A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT IN FOUR PROMINENT WESTERN ANGLOPHONE NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the manner in which the conflict in the oil-rich Niger Delta in Nigeria is represented in western Anglophone media. Large oil reserves in the Niger Delta have contributed millions of dollars towards the growth of Nigeria's export economy. Despite this, the Niger Delta is the least developed region in the country and is characterised by high rates of inequality. Residents of the Niger Delta have been outraged by the lack of action on the part of the Nigerian government and multinational oil corporations. Their discontent over the inequalities in the region has resulted in the proliferation of armed groups and militants who often use violent and criminal tactics to communicate their disgruntlement. This thesis closely examines the representations of the violent insurgency in the Niger Delta by conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis of 145 news texts selected from four western Anglophone newspapers from 2007 to 2011. The depiction of the conflict as it appears in the four newspapers is discussed in relation to an overview of scholarly literature which explores the portrayal of Africa not only in western media, but also in other forms of western scholarship and writing. The research undertaken in this study reveals that to a significant extent representations of the Niger Delta conflict echo and reflect some of the stereotypical and age-old negative imagery that informs meanings constructed about the African continent. However, the analysis of the news texts also shows that there are certainly efforts amongst some newspapers to move beyond simplistic representations of the conflict. The disadvantage however, is that these notable attempts tend to be marred by the use of pejorative language which typically invokes negative images associated with Africa. This study argues that the implications of these representations are highly significant as these representations not only affect the way in which the conflict is understood, but also the manner in which the international community responds to it.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFP   Agence France-Presse

AP   Associated Press

BBC   British Broadcasting Corporation

CDA   Critical Discourse Analysis

CNN   Cable News Network

DA   Discourse Analysis

DRC   Democratic Republic of Congo

MEND   Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

MNC   Multinational Corporations

MNOC   Multinational Oil Corporation

MOSOP Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People

NGO   Non-Governmental Organisation

NWICO New World Information Communication Order

OPEC   Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

SAP   Structural Adjustment Programme

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

US   United Sates

PIDIC   Poverty Instability Disease Illiteracy and Corruption

UK   United Kingdom

LIST OF MAPS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There is much literature exploring the manner in which western media and other forms of western writing and scholarship portray events and issues in Africa. An underlying concern of much of this literature is that the image of Africa appearing in western media and western scholarship tends to be negative, biased and characterized by racist undertones (Gruesser 1992; Pieterse 1992; Mbembe 2003; Wa'Njogu 2009). Those who criticize western media coverage of the continent argue that there is a tendency to cast Africa as a place that is beset with political and socio-economic disorders. It is further argued that the preoccupation with this subject matter in western media prevents sensible treatment and commentary concerning the continent (Chari, 2010:334; Wa'Njogu, 2009: 77). Discussions of these seemingly problematic representations of Africa in western media and western scholarship form the foundation from which this study is conducted.

In particular, this study aims to provide a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of representations of the conflict over oil in the Niger Delta. When the oil industry was established there during the 1950s, it brought with it expectations for the socio-economic development of the region. While the great amount of oil revenue generated through the exporting of oil to a number of mostly western states has grown the Nigerian economy, the Niger Delta remains economically underdeveloped with most of its residents living on US $1 or less a day (Omotola, 2006:4; Zalik, 2004:405). Disputes over the amount of oil revenue to be allocated to the Niger Delta have resulted in a violent insurgency which has been waged since the mid-1990s between armed groups, the Nigerian military and the security personnel of Multinational Oil Corporations (MNOCs). The interests of the various actors involved both directly and indirectly in the struggle over oil revenue, have resulted in a rather complex and violent conflict which is difficult to define and explain (Ukiwo, 2011:24; Ako, 2011:45-46).

The conflict is significant for the broader international political economy as violence in the region has often caused global oil prices to increase. The Niger Delta, which is among the top ten oil-producing regions in the world, is central to the global political economy of oil which is one reason why news reports in western media concerning the struggle over oil in the region abound. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a theoretical and

methodological framework for the examination of the representations of the Niger Delta conflict in four western Anglophone newspapers.

Research Objectives and Justification for the Study

The main aim of this study is to explore the way in which the conflict in the Niger Delta is represented in western Anglophone newspapers. The media are an important tool through which people understand the world in which they live (Chari, 2010:335; Hall, 1997:16; Webb, 2009:10). Images which constantly appear in the media become prominent and naturalised images constructed in the minds of audiences. These images are often ideological in that they are constructed as objective truths reflecting people and events as they supposedly are (Lippmann, 1922:29). It is with this in mind that this thesis aims to examine the manner in which western Anglophone newspapers represent the Niger Delta conflict. The term 'western Anglophone' is used throughout this study to refer in particular to the United States (US) and Britain, although countries like New Zealand, Canada and Australia can also be considered to be part of the Anglophone west. The four newspapers selected for this study are the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* from the US and the *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* from Britain.

The selected newspaper publications are critical for this study as they are influential conveyors of news and information to an extensive audience as well as to other media entities. While many of the stories which have been sampled from the newspapers are illustrated by photographs, the primary focus of the analysis for this study is the written texts. The use of language by the media is important because of its role in the social construction of events and people's identities. The way in which the media make use of language goes a long way in shaping the discourses that are disseminated as news and information to members of the public.

Because discourses are socially and historically formed over time through the social values, beliefs and traditions embedded in language, discourses tend to reflect the fundamental ideas and perceptions of a given society. By deconstructing discourses which reflect the hegemonic values and beliefs within society, one is better able to expose the latent power of dominant groups to advocate some meanings while excluding others (Fairclough 1992; Foucault 1972). As such, by adopting some of the analytical tools proposed by CDA,

this thesis aims to uncover the hidden meanings and images contained in discourses which stem from representations of the conflict in the Niger Delta.

The common thread which runs through the burgeoning literature on Africa's representation in western media is that despite the diversities and differing contexts within which events in Africa take place, there are certain stereotypical images which have become synonymous with the continent. These stereotypes paint the picture of an Africa which is lagging in its development and an Africa plagued by poverty, political instability and problems which seemingly cannot be resolved. Because such stereotypes are presented as accurate and unproblematic reflections of reality, the expressions of prejudice contained in stereotypical representations of Africa tend to be hidden (Pieterse, 1992:12; Wa'Njogu, 2009:77; Ojo, 2007:6; Mengara, 2001:9). Therefore in addition to exploring the representations of the conflict in the Delta, this study aims to examine whether representations of the Niger Delta conflict in the newspaper texts sampled for this study echo and reflect the stereotypical images of Africa that have regularly appeared in western media and other forms of western writing and scholarship about the continent. This study also aims to consider the likely implications of the way in which the Niger Delta is represented in the four western Anglophone newspapers.

Although there are a number of existing studies which problematize representations of Africa in western scholarship, as will be shown in Chapter Two, studies which explore the coverage of Africa in western media are rarely theoretically nuanced and grounded or methodologically systematic and thorough. Studies which explore the image of Africa in western media tend to make rather broad claims about the representation of the continent. Consequently this study aims to address this shortcoming by using CDA to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis of the representations of one area in particular, the Niger Delta.

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a flexible methodological and theoretical framework through which the goals outlined above can be adequately explored. As briefly mentioned, an integral part of CDA entails the examination of the connection between language use and unequal relations of power. This is of great importance because CDA calls into question the widespread propensity to underestimate the pivotal role that language can play in the production, maintenance and transformation of social relations of power. Given

the objectives of this research, CDA is a relevant method of analysis in that it reveals how language, and in this case the language of the sampled newspaper texts, can often unconsciously and unexpectedly contribute towards the domination of some by others.

Norman Fairclough's three-stage analysis, which is outlined below, offers a systematic approach through which to conduct a CDA of newspaper texts taken from the four western Anglophone newspapers selected for this study. However because of the complex nature of the conflict in the Niger Delta as well as the multiple actors involved, there is not enough space to comprehensively utilise all three stages of analysis. Instead only the first stage of analysis, which includes a range of critical questions and linguistic tools and concepts, is used to explore the representations of the conflict in the news texts.

In order to fully understand CDA as a method of analysis, it is important to contextualise it within a discussion of discourse. Discourse is a complex concept that has been articulated and expressed in a wide variety of ways. The varying ways in which discourse has been examined are also reflective of the differing intellectual traditions that form part of the social sciences (Wodack 2008; Fairclough 1989, 1995a; Mills 2004). To understand CDA in relation to this research and its proposed goals, it is necessary to briefly review how the concept of discourse is used outside of CDA before explaining its use within CDA.

According to Wodack (2008:1), the term 'discourse' can be used to mean anything from a historical monument, a realm of memories, policy, a political strategy, narratives, talk, speech, topic-related conversations and even language in general. Analysts talk of racist discourse, gendered discourse, discourses on (un)employment, media discourse, populist discourse and many more. However some scholars have provided distinct definitions of discourse which highlight certain unique features. A brief survey of these various definitions and conceptions of discourse is provided below, thus paving the way for a definition which is rooted in the chief theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of CDA.

Some scholars maintain that discourse can be treated as a mode of semiosis or a mode of meaningful symbolic behaviour. In this instance discourse is understood as language-in-action and as a means of constructing the social world (Blommaert, 2005:2; Matheson, 2005:15 16; Brown and Yule, 1983:1; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:5-7). Language users engaging in discourse are considered to be carrying out social acts and taking part in social interaction. Because discourses are linked to action and are often institutionalised, they are able to serve certain ends and can thus affect the exercise of power (Blommaert, 2005:2;

Brown and Yule, 1983:1; Jäger, 2001:34). This is not necessarily a consequence of a decisive and deliberate decision on the part of the author of the discourse, but can happen unconsciously. Thus discourse can be considered to be both a social and cultural phenomenon which entails historical patterns and progressions of use (Jäger, 2001; 34; Blommaert, 2005:3; Van Dijk, 1997:2).

There is also a longstanding tradition of treating discourse in linguistic terms and as a method that looks beyond the sentence so as to find consistency in a message structure or a given text. From this perspective, discourse is essentially understood as language-in-use. It is seen as a complex of linguistic forms or linguistic structures that are actually used by people. Discourse is also understood as an institutionally consolidated concept of speech, which brings about the flow of societal knowledge stored throughout time (Jäger, 2001:34; Johnstone, 2002:2-3; Jaworski and Coupland, 2006:1). This view of discourse contends that the generalisations that people make about language are made according to the discourse in which they participate. Discourse can thus be seen as conventional ways of talking that both create and are created by conventional ways of thinking. It is these linked ways of talking and thinking that constitute ideologies and also serve to direct the flow of power in society (Jäger, 2001:34; Johnstone, 2002:3).

Other approaches to discourse move away from the linguistic aspects and focus particularly upon the societal role of discourse. Foucault (1972) played an important role in this shift and was one of the first thinkers to conceive of discourse as a 'system of the possibility of knowledge – enabling us and at the same time constraining us to do things' (Foucault cited in Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:6). This conception of discourse emphasises that the subject positions which people occupy in society, are all at once products of discourse and producers of discourse. Added to this, discourse can be seen as a means of constructing social practices, yet can also be constructed by social practices. In so doing, a discourse can innovate new social practices, forms of knowledge, identities and social relations (Sarangi and Coulthard 2000: xv; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:5-7). Nonetheless, owing to the fundamental instability of language, meaning can never be permanently fixed. Thus a discourse is not a closed entity. Instead it is subject to being transformed through contact with other discourses. One of the reasons for this is because different discourses which represent distinct ways of talking about and understanding the social world, are engaged in a constant struggle with one another to achieve hegemony (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Foucault 1972).

What is clear from the above definitions and descriptions of discourse is that notions of the term are rather multifarious as there is no unified conception of discourse. Indeed discourse can relate to a wide range of factors, chief of which is the construction and dissemination of meaning and information around varying elements which form a crucial part of what we understand to be reality. What can also be taken from the views of discourse outlined above is that it can be viewed as language-in-use relative to social, cultural and political configurations. That is, discourse not only reflects social order but also shapes social order and the interaction of individuals in relation to society. This is one of the primary reasons why discourse has fallen within the research interests of many social scientists (Jaworski and Coupland, 2006:3).

Given that this research specifically makes use of CDA as a method of analysis, it is also important to understand the notion of discourse from such a standpoint. One of the leading proponents of CDA, Norman Fairclough (1989; 1992), integrates Foucault's approach to discourse with a systematic framework of analysis based on a linguistic analysis of texts (Mills, 2004:131). Like some of the scholars mentioned above, Fairclough asserts that discourse is a mode of action – one of the ways that people may act upon the world and especially upon each other – as well as a means of representation. Fairclough also states that in order to understand discourse as a form of social practice, one must consider the dialectical or mutually reinforcing relationship between discourse and social structure. In other words, the latter (social structure) is both a condition for, and an effect of, the former (discourse) (Fairclough, 1989:25; Fairclough, 1992:64).

Fairclough (1989:25) purports that discourse involves social conditions of production, and social conditions of interpretation. He goes on to emphasise that by conceiving of language as discourse and as a social practice, one is committing oneself to not just analysing texts nor just to analysing the processes of production and interpretation of texts. In fact, by regarding language as discourse and social practice, one is required to also analyse the relationship between texts, processes and their social conditions considering 'both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures' (Fairclough, 1989:26).

As a critical methodological and theoretical framework, CDA arose from earlier forms of discourse analysis which in turn can be seen as a reaction to traditional, formal and structural linguistics (Mills, 2004:120). Discourse analysts are interested in 'real' naturally occurring language, such as tape-recorded speech, or texts such as instruction manuals,

books, newspapers, government documents, policies and so on (Mills, 2004:122). Discourse analysis is a process which investigates characteristics of manifest language and word usage. It also examines the underlying description of topics in various texts by connecting words to themes and providing an analysis of content (Neuendorf, 2002:5-6). In addition to focusing on the description of the structural units within a text or utterance, discourse analysis takes as its starting point the view that through language representations of reality are created. These representations are never mere reflections of a pre-existing reality, but contribute to constructing reality. This does not mean that reality itself does not exist. However, this approach emphasises that meanings and representations are constituted as such through discourse (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:8-9).

Discourse analysts are also interested in what happens when people draw on the knowledge they have about language based on their memories of things they have said, heard, written or seen, in order to do things in the world. Furthermore, discourse analysts claim that discourse is both the source of this knowledge and the result of it (Johnstone, 2002:3). Subsequently the purpose of discourse analysis is not to merely get behind the discourse, to find out what people supposedly really mean when they make a particular statement, or to discover the 'reality' behind a discourse. Rather, the principle underpinning discourse analysis is that reality can never be reached outside discourse, which in turn warrants the need for the analysis of various discourses. Accordingly, discourse analysis has provided some scholars, including critical discourse analysts, with a general framework for problem-oriented social research (Wodack, 2008:2; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:21).

Although discourse analysis has been very important in opening up new areas of study, bringing about the analysis of the systematic organisational properties of language and attempting to develop a system of notation and description for these organisational units, it has also been criticised for a number of reasons (Mills, 2004:125). For instance, even though it considers language-in-use within socially manifest language contexts, some forms of discourse analysis have been criticised for showing inadequate concern for the way that social relations impinge upon the production of speech or written texts. Other forms of discourse analysis have been accused of paying inadequate attention to the power relations between participants (Mills, 2004:125).

Fairclough (1989; 1992; 1995) builds upon earlier approaches to discourse analysis, but takes on board some of the criticisms indicated above. He adopts a critical stance towards certain forms of discourse analysis and argues that many such analyses overlook the

ideological nature of discursive and social practices (Mills, 2004:125). By discursive practice, he means the process involved in producing a text. Entailed are the rules, norms and mental models of what is considered to be socially acceptable behaviour in various roles and relationships, including the way that these rules, norms and models play a part in producing, receiving and interpreting a text (McGregor 2003).

Fairclough's approach to discourse analysis endeavours to systematically investigate the opaque relationship of causality and determination between discursive practices and wider social and cultural structures (Fairclough, 1995:132). According to Fairclough (1995:132), CDA aims to explore how such practices and texts emerge from and are ideologically shaped by power relations and struggles over power. Moreover, CDA concerns itself with how the opacity of the relationships between discourse and society results in the safeguarding of power and hegemony.

A noteworthy part of Fairclough's work is concerned with the dialectic nature of discourse and particularly with intertextuality, which can be broadly defined as the propensity of texts to make reference to previously constructed texts. Unlike most discourse analysts, Fairclough clearly situates intertextuality within a social context (Mills, 2004:137). This is premised on his view of language as a form of social practice; that language is an integral part of society and not external to it. Related to this is the view that language is a both a social and socially conditioned process, determined by other (non-linguistic) parts of society (Fairclough, 1989:22). Therefore CDA does not provide a ready-made, how-to-do approach to conduct social analysis, but emphasises that for each study a thorough theoretical analysis of a social issue must be made, so as to be able to identify which discourse and social structures to analyse. Of particular interest for CDA research is the study of the many forms of implicit or indirect meanings, such as presuppositions, allusions, implications, passive and active voice in sentences, metaphors and predication – some of which will be later explained (Fairclough, 1989:22, 23; van Dijk, 2001:97).

In developing a methodological framework for doing CDA, Fairclough (1989:2, 3) emphasises 'common-sense' assumptions which are implicit in the conventions that people make use of in the production of texts and of which people are also generally not consciously aware. This is of particular relevance to this thesis because the often taken for granted practices that provide a guideline for media practitioners in their production of journalistic texts, may legitimate existing social relations and differences of power. The way in which journalists use language to represent a given reality and the rules and guidelines that

constitute a piece of writing as journalistic inevitably become ideological. Ideology and language are interconnected, because the use of language is the most common form of social behaviour, where people rely most on 'common-sense assumptions' (Fairclough, 1989:2). Therefore unequal relations of power which are premised on taken for granted knowledge in the representation of a conflict situation such as that witnessed in the Niger Delta, can easily and yet unconsciously be reproduced and reinforced.

CDA as a Method of Analysis

Fairclough's model of CDA is used in this study to analyse the news texts which appear in the four selected western Anglophone newspapers. The news texts which make up the sample appeared in the online editions of the four newspaper publications and were published between 1 January 2007 and 31 December 2011. This period is important as it is characterised by a number of significant political and economic events in relation to the Niger Delta. A total of 146 news texts were retrieved from the four newspapers during the period indicated above. Further details about the sample and the reasons behind the selection of these four newspapers are provided in Chapter Four. The rest of this chapter is devoted to explaining the methodological approach that is used to analyse the news texts and to ultimately fulfil the goals of this study.

Fairclough (1989, 1995) uses a three stage framework of analysis to explore the complex connections between discourse, ideology and power in the production and decoding of texts. Fairclough refers to the first stage of analysis as a description of texts. This stage is concerned with the formal properties of texts and is organised around ten main questions and some sub-questions. The second stage of analysis entails a close look at the processes involved in the production and consumption of texts (Fairclough, 1989:22; Richardson, 2007:75; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:82). These combined processes are referred to as discursive practices as already explained above. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002:82) also explain that an analysis of discursive practices is centred on how authors of texts draw on already established discourses and genres to create a text. The third stage of analysis is concerned with the relationship between language and society and also with how language can function as a social practice (Fairclough 1989; Fairclough 1992; Fairclough 1995).

