

RESEARCH THESIS

Interest divergence and power relations within the world-system: The case of the Nigeria's Niger Delta Conflict

How does the interest divergence generated by the oil industry lead to various discourses among a selected number of actors linked to the Niger Delta region?

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Abbreviation

INGO: International Non Governmental Organization

JIT: Joint Investigation Team

MEND: Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

MOSOP: Movement of the Survival of Ogoni's People

NEITI: Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative

NGO: Non Governmental Organization

NNPC: Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation

OPEC: Organization of Petroleum of Exporting Countries

Shell BP: Shell British Petroleum

SNEPCo: Shell Nigerian Exploration and Production Company of Nigeria Limited

SPDC: Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

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Introduction

The Niger Delta is an unstable area of Nigeria, where oil revenues often trigger violence. As a result of this instability, thousands of barrels of crude oil have been wasted every day since the 1990s, representing a significant loss to the Nigerian economy with millions of dollars lost each year. Although Nigeria constitutes the world's sixth largest oil producing country, general mismanagement and successive military governments have left the country in a dire poverty¹.

There is an obvious conflict of interests in the Niger Delta as a result of oil industry activities, where the local communities are greatly affected by the environmental deterioration, whereas a minority of the nation benefits from the oil revenues that they take for granted. This discrepancy, and given the fact that the Nigerian federal government controls and owns all the natural resources and all the lands, have led to high frustration among local peoples and mistrust toward the federal government. The latter is believed to not care for their problems as long as oil flows. Moreover, since the Federal government has the absolute power, this gives any issue occurring in the Niger Delta a national dimension².

Although Nigeria transited from a military dictatorship to democratic rule in 1999, the situation did not improve and rather bigger frustration, resentment and anger kept growing which gave way to even more violence.

Today, the Niger Delta conflict is seen as the result of a complex combination of injustice, greed, marginalization, right denials, political repression and the demand for social equity and justice. Yet, while injustice and greed may set off conflicts in rich natural resource countries, these factors do not come alone but are combined with historical and external factors along with local political and economic dynamics³.

Consequently, by focusing on a local conflict that not only plays a crucial role for the political stability of Nigeria but as well for the global energy security, - taking into consideration the high interests at stakes as the region is the most productive oil fields in Africa-, this study is timely and interesting from a political and economic perspectives to understand interest divergence and power relations within the world-system.

¹ Global Security. (2006), *Nigeria-Niger Delta*, Global Security.org

² Courson.E. (2009), *Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)*

³ *Ibid.*

I. The Niger Delta Case

1. Historical Background

Since the colonization of Nigeria by the British, the Nigerian oil industry has been closely linked to the economic interests and strategic plans of the British colonial system. The latter's main aims were to maintain the Nigerian oil resources for their exclusive exploitations, and to grant the privileges of the exploitation to British and British-allied private projects⁴.

Shell British Petroleum (Shell BP) - now Royal Dutch Shell and better known as Shell, discovered crude oil in 1956 at Oloibiri, located in the Niger Delta region. After the discovery, many oil companies came into the region, such as non-British ones like Agip, Chevron, and Mobil. However, as a British company Shell benefited from the British influence and was then able to monopolize all the Nigerian oil resources until 1957. From 1958 started the commercial production of oil notably with the first oil exports. Quickly Shell-BP started to dominate the Nigerian oil industry and has been enjoying this advantage until the recent time⁵.

By 1960, Nigeria became an independent country and the Nigerian government became the only owner of the oil and gas resources⁶. Later on, the Petroleum Act of 1969, the Offshore Oil Revenue and the 1971 Act, all signed between the Nigerian government and the oil companies, established the share of the oil profits between them on a 50/50 basis⁷. Moreover, in 1973 a Joint Venture Agreement was formalized, setting a new partnership with the oil companies that un-restricted the foreign investments and maximized the Nigerian government's revenues from oil⁸.

In 1977, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was established. It was created to emphasize the new Nigerian ownership in the oil industry and its participation in the operations of the oil industry⁹. However, despite the Nigerian government's attempts to operate and dominate the oil industry, it did not succeed notably because of a lack of oil technology and skills and a rooted corruption¹⁰.

Since 1999, Nigeria is a Constitutional democracy and has a system of a federal government. This Federation consists of 36 states where the federal administrative capital is Abuja. There are also 774 Municipal Councils which represent the local government system in the country. When it comes to power, the Federal government has an exclusive responsibility for all the country's issues and plans, including national security, national planning and defence¹¹.

⁴ Soremekun, K. (1995), *Perspectives on the Nigerian Oil Industry*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division. (2008), *Country Profile: Nigeria*

⁷ Soremekun, K. (1995), *Perspectives on the Nigerian Oil Industry*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Soremekun, K. (1995), *Perspectives on the Nigerian Oil Industry*

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Osaisai.F. (2009), *Federal Republic of Nigeria Profile*

According to the Nigerian Constitution, the Federal government is the only one that has the legal rights to oil and gas reserves and that can give out permits, licenses and leases for the oil exploration and extraction to the multinational oil companies, which are then entitled free access to the land encompassed by their permits, leases or licenses¹². This centralisation of resources ownership denies the local communities from having legal rights on their lands.

2. General overview on Nigeria and the Niger Delta

Situated in Western Africa on the Gulf of Guinea between Benin and Cameroon, comprising a population of more than 155 million people¹³, Nigeria represents today the largest and most populous African country¹⁴. Provided with important natural resources, such as iron ore, limestone, zinc, and with abundant arable lands, the country is also home of important oil and natural gas reserves, most of them located in the Niger Delta region. These important reserves make Nigeria the tenth largest oil reserves in the world, the biggest oil exporter in Africa, while the seventh largest gas reserves in the world and the largest in Africa¹⁵.

In addition to its large natural resources, Nigeria is also characterized by its rich ethnic diversity, languages and customs. The country is indeed home of more than 250 ethnic groups, and although the official language is English, more than 500 indigenous languages are spoken¹⁶. The most populous and politically influential ethnic groups are the Hausa and Faluni (29%) in the North, Yoruba (21%) in the Southwest, Igbo (18%) in the East and Ijaw (10%) in the Niger Delta¹⁷.

The 36 Nigerian states are organized into six zones¹⁸, with in particular the South-South zone, also known as the South-South Niger Delta¹⁹. This region stretches over 70,000km² and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. It includes six states, namely Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State, and comprises more than 31 million inhabitants and more than 40 ethnic groups²⁰.

