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**Niger Delta Conflict: A Framing and Critical Discourse Analysis of News Media
Coverage**

MA Thesis

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Tartu 2020

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

Ezinne Favour Ogwuegbu / *signature of author* /

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Abstract:

This thesis, “Niger Delta Conflict: A Framing and Critical Discourse Analysis of News Media Coverage”, examines the media’s representation of the Niger Delta conflict and its main conflicting actors. In conflicting reporting, the media can play influential roles of engaging in peace/conflict journalism or in war/violence journalism. The study adopted framing theory and the media’s agenda setting function, predicated upon the need to rectify the inadequate focus on the Nigerian news media’s framing of the conflict in the Niger Delta. It also investigated the gaps between the media’s reporting of the conflict, and academia.

It employed qualitative content analysis through framing analysis of the literature (identifying conceptual frames and causes-solutions to the conflict), consequently used to analyze 114 media articles from *The Punch* and *The Guardian* – both purposefully selected due to their independent status, presence online and widespread audience, for the period 2016 to March 2020. Additionally, a brief critical discourse analysis of the news articles from 2016 (39 articles), was performed to further explore the thesis objectives, through select tools. Featured interviews were omitted from the article samples.

The research results concluded that the government and oil corporations enjoyed more positive slant in the media, indicating relative bias, with the local actors more negatively portrayed (militant activities foregrounded over the core reasons for agitation). Economic loss was promoted in salience, at the expense of the roots of the Niger Delta’s restiveness. Reports were mainly episodic, concentrating on specifics, without frequent recourse to analysis/background information. 2016 reports centered more on incidents of violence perpetuation. The results revealed both similarities and significant gaps between academia and the news media framing of the conflict.

This study had limitations, however, it will provide reference for: future extensive research on the media’s role in the region’s crisis – especially studies that seek to assess any gaps in representation via use of additional empirical data sources (e.g. interviews, more newspapers, questionnaires and comparative analysis of newspapers); studies that seek to study salience promotion in the conflict via interviewing of editors of relevant news media.

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Introduction

The Niger Delta crisis represents a struggle for power over the oil resources and the benefits of oil production, mainly. The Niger Delta region has been overwhelmed by militant activities, by way of local armed resistance, government forces, and the private militias that oil corporations hire (Aaron and Patrick, 2013). As the Government responds by mainly increasing the military presence in the region, the indigenes are violently and non-violently protesting against the mismanagement by multinational oil corporations, the lack of inclusivity in oil production decisions, and the unequal oil wealth distribution by the government, whilst oil corporations hire military personnel from private companies due to the inefficient protection of oil facilities and workers by the government (Falola and Thomas, 2014). Violence such as electoral violence, murder, criminality, kidnaping, and militant activities have plagued the people situated in this conflict. With these three main actors identified in the conflict, certain drivers of the conflict arise from the corruption, unemployment, violence, lack of general fair elections, lack of social welfare programs and facilities and so on (Ibeanu, 2000; Akonye, 2014).

It is important to put an end to the crisis in the region, in order to restore the environment and to save lives. This is where the media plays a vital role, and is the subject of this thesis. The media has been considered to be a powerful social institution having large impact on society. In his study of the mass media and wars in Africa, Nwosu (1996, p. 7) asserts that the media can impact the outset, conduct or conflict escalation, or help end most types of social violence. McQuail (2005) posits the media's role as being essential to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and that they can be socially responsible for mobilizing people towards positive change, via peaceful agenda setting and implementation of conflict resolution policies. Following the second world war, the nexus between the media and conflict became a global focus, with the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal's sentencing of the Editor of *Der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher, to death by hanging. Hamelink (2008) argues that the portrayal of the conflict by the media can affect such conflict's outcome. Therefore, the media's presence in the Niger Delta conflict could have effects on the conflict's resolution or escalation.

The media has evolved into a social institution that influences events in Nigeria, through the coverage, volume of such coverage or even the lack of coverage of such events. The conflict in the Niger Delta is reported on the basis of the subjects that often include group agitations, pipeline vandalism, and the Amnesty Program of the Federal Government, and one technique employed by the media is framing. Entman (2002, p. 395) describes framing as making pieces of information more memorable or meaningful to the audience. Hence, a news story's placement in terms of frequency and prominence, and in the way it is written, can affect the audience's value of that information. The media's role is pivotal in people's construction of opinions on politics, conflict and the economy, since they constitute the major source of news that audiences use to hold any perception about conflicts and other public issues.

The aftermath of destructive and deadly prominent conflicts of the 1990s, has increasingly seen media practitioners and academicians focused predominantly on the prediction and prevention of conflict. Less focus has been made on how to respond to and recover from them (Frohardt, 2003). Several studies including those of Nwosu (2009), Obijiofor (2008), Kadafa (2012), Iwengi (2012), Ibaba and Etekpe (2013) and Egbe (2012), have concentrated on the identification and comprehension of causal elements like long standing grievances, economic decline, ethnic and religious origins of conflicting parties. However, inadequate focus has been granted to the framing of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Oil presence leaves the region susceptible to conflicts, and this has garnered the attention of both the media and academic literature. Lots of previous research studied issues on economic, environmental, political and ethnic conflict dimensions of conflict, those studying media coverage have not sufficiently addressed framing, which refers to how an information piece is framed or presented. The existing arguments on the media's ability to shape conflict often generate distinctive answers, and few questions also emanate.

Thus, the objective of this thesis is to investigate the role of the media and its framing of the Niger Delta conflict. It seeks to explore how the Nigerian media represents the issue, and the key actors in the conflict, since any misrepresentation of the conflict and its main actors might result in leading groups and the general public further away from a common

comprehension of the issues in the conflict. Since the Niger Delta conflict presents lots of complexities, conflict management has proven quite difficult. There is need to not relent from the efforts to create contemporary approaches that aim to resolve conflicts. Hence, the thesis explores the questions: (1.) How does key Nigerian newspapers present the conflict in the Niger Delta and the major actors involved within the last four years? (2.) What role does the Nigerian media play in the Niger Delta conflict?

Due to time and resource limitations, this thesis will adopt content/framing analysis of news reports from 2016 to [March] 2020 and critical discourse analysis of two main widely-read newspapers – *The Punch* and *The Guardian* – to explore the media's roles. The intention is to identify and analyze the predominant frames through which academic literature presents the conflict, and to build a conceptual framework to be used in the analyses of the newspaper's conflict presentation, via qualitative content analysis (QCA), and the methodological tool of framing, for the purpose of discovering any gaps or misrepresentation by the media. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tools will be used consequently on selected news reports (2016 news articles) to identify how conflict actors, and their activities are represented, with the aim of reaching the research thesis objectives.

The initial step to conflict resolution is finding common grounds between the main actors, otherwise attempts might fail. Attempts have been made so far, yet the conflict persists. As Lederach (1995, p. 18) states: “conflicts also transform perception of self, others, and the issue in question, usually with the consequences of less accurate understanding of the other's intention and the decreased ability to clearly articulate one's own intention.” The conflicting actors in the Niger Delta conflict, presumably comprehend the conflict in various ways. Before settling into the commencement of a common framework, it is vital to investigate all existing components of the problem. Different forms through which the understanding of actors is shaped about a problem exists, and experience is one of them. The media is another form, since information about the framing of a conflict and its actors are disseminated through it. It is thus essential to explore how the Nigerian media frames the Niger Delta conflict and its key actors.

Previous studies have predominantly preferred time periods of significant/heavy violence and/or militarization. Few have sought to attempt such comparative exploration of academic literature and the news media; and/or used framing as a methodological context in exploring the Niger Delta crisis. Thus, in addition to contributing to the available literature, this study will provide reference for future extensive studies of the crisis in the region, particularly for studies that seek to explore such gaps through additional use of focus groups, field observations, and in-depth interviews on the host communities, oil corporations and the government representatives and/or agencies, on their perception of the role of the media and impact on conflicting actors. This thesis contributes to academic and conflict management/resolution efforts through investigating any gaps between the media reports and academia – investigating areas of convergence or divergence in framing and also any misrepresentation by the media of the conflict and its main actors. It also elevates the potential essence of reconciliation of these gaps to conflict resolution/management in the region. It will not investigate factors that influence media reporting. Limitations to/of the study are discussed consequently.

The research thesis will be divided into five distinct chapters, as well as sections on an introduction and a conclusion. The first chapter will include a brief yet comprehensive description of the conflict, in order to highlight the contours and complexities of the problem. The second chapter will be a review of literature on the Nigerian media and the Niger Delta conflict, an assessment of literature on a more broad relationship between the media and conflicts (resolution, management and causation), and also explore theoretical underpinnings on framing and agenda setting, to understand this unique abilities of the media in news reporting. The third chapter will highlight the methodological underpinnings of the thesis, detailing the research approach, data collection and analysis methods, and also present the limitations of/to the study. The fourth chapter explores the conceptual frameworks from academic literature (framing analysis). The fifth chapter will contain media analysis, and discuss empirical findings from the analysis of the media, and the key results prominent throughout the study. The section on conclusion, will conclude the thesis, summarize findings, and point towards recommendations for future exploration of the topic.

Chapter One: Background to the Conflict in the Niger Delta

Introduction

This chapter will conduct a brief description of the conflict, in order to identify the conflict's contours and complexities. It will introduce the Niger Delta region as a location, the conflict drivers and sources, history, key players and the accomplishments made towards addressing the crisis. This chapter is included due to the significant difference of the region under study, from the regions of focus of the researcher's institute. The next section in this chapter will introduce the location that is the Niger Delta region.

Niger Delta Region and Conflict History

Nigeria is a federal republic located in West Africa, with 36 autonomous states and 774 local governments, with similar political structure to the United States of America. It is comprised of 250 distinct ethnic and tribal groups. In 1960 Nigeria gained its independence from the British colonial rule, and experienced military rule in periods between 1960 and 1999, when it transferred to civilian leadership. With a population of around 202 million people, according to the World Bank (2020) overview, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, accounting for about half of the population of West Africa. According to the CIA World Factbook, the main religions based on 2018 estimates include: Islam (53.5%), Christianity (45.9%) and others (6%).

The conflict of the Niger Delta is entrenched in a long history of self-determination struggles. Throughout this long history, the people of the Niger Delta have sought autonomy over the resources of the region, and the region itself. Nigeria became an independent state in 1960, after over 40 years of British colonialism. Before the British, interests in the region have been evident through the 400 years of European incursion, as a result of the vast natural resources of the region. The oil in the region did not start gaining political attention until 1960. The Shell and other multinational oil corporations had dominated the industry before then, and protests against them commenced in the early 1960s, with violent and non-violent protests prevailing since then against the inequitable distribution of the wealth from the oil resources. With civil war agitations that saw to the power shift to the federal government

from the regions, especially over control of oil resources, feelings of exclusion, disappointment and dispossession prevailed. Federal allocations to the states with oil-producing capabilities fell from 50% in the 1950s to 13% in the 1990s (Niger Delta Development Commission, 2010, p. 6), initially falling to 3% and only increased to 13% due to the protests and the new democratic government's legitimacy. The indigenes still struggle for cleaner environment, greater control over the land and resources, and share of the oil wealth, and ending exploitation, since the 13% barely gets to the region's grassroots.

The region denoted as the Niger Delta is located in the Southern part of Nigeria. Complexities geographically, politically, geologically, and ethnographically, often come up when it comes to defining the region. This stems from the argument about how socio-political reasons, as well as crude oil discovery in the region, and political leadership redefine the concept of the term/region. The Niger Delta concept emanated from its position at the mouth of the Niger River, according to Etekpe (2009). The region was formed by West Africa's largest river – the River Niger – flattening out into the south-eastern coast of Nigeria into a tangle of mangrove swamps and creeks, infused with brackish and fresh water. Gas and oil deposits are abundant onshore and offshore, consisting of deposits in Agbami, Usan, Bonga, Amenam/Kpono field – of over 20 million people. Osaghae et al. (2007, p. 6) explains that the region's uniqueness and peculiarity is not just the abundance of oil and gas deposits, but the coastal low lands and water features of the region, as well as the creeks, marshlands, lagoons and tributaries. Similar to various Deltas around the world, it has a warm humid sub-tropical climate, with lengthy dry seasons and short rainy seasons. It is noteworthy to mention that the region was expanded as a result of General Abacha's concept of the geopolitical zone – South-South, that aligned the region to being synonymous with the states with oil resources and producing capabilities. For instance, the states of Imo, Abia and Ondo, which were historically outside the Niger Delta area, and not possessing the features of a delta, came to become part of the Niger Delta, and Etekpe (2007, p. 2) explains this distinction by asserting that historical distinctions exist between the oil producing states, the Niger Delta and the geo-political zone of the South-South, and should be referred to as the oil producing states, not states of the Niger Delta. Through the Niger Delta Development

Commission's creation, following the Act in 2000, President Obasanjo further confused the region's definition, hence redefining the Niger Delta as inclusive of the nine Nigerian oil and gas producing states.

There has often been a lack of unanimity among the indigenous people and scholars regarding the region's actual boundary. Mitee (2012, p. 3) explains that with the discovery of commercial quantities of oil, the Niger Delta region was gradually expressed in terms of regions that produced oil, and not based on the geographical components of the region. The states in this region hence includes: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Imo and Rivers.

According to the Niger Delta Development Commission (2010, p. 6), under the 1999 Constitution in section 16, all revenues of the Nigerian state are paid into the Federation Account, with the derivation formula at only 13% for the Oil-producing states. Today the derivation formula (referring to the tax revenue percentage which oil-producing states can keep from the production of oil and natural resources within the state) has fallen from 50% in the 1950s, when regional autonomy was at its peak in Nigeria, to as low as 13% since 2001.

Conflict Drivers and Sources

The crisis in the Niger Delta originated from a struggle over palm oil resources and land rights. It is embedded in a long struggle historically, and takes roots in the socio-economic consequences of the transatlantic slave trade. However, with the discovery of oil in 1958, the conflict has evolved into a struggle for access to the oil production benefits, and power over the oil resources. It is a crisis rooted in lots of political, economic, social and environmental complexities and considerations, which has made it complex for conflict management and resolution. The main conflict causes are often identified as lack of corporate social responsibility of the oil corporations and their activities, lack of inclusiveness in the decision-making that borders oil production (resource control), government the lack of government interest in the region's development and in equitably distributing oil production wealth (Ibeanu, 2000; Akonye, 2014). Others have included the

environmental degradation and pollution (Ojakorotu and Okeke-Uzodike, 2006; Aghalino et al., 2014), oil legislation and policies (Ako and Okomah, 2009; Paki and Edoumiekumo, 2011), state-imposed poverty (Ejibun, 2007); corruption (Vidal, 2013; Katsouris and Sayne, 2013), colonial history and so on.

The Niger Delta has suffered environmental challenges. There has been over 10 million barrels of oil spillage, between 1958 to 2012 (Kadafa, 2012). The Amnesty International Report (2009) claimed that the spillage estimates by the Nigerian government was about 7,000 between the years 1970 and 2000, and according to Adebayo (2019), the Journal of Health and Pollution in a 2018 study found that this number was around 12,000 spills between 1976 and 2014. According to the Amnesty International Report, a lot of indigenes and inhabitants have experienced loss of basic human rights, their livelihood, food and clean water access, skin lesions, breathing complications and sore eyes. A lot of the region's communities prove to be dangerous to reside in.

The region remains poor, although it is considered the economic powerhouse of Nigeria, generating billions in dollars in revenue for the Nigerian government since the discovery of oil in 1956. According to the United States Energy Information Administration (2015), Nigeria is the largest oil-producing state in Africa, with Africa's largest natural gas reserve and the fourth largest exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The main source of foreign exchange is oil and natural gas revenue, constituting more than 95% of the total 2014 exports of Nigeria to the world (ibid.). Since 2005, Nigeria has experienced an increase in kidnapping, vandalism, and militant takeovers, with the Amnesty program of 2009 leading to fewer supply disruptions and attacks in 2009-2010. In 2016, oil sabotage and theft incidents increased, and President Buhari announced unfavorable policies to the Amnesty beneficiaries, to curb corruption (ibid.).

The Niger Delta is Africa's largest wetland, yet the majority of the region's inhabitants remain unemployed and impoverished. Conflict drivers can be linked to the history of Nigeria and the nature of the integration of the region's indigenes into the economic and political system, and the overall Niger Delta oil business. Severe corruption and displeasure with the centralist style of federalism, has resulted in oil politics for the

possession of power to control resources at any cost, translating into tensions in its fiscal federalism, between dominating federal elites and the Niger Delta's ethnic minorities, who face marginalization (Obi and Rustad, 2011, p. 2). Indigenes of the region, also share in the desire to gain control over these oil resources and local affairs, where the region remains plagued with vicious repression cycles, criminality, exploitation, militarization and resistance (ibid.).

Key Actors

The Niger Delta conflict comprises of three major actors. This includes (in no particular order): the Indigenes of the region, the oil corporations and the government (Falola and Thomas, 2013). The locals hold the belief that their lands and its resources are being exploited by the oil corporations, as the locals are not included adequately in employment or at all in the economic influence of the petrobusiness. Since the oil is extracted from their lands, they strive for greater share in the economic wealth emanating from oil production. The locals also see the urgency for development, in order to curb poverty, medical hazards and environmental pollution. Violent groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) among others, exist alongside non-violent groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and protests by women, disavowing the activities of the oil corporations and the federal government's unjust policies.

The oil corporations have the belief/conviction that the government does not adequately provide security and the funds and equipment to ensure the security of oil production. Hence, they have increasingly privatized security forces. Many multinational oil corporations make the decision to occasionally fund and deploy military and arm protection from private bodies to protect their oil installations and business from local militants, like former soldiers, criminals and rebels. Employees of the corporations are often kidnapping targets, where such activities the frequency of oil bunkering and kidnapping dramatically increased in 2004, and saw a decline in 2009-2010 as previously mentioned, where Crude oil production peaked in 2005, and significantly declined with the surge of militant groups, and somewhat made a recovery in 2009, but remaining lower than its peak levels in 2005.

Oil sabotage has however increased in 2016 (United States Energy Information Administration, 2015). Oil corporations see the MEND – the biggest and notorious armed Niger Delta group – as kidnapping and oil bunkering experts. Smaller movements also use similar tactics to combat the oil corporations. The divide-and-rule tactics have been used by the multinational oil corporations to combat these protesters, and deploying military personnel to carry out intimidation of defenseless communities, according to Ikelegbe (2011). The companies fuel the conflict in these ways, and the militias counter by disrupting oil production. Oil companies have also paid money to armed and youth groups for surveillance.