As previously discussed, this study will focus particularly on the first stage of analysis. This stage involves the deconstruction of texts in order to expose some of the hidden

meanings which are contained in the explicit meanings of texts. Because of the complex nature of the Niger Delta conflict and the multiplicity of actors involved in and affected by the violence in the region, there is simply not enough room to effectively apply all three stages of analysis in this study. However there are some instances, particularly when examining the implications of the representations of the Niger Delta conflict, that certain aspects of the second and third stage of analysis are used.

Fairclough (1989:110) states that the set of formal features present in a given text are based on specific lexical and grammatical choices which are available to a text producer. Elaborating on Fairclough's approach, Richardson (2007:47) explains that words express connoted as well as denoted meanings. All types of words do this, but most notably adjectives, verbs, nouns and adverbs carry both connoted in addition to denoted meanings. A CDA of news texts should therefore move from the small-scale (micro) analysis of words through sentences, to a larger-scale analysis of the organisation of meaning across a text as a whole (Richardson, 2007:46, 47). In line with Fairclough's work and Richardson's elaboration of Fairclough's approach, this study adopts this stance and aims to move beyond a surface-level analysis of the news texts reporting on the Niger Delta conflict, by uncovering meanings within the texts which are opaque or not immediately apparent.

Fairclough proposes ten questions (and some sub-questions) to be used during the first stage of a critical discourse analysis. These questions are intended to highlight that the formal features present within a text can be regarded as the result of specific choices from among the various grammatical and linguistic options available in the construction of discourses (Fairclough, 2001:92). However, only some of Fairclough's ten questions are applicable to this study. The questions discussed below are supplemented by a series of linguistic tools and concepts related to Fairclough's questions. Richardson (2007) proposes these linguistics tools and concepts as a way of providing a more elaborate means of analysing newspaper texts within the scope of Fairclough's three stages of conducting CDA. It should be noted that Richardson's analytical tools and concepts are particularly helpful as they are explicitly situated within the domain of newspaper analysis. The questions and linguistic concepts which are most pertinent and relevant to this study are also discussed below.

1) What classification schemes are drawn upon?

The naming and referencing of actors within texts is a prime tool of classification that is adopted by writers. The way in which certain groups of people or individuals within society are named and made reference to, has a significant impact on the manner in which they are viewed and treated. According to Richardson, 'we all simultaneously possess a range of identities, roles and characteristics that could be used to describe us equally *accurately* but not with the same *meaning*' (Richardson, 2007:49). Journalists have to describe the actors that they present in their news reports and the process of naming actors within texts always involves choice. The method appropriated to name social actors pinpoints not only the group(s) that they are associated with, but can also draw attention to the kind of relationships that exist between the person doing the naming and the named (Richardson, 2007:49). Hence Fairclough (2001:92) further urges the critical discourse analyst to ask whether the words used to name an actor are ideologically contested and also whether there is 'rewording or over wording' of a name or names used within a text.

It logically follows that by choosing one social category over another journalists choose to include those they write about within a particular category, while excluding them from other differing categories. Perhaps to state it differently, it can be argued that reporters can choose to foreground one social category over other equally precise alternatives (Richardson, 2007:49). A key aspect of the analysis in Chapter Four involves the examination of the language of the sampled news texts to expose some of the ways in which naming and referencing can be used as a classification scheme which determines understandings of the various actors involved in the Niger Delta conflict.

2) What types of actions, processes and participants predominate in the text?

This question highlights the critical element of transitivity. Transitivity describes the relationship between participants and the roles they play in the processes or actions that are described in a news report. To ask this question is to essentially uncover the transitive elements within a text. For instance, transitivity is concerned with the manner in which actions and processes are represented, the meanings of those actions and process, and the representation of the person(s) specifically performing the actions and the person(s) subject to the actions and processes reported in a given text. In short, transitivity outlines who (or what)

does what to whom or what within a sentence. As a result transitivity also makes up the very heart of representation, conveying the relationship between participants and the roles they play in the actions and processes which appear in news reports (Richardson, 2007:54; Fairclough, 1989:120' Fairclough, 2001:93).

Of great relevance in answering this question is the grammatical notion of predication. The focus of predicative strategies within texts entails the ascription of certain values to participants. While transitivity looks at the role of participants within the processes and actions described in a text, predication is primarily concerned with the types of social and cultural characteristics that are attributed to participants (Richardson, 2007:52). As such it is very important to note that predication tends to incorporate a certain level of connotation. This is because descriptive words such as 'rebel groups', for example, may imply the use of violence by such groups. Furthermore to ascribe violence to the word 'rebel' is normally the result of previously produced texts which create a common thread between rebels and violence. It may also be the result of dominant discourses where rebels generally appear as violent actors within texts (Richardson 2007; Fairclough 1989; Fairclough 1995).

Richardson (2007:52, 53) emphasises that a predicative strategy contained in a text does not necessarily render the text as an unreliable source of information or as being untrue for that matter. Rather it more importantly points towards the ideological nature of the simple use of grammatical tools. Moreover, it also significantly reveals the political and ideological nature of knowledge production and meaning-making, as some forms of knowledge and meanings have the power to occupy a dominant position in society, due to the fact that they are constantly being reproduced and reformulated in various contexts (Richardson 2007; Fairclough 1989; Fairclough 1995, van Dijk 2001).

3) Are there important features of relational modality?

Modality is an important concept for understanding both the relational and expressive values contained in grammatical features. The question of modality can be seen as the question of what writers or speakers commit themselves to when making statements or demands, asking questions or making offers. Modality is expressed by modal auxiliary verbs such as, 'may', 'might', 'must', 'should', 'can', 'can't' and 'ought'. In addition to this, modality is also expressed by various other formal features including adverbs and tenses (Fairclough, 1989:128). The focus of this question therefore, is on how the choice of wording

12

within a text depends on and aids in creating social relationships between actors. Relational modality also refers to the writer or speaker's judgment of the 'probabilities, or obligations, involved in what [she] is saying ... it is the stance speakers or writers take towards representations, and their degree of affinity with them' (Halliday, Hodge and Kress cited in Fairclough, 2003:165; Fairclough, 2001:97).

4) Are there important features of expressive modality?

Expressive modality refers to the writer's authority with regard to the truth or probability of a representation of reality. Newspapers are particularly interesting because in news texts, reported events are mostly represented as categorical truths or facts (Fairclough, 1989:129). This is often given as one of the leading criticisms when looking at how the representation of news may be dependent on the writer's perception of a reality or event.

5) What metaphors are used?

According to Fairclough (1989:119) and Richardson (2007:66), a metaphor is the means through which one aspect of experience is represented in relation to another or more simply put, perceiving one thing in terms of another. It is by no means restricted to the kind of discourses with which it is stereotypically associated, namely poetry and literature. Any aspect of experience can be represented in terms of any number of metaphors. Thus of importance are the relationships between alternative metaphors, primarily because different metaphors have different ideological attachments (Fairclough, 1989:119; Richardson, 2007:66). For instance, when the spread of a strike by protesting workers against their employers is described as a cancer, a metaphor of disease is being used.

More importantly the ideological significance of disease metaphors tends to represent dominant interests to be the interests of society as a whole, while representing the expressions of non-dominant interests (strikes or demonstration) as undermining 'the health of society'. If the strike were referred to differently, as an instance of a 'vociferous protest' for example, a different understanding of the nature of strike action is created in the reader or interpreter's mind. Fairclough (2001:100) purports that, 'one does not arrive at a negotiated settlement with cancer, though one might with an opponent in an argument. Cancer has to be eliminated, cut out'. In this manner the use of differing metaphors may imply different means of

representation and different ways of dealing with societal issues (see also Fairclough, 1989:120; Richardson, 2007:66, 67).

These questions and the analytical tools and concepts outlined above, all of which relate to Fairclough's first stage of analysis, will guide the analysis to follow in this study. These questions and analytical tools will be used to examine the language of the news texts which report on the conflict in the Niger Delta. Moreover these questions and tools are of prime significance as they will enable one to deconstruct the formal features of language, so as to uncover the discourses contained in the news texts and their hidden meanings. As emphasised in the foregoing discussion, discourses are often embedded in the fundamental beliefs and ideals of society and thus incorporate an ideological component. Therefore CDA helps us unearth the representations present in the news texts such as the ones analysed in this thesis and to also explore the possible implications of these representations.

Conclusion

As already emphasised the main concern of this thesis is to examine representations of the Niger Delta conflict and the manner in which it is represented in four western Anglophone newspapers. Representations of Africa have long been criticised for constructing a negative image of the continent. In order to critically examine representations of the conflict in the Delta, it is important to understand the key arguments that other scholars and commentators have made concerning the representations of Africa. Accordingly, Chapter Two provides a comprehensive overview of literature which outlines the various arguments which have been postulated with regards to the image of Africa in western media coverage and other forms of western scholarship and writing on the continent.

In order to contextualise the analysis of the representations of the Niger Delta conflict, Chapter Three provides a brief discussion of the nature of the conflict and the grievances which have been cited as the major cause of the protracted insurgency in the region. Chapter Four makes use of the method of analysis described above as a means to critically analyse the sampled news texts which report on the conflict. The concluding chapter consolidates the observations which are made from the analysis of the conflict in Chapter Four by relating these observations to some of the arguments that have been asserted concerning the image of Africa in the west. The final chapter thus explores whether the representations of the conflict in the Niger Delta echo or reflect stereotypical images of Africa which have been historically

constructed. In addition to this, the implications of the representations of the conflict in the Delta are also critically examined and discussed.

CHAPTER TWO:

REPRESENTATION AND THE IMAGE OF AFRICA IN THE WEST

Concerns over the image of Africa in the west have been expressed in a number of quarters for quite some time. Those who express their concern refer to constructions of the continent that stem from historically entrenched and pejorative images which first appeared during the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Specific concerns over the image of Africa in western media have also often been expressed. This chapter provides an overview of the debates and arguments which have emerged in relation to the image of Africa in western media and other forms of western writing.

Additionally this chapter opens with a discussion of the notion of representation. This discussion is necessary in order to understand the role that media texts play in shaping and framing the prominent meanings attributed to Africa. The chapter goes on to provide an overview of some of the criticisms that various scholars and commentators have made about the way in which Africa is represented in the west, and particularly in western media. Towards the end of the chapter, brief attention is paid to the effects of the dominant images which appear in representations of Africa in the west. In essence therefore, this chapter provides the background needed for an exploration of the representations of the Niger Delta conflict in the four elite western Anglophone newspapers chosen for this study.

Representation

According to Webb (2009:1) representation is a common term which is used in a number of fields, professions and domains. Because the term is used in media and communication, art and visual culture, politics and government, sociology and linguistics, as well as film and literary studies to mention but a few, it has many different nuances and uses. However, what should be noted, Webb (2009:1) argues, is that in most of these disciplines, the term is used in relation to discussions about the embedded and underlying meanings of texts.

Representation entails the use of language in communicating something meaningful about the world (Hall, 1997:15). In addition to the use of language, representation also involves the use of signs and images which stand for or represent things (Hall, 1997:15). Consequently it can be seen as forming a vital part in the production of the meaning of simple and complex concepts that exist in our minds, through language. We can thus think of

representation as the connecting point between various concepts and forms of language which enable us to refer to either the 'real world of objects, people or events, or indeed to imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people and events' (Hall, 1997:16, 17).

Webb (2009) elaborates on Hall's discussion of representation by asserting that representation does not simply make connections, relationships and identities visible, but that it also plays a role in making and constituting the connections between these elements. She explains that representation is also not just about substitution and reiteration, but also and more importantly about constitution. It paints as real the world we live in and our ways of being in the world and in society (Webb, 2009:10).

Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (2010:6) add that the notion of representation recognises that which is possibly fictive in our understanding. It allows for a gap between how we see things and how they might potentially be. Debates about representation tend to involve an acknowledgement of the relationship between representation, power and ideology. In other words, representation determines who is empowered to speak on behalf of a constituency and what is considered to be the authentic voice(s) of a group (Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie, 2010:6). This is an idea which closely echoes a view cited by Grinker et al. (2010:3) through which they maintain that the 'world is already clothed in our systems of representation'. While these systems of representation may at times be rather obvious, this is not always the case, especially when people tend to see things 'through the looking glass of [their] own values, assumptions, or beliefs' (Grinker et al., 2010:3). It is these very same values, assumptions and beliefs which authorise certain perspectives while obscuring, limiting and prohibiting others (Grinker et al., 2010:3).

According to Mahadeo and McKinney (2007:15), one of the primary and highly influential components through which meanings are produced and represented is the mass media. In this instance the concept of representation relates to the idea that the media construct meaning about the world. This is because by representing the world the media help readers and viewers make sense of it. Furthermore the media provide ways of imagining certain identities and groups, which in turn can have material effects on how people experience the world. The mass media also have the power to represent again and again some identities and some imaginings, while excluding others and making them seem unfamiliar or threatening (Hall, 1997:15; Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007:15). By naming the world's parts, as Gitlin (cited in Hawk, 1992:5, 6) asserts, the mass media

certify reality *as* reality ... To put it simply: the mass media have become the core systems for the distribution of ideology. That is to say, every day, directly or indirectly, by statement and omission, in pictures and in words, in entertainment and news and advertisements, the mass media produce fields of definition, association, symbol and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete.

Therefore because the mass media are engaged in using language and other signs to represent what they observe, they in turn exercise a form of power and control over that which they observe (Grinker et al., 2010:3). The reason for this is that the observations that media represent enable the arising discourses to become naturalised. Brookes (1995:464) argues that the more naturalised a discourse becomes, the more it loses its visible ideological characteristics thus becoming common sense. Once a discourse becomes common sense, the more likely it will be that 'the knowledge, beliefs, social relationships and social identities it has produced will become entrenched and therefore more difficult to challenge' (Brookes, 1995:464).

These are significant considerations to heed, because if ideas about ourselves and others are drawn from that which is presented to us and if what is seen and written is rooted in power relations, then it is imperative to question rather critically what is presented to us by the mass media. This is of great importance as many of the elite and influential global media conglomerates which are directly engaged in the production and dissemination of news and information, are located in the affluent and powerful parts of the west (Grinker et al., 2010:4; Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007:15).

Drawing from the work of Branson and Stafford (1999), Mahadeo and McKinney (2007:16) go on to argue that western media, referring mostly to media in the US, France, Germany and the UK, offer representations of Africa which provide their audiences with a continuing narrative of African underachievement. They also maintain that while it is important to remember that people tend to use representations of people, places and events in order to make sense of the world, these representations can be and are often stereotyped. Therefore what needs to be problematized and seen as a contentious matter, is the dominance of negativity in representations of Africa in western media (Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007:16).

According to Hawk (1992:6), the public in the west is inundated with news from newspapers, radio, television networks and satellite television. However, despite the proliferation of different types of media which generate news, diversity in the nature of news

18

content about Africa has not followed suit. Instead, what is presented to viewers and readers is a fairly homogenous picture of the continent. In turn this homogenous picture replicates and reproduces familiar images. These images, which are fairly easy to communicate in short dispatches, mostly include events such as coups, wars, and outbreaks of famine and disease. Stories which communicate Africa's history, cultures and values do not typically reach western readers and viewers. Therefore the image that is created of Africa is that of a failed continent which needs aid and assistance from the west (Hawk 1992; Brookes 1995; Ankomah 2008).

Hawk (1992:6) and a number of other scholars (Wa'Njogu 2009; Palmberg 2001; Dunn 2003; Terrell 1989) highlight that this pattern of coverage on Africa was heightened by the practices of reporting on the continent during the wars of independence from colonialism. This pattern of negative coverage continued to colour news reports on African issues during the post-independence era. With the cultural space expanding and opening up during the early years of African independence, a platform was created to call into question some of the controversies around media images and the themes depicting the way in which Africa and other developing nations were portrayed by western media (Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007:14). As a result of the distorted treatment of the developing world by western media, a call was made amongst developing countries, for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) during the 1970s and 1980s.

The NWICO Debate and the Image of Africa in the West

Those who made a call for NWICO argued that the industrialised nations of the west controlled the flow of information and, to a considerable extent, the means of development for other parts of the world (Theerasatiankul, 2007:1). Acting under pressure from its growing constituency in the third world (such as the newly independent African states), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) began to sponsor research and conferences in the 1970s as a means to explore the guiding ideals of communication between nations. From these conferences and numerous other debates, it was concluded that there was an imbalance of information between the developed states of the west and developing states of the third world. It was also gathered that the content of information about developing states was disproportionately negative, and that developed states controlled the means to communicate through transnational news agencies such as

Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP), United Press International, the Associated Press (AP), Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Theerasatiankul, 2007:14, 15; Ojo, 2007:1).

Advocates of NWICO claimed that dependence on information from a few elite countries in the west would inevitably perpetuate the neo-colonialism of former colonies. Another danger, they argued, lay in the fact that most people in the developing world were forced to see themselves and those from other developing countries through the media of the dominant western news agencies, which habitually painted developing states in a negative light (Theerasatiankul, 2007:16, 17; Terrell, 1989:149). It came as no surprise therefore that many developing countries, including a majority from Africa, wanted a radical overhaul of the international communication system which prevailed at the time. They wanted the world communication system to reflect the multiplicity and equality of all human races (Ojo, 2007:3, 4).

The NWICO debate created a platform for UNESCO to accept the MacBride Commission Report – titled 'Many Voices One World' – thus providing symbolic support to the call for a new global information and communication order. Nevertheless, the NWICO debate failed to bring about the actual reform and restructuring that the developing world sought, partly because of resistance from the west. For example, former US president Ronald Reagan made it clear that the west would not 'permit attempts to control the media and promote censorship under the ruse of a so-called "New World Information Order"' (Ojo, 2007:6; Theerasatiankul, 2007:15).

With NWICO having failed, both Ojo (2007:6) and Theerasatiankul (2007:16) contend that when reporting on Africa, western media tend to continue old patterns of emphasising conflicts, crises and disasters as the dominant themes of news coverage about the continent. They argue that western media have not deviated from their distortion of news and use of stereotypes and denigrating language. In support of this view, Ojo (2007:6) makes specific reference to the May 2000 edition of the influential British journal *The Economist* in which Africa is referred to on the front-cover story as 'The hopeless continent'. It should be noted however, that 11 years later on 3 December 2011, *The Economist's* cover story was also on Africa. This time the headline was 'Africa Rising', with the sub-heading reading 'The hopeful continent', a direct and stark contrast to the May 2000 headline (*The Economist* 2011). lmThis story, which is published in one of the most globally influential financial journals, may indicate a positive shift in its coverage of the continent.