The Niger Delta region is well-known for its rich biodiversity, being one of the ten most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world, as well for its massive oil deposits that the Nigerian government and several multinational oil companies have been intensively exploring and extracting since the 1960s. Since the beginning of the oil-related operations, the oil industry has generated more than US \$600 billion²¹. Today the Nigeria's economy relies mostly on the capital

¹² Amnesty International. (2009), *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and poverty in the Niger Delta*

¹³ Central Intelligence Agency. (2011), *The World Fact Book*

¹⁴ The World Bank. (2010), *Nigeria Country brief*

¹⁵ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division. (2008), *Country Profile: Nigeria*

¹⁶ Central Intelligence Agency. (2011), *The World Fact Book*

¹⁷ Library of Congress – Federal Research Division. (2008), *Country Profile: Nigeria*

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ Absolute Astronomy.com. (2011), *Encyclopaedia: Niger Delta*

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ Amnesty International. (Jun 30, 2009), *Oil industry has brought poverty and pollution to Niger Delta*

intensive oil sector, which provides 95% of foreign exchange earnings and around 80% of the budgetary revenues²². This overdependence on the oil industry has put even more pressure on the Niger Delta region which for instance supplies 40% of the imported crude in the United States, then playing a crucial role in the economy of the country²³.

3. Consequences of the oil industry in the Niger Delta region

Despite the important profits made from the oil industry, 70% of the Nigeria's population were living below the poverty line in 2007²⁴. More particularly in the Niger Delta area, although the region contributes to almost 80% of the Nigerian government's revenues, the communities barely benefit from it. Poverty is rampant; half of the rural communities do not have access to clean water or health-care while life expectancy is the lowest in Nigeria, falling below 40 years²⁵. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), this poverty, when compared with the immense profits and wealth generated by the oil industry, is one of "*the world's starkest and most disturbing examples of the 'resource curse'*"²⁶.

According to a report released in 2009 by Amnesty International, oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring, all associated with the presence of oil-related operations, have been ongoing in the Niger Delta since the beginning of the oil exploitation. Moreover, although oil spills figures vary significantly between sources and that no proper assessment have been conducted to evaluate the scale of pollution and the environmental damages caused by the oil industry, according to the UNDP more than 6,800 oil spills were recorded between 1976 and 2001²⁷, while environmental activists assert that oil companies are actually spilling even more oil into the Niger Delta each year than what was spilled as a result of the Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010²⁸.

Moreover, to better understand the impact of the oil industry on the Niger Delta's environment and its communities, it is important to bear in mind that livelihoods, health and access to food and safe water are directly related to the land and the quality of the environment, which means that the Niger Delta communities' well-being and development depend heavily on the environmental quality and sustainability of their region. According to the UNDP, more than 60% of the people living in the region depend on their natural environment for their livelihood, while most of the communities use their environmental resources as their principal source of food²⁹. However, as much of the oil infrastructures are situated near the communities' homes, farms and water reserves, then the ongoing oil spills, waste dumping and gas flaring that have been occurring for decades have had a direct impact

²² Central Intelligence Agency. (2011), *The World Fact Book*

²³ Vidal, J. (May 30, 2010), "Nigeria's agony dwarfs the Gulf oil spill. The US and Europe ignore it"

²⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. (2011), *The World Fact Book, Nigeria*

²⁵ Vidal, J. (May 30, 2010), "Nigeria's agony dwarfs the Gulf oil spill. The US and Europe ignore it" & The Economy Watch. (Jun 24, 2010), "Oil Spill in Niger Delta: 50 YEARS of Agony"

²⁶ Amnesty International. (2009), *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and poverty in the Niger Delta*, p.9

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ African Conservation Foundation. (Apr 11, 2011), "Don't let oil companies destroy the Niger Delta!"

²⁹ Amnesty International. (2009), *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and poverty in the Niger Delta*

on the neighbouring communities, especially on the poorest whose livelihood depend mostly on fishing and agriculture³⁰. Indeed, while oil spills on land devastate crops and damage the quality and yield of the land used for farming, oil spills in water damage fisheries and pollute water used for drinking and other domestic needs.

In addition to a direct pollution and an ongoing environmental degradation of the land and water land, oil-related pollution causes numerous diseases, as a result of food and water contamination, along with air pollution. As a consequence, the oil industry has often been accused of violating basic human rights, in particular “*the violations of the right to health and a healthy environment, the right to an adequate standard of living (including the right to food and water), and the right to gain a living through work*”³¹.

Therefore, as a result of severe poverty and of the serious socio-economic situation in Nigeria, and in particular in the Niger Delta region, resentment was generated among local communities in the region. In the 1990s this led to several peaceful community protests which were met with unexpected repression from the States³². For example, in 1990 protests against poverty and unfair revenue distribution from oil production were high and intensified as a result of people’s recognition of the bad impacts of the oil exploitation on their lives and environments³³.

Moreover, in the same period of time the Movement of the Survival of Ogoni’s People (MOSOP) started to protest against the degradation of their land by Shell³⁴, and later released the Ogoni Bills of Rights that listed their concerns about the oil industry consequences, the political, social and economic neglects they were facing and the poor services and life conditions they were living in. By arising these concerns their ultimate objective was to get self-determination and political autonomy³⁵. In line with this movement, in 1998 the Ijaw Youth movement issued the Kaiama Declaration³⁶. In this declaration, the Ijaws called for the oil companies to withdraw from the Ijaw’s land, and the government to give them the right of self-determination and ‘ecological justice’³⁷.

Furthermore, in 2005, an armed group named itself the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) declared responsibility for armed attacks on oil companies’ infrastructures and pipelines. MEND’s stated goals are to guarantee reparation from the Federal government for the

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Amnesty International. (Jun 30, 2009), *Oil industry has brought poverty and pollution to Niger Delta*, ¶12

³² Niger Delta Citizen and Bugdet Platform. (2008), *Carry Go: Citizen Report on State and Local Government Budget in the Niger Delta*

³³ US Agency for International Development. (n.d), *Land Tenure and Property Rights: Nigeria*.

³⁴ Niger Delta Citizen and Bugdet Platform. (2008), *Carry Go: Citizen Report on State and Local Government Budget in the Niger Delta*

³⁵ Princewill, M. (n.d), *Declaration of Niger Delta Bills of Rights, Niger Delta congress, Nigeria*

³⁶ Ijaw Youth of the Niger Delta. (1998), *Kaiama Declaration*

³⁷ *Ibid*

pollution and environmental damages caused by the oil companies³⁸ and to localize the Nigerian land, oil and gas resources.

