave differently from mainstream media because of their ethnic agenda. Thus, rather than reporting national and international occurrences, CLR, together with its audiences, create mostly local news about the needs and aspirations of its targeted audiences. According to P2:

... most people in the community prefer to report issues to us than even to the police because they feel when they bring issues to us, we act on it. ... When people are doing something bad in the community and they see that Fafa FM is coming, they will stop and run away because they know what when we get hold of the issue,

we'll make sure that the relevant authorities are involved, and necessary action is taken. (Personal communication, 2020)

In addition, P4 posited that: '... those who are into farming, sometimes we go into the communities, listen to their problems especially in respect of their farming issues and then we talk to our leaders or stakeholders to educate the farmers' (Personal communication, 2020).

It can therefore be argued that part of the ethnic agenda of CLR is to mediate the everyday economic, political and social needs of its ethnic community. P4, whilst supporting the above, stated that:

As for me as a journalist, sometimes when I do my news and those things, I get out into the streets; I move into the communities and say to people, what would you want me to do for you concerning the situation? ... So what they tell me, I draft it into the news, I pass it on. So, from there we bring it under control. (Personal Communication, 2020)

Thus, the station actively goes beyond merely reporting occurrences to seeking and satisfying the socio-economic and political issues of its community. The station actively plays this role by ensuring regard for law and order and represents people's cases with state institutions, thereby addressing the emotional and psychological wellbeing of its audience. According to P2, the station acts as a platform for liberating affected people from spiritual bondage and suffering thus:

So, for instance, talking about spiritual matters, we know the constitution of Ghana, the Police don't do spiritual matters. You know, the traditional authorities are the people who are supposed to oversee those things. So, we try to engage the traditional authorities, the chiefs, the opinion leaders. (Personal Communication, 2020)

Whilst CLR appears to meet the criteria of being an ethnic media organisation by creating and sustaining a sense of belonging along historical, religious, and cultural lines in its ethnic community (Matsaganis, Katz, and Ball-Rokeach 2011), the question remains as to whether the station practises ethnic journalism. This is because the journalistic practices of the station appear to reflect activities stipulated for community media in Ghana. The critical issue is whether CLR should be regarded as ethnic media or community media. The national media policy (2000, n.d.) identifies community radio and TV as: 'those that are about, for, by and of a specific marginalised community, which pursues a particular social development agenda, which is non-profit, non-sectarian and non-partisan'. It is clear that such a description is meant to avoid the tag 'ethnic media' because of its ominous implications. Although CLR is profit-oriented and had overtly indicated its aim to promote a particular culture, an ambivalence is discerned from participants' attitudes concerning the station being an ethnic media practising ethnic journalism. In other words, the data do not expressly project only Ewes as the sole beneficiaries of the content and benefits of the station. According to a participant:

What we do is that because most people listen to that program outside the Volta Region so what we do is that, the program is in Ewe but the host makes sure that intermittently they try and then summarise in English so that people who cannot speak Ewe can understand what is really happening. (P2. Personal Communication, 2020)

Lecheler, Matthes, and Boomgaarden (2019) have argued that what sets ethnic journalism apart as a distinct category is the involvement of ethnically differentiated groups living within a dominant culture. The English and Akan media cultures are dominant in Ghana. Thus, it can be argued that, by its focus, CLR may be said to practise ethnic journalism. However, the ethnic aspect of the media was mildly expressed because the governance system of the country has tried to suppress strong ethnic expressions because of its potentially negative ramifications. The fact that the station acknowledged and was open to grant access and participation to other beneficiaries who might not be Ewe implies a positive ethnic orientation that would not breed undesirable consequences.

## **Ethnic media and journalists' responsibility to their host community: professionalism versus community needs**

During data collection, questions were asked to examine the intersection between the professionalism of the station's journalists and the ethnic needs and aspirations of their environment. The journalists agreed with existing general notions about journalism and its demands. They felt that journalism should be 'in the public interest', be about truth and newsworthiness. As P2 put it, 'As for me as an editor my responsibility is to make sure that whatever we bring out to the public is the truth. We make sure that it's authentic. Lastly, I make sure that at least it is impacting, changing lives' (Personal Communication, 2020).

