

## Chapter One - Introduction

### Introduction

In January 2006, media images of expatriate oil workers held captive by gun-wielding militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria sent shockwaves worldwide. This episode opened a new chapter in the internationalisation of the politics of energy in the region. The exacerbation of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa has been closely linked to the control of natural resources.<sup>1</sup> The increasing involvement of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in conflicts across the world lends credence to fears that conflicts cannot be avoided where big businesses are involved.<sup>2</sup> In Nigeria, these conflicts have arisen from agitations by host communities with natural resources. These communities are increasingly voicing their dissatisfaction over the exploitation of their resources by Multinational Corporations, and the perceived collusion with the federal and regional/state governments. Within the affected areas lie grave concerns over the degradation of the environment, gross human rights violations and underdevelopment. It is alleged that huge mining and natural resources companies, including oil giants like ExxonMobil and Shell do not hesitate to use armed force or support armed conflict in pursuit of their corporate interest.<sup>3</sup> Corrupt government officials, armed dealers and Multinational Corporations all have a role to play in this bloody nexus of natural resources and conflict.<sup>4</sup>

However, the Nigerian government has either chosen to ignore these concerns or has in extreme situations, taken punitive action in a bid to silence moves towards dissent. These agitations have escalated into armed conflict which now threatens Nigeria's foreign export earnings. The militants, on the other hand, have been labelled criminals and terrorists by the government.<sup>5</sup> However, their strategies and modes of operation which have received wide media coverage, is increasingly earning them international

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<sup>1</sup> Collier, P. & Hoeffler, A.: "On economic causes of civil war," Oxford Economic Papers 50, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Nel, P & Jordaan, E (eds): *Power, wealth, and global order: an international relations textbook for Africa: Workbook*. University of Cape Town Press, Rondebosch, 2000. ; Saro-Wiwa, K. *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Goldstein, J.: *International Relations*. Longman, New York, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> *Vanguard Online* Editorial "Festering Niger Delta crisis" Retrieved 03/06/06 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/articles/2002/editorial/ed14032006.html>

recognition. The militants, recognising the important role the media could play in these conflicts, have employed politically motivated media strategies to attract global attention and legitimacy. It seems that the Niger Delta militants are perfecting the Al-Qaeda styled militant insurgency and defiance of central governments while simultaneously making use of the media to propagate their ideologies.<sup>6</sup> Al-Qaeda is linked to international terrorism and has perfected its hit-and-run guerrilla tactics with its attacks on military and civilian targets in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet, its use of the media to propagate its ideologies gives it a certain reach globally. This could prove a big problem for the Nigerian government, as media coverage could further undermine the legitimacy of its actions in the Niger Delta.

There is a multiplicity of actors in the Niger Delta conflicts, and they interact with the media in different ways. This study acknowledges the main actors in the conflict, namely; the host communities, the Multinational Corporations, and the Nigerian government. This study extrapolates a bipolar situation where the major actors are engaged in a binary stand-off. The host communities have taken a position and the MNCs, with the support of government, have taken theirs as well. The media has become the new battleground in these conflicts. Essentially, whoever wins the support or makes the best use of managing its image in the media stands a greater advantage of consolidating local and international support for its agenda. The Nigerian government, though having no immediate answers to these conflicts, has also employed its own techniques to manage its image in the media. The media, ironically, has also become the middle ground for the exchange of ideas which could either resolve or exacerbate the conflict.

The role of the media in conflicts is increasingly taking centre stage. The media generally plays a major role in society; it occupies an important space in the public sphere. The media has enormous power due to its ability to affect public opinion. This could come as a result of sustained coverage of a particular issue. It seems like the most effective

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<sup>6</sup> Bassey, E.: "News Management Techniques in the Niger Delta Conflicts: The Nigerian Government's Approach to a Global Phenomenon" Research Essay for *Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa* course module. University of the Witwatersrand May 2006: 2. (unpublished)

strategy for quickly focusing attention on egregious human rights abuses which are numerous in conflicts, is to focus media (local, national and international media) attention on such a situation. An efficient technique of handling media attention is to control media access or manage the amount of information that reaches the media.

News management is a global phenomenon. These are ways of portraying a positive self image in the media. Governments, Multinational Corporations, instigators of rebellion, freedom fighters or those labelled terrorists are becoming increasingly adept at using these techniques. While these techniques are case sensitive (as conflict situations may vary), the principles normally remain the same. However, is media attention short-lived in an age of the sound-bite? If that is the case, then how effective is this as a long-term strategy?

## **1.1                    Aim**

This research aims to critically examine the role of the media in the escalation or resolution of resource-driven conflicts in the Niger Delta. It acknowledges the relationships that exist between the host communities on the one hand, and the Multinational corporations and the Nigerian government on the other hand. However, it aims to examine how the media has become a tool of these actors, in furthering the political machinations that fuel these conflicts. It analyses the implication that successful media strategies of the actors have on policies and trends in the international political economy of resource-driven conflicts. In light of increased militancy and the disruption of oil production in the region, this study examines the media's role, to establish whether favourable coverage has only helped to embolden the militants, or whether the media is only serving the biddings of large Multinational Corporations which own large chunks of the media anyway.

## **1.2                    Statement of the Problem**

The root causes of the Niger Delta conflicts can be attributed to many factors. While these conflicts which evolved from agitation (for greater participation in managing the region's mineral resources) have been largely ignored for several decades, only recently

has it attracted global attention. This has been as a result of constant media coverage, first, of the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni nine. Saro-Wiwa spearheaded the activism which focused global attention for the first time on the crisis. The second was that the end of the cold war highlighted increasingly, the lack of legitimacy of repressive military governments which had governed Nigeria for several decades. The excesses of these governments were often ignored by the first world countries due to the economic benefits the multinationals bring to their host countries and the proxy politics of the cold war. The end of the cold war era however, heralded a wave of liberalism and democratization which has dominated global politics. These, aided by rapid growth in communication technology; which includes the development of the World Wide Web, instant global television coverage otherwise known as the 'CNN effect', has made it impossible for the world to ignore these conflicts.

Although enduring untold hardship, the African media has been at the centre of this revolution. While constantly facing persecution from their respective governments, the resilience of the media practitioners in Africa has gone to reinforce media's influence on public opinion. The escalation of armed conflict in the Niger Delta has further implications for the media; the media could become a catalyst in the resolution or escalation of the conflict. This, however, could come to depend on which side can make the most use of, or lack adequate strategies which drive media coverage.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This research report will analyse the media's interactions in the conflicts in the Niger Delta to seek to answer the following questions:

- How do the host communities view the media in these conflicts?
- What strategies have the Niger Delta militants, in particular Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) employed at furthering their goals using the media?

- What particular media strategies have the Nigerian government and the multinational corporations evolved in response to Niger Delta agitations and the recent escalation into armed conflicts?
- Has the media's role in these conflicts aided in the exploitation of marginalised communities by not giving adequate voice to these civil agitations or has its coverage created the Al Jazeera factor (which is the phenomenon that seeks to explain why belligerents involved in conflicts are noted to escalate the level of violence whenever the media is around); thus emboldening the militants into extreme acts of militancy and violence?

#### **1.4 Limitation and Scope of Study**

This research is limited to the study of the role of the media in the Niger Delta conflicts. The study examines the period, between 1990 and 2006 when civil agitations led by Ken Saro-Wiwa began, to the recent escalation into armed conflict. It analyses the interrelationships that exist between the principal actors and interrogates their use of the media. The research also examines the implications of media coverage of these conflicts and the impact it has on intervention by the international community.

#### **1.5 Rationale/ Motivation**

Since the 1960s, sub-Saharan Africa has experienced more conflicts than any other part of the world.<sup>7</sup> Since 1960, eighteen civil wars have been fought in Africa. Many of these conflicts have their origins in the struggle over natural resources.<sup>8</sup> In many parts of the continent, local communities are aggrieved over the exploitation of mineral resources which they allege, continues without any visible socio-economic benefit to the inhabitants.

Multinational companies have been accused of operating in developing countries with such poor environmental and safety records that they would not dare to replicate in

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<sup>7</sup> Gurr, T. R. *Why Men Rebel*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

western countries.<sup>9</sup> Western countries are often accused of formulating their foreign policies to protect these conglomerates in the continued exploitation of natural resources in developing countries.<sup>10</sup> There are also concerns expressed in some quarters over how governments of developing countries corroborate with multinationals corporations to control and subjugate their citizens. Although most host governments have certain bargaining powers, these corporations exploit their workers and degrade the environment. Many a times, however, their hosts would play down these abuses just to ensure a steady flow of funds and investments. Goldstein notes that:

MNCs use various means to influence host governments, hiring lobbyists, advertisements to influence public opinion, incentives to politicians as well as corruption. Nobody knows the full extent to which MNCs use payoffs, kickbacks, gifts and similar methods to win the approval of individual government officials for policies favourable to the MNC.<sup>11</sup>

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review**

### **1.6.1 Theoretical framework**

A lot of literature exists on conflicts; exploring their causes and effects on humanity. However, the complex nature of African conflicts has resulted in various hypotheses which will occupy empirical scholarship for a long time to come. This chapter will lay the groundwork for much of the study and analysis that takes place in later chapters. So, the basis for this section will be to evolve a theoretical framework that examines conflicts, in particular, internal conflicts and how the effects of these conflicts impact on the international system. This research will be conceptualized within the framework of two distinct approaches to media research (namely the Marxist and the Liberal Pluralist approaches) and extrapolated in conflict situations. Our framework also examines the role played by actors in internal conflicts in either escalating or helping in the mediation of these conflicts. Special attention will be paid to the media and its role in effecting change

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<sup>9</sup> Nel, P & Jordaan, E (eds): 2000 *Op. Cit.*; Saro-Wiwa, K. 1992 *Op. Cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Goldstein, J.: *International Relations*. Longman, New York, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 372

in the international system. The research's underlying theme exposes the media as a site of contestation: the media could be manipulated by sources of information (e.g. politicians), commercial interest (e.g. advertisers) and even the media practitioners themselves.

Historically, conflicts have been recognised to be basic and pervasive social processes. The study of conflicts engaged the interest of early scholars like Gumplowicz, Martindale, Marx, and Bernard.<sup>12</sup> A conflict is defined by the Penguin dictionary of international relations as “a social condition that arises when two or more actors pursue mutually exclusive or mutually incompatible goals”.<sup>13</sup> Hyde-Clark Humphries notes that “this exemplifies a situation where two or more parties in the system face the choice of preserving their political strategy and/ or economic interest by refusing to compromise even at the risk of going to war or sacrificing some of those interests in order to maintain peace”.<sup>14</sup> While Hyde-Clark Humphries views this standoff as not necessarily constituting a conflict, she acknowledges that it exemplifies a crisis that could escalate into a conflict.

Most theories on African conflict have Eurocentric origins. This is because their prevailing assumptions and prescriptions tend to reflect western assumptions about human nature, the nature of society and polity. It promotes the inherent possibility and desirability of constructing and testing general theories of social phenomenon.<sup>15</sup> Ryan, exploring the international dimension of ethnic conflict critiques the theory of the plural society as a version of an incompatibility approach to understanding ethnic conflict.<sup>16</sup> He analyses two alternative approaches: the consociational democracy approach, and the

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Glasser, T.: *Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent*, The Guilford Press, New York, 1995, p. 301.

<sup>13</sup> Evans, G. and Newnham, R.: *The Penguin Dictionary of International Relations*, Penguin: London, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Hyde-Clarke Humphries, N.: *Crisis Management, War and the Media : the Gulf War and the Fourth Estate, Thesis (M.A.)* (1999) -- *University of the Witwatersrand*.

<sup>15</sup> Cited by Gurr, T.R. “Theories of Political Violence and resolution in the Third World” in Deng, F. M. & Zartman, I. W.: *Conflict resolution in Africa*, The Brookling Institution, Washington, D.C., 1991, p. 154

<sup>16</sup> Ryan, S.: *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations*. Brookfield, Vermont: Dartmouth Publishing, 1990, p.24.

hegemonic exchange approach.<sup>17</sup> Ryan notes that “certain features of the international political system can help determine whether a multiethnic state ends up as a consociational democracy or a plural society”.<sup>18</sup> These features include the decentralized distribution of power in the present international political system, and the use of self-determination as a legitimizing principle in international politics. He proposes changes to the international politics system which would improve its ability to respond to ethnic conflicts.<sup>19</sup>

While managing and resolving African conflicts could be seen as an African responsibility,<sup>20</sup> general theories of conflict would be applicable here. Conflicts in Africa have been analysed from many perspectives, yet, Gurr notes that two basic positions are most applicable. One involves applying directly the theories and techniques of western social science. The other opposing argument (in the extreme) makes a case for African solutions to Africa’s problems. While moderates like Walter, Bozeman,<sup>21</sup> would acknowledge the role of general theories and techniques, they are more interested in interpretations that fit variables and concepts in African conflicts.

An alternative approach to conflict research examines the Social Contract Theory of Small Arms. Implicit in this contract is that people accept to give up their rights to protect themselves, including the right to bear arms to the state with the understanding that the state will provide adequate physical and social security.<sup>22</sup> In doing so, people transfer possession of arms to the state and its coercive agencies. However, they retain social ownership of the weapons, enabling them to reclaim their rights to self help whenever the state fails to fulfil its part of the social contract.<sup>23</sup> It is estimated that there are one million

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. P. 15

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 24

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. P. 28

<sup>20</sup> Zartman, I. W. “Conflict Reduction: prevention, management and Resolution” in Deng, F. M. & Zartman, I. W.: *Conflict Resolution in Africa*. The Brookling Institution, Washington, D.C., 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Gurr, T.R. Op. Cit

<sup>22</sup>Ebo, A. “Small Arms Proliferation in Nigeria: A preliminary overview”, in Ibeanu, O. & Mohammed, F. (eds): *Oil Violence: the Proliferation of Small Arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Frankrad Publishers, Lagos, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



illicit small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> Small arms proliferation in the Niger Delta could be partly a reflection of this general failure of the social contract. It can be argued that due to the lack of service delivery by state apparatus and its obvious lack of governance, this has resulted in its legitimacy being challenged by a majority of people in the Niger Delta. Proliferation of SALW in Nigeria is a strong indication that people are increasingly repossessing their right to bear arms in order to protect themselves and make a living, whether legally and otherwise, that is anarchy pending the reconstitution and resumption of the social contract.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.6.2 Human security: theory and concepts

Traditional theories of international relations see security as state centric. However, in a rapidly globalizing world, the notion of security implies an expansion in its meaning. One of the primary roles of the state is to provide peace and security for its citizens, both within the nation-state and to ensure their protection against threats from outside.<sup>26</sup> Human security, unlike traditional concepts of security (which focuses on defending state borders from external military threats), is concerned with ensuring the security of individuals.<sup>27</sup> While a state might emphasise the need to protect its territorial integrity and internal security, it is noteworthy that in the event of a breach of security, the populace normally suffers. Human Security, in simple terms, could be said to be the ideology which promotes a safer and secure world for all of humanity. Violent conflicts are among the greatest threats to human security in Africa. Wars in Africa have inflicted massive destruction upon the continent's infrastructure, both human and physical, displaced millions of people, disrupted livelihoods, and seriously damaged the environment.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Rugumamu, S. "Post-Cold War Peace and Security: Prospects in Southern Africa" in *SAPES Occasional Paper Series* No. 5, Harare. Published in Peace, Human Security and Conflict Prevention in Africa Proceedings of the UNESCO-ISS Expert Meeting held in Pretoria, 23 - 24 July 2001

<sup>27</sup> Human Security Report. Retrieved from the worldwide web on 1 September, 2006: [http://www.humansecurityreport.info/HSR2005\\_PDF/What\\_is\\_HS.pdf](http://www.humansecurityreport.info/HSR2005_PDF/What_is_HS.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Cilliers, J. "Conflict Early Warning Systems and Support of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan" Paper Presented at the Conference on Early Warning Systems 'Conflicts are Preventable, Peace is Sustainable, Khartoum. Institute for Security Studies, 10-13 April 2006.

The growing interaction of societies on a worldwide scale increasingly demonstrates the overall need for human security, though it is not yet enough to prevent all forms of violence or conflict. The world's future depends on a growing need for human security and a better understanding of all the risks and threats that affect populations and individuals.<sup>29</sup> This highlights Buzan's notion of human security which broadens the scope of threats to humanity to include, political, economic, social and environmental threats, in addition to those that are militaristic.<sup>30</sup> That, however, is just one view; a theory neo-realists would support. However, from the opposite camp, post-modernists argue that human security should deal directly with what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted as "the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence".<sup>31</sup> Naidoo notes that these two at the end of a continuum stake out the two main contemporary theories of international relations especially as it relates to human security.<sup>32</sup>

Booth, a post-modernist, argues that human security is ultimately more important than state security. He notes that governments which are supposed to be the guardians of "their peoples" security have instead become the primary source of insecurity for the many people who live under their sovereignty.<sup>33</sup> Non-state actors also contribute to the state of (in) security in a region. These include MNCs, criminal syndicates, rebel groups and NGOs. Naidoo notes that while these actors could operate outside of state sanctions boundaries, this only happens in what he calls "weak states". He adds that the existence of strong non-state actors doesn't necessarily mean the death of a state.<sup>34</sup> In Africa, the last decade has witnessed serious internal conflicts that have consequently subverted

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<sup>29</sup> Agenda for Action of the International Security Network for the Promotion of Human Security and Peace. Retrieved from the worldwide web on 1 September, 2006  
<http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/Books/Unesco/Agenda.html>

<sup>30</sup> Naidoo, S. "A Theoretical Conceptualization of Human Security" in Thomas, C. and Wilkin, P. (eds): *Globalisation, Human Security and the African Experience*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Human Security Report. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>32</sup> Naidoo, S. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Booth, K. 1994. "A Security Regime in Southern Africa: Theoretical Considerations. Southern African Perspectives No. 30, CSAS" in Thomas, C. and Wilkin, P. (eds): *Globalisation, Human Security and the African Experience*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

regional security. However, as regional cooperation increases, it is hoped that more steps will be taken to uphold the security and well being of the individual.

A lot of literature exists on the role and functions of the media, focusing primarily on the notions of forms of media ownership and how particular media practices invariably set particular agendas. The media plays an active role in most conflicts worldwide. However, while in some cases the media could be accused of taking sides, media often facilitates the level of debate that goes on in agitations before and after they escalate into full blown conflicts. Actors in a conflict often include the use of the media in their strategies to further their political goals. It could be said that the media occupies the space that exists between parties in a conflict.

### 1.6.3 The Media and Society

Liberal Pluralist Theory supports a press that is free and unencumbered by government or legislative oversight. The press is supposed to be the watchdog of the government and inform the polity of government policies while supporting the entrenchment of democracy. Curran notes that the media can be viewed in liberal theory as an agency of information and debate that facilitates the functioning of democracy. It also provides a channel between government and the people in political discussion and debate on issues that affect the polity.<sup>35</sup>

Habermas's concept of the 'public sphere' gives credence to this notion of the media. He supports the expectation that the mass media should facilitate pluralist debate and the free formation of public opinion.<sup>36</sup> A liberal pluralist theory of the media will support a free and independent press, which operates in the role of the public watchdog. Thus, "assisting the equitable negotiation or arbitration of competing interests through the democratic process";<sup>37</sup> while also playing the consumer representation role, with the media operating in the marketplace assumed to thereby reflect popular concerns and

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<sup>35</sup> Curran, J.: *Media and Power*, London: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Habermas, J.: *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989, p 301.

<sup>37</sup> Dahlgren, P. and Sparks, C.: *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere*, London, Routledge, 1991, p.7.

perform an informational role. The media is often said to have the power to set agendas in the public sphere.

Marxist and Neo-Marxist approaches however, present a strong criticism of the independence of the mass media in capitalist liberal democracies. The Marxist tradition sees the media as following the ideological interest of the dominant class in society; the media becomes integrated into the existing economic and political elites and is not free from their control.<sup>38</sup> This research will be guided by the liberal pluralist approach with particular emphasis on the Agenda Setting theory of the media.

## **1.7 Literature Review**

The issues that are discussed in this section lay the groundwork for much of the research and analyses that takes place in this study. A review of the literature as it pertains to the questions of resource-driven conflicts, the role of the media in these conflicts, and how actors handle the conflicts are all necessary, to place the Niger Delta situation in a wider theoretical and empirical context. While this review will be arranged thematically, the researcher acknowledges that broad themes will invariably overlap where one theme becomes relevant to the analysis of the other.

### **1.7.1 Resource Driven Conflicts**

The factors that cause conflicts over resources are often said to be economic. This could overlap with political factors like exclusionary national ideologies and so forth. Brown, amongst others, argues that “the prospect for conflict in a country depend on the type and fairness of its political system”.<sup>39</sup> It is true that whoever controls political power has access to economic resources. In Africa, however, that will prove to be a simplistic theory. Brown notes that factors that could contribute to these include “discriminatory economic systems, poor or slow economic growth and the effects of modernisation”.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Bottomore, T. B. and Maximilien, R. (eds): *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, London, Pelican Press, 1961.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, M. (ed) *Ethnic Conflicts and International Security*, Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p.18.

When a country's economy is in shambles, the amount of resources available to citizens diminishes and the agitation for more resources could lead to potential conflict. Brown argues that economic development was not necessarily the solution because, "it can aggravate the situation; economic growth always benefit some individuals, groups, and regions more than others".<sup>41</sup>

While these theories of conflicts all have their strengths and weaknesses, the underlying challenge could be explaining the role that elites and leaders of groups play in instigating violence. Ajulu<sup>42</sup> is of the opinion that most internal conflicts, no matter the factors involved, have one constant variable; namely the interest of elites, who, in feeling excluded from or needing more political and economic access, play the majority against themselves to their own benefit.

Other theorists like Paul Collier see the high dependency upon primary commodity exports as a major source of resource driven conflicts. He notes that "natural resources are particularly salient because they typically remain a viable source of revenue for driving war..., and as exports, they may become more easily looted or taxed by rebels".<sup>43</sup> It is also more likely that governments will take harsh measures to prevent such hold-ups. Recent conflicts in Nigeria, Colombia, Sudan, and Indonesia (Aceh) have all been exacerbated by this dynamic.<sup>44</sup> Collier and Ross's argument contradicts the widely held belief that abundant resources aid economic growth and are thus positive for political stability.<sup>45</sup> They note that most empirical evidence suggests that countries economically dependent on the export of primary commodities are at a higher risk of political instability and armed conflict, as different interest contend for the control of these resources.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p.19.

<sup>42</sup> Ajulu, R. Unpublished lecture notes (2006)

<sup>43</sup> Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A. "On economic causes of civil war" in *Oxford Economic Papers* 50, 1998, p. 563-573.

<sup>44</sup> Ross, "M. Nigeria's Oil Sector and the Poor", Prepared for the UK Department for International Development "Nigeria: Drivers of Change" program, 2003, Ibid. 3

<sup>45</sup> Collier, P. *Economic causes of civil conflict and their implications for policy*. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Ross, M. L. "The political economy of the resource curse" in *World Politics*, 51, 1999, p. 297-322.

William Reno<sup>47</sup> links the origins of contemporary intra-state conflicts to the diversion of a state's economic resources through patronage networks that created "shadow states". He notes that it reflected the legacy of the Cold War and the patronage system which supported despotic governments whose intentions were looting economic resources. With dwindling Cold War sponsorships, and the increasing dependence by belligerents on mobilising private sources of support to fund their military and political activities,<sup>48</sup> Reno argues that the ruling elites have adjusted their strategies and state policies to allow them controlling interest in informal economies and privatized companies.<sup>49</sup>

### 1.7.2 The Role of the Media in International Relations

The reaction of some realist theorists like Walter Lippmann and Herman Kahn<sup>50</sup> is that, the media represents a dangerous platform which if not managed properly, could end up harming state interests. Since the media has proven very hard to silence (a reality that states have come to accept), it therefore must be controlled, or at least managed effectively to serve the purposes which the state deems necessary. The liberal view of the media on the other hand sees the media enhancing debates and giving voice to the disaffected and disenfranchised in the society. While it's a proven fact that the media messages can be manipulated to suit various purposes, liberals like John J. Mearsheimer and Robert Keohane see this as the lesser evil.<sup>51</sup>

With the advent of satellite television, the media is increasingly becoming a global player in the international environment, but it is fair to say that there is no systematic, general rethinking of media in critical debates in International Relations. Media studies are still largely unexplored in many international relations circles. A survey of six leading

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<sup>47</sup> Reno, W.: *Warlord Politics and African States*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Berdal, M. and Keen, D. "Violence and economic agendas in civil wars: some policy implications" in *Millenium: Journal of International Studies*, 26 (3), 1997, p. 795-818.

<sup>49</sup> Reno, W. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>50</sup> McAllister, T. V.: *Revolt against modernity: Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin & the search for post-liberal order*. University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 1996, pp. 58-68.

<sup>51</sup> Keohane, R.: *International Institutions and State Power: Essays in International Relations Theory*, Westview, 1989.

American and British International Relations journals by Mekelberg in 1998 revealed the lack of focus on the media. His study showed that less than 2 per cent of all articles were concerned with any aspect of media.<sup>52</sup> In the post-cold war era, the level of interaction by the media is increasingly made evident by the amount of pressure it exerts in facilitating public debate on international events. This eventually has a way of influencing foreign policy.

Hastedt and Knickrehm acknowledge a society-focused policy making model that has gained prominence. This model, they argue, sees foreign policy as media-driven. Various governments have been successful in using the media to further their agenda, but the same media have turned out to be the Achilles heel of government policies, if not handled properly. The impact of the media on foreign policy is a subject of many studies, but Hastedt and Knickrehm argue that, for governments to be effective, policymakers must now develop media policies that would run concomitantly with their policies. They note that governments must convincingly communicate their foreign policy goals to the public; otherwise “they run the risk of having the media portray a different ‘picture’ of the policy problem”.<sup>53</sup>

### 1.7.3 Media in Conflict

The role played by the media in conflict has been the concern of scholars in political communications. But that scholarship has concentrated around areas that deal with the role played by media in war, terrorism, and in protests. However, it is important to understand the role the media plays in attempts to reduce conflicts.<sup>54</sup> Theoretically, the media is expected to play a positive and informative role in society, yet, in most situations, the media has been accused of instigating conflicts.<sup>55</sup> The media can be manipulated by actors who are intent on instigating violent conflict or intending to

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<sup>52</sup>Shaw, M, ‘Media and Public Opinion in International Relations’, in Brigitte Nacos and Robert Shapiro, (eds): *Decision-Making in a Glass House: Media, Public Opinion and American and European Foreign Policy*, Boulder, Co.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Hastedt, G. and Knickrehm, K.: *International Politics in A changing World*, Longman Publishers: New York, 2003, p. 140.

<sup>54</sup> Wolfsfeld, G. “Media, Conflict and Peace in *Political Communication in a New Era: A Cross-National Perspective*” in Wolfsfeld, G. & Maarek, P. (eds), Routledge, UK, 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

manage their image during conflicts. David Lush cites the Rwandan Genocide as a classical example where the one private radio station Radio-Television Mille Collines (RTML) broadcast messages urging Hutu militants to hunt down and massacre Tutsis.<sup>56</sup> This he blamed on the inability of a weak media to stand up to a manipulative ruling class. He also blames Africa's new liberalism on the inability of the media to stand-up to pressures, "the mushrooming private media in Africa's second liberalism have not had the ethical benchmarks and professional parameters to navigate them through an industry that in which many were getting involved in for the first time".<sup>57</sup>

Although media can be manipulated to promote conflict, media can also promote conflict involuntarily; Frohardt and Temin support this view when they note that:

Such passive incitement to violence most frequently occurs when journalists have poor professional skills, when media culture is underdeveloped, or when there is little or no history of independent media. Under such circumstances, journalists can inflame grievances and promote stereotypes by virtue of the manner in which they report, even though their intentions are not necessarily malicious and they are not being manipulated by an outside entity.<sup>58</sup>

However, the media can set the agenda of what will dominate government policies and public reaction in times of conflict. Miller argues that the 'media agenda' is the set of issues addressed by media sources that ultimately affect the 'public agenda' which is the issues the public consider important, especially when it comes to political issues.<sup>59</sup> Proper media coverage becomes the bedrock of citizens' knowledge of complex and often intractable conflicts. This knowledge could influence and prompt wise foreign policy choices. Theoretical perspectives from McCombs & Shaw, Rogers, Hart, & Dearing, McCombs, define "agenda setting" as the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. There are underlying assumptions that exist here. The press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it.

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<sup>56</sup> Olukoshi, A., Kayizzi-Mugerwa, S. and Wohlgemuth, L.: *Towards a New Partnership With Africa: challenges and opportunities*, 1998, p. 51

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

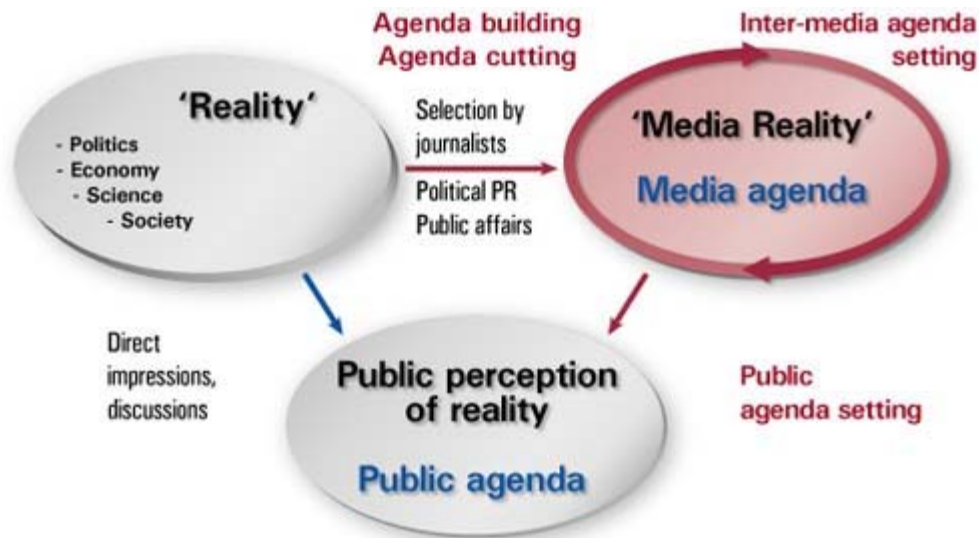
<sup>58</sup> Frohardt, M. and Temin, J. "Use and Abuse of Media in Vulnerable Societies" in United States Institute Of Peace, *Special Report 110*. October 2003, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, K. *Communication theories: perspectives, processes, and contexts*.(2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. (2005).