In addition to MEND, in the beginning of 2006 other militant groups started to support the rights of the local people, kidnapping oil companies' workers and destroying the companies' infrastructures which have strongly affected the oil industry in the Delta³⁹. These actions led the Federal government to initiate the Amnesty program in 2009 which aimed at bringing peace to the region. The program demanded the militants to drop their weapons in exchange for receiving a presidential pardon, education, and getting access to rehabilitation programs and training courses. Although the Amnesty was joined by many militants in the region, some armed groups along with MEND refused it, and despite the ceasefire in 2009 they took back their arms and resumed their fight⁴⁰.

II. Methodology

1. Research Problem and Question

After having set the context of the exploitation of the oil natural resources in the Nigeria's Niger Delta and having showed the strategic dimension of it as a potential catalyst for social development and economic growth, it seems that the main actors involved in the oil industry, and driven by their own interests, have influenced the environmental, social and economic aspects of life in the region, resulting in a major conflict. This competition has shaped a certain formula of power relations that controls the current situation.

It appears necessary to investigate the different discourses that are competing. We would like to understand how the interest divergence can lead to different discourses, and then to understand the role of these discourses in explaining how power controls the relations among the different actors.

In a word, the problem is to comprehend how the interest divergence generated by the oil industry leads to various discourses among a selected number of actors linked to the Niger Delta region.

In order to be able to answer this problem we raised the following questions to be analysed:

- a. How are the various discourses created?
- b. How do the different discourses influence the conflict?

³⁸ Niger Delta Citizen and Budget Platform. (2008), *Carry Go: Citizen Report on State and Local Government Budget in the Niger Delta*

³⁹ US Agency for International Development. (n.d), *Land Tenure and Property Rights: Nigeria*

⁴⁰ Nigerian Curiosity. (2009), "Niger Delta Amnesty: Dividends?"

2. Guidance:

In order to address this problem and questions, this paper has been divided into six parts. First of all a background and a general overview about the Nigeria's Niger Delta case is given in order to better understand the context and to be able to set the question into a specific context. Then a second part deals with the methodology in which the method is specified, explained and justified, the main actors are identified, the sources of the empirical data are given, and the main obstacles faced for the writing of the paper are mentioned. In a third part the main actors' arguments are given, used as the empirical data which will be analysed in the following part named the analysis part. In this fourth part the different discourses of the main actors are identified, explained and analysed. This enables to link this analytical part with the world-system theory in the next section. In this theoretical part, the world-system theory serves to comprehend the relations between the world-system structure, power relationships and interest divergence, and then how this relation leads to the creation of different discourses and its role in the conflict. Finally, in order to assess the case from a communicative perspective, a discussion about the relations between the concepts of communication, of the creation of discourses and of world-system is offered, in addition to a further discussion about environmental communication.

3. Identification and justification of the main actors

In this research paper our focus is on the conflict occurring in the Niger Delta region since the 1990s. From our literature review and readings we came to a conclusion that the main actors involved in the conflict are **Royal Dutch Shell**, as the main oil company in the region, the **Nigerian Government** (Federal and States governments), and **MEND**, as the main active armed group involved in the conflict. Moreover, in order to get the international dimension we used **Amnesty International**, as a secondary data that we believe is objective and reliable.

The reason behind our choice of the main actors is that they are the most involved in and have the most influence on the situation.

Concerning **Shell**, we believe that it reflects the other oil companies' perspectives and opinions about the situation in the Niger Delta region as it controls more than 40% of the Nigeria's oil, and is the main oil operator on land. Then, due to its extensive operations and its great influence in the region, Shell has been the most targeted oil company in the region by different movements, which makes it a key player in the conflict⁴¹.

Regarding the **Nigerian government**, we believe that the role of the government is to maintain stability and security within its borders and in case of any conflict it should resolve it without taking any side with the ultimate objective of protecting its peoples. In the Niger Delta case, as the government has the ultimate power and legal rights on the natural resources in the country, it plays a

⁴¹ Onuoha, A. (2008), *When communities confront corporations : Comparing Shell's presence in Ireland and Nigeria*

key role in the conflict as most of the legal agreements or contracts related to the oil industry have been made between the multinational oil companies and the national government. This has led the communities to be deprived of their rights of self-determination and ownership⁴².

Concerning **MEND**, we chose this actor as since 2005 this armed group has been greatly responsible for the escalation of the struggle by the Niger Delta's communities against the oil companies' operations and their negative impacts on their lives and environment. Their armed actions have had local, national and international impacts. Indeed, in 2006 it was estimated that a quarter of the Nigeria's daily oil exports was reduced because of these armed attacks, and thus affected the revenues of the Nigerian government. Moreover, due to the considerable role of Nigeria in the oil industry, these significant reductions have dramatically affected the profit margins of multinational oil companies operating in the region, in particular Shell, and disturbed global oil supplies, which has resulted in the volatility of the oil markets⁴³.

Finally, concerning **Amnesty International**, we considered it as a secondary actor as it does not have a direct role or involvement in the conflict, but rather it gives an external eye on the situation, providing an international dimension of the case. Furthermore, this source is reliable, expert and globally recognized, which make its arguments stronger.

In order to get our empirical data, we would like to emphasize that we only referred to a list of limited documents which are listed in our Appendix.

4. Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Different definitions about discourse exist; two main definitions are interested for the purpose of this research, which is based on discourse analysis, as they present discourse as a shared representation of the world which enables to comprehend it through language. One, given by Linnros and Hallin (2001), defines discourse as "*as bounded ways of representing the world, with the use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is then the analysis of how texts work in socio-cultural practice; furthermore, discourses must be seen as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak*"⁴⁴. A second definition given by Dryzek (1997) describes a discourse as "*a shared way of apprehending the world. Embedded in language, it enables those who subscribe to it to interpret bits of information and put them together into coherent stories or accounts.*"⁴⁵

Non-Foucaultians such as Hajer and Versteeg, link discourse with the symbolic interactionism theory and focus on language and "*pragmatic production of meaning*" to explain the concept of

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ Courson, E. (2009), *Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Political Marginalisation, Repression and Petro-insurgency in the Niger Delta*

⁴⁴ Linnros & Hallin. (2001), *The Discursive nature of environmental conflicts: the case of the Öresund link*, p.392

⁴⁵ Dryzek, J. (1997), *The Politics of The Earth. Environmental Discourses*, p.8

discourse. On the other hand, Foucault explains discourse as a relation between power and knowledge where power here does not have repressive effects but rather have constitutive and productive ones⁴⁶. For Foucault quoted in Oels & Feindt (2005), “*a discourse is constitutive of ‘reality’ in that it physically shapes reality*”⁴⁷. Indeed, for him discourse constitutes particular ways of being linked with the world and of being connected to it. The latter then “*establishes what is ‘true’ based on socially accepted modes of knowledge production*”⁴⁸. Furthermore, Foucault describes discourse as ‘a strategic situation’ leading to the formation of various actors which “*enables and constraints them by shaping their field of opportunities and by limiting their freedom*”⁴⁹, and as locations where tensions and struggles may be created. For our research objective Foucault’s perspective on discourse will be our primary reference.