The participants also believed in universal notions of professionalism, which is expressly captured in the station's Editorial Policy that journalism should present balanced stories, be fair to stakeholders and not deviate from the ethics of the profession. The Editorial Policy is explicit under News Quality that: 'The quality of news shall not seek to promote any political party or an individual'. To a participant, 'a journalist must not be biased. A journalist must go to what he or she learnt. A journalist must go according to the rules and regulations of journalism' (P3, Personal Communication, 2020). Other positions expressed are 'You need to make sure that you follow the code of ethics of journalism so that it will favour the two sides, not only one side' (P4, Personal Communication, 2020). Since Ghana's media sphere is highly politicised along the two dominant parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) (see Akpojivi and Fosu 2016), the station ensures balance of both sides by inviting or representing the views of both parties. As P2 describes, '... we will call the NDC and call the NPP, talk to them until we get the facts. We will not take sides' (Personal Communication, 2020). These assertions highlight the importance of journalism education and training, i.e. awareness of and subscribing to a professional code of conduct and professionalism, and this was used to define good professional journalism in the context of CLR.

In addition, getting a balanced view from both parties further shows the distinctive features of Fafaa FM, within the political and media sphere of Ghana. In Ghana, most commercial private radio stations adopt political leanings. CLR is located in an area that is the stronghold of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which is currently the main opposition party in Ghana's politics. Thus, the expressed neutrality of this station remarkably accentuates its ethnic status. The participants feel it is their duty to help vulnerable people in society through advocacy, lobbying and development journalism. Thus, the journalists also regarded professionalism as ensuring the material, spiritual and psychological wellbeing of the entire ethnic group irrespective of the individual members' political leanings.

Concerning participants' views on the extent to which the station meets their audience's needs, various interesting views were shared. These views correlated with Şahin (2017) whose study based on interviews with journalists and editors working for Turkish-language newspapers, suggests three conceptual dimensions that can help to understand ethnic media journalists' professional roles and performance: perception of audience, relation to power and professional ideals. According to the author, these dimensions may overlap in practice and provide a basis for understanding ideas and attitudes towards journalistic practices within ethnic media.

A participant was of the view that the practice of journalism should identify with the targeted people, be empathetic to solve the people's problems. This suggests journalism is powerful whilst audience is vulnerable and need assistance from the media. The interventionist ideology of the station is thus strongly highlighted to support the journalist's community-focused journalistic practices described earlier. Also, participants emphasised the watchdog role of the news media, which is to hold political figures accountable to the people. As P4 puts it, 'The role of journalism is that we must go outside the radio, feel the hotness, feel the situation in which people are living around us before calling us as journalists. When we find solutions to their situations, then we are journalists' (Personal Communication, 2020). Similarly, P1 states that 'Fafaa Radio is created or built to assist

humanity especially poor people, farmers, the vulnerable, the target or purpose of Fafaa Radio is to help people in terms of agrar and also developmental issues in the community' (Personal Communication, 2020). Thus, once the journalists were engaging in all these, they feel they were meeting the aspirations of their audience. This though is a one-dimensional position which ought to be tested from the perspective of the audience for a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The findings from this study are not different from similar studies such as Husband (2005) and Tubergen (2014) that examined ethnic journalism practices and their place in national development. As Husband (2005) alluded, ethnic minority media may be the dominant media for ethnic minorities, and within the context of this study, CLR is the dominant media for the Ewe minority ethnic group in Dzodze, as not only do they cater for their needs and integrate them into content production, they serve non-Ewes located within the region. In addition, while Husband argues that it is likely for employees at ethnic minority media to disengage from the identity of the ethnic media community, in this study, we found that employees were engaged in the identity of the community. Being members of the minority community themselves, these employees reached out to the community to identify and address their needs via the media. By so doing, they maintain high professionalism of being truthful and objective in their reportage.

### **Conclusion: ethnic media and journalism in Ghana – way forward**

Before concluding, we make haste to acknowledge some weaknesses of this study. Being an almost virgin terrain in Ghana, the topic lacked existing literature on Africa and Ghana to enrich the discussion. Additionally, the use of just one radio station may not provide a convincing picture of the issues under investigation. It was difficult to identify media houses that meet the hypothetical criteria of ethnic media to be included in a study. Thus, despite identifying CLR as a potential ethnic media organisation, this study alone cannot provide conclusive evidence about the existence of ethnic media/journalism in Ghana. A study of this nature should include audience perspectives, which is lacking in this current study due to logistical challenges. We, therefore, call for more research in the area for a better understanding of the topic and to help develop conceptualisations that reflect the realities of the country.

The study has discovered that CLR exhibits tendencies in its establishment, ideology and practices that make it ethnic media although it is not very clear whether its practices could be described as ethnic journalism or community radio. This confusion can be attributed to the regulatory body's (NMC) systematically avoiding using ethnic media in their classification of media, possibly because of the divisive and fragmented political landscape of Ghana. CLR's main journalistic roles from the perspective of the journalists include providing information in Ewe for Ewes, meeting the immediate needs of the station's patrons, irrespective of where they are found, championing the cultural and material development of the area, being ethical, and being fair and balanced in practice. In addition, as stated in the editorial policy CLR, the station's focus is on meeting the needs of the community, therefore, the station could be seen as acting as a platform for its targeted ethnic group to participate in the media and local/national development. Thus, CLR plays a germane role in the socio-cultural, political and economic development of its accessible communities.