As a reaction to the region's increasing violence and instability, the government has resorted to militaristic responses, taking extreme measures through the security forces to quell the fractions between the locals and the multinational oil corporations. The army has executed massacres and massive attacks on communities. The army has acted independently in the past, as in the administration of President Obasanjo, who was criticized for not restraining the military. The Nigerian government and its alliances, are also said to have deployed militant, armed and criminal groups with weapons, to terrorize those who oppose the government. The ruling elite of the government are considered to be architects of misfortune and conflict in the Niger Delta region (Falola and Thomas, 2013). The state's alliance with the oil corporations enables the latter to continuously exploit the resources and lands, and conduct irresponsible activities for financial and economic benefits. With the region's wealth and resources, it should not be plagued with unemployment, environmental degradation, poverty and health hazards. More of these will be explored in the conceptual framing identified the academic literature of the region's conflict and its actors in chapter three.

Federal Government's Noteworthy Accomplishments

The Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was the first board set up with the objective of meeting specific development needs of the Niger Delta people. This was set up by the government in 1960, and the two significant factors that led to its actualization were the sincere will of the then Prime Minister of Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa, to improve the region,

and the recommendations from the 1958 Nigerian Constitutional Conference. This Board witness the invaluable economic enterprise opportunities and potentials that the Niger Delta had, and its experts were instructed to conduct examination of the measures to promote the Niger Delta's physical development, to address the grievances of the locals (Enemugwem, 2009, p. 167). The examples of plans for development included civil aviation, railway networks, communication networks, telecommunication, water-way, postal services and seaport constructions. Following the collapse of the NDDB, the government established the eleven River Basin Development Authorities alongside the Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDRBDA) in 1976 (Paki and Edoumiekumo, 2011, p. 280), with an establishment of a committee that administered 1.5% funds specially for the region's development in 1980 – later increased to 3% and administered by the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1993. This failed in its objectives however. The government set up the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, with the aims of developing the Niger Delta into an ecologically regenerative, economically prosperous, politically peaceful and socially stable region. Its master plan was to integrate all societal levels and proffer participation of stakeholders in the process of planning and decision-making of development projects in the Niger Delta (Niger Delta Development Commission, 2010).

Ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2004, initiated a disarmament program. It produced expected results, when groups of militants led by Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom, engaged in peace talks, resulting in the public destruction of weapons in thousands. After this period, it remained clear that more arms needed to be disarmed before the region's stability would be restored. The establishment of the Niger Delta Ministry in 2009, did not change much, and faced inadequate funding (Aghalino, 2012, p. 148). The Amnesty Program in June 2009, kick-started peace processes, granting amnesty and rehabilitation for ex-Militants. This ushered in avenues for hope, but the process seemed ridden with poor human development by the government, where although it was a timely idea, a change in strategy was necessary in terms of collaborative participation.

Conclusion

The Niger Delta region is ridden with several contours and complexities which has been briefly explored in this chapter. The main conflict actors are the government, the oil corporations and the locals. The next chapter of this thesis will explore the theoretical frameworks and literature on media and conflict.

Chapter Two: News Media and conflicts, Framing and Agenda Setting

Introduction

This chapter explores previous scholarly works which have studied the existing relationship between the Niger Delta conflict and the news media in Nigeria, as well as the review of the literature on the news media's role in conflict. It explores the media framing concept and the framing theory, as well as agenda setting, and draws expectations about the case to be studied in its conclusion, as well as the study's contribution to the field.

Niger Delta Conflict and the News Media

There is not much of an extensive literature on the relationship that exists between the news media in Nigeria and the Niger Delta conflict. The limited academic body of literature confirm the essential role of the media in the Niger Delta conflict, considering the possibility of the relationship and partnership of the government, media and the public, being liable to impartial information dissemination, conflict transformation and information manipulation. Due to the limited literature, this section explores in great details, the key articles that address this study field.

The direct relationship between the coverage by the Nigerian media and the Niger Delta conflict, is examined by a small thread of literature. This body of literature asserts that the Nigerian media has engaged in the misinformation of their audience and the public, about the activities and identities of the key players of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Chilwa (2010), examined the role of the media and the Nigerian government in the misrepresentation of the Niger Delta people in a negative light. Asserting that that there is indeed such representation of the local inhabitants, he employs the combination of a Corpus Linguistic Method and Critical Discourse Analysis, to mostly investigate the choice of vocabulary which are used by the Nigerian news media as an attribute to and label of the local militias and people of the Niger Delta. According to his study, such negative representations by the news media of the local militias, posits an ideological strategy and tool used to divert attention and the agenda from the prevalent issues of ethnic exploitations and the marginalization plaguing the Niger Delta region (ibid., p. 41). In spite of the region being

solely responsible for the oil wealth, through its oil resources, that constitutes Nigeria's oil-based economy. The author is of the assertion that the Nigerian government and the media have successfully created suspicion on the people's activities, and the local militias. To enable the comprehension of the power of words and their ability to shape perceptions, Chilwa enunciates that language possesses ideological propensities, and that the media's ideological work appears to impact the presentation of and perceptions about individuals or groups, as well as their activities. Such misinformation occurs mostly when the opinions of those in power are cited. The Nigerian media tends to have five frequently used lexicons for the description of the militia and the general people of the Niger Delta, which according to Chilwa included: Kidnappers, Militants, Hoodlums, Criminals and Kidnappers, in no particular order. By employing such terms like hoodlums or militants, the Niger Delta locals are portrayed by the media as social outcasts, and groups of criminals – people who should not be seriously considered (*ibid.*). The concluding result from this study portrays that government actions are being hidden from focus and the public agenda, with the spotlight cast on the locals as criminals and violent, by the press and the government.

In the same vein, Chilwa (2011), explores the media's role in manipulating the public's perceptions about the Joint Military Task Force (JMTF) and its role in the Niger Delta conflict. Deployed by the Nigerian army in 2009, to see to the restoration and protection of oil pipelines and installations. Instead of the assigned task, one division in the JMTF carries out indiscriminate attacks and killings, and destruction of properties, of civilians. Military occupation of the region has often been the response of the government, with such occupations beginning in 1994, where the actions of the military has resulted in the killing and raping of thousands of civilians, as it is reported. The 1999 Odi massacre of all male youths in Bayelsa state, represents one of the worst reports. Chilwa (2011, p. 207) states in his findings that the Nigerian media had sympathy for the actions of the JMTF in spite of their abominable attacks on civilians and obvious killings of insurgents. The label of aggressor was often attributed to the people of the Niger Delta and the militias, whereas the actions of the JMTF were represented in positive light, and as the victims. The violence and killings perpetrated against the people and militias, was often excused under the

portrayal of the JMTF as liberators, and the militias as deserving of these activities, since rescues were made by the JMTF. At one point, according to Chiluya, the media did not cover the cruel acts of the JMTF, despite their report's focus on the war, violence and security situation in the region. The media portrayed the JMTF as 'national heroes on a rescue mission' (ibid.), and the popular perception towards Niger Delta civilians became negative. The way victims or actors are represented in news texts are not devoid of value, and represent perspectives that may negatively or positively portray subjects depending on the reporters' aims/goals.

The relationship between the media and Niger Delta conflict resolution, is examined by another body of literature. In this field, authors assert that the media can be an essential tool for creating approaches of conflict management, if they are treated and considered as impartial communication platforms, information dissemination and the discussions on conflict management. This thread, explores the coverage of the Niger Delta conflict by the media through societal grassroot levels, and not just the channels of news reports closely linked to the government. Nwagbara (2011), investigates the role of grassroot media in the establishment of the Niger Delta's conflict management and resolution. The author expresses that the media could serve as a medium for change and a tool for transformation, that can be portrayed in the refined ways that most of the key actors and the people, in the Niger Delta region and politics, perceive governance issues through the involvement of the media and the public sphere's expansion (Nwagbara, 2011, p. 150). He disagrees with Chiluya's more negative outlook of the media, and instead, presents a rather positive perspective of the media in the Amnesty deal. Nwagbara asserts that the grassroot press played a vital role in the Amnesty since it assisted in the conveyance of communal, confident and hopeful sentiments during the conflict. This authors perspective is evident in his assertion that the actions of the government and those that speak in its favour, are reported by the media, in addition to the media's criticism of government performances and policies by proffering alternative courses of action (ibid., p. 157). However, lasting peace can be attained through the creation of media that mutually benefits the locals in the region and Nigerians overall.

In the wake of the amnesty deal, media used effectively, can employ good journalism to transform the region.

Mogekwu (2011) takes a recommending approach to discuss the Niger Delta conflict and the media, through the advocacy for peace journalism. According to the author, the media alone cannot resolve conflict at any level, but its contribution and role can be invaluable to conflict (p. 246). He distinguishes between good journalism and peace journalism, attributing the latter to involving more than just objective reporting, and including the determination to initiate and promote dialogue, with an interventionist character. The Niger Delta conflict is described as being emblematic of different crises in several parts of the world, which could have been avoided had necessary latent-level intervention been implemented appropriately (p. 255). The expectation that the media in itself could have sufficiently counterpoised crisis escalation, is overstated, according to the author; but the media could play a role of an effective initiator. Like Nwagbara (2011), Mogekwu is of the view that local media with closest proximity to the conflict, ought to take on dialogue promotion responsibilities, not just by repetition of event reports, but by conducting analysis and engaging in the confrontation of relevant parties with facts that should be addressed. Local media can best understand the attendant nuances and prevalent issues, and should show persistence and get involved. Nwozor (2014, p. 156), refers to the media's ability to relevantly assist in the enthronement of peace culture in Nigeria, a feat which is impossible in isolation. Odoemelam et al. (2016), advocate a functional approach to mass media reporting to the conflict issues of the Niger Delta.

Still under this thread of literature, Eti (2009, p. 102), makes the conclusion that democratic virtue rests in the fact that adequate access to freedom and the public space to engage in public discourse prevails, and that the need to frame conflict issues in mannerisms that make them susceptible to conflict management, exists. The author opines that the media should strive to make warning signals available, and reduce elements of violence in conflicts, instead of spark further instability. It mainly explores press local to the Niger Delta – the Niger Delta Press, which has more local reach than other major Nigerian newspapers. He enumerates the factors that impact the objective discourse of conflict situations like the

conflict's nature, geographical constraints, prevalent corruption culture, time, partiality in the discourse, and patronage culture. Based on the fact that the media has a critical role in conflict issues, it is imperative for it to refrain from the 'risk of oversimplification', and of merely projecting extreme dual classification of opposing views into inferior and superior, or extremes of good and bad (ibid., p. 99). The higher the number of media outlets, the higher the plurality and divergent voices, according to Eti, for which the Niger Delta Press falls short of achieving, and is hence unable to articulate all the present voices in the Niger Delta region. Thus, an alternative press system is vital for adding other voices, and challenging existing press systems. For this to work, there has to be an absence of gate-keeping and institutional structures and functions that tend to regulate access to the media and information (ibid.).

Furthermore, Eti (2012) carries out a deconstruction of hostage taking in the Niger Delta region, through the use of content analysis, in the exploration of three national dailies – *The Punch*, the Daily Champion and the *New Nigerian*. The study shows conflict reporting as predominantly episodic and sporadic, implying that unless there is an explosion, killing, shooting and so on, the Niger Delta mostly disappears from the radar of the news. According to the author, the Nigerian press tends to report violent crisis, from government sources and their perspectives that seek to control the flow of information for the ruling elites' benefits (p. 24). Factors that affect conflict reporting in the Niger Delta are explored, such as the concentration of many Nigerian mainstream media in the city of Lagos, where distance is a limitation, as well as the city's capitalistic worldview which could influence news reporting activities, and the problems that emanate due to ownership patterns. Ethnicity and political divisions are mentioned as additional problems, to geography and ownership (ibid., p. 25). The media were more descriptive than prescriptive of the events, for which the Niger Delta crisis requires more than the former. Political orientations predicated the prominence levels given by each newspaper, where the South-based papers promoted the marginalization rhetoric of the Niger Delta people, and the north-based paper offered a disgruntled perspective of them (ibid., p. 38). Udeze and Chukwuma (2011) also investigate how media ownership impacts the Niger Delta conflict reporting by the media, where government-

owned papers are more biased and censored, and the private papers have less bias and censorship. Rita (2015, pp. 8-9), through a comparative analysis of government and private-owned papers, concludes that the latter fared better in the reportage of the Niger Delta conflict; revealing that both papers performed poorly at agenda setting functions, that suggests that they could be tools for the forging of peace.

Obijiofor (2009) examines 4 online Nigerian newspapers' framing of the crisis in the Niger Delta between January to May 2008, and the key sources of news in conflict reporting, as well as the extent to which journalists rely on new technologies, and the consequent ethical implications. The author's analysis demonstrate that the crisis was constructed in a law and order frame, implying that the media was concerned with how the conflict degrades Nigeria's law and order. This is suggestive of a focus towards peace journalism more than war journalism. For the author, the predominant use of governmental sources for reports, does not indicate intended bias, but is reflective of the challenges faced in accessing the Niger Delta activists.

Closely following suit, is the study of the relationship between peace in the region of the Niger Delta, and the Nigerian press. Okon (2013) posits that three key Nigerian newspapers: The Punch, The Guardian, and the Niger Delta Standard, mainly reported on the Niger Delta conflict's gruesomeness than on peace advocacy. The author recommended that the newspapers should embrace advocacy ideologies for crisis problems and solutions, since the media is a crucial link between the coverage of incidents and issues, and the cognition of these issues. Hence, it is of the essence for the media to adopt peace and conflict transformation ideals. The research portrays that the Niger Delta's local paper, accorded to peace advocacy, 28% of its space, whereas The Guardian and The Punch, offered none of its editorial space for this, preferring to focus instead on the region's violence, killings and drama. Okon is of the view that newspapers should seek to serve as the parliament of the people, where projections of ideology and opinion can be made, for adoption, and for the media to lose the docility imposed by a long former military rule in Nigeria. Journalists ought to embrace advocacy as a *modus operandi*, to tackle the problems such as the one in the Niger Delta, for peace and solutions to manifest (Okon, 2013, p.17). Authors such as

Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013); Ashiekpe (2009), also reflect on the role of the media as potent tools in facilitating dialogue and communication for the Niger Delta conflict, in turning the situation, and emphasize the possibility for the media to play a role in conflict exacerbation.

A thread of literature explores the Nigerian media coverage of the environmental pollution that has emanated as following oil explorations in the Niger Delta. Owolabi and Okonkwo (2014); Ashong and Udoudo (2007; 2017); Akpati (1996), state that contrary to the social responsibility theory, the Nigerian media has performed below expectations in light of environmental issues (being one of the precursors for clashes in the region), since they have been unable to propagate the messages of environmental pollution and justice to the grassroots. The authors propose the establishment of independent local media that dedicates its mission to this purpose, locally situated and managed by the Niger Delta people.

The work by Alozieuwa (2015, p. 11), serves as an overarching contribution, as he adopts a unique approach to addressing the pattern of Nigerian media coverage of conflicts, by asserting that the media in Nigeria, has an ideological orientation to conflict, where it will be unable to attain its potentials for encouraging conflict resolution and management, until it “weans itself from this orientation... in which case the efforts at peace journalism may remain a mirage.”

News Media Role in Conflicts

From a global perspective, the media and conflict are closely linked. Conflict actors/combatants need the media to report the issues, preferably from their perspective, whilst the media obtains/creates content from these actors (Liebes and First, 2003). Contending governments had significant control over media coverage in conflicts of the 1980s, where they monitored the extent to which reporters could go into zones of conflict. The work stations of journalists can be remote nowadays due to the breakthrough in satellite technology, social media and the internet. Eyewitnesses can capture incidents on their phone cameras, hence serving as e-reporters for news media. Media stakeholders, government and international bodies are invested in the media’s ability to resolve conflict. Such interest is predicated on the view that government or international decisions can be elicited to stop

particular conflicts, through sustained reportage by the media of such conflict. Thompson (2007) refers to this as the “CNN effect.” This is reflective of the global presence of CNN, and the potentials for images of mass suffering on such widespread media impacting public opinion, and cueing international and governmental agencies into intervening in situations of crisis. The notion that significant coverage by (and presence of) the media of a conflict, can affect conflict outcome is referred to as the Heisenberg effect (Thompson, 2007, p. 3). The Heisenberg effect is used to describe “how the act of observing a particle actually changes the behavior of that particle, its velocity or direction” (ibid.). This is similar to the way research participants’ awareness of their being observed, could pose certain influence on research findings. Hence, media coverage could influence how a conflict is perceived, or unfolds, in terms of escalation, casualty rates and conflict resolution, among others.

The type of media presence in a conflict/crisis, especially at communal, regional, national or international level, affects conflict resolution or escalation. According to Obijiofor (2008), Christine Amanpour – CNN prize winning reporter – argues that such sustained coverage of the Bosnian conflict by the media in the 1990s, led to the intervention by the United States and its NATO allies, in the genocidal-level killings. The use of the local media in the 1993 Rwanda genocide to instigate violence, is proof of the influence of the media in conflict, and more so due to the Western media’s initial neglect, insufficient mention, and underestimation of the conflict, alongside the reluctance of the West to intervene (Thompson, 2007; Waldorf, 2007; Kabanda, 2007). Initially, the conflict was reported as communal clashes, which although true, represented a watered-down nature of its extent. The intention here is to highlight the essence of media in conflict, as this thesis does not attempt to argue for intervention of international media in the Niger Delta.

The media has perhaps been generally overlooked in conflict analyses evaluating the media’s role in conflict. Frohardt and Temin (2007, p. 389) explain that this is because “on their own, they are rarely a direct cause.” Nevertheless, the media can be extremely influential tools (as part of a larger factor), in the promotion of violence as seen in the former Republic of Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The media can not only reach the homes of people; it can also reach their minds, shape thoughts and potentially shape behavior. In the Rwanda

genocide, not all receivers of the anti-Tutsi propaganda acted on the directives, or believed what they heard, but some still acted according to the media's script. Kagwi-Ndungu (2007) states that an issue in a hate newspaper during the Rwandan genocide (*Kangura*), had the title: "Tutsi? What arms shall we use to conquer the "Inyenzi" once and for all." The Tutsi tribe was labelled 'Inyenzi' and an evil that needed to be stopped; directing the Hutu majority on ways to locate and kill them.

The way various actors involved in the Niger Delta conflict report on it can influence its outcome. The news media as a medium can play a role here. Monasebian (2007), citing Koessler (1978) argues that the choice of words that conflict combatants engage in to portray their opinions are also critical, and ought to be addressed. This means that words used by conflicting parties in a conflict to describe opponents and issues of contention, can contribute to conflict escalation. Ironically, Hamelink (2008) opines that constant conflict coverage can also create further panic, and produce terrifying impacts. Several questions emanate such as: What type of frames were engaged in the reporting of the conflict? How balanced were such reports? What type of coverage has the media done on the Niger Delta crisis?