Another assumption is that media concentration on a few issues and subjects lead the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues. While the agenda setting approach of media studies has been in existence for 40 years, a recent research by Media Tenor Institute<sup>60</sup> compares the relationship between Reality and the Media's selection of Reality and the influence of these on public perception has shown that that the media shapes peoples' minds, especially those with no direct connection to newsworthy events. Consequently, topics not discussed in the media have proven to be irrelevant or less relevant to the public.<sup>61</sup> Griffin notes that the validity of the theory's cause-and-effect chain of influence in the relationship between media agenda and public agenda has been proven despite being subjected to critical reviews, he cites the research done by Yale researchers Shanto Iyengar, Mark Peters, and Donald Kinder as evidence of the over 350 studies done to test the theory.<sup>62</sup> The finding of the cause-and-effect influence has resulted in the perception model which has been demonstrated below.

### Perception Model<sup>63</sup>



<sup>60</sup>[http://www.mediatenor.com/smi\\_AS\\_approach.php](http://www.mediatenor.com/smi_AS_approach.php)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Griffin, E. M.: *A First Look at Communication Theory*, (6th ed.) New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Source: Prof. Frank Brettschneider, University Hohenheim, Germany, retrieved on 11/9/06/07 from the world wide web: <http://www.mediatenor.com>

Gunho Lee notes that one of the most critical aspects in the concept of an agenda-setting role of mass communication is the time frame for this phenomenon.<sup>64</sup> This, he stresses, occurs due to the ever-shifting perceptions of the media and its gatekeepers. So, by ‘Priming’, media's content will provide a lot of time and space to certain issues, making these issues more accessible and vivid in the public's mind.<sup>65</sup> Agenda-setting theory seems quite appropriate to help us understand the pervasive role of the media (for example on political communication systems).<sup>66</sup>

#### 1.7.4 Globalisation and New Media

The rapid rate of globalisation has enhanced the way the media’s reach can be felt worldwide. Frank Aycock, notes that new media has changed the way the media industry does business since “the media have traditionally been about localism-newspapers and radio, especially, but television also, traditionally focus on local audiences”.<sup>67</sup> He now questions at the dilemma that has arisen:

Defining localism has become a complex problem. In this ever-shrinking world, defining the local community takes on a new significance. How does one define its local community when even a newspaper or radio station in a small hamlet can suddenly “go global”?<sup>68</sup>

Globalisation is defined by Terry Flew and Stephen McElhinney as the term used to describe and make sense of a series of interrelated processes including, the increased pace of interconnectedness that has taken place in the world over recent years.<sup>69</sup> They argue that the contribution of technological developments in communications media has played a role in the process of globalisation.<sup>70</sup> New media could mean the advancement of

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<sup>64</sup> Lee, G. “Priming as an Aspect of Agenda Setting Effects in the Digital Age”, *Conference Paper*, International Communication Association, 2005, p. 1-31.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, K. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Griffin, E.M. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>67</sup> Aycock, F. Localism in the Era of Globalization and New Technologies: Implications for the 21st Century, Retrieved on 12/06/07 from the world wide web:<http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring99/Articles/aycock/aycock.html>

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Flew, T and McElhinney, S. ‘Globalisation and the Structure of New Media Industries’ in Lievrouw, L and Livingstone, S. (eds): *The Handbook of New Media: Social Shaping and Consequences of ICTs*. Sage, London, 2001.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

information dissemination from the print format, local TV and radio stations to the digital revolution that has engulfed the entire Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) industry. However, Thompson argues that:

The development of new media and communications does not consist simply in the establishment of new networks for the transmission of information between individuals whose basic social relationships remain intact. Rather, the development of media and communications creates new forms of action and interaction and new kinds of social relationships – forms that are different from the kind of face-to-face interaction which have prevailed for most of human history<sup>71</sup>.

The impact of new media is enormous; however, Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson note two complementary effects. Firstly, the expanded access for more people to participate in mediated communication, whether commercial or cultural. Therefore, it is instrumental in ending the monopolies of broadcasting, and particularly of state broadcasting that served nation-building projects in the Third World. Secondly, the other effect is to extend participation beyond previous confines of time and space. The public sphere is open to more players.<sup>72</sup> But Jon Anderson argues that globalization in the information realm only selectively reverses some trends associated with the period of high nationalism, while augmenting others.<sup>73</sup>

In what Walter Wriston, the former chairman of Citicorp refers as “twilight of sovereignty” Barrie Axford and Richard Huggins acknowledge the impact of new media on political culture as they explore the theme of the putative transformation of political modernity. They argue that:

the effect has resulted in the reliance by actors on professional image management techniques and apparatuses, as political negotiations, competition and appeal—even within government, party or movement organisations— become more increasingly mediated.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Thompson, J. B.: *The media and modernity: A social theory of the media*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, CA., 1995, p.81.

<sup>72</sup> Eickelman, D. and Anderson, J.: *New Media in the Muslim World*, Indiana University Press, 1999.

<sup>73</sup> Anderson, J. “New Media & Globalization in the Internet Age”, 2002. Retrieved on 12/06/07 from the World Wide Web: [www.mevic.org/keynote.html](http://www.mevic.org/keynote.html)

<sup>74</sup> Axford, B. and Huggins, R.: *New Media and Politics*, Sage; Street, London, 2001, p. 30.

New media has also had an overwhelming impact on conflict management, as it provides instantaneous communications that combine text, graphic, sound, photos and video, using computer technology. This has given rise to the advancement of cable and satellite TV, fax, email and the internet which has contributed immensely to the rapid globalisation that we now experience.

#### 1.7.5 News management techniques: a global model

Because of its apparent power, controlling the media has become increasingly important to actors involved in a conflict. This control will range from managing media access to information, to restricting media access in conflict environments. Barbie Zelizer defines news management as “acts which are intended to influence the presentation of information within the news media. The expression *managing the news* is often used in a negative sense”.<sup>75</sup> News management is said to be the way that individuals or organizations (mainly governments) attempt to control the flow of news to the media and to ‘set the agenda’ for the media.

Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia argues that:

This might involve issuing a press release which is embargoed, holding press conferences timed to make the lunch-time and early-evening news, or staging an event which is big enough or unusual enough to grab the media’s attention. The government might, for example, choose to announce bad news on the same day that optimistic employment figures are announced. An extreme example of news management was the February 1996 ‘Scott report’ on arms sales to Iraq. Expecting the report to be severely critical of the government, ministers arranged for the report to be made available to them a week before it was scheduled for its first debate in parliament; a number of handpicked Opposition Mps were given a few closely supervised hours to ‘read’ the report which ran into several volumes; all other MPs had a matter of minutes only. The Government also made their own choice of quotes from the report available to journalists.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Zelizer, Barbie: *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy*, Sage Publications, Inc, 2004, p. 23-24.

<sup>76</sup> *Wikipedia Online Encyclopaedia*, “News management” Retrieved from the World Wide Web: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News\\_management](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/News_management)

While research into this phenomenon is in the early stages, historically media's involvement in conflict has raised the profile of this discipline and occasions the way that governments will treat the media especially in conflicts. Young, in exploring the various challenges that the media faces in international conflicts, notes that, the military often cite issues of security and conflict escalations as reasons why the media access to 'classified' information is restricted. Young notes that:

There is an ongoing tension between journalists' desires to report on conflicts and military actions, and military concerns about security. Generally, journalists accept the need for some secrecy regarding military manoeuvres. However, many journalists have observed that secrecy and controls on reporters are often imposed for reasons of political convenience, for example to avoid blame for military or political errors that deserve exposure.<sup>77</sup>

On conflict escalation, Young notes that the media can contribute to conflict escalation, either directly or indirectly. He notes that experienced war reporters observe that sometimes, the very presence of cameras will prompt the sides to start shooting. Terrorists or rebel fighters often rely on the media. They are increasingly astute in recognising media opportunities which could aid their cause. "Strategic terrorist attacks may be calculated to draw media attention, and so draw attention to their cause. In the absence of media coverage, many types of terrorism would be useless".<sup>78</sup> Carruthers argues that the media's role in conflict has often been seen as a threat by war planners.<sup>79</sup> However, he notes that no matter the challenges that the media faces, armed conflicts were good for the media business. Conflict produces an endless resource base for stories; they involve deployment of troops and weapons in ways which makes for exciting pictures and copy.<sup>80</sup> Taylor's argument reinforces the assertions that when nations are at war, newspaper sales increase, television and radio ratings go up.<sup>81</sup> This, he notes, is because the media's role is expanded from not just reporting information but also

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<sup>77</sup> Young, C. "The Role of Media in International Conflict" in *Canadian Institute for Peace and Security*, Working Paper no. 38, 1999, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid p. 52

<sup>79</sup> Carruthers, S. L.: *The Media at War- Communication and Conflict in the 20th Century*, London, 1998.

<sup>80</sup> Media and Conflict. Special issue of the magazine *Track Two*, a publication of the Centre for Conflict Resolution and the Media Peace Centre, Rondebosch, South Africa. December 1998.

<sup>81</sup> Taylor, P. Lecture Notes, 1995. Retrieved on 12/06/06 from the world wide web: [www.leeds.ac/ics/arts.pt2.htm](http://www.leeds.ac/ics/arts.pt2.htm).

providing the only source of communication and entertainment during war times. Young and Jesser agree that the media in wartime could serve a variety of roles. They argue that the media could bring actual information on the war to audiences who are removed from the fighting or be a source of entertainment thereby bringing comic relief to publics more directly involved such as, for example, those under a bombing campaign.<sup>82</sup>

Governments' use of news management techniques will show how effective it has become in influencing public opinion when it comes to managing the media. While unbridled public opinion could jeopardize the war effort, public opinion, if properly handled, could create a boost for the war effort. Public attitudes to war (which could be swayed easily) have been a major concern to military and government strategists. If only the media were just simple observers of war, but that is impossible in this information age. The media have become active participants and sometimes their coverage can even provide a catalyst which produces dramatic shifts in political and military decision making, like what media images of dead American soldiers being dragged along the streets of Somalia did. Former British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, in September 1993, commented that "public debate is not run by events but by the coverage of events".<sup>83</sup> Military planners have often pondered whether the media's involvement (in war) is good for the business of waging war. History has revealed governments' effort to control public opinion and set the agenda when it comes to times of military campaigns.

Wolfsfeld argues that the military institutions globally believes in the culture of secrecy, therefore, military planners are uncomfortable to think that their plans could be exposed to the enemy: it seems war is not just fought and won physically but psychologically/ideologically as well.<sup>84</sup> Onadipe and Lord also assert that the military operatives do not encourage transparency or freedom of press where the armed forces are concerned. They argue that extensive media coverage could jeopardize the war effort as

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<sup>82</sup> Young, P. and Jesser, P. *The Media and the Military*, London, 1997.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Wolfsfeld, G.: *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997.

media reports could be seen as subversive, lower morale, while being a mine of information to the enemy.<sup>85</sup>

Mutua notes that when countries are at war, governments have repeatedly tried to control the flow of information about the war effort; they face the challenge of how to garner public support for the war agenda, as well as shore up morale within the populace during the war.<sup>86</sup> An effective method of controlling public opinion during past wars had been the use of propaganda. The word propaganda refers to any technique that attempts to influence the opinion, emotions, attitudes, or behaviour of a group in order to benefit the sponsor.<sup>87</sup> Young states that the success of the American government in generating and sustaining media support during the 1990 Persian Gulf War was an example of news management. This, he noted, led to criticisms that the American-led media failed to adequately investigate the Gulf War, or to report on the causes of the war.<sup>88</sup> Many media theorists expressed grave concerns that the public seemed quite willing to accept such a ‘tame’ press’.<sup>89</sup>

#### 1.7.6 De-escalation of conflict

Gowing argues that media can be a tool for conflict de-escalation. This process could even lead to conflict resolution.<sup>90</sup> Van de Veen states that many advocates of conflict prevention were convinced that the media can play a critical role in defusing tensions and forging peace. But he notes that most media representatives are opposed to becoming actors in the developments they have to cover.<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, he argues that there were

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<sup>85</sup> Onadipe, A. & Lord, D.: *Conciliation Resources: African media and conflict*. New York: Conciliation Resources, 1999. Retrieved on 03/06/07 from the World Wide Web: [http://www.c-r.org/occ\\_papers/af\\_media/](http://www.c-r.org/occ_papers/af_media/)

<sup>86</sup> Mutua, A.N.: A study of Propaganda and the Press in Africa. 2001. Retrieved on 03/10/06 from the World Wide Web:[http://www.geocities.com/a\\_mutua/propaganda.html#references](http://www.geocities.com/a_mutua/propaganda.html#references)

<sup>87</sup> IPA “How To Detect Propaganda” Institute for Propaganda Analysis, Retrieved on 03/06/06 from the World Wide Web: <http://brainstorm-services.com/wcu-2004/IPA.html>

<sup>88</sup> Young, C. *Op. Cit.*: 28

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Gowing, N.” Media Coverage - Help or Hindrance in Conflict Prevention”, in Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict Report. Washington, D.C. 1997.

<sup>91</sup> Van de Veen, H. “Better Media, Less Conflict” in Van Tongeren, P., Van der Veen, P. And Verhoeven, J.: *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peace building Activities*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002.

opportunities for them to be won over to the cause of conflict prevention.<sup>92</sup> Media coverage of the conflict in Vietnam resulted in lack of popular support for the war and this resulted in the withdrawal of American troops from the conflict. Young also argues that the media can offer better communication with and better information regarding the adversary. This media, he states, allows opposing sides to see the other relatively directly; by bringing the opponent into our living-rooms, the media can help to prevent the demonization of the other side.<sup>93</sup> However, Walter Lacqueur will argue that media reportage of hostage-taking could serve a negative effect by emboldening the kidnappers, thus escalating the conflict.<sup>94</sup> Alali and Eke are of the opinion that media coverage remains the only hope these hostages have of ever getting released as it often remains the only channel of communication between the hostage-takers, governments and other interested parties.<sup>95</sup>

## **1.8 Analytical Framework**

### The Causal Diagram

In the causal diagram below, I have identified the independent variable to be the causes of resource-driven conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. I will argue that agitations over perceived ills has resulted in various disputes and pitched the host communities, the government and the oil exploration companies against each other. The unresolved disputes have degenerated into conflicts, the escalation of which, in the last two years, have seen the increasing use of violence on both sides in attempt to settle the conflict. However, host communities, in particular the Ogoni, before resorting to violent protest, had on numerous occasions challenged the authorities, in civil protests and strikes in an effort to get their case into the public domain. These protests have been documented

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

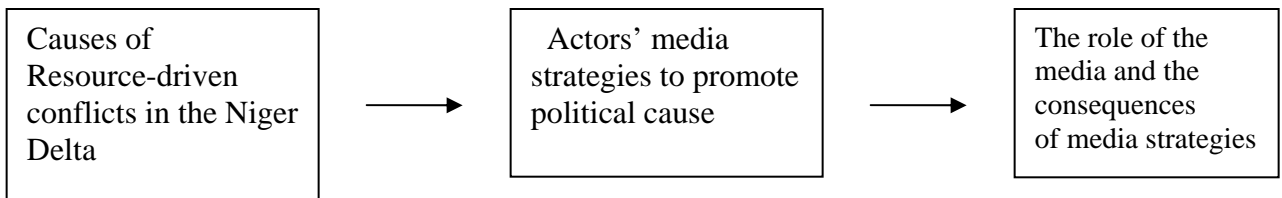
<sup>93</sup> Young, C. Op. Cit.: 28

<sup>94</sup> Lacqueur, Walter. *No End to War: Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Continuum, 2003.

<sup>95</sup> Alali, A.O. and Eke, K. K.: *Media Coverage of Terrorism: Methods of Diffusion*. Sage, Newbury Park, 1991.



in the media which in turn becomes an important actor in the power game that has evolved in this crisis. The intervening variables include: The actors' (the host communities, the multinational corporations (Shell in particular), and the Nigerian government) media strategies. The consequences of these strategies intertwine with the role of the media (the dependent variable) to chart the next stage of the conflict.



#### **A Causal Diagram showing the variables in the Niger Delta Conflicts**

This study analyses two different periods in this crisis. First, it will analyse how the media was used in the period leading to the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight co-defendants, to gauge the response of the international community. It then analyses the recent militant agitation in the Niger Delta and examines the media strategies used by the actors in this new escalation of the conflict. An underlying question that this research will answer is the role the media played in the different stages of the conflict. How effective was the media in shedding light on the issues driving the conflict? After analysing the plight of the Ogoni activists, is it possible that the escalation into armed conflict has been a result of the militants, deciding that the media was not furthering their interest or is it because they saw in the media an opportunity to broadcast their disenfranchisement, using armed protests?

## 1.9

### **Data collection** Methodology and Evidence Requirements

My approach to this research has been qualitative in nature. The study however exploited both primary and secondary sources. The reason for a qualitative approach is to create a critical understanding of the media's role in the Niger Delta conflict by exploring and interpreting data primarily from interviews and secondarily from existing literature, archival documents and other records. Using this research method is advantageous because it explains behaviours, processes as well as the 'actors' in the processes, attitudes and motivations.<sup>96</sup> I have analysed the Niger Delta crisis through interviews with major players and interpreting data from available literature.

This study primarily focuses on the role the media has played in the Niger Delta crisis. So, the primary information sought, identified and collected is the literature on the ensuing conflicts. It also involves analysing the literature that has accumulated around the issues of resource-driven conflicts, in particular, the Niger Delta. Several stages of this case study has been analysed. The first stage is an analysis of how the actors have made use of the media during the first period of political agitations and the resultant global response to this exposure. In this analysis, the various strategies of the actors primarily, the Ogoni activists have been examined. The underlying issues will be how they made use of the media and what their perception of the media was. To understand the media coverage, an analysis of both the local and international media is required.

The second stage briefly shows the agitation for resource control spearheaded by the state governments in the Niger Delta. In this period, legal redress was sought and sadly, the Federal Government retained the rights to mineral resources in the Niger Delta. The third stage is an analysis of the recent militant agitations within the Niger Delta and the threats of the militants to shutdown 25% of Nigeria's oil generating capacity. The insurgency corresponded with a simultaneous media campaign which recently seems to have generated a sense of goodwill for the militants globally. While the world condemns any

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<sup>96</sup> Przeworski, A and Salomon, F. *The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions*. Social Science Research Council: New York, 1995.

acts of terrorism - a direct consequence of the September 11 bombing of the World Trade Centre-major governments were quick to warn the Nigerian government against punitive actions that would have resulted in the deaths of hostages.

The eventual release of the hostages and the media coverage seems to have served the purposes of the militants; yet, this study will investigate how the other actors, Shell and the Nigerian Government have reacted to the issues. This study acknowledges the role that the New Media (Internet) plays in this crisis. It shows how the Internet contributed in expanding the level of debate that already existed.

#### 1.9.1 Data Collection Tools

The Libraries of the University of the Witwatersrand, the Centre for Advance Social Science, Port Harcourt, the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs, Lagos, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja and the Africana section of the Boston University library were used to retrieve literature related to this study. The study also made an extensive use of the internet primarily focusing on Nigerian news websites as well as online resources from JSTOR. JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization with a dual mission to create and maintain a trusted archive of important scholarly journals, and to provide access to these journals as widely as possible.<sup>97</sup>

#### 1.9.2 The Interview Process

The interview process was used to provide answers to some of the questions asked in this study. Interviewing has become a widely used means for data generation in qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln note that, “The interview is a favourite methodological tool of the qualitative researcher; it is not a neutral tool, for the researcher creates the reality of the interview situation”.<sup>98</sup> Wisker states that “interviews can provide both the detailed information you set out to collect and some fascinating contextual or other

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<sup>97</sup> *About JSTOR*. Retrieved August, 26, 2006 from the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.jstor.org/about/desc.html>

<sup>98</sup> Denzin, N, and Lincoln, Y.: *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.

information”.<sup>99</sup> Interviews that are conducted for qualitative research rely for their quality on the nature of the interactions with the interviewees. This study relied heavily on the semi-structured interview format.

Hitchcock and Hughes state that the semi-structured interview;

allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses... Some kind of balance between the interviewer and the interviewee can develop which can provide room for negotiation, discussion, and expansion of the interviewee's responses.<sup>100</sup>

To Bernard,<sup>101</sup> the advantage of the semi-structured interview is that the interviewer is in control of the process of obtaining information from the interviewee, but is free to follow new leads as they arise. Each respondent was asked to give a once off, in-depth interview of approximately one hour in duration. The interview guide used was a set of questions, targeted at different categories of respondents based on their status and position and phrased in a similar way across respondents to encourage consistency in data collection and to enable the researcher to make comparisons between the various respondents. The interviewer used open-ended and closed questions that were linked to theoretical perspectives on conflict and media management in conflict. Thomas Burgess notes that while many researchers would advise against using open-ended questions and advocate using closed questions, open questions can be useful.<sup>102</sup> This, he notes, could be useful if a researcher was interested in making very precise judgments of each individual respondent.

For my interviews, I used a digital tape recorder, which serves as a permanent record of the interview. This is advantageous because it allows the interviewer to observe the respondent in the interview process, and limits the chances of errors that happen often when the interviewer depends only on taking notes.

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<sup>99</sup> Wisker, G.: *The Postgraduate Research Handbook*. New York: Palgrave Houndmills, 2001, p. 165

<sup>100</sup> Hitchcock, G and Hughes, D.: *Research and the Teacher: A Qualitative Introduction to School-based Research*. Routledge, London, 1989, p. 83.

<sup>101</sup> Bernard, H.: *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, California: Sage, Newbury Park, 1988.

<sup>102</sup> Burgess, T. “A general introduction to the design of questionnaires for survey research” In *Information systems services: Guide to the Design of Questionnaires*. 2001. Retrieved June 17, 2006 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/iss/documentation/top/top2.pdf>

This included interviews with media practitioners; Jahman Anikulapo, (*Sunday Guardian* Editor), Ibibab Don Pedro (Award winning Journalist), Ogbonna Nwuke, (Editor -in – Chief of *The Telegraph*), representatives of the Ijaw / Ogoni nations, Ludum Mitee, (President, MOSOP), Mike Ekamon Jr. (National President, SNDYCW), militants<sup>103</sup> and Emmanuel Eyo (NIIA) a member of the Nigerian government’s policy-making mechanism. Also interviewed was Prince Billy Gillis-Harry (President, PHCCIMA). This study also analyses interviews with academics; Austin Tam-George (UCT), Sofiri Joab-Peterside (CASS), whose major research interests have been the crisis in the Niger Delta, as well as other resource driven conflicts.

### **1.10 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

I used the Thematic Content Analysis approach in this research, this was helpful in analysing the themes that resonated in the sampled news reports, a significant source of data collected. I chose to use the thematic content analysis (TCA) for the analysis of my interview data. The reason for this is that thematic content analysis allows a researcher to dig deeper to analyse the themes he identifies unlike content analysis. Wilbraham<sup>104</sup> notes that the flexibility shown by TCA permits it to be used to amplify other kinds of analyses. Therefore, TCA studies, perhaps because they sustain their positivist roots, are able to produce comparable and evaluative data. She notes that,

TCA assumes an ‘atheoretical’ - or ‘theory-free’ - stance, i.e. it is not burdened with slippery philosophical / theoretical underpinnings and overtones or jargon. It sets out an easy recipe to follow or adapt, and since method and content are fairly distinct, its applications to any form of written / spoken discourse, are limitless.<sup>105</sup>

Four stages were involved in the analysis,

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<sup>103</sup> The militants insisted that their names were not to be included in this study; interviews also were not recorded electronically to preserve their identity.

<sup>104</sup> Wilbraham, L. (1995) “Thematic Content Analysis: Panacea for the Ills of 'Intentioned Opacity' of Discourse Analysis?” Paper presented at the *1st Annual Qualitative Methods Conference*, A spanner in the works of the factory of truth, 20 October 1995, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Retrieved November 20, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.criticalmethods.org/spanner.htm>

<sup>105</sup><http://www.criticalmethods.org/wil.htm>

- I first listened to and transcribed my interview data.
- I started a vertical analysis of my data by chronologically summarizing the key issues and statements that emphasized the answers to the research questions.
- I analysed data from my secondary sources, checking for consistency with my research questions.
- I analyzed the data horizontally by identifying the themes across board and compared them to my hypothesis and research questions.

### **1.11 Study Outline**

The study is divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter provides the background and rationale of the study as well as the research questions that will be explored. It discusses the broad theoretical framework and analysis of the available literature that form the basis of the study; it also provides an analytical framework and identifies methodology of data collection/analysis. Chapter Two focuses on answering the first research question. It also provides a historical context of Niger Delta activism and focuses on Ogoni activism during the period 1991-1996. Chapter Three discusses the strategies used to manage these conflicts in light of the further escalation to armed resistance and insurgency; it traces the origins of militancy in the Niger Delta and the various groups involved and recently the model presented by MEND in this new phase of armed conflict.

Chapter Four examines the responses of Shell and the Nigerian government, especially to the media blitz that has ensued. It also studies the multiplicity of actors in these conflicts to see their interaction with and response to the media. While this research extrapolates a bipolar situation where two major actors are engaged in a binary stand-off, each actor has a range of secondary actors (NGOs, Multinationals, and Foreign Governments etc) that have aligned their support based on their overlapping interest. Chapter Five charts the role of the media in these conflicts from a media perspective. Is the media's role a catalyst to fuelling these conflicts or will its continued interventions result in their de-escalation? Do the media need its own strategy to ensure that its involvement does not

serve the political interest of the principal actors? In Chapter Six, conclusions based on the findings of the research are discussed. The content of chapters 2-6 are based on the integration, review and analysis of the data collected from the thematic content analysis and the interviews conducted with actors and analysts in the Niger Delta and Lagos Nigeria.

## Chapter Two – Origins of political agitations in the Niger Delta

In this chapter, the study focuses on answering the first research question which is the perception of local communities of the media. It also provides a historical basis of Niger Delta activism and its culmination in the Ogoni struggle of the 1991-1996 periods. It also studies the responses from Shell and the Nigerian government, especially to the media blitz that ensued. It is easy to presuppose that the agitations for self actualisation started with the Ogoni tribe. It is also possible to erroneously believe that the Ogoni is the only ethnic group that exists in the Niger Delta. This chapter provides an overview of what makes up the Niger Delta and this will serve as background information on the origin of the conflicts in the Niger Delta.

### 2.1 Background on Nigeria

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and the continent's leading oil producer. A former British colony, the country gained its independence in 1960. Nigeria is located on the fringe of the West African Sub-region, sharing boundaries with Benin, Niger, Chad and Cameroun. It has a population of 140 million<sup>106</sup>, which is made up of three major ethnic groups; Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo and about 371 other ethnic groups. The Nigerian society often experiences occasions of rivalry and tension between regions and ethno-religious groups. This could be blamed on the forceful integration of so many nationalities and interests into a pseudo-national structure by the British coloniser in 1914. It has been argued that there is no such thing as a Nigerian state, but an aberration that is soon coming apart as recent conflicts and upheavals could point as indicators.<sup>107</sup> Sir Hugh Clifford a one time British Colonial governor in Nigeria referred to the Nigerian state he helped create as:

... a mere collection of self-contained and mutually independent Native States separated from one another... by great distances , by differences of history and tradition and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> 2007 Provincial Census Figures from the Nigerian Population Commission.

<sup>107</sup> Babawale, T. (ed): *Urban violence, Ethnic Militias and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*, Malthouse press, Lagos, 2003. p.42

<sup>108</sup> Olojede, I. "et. al." "Nigeria: Oil Pollution, Community Dissatisfaction and Threat to National Peace and Security" in *AAPS Occasional paper series*. Vol. 4, Nov. 3, 2000, p.17.



In this structure, the colonialist treated the disparate nationalities that formed Nigeria unjustly, unequally and undemocratically, a legacy that has been perpetuated as “the independent leadership has continued to treat the diverse nationalities, especially the ethnic minorities unjustly, unequally and undemocratically”.<sup>109</sup> Instead of making an attempt to transform the state they inherited, emergent leaders (who normally come from the Hausa-Fulani tribe and their collaborators) have opted to use it to satisfy selfish, personal and group ambitions.<sup>110</sup> In perpetuating this injustice, they have had to resort to repression and violence as a means of controlling an alienated citizenry.

Despite the institution of a federal system of government since independence, and unlike other federal systems where the nation state evolves from the bottom to the top, in Nigeria, it has been imposed on the people, and sustained by the use of force which has unfortunately failed to provide the glue for national cohesion.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, Nigerians have been under military rule longer than any other country in Africa. The military which had governed since 1983 when it overthrew the civilian government in a *coup d'etat*, announced in October 1995 that it would hand over to a democratically elected government. However, this government was however to be led by an incumbent military dictator, General Sani Abacha, whose self succession agenda was only thwarted when he died mysteriously of a heart attack. It is only then that the military handed over to the civilians in 1999.

The ascending role of oil in the Nigeria's economy since the commodity was discovered in the 1950s has resulted in a capital-intensive industry that contributes around 95% of export earnings, and about 85% of government revenue.<sup>112</sup> This mirrors a country with a monocultural economy characterised by high levels of dependency on crude oil earning. The Nigerian military rulers' resistance to initiating greater transparency and accountability in managing the country's multi-billion dollar oil earnings limited

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid *Op. Cit.* p.42

<sup>110</sup> Falola, T. and Genova, A.: *The Politics Of The Global Oil Industry: An Introduction*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, 2005, pp.196-202.

<sup>111</sup> Osaghae, E. E.: *Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*, C. Hurst and Co., London, 1998, p. 3, 28, 31-38.

