

LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION AND LEXICAL CHOICES ON MILITANTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE NIGER DELTA

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Article History

Received : 23/06/2022

Accepted : 28/06/2022

Published : 30/06/2022

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Abstract

In the Niger Delta region, Multi National Oil Corporations have been massively involved in the production of crude oil since 1956 when Shell British Petroleum successfully discovered oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri the present-day Bayelsa state. Ever since, Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Agip, Elf and Texaco had operated and continue to operate in the region on the basis of joint venture agreements with the federal government through the NNPC. After some decades of oil exploration and production in the region, the oil wealth has not translated into development in the region. Instead, it has caused environmental despoliation through dredging, construction of access canals to create paths to installations, oil spillages, gas flaring, oil well blowouts, and improper disposal of drilling mud, as well as pipeline leakages and vandalism.

Keywords: Linguistic Representation, Lexical Choices, Militants, Environmental Issues, Niger Delta

INTRODUCTION

It has been observed that oil prospecting and exploration activities pollute the environment; consequently, there is a high level of farmland and aquatic species destruction. The people of the Niger Delta region who were originally farmers and fishermen had their means of livelihood destroyed; as there is loss of fertile farmland, decline in agricultural produce, migration, loss, and destruction of aquatic resources, contamination of natural sources, drinking water, atmospheric pollution, rapid corrosion of roofing sheets (acid rain), gradual extinction and migration of wildlife, general biodiversity destruction, and massive rural/urban migration. (See F. and Gray, J.S. 1995, Fagbami, A.A., Udo, E.J. and Odu, C.T.I. 1988, Ohimain, E.I, et a. 2008, Tanyi (2020), WHO 2004, Ubong I. 2010, Igbara, J.W. 2010, Edwards, S.C., et. al 2010, Olsgard and Ebim 2015). All these studies, from different perspectives, have tried to examine the crises in the region with the aim of at least preferring solution to the debacles.

On a daily basis, activities of the JTF and the militants are reported in the media, and the place of the media in supporting structures for increased debate continue to widen the public sphere. This

process guarantees the actualisation of democratisation project in contemporary Nigeria, as well as serves as a bridge to re-enforce conflict resolution in the Niger Delta. It should be noted that the media is naturally attracted to conflict, therefore an understanding of the media's role in shaping beliefs and behaviours, especially prejudiced beliefs and behaviours is central in conflict resolution and management. In contemporary Nigeria, media slant, conflict, prejudice, and propaganda are major affixes in her media practice. This is the case with the Niger delta. An understanding of the reportage on environmental despoliation as a corollary of media engagement or mediation is fundamental in the peace rebuilding process in the region because as Okune (2006) observes, *no text is totally independent of the influence of other texts*. This is because the media is an instrument that could be utilized to shape belief, attitude, and perception. It is also a veritable instrument that could be used to advance objectivity and fairness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Niger Delta had been peaceful until local resistance arose in the region due to lopsided nature of the sharing formular of the

proceeds from oil. This was also in addition to the complaint of the level of pollution and environmental degradation in the region (See 2011 UNEP Report) on Environmental Assessment of Ogoniland. All these as reported above report have been critically examined. Specifically, Ebim's works have dealt on the issues of climate change, environmental despoliation, the cleaning up of Ogoniland, etc. all the works dwelt on the areas of Discourse, Representation, Thematization, and linguistic labels (Ebim, & Tanyi, (2021, Ebim, 2021a, 2019a, 2019b, 2017, 2015). In recent times, the focus of the Niger Delta Discourse has shifted to the way oil revenue is being shared and how oil pollution was undermining local livelihoods. This has led young people from the region to get involved in agitations for the attraction of more developments to the region. After several years of struggles, the same youth claimed that they have been left out of the Development and that their struggles have been highjacked by the government. There is a consistent outcry of marginalization from the people of this region. This is exactly the way blacks in America are marginalized. Writing on the experiences of the blacks in their foreign lands, Okune, (2011) opines that: *"They suffered racial discrimination because of their skin colour. If their literary works were written to repudiate the negative depiction of the black race by pseudo-scientific theories propounded by racist ethnologists like Levy Bruhl, de Gobineau, and Spengler, as well as extol Africa, then these writers became so passionate as to sound strident, idealistic, nostalgic and sentimental in the"*. Although there is a counter-argument from the elites that it is the fault of national-level politicians who take a larger slice of the NDDC contracts. Since its inception, the commission has received \$40 billion to invest in development projects. These include road construction, health care, education, and job creation. But there is very little on the ground to account for this money. Contracts are often inflated. Projects get abandoned. And shoddiness is normal. Young people will have to live with the fallout. They are already suffering the impact of political corruption because the money that should have been used to improve their lives has simply disappeared.