Furthermore, it is important to mention that according to Linnros and Hallin (2001), discourse does not take place in isolation, but “*in dialogue, contrast or opposition to other utterances or discourses*”⁵⁰. In addition, they also claim that discursive formations cannot be isolated from the domains of social life as they are internally connected to different aspects of social and material processes “*such as power, social relations, institutions, beliefs and material practices*”⁵¹. They then further saying that discourses are ordered in discursive orders, which enable some discourses to be hegemonic and as a result to be the ones which determine what the truth, knowledge and common sense are⁵². To better understand this discourse order, the authors introduce the concept of core discourse. In the core of the discourse lies the essential and crucial statements while in the periphery are found statements which are questionable, nonessential or marginal. The advantage of this model lies in the fact that we can apply it to various levels of discourses and this can help to clarify both relationships with the different counter-discourses and relationships between the different discourses and the hegemonic one⁵³ which in turn shows the state of power and power relations in the situation.

According to Hardy et.al (2000), discourse does not have meaning, but rather their meanings are enhanced and disputed through the production of texts, hence the use of written texts for our research purposes. At the same time discourses are considered as social, originating from the interaction between different social groups and structures in which the discourse is implemented⁵⁴. It then leads to the idea that discourses play a crucial role in the social construction of reality as they create knowledge, social identities and relationships among people, which make discourse both

⁴⁶ Oels. A & Feindt. P.H. (2005), *Does discourse matter? Discourse analysis in environmental policy making*, p.164

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.164

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.164

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.165

⁵⁰ Linnros. H.D & Hallin. P. (2001), *The Discursive nature of environmental conflicts: the case of the Öresund link*, p.392

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.392

⁵² *Ibid*, p.392

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ Hardy. C. et.al (2000), *Discourse are a strategic resource*, p.1232

socially constituted and constitutive⁵⁵. Therefore, using discourse analysis here helps us to understand what are the social roles and identities of our actors and the relationships between them.

Moreover, it is worth saying that discourses are produced within a certain context and that without the latter a discourse cannot be understood⁵⁶. That is why before identifying any discourse we investigated and explored the context in which our discourses are embedded. As we may know discourses are not isolated from other discourses neither their formation from the domains of social life, which means that discourses are integrated into a wider discursive landscape where they compete with each other and are interwoven⁵⁷. For this reason we focused on four main discourses as we believe from our previous investigation that their formation and evolution depend on each other. Moreover, since time does not affect the discourse relationships whether they were created previously, are created in the current time or will be created in the future, thus no matter the time, discourses that are embedded within a certain context are then interconnected with each other⁵⁸. These ideas emphasize the role of discourse in defining the problem at stake, while framing the arena in which the different actors are competing or cooperating⁵⁹.

Political issues are easier to understand if they are given a social dimension what gives us a whole picture of the situation from different angles. Since discourse enables to give a social dimension to political issues, discourse analysis is then considered as a useful tool to understand the conflict⁶⁰. In reference to the historical background, this idea is interesting to understand how the different discourses have been articulated with each other and then to grasp the motives behind the current conflict. Moreover, a strength of discourse analysis lies in its ability to answer the 'How' question. Indeed, because discourses are not isolated from other discourses but rather are embedded into a larger landscape and interwoven with each other, then influencing each other, we used discourse analysis to know the process behind the different actions that generated the ongoing conflict. We are aware that discourse analysis will not provide the right, good or definite answers neither will determine what is true, but "*it could easily end up in a situation where anything goes*"⁶¹, that is why we used 'How' questions in our sub-questions.

The purpose of our research thesis is not to provide definite answers or resolve the problem but rather to approach and think about it, and to reveal and understand the intentions and motives driving our actors' specific actions and their hidden agenda through discourse analysis. Indeed,

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.1231

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p.1233

⁵⁷ Oels. A & Feindt. P.H. (2005), *Does discourse matter? Discourse analysis in environmental policy making*, p.162

⁵⁸ Hardy. C. et.al (2000), *Discourse are a strategic resource*, p.1233

⁵⁹ Oels. A & Feindt. P.H. (2005), *Does discourse matter? Discourse analysis in environmental policy making* p.168

⁶⁰ Linnros. H.D & Hallin. P. (2001), *The Discursive nature of environmental conflicts: the case of the Öresund link*, p.400

⁶¹ Hajer.M & Versteeg. W. (2005), *A Decade of Discourse Analysis of Environmental Politics: Achievements, Challenges, Perspective*, p.181

discourse analysis provides a good understanding of power relations and hierarchy. Moreover, from a personal perspective, we think that discourse analysis might enhance our critical skills and creativity, and because discourse analysis is not a 'hard' science it gives us more space to interpret what we perceive as important for the understanding of the case.

5. Literature Review and Empirical Data

In order to get recent and objective information to direct our research, we have chosen to refer to both online and written materials, from 2005 to 2011. First of all, for the online data our aim was to get information that was recent, up-to-date, from both local and international perspectives, reliable and original. Indeed, the books that we used did not always provide enough recent data or quotes directly from our main actors. In this case the online available documents, reports and interviews completed the information we could not get from the books. Concerning the access to the books, our main source was the Nordic African Institute located in Uppsala, Sweden, as it is specialized in research, documentation and information on modern Africa in the Nordic region, then providing us with reliable and objective data.

For the theoretical part, in addition to the previous sources we used as well the course literature studied during the programme notably referring to the governance of natural resources, and we also used materials provided by our thesis supervisor.

We used different reports, written and video interviews, press releases, meeting minutes' summary and particular documents like Declarations as our empirical data. To get information about Shell's discourse, we referred to three main reports released in 2010, that is economic, environmental and societal, to their general business principles on which the Group's activities and vision are based on, and to an interview with the Shell's Country Chair in Nigeria in 2008.

For the Federal government, we used the Official Website of the Office of Public Communications of Nigeria, in particular the Seven Points Agenda that concerns the Niger Delta development plan in 2009, while for the State governments we used a meeting minutes' summary in which three Executive Governors from the Niger Delta region were discussing with the CEO of Chatham House in 2009 about the situation in the Niger Delta.

Regarding MEND's discourse, we used two main press releases, two video interviews, three interviews with MEND's leaders and spokesperson, two articles in which the latter were quoted, and the Kaiama Declaration 1998.