On the other hand a closer inspection of the December 2011 story, reveals that positive aspects of the economic growth of the continent are highlighted against a backdrop of some of the problems that *The Economist* reported in its May 2000 issue – corruption, poverty and disease. While these two stories are not necessarily an indication of broader trends in the coverage of Africa by other elite media publications and global media conglomerates, what can be gathered is that it would seem, as supporters of NWICO and numerous other scholars have pointed out, that the pattern of reporting that reinforces problematic representations of the continent, is an old and recurring theme which arises in current investigations on the coverage of Africa in western media. A significant body of literature situates these problematic representations in descriptions and images of the continent and its people which have their origins in pre-colonial and colonial texts.

Old Images in Current Representations

The concern with negative images of Africa rests on a number of underlying arguments. Of particular relevance to this study is the argument that these negative images of Africa and the stereotyping of the continent are as old as the relations between Europe and Africa (Palmberg, 2001:7). Anthony Smith (cited in Terrell, 1989:135) states that for a number of centuries, explorers, geographers, cartographers, colonists, travellers, adventurers and reporters made an attempt to describe in different ways and for different reasons unfamiliar regions of the planet. Many of the books and other material that explorers and adventurers produced during the pre-colonial and colonial eras provided a denigrating account of the continent and its people. Wa'Njogu (2009:76) claims that the more they exaggerated their tales of African 'barbarism', the more books they sold.

Furthermore as Europe gradually established its dominance over Africa during the 19th century, it developed a complex set of relationships, institutions and traditions which still significantly influence western press coverage of the continent and its affairs. Some of the most vital traditions were established by journalist-explorers who helped to further entrench European dominance. According to Terrell (1989:136), Henry Stanley was one of the many well-known journalist-explorers who facilitated this process. With regards to one of his exploratory expeditions, Stanley (cited in Terrell, 1989:136) recorded the following statement in his journal:

On August 14, 1879, I arrived before the mouth of this river to ascend it, with the novel mission of sowing along its banks civilised settlements, to peacefully conquer and subdue it, to remould it in harmony with modern ideas into National States, within whose limits the European merchant shall go hand in hand with the dark African trader.

Much like Stanley's quote above, the 19th century foreign newspaper reporter or correspondent working within the popular press, also viewed himself as a great explorer who placed himself in a superior subject position to the African object. Indeed this sentiment was the norm at the time, as for the 19th century reporter Africa was his object while he and his civilisation were the subjects (Terrell, 1989:136, 137).

Some argue that even in 21st century news reports, this problematic understanding and perception of Africa as an inferior entity persists. Discussing coverage of the protracted conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) by ABC News, Dunn (2003:4) explains that for many in the US and European media, the complex political dynamics of the Congolese civil war during the time of Mobutu's ascendance to power, seem unintelligible and in making them intelligible the media draw on problematic historical images. For example, in 2002 an American evening news programme on ABC News ran a series of 'in-depth' reports on the war in the Congo. The title of the series was 'Heart of Darkness' (Dunn, 2003:4). The broadcasts by ABC News were intended to 'shed light' into the troubled region so as to make sense of and provide coherent discussions about what was represented as inherently chaotic and anarchic.

The title of the series refers to a century-old label originally articulated by Joseph Conrad who wrote a famous and highly controversial novel titled *Heart of Darkness* (Dunn, 2003:4). Dunn argues that implied by these reports is the belief that the Congo, situated in the heart of the continent, is a land of violence, avarice and chaos; a land which in many respects is simply beyond the comprehension of western audiences. By making use of the historical trope of the heart of darkness, ABC News highlighted the propensity in some quarters of the American media, to re-employ old images and discourses when reporting on African issues. According to Dunn (2003:4), it is rather clear that even in the 21st century, western understandings of the Congo, as seen in the case of ABC News, rely quite heavily on earlier representations.

Another written reference to Africa as a dark continent was articulated by Henry Stanley in 1878 when he wrote of his travels to Africa. The representation of the continent as a dark and impenetrable geographic landmass was subsequently adopted by missionaries,

travellers and literary authors who used it for intellectual, political and dramatic purposes (Jarosz, 1992:105, 106). Ankomah (2008:13) describes this underlying tendency to re-employ old images and representations by western media in their news reports as 'historical baggage'. According to George Alagiah (cited in Ankomah, 2008:13), a BBC news caster and former African correspondent, historical baggage refers to 'The 20th century view of Africa infected with the prevailing wisdom of the 19th century'. Alagiah went on to plead in a lengthy piece he wrote for the UK *Guardian,* that news reporters need to cut through this baggage when reporting on Africa. In spite of his plea, Ankomah (2008:14) notes that the *Guardian* still chose to title Alagiah's article 'New Light on the Dark Continent', using once again the age-old imagery of Africa taken from the pre-colonial and colonial eras. This supports the view already discussed above that there is not only a stereotypical representation of Africa in western media, but also a dominant and naturalised representation of the continent, based on pre-colonial and colonial images (Brookes, 1995:487; Ankomah, 2008:13; Dunn, 2003:4).

Metaphorical Images of Africa

In a chapter titled 'Africa and the world', Ferguson (2006:2) writes that when Africa is spoken and written about today, this is normally done in troubled and urgent tones. Africa is never just written about as a self-existing entity, but is always constructed as 'the crisis in Africa, the problems of Africa, the failure of Africa, the moral challenge of Africa to the international community ... even a scar on the conscience of the world' (Ferguson, 2006:2). Mengara (2001:8) cynically argues that it is quite clear that the Africa we know and hear about today is inherently a European-made Africa.

Furthermore for Mengara, Africa is a world that is moulded into postcolonial chaos and is continually represented as a continent where nothing works because of the intrinsically chaotic, uncivilised and autocratic nature of its people. Mengara (2001:9) also contends that in present-day Africa there are hundreds of societies each with their own characteristic features and traditional alliances. However, when reporting on Africa this complex socio-cultural reality is often not made evident. Instead many writers have perpetuated dominant inherited perspectives and stereotypes which have consequently become the 'natural skin' of the continent and its people (Mengara, 2001:9).

When looking at the dominant representations of Africa in western media, Wa'Njogu (2009:77) helpfully explains that the notion of Africa is constructed through metaphor. In line

23

with other scholars (Mengara 2001; Mbembe 2001; Brookes 1995; Pieterse 1992), Wa'Njogu argues that these dominant images of Africa do not originate from Africa, but from the stereotypes of Africa that have permeated western culture. These metaphors are mostly negative and rely on the construction of contrasts between Africa and the west. Jarosz (1992:105) clarifies that such metaphors are also a key element in western discourses which have represented the land of Africa and its people from the nineteenth century to the present. These metaphors characteristically identify and incorporate the entire continent, regardless of its diversity, as other and as 'a negatively valued foil for western notions of superiority and enlightenment' (Jarosz, 1992:105; see also Mbembe, 2001:3).

Outlining the importance of metaphors in the British *Guardian* and *Telegraph,* Brookes (1995:473) critically notes that choices of metaphor are ideologically significant, primarily because they construct reality in different ways. Furthermore because metaphors are a prevalent and naturalised component of language, people are generally heedless to the manner in which metaphors structure the beliefs, thoughts and actions that are described. As mentioned above, an often used metaphor to describe Africa is that of the 'dark continent'. This metaphor 'homogenises and flattens places and people [and] denies the actualities and specifications of social and economic processes which transform the continent' (Jarosz, 1992:105).

The metaphor of Africa as the dark continent typically involves the dual construction of dark versus light and Africa versus the west. Later on the metaphor of Africa as the dark continent appeared within the discourse of economic development in British and American mass media reports about large scale developments in poor African states (Jarosz, 1992:106, 108). For Brookes (1995:474), the metaphorical construction of Africa as the dark continent, symbolically suggests the presence of evil, sin, paganism and unenlightenment amongst Africans. Consequently the dark continent metaphor prevents a refined and detailed examination of the forces of cultural and economic imperialism taking place in Africa and the role that Europe and America play in this imperialism (Jarosz, 1992:105).

When looking at the manner in which African civilians are represented in the media, a number of scholars (Ake 1989, Ankomah 2008; Brookes 1995, Hawk 1992; Palmberg 2001) assert that they are seen through the metaphor of the African as victim. During the 1984/85 hunger crisis, photographic images and written news reports in the west European media, represented the affected as pitiful victims of uncontrollable events. This image was captured by pictures which were taken out of context, in a close-up position, zooming in on body

language and facial expressions (Ake, 1989:85). In her CDA of the coverage of Africa in the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph,* Brookes' (1995:478) observations echo that of Ake. In both newspapers African civilians are constructed as beneficiaries of aid from the west, victims of disease and famine, and as victims of the repression and violence of their own governments and political leaders.

Other metaphors often used to describe Africa include representations of Africa as a place where death and disease prevail, an Africa full of never-ending problems and crises, an apathetic Africa wherein different laws are enforced from those in civilised countries. Still other metaphors unveil an Africa where hunger and famine go hand-in-hand and an Africa without hope – the so-called hopeless continent (Ake, 1989:85; Jarosz, 1992:107, Hawk, 1992:7; Chari, 2010:334). By using these metaphors and the images that are subsequently invoked, Brookes (1995:471) asserts that certain ideological representations of experiences or events around the idea of Africa are constructed. 'Reality' is divided into categories around crucial concepts, thus resulting in specific meanings as opposed to others being continuously and customarily foregrounded. The use of these metaphors in western media texts, results in the foregrounding of Africa as primitive, hopeless and helpless, uncivilised, violent and repressive to mention but a few, thus rendering these meanings as intrinsic and naturalised features of the continent and its people (Brookes, 1995:471; Ake, 1989:84).

The way in which Africa is represented brings to mind an argument by Said in his seminal work titled *Orientalism.* For Said (1979) western writings on the so-called 'Orient' do not necessarily provide a true or accurate representation of the Middle East or of people of Oriental descent. Rather Orientalism as an ideology is a means through which the west asserts its imperial interests and ideological superiority over that which is non-western or considered other. Mbembe (2001:1) argues that such western constructions of absolute otherness have been pushed to the limit when it comes to Africa. According to Mbembe, these representations of Africa reflect the west's frantic desire to assert its 'inherent' difference from the rest of the world. Mbembe goes on to maintain that Africa still serves as a metaphor through which the west represents the origins and superiority of its own norms and values. Through Africa, the west creates a self-image and incorporates this image into a set of meanings and understandings which speak to what it considers to be western identity (Mbembe, 2001:2). Similarly Ferguson (2006:2) states that western societies have historically found in Africa a fundamental other for their own constructions of civilisation, progress, modernity, development, enlightenment and history. The metaphors, stereotypes and negative

imagery of Africa selected for media reports as discussed above, thus tell media audiences more about the west than about Africa.

Negative Images of Africa

The metaphors discussed above mostly serve to paint a negative picture of Africa. According to Mbembe (2001:2, 3), the African human experience frequently appears in current discourses as an experience that is mostly understood through a negative interpretation. Like Mbembe, many scholars who examine Africa's image in western media, decry what they perceive to be an overarching negative image of the continent. Palmberg (2001:8) contends that while there certainly are alternative images of Africa which are sometimes depicted through well researched journalistic texts, mainstream western media coverage of Africa, tends to promote the negative stereotypes explained above. These negative stereotypes are more often than not inclined to emphasise the sensational, have a preference for catastrophes and are prone to describe conflicts in simplistic and decontextualized ways. Similarly Ebo (1992:20) argues that the negative and superficial coverage of Africa in the American media stems from the tendency of foreign news correspondents to scrutinise African news events from an American sociocultural mentality. An effect of this is that American correspondents 'deculturalize news from Africa by stripping it of its social relevance and value' (Ebo, 1992:20; see also Palmberg, 2001:9).

African journalists from various states attending a media managers' meeting in Nairobi Kenya in 2006, claimed that although western media are quick to file negative reports about Africa, they do not take much initiative to report on the continent's positive developments. Shortly after a series of presentations conducted by news editors from Britain's *Financial Times* and *BBC Television*, Godwin Agbroko (cited in Mbeki, 2008:25) chairman of Nigeria's *ThisDay* newspaper, asserted that the focus in news reports tends to be on negative aspects of the African continent and its states. Agbroko also maintains that western media are generally not interested in providing an account of crucial historical factors such as colonialism, that shape current realities in Africa. Not much is said about the continent's strategic importance to first-world industrialised states, nor of Africa's relevance to world development and global technology. Stories which highlight government-led developmental programmes or government-run industries are also rather sparse (Ankomah, 2008:14; Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007: 18).

Similarly, a review conducted by Biko et al. (2000:2, 4) of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post's* coverage of Africa, reveals that there are serious problems with the manner in which these two elite newspapers report on the continent. They state that among the 89 articles related to Africa that they reviewed, there were none which reported on regional political and economic cooperation in Africa. Moreover the news reports which they assessed lacked sufficient context and were primarily negative in their content. Providing an explanation of this, Charles Stith (discussed in Mbeki, 2008:27), a former US ambassador to Tanzania, draws attention to the presence of a historical framework which, by designation, sees Africa and Africans as inferior; a factor which in turn makes most stories about the continent negative.

Jere-Malanda (2008:37) maintains that the problem of negative reporting may be aggravated by scarcity of alternative views of Africa offered by western media. 'Positive Africa is dry news, and dry news doesn't sell. What sells is PIDIC – poverty, instability, disease, illiteracy and corruption'. For example, Ake (1989) states that during the food crises which took place between 1984 and 1985, western mass media reports failed to report on the efforts made by Africans to deal with the crisis. Even though people living in rural areas reacted to the crisis by using it as an impetus for devising new solutions and alternative systems to fight hunger and its causes, including the restoration of the environmental equilibrium, this was not covered by the mass media in the west (Ake, 1989:92, 93, 96).

At the same time one should also note that a number of scholars recognise that many African countries are undergoing grave economic and political crises with attendant severe social hardships and that it is necessary for these negative events to receive media attention. However, they emphasise that there is an urgent need to interrogate the selection process of news and information production about Africa, which in essence propagates biased representations of the continent (Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie 2010; Jere-Malanda 2008; Mbeki 2008; Mahadeo and McKinney 2007). As Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie (2010:28) point out, it is not that the realities which are represented in images of Africa in the west are necessarily false. Instead what needs to be considered problematic is the way in which they are used to signify certain powerful and dominant meanings of what Africa is and who Africans are.

Evidently, many writers consider the representation of Africa in western media to be deeply problematic. However one ought to also note that not all discussions of Africa's media image concur with the foregoing. For example, Scott's (2009:550) study of the coverage of

Africa in UK news reports is one of the few scholarly articles on this topic which disputes the arguments posited above. In contrast to the notion that negative portrayals of Africa in western media are apparent in the overemphasis of certain issues such as disease, conflict and famine, Scott contends that the UK press does not contain a significantly high percentage of negative news stories about Africa. In fact the UK press, Scott argues, contains a high percentage of articles on religion, tourism and culture in Africa (Scott, 2009:550).

Responding to an earlier article by Brookes (1995), Scott (2009:551) makes it clear that he is aware that Brookes and others argue that in reporting African affairs, the press in the UK tends to make use of metaphors that represent Africa as a deeply troubled place of darkness. However, he questions this position by pointing out that in none of the 155 headlines recorded in his sample of newspapers, were there examples which confirmed Brookes' assertions. Providing an explanation for this, Scott maintains that it is indeed possible that there has been an observable shift in the use of metaphors and images which reflect greater sensitivity amongst journalists to the use of language (Scott, 2009:551). While Scott's analysis does suggest that the coverage of Africa in some Western media may be less problematic than some scholars believe, it is clear that an overwhelming number of scholars consider the current coverage of the continent to be rather problematic and to continue to reflect earlier negative images of Africa.

Effects of Negative Representations

Coverage of Africa in the news reports of western mass media which has been shown above to produce a predominantly negative image of the continent has a number of adverse effects and implications. In a world where most if not all countries chase the tourist dollar of foreign direct investment, the incessant negative portrayal of Africa ends up driving away business and tourists from the continent. Jere-Malanda (2008) and Ferguson (2006) reveal that studies of capital flows to Africa show that negative perceptions of Africa and the sustained negative coverage of the continent by western media have for many years discouraged investors from pumping capital into viable sectors within certain African countries, thus undermining growth and development. Even African countries with political and economic stability suffer from the effects of negative information as potential investors lump all African states together as part of a continent that is not considered to be an attractive place to invest in (Ankomah, 2008:14; Jere-Malanda, 2008:40; Ferguson, 2006:7).

Information that viewers and readers of media texts receive concerning Africa is principally the return of American or British ideas to their respective citizenry (Hawk, 1992:13). Moreover for western audiences which have continuously been fed with news and 'misinformation that pep them up as better-than-thou', through images and stories that dehumanise Africa, it becomes rather plain to see, as Jere-Malanda (2008:36) points out, the type of self-understanding about Africa they have received from their media. Illustrating this point a few scholars have argued that in a number of news reports where Africans are shown taking initiative in their communities to address societal problems, they are normally seen as 'being like us'. In other words they are seen as being similar to westerners (Mahadeo and McKinney, 2007:17, 18). Accordingly, the danger in this is that if Africa is newsworthy in so far as it upholds the dominance of the west ideologically, then Africa will perpetually be represented in a distorted fashion (Ake, 1989:90). But recognition of such factors also points towards the extent to which perceptions or interpretations of Africa are created out of particular 'biases, prejudices, fantasies, or ideologies and how these visions take shape in the various representational forms' of media and scholarship (Grinker et al., 2010:4).

Conclusion

Western media and other forms of western writing and scholarship on the continent are criticised for representing Africa as hopeless, mysterious and underdeveloped. Criticism of the negative portrayal of Africa and other parts of the developing world came to prominence with the call for a New World Information and Communication Order in the 1970s and 1980s. The NWICO debate recognised that elite media corporations situated in the west determined the flow of news and information concerning various parts of the world including Africa. Because of their global dominance the criticism of western media coverage of Africa, was rooted in a concern that the widely circulated negative image of the continent could potentially undermine its development. These concerns continue to be articulated today, revealing that although the recommendations proposed by NWICO were rejected, this has not necessarily stifled criticism of western media coverage of Africa. Indeed, a number of scholars and commentators continue to decry the problematic age-old metaphors and stereotypes through which the continent is generally understood and interpreted.

While there are numerous problems on the continent that deserve media attention, commentators and scholars point out that there is a need for western media coverage of the

various problems faced by African states to be more adequately contextualised. Without attention being paid to the contextualising of the problems that 'plague' Africa and its people, the complicity of western states and multinational corporations (MNCs) in some of these problems tends to be obscured. In this manner because of the naturalised prejudices contained in representations of Africa in western media, the image of Africa and understandings of the continent by audiences are gravely limited and biased.

What is noted therefore in this chapter is that there seems to be an overwhelming concurrence amongst a range of scholars on the primarily negative image of Africa in western media. The arguments posed above enable one to understand the core issues and debates concerning representation and the image of Africa in the west. However, one should note that few of the above discussions of Africa's image in western media are based on detailed analyses with clear theoretical and methodological grounding. Often the claims made are quite general and are not based on a careful analysis of a set of articles. Therefore this study aims to address this shortcoming by providing a detailed critical discourse analysis of the representations of the Niger Delta conflict in selected British and American newspapers.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

Before discussing the way in which the conflict in the Niger Delta is represented in the newspapers selected for this study, it is necessary to provide some background information about the conflict. One should bear in mind however, that the primary goal of this research is to examine the representations of the conflict in four elite western Anglophone newspapers and the implications of these representations, as opposed to providing an analysis of the conflict itself. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a concise contextualisation of the conflict in preparation for the analysis of representations of the conflict in Chapter Four, rather than to shed new light on the conflict.