An increasing body of scholarly literature on the coverage of conflict by the media prevails, in addition to the viewpoints regarding how the media can assist conflict resolution (e.g. of such works include Wolfsfeld, 2004; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005). Based on this context, a contemporary form of journalistic reporting has been advanced in form of peace and conflict journalism, aimed at encouraging and promoting peace culture. According to Hanitzsch (2004, p. 484), peace journalism refers to a frame or program of news reportage by journalists that adds to the respective processes of peace-making and keeping, for the peaceful conflict resolution. The theoretical perspectives that inform such concepts of peace and conflict journalism, and war journalism, have been widely credited and associated with Johan Galtung (Galtung, 1969, 2003; Galtung and Höivik, 1971). Several scholars (such as Cooper 1965; Himmelstrand, 1969; Yalem, 1971; Galtung and Höivik, 1971; Klitgaard, 1971; Chatterjee and Bhattacharjee, 1971; Kende, 1971), have explored peace, war, violence, and conflict resolution in the mid- to late twentieth century, but research and academic interest in these subjects took off in the first decade of the 21st century due to three

key factors: the rise in the number of conflicts globally, in the early 1990s; the disillusionment of the public with the conflict reporting style of journalists; and the rise in the media focus on negative events and conflicts, natural disasters included. The interest of the public, lawmakers, policymakers, scientists and journalists have been focused on the role of the media in conflicts such as the Gulf wars, the Somalian conflicts, and the Bosnian war (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 2).

Two schools of scholarly thought exist, on peace and conflict journalism. One is of the belief that journalists and the media can make peaceful contributions to conflict settlements by the way they report on conflicts (e.g. McGoldrick, 2000; 2006; Galtung, 2003; Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Peleg, 2006; Hackett, 2006; Lynch, 2007; Kempf, 2007), and the other school that assert that peace journalism could cause conflict aggravation instead of the ease of conflicts and existing tensions (e.g. Wolfsfeld, 1997; Fawcett, 2002; Hanitzsch, 2004; Loyn, 2007; Hamelink, 2008). In 2002, for instance, Fawcett opines that there can be an alignment of journalists that work for media organizations, to a side of a conflict, who cannot be objective or detached peacemakers due to the way they frame and package the news. Fawcett (2002, pp. 220-221) states that the news media's applied narrative and rhetorical forms, facilitate certain discourses and frames, that tend to close off the advancement of alternative ways for viewing events. Along the same sentiments, Wolfsfeld (1997, p. 8) goes further to explain that journalists would just easily prefer to report on war, and not peace, as the former provides conflict, drama and ensures that visuals are available in abundance. For them, it might be much easier to consider war as a series of events, to which they can report on specific start and end.

There are two modules of conflict reporting that are opposing: "peace and conflict journalism", and "war or violence journalism." Hanitzsch (2004, p. 484) builds on Galtung (2003) to examine them. The latter focuses on winners and losers, and news coverage commences only when there has been an outbreak of violence, and focuses on the aftermaths which are visible, such as the casualties, the dead and the material damages. There is the advocacy of "our side," and the support for the cover-ups and lies of this side, and then the exposure of the perpetrators and untruths of atrocities on the "other side." With the strong

inclinations towards victory orientation, this style of journalism does not approve of peace initiative coverage – at least for as long as it remains unclear who the victor is.

The value and practical inclinations of peace and conflict journalism is significantly different from the aims of war or violence journalism. Peace journalism seeks to identify the causes of conflict and to map out the solutions to this without side-taking or misrepresentation, whereas war journalism focuses on the exploitation of one side or its achievements – a win-lose advocacy. For peace and conflict journalism, the emphasis and philosophy are towards the prevention of war and violence, and focuses on the creation of conflict resolution, and peace-making and keeping efforts. Through this means, this style of journalism unveils lies, culprits on both sides, and cover-up efforts. It tends to dedicate specific attention to initiatives for peace and reportage on post-war developments, because of its inclinations towards solutions (ibid.).

Theoretical and practical assumptions of peace journalism entail certain requirements. Hence, the practices of journalism should be fueled by concerns for the public interest (the greater good of society), according to Hanitzsch (2004, p. 489). The problem here lies in the fact that there is the ignorance of the fact that journalists and their employers do not incline themselves to anonymous mass audience, but to their (the media's) responsibilities to their specific audiences' interests. Disregard for these preferences of the journalists could hamper on the economic existence of the media organization, and its business.

Commercial media's business orientations have been considerably assessed in literature, with this orientation being linked closely to the audiences' specific interests. The logic is that content by the media targets particular audiences who are reciprocally pulled towards to media content and also to advertising. These attracted audiences are then inadvertently sold to advertisers by the media. As Gasher and Gabriele (2004, p. 314) mention, every day, newspapers assemble specific audience of predictable size and observed demographic features through such paper's extensive news packaging, opinion and information, and they sell this audience access to advertisers. The commercial and business orientation of the media is corroborated by Gardner (2001, p. 302), who affirms that media

often involve in conflicts when they are at high points of public interest, or they have already spiraled out of hand, as a result of heightened competition and economic constraints. However, this research thesis does not seek to explore the challenges faced by the media in conflict reporting.

Critiques have been made regarding peace journalism, and one of such criticisms is on its advocacy for active journalistic involvement in conflict resolution. This entails an emotional attachment to the events been reported upon. Accurate and fair judgement could be undermined following the journalist's decision to make moral judgements about good or bad, and right or wrong. On what criteria would these be based? Who makes this decision? Hamelink (2008, p. 79-80) comments on the likelihood that peace and conflict journalism might not resolve conflict, but instead contribute to aggravating matters and escalating conflicts of groups into mass killings, especially when the media serves as a tool to incite violence or bias.

There might be dangers of conflict aggravation by the media if they are used for the wrong reasons and in the wrong ways. Hamelink (2008, p. 80) provides two instances in which the media engaged directly in the perpetration of crimes against humanity: the Nuremberg criminal tribunal's trial and sentencing of Julius Streicher – the editor of *Der Stuermer* – to death, and the second being the conviction of certain executives of the Rwandan Radio Television Lires des Mille Collines (RTLM), due to their participations in propagating hate speech and message that inspired the massacre of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis in 1994, by the Hutus. Puddephatt (2006), similarly mentions that the media could either participate actively in conflict, bearing responsibility for increase in violence, or it stays independent and away from conflict, hence contributing to violence alleviation and conflict resolution. While there is no evidence to suggest that the commercial newspapers which will be explored in this thesis have directly incited violence, it is left for assessments to ascertain how they have played a role in the conflict through their conflict reports, as well as what their representation of the main conflicting actors has been.

Thus, as already discussed, the way the media reports on certain conflicts can influence such conflicts in a manner of ways. In conflicts such as the Niger Delta crisis, the

media can play vital roles that could influence outcomes positively or negatively. In spite of the criticisms on peace journalism, media has an important role to play, regardless. Gardner (2001, p. 301), states that although the potentials for conflict resolution is not fully utilized, it has played many vital roles in assisting societal rebuilding after conflict has elapsed, and that the media could also largely influence how parties, both internally and externally, relate to the conflict and the actors involved, through the choice of stories omitted or covered, the sources applied, and stands taken towards reporting ethically. Hence, several international organizations tend to apply media as a tool, in their work on conflict resolution and transformation, in their problem-solving approaches.

News Framing by the Media (Framing Theory)

There is a vast thread of literature on how news media frames events and inadvertently affects the perceptions of the public about those events (e.g. Entman, 1991, 2002; Scheufele, 1999; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Peng, 2008). According to Chong and Druckman (2007, p. 106), the framing theory posits that issues can be viewed through varieties of viewpoints and be construed to have consequences for several considerations or values. Thus, the way things are presented can have effects on the choices that people make (De Vreese, 2005, p. 52). The definition of ‘frame’ as a noun, refers to the boundary in which a picture is displayed; while as a verb, the concept denotes the creation of a frame. Frames depict bits of information about any item or issue which is a subject of communication, thus enacting their elevation in salience, especially in such ways that deem to promote particular definitions of problems, moral evaluation, casual interpretation and so on (Entman, 2002, p. 394). Salience here refers to the idea of making a piece of information more memorable or meaningful and noticeable to the audiences (ibid.). Newspapers as communicators, can make framing judgements consciously/unconsciously, when putting their messages across, and this can be guided and organized through distinctive frames.

Frames frequently identify problems, and diagnose such causes, construct moral judgements and proffer remedies. Within this context, Peng (2008, p. 362) describes framing as “a process of inclusion and exclusion.” From within the framing concept, the idea of dominant meanings emerges, and such dominant meanings include the “problem, causal,

evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed, and accepted by the most people” (ibid., p. 395). Entman (2002) hence claims that identifying a meaning as preferred or dominant, implies the suggestion of a particular framing of the situation that texts mostly support, and that resonates most congruently with common audience. A prominent example is the ‘Cold War’ frame.

A core argument of the framing theory is that framing influences the responses of people to communication. It does so especially within interests that are political or social, since people are prone to non-thorough information and active cognition (Entman, 2002, p. 395). Framing can be employed in cultural studies, political sciences, social psychology, and sociology. Chong and Druckman (2007, p. 106) state that when framing is explored through communicative contexts, it is a process that aims to structure and organize social meanings.

Media framing is hence a process through which an issue is portrayed in the news media. Such frames refer to the ‘cognition’, ‘selection’, ‘presentation’, ‘exclusion’, ‘emphasis’ and ‘interpretation’ patterns that persist, “by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse” (De Vreese, 2005, p. 52). When we explore frames in news media, we are referring to devices that enable the facilitation of how journalists organize enormous information quantities, and effectively package them for audiences (Borah, 2011, p. 248). The way an event is framed by the news media is dependent on what is made prominent, suppressed or hidden the communication text. People tend to make choices on the basis of how things are presented because of framing (De Vreese, 2005, p. 51). Much of this thesis will demonstrate that news framing has influences on the processing of information and power relations in conflict. News are disseminated to millions of audiences daily, and those yielding the power of news presentation have the capability to inform audiences and define situations out of their own realities. Entman (2002, p. 395) affirms that framing as a methodological approach is essential because it uncovers how texts that are communicated, exert power and influence.

The available literature on framing highlight that the support of the mass media for the status quo is influenced by lots of factors such as the prejudices of the journalists, professional routines and so on (McLeod and Detenber, 1999, p. 4). However, it is important

to reiterate again that the objective of this research is not to explore these factors. Smith et al. (2001) highlights two main ways through which the media can apply bias in covering protest events for instance. The initial one is the bias stemming from news selection and the second being the way the media proceeds to describe such events. Peng (2008, p. 362) explains these biases as selection and description bias. The former implies that the media agenda can influence what protest event gets reported, regardless of the features of such event, while the latter implies that protest organizers and activities are often portrayed in ways that reporters deem fit to apply to their audiences. Scheufele (1999, p. 105) points out that the media actively sets the referential frames that audiences apply in their interpretation and discussion of public events.

As the next section explains Agenda setting, it is necessary to clarify that framing and agenda setting have distinctions. Scheufele (1999) attempts to proffer this differentiation, by maintaining that agenda setting hinges more on accessibility where the media possess the capability to enhance the media audience's attachment of importance to an issue. Agenda setting has to do with the salience accorded to issues: what is considered as more important than other issues, whereas Framing concerns how the issues are presented, and anchored on the idea that this can influence the perception of the audience about such issues. McCombs, Shaw and Weaver (1997) suggest that framing can be considered as the Agenda setting's second level, in relation to the impact that the salience of media reports can have on how audiences interpret news reports.

Words that are employed to represent events often affect the way audiences conduct evaluation of such news content. Scheufele (1999), agrees with this. The media sometimes select and report news in mannerisms that would influence the reader to view reality from the media's presentation. Thus, in the case of the Niger Delta conflict, the media can decide to present the region's indigenes as having sole responsibility for the regular oil spillage and downplay the role of the Government and the Multinational Oil Corporations operating in the region. The casual interpretation that the inhabitants are to blame for the oil spills can be presented by the media.

Agenda Setting

The media has agenda setting functions. This asserts that the media significantly influences its audiences through the stories that are chosen to be newsworthy, and the level of space and prominence accorded to such stories (Baran and Davis, 2003). How the media reporting shapes the priority bestowed on objects of media content such as issues, events, candidates and problems, is the point of focus. McLeod et al. (1994, p. 4), in stressing the essence of salience in agenda setting, explains that the salience is acquired by the audiences from the media, incorporating into their own agenda, similar weight. In spite of the communication of such saliences being an inevitable by-product of journalistic traditions and practices, and even incidental, such saliences constitute one of the features of the messages transmitted to the audiences.

Agenda setting implies that through the repetition of news reporting, the importance of an issue is heightened in the mind of the receiver. Hence, the media makes the provision of the agreement on public issues permitting dialogue between parties with divergent views, through agenda setting (Severin and Tankard, 2001). Agenda building is described by Baran and Davis (2003) as a step up of the agenda setting approach, and referring to a collective way in which the media, the public citizenry and the government, influence one another in areas that concern formation of public policy. Miller (2005) states that agenda setting includes three agendas:

- i. The media agenda – which includes issues that the media sources address
- ii. The public agenda – issues that the public consider or believe to be more important
- iii. The policy agenda – the issues prioritized by decision makers (legislators, executives and such decision influencers).

Walter Lippman in the early 1920s, social commentator and journalist, posited arguments of the media's ability to control the view of audiences, by ignoring certain issues and focusing on others. The level at which a story is covered by the media affects the degree to which the people consider the story as vital. Lippmann's ideas, were refined by Bernard

Cohen (1963) who pointed out that the media does not tell people *what* to think, but can play a role in what people *think about*. Cohen is credited with the refinement of the Agenda setting approach. He points out that the media is more than an opinion or information purveyor. This is due to the consideration that they succeed more often in influencing the choices of the readers on some issues based on the accorded salience of such coverages. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) introduced the theoretical approach, by putting this idea to empirical test, following their study of the media's role in the Presidential Campaign of 1968 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in the United States, through the comparison of the agenda of news media and public agenda. It studied undecided voters and carried out content analysis of some local and national newspapers. This study uncovered strong correlations between the issues which were prominent in the news media and the public. The agenda setting theory was established via this initial effort. According to Stacks et al. (2015, p. 29), over 400 empirical studies have been carried out and published.

Certain things are noticeable under Agenda setting. McQuail (2005) states that the media does not reflect social reality, since news reports are filtered, shaped and chosen by room staff or broadcasters of the news; people's news sources are limited, because they do not pay adequate attention to all outlets and hence have dependence on the media; people are led to perceive some issues as important through the few media agenda selected by professional gatekeepers. Folarin (1998) is of the view that the media pre-determines issues of prominence for the society, where what people know regarding public events are those that the media primarily presents to them. The interpretation of the conflict by many people is often what they get from the media.

The Agenda setting approach has certain limitations which include the fact that media audiences may not be well-informed as the theoretical approach assumes. It assumes that the people might be properly informed, skeptical or thoughtful, actively engaged/interested in the issues addressed by the media and have no ignorance of the facts. So, the media's transfer of salience might be lost if the audience has none of these qualities. The media according to some scholars, cannot conceal or create problems, but they can alter priorities, salience and awareness that people accrue to particular contents of the media; especially for those

interested or attached to these problems. Otherwise, it holds no importance if you have no attachment or interest, or if your mind is already made up on an issue. Salience is hence weakened. Hollihan (2010) argues that the media is not omnipotent, and likely do not often set the agenda, and when they do set the agenda, its influence is not always equally felt.

Another criticism is that it pays inadequate attention to the effect of audience knowledge on how such media contents are accepted. The reports could only affirm the stereotypes that audiences have about an issue. For instance, a portion of the media's audience might accept the framing of incidents in the Niger Delta, confirming that those who are exposed to same content view such issues similarly. However, such indigenes of the Niger Delta could see the same content, and as they are directly affected by the crisis, reject the content as being far removed from reality. In the framing of the Niger Delta conflict, the media could frame issues pertaining to social responsibility, environmental sustainability and so on, in ways that afford mutual benefits for all involved conflicting parties.

The case advanced by this thesis is not that the media should not report facts/event, but that more efforts towards analysis-based (thematic) reporting should be encouraged to offset the possibilities of the incident- or violence-based (episodic) reporting being granted salience. Since online copies of these newspapers reports used for this thesis cannot avail the chance to investigate the status given to the positioning of reports, headline displays, picture exhibitions, paper layouts, editorial comments and so on, attention on determining agenda would fall to the analysis of the media contents and reports on the Niger Delta crisis, to identify these attempts at salience creation.

Additionally, previous studies have predominantly centered on time periods of significant and heavy violence and/or militarization. Fewer have sought to attempt such comparative exploration of academic literature and the news media; also, fewer studies have used framing as a methodological context in exploring the Niger Delta crisis. More so, in addition to contributing to the available literature, this study will help inform future extensive studies of the crisis in the region, particularly for studies that seek to explore such gaps via additional use of focus groups, field observations, and in-depth interviews on the

host communities, oil corporations and the government representatives and/or agencies on their perception of the role of the media and impact on conflicting actors.

Conclusion

In light of the examined theories, concepts and literature review in the preceding sections of this chapter, this thesis will seek to explore if there are any gaps or misrepresentation in the information that the media reports about the Niger Delta conflict and the key actors in the conflict. Such gaps will be identified based on comparative content analysis of the information in academic literature and what the media publishes. This is the key contribution to be made by this thesis. Indeed, few authors have undertaken the examination and studies of the Niger Delta conflict framing and the media, but this research thesis will add to the few body of literature and contribute to it by identifying areas of divergence and convergence between academia and news media, identifying the importance of the reconciliation of these gaps to conflict resolution in the Niger Delta. At the essence of this thesis, is not so much that other authors have not researched the bias in the Nigerian media, but the prospective identification of whether such bias persists in more recent times.

This thesis expects that:

- i. The Nigerian news media still has not done enough to initiate peace journalism. The media does more of incident (episodic) reporting.
- ii. The local Niger Delta residents as key actors in the conflict and some dynamics of the conflict have been misrepresented by the news media.
- iii. The government and oil corporations have enjoyed more positive presentation by the news media.
- iv. There are gaps which exist within the predominant frames advanced between the media and academic literature, respectively.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will explore the methodological approach and design of this study, as well as the data collection and analysis approach. It will define the broad predominant conceptual frames as identified in the academic literature. Overall, the thesis aims to investigate the media framing through insights on the news stories reported in the online national and privately owned newspapers – *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. The chapter will also assess the limitations of the study. The first section explores the research design and methods.