Finally, concerning Amnesty International, we used its most recent report related to the situation in the Niger Delta in 2009.

We then deeply reviewed all the above materials which enabled us to come up with a general overview of each actor's discourse. Then according to our understanding of the situation we used what we thought was the most relevant to the conflict, that is the environmental, social and economic aspects. We wanted to understand how each actor perceives these issues and how it reflects their

actions and behaviour in regard to the current situation. By analysing the generated discourses, we were then better able to understand the formula of power relations that leads to the present conflict. Consequently, in order to conduct our analysis, we only referred to a list of limited documents which are listed in our Appendix.

6. Obstacles faced

When working on this thesis research our main obstacles were the lack of resources that includes, time, funding and materials. Concerning the time constraint, we had to manage writing the thesis in seven weeks which we think is not adequate to produce a high quality research. For the funding, we did not get any fund resources due to the lack of time, what prevented us from making interviews with the different actors as we could not go to the field study. This greatly influenced our research methods and research question, and led us to choose the text discourse analysis as our method to investigate our problem.

We would like also to stress that because we were not able to go to Nigeria we were then not able to make our own observations. This prevented us from expressing at some points some personal point of views because we wanted to be legitimate.

Another obstacle was the difficulty to get information from the Nigerian government. First it was hard to find enough recent reports issued by the Federal government and the States. Second, it is important to mention that despite our hard efforts we could not find any information from the municipalities and local councils, while all the governmental reports linked to the Niger Delta situation were not activated online, making our research difficult to complete.



Yahoo. (2007), "The oil Industry in Niger Delta"

III. Main Actors' arguments:

1. Government's arguments

- The Federal government:

The Federal government stated that its previous efforts for development and bringing stability were being frustrated by the militants. It assured it did everything it could to bring peace back, in particular through the intervention of the Joint Task Force⁶². Later on the Federal government decided to take another approach through the announcement of an Amnesty programme in 2009.

According to its saying, peace and development have been at the core of the government's concerns eager to change what have been done so far in the country and to attract more foreign investments on which its economy growth relies on: *"President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua has restated his total commitment to the peace, stability and development of the Niger Delta"*⁶³. It assured that this would be only possible if peace and security were achieved. According to it the Amnesty programme had been accepted by all militants in the Niger Delta, which had led to the reduction of violence making the region now peaceful: *"the general amnesty I extended to all militants in the Niger Delta has led to the laying down of arms and a return of peace. Agitations are now over. All the stakeholders have seen the imperative of peace for development to take place"*⁶⁴.

Moreover the Federal government insisted on the important role of the State governments, because according to it the States are key players and the stability of the centre depends on the stability of the States.

In 2010, the Federal government's development plan was focused on youth empowerment as it believed that the youths are the leaders of tomorrow and they had the chance to change the way things it had been doing. For this, the Federal government required and asked for the cooperation of the States to provide more job opportunities for the Nigerian youth⁶⁵.

Moreover, concerning the environment, the Federal government praised the OPEC (Organization of Petroleum of Exporting Countries) for their efforts for making the extraction and exploitation of crude oil more environmental friendly⁶⁶.

⁶² Official Website of the Office of Public Communications. (May 22, 2009), "FG assures foreigners of safety, explains security operations in Niger Delta"

⁶³ Official Website of the Office of Public Communications. (Nov 9, 2009), "President Yar'Adua restates total commitment to development and stability of Niger Delta"

⁶⁴ Official Website of the Office of Public Communications. (Oct 14, 2009), "Oil-producing areas now peaceful – President Yar'Adua"

⁶⁵ Official Website of the Office of Public Communications. (Oct 25, 2010), "Amnesty has brought peace to Niger Delta – President Jonathan"

⁶⁶ Official Website of the Office of Public Communications. (Oct 14, 2009), "Oil-producing areas now peaceful – President Yar'Adua"

- The State governments:

A discussion between three State governments of the Niger Delta, namely the Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States represented by their three Executive Governors, respectively Chibuike Rotimi Amaechi, Timipre Sylva and Emmanuel Uduaghan, went on the 26th February 2009 in order to discuss the origin and the possible solutions to the Niger Delta troubles⁶⁷.

From their general perspective, the idea of needed development was raised. They declared that oil companies had been neglecting the development of the host communities, that no development programmes had been initiated and implemented by them, and that only a minority of the local people got the opportunity to work within the oil companies, the latter employing workers from other cities or countries, increasing the hostility between them.

When talking about the reasons behind “criminality” and tensions in the region, one of them declared that there was no struggle in Niger Delta, but that the instability in the region was actually the result of “criminals” claiming to protest for justice and liberation, whereas their actual motives were to make immediate profits: *“Kidnapping and other criminal activity is more appealing to people, because there is an immediate profit and the amount of money that you can make is also higher”*⁶⁸. This idea was shared among the different Executive Governors, with the Executor Governor of the Bayelsa State furthering that *“money is made from kidnapping, ransom, and the direct theft of crude oil”*⁶⁹, and claiming that actually militancy was a business through which “criminals” could easily make money. Moreover they assured that illegal bunkering worsened the situation specially that it has an international dimension. This idea of making easy money had diverted people from going to school and this had greatly affected the educational sector. Dealing with “criminality”, they suggested that sentences should be harsher and that more soldiers were needed. Indeed, they believed that before resolving injustice and poverty, “criminality” should be first tackled.

On the other hand, they did not believe that all these issues were the result of bad governance or corruption, but was the result of the inaction of *“stakeholders, State government or the oil companies”*⁷⁰. Moreover, they believed that the problem of poverty would be always there as it is not a particular problem for Nigeria but it is a problem that concerns the whole Africa.

In order to solve these issues they agreed that the participation and collaboration of everyone, that is at the local, state, federal and international levels, is required: *“For a peace plan to succeed in the Delta, we need strong wills and resources from the international community, the local community and the oil companies”*⁷¹. According to them the international community has a big role in

⁶⁷ Chatmam House. (Feb 26, 2009), Meeting Summary: “State Government Solutions to the Niger Delta Troubles: Key Challenges, Needs and Strategies”

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.4

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.3

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p.10

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.3

tackling these issues saying that “*the issues are in the international domain*”⁷² and that “*the Niger Delta problem is not just the Niger Delta’s problem. You must begin to see it as an international issue*”⁷³. Therefore they believed that they needed to get funding from them. Moreover, each State government needs to get their people’s trust in order to be able to implement its development plans, such as the construction of schools and healthcare centres, and to enforce the laws.

Their last idea was that the oil economy is the largest in Nigeria “*that cannot be taken from us*”⁷⁴.