This is a disturbing development that could return the Niger Delta region to the days of militancy if not properly checked. And because the country is currently battling with an urgent insecurity problem relating to the Boko Haram insurgents, organised armed banditry involving Fulani herdsmen, farmer-herder conflicts, kidnapping, and armed robbery there is the need to ensure that the fragile peace being enjoyed in the Niger Delta region is maintained. It is not a hidden fact that in Nigeria, political elites are often officially or unofficially protected by state security agents. Those who suffer the consequences of insecurity are ordinary. In this study therefore the focus is on newspaper reports on the activities of oil companies in the Niger Delta to examine how language is used in the depiction of the environment from a linguistic viewpoint.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In the data excerpt below, we noticed that the Niger Delta militants changed from bombing of oil installations to oil bunkering and piracy. The security operatives within the region were recording success in the area of putting an end to bunkering. In the course of

carrying out the operation of ensuring a safe haven for the multinational oil corporations, lives were lost. In the extracts below reported within this period, the situation is hardly different from that of the Boko Haram in terms of shedding of blood:

IT was celebration galore for the Joint Task Force (JTF) in Niger-Delta, codenamed Operation Shield, when its troops, on June 23, accosted some purported sea pirates in the creek of Bayelsa State and shot dead six of them in a supposed gun battle, while the seventh suspect, who escaped with bullet wounds, later died. One of the suspects, Tony Ebipa, a speedboat driver, was married with two wives and two children. In fact, one of his wives was pregnant at the time he was killed, last month. Another victim, Timi Esemogha, a bricklayer, was married to one wife with one child. Media Coordinator of JTF, Lt. Col Onyema Nwachukwu, told reporters: "About 5.00 pm on June 23, troops of JTF Operation Pulo Shield, at Agge, while on patrol along River Ramos, encountered a gang of seven suspected pirates. On sighting our troops, the pirates opened fire and our patrol troops immediately returned fire. TEXT A1

The opening sentence in the above extract D51 is a contradiction of what ought to be when a life is lost within the African context. The use of the expressions: "celebration galore" as reported by the news writer tends to place a question mark on the rationale for the celebration at the death of a living being. The same extract reveals that some people have been made widows as a result of the killing of the militants-an exercise that is marked with "celebration galore". The said widow in the report is even said to be pregnant-a situation that should have called for sympathy but heralded by "celebration galore". But the reason for such acts is revealed in the last sentence as the spokesman for the team observes: "on sighting our troops, the pirates opened fire and our patrol troops returned fire". This means that the killing was a reaction to the shooting by the pirates who were the first to launch an attack. "The response with fire" was only reported and not its repercussion which is only revealed after a closer look at the news item as presented by the reporter. In the subsequent extract, the spokesman avers that:

"Six pirates were killed in the encounter while one escaped into the river with gunshot wounds". He added that items recovered included one 200-horse power speedboat, two single barrel guns, seven mobile phones, two hack saw blades, four wraps of substance suspected to be Indian hemp, and four torch lights. Few days, however, human rights activists and families of the purported suspects raised dust over the killings, alleging extra-judicial murder. They claimed there was no

exchange of gunfire between the youths (suspects) and soldiers who arrested them before they were murdered. TEXT A2.