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil producer and the sixth largest oil producer in the world. Oil and gas revenues have grown to approximately US$ 70 billion in this west African country, providing almost 90 percent of the country's total exports. This means that Nigeria has become so dependent on the production of crude oil that the political stability of the entire nation is bound to the management of the political economy of oil in the Niger Delta (Obi and Rustad, 2011:4; Clarke, 2010:86). This chapter delves into the complexities surrounding the conflict in the Delta, outlining in a brief but fairly detailed manner the historical and socio-economic elements that have played a part in the conflict.

The prominent position that the Niger Delta occupies in national and global consciousness is due to its strategic importance as the source of over 75 percent of Nigeria's petroleum production and 2.9 percent of world production (Obi and Rustad, 2011:4; Ejobowah, 2000:33). A number of actors from across the globe have at some point had a bearing on the conflict, be it direct or indirect. It is no surprise, therefore, that the Niger Delta has been described as a haven for international social justice organisations, NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) activists and politicians on the make (Clarke, 2010:90).

A crucial factor is that the conflict in the Niger Delta has had far reaching effects right across global energy markets, contributing towards increased oil prices and tighter supplies globally. For example, a report by the *International Herald Tribune* reveals that an attack by gunmen on a boat carrying oil workers to an offshore rig in the Delta in 2007 caused an increase in the global price of oil by more than US$ 1.5, bringing the price of a barrel of oil to US$ 53.38 (Ejibunu, 2007:21). Thus the rise of militancy in the Delta has been rather troubling for the international community due to the region's rising geo-political importance. The Niger Delta has loomed large in the security interests of the Unites States (US) as it has

for the European Union (EU) and a few other major oil-importing states such as China and India. The strategic importance that the region occupies within the international system has been particularly pronounced with the security challenges in the Middle East that have emerged since the terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001 (Ukiwo, 2011:18; Shaxson, 2007:190; Omotola, 2006:3).

The Nigerian government's dependence on oil rents paid by MNOCs who control the technical process of the production of oil, has made the Nigerian state an 'oil gatekeeper and oil revenue collector, operating in partnership with, and beholden to, oil MNOCs' (Obi and Rustad, 2011:5, 6). An economy of conflict has emerged in the Niger Delta, where violent and blood struggles for the appropriation of oil resources and benefits from the oil economy is the order of the day (Ikelegbe 2005). Beyond this, the Niger Delta has one of the world's highest rates of gas flaring which contribute to global warming, climate change and the fragile ecosystem of the Delta (Obi and Rustad, 2011:4).

Due to these multiple factors the Delta has been restive for over four decades, with the conflict kicking off in the form of marches and protests in the 1970s and 1980s. The 1990s were marked with pockets of insurrection which intensified after 2000, leading some to describe the situation as an armed rebellion and 'an outright low intensity war' (Ikelegbe, 2005:208). In the 1990s, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) played an important role in spearheading active resistance against the Nigerian state and the MNOCs. More recently armed militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have been at the forefront of militant alliances which have carried out lethal attacks on oil installations (Ikelegbe, 2005:208; Obi and Rustad, 2011:9).

The Political Economy of Oil in Nigeria

The oil-producing Niger Delta is one of the largest regions in Nigeria. With regard to the production of oil, three states are of primary importance – Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta (Obi and Rustad, 2011:4; Watts, 2004:52; Zalik, 2004:404). There are 185 local government areas in the Niger Delta and a population of 128 million people, thus the Niger Delta has one of the highest population densities in the world as well as an annual population growth rate estimated at three percent. Forty ethnic groups live in the Delta and speak close to 250 dialects. These various ethnic groups are spread out across the Delta in communities of about 5 000 to 6 000 people, covering an area of 27 000 square miles (Ghazvinian, 2007:18).

NIGER DELTA

Map 1: Geographical positioning of the Niger Delta region in Nigeria, Source: Stratfor Global Intelligence (2012)

About 1 500 of these communities are host to Nigeria's oil industry including MNOCs, state and local oil companies, oil service companies, export terminals, refineries and a huge liquefied natural gas sector (Obi and Rustad, 2010:4; Ghazvinian, 2007:18-19). Thousands of miles of oil pipelines interlace the mangrove creeks of the Delta, which provide the Nigerian state with 70 to 80 percent of all its natural resources. In addition to being rich in oil, the Delta wetland is also rich in fish and wildlife resources, with many unique types of plant and animal species (Ghazvinian, 2007:19; Omotola, 2006:3).
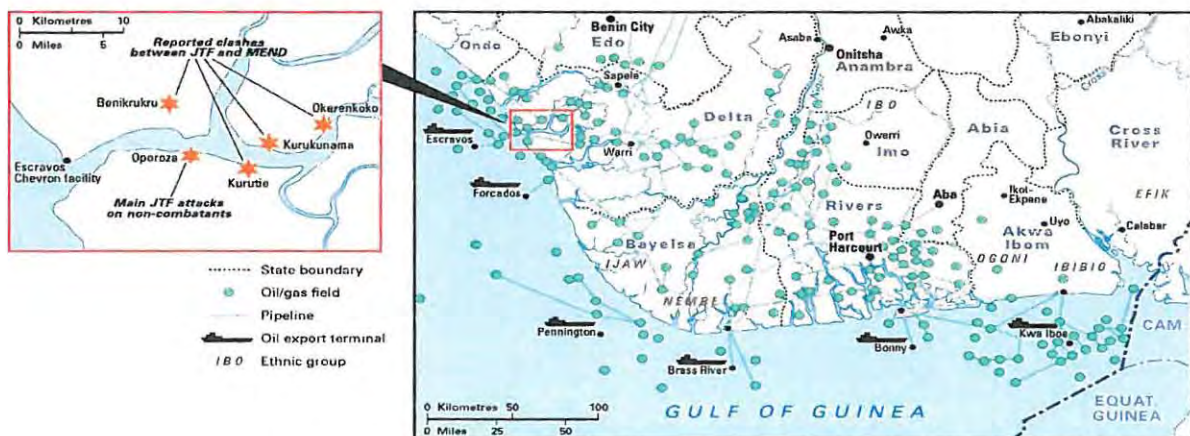
Map 2: Niger Delta states and oil fields, Source: Africa Confidential Online (2009)

Because it is an evidently resource-rich area, particularly as far as the contribution of oil production to Nigeria's economy is concerned, many scholars have argued that the

33

Nigerian government should have reduced poverty, yet Nigeria ranks amongst the poorest countries in the world with 70 percent of its population living on US$1 or less per day (Omotola, 2006:4). Furthermore, the Niger Delta, from which 'millions of barrels of oil, have been sold on the international market for hundreds of billions of dollars', remains one of the poorest and least developed regions in Nigeria (Ghazvinian, 2007:19; see also Omotola, 2006:4).

According to Ghazvinian (2007:19), for 40 years foreign MNOCs have carried out some of the world's most sophisticated and advanced modes of oil exploration and production operations, using millions of dollars' worth of imported and highly modern technology, against a backdrop of impoverished communities. The reality of perpetual conflict extends beyond this paradoxical image however. As indicated above the conflict in the Delta has been characterised by multiple actors, intricately connected in a complex web of interests, which continue to contribute towards the reproduction of various forms of inequalities and violence in the region.

Historical Emergence of Oil Exploration and Production in the Niger Delta

The race for oil in Nigeria began in 1908, when a German business interest formed the Nigerian Bitumen Company to undertake exploration for bitumen (an aggressive oil-based substance derived from heavy crude oil) in the coastal areas between Lagos and Okitipupa (now referred to as Ondo state). The company stopped its operation when World War I broke out (Ikein, 1990:24). In 1914 the fledgling Nigerian colonial state declared exclusive sovereign rights over oil resources within its protectorate by passing the Mineral Act which enabled the colonialists governing Nigeria at the time to grant licenses and leases to British subjects and companies. In 1937 Shell D'Arcy (renamed Shell-BP in 1956) which was the predecessor of Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, was handed a license to explore the entire Nigerian land-space. The focus area was the Niger Delta. This is where Shell-BP drilled its first oil wells in Oloibiri, Afam, Bomu and Ebubu in 1956 and linked them with surface pipelines to Port Harcourt, one of the major cities in the Delta (Ejobowah, 2000:34; Ikein, 1990:24).

The export of oil from the Niger Delta started in 1958. As a result, when Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, it was already established as an oil producing country, producing and exporting at the time over 170 000 barrels of oil per day. This growing oil

production drew the attention of a number of international oil companies to the country, notably Texaco, Gulf, Safrap (later ELF), Exxon Mobil, Tenneco and Esso West Africa (Ikein, 1990:25). A Petroleum Profit Tax Ordinance which was passed in 1959, required companies to pay 50 percent of their oil profits to the Nigerian government. The use and distribution of these oil profits became a very contentious issue over the next few decades (Ikein, 1990:25). In the 1960s oil was mostly drawn from the eastern and midwestern regions, which were entitled to 50 percent of rents and royalties according to the country's revenue allocation formula otherwise known as the derivation principle. This meant that the oil producing states would receive 50 percent of the revenue derived from oil exploration and production (Ejobowah, 2000:34-35; Ikein, 1990:29, 31).

Successive reviews of the derivation principle saw the reduction of the revenue percentage allotted to the oil-producing regions. The Nigerian civil war provides for an interesting case in point as it was the civil war which was by and large the first dispute witnessed in Nigeria over the ownership of oil. During the war, leaders from the eastern region ordered MNOCs to pay rents, royalties and taxes to the newly seceded Republic of Biafra. Oil struggles between ethnic groups were also behind the civil war. Resentment against Igbo commercial dominance in Biafra partly led many of the Delta minority ethnic groups, including the Ijaw and the Ogoni, to side with the Federal Government thus helping to defeat the secessionist rebellion (Zalik, 2004:405). After the civil war the government released the Petroleum Decree which declared null and void all concessions held by oil companies. The decree vested within the state, control and ownership of all petroleum within its territorial boundaries and waters (Ejobowah, 2000:35). One of the major consequences of this is that the derivation principle which determined the share of revenue to be returned to the state of derivation, was systematically reduced from 50% in 1960, down to 20% by 1975 and down even further to 1% in 1990. Nonetheless since then it has increased to 13%. That the Nigerian state made provision for the largest amount of oil revenue to be redirected towards regions which do not possess oil but contain the majority ethnic groups, has heightened the anger and animosity of Niger Delta residents (Akinolo and Adesopo, 2011:252).

A majority of Delta residents belong to Nigeria's minority ethnic groups and have felt increasingly disenfranchised, as successive governments have not taken responsibility in ensuring the socio-economic development of their oil-rich region (Ejobowah, 2000:36; Ikein, 1990:29; Zalik, 2005:405). Moreover, Zalik (2004:405) stresses that monitoring derivation

budgets in Nigeria takes place haphazardly. In fact, until recently less than ten percent of the accumulated revenue from oil production was actually paid to the small states of the Niger Delta, even when the official amount that was supposed to be paid was higher than this. Popular resentment in the Delta regarding this situation, has been manifested in the form of anger towards Nigerians from other parts of the country, in particular the ruling ethnic majorities such as the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo (Ejobowah; 2000:36; Omotola, 2006:9; Zalik, 2004:405).

The Nigerian State and Multinational Oil Corporations: An Unequal Partnership

It is also important to note that the colonial past of the Nigerian state, brought about its premature and problematic integration into global capitalism. For instance, as much as the government declared itself the sole controller of oil production as well as the sole distributor of licenses and leases to MNOCs, the Nigerian government lacks autonomy, primarily because it does not have the technological resources or expertise to exercise complete control of the oil industry (Omotola, 2006:6, 7; Frynas, 2001:29, 30). A number of critics assert that the Nigerian government and the MNOCs operating from the Niger Delta are partners in the exploitation of oil. This partnership has meant that the government has not made significant policy changes as far as improving the welfare of the oil-producing states in the Delta is concerned (Obi, 1997:11). Instead, hungry for more oil rents from the MNOCs, the state in the 1990s adopted structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), which caused it to open up the oil industry while reinforcing its authoritarian grip. The strength of their mutual economic interest and the manner in which the government has historically associated the presence of foreign MNOCs with technological development and economic growth, has overridden concerns about the right of Niger Delta residents to the benefits of oil mining and production (Ikein, 1990:28; Obi, 1997:12).

The Crisis of Development

Omotola (2006:7) argues that these characteristics of the Nigerian state have placed the Niger Delta in a difficult crisis of development. Over 85 percent of the region's working class have no ties with the oil and gas industry. As an alternative to making a living they have had to make do with low-wage/low-productivity informal trade (Ahonsi, 2011:29). Furthermore,

even though the Niger Delta has an adult literacy rate of 78 percent, significantly higher than the national level which sits at 54 percent, the Delta's unemployment levels are much higher than the national level. This is reflected in the figure of one in every seven young people in the Delta being unemployed (Ahonsi, 2011:29).

In spite of the enormous amount of resources that have been extracted from the Delta, public infrastructure and services in the region remain grossly underdeveloped. The Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan has verified this, stating that although the terrain is made up of a great number of rivers, the state of water transportation is so poor that the cost of water transport is inflated in comparison to road transport (Ahonsi, 2011:31; Ghazvinian: 2007:19). Even so, 40 percent of the total length of paved roads in the region remains in a very poor condition with most of the wetland areas being inaccessible. The Delta is also without railway transportation and possesses a very poor stock of adequate housing and many of these houses lack access to electricity supply (Ahonsi, 2011:31). As such, the widespread perception of relative deprivation and alienation that Niger Delta communities feel they are subjected to is heightened by the conspicuous disparity between the level of wealth extracted from the Delta and the conditions of poverty in which Delta residents live (Ukiwo, 2011:24).

Concerning the recruitment of new employees, job-seekers in the Delta claim that oil company staff members give first preference to applicants from other regions in Nigeria. As unemployed Niger Delta youths began to blockade the oil installations in search of employment, the MNOCs made an attempt to buy peace from them by paying them monthly allowances (Ukiwo, 2011:24). According to Ukiwo (2011:25), this was by no means a solution to the problem as the handouts incongruously created an impression of the oil industry 'as a place to scrounge around for free money'. The complexity of the problem is also evident in how indigenous youth employed as security personnel by the oil companies, use their salaries to purchase weapons to protect their interests in the competition for security contracts from the oil companies. This has added a problematic dimension to the conflict. For instance the proliferation of light military arms is one of the key components that has fuelled the already existing insecurity and instability (Ukiwo, 2011:25).

Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta

Before oil was discovered in the Niger Delta, the region had the most extensive fresh forests, aquatic ecosystems and biodiversity in West Africa (Ahonsi, 2011:30). The Delta held the

largest percentage of Nigeria's fisheries industry, diverse medicinal and forest resources, fertile soil for farming as well as a suitable habitat for endangered wildlife. These natural resources served to provide a reasonably sustainable livelihood for millions of people across the region. Over the years, however, the ability to live off these natural resources has been undermined. Incessant oil spills have inflicted significant damage on farmlands and rivers. This has made the Delta one of the five most oil-polluted environments in the world.

As a result of the pollution of the environment, Delta residents can no longer sustain soil nutrients and aquatic resources needed for a basic sustainable livelihood (Omotola, 2006:10; Frynas, 2001:35). Gas flaring and the emission of carbon dioxide and methane has had serious negative implications for the environment, most notably noise pollution in the affected and surrounding communities, acid rain and climate change. Consequently the snowballing effects of environmental degradation due to the production of oil have been devastating. This not only destroys environmental resources, but also causes health hazards (Clarke, 2010:94; Omotola, 2006:10, 11; Kew and Phillips cited in Ahonsi, 2011:30).

The Struggle for the Control of Oil

The quest for the control of oil by Niger Delta communities lies at the heart of the violence in the region. In this instance resource control is fundamentally based on claims of ownership, access and justice. It 'refers to the desire [of residents] that the region be left to manage its natural resources, particularly its oil, and pay taxes and/or royalties to the federal government' (Ako, 2011:42). This notion of resource control is founded on the historical struggle of the Delta people for political and economic autonomy. At the top of their agenda has been the reversal of decades of evident federal marginalisation in the exercise of power and from the benefits gained from the exploitation of oil in the region (Ako, 2011:42).

In understanding the nature of the conflict it is important to take note of the fact that a desire for more control of resources has been at the centre of militant and aggressive activities adopted by a number of groups which have similar concerns but use a diverse range of strategies. These include militant or militia groups which at the outset were motivated by a demand for resource control. Politicians have also been a driving force in the conflict. They have adopted and taken advantage of the expressed and urgent intention by some of the insurgent groups to gain control of the oil resources. Politicians manipulate the situation to

not only legitimise their leadership, but to also increase their access to political power and oil revenue (Ako, 2011:45).

While the conflict has become violent, it is important to note that the violence follows years of peaceful protest. Some commentators argue that the emergence of armed conflict must be understood as the outcome of the failure of non-violent measures such as peaceful protests, litigation, media campaigns and publicity to yield a favourable response to the numerous grievances cited by Niger Delta residents (Omotola, 2006:12). One of the earliest appearances of a resource control campaign incorporating violent measures was a twelve day revolutionary attempt to create a Niger Delta Republic in 1966, led by Isaac Adaka Boro. However, subsequent attempts to exert pressure for resource control between 1970 and 1990 were mostly peaceful and political, with an elite (who formed socio-political and ethno-cultural movements) confronting the Nigerian federal government using the discourse of resource control (Ako, 2011:45).

This shifted in 1990 with the establishment of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). MOSOP played a significant role in the radicalisation of the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta. Although the organisation tried to use peaceful means to push for its objective of 'Ogoni control of Ogoni resources', the response from the MNOCs and the federal government ranged from indifference at first to violent state-led suppression. The region was subjected to a period of 'state-sponsored terrorism' as attacks on supporters of resource control became worse (Ako, 2011:45). The mounting crackdown on groups and individuals who supported the struggle against the state and the MNOCs, culminated in the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. Saro-Wiwa who was the leader of MOSOP was executed alongside eight other leaders jointly known as the Ogoni Eight (Ako, 2011:45; Osaghae, 1995:325, 326).

After the execution of these leaders, militant groups increasingly adopted the view that a violent stance was needed to send a message which communicated the seriousness of the people's demands and to induce a response from the Nigerian government and MNOCs. Youth activism emerged at the forefront of a new phase of more intensive and extensive forms of violent resistance (Ikelegbe, 2011:132,133). Many of the youth have taken to the creeks and remote mangrove regions of the Delta as a way of escaping poverty and fighting back against the oil companies which they see as the leading cause of their predicament. Consequently, the abundant militant groups and gangs in the creeks are rarely short of new people to recruit. According to Ikelegbe, these militia groups and gangs are both a form of

employment and an opportunity to face-up to the economic and social crises in the region (Ikelegbe, 2011:131).