This study suggests that ethnic media/journalism could be a central factor in democratic sustenance and development of local communities. Avison and Meadows (2000) posited that in Western countries such as Australia and Canada, ethnic media have helped in strengthening the democratic process by creating a space for marginalised groups to communicate about shared experiences (cited in Lazarte-Morales 2012, 2). This space enables the creation and recreation of political, economic and cultural realities which are ignored by mainstream media as a result of the perceived lack of political and economic force of the ethnic minority community. Ethnic media are able to do this by 'supplying information for these communities in their native language about services, rights and political, social and economic developments in the local and national contexts in which they are embedded' (Şahin 2017, 1276).

We argue that expressing and participating in the affairs of one's ethnicity is germane to national democratic culture, which should involve all shades of interests. It concerns addressing the issues of the minority voices which are most often neglected in democratic discourses. Such a development comes from the ability of the community to sustain and promote its cultural heritage since culture, according to Lopez-Claros (2014), plays a central role in the overall economic development of any country.

Finally, we argue that the tendency to suppress ethnic discussions, even in the academic arena within post-colonial African state, is a disincentive to national development, as academics from the global north have researched extensively on ethnic language and place in socio-economic, cultural developments of citizens and immigrants (see Tubergen and Wierenga 2011; Tubergen 2014). Ethnicity generally and ethnicity in the media in particular are part of our reality. Avoiding a discussion on them does not take the phenomenon away. Whether ethnic manifestation produces desirable or undesirable consequences require that it be studied for society to learn from and understand them. This study has shown that ethnicity is not inherently bad or negative and that ethnic media could contribute significantly to local and national development if properly harnessed as evident in countries like Netherlands (Tubergen 2014) and New Zealand (Ross 2019) amongst others.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## ORCID

Ufuoma Akpojivi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9349-2977>

## References

- Ahmed, A. 2012. "Broadcasting Reform in Ghana: A Critical Analysis of Broadcasting Policy and Regulatory Change 1994–2008." PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.
- Akpojivi, U., and M. Fosu. 2016. "Indigenous Language Broadcasting in Ghana: Retrospect and Prospect." In *Indigenous Language Media, Language Politics and Democracy in Africa*, edited by A. Salawu and M. B. Chibita, 121–150. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Akpojivi, U., and M. Fosu. 2020. "African Language Journalism in Ghana and the Quest for Quality Journalism: An Investigation of Peace FM." In *African Language Media Development, Economic and Management*, edited by A. Salawu, 204–223. London: Routledge.
- Ansah, G. N. 2008. "Linguistic Diversity in the Modern World: Practicalities and Paradoxes." *The International Journal of Language, Society and Culture*. Issue 26. Accessed May 14, 2011. [www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/issues/2008/26-1.pdf](http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/issues/2008/26-1.pdf).
- Ansu-Kyeremeh, K. 2007. "Implications of Globalization for Community Broadcasting in Ghana." In *The Power of Global Community Media*, edited by L. K. Fuller, 101–109. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Asante, R., and E. Gyimah-Boadi. 2004. *Ethnic Structure, Inequality and Governance of the Public Sector in Ghana*. UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development).
- Bannon, A., E. Miguel, and D. N. Posner. 2004. *Sources of Ethnic Identification in Africa*. Afrobarometer: Working paper No. 44. [http://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous\\_files/wgape/5\\_Bannon.pdf](http://cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous_files/wgape/5_Bannon.pdf).
- Blankson, I. A. 2005. "Negotiating the Use of Native Languages in Emerging Pluralistic and Independent Broadcasting Systems in Africa." *Africa Media Review* 13 (1): 1–22.
- Bowd, R., and A. B. Chikwanha, eds. 2010. *Understanding Africa's Contemporary Conflicts: Origin, Challenges and Peacebuilding*. A Monograph of the Africa Human Security Initiative. <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Mono173.pdf>.
- Bratton, Michael, Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, and Robert B. Mattes. 2005. *Public Opinion, Democracy and Market Reform in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chigudu, D. 2019. "Demystifying the Root Causes of Conflict in old "Greater" Sudan: Ethnicity and Tribalism." *Journal of Developing Society* 35 (2): 1–16.
- Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. 1992. <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/gh/gh014en.pdf>.
- Fafaa FM. n.d. *The Editorial Policy*. Ghana.