Research Design and Methods

Media coverage can have strong impact on conflicts. It can impact the parties' perceptions of such conflict and other involved actors (Gardner, 2001). This thesis inadvertently seeks to conduct a case study on how the Nigerian news media presents the Niger Delta conflict and its key actors, through the exploration of the Niger Delta conflict and the representation by two major Nigerian newspapers, in the last four years (2016-2020). The intention is to identify and analyze the predominant frames through which the academic literature presents the region's conflict, and to use this as a conceptual framework to be applied in the analyses of the presentation by the newspapers of the conflict, through the use of qualitative content analysis (QCA) to identify any existing gaps between the academic literature and the media reports, and deduce if there is any misrepresentation in the conflict reportage by the media. The framework which is identified from the analysis of the literature, will provide a lens for the organization of the news articles, and exploration of the causes and solutions for the major actors/frames identified in these news articles. It is for this reason that framing, as a methodological approach is used through qualitative content analysis.

Subsequently, the study will employ certain tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify elements in selected texts, as a way to further assess how the key actors in the conflict are represented, and deduce how the media plays a role through such representations. Media representation suggests a presupposition that texts in media make up

viewpoints and value judgements about social situations, relationships and events, hence such representations constitute types of social reality that reflect the purpose and position of those that produce it. This is often portrayed in the choices of what is left in the background, included, excluded or foregrounded, or made implicit or left explicit in the text (Fairclough 1995a, van Dijk, 1991). The analysis of representation according to Fairclough, would identify structures of propositions and how they reflect ideology and power relations. The choice of word over others by the writer, is vital because of its capacity to shape perceptions. Fairclough (1995b) is of the argument that formal choices make up choices of meaning, which might portray how the language of the media might ideologically work, similar to the view by Hodge and Kress (1993), on how choices made in particular contexts could offer a good insightful guide to how texts can be influenced by social forces. Critical Discourse Analysts often differ in what tool kits to employ, and with apologies to other analysts, some standard tools will be used to evaluate selected news texts. A critical analysis often orients towards problems that are social, especially with the purpose of discovering solutions to them. It often seeks to expose the subtle ways through which those who wield power, oppress others. CDA in the media discourse, would entail analysis of the texts' socio-cultural practices that it is involved in (Fairclough, 1995a), which would seek to explain the process in which news production is affected by social practices, and how media texts influence society in turn, via shaping the readers' views and opinions (Fairclough, 1989). The latter is what we seek to investigate through this thesis.

Data Collection

Since this thesis aims to explore the Nigerian media's presentation of the Niger Delta conflict and the main actors, through media analysis, and first identifying and analyzing conceptual frameworks present in academic literature, two main and privately owned newspapers - *The Punch* and *The Guardian* – were purposefully selected. The choice of newspapers is due to the need to gauge a wider scope of the media's report of the conflict, since they are both amongst the most widely read newspapers in the country. As it was important to obtain such a broad scope of the Nigerian media's framing of the Niger Delta

conflict, these newspapers were chosen for their easy access, and the lack of resources to obtain the hard copies of the news articles/stories needed.

The Punch is a privately-owned daily paper, and is distributed in English; printing over 90 000 copies per day, with online accessibility through its official website – punchng.com. It was founded since 1976, and covers a vast array of issues. Similarly, *The Guardian* was founded in 1983, and is independent and also available online. It prides itself as owing no allegiance to any ethnic community, political party, interest or religious groups. Due to resource limitations, this thesis will be unable to conduct a comparative analysis of newspapers local to the Niger Delta, via inclusion of such newspapers as an empirical source.

It was important to be specific in the word search, since Nigeria is a country with vast problems ranging from ethnic conflicts, corruption, etc. The key words used in the search on the newspapers' websites were: 'Niger Delta', 'Niger Delta crisis' and/or 'Niger Delta conflict. Theoretical saturation was employed to ascertain the actual time frame for the data collection and the research, because the contexts under which the news were reported did not change much as we farther went back in time. Thus, as much of the coverage did not change much since before 2016, until [March] 2020; and since a few but essential number of academicians have explored the content of much of these papers in the period before this time frame, it allowed for further incentives to apply the chosen time frame. In addition, 2015 was the year, former Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan – indigene of the Niger Delta – lost the presidential election to Muhammadu Buhari (incumbent president; currently in his second term in office). Although this thesis does not seek to explore the impact of leadership on media reportage, the time frame makes for a curious period of investigation, in light of the multiple renewed attacks by Niger Delta militants in 2016, where oil production fell by almost 40%. 56 news articles were obtained from *The Punch* and 58 news articles were obtained from *The Guardian*. Overall, 114 news articles (Table 1) were used for the framing analysis. For the Critical Discourse Analysis, only news articles from 2016 were used (39 articles – 15 from *The Punch*; 24 from *The Guardian*).

Table 1. Distribution of 114 News Articles

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Quantity	40	31	17	16	10

Data Analysis

The methodological approach/tool of framing is commonly used in investigating content reported by the media (Gardner, 2001, p. 301), and since this thesis aims to discover how the key Nigerian newspapers report the Niger Delta conflict and the main actors involved, through the analysis of the main contexts in which academic literature and the media discusses the issue, it is important to first identify the major frames employed by scholarly literature to discuss the problem. Through the using of framing as a methodological tool, four key frames are found (by the researcher) to be predominantly referenced in the literature – local activity, government role, legal system and corporate activity. Within these academic frames, a cause-solution frame is used to identify the key discourses commonly used in the discussion of the problem. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) and some elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are used for the analytical process. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) is defined in multiple ways by scholars, however according to Patton (2002, p. 453), it is any ‘sense-making effort’ and qualitative reduction of data, which attempts to make identifications of core meanings and consistencies from a volume of qualitative material. It involves a process designated for the condensing of raw material into themes or categories on the basis of valid interpretation and inference or deductively through pre-existing theories or models. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an extensive and interdisciplinary methodological approach to society and language, centering on discourse as a social practice. The framework of CDA has largely been influenced by approaches from its key proponents, and these approaches include: Fairclough’s Dialectical-Relational Approach, Wodak’s Discourse-Historical Approach and van Dijk’s Sociocognitive Approach. The socio-cognitive approach is more related to this study, in identifying the

different representations of the key actors in the Niger Delta crisis/conflict, as well as the representation of the conflict itself by the Nigerian news media.

This study undertakes a unique approach in which QCA is conducted via framing analysis. The conceptual frames from academic literature can be attributed to the key subjects of the conflict, and the cause-solution frames are the key building blocks for these particular subjects. These predominant conceptual frames are the analytical frameworks for conducting the analysis of how the Nigerian media (newspapers) report the conflict and the main actors. The organization of the news articles, will be made on the basis of the conceptual framework realized from the literature framing analysis, as a lens to explore the cause-solutions to the problems in the news articles. Findings from the literature and the media will be summed up in “cause/solution” tables.

The conceptual framework to be obtained from academia, will be carried out through a literature framing analysis. The coding process for the media articles will be linear, involving a first-level general coding where the conceptual frames identified in the literature are explored in the news articles and possible additional frames are identified within the media reports, followed by a second-level coding which would identify the cause-solution frames within these general conceptual frames. These will enable the basis to check for any gaps or misrepresentation in/by the media reports about the conflict and the main actors.

Additionally, a brief Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be carried out on news articles from 2016 (39 articles). This is due to its denotation as the year where Nigeria had multiple renewed attacks by militants, and oil production fell by almost 40%, to further identify how the media frames these actors in order to understand the media’s role in the Niger Delta conflict, through the investigation of the characterizations, foregrounding/backgrounding, agency deletions or attributions, and so on. The media language’s ideological work involves how people or groups, relations and identities are represented. Thus, specific social identity constructions would portray how their actions are to be evaluated, considered or judged. The ideological work of media language includes how individuals or groups, identities and relations are represented. Hence, particular construction of social identities would define how their actions are to be judged or evaluated, and link

them to specific attitudes or behavioral patterns. Representations could conceal truths that need to be revealed and hence legitimize specific negative labeling or identity in the interest of certain groups or government.

Definition of Conceptual Frameworks (Frames)

The thesis explores predominant frames, and cause-solutions in each frame, within the academic literature and media articles, as identified by the researcher. The frames which are predominantly discovered within the literature and the news articles, in no particular order, include:

Local activity: This conceptual frame pertains to the roles of the local indigenes and natives of the Niger Delta, and actions undertaken by them.

Corporate activity: This frame pertains to the interests of the Multinational Oil Corporations in the region of the Niger Delta, and the actions they undertake in the course of the conflict.

Government role: This frame has to do with the interests of the Nigerian government/state, as well as the actions undertaken by them during the course of the conflict. Here, we refer to both the regional government of the Niger Delta and the Federal Government of Nigeria in similar light as the former is in direct control of the Federal Government (particularly the executive branch) when it comes to the *Petrobusiness* of the oil and gas resources in the region.

Legal system: This frame has to do with the entire legislative system and structure, referring to the lack of inclusiveness that has resulted based on bias and unfair laws. This is different from the ‘Government role’ frame, although related, because it refers to the inadequacies of the existing legal structures.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations exist which might plague this research study. Since framing as a methodological tool is not the most straightforward task and the frames as identified, depends largely on how/what the researcher’s interpretation of the news reports and academic literature are, there is the possibility for one-sidedness or bias in the framing

analysis. However, the research intention of this thesis is to attempt to discover openly what the role of the Nigerian media in the Niger Delta conflict is. This can be overcome by the engaging the assistance of two other independent evaluators, who would conduct independent framing of the article samples employed. The researcher is native to the Imo state in Nigeria, which although politically designated part of the Niger Delta, is not directly affected by the conflict. Thus, since the researcher does not reside in the region, and in spite of nationality, the analysis of the media reports will be quite straightforward. The time frame of the analysis constitutes periods which the researcher was also abroad and out of Nigeria, that also allows for an outward viewpoint into the conflict dynamics.

There are other limitations, which include: the danger of oversimplification. This is as a result of minimizing such a complex conflict into simple sets of classifying frames; the limitation in addressing the reasons for any skewed media representation, as this thesis does not seek to address the causes behind these inaccuracies in the reportage of the Niger Delta conflict and its main actors. Doing this will entail exploring the forces that shape the coverage or reporting of the news, and the power balance of this process and the news-making process in Nigeria. If time and resources allowed, it would be interesting to explore media reportage and the various federal government administrations of Nigeria. This is in order to investigate how presidencies (Heads of State) have affected media coverage on the situation in the Niger Delta since the discovery of oil/gas resources in the region. This study could not investigate prominence in agenda setting via assessing story placements, accorded spaces, images and headlines, due to the usage of online news sources, and not print.

Finally, this thesis does not address how incorrect or negative representation of key conflict actors and the conflict itself, affects the conflict and/or the involved actors. This limitation accrues from the inability to conduct focus groups and in-depth interviews via sampling of various main actors/stakeholders, to ascertain their perception about media reportage and coverage of their groups and the conflict, due to lack of resources. Such interviews entail series of coordination and acquisition of necessary permissions, in addition to the cumbersome channels to reach the necessary channels.

Conclusion

Framing is the main methodological tool used in this research, with the application of qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis. Two major independent and online newspapers are used as data sources. The key limitation of bias in the study, is largely compensated for through inter-coding/analysis by two independent evaluators of same materials/data used by the researcher. The next chapter conducts a framing analysis (presenting the conceptual frames) of academic literature, as identified by the researcher.

Chapter Four: Conflict's Cause-Solution Dynamics (Literature Framing)

Introduction

The available literature on the Niger Delta crisis allude to the conflict's complexity. Since the crisis has undergone various phases – violent and non-violent, majority of authors have alluded to its position as a security issue for the state of Nigeria and the Nigerian people. In academic literature, the crisis is discussed under some prominent conceptual frames, as identified by the researcher, which include: local activity, corporate activity, government role and the legal system. However, there are some predominant components expressed as the problem in the conflict of the Niger Delta region, and these include: the lack of inclusivity in processes of decision-making in the Petro-business and oil production, corruption and unjust policies, degradation of the environment, ineffective legal system, irresponsible corporate behavior, poverty/neglect and lack of human rights. We carefully explore these four key frames, as well as the causes and solutions to the identified problems within them, in this chapter. There are numerous causes and solutions that can be identified from the vast existing literature on the Niger Delta conflict, however, the predominant causes denoted/emphasized here, are ones that accentuate the roles played by the main actors in the conflict; not necessarily what these actors are affected by, although the chapter touches upon that. This is due to the need to delineate and proffer criteria for what can/cannot be included within each frame. Nevertheless, these frames are not mutually exclusive. The first section of this chapter explores the local activity frame.

Local activity

The Niger Delta conflict is discussed in academic literature through the local activity frame. This body of literature portrays the region's crisis as occurrences of violence within and between the local communities via kidnapping, electoral violence and pipeline vandalism. The natives of the Niger Delta are of the belief that revenue accrued from oil, should directly go to these host communities of oil corporations, in the form of trust funds, with community leaders determining expenditures (Ibeanu, 2000, p. 32; Smock, 2009, p. 5; Dudley, 1982, p. 263). Nevertheless, unfulfilled promises, the lack of interest by leaders to

the poverty and deprivation in the region, environmental degradation, socioeconomic deprivation and the corruption of leaders, has largely led to a recourse to the social vice of kidnapping in the last decade, by local militias (Odoemene, 2011, pp. 120-121; Otite and Umukoro, 2011, p. 230; Ibaba, 2011, p. 243). In addition to the motivation is the desire for resource control by the locals (Watts, Okonta and Kemedi, 2004; Ojakorotu, 2008, p. 280). The perceived indifference of the oil corporations by the people, in addressing the challenges faced by these communities, and the protracted outcry against environmental degradation in the late 1990s, also encouraged an environment of instability and culminated into militarization. This is not to generalize that all activities embarked on by locals and groups, are/were violent. An example is the more pacific orientation of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), with the Ogoni Bill of Rights (Olumide, 2011, p. 97), and the Movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) with its more coercive/criminal approach (ibid., p. 99; Ibaba, 2011, p. 256). Predominantly, agitations were often conducted in the efforts to protest against the oppression by the government and the exploitations by the oil corporations, as well as the unique relationship between these two actors, degenerating rapidly into the destruction of oil facilities, kidnapping, hostage taking of oil workers, pipeline vandalism, militancy and homicide (Duru and Ogonnaya, 2012, p. 164; Oruwari and Owei, 2006, pp. 6-7; Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009, p. 195; Sanubi, 2011, pp. 203-205; Omojunikanbi et al., 2019, p. 1).

Violence has taken shape in various forms. For instance, according to Akonye (2014, p. 141), nineteen individuals were killed on January 15th, 2006, including soldiers deployed to the Niger Delta by the federal government via the Joint Military Task Force. In the same year, some militants killed five soldiers in October. The papers reported in January 25, 2007, that nine Chinese expatriates had been kidnapped and held hostage in Bayelsa state by militants, and released on compromise (ibid.). The emergence of environmental movement organizations and armed youth organizations have been against the background of militarization that has been exploitive, alongside the infringement of human rights (Watts, 2007, p. 642). Good governance is stated as the main driver to handling the vices of kidnapping effectively (Akonye, 2014; Ejumudo, 2011). With the creation of jobs for the

youths, university graduates and the overall affected population of the Niger Delta, adequate provision of state security mechanisms, and provision of education and social amenities, social vices will reduce tremendously (Akonye, 2014, p. 146; Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 69); especially with consideration of the quality of developmental projects (Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, p. 170).

In addition, ethnic nationalism has also proven to be one of the key problems in the Niger Delta. According to Fashina (1998, p. 93; 87), the national question is a socio-economic-political one, regarding the co-existence or association of ethnic nations/groups within a state. It emanates when ethnic nationalities feel exploitation, discrimination and disadvantage, among other issues, in the distribution of rights, power and resources, by the sole virtue of their numerical shortcomings or their ancestry (ibid., p. 106). It persists when nothing is done to redress the concerns or if the implemented efforts to resolve issues are thought to fall beneath expectation. The concerned ethnic groups form ideological movements as a means to realizing their aims, which involves the promotion/acknowledgement of equitable resource distribution, elimination of injustice and exploitation, promotion of equal rights and equitable power access, national autonomy and/or independence.

Thus, ethnic nationalism goes one step further from the national question. It goes ahead to formulate and adopt strategies to attain the aforementioned ends. The establishment of an ideological movement is one of such strategies. Fashina (1998, p. 88), ethno-nationalism therefore refers to an ideological movement that claims, on behalf of a group that by virtue of a common ancestry, its members share a culture, which is considered as distinct from the culture of other group.; such common culture and ancestry, thus makes the group equally qualified for economic and political well-being as other groups (polycentric nationalism), or grants them superior political economic position among the other groups (ethnocentric nationalism). A few examples of such movement in the Niger Delta include the Ijaw National Congress (INC), Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), etcetera. Many people fight under the guise of economic emancipation of the region. However, they are in fact, exploiting the Federal Government

and the oil corporations by demanding money that never make it to the downtrodden population of the Niger Delta. Sanubi (2011, pp. 204) describes a congruence of objectives, where genuine social agitation meets political/ethnic ones over resource marginalization, however Obi (2001, p. 87) mentions the gradual evolution of oil politics, where ethnic identity is transformed as an element of mobilization, not just for the interrogation of resource control, but also for social alliance and mobilization for the resistance of extraction, exclusion and alienation from proceeds that should alleviate the deprivation of the people of the Niger Delta, from making a livelihood through their water and land. The corruption of the Niger Delta elites and traditional leaders due to greed emanating from bribery by oil corporations (Nweke, 2012, p. 204; Faleti, 2009, p. 17; Nwogwugwu et al., 2012), and erosion of cultural values by oil corporations, are drivers of conflict in this frame since youths lose confidence in submitting to such authorities and subscribe to 'quick money' syndrome through criminality (Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, p. 173; Sanubi, 2011, p. 206). Such youths pose a huge stumbling block to programs of development. There have been inter- and intra-ethnic struggles among Niger Delta tribes, due to struggle over oil and land resources (Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, p. 171; Sanubi, 2011, p. 196). Additionally, such inter-communal struggles emanated from engaging in competition over benefits of the oil industry such as project location, employment, contract awards, etc. (Ibaba, 2011, p. 253).