2. Shell’s arguments

Producing and delivering oil and gas in a way that is both profitable and sustainable is at the core of the Shell Group’s general business principles. The latter declares indeed that it is committed to participate to sustainable development, which means that it has to consider both short and long term interests while in the meantime it has to integrate economic, environmental and social issues into its business decision-making⁷⁵.

More particularly, in one of its general business principles the Group acknowledges its responsibility to the society, and therefore that Shell companies commit themselves to act in a way that takes into consideration and guarantee health, safety, security and the environment: “*Shell companies have a systematic approach to health, safety, security and environmental management in order to achieve continuous performance improvement. To this end, Shell companies manage these matters as critical business activities, set standards and targets for improvement, and measure, appraise and report performance externally*”⁷⁶.

Moreover, the Shell Group assures in its general business principles that in order for its companies to be “good neighbours” with the hosted communities, the latter constantly strive for improving the ways that enhance people’s general well-being⁷⁷, and that they carefully deal with the social consequences of their business operations to reduce the negative effects from them⁷⁸.

Concerning the health considerations, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) declared that in 2009 it was dedicating part of its resources to contribute to the development of the health care in the Niger Delta, notably through the construction of health facilities, the employment of health staff, and the provision of health education to local people : “*SPDC currently supports 27 health facilities in the Niger Delta [...] more than 880 government-employed communities health staff*

⁷² *Ibid*, p.4

⁷³ *Ibid*, p.13

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.16

⁷⁵ Royal Dutch Shell plc. (2005), *Shell General Business Principles*, p.4

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p.8

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.8

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.8

*work at these facilities [...] we reached more than 114,000 people through our health outreach programme, which provided a range of services including health education*⁷⁹.

In addition, in order to empower local people, Shell assures working hand in hand with government agencies, companies, local and international NGOs as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or USAID, that they fund, to develop projects, capacity building, training workshops and education⁸⁰.

Regarding the environmental aspect, SPDC asserts that 70% of the oil spills that happened over the last five years in the Niger Delta resulted from either sabotages or leaks caused by “thieves”. Furthermore, it claims that some delays in the repairs are actually caused by local communities and gangs who prevent them from having access to the concerned areas, and that about one spill every four days is caused by saboteurs or thieves⁸¹.

Furthermore, the Group asserts that it constantly seeks ways that enable it to reduce its environmental impact of its business activities⁸². For instance, in the case of oil spills, Shell stated in their 2010 report about their environmental performance in Nigeria that it is “*committed to cleaning up oil spills when they occur as fast as possible no matter what their cause*”⁸³. As well in order to assure its commitment to improve its environmental performance, the Group mentioned in the same report that it is committed to maintain and keep efficient its equipments and infrastructures so that avoiding operational spills, and that all the SPDC’s main facilities are independently certified to international standards while independent assessments and audits regularly check them⁸⁴. In addition, in case an oil spill occurs the SPDC in cooperation with representatives from the affected area and the government form a joint investigation team (JIT) to scrutinize the causes and the consequences of the spill. In case SPDC is found out to be responsible for the spill then the latter undertakes to negotiate compensation with the affected property-owners⁸⁵.

Moreover according to the Shell’s general business principles, regular dialogues and engagement with its different stakeholders are crucial. Shell companies indeed commit themselves to report their performance in a transparent way and to allow the access to their confidential information. As well the Group declares its willingness to communicate and to maintain relations with the different parties it has to deal with: “*In our interactions with employees, business partners and local communities, we seek to listen and respond to them honestly and responsibly*”⁸⁶.

⁷⁹ Shell Report. (2010), *Shell in Nigeria : Improving lives in the Niger Delta*, ¶10 & 11

⁸⁰ Shell Report. (2010), *Shell in Nigeria: Our Economic Contribution*, p.1¶8, & Shell. (2008), “Making sense of Nigeria’s troubles”: interview with Basil Omiyi, Shell’s Country Chair in Nigeria

⁸¹ Shell Report. (2010), *Shell in Nigeria : Environmental Performance-Oil Spills*

⁸² Royal Dutch Shell plc. (2005), *Shell General Business Principles*, p.8

⁸³ Shell Report. (2010), *Shell in Nigeria : Environmental Performance-Oil Spills*, ¶1

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, ¶16

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, ¶10

⁸⁶ Royal Dutch Shell plc. (2005), *Shell General Business Principles*, p.9

From an economic perspective the Group says that it contributes to the economic development of the Niger Delta region notably by providing job opportunities for the locals, by increasing Nigeria's power supply, by initiating and sponsoring an institute designed to fight corruption, and by encouraging and funding small scale projects that enhance local people's capacity and participation in the development of their region. For instance, concerning the creation of job opportunities, around 6,000 direct employees and contractors, of whom 90% are Nigerian, were employed by SPDC and Shell Nigerian Exploration and Production Company of Nigeria Limited (SNEPCo)⁸⁷.

Concerning the corruption aspect, the Group declares that its business is driven by honesty, integrity and fairness, and that any form of illegal payments or facilitation payments are unacceptable in its policy⁸⁸. Moreover, in order to fight corruption that is believed prevents from "*turning oil revenues into benefits for the people of Nigeria*"⁸⁹, Shell initiated and sponsored the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) which is responsible for ensuring the transparency and the control of the payments made between the government and the international oil companies⁹⁰. On the other hand, the Group assures that it does not have any political affiliation with any parties and that it does not take part in any political activities or funding⁹¹.

Finally, in an interview conducted in 2008 with Basil Omiyi, the Shell's Country Chair in Nigeria, the latter assured that the dire poverty and underdevelopment in Niger Delta are the roots of the ongoing conflict. According to him, often oil companies are made "scapegoat" by the media and the communities for being partly responsible for the problems occurring in the region. However, he insisted on the fact that oil companies are actually abided by the laws and regulations in force in the country, and it is not their role to replace the government's responsibilities towards its peoples: "*It's [the oil companies] not their role to replace government [...] the primary agents for development, the various local and state governments, whose statutory duty it is to do so, have not been doing enough. Many people, including journalists, wish the oil companies could fill this gap*"⁹².