- Fosu, M., and U. Akpojivi. 2015. "Media Convergence Practices and Production in Ghana and Nigeria: Implications for Democracy and Research in Africa." *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies* 4 (2): 277–292.
- Gadzekpo, A., A. A. Yeboah-Banin, and S. Akrofi-Quarcoo. 2020. "A Case of Double Standards? Audience Attitudes to Professional Norms on Local and English Language Radio News Programmes in Ghana." *Journal of African Media Studies* 12 (1): 3–22.
- Ghana Statistical Service. 2013. *2010 Population and Housing Census: National Analytical Report*. <http://www2.statsghana.gov.gh/nada/index.php/catalog/3>.
- Guerini, F. 2008. "Multilingualism and Language Attitude in Ghana: A Preliminary Survey." *Ethnorema*. 4. <http://www.ethnorema.it/pdf/numero%204/03%20Articolo%20Guerini.pdf>.
- Husband, C. 2005. "Minority Ethnic Media as Communities of Practice: Professionalism and Identity Politics in Interaction." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (3): 461–479. doi:10.1080/13691830500058802.
- Ilorah, R. 2009. "Ethnic Bias, Favouritism and Development in Africa." *Development Southern Africa* 26 (5): 695–707.
- Lazarte-Morales, A. 2012. "Ethnic Journalism." In *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, edited by W. Donsbach, 1–3. Oxford: John Wiley & Sons.
- Lecheler, S., J. Matthes, and H. Boomgaarden. 2019. "Setting the Agenda for Research on Media and Migration: State-of-the-Art and Directions for Future Research." *Mass Communication and Society* 22 (6): 691–707. doi:10.1080/15205436.2019.1688059.
- Lentz, C. 1995. "'Tribalism' and Ethnicity in Africa: A Review of Four Decades of Anglophone Research." *Cahiers Des Sciences Humaines* 31 (2): 303–328.
- Lopez-Claros, A. 2014. *What Role Does Culture Play in Development?* World Economic Forum. Accessed April 21, 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2014/12/what-role-does-culture-play-in-development/>.
- Matsaganis, M., V. Katz, and S. Ball-Rokeach. 2011. *Understanding Ethnic Media: Producers, Consumers and Societies*. Sage. doi:10.4135/9781452230412.
- McQuail, D. 2010. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. 6th ed. London: Sage.
- Musvosvi, J. 2010. "Race, Ethnicity and Tribal Conflicts." *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 6 (1): 41–56.
- Myers, M. 2008. *Radio and Development in Africa: A Concept Paper Prepared for the International Development Centre (IDRC)*. <http://www.marysophiamyers.org/pdfs%20of%20my%20publications/5%20Radio%20and%20Development.pdf>.
- National Communication Authority. 2019. *3rd Quarter Industry Data*. <https://www.nca.org.gh/industry-data-2/statistical-bulletins/>.
- National Media Commission. 2000. *Ghana National Media Policy*. Accra: NMC.
- Nyamnjoh, F. 2005. *Africa's Media Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*. London: Zed Books.
- Ofori-Mensah Ababio, E. O. 2012. "The Role of Language in Ethnic Identity: The Case of Akwamu in Ghana." *African Journal of History and Culture* 4 (5): 74–97.
- Ostini, J., and A. Fung. 2002. "Beyond the Four Theories of the Press: A New Model of National Media Systems." *Mass Communication and Society* 5 (1): 41–56.
- Owu-Ewie, C. 2017. "Language, Education and Linguistic Rights in Ghana." *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 28 (2): 151–172.
- Rajagopalan, K. 2001. "The Politics of Language and the Concept of Linguistic Identity." *CAUCE, Revista de Filología y su Didáctica* 24: 17–28.
- Robinson, A. L. 2016. *Ethnic Diversity, Segregation, and Ethnocentric Trust in Africa*. Afro Barometer Working Paper No. 166.
- Ross, T. 2019. "Pulled Two Ways: Norms of 'Pacifness' and Journalism in New Zealand's Pacific News Media." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 40 (6): 649–664.
- Şahin, S. 2017. "Journalism and Professionalism in Ethnic Media: The Case of Turkish-Language Newspapers in the United Kingdom." *Journalism Studies* 19: 1–18. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2016.1266911.
- Siebert, F., T. Peterson, and W. Schramm. 1956. *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Silverman, D. 2016. *Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Tubergen, F. 2014. "Ethnic Boundaries in Core Discussion Networks: A Multilevel Social Network Study of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 41 (1): 101–116.
- Tubergen, F., and M. Wierenga. 2011. "The Language Acquisition of Male Immigrants in a Multilingual Destination: Turks and Moroccans in Belgium." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37 (7): 1039–1057.
- Venkatasawmy, R. 2015. "Ethnic Conflicts and Development in Africa." *Transience* 6 (2): 26–37.