The ambiguity and contradictions are further revealed in the extract as the human rights group “claimed extra judicial killing” of the youths who “did not fire any gunshot but were murdered without any form of resistance after they were captured alive”. The focus is on the use of the two lexical items “killing” and “murdered”. To the security experts “killing” is legitimate within the confines of the law while the human rights group is of the view that “murdered” is unlawful and a violation of the rights to life of the victims. In our view, the word “killing” is a representation of justice by soldiers who paint the victims as evil-doers while the human rights group sees the act as a deliberate attempt to label “innocent” citizens as “evil” to “extra-judicially” eliminate them. The allegation that the suspects were arrested before being “killed” in the words of the soldiers is what paved the way for the celebration galore because there wouldn’t have been any form of “celebration if the suspects were shot in an exchange of fire in the bush in an ideal situation unless there was a bounty placed on them as wanted “criminals” or even “societal outlaws”. In a bid to sustain the fight to ensure the safety of oil pipelines the Armed forces report in the next extract their determination to flush out the leader of one of the militant groups from his place of hiding even though it was speculated that he had escaped to Ukraine. From the headline, the message is clear- to flush out the militant leader but the reversal to the word militant in place of pirates as used in the above extract is what is not clear. Extract D53 below captures the message:

We’ll soon flush Tompolo out of hiding- JTF: The Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta has debunked the report that militant leader, Government Ekpemupolo, alias Tompolo, who was declared wanted by the security outfit on May 21, had escaped to Ukraine, declaring that he would soon be smoked out of his hideout. Also, leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), General Boyloaf, who indicated, weekend, his intention to accept the proposed amnesty for militants by the Federal Government, yesterday reassured oil companies in the region and asked them to ignore the 72-hour ultimatum given by the militant group to vacate the region, saying there was no cause to panic. The MEND ultimatum expired Monday night and there were fears that the militant group would resume fresh attacks as from yesterday (Tuesday) but, General Boyloaf, who spoke exclusively to Vanguard said: As far as I am concerned, nothing will happen in Bayelsa, Ondo, Edo, Rivers, and parts of Delta State, where I have given directives that they should not blow up oil installations or disturb oil workers. TEXT A3

The use of such lexical items as: “militant leader”, “declared wanted” “escaped” “smoked out of his hideout” indicated” [his intention to accept the proposed amnesty for militants]“72-hour ultimatum given by the militant group to vacate the region, “no cause to panic” there were fears that the militant group would resume fresh attacks” I have given directives that they should not blow up oil installations or disturb oil workers” tend to give the Niger Delta militants some measure of audacity and notoriety to decide when to quit. This, therefore, could be responsible for the “celebration galore” that heralded the execution of six people who were arrested unarmed as alleged in extract D51. It should be made clear at this point that the word “MEND” as reflected in the above extract refers to an organization formed by a select group of Niger Delta militants to agitate for equity in the distribution of the resources in the region. Their mandate is to ensure that oil exploration within the region is done in accordance with the international laws that govern such exercise as obtainable in other parts of the world. Their belief however is that the level of corruption that permeates the exploration activities can only be checkmated by a pressure group such as MEND which is violent in approach where dialogue fails. As seen in the extract above, the leader of the group was declared wanted as a result of his activities that tend to halt oil production; a situation that prompts the security operatives to resort to the use of force in ensuring that he is “smoked out of his place of hiding”.