<sup>112</sup> Forrest, T. G.: *The Advance of African Capital: Growth of Nigerian Private Enterprise*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh. 1994, pp.45-46.

economic growth and prevented an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1993 and bilateral creditors on debt relief.<sup>113</sup> However, the Obasanjo-led civilian government was successful in securing a liquidation of large part of Nigeria's foreign debt owed to the Paris Club donors. Table 1 below charts the increasing contribution of oil to the Nigerian economy during the periods 1957 where oil contributed 0% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, to 1992, where the industry's contributions to Nigeria's economy had risen to 82.0%.

**Table 1 Contribution of Oil to Government Revenue (1957-1992)<sup>114</sup>**

Year	Oil Revenue	Year	Oil Revenue	Year	Oil Revenue
<b>1957/58</b>	0.0	<b>1969/70</b>	17.2	<b>1981</b>	75.1
<b>1958/59</b>	0.1	<b>1970/71</b>	26.0	<b>1982</b>	71.8
<b>1959/60</b>	1.0	<b>1971/72</b>	52.5	<b>1983</b>	69.1
<b>1960/61</b>	1.1	<b>1972/73</b>	41.5	<b>1984</b>	77.2
<b>1961/62</b>	7.4	<b>1973/74</b>	71.4	<b>1985</b>	77.8
<b>1962/63</b>	7.3	<b>1974/75</b>	80.8	<b>1986</b>	65.8
<b>1963/64</b>	4.0	<b>1975/76</b>	87.0	<b>1987</b>	76.0
<b>1964/65</b>	5.3	<b>1976/77</b>	84.0	<b>1988</b>	78.2
<b>1965/66</b>	9.1	<b>1977/78</b>	84.1	<b>1989</b>	82.3
<b>1966/67</b>	13.3	<b>1978/79</b>	80.0	<b>1990</b>	79.8
<b>1967/68</b>	14.0	<b>1979/80</b>	83.6	<b>1991</b>	78.1
<b>1968/69</b>	9.9	<b>1980</b>	83.8	<b>1992</b>	82.0

<sup>113</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *Country Profiles- Nigeria*. Retrieved on 26/04/07 from the world wide web [http://www.uneca.org/aisi/nici/country\\_profiles.doc](http://www.uneca.org/aisi/nici/country_profiles.doc)

<sup>114</sup> Ikporukpo, C. 1996. "Federalism, political power and the Economic power game: Conflict to access to petroleum resources in Nigeria" in Olojede, I. "et al" *Nigeria: Oil Pollution, Community Dissatisfaction and Threat to National Peace and Security. AAPS Occasional paper series*, Vol. 4, Nov. 3, 2000. p.17

## 2.2 The Niger Delta: An Overview

A labyrinth of coastal barrier island, freshwater swamps, mangrove forests, creeks and huge deposits of hydrocarbons, the Niger-Delta is comprised of distinct ethnic groups with twenty-six language groups in Rivers and Bayelsa States alone.<sup>115</sup> It is located in the east-central coast of Nigeria and occupied by six states of the Nigerian federation mainly-Delta, Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Cross River. The region has one of the most fragile ecosystems in the world as well as the second largest delta region globally.<sup>116</sup> It also has the largest wetlands and the third largest mangrove forest in the world.<sup>117</sup> The Niger Delta is considered the best endowed delta in natural resources, especially oil and gas when compared to the Rhine, the Nile and the Mississippi.<sup>118</sup> Yet, the Niger Delta is perhaps the least developed of the world's major river deltas. Its ecological problems are compounded by the environmental degradation, particularly oil pollution, a regular feature of oil exploitation that has rendered most of the region a wasteland. The Niger Delta is also rich in other resources, although oil exploration is the most prominent economic activity, other industrial activities such as timber processing, steel, glass, textiles, paints, fertilizer and petrochemicals also impact on the environment.

### 2.2.1 Socio-economic features

The Niger Delta has an expanding poor rural population and this is compounded by an urban population explosion which is attributed to the rural - urban migration to the major oil-producing cities. These cities rarely cope with this surge in population, which puts a strain on their already beleaguered facilities. The Niger Delta's vast oil resources, though exploited for the good of the majority of the country, has not impacted on the lives of its inhabitants. The region remains poor and the GNP per capita is below the national average of 280 United States Dollar. The Niger Delta scenario has a catalogue of problems; the unemployment level especially amongst the youth is high, agricultural

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<sup>115</sup> Alagoa, E.J and Tamuno, T.N (eds): *Land and People of Nigeria: Rivers State*, Riverside Communications, Port Harcourt. 2000, pp. 3-11.

<sup>116</sup> Olojede, I.,etal "Nigeria: Oil Pollution, Community Dissatisfaction and Threat to National Peace and Security" in *AAPS Occasional paper series*. Vol. 4 Nov. 3, 2000. p.19

<sup>117</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) (2002) *The Niger Delta Development Commission: Towards a Development Blueprint*. p.20

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p.12

production is often below subsistence and educational levels are below national averages, particularly low for women.<sup>119</sup> While 76 per cent of Nigerian children attend primary schools, this level drops to about 30 per cent in some parts of the Niger Delta.<sup>120</sup> The high level of poverty and poor housing conditions are exacerbated by high living conditions. Living in the Niger Delta is terribly expensive. Fubara notes that:

[t]he region is regarded as a threatened environment when viewed from its irreversible losses in potential biological diversity due to a host of factors including flooding, coastal erosion, sedimentation, siltation, oil pollution and air pollution, land subsidence, noise and light pollution and a feeling of inequality in the allocation of economic resources of the oil income.<sup>121</sup>

It will be unfair to claim that the oil exploration has not had some level of economic impact on the host communities. Some local communities have benefited immensely from oil production. Its members who secure full-time employment in the oil industry are highly paid for skilled workers, but they constitute a well-paid minority who live with a mass of unskilled or underemployed locals. The majority of the fortunate few come from the dominant ethnic groups and not the oil producing communities. Human Rights Watch has collaborating research which shows that:

Contractors to the oil industry, often traditional leaders or those with close links to the military administrations of the oil producing states, also potentially make large amounts of money, often increased by the widescale corruption surrounding the award of contracts for construction and other oil industry projects—from which those in the oil companies in charge of the choice of contractor also benefit<sup>122</sup>.

Direct beneficiaries of oil producing activities; politicians, contractors, compromised activists and traditional leaders, have always supported oil production arguing that disruption of these activities result in a loss of income. Yet, this contrasts with the realities faced by a great majority of people from the minority ethnic groups of the Niger Delta who have remained impoverished.

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<sup>119</sup> Caragarajah, Ngwofon and Thomas, 1994.

<sup>120</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>121</sup> Fubara, B. The Politics of the Niger Delta, in Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) (2002) *The Niger Delta Development Commission: Towards a Development Blueprint*. p. 22.

<sup>122</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1995. p. 8.

### 2.2.2 Niger Delta and National Politics

The Niger Delta suffered from neglect and inequality even before the Nigerian state became a legal entity.<sup>123</sup> The struggle for self-actualisation could be traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when some princes and merchants of the region fought against the monopolistic tendencies of European firms. This was viewed as treason by the colonialist and reprisals were often swift; King William Dappa Pebble of Bonny was exiled to Clarence in 1854, Jaja of Opobo was deported to Accra in 1887 and Nana Olomu of Itsekeri was overthrown in 1894 for opposing British trade monopoly on the Benin River. The British invasion of Oba Ovoramvem Nogbaisi's Benin kingdom in 1897 and the resultant plunder of national artefacts still remains a sore point in history.<sup>124</sup>

This nationalist struggle often taking various forms has continued from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Interesting landmarks are the anti-tax revolt which started in Warri in 1927. This tax revolt later spread to Owerri Province in 1929, culminating to the famous Aba Women's Revolt. In 1954, during the Constitutional Review Conference that led to the declaration of independence from British colonial rule, the British government proposed that the Niger Delta be declared "a special federal territory" but because of political ill-will within the Nigerian political leadership, it was called a special development area.<sup>125</sup> The people of the Niger Delta have historically clamoured for special attention due to their state of underdevelopment. This led to the inauguration of the Sir Henry Willink commission in 1957; charged with investigating state creation as a solution to the problems of ethnic minority groups. The commission acknowledged the fears and apprehensions of the minorities as genuine but due to intimidation from the colonialist and the big ethnic groups, advised that "a separate state would not provide a remedy for the fears expressed".<sup>126</sup> It instead recommended the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB). The NDDDB established in 1961 by Act of Parliament and integrated into the 1963 Constitution, was charged with the responsibility of advising

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<sup>123</sup> Ozoze, V. A.: *Ethnicity and Politics of Exclusion in Nigeria: Employing Rawls' Theory of Justice in Plural Societies*, Master's Thesis in Applied Ethics, Centre for Applied Ethics, Linköpings universitet, May 2005.; Nnoli, O.: *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria*, Hants, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1995, p.149.

<sup>124</sup> Darah, G. "The Socio-Economic and Political challenges of the Niger Delta" in Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds): *Challenges of the Niger Delta*, Centre for advanced Social Science, 2001, P.24.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. p.26

the Nigerian government and the Government of Western Nigeria with respect to the physical development of the Niger Delta.<sup>127</sup>

The commission, recognising the dangers of the majority ethnic group usurping political power, noted that:

We believe that while the first object of our recommendation must be to allay fears, this should be combined with a second, to maintain the unity of Nigeria... this we think can be best done by balancing power within the country so that a majority (tribe) may be less tempted to use power for its own advantage.<sup>128</sup>

Unfortunately, this recommendation was ignored and the situation continues till today.

### 2.2.3 Isaac Boro and the Niger Delta Republic

An interesting landmark in the nationalist struggle was the 1966 Ijaw revolutionary uprising led by the late Isaac Boro and his comrades – Samuel Owonaru and Nottingham Dick, who were young idealistic university graduates. In his autobiography, Boro acknowledged that his mission had been to free his people from the marriage of inconvenience with the entity called Nigeria.<sup>129</sup> Leading a guerrilla army of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Boro and his lieutenants declared an all-Ijaw Niger Delta Republic. The group over-ran most the Eastern Ijaw territory, but the revolution lasted only two weeks as the advance was halted by the Federal government's counter-offensive. Boro's revolution chronicles the first secession attempt in Nigeria's history.<sup>130</sup> Boro and his group were arrested and sentenced to death, a sentence only commuted by the Gowon administration in a desperate move to checkmate the Biafran Republic which had seceded. The Nigeria Civil War had thus begun.

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<sup>127</sup> Akinyele, R. T. States Creation in Nigeria: The Willink Report in Retrospect, *African Studies Review* Volume 39, No. 2, September 1996, pp. 71- 77.

<sup>128</sup> Osaghae, E. E. Op. Cit.

<sup>129</sup> Boro, I. (1967) *The Twelve Day Revolution*.

<sup>130</sup> The Punch (Lagos, Nigeria) Monday, April 2004, p.14

#### 2.2.4 The Nigerian Civil War

The Biafran government's first move was to take over Port Harcourt, which was the hub of the Nigerian oil industry. Lieutenant Colonel Odimegwu Ojukwu's move threatened the federal government's source of income, and Nigeria declared war on Biafra. One would have thought that with the secession, the lot of the minorities would have improved, but *alas* that was not the case. The minorities in the new Biafran state soon realised that their lot had worsened as the Ibo ethnic group swiftly overran and took over socio-economic activities in Biafra. Ideologically, the Niger Deltans had agreed in principle with the secession from Nigeria, but as the war progressed, they realised that they were only going to be second-class citizens in this new mix. The beast of tribalism had already reared its head again. One had to be from the Ibo tribe to succeed in the new nation. The war also created an avenue for silent pogroms against the minorities that were considered a threat by the majority Ibo tribe of Biafra. The Niger Deltans, once again, were ripe for a change they soon realised that they were slightly better off as Nigerians than being part of Biafra.

Gowon's move of commuting Boro's death sentence was to garner support from the people of the Niger Delta and this he achieved by creating 12 new states. Two of these states had strategic importance; Cross River State was created to allow federal troops access into landlocked Biafra, while Rivers State was to undermine Biafra's claim to the oil. With the support of the minorities of the Niger Delta, the Nigerian state started winning battle after battle; the war cry, 'One Nigeria, One Hope' resonated well with the minorities. For once, they even forgot the pain they felt from being part of the Nigerian State. Reprisals from the Biafran government were quick. Many prominent indigenes of the Niger Delta were arrested and summarily executed by the retreating Biafran troops, who also laid waste to existing buildings and infrastructure. Ironically, Boro joined the Nigerian Army, attained the rank of Major but was killed mysteriously while on his way to liberate Bonny from Biafran occupation.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> MOSOP, *Ken's Saro-Wiwa's Last Words*, MOSOP publication, Port Harcourt, 2004.

While war raged, the Federal Government, under the guise of denying rebels access to oil wells and revenues, nationalised all oil earnings and thus abolished the derivation principle which gave oil states 50% royalties to oil earnings.<sup>132</sup> Major oil corporations were also directed to relocate their headquarters to the nation's capital, Lagos. This, as Darah argues, initiated a process of capital flight from the oil producing states.<sup>133</sup> It is necessary to reiterate here that the major reason behind the Nigeria Civil War was the presence of oil in the Niger Delta. Had there been no oil, the eastern region might have seceded without furore. This overemphasises the importance of oil to the Nigeria economy. Nothing was to stand between the state and its source of revenue. After the Civil War, in an attempt to compensate, reward or quell agitations from minority groups, other states have been created in the Niger Delta. Akwa Ibom State was created from Cross River State and Delta State from the old Bendel State in 1987. Bayelsa State was also created from Rivers State in 1996 by Sani Abacha, yet it is important to note that while oil was first exploited in Oloibiri, Bayelsa, when created, had no single petrol station; roads and other infrastructure were non-existent.<sup>134</sup>

### 2.2.5 Oil Exploration and the Nigerian economy

Since 1973, the Nigerian economy has depended solely on petroleum as its main source of income. Crude petroleum has been the single largest foreign exchange earner, accounting for 81.1 percent and 96.1 percent respectively, of government revenue and export earnings in 1980.<sup>135</sup> Before 1960s, the main source of fiscal revenue accumulation was agriculture. The Nigeria state depended on the export and processing of agricultural products for its sustenance. During this period, the states or regions retained 100 percent of their revenue and only paid royalties and taxes to the central government. This marked the first phase of Nigeria's development. However, with the discovery and exploitation of crude oil, the equation was reversed. Oil now became the major source of fiscal earning and the region producing oil was made to give up 50 percent of its earnings to the central

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<sup>132</sup> Table 2 below illustrates the reduction in derivation over time.

<sup>133</sup> Darah, G. Op Cit.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ekuhare, B. "Sustainable Development Models for the Niger Delta Region" in Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds): *The Niger Delta Development Commission: Towards a Development Blueprint*, 2002 p. 37.



government and other component regions became increasingly dependent on the central government for their financing. This had serious implications on the agricultural sector as production was increasingly being abandoned for the spoils of the petroleum. As time went on, the government abandoned the notion of derivation in favour of the Revenue Allocation Formula. This was to drive the ideology of equality, access to development opportunities and engender minimum standards for national integration.

**Table 2 Allocation of Revenues Based on the Derivation principle which gave oil states 50% royalties to oil earnings**<sup>136</sup>

Year	Percentage (%) Derivation
<b>1953</b>	100% derivation
<b>1960</b>	50%
<b>1970</b>	30%
<b>1977</b>	25%
<b>1981</b>	5%
<b>1984</b>	1.5%
<b>1992-99</b>	1%
* <sup>137</sup>	
<b>2006</b>	13%

Ekuerhare argues that:

This balanced development objective of revenue allocation had failed to address practical development policy issues such as incentives for fiscal independence, environmental impact of oil exploration, intergenerational gap created by present resource allocation and balancing present losses (opportunity costs) with gains/benefits to the areas where the revenue generating resources are located.<sup>138</sup>

He argued that these policies, paradoxically, created the crisis of deepening underdevelopment and grinding poverty in the Niger Delta. This, he stressed, could be

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<sup>136</sup> Fubara, D. “Issues and Strategies for Rational Niger Delta Development Commission” 1999, in Fubara, B. The Politics of the Niger Delta, in Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) (2002) The Niger Delta Development Commission: Towards a Development Blueprint. p. 25

<sup>137</sup> This was reinstated by the Obasanjo led-Government after a landmark legal battle which the Federal Government won.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 40

addressed through the transformation of the Nigeria's monocultural economy and restructuring of the lopsided federation, which has encouraged the culture of dependence and lack of production. Saro-Wiwa expands on this argument of lopsided federation, when he stresses on the need for self determination for the minorities often from the Niger Delta. This ethnic autonomy, he argues, the three dominant ethnic groups already have:

The fact that these groups are already administered in a multiplicity of states means that they have a surfeit of self determination. Their gain is the loss of all other groups who are forced to be administered in multi-ethnic states where they suffer a clash of cultures and their progress stymied. The fact that the Nigeria constitution states (and quite wrongly too) that Nigeria is a federation of states means that, those ethnic groups which do not have states to themselves suffer a disability under the constitution.<sup>139</sup>

It is estimated that Nigeria's foreign exchange earning from crude oil between 1993 and 2004 from an estimated 7.7 billion barrels of crude oil it produced was \$230 billion.<sup>140</sup> This revenue breakdown was achieved in several ways namely, sale of equity crude, sale of domestic crude, gas receipts, petroleum profits tax, gas flaring penalty, and interest earned on the huge sums deposited in the Central Bank of Nigeria, JP Morgan in New York, and the Federal Reserve Bank in New York.<sup>141</sup>

This revenue, for instance, has been shared amongst 36 states of the federation on the basis of land mass and population. The Niger Delta is only made of six states which cover only a small ratio of Nigeria's land mass and has a population of 20 million of the 140 million inhabitants of Nigeria. The share of the revenue that is used for development in the Niger Delta is further reduced.

#### 2.2.6 The Politics of conflict

From the scenario provided above, it is easy to understand why there were agitations from the Niger Delta people, who are aggrieved, deprived and depraved. The Nigerian

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<sup>139</sup> MOSOP (2004) Op. Cit.

<sup>140</sup> Ibeanu, O. & Mohammed, F. (eds): *Oil Violence: The Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Niger Delta*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung; Frankrad Publishers, Lagos, 2005, p.42

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

constitution stipulates that all minerals, oil, and gas belong to the Nigerian Federal Government, which negotiates the terms of production with international exploration companies. These companies operate joint ventures with Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), which owns 55 - 60 percent of the profits accruing from the venture.<sup>142</sup> Politics has become an exercise in organised corruption; a corruption perhaps demonstrated around the oil industry itself, where large commissions and percentage cuts of contracts have enabled individual soldiers and politicians to amass huge fortunes.<sup>143</sup>

Findings from a survey carried out in 2000 by researchers from the Committee on Conflict Resolution and Peace Building reveal that 65 percent of Niger Deltans favour moves for secession from the Nigerian state. This reflects dissatisfaction with the federation, because it does not guarantee them autonomy, self determination and access to public resources; the bulk of which is derived from their area.<sup>144</sup> It is argued that the federal government owes the region reparations for over 40 years of exploitation, environmental degradation and acute underdevelopment.<sup>145</sup> The ongoing debates and contestations in the Niger Delta on the issue of insensitivity of the Nigerian state about the predicament of the oil producing communities have gone beyond what can be ignored. The practice of bribing a handful of local chiefs, elders and political elites cannot resolve the political imbroglio in the region.<sup>146</sup>

In recent years, their grievances have taken various forms as in the creation of cultural associations and self-help groups to fight for their rights as oppressed people. However, the boldest attempt after Boro's failed revolution was to come. On April 22, 1990, army officers of Niger Delta extraction attempted a *coup d'etat* which failed. This coup was allegedly inspired mainly by the self determination struggle of the southern minorities. It is argued that the coup attempt failed because the officers excised from Nigeria the five

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<sup>142</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities*, New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1995. p. 7.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>144</sup> Olojede, I., Fajonyomi, B., Akhape, I., Mudashiru, S. "Nigeria: Oil Pollution, Community Dissatisfaction and Threat to National Peace and Security" in *AAPS Occasional paper series*. Vol. 4 Nov. 3 2000, p.55.

<sup>145</sup> *Tell Magazine* 18<sup>th</sup> October 1999.

<sup>146</sup> Akindele, R. and Ate, B. (eds): *Beyond Conflict Resolution: Managing African Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, NIIA, Lagos, 2001.

heavily Islamised northern states. The mobilisation of a counter-offensive from senior army officers, led by Gen. Sani Abacha, from the north was swiftly executed and the coup plotters were swiftly rounded up and summarily executed. This also led to the purging of military officers of Niger Delta origin from the armed forces. Those not implicated and arrested were either retired or as speculated later, killed in a mysterious plane crash that contained 150 military officers mainly from southern Nigeria.<sup>147</sup>

### 2.2.7 Oil exploration and the environment

Globally, it is becoming accepted that oil production has had damaging effects on the environment of the oil producing communities<sup>148</sup>. However, the extent of damage is constantly in dispute. Human Rights Watch argues that in the Niger Delta:

Despite decades of oil production, there is surprisingly little good quality independent scientific data on the overall or long-term effects of hydrocarbon pollution on the Delta, yet oil-led production has clearly seriously damaged the environment and the livelihoods of many of those living in the oil producing communities.<sup>149</sup>

Shell has been operating in the Niger Delta since 1958. In its 49 years of operations, it is arguable that, rather than setting standards and promoting a positive relationship with local people, as well as sound environmental and social policies, Shell seemingly has done little.<sup>150</sup> World Bank records reveal that Nigeria holds the worst associated gas flaring record in the world. The Niger Delta emits an estimated 12 million tons of methane per year.<sup>151</sup> Moiulor notes that “the importance of Nigeria's oil to Shell cannot be underestimated, accounting for almost 14% of the company's production that equates to the greatest production outside the USA”.<sup>152</sup> Therefore, it appears that both Shell and the Nigerian government have an interest in maintaining the *status quo*. The Human

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<sup>147</sup> Don Pedro, I. Award winning journalist and activist, interviewed by author, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, 9th January, 2007.

<sup>148</sup> O'Rourke, D. and Connolly, S. “Just Oil? The Distribution of Environmental and Social Impacts of Oil Production and Consumption” in *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*. 28, no. 219, 2003, pp. 587-617.

<sup>149</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Op Cit*, p.7

<sup>150</sup> *Amnesty International*, “Oil in the Niger Delta: threatens lives”. Retrieved on 26/08/06 from the world wide web <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/nga-031105-shell-action-eng>

<sup>151</sup> Anyaebunam, E. “Niger Delta: A Case for Regional Contingency Plan” 1995, p. 143

<sup>152</sup> Moiulor T. “Govt Earns N63 Billion”, *The African Guardian*, Lagos, 8 August 1993.

Rights Watch has noted that, although the oil companies insist that they operate under the highest environmental standards, “available evidence is to the contrary, the effects of oil exploration have seriously damaged the environment and livelihood of many who live in the oil producing communities; oil spills, gas flaring and industrial building projects without proper environmental impact assessment are proof of poor environmental standard”.<sup>153</sup> Large oil spills which occur occasionally kill fish and agricultural crops; pollute water, often rendering economic activities to a standstill. Compensation, if paid at all, is normally not commensurate with the damage incurred. Shell’s claims of sabotage of facilities, of which they owe no legal liability coupled with a moribund judicial system robs these poor communities of redress.<sup>154</sup>

Anger at the perceived ills from the exploration activities are often expressed in the form of strikes or protests by local communities or families. These protests are mostly disorganised and their effects localised, as the communities (due to intimidation from oil companies and security forces) are often too poor or lack the resources to attract national attention to their situation. However, in the case of a threat to oil production, the news often filters to the press and due to government influence, is often viewed as acts of treason or sabotage. The first successful attempt at mass mobilisation of protests was achieved by the Ogoni, and their activities brought international exposure to the plight of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta.

### **2.3 The Ogoni struggle and the formation of MOSOP**

The Ogoni people of Rivers State (with a population of just half a million people) using passive resistance, decided in 1990 to engage the government and Shell at raising the level of commitment to development. Like the Tiv insurrection<sup>155</sup> of the 1960s and the

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<sup>153</sup> Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria’s Oil Producing Communities*, New York: Human Rights Watch, July 1995.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 9

<sup>155</sup> The Tiv ethnic group is situated in the middle belt of Nigeria, they rioted against tax assessment by the Native Authority between March to October 1960.

Boro-led Ijaw revolt of 1966, the Ogoni initiative used the ethnic territory as the basis of organisation and mobilisation.<sup>156</sup>

This led to grassroots mobilisation which culminated in the formation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by late Ken Saro-Wiwa. MOSOP became a coalition of pre-existing Ogoni organisations such as the National Union of Ogoni Students, the Conference of Ogoni Traditional Rulers, and the Federation of Ogoni Women Organisations. This became the first really successful effort to organise people in the oil producing communities to officially highlight their grievances in relation to oil production on a national and international scale.

To someone recently acquainted with the subject, the Ogoni situation may seem more about human rights than the environment. After all, Nigeria, with a history of dictators and military misrule, had denied its people democratic elections and minority rights. The Ogoni issue, however, is more reaching and symbolic because, it highlights the possible outcome for communities that object to the decimation of their natural resources. MOSOP, in August 1990, adopted an Ogoni “Bill of Rights,” which listed the grievances of the Ogoni people and demanded “political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the republic as a distinct and separate unit,” including, “the right to use a fair portion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development.” While the political demands were aimed at the Nigerian government, it also implicated Shell in “the genocide of the Ogoni”.<sup>157</sup> MOSOP, through its spokesman, Ken Saro-Wiwa, maintained that the environment in Ogoniland had been “completely devastated by three decades of oil exploration and ecological warfare by Shell”<sup>158</sup>. Shell, in rebuttal, stated that “allegations of environmental devastation in Ogoniland or elsewhere in our operation area are not simply true”.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) *Op. Cit.* p.30

<sup>157</sup> Saro-Wiwa, K. *Genocide in Nigeria: The Ogoni Tragedy*, Port Harcourt: Saros, 1992, 81.

<sup>158</sup> Saro-Wiwa, K. 1996, p. 42-43.

<sup>159</sup> SPDC, *Nigeria Brief: The Ogoni Issue*, Laos: SPDC, January, 1995.

This 'Bill of Rights' was later sent to General Sani Abacha (then Nigeria's military dictator) and oil companies operating in Ogoniland, but was completely ignored. In response, MOSOP used the media to highlight its problems, especially during a mass rally on January 4, 1993, now regarded as Ogoni Day. In 1993, Shell was forced to close its production in Ogoni following mass protests at its facilities, citing intimidation of its staff, and the flow stations there remain closed until today, although active pipelines still interlace the region.<sup>160</sup> The Nigerian government viewed this as an act of rebellion which if left to grow, could motivate other oil producing communities to mobilise. Any threat to oil production was regarded as a threat to the entire existing political system. Reprisals were swift and brutal. Scores of Ogoni people were brutally murdered and scores of towns and villages sacked under various pretences. Sometimes, open attacks at MOSOP activities were the norm.<sup>161</sup> However, the most prominent activist at the helm of this conflict was Saro-Wiwa, whose profile and strategies helped to sustain media attention on the conflict.

### 2.3.1 Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP

Kenule Beenson Saro-Wiwa was born in 1941 at Bori, a small town in the southern coast of Nigeria. He was educated at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and at Government College, Umuahia; where he later taught. Saro-Wiwa has been a teacher, a university lecturer and an administrator. After a brief stint with government, he concentrated on his writing and in 1983, he published his first novel. Amongst other literary achievements, his most popular work was the "*Sozaboy: a Novel in Rotten English*."

Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian writer of international repute, environmentalist, and political leader of the Ogoni, an ethnic minority occupying Nigeria's oil-rich Delta region. In 1991, he was one of those instrumental in founding the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and began a vigorous international campaign against the environmental damage caused by the oil exploitation by multi-national companies in Nigeria.

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<sup>160</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Op Cit*, p.9

<sup>161</sup> Amnesty International, *Nigeria: the Ogoni Trials and Detentions*, London: Amnesty International, September 1995

Campbell in *Postcolonial Studies*, noted that he largely criticised Shell, which he held responsible for the ecological destruction and industrial pollution of his homeland, and he also accused both the Nigerian government and Shell of genocide.<sup>162</sup> Despite a brutal government campaign against the Ogoni, he always advocated peaceful and non-violent protest. However, on June 21st 1993, he was arrested ostensibly for his part in Election Day disturbances.<sup>163</sup>

Campbell chronicled the uneasy relationship he had with government, noting that Saro-Wiwa was continually detained without charge by the Nigerian military government.<sup>164</sup> Finally, Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogonis were found guilty by a special military tribunal of murdering 4 people who allegedly were government sympathizers. This tribunal blatantly violated international standards of due process and produced no credible evidence that he or the others ever participated in the killings.<sup>165</sup> On November 10, 1995, ten days after the verdict of death sentence, Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight comrades, whom many sympathisers worldwide viewed as prisoners of conscience, were hung by Nigeria's dictator, General Sani Abacha without any rights to appealing the judgements. Prior to his execution in 1995, Saro-Wiwa won the Goldman Environmental prize, and that year he was also awarded Sweden's prestigious Right Livelihood Award, known as an alternative Nobel Peace Prize. Throughout his struggle, Saro-Wiwa always professed non-violence. Harvan argues that Saro-Wiwa's famous statement when he received the Fonlon-Nichols Award for contributions in the field of literature encapsulates the ideology that he expounded:

The relationship between literature and non-violent struggle is an old and acknowledged one in Ogoni culture. ... We did not only sing: we sang to satirise or praise or to cleanse society of some ills. ... Coming from my background, my work as a modern writer could not but lead me to question the society in which I

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<sup>162</sup> Campbell, M. "Witnessing death: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni crisis" *Postcolonial Studies*, Volume 5, Issue 1, April 2002, pp. 39 - 49

<sup>163</sup> Saro-Wiwa's MOSOP threatened to boycott national elections, this however turned violent when government agents fired at demonstrating Ogonis.

<sup>164</sup> Campbell, M. Op. Cit.