3. MEND's arguments

In 1998 a Conference held in Kaiama, that resulted into the Declaration of Kaiama, gathered 25 representative organizations of the Ijaw nation to deliberate on the issues faced by the Ijaw ethnics in the Niger Delta, and observed the following main observations⁹³:

⁸⁷ Shell Report. (2010), *Shell in Nigeria: Our Economic Contribution*, p.1¶4

⁸⁸ Royal Dutch Shell plc. (2005), *Shell General Business Principles*

⁸⁹ Shell Report. (2010), *Shell in Nigeria: Our Economic Contribution*, p.1¶7

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p.1¶7

⁹¹ Royal Dutch Shell plc. (2005), *Shell General Business Principles*

⁹² Shell. (2008), "Making sense of Nigeria's troubles": interview with Basil Omiyi, Shell's Country Chair in Nigeria, ¶3

⁹³ Ijaw Nation. (1998), "The Kaiama Declaration by Ijaw Youths of the Niger Delta"

“That the quality of life of Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalization visited on Ijaws by the alliance of the Nigerian state and transnational oil companies”

“That the unabating damage done to our fragile natural environment and to the health of our people is due in the main to uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas which has led to numerous oil spillages, uncontrolled gas flaring, the opening up of our forests to loggers, indiscriminate canalization, flooding, land subsidence, coastal erosion, earth tremors etc.”

“That the degradation of the environment of Ijawland by transnational oil companies and the Nigerian state arise mainly because Ijaw people have been robbed of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land and resources through the instrumentality of undemocratic Nigerian State legislations [...]”

“That the violence in Ijawland and other parts of the Niger Delta area, sometimes manifesting in intra and inter ethnic conflicts are sponsored by the State and transnational oil companies to keep the communities of the Niger Delta are divided, weak and distracted from the causes of their problems”.

From the above observations the Ijaws made it clear that in 1998 as a result of an alliance between the Nigerian State and the transnational oil companies their quality of life was deteriorated, their natural resources depleted and robbed from them, their environment damaged and their health utterly affected. Later in 2005, a movement with the same observations, known under the name of MEND, decided to take a different approach to make their claims heard.

According to Jomo Gbomo, one of the 2007 MEND's leader and spokesperson, the ongoing injustice occurring in Nigeria in general and in Niger Delta in particular has led to the creation of MEND. Indeed, instead of bringing about prosperity and development in the region, the existence and exploitation of oil has rather brought about poverty and violence and has unfairly benefited to a minority: *“The region which is the milking cow of the federal republic of Nigeria is ironically the poorest and least developed”*.⁹⁴ He continues stating that the presence of oil companies and the pollution they caused have actually adversely affected the local people's lives over fifty years by depriving them from *“their primary sources of livelihood, which is fishing and farming, as well as their sources of drinking water”*⁹⁵. For him this has led to a glaring injustice which has been allowed by the Nigerian government which is believed to have been working hand in hand with the oil companies to annihilate any movements: *“the oil companies suppress any protests by using excessive force provided by the military”*⁹⁶. According to Jomo Gbomo, because of this important cooperation

⁹⁴ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don't Panic online, “An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta”, ¶13

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, ¶15

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, ¶16

MEND had no choice but to expand its field of action by not only targeting the oil companies facilities but as well the civilian facilities used by the oil workers⁹⁷.

Jomo Gbomo justified then in 2007 during an interview, their cleavage with the Nigerian government in which they have lost trust: *“we have no trust for the Nigerian state”*⁹⁸. Indeed, in addition to the believed cooperation with the oil companies, the latter is also said to have systematically recourse to the use of force as a response to MEND and other activists’ demands instead of engaging into dialogue that could help to bring about peace. For instance, Ateke Tom, a signatory to MEND, reported that this happened in 2009 during a ceasefire when the Nigerian armed forces attacked a MEND camp: *“This latest attack is an indication that the Nigerian government prefers to make military inroads during the ceasefire instead of inroads towards genuine peace and reconciliation”*⁹⁹.

Furthermore, the MEND’s leaders legitimize their recourse to violence and force in their attempt to bring about change in the area by recalling the previous murderer of non-violent activists by the Nigerian government. Indeed, they claim that since the government used force and punishment as the only means to respond to the various movements’ demands, whether they were pacific or not, then MEND chose to fight directly, as Jomo Gbomo declared in 2007: *“If a peace activist is killed for wanting change then it is better to fight and be killed for the same change. The only language the Nigerian government understands is force and not talk”*¹⁰⁰.

Moreover, they perceive the Nigerian government politicians and leaders as “criminals” that the Nigerian people should get rid of if peace is meant to prevail. Indeed, when Jomo Gbomo is asked in 2007 about his impression on the Niger Delta’s politicians, his answer is quite clear and eloquent: *“The rot is right at the top and has spread right down. Nigeria will only be free when all citizens resolve to take drastic action to rid our society of these criminals who have imposed themselves as rulers over a helpless citizenry.”*¹⁰¹

In addition, MEND assured that it was not affiliated with any Islamic movements and that it did not take part to any operations of oil bunkering as the Nigerian government claimed. Rather in 2007 Jomo Gbomo declared this was a fake accusation made up by the Nigerian government who, along with the military officials, was actually the ones carrying out the bunkering and had made this allegation in order to protect their interest: *“If the Nigerian government believes our source of funding is bunkering, why has it refused to stop this practice or at least prevent tankers from entering such areas to load? The reason is simple. Bunkering is carried out by Nigerian government and military officials and blamed on militants”*¹⁰². Moreover, MEND says that its members are different from the

⁹⁷ Sahara Reporters. (March 30, 2007), Interview: “We Will Soon Stop Nigerian Oil Export —Jomo Gbomo”

⁹⁸ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don’t Panic online, “An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta”, ¶16

⁹⁹ Sahara Reporters. (March 30, 2007), Interview: “We Will Soon Stop Nigerian Oil Export —Jomo Gbomo”, ¶15

¹⁰⁰ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don’t Panic online, “An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta”, ¶25

¹⁰¹ Sahara Reporters. (March 30, 2007), Interview: “We Will Soon Stop Nigerian Oil Export —Jomo Gbomo, ¶13

¹⁰² *Ibid*, ¶10

gangs stealing crude oil, denying any relations with them, and believes that the latter are actually supported by generals and officials: *“The gangs that steal crude are backed by serving and retired generals and politicians. We generate money through so many other means and that's the difference”*¹⁰³.

In 2007, MEND had hope in the international community to help them to address the many problems it was facing, and asked in particular the United States and the United Kingdom to renew the commitment they already made in 2006: *“we call on the international community to immediately prevail on the Nigerian Government to addressing problems facing the Niger Delta people. We also call on Britain and the United States of America to actualize their commitment towards resolving the Niger Delta problem as they promised during the 2006 February”*¹⁰⁴. However, according to it the international community did not meet its expectations when the British Prime Minister G. Brown sent in 2009 military help to support the Nigerian government in its fight against MEND. Indeed when asked about what he thinks about it, Jomo Gbomo stated: *“We were disappointed because he should know better that Nigerian leaders are corrupt and it's military very oppressive”*¹⁰⁵. In addition, when he is asked how much prepared they are to confront the Nigerian government, he assures that they are well prepared and ready for the fight, contrary to the government which has to ask external help from the international community: *“It is also clear that the Nigerian military is unprepared for our brand of warfare. As a Nigerian, I'm greatly embarrassed by the Nigerian government's appeal for US help in combating militants in the Delta. [...] We are confident we will be victorious against the Nigerian military in conflict in the Delta”*¹⁰⁶.