General Boyloaf the leader of the group however is seen in this report being ready to embrace dialogue and sue for peace as the report observes: General Boyloaf, who indicated, weekend, his intention to accept the proposed amnesty for militants by the Federal Government, yesterday reassured oil companies in the region and asked them to ignore the 72-hour ultimatum given by the militant group to vacate the region, saying there was no cause to panic. TEXT A4

This indicates the willingness to embrace dialogue as well as the federal government’s amnesty programme which is aimed at pacifying the militants. The amnesty programme is also targeted at ensuring that they (militants) drop their weapons and be ready to get integrated into the larger society. This is expected to enable them live normal lives again after a long period of struggle with the federal government.

REPRESENTATION OF JTF AND ENVIRONMENT

The focus of this segment, therefore, is to explicate media reports on environmental issues and see how the media has ensured that objectivity is maintained by calling attention of the government to the insurgency in the region. In order to critically examine the issues of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region as precursors to insurgent activities that have ravaged the region for a while, we take some extracts from our data and following the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis as laid down by Teun Van Dijk, analyse them accordingly:

JTF Uncovers Oil Spill from Shell Pipeline: The Joint Military Task Force (JTF) code-named Operation Pulo Shield yesterday said it has uncovered a huge crude oil leakage from the pipeline owned by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). The Media Coordinator of the Joint Task Force, Lt. Col Onyema Nwachukwu in a statement said the JTF patrol team discovered the leakage close to a signpost marker KP-67 located around Pulokiri/Money Ground (between Adamakiri and Creek 6) general area. The statement said preliminary investigation revealed that the spill may have been caused by corrosion of the pipelines and that an on-the-spot assessment showed brownish liquid substance coming out from an opening on the pipeline. TEXT B1

The headline in extract C31 above contains an element of truth as it concerns environmental degradation in the Niger Delta area as opposed to the initial claim that the people were only crying foul just to attract the attention of the international community. As reported in the extract, the name shell which has always been an albatross on the throat of the Niger Deltans did not only appear as culpable but it is found to be behind the high level of degradation that has ravaged the region for a period of time. By using the expression “a huge crude oil leakage” the reporter uses hyperbole to exaggerate as well as local meanings such as “a signpost marker KP-67 located around Pulokiri/Money Ground (between Adamakiri and Creek 6)” to polarise the relationship which had gone sour between shell and the host community. The name of the patrol team that “uncovered” the spill “Operation Pulo Shield” is a cover up for any act of extra-judicial murder which might be committed in the area because it is hardly known to anybody outside the military circle—a process that usually gives the operatives the power to carry out impunities without being caught. The emotion of the reporter however comes to the fore when he introduces the word “may” in reporting the incident thus placing a question mark on the revelation by the security operatives. Even though the reporter tries to down play on the truth about the revelation, the security operatives state the main cause of the leak as:

...corrosion on the pipeline and urged Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) management effect immediate repairs on the line to prevent further spill. In another development, the JTF spokesman, said its troops in Bayelsa State, deployed to patrol the water ways of Osiegbene Creek in Ekeremor, Brass and Southern Ijaw Local Government Areas have stamped out 42 illegal oil distillery camps and scuttled 25 open wooden boats (Cotonu boats) used by oil thieves along Osiegbene, Yeregbene, Otui Lagos gbene and Oyeregbene communities. TEXT B2

This corrosive nature of the pipelines in the region call to question the allegation that there is lack of maintenance culture on the part of the multinationals that carry out oil exploration in the Niger Delta region; thus substantiating the claim that oil prospecting firms are only interested in their own gains to the detriment of the inhabitants of the region. But the media is constantly in search of news items on the issues of environmental despoliation whether subverted of objective as Taiwo observes:

Petroleum is the major source of income for Nigeria. It is the constant focus of discussion on a daily basis in most domains of discourse. Since the economy of the nation depends largely on it, issues that surrounds its pricing both at the local and international markets are naturally of concern to an average Nigerian the press knows the importance of petroleum in the life Nigerians, and they always present captivating headlines on it (2007:48).