Another major issue is the problem of electoral violence in the region and the Nigerian state, as a result of the Niger Delta's unrest. If electoral remains protracted, the crisis in the Niger Delta will persist (Otite and Umukoro, 2011, p. 230). From the onset, militants in the Niger Delta, did not acquire their own guns, because these guns consequently used to counter governmental repression, were obtained prior to their recourse to militancy, from the oil corporations and the government, where some of the locals were used as hired thugs for election rigging (Watts, 2007, p. 642; Bekoe, 2005, p. 5; Polgreen, 2007; Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 61); candidates vying for political office, used militant groups to advance their aspirations through the offer of rewards in return for acts of political intimidation and violence against opponents (Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, p. 174). Also, oil corporations equipped the youths with weapons to safeguard pipelines, and these were also

re-used to fight both the corporations and the government (Tuodolo, 2009, p. 337). Hence, small arms proliferation in the Niger Delta has been a problem. Academic literature recommends the restraining of military activity in the region, by the Nigerian army, with recourse to diplomacy and strategies of conflict resolution as a priority in the conflict (Smock, 2009; Ejumudo, 2011). The solution to the crisis rests upon diplomatic cooperation between the Nigerian state, and all involved actors, as well as for the natives of the Niger Delta, to utilize the international spotlight through the international community, to clamour for political leadership, vested upon an obvious agenda of justice and equity (Smock, 2009; Obi, 2009, p. 17). Traditional media can also be a tool for ensuring that the Nigerian government is compelled to justify its actions (Eti, 2009, p. 92; Nwagbara, 2010, pp. 151-152). Additionally, the implementation of good governance practices in order to address the challenges posed by proliferation should be considered (Ebo, 2005; pp. 137-138; Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 65; Ejumudo, 2011). Attempts at reviving the traditional economy of the oil producing communities should also be made, in addition to technical supports and funds (Nwankwo, 2016, p. 273), and the consultation of local stakeholders in determining strategies of development (Sanubi, 2011, p. 212).

Corporate Activity

A thread of literature investigates the corporate behavior and activity of multinational oil corporations. They focus on oil exploitation, environmental degradation, human rights infringement, lack/inadequacy of corporate social responsibility and corporate-community engagement, and the nature of the partnership with the federal government, as the key problems in the conflict. Various perspectives exist on the relationship which exists between the activities of oil corporations and the crisis in the Niger Delta, but generally, authors acknowledge the positive contribution of multinational oil corporations, since their foreign direct investment (FDI) result in an increase in local development and the enhancement of levels of economic production, technology, opportunities and employment (Ezirim, 2009, p. 3; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 231). However, their pitfalls are shown to be greater. Opinions regarding the positive contribution of oil corporations is largely unpopular among the people of the Niger Delta, and is greatly debated.

One perspective asserts that multinational oil corporations have brought about negative effects. Their investment of capitals create enclaves, corruption, labour exploitation and lack of integration into the economy (Ezirim, 2009, p. 4; Akpan, 2006; Eweje, 2007; Owolabi and Olu-Owolabi, 2009), allowing such corporations to oversee production without any influence from the political, economic and social structures of the host communities. According to Faleti (2009, p. 17), oil corporations in partnership with the Nigerian government, employ divide and rule strategies within the oil producing host communities, rather than adhere to international oil mining standards in their activities. They choose to bribe most vocal community members and traditional institutions, in order to quell pressures calling for corporate responsibility (Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, pp. 174-175; Odogbor, 2004, pp. 112-113; Owolabi and Okonkwo, 2014, p. 40; Udoh and Ibok, 2014, p. 83). This has destroyed formerly prominent traditional institutions such as the age-grades, chiefs, elders and elites (ibid.). Thus, these traditional institutions initially meddle to achieve peace, but become absorbed due to financial benefits (Nweke, 2012, p. 204). Hence, local youths who previously had respect for these institutions, lose the trust in them. In addition, Nwogwugwu et al. (2012); Ibaba (2011, p. 254), state that more influential groups or few individuals in the Niger Delta end up benefitting from finances meant for empowering the people and transforming the communities. More so, Idemudia (2010); Von Kemedi (2006, p. 13), argued that corporations like Shell seemed to be nonchalant about communal conflicts, as the government provided them with armed troops to safeguard their oil facilities, while the communities fought one another. Oil corporations also defied and ignored orders from the government (Zuokumor, 1985, p. 35; Olumide, 2011, p. 96).

Another similar perspective is of the belief that even as oil corporations exploit oil resources, and in spite of the negative effects of their activities, they provide technology and investment capital that inadvertently enhance the Niger Delta's development and industrialization, positively (Ezirim, 2009, p. 4; Tuodolo, 2009, p. 536). This perspective additionally argues that major challenges exist in the curbing of excesses, the maximization of benefits, the minimization of perverseness, conduct regulation and policy influence in such mannerisms to ensure that more concrete and healthy contributions to the region's

general development and growth, emanate (Ezirim, 2009, p. 4). Some oil corporations are of the belief that the government holds responsibility for the provision of social amenities and infrastructures, since they pay rents, royalties and taxes to the federal government (Hutchful, 1985, p. 122; Ibeanu, 2000, p. 29), in addition to the government possessing shares.

Multinational oil corporations have brought about the despoliation of the environment. They do so through exploration activities, gas flaring practices, oil spillage, and poor waste management, (Ibeanu, 2000, p. 23; Ojatorotu and Okeke-Uzodike, 2006, pp. 96-97; Eyinla and Ukpo, 2006, p. 4; Ojatorotu and Gilbert, 2010, p. 12; Aghalino and Okolie-Osemene, 2014; Nwankwo, 2016; Ibaba, 2011, p. 243). The impact of the deliberate action of poor oil waste management results in dire destruction of the means of livelihood of the local communities. Since the Niger Delta is denoted as one of the most endangered ecosystems and delta in the world, by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP, 2011), there is an essence for urgency in commencing cleanup of the oil spillage and the restoration of the mangrove forest. These dire consequences of environmental degradation also impact the health of the people of the host communities, as well as their basic needs. These concerns about the environment are often discussed alongside human right issues. This is because the contamination of the environment entails contamination of land, creeks, drinking water, and the rest of the ecosystems of the Ogoniland for instance, would take an extensive period of time to nurse back to a completely productive health (ibid.). The first decree (Decree 99) aimed at discouraging gas flaring enacted in 1979, was modified by the government to allow oil corporations pay a fine for gas flaring. Corporations hence preferred this to quitting the action (Ogunrin et al., 2005, p. 106; Ako, 2015). The oil corporations give the false impression that oil wastes are being re-injected into old wells.

Communities' water sources are contaminated. UNEP (2011) states that a layer of 8cm in refined oil was found floating on the groundwater in Ogoniland, which constitutes drinking water wells for families, 900 times way beyond the guidelines of the World Health Organization. Several authors allude this to the uneven balance of power with regards to decision-making in the Niger Delta, as well as the oil corporations' lack of effective

corporate social responsibility in their host communities. These oil corporations are encouraged to improve their maintenance and control of their oil facilities, in addition to the establishment of bodies responsible for effective environmental restoration and implementation of recommendations on the environment. The UNEP report on Ogoniland, recommended the establishment of an Environmental Restoration Authority, working under the Environment ministry, but with a different budget from the state. It also stressed the involvement of communication experts, to ensure that dialogue and engagement with the community continues, as well as educational programs targeted at awareness on oil spillage issues, whether from illegal local activities or operational failure (UNEP, 2011, p. 225-226).

The 60/40 cost-benefit share partnership of the Nigerian government and the multinational oil corporations, leaves the host communities with nothing and feeling of neglect. This joint venture agreement, avails the multinational corporations stronger footing and influence on the government, to get away with subpar corporate behavior. With the lion share of the oil business going to the Nigerian state and it having major stake in some of the oil corporations involved in unethical environmental activities, concern for and the effective implementation of environmental policies also suffers (Olumide, 2011, p. 94; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 265). Thus, the Niger Delta crisis persists considering that oil production prevails in spite of the consequences to the environment and the concurrent socioeconomic impacts on the locals. The exploitation of oil resources constitutes an infringement on human rights of the region's inhabitants since their environment is devastated and health issues emanate. With the failure of violent solutions to the resistance from the community, and the preference of such tactics by past successive military leadership of the Nigerian state, a reassessment of strategy has been unavoidable, towards the need for a new regime of conflict management/resolution in the Niger Delta. This cannot be accomplished with the parties to the conflict fighting one another. The discussed solution is for inclusivity of the locals in the oil business and related decision-making (Ejumudo, 2011, p. 46; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 272; Ibaba, 2011, p. 265), and addressing issues of socio-economic and political exclusion (Abdel-Fatau, 2004, p. 247; Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 71).

The corporate activity of oil corporations is discussed by another thread of literature, exploring the relationship between these corporations and the host Niger Delta communities. Some strands of literature emphasize the corporate-community relations by exploring the practices and policies of key oil corporations like Shell, Chevron, Total and Agip. Findings have shown that Shell has had way more damaging and enduring conflicts than Agip, Chevron and Total (Aaron and Patrick, 2013; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 206). Community projects by oil corporations such as Shell, are often found to serve the needs of the locals, poorly, because of their poor completion and implementation, as well as the failure to inculcate the local people in the planning, management and execution (Aaron and Patrick, 2013; Ogula, 2012, p. 4; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 97). Studies claim that the conflict's scale and intensity in the community-corporate relations in the region, are predicated upon the patterns of corporate social responsibility of the multinational oil corporations (Okoko, 1996; Nwankwo, 2016). Specifically, those communities whose concerns are taken into account in the initial stage of engagement of the corporations and such community via the corporations' corporate social responsibility policies, often have a more cordial relationship with the corporations (Aaron and Patrick, 2013, pp. 354-355; Nwankwo, 2016, pp. 17-18). A lack of institutional mechanisms that examine lapses in the execution of corporate social responsibility projects can aggravate crisis (Daferighe and Adedeji, 2010; Ako, 2012).

Nonetheless, it is vital to note that it is not often the case with such success stories. Oil corporations try to assuage the local communities' concerns by changing corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies to be more people-centric, following communal step-up against exclusionary policies; but for all the noble intentions proposed by the corporations, the policies are unpragmatic, prompting oil corporations to resort to bribing of the traditional institutions and most vocal of communities instead of executing concrete CSR (Okoko, Nna and Ibaba, 2006, p. 187; Faleti, 2009, p. 17). They express commitment to environmental practices to the local communities but fail (Akpan, 2006; Ite, 2007; Watts, 2009, p. 20). Some proffered solutions include the need for responsible and inclusive corporate social responsibility, and community cohesion, especially among the community elites, as oil corporations often find it difficult to enter into Memorandum of Understanding or

settlements with groups, due to the multiplicity of same demands via groups within same communities that hence make former agreements void. According to Nwankwo (2016, p. 218), there is often the difficulty of finding a group that genuinely represents an entire host community. Hence, as a solution, efforts to consolidate a more sustainable corporate-community relations are important, because concrete implementation of community-corporation MoUs that are agreed upon will make the corporations good corporate citizens (Aaron and Patrick, 2013, pp. 354-355; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 119). Corporate social responsibility projects should be relevant, timely and tailored to needs of the host communities (Nwankwo, 2016, p. 272; Udoh and Ibok, 2014, p. 75). This also includes replacing and maintaining old pipelines.

Government Role

The crisis in the Niger Delta is discussed by another thread of literature within the frame of the role played by the government. This literature argues that the root of the crisis is in the corruption, poor governance and the lack of interest in social welfare systems by the political leadership. Problems that prevail are underdevelopment, hunger, unemployment, poverty, diseases, and political and socioeconomic alienation. These are all negative impacts of the poor governance and lack of interest in providing welfare facilities. In addition, the long-term marginalization and neglect has also been a driver (Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 51). The prevailing conflict has political dimensions that can be resolved via political actions (Smock, 2009; Olumide, 2011, p. 76). Such political inclinations emanate from the firm control of resources [by major ethnic tribes] since the 1960 political independence of Nigeria (Obi, 2002, p. 105; Ibaba, 2011, p. 243), with certain unfair and intolerable legislations still in effect and not abolished. As a result, the conflict is built on a background of these ethnic majorities in government, seeking access and control of the nation's oil wealth obtained from the lands of ethnic minorities (Olumide, 2011, p. 77). Nwankwo (2016, p. 271); Ibaba (2011, p. 265) recommend the adjustment of certain obsolete laws and strengthening regulatory practices.

Laws have often been enacted unfavorably. The federal government has modified colonial Mineral Ordinances in ways that have been largely unacceptable to the Niger Delta

minorities (Ako and Okonmah, 2009, p. 54; Obi, 2010). Some of these unfair regulations have included the 1969 Decree 51, which transferred total ownership of petroleum products in the Niger Delta, to the Nigerian Federal Government; the 1978 Land Use Decree, which disposed the local communities of the occupancy and land ownership rights, and bestowed this on the Federal Government and its agencies; the 1971 Offshore Oil Revenue Act of 1971, that granted the exclusive rights over the coastal area's continental shelf to the federal government. According to Ojatorotu and Gilbert (2010, p. 6), these unfair regulations have become operational whenever the government and companies sought to take advantage of the host communities when natural resources were involved.

The state-imposed poverty by the Federal Government of Nigeria, on the people is provided as a cause. The Niger Delta people largely live in abject poverty, in the midst of the billions of dollars generated on their lands (Ejibunu, 2007, p. 10; Oviasuyi and Uwadiae, 2010, p. 115; Moro, 2009, p. 324; Ako, 2015), in oil revenue, to the extent that there is lack of access to basic amenities like electricity and good water. They live in creeks and watch the multinational oil corporations make fortunes. The recourse to militancy by the local people, have been met by military response by the government, which has resulted in deaths of many as in the case of the Odi community, Choba, Ogoni and Umuechem, as well as the assaults on women. Thus, the demands of the locals in the Niger Delta to attain control and inclusivity in the petrobusiness, and for enjoyment of more benefits from the oil wealth obtained from their lands, continue to stay unanswered or lost to unfulfilled promises (Smock, 2009, p. 1; Ejumudo, 2011, p. 46; Ifedi and Anyu, 2011, p. 91).

The Niger Delta conflict is also further triggered by the current oil revenue allocation formulas of the government. This ought to be abrogated according to the restive youths (Nna and Ibaba, 2011; Okoko, Nna and Ibaba, 2006). The derivation principle should allow for appropriate return of revenue to sources and bases of natural resources, in the Nigerian revenue-sharing system, but Nigeria's revenue sharing formula is a major cause of conflict in most of the Niger Delta (Obi, 2001, p. 87; Ojatorotu, 2008, p. 283; Olumide, 2011, p. 74; Sanubi, 2011, pp. 207), with the government's ability to resolve it determining the region's peace and development. Complexities of the region's situation and the comprehension of it

leads people to have the perception that peace will not return until the problem of resource control is addressed by the government and oil corporations (Ojakorotu, 2009, p. 6). The Nigerian state's fiscal policy and federation is politically-laden and contentious, and the concomitant issues with revenue-sharing formula, portray the inefficiency of Nigeria's democracy (Ejumudo, 2009, p. 18).

Within all persistent issues with Nigeria's federalism, the derivation principle is the most contested and controversial. The region enjoys a derivation formula of only 13%, compared to the 50% that previously benefitted resource regions in Nigeria (Ehwarieme, 1999, p. 59; Ejumudo, 2011, p. 42). There is need for extensive amendments within the government on the issue of fiscal control, and addressing non-inclusivity of the local community in the government-corporation joint partnership (Smock, 2009; Ejumudo, 2011; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 274); Some cue can be taken from the U.S. fiscal federalism, where the states have relative control over economic resources without central government's intrusion (Sanubi, 2011, p. 212). Oil production could be greatly boosted if peace is initiated in the region (Smock, 2009). For instance, the overall portion of oil revenues by the federal government experienced a drop in 2006-2007, by \$10-\$14 billion a year as a result of disruptions posed to production, due to effects of the crisis, which constitutes money which ultimately did not reach any of the oil producing states (Smock, 2009, p. 4).

Corruption in the government is an issue. It propagates lack of welfare and development in the region (Sanubi, 2011, p. 209; Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, p. 182; Ibaba, 2011, p. 243; 260-262; LaMonica, 2011, p. 275). As much as colonial legacy is blamed for the conflict in the Niger Delta, Malaysia was also a former British colony, but its economy experienced continuous growth. The higher level of corruption in Nigeria also cannot be compared to that of Ghana. The degree of corruption in the federal government and the lack of interest and will by the leadership, in genuine political processes, are driving factors of unrests and turmoil in the Niger Delta. Kidnapping and vandalism have become the order of the day by local militias, because of the lack of interest of leaders and their corruption, in a way of protesting against the exploitation by multinational oil corporations and oppression by the governments. High-level officials of the government are said to participate in the

siphoning of oil resources (Ibaba, 2011, pp. 261-262), and especially in collaboration with the military and the pipeline vandals (Vidal, 2013, p. 4; Katsouris et al., 2015; Osah et al., 2017, p. 75). Such unprecedented response to dangers posed to the existence of local communities by the activities of the oil corporations, the political marginalization, economic deprivation etcetera, have led to the emergence of civil society groups and environmental activists in the region (Ojakorotu, 2009, p. 5). Economic diversification is also a solution (Otite and Umukoro, 2011, p. 232).

The committees, agencies and bodies set up for the administration of initiatives and address of the Niger Delta issues have had subpar results. For example, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC); the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) etc., have failed in their tasks (Omoweh, 2006, p. 246; Ejumudo, 2011, pp. 43-44; Offiong and Cocodia, 2011, p. 180; Sanubi, 2011, pp. 208-209; Otite and Umukoro, 2011, p. 217; Ibaba, 2011, p. 259; Ifedi and Anyu, 2011, p. 86). As a solution, the federal government could separate the duties of the state/regional governments with that of the development commissions/agencies (Nwankwo, 2016, p. 274), as well as tackle the issue of corruption within these agencies (*ibid.*, p. 271), rather than creating more unworkable ones. The prospects for long-term peace in the Niger Delta region rests upon effective electoral reform, and the development of institutions through which the popular will of the people can be protected and expressed (Lubeck et al., 2007; Smock, 2009, p. 5; Ibaba, 2011, p. 264); credible government and leadership, sustainable developmental models, alongside a transformation towards good governance (Odoemene, 2011, p. 132; Ejumudo, 2011; Ibaba, 2011, p. 264; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 273; Udoh and Ibok, 2014, p. 86; Denedo et al., 2017), and anti-corruption efforts (Lubeck et al., 2007; Ibaba, 2011, p. 266).

The government's coercive response to the conflict have occurred via punitive expeditions by the military. This is often as a way to combat militancy and demonstrate total control over the region's mineral and oil resources (Ibeanu, 2000, p. 26; Imobighe et al., 2002, p. 62; Obi, 2004; Ojakorotu and Gilbert, 2010, p. 5; Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017, pp. 9-10). The result has been murders and destruction in/of communities, as well as inter- and intra-ethnic strife and the engagement in the manipulation, and usage of rival gangs by the

state (Odoemene, 2011, pp.123-124). It has become obvious that state oppression and violence only served to exacerbate conflict rather than bring about a solution. The Joint Military Task Force set up in 2003 for instance, did not restore order as was the intention, but rather carried out activities that alienated them from the indigenes (Okolie-Osemene and Aghalino, 2011; Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 67; Otite and Umukoro, 2011, p. 218). Sawyer (2010, p. 245) states that the forces sent to quell the crisis in Odi (Bayelsa state), only wrought massacre and were agents of human degradation, through the destruction of lives and generational psychological trauma that probably emanated. An amnesty process which is inclusive, devoid of governmental imposition, and bought in by the local community is key to sustaining peace after amnesty period elapses (Obuoforibo, 2011, p. 71; Nwankwo, 2016, p. 94).