The violence in the Delta is therefore not merely a resource war between political elites and 'boys' or young men in the creeks, who form a part of militias and dissident groups such as MEND. Some MNOCs are also implicated in the violent behaviour of these groups because by using divide-and-rule tactics and military personnel to intimidate and harass relatively defenceless communities, the MNOCs end up aggravating the situation (Ukeje 2011:94.95; Bøås 2011:123). As Bøås (2011:116) points out, the extent to which an armed movement with an agenda of social and political change can sustain and 'act consistently with that vision ... depends to some degree on how the group is treated by the system and society it is rebelling against'. Oftentimes, those forming part of resistance groups in the Niger Delta have been treated with little respect, specifically by the Nigerian government and military forces, as well as MNOCs.

While disillusionment with peaceful protest as a way to increase resource control for Niger Delta residents is an important driver of the conflict, it must be pointed out that not all violence in the Niger Delta is indisputably linked to the fight for resource control. There is a need to distinguish between the various actors involved and the intentions behind their violent acts. Ako (2011:46) draws the lines of distinction stating that in the Niger Delta, the term 'militants' refers to armed groups who use violence to articulate their political demands. These demands include the release of arrested leaders, cash reparations for affected communities and a greater share of oil revenues as briefly discussed. It is these demands which set them apart from the criminal groups who kidnap oil installation workers and expatriates mainly in order to extract money. There are also disaffected community members who may perform kidnappings or carry out attacks in a bid to campaign for a clinic or school, but may not have an overarching political aim (Ako, 2011:46). While it is useful to distinguish between these different groups, the lines separating them are not always clear and individuals and groups may participate in both political and criminal forms of violence.

Cults also play an important role in the conflict. In the Nigerian context, the term 'cult' does not refer to a group based on religious precepts. Rather, cults are groups committed to providing security and economic opportunities for their members and respective communities. These cults began in Nigerian universities in the 1950s but multiplied greatly and became associated with violence in the 1980s. Cult members pledge allegiance to an oath of secrecy and rely on violent means to achieve their goals (Ako,

2011:46; Bøås, 2011:129; Obi ad Rustad, 2011:3). Bøås argues that such groups have increasingly grown into criminal organisations. Since most leading politicians are university graduates it also means that many of them belonged or still belong to cults. Accordingly, states Bøås (2011:120), this suggests that the relations they develop with militias are not an unfamiliar occurrence, but an extension of an intimate association between politics and violence accepted during their time as students at universities.

Political elites from the various states in the Niger Delta add a complicated component to the conflict. When Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, some of the Niger Delta political elite employed the discourse of resource control for their personal political agendas by demanding increased derivation and true federalism to alleviate poverty and underdevelopment in the region. While they were successful in getting derivation to be increased, Ako (2011:47) contends that they also subjected the 'states resources to personal control and did not better the lot of their states' citizens'. Such issues amongst a range of others have also led to a rise in militancy and violence.

What can be drawn from this, therefore, is that the conflict in the Niger Delta is characterised by an intricate connection between militia groups and local political elites. This link was illustrated in the 2003 and 2007 elections, which witnessed the convergence of militancy and politics. Militia members, who enjoyed patrimonial relationships with Niger Delta political elites, felt they were betrayed after the 2003 elections when their political sponsors refused to fulfil their promises of money, employment and education. One of the defining features of this was the birth of MEND which has continued to play an important role in the conflict. MEND is rather unique in that it is both an expression of an idea and an amalgamation of several groups operating right across the Delta. It incorporates large groups of insurgents, militias and gangs and has proved to be a force to be reckoned with (Bøås, 2011:119).

Many young men operating under the banner of MEND have attacked oil installations and taken oil workers hostage, in order to put forward their political demands for the greater regional autonomy of the Niger Delta and resource control. However, it has also often been the very same young men, Bøås (2011:123) maintains, who take hostages purely as a means of accumulating ransom money. In addition, these young men are hired as criminals for local politicians especially during election campaigns. Therefore, while on the one hand they conduct an armed political insurgency, on the other hand, they operate as bandits. Moreover, in their role as bandits they are co-opted by the very same political elites they rebel against

(Bøås, 2011:123). Consequently, the relationship between the various political actors and the various motivations for their actions is evidently rather complicated.

Conclusion

The complex webs of oil-related violence in the Niger Delta require a refined analysis of the conflict based on the recognition of convergence and connections between the various actors involved as there is not a single, straightforward cause for the violence. Revealed above, is that a number of scholars have attempted to provide a comprehensive analysis of this conflict. The foregoing discussion very briefly summarises the various issues which have been identified as the leading causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta. This has been done so as to provide the reader with a brief and concise overview of the violent insurgency which so often makes news headlines in international media. This has also been done in order to give the reader a sense of the role the Niger Delta plays as an oil producing region within the Nigerian state.

It is evident from the observations highlighted in this chapter that the violent unrest and resistance portrayed in international media is a consequence of a build-up of grievances that have unfolded into complex and paradoxical responses by various actors within the oil-rich region. However it is reiterated that the purpose of this chapter was not to shed new light or uncover a new analysis of the conflict. Rather the aim was to provide the reader with an outline of the range of issues which are cited as the causes for the conflict, with the hope of providing a background for the analysis of news texts in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

This chapter begins by explaining the core features of the corpus or sample of news texts taken from the selected British and American newspapers. The texts are then analysed by examining two features related to the manner in which the conflict in the Niger Delta is represented in the four newspapers. Firstly, the representations of various actors involved in the conflict are analysed, and, secondly, an analysis of the representations of the Niger Delta as a geo-political entity is provided. In both instances CDA is used to provide a careful and close analysis which takes into cognisance the broader arguments concerning representations of Africa in the west, as well as the complexities that are characteristic of the conflict as explained in the previous chapter.

The Sample of News Texts

The sample of this study includes 145 news texts which were collected from four newspapers originating in the United States and Britain. A selection of two newspapers from each country was made. In Britain, the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph* were chosen, while in the US the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* were selected.

British newspapers are normally classified as being either 'quality', 'serious-minded' newspapers or as being tabloids (Mondotimes Online). Traditionally the broadsheets, which were characterised by a large paper size in comparison with the tabloids, were considered to be the serious, quality newspapers. However, with a shift in the format of newspapers in Britain, the traditional broadsheets such as the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph* have been transformed into a more compact size resembling the tabloids (Mondotimes Online).

The *Guardian* is a daily newspaper published in London, covering national and international news. It is described by Mondotimes as one of the best media outlets in the world (Mondotimes Online). The *Guardian* remains faithful to its liberal tradition as a quality national newspaper (Brookes, 1995). Its circulation figure currently stands at 248 775 newspaper copies distributed each day. Much like the *Guardian,* the *Daily Telegraph* is also known for its high standard of journalism. However, the *Daily Telegraph* is seen as being more of a centre-right newspaper with a conservative outlook in its news coverage (Brookes, 1995). The *Daily Telegraph's* circulation figure is significantly higher than the *Guardian,* with a daily distribution of 634 113 newspaper copies (Mondotimes Online).

Like the British newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are also daily newspapers with a wide-ranging coverage of both national and international news. The *New York Times* is described by Mondotimes as one of the best American media outlets, ranking as the third largest American newspaper, with an average daily distribution of 1 150 589 newspaper copies. It is also placed amongst the top 50 newspapers in the world, having an established reputation for journalistic excellence (Winfield et al 2002:291). The *Washington Post* is located in Washington DC and has a strong record for investigative journalism. Together with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* is ranked amongst the top ten newspapers in the US, with an average of 507 465 newspaper copies distributed daily. Unlike the British newspapers, it is not as easy to pinpoint the political stance of the American newspapers. For instance both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have journalists of both conservative and liberal political stances. However it would seem that the *New York Times* is generally viewed as a newspaper with a liberal perspective, while the *Washington Post* is considered to be somewhat more conservative (Winfield et al 2002, Peng 2008, Mondotimes online).

These four newspapers were selected for this study because they are evidently highly influential sources of information. All four newspaper publications are viewed as being among the most important national newspapers in their respective home countries. Furthermore the stories which are published in these media outlets influence other newspapers, wire services, news magazines, radio and television programming and also have an impact on public and arguably international opinion. These four newspapers are read by top decision makers and leaders in the business sector and in government structures within their home countries and other countries. In addition to influencing other media outlets, it is also believed that these newspapers exert strong influences on the foreign policies of their home countries (Peng, 2008:368).

The corpus selected covers a five year period, beginning on 1 January 2007 and ending on 31 December 2011. This timeframe is rather crucial in the Nigerian political and economic landscape as it is coloured by quite a number of important domestic and international events. In 2007 Umaru Yar'Adua was voted in as the thirteenth president of Nigeria. This was also a year which saw a steady increase in the kidnapping of foreigners (mostly British and American) working for various transnational firms and MNOCs in the Niger Delta. In 2008 the global economic meltdown affected Nigeria and there was a continuation of kidnappings of foreigners and attacks on oil installations belonging to

MNOCs. In 2009 the Royal Dutch Shell oil corporation was tried in a highly publicised case in an American federal court. Shell was accused of human rights violations in Ogoniland in the Niger Delta. In the same case, Shell was also accused of complicity in the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the eight other MOSOP leaders. When former Nigerian president Umaru Yar'Adua died of a long illness in 2010, Goodluck Jonathan succeeded him and became the first president from the Niger Delta. A further significant event in 2010 was the interruption of the annual Independence Day celebrations held on 1 October by violent bombings in Abuja, Nigeria's capital. The controversial MEND, which claims to fight against the oppression of the people of the Niger Delta, claimed responsibility for the attacks. Finally, towards the end of 2011 Nigeria witnessed the worst oil spill in the coastal waters of the Niger Delta for a decade. The massive spill was attributed to Shell. These events, which have all had an impact on the political economy of oil in the Delta, have yielded a variety of news stories which deal with a number of key issues surrounding the conflict in the region.

From the 145 news texts relating to the conflict which appeared in the four newspaper publications, 57 were published in the *Guardian,* 27 in the *Daily Telegraph,* 44 in the *New York Times* and 17 in the *Washington Post.* The 145 news texts fall under seven major news categories namely, world news with a specific focus on Africa, business or finance news, UK news, sports news, expat news, and news on the arts. The table below provides a summary of the total number of news stories which were published by the four newspapers from 2007 to 2011.

Table 1: Total number of stories selected from 2007 to 2011

Guardian		Daily Telegraph		New York Times		Washington Post	
Year	No. of Stories	Year	No. of Stories	Year	No. of Stories	Year	No. of Stories
2007	14	2007	13	2007	15	2007	1
2008	7	2008	3	2008	11	2008	1
2009	17	2009	2	2009	10	2009	4
2010	7	2010	3	2010	6	2010	5
2011	12	2011	6	2011	2	2011	6
Total	57	Total	27	Total	44	Total	17
Total no. of stories in the four newspapers			145				

The stories which constitute the corpus are all related to the Niger Delta and to the conflict which has been a part of the region since the official discovery of oil in Nigeria during the 1950s. However, the stories report on different elements of the political economy of oil in the region. Accordingly, the 145 sampled news texts were characterised by subject matter which is rather varied and wide-ranging. By 'subject matter' is meant the overarching subject within a text – a subject essentially signifies what a news text or story is about. In some instances the subject matter of each news text differs according to the angle adopted by the newspaper. While some news articles focus on a single subject, a news text may incorporate up to three types of overarching subject matter.

A detailed outline of the subject matter contained in each newspaper and the number of stories relating to a given subject matter is provided in Appendix A. To provide the reader with an overview of this information, a bar graph is provided below. This bar graph gives an indication of the number of stories related to a given subject matter. What is clear from the graph is that violence and instability, the kidnapping of foreign workers (particularly when those kidnapped were British or American), the activities of Shell in the Niger Delta, environmental degradation and human rights abuses in the region, make up the core of the subject matter of the news texts.
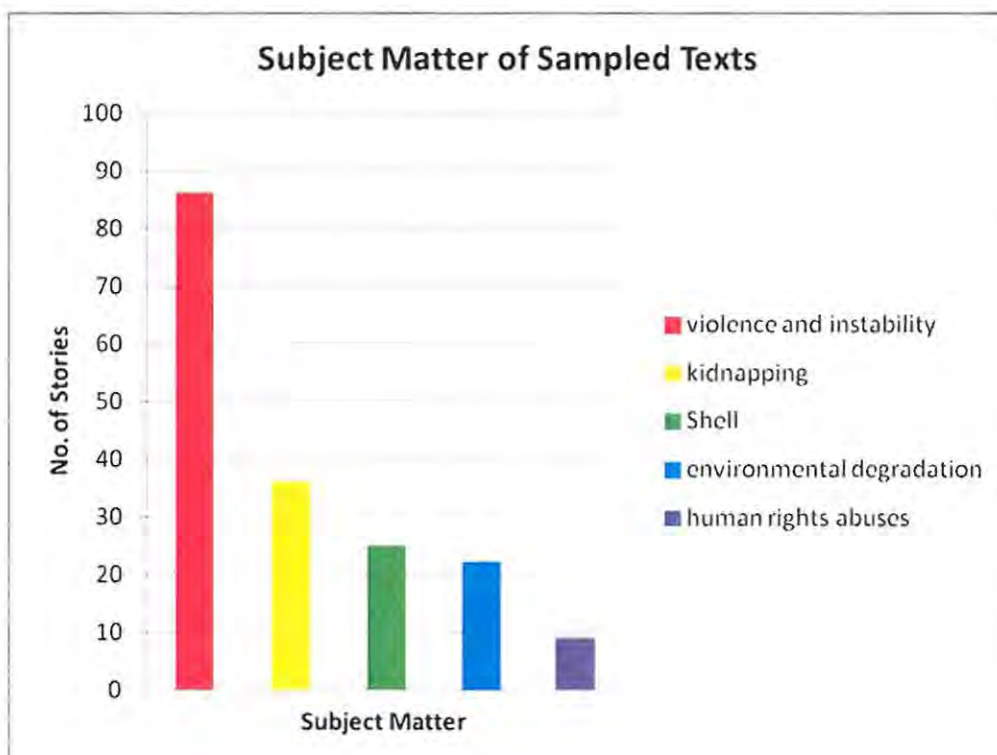

Figure 1: Bar graph depicting subject matter which appears in sampled news texts

Representations of Actors in the Niger Delta Conflict

As already highlighted in Chapter Three, the violent insurgency discussed in media reports on the Niger Delta is the result of a complex set of circumstances which cannot be adequately explained in simple terms. The unrest in the Niger Delta is one which involves a number of actors, many of whom are constantly negotiating and renegotiating their role in the struggle over oil production and oil revenue allocation. As a key player in the provision of oil to some of the world's largest markets including the US, China and the European Union, the Niger Delta as a geo-political entity has occupied a position of strategic importance. This in turn has had a profound effect on the conflict. Therefore, any analysis of news texts which report on this conflict must consider these complexities by taking a stance which is both critical and nuanced. This is made possible by the use of a CDA which incorporates some of Fairclough's (1989, 2001) ten questions and Richardson's (2007) analytical tools and concepts, discussed in Chapter One. The section that follows uncovers the representations of the different actors involved in the conflict, namely armed groups, local residents and foreign oil workers. This is then followed by an analysis of representations of the Niger Delta as a geo-political entity and site of the conflict.

Dissident and Deviant Armed Groups

As discussed in the previous chapter, after the failure of non-violent protest to improve the situation of the people in the Niger Delta, resistance movements and organisations became more violent. One feature of this violence was the kidnapping of foreign oil workers and attacks on foreign oil installations and oil rigs. This aspect of the conflict receives considerable attention in the selected news texts, particularly in stories published between 2007 and 2009. A close look at the subject matter of the stories published during this period reveals the prominence of stories about violence and kidnapping in which the violent actions are mostly portrayed as acts of criminal rather than political violence. The social categories that are used to name and reference the groups that carry out these acts, particularly in the case of kidnappings, include descriptive nouns such as 'gunmen', 'local thugs', 'factions' (DT 7 Feb 2007), 'criminal gangs', (WP 6 July 2007), 'separatist fighters' and 'rebel group[s]' (NYT 29 Jan 2007).

In all four newspapers, the groups that carried out the kidnappings are usually firstly described by phrases which emphasise the criminal and violent nature of their actions, after which terms such as 'militant[s]' or 'militant group[s]' are sometimes used as descriptive nouns. The choice and the order in which these social categories appear in the news texts are rather significant. One of the reasons for this is that when groups are described as 'gunmen' or 'thugs', political intent as a possible underpinning motive behind their actions, is placed as secondary and what is primarily foregrounded is the criminal and violent act of kidnapping. This is evident in a story published by the *Guardian* titled 'Gunmen seize Nigeria oil workers'. The story gives an account of the kidnapping of foreign oil workers. The journalist explains that:

> The men – understood to be working for a Nigerian oil services company – were reported to have been seized by gunmen in the country's southern crude oil-pumping region. Officials at the British and US embassies in Nigeria confirmed the kidnappings, also believed to include that of an Indian worker. Joshua Benemesia, the leader of an unarmed government-funded group helping to provide security in the state, said the abductions had happened near Bayelsa. On Thursday, five gunmen abducted a Polish worker as he headed to a construction project in Southern Nigeria. The man was rushed into the lawless region's swamps and creeks in a speedboat, Nigerian officials said. The kidnappings are the latest in more than 100 abductions of foreign workers in the oil-producing Niger Delta this year. Around 200 have been abducted since militants stepped up attacks against oil companies and the government in late 2005 (GDN 25 May 2007).

By describing the group of men who carry out the kidnappings firstly as gunmen, a predominantly negative valuation is attached to their actions. The notion of gunmen highlights the criminal nature of their act of violence. The criminality of the men carrying out the kidnappings is further emphasised in that they are depicted as active participants performing threatening actions, such as seizing and abducting foreign oil workers. The dominant construction that emerges is that of violent men performing violent acts against their victims most of whom are foreign oil workers from the west – four Britons, three Americans, one Polish and one Indian as reported in the story.

The reporter's choice of a local source – Joshua Benasamia – who confirms where the kidnappings took place, also somewhat serves to highlight criminality as one of the defining

features of the gunmen. This is because Benesamia is described as 'the leader of an unarmed government-funded group helping to provide security in the state'. This description serves as a classification scheme which divides the local actors engaged in the conflict over oil, into unarmed groups and gunmen. There is a positive valuation attached to the unarmed government-supported group and a negative valuation attached to the gunmen. Furthermore the use of the word 'unarmed' both as a presupposition and as a classificatory scheme, brings to light questions of legitimacy and illegitimacy concerning the role of the various actors involved in the conflict in the Delta. In other words to the extent that the group which Benesamia heads up is described as an unarmed and government-supported group, then a form of legitimacy is attached to his group which is otherwise absent when considering the manner in which the gunmen are described.