In the same extract above, the patrol team did not only uncover oil leakages but also “stamped out 42 illegal oil distillery camps and scuttled 25 open wooden boats (Cotonu boats) used by oil thieves”. This has always been the major headache of the Nigerian state, the issue of oil pilferage which is known in the Nigerian parlance as “oil bunkering” a coinage that has become domesticated into the Nigerian English lexicon. There are however certain lexical items in that extract that call our attention to the news report such as: “stamped out” “illegal oil distillery camps” “scuttled 25 open wooden boats” “(Cotonu boats)” “used by oil thieves”. To “stamp out” is to remove and one begins to wonder how the military men were able to remove 42 illegal oil distilling camps in one day. We believe that their intention was to use the word “destroyed” or even “demolished”. In another development, to “scuttled” is to frustrate one’s plans but when boats are being scuttled not even human beings then it becomes an issue for deeper linguistic examination. Our position is that the intention was to use the word halted in place of scuttled which is a more appropriate linguistic term for such an expression. Again the use of the word “cotonu boats” is not clear whether those boats were made in cotonu or whether they were cotonu bound:

156trn Needed To Clean Up Niger Delta: Over N156 trillion (\$1trillion) is needed to clean up the Niger Delta area impacted by the activities of illegal refineries, oil theft , and pipeline vandalism, Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta, Mr. Kingsley Kuku has said. Kuku who is also the Chairman, Presidential Amnesty Programme, said at the conference on oil and illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta held in Lagos that the current wastages in the nation’s oil industry was regrettable. TEXT B3

The negligence reported above led to the need for a huge sum of money to be used in cleaning the Niger Delta region. But the

headline is too exaggerated and gives a very wrong signal. It is a fact that certain areas have been environmentally degraded in the Niger Delta region but that does not mean every nook and corner in the region needs to be cleaned as used in that headline. The mere sight of the sum of money needed gives a very wrong signal that a chunk of the nation's common wealth is going to be used in an entire region whereas it is the specific spots where the despoliation takes place that the cleaning exercise will be carried out. So in our view, the headline is misleading and aimed at misinforming the masses to distract attention from the main issues at stake. To give credence to that misinformation, the reporter begins by saying the money is needed because of "the activities of illegal refineries" "oil bunkering" and "pipeline vandalism" as if these are the activities that have caused the high level of environmental degradation. The reporter downplayed on the activities of the multinational corporations that have been in the region since 1956 when oil was first discovered in Oloibiri the present Bayelsa state. This is a process van Dijk calls "immersion" of a news reporter to misinform the populace. This looks like the reporter tried to appeal to the sentiment of readers by using hyperboles and litotes to play up the blame game in the course of immersing himself in the story to lay the blame on the people rather than the major actors in the menace of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta region.

He said the president has since empowered joint military forces to tackle those who were hell-bent in sabotaging the nation's economy and its environment. According to him, the efforts of the security forces in checking the activities of the saboteurs have started yielding results. "We are aware that several sites of illegal refining have been dismantled and destroyed. We are entering a critical phase in frontally confronting this challenge and there is no doubt that we will triumph. TEXT B4.

The extract C34 still on the report on the need for environmental cleansing still places the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Niger Delta oil "thieves" as the reporter did state in the report. The irony however is that Shell petroleum which was mentioned in the report has been totally removed from the blame game. As the then special adviser to the president observes: the efforts of the security forces in checking the activities of the saboteurs have started yielding results; we are aware that several sites of illegal refining have been dismantled and destroyed; We are entering a critical phase in frontally confronting this challenge and there is no doubt that we will triumph. That even the Nigerian government downplays on the challenges posed by the oil companies in creating problems in the Niger Delta as seen in the report is a clear indication of how the less privileged are relegated to the background as van Dijk opines:

The nature of news suggests that it is more than just practical ways of managing huge amounts of information within strict deadlines. The values are not arbitrary. They reflect the

class, gender, and ethnic position of the journalists and play an important role in the reproduction of power. This process is most visible in news discourse content and the routines of everyday news production. To guarantee a steady supply of news, independently of what actually happens in the world, and for an effective organization of their Newsbeat, journalists must make sure to tap sources that provide continuous information that may be used to make news. These sources are mostly powerful or elite institutions, such as the government, state agencies, parliament, city councils, big corporations, political parties, unions, the police, the courts, or the universities (Fishman, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). They have also organized their permanent access to the news media, e.g., through press offices and spokespersons and by press conferences and press releases. It is not surprising, therefore, that most news comes from and is about such institutions or the elite persons that control them. Despite the ideologically based illusion of independence, journalists partly share the class interests of these elites, and their news production routines are finely tuned to the representation of their actions, their points of view, and ultimately their ideology. (1988:170).

The above position of van Dijk clearly manifests in EXTRACT C34 as everything about the oil corporations are downplayed in the report and the entire blame placed on the oil pilferers who are the "less" mortals that can easily be used as scapegoats in the case of any altercation.

Youths, Community Leaders Clash over Coy Gifts in Edo: More than five houses were set ablaze and many people injured in Okomu community of Ovia South West Local government area of Edo state yesterday when some youths suspected to be ex-militants attacked community leaders over gift donated to the community by the Okomu Oil Company operating in the area. TEXT B5.

There is a shift from blame game to fomenting trouble in the Niger Delta by the same imperialist oil corporations operating in the region. In extract C35 above we see the peoples' fortunes razed to the ground because of what the reporter calls "coy gift". By "coy" it refers to the abbreviated form of company. Just like the slave traders used "gin" to give to our forefathers who drank and got intoxicated, the "coy" has decided to bring such "intoxicating" gifts to the Niger Delta region to ensure that peace is elusive as demonstrated in that report. The perpetrators of this dastardly act are said to be ex-militants. This is also a clear picture of disturbing

times were militants where not fully integrated and accommodated into the amnesty programme thus leading to such nefarious acts being carried out.

One of the community leaders Mr. Rickson Nanagha who spoke from his hiding place on telephone said the suspected ex-militants stormed his house Monday morning demanding for the materials donated to the community by the oil firm. He said his house and other buildings including that of the Headmaster of Okomu Primary school were set ablaze when they found out he had escaped. Nanagha said: "These boys started this problem in 2011 when we asked them to disarm and accept amnesty. They came to my house then and started fighting me. Luckily for me, I got over that incident but they were not happy with some of us because we insisted they must drop their arms." T EXT B6

The utterances that "the suspected ex-militants stormed his house" paint a picture of a war situation and seem lopsided in terms of the reportage. But the emotions of the reporter keep cropping up in the story as the use of the word "suspected" militants is the reporter's creation. The community leader made it clear in his telephone interview that "These boys started this problem in 2011 when we asked them to disarm and accept amnesty. They came to my house then and started fighting me. Luckily for me I got over that incident but they were not happy with some of us because we insisted they must drop their arms." So for the reporter to still claim that the perpetrators are not known even when they had been identified by the leader of the community is another way of hiding the truth to conceal certain ideological stance thereby bringing to the fore the believe of the news writer and the editorial team. As if dissociating themselves from any form of violent attack after the declaration of the amnesty programme, the Niger Delta youth(s) seem determined to ensure that effective development returns to the region after years of environmental despoliation. In the next report we see a different set of Niger Delta "boys" those who rather "report" perpetrators of violence to the authorities rather than being partakers in the crime.