<sup>165</sup> Amnesty International Op. Cit.



live and, having identified the problem, to invite my audience to a necessary struggle for peace change, for improvement.<sup>166</sup>

Osaghae notes that, the death of Saro-Wiwa sounded the death knell, to most of MOSOP activities. While no organisation has had the cohesion and dynamism of MOSOP since 1995, protests and demonstrations against oil companies occur on a regular basis.<sup>167</sup> Saro-Wiwa's memory has achieved iconic status, yet activism is only done by local community members. The well-known leadership seem to have learnt their lesson from Saro-Wiwa's death and no one wants to be seen as the open face of defiance against government and oil companies.

### 2.3.2 Nigerian media coverage of the conflict

According to Adebamiwi, the media in Nigeria had become an institution that sought the protection of marginalised groupings and interests against dominant groups and interests.<sup>168</sup> The press had since its advent in 1859, been a medium of articulation, projection of interest, and catalyst for civil intervention during the colonial era, thus a voice for the disadvantaged in the society.<sup>169</sup> Adebamiwi believes that the dominant section of the press had defended marginal interests while the marginal section (mostly state owned/or dominant ethnic groups) had supported and defended dominant interests. Consistently, the dominant section of the Nigerian press has defended marginal interests, in the total organization of the Nigerian state. Conversely, the marginal section of the press has supported and defended dominant interest. Media coverage therefore went along polarised lines,<sup>170</sup> a position acknowledged by Ebenezer Obadare, who notes that it is often alleged that the press is overtly sectional, both in its coverage of events and in its analysis of perspectives. He alludes though that this seeming tar of ethnicity or protection

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<sup>166</sup> Harvan, M. 'Its Eventual Victory is not in Doubt': An introduction to the literature of Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, Department of English and Comparative Literature, American University in Cairo, 1997.

<sup>167</sup> Osaghae, E. E. "The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation And The Future Of The Nigerian State" *African Affairs*, Volume 94, Number 376, pp. 325-344

<sup>168</sup> Adebamiwi, W. *A Note on Press Coverage of the Ogoni Crisis*, The Panos Institute 2000-2003, <http://www.panosinst.org/resources/guides/journalists/60-ogoni.php>

<sup>169</sup> Philips, J. E. "The Trouble With Nigeria" in *African Studies Review*, Volume 48, Number 2, September 2005, pp. 133-139

<sup>170</sup> Adebamiwi, W. Op. Cit.

of sectional interests does not stop the press from probing issues relating to political integrity and fiscal probity.<sup>171</sup>

In analysing media coverage of the Ogoni conflict, Adebamiwi identifies three important issues: first, the major actors in the Ogoni Crisis, (mainly the Ogonis and the government and Shell) were in open conflict over the definition of the issues at stake, consequently the media's interpretation was based on where their sympathies lay. Second, that both sides of the conflict recognised the correlation between media content and public opinion, using the media effectively created an advantage. Third, he argued that the key issues in media coverage of the crisis were domination, exploitation, federalism, justice, fairness, and political, social, and economic neglect".<sup>172</sup>

For him, the dominant and marginal media coverage showed a clear linkage between the crisis and the national question.<sup>173</sup> Adebamiwi, identified the Lagos-based press as the dominant press that gave voice to the Ogoni struggle while the northern-based press (the nation's political leadership being predominantly northerners) supported the views of the political hegemony. As *Newswatch* (a Nigerian newsmagazine) captured it, the voice of the Ogoni "represented, the collective voices of the oil-producing areas of the country, crying against the neglect and poverty they have experienced in the midst of plenty".<sup>174</sup>

Adebamiwi noted that in the Lagos-axis media coverage, "Strong images of devastation and evocative metaphors are used to construct the binary image of the deprived and the criminally indifferent." The government-owned establishment press, including the *New Nigerian* and *Hotline*, on the other hand saw Saro-Wiwa as "instigator and promoter of militant strategy and violent options." The polarisation along lines of strategic interest dominated newsroom ideologies. However, government's repressive tendencies

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<sup>171</sup> Obadare, E. "The Press and Democratic Transition in Nigeria: Comparative Notes on the Abacha and Abubakar Transition Programs", *A Journal of Opinion*, 1999, African Studies Association Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 38-39.

<sup>172</sup> Adebamiwi, W. 2003, Op. Cit.

<sup>173</sup> Adebamiwi, W. "Territoriality and the Discourse of Ethnic Groups' Clashes" in *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Volume 13, Issue 2, , Routledge, Cambridge, April 2007, pp. 213 - 243

<sup>174</sup> Adebamiwi, W. 2003, Op. Cit.

especially during the military regimes sparked resistance amongst the underground press mainly led by news magazines.<sup>175</sup>

Adebamiwi in conclusion noted that:

For the Lagos press, the Ogoni crisis was yet another manifestation of the 'lopsidedness' of the Nigerian Federation, inequitable resource allocation, hegemony and domination by the Northern leadership, in particular, and the need for self-determination for the constituent parts of the Nigerian Union. For the Northern/government sympathetic press, it was purely a matter of law and order, of subversive agencies and groups that had ulterior motives, of the sovereignty of Nigeria and her rights to non-interference by other countries.<sup>176</sup>

### 2.3.3 Niger Delta Communities and their Perception of the Media

One of the questions that this study aims to answer is how the local communities view the media in these conflicts. In Chapter Two, we have acknowledged theoretical perspective which placed the media in a positive and informative role in society. However, the media can be manipulated by actors involved in conflict situations; the media itself during conflict situations becomes a site for contestation, therefore, managing one's image during conflict is often given high priority. The relationship between the oil producing communities and the media has not been a smooth one. Before the Ogoni struggle gained momentum, the media allegedly under-reported or misrepresented the underlying issues that led to contention in the Niger Delta. This is due to certain factors; first, the communities of the Niger Delta were not efficiently mobilised to merit any attention from the press. While protests and occasional demonstrations went on, these incidents were isolated and the oil companies' public relations machinery smoothly put a spin on these issues.

Secondly, the majority of the press was located in Lagos, the south-western part of the country. The press is owned by dominant interest in the majority ethnic groups. While the press could have stayed neutral, with the agenda of the owners, it was often easier to

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<sup>175</sup> Olukotun, A.: *Repressive State and Resurgent Media under Nigeria's Military Dictatorship, 1988-98*, Nordic Africa Institute, Goteborg, 2004, pp.23-33.

<sup>176</sup> Adebamiwi, W.2003, Op. Cit.

ignore the situation or report nonchalantly. As the Niger Delta communities had no vibrant local press, it was common for the issues on ground to be reported from a position that favoured dominant interest. Several editors in the major newspapers were not indigenes of the Niger Delta and thus, did not really understand its dynamics. Some of these people brought in their ethnic sentiments in to the editing of the newspapers.<sup>177</sup>

Thirdly, the Nigerian government owned most of the mass media outfit. The radio services and the television networks were controlled by government personnel, government also owned controlling shares in major print news outfits; it was only until later in the 1990s that government privatised some of the mass media and private investors were able to participate.<sup>178</sup> While the press was increasingly owned by private investors, these investors often turned out to be contractors who were benefiting from the *status quo*, the media outfits became an extension of their profiteering activities and were used to garner more influence, hence more government funded contracts.<sup>179</sup> Fourthly, during the military rule, the media was often the target of obnoxious laws and decrees enacted to muzzle the press. Most journalists often engaged in self-censorship to avoid arrest and detention over sensitive issues that occupied a prominent place in the nation's agenda.<sup>180</sup>

The MOSOP campaign created awareness in the press. The local communities were becoming increasingly conscious of the power of focusing press attention on their activities. This was a direct result of the renewed participation of educated and enlightened members of the community in the struggle. Enlightenment campaigns and public participation in rallies which focused press attention gradually encouraged the locals to be more vocal. A major catalyst was the realisation that the international media could be relied upon to report on the situation no matter how little the coverage (after all, a little coverage was better than none). The local communities began creating their own

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<sup>177</sup> Don Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>178</sup> Agbaje, A. *The Nigerian press, hegemony, and the social construction of legitimacy, 1960-1983*, Lewiston : E. Mellen Press, 1992, p. 5.

<sup>179</sup> Joab-Peterside, S. Senior Researcher at Centre for Advance Social Science (CASS), interviewed by author, Port Harcourt, Nigeria 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2007

<sup>180</sup> Obadare, E. Op. Cit.

means of sending out messages; newsletters, pamphlets and other enlightenment materials were distributed amongst the people with a primary aim of sensitising them on their rights as citizens, as well as on ways to efficiently resist the *status quo*. The practice of photocopying and passing on whatever news on the Niger Delta became common. Thousands of people in the hinterlands came to rely on photocopied news as normal newspapers were either not distributed to these areas or were too expensive for the locals.

The average illiterate individual in the Niger Delta may not truly articulate how he/she benefits from the press. However, he will readily speak to anyone willing to listen, expressing his discontent with government, oil companies and their beneficiaries. Most indigenes of the local community still do not trust the messages that emanate from government-owned media outfits. It will take some convincing to accept any level of objectivity in their news bulletins.

#### **2.4 Conclusions**

The Niger Delta's problems are many; yet, the underlying issues seem to be the marginalisation of its people and gross abuse of the environment due to oil exploration activities. This has only escalated the level of extreme poverty in the region which has led to a series of protests and civil action. The communities have had to endure an insensitive and nonchalant media, yet the activities of MOSOP and the media attention it focused on the Niger Delta has awakened its inhabitants to the media's power in setting agendas. Perhaps, a major weakness of the Saro-Wiwa led MOSOP strategy was its thinly-disguised over-reliance on the international community. Whether the international community eventually let them down, is a subject open to interpretation. The inhabitants of the region may not interact often with the media but they are ostensibly able to show some media savvy when defending their position on issues that affect the region.

## **Chapter Three - Militancy and the Escalation of Conflict- A Media Driven Blueprint?**

In the previous chapter, the study tried to create an understanding of how the Niger Delta conflicts have become synonymous with the frustrations, disillusionment and the deprivations that have been associated with oil exploration. By building up on the historical dimension of these challenges, the study provides an insight into the origins of agitations and violent conflict by the local communities. This chapter discusses the strategies used to manage the Niger Delta conflicts, in light of the further escalation of armed resistance and insurgency. It traces the origins of militancy in the Niger Delta and the various groups involved, and more recently, the model presented by MEND, in this new chapter of armed conflict.

### **3.1 The Niger Delta Struggle**

The struggle for self determination and crisis in the Niger Delta can be structured in phases. While there is no agreement on the periodization of these phases, this study will draw on distinct events could help chart these phases. A study by Lemmy Owugah identifies the following stages,

- The legal battles against oil companies for adequate compensation from the late 1970s to mid-1980s constitute the first phase.
- The second phase, he argues, spreads from mid-1980s to mid-1990s. This period witnessed peaceful demonstrations and occupation of flow stations in demand for adequate compensation and the provision of basic amenities.
- The forceful occupation and shutting down of flow stations and destruction of property belonging to oil companies in the mid-1990s to 1998, constituted the third phase.

The fourth phase, he notes, began with the issuance of the Kaiama Declaration by the Ijaw Youth Council in 11 December 1998. This phase could also be termed as the militant stage which called for self-determination within the Nigerian State and

control of resource.<sup>181</sup> However, this study will also introduce a sub-section to Owugah's fourth phase by introducing the Resource Control legal battles spearheaded by the governments of the six Niger Delta States at the Supreme Court.

### 3.1.1 The Ijaw National Congress and the Kaiama Declaration

The Ijaw are allegedly the most populous ethnic group in the Niger Delta and the fourth largest group after the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups in Nigeria. They spread from Akwa Ibom State on the East to Ondo State on the Western fringe. The geographical nature of the Ijaw territories is Deltaic; subsequently, this atomizes the lands into countless islands.<sup>182</sup> This is also compounded by the difference in dialect which imposes a clannish outlook on the Ijaws. So, most Ijaws or Isons do not recognise each other as such, rather they believe in clannish distinctions such as Kolokuma, Apoi, Okrika, Egbema, Ogbia, Kalabari, Kumbo, Kabu, Arogbo, Andoni, Mein, Atissa, Epie, Biseni, Obolo, Nembe, Kou, Olodiana, Furupagha, Operemor, Tuomo, Tungbo, Seimbiri, Ngbelebiri, Igbani (Bonny) Gbaramatu, Gbaran, Oporomor etc.<sup>183</sup>

The formation of the Ijaw National Congress (INC) signalled a breakthrough in Ijaw nationalist politics. Ironically, the INC was formed at the same time with MOSOP.<sup>184</sup> In congruence with the trend of self-determination struggles in the Niger Delta, INC objectives included territorial autonomy, resource control and cultural identity. The Ijaw terrain is most difficult and development in these areas is non-existent. Apart from Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa State, and a few land-based communities, no Ijaw settlement has roads, telephones or potable water.<sup>185</sup> Ijaw communities also lack other social amenities like schools, hospitals, electricity etc. In the last decade, the Ijaws have tenaciously sought the actualisation of these objectives. The Ijaw National

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<sup>181</sup> Owugah, L. "Political Economy of Resistance in the Niger Delta" in *The Emperor has no Clothes*, pp.115-117.

<sup>182</sup> *Ijaw News*, Ijaw Unity Now Vol. 4, No. 9. November 15, 2003. Retrieved on 06/03/07 from the World Wide Web, <http://ijawnews.tripod.com/>

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds): *Challenges of the Niger Delta*, Centre for advanced Social Science, 2001, P. 34

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

Congress spawned the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) which employs a more combatant approach to the liberation struggle. Their agitation has lifted them from the position of relative obscurity and thrust their political demands into national and international sphere. The congress also politicised the Ijaw indigenous religious-cultural institution of Egbesu cult, which is the worship of a traditional Ijaw god. Adherents of the Egbesu cult believe that it grants them supernatural powers and thus makes them impenetrable to bullets and machete cuts. On 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1998 Ijaw youths under the aegis of the IYC met at Kaiama in Bayelsa State to deliberate on the best way to ensure the continuous survival of the indigenous peoples of the Ijaw ethnic nationality of the Niger Delta within the Nigerian state.<sup>186</sup> The resolutions from that conference have become known as the Kaiama Declaration. The declaration amongst other things stated that:

All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis for our survival. Accordingly, we demand the immediate withdrawal from Ijawland of all military forces of occupation and repression by the Nigerian state. Any oil company that employs the services of the armed forces of the Nigerian state to 'protect' its operations will be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people.<sup>187</sup>

The youths advised all oil companies' staff and contractors to withdraw from Ijaw territories by the 30th December 1998, pending the resolution of the issue of resource ownership and control in the Ijaw area of the Niger Delta.<sup>188</sup> The declaration was not without costs. Military reprisals against the Ijaws included shootings, killings and sacking of communities like Kaiama.<sup>189</sup> The INC is currently mired in a crisis of leadership transition; power tussles and personality clashes that threaten to derail the focus of the Ijaws. It is hard to say what may happen next as factions are already on the brink of a break away.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> The Kaiama Declaration, Retrieved on 04/03/07 from the world wide web, [http://ijawcenter.com/kaiama\\_declaration.html](http://ijawcenter.com/kaiama_declaration.html)

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid

<sup>189</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) *Op. Cit.* P.32.

<sup>190</sup> Nwuke, O. Editor -in -Chief of *The Telegraph*, interviewed by author, Port Harcourt, Nigeria . 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2007.



### 3.1.2 Resource Control and the Quest for the Soul of Nigeria

The resource control controversy has become one of the most critical issues in Nigeria's nascent democracy. Since 1999, the debate on the management of the nation's oil earnings dominates the agenda in contemporary political discourse, at times heating up the polity.<sup>191</sup> The Election of President Obasanjo in 1999, brought with it fresh hope that with the new democratic dispensation, things would improve for the Niger Delta region. Embedded in Obasanjo's electioneering promise was the resolution of the issues surrounding the Niger Delta.<sup>192</sup> Due to rising concerns about security in the Niger Delta and its attendant effect on the Nigerian economy, the 1995 Constitutional Conference recommended a restructuring of Federation Account Revenue. The recommendation sought the setting aside of 13 per cent as derivation revenue to assist the development of oil-producing communities.<sup>193</sup> A compromise, the adoption of 13 percent was to put significant resources in the hands of the Niger Delta States. Unfortunately, the recommendations were never implemented and thus, at the inception of the new democracy, the percentage allocated by the federal government to derivation remained at a mere 1 per cent of oil revenue.<sup>194</sup>

As Obasanjo was elected on the Niger Delta ticket,<sup>195</sup> (he had failed to secure majority votes in his constituency) the stage was set for him to fulfil his promises. According to David Edevbie, the former Commissioner for Finance & Economic Planning of Delta State, the 13 per cent derivation principle was fortunately enshrined in the 1999 constitution. Section 162 (2) of the 1999 Constitution provides that:

The President, upon the receipt of advice from the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission, shall table before the National Assembly proposals for revenue allocation from the Federation Account, and in determining

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<sup>191</sup> *The Tide Online*, Still on federalism and resource control, Retrieved on 04/03/07 from the world wide web, <http://www.thetidenews.com>

<sup>192</sup> Edebe, O. Divergent Perspectives on the Niger Delta Question , Retrieved on 06/03/07 from the world wide web, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/articles/ad.asp?blurb=303>

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> The Niger Delta votes gave Obasanjo the comparative advantage he needed to be elected president, the Niger Delta indigenes voted overwhelmingly for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), in anticipation of benefiting from Obasanjo's campaign promises.

the formula, the National Assembly shall take into account, the allocation principles especially those of population, equality of States, internal revenue generation, land mass, terrain as well as population density: provided that the principle of derivation shall be constantly reflected in any approved formula as being not less than thirteen per cent of the revenue accruing to the Federation Account directly from any natural resources.<sup>196</sup>

He noted that the president reneged on his campaign promises and this affected the Niger Delta state governments, the governors protested, yet, it was to no avail.<sup>197</sup> A major issue was that all the state governors in the region had campaigned on the same platform with Obasanjo and promised the people quick results. The delay by the president was obviously costing the governors' major political mileage.

The delay in implementing the derivation and the introduction of the on-shore/offshore dichotomy in oil revenue distribution was interpreted by the oil producing states as a betrayal. Using legislative instruments, the onshore/offshore dichotomy debate sought to modify the concept and meaning of land and riparian rights, which would deny the natural owners of land, rivers and seas of the benefits accruing from the exploitation of their natural bounties.<sup>198</sup> While some states would not be affected, the worst hit would be states with claims to oil on offshore mining fields. This provoked strident protest from the littoral oil-producing states.<sup>199</sup>

The federal government in 2001 filed a suit against the country's 36 states (in what was known as the epic resource control battle), seeking interpretation from the Supreme Court on who owned the resources of the federation and what constituted the seaward boundaries of the states. When Nigeria's Supreme Court ruled in April 2002 that all of the country's offshore oil and gas resources belonged to the federal government, it was an apparent triumph for President Olusegun Obasanjo.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Edevbie, D. The politics of the 13 per cent derivation principle, Retrieved on 05/03/07 from the world wide web: [http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/fromstates/delta/politics\\_derivation\\_principle.html](http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/fromstates/delta/politics_derivation_principle.html)

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Edebe, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>199</sup> Edebe, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>200</sup> Edevbie, D. Op. Cit.

The *Africa Policy E-Journal*, noted the dismay expressed by stakeholders in the region when the landmark decision was made, it noted:

On 5 April 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that the seaward boundary of the country's eight littoral states terminated at their low-water mark, effectively giving the federal government control over the offshore oil and gas resources.<sup>201</sup>

Akwa Ibom State, as a result of this, would not have any revenue accruing to it, yet it would also have to refund to the federation account the fiscal allocation it had already received and spent. Nigerian law professor, Itse Sagay, argues that the ruling would exacerbate the conflict between the federal government and the oil states. Commenting in *ThisDay*, a national daily, he states that:

Apart from the fact that the judgment is a clear negation of the rules of international law, under which the continental shelf is an inalienable and inherent part of the coastal state; the domestic Nigerian laws applied constituted a blatant expropriation of the natural resources of the southern minorities.<sup>202</sup>

Governor Attah of Akwa Ibom State became the leader of the Niger Delta's resource control battle. He argued that "the distribution of natural resource among Nigerian states was broad and that other states should have control over revenues that could be generated by the development of their agricultural and mineral extraction potential".<sup>203</sup> This argument is corroborated by Lawrence Ekpebu, a former federal envoy, who argues that only resource control will lead to the resurrection of Nigeria; noting that oil had killed initiatives of all Nigeria regions that had, before the dependence on oil revenue, generated sufficient incomes from cash crops and other commodities. He argues that, "The call for resource control should not be confused with secession pointing to the nationalistic predilections of the elites of the Niger Delta who, even when other ethnic groups attempted to secede stood strongly for Nigeria".<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup>*Africa Policy E-Journal* "Nigeria: Oil, Poverty, and Rights" 2, 2002. Retrieved on 01/03/07 from the world wide web <http://www.africaaction.org/docs02/nig0207b.htm>

<sup>202</sup> *ThisDay* Newspaper, 10 April, 2002

<sup>203</sup> Overly, J. Governor takes on federal government and wins, Retrieved on 01/03/07 from the world wide web <http://www.internationalreports.net/>

<sup>204</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. & Ukiwo, U. (eds) *The Niger Delta Development Commission: Towards a Development Blueprint*, 2002, p. 6.

While all went well, resource control became the rallying cry of all the governors in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. However, as the political struggle grew more intense, some governors developed cold feet. This led to a political stalemate and President Obasanjo who was dealing with an impeachment scare from the National Assembly, realised that he had won the battle but lost the war. Facing the risk of a serious political backlash, President Obasanjo reversed course and set up a committee to arrive at a political solution, which was codified and passed by the national assembly in February 2004.<sup>205</sup> Kola Ologbondiyan, commenting in *ThisDay* notes that:

After much disagreement between the executive arm and the legislative arm, the latter had accepted the compromise proposal of the president. On 9 January, 2004, the president presented the Bill, which was approved and passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives on 20 January, 2004 and 10 February, 2004 respectively.<sup>206</sup>

### **3.2 Origin of Militancy in the Niger Delta**

In a special report on the Niger-Delta by the Institute for Policy Studies in the United States,<sup>207</sup> it was acknowledged that the violence in the region is raising the barometer of concern worldwide. The report stated that:

A year before the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Department of State in its annual encyclopaedia of global terrorism identified the Niger Delta-the geographical heart of oil production in Nigeria-as a breeding ground for militant and "impoverished ethnic groups" involved in numerous terrorist acts (abduction, hostage taking, kidnapping, and extrajudicial killings).<sup>208</sup>

Conflicts or rebellions are costly, the extraction process can be held up by protests especially when, as Ross argues, oil is onshore, and must be transported through long pipelines, making it easier for rebels to undermine the government, and extort money from oil companies, by sabotaging the pipelines and taking expatriate workers

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<sup>205</sup>Overly, J. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>206</sup>Olagboniyan, D. "Senate passes Onshore/Offshore Bill", *ThisDay* Newspaper, 21 January, 2004.

<sup>207</sup> Douglas, O. Kemedi, V. Okonta, I. & Watts, M. "Alienation and Militancy in the Niger Delta: A Response to CSIS on Petroleum, Politics, and Democracy in Nigeria" in *Foreign Policy In Focus*, Silver City, NM & Washington, DC. 2003.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

hostages.<sup>209</sup> Resource-driven conflicts are caused by a variety of factors, but in the Niger Delta, the agitations should not necessarily have led to armed conflict. Yet, it seems that after exhausting avenues of peaceful activism, militants have resorted to insurgency.

During 1993-98, ethnic militias arose and communal vigilante politics flourished. In 1994, the O’dua Peoples Congress (OPC) was established in the Southwest to protest the annulment of presidential election result in which a southerner Moshood Abiola, was alleged to have won. Two years later, the South-east also produced their own militia; two vigilante groups, the Bakassi Boys and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). In 1999, the North also joined the fray, with the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) in a move seen as a counteroffensive to perceived Yoruba hegemony. It is argued that the rise of ethnic militia or militarisation of the Nigerian consciousness is due to the failure of the state to provide the social and human security that its citizens require. This gives credence to the Social Contract Theory of small arms that was discussed in the second chapter. The citizens retain social ownership of the weapons, enabling them to reclaim their rights to self-help whenever the state fails to fulfil its part of the social contract.<sup>210</sup> These and other ethnic militias have come to play a transformative role in political life largely as party thugs, enforcers, and champions of local interests. The politicisation of conflicts in the zone has led to internal ethnic clashes and tribal wars. This has equally contributed to instability in the zone. Yet, at the heart of these conflicts, has been the struggle for control or access to resources. These conflicts pose a serious threat to human security in the region.<sup>211</sup>

Militancy in the Niger Delta, however, did not start on altruistic reasons. The origins of these militants can be traced to what Judy Asuni, notes as groups or cults formed to protect interests.<sup>212</sup> They “originated with the intention of offering physical protection and providing their members with an opportunity to meet people with similar ethnic or

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<sup>209</sup> Ross, M. ‘Nigeria’s Oil Sector and the Poor’ Prepared for the UK Department for International Development “*Nigeria: Drivers of Change*” (2003) program

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Bassey, E. The Niger Delta Conflicts and its Impact on Human Security in Nigeria, Research Essay for *Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa* course module, 2006, University of the Witwatersrand (Unpublished)

<sup>212</sup> Judy Asuni is the director of the Nigeria-based Academic Associates PeaceWorks (AAPW)

social identities. In 1999, many jobless university graduates, most of whom were members of tertiary institution cults aided in the formation of duplicate cults in the streets and villages of the Niger Delta and these clandestine gangs became affiliates of tertiary cults. The Niger Delta became a highly contested region in the 1999 elections, unscrupulous politicians to arm these cults with Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). They now had an army whom they depended on to carry out attacks and reprisals on political rivals; the political party with the most firepower invariably won the elections. Unfortunately, the ruling Peoples Democratic Party has allegedly sponsored election violence in the region.<sup>213</sup>

After the 1999 elections, these groups left with no other means of livelihood, acquired more arms and began to compete with each other over oil bunkering”.<sup>214</sup> The 2003 elections worsened issues when politicians seeking office manipulated two of the prominent groups namely; the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), led by Ateke Tom, and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Alhaji Asari Dokubo, exacerbating rivalries to advance their aspirations, often rewarding gang members for committing acts of political violence and intimidation against their opponents.<sup>215</sup> This public endorsement by political parties and politicians only emboldened these youths. Street gangs like Degbam, Dewell, Icelanders, Greenlanders and their affiliate tertiary cults the Vikings, Black Axe, Klansmen Konfraternity (KKK), Buccaneers and the supreme mafia confraternity, all became political militias.<sup>216</sup> The end of the 2003 elections did not stop the violence generated by these groups. It continued in the creeks and water ways of the Niger Delta. Streets and villages were also not spared. The influence of these militias became so strong they even became a source of worry to their former sponsors. The rising levels of violence and insecurity in the region soon prompted the government to attempt a clampdown on cult activities. Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom considered the leaders of the largest groups were declared wanted by the same politicians

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<sup>213</sup> Edede, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>214</sup> Dorina Bekoe Strategies for Peace in the Niger Delta, USIP Briefing October 2005 Retrieved on 31/08/06 from the world wide web: <http://www.usip.org/specialists/bios/current/bekoe.html>

<sup>215</sup> Ibid

<sup>216</sup> Edede, O. Op. Cit

who armed them.<sup>217</sup> They were forced into hiding in the creeks and operated as clandestine movements. It is hard to say when the militias metamorphosed into freedom fighters for the Niger Delta cause. Okah Edede argues that:

They took the initiative from the realms of pen and paper into the dimension of AK47, because as freedom fighters, they were harboured and accepted by their people and even the international community. If they had continued as cultists, they would have been labelled terrorists and undesirables.<sup>218</sup>

With the veneer of acceptability that has been conferred on these groups, they have focused their attacks more on oil producing companies. It is noteworthy to say that, while the militias have changed their strategies to include hostage taking raids, kidnappings, destruction of property, they still tap into the same narrative of discontent that has plagued the inhabitants of the region for decades.

### 3.2.1 The Ideology behind MEND

With the proliferation of armed militia groups in the Niger Delta, many with shadowy agendas, one group, The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has taken the Nigeria political terrain by storm. The mention of MEND is seen to evoke various emotions in people of the Niger Delta, and Nigerians in general. To some people, MEND members are the emancipators of the Niger Delta, whereas to others, they are just criminals and terrorists. Whatever they may be called, they are seen as a serious security threat by both government and oil companies operating in the region.