The last sentence in the cited news text provides the first mention of the word 'militants'. The term 'militants' connotes rather different qualities to that of gunmen. Militants are typically understood as politically motivated groups, which adopt a militant and aggressive stance against the entities which drive their perceived marginalisation or oppression in society. Consequently one could argue that by first describing the kidnappers as 'gunmen' rather than 'militants', the political objectives which are likely to be associated with their acts are obscured.

At the same time it is not clear whether the reporter takes note of the distinction between militants and gunmen. This distinction is highly important as although gunmen and militants may share similar concerns regarding the allocation of oil revenue and the politics that surround the struggle over oil, the tactics and strategies they use may be radically different. The lack of a clear distinction that highlights differences in motives and strategies in the conflict may end up representing all armed groups as criminal entities wielding violent tactics to promote their own interests. This is an over-simplification which gives insufficient attention to the complexities that characterise the conflict.

In line with the above observation, further inspection of the representations of militants and other armed groups involved in the conflict over oil in the Delta region, reveals a trend across all four newspaper publications, whereby the political content of the acts of rebellion and violence by such groups is obscured. The underlying narrative which emerges from the texts is that while some of the militant groups claim they are fighting to gain resource control of oil, there is not much veracity in their claims, as they use underhanded methods such as the abduction of foreign oil workers for large ransom payments and the theft

of oil, to enrich themselves. Although in some of the sampled texts this is discreetly implied, in other texts reporters state it as a fact, as noted from the excerpts below taken from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*:

> For years the Niger Delta has been plagued by instability caused by armed militants who kidnap foreign oil workers or wealthy Nigerians for ransom, clash with the military and sabotage oil pipelines ... The militants have claimed to be fighting on behalf of local people who get no share of the oil riches, but their actions often boiled down to profit-driven criminality (NYT 3 Dec 2008).

> The militants say they are fighting for a fairer share of the oil wealth. But the line between militancy and criminality is blurred. Some militants have grown rich from a trade in stolen crude oil and extortion, with hundreds of expatriates and wealthy Nigerians kidnapped for ransom over the past three years (WP 4 Oct 2009).

Both stories uncover a move by the Nigerian government to bring peace to the Niger Delta, through various concessions made to militants with conditions. The story in the *New York Times* titled 'State Finds (or Buys) Some Peace in Nigeria' provides a close look at how militants were co-opted into federal government structures as politicians in order to provide peaceful conditions to facilitate the operations of oil companies. Similarly the story published by the *Washington Post,* titled 'Last prominent militant disarms in Nigeria's delta' is about a decision taken by the Nigerian government under the auspices of then president Umaru Yar'Adua, to grant amnesty and pardon to militants wanted by the government, as a means of ultimately settling the crisis and bringing some form of stability to the region.

The notion of expressive modality in this instance is a useful tool of analysis, as it measures the writer's authority with regards to the truth or probability of the statements made in a text (Fairclough, 1989:129). In both texts there is an acknowledgement that militants have fought to gain access to the benefits of oil production which have been denied to them. However, it is also apparent that the writers of the texts do not hesitate to state as fact that militants have used the conflict over oil revenue allocation for their personal economic benefit.

Statements such as, 'The militants have claimed to be fighting on behalf of local people ... but their actions often boiled down to profit-driven criminality' (NYT 3 Dec 2008), as well as 'the line between militancy and criminality is blurred' and 'Some militants have

grown rich from a trade in stolen crude oil and extortion' (WP 4Oct 2009), indicate high expressive modality. Some of the phrases used here, such as 'the line between militancy and criminality **is** blurred' and '**have** grown rich', represent the writers' statements as categorical truths as opposed to implicative statements or suggestions. Had the reporters used less certain phrases such as 'the line between militancy and criminality **may be** [or **could be**] blurred' or '**may have** [or **could** have] grown rich' their assertions would be represented more tentatively, thus giving the reader room to conceive of the reported event or situation from multiple perspectives.

This is not to say that the statements made by the reporters in both excerpts provided above are necessarily a false representation of the role of militants in the conflict over oil; however, there is a need to draw attention to the fact that when texts are produced there is a choice that writers make in relation to the words used. Many journalistic texts make use of high expressive modality as the very nature of reporting news is to produce factual accounts of events, where the reporter's authority regarding the statements he/she makes is unquestionable. Therefore the common-sense usage of simple words such as 'is', 'have' and 'often' may end up being ideologically loaded, primarily because they construct a certain understanding and image of an event or situation. Militant groups in the Niger Delta certainly do kidnap foreign oil workers as reported by the newspaper articles. However, the articles' focus on such kidnappings and the representation of these kidnappings as being primarily criminal rather than related to political goals obscures the various other complex intentions behind the kidnappings and gives inadequate attention to the reasons these groups give for their actions.

Despite the problematic features contained in the representations and images of militant groups and armed gangs as examined above, some of the sampled news texts can be commended for attempting to uncover the contentious webs of relations between the multiple actors involved in the conflict and the violence which accompanies these relations. This is apparent in the quotes provided below from the *Washington Post* and the *Guardian:*

> ... both criminal, armed community groups and also those in the pay of powerful
> government politicians – are often overlapping if not indistinguishable ... groups such
> as Asari Dokobo's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and the Movement for the
> Emancipation of the Niger Delta have portrayed themselves as being at the forefront
> of the struggle against the government and the economic marginalisation of the delta,

members of the same groups ... have also acted as paid thugs for pro-government politicians, and as members of 'cults' or violent criminal gangs (GDN 20 Jul 2008).

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, the principle militant group known as MEND, launched a guerrilla-style battle three years ago. It attacks oil facilities and kidnaps foreign oil workers in what it calls a crusade to bring development to a region whose residents have enjoyed few of the riches from 50 years of oil production ... But the militants also steal and sell oil, and many began their careers as thugs hired by corrupt Niger Delta politicians to ensure electoral victory through intimidation. Most analysts regard them more as cash-hungry gangs - often in cahoots with politicians and military members - than freedom fighters (WP 27 Jul 2009).

Although the use of words such as 'thugs' and 'cash-hungry gangs' (WP 27 Jul 2009) depicts militants as opportunistic criminals exploiting the political struggle in a bid to access the benefits of the oil economy, what is worth noting about these texts is that they also bring to light some of the complex and critical issues intrinsic to the conflict as well as the complicated use of criminal violence as a type of political tool – all of which are significant factors that are intricately enmeshed in the struggle over oil revenue allocation. In addition to this, both news texts draw attention to the controversial relationship between militants, cults and politicians. The text taken from the *Washington Post* draws attention to the fact that young men in militant groups were initially drawn into the violent militias by politicians. Moreover, as can be noted in the text published in the *Guardian,* members of cults have also engaged in the activities of militant groups, maintaining ties both in cult gangs and militant groups.

The chief attribute of the various dissident groups and insurgent militias and gangs in the Niger Delta which is not captured in most of the sampled newspaper texts, save a few such as the ones quoted above, is their immersion in a culture of violence as a mode both of survival and accumulation. While this is not examined in most of the sampled news texts it is an important factor to consider as it serves as the guiding principle which causes them to operate, under various conditions, between a political and criminal agenda. Bøås (2011:129) adds that this immersion in a culture of violence makes it challenging to classify the numerous and complex dissident and deviant armed groups as being motivated by either criminal or political motives.

While there is an abundance of stories from the sample which feature the various armed groups in the Delta, few of the news texts which appear in the four newspaper publications attempt to delve into the lived daily experiences of the common men and women in the Delta as they find themselves immersed in the political economy of oil. While armed groups such as gunmen, militants, cults and rebels are represented as active agents of violent and often criminal acts, local residents who are not directly engaged in any aspect of the armed insurgency are mostly represented as passive actors within the sampled news texts.

The prominent image of local Delta residents which emerges from the sample is that of nameless and helpless victims. These residents are presented as victims of the different armed groups, victims of Nigerian military and government forces and victims of multinational oil corporations. Very little detail about the residents is given and they are often referred to according to the number of people affected or according to their ethnic identities. Even the few stories in which residents are named beyond their ethnic identities or numbers tend to depict the named residents simply as victims. Their victimhood is emphasised while any active attempt to empower themselves within their circumstances is absent from the news texts, almost implying that they have no agency to transform their circumstances. The opening paragraph of a story published in a May 2009 issue of the *Guardian* provides an illustration of this:

> Hundreds of people, including many civilians, may have been killed in a Nigerian
> military offensive in the oil-rich Niger Delta over the past week according to
> Amnesty International ... 500 people had gathered for an annual festival last Friday
> when an aerial bombardment occurred, Amnesty said, leading to civilian casualties,
> caused by both the military and the armed groups ... the affected areas are mainly
> home to Ijaws, the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta (GDN 21 May 2009).

This story covers a government and military-led counter insurgency operation, which was aimed at destroying the militant groups that threatened Nigeria's oil production through their attacks on foreign oil installations. Caught in the crossfire of the military operation are local residents. The residents who were exposed to the violence are portrayed in this text as nameless victims. They are identified according to the estimated number of casualties incurred and in relation to their ethnic identity, namely Ijaw. In addition to this it is also

worth noting that the mention of ethnicity as a tool of identification in news texts of this nature tends to be a stereotypical mode, in many western news reports, of representing civilians who find themselves in conflict situations in African states (Brookes 1995; Ake 1989; Ankomah 2008; Palmberg 2001).

This style of reporting on conflict in the Delta is repeated in the *Guardian* in a story published a month later. The opening lines of the story are much like the one quoted above:

> Tens of thousands of villagers in the Niger Delta are again picking up the pieces after
> the most intense violence in the oil producing region for months if not years ...
> Witnesses say the raids led to scores of deaths, while up to 10,000 people have been
> forced to abandon their villages (GDN 14 June 2009).

The experiences of the residents in the context given above are generalised to all residents described numerically as 'tens of thousands of villagers' and '10,000 people' with reference also being made to 'scores of death'. While armed groups in most of the texts in the sample are depicted as active agents of violent actions as well as the cause of instability in the Delta, the common men and women of the Niger Delta are largely represented as passive actors and in most news articles very little detail is given concerning their circumstances. The only positive action they are depicted performing in the above report is that of 'picking up the pieces'. The reader is presented with a mass of villagers picking up the remains of their livelihoods after a spate of violence in their region. Their sense of agency as individuals and also as a people, within the violent circumstances they face, disappears and that which stands out is a sense of passivity forced upon them as a result of violence and displacement.

The few stories which go beyond numerical and ethnic descriptions of local residents in the Delta foreground the image of a people who live in traditional and simplistic communities. This passage below is taken from a story published in the *Guardian* and which covers the environmental effects of oil spillage in the Niger Delta:

> Chief Promise, who swam with us, angrily rejected Shell's allegation that the spill
> had occurred because of sabotage. 'People died, hundreds of people were ill,' he said.
> 'Nets, fishing pots, huts were lost. This is where we fish and farm. We have lost our
> forest' (GDN 27 May 2009c).

The journalists, who were writing about the oil spill in Otegwe 1 in Ogoniland, describe how they had to swim through 'swamp forest'. Chief Promise is the subject in the story who assists them as they conduct their investigations into the spill. The choice of the word chief to describe Promise is rather convenient as it fits into the descriptions of the natural environment as a rural place with villages and forests and traditional people. While the journalists may have seen their choice of words as being purely descriptive, there are certain connotations and associations which result from the language used. The use of words such as 'chief', 'village' and 'forest', appearing in the first two paragraphs of this story, invoke the idea of traditional communities living lives that are far removed from those of the readers and with which the readers cannot easily identify.

The *Washington Post* published a similar story titled 'Oil Assets Still Fueling Gas-Fired Flames in Niger Delta'. The story is about pollution caused by flares from foreign-owned oil installations. The imagery noted in the excerpt from the *Guardian* above, is also apparent in the article below:

> Kingsley Okene is the chief here. But despite his authority, he says he has never managed to snuff the giant gas-fuelled flames that have towered over his Niger Delta village for decades ... the flames have become emblems of the inertia of the troubled region, where environmentalists, oil companies, politicians and militants argue about the wealth and wisdom of oil exploration. Some of the nation's poorest people, meanwhile, watch from the sidelines (WP 29 Aug 2009).

Again, a prominent figure in a community within the Delta is described as a 'chief' rather than, for example, a leader. By using the word chief, Promise is somewhat exoticised as this word is not used to describe community leaders in the west. The text presents us with a picture of tension between the simplicity of village life where chiefs are supposed to be the guardians and solution-finders within their villages, and the external conditions and effects of modernity imposed on such communities through oil pollution and gas flaring. In this manner, 'Chief Kingsley Okene' and his fellow villagers are represented as victims who are helplessly confronted with the effects of modernity which operate outside the order of their communal lives and traditions. One could argue that this kind of representation implies that such communities are backward, lacking the resources and infrastructure to address the problems that accompany the political economy of oil in their region. Their victimhood is

reinforced since it is constructed around forces which are beyond their reach and removed from their world.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight

Ken Saro-Wiwa has been described in many quarters as one of the leading forerunners of the struggle over oil in the region. Together with eight other leaders, Saro-Wiwa founded MOSOP during the early 1990s. The movement was established as a means of addressing the environmental and socio-political problems that arose from the destructive activities of multinational oil giants such as Shell in Ogoniland. However, fearing that Shell would be driven out of Ogoniland due to persistent protest action by MOSOP, the Nigerian military regime of the time controversially decided to execute Saro-Wiwa with the eight other Ogoni leaders.

The role of Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight in the struggle over oil in the Niger Delta features rather prominently in the sampled news texts. Most stories which include references to Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight appeared in 2009 and 2010. In 2009 the *Guardian* and *New York Times* devoted a considerable portion of their news coverage to a high-profile court case against Shell in an American Federal Court for human rights abuses in the Niger Delta and also for its collusion in the execution of Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight. Environmental degradation featured rather prominently as the subject matter of stories which appeared in the *Guardian* in 2010. Most of these stories make reference to Saro-Wiwa's ardent struggle against environmental pollution by oil companies in Ogoniland. The *Daily Telegraph* and *Washington Post*, in contrast, did not publish any stories about or mentioning Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight.

A close appraisal of the representation of these actors suggests a markedly different form of representation to that of other local Niger Delta residents as well as to that of armed groups. Unlike the militant groups and gunmen who are generally described along the lines of being criminal agents and antagonists in the conflict over oil in the region, Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight are portrayed as selfless activists and critics of both the foreign oil companies and the Nigerian military regime of the time. Furthermore, although Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni eight are depicted as victims, much like the common men and women in the Delta, theirs is an image of victims with agency. They are represented as victims who were committed to identifying solutions to the problems inherent to the political economy of oil

within their communities. The passages below which appeared in April and May 2009 issues of the *Guardian* are respectively titled 'Shell in court over alleged role in Nigeria executions' and '14 years after Ken Saro-Wiwa's death, family points finger at Shell in court':

> Saro-Wiwa became famous as a campaigner on behalf of the Ogoni people, leading peaceful protests against the environmental damage caused by oil companies in the Niger Delta. There was worldwide condemnation when, along with eight other activists, he was hanged by the Nigerian military government in 1995 ... (GDN 5 Apr 2009).

> In 1990 Saro-Wiwa, a well known journalist and activist, helped found the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, bringing its case against Shell's destruction of the environment to an international audience. A peaceful protest in 1993 mobilised 300,000 Ogonis (GDN 27 May 2009a).

Words such as 'campaigner', 'activist' and 'journalist' contained in the news texts above, are words which when taken within the context of a conflict situation, have a positive valuation attached to them unlike words such as 'militants', 'cults', 'gunmen' and 'rebels' which are used in relation to the armed groups discussed earlier. Saro-Wiwa is depicted in these texts as an active and self-empowered agent, using peaceful means to mobilise thousands of local residents in their endeavour to engage the Nigerian government and foreign oil companies such as Shell. This is in contrast to portrayals of the militant groups, who are mostly depicted as criminals who use violence for their own benefit. In addition, the image of Saro-Wiwa which appears in these texts is noticeably different from the images of the helpless, passive and disempowered Delta residents who are not engaged in the armed insurgency but are affected by it.

Saro-Wiwa is also portrayed in a similar way in the *New York Times* as can be noted from the passage below which appeared in a May 2009 issue of the publication:

> The elder Mr. Saro-Wiwa, who founded the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples in 1990, was one of the most vocal critics of Shell for the damage done to the delta communities, including gas flaring and the destruction of mangroves to make way for pipelines ... Mr. Saro-Wiwa was arrested in 1994 and put on trial before a special military court along with the other Ogoni advocates, on charges that human rights groups and Western governments said were trumped up (NYT 21 May 2009).

Much like the descriptions which appeared in the *Guardian*, Saro-Wiwa in the above text is described as a respectable man and a vocal critic of the foreign oil industry in the Niger Delta. The Ogoni Eight in this passage are described as advocates thus emphasising their role in the struggle as actors engaged in supporting and championing the cause against the pollution of their natural environment by Shell. These portrayals of Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight, which differ quite starkly from the representations of local residents and the various other forms of armed groups in the Delta, are a fitting illustration of what the aforementioned western Anglophone newspapers, more specifically the *Guardian* and the *New York Times,* consider to be appropriate or acceptable ways for marginalised people to confront the harsh realities of their victimhood.

In drawing attention to these features as the primary elements through which Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight are represented, I do not mean to undermine the significance of the role played by Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight in the struggle over oil in the Delta nor do I mean to suggest an equivalence between them and contemporary militants. Rather, I seek to bring attention to the values which inform the way in which the news texts represent the actors enmeshed in the conflict. What may be gathered from this is that there is a positive valuation which is attached to the type of resistance and agency favoured by Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight. On the other hand there is a negative valuation attached to the violent resistance characteristic of contemporary armed groups. The peaceful protests and activism displayed by Saro-Wiwa are depicted as being legitimate and sincere while the violent and defiant resistance displayed by armed groups are depicted as being illegitimate and criminal.

Moreover while all three kinds of actors (armed groups, local residents, Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight) are somewhat represented as victims, there are also different forms victimhood attached to each group of actors. The armed groups are constructed as victims who irrationally and inappropriately take matters into their own hands by stealing oil, attacking foreign oil installations and kidnapping foreign oil workers. The local residents and civilians are constructed as destitute and powerless victims. Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight present a departure from this, primarily because they are constructed as empowered victims who use their activism and advocacy as a form of resistance. These representations are therefore highly ideological as they contain latent value judgements of what the producers of the news texts consider to be politically acceptable forms of resistance and struggle against oppression and socially acceptable forms of victimhood.

The foreign actors who feature most often in all four newspapers selected for this study predominantly appear to be white, European (mostly British and American) males. For the greater part, these actors work for European and American-based foreign oil companies as well as oil construction companies situated in the Niger Delta. One of the key trends captured across all four newspapers is that their nationality and their victimhood are the primary features of description and reference. Foreigners are engaged in quite a number of activities in the Niger Delta, yet they appear most often in the news texts as victims of kidnappings, abductions and hostage-taking carried out by the armed groups. Foreign oil workers are generally characterised as people who are being acted upon, with the effect of this being a likely emphasis of their position as passive victims rather than active contributors to the conflict over oil in the region.