Ijaw Youths blame attack on Tompolo: The Ijaw Youth Campaign for Peace has said that it is saddened by Sunday's attack on Atlas Cove Terminal in Lagos and the continuous destruction of oil pipelines in the Niger Delta by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta. In an online statement to Vanguard in Port Harcourt, yesterday signed by its spokesman, Pere Prince, the group called on all Ijaws at home and abroad to reject the actions of MEND for its wanton destruction of the country's economic property in the land. TEXT B7

The extract C37 above is about the story on the bombing of Atlas Cove in Lagos south west Nigeria by Niger Delta militants who had issued a warning about their mission to Lagos to prove that they could operate outside their region when it comes to destruction of oil installations in the country. This threat was enforced and a lot of oil installations were damaged in the process. In this report, we see a section of the regional "boys" claiming their innocence and pointing accusing fingers at "MEND" a militant group that had terrorised the country in the past before the issue of the amnesty. The Niger Delta "boys" suddenly realised the evils of destroying oil installations and called on all and sundry to condemn the activities of the only militant group that refused to disarm. But a graphic picture of the level of destruction was painted by the reporter as he quotes the spokesman for the dissenting voice saying:

We wish to categorically state that yesterday's attack on Atlas Cove Terminal in Lagos and the previous attacks on oil installations which MEND claimed responsibility is condemnable. We also urge all Ijaws at home and in the Diaspora to join in condemning this barbaric act on the economy of our nation. This is an act of economic sabotage which will not solve the present crises rather it would bring a setback. TEXT B8

There are certain utterances in that report that tend to reveal the political dimension to the issue of the Niger Delta insurgency even though the issue had been projected as ethnic and environmental in the past. Such utterances include: "yesterday's attack on Atlas Cove Terminal in Lagos and the previous attacks on oil installations which MEND claimed responsibility is condemnable" "condemning this barbaric act on the economy of our nation." "Acts of economic sabotage which will not solve the present crises rather it would bring a setback". A close observer of the nation's political development will agree that there was no time the youths of the Niger Delta region noticed that their activities were inimical to the development of the nation; that their persistent bombing of the oil installations constituted acts of economic saboteur or that the persistent claiming of responsibility for destruction in the region was condemnable until one of their own became the president of the nation. This also shows the political dimension in which the Niger Delta crises have been configured to take sympathetic colouration while politics remains at the core of the events. Finally, on this segment, we take a look at the way the issue of the Odi massacre was reported after the indigenes had taken the federal government to the court and had won the case against the wanton killing and destruction of properties in the community. Tanyi (2020) observes that "*The institutionalization of English Language in Nigeria as a medium of instruction among schools, commerce, public communication and administration, and as tool for achieving several other functions in Nigeria's educational system, poses its own challenge to learner.*" These extracts are taken from the three different newspapers under review. The Odi Massacre occurred as a retaliatory move in the clash between the Odi who were living in Lagos state and the Oodua People's

Congress (OPC) (Yoruba ethnic militia group) in Lagos, the militant Ijaw Youths at the village of Odi erupted like a volcano. In an attempt to curtail the damage, some police officers were deployed there to maintain peace and order. In the process of arresting some militant youths, the police officers –seven of them – were overpowered and kidnapped on 4th November 1999. Before they could be liberated, they were killed by their captors. The Federal Government reacted swiftly to the killings by asking the then Bayelsa State Government to find the killers or face a state of emergency. At a press conference, the then Vice President Atiku Abubakar said:

A dividing line must always be drawn between genuine protest and outright criminality. Groups and individuals cannot hide under the guise of defending narrow community interest to commit mayhem and expect the government to fold its arms...all those who break the laws of the land will definitely incur the full wrath of the law”.... “The fact that we have to run a constitutional and democratic government does not diminish the capacity of the government to deal decisively with hoodlums, arsonists and terrorists wherever they are found in the country, (National Concord, Lagos, Nov. 10, 1999, p. 2.). TEXT B9

As a result, soldiers were moved to Odi purportedly to find the murderers barely two weeks after the Ijaw youths killed the police officers in the area. More than 100 persons including soldiers were feared dead in a renewed clash between the Odi and Mbiama youths in Bayelsa. Ijaw leaders claimed that the soldiers, who reportedly arrived in about 10 TATA trucks, started ‘shelling’ Odi and its environs in the night. After some years, the Odi people of Bayelsa state won the court case they instituted against the then federal government. Since this particular incident falls within the ambience of environmental degradation and since the court case was won within the period of this study, we deem it fit to reflect the discourses generated from the reportage from a linguistic perspective.