MEND is the latest group of indigenous militant movements sworn to an armed struggle against the Nigerian government and foreign multinational oil corporations that they hold responsible for the exploitation and oppression of the people of Niger Delta and the degradation of their natural environment. MEND has committed itself to gaining local control of Nigeria's oil and to securing reparations from the national government for the environmental degradation caused by the oil extraction. In a BBC interview, one of the group's leaders, who used the alias Major-General Godswill Tamuno, stated that MEND

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

was “fighting for total control”<sup>219</sup> of the Niger Delta’s oil wealth. In its list of demands, MEND called for the release from detention of two ethnic Ijaw leaders- Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, leader of the Niger Delta peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) who is jailed and charged with treason, and Diepreye Alamiyeseigha, a former governor of Bayelsa State charged with corruption.<sup>220</sup>

### 3.2.2 Constituency and Organisation

There are allegations that MEND is closely connected with Dokubo-Asari’s NDPVF, allegations that MEND has repeatedly denied. However, MEND reportedly seeks to unite all relevant militant groups in the Niger Delta to a common cause.<sup>221</sup> Unlike in the era of MOSOP where the leadership was easily identifiable, MEND’s membership remains a mystery. MEND’s leadership has chosen to remain faceless and although its cause has inspired copycat militia groups, MEND seems to enjoy tremendous support from the local communities it operates from. While these may be true, respondents were quick to note that there is a clear sense that the communities support the militants as their youth and folk heroes and that gives the militants the legitimacy they enjoy.<sup>222</sup>

However, as Tam-George argues, the nature of the struggle itself legitimised the struggle. The communities do not need to officially confer anything of the militants. He argues that during the Ogoni struggle, MOSOP’s prominent mark was that it had a clear organisation and structure, with a hierarchy of leadership that was identifiable. If there was any trouble in Ogoni, these leaders were easily arrested, intimidated or in extreme situations killed.<sup>223</sup> MOSOP leaders could also not embark in any action without seeking ratification from the entire Ogoni community via voice votes and other instruments. The MEND militants, he notes, had anonymised the struggle. They operate like a shadowy organisation and have

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<sup>219</sup>BBC News, “Nigeria’s Shadowy Oil Rebels”, Retrieved on 31/08/06 from the world wide web: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4732210.stm>

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>222</sup> Don Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>223</sup>Tam-George, A. Post-doctoral Fellow at University of Cape Town, Interviewed by author. Port Harcourt, Nigeria, 7-01-07.



literally plucked legitimacy from the brambles of the peoples faces. The lack of formal structure has made it more difficult for the authorities to contend with the movement.<sup>224</sup>

Tam-George argues that,

This shift is seen as more important because it has broadened our understanding on what popular struggle is all about, we have entered into a new zone of understanding on what popular power is about. The legitimacy of popular power originates from the things the people suffer. That is why we have so many militant groups who don't need to be endorsed with a stamp of legitimacy, if you compromise one group, you can't compromise the other.<sup>225</sup>

Cyril Obi in exploring the ramifications and reach of the new struggle by MEND notes that the struggle globalises a localised event:

The globalisation of local struggles in the Niger Delta is a novel dimension of the ethnic identity politics in Niger Delta and Africa. Unlike the old movement, the new is militant and challenged the legitimacy of the Nigerian State, demanding it's restructuring in a manner that recognises the rights of oil minorities to local autonomy and the control of their resources.<sup>226</sup>

### 3.2.3 MEND's Military Tactics

For a non-professional military organisation, MEND's attacks have shown a high level of discipline and sophistry, a clear departure from methods employed by previous militant groups in the Niger Delta which have been extorting money from companies working in the region and bunkering oil for many years.<sup>227</sup> MEND's strategy seems to be systematic and well-coordinated guerrilla styled attacks and kidnappings.

The militants using speed boats in the Niger Delta's swamps attack targets in quick succession. The sprawling network of pipelines makes it difficult for the government and Shell's defensive systems to wade off the militants' multiple and highly manoeuvrable

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Tam-George, A. Op. Cit.

<sup>226</sup> The Changing Forms of Identity Politics in Nigeria under Economic Adjustment, The Case of the Oil Minorities Movement of the Niger Delta, Nordic Africa Institute, Research Report no. I19

<sup>227</sup> *BBC News*, 20 April 2006. Nigeria's shadowy oil rebels, Retrieved on 07/03/07 from the world wide web; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4732210.stm>

units. The militants' access to sophisticated firepower and combat training has enabled the militants to overpower a combination of Shell's Western-trained private military guards and elite Nigerian units in several engagements. In several cases, as Brigadier General Elias Zamani, commander of a task force deployed by the government noted, the casualty toll on government troops was alarming.<sup>228</sup> Daniel Howden of the *Independent* notes that even more devastating has been the explosions out in the swamps which have closed down significant parts of the oil industry were carefully placed by people who understood the geography of the pipeline network.<sup>229</sup> The effective use of Shell's hostages to coerce both the government and the company, to halt or delay repairs has resulted in companies like Chevron and Elf shutting down facilities or even relocating operations to other West African countries.

While there have been claims that MEND is getting outside help in form of military hardware and assistance,<sup>230</sup> Asari Dokubo is said to have acquired his military training in Libya. It won't be surprising to find out that its tactical commanders were disgruntled former military personnel who were purged from the military on the wake of the failed Gideon Okah *coup d'etat*.<sup>231</sup>

#### 3.2.4 MEND's Resistance Diary

MEND's first known act of defiance was on January 11, 2006. Fast speedboats laden with arms-bearing militants attacked Shell's location and took four expatriates hostage at Ekeremor in Bayelsa State. The hostages were set free on January 30 on humanitarian grounds, after 19 days of intense negotiation with Governor Goodluck Jonathan of Bayelsa State. However, on February 9, MEND issued an ultimatum to all expatriates oil workers to leave the region on or before February 12.

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<sup>228</sup> Howden, D. "NIGERIA: Shell may pull out of Niger Delta after 17 die in boat raid" *The Independent* (UK), January 17th, 2006.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Government has even alleged that MEND has ties to Al Qaeda.

<sup>231</sup> An interviewed militant stated that he was a former Military commander who was retired just when he could have been promoted to a senior officer rank. He alleged a systematic purge of Niger Delta citizens from top ranking military posts.

Other attacks included the February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006 seizure of nine expatriate workers of Italian petrol company, Eni SpA, six days after the expiration of the February 12 deadline. Six of them were released after ten days. These and other acts of defiance or rebellion like blowing up of flow stations, robbing of banks, for example, have occurred. These attacks on oil installations and kidnapping of foreign oil workers have reduced Nigeria oil production output by 25%. In a massive show of strength in 2006, MEND expanded its theatre of operations by placing car bombs in a military barracks, in a Shell residential compound and outside the Government House, all in the state capital, Port Harcourt. As the crisis deepens, there are speculations that MEND is about to expand its activities beyond the boundaries of the Niger Delta.<sup>232</sup>

MEND's brazen attacks have emboldened many militant groups into a systematic wave of copycat attacks, kidnappings and murders. When asked whether the spate of criminality that has engulfed the region had lessened the credibility of the militants, a respondent, Tam-George argued that, the element of criminality was only symptomatic of a deeper malaise.

He stressed that:

No agitational terrain is pure, you will find all sorts of elements who will come and exploit the situation, and therefore those who understand the conflicts as a question of law and order are clearly missing the point. The Federal government because of its own wilful neglect of the Niger Delta has created the environment for criminality to thrive.<sup>233</sup>

Mwesiga Baregu corroborates in arguing that the conflict thrives only due to the perceived marginalization of the indigenous people of the Niger Delta. He even argues that in some cases, the militants might think they have a moral standing in fighting for their rights. MEND, he notes, was one of approximately 120 such groups that were organised to fight the foreign oil companies and the collaborationist Nigerian government in the inequitable exploitation of their oil wealth. "They may also be identified as

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<sup>232</sup> Mitee, L. President of MOSOP. Interviewed by author Port Harcourt, Nigeria, 16-01-07.

<sup>233</sup> Tam-George, A. Op. Cit.

counter-terrorist if they are conceived as fighting a terrorist onslaught unleashed by the oil companies upon the Ijaw people”.<sup>234</sup>

### 3.2.5 A Media-driven blueprint?

In Chapter Two, the study reviewed literature interrogating the role that the media plays in conflicts. While most attacks by other militants, before the emergence of MEND, were largely labelled as acts of criminality, MEND’s activities have generated international resonance and focused international spotlight once again on the plight of the Niger Delta. MOSOP activities and the death of Saro-Wiwa sparked the first wave of publicity in the Niger Delta, but its resonance never really disrupted economic activities worldwide, maybe because the movement’s ideals were enshrined in non-violent protests. MEND’s approach seems to have the opposite effect; world markets have woken up and listened whenever MEND makes a statement as it is likely to affect global oil prices. A major question this research seeks to answer is what strategies have the militants employed to use the media in furthering their goals?

It has been argued, perhaps with some justifications that, MEND, of all the militant groups, appears to be the most ideologically clear-sighted. MEND’s first strategy of attracting media attention was its mastery of imagery in which of course, the media thrives. The first physical images the media had of MEND were of heavily armed militants wearing ski masks and balaclavas. The sense of mystery and speculations that single act evoked was enough to lead media headlines for weeks to come. Another effective method of information dissemination is MEND’s highly efficient media relations strategy. Militant groups used to depend on direct contact with the media to be able to propagate their message. With the advent of the internet, MEND has been able to get its news out to the media through emailed press releases on its activities.<sup>235</sup> Most media houses operate from Lagos and sourcing news from the Niger Delta involves some travelling around very unsafe and unfamiliar terrain with the cost of mobility also prohibitive. Some news editors were often reluctant to fund repeated trips to the Niger

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<sup>234</sup> Baregu, M. “Globalisation and international terrorism” *African Security Review* 15.3, Institute for Security Studies, 2005, p. 107. Retrieved on 07/06/07 from the world wide web <http://www.iss.co.za/>

<sup>235</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

Delta and thus reporting of the issues were perceived as being always one sided. However, with MEND's methods, which include sending emails, photographs and news updates, as well as hosting their website,<sup>236</sup> journalists can access instant information about MEND activities.

During the fieldwork for this study, the author had the opportunity of visiting a militant base in the creeks, and was able to observe militants surfing the web, using laptops and sophisticated satellite transmitting equipment, satellite phones and gadgets. When interviewed, several commanders noted that they all had acquired university degrees and some even had post-graduate qualifications and were only forced to get to the bush due to economic hardship and marginalisation. The impression of MEND that the author left with was one of a well organised military force abreast with technological developments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From the emails sent by MEND, analysts argue that the militants must be in touch with experienced media specialists who help them with their media strategy. "They send emails and photographs to you, they give you news reports from their perspective and they are well written press releases, making them more attractive and convincing to journalists on deadlines".<sup>237</sup> MEND has also given the media online contact information on how they might be contacted for verification of the source of their information. This is calculated at the media, both local and international. The Niger Delta, before MEND, was only focused on special reports or editorials, but these days, the Niger Delta is leading the agenda on almost a daily basis.<sup>238</sup>

Hostage taking is also a major media strategy of MEND. It relies on its reputation of taking hostages for only political reasons and setting them free when the point has been made. With its first hostage taking of four expatriates, MEND simultaneously issued a list of demands. However, hostage taking now poses a challenge to MEND's credibility because of the threat of it becoming a major money making venture. Militants from groups not affiliated to MEND are kidnapping expatriate oil workers without a clear agenda, apart from demanding ransom. For example, a recent hostage taking in Port

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Don-Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>238</sup> Tam-George, A. Op. Cit.

Harcourt was carried out by the Ikwerre tribe, who are basically not Ijaws. Although MEND via rebuttals is able to disassociate itself from these activities, there is a lot of harm being inflicted on the image of the struggle. The Niger Delta inhabitants are often seen as criminals, hostage takers and as people who do nothing else apart from promoting violence and exploiting people through that kind of violent process.<sup>239</sup> This view is often echoed by other stakeholders like the Nigerian state and its foreign principals. Joab-Peterside argues that the hostage taking is no longer a viable strategy because of its deployment as an instrument of accumulation by rapacious militants and their political collaborators. He says:

The frequency with which it is being carried out, the profiteering tendencies involved, the criminal elements who have hijacked the process and not making any fundamental demands on the state on behalf of the people of the area, renders the strategy no longer viable.<sup>240</sup>

Others argue that while it was possible to criminalise the hostage taking activity of the militants, a political angle to the pattern was emerging. There are instances where hostages from Algeria, Yemen, and Morocco are considered by the militants as hostages of lesser value than those from other countries. This reveals a conscious political motivation behind the hostage taking.<sup>241</sup> This also feeds into the internationalization of the conflict because the militants know that taking Americans hostage for example, will instantly get air coverage in CNN and thus making it a global issue. How this plays out reveals how foreign governments relate to their nationals who are in the Diaspora, since the casual handling of the situation might have implications on the domestic politics of that country. Therefore, while hostage taking may seem a localised and isolated issue, it tends to have a lot of global impact.

An important source of publicity for MEND has been from the released hostages themselves. While this could be attributed to the Stockholm syndrome,<sup>242</sup> these hostages

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<sup>239</sup> President Obasanjo on a national television programme openly berated Niger Deltans and blamed them for the crisis, he called them lazy and criminals. This sparked a public outrage.

<sup>240</sup> Joab-Peterside, S. 'MEND's use of kidnapping was strategic, but it has lost its significance' Newsletter for the Centre for Advanced Social Science (CASS) Port Harcourt, Vol. 15. No. 2. Oct- Dec. 2006.

<sup>241</sup> Tam-George, A. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>242</sup> This represents a psychological condition where a hostage displays positive feelings towards the hostage-taker, the hostage-taker in turn reciprocates positive feelings towards the hostage and the

have been quite effective in creating the kind of positive image that drives MEND's local and increasingly international media campaigns. When the first four hostages were released on humanitarian grounds, the American hostage released on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday was quite vocal in praising his treatment by MEND. He even went on CNN to say that while his kidnap was unfortunate, he believed and respected the demands of his abductors and the host communities. The world media could not ignore such potent instances of public declarations and apart from a few incidences where hostages have died, the MEND militants try to treat the hostages humanely.

MEND, in recent times, has complicated our understanding of their objectives by saying that any lover of justice and the Niger Delta is a member of MEND, an infinite membership criteria which seeks to recruit every inhabitant of the Niger Delta. This makes it even harder for it to claim or disclaim activities perpetuated in the Niger Delta. This infinite criterion of membership enhances the amorphous character of MEND. Tam-George states that, "what we know now as MEND is only a systematic media manipulation, a systematic pattern of destruction and scientific engagement with the authorities and actors involved in this oil discourse".<sup>243</sup>

Another interesting development has been observed in recent times. MEND seems to be in the process of reinventing its public image into a formidable political entity. With the approach of the general elections in April 2006, newspaper articles attributed a number of political remarks to MEND. A member of MEND (who granted an interview but wishes to remain anonymous) noted that MEND has had to re-evaluate its strategy and thus will become more involved in charting the course of the political narrative especially as it concerns the position of the Niger Delta. A group claiming to be representing the political arm of MEND has in recent months released editorials in the media, commenting on the various issues that have dominated the agenda in the build up to the elections. An editorial in *ThisDay* newspaper argues:

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hostage displays negative feelings towards those responsible for the rescue. See Huddleston-Mattai, B. *Journal of Black Studies*, 1993, p.347, vol. 23, no. 3.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

It is against this background that politicians participating at the April 21 presidential polls have made the restoration of values to the Niger Delta as one of their cardinal programmes. Major presidential candidates have continued to roll out laudable promises capable of assuaging the anger of the people of the zone. The Niger Delta affair therefore has become a selling point for the presidential candidates. It is the view of many that such presidential candidates, who show insensitivity to the plights of the people of the Niger Delta, might automatically lose the support of the zone in their quests.<sup>244</sup>

### **3.3 Niger Delta conflicts and the Implications for Human Security in Nigeria**

The high profile kidnappings of expatriate oil workers in the Niger Delta have gradually developed into a well-oiled business venture. While this sends a clear message that the militants have taken the conflicts to another level, the issues of under development and grievances levelled at the government and MNCs come into play. The recent insurgency has serious negative implications for the Niger Delta. First, the Niger Delta already resembles a war zone with the proliferation of armed personnel since the early 1990s when the first civil protest by the Ogoni communities started. While reprisals from the government-sanctioned security forces were quick, the violence was often only one sided. These reprisals have affected the social fabric of the Niger Delta people. In communities where these reprisals took place, socio-economic activities have grounded to a halt as most of these communities were completely razed to the earth. Most residents not arrested, killed or assaulted under various pretexts, have either become refugees or have fled in the face of gross violations of their human rights.

Second, the militants now have easy access to sophisticated weaponry and have demonstrated the ability and willingness to use these weapons to further their aims. They are gaining easy recruits from the youth of these disenfranchised communities. Many poverty-stricken youths in the Niger Delta now find membership of these militias preferable to living conditions as delinquents struggling to survive in their own communities. To these militants, as Maxted and Zegeye regrettably noted, it seems, the advantage of warfare over mere delinquency is that it legitimizes in the name of 'justice'

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<sup>244</sup> *ThisDay* (Lagos) Nigeria: The Niger Delta as Campaign Agenda. March 4, 2007.



or ‘revolution’ the use of arms and violence to gain control over the resources of the state<sup>245</sup>.

The human security crisis in the Niger Delta seems to manifest itself in many different forms: militant attacks on oil installations, kidnappings, and the violation of human rights, the suppression of civil liberties, abject poverty, debt problems, population displacement, ecological disaster and disenfranchisement. In the resultant conflicts, it seems that women, children, the elderly, and the economically disadvantaged, bear the brunt.<sup>246</sup> Easy access to light and medium range arms only exacerbates the nature of conflicts, as this ensures longevity of the conflicts. However, ethnic rivalries are also playing themselves out into violent conflicts. These all have roots in the struggle and claims of ownership over scarce oil revenues. Right now, communities in the Niger Delta are stock piling arms to prevent attacks on themselves by other communities. Ancient scores are now being settled under various pretexts. This only adds to the conflagration, as wars between for example the Ijaw and the Itshekiri often renders a whole region ungovernable. This has direct implications on socio-political activities, in the Niger Delta.

Third, Nigeria since the return to democratic rule in 1999 was until, the recent national elections in April 2007, held up by the international community as a positive example of the rising tide of democracy on the African continent. This perception has since shifted as international observers argue that the April elections lacked credibility due to gross irregularities and alleged state-sponsored violence. Indeed, apart from facing numerous socio- economic challenges, the nation seems to have reversed significant strides made towards building a more representative political system. Right now, the structure remains fragile and signs of disintegration in Africa’s most populous nation are already surfacing.<sup>247</sup> However, in recent times, Nigerian elections have become increasingly

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<sup>245</sup> Macted, J and Zegeye, A. “Human Stability and Conflict in the Horn of Africa” in Thomas, C. and Wilkin, P. (eds): *Globalisation, Human Security and the African Experience*. Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publications, 1999.

<sup>246</sup> An African proverb notes that “when two elephants fight, it’s the grass that suffers”

<sup>247</sup> Wee, P. “Responding to Crisis in Nigeria” United states Institute for Peace. 2006. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 1st September, 2006. [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/.html)

violent. This trend has been exacerbated by the introduction of armed militants. Militant groups in Nigeria have been known to use their military might to either support or destabilise elections. International observers at the last national elections, in 2007, were unable to give a clean bill of health to the elections held in the Niger Delta. Some were even bold to declare that there were no elections in most parts of the region.<sup>248</sup> The democratic dispensation has recorded more conflicts than during reign of military regimes. Between May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999 when President Obasanjo was sworn in and December 19<sup>th</sup> of the same year, more than twenty cases of conflicts were recorded. Ten of these directly impacted on the Niger Delta.<sup>249</sup> Nigeria has held national elections in April 2007. This was the culmination of President Obasanjo's two-term tenure.

The Niger Delta conflict presents a serious challenge. Statistics are available on the cases of politically motivated crimes in the country during the 2007 general elections.<sup>250</sup> Several high profile murders of political aspirants in the run-up to the elections, denotes the increasing insecurities that exist with Nigerian elections. In the 2003 elections, the Niger Delta militias were few and not well armed. Recently, there has been a multiplicity of militia and armed gangs all operating under the pretext of the liberation struggle. They are so well armed that in recent clashes with Nigerian security forces, their superior fire power has routed attempts by government to restore stability and arrest these militants.<sup>251</sup> The post-election crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo points to the trend of trying to hold democratic activities in a militarised zone. Political thuggery has always been a feature of Nigeria elections. However, the implication of these to the Niger Delta leaves much to be desired. The Nigerian Government announced on September 1, 2006, its intention to acquire 80,000 new firearms for the Nigeria's police ahead of recent elections held in April 2007. In an interview with the BBC, Nigerian Police spokesman Haz Iwendi noted that the guns were needed to arm 50,000 new police officers.<sup>252</sup> However, with the

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<sup>248</sup> Human Right Watch. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>249</sup> The Panos Institute, 'Chronology of Conflict' 2000-2005. Retrieved on 26/08/06 from the world wide web <http://www.panosinst.org/resources/guides/journalists/toc.php>

<sup>250</sup> Vanguard (Lagos), Nigeria: Naccima Tasks FG on N/Delta Restiveness. August 31, 2006. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 3rd September, 2006: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200608310453.html>

<sup>251</sup> This researcher personally witnessed an operation carried out by the militants.

<sup>252</sup> *The Journal of Turkish weekly*, "Nigeria police to get arms boost", 02 September 2006. Retrieved from the worldwide web on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2006 <http://www.turkishweekly.net/news.php?id=37811>

generally brutal history of Nigerian security forces and the Nigerian Police in general, one wonders whether this will not lead to exacerbating the problem of the region.

Fourth, the Niger Delta conflicts are a major threat to the human security of the West African sub-region. Most African conflicts have been internal, but the origins of these conflicts often arose along the same lines as the Niger Delta conflicts (accessibility to light arms alongside the 'illegal' exploration of natural resources). There is the ability of conflicts to spread into other nations and consequently, destabilise whole sub-regions like the case of the Liberian civil war. Easy access to light arms in the Niger Delta means that ethnic militants and criminal elements in neighbouring countries could effectively tap into the global arms trafficking network through channels already established in the Niger Delta. On the other hand, Niger Delta militants could join the lucrative trade of exporting violence by becoming armed mercenaries. Also, the Niger Delta conflicts, if not arrested at this early stage could potentially lead to a protracted low-grade war, that will hamper Nigeria's revenue generating capacity. The Nigerian civil war had at its core attempts to control the mineral resources of the Niger Delta.<sup>253</sup> A war in Nigeria with its huge population has serious human security implications for the whole of Africa and the world. Very few countries in the world have the resources to handle a huge influx of refugees from Nigeria.<sup>254</sup>

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The Niger Delta conflicts have become a reflection of the frustrations, disillusionment and the deprivations that arguable accompanies oil exploration. The 1990s saw the rise of ethnic militias in Nigeria; their emergence can be linked to challenges of socio-political integration of the federation. The rise of militancy in the Niger Delta region is directly linked with unequal socio-economic realities of the region when compared with the rest of the Nigeria's other regions. Several movements and measures have been employed to

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<sup>253</sup> Mohamed Salih, M. A. *Environmental Politics and Liberation in Contemporary Africa*. Springer, The Netherlands, 1999, pp.76-78

<sup>254</sup> Olojede, etal. *AAPS Occasional paper series*. Vol. 4 Nov. 3 2000,p.62

resolve this malaise. No solution is on sight as the Nigerian government seems intent on maintaining the status quo. The two elections have empowered gangs and contributed to the militarisation and proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. These militants have recently undergone a career change, re-engineering their ideology and re-emerging as self-professed freedom fighters.

The emergence of MEND has refocused media attention on the region. Its strategies and media savvy has granted it unparalleled access to both local and international media, yet as evidence shows, elements of criminality have hijacked a major part of the process. This puts MEND's relevance as an agent of change and resistance in jeopardy. With the Niger Delta's increasing importance in the national politics and the recent general elections, MEND's recent metamorphosis as an agent in the political terrain may serve as a catalyst to permanent change in the region. However, the ongoing conflict in the region could pose a serious threat to the human security of its inhabitants, the nation and the sub-region as a whole.

## Chapter Four - The Nigerian Government's Response and the Role of Secondary Actors in the Conflict

*The flames of Shell are flames of Hell,  
We bask below their light,  
Nought for us to serve the blight,  
Of cursed neglect and cursed Shell.*<sup>255</sup>

In Chapter Two, we analysed the perspectives of Hyde-Clark Humphries, who notes that a conflict exemplifies a standoff between two or more parties in a system. They are faced with the choice of preserving their interests, but refuse to compromise even at the risk of going to war or sacrificing some of those interests in order to maintain peace.<sup>256</sup> Booth acknowledges the role of non state actors that also contribute to the state of (in) security in a region. These include Multinational Corporations (MNCs), criminal syndicates, rebel groups and NGOs etc.<sup>257</sup> The previous chapters traced the build-up to the Niger Delta conflicts, their findings reveal the complexity that exist in this nexus of regional instability and the multiplicity of agendas subsumed in the roles of the primary actors. In this chapter, the study primarily reveals the response of the Nigerian government and the oil companies to the media coverage of the conflagration. It also highlights how the primary actors relate with secondary actors in these conflicts and analyses their interaction with and response to the media.

### 4.1 Multinational Corporations and Globalisation

Globalisation, aided by the rapid advancement in technology, is erasing the barriers of transnational boundaries. The international actors that reap the most benefits from this trend are the Multinational Corporations. Goldstein notes that Multinational Corporations (MNCs) or Transnational Corporations (TNCs) are “large corporations that operate worldwide in many companies in the world simultaneously, with fixed facilities and

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<sup>255</sup> Ogoni song, *The Shell Review*, SIPC, July 1993, p.57.

<sup>256</sup> Hyde-Clarke Humphries, N. (1999) *Crisis Management, War and the Media : the Gulf War and the Fourth Estate. Thesis (M.A.) -- University of the Witwatersrand.*

<sup>257</sup> Booth, K. 1994. “A Security Regime in Southern Africa: Theoretical Considerations. Southern African Perspectives No. 30, CSAS” in Thomas, C. and Wilkin, P. (eds): *Globalisation, Human Security and the African Experience.* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publications, 1999.

employees”.<sup>258</sup> Transnational corporations have increasingly expanded their hold on the worlds’ financial markets. Some Transnational Corporations make more profits annually than many developing countries in the world.<sup>259</sup> They often establish their bases where their business interests are best served and in most cases, in developing countries where there is a dire need for funding and foreign investments.

The Human Rights Watch has been explicit in expressing concerns about how developing governments collaborate with transnationals to control and subjugate their citizens. Although most host governments have certain bargaining powers, these corporations exploit their workers and degrade the environment.<sup>260</sup> In most cases, their hosts would play down these abuses to ensure a steady flow of funds and investments:

MNCs use various means to influence host governments, hiring lobbyists, advertisements to influence public opinion, incentives to politicians as well as corruption; nobody knows the full extent to which MNCs use payoffs, kickbacks, gifts and similar methods to win the approval of individual government officials for policies favourable to the MNCs.<sup>261</sup>

It has become a proven fact that most transnational companies operate in developing countries with such poor environmental and safety records that they would not attempt to replicate in their operations in western countries.<sup>262</sup> Yet, this exploitation of the environment continues unabated as some of the western countries that benefit from these activities keep silent about the concerns raised by host communities and civil society groups that are opposed to them.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Goldstein, J. Op. Cit. p. 366

<sup>259</sup> Ibid. p. 368

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. p. 371

<sup>261</sup> Ibid. p. 372

<sup>262</sup> Human Rights Watch (1999) Op. Cit.

<sup>263</sup> Rodney, W.: *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, London, 1973.

## 4.2 The Media Blitz and its Effects on the Nigerian Government and Shell

The Niger Delta has received a fair amount of media coverage in the last decade. This is largely attributed to the outcry that accompanied the execution of Saro-Wiwa, and his co-accused, as well as the recent conflagration of conflicts, engineered alongside a MEND driven media agenda. The global protest that accompanied the execution of Saro-Wiwa and his co-accused took the Nigerian government and Shell by surprise. The international media ran a lot of stories on Shell and its activities in the Niger-Delta detailing its complicity in fuelling the conflicts that arose.

Newspaper reports using emotive phrases such as “activists accuse Shell of arming the death squads who have been brutally suppressing the Ogoni people”, was highly critical of Shell and its alleged role in importing firearms for Nigerian security forces.<sup>264</sup> Some reports also criticised Shell’s involvement and collaboration with the Nigerian government in the oppression of the Ogoni people. Although they reported that Shell was taking punitive actions to clean up its Nigeria operation, it was seen as medicine after death as the harm had already been done.<sup>265</sup> Another such report coming just after the first anniversary of Saro-Wiwa’s death, gave an in-depth analysis of the issues related to the crisis in the Niger Delta and called on the international community to speed up sanctions against Nigeria, and a boycott of Shell products worldwide.<sup>266</sup>

The *Financial Times* reports were perhaps the most damaging. It reported on the renewed flak Shell was taking and the planned boycott of its product due to its involvement with the Nigerian government. The article mentioned a document it intended to release in which a senior manager of Shell wrote on 4 May 1994 requesting military assistance from the government. It ran quotes from Shell’s spokesperson but seemed quite critical of

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<sup>264</sup> Doudu, C. “Shell admits importing guns” in *The Observer*, 28 January 1996.

<sup>265</sup> Insight Team, “Shell Axes “corrupt” Nigerian staff” in *Time*, 17 December 1995.

<sup>266</sup> Lean, G. “Oil brings untold damage to the Niger-Delta” in *Independent on Sunday*, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1996 and “Shell paid Nigerian military”, 17th December, 1995.

those comments. The article also raised questions about the sincerity of Shell's reports on mediation during the crisis.<sup>267</sup>

The media frenzy that ensued, coupled with the clamour for international sanctions against Nigeria and Shell by human right organisations set the agenda on issues concerning transnationals and conflicts and practices that seem to be associated with their commercial involvement the world over. Because of its apparent power, controlling the media becomes a priority of actors involved in a conflict. Thus strategies were developed to manage media images of these conflicts. This control ranged from managing media access to information, to restricting media access in conflict environments.

#### 4.2.1 Nigerian Government and News Management

In an attempt to understand how the government has tried to manage its image in the press, an understanding of the Nigerian information system is necessary. The Nigerian government's key arm of information dissemination is the Federal Ministry of Information, and National Orientation. This body is headed by a minister who is a member of 'The National Executive Council' in whatever permutation the existing government choose to be identified with.<sup>268</sup> The vision of the ministry is "to create an informed and properly orientated citizenry, make clear the goals of government and involve the people in policy-making through effective and efficient public information management".<sup>269</sup> While it is easy to understand this mission statement in a democratic dispensation, the perception of Nigerians to military governments' information machinery has always been that of propaganda.

From 1970s to the 1990s, ownership of the electronic media was in the government's domain. The government-owned National Television Authority (NTA), Radio Nigeria and the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), all became useful tools in the hands of the

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<sup>267</sup> Adams, P., Cosie, R., Lewis, W., Mathews, M. "Shell faces new onslaught over Nigeria" *Financial Times*, 16th December, 1995.

<sup>268</sup> The Current minister is John Ogar Odey.