Legal System

The fourth frame predominantly discussed in literature is within the context of the legal system of Nigeria. Within this perspective, scholars present the crisis as a collection of several conflicts and also explore the prospects for applying restorative justice. According to findings, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) had around 500 pending cases in the Nigerian courts in 1998, with about 350 or 70% of the being related to claims for compensation on oil spillage (Onuoha, 2007, p. 64). Between 1999 and 2003, the Shell corporation had around 1426 spillage of oil, and paid about \$3.2 million in compensation (ibid.). For solutions, scholars move away from the mere execution of effective programs of development, to the emphasis on the issue of inclusivity and restorative justice (Onuoha, 2007; Fenoff, 2010; Ikelegbe, 2010, p. 81). The dilemma as to what constitutes justice, plagues the conflict between the multinational oil corporations and the host communities in the Niger Delta.

Several laws regulating the oil industry exist, but a lot of them are not recognized or supported by the natives of the Niger Delta region. They either do not recognize the institutions that make some of these laws, or simply find some of them unjust (Onuoha, 2007, p. 67). The conflict in the region is premised on the laws regulating the exploration of oil resources (Okonta and Douglas, 2001; Giroux, 2008). For instance, the Mineral Oil

Ordinance was passed in 1914 by the British colonial administration, which had the agenda to reserve monopoly of oil license only to British oil companies (Soremekun and Obi, 1993, p. 216). This served as an initial signal of the absence of influence of local Nigerians in the petrobusiness, and is a reflection of the attitude by the post-colonial state/government vested with all resources (Omoweh, 2005, pp.111-112). This law put oil corporations under the protection of the government at all time, whereas the natives were merely onlookers to the processes of oil exploration, with the oil corporations being accountable only to the government and not to the region's people (Ebeku, 2002; p. 1; Onuoha, 2007, p. 68; Paki and Edoumiekumo, 2011; p. 2). Hence, the local communities have their interests, concerns and needs overlooked.

Another law was enacted in 1937, according more benefits to the oil corporations. The government often sided with the corporations, whenever misunderstandings erupted between the oil corporations and the host communities (Onuoha, 2007, p. 68). However, in 1969, the Oil Mineral Decree was passed by the Nigerian government, as part of the response to the civil war of 1967. This decree granted the government total control over all oil revenues, reserves and the oil industry. The government has made some efforts judicially, to involve interests of the oil producing states in production, but the locals clamour for more in form of compensation for the damages to the environment, the injustice and mass unemployment. The courts seem incapable of adjudicating these issues satisfactorily (Onuoha, 2007, p. 73). The laws have also been unable to curb gas flaring, as the problem remains unabated because of the focus on continuous and uninterrupted exploration of oil for revenue, in spite of its implications on the health and environment of the people, via laws signed that only appropriated resources and placed them within governmental control, without the involvement or consideration of the host communities (Raji and Abejide, 2013, p. 52; Olumide, 2011, p. 99; Ejumudo 2013; p. 51). For starters, the gas flaring laws can be amended to remove the proviso allowing fines for gas flaring by oil corporations (Nwankwo, 2016, p. 273), as well as strengthening other environmental protection standards (Oтите and Umukoro, 2011, p. 232; Ibaba, 2011, p. 264).

The Niger Delta region has undergone underdevelopment due to the constitutional and legal framework that has availed such foundation (Ejumudo, 2013, p. 53; Bello and Olukolajo, 2016, pp. 41-42). Through such unfair legal provisions such as the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Decree of 1978, avenues of suppression, oppression, marginalization, disempowerment, deprivation and dispossession of the Niger Delta people, by the government in alliance with the local bourgeoisie and multinational oil corporations, is prevalent. The 1978 Land Use Act has created a form of buffer for the oil corporations to behave more recklessly in their activities in the region (Omoweh, 2005, p. 115). The engagement in restorative justice might not result in restorative outcomes quite yet, but the mechanism for attending to the problems plaguing the region and the conflict's intractable nature will be provided. It will serve as an alternative means for addressing the issues that plague the relationship between the locals, the oil corporations and the government (Onuoha, 2007, p. 73; Ejumudo, 2011, p. 23).

The existing legal framework which guides the valuation of compensation in Nigeria, has come under criticism. According to Abii and Nwosu (2011), too many grey areas exist in such compensation frameworks in the operations of oil corporations, that they often failed to provide timely or even fair compensation, due to the faulty judicial system of Nigeria. Victims often tend to lose cases on grounds of technicality and find it difficult to make payment for legal charges. These victims are pushed to seek redress in courts because of the absence of adequate alternatives, for compensation on damages (Adebowale, 2004; Crag et al., 2013). This is often wrought with high legal costs, delays, wide-ranging compensation rates and so on. Otegbulu (2009) asserts that the legal and policy frameworks for conducting exhaustive assessment of the economic value emanating from damages to resources on the basis of economic function in Nigeria, is immensely lacking. Schopp and Pendergrass (2003) further explore the difficulties to measuring losses in goods and services of the ecosystem. Similarly, Owolabi and Okonkwo (2014, p. 41) argue that the mentioned compensations in available laws (such as the Nigerian Petroleum Act 1969 and the Oil Pipelines Act 1965) mostly lack standardization by these rules or law. Many people needing compensation have also been selectively excluded, due to lack of procedural transparency, and the time lag

before people receive due compensation emanates to environmental injustice. The current legal framework is contradictory and unclear in vital areas (Babawale, 2013), and the recommendation is for a revisiting of these provisions (Bello and Olukolajo, 2016, p. 46).

Reflecting over the different opinions of authors, Table 2 (page 59) provides an overarching snapshot of predominant core concepts discovered in literature. They are not exhaustive, but representative, as several authors agree to the security concern posed by the Niger Delta conflict, although the causes for the problem and conflict's solutions might differ or converge. Literature exploring the local activity frame view violent local activities and political unrest as causes, and solutions recommended include the utilization of local media and international community, community elite cohesion, and provision of necessary amenities. The literature addressing this from the corporate activity context posits environmental degradation, lack of corporate-community engagement and responsible corporate behavior, exclusion of local community in oil resources; decision-making, and human rights infringements, as key causes. Recommended solutions are sharing of decision-making process, inclusivity of locals, strengthened regulations and responsible corporate behavior. The third predominant frame which is government role presents the conflict causes as lack of interest and poor governance, corruption, failed fiscal federalism and revenue allocation formula, as well as coercive responses of the government. Recommended solutions are for recourse to diplomatic processes, good governance and transparency, inclusivity of the local community, amendment of fiscal federalism, economic diversification and sustainable development programs. The conflict is also discussed in literature under the legal system frame. This system is considered to be unfair to the rights of locals to oil resources and compensation. There is need for more inclusivity via revisions of current provisions, and restorative justice as an approach to handling the problems existing between the main conflicting actors.

The main issues have been identified within each four predominant conceptual frames and contexts, which are: local activity, corporate activity, government role and legal system. Table 2 illustrates the conflict dimensions by presenting the predominantly provided causes and solutions of the conflict within each frame. Similar chart (but with vast similarity

or differences in results), will be used for the media analysis. The media analysis will go ahead to see to identifying any positive faces of the conflict, as way of also determining the media's role in the conflict through the examination of its reportage and presentation.

Table 2. Conflict Dynamics: Causes and Solutions (Literature Framing Analysis)

Conceptual frames	Causes of the problem	Solutions to the Problem
Local Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Electoral violence, ethnic nationalism and inter-ethnic strife -Protests and violent response: pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, restiveness, oil bunkering, arms proliferation etc. -Elite corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Utilization of the international community to seek equitable and just leadership in Nigeria -Cohesion of the local elite -Utilization of local media -Inclusivity, provision of necessary amenities and good governance practices
Corporate Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of shared decision-making; partnership with the government -Unequal share of wealth -Human rights violations -Lack of/Inefficient corporate responsibility -Environmental degradation -Inadequate corporate-community integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Shared decision-making -Responsible corporate behavior -Strengthened maintenance and regulatory bodies/regulations -Concrete/efficient corporate social responsibility

Government Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Corruption; lack of interest; lack of socio-economic and political inclusion -Poor governance practices -Coercive military action and responses -Marginalized policies and ineffective fiscal federalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Electoral reforms; Good governance -Inclusivity and transparency -Non-coercive response -Social welfare programs; economic diversification -Fiscal federalism amendments
Legal System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ineffective legal system; Unjust legal provisions; Lack of inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Legal inclusivity/amendments -Restorative justice

Conclusion

This chapter has identified and discussed four predominant frames, as well as the causes and solutions for the problem. As previous chapters have alluded to the significance of studying the media, in conflict situations or cases, the next chapter of this thesis will go ahead to analyze empirical data on the media reportage of the conflict, according to the identified conceptual frameworks, to determine how the media presents the conflict's main actors and the conflict, as well as what this speaks to the role of the media in the conflict through such framing. The next chapter assesses news media framing, based on the predominant frames from academic literature, and new frames (if any), and a critical discourse analysis.

Chapter Five: Conflict's Cause-Solution Dynamics (News Media)

Introduction

This chapter presents the outcome of the qualitative content/framing analysis of the news media articles for the period 2016 to 2020 (March), according to assessment of two online and widely read newspapers – *The Punch* and *The Guardian*. Findings are presented from a total of 114 articles from both newspapers – 56 from *The Punch* and 58 from *The Guardian*. Articles which are feature interviews are excluded, as they do not necessarily contain views of the papers, but of those interviewed, contrary to the aims of this thesis. For the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) section of the chapter, only articles from 2016 are used due to its denotation as the year where Nigeria had multiple renewed attacks by Niger Delta militants, with its oil production falling by almost 40%. The main frames identified are local activity, corporate activity, government role, and legal system. This chapter will not present individual contents of all reports, although analysis of all articles is conducted and considered, but will often highlight some very representative ones for emphasis. These frames are not mutually exclusive. The first section of the chapter presents the local activity.

Table 3. Distribution of conceptual frames (News Media)

Main frames	<i>Local activity (a)</i>	<i>Corporate activity (b)</i>	<i>Government role (c)</i>	<i>Legal system (d)</i>	<i>None</i>	Total
	28	7	50	4	13	102
Mixed frames	<i>(a & b)</i>	<i>(a & d)</i>	<i>(a & d)</i>	<i>(a, c & d)</i>	<i>(a & c)</i>	
	1	1	2	1	6	12
News articles						114

Local Activity

The news articles that discuss this local activity concept highlight this by predominantly presenting the various militant activities and threat of the militants. These activities include pipeline vandalism, violent political protests, attack on oil facilities, and kidnapping as a problem in the Niger Delta. Sometimes, the locals are also presented from a standpoint of disassociating from the violent means employed by certain groups of the region, and the issue of inter-ethnic/communal and group clashes are highlighted as well, where some groups denounce any form of representation of them by other groups – an indication of a lack of unified local response to the conflict and issues in the Niger Delta and the plurality of voices.

Some articles addressed the issue of militancy in the Niger Delta. These activities comprise of oil pipeline attacks/vandalism, etcetera, due to the perceived neglect of the region. A news article with the headline “Alleged plan to resume oil production causing conflicts in Ogoniland,” addressed the inter-communal squabbles between the Ogoni and Oyigbo communities; criminal gang wars caused due to the possibility of forced resumption of oil exploration in Ogoniland, where some of these crimes occur due to the sponsorship of crime by the oil industry. It reports that if people protest, this is often met with a coercive response by the government authorities. A MOSOP Group leader, Fegalo Nsuke, is referenced as urging the government to desist from any forcible resumption of oil exploration, since protests will lead to loss of lives due to the violent response of the authorities. The report does not explore any direct solutions (*The Guardian*, August 21, 2019). Pipeline attacks in 2016 on Shell, Agip and Oando pipelines, after a prior unilateral ceasefire by the Niger Delta Avengers (which announced its existence publicly in the same year), are reported as the group’s response to continued military presence in the region (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016; *The Guardian*, November 15, 2016; *The Punch*, May 19, 2016). The unilateral ceasefire was announced by Niger Delta Avengers, in support of genuine dialogue between elders of the region, genuine stakeholders and the government, following the devastating attacks on pipelines since the beginning of 2016 (*The Guardian*, August 21, 2016). Frequently, articles on local activity often cite the inaction of the government, its lack

of genuine will and political commitment, as reason for protests, attacks and agitation. For instance, the Ijaw Youth Congress blames the lack of interest in the resolution of regional issues, as responsible for new attacks in October 2016 (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016). The government is also accused by the Niger Delta Avengers, of conducting meetings with select groups, without the involvement of agitating youth leaders and groups (*The Punch*, August 11, 2017), where frustration with government talks threaten a widening of attacks (*The Punch*, February 9, 2017).

Another cause of the problem is ethnic nationalism (*The Guardian*, July 17, 2016; *The Guardian*, August 21, 2016; *The Punch*, July 6, 2016; *The Punch*, August 11, 2017). One news report titled “An unwinnable war” alludes to ethnic nationalism, within the local activity frame. It also mentions the environmental degradation, strange diseases and livelihood impoverishment suffered by the Niger Delta region, stating also that the activities of militants have done a lot of damage to the region’s ecosystem, and loss of oil revenue to the federal government in a collation of both ‘sensible and senseless demands.’ The Niger Delta leaders are portrayed as pleading for recourse to peace and dialogue with the government (*The Punch*, September 11, 2016). However, predominant blame is put on the militants for the existing lack of peace, with the economic effects on oil exploration as a motivational precedence for admonition/pleas, rather than concern for the challenges faced by the region. The futility in seeking nationalist goals are also expressed. No direct solution is discussed by the article, but militants are advised to make recourse to peace, and the government is urged to be more proactive in initiating negotiations. The destruction caused to the social structures and behavior of the people is mentioned by another article (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016). One more solution is engaging in efforts at amplifying information and marginalized voices in host communities through media, and closing the loop in feedback between the government and locals (*The Guardian*, October 31, 2018). The militants are often implored to adopt peace, in order to hasten the development, they desire (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016).

The corruption and greed of local elites, criminals, ex-agitators etc., is another issue. The corruption of local elites leads youths to take matters into their own hands, and lead a

life of criminality for easy money (*The Guardian*, January 30, 2020). They seek relevance with the government rather than truly representing the people (*The Guardian*, October 8, 2016). Members of the local communities, chieftains, local and state government, are complicit in the region's environmental degradation, based on their involvement in illegal oil bunkering, acts of sabotage and illegal refining conducted in poor quality (*The Punch*, March 6, 2017). An article titled "Avengers now ready for talks," describes the issue mostly from the local activity frame. These local elites and the government are blamed for the activity of the local militants who make recourse to attacking oil installations, vessels and pipelines, etcetera, due to the former's corruption and greed, and the refusal of the government to reapply the proceeds from oil exploration for regional development and to initiate dialogue. The local militants act out due to the prioritization of the oil economy by the government over dialogue, and the issues faced by the Niger Delta people. The militants make threats of crippling oil production if dialogue is not made a priority (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016). The Niger Delta Avengers have claimed to seek a fairer share of the oil wealth for the residents, and for their political autonomy and self-determination (*The Guardian*, August 21, 2016; *The Punch*, July 6, 2016).

The Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari is quoted as blaming the Niger Delta people who have looted the treasury as sponsors of militancy. The launching of an exercise with codename 'Operation Crocodile Smile', is hence perceived as a preparation by the government for full offensive in the region (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016). However, the militants are accused of incessant attacks for no 'tenable reasons' and leading the government to lose trust. The depreciating potential of the federal government to sustain the hemorrhaging economy is stated as a key concern. The militants are accused of having criminal motivations behind the attack, with grievances as a ruse (*ibid.*). Certain predominant solutions are presented such as the initiation of negotiation and dialogue with the militants (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016), where the Federal Government is urged to ensure that member-states of multinational oil corporations are committed to negotiations, so that an environment fostering genuine/transparent dialogue is achieved, to ensure that the demands of the region are met, for lasting peace and conflict de-escalation (*The Guardian*,

June 13, 2016; *The Guardian*, June 14, 2016). The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), go as far as announcing its 7-member negotiation team (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016). Additionally, tackling the region's unemployment in sectors such as ICT, Agriculture and Construction is considered vital. Unemployment is presented as a critical link to conflict de-escalation in the Niger Delta. The provision of employment is alluded to as a way of tackling the issues of locals in the region (*The Guardian*, June 21, 2018). Effective community-driven policing is considered a feasible way to approach security issues in the region, according to Edo State governor, Godwin Obaseki (*The Guardian*, December 29, 2019), as well as bipartisan approaches that set political orientations aside (*The Guardian*, July 26, 2016).

The causes-solutions identified within the news and academic literature are relatively in sync. However, within the news media, the local activity frame is constructed in a way that places recourse to and burden of peace largely on the militants. The solicitation for peace and dialogue only seem to prevail, as a response to militancy, rather than addressing the region's woes. Interestingly, the activities of militants are considered to be denying the region access to basic amenities, drawing attention away from the key reasons for agitation. Militancy should be condemned, but the frequent spotlight on its effects on the environment, tends to ignore the fact that oil corporations and government agencies play a significant role as well. One cannot ascertain the true intentions of the resurgent militants, but regardless of their silence or inaction, the problems which plague the region, persists. These attacks appear to be effective in drawing the government's attention. Reports appear predominantly concerned about the economic losses of the country, over the region's problems. Even when the problems are mentioned, concerns for economic loss takes precedence.

Corporate Activity

The corporate activity frame is surprisingly less explored in the news articles, compared to the government role and local activity frames. Academic literature places dire responsibility on oil corporations and their activities, but this role is not adequately expressed in news media. When it is mentioned, there is often a collation of the oil corporations and the government, and often times, the corporations are not explicitly addressed. For instance,

the problems caused by the activities of oil operators in the host community are not made prominent, rather the government is addressed. The industry operators are implored to commit to economic, social and environmental sustainability (*The Guardian*, October 21, 2018). However, the human rights violation by security agents of oil corporations/extractive companies in the Niger Delta region is stated, and as a solution, oil corporations are urged to conduct training and communication of company policies to ensure the minimization of risk (*The Guardian*, February 26, 2020). Overall, an observation is that whenever the corporate activity frame is discussed, it mainly acknowledges the difficulties faced by oil corporations. This includes the economic consequence of militant attacks on operations (*The Punch*, July 6, 2017). One article goes as far as suggesting that tax payment by corporations to the government is adequate, and that this ought to free them from unnecessary demands and responsibilities (*The Punch*, March 6, 2017).