Today, Odi is growing fast with well-planned streets and a Federal Government College. For a first-time visitor, this may not be the picture of the community that has endured in the media. The story of Odi’s descent into oblivion started during the election that ushered in civil governance to the country in 1999. The army brought down every building, sparing the only bank in the town, First Bank, church buildings, and schools. At the time they retreated, several bodies of children and the elderly burnt beyond recognition littered the town. The first people to visit Odi after the massacre were said to have met a deserted town with dogs eating the remains of the dead. TEXT B10

The picture painted above is that of gloom and petrification- a decomposing scenario that can only be endured by the oppressed. The expression Odi is growing fast with well-planned streets” is contrasted with the act of destruction which had stared the people in the face “The army brought down every building, sparing the only bank in the town, First Bank, church buildings, and schools”. The only symbol left was that of imperialism, a picture of the bank where money is sent to for easy transactions of business by the government and its agents. It is an irony that such structures were not levelled out. The destructive tendencies of the soldiers are adequately captured in this expression: At the time they retreated, several bodies of children and the elderly burnt beyond recognition littered the town. Therein lies the irony in a military regime ruling a nation for so long a time thus giving rise to unlawful tendencies as described in the above text. And for the dogs to be eating the remains of the dead is an eye sore. But because the art of subjugation, militancy, and militarism had reign supreme in Nigeria, it was believed that democracy as at the early stage was an equivalence of militarism so the need for “an eye for an eye mentality”. As reported in the next extract, it was not only the lowly placed that were affected but also the crème de la crème of the society:

Among those who visited was the wife of the Senate President, Mrs. David Mark, an indigene of the town. As she walked to where her family house once stood, her shoe was pierced by a nail which gave her a foot injury. The action of the soldiers was justified by Obasanjo and his then army chief, General Victor Malu. But it drew condemnation across the country. TEXT B11

The above picture is that of compounded agony and excruciation in the face of terror and pain caused by a government that ordinarily should support, protect and secure the helpless citizens of a country. The expression about Mrs. David Mark that: “As she walked to where her family house once stood” is a euphemism for the total destruction that had befallen her family house---a euphemism for saying the ruins that had symbolised her paternal home and the reality that her family members, if they were still alive, had nowhere to call their home. And to further compound her woes, she was pierced by a nail on her way to inspect the level of damage done to her paternal home. It is also an irony that such a level of destruction was justified by a sitting president who was “elected” through the ballot boxes to protect the citizens of the country. The irony became situational when the same justifiable act drew condemnation from across the country as well as the international community.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we observed that the continuous representation of the youth of Niger Delta as lazy, unwise, and deviant, local leaders preserve their political, economic, and social power and maintain their domination over young people. This is not an act that is

accidental that young people are the main perpetrators of violence in the Niger Delta, because many of them feel that the country is not benefiting them in any way. They, therefore, chose to perpetrate violence so as to call the attention of government to their plights. Yet by using violence, young people also undermine the very development they yearn to have this is because violence leads to loss of lives and destruction of valuable assets, which slows down development. To address youth violence in the Niger Delta, it's necessary to demand accountability from institutions and to challenge the common ideas used to exclude young people from the development process. Both federal and state governments should build a comprehensive framework to address the problem by taking a critical look at the underlying drivers of insecurity, such as lack of economic opportunities for young people, drug abuse, and the absence of the rule of law. It must also address corruption in public office, unfair electoral processes, and environmental pollution. The governments should also address weak institutions and poor security governance. The media should be thorough in their search for truth, this will give room for balanced reportage.

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