<sup>269</sup> *Nigeria Direct*, The Official Information Gateway of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Retrieved on 20/09/06 from the world wide web; <http://www.nigeria.gov.ng/aboutministry.aspx>



government. As it had firm control of the electronic media, the military governments only had one thing to fear, the print media. As noted earlier, the print media was mostly southern based. The print media was also polarized along ethnic lines, with the Lagos based media perceived to be anti government, and the Northern based media seen as pro government.<sup>270</sup>

This, however, has shifted slightly. With the advent of democracy and a southern president, (in the person of Obasanjo) and his aggressive wooing of the media in form of media tours; the southern press, has become slightly tolerant while the northern press then supported the opposition. The dynamics, however, have shifted, with a newly elected president, (in the person of Umaru Yar'Adua), who assumed office in May 2007. It is too early to analyse what lines that the press would lean towards. During the years of military occupation, Nigerians were adept with reading hidden meanings in whatever they heard from the national media but were quick to verify the facts in the alternative print media. To counter this bad press, successive governments had only one option; to harass, intimidate, kill and imprison journalists, whom they felt were thorns in the government's flesh. At the extreme, newspapers and news-magazine offices were invaded by government agents, in attempts to seize newsprint and close them down.

An effective method of managing the press was the promulgation of decrees, to muzzle it. The most pernicious were the sedition laws, designed to discourage criticisms that could lower the esteem of the authorities in the eyes of the ordinary citizens.<sup>271</sup> Chris Ogbondah argues that these laws are legacies of colonial occupation.<sup>272</sup> He notes that the Newspaper Ordinance No. 10 of 1903, and Decree No. 4 of 1984 (Public Officers Protection against False Accusation Decree) were very similar in the fact that they were both enacted by authoritarian governments, the colonialist\imperialistic and the military.<sup>273</sup> Yet, with the advent of independence, successive governments have also made use of them.

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<sup>270</sup> Adebamiwi, W. Op. Cit.

<sup>271</sup> Duyile, D. and Oyinlola, M. "Ordeals of the Nigerian media" The Sun Online, Tuesday, March 8, 2005

<sup>272</sup> Ogbondah, Chris W. "Nigerian Press under Imperialists and Dictators, 1903-1985", Paper presented at the 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Portland, OR, July 2-5, 1988.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

Duyile and Oyinlola note that:

In his very first press conference after Nigeria's independence, Mr. T. O. S. Benson, the Minister of Information (in Tafawa Balewa-led indigenous democratic government) warned that stern punishment awaited journalists and newspapers that made it their business to criticize the Federal Government. A year later, Dr Chike Obi, nationalist, parliamentarian, and leader of the Dynamic Party, was charged for sedition, under the very laws that the colonial authorities had used to suppress media criticisms.<sup>274</sup>

All successive military regimes from General Gowon up to General Sani Abacha made significant in-roads at curtailing press freedom, enacting numerous decrees that affected the running of newspapers and the broadcast media. This lays down the background of the Nigerian press environment before the advent of the Ogoni led crisis of the 1990s. When the Saro-Wiwa led MOSOP issued the 'Ogoni Bill of Rights', the rally was disrupted by government agents and several people were killed and arrested. Coverage in the national media was pro-government, but the print media came out with damning reports of government's oppressive tactics. Since it could not effectively raid and stop the majority of the press from going to print, government effectively tried to down play attacks on it by labelling the opposition press as 'Lagos-Ibadan media'. The tagged group was believed to be dominated by one ethnic group fostering their interest.<sup>275</sup>

Government however, had other ways of managing the press. An example is what Uche calls 'co-opting':

The government uses certain preferential treatments to 'buy' the most influential journalists in the country... appointing these influential critics in the media to top posts within the government. 'Co-opting' of journalists ensures that they are reduced to being mere stooges of government officials.<sup>276</sup>

This prompted the editor of the *Guardian* to publish an article reassuring his readers that his proprietor's acceptance of a ministerial appointment in the government could not

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<sup>274</sup>Duyile, D. and Oyinlola, M. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>275</sup>Nwachuku, Florence (1998) Media ownership in Nigeria: Present and future perspectives. *Media Development* 1998, No. 2.

<sup>276</sup>Uche, Luke Uka (1989). *Mass Media People and Politics in Nigeria*. New Delph: Concept Publisher Company. Cited in Nwachuku (1988).

influence the objectivity of the newspaper in handling issues concerning government.<sup>277</sup> Of course, the readers were not convinced and eventually, the *Guardian's* once fiery editorial was reduced to a moderate apologetic ghost of its former self.

Another method of managing information according to Omu is to deny journalists access to places and persons for information, refusing to give government advertisements and dubious labelling of documents containing valuable information. For example, the newspapers that were pro-government during the colonial rule, namely the *Eagle*, *Lagos Critic* and *Record* (for some years of its existence) received most government advertisements.<sup>278</sup> This is a common practice worldwide. Anti-government media are normally starved of government advertisement.

Government has also devised a new way of keeping the media in check. Critiques of the setup of government regulatory bodies show that these bodies can be a source of negative or positive control of the media. Where there are defects or loopholes in the decree that set up such regulatory bodies, these can be used for repressing freedom of expression. It is thought that government may intentionally leave loopholes to exploit in silencing any opposition. It is widely believed that one pitfall in the decree that set up the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is the power given to the commission to revoke the licenses of stations which do not operate in accordance with the code and in the public interest. The decree did not specify either how to seek redress or to what the public interest is. Thus, the decree allows the NBC to provide licenses in perpetuity only to withdraw them at whim.<sup>279</sup>

However, government-controlled broadcast media still dominate the country. Private broadcasters do a lot of self-censorship by not transmitting stories that criticize the government.<sup>280</sup> The government continued to enforce laws permitting only government broadcasters to air programs nationwide, limiting the scope of private stations. The

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid

<sup>278</sup> Omu, F. I. A. (1978) *Press and Politics in Nigeria, 1880 - 1937*. London: Longman Group Ltd.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Duyile, D. and Oyinlola, M. Op. Cit.

government has used the foreign content provision of the Press Law of 1993 to revoke licenses granted to some broadcasters. The regulation requires local television stations to limit programming from other countries to 40 percent; satellite broadcasters are limited to 20 percent.<sup>281</sup>

Although there is a large and vibrant independent domestic press that is frequently critical of the government, the government also owns or controls many publications. All newspapers and magazines are required to register with the government under the Newspaper Registration Board Decree 43 of 1993. Sani Abacha's Minister of Culture and Information, Walter Ofonagoro, threatened to close newspapers not registered with the board. The registration fee was about \$3,000, and the registration process required editors to provide their home as well as office address.<sup>282</sup> Although no newspaper had registered by the end of 1997, the Culture and Information Minister regularly threatened to close unregistered newspapers. The Abacha regime had, at various times, shut independent newspapers for various offences, but there were no known cases of papers being prosecuted for failing to register.<sup>283</sup>

A major source of irritation to the Nigerian government is the foreign press coverage of news. The government has on several occasions accused foreign media organisations of being biased on their reportage of Nigeria. A recent event occurred in February 2007, where government accused the CNN of staging its report and promoting the cycle of violence in the Niger Delta region. After the report, the then Minister of Information, Mr Frank Nweke Jnr argued that the CNN report: "utterly disregards the most elementary principle of journalism because no government official was interviewed".<sup>284</sup> While this may be true in some cases, an interesting development in Nigeria occurs when an important news story breaks. More often than not, this report will first be aired on Cable News Network (CNN) or the British Broadcasting Network (BBC) before the local media

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<sup>281</sup> *ibid*

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>283</sup> "Nigeria Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997" U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, January 30, 1998. Cited in *Laws and regulations*. Retrieved on 20/09/06 from the world wide web; <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/nigeria/law.htm>

<sup>284</sup> Koinange, J. Big guns, big oil collide in Nigeria, *CNN.com*, Retrieved on 20/04/07 from the world wide web; <http://www.cnn.com/2007/WORLD/africa/02/06/btsc.koinange.nigeria/index.html>

even gets wind of it. A number of reasons for this have been put forward by local press, but a major one is said to be the vast resources (financial and otherwise) at the disposal of these correspondents and the level of immunity from prosecution they seem to enjoy. Most Nigerian journalists feel safer if they wait for the story to break on the wire services before sending their copy.<sup>285</sup> In most major newsrooms in Nigeria, the television is tuned on to either the BBC or CNN<sup>286</sup>.

Government response has been to limit the amount of foreign journalists accredited to cover the nation at any given time. Moreover, foreign journalists are routinely required to inform the Nigerian embassy of the subject matter of their proposed coverage before they are granted visas. Proposing political coverage is discouraged and may result in the visa request being refused. There are fewer than 10 resident foreign correspondents.<sup>287</sup> Ironically, since the advent of democratic governance, government has become increasingly hostile to foreign press and this has prompted several bureaus to move from Nigeria to more receptive countries.

Before the 2007 general elections, Nigeria's nascent democracy was frequently held up as a positive example of the rising tide of democracy on the African continent. With the advent of the Obasanjo administration, Nigeria was applauded as having made significant strides toward building a more representative political system. Yet, as the recent elections revealed, the structure remains fragile and signs of disintegration in Africa's most populous nation are already surfacing.<sup>288</sup> The democratic dispensation has recorded more conflicts than in the case of the military. More than twenty cases of conflicts were recorded between May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, when president Obasanjo was sworn in and December 19<sup>th</sup> of the same year; unfortunately, ten of these directly impacted on the Niger Delta.<sup>289</sup> The Obasanjo led government had evolved in its news management techniques of these

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<sup>285</sup> Don-Pedro, I. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>286</sup> A practise the researcher has personally witnessed in most newsroom he has visited.

<sup>287</sup> *Nigeria Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997*. U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

<sup>288</sup> Wee, P. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>289</sup> The Panos Institute, *Op. Cit.*

conflicts. However, there is almost no difference from some of the methods used by former military governments.

There have been certain restrictions on access to areas where conflicts have occurred. For example, when the town of Odi was bombarded by the military, any journalist caught within fifteen kilometres of the town for a month was likely to be harassed or even detained by the military.<sup>290</sup> Those that were allowed access were sent in with government minders, with the understanding that, government had the right to censor the reports before it want to press. Any journalist that defied this unwritten understanding was subsequently blacklisted.<sup>291</sup>

The government has refused to recognise the militants as a substantive movement. The militants have been demonised in most government-sponsored or owned press coverage. These militants are tagged criminals, terrorists and/ or crude oil pirates, thus refusing to legitimise their claims to fighting a just cause. This government does by citing instances of sabotage to oil facilities, the kidnapping and abduction of foreign expatriates by militant groups in the Niger Delta.<sup>292</sup> Government became very adept at spinning the news coverage of any violent eruption as cult-related violence, therefore, trivialising the situation. The government has consistently used the mass media in its control to condemn the antics of the militants while also attempting some negotiations with the militants. However, if the negotiations have reached a deadlock, the government's public relations machinery is quick to lay the blame on the militants.<sup>293</sup> Government also engages the media whenever going on a military operation to 'hunt down' the militants, yet, you are not likely to get a clear perspective on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), which is government funded news organisation. The government has completely decreed a clampdown on Niger Delta news and no negative news is allowed to be aired.<sup>294</sup>

The Information Ministry has simultaneously projected a positive self image of the government. It does this by focusing media coverage on the development programmes

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<sup>290</sup> Don-Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Anikulapo, J. *Sunday Guardian* Editor, Interviewed by author, Lagos, Nigeria, 17-01-07.

<sup>293</sup> Odeniyi, P. "Why I met Dokubo-Asari, Ateke, by Obasanjo" in *The Nation*, 27/10/06, p.5.

<sup>294</sup> Don-Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

instituted by government in the Niger Delta. A body like the Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC) is one of such intervention programmes. It has also tried to steer news coverage of the media to Nigeria's intervention in the conflict in Darfur region. Government has also engaged in talks with the militants, often calling for ceasefires, but this is often viewed with suspicion by the militants.

There is no official legislation on media censorship in Nigeria.<sup>295</sup> However, the government has not annulled the numerous anti-media laws inspite of pressure from civil society. The press though, has in many instances, employed self-censorship mechanisms, but news magazines are often the scapegoat in such cases and they are routinely harassed by government agents. Journalists whose reports seem pro-Niger Delta sometimes take flak from government officials. Ogonna Nwuke, Editor-in-Chief of *The Telegraph* in Port Harcourt recalled that:

Peter Odili, the erstwhile governor of Rivers State once phoned me and accused me of promoting outlaws, I can remember telling him that we (journalists) only put these issues on the front burner so that men like him in positions of authority could help effect change<sup>296</sup>.

The advent of internet-based technology has proven to be the most challenging aspect of news management. The government has no method of checking or preventing the public from gaining access to the worldwide web. With a proliferation of Nigerian-based news websites and lately blogs, the government is yet to put into place, policies on how to contain this new phenomenon. Most government officials still don't have access to the internet, or are not yet trained on how to monitor news content using the internet. But with the official gateway of the Ministry of Information operating online, the government seems set to counter any negative press it receives through the internet.

There is a clear difference between how the media operated under the military government and the civilian dispensation. The military made no effort to woo the media, but the Obasanjo government, in recognising the power of the media, made it a deliberate

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<sup>295</sup> Although the former National Assembly during Obasanjo's government is debating on a proposed government sponsored bill on media control.

<sup>296</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

policy to woo the press. A lot of newsrooms have to face the challenge of dealing with compromised journalists.<sup>297</sup> However, this also seems to be a two-way street as “all across the media organisations nationwide, features and news editors have parcelled up the country into spheres of influence, where they offer protection to people in power”.<sup>298</sup> For example, it was very difficult to find any negative report on former Rivers State governor, Odili, challenging the lack of development and infrastructure in the news. Very few journalists can stand up to the government when they would get reprimanded by their own news editors to soft pedal on investigative reports.<sup>299</sup>

In the media, in recent times, the government has tried to show a humane side to its dealing with the issue by trying to procure medical treatment abroad for former Bayelsa State governor, Alamiyeseigha, incarcerated for fraud. They are also granting visitation rights to militant leader, Dokubo-Asari, who had been incarcerated on treasonable charges.<sup>300</sup> Dokubo-Asari has since been released by President Yar’Adua, in a show of reconciliation.

The government is not only relying on media strategy alone. It is combining this with military and psychological warfare. In the last 18 months of the Obasanjo administration, there were key appointments of Niger Delta citizens into senior positions in the armed and security forces. This strategy is to let Niger Deltans deal with the problem of the Niger Delta.<sup>301</sup> The former Chief of Army Staff under Obasanjo was of Niger Delta origin and for the first time in a long time, the police commissioner of Rivers State, was also a Niger Delta man. Other inducements include job offers to Niger Delta indigenes in the Nigerian armed forces. This however spells doom for the inhabitants because, a decade from now, if the conflict continues, Niger Delta indigenes will be fighting each other from both sides of the fence.<sup>302</sup> Government has also offered the militants certain inducements like large sums of money, which they call “empowerment”, and is offering to train and absorb the militants into the armed forces or create the coast guard which will

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<sup>297</sup> Joab-Peterside, S. Op. Cit

<sup>298</sup> Don-Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, Tam-George, A. Op. Cit.

<sup>300</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.



be staffed mainly by the militants.<sup>303</sup> This offer so far has not been given serious consideration by the militants.

#### 4.2.2 Media Strategies of the Oil Companies

Several oil companies operate in the Niger Delta, but Shell seems to have taken most of the media criticism levelled at the industry. This is because, Shell has the largest operations in the country and most of its wells and flow stations crisscross the lands, farms and creeks of the Niger Delta. Saro-Wiwa's death also exposed Shell to the worst negative media image in decades. Its massive public relations machinery was caught napping. Obviously, they had expected the public outcry to be a local affair in which they could rely on the Nigerian government to contain it.<sup>304</sup> Shell's chief executive in Nigeria, Brian Anderson, in 1995, had issued a press release saying "that a large multinational company like Shell cannot and must not interfere with the affairs of any sovereign state".<sup>305</sup> The allegations against Shell included, payment of field allowances to soldiers deployed to its facilities, negotiating to import arms for the Nigerian police for example.<sup>306</sup> Although Shell denied these allegations, they were later proven beyond doubt. Thus, in an attempt to clean up its image, it did not take long for Shell to rally its forces. The company embarked on a public relations campaign as well as renounced its former position of 'non-interference'. Shell published several public statements in major newspapers worldwide especially in Britain justifying its position of doing business in Nigeria. "Some say that we should pullout, and we understand...whatever you think of the Nigerian position, we know that you wouldn't want us to or jeopardise their future".<sup>307</sup>

Shell retained the services of the world's largest PR company, Burson-Marsteller. It also retained the services of the sixth largest PR company, E. Bruce Harrison, with expertise in environmental issues.<sup>308</sup> It has been alleged that Shell is a past master in the art of spin-doctoring; the company jealously guards its corporate image and devotes a great deal of

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Okonta, I and Douglas, O. *Where Vulture Feast: 40 years of Shell in the Niger Delta*. P. 176

<sup>305</sup> Ibid. p.195

<sup>306</sup> Human Rights Watch (1999) Op. Cit.

<sup>307</sup> Shell Advert, 1995.

<sup>308</sup> Okonta, I and Douglas, O. Op. Cit. p. 199

time and energy to keep it spotlessly clean. This is an allegation Roger Moody corroborates by suggesting that, “Shell has probably devoted a large part of its budget, over a longer period, to selling itself to the conservationist lobby, than any other oil major”.<sup>309</sup>

Saro-Wiwa’s imprisonment and death sentence only enhanced his image on the international scene as the numerous awards he received in that period attests.

Okonta and Douglas argue that for Shell:

These awards translated into even more bad publicity. It was one thing to be vilified for doing business with apartheid South Africa, but to be seen as devastating the environment and collaborating with a corrupt military junta in mass killings of defenceless people in order to steal their oil was the ultimate corporate-image nightmare.<sup>310</sup>

A new strategy was needed. Shell’s PR campaign in the aftermath of the hangings was largely designed to tarnish Saro-Wiwa’s image and to protect Shell’s ‘spotless’ environmental conservatism records. To do this job, Shell sponsored journalists who wrote damning reports referring to Saro-Wiwa’s MOSOP as a terrorist organisation. Journalists like Andrew Neil, former Editor of the *London Sunday Times*, Richard D. North and Donu Kogbara, who incidentally was Saro-Wiwa’s niece, became handy tools of Shell’s PR machinery. Shell’s PR firm Shandwick also arranged visas and sponsored sanitised trips to Nigeria for journalists to ‘see’ things for themselves.<sup>311</sup> It also took advertorials in magazines and newspapers worldwide to support its claim of spending \$20 million annually in Niger Delta development programmes. Shell presently operates about sixty websites to push its position and its senior officials constantly travel the globe advocating that Shell is infact, the victim in the Niger Delta saga, and not the villain.<sup>312</sup>

Despite of all these statements, Shell’s public image suffered (its share price never wavered though) and that forced its management to adjust their public position. This

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid. p. 200

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. p.204

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. P. 214

<sup>312</sup> Ibid. P. 215

turnaround, occasioned by a major review of its policies has resulted in a new humanitarian image that Shell has adopted with its new charter focusing on respect for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This new stance is questionable because Shell has so far made no concrete moves to change the *status quo*. Shell is still trying to consolidate on its PR machinery, but in spite of spending millions of dollars and some two thousand Ogoni dead, it is nowhere near achieving what it set its mind to do since January 19, 1993, namely; return to its operations in Ogoni and thus score a big public relations victory.<sup>313</sup>

The renewed conflicts have seen oil companies in a quandary, with Shell's bashing from the Ogoni affair, oil companies are more cautious about making overt statements that might threaten their already fragile public image. The oil companies don't seem to have a clear strategy in dealing with the conflict and they increasingly run to government for protection.<sup>314</sup> However, the oil companies manage huge financial resources, which they don't mind using if it furthers their collective PR goals. An effective method has been to identify credible journalists covering the oil sector and employing them into the PR departments in the industry.<sup>315</sup> The erstwhile general manager Public Affairs Department of Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) which operates joint-venture projects with the foreign based companies, Levi Ajuonuma, was a renowned journalist covering the oil sector. Today, he spearheads its PR machinery. This effectively silences discordant voices for a while, but an ongoing practise is to fly in Lagos based and/ or foreign journalist to do PR excursions. When there are issues, for example, oil spillages or community agitations, the journalists are taken to another location away from the conflict zone and shown community development projects the oil companies have executed. When these journalists who have been given the VIP treatment go back they are forced to write glowing report about the companies.<sup>316</sup> However, its been noted that the interest of the oil companies converge with those of the government, so whatever good PR campaign the government embarks on inadvertently ends up benefiting the oil

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>315</sup> Don- Pedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

companies.<sup>317</sup> But whenever the campaign goes awry, the companies are swift in distancing themselves from the process, to avoid the backlash which is inevitable.

### **4.3 Actors in the Conflicts**

#### **4.3.1 Civil Society and New Media**

New media has often been termed all emerging communications that combine text, graphic, sound, photos and video using computer technology. This has given rise to the advancement of cable and satellite TV, fax, email and the internet. The emergence of new media has tremendously benefited civil societies. The new media has proven to be a successful tool in the hands of marginalised people who previously had no means of expression. It has become a medium for the civil society organisations that are known for their support of the underdog. Civil society is, of course, not a new concept, but it is one that has been re-discovered over the past decade with this rise in citizen activism. Before the advent of new media which has sped up the globalization process, the world was by and large made of isolated communities that could only impact on their immediate environment. With globalisation, there has been a greater participation in the global sphere by communities that previously had no voice.

Increasingly, these organizations have recognized the need to ‘think globally, but act locally’ and when the need arises, they also, ‘think locally, but act globally.’ The new media has given civil society groups worldwide the opportunity to network and organize global protests on a scale unimagined before. The protests that erupted after the death of Saro-Wiwa was mainly driven by the use of the internet, as major civil society groups like Green Peace International, Human Rights Watch, for example, all teamed together in coordinated protests that the world could not ignore. The momentum generated by boycotts, picket lines and petitions signed over the internet put pressure on world organisations to at least do something to save face at their perceived culpability in the exploitation of Niger Delta resources.

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<sup>317</sup> Tam-George, A. Op. Cit.

#### 4.3.2 Response by the International Community

The resultant effect of the coalition was instrumental to a re-examination of the international community's reaction to the crisis. Nigeria is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and a number of other international human rights instruments, including the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. The Nigerian military government led by General Abacha had been in violation of many if not most of the rights enumerated in these accords.<sup>318</sup>

It took the activities of the MOSOP, and the trial and execution of the Ogoni Nine to bring the activities of Shell to the international stage. International entities were forced to take action against Nigeria and Shell. The Commonwealth immediately suspended Nigeria from the organization after the Saro-Wiwa executions.<sup>319</sup> Although sanctions were recommended, none were taken. Several Commonwealth countries like Britain and Australia are major trading partners with Nigeria, sanctions meant a loss in significant business. Therefore, Nigeria, although suspended, was not expelled from the Commonwealth.

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted a resolution on Nigeria in 1995 condemning the Ogoni nine executions and encouraged member states to impose their own sanctions on Nigeria even without Security Council action.<sup>320</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) voted for the establishment of a commission of enquiry into abuses of labour rights in Nigeria while the African Commission resolved at its second ever extraordinary meeting to send a fact finding mission to Nigeria.

The European Union imposed fresh sanctions on Nigeria in addition to those already adopted after the 1993 elections were annulled. The United Kingdom assumed a very

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<sup>318</sup> Human Rights Watch (1999). Op. Cit.

<sup>319</sup> Kovarik, B. "Remembering Ken Saro-Wiwa" Society of Environmental Journalists, *S. E. Journal* 2005 Retrieved on 20/09/06 from the world wide web; <http://www.runet.edu/~wkovarik/misc/blog/17.wiwa.html>

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

tough stance with Nigeria but France and Germany reneged despite the EU's ruling; France and Germany were Nigeria's largest trade partners in Europe.<sup>321</sup>

In addition, there were attempts by international entities to create codes of conduct for international business. Some countries even tried to pressure multinationals to uphold the same standards internationally as they would in their parent countries. These measures have not really proven successful so far, though a few important steps are note worthy.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy is the most influential voluntary code to date.<sup>322</sup> The Clinton Administration in 1995 announced a set of "model business principles" a voluntary code of ethics to be used by U.S. based-multinational companies, which supports respect for fundamental human and labour rights.<sup>323</sup> In 1997, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) adopted a Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, which was signed by twenty-nine countries.<sup>324</sup>

Frey, in her investigation into international law governing transnationals, noted that "International law, historically focused on relations between states, is also adapting to the new climate." She reasoned that, the increasing power of transnational corporations with the global economy has brought with it a corresponding awareness of the need for an international regime that places direct responsibilities on these companies.<sup>325</sup>

United Nations Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination at its sixty-seventh session,<sup>326</sup> indicted the Obasanjo-led government of Nigeria for failing to implement the 1997 General Recommendation 23 on the rights of indigenous peoples regarding

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<sup>321</sup> Human Rights Watch /Africa Overview Retrieved on 20/09/06 from the world wide web; <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1997/WR97/AFRICA.htm>

<sup>322</sup> [www.ilo.org/public/english/50normes/sources/mne.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/50normes/sources/mne.htm)

<sup>323</sup> Kovarik, B. Op. Cit.

<sup>324</sup> Watson, G. The OECD Convention on Bribery, March 1998, Retrieved on 20/09/06 from the world wide web; <http://www.asil.org/insights/insigh14.htm>

<sup>325</sup> Frey, B.A, "The Legal and Ethical Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations in the Protection of International Human Rights" in *Minnesota Journal of Global Trade* 6, 1997.

<sup>326</sup> CERD/C/NGA/CO/18, November 2005

‘environmental racism’ and degradation. The UN Committee report in Paragraph 19 expressed grave concern regarding the adverse effect of oil exploration on the Niger Delta environment. It ruled against the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Decree of 1978 enacted to enable the government to expropriate the resources of the Niger Delta peoples, holding that the legislations were contrary to the provisions of the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Minorities.<sup>327</sup>

The committee recommended repeal of these offensive, oppressive and inhumane laws and reiterated “that along with the right to exploit natural resources there are specific, concomitant obligations towards the local population, including effective and meaningful consultation”.<sup>328</sup>

Efforts to place direct responsibilities on transnational corporation at the international level picked up in the late 1990s. Several bodies were set up to monitor the activities of these multinationals. Although these initiatives may not yet place legally binding responsibility on transnational corporations in relations to social responsibility, it seems that it would only be a short time before they do so – though resistance can be expected from the business sector.

#### **4.4 Towards a sustainable development in the Niger Delta**

The Nigerian government’s attempts at addressing the concerns raised by the Niger Delta communities by establishing developmental agencies have allegedly lacked credibility. These commissions are the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB), Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) and later Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The NDDDB established by an act of Parliament No. 19 of 1961 and integrated into the 1963 Republican Constitution was the precursor of the OMPADEC. The NDDDB, which later became the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) failed. Its failure was blamed on

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<sup>327</sup> Ijaw Foundation, “Self-Government For The Ijaws Is The Solution To The Niger Delta Conflict”, Retrieved on 06/03/07 from the world wide web: <http://www.unitedijawstates.com/selfgovernment.htm>

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

the Federal, Western and Eastern governments' refusal to fund the agency, consequently leading to its collapse.

In 1992, General Babangida, Nigeria's military dictator founded OMPADEC but systematically starved it of necessary fund and it also died a natural death. OMPADEC was used in carrot and stick approach to dealing with the Niger Delta issue, the carrot being plum contracts aimed at the elites and the stick being systematic state oppression. This promoted the system of 'clientelism'.<sup>329</sup> The issuing of plum contracts only helped to incite the host communities against themselves. Since the greatest benefactors of the contracts were traditional rulers, village heads, retired military generals, top civil servants and the so-called 'new breed politicians' the majority of these contracts were never completed till date.<sup>330</sup> The NDDC was established in 2000 as a federal agency for the amelioration of the developmental, infrastructural, and environmental problems in the oil-producing areas. The NDDC Bill subsequently repealed the OMPADEC Act and transferred all the rights assets and liability of OMPADEC to NDDC. This Act increased the NDDC States membership to nine.<sup>331</sup> It took President Obasanjo more than one year to sign the NDDC bill. This can be attributed to the political dimensions surrounding the constitution of these institutions and the arbitrariness connected with the issue of the 13% derivation fund. Ozo-Eson and Ukiwo argue that:

The performance of these agencies show that it is not really the broad details of what is shown is contained in the enabling legislation that mattered, but the political will to carry out to the letter the mandate of the agency and the proper management of its human and material resources<sup>332</sup>.

Getting the government to admit its failure in delivering to the people its corporate social responsibility (CSR) might be the first step.

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<sup>329</sup> Clientelism was introduced to win a faction of the oil communities to government; the clients who benefited from contracts maintained the status quo.

<sup>330</sup> Omoweh, D. *Op. Cit.* p. 204

<sup>331</sup> Ozo-Eson, P. and Ukiwo, U. (eds) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7



#### 4.4.1 Shell and the Politics of Community Development

Multinationals should also be seen as sincerely attempting to solve some of these problems, although, how they get around to doing that seems difficult. Shell seems to be trying out a model of community participation and development. Oil companies have recently embarked on paying what they call unemployment benefits to some of the local communities. This means paying 30 thousand Naira (approximately USD220) quarterly to indigenes that are unemployed. However, as Zalik argues;

This new model's attempt to achieve social consent is partially contradicted by the corporate requirement of profit maximisation served by rising prices associated with perceived and real threats to oil supplies. The oil companies' pursuit of a social 'licence to operate' thus rests uneasily with an industry whose underlying logic profits from the upward movement of oil prices, dependent on instability and violence.<sup>333</sup>

This presents a paradox, since, as Ross argues, countries that have oil and mineral wealth seldom refrain from exploiting it. He goes on to recommend measures that, taken collectively, could help make extractive industries more pro-poor and perhaps, make countries less dependent on oil or mineral exports as their primary source of income.<sup>334</sup> They include helping poor states diversify their exports, promoting transparency, offering extractive sector aid only to governments that are already democratic and pro-poor, and establishing mechanisms to monitor the flow of resource revenues between firms and governments.<sup>335</sup> Meeting the demands of the host communities should be seen as a priority by all stakeholders. These demands include as Suberu argues:

A more effective representation of the indigenes of the Niger Delta in the federal government, including the executive presidency. To end all excessive or repressive police or military operations against restive or aggrieved oil-producing communities, and the summoning of a sovereign conference to renegotiate Nigeria's allegedly fraudulent or inequitable federal monetary allocation.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Zalik, A. "The Niger delta: 'Petro-violence' and 'partnership development'" in *Review of African Political Economy*, Volume 31, Number 101, September 2004, Routledge.