The failure to observe corporate social responsibility obligations, is a problem. There is sometimes the lack of proper drafting of MoUs and GMoUs that define company-community relations (*The Punch*, August 27, 2018; *The Guardian*, October 6, 2019). In a report titled 'How resilience, resistance rekindled hope of OML 25 host communities,' host communities within the Oil Mining License 25, initiate a non-violent resistant against the Shell corporation because of the abysmal living conditions, where the federal government and the oil company have generated significant revenues from oilfields, while the communities have been subjected to abject poverty, environmental pollution and misery. Shell's plan to divest its stakes in OML 25, to a non-indigenous company sparked anger from the community, and the shutdown of the flow station of the company in 2017 (*The Guardian*, October 6, 2019). The public secretary of the Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) is quoted as stating that the Shell corporation treats the communities 'as thrash,' and not observing its corporate social responsibility as agreed under Memorandum of Understanding. The government intervened in 2004, but failure to honor corporate social responsibilities continued, with shutdowns in 2014 and 2017, following subsequent occupation by the locals. The decision to divest to non-indigenous company could only worsen the plight of the indigenes. An oil company owned by a native, *Belamaoil*, is

applauded for its care for the concerns of the local community. Divesting to indigenous companies, is considered a plausible recourse.

The degradation of the environment by activities of oil corporations has been the cause of much of the existing conflicts between the local community and these corporations. For instance, one article mentions the oil spills from 1976 to 1991 (*The Punch*, August 9, 2016). Another article addresses the fact that the situation of company headquarters of operating oil corporations outside the region, implies that oil companies are devoid of any deeper connection between them and their sites of operation, as it is easier to treat the environment with contempt (*The Punch*, March 6, 2017). This is due to the fact that they are not directly suffering the consequences, which might compel them to act more responsibly. Recommendations often include the relocation of corporations to the region (ibid.), respect for MoUs and GMoUs and the government's standardization of the oil and gas industry (*The Punch*, August 27, 2018).

Discussions in academic literature and the news media are quite similar, on some of the important points. One article refers to training conducted by the oil corporation – Total – via a program underscoring the commitment of the company to aligning its actions with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, and, in line with academic literature, the corporate behavior of oil corporations determines the corporate-community relationship in such host communities. Environmental degradation and the violation of human rights by the oil corporations are presented, albeit briefly. The partnership between the government and the oil corporations highlighted by academic literature, that hampers the effective promulgation and implementation of guidelines by the government, are not explicitly explored by media articles, but such can be alluded to (e.g. the case of the OML 25 host communities, where several shutdowns by the government following the non-violent occupation of the flow station, does not deter consequent default by the Shell corporation). It is the economic consequence of continuously halted operations that gets Shell to agree to the payment of N1.36 billion to the OML 25. Similarly, solutions border around the standardization of the oil and gas industry, responsible corporate behavior, and implementation of corporate social responsibility.

Government role

Several news articles from the analysis explore the problem via the government role frame. The general observation is that the conflict is mostly predominantly framed as a *local community versus government* squabble. This means that articles highlighting negative actions, often present it as the government being an agent of the region's devastation, which ought to also involve oil corporations. News articles often cite neglect, lack of commitment, genuine interest and political will, and coercive response of the government as causes, and generally agree that governmental coercive response is not a solution. One article titled "Solution to Niger Delta crisis crucial to nation's economy," states neglect, unfulfilled promises, oppression and persecution of the people, as problems propagated by government actions/inactions, and proffers the establishment of a special system of education, compensation and addressing of environmental issues of the region (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016), but does not state any direct solutions. Largely, the government is implored to act from the standpoint of concern for economic devastation for the country as a motivation to initiate dialogue, and not even concern for the prevalent problems of the people and the region (*The Guardian*, September 4, 2016; *The Guardian*, October 2, 2016).

The positive efforts of the government are expressed more often in the articles and at greater lengths/details than the negative role they play. Thus, as previously mentioned in the local activity frame, the conditions for peace are often placed solely in the hands of the locals, as though being entirely up to them. The efforts been made through the Amnesty program in managing restiveness is discussed (*The Punch*, September 10, 2017; *The Guardian*, January 7, 2020). For example, one article with the headline "Amnesty Office trains 13,000 in agriculture, as automobile company employs 200," briefly denotes neglect by the government, as cause of agitations; however, it reports the positive efforts initiatives in place for youths of the Oguta/Egbema area, in areas of Agriculture for job, food and wealth security (*The Guardian*, August 25, 2016). Similarly, another one highlights the relative success of the government in the 'attainment of relative peace' in 2018 (*The Guardian*, July 15, 2018; *The Punch*, May 6, 2019; *The Punch*, May 27, 2019; *The Punch*, January 9, 2020).

One article portrays the locals as frustrating efforts, with the government positively portrayed for its investments in trillion naira in the region (*The Guardian*, May 22, 2018).

A predominant problem is the government's failure to fulfil promises, mandates and exert good governance. An article points out the ineffectiveness of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and various institutions of the government. As a solution, the government is urged to strengthen these institutions and increase their funding, according to a civil society organization called Africa Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANE EJ) (*The Guardian*, May 16, 2018). The NDDC is berated for its corruption, incompetence and dysfunctional management (*The Punch*, September 4, 2016; *The Guardian*, April 25, 2017; *The Punch*, June 4, 2017; *The Guardian*, May 16, 2018; *The Guardian*, August 11, 2019; *The Guardian*, January 30, 2020). These corrupt practices range from contract racketeering nepotism, siphoning of funds etc., with political elites facilitating these practices, stripping the region of resources which are intended for its development. Regional governments are said to do nothing tangible with the revenue allocations to develop their region; but choose to settle political cronies and traditional rulers. Roads and other infrastructure are poorly constructed, and the government makes appointments not on the criteria of meritocracy, but based on settlement. As a long-term solution, restructuring to fiscal federalism, that enables the locals involved in developing their land with their resources; making regional development plans easier (*The Guardian*, August 7, 2016; *The Guardian*, November 6, 2016; *The Punch*, February 3, 2017; *The Guardian*, April 25, 2017; *The Guardian*, July 12, 2018; *The Guardian*, August 11, 2019). Corruption also rears its ugly head in the Nigerian military. One article highlights the sales of arms and ammunition by Nigerian soldiers to militants in the Niger Delta (*The Punch*, February 5, 2020).

The regional governors alongside traditional elites have become contractors to the oil corporations, while the local people wallow in poverty. Hence, another issue is the government's inability to use proceeds from resources for the region's development (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016; *The Punch*, September 4, 2016; *The Guardian*, August 11, 2019; *The Guardian*, November 17, 2019). Poor governance and corrupt behavior of those in power implies that the host communities continue to be eluded of basic social amenities. The

federal government is mostly encouraged to commit to dialogue and negotiations, with the relevant stakeholders and also through more representative channels, and the engagement in good and quality governance (*The Punch*, August 19, 2017). An article “Conflict looms over Ogoni cleanup delay,” portrays the failure of the government to commence clean-up of Ogoniland, 25 months after announcing the promise. The government is urged to fulfil promises and respond timely before recourse to resumption of oil exploration (*The Guardian*, November 11, 2018). This is because Shell has been considered *persona non grata* by the community. To tackle the corruption of the regional governments and of the local elites, the federal government is encouraged to avoid ad hoc contraptions, but to deal directly with representatives recognized by the local people (*The Guardian*, October 8, 2016). The government must equally engage in economic empowerment, provide basic amenities, review security surveillance, and foster participation of the indigenes in the oil industry and the ownership of oil blocs (*The Guardian*, November 6, 2016).

Furthermore, some articles that discuss the role of the government through its coercive response, and militarization of the region. One article stands out with the headline “Anxiety in Niger Delta as military showcase might.” Residents in the region are quoted as sighting long-range military equipment and personnel carriers. Warplanes, drones and tanks and weapons that have no place in tactical amphibious warfare, are drafted as a means of intimidation of the people, with capacity to destabilize the region’s relative negative peace (*The Guardian*, September 4, 2016; *The Guardian*, October 8, 2016). In the local activity frame, it has been discussed that such activities have tendencies of leading local militants to violent behavior and causing agitation in the communities. The government is accused of lack of interest and political will (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016), as well as non-commitment to genuine dialogue, and recommendations are made for the government to withdraw troops and to initiate dialogue with the militants (*The Guardian*, September 4, 2016; *The Guardian*, December 27, 2016). There is a stated lack of inclusivity and absence of integration of the local stakeholders in the formulation and execution of the Presidential Amnesty Program (*The Guardian*, November 12, 2016). The lack of genuine interest of the leadership of the country to meet the needs of the region, and its tendency to engage in

dialogue with groups and individuals, without proper consultation (*The Guardian*, August 7, 2016), and who do not properly represent the region or existing groups are highlighted (*The Guardian*, August 7, 2016; *The Guardian*, December 27, 2016; *The Punch*, August 11, 2017). An instance that portrays the lack of interest, from the articles, is the president's comment on Niger Delta militants aiming to colonize Nigeria (*The Guardian*, October 6, 2019). A deliberate neglect of Urhobo groups in the scheme of conflict resolution, spearheaded militant activities (*The Guardian*, October 27, 2016).

The government's lack of a holistic implementation of the 2008 report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, and its perceived intimidation of former warlords, in addition to gross underdevelopment, is a persistent issue. An article recommends the increment of oil revenue allocation to 25%, establishment of a community trust fund from the royalties, rents, compensations and entitlements from oil and gas corporations, the improvement of infrastructure, focus on employment and education, and moving beyond mere Amnesty stipend payments to ex-agitators (*The Guardian*, January 31, 2016). Others include the need for transparency and accountability, and a recourse to a more participatory approach to the region's development, which provides a sense of ownership to the people over their issues. A monitoring mechanism to enhance efficiency of projects is another recommendation (*The Guardian*, February 27, 2020). Proper consultation before dialogues are initiated is essential to avoid marginalization, misrepresentation and exclusion of any group (*The Guardian*, August 7, 2016). The pursuance of economic diversification through the development of potentials apart from oil, in the Niger Delta is another solution (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2017).

Analytical observation denotes that this frame is practically the most in sync between the academic literature and news media. The government is represented as should be, however, news media places a lot of burden on the matter of peace and dialogue on the local community. More than half of the articles under this frame explore the positive face of government actions, and while others allude to its negative roles, others simply address the government without mention of its negative roles. It is interesting that the media places lots of issues which would normally be discussed under the oil corporation frame as well, under

the government role frame. Activities of gas flaring or pollution, for instance, immediately point to the government, and the reader is left to draw the conclusions and involve oil corporations. Thus, it is not as pronounced in the media, as it is in academic literature about the failure of the government to regulate the oil corporations within this frame. The representation is predominantly local activity vs government role. Politicization of the situation, through exclusion of some groups, and the promise of cleanup as incentive by the government, is highlighted.

Legal System

Fewer articles discuss the conflict from the context of the legal system. One article titled “PIB won’t address Niger Delta crisis,” explores the failure of the Petroleum Industry Bill to address issues of environmental pollution, clean up, compensation, revenue allocation and its usage in the process of development. It explains that the Bill is intended to be resolve conflict, and address the protracted environmental devastation of the region. The Bill is considered as flawed as it overlooks the local communities as fundamental planning units (*The Guardian*, March 5, 2018). This article does not proffer direct solutions, but alludes to need for certain amendments. The revenue from petroleum tend to override the importance and need for corporate social responsibility, since the secretary of the board is nominated by the oil corporations, meaning that the funds are put out there to maintain the control and interest of the corporations in the process.

The Petroleum Industry Governance Bill (PIBG), understood as same with the PIB, is condemned by stakeholders due to its plans to unbundle the NNPC into two limited liability companies, where the oil asset of Nigeria can be sold via stock exchange. This criticism comes as a result of the possibility of potential ownership by aristocrats with other interests, through unfair privatization taking over the country’s economic cornerstone. This could propagate further neglect and alienation of the people in the region, since the Petroleum Act already declares the region’s oil resource a national asset; the PIBG enhances the possibility of private corrupt or foreign entities obtaining control over it (*The Guardian*, September 2, 2018). This bill has been contested for over a decade in the Nigerian parliament, and has yet to be passed. This bill proposes a 10% equity share for oil producing

communities, to which another news articles mentions could emanate in the exacerbation of the crisis in the Niger Delta region. A holistic review is proposed (*The Guardian*, November 12, 2016; *The Punch*, December 14, 2017).

Regulatory and governance challenges plague the oil industry in Nigeria, due to endemic corruption. Efforts at reform have experienced severe setbacks since the establishment of the Oil and Gas Reform Implementation Committee by former President, Obasanjo, in April 2000 (*The Punch*, December 14, 2017). The PIB bill bounces between the executive and legislative arm of government, and could bring about changes to the fiscal governing terms and organizational structure of the oil industry in Nigeria (*The Punch*, January 9, 2020). The Niger Delta might have relative negative peace currently, but it is in a potential volatile state. The poor regulation and regulations of the oil industry, entails the overlapping responsibilities of agencies, that disallow proper atmosphere for the attainment of strong environmental guidelines' implementation. An article recommends the consultation, increased transparency and participation among stakeholders, to ensure sustainable and effective governance of the oil/gas industry (*The Punch*, January 18, 2019).

The news does not thematically report on laws and legislations that might help sensitize the public to few crucial and available laws on the environment or other laws regulating the oil/gas industry. The few reports in this frame, have been mostly made due to the economic challenges facing the oil and gas industry in Nigeria, with the concern for the Niger Delta host communities and stakeholders, taking little to no precedence. While it is arguable whether the media should be charged with this responsibility of doing more than episodic reports on essential laws, the media does not also portray the legal shortcomings and challenges for the natives in obtaining environmental justice and compensation, for the time period under study. Cases in court regarding cases by the host communities/individuals and the multinational oil corporations are not even highlighted. It has been quite the surprise to surf through foreign media and agencies to find legal cases as current as the past year and in 2020, on human rights abuse and environmental degradation claims against Shell, for instance. The next section of this chapter presents the critical discourse analysis.

Table 4. Conflict Dynamics: Causes and Solutions (News Media)

Conceptual frames	Causes of the problem	Solutions to the problem
Local Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ethnic nationalism and inter-ethnic tensions -Protests and violent response: pipeline vandalism, restiveness, oil bunkering, arms proliferation etc. -Elite corruption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Just policies and genuine negotiations -Cohesion of the local elite -Equal inclusivity, provision of necessary amenities and good governance practices
Corporate Activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Underdevelopment -Lack of indigenous inclusivity (i.e. divesting shares to foreign oil corporations). -Human rights violations -Lack of corporate social responsibility -Environmental degradation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Responsible corporate behavior/ efficient corporate social responsibility -Inclusivity via divesting of shares to indigenous oil companies -Development projects
Government Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of interest; lack of socio-economic inclusion and exploitation -Corruption; Poor governance practices/agencies/regulations -Coercive military action and responses -Marginalized policies and ineffective fiscal federalism -Lack of inclusivity/consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Good governance; Fair policies; Restructuring -Inclusivity and transparency -Non-coercive response -Socio-economic welfare programs; Dialogue -Economic diversification -Proper fiscal federalism
Legal System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Red-tape; Lack of inclusivity; Inefficient legal system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Legal inclusivity/amendments

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of News Articles

The linguistic tools such as framing, exclusion/inclusion, deletion/omission, agency-patient attribution/labelling, foregrounding/backgrounding, presupposition, are employed for a brief yet encompassing analysis, to complement the framing analysis and further investigate the representation of the key actors, and the conflict. These tools are pertinent, since they can serve foundational functions for further context analysis of the discourse. Five (5) frames are identified in no particular order: *economic loss, injustice and defiance, criminality/injustice, government-local/government-militant clash, and dialogue/negotiation*. It is important to note that ‘good or bad’ representation of an actor is not necessarily predicated on whether good/bad activities are reported or not, as the newspapers still have to report facts. The underlying implications and discourses advanced, or salience projection attempted via such denotation, is what matters. This section of the chapter seeks to provide the results of the CDA, through highlighting some representative samples of each of these frames from the analyzed articles.

Economic Loss: As newspaper reports typically apply top-down formulas or structures for presenting information, often based on a descending order of importance (Van Dijk, 1998), it is imperative to assume that whatever reports put first, will most likely be held to high importance, while the last will be interpreted as least. Such initial sequencing often serves the purpose of frame creation for the story. Even if the media merely reports statements of others, through its reports it serves a function of relaying the ideologies and discourses of elites.

Thus, the Niger Delta crisis is *framed* from a standpoint of *economic loss* of the Nigeria state (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016), This report’s second paragraph is devoted to providing the numerical detail of such loss, before any mention of the plight of the local people. The government is urged to initiate peace due to the crippling economic situations first and foremost, before concerns for the region’s problems:

“Nigeria’s *daily loss to activities of militants* in the Niger Delta may soon *ground the nation’s economy*”

“Aminu, who *put the loss above N3 trillion in less than six months*, said the country might be *heading for doom...*” (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016).

“the government will not have fund to put on projects, pay salary and finance the budget. It is so obvious that the large chunk of revenue that the government rely on comes from oil. If something is not done, we will continue to be in recession... *government must dialogue with Niger Delta and apologize to the deprived people in the region, analyze past grousers*” (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016).

‘...they have bombed critical oil and gas installations in the Niger Delta, and thrown the national economy into a crippling shock’ (*The Punch*, May 19, 2016).

‘...difficult to see how an armed conflict can secure our oil and gas assets in the region’ (*The Punch*, August 30, 2016).

Some perceived activities/labels/identities within this frame include:

- a) Local people: ‘...daily loss to *activities of militants* in the Niger Delta’; ‘Nigerians must not keep quiet and allow a section of the country hold the nation to ransom’ (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016);
 ‘...destruction of oil facilities in the Niger Delta by *the militants* has crippled crude oil production and power supply’ (*The Punch*, October 22, 2016).
- b) Government: ‘*the Presidency* must dialogue and plan a long-term initiative that would assuage the worries of the region’ (*The Guardian*, September 30, 2016).

The country’s economic loss and difficulties are *foregrounded*, whilst the problems of the local community as an equally important issue, are *backgrounded*. The article could have further provided commentary and substantial background details about the government’s role in the state of the Niger Delta region, but the presentation by the news media here places salience on economic issues, which audiences might seem more drawn to, as opposed to

reflecting over the ongoing problems in the Niger Delta. The *presupposition* here is that economic issues of the Nigerian state, are of greater significance than the Niger Delta crisis.