For instance the verbal phrases and verbal processes which reoccur in the texts in relation to foreign oil workers, include phrases such as 'foreign workers are **being held hostage**' (NYT 16 May 2007), 'Four Americans **seized by gunmen** ... were **freed and handed over** to authorities' (NYT 31 May 2007), 'the **kidnapped** men who **were abducted** Friday evening, were Dutch, Pakistani, British and French' (NYT 3 June 2007), 'A group of oil workers including, four Britons and three Americans, **have been kidnapped**' (GDN 25 May 2007), and 'Four Britons are believed to be among a group of foreign oil workers **kidnapped from a ship** off the coast of Nigeria ... The US Embassy said three Americans **were taken**' (DT 25 May 2007). Such phrases paint the picture of a people who are victims of violent processes. It is also noteworthy that their nationality is the primary form of identification.

Therefore a key trend in the sample is that where foreign oil workers are the primary subjects within a news text, the overarching subject matter of the text is almost always kidnapping. Furthermore even though there were a significant number of cases which involved the kidnapping of wealthy Nigerians, the newspapers tend to devote more attention to kidnappings which involved the abductions of foreign oil workers. While some of these stories are presented as news in brief, thus providing a summary of the events which took place, there are a number of cases which received comprehensive coverage. Depending on the duration of the kidnapping, a single case is sometimes reported on several times. This is particularly true of the *Guardian* and *Telegraph*. Stories involving the kidnapping of British

oil workers are typically first reported as breaking news. However such stories tend to be later followed by longer investigative articles by the reporters. At times the names of the workers, their profession and place of origin in Britain are included as features of naming and referencing in the news texts – characteristics which were lacking in representations of local Delta residents as revealed above.

An interesting case in point is the story of the kidnapping of a three-year old girl Margaret Hill. Margaret was born in Nigeria to British expatriate Mike Hill and local Niger Delta resident Oluchi Hill. Although Margaret is Nigerian born and has a Nigerian mother, she is described in both the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* as a British national. This mode of naming and referencing is continuously repeated in many of the opening paragraphs of stories which reported Margaret's kidnapping as can be noted from the excerpts below:

> Gunmen this morning took a three-year-old British girl hostage in Nigeria's oil-producing delta region (DT 5 Jul 2007a).

> …the three-year-old British girl taken hostage in Nigeria has been freed by her kidnappers and reunited unharmed with her parents (DT 8 Jul 2007).

> The Foreign Office today called for the immediate release of a three-year-old British girl who was abducted at gunpoint in the Nigerian oil city of Port Harcourt(GDN 5 July 2007).

> Margaret Hill, the three-year-old British girl taken in the oil city of Port Harcourt, is the third child to be seized in three weeks and the first foreign child to be taken (GDN 6 Jul 2007).

The emphasis on Margaret's British identity brings to light questions of relational modality as the reporters presume that British readers would sympathise with her based on the fact that like them she is British and is therefore a part of 'us'. This sense of being a part of 'us' and sharing a British national identity is further reiterated by descriptions of her father Mike Hill in the *Guardian* as being 'originally from Murton in County Durham' (GDN 5 Jul 2007), and again in the *Telegraph* as being 'an oil contractor from Co Durham' (DT 8 Jul 2007) in Britain. This classification scheme creates lines of distinction and separation between Nigerians and British nationals in the Niger Delta. A 'positive self-representation' is attached to British nationals and expatriates while a 'negative other-presentation' (van Dijk,

2001:10) is attached to Nigerians, particularly the armed groups and criminal gangs that are the suspects behind most of the kidnappings and abductions. Moreover, by giving foreign oil workers and other expatriates names in news reports and providing personal details about their towns of origin, the producers of texts provide an opportunity for their readers to identify with the subjects in the news texts even if this is along the lines of national identity. In contrast, portrayals of local Delta residents as nameless and faceless subjects, creates the image of unrecognisable distant others removed from the world of the reporters and possibly their readers.

Representations of Place: The Niger Delta as a Geo-Political Entity

One of the crucial means through which representations of the conflict in the Niger Delta can be examined, is by looking at representations of the Delta as a geopolitical entity. In this instance the Niger Delta does not merely appear in the sampled news texts as a geographic territory with politically defined boundaries. Rather the imagery that surrounds constructions of the Niger Delta as place, presents a region which is fraught with contradictions. The Niger Delta presented to readers of the four selected western Anglophone newspapers is oil-rich, possessing vast amounts of oil reserves, yet this resource-rich region is also the poorest in Nigeria. The Delta is depicted in all four newspapers as the heartbeat and backbone of Nigeria's export economy. At the same time, the Delta is beset with violence and instability and is represented as a chaotic and dangerous place for its people and more especially for foreign nationals and expatriates. The region is also portrayed according to its natural surroundings with most descriptions delineating a forest-like place with thick vegetation, mangrove swamps and creeks which serve as shelter for armed groups and criminal gangs.

That the Niger Delta is a region immersed in the contradictions of the political economy of oil in Nigeria, is a theme which emerges rather conspicuously from all four newspapers. In this instance representations of the Niger Delta more specifically in the *Guardian, Daily Telegraph* and *Washington Post* tend to emphasise the contradictions that have accompanied the production of oil in the region. This is a reoccurring feature apparent in descriptions of the Delta as evident in the excerpts below:

> This southern edge of West Africa, where Nigeria's wealth pumps out of oil and gas
> fields to bypass millions of its poorest people is a restless place (GDN 9 Dec 2007).

This swampy corner of Africa's most populous country pumps £28 billion into the exchequer, 80 percent of its revenue. But very little trickles down to the 30 million Nigerians living here, leaving them with a collapsing infrastructure, few schools or clinics and devastating environmental ruin (DT 7 Feb 2007).

Despite Nigeria's oil riches, the vast majority of its 140 million people live on $2 a day or less and some of the acute poverty is in the villages of the delta (WP 4 Oct 2009).

Most of these descriptions tend to rather simplistically juxtapose the great amount of wealth generated from the oil industry in the region against widespread poverty, lack of infrastructural development, and rampant violence by militant groups. Furthermore, the Niger Delta as a geo-political entity is represented as a place where violence in all its various expressions seemingly reigns supreme. Statements such as, 'but here in the ... delta, many analysts and observers warn that a calm could be a prelude to all-out war' (WP 27 Jul 2009), 'The Delta is poised to blow up' (DT 7 Feb 2007), 'the volatile Niger Delta' (GDN 12 Jan 2009), 'the conflict-plagued Niger Delta region' (WP 27 Jul 2009), 'the whole region is awash with guns and the delta is one of the most dangerous places on earth' (GDN 10 Jun 2009), paint a picture of a place where instability, anarchy and chaos are naturalised as inherent features of the region.

Poverty is also depicted as a characteristic feature of the Niger Delta. Here descriptions of the Delta as a geopolitical entity are dominated by reoccurring words and phrases such as 'abject poverty' (NYT 10 Aug 2009), 'terrible deprivation' (GDN 6 Jul 2007), 'desperately poor' (GDN 7 Jul 2007), 'poverty stricken zone' (GDN 9 Dec 2007), 'impoverished' (DT 25 May 2007), 'remains destitute' (NYT 10 Aug 2009), and 'acute poverty' (WP 4 Oct 2009). The image of the Delta is thus of a place which is needy and deficient, a place where lack and deprivation are emphasised as being the key features of its various communities.

Despite the imagery depicted above there are news texts within the sample which move beyond simplistic representation of the Delta as a place imbued by violent strife and poverty. No other story captures the theme of a region beset by the tensions of the political economy of oil in the Niger Delta as intricately and adeptly as a feature story published in a February 2011 issue of the *New York Times*. This article, titled 'Riches Flow into Nigeria but are Lost After Arrival', describes the various challenges that have prevented the oil-rich Delta

from benefitting from the vast amounts of oil revenue which have been pumped from its creeks since the establishment of the oil economy during the 1950s.

Unlike descriptions which bring to light some of the more obvious disparities that have been cited as the leading cause of the problems in the Niger Delta as noted in the statements and phrases quoted above, this story fleshes out complexities of the oil economy in the Delta which are not ordinarily mentioned in the other newspapers. For instance, the opening lines of this story reveal a number of white elephant projects in a small settlement built from oil money such as 'a ghostly high-rise hotel, a luxury shopping center-in-waiting, [and] a giant hospital that is mostly empty'. Despite this, states the reporter, closer to the densely populated areas 'schools are crumbling, commerce spills from the squalid shacks, soldiers operate checkpoints and militants hide in the creeks'. The reporter goes on to uncover in greater detail a number of the contradictory features which can be observed in the Niger Delta:

> Billions of dollars of Nigeria's immense oil riches have been funnelled to places like this in the last year alone, yet they have not brought the country peace. The region is still plagued by huge disparities of wealth, kidnappings, sabotage and threats of more to come. In recent months this conundrum – a flood of oil wealth yet continued unrest – has emerged again amid signs that the rebellion is not over … Making sure oil profits return to this impoverished region has long been a rallying cry of the militants, but the recent increase in money here – a great deal more money – has brought more questions than calm to the Niger Delta (NYT 8 Feb 2011).

Although the use of the word 'plagued' provides a similar metaphorical representation as conveyed by the other newspapers and thus depicting a region infested by a disease of poverty and violence, what stands out about this story which some of the other newspapers do not adequately address, is that there have certainly been moves to bring socio-economic development to the region and that addressing the problems of the Delta is more complicated than it may seem. However, the manner in which the development has been implemented is not attending to the urgent needs of the majority of Niger Delta residents.

One of the primary presuppositions which is simplistically implied in many news stories concerning the Niger Delta oil economy in the other newspapers is that a greater share of oil revenue accrued from oil production ought to automatically transform the situation in the Delta thus bringing about wealth to the impoverished communities as well as peace and

stability. However, this story from the *New York Times* questions this presupposition by drawing attention to the fact that an increase in oil revenue in the region has only served to heighten the problems of inequality and violence. The reporter cites a lack of transparency from both the Nigerian national and federal governments concerning the use of money generated by oil revenue. He also draws attention to corrupt practices and dealings within the oil economy by the national and federal governments – observations which are not given as much attention in the other newspapers but which provide a more detailed and complex picture of the situation.

Conclusion

While the conflict in the Delta is very complex, particularly given the historical trajectory of the oil economy and the presence of multiple actors and conflicting interests wrapped up in the political economy of oil in Nigeria, the discourses which emerge from representations of the region in all four British and American newspapers are fairly similar. This chapter reveals that although the four newspapers are associated with different ideological positions, the similarity in the type of language used and imagery conveyed points towards a fairly homogenous representation of the Niger Delta conflict.

It is important to emphasise that while the representations uncovered in this chapter are not necessarily the result of a deliberate or systematic decision taken by the reporter or text producer, the lexical choices the journalists make with regard to how they represent the conflict may reinforce dominant discourses of the conflict in the Delta that also generally appear in other representations of Africa and its people. The chapter that follows develops the observations which have been made in this chapter concerning the representations of the struggle over oil in the Niger Delta. Some of the more theoretical elements of CDA are used in the proceeding chapter to examine whether representations of the Niger Delta echo or reflect stereotypical representations of Africa in western media coverage and other forms of western scholarship and writing. In addition the chapter that follows is also aimed at briefly exploring the implications of the representations of the Niger Delta.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Western media coverage of Africa has long been viewed as a matter of great contention. This study reveals that despite numerous calls for transformation concerning representations of the continent, including the call for a New World Information and Communication Order during the 1970s and 1980s, many commentators argue that the image of Africa in western media continues to be largely negative and problematic (Ojo 2007; Theerasatiankul 2007; Terrel 1989; Wa'Njogu 2009). It is highlighted in Chapter Two that a number of western countries, including the US and Britain, are hosts to globally recognised news agencies, which supply news and information to the international community. Because these western news agencies have an extensive audience, comprising the likes of political elites, policy-makers, private sector officials and the working and middle classes, concerns have mounted over the continued negative portrayal of Africa in western media (Theerasatiankul 2007; Ojo 2007, Brookes 1995, Chari 2010; Grinker et al 2010).

Of particular concern has been the reproduction of negative stereotypes dating back to the pre-colonial and colonial eras in current imagery of the continent (Terrel 1989; Wa'Njogu 2009; Akomah 2008; Brookes 1995; Grinker et al 2010). Scholars who criticise depictions of Africa in western media are concerned that preoccupations with images of the continent as a conflict-ridden, hopeless and problematic place, will not only restrict the development of African states, but will also ultimately reinforce the ideological dominance of the west (Grinker et al 2010; Ferguson 2006; Ake 1989; Jere-Malanda 2008; Brookes 1995). The exploration of the representations of the conflict in the oil-rich Niger Delta in the four western Anglophone newspapers which is undertaken in this thesis, takes as its backdrop this on-going broader discussion of the representation of Africa in western media and scholarship.

As explained in Chapter Three, residents of the Niger Delta expected the discovery of oil to generate wealth and development in the region. Instead, the Delta has been described as one of the poorest regions in Nigeria. Even though there are a number of well-resourced MNOCs, most towns and cities in the region lack basic infrastructure to service the needs of the local population. Consequently, the political economy of oil in the Delta has fuelled resentment, especially amongst unemployed youths who are caught in a cycle of violence and poverty (Ukiwo 2011; Ahonsi 2011; Ghazvinian 2007; Omotola 2006). The violent struggle over oil revenue allocation and the fact that the Niger Delta supplies large quantities of oil to international energy markets has propelled this oil-rich region into the international limelight.

In fact, the region's geo-political importance in relation to oil is one of the main reasons for the great interest in the conflict in western media as highlighted in Chapter One.

This study aims to examine and uncover the manner in which the Delta is represented in the four western Anglophone newspapers selected for this study. In addition to uncovering representations of the Niger Delta conflict, this study also seeks to investigate whether these representations echo and reflect the negative and stereotypical imagery evident in western media coverage of Africa and other forms of western writing and scholarship. Lastly this study seeks to explore the implications of these representations. This chapter addresses these research questions by relating the observations which are made in Chapter Four (which provides an analysis of the sampled news texts), to the arguments and claims noted in the review of literature in Chapter Two.

Representation of the Conflict

CDA has been most useful for this study as it has offered a theoretical and methodological framework through which the language of the sampled news texts could be critically analysed so as to examine the representations of the conflict in the oil-rich Niger Delta. As argued in Chapter One, language is not merely a transparent medium of communication which conveys information, news or objective descriptions and illustrations of the world in which we live. Rather, language creates social representations which outline and define the social identity of a group, including the group's shared beliefs about its underlying conditions and ways of existence and reproduction. Therefore language is not neutral. It not only describes, but also helps us to make sense of the world and in making sense of the world language also shapes the world (Matheson, 2005:5, 6).

Therefore the words used and lexical choices made by the media to produce news texts have important implications (Matheson, 2005:6). Events or situations reported in news articles can only make sense if they can be located in some way within a range of already conceived and constructed social and cultural identifications. Thus the decisions made when producing texts are social because texts are constituted by that which is social and in turn texts yield effects which are social (Matheson, 2005:15 16; Fairclough, 1989:23; Blommaert, 2005:2; Brown and Yule, 1983:1; Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002:5, 7).

Representations of the Niger Delta conflict are examined in Chapter Four by way of a critical analysis of the texts sampled from the *Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* in Britain and

the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* in the US. The first part of the analysis provides a detailed inspection of the representations of actors which feature prominently in the newspaper texts. These actors include the different armed groups directly engaged in the conflict over oil and local residents who are not engaged in the conflict but are affected by it. The armed groups are described as the main agents of violence and instability in the region. Local residents, who are not engaged in the violent insurgency, are mostly described in the news texts in a way that portrays them as distant others and as victims of the armed groups, the Nigerian government and MNOCs.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight also feature rather notably in the sample. While they are portrayed as victims, they also appear in the news texts as actors in their own right in their advocacy of social and political change in the Niger Delta. Another group of actors who play a central role in representations of the conflict are foreign oil workers and expatriates, with British and American expatriates receiving the most attention in the texts. Like Delta residents, some foreign oil workers and expatriates, especially those who have been kidnapped or exposed to violence, are portrayed as victims of the violence committed by armed groups. However, representations of these actors focus on their national identity as either British or American and these actors are described in far greater detail than the Niger Delta residents. Also featured in Chapter Four is a critical analysis of representations of the Niger Delta as a geo-political entity. The region appears in the sampled texts, as a place embroiled in great tensions.

Taken-for-granted discursive practices, which are a characteristic element within the process of reporting events, have the potential to direct meaning-making, perceptions and understanding in relation to those events (Brookes 1995; Matheson 2005; Fairclough 1989; Fairclough 1992; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). Linguistic and grammatical tools described in Chapter One, such as the naming and referencing of subjects, presuppositional phrases which contain implicit claims and assumptions embedded within the explicit meaning of texts, predicative tools used to represent the values and the characteristics of subjects, as well as transitive verbal processes which indicate the connecting points between subjects and actions depicted in a text, are just some of the features used on a daily basis to convey information and construct reality (Richardson 2007; Fairclough 1989; Fairclough 1992). Consequently, the use of taken-for-granted social categories such as gunmen, armed gangs, rebels, militant groups, British nationals, expatriates, chiefs and villagers, used on a descriptive level to

delineate subjects within texts, not only describe but also contain latent meanings which are ideological.

If one moves beyond a face-value interpretation of the news texts sampled for this study, one realises that these social categories act as classificatory schemes which attach a positive 'us' valuation to some groups (foreign oil workers and expatriates) and a negative 'other' valuation to other groups (gunmen, armed gangs, rebels and militant groups). The ideological import of these classification schemes lies in the use of techniques such as relational and expressive modality observed from the analysis of the news texts. Moreover these techniques create lines of identification between British and American readers and British and American actors in the texts, primarily described according to their western national identities.

The critical analysis of the sampled texts also points out that in so far as certain actors are described as militant and criminal gangs, performing violent and threatening actions against foreign nationals, these actors are thus painted as dangerous and distant others with a negative 'other' valuation attached to them. Furthermore, the political motives that inform their violent actions are obscured through an emphasis on what is mostly cast as illegitimate violent and criminal actions.

In Chapter One discourse is defined as a conventional way of talking that is created by conventional ways of thinking (Johnstone 2002). Matheson (2005:18) explains that if reporters do not have available to them these conventional ways of using language in a routine way to report on events, then they cannot make sense for their audiences of the unusual, unexpected and unpredicted events which form the basic content of what is considered newsworthy. Therefore news articles have to provide readers with a coherent and fairly easily decipherable interpretation of events Matheson (2005:18). This is what news reporting does. On the other hand this does not mean that reporters ought to 'dumb-down' situations or that they can be excused for not attending to complexities within those situations or for repeating harmful stereotypes.