<sup>334</sup> Ross, M. "Extractive Sectors and the Poor", *Oxfam America Report*, Retrieved from the worldwide web on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2006 <http://www.oxfamamerica.org>

<sup>335</sup> Ibid

<sup>336</sup> Suberu, R. T. "Can Nigeria's New Democracy Survive?" Retrieved from the World Wide Web on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2006. [http://www.currenthistory.com/org\\_pdf\\_files/100/646/100\\_646\\_207.pdf](http://www.currenthistory.com/org_pdf_files/100/646/100_646_207.pdf)

A refusal to meet these demands will result in the continuation of violent agitation, insecurity and instability in the Niger Delta.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

The media coverage of the Niger Delta conflicts has reawakened intense interest worldwide. It has brought the Niger Delta community's agitations, the Nigerian government and political economy of oil extraction under intense scrutiny from the international community. While the immediate salvo fired has immensely favoured the militants, the Nigerian government and the oil companies have embarked on a massive news management and public relations campaign to counter the dismal publicity the media frenzy has generated.

Traditional news management techniques of the Nigerian government which are focused primarily on limiting access to information, media censorship and persecution of 'defaulting' journalists, for example, have proven to be grossly inadequate. The oil companies on the other hand have spent huge amounts of money in an effort to launder their image. However, the rapid advancement of information technology and the strategically executed ideological approaches of the militants to media management have proven very hard to spin. Mounting pressure from the international community is a direct response from the interactions of a multiplicity of actors ranging from foreign governments, world bodies and NGOs. Although international efforts at mediation are encouraged, the most effective way of solving the problem will take collective measures, since government's various intervention programmes such as the NDDB, OMPADEC and NDDC for example, have not been seen to sufficiently address the people's quest for equal treatment and autonomous control of local resources.

The need for indigenous solutions to these challenges exists. Africa must wake up and accept responsibility for its problems, because as Obi argues:

Historical evidence shows that given the contemporary global configurations, the former colonial powers and the super powers are preoccupied with larger issues which have greater impact on their national interests and therefore hesitant to pursue aggressive interventionist policies in Africa<sup>337</sup>.

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<sup>337</sup> Obi, C. Environmental Security in Africa, in Saliu, A. (ed): *Selected Themes in Nigerian Foreign Policy and International Relations*, Ilorin, Sally and Associates, 1999, p. 223.

## **Chapter Five - The role of the Media in the Niger Delta conflicts**

In Chapter Four, we revealed the response of the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies to the media coverage of the conflagration. We also highlighted the multiplicity of secondary actors in these conflicts and analysed their interaction with and response to the media. This chapter charts the role of the media in these conflicts from a media perspective. The main issue here is whether the media's role serves as a catalyst to fuelling these conflicts or would its continued intervention result in de-escalation? We examine the political economy of the Nigeria media, to enquire whether it needs its own strategy to ensure that its involvement does not serve the political interests of the principal actors but rather, of the public good.

Chapter two examined theoretical perspectives and literature on African conflicts, observing the multiplicity of actors that were involved and the effect conflicts had on the security of the region. These reviews were interwoven into the narrative of the media's role in society and media's response to conflicts. The media generally plays a major role in society. It occupies an important space in the public sphere.<sup>338</sup> The media has enormous power due to its ability to affect public opinion. The role of the media in conflicts is increasingly taking the centre stage. This could come as a result of sustained coverage of a particular issue.<sup>339</sup>

The chapter contrasts theoretical perspectives from Liberal Pluralist Theory which supports a press that is free and unencumbered by government or legislative oversight, and the Marxist or Neo-Marxist traditions that sees the media as following the ideological interest of the dominant class in society. The media becomes integrated into the existing economic and political elites and is not free from their control.<sup>340</sup> The media is supposed to be the watchdog of the government and inform the polity of government policies while supporting the entrenchment of democracy. Realist theorists, however, believe the media represents a dangerous platform which if not managed properly, could end up harming

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<sup>338</sup> Habermas, J. *Structural Transformation of The Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into A Category Of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989, p 301

<sup>339</sup> McCombs, M.E. "The Agenda-Setting Approach" in: Nimmo, D. & Sanders, K. (Eds): *Handbook of Political Communication*. Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage, 1982.

<sup>340</sup> Bottomore, T. B. and Maximilien, R. (eds), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, London: Pelican Press, 1961.

state interests. To Curran, the media in liberal theory is an agency of information and debate that facilitates the functioning of democracy. It also provides a channel between government and the people in political discussions and debates on issues that affect the polity.<sup>341</sup> The Nigerian media exists in a global environment, yet, its challenges are localised to the extent that not all media theories can be effectively applied. These challenges can only be appreciated when you have an understanding of the Nigerian media.

## 5.1 The Nigeria Media

Nigeria is a country with a press which is over 150 years old.<sup>342</sup> In the tradition of the press as watchdog, the Nigerian press is definitely political and has been known to set the national agenda. The Nigerian press is a product of anti-colonial protest. Oatway notes that the Nigerian war for independence was fought on the pages of newspapers and not with bullets.<sup>343</sup> Yet, the history of the Nigerian press is rife with persecutions and perseverance. This foundation of oppression was laid in the colonial era and successive governments have only modified or enhanced this legacy. Olatunji Dare, journalist and journalism educator notes of the Nigerian press since independence:

The story of the Nigerian press since independence has been one of persecution and perseverance. Not that the news media fared much better in the colonial era, but on the contrary, the foundation was laid during the period for the persecution that the post-colonial press was to undergo.<sup>344</sup>

He argues that although the instruments of persecution were varied, the most pernicious perhaps, were the sedition laws that were designed to discourage criticisms that could lower the authorities in the estimation of the authorities in the eyes of the ordinary citizens.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Curran, J.: *Media and Power*, London: Routledge, 2002.

<sup>342</sup> The only other countries with a longer history than Nigeria are Egypt and South Africa.

<sup>343</sup> Oatway, J. "Nigeria Media Report" (2000) Retrieved June 20th, 2005 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.journ.ru.ac.za.htm>

<sup>344</sup> Duyile, D. "Ordeals of the Nigerian media" in *The Daily Sun*, Tuesday, March 8, 2005.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

Since independence, the Nigerian media has been through a challenging period. Having to operate in a society that is serially governed by successive military regimes for over thirty years, objectivity in the news media came with dire consequences. Yet, the media's social responsibility role is enshrined in Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution, which specifically requires the media to "monitor governance and to uphold the responsibility and accountability of the governed to the people".<sup>346</sup> Democracy's first assumption is the freedom of expression but the Nigerian media has found out that this is not to be. Laws upon laws have been enacted to muzzle the media. Media freedom in Nigeria, like in most African countries, seems closely bound to the political dispensation prevalent at any given time. The Nigerian press has remained resilient and has continued to test the boundaries of its reporting license with unprecedented boldness, often resorting to advance forms of clandestine guerrilla style journalism.<sup>347</sup> This history of hard hitting investigative, opinionated journalism has seen the evolution of the Nigerian press into a force to be reckoned with.

## **5.2 Political Economy of the Nigerian Media**

### **5.2.1 Media ownership and control**

The history of the Nigerian media is characterised by two forms of ownership, namely; those owned by the government and those owned by private individuals. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the state owns the majority of the broadcast media. Newspapers such as the *Daily Times* (which has now been offered for privatization) and the *New Nigerian* represented government investments in the print media. A broad array of newspapers owned by state governments also exists. The state-owned Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) is the largest television network in Africa. It has 39 local stations, in the 36 states of the federation, all hooked to the national grid. These stations are usually deployed in hegemonic contests by the state, as their broad coverage proves to be an effective method of information dissemination. The state-owned Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria's (FRCN) flagship station, Radio Nigeria, transmits on the short-

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<sup>346</sup> The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

<sup>347</sup> Bassey, E. *The Rise and Fall of ThisDay Newspaper: The Significance of Advertising to its Demise. Thesis (M.A.)* (2006) -- *University of the Witwatersrand.*

wave length radio channel to all the 36 states of the nation, and this infrastructure is supported by 36 stations owned by state governments.

The deregulation of broadcasting by the state in 1994 has opened up the industry. Yet, in broadcasting, only ten or so of fifty existing television stations are in private hands, while of the fifty or so radio stations, a handful are privately owned.<sup>348</sup> This can be attributed to the high cost of setting up a station as well as the politicization of the broadcast licensing process. However, the constraining regulatory environment under which private televisions are allowed to operate prevents them from becoming oppositional. The most successful private electronic media are AIT Television and Minaj Television as well as Ray Power Radio which operate out of Lagos. They all offer refreshing contrasts to the heavily state-controlled contents of state electronic media by attempting to give balanced coverage to both government and opposition.<sup>349</sup>

The period since 1999 has witnessed a mushrooming of sorts in the newspaper industry. Although a number of these are at the margins of survival, new titles like the *Abuja Today*, *the Sun* and the *Daily Independent* have emerged, adding to the existing number. In the 1999 edition of the Media World Yearbook, a census of the Nigerian media puts the number of regular newspapers at 78, magazines at 45, television stations at 52, and radio stations at 31<sup>350</sup>. In the privately owned print media, the *Punch* is rated the widest circulation, with a print run between sixty thousand and eighty thousand copies per day. The *Guardian's* print run is estimated to be between sixty and seventy thousand copies per day. *ThisDay* follows with an estimated circulation of fifty thousand per day. Other newspapers such as the privately-owned *Nigerian Tribune*, *Post Express*, the *Vanguard*, and the *Comet*, until recently state-owned *Daily Times* and the *New Nigerian* do not perform so well in terms of circulation.<sup>351</sup> The magazine market is dominated by three giants, namely, *Tell Magazine*, *the News*, and *Newswatch*, which have circulation figures

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<sup>348</sup> Olukoyun, A. "Media Accountability and Democracy in Nigeria, 1999-2003" in *African Studies Review*, Dec 2004. Retrieved on 14/03/07 from the world wide web:  
[http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4106/is\\_200412/ai\\_n10298384/pg\\_8](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4106/is_200412/ai_n10298384/pg_8)

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Tunji, O and Idowu, L. (eds.): 140th Anniversary of the Nigerian Press. Lagos: Tosen Consult, 2000.

<sup>351</sup> There are however not official figures, these estimates are based on whatever the media organisation releases to the public.

of about one hundred thousand, eighty thousand, and fifty thousand, respectively. Since 2000, there appears to have been a slight drop in circulation of all newspapers, especially magazines.<sup>352</sup> The low circulation rate of the print media is often blamed on the economic downturn of the 1980s and 1990s, and specifically a result of hostile authoritarian economic policies toward the media. For a country of 140 million, the combined circulations figures of newspapers, magazines and other publications barely hits the one million mark.<sup>353</sup>

The Nigerian media is also challenged by the socio-economic realities of the Nigerian economy. Ayo Olukotun argues that the imposition of a value-added tax onto newspaper production by both the Abacha and Abubakar administrations was a direct attempt at discouraging newspaper production. This resulted in the skyrocketing cost of production which forced many newspapers to downsize their staff, cut back on circulation, increase cover price, and/or closedown their operations.<sup>354</sup> The newspaper is rapidly getting out of the reach of ordinary Nigerians due to the high cover price, but the gregarious thirst for information has made the Nigerian reader more innovative. The formation of the 'free readers clubs'<sup>355</sup> has kept the balance in readership figure.

In Nigeria, the newspaper business is yet to be profitable. Various economic factors affect most media organisations. Consequently, various newspapers, state-owned and private, owe their staff several months of salary, ranging from three months to twelve months. Even when these journalists get paid, their paycheck cannot meet basic needs, as the sector has the worst remunerations in the business sector. Peter Enahoro, former managing director of the *Daily Times* recounts a senior journalist's observations that,

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<sup>352</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Olukotun, A. "Governance and the Media" in Hyden, G., Okoth-Ogendo, H and Olowu, D.: *African Perspectives on Governance*, Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2000, pp. 91-121.

<sup>355</sup> This phenomenon which started in the 1990s occurred when people who had no money would gather at news stands and read newspapers for free. The dynamics however, has slightly changed as vendors now charge a minimal fee for readership.



The Nigerian journalist goes out to work armed minimally despite today's electronic age. Side by side with his foreign counterpart he is equipped like a stone age communicator amidst the clusters of sophisticated gadgetry presided over by his Japanese equivalent. Under these conditions, the Nigerian journalist is an unsung hero...deplorable low wages and delayed salary payments are common,<sup>356</sup>

## 5.2.2 The Constituents of the Nigerian Media

The press had, since its advent in 1859, been a medium of articulation, projection of interest, and catalyst for civil intervention during the colonial era, thus a voice for the disadvantaged in the society. The composition of the Nigerian media is a subject fraught with many positions. The subject, however, reopens the debate on Nigeria's national question and the extent to which the media, preponderantly located in south-western Nigeria, constitute a national media. Indeed, it has been suggested that no national media exists in Nigeria as of now, but rather three different media, corresponding to Nigeria's major ethnic divisions.<sup>357</sup> Indeed, it is argued that there exist an "Arewa media", an "Ikenga media", and an "Ngbati media" corresponding to Nigeria's major geopolitical zones.<sup>358</sup> Enahoro argued that:

Many of today's so-called national newspapers emanating from the South-West are in fact regional publications whose loyalties are to the personalities and causes espoused by the apparent majority of the people of that area. It is tantamount to a monopoly of a vital resource with a crucial bearing on the democratic process.<sup>359</sup>

The location of the media in Lagos could be explained from the viewpoint of commerce. Lagos, a former Federal Capital, is still the commercial hub of the nation. At the relocation of the federal capital to Abuja (a move deemed premature due to insufficient infrastructure), the media stayed back in Lagos only fielding correspondents in Abuja. However, the majority of media workers are predominantly from the south-western axis

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<sup>356</sup>Enahoro, P. "The State of the Media." Daily Times, June 9, 1994, p. 20

<sup>357</sup>Adebanwi, W. "The Nigerian Press and the National Question" in Momoh, A. and Adejumobi, S.: *The National Question in Nigeria: Comparative Perspectives*, Aldershot: Ashgate Books, 2000, pp.201-15.

<sup>358</sup>Arewa is a popular term in Nigeria for the Hausas of Northern Nigeria; Nkenga is used similarly to denote the Ibos of eastern Nigeria, while Ngbati is a derisive epithet for the Yorubas of western Nigeria.

<sup>359</sup> Enahoro, P. *Op. Cit.* p.20

encouraging the Lagos-Ibadan press label. Sam Oyovbaire, a Midwesterner, notes that the Lagos press are, “an institutional and locational monopoly”<sup>360</sup> that determine the mindset of the Yoruba civil society.

It should be noted that location of media in southwest axis of Nigeria may have been designed for commercial reasons, or to facilitate access to the state rather than dovetail with ownership patterns. For instance, four of the major media organisations, *ThisDay*, *the Vanguard*, *the Guardian*, *African Independent Television (AIT)*, *Ray power Radio* and *Rhythm 93.3* are owned by Niger-Delta indigenes,<sup>361</sup> a fact that Olukoyun argues, may not be unrelated to the petroleum-driven political economy of Nigeria and the incorporation of the elite from the Niger Delta area into a national framework of spoils sharing.<sup>362</sup>

The northern press or Kano press has legacy of defending government interests, particularly, during the military era, when the military hegemony was predominantly constituted by northern Nigeria indigenes. The print media in the north, however, has a few representations, a direct effect of the low illiteracy rates of the population. Bent Bonde in collaboration argues that:

Attempts were made in the past to float similar print media into the North but it was a colossal fiasco not only attributable to lack of patronage by advertisers but also in terms of readership. Private broadcasters are not interested in the North either because of the religious sensibilities. You cannot for instance advertise alcohol in some if not all parts of the North, even though some of them drink.<sup>363</sup>

Another factor is the enormous influence that the Hausa-based services of the Radio Nigeria and the BBC have on the population, the majority of whom own a transistor radio. Although a few privately owned newspapers exist, the medium of communications is Hausa, and these papers rarely set or contribute to the national agenda.

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<sup>360</sup> Oyovbaire, Sam. “The Media and the Democratic Process in Nigeria”, Paper presented to the Senior Executive Course, no. 3, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, August 7, 2001, p. 35.

<sup>361</sup> Joab-Peterside, S. “The Media: Defense and Promotion of Human Rights in the Niger Delta” in *CASS Newsletter* Vol. 13 No. 1 May 2005 p.23

<sup>362</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>363</sup> Bonde, B. “Notes on Media and the Nigerian conflicts” in *Media Progress*, 2005. Retrieved on 14/03/07 from the world wide web: <http://www.mediaprogress.net/>

In recent years from 1999, there has been another addition to the constituents of the Nigerian media. These are media organisations existing in the Niger Delta region. They are recently lending a loud voice to the debate that has been awakened by the so-called agitation for resource control. Aptly named the ‘Niger Delta/ South-South press’, their practitioners insist that they are basically community papers that are more in touch with the realities on ground and thus, their reporting was bound to set the agenda. These newspapers operating mainly from Port Harcourt, the commercial hub of the Nigerian oil industry, have facilitated a mushrooming of sorts in the newspaper industry. However, a number of these newspapers are barely surviving and can hardly afford to fund the next print run. Their circulation figures are also normally small, but in Port Harcourt alone, there are at least 15 of these titles at any given time. Niger Delta newspapers are unapologetically into advocacy journalism. Most of the staff and the proprietors are Niger Delta indigenes. It is not surprising to see emotive headlines on display at local newsstands. In most of these newspapers, however, the level of professional practice is rated low, a direct implication of many proprietor/editorships that reveal lack of experience and training. The Niger Delta press has become what Adebamiwi calls an institution that sought the protection of marginalised groupings and interests against dominant groups and interests.<sup>364</sup>

### **5.3 The Nigerian Media and Social Responsibility**

The notion of the social responsibility of the mass media means that the mass media acts as the conscience of the nation by revealing bad things, commending good things and keeping the interest of the citizenry uppermost in their agenda<sup>365</sup>. The media in post-authoritarian societies such as Nigeria have a social responsibility in ensuring the stability of the polity. While the question of national identity remains a major challenge, the media grapples with a legacy of oppression and control that has only intensified. This often manifests in inadequate safeguards for press freedom in the constitution, persecution and intimidation of journalists by government security operatives and the denial to access for

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<sup>364</sup> Adebamiwi, W. *Op. Cit.*

<sup>365</sup> Owens-Ibie, N. “American Media and the Nigerian Press: A Study of Agenda Setting in the Democratic Process” in *Governance and the Electoral Process: Nigeria and the United States of America* (ed) Oyin Ogunba, Lagos: ASAN, 1997, .469.

journalists. For instance, the media, for decades, has advocated for a Freedom of Information Act, an issue that has seen a lot of foot dragging in the National Legislative Assembly recently. If indeed the press is to take up its public responsibility role, it must be unfettered by restrictions placed by officialdom to censor the press.<sup>366</sup> Religious tensions in the predominantly Muslim north have adversely affected the media. Nigerian journalists who have generally tried to strike a balanced tone on issues of religious and ethnic conflict, have nonetheless been caught in the fray. According to press reports, Jama'atul Nasril Islam, an influential Islamic body based in Kaduna, reaffirmed a *fatwa*<sup>367</sup> sanctioning the killing of two *ThisDay* journalists in its annual 2003 report. The edict was issued in 2002 by the Zamfara State government after *ThisDay* published an article that sparked religious riots in the north that killed more than 200 people.<sup>368</sup>

From the point of view of political economy, the print and electronic media in Nigeria broadly promotes capitalist interests, being themselves inserted into the circuit of marketing, advertising, and the consumer culture which legitimizes capitalism as a cultural and ideological project. Although there are variations in the extent to which journalists embrace neoliberal capitalist values, given that there are class struggles within the media themselves, Nigeria of the late 1990s and early twenty-first century lacks a media culture of a distinctively anti-capitalist tradition.<sup>369</sup>

The media under military rule had an agenda of liberating the nation and its antecedents speak for themselves. In the democratic era, the media seems to have gone to sleep. The media under democratic rule was obviously not trained to deal with a democratically elected government, and it seems to have no answer to the spiralling problem of low representation of the populace. Most media organizations are supposed to have established clear values, show leadership in embedding those values, and establish policies and processes for ensuring they do not fall short of them.<sup>370</sup> Media organisations, however, are not doing enough to train their staff. Journalists are still earning the lowest

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<sup>366</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>367</sup> A *fatwa* is an Islamic decree often leading to a death sentence.

<sup>368</sup> Nigeria Media <http://www.cpj.org/attacks03/africa03/nigeria.html>

<sup>369</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>370</sup> Baker, M. The Media and Social Responsibility, *Business Respect*, Issue Number 70, 1 Feb 2004.

in the private sector. Low morale also plays a huge part of robbing the journalist of a sense of direction. But in all of these, one basic problem facing most journalists in Nigeria is the inability to effect a thorough investigation of information. Some journalists lack the unwavering commitment to the laws or canons of the practice. Many do not exhibit the ability and determination to remain socially responsible to the citizenry or even the government, at all times.<sup>371</sup> Under the current democratic experiment in Nigeria, journalists, no matter their medium, ethnic or political affiliations, have a sacred duty to interpret political developments and activities to sustain the Nigerian society and its nascent democracy.<sup>372</sup>

Abimbola Adesoji, however, is of the opinion that the poor response of the press to the challenges of democratisation, particularly in the present dispensation, has produced far more serious developments with grave implications.<sup>373</sup> He argues that it was not uncommon that in their desire to be part of the system and as a form of compensation, vibrant journalists have secured appointment in government as commissioners, special advisors or special assistants.<sup>374</sup> Others, he noted, had become contractors and media consultants to the government at different levels. This policy of incorporation, apart from resulting in the incapacitation of vibrant journalists, has more importantly led to what he argued was a surrender of the press to the state, with the political elite becoming the ultimate victors. One direct fall out of this development, he noted, has been the watering down of the headlines and content of reports and editorials.<sup>375</sup>

The ultimate casualty of this ugly scenario is the Nigerian people who have been denied robust criticism and assessment of government policies and programmes aimed at keeping the leadership on their toes.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Onyije, D. "Media and social responsibility" *The Tide Online* Monday, Aug 1, 2005, Retrieved on 15/03/07 from the world wide web: <http://www.thetidenews.com/>

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Adesoji, A. "Globalization of the media and the challenges of Democratisation in Nigeria" in *Nebula3*. Vol.4, December 2006

Retrieved on 15/03/07 from the world wide web: <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/Adesoji.pdf>

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid. p. 44.

However, the Nigerian press has risen on occasion to display a high sense of purpose in exposing cases of corruption and ineptitude in the public service. An example is the certificate forgery case of Salisu Buhari, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives. Buhari falsified his age, claimed to have received a degree from University of Toronto, which he presented to the Independent National Electoral Commission for screening. This was later found out to be forged. This discovery, particularly the press exposition of it, led to his forced resignation and trial.<sup>377</sup> In fulfilling its social responsibility role, the Nigeria media has increasingly had to partner with civil society groups, often being the voice of the groups.

#### **5.4 The Media and Civil Society**

The civil society in Nigeria is essential in laying the foundation of a self-governing society and a more accountable state. It is, however, constrained by repression from an oppressive government security apparatus, lack of a centralised and cohesive leadership as well as a chronic lack of resources. These basic essentials for the survival of organisational groups seem to be embodied in a free and equitable atmosphere to operate, a clear vision and resources to act open the vision as well as linkages across society that will engender growth and development.

As Lewis, Rubin and Robinson argue:

An active, diverse and capable civil society can be crucial in assuring governmental accountability, creating a vibrant arena of public debate and potential competition, shifting political away from personal or ethnic appeals and towards a focus on issues and programmes, encouraging the inclusion of diverse groups and safeguarding the legitimacy of new institutions... in the quest for stability and durable power sharing amongst elements of a plural society, civil groups can play indispensable roles.<sup>378</sup>

In Nigeria, associational groupings have their roots in pre-colonial organizations that were brought into the colonial cities and mining centres by rural migrants -ethnic mutual support/hometown associations, burial societies, informal savings clubs, dance groups, trade associations/guilds - to promote and defend the interests of their members. Some of

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Lewis, P. M., Rubin, B. R. and Robinson, P. T.: *Stabilizing Nigeria: Sanctions, Incentives, and Support for Civil Society*, Century Foundation Press, 1998, Pg. 98.

these formed the nuclei of the political associations that provided the vehicle for nationalist anti-colonial agitation, others continued to serve and protect the myriad interests of their members in other ways.<sup>379</sup>

Civil society groups are often interwoven by mutual need, common interest and association. This tapestry of convergence, which is crucial for strengthening of mutual network across diverse interests, can be identified into these categories: democracy and human rights, popular associations, conflict resolution, media, religious, environmental and business. The media plays an important role in civil society in Nigeria. Its role is made even more important since it is the vehicle that grants other civil societies the voice in their struggle for an equitable society. The aspiration of the organised civil societies in Nigeria can be summed up in Abraham Adesanya's famous statement:

I have a dream of a nation where no man is oppressed. An egalitarian society. That is what we are working towards. We desire a nation, a true federal state where all the nationalities will have equal access to political power. Where justice, equity and the rule of the law operates. We want to leave a good legacy for our children like you said, I am old. There is nothing again I am looking for. But our children and children's children must not be slaves in their father's land.<sup>380</sup>

One basic weakness of civil society organizations appears to be unevenness in their spread and strength across the country and the concentration of their activities in the Lagos-Ibadan axis. In most parts the country, the presence of civil society is almost non-existent. In one fundamental respect, this unevenness often appears to give ethnic/regional character to broad democratic struggles waged by civil society and this is exploited by government in ethicizing the struggle.<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Okome, M. (1999) State And Civil Society In Nigeria In The Era Of Structural Adjustment Program, 1986-93, *West Africa Review* Issn: 1525-4488, Retrieved on 15/03/07 from the world wide web <http://www.africaresource.com/war/vol1.1/okomee.html>

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Olukotun, A. "Governance and the Media" in Hyden, G., Okoth-Ogendo, H and Olowu, D.: *African Perspectives on Governance*, Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 2000, pp. 91-121.

One way of overcoming this lacuna, opportunistically exploited by conservative forces, is for civil society groups and rich business moguls (with no hidden agenda) to stimulate the growth of media across the nation's geo-ethnic zones. Another possibility is for the existing media institutions to print simultaneously in different locations, just as *ThisDay* is already doing in Lagos and Abuja. The authentic indigenous concerns could then be brought to bear on newspaper editions outside the southwest.<sup>382</sup>

## **5.5 Challenging Media Representations**

The schisms created by this apparent lack of cohesion in the media have grossly polarized the media environment. The journalism practiced by sections of the private press in numerous cases has been of a dubious nature with unproven, personalised and biased allegations against one or the other target. Particularly private print media without professional owners and managers have tended to sensationalise their stories. These include stereotyping other ethnic groups. As almost all the private print and broadcast media are located in the south, sometimes, it is the northern, dominantly Muslim population that is described with prejudices. The spate of religion-fuelled conflicts that originate from the northern Nigeria axis does not help in changing media stereotypes. These stereotypes are often labelled on other regions and ethnicities depending on who is at the helm of the media. While this stands as a challenge to Nigeria journalism, perhaps the most debilitating is the role of corruption in the Nigeria media.

## **5.6 The Nigerian Media and Corruption**

If the media is to remain a measurement of morality and information in the society, it must be seen as being beyond reproach. However, the fragility of the Nigerian media in economic terms, symptomatic of which are low remuneration, delayed salaries, frequent job changes and the crisis of viability of media, often results in corruption.<sup>383</sup> Journalists in Nigeria today, have had to resort to survival strategies, this is not helped by the

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*



undoubtedly close relationships most media proprietors and editors have with the Nigerian political and business elite. It is not uncommon for media practitioners to get enlisted in the battles of these elites or alternatively seek to profit from publicized projects and outright deals with the political class.<sup>384</sup> In Nigeria's Fourth Republic, corruption is a rampant feature and the media is not immune. Corruption in the media comes in all shapes and sizes. It is often said in Nigeria that everyone has his price. It is often seen in the practice of taking bribes in return for killing or publishing stories, outright blackmail of public office holders. Journalists are on the payroll of state governors, ministers, and politicians, gifts of cash and kind given to reporters who cover government activities (known as the brown envelope syndrome),<sup>385</sup> as well as cash gifts distributed at press conferences.

Ayo Olukoyun argues that the media in Nigeria now lacks credibility to some extent because of corrupt practices;

In other words, while they have sought to set standards of accountability, journalists themselves have been fingered for corrupt and unethical practices to the extent that their reports and silences have been influenced either by outright bribes or seductive gratifications.<sup>386</sup>

The government has been indicted in this circuit of accusations. In April 2002, Stephen Faris, a foreign journalist, stirred up a controversy, when he published in *Times Magazine* of April 15, 2002, the allegation that the Minister for Information and National Orientation, Jerry Gana, had offered him US\$400 after an interactive session involving the minister and foreign journalists.<sup>387</sup> Minister Gana, however, denied the allegation, but the incident highlights what has in fact become an unwritten convention in state-media interactions in Nigeria, namely; making journalists write down their names during press conferences and then handing out brown envelopes, paying for trips for journalists etc.

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<sup>384</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>385</sup> The brown envelope syndrome is the practice of inducing writers and editors with financial gratification to influence their writings in favour of the givers.

<sup>386</sup> Olukoyun, A. (2004) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>387</sup> *Daily Times*, April 19, 2003

Olutokun and Seteolu concede that the Nigerian media was a reflection of its society therefore:

The media is not immune to corruption, ethnicity or factionalism, all of which afflict the Nigerian socio-polity. And this basis necessarily detracted from their moral profile and consequently weakened their watchdog role. Self-cleansing, internal regulatory mechanisms such as The Press Council as well as keen commercial competition help to restrain, in a measure some of these abuses.<sup>388</sup>

However, they argue that, the committed segment of the press was still by and large free from the rot while the possibility of disrepute or business failure serves as a check against grossness.<sup>389</sup> Corruption, therefore reflects immensely on how the Nigerian media reacts to conflicts and potential conflicts; is it possible that the media is selling out on its perceived responsibility to the public?