Regarding *agency*, the government are the ones to initiate action, and hence have power in the text. The Niger Delta locals are passivized and at the same time omitted, since they are not given a voice, nor are they initiating action. The agency of the government is also deleted, with none of the problems in the region attributed to the government.

Criminality/Amnesty: This frame describes articles which foreground the criminal activities of the militants/locals and the amnesty activities of the government. In one article titled: ‘Amnesty Office trains 13,000 in agriculture, as automobile company employs 200,’ empowerment is essential and foregrounded, but what about the other broad spectrum of issues plaguing the Niger Delta? Those issues are once again *backgrounded*, and the government is given greater *agency*, as it is initiating activities (*The Guardian*, August 25, 2016).

a: ‘According to Boroh... the people complained of *neglect*...’ (*ibid.*).

Consider line *a* above. Who is responsible for this neglect? Here the reporters either presume that the audience could easily infer this, or it can be considered a way of deleting the role of the government in the neglect. Nonetheless, the Nigerian government is represented as a good actor, executing its responsibility of ensuring peace; whilst the local people are repentant/prospective criminals accepting amnesty to have their ‘crimes’ pardoned.

b. ‘the Avengers could end the survival of the Niger Delta environment by their attacks’ (*The Punch*, May 19, 2016).

c. ‘distasteful that our strategic oil facilities are been destroyed with attendant negative impact to our environment, as funding for replacement might be impossible’ (*The Guardian*, August 25, 2016).

d. ‘[I] don’t even know what the objectives of the insurgency is all about.’ Statement from a lead fellow from the 6th Forum (*The Guardian*, August 25, 2016).

e. ‘...tacit support of the NDA’s conduct under the pretext of a so-called Niger Delta struggle’ (*The Punch*, June 7, 2016).

The statement *b* and *c* posit the militants as almost having sole responsibility of negatively impacting the environment, while the oil corporations are excluded/omitted. Again, the issue behind the attacks are ignored, whereas concern for economic loss takes prominence. Excerpts *d* and *e* blatantly undermines the agitation of the militants, inferring meaninglessness to it.

The government is represented as pursuing amnesty for the ex-militants. Some excerpts:

f. ‘...a presidential amnesty programme accompanied with support and training of ex-militants was inaugurated by the late President Umaru Yar’Adua’ (*The Guardian*, July 17, 2016).

Government-Militant/Local Clash: This frame describes reports which foregrounds the potentials for confrontation or actual confrontation between the government and the militants or locals. In one report, the militants are represented as responsible for Nigeria’s economic devastation and contributing to the environmental damage of the region, hence the prospective and resultant coercive reaction by the government. The government is presented as the peace-maker, seeking dialogue, and resorting to the deployment of heavy arms/troops to the Niger Delta, to secure a win over the region’s militants:

‘The *Federal Government of Nigeria* is amassing troops, arms and ammunitions in the oil-rich Niger Delta region *in readiness for war with the militants* who have been destroying oil infrastructure’ (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016).

‘The massive deployment of troops and heavy arms to the Niger Delta, seems to underscores the *Federal Government’s* resolve to secure a military victory against the militants in the region, despite calls for dialogue’ (*The Guardian*, September 4, 2016).

“‘Exercise Crocodile Smile,’ is intended to completely liquidate militants operating in the region” (*The Guardian*, September 4, 2016).

‘*Delta Naval Command* yesterday said it made a major breakthrough over pipeline bombings in Delta State as a kingpin behind many of the incidents behind many of the incidents was arrested’ (*The Guardian*, June 8, 2016).

‘...pass the message to the militants that one Nigeria is not negotiable. I pray they better accept it’ (*The Punch*, July 6, 2016).

‘...the Federal Government will deploy 10,000 troops in the Niger Delta in 2017’ (*The Punch*, September 9, 2016).

The power of the government is portrayed, and granted salience in the above representations. The issue of deprivation of the region’s locals is omitted.

Some perceived activities/labels/identities of the militants include:

n: ‘...activities of these militant groups which are now sprouting like mushrooms and making both sensible and senseless demands’ (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016).

‘[T]he military needs to actually remain on our waterways to ensure that we adequately man the waterways itself while we engage the communities...’ (*The Guardian*, June 8, 2016; *The Punch*, June 8, 2016).

The connotation in excerpt *n* above infers that the militants are not to be taken too seriously by the government, which is not good for any recourse towards crisis resolution/management. Generally, the excerpts all allude to the persisting salience granted to the activities of the militants, and the *omission* made by the failure of highlighting the extreme deprivation actually occurring in the Niger Delta, which has commonly been the harbinger of the region’s restiveness. The government is the more responsible player, and the concern for economic stability of the state can be inferred.

‘Niger Delta Republic is hereby shot and killed... Have they asked Niger Deltans if they want to be citizens of their so-called Niger Delta Republic?’
(*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016).

The militants who, whether or not we ascertain their true intentions, are identified apart from the rest of the ‘*Niger Deltans*.’ Whilst this may or may not be something positive, it *backgrounds* the fact that the issues felt in the region, as a result of the oil crisis, are also felt by all. It also *backgrounds* self-determination concerns of the militants, by ridiculing it, and presupposes that it does not appeal to the Niger Deltans.

The militants are also referred to as ‘*kidnappers*’, ‘*cultists*’ and ‘*robbers*’ (*The Guardian*, September 4, 2016). There are intentions by the government to engage in dialogue, to which such labelling constitutes an obvious contradiction. Such negative construction is aimed at discrediting the struggle of these groups. It also *backgrounds* the motivations behind such recourse to criminal actions by some groups.

Some representations of the government include:

‘...Federal Government is offering them the peace reed’ (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016).

‘The government says it wants to negotiate with the militants’ (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016).

The (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016) report attempts to portray that it is non-biased, and even calls for the recourse away from violent response by the government, yet the activities of militants (although understandably violent), are denoted as troublemakers. Simply put, the government is the peaceful party, and the militants are not.

In the same article, the *agency* of the militants is highlighted more, often omitting/excluding the government and according it no responsibility. A prominent example of the latter is:

‘Their environment has been savagely spoilt. Their fishing waters and farming lands have vanished leaving them impoverished’ (*The Guardian*, September 13, 2016).

This once again, begs for the question of ‘by whom?’ The oil corporations are entirely excluded and the discourse is allowed to continue with a *government-local* focus.

Injustice and Defiance: This frame describes reports which advance the die-hardness of the militants and the locals, as well as those highlighting the injustice to the region. In one report, the Niger Delta Avengers agree to enter into dialogue with the government on the issues affecting the Niger Delta region (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016). The militants are given a voice and agency, but as can be seen via the opening remark below, the underlined part insinuates that these militants did not have it in them to be ever reasonable. It comes off as a surprise that they want dialogue:

‘In what amounts to a change of heart, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)...agreed to enter into dialogue with the Federal Government on issues affecting the Niger Delta region’ (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

There are many examples which point to the *agency* of the militants, these excerpts below are representative:

‘...warned the Federal Government not to turn the dialogue to a “political jamboree...”’ (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

‘...we may review our earlier stance of not taking lives...’ (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

There is the representation/frame of *injustice and defiance*:

“The genuine spirit behind our struggle for the Niger Delta cannot be derailed on the basis of connivance by politicians, traditional rulers, settled ex-agitators and criminals moving around to fill their pockets” (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

‘...we are ready for war and have nothing to lose!!!’ (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

“If they refuse to heed our advice, this will result in sinking of two of their mother vessels as an example to others” (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

The Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), through its spokesman names a dialogue member-team; however, one of those named is reported as making a tweet which collates MEND with recent militancy (see line *m* below), when it was not responsible for any recently announced attack, and has not taken such route in years (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016). Whether or not the label is befitting, it dilutes the credibility of the group of being worthy enough to dialogue with.

m: ‘Do not support MEND or support any militancy therefore, cannot represent MEND’ (*The Guardian*, June 14, 2016).

Dialogue/Negotiation: This promotes salience of the acceptance of the chance of dialogue by conflicting actors. One article titled: ‘How to end militant attacks in Niger Delta, by Mitee,’ grants salience to the *Dialogue/Negotiation* frame (*The Guardian*, November 25, 2016). However, it appears quite persistent across all frames that the problems experienced by the local people are not made prominent (or reported on), but the reports under this frame attempts to foster peaceful recourses. Some excerpts which are representative of this frame include:

g: ‘*The Niger Delta Avengers* have pledged to lay down their weapons and resume talks with the Nigerian government after months of attacks on the country’s oil and gas infrastructure that have crippled the economy’ (*The Guardian*, August 21, 2016).

‘We are just a few people who speak for ourselves but you may come to see that our word may just be our bond’ (*The Guardian*, December 27, 2016).

‘...the militants were still amenable to dialogue’ (*The Punch*, August 30, 2016).

The above excerpts are positive representations, but excerpt g is in such mannerism that has come to characterize the current discourse, this is tainted by the emphasis on the crippled economy.

‘...his [Buhari’s] administration was making steady progress towards resolving the problem in the Niger Delta region’ (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016).

‘President Muhammadu Buhari on Wednesday pleaded with militants to “give Nigeria a chance”’ (*The Punch*, July 6, 2016).

‘...the Federal Government was doing all within its ability to restore peace to the Niger Delta’ (*The Punch*, June 5, 2016).

Often times, this frame is found briefly mentioned within other articles advancing other frames, or very few articles portray it standalone. As such, there is no further exploration of the agency, exclusion/inclusion, etcetera, within this frame in this analysis.

Oil corporations within the discourse: This is not a thematic frame, but one might wonder: where are the oil corporations in all of these? As highlighted in the news media’s conceptual framing analysis section, the oil corporations are fairly/barely mentioned in relations to being granted agency of responsibility for the role it plays within the Niger Delta oil crisis; if at all, they are predominantly portrayed as victims of attacks by the militants. This could lead one who is not conversant with the crisis, but has the interest to learn, to infer that the oil corporations have not played vital roles in conflict escalation. See few examples of the representation of oil corporations below:

1: ‘Oil majors including Shell, Exxon, Chevron, Eni and the state-run oil group NNPC have all been targeted this year’ (*The Guardian*, August 21, 2016).

2: ‘Renewed multiple attacks on the Nigerian Gas Company pipeline connected to the Escravos facility of Chevron, in Delta State...’ (*The Guardian*, January 31, 2016).

3: ‘The latest attack on the Bonny 48-inch crude oil export line penultimate Saturday, effectively reignited the existential danger to the Nigerian economy... first of such attacks since *NDA* unilaterally declared a ceasefire over a month ago’ (*The Guardian*, October 2, 2016).

4. ‘...renewed attacks and destruction of oil facilities by militants in the Niger Delta’ (*The Punch*, June 8, 2016).

5. ‘Attacks in the last few weeks have hit platforms belonging to Chevron and Shell’ (*The Punch*, May 17, 2016).

Overall, the oil corporations are passivized, and are framed as victims of militancy. The militants (Niger Delta Avengers) are represented as criminals, attacking the economy of the Nigerian state in excerpt 3. Excerpt 4 is meant to infer an attack on the oil corporations’ pipelines, even though they are often deleted as patients. It totally omits the issues behind the attacks, indicative of the focus on titillating and entertaining reporting, rather than genuine education of the public.

There are rarely samples that portray the involvement of the oil corporations. The excerpt below is hardly representative when the entire analysis is considered:

‘...conflict in the Delta arose in the early 1990s over tensions between foreign oil corporations and a number of *minority ethnic groups* in the area who felt they were being exploited’ (*The Guardian*, July 17, 2016).

Conclusion

Overall, the idea advanced through the critical discourse analysis is not that the media does not mention the grievances of the local host communities, but the discovery that they are often backgrounded, with the oil corporations benefitting the most from exclusion and omission. The government is relatively represented as the more responsible actor (which does not imply that nothing bad was reported about this actor), while the local people are mostly represented in negative light. The foregrounding of economic loss as a motive to get the government to the negotiation/dialogue table, speaks to the issue of how the news media

extends salience. As indicated in the conceptual framing section, the media does not adequately explore the corporate activity frame and the legal system frame, at least in terms of parallels drawn between the academic literature and the media. In the local frame, it is also surprising that electoral issues are not discussed within the local activity frame by the media, even though 2019 as a Presidential election year, was included within the analysis. The government is often conflated with the oil corporations or solely often blamed for certain issues. Perhaps rightly so, as the point is not to absolve the government of its role in the conflict. Far between, a few articles attempt to present the sides of the conflict, but the conclusion of this thesis is that this is not adequately done. A glaring bias against the militants or the local communities is present. As much as the agitators are offered a voice, the slant towards the government, and more so the oil corporations, is more prominent. Thus, the Nigerian news media has not done enough to advance peace journalism, even in time periods where militancy was perceived to be largely dormant (i.e. 2019 and 2020). The reports were seldomly thematic but predominantly episodic (i.e. intended to simply report events, and did not proffer recourse for audiences' deeper understanding of the conflict through the provision of adequate historical angles). When they did, they were quite few and wrought with these discursive considerations. Nigeria is a country faced with lots of issues, and a few sometimes, the Niger Delta issue was addressed/affixed within other issues reported.

Conclusion

The thesis sought to investigate the media's representation of the Niger Delta conflict and its main players, and to ascertain the media's role in the conflict. The agenda setting approach and framing theories both promulgate the ability of the media to influence what audiences think about and how they perceive such issues and make interpretations; highlighting the relative importance of the media, as an object of research. Agenda setting hinges more on accessibility with the media's possession of the capability to enhance the media audience's attachment of importance to an issue, and the salience accorded, regarding what is considered as more important than others. Consequently, framing concerns how the issues are presented, and the idea that this can influence the perception of the audience about such issues and on how they interpret news reports. Why does the reconciliation of the gaps between academia and news media matter? Academic literature entails more extensive investigation and representative study (although still bias-prone), it offers a more encapsulating insight of the conflict parameters, through pointing out the shortcomings of its actors and conflict dynamics. Since the media presents a form through which an actor's understanding of an issue is shaped due to its essential role, the identified lack of vital representativeness poses a danger to the region's stability, conflict management and resolution, through the common rhetoric promoted, as less enlightened groups in society might have more access to news media, with literature mostly informing the more enlightened. Hence, the further prominence of studying the gap.

The media can either serve the purpose of contributing to peace processes or it can exacerbate violence/conflict. Indeed, the media has been generally overlooked in conflict analysis, due to its inability to constitute direct cause on its own, however, it has played vital roles in conflict such as in the Rwanda genocide, the Bosnian conflict, etcetera. The thesis set out to test certain expectations which were that: the Nigerian media has still not done enough to initiate or practice peace journalism, and did more of episodic reporting; the local residents and certain conflict dynamics had been misrepresented; the government and oil corporations had enjoyed more positive slant in reports, and the exposition of certain gaps between academia and news media reports.

Framing was utilized as a methodological context for a qualitative content analysis of academic literature, and 114 news media articles spanning 2016-2020, as well as critical discourse analysis of 39 news articles from 2016, through the use of selected tools like foregrounding/backgrounding, agency deletion /attribution, exclusion/inclusion etc. Framing analysis investigated the gaps between literature and the media, and the representation of the main actors. The critical discourse analysis permitted further insight into ascertaining the role of the media in the conflict, its representation of the conflict and the actors. It allowed for the discovery of what issues the media granted more salience to, and how the Niger Delta conflict was framed.

The results of the media analysis revealed a more positive slant towards the government and the oil corporations, indicating relative bias. The media also did more of episodic reporting as opposed to thematic reporting; concentrating on specific events, without frequent recourse to analysis and background information. To this, we inferred that the media focused more on entertaining/titillating of the audience, over genuine education. The media's coverage of the conflict in 2016 centered more on when there had been a perpetuation of violence, and consequently, we can deduce that the conflict relatively left the agenda of the media, as it would mostly be affixed as an honorary mention within reports of more broad economic issues. The media portrayed the local actors with a more negative slant, often referring to the activities of militancy and obscuring the core reasons for agitation. The burden of peace was mostly conferred on the local actors, with the gross omission of the oil corporations, and depiction of the government in more responsible light, amidst its negative roles. Often, the government and mostly, the oil corporations, were deleted in terms of the roles they played in the prevalent deprivation and state of the region's indigenes. In some cases, the media made report on calls for peace by actors, but the framing of stories/reports with the slant/bias, and the elements that reflected uneven power balance among key actors, thwarted such efforts.

The implications for the conflict are that there is no genuineness on the part of the government and the oil corporations to mitigate the crisis, even in light of ongoing efforts and programs. It accentuated the notion that the region's issues have less prominence, and

are vital only for the sake of its enrichment of the Nigerian state. The consistent omission of the oil corporations, and the government versus indigenes frame and narrative, implied that conflict resolution and management rested on these two actors, and not on the oil corporations. This can also be interpreted as an innocent omission – that the audience can make correct inferences – but it is less likely. In academia, this would depend on considerations of whether the government deserve predominant blame due to its poor governance and regulation of the oil sector in the first place. The attempts at backgrounding and belittling the reasons behind agitation and the activities of the militants (although sometimes violent), endangers the prospects for recourse to peaceful negotiations/dialogue. Highlighting that the activities of militants impact the environment negatively, is vital, but without concurrent provision of information on reasons for agitations, the fact that dire environmental issues were an issue prior and a precursor to restiveness, is rendered moot. The legal system frame was not very prominent in the media report, in spite of the media's importance in keeping the audience informed on the shortcomings of the system, and its failures to confer justice.

This study had several limitations such as the inability to investigate prominence in agenda setting via assessment of the placement of stories, accorded space, images and headlines, due to the use of online news sources, as opposed to print. There was also the danger of oversimplification, due to the minimization of such a complex conflict into simple sets of classifying frames. To mitigate this, the researcher engaged the services of two independent coders/evaluators. This thesis also did not address: the reasons for any skewed media representation such as the effect of sources, political leadership and ownership on framing, nor the challenges posed to media's conflict reportage; how incorrect or negative representations affect the conflict and/or the players involved.

However, this thesis elevated the essence of reconciliation of the gaps between the media and literature, to the region's conflict resolution/management, employing framing as a methodological context where only few studies have done so in studying the Niger Delta conflict. Also, it investigated a time period of less violence compared to the focus of previous studies on periods considered as hotspots. In addition to contributing to the existing

literature, it provides reference for future extensive studies of the crisis in the region – especially studies that seek to explore the gaps in representation through additional use of focus groups, field observations, and in-depth interviews of host communities, oil corporations and government representatives/agencies, on their perception of the media’s role/impact on conflicting actors. It will also provide reference for studies that seek to study salience promotion in the conflict via interviewing of editors of relevant news media. Thus, further studies can extend the empirical sources, through including interviews, more newspapers, application of questionnaires and comparative analysis of the newspapers, for further encompassing insight. The unfairness of such brunt of burden on the news media, can be explored by future studies.

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