It is further noted earlier in the study, that a refined analysis of the conflict in the Niger Delta needs to be aware of the complex webs of oil-related violence in the region. Thus reporting on the conflict can be reasonably expected to touch on such complexities. Some of the news texts discussed in Chapter Four, particularly those from the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* (GDN 20 Jul 2008; WP 27 Jul 2009), can be commended for making an effort to uncover the underlying complexities typical of the armed groups leading the front

lines of the violent insurgency in the Delta. However, an element which is somewhat neglected by these newspapers is the immersion of young men who are concurrently members of politically-orientated militant groups and cult gangs, in a culture of violence as a mode of both survival and accumulation.

It is observed from the analysis of the various actors involved in the conflict, that an emphasis on violent actions including the kidnapping of foreign oil workers for high ransom payments by armed groups, stresses criminality and monetary opportunism as the decisive motives behind their actions. As Brookes (1995:478, 484) argues, rebel and militant groups in western media coverage of Africa, have a tendency of being represented simply as agents of violence and disorder. The negative 'other' valuation which is attached to these groups reflects the distinct tendency whereby western media coverage leans towards negative significations of the continent. In the review of literature in Chapter Two, Mbembe (2001:2, 3) is quoted as stating that the African human experience appears in current discourses as an experience which is mostly understood through a negative interpretation. Although quite harsh, this statement rings true when examining the sampled news texts.

It is important to stress here that armed groups in the Niger Delta are indeed engaged in violent activity. As seen earlier in this study these armed groups operate in different guises, using political and criminal tactics to capture the attention of MNOCs, the Nigerian government and the international community. It is also revealed that they use these very same criminal and political tactics to fulfil their personal socio-economic needs and demands. Consequently it may seem reasonable and correct for them to be represented as dangerous, threatening, violent and cash-hungry criminals. However, the use of CDA as a means of critically analysing and deconstructing language and its representational forms, requires one to look beyond the surface of dominant images portrayed in the media. Reporters make choices when they represent people. Through discourse, news media are able to force attention on certain issues and can build images around certain group identities. As such, a focus on the violent actions of militant groups can stereotype them as being inherently violent and volatile, thus fixing these traits as the prime meanings through which they are understood. Furthermore, the context that informs their violent behaviour may receive inadequate attention.

Referring to the tensions between the political and criminal motives that inform the violent actions of armed groups in the Niger Delta conflict, Ikelegbe (2011:126) argues that the violence which is characteristic of the struggle over oil in Nigeria, could be an intentional

defiance of existing law and order. However, this violence could also be a rejection of certain policies, laws and power relations that are seen as being unfair, alienating and oppressive. In this instance, the kind of criminal activity which is part of the violence could be related to a type of socio-political consciousness and could be driven by socio-political discontent and objectives. In this manner, even crime and violence that is not explicitly political could also be related to political resistance. Of significance therefore, is that when appraising the violent behaviour of the various armed groups in the Delta, it is very important to contextualise their actions from a broader standpoint (Ikelegbe, 2011:126).

These observations by Ikelegbe (see also Crummey 1996) stem from their scholarly and academic explorations of the Niger Delta which allow for in-depth and widely researched discussions of the conflict. However, it should be reasonably understood that journalists cannot be expected to provide the same sort of critical analysis which appears in the work of scholarly commentators. This is because journalists are often restricted by some of the discursive practices of their profession, such as meeting deadlines and having to compress information according to its relevance and proximity to their home countries. Nonetheless, the emphasis on the violence of militant groups in the Niger Delta tends to propagate the historically constructed negative stereotyping of such groups while also obscuring the role played by other actors in fuelling the conflict, such as the actions of government and MNOCs. This is an important factor to consider as the violence is a consequence of the actions of many different actors including the Nigerian state and MNOCs, yet it is the armed dissident and deviant groups that are represented as the leading cause of the conflict in the news texts analysed in this study. Furthermore, although there is some negative coverage of the role of Shell in the Niger Delta, employees of MNOCs mostly appear as innocent victims in the news articles, despite the fact that their actions as employees of MNOCs could also contribute to the conflict.

Mahadeo and McKinney (2007:17, 18) maintain that in western media when Africans take initiative in their communities to address social problems, they are typically represented as 'being like us' or as being like westerners. Given this observation, the analysis of Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight provides a rather germane point of reference. Unlike representations of the armed groups and other local residents, Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight are portrayed rather differently. While they are depicted as victims of the political economy of oil in the Delta, they are represented as embodying a different type of victimhood. For the most part, they are represented as active agents committed to identifying

appropriate solutions to the problems in their strife-torn region. In fact, even in their death Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight are seen as protagonists of positive social and political change in the Niger Delta.

Although this does not explicitly translate into the assertion that they are like westerners, as argued by Mahadeo and McKinney (2007), it certainly points towards the kind of resistance against oppression that is considered to be acceptable by the authors of the articles in the four selected newspapers. This is the peaceful but 'effective' resistance adopted by Saro-Wiwa and the eight other Ogoni leaders executed by the Nigerian military regime. In many ways this is what distinguishes representations of these actors from the representations of the other organised groups in the Delta who are shown to use violence and criminality to express their discontent, and from other victims who are presented in the texts as passive. A critical look at this requires one to strongly consider how these representations, although positive on a surface level, reveal the extent to which perceptions of African people are created out of what Grinker et al. (2010:4) refer to as distinct 'biases, prejudices, fantasies or ideologies' and how this finds meaning and relevance in various representational forms in the media.

As already stated, in addition to uncovering the representations of the Niger Delta conflict, one of the primary goals of this study is to examine whether these representations echo or reflect stereotypical images of Africa in western media and other forms of western writing and scholarship. Indeed negative stereotyping is evident in the representations of local residents that are not directly engaged in the violent struggle over oil revenue allocation. With regards to this, the analysis reveals that local residents are portrayed as nameless and helpless victims. Seemingly then, the journalists writing for the four newspapers under discussion have fallen into the taken-for-granted tendency of perpetuating dominant-inherited interpretations and stereotypes relating to the continent and its inhabitants.

Some of the chief metaphors identified in the review of literature in Chapter Two, signify an Africa which is a place where death and disease prevail. Africa is represented as a place full of never-ending problems and crises. The entire continent is conveyed as an apathetic unified whole where different laws are enforced from the laws in so called civilised countries (Ake, 1989:85; Jarosz, 1992:107, Hawk, 1992:7; Chari, 2010:334). Added to this, is the age-old metaphor through which the entire continent is described and made sense of as a hopeless place (Brookes, 1995:471; Ake, 1989:84). The analysis of the Niger Delta as a geo-

political entity reveals certain instances where such old metaphorical conceptions emerge in recent descriptions of the region.

Representations of the Niger Delta as a place embroiled in the chaotic tensions and complexities of the conflict over oil, seem to echo and reinforce the notion that the continent is enmeshed in a series of never-ending problems and is therefore a place without hope. With regard to the conflict, the idea of hopelessness is expressed in the dramatic dominance of continuous violence, instability as well as poverty and deficiency as elaborately described in the news texts appearing in the four newspapers. Additionally, just as Africa is normally written about in 'troubled and urgent tones' (Ferguson, 2006:2), so too is the Niger Delta, a region which is overwhelmingly portrayed in the four British and American newspapers as characterised by hopeless and persistent violence.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that the violence in the Delta is indeed a matter of great concern which requires urgent attention and that journalists have a responsibility to report on these matters. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the fact that the media have the power to frame news reports in certain ways and to thus present a particular view of reality which is built on and resonates with already existing imagery. When news reports about the Niger Delta refer to poverty, violence and instability, without substantially investigating the source of these social factors, the picture that stands out as a representation of reality, is that much like the rest of the continent, the Niger Delta is also a place where nothing works and is therefore hopeless (Chari, 2010:334).

This is problematic as it was shown in Chapter Three that the conflict has numerous causes, among them the actions of the federal and national government, MNOCs and transnational networks engaged in oil theft in the oil-rich region (Ejobowah 2000; Obi and Rustad 2011; Ikein 1990; Zalik 2005). However because the news reports do not substantially investigate these factors, they are often obscured and at times absent from representations of the conflict. This then leaves the reader with the impression that the conflict is caused solely or principally by local actors such as armed groups who employ violent and at times criminal tactics to drive forward their demands. What is of concern then is that the choices made in representing the conflict in the way outlined above, highlight certain perceptions and understandings of what is taking place in the Niger Delta, while rendering other possible interpretations and understandings as less likely.

Conventional labels which have often been used in representations of Africa also emerge in the representations of the Niger Delta as a geo-political entity. The region is

described with reference to violence, criminality, poverty, lack, despair, underdevelopment, hopelessness, corruption, chaos, instability and danger. A number of scholars assert that labels are a powerful and effective tool in the sorting of people and places into rigid social categories. This is particularly the case with news texts which require the use of descriptive labels to compress information into a few words. Labels also allow text producers to generalise about the people or events they write about (Matheson 2005; Fairclough 1992; Fairclough 1995; Richardson 2007; Van Dijk 2009). As such the labels described above do not simply function on a linguistically descriptive level but are ideological in that the Niger Delta, and more broadly Africa, comes to be associated with negative terms in the minds of the readers.

The above discussion has revealed that representations of the Niger Delta conflict do indeed to a considerable extent invoke the different kinds of problematic images of Africa which have been criticised since the NWICO debates almost half a century ago. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are a few news texts in the sample which commendably delve into some of the complexities of the conflict and which do not seem to uncritically reflect the problematic representations some have argued are typical of western reporting on Africa. This is particularly the case with several articles in the *New York Times* (8 Feb 2011), *Guardian* (20 Jul 2008) and *Washington Post* (27 Jul 2008). These stories try to get behind the complexities and tensions that are apparent in the array of armed groups engaged in the conflict. Such attempts may indicate shifting attitudes in representations of Africa.

A troubling factor concerning representations of the Niger Delta conflict is that the commendable attempts to uncover the deep-rooted complexities of the conflict tend to be masked by the use of pejorative language which gravitates towards what Ankomah (2008) in Chapter Three describes as historical baggage – the underlying tendency of western media to re-employ old images and representations in their news reports. The ideological implications of this are quite telling in that representations of the Niger Delta conflict repeat or resonate with deep-seated hegemonic discourses about the region and its residents, without which events and any form of information about the conflict supposedly cannot be understood. These discourses are not simply a neutral or accurate reflection of the Niger Delta conflict. They fall within an ideological ambit which is historically derived from socially and culturally held ideas about Africa and its people. Thus to a large extent although the four newspapers adopt different ideological stances on issues of significance in society (more liberal in the case of the *Guardian* and *New York Times* and more conservative in the case of

the *Telegraph* and the *Washington Post*), their representations of the conflict tend to resonate with old discourses which perpetuate the conventional frameworks through which Africa and its people are often understood.

Implications of the Representations

What is clear from the discussion above is that the images which depict Africa as a place of numerous socio-political problems, violent conflicts and never ending problems are also apparent in the way the Niger Delta conflict is represented in the four newspaper publications. Consequently it indeed seems to be the case that old discourses on Africa are to some extent reproduced in current portrayals and representations of the Niger Delta conflict. One of the more dangerous implications of the reproduction of such pervasive discourses is that they ultimately lead us to think that the conflict is insoluble or inevitable. The recurrence of stories which focus on regional instability, kidnapping and political violence as the primary subject matter informing the choices of news production with regards to the Delta, tends to suggest that the region is ensnared in a set of complex problems, for which no solutions can be found. While it is quite evident that the violent insurgency in the Delta is not an easy conflict to resolve, it is also important to note that such representations risk normalising or naturalising the conflict as if it is an inevitable condition, rather than the product of particular actions and choices taken by various African and non-African actors.

In addition, a focus on the violent actions of armed groups which have received wide coverage across all four newspapers, may end up underplaying and even masking major issues concerning the conflict. Apart from the stories which bring to light Shell's collusion in the execution of Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Eight by the Nigerian military regime, few of the stories which were sampled from the four newspaper publications, report on the problematic relationship between the Nigerian government and MNOCs such as Shell. This historically controversial relationship is discussed in Chapter Three, where it is stated that the Nigerian state's close relationship with MNOCs has contributed significantly to the tensions in the Niger Delta (Omotola 2006; Ahonsi 2011; Ghazvinian 2007). Considering the amount of influence that these newspapers carry as custodians of good journalism in their home countries and also internationally, their silence on this matter could potentially obscure a crucial vantage point, through which global perceptions and responses to the conflict may perhaps develop. Rather than coming to think of the conflict as something for which the

Nigerian government and MNOCs must take considerable responsibility, readers are likely to think the conflict is a result of the particularities of the Niger Delta and the greed and criminality of local armed groups and thus not their concern.

Scholars who have decried Africa's image in western media and scholarship argue that Africa is a type of metaphor through which the west represents its supremacy over other groups of people or tells a story about itself through the discussion of others. Events in Africa are more often reported when they carry some form of importance to the west (Mbembe 2001, Ferguson 2006; Jere-Malanda 2008; Hawk 1992). This is evident from the analysis conducted in Chapter Four. It is observed that a majority of the news stories that were published between 2007 and 2009 particularly in the *Guardian, Daily Telegraph* and *New York Times*, focus on the kidnapping of foreign oil workers, attacks on oil installations by armed groups and subsequent peaks in global oil prices. The preoccupation with these specific events goes beyond their obvious news value. Instead these events are likely considered to be significant and newsworthy because of their relevance to the home countries of the four newspapers. These preoccupations also point towards a rather problematic orientation in which western lives and the suffering or death of western people, is considered more urgent, important and deserving of attention than the suffering and death of Africans or other groups of people.

It is indicated earlier in this study that debates concerning representation generally acknowledge the close relationship between representation, power and ideology (Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie 2010; Grinker et al 2010). As explained there, representation helps us to establish who possesses the power to speak on behalf of others. It is also through representation that the media have the power to perpetuate certain images of people and places while excluding or obscuring others (Hall 1997; Hawk 1992; Grinker et al 2010). Thus it can be argued that the representations of the conflict in the Niger Delta in prominent newspapers such as the four used in this study affect the global agenda concerning the conflict. This agenda-setting role of the media is crucial as the discourses which emerge from representations of the conflict in the Delta, reflect hidden power relations which are rooted in the media's ability to create images, synthesise information and disseminate ideas. Moreover the discursive choices which affect the representations of events and groups of people become a tool through which power and control can be exercised.

Limitations of the Research and Opportunities for Further Study

Fairclough (1989, 1995, 2001) proposes a three stage approach to analysing texts. This thesis has used his approach to explore representations of the Niger Delta conflict. However because the conflict is a rather difficult situation to understand and because of the complex webs of competing interests amongst the various actors involved, it was simply not feasible to carry out the second and third stages of analysis as proposed by Fairclough. In Chapter Four several of the tools provided by Fairclough and elaborated upon by Richardson, were used to critically engage with the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict in the four western Anglophone newspapers. As evident from the above discussion, the first stage provides an analytical basis from which observations can be made concerning the representations of the struggle over oil in the Delta.

The second and third stages of analysis provide an opportunity for one to delve into the notions of intertextuality, the role that language plays as a type of social practice, and the way in which the discursive practices which are part and parcel of the journalistic profession, dictate the form that news texts take. Although there are instances in the analysis of the representations of the conflict where these two stages have been used to a limited extent, there was not enough room to fully make use of the proposed questions and analytical tools which constitute these two stages. Therefore, this provides an opportunity for further research which will apply the second and third stages of analysis not only to the coverage of the conflict in the Delta, but also to studies which look at the broader representation of Africa in western media.

While there is considerable scholarly work which criticises the image of Africa in western media and western scholarship, much of this literature is based upon general observations rather than on a careful and systematic analysis of texts. This research study aimed to provide a careful analysis of news texts covering the conflict in the Niger Delta. Further research that includes this similar type of analysis is required to bring to light and offer new ways of challenging the naturalised and problematic discourses specifically concerning Africa's image in western media.

The analysis of the Niger Delta conflict undertaken in this study reveals that there are certain images of the conflict and the region, which echo and reflect some of the more conventional and old stereotypes which emerge from representations of the continent. However, the analysis also points out that there are certainly some representations of the

conflict which move past such stereotypes and which do indeed seek to uncover the intricacies that are part and parcel of the violent struggle over oil. This also points towards an area of further study which could explore current representations of the conflict and investigate whether there is a shift in the manner in which Africa is represented in western media. If indeed a shift is occurring, it will need to be critically examined so as to reveal the manner in which new discourses about Africa are calling into questions some of the older and more entrenched discourses which echo and reflect historically constructed biases and prejudices.

Closing Remarks

The media are a powerful tool for the production and dissemination of discourses which convey certain ideas, images and meanings about a group's social and cultural identity and also about societal events. When conveying meanings around certain realities or groups of people, the media will often draw on common meanings which are already familiar to their audiences. This is often what embeds discourses with ideas and meanings which are not immediately obvious and which have various social and political implications. This study has revealed that there are taken-for-granted images and ideas which are part and parcel of discourses concerning Africa.

Representations of Africa in western media tend to cast the continent in a negative light. These representations draw on problematic historical images of the continent. These images of the continent date back to the eighteenth century but continue to be invoked in current representations of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Some of the problematic discourses which are related to representations of Africa in western media and other forms of writing and scholarship on Africa, are so pervasive that even when journalists seek to uncover the complexities of situations such as the Niger Delta conflict, they tend to unexpectedly and unconsciously use language which maintains old stereotypical images. Therefore, even though the call for a New World Information and Communication Order was made almost half a century ago, a critical analysis of the representations of the conflict in the Delta highlights the continuing relevance of such a call within the context of the 21st century.

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Below are tables which provide an indication of the subject matter contained in the sampled news texts that are taken from the four British and American newspapers selected for this Study. In this study the term 'subject matter' refers to the overarching subject within a text or what the news text is about. The tables below provide a breakdown of subject matter which appeared across the five year period from 2007 to 2011 in the four newspapers.

Guardian		
Year	**Subject Matter**	**No. of Stories**
2007	violence and instability	4
	kidnapping	11
2008	violence and instability	6
	kidnapping	1
2009	kidnapping	5
	violence and instability	5
	human rights abuses	5
	Shell	4
	environmental degradation	3
2010	kidnappings	2
	violence and instability	3
	human rights abuses	2
	Shell	3
2011	environmental degradation	11
	Shell	6
	violence and instability	1
	human rights abuses	1

Daily Telegraph		
Year	Subject Matter	No. of Stories
2007	kidnapping	10
	violence and instability	11
2008	violence and instability	3
2009	kidnapping	1
	violence and instability	1
2010	Shell	2
	violence and instability	1
2011	Shell	5
	environmental degradation	2
	violence and instability	1

New York Times		
Year	Subject Matter	No. of Stories
2007	violence and instability	15
2008	violence and instability	11
2009	violence and instability	9
	human rights abuses	1
	Shell	1
2010	violence and instability	6
	kidnapping	1
2011	violence and instability	1
	Shell	1

Washington Post		
Year	Subject Matter	No. of Stories
2007	kidnapping	1
	violence and instability	1
2008	violence and instability	1
2009	environmental degradation	1
	violence and instability	3
2010	environmental degradation	2
	violence and instability	5
	kidnapping	3
2011	kidnapping	1
	Shell	3
	environmental degradation	3