## **5.7 The Nigerian Media and Nigerian Conflict**

The proceeding part of this chapter has painted a picture of the contemporary Nigerian media. This analysis, while not conclusive, will help to create an understanding of how the media has dealt with conflicts in Nigeria. The Nigerian state has been embroiled in conflict for most of its existence. These conflicts are believed to be caused by the politicisation of ethnic and in some cases, religious factors. However, most conflicts have been overshadowed by the national question and the control of resources. Nigeria has witnessed intensified contests concerning rights over economic re-distribution and judicial authority, and the privileges of representation and patrimony.<sup>390</sup> Nigerian conflicts have resulted in *coup d'etats*, riots and most importantly, a civil war which lasted for three and a half years. The military intervention in governance also set a precedence of militarisation of politics.

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<sup>388</sup> Olutokun, A. and Seteolu, D. The Media and Democratic Rule in Nigeria, *Development Policy Management Network Bulletin* Vol. XIII, No. 3, September 2001, pp. 30-34

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Gore, C. And Pratten, D. The Politics Of Plunder: The Rhetorics Of Order And Disorder In Southern Nigeria. In *African Affairs* (2003), 102, 211–240 © Royal African Society 2003. DOI: 10.1093/afraf/adg014

In recent years, Nigerians have witnessed more conflicts than during military rule. Since the advent of democracy, twenty conflict situations have played themselves out. These include ethnic/tribal wars, religious conflicts and the recent Niger Delta debacle.

#### 5.7.1 The Media and Nigerian Conflict

The media remains one of the most important institutions in Nigeria's social landscape. This importance is rightly underscored by the varied emotions with which other sectors of society regard it. No matter the emotions evoked, there is a general acceptance and recognition of the role of the press in shaping public consciousness. Often in Nigeria, like in most countries, people tend to depend heavily on media articulation as a formal guide to any particular issue.<sup>391</sup>

Therefore, this amplifies the media's role in the construction of social reality in general. However, while the media continues to reflect a reality, it also continues to exist as a part of that same reality. In addition, the media may also reflect a certain reality in such a way as to accommodate its own conviction about it. This explains the media's apparent successes in shaping or altering the perceptions of the public, many of whom usually take the essential accuracy of its reports for granted.<sup>392</sup> In spite of the many challenges faced by the media, the general public regards (especially the privately-owned media) as a veritable source of information and current affairs. It is in the light of these that the media is expected to have played an important role in helping to manage or help resolve the perpetually conflict prone environment that Nigeria finds itself.

The media has been reactionary in its reportage of these conflicts. It is often argued that the media has been tools in the hands of those planning conflicts in Nigeria rather than try to help solve them. The contestations over economic re-distribution and access to the privileges of representation by various ethnic groupings, a reality the media is immersed in, as a Nigerian entity, often colours the reportage of news. In spite of the enormous potentials it possesses, the Nigerian media has not aided in creating a culture of

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<sup>391</sup> Obadare, E. "Constructing Pax Nigeriana? The Media and Conflict in Nigeria-Equatorial Guinea Relations" in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol. 10, No. 1, 2001, pp. 80-89

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

entrenched nationalism, and the media simultaneously accepts and constructs a reality which reified a particular mental disposition by most Nigerians towards a 'recalcitrant' neighbour. The media has even been accused of being the catalyst for conflicts as noted in the 2002 'Miss World Riots' in which over 200 people were killed in the northern town of Kaduna over a 'blasphemous report' written about the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>393</sup> The media in Nigeria is faced with a daunting task, reporting and maintaining a balanced perspective in a society divided by numerous factors.

### 5.7.2 The Media and the Niger Delta Conflicts

The Nigerian media is divided at several fronts. There is the divide between the government and privately-owned media, a divide along ethnic lines and within the private media, the Lagos, Kano and recently Niger Delta press. The Niger Delta agitations have been on since Nigeria's independence from colonial rule, yet, it attracted very little coverage from the media. From the time of Isaac Boro to recent times, marginalized communities have consistently clamoured for a greater share and participation in Nigeria. In the early era of agitation, the press was more or less confronting the military government on various issues ranging from the rule of law, legitimacy of the military incursion into politics and the challenges of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). It had no time or little time to engage the Niger Delta communities or the public on issues of perceived marginalization. Various factors were at play here. The post-civil war era saw the press actively engaged in the reconstruction of the Nigerian national identity. This was a deliberate agenda, an attempt at repairing the torn psyche of the nation.

On the other hand, the press was engaged in running battles with the government, often leading to imprisonment and closure of media organizations as well as the numerous oppressive laws enacted to stifle journalism. It was an accepted notion that the Nigerian economy survived on the revenues derived from oil explorations which should be used to benefit everyone in the nation. The effective public relations apparatus of the government and oil companies also affected the way the Nigeria media viewed the Niger Delta

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<sup>393</sup> CNN, Obasanjo blames media for Miss World riots, November 26, 2002 1144 GMT

agitations. Government and their joint venture partners were quick at attaching labels to dissenting voices and thus, instances of community agitations were casually reported in the media as civil agitations or criminal activities by those who wanted to destroy the economy of the nation. President Shehu Shagari, (a civilian president of northern origin) went as far as saying that Niger Deltans were thieves trying to appropriate the nation's resources for themselves.<sup>394</sup> These labels affected the media to the extent that even when issues of ecological importance like oil spillages were raised, the media often reported from the perspective of the multinationals which always claimed sabotage of pipelines. On the other hand, the communities were presented as insatiable parasites that were always on the look-out of compensation for imaginary ecological disasters in the region. In the events where the demonstrations or civil strikes went violent, due to the intervention of the Nigerian security apparatus, news of the wanton killings and destruction were spare. There is a clampdown on media coverage on the Niger Delta conflicts which is strictly enforced at government-owned NTA; therefore it is virtually impossible to get a clear perspective on issues affecting the region.<sup>395</sup> The NTA was effective in propagating government's position concerning the Niger Delta; not once were the host communities given a right of response in any of the media.

*Sunday Guardian* Editor, Jahman Anikulapo, noted that the private media in the past had been lukewarm about the Niger Delta issue, it was not treated as something important, making the response slow. He argues that, "the thing about the media is that we are still trying to balance our interest for the public and our interest for the politics. Some of us are still aligned to the interest of the government".<sup>396</sup> Ownership structures in the private media also affected the reporting on the Niger Delta. Most media owners have aligned themselves towards various political interests. In any case, they are elites who are seen as already benefiting from existing structures that control the nation's economy.<sup>397</sup> The civil society is often said to have a close relationship with the media, yet, in the intervening era, the civil society was not as effective as they should have been and the already

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<sup>394</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>395</sup> DonPedro, I. Op. Cit.

<sup>396</sup> Anikulapo, J. Op. Cit.

<sup>397</sup> Joab-Peterside, S. Op. Cit.

established ones were busy engaging the government on various fronts. Corruption and the economic situation (particularly when media houses do not pay their staff) of the country also adversely affected the relationships that existed between the media, the host communities and the government/ oil companies. The implications are that the 'brown envelope syndrome' has become so entrenched that very volatile issues were ignored because it became who pays the reporters that determined what got published.<sup>398</sup>

The Niger Delta issue only attracted media attention on the inception of the Ogoni struggle; MOSOP and Ken Saro-Wiwa were a novel phenomenon, the MOSOP campaign strategy was disarming in its simplicity. It was premised on the following facts; Shell's exploration activities since the 1960s have devastated the Ogoni environment. Therefore, as far as the Ogoni were concerned, it was an example of ecological racism and a blatant display of double standards. Shell was destroying the Ogoni environment in Nigeria while it upheld environmental standards in its European or western operations. Okonta and Douglas noted that the Ogoni further argued that,

Shell in collaboration with the Nigerian government, had taken billions of dollars out of Ogoni without giving the owners of the land adequate recompense. The Ogoni had had enough of this injustice and so they were appealing to the world to help get Shell off their back. This was the message Saro-Wiwa delivered everywhere he went.<sup>399</sup>

The media coverage of the Ogoni crisis generated a politically charged debate which in the view of Curran, was a radical representation of contending and significant interests in the society.<sup>400</sup> Media's role in the public sphere should facilitate their participation in the public domain, enable these interests to contribute to public debate, and have an input in the framing of public policy. The media, Curran admitted, could further help representative organizations to function, while exposing their internal process to public scrutiny and opinion.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Okonta, I and Douglas, O (2001) *Op. Cit.* p. 202-203

<sup>400</sup> Curran, J. (2000) *Op. Cit.*

<sup>401</sup> Ibid

How can we appropriately analyse the media's role? The media coverage no doubt generated at best a debate of national proportions. As we noted earlier, the agenda was clearly set by Saro-Wiwa's MOSOP and the support it attracted from civil society organisations. Adebamiwi noted that, "Ken Saro-Wiwa, the arrowhead of the Ogoni struggle, attracted a large measure of support to the cause, given his own relationship with the Lagos-Ibadan press as a newspaper columnist, author, TV series producer, and later president of Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA)".<sup>402</sup>

The uproar that emanated from the crisis soon attracted world attention and international media hounds soon closed in on the scene. The role played by the international media at the initial part of the crisis was not very proactive. Many media organisations are all part of conglomerates whose massive interests in mining operations globally could be called into question. Therefore, the international media had to grapple with self-censorship. Media frenzy ensued after Saro-Wiwa's death. This came with the clamour of civil society by human right organisations for the imposition of international sanctions on Nigeria and Shell.

Since the death of Saro-Wiwa, the media has shown only a cursory interest on the Niger Delta. However, agitations assuming the scale and scope of MOSOP's have simmered down as no community or its leaders were willing to take the risk that Saro-Wiwa and his leadership took; the consequences served as a deterrent. At the beginning of new agitations in the late 1990s, the PR machinery of Shell and other Multinational companies had recovered and the military government was prompt to clampdown on perceived dissent. So the media only relied again on whatever the PR departments of government and oil companies doled out. The news reports were clearly pro-government once again, complacency had set in and activists and youths were once again labelled criminals. The media attention, however, was re-captured by the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) declaration at Kaiama. Yet, the coverage was often biased in favour of the government's view point.

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<sup>402</sup> Adebamiwi, W. Op. Cit.

This has been the focus and thrust of media reports on the Niger Delta which occurred from 1999-2005.

*ThisDay* newspaper assistant editor, Oma Djebah, in a paper, argues that the media coverage on the Niger Delta was dismal, especially in 2004.<sup>403</sup> Djebah's research involved analyzing 180 articles from four major newspapers in Nigeria; *The Guardian*, *ThisDay*, *The Punch* and *The Vanguard*.<sup>404</sup> By focusing his research on the period when on September 27, 2004, Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), a militant group, threatened to launch an "all-out war" in the Niger Delta unless the Nigerian government acceded to agitations for a greater control of the region's rich oil resources by the host communities; Djebah argued that while his research acknowledges the extensive media coverage generated, the media discourse had keyed into representations of Asari-Dokubo as an 'enemy of the state' by the power hegemony.<sup>405</sup> Djebah argues that the media in Africa was still grappling with understanding the principles of Peace Journalism. He notes that:

The tragedy is that the media in Africa is perceived as a propaganda tool that was manipulated to serve the cause of war Journalism. Thus the media never really bothered about the suffering civilians in the area. The image of the occupied people, as presented in the media discourse, also depicted them as if they were "militant youths", "oil thieves", who vandalize oil pipelines in the Niger Delta.<sup>406</sup>

He notes that a majority of the Nigerian media organisations adopted the perception of the western media; the enemy image was personified in the person of Asari-Dokubo. Asari-Dokubo was being portrayed as Nigeria's Osama bin Laden, as a section of the media, tactically addressed him as a militant Muslim "who has travelled widely in the Middle East and has links with Osama bin Laden".<sup>407</sup> The only exception he points to was the *Vanguard*, which took a rather different position in this particular case.

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<sup>403</sup> Djebah, O. The Role of Peace Journalism in Africa: The Nigerian Experience, a paper presented at Highway Africa Conference, held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa, from 10th-14th September, 2006

<sup>404</sup> See Appendages for sample of the news reports.

<sup>405</sup> Djebah, O. Op. Cit.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.



Djedah argued in conclusion that since the propaganda war in the media consisted mainly of articles portraying the Nigerian government as peace-loving, a ruse to win audience compassion and support, both nationally and globally. The media's coverage of the Niger Delta conflict during the period under review negated the principles of objectivity, balance and comprehensiveness which were basic ingredients of peace journalism.<sup>408</sup>

However, from the period after the Ogoni struggle to the period Djedah reviewed, there has been a heightened awareness of the media by the communities in the Niger Delta. This has prompted publications and newsletters, and the setting up of websites by communities in the Niger Delta. MOSOP's newspaper the *Ogoni Star*, is a prominent community newspaper, the Ijaw Youth Council for Human Rights has a newsletter that focuses on human and environmental rights abuses. The IYC also has a paper called the *Ogene* which popularizes the Ijaw struggle as well as the Ijaw Nation a website.<sup>409</sup> The main drivers of news in the region, however, are publications from a section now tagged the Niger Delta Press (NDP). The NDP is openly into advocacy journalism trying to present an alternative to the news emanating from the Lagos or national press. It is devoted strictly to the reportage of issues that affect the region. It has been accredited with keeping the rest of the nation abreast with alternative reports from the Niger Delta, thus keeping the issues on the fore of national agenda. Its consistent coverage has also helped in altering the perception of the nation on most issues on the Niger Delta.<sup>410</sup> Although their combined circulation is quite low, their news reports are often picked up by the national dailies and the international press. There are allegations that reports from these papers are often confrontational, openly sensationalizing the activities of the militants and activists. This has prompted a major crackdown by government on some of the proprietors of these publications.

The Resource Control battle between the governments of the oil producing states and the national government was also driven by the elites in the system, it resulted in a sustained

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Joab-Peterside, S. Op. Cit.

<sup>410</sup> Nwuke, O. Op. Cit.

debate on the issues amongst the elites from the Niger Delta, the government, the Nigerian public, the media and civil society. As long as the debate was sustained in the media, the coverage was good but as soon as the governors lost their momentum amidst allegations of corruption and threats of reprisals from the central government, media coverage once again waned. The Supreme Court onshore/offshore dichotomy ruling in favour of the central government compounded issues.

The introduction of MEND into the political fray has further enhanced the media coverage. In Chapter Four, we analysed the media strategies of MEND's high command and argued that its success has been acknowledged by a broad spectrum of the media. The level of awareness raised in the media by MEND on the Niger Delta question has reached its highest peak in the last four decades. Yet, the level of complacency in recent past on the media's part is blamed on a number of factors. From the onset, MEND's strategies won the heart of the media, it all started with an email circulated to the media on MEND's intentions to strike at the heart of the Nigerian oil economy which they promptly did, the media especially the practitioners from the Niger Delta automatically romanticised the notion of MEND's intervention into the conflict.

To Anikulapo, MEND's dexterity at media relations has the following effects:

I think MEND is a very articulate and effective organisation, in terms of their information articulation, they are very good. I believe that everyone in the media from the Niger Delta is an ad-hoc member of MEND... because immediately you're from the Niger Delta; they have captured your imagination. I know of my colleagues here when we discuss, they talk as if they were the hostage takers themselves and it takes a lot of debate to get them to remember their responsibility as objective journalists.<sup>411</sup>

The media has responded to the incessant hostage taking activities in the region. This has hurt MEND to no small measure. At the initial stage when hostages were taken, from a professional sense of duty, the media would promptly report. These days, the media is increasingly analysing its motives to see if their reports were actually emboldening the hostage takers to more acts of kidnappings.

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<sup>411</sup> Anikulapo, J. *Op. Cit.*

Anikulapo argues that:

MEND's biggest crisis right now, is how to tackle the negative backlash that has resulted from the irate spates of hostage taking. They have even gone back to the drawing board to retool their ideology; we see evidences of these from their review of the Niger delta budget allocations, their articulations on the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), their commentaries on the National Census and politics. It is apparent that these are a group of intellectuals, an interventionist group who know what they want inspite of other factors puncturing their material.<sup>412</sup>

The media coverage of the conflict, with the spates of kidnappings which MEND denies responsibility, has turned the crisis back in favour of the government. Several media reports although sympathetic to the Niger Delta cause has categorically condemned the attacks as irresponsible. It is becoming more comfortable to agree with the government spin on the effects of militancy on the security of the region and the country as well. The media's challenge, however, is to maintain an objective role while being persistent in issue-driven journalism. Even more challenging, is the need for the media to be part of the solution to the Niger Delta question.

## **5.8 Conclusions**

The political economy of the Nigerian media puts it in a very delicate position. In its assumed role as the fourth estate of the realm, the media has to grapple with ownership structures, a challenging economic environment, and a sense of being under-utilised. It also faces other challenges like lack of equipment, lack of training or re-training for journalists; the list goes on and on. Yet, it has managed over the past decade to rise above many of these challenges to become a formidable force in the Nigerian experiment. The rise of the Nigerian media can be directly linked with the rise of civil society. However, the media like civil society is grappling with the crisis of identity. The civil society movement in Nigeria is almost non-existent and will need a massive injection of capacity to survive the aftermath of the April 2007 general elections. The Niger Delta conflicts have impacted on the media in several ways. However, the most visible has been the reversal of its complacent attitude to one of engagement on issues that affect the majority

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

of Nigerians and the Niger Delta inhabitants in general. The media's flirtation with MEND's ideology also speaks volumes of the political clout that MEND seems to be wielding. Yet, it stands to be seen, how far media is willing to go in placing Niger Delta issues in the front burner of national agenda. The media plays an important role in the Niger Delta conflicts although the impact of its role will engage scholarship for decades to come.

## **Chapter Six – Conclusion**

This study was underpinned by the following aims, to critically examine the role of the media in the escalation or resolution of resource-driven conflicts in the Niger Delta. It also examined whether the media has become a tool of these actors, in furthering the political machinations that fuel these conflicts. It analysed the implication that the successful media strategies of the actors had on policies and trends in international diplomacy. However, in light of increased militancy and the disruption of oil production in the region, this study examined the media's role, to establish whether 'favourable' coverage has only helped to embolden the militants, or whether the media is only serving the biddings of large Multinational corporations which own large chunks of the media anyway.

### **6.1 The Niger Delta Conflicts**

The Niger Delta conflicts have been blamed on a multiplicity of factors. They include: the Nigerian identity question, ethnic politics, political injustice, manipulation, civil and environmental rights abuses, the gross disregard for the rule of law. These are compounded by corruption at all levels of government, mismanagement, misappropriation, and embezzlement of state funds, the suppression and lack of a viable civil society. The greatest challenge seems to be finding a lasting solution to a situation that is fast accelerating into global proportions. The media generally plays a major role in the society. It occupies an important space in the public sphere due to its ability to affect public opinion. In conflicts, the media ironically also becomes the middle ground for the exchange of ideas which could either resolve or exacerbate the conflict. While existing literature on the media's role in conflicts focused on the causes and effects of media coverage, this study is revolutionary in the sense that it locates the media in a position where its role could become central in the conceptualisation, management and resolution of conflicts.

This study acknowledged existing theories which normally seeks to place the media in an informative role in conflicts. Yet, media is increasingly placed in multiple roles in

conflicts; the media's role in the Niger Delta conflicts has been self-contradictory. This study recognised the threat posed by political strategies that places the media in a central role. It exposed a situation where conflicts are planned with the hope of using the media as a theatre where the winner claims the victory, yet ironically, this same media can become the middle ground where negotiations could take place thus, bringing a speedy resolution to conflicts.

The Nigerian media reflects the polarization that exists in the Nigerian national and ethnic consciousness. Studies have shown the polarization of the media along ethnic and cultural lines. While this reflects the diversity that exists within the nation, it poses a serious challenge to the media's attempt at representing the interest of the people. A partisan media stands the risk of further alienating the state from the people it seeks to represent. The Nigerian media faces innumerable challenges in its bid to preserve an impartial role in its reportage of national issues.

In the Niger Delta conflicts, the actors have engaged the media in their bid to legitimise their political cause, the main actors in the conflict has been the host communities and their alleged support base, versus the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies presenting a single front due to their joint venture operations. The host communities until recently have been unable to effectively utilise the media to pursue their agenda.<sup>413</sup> Since the media was faced with surviving in an authoritarian environment such as pre-democratic Nigeria was, the Niger Delta question was not a significant part of their agenda. The government and the oil companies' agenda dominated the media for decades. Through the use of cohesion and government-owned media facilities, the media space was saturated with messages that leaned drastically in their favour. Saro-Wiwa's emergence provided the boost that the local communities desperately needed in airing their grievances and thus media coverage was improved. With the emergence of MEND, a radical shift has occurred in media coverage and most media organisations have increasingly added their voice to the agitation for an equitable resolution of the conflicts. The contribution of new media and ICT technologies cannot be ignored and so is the

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<sup>413</sup> See chapter three

ability of MEND to appropriate these resources to heighten awareness. The blossoming presence of Nigerian media organisations in cyberspace and the global reach it culminates in makes official censorship almost impossible.

## **6.2 The Role of the Media in the Niger Delta conflicts**

A major question this study seeks to answer is whether the media's role in these conflicts has aided in the exploitation of these marginalised communities by not giving adequate voice to these civil agitations or has its coverage created the 'Al Jazeera' factor thus emboldening these militants? The Media's role has had both positive and negative effects on the conflicts.

### **6.2.1 Negative effects**

The media's earlier complacency and the fact that its agenda was dominated by messages that favoured the government and oil companies may have been a major contributor to the escalation into conflicts in recent times. Whenever the reports on the Niger Delta were issued in the media (pre Saro-Wiwa times and sometimes even now), most of these reports are never properly investigated, and consequently, media messages instead of seeking a balance, perpetrated already existing stereotypes on Niger Delta issues. Objectivity is upheld as the motivating ethic of modern journalism. Has the media in its reportage on the Niger Delta been objective? The answer leans towards the negative. It will be unfair to attribute all of the blame on the media; its political economy<sup>414</sup> has negatively impacted the media in many aspects.

The media has been accused of being sensational in its reportage of issues in the Niger Delta; this proves to be a lethal mix since publishing a poorly investigated news report that has been overtly sensationalised only helps to heat up already existing tensions. The media has a social responsibility in ensuring that its coverage does not threaten the national security of the country. But on the other hand, media has to be careful not to play into the clutches of government spin-doctoring which always cites instances of national security as an excuse for its security clampdown on information and access.

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<sup>414</sup> See Chapter Six

The sensationalism of coverage on the Niger Delta could be a major contributing factor to the recent hostage takings and attacks on oil installations, since empirical evidence has proven that media's focus can play a major role in emboldening actors in conflicts. This agrees with Young's analogy that the media can contribute to conflict escalation, either directly or indirectly.<sup>415</sup> Therefore, the media coverage has proven to be a useful tool, since the strategies of the militants have always relied on the media. Young notes that: "Strategic terrorist attacks may be calculated to draw media attention, and so draw attention to their cause. In the absence of media coverage, many types of terrorism would be useless".<sup>416</sup> So, it goes to prove that the media has been manipulated on several instances; media opinion often swings like a pendulum depending on whose strategy seems most effective.

Foreign media coverage has been blamed for negatively impacting on the Niger Delta; the international media is notorious in portraying conflicts in third world countries in a particular way. Media conglomerates are part of the global business environments, most multinational companies are the parent companies of these media organisation and its not surprising that emotive terms like 'terrorists' and 'kidnappers' are used to describe the activities of the militants. The practise of parachute journalism is rife. This happens when foreign correspondents arrive at a scene of a conflict, spend a few days or a week at most and then write or transmit reports which normally are not researched properly, but produced in a certain way to meet the gatekeeping needs of international media companies. These reports often reinforce dominant caricatures of Africans (as wild, corrupt and ungovernable) in the Western imagery. The recent saga between the Nigerian government and the CNN<sup>417</sup> reveals the extent to which the media can affect the conflict. This effect has been exacerbated by the appropriation of the misery and legitimate wrath

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<sup>415</sup> See 2.3.4 on notes on the media and conflict.

<sup>416</sup> Young, C. (1999) *Op. Cit.* p.52

<sup>417</sup> The Nigerian government accused the CNN of staging a report where militants blatantly showing off their hostages, danced in a show of strength, Jeff Koinage CNN's African correspondent was vehement in denying the accusations but emails released by MEND show that he didn't quite tell the whole story.



of the people of the Niger Delta to further a time-honored xenophobic western media agenda against Africans.<sup>418</sup>

### 6.2.2 Positive effects

Media coverage of the Niger Delta has also yielded positive results. The first positive effect has been the placing of Niger Delta issues in the foremost part of media agenda. The media has more or less become a champion of the Niger Delta struggle. This has come from a better understanding of the issues that affect the people of the Niger Delta. Therefore, media reports on the Niger Delta are now issue-driven; in the private press, specific sections are now dedicated to the Niger Delta. The media is taking on the government on issues of accountability, development, and empowerment of Niger Delta communities. The era of one-sided news reports fed from government spin doctors seems to be ending. The media now reports timely on the situation in the Niger Delta, thus keeping the citizens informed on issues that affect their livelihood.

Another development which has positive implications is the emergence of the Niger Delta press. Although the press is still in the developmental stages (due to its perceived weak journalism standards), the national media is increasingly beginning to depend on the NDP for insights into issues in the region. This is due to their ability to deploy resources and their acceptance by the local communities as champions of the cause. Reports done by the NDP are often reproduced by the national and international press. The increasing awareness created by the press could be a catalyst in getting the communities involved in seeking answers to their problem through the continued use of the press since militancy in the long run fuels the conflicts and impacts negatively on the human security of the inhabitants of the region.

The involvement of the international media also has its benefits, but realists will ponder on whose agenda the international press are pursuing. Yet, due to the international media's reach and deployment globally, the ability to focus international media attention on the

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<sup>418</sup> Kperogi, F. "Nigeria: CNN, Niger Delta and Western Media Portrayals of Africa (I)" in *Weekly Trust*, February 25, 2007.

Niger Delta has proven to benefit its communities since the challenges facing the region can no longer be swept into the mangrove swamps like a sordid little secret.

There has been a greater appreciation of the media's role from the approach to the conclusion of April 2007 general elections. The Niger Delta question was a major campaign issue for major presidential candidates whose campaign rhetoric is pregnant with promises of assuaging the anger of the people of the zone. The ability to address Niger Delta issues was a selling point for the presidential candidates since it is the view of many that those presidential candidates who showed any sign of insensitivity to the plights of the people of the Niger Delta, might automatically lose the support of the zone in their quests<sup>419</sup>. While in the end the elections produced a candidate whose credibility as President is still under question, the media must be applauded for putting these issues at the fore of the agenda. They have to be careful not to fall into the same trap as before of echoing empty promises and yet, not holding the political elites to the commitments made during the electioneering campaigns.

Finding a holistic solution to the Niger Delta question will take a while. The conflict and the involvement of the actors are still in the evolutionary stages, whether the media's role will change in the future is something we are yet to experience. As the events unfold, it is hoped that the media will stay alert to its social responsibility role by becoming the catalyst that will influence the actors towards an amicable resolution.

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<sup>419</sup> *This Day* (Lagos) 'Nigeria: The Niger Delta As Campaign Agenda' March 4, 2007

## **Appendages**

### ***THE GUARDIAN* (Articles)**

“Dokubo stops arms surrender”, Kelvin Ebiri, November 18, 2

“Dokubo, militant Group leader, Surrenders 188 Guns”, Kelvin Ebiri, 29, Oct 2004

“Asari-Dokubo alleges murder of 3 group members”, Kelvin Ebiri, Nov 5, 2004

“Niger Delta Youths Disown Dokubo, militia leader”(no author), Jul 19, 2004

“Dokubo denies link with Al-Qaeda, restates commitment to peace pact”, Kelvin Ebiri, Nov 3, 2004

“Dokubo Asari in Abuja, meets security Agents”, Madu Onuorah and Kelvin Ebiri, Sept 30, 2004

“Dokubo list terms Conditions for disarming”, Kelvin Ebiri, Oct 8, 2004.

### ***THE PUNCH* (Articles)**

“Oil producing state governors spend derivation fund recklessly”, Sola Adebayo, Sept 28, 2004

“Arms still pile up in Niger Delta-Task Force Chief”, Sola Adebayo, Feb 4, 2005

“Akinrinade Highlights Dangers of president’s talk with Dokubo”, Oct 21, 2004

“British aid to Nigeria to focus on Niger Delta”(no author), Sept 7, 2004

“EU Delegation meets Dokubo, Ateke, others”, Festus Owete, Oct 23, 2004

“Amnesty for Dokubo, Ateke, Others”, Ibanga Isine, Sam Akpe and Yusuf Alli, Oct 4, 2004

“16 Oil Workers kidnapped”, Sola Adebayo, Dec 27, 2004

***THISDAY*** (Articles)

“Group urges N/Delta Govs to justify Allocations”, Eddy Odivwri, Nov 28, 2004

“Militants Threaten Escravos Crude Pipeline Again”, Mike Oduniyi, Okon Bassey and Cletus Akwaya, Feb 7, 2005

“Warri: US Wants Justice over Slain Citizens”, Nneoma Ukeje-Eloagu and Jaiyeola Andrews, May 3, 2004

“Niger Delta: 4 killed in Warri, 5 in Bayelsa”, John Iwori, 21 April 2004

“Group Disown Dokubo Asari’s Organisation”, (no author), 27 Oct, 2004.

“Niger Delta: Military Gives Assurance on security”, Onyebuchi Ezigbo, Sept 1, 2004

***VANGUARD*** (Articles)

“Police Warn against Rallies by Dokubo, Ateke Tom’s supporters”, John Ighodaro, Oct 7, 2004.

“Our conditions for Peace, by Asari Dokubo”, Hector Igbikiowubo, Oct 1, 2004

“SSS quizzes Dokubo”, Emma Amaize and Osaro Okhomina, Nov 18, 2004.

“Dokubo Spits fire: I can’t take Govt’s Insincerity Any Longer,” November 20, 2004.

“CRIVIFON flays FG over Killings in N-Delta”, May 3, 2004.

















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