In 2009, MEND declared it was willing to disarm on condition that the Nigerian government be ready to meet their main demand which was to let the people of the Niger Delta to have access and to benefit from their oil resource¹⁰⁷. As well it believed that local people perceived its members as messiah and patriots¹⁰⁸.

Therefore, MEND's objective is to fight for justice : *“We are asking for justice. We want our land and the Nigerian government to transfer all its involvement in the oil industry to host communities which will become shareholders in these oil companies”*¹⁰⁹. According to MEND, only justice will bring back peace in the Niger Delta region. As well it thinks that the Niger Delta's people should have access to their resources and that the government should compensate them for the long-

¹⁰³ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don't Panic online, “An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta”, ¶22

¹⁰⁴ T. Alaebi. (Feb 13, 2007), Mend Press Release: “Hostage released; further action sure”, ¶10

¹⁰⁵ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don't Panic online, “An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta”, ¶18

¹⁰⁶ Reporters (March 30, 2007), Interview: “We Will Soon Stop Nigerian Oil Export —Jomo Gbomo”, ¶18

¹⁰⁷ RFI. (Oct 26, 2009), Nigeria - interview with Mend spokesperson: “Mend declares indefinite ceasefire but won't disarm”

¹⁰⁸ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don't Panic online, “An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta”

¹⁰⁹ Sahara Reporters. (March 30, 2007), Interview: “We Will Soon Stop Nigerian Oil Export —Jomo Gbomo”, ¶15

lasting “theft” of their resources, as declared in 2007 by Jomo Gbomo: “*Without the restoration of our rights and compensation for fifty years of theft, there will never be peace in the Delta*”¹¹⁰.

After the release of the Amnesty programme, MEND accepted a ceasefire to give the government the chance to fulfil its promises. But later, calling the Amnesty programme a “sham”, a group of rebels along with MEND rejected the offer, and promised to resume their fight against the government and the companies. Mr J. Gbomo and Mr Okah threatened that: “*All companies related to the oil industry in the Niger Delta should prepare for an all-out onslaught [...] Kidnapping will still happen, but it will escalate. They will carry out attacks on land as well, and take the fight to the government. Officers will be targeted. Soldiers will be targeted. Police stations will be targeted. They will even go to the big hotels to kidnap people.*”¹¹¹.

4. Amnesty International’s arguments

According to a report released in 2009 by Amnesty International, the Niger Delta is one of the most petroleum-affected area in the world where the environment and ecosystem are highly damaged, severely compromising people’s livelihood and health there¹¹². Amnesty International furthered that the oil industry has been causing severe damages on the environment and pointed out different reasons explaining the oil spills which are the result of “*corrosion of oil pipes, poor maintenance of infrastructure, spills or leaks during processing at refineries, human error and as a consequence of deliberate vandalism or theft of oil*”¹¹³.

While the oil companies assure that oil spills are mainly caused by sabotage and theft, the communities and many NGOs claim this is not true, assuring that the number of sabotages responsible for the damages are lower, and rather claim that the companies are using this argument to avoid having to pay compensation¹¹⁴.

Moreover, it is assured that the efforts for cleaning-up the oil spill-related pollution are inadequate and too slow, which consequently leaves the peoples without any recourse, and then have to face the daily and ongoing impacts of the pollution. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the Niger Delta’s communities highly depend on their land and the quality of their environment: “*the environmental damage that has been done, and continues to be done, as a consequence of oil production in the Niger Delta, has led to serious violations of human rights*”¹¹⁵.

In 2002, the African Commission stated that the Nigerian government had facilitated and contributed to the destruction of the land in Niger Delta instead of protecting its peoples from damages caused by non-state actors, such as oil companies: “*the Nigerian Government has given the green light*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, ¶16

¹¹¹ S. Baldauf. (Jan 31, 2010), *Nigeria militants call off truce in oil-rich Niger Delta*

¹¹² Amnesty International. (2009), *Nigeria: Petroleum, Pollution and poverty in the Niger Delta*

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p.14

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.21

to private actors, and the oil Companies in particular, to devastatingly affect the well-being of the Ogonis [indigenous peoples belonging to the Niger Delta region]”¹¹⁶. The Commission required the Nigerian government to take its responsibilities towards its peoples notably by protecting their environment, health and livelihood, but so far no decisions from the African Commission has been implemented in Nigeria¹¹⁷. This led the Commission to affirm that the Nigerian government has failed to protect the natural resources and breached its obligation to ensure food availability¹¹⁸. Moreover, Amnesty International mentions that under international law the Nigerian government is obliged to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. “[...] The obligation to protect requires measures by states to ensure that other actors (such as companies) do not undermine or violate human rights. The obligation to fulfil means that states must take positive action to facilitate the enjoyment of human rights”¹¹⁹, but obviously the Nigerian government has failed to accomplish its obligations.

Moreover, Amnesty International stated that the oil companies have been taking advantage of the weak regulatory system, and considered that they have failed to take proper actions to prevent and remedy the pollution and environmental damages¹²⁰.

In conclusion, Amnesty International assures that the present conflict is the result of a competition over the control and use of the land in the region and that human rights have been violated: “Companies depend on land because the oil is beneath it, while communities depend on land for farming and fishing. However, in almost every respect the human rights of the people of the Niger Delta have been undermined by the laws enacted to allow oil and gas extraction to occur”¹²¹.

IV. Analysis

1. Reading behind the text: different discourses

From the analysis of the empirical data that are related to the Federal government, one main discourse for the latter has been defined, which is the ‘**Peace and Development**’ discourse. Development and peace cannot be achieved separately, but go together. Indeed, peace is necessary to allow development, and vice-versa to maintain peace, development is crucial. Within this discourse, different story-lines have been identified, making the link between these two concepts even more obvious. The latter are stability, security, economic growth and youth empowerment.

The Federal government has been using three different approaches to achieve peace. The first one was to have recourse to the Joint Task Force but because it did not work it offered a truce through the Amnesty programme, and later asked for more cooperation from the States. Using the Joint Task

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.23

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.33

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.39

¹²⁰ *Ibid*

¹²¹ *Ibid*, p.24

Force was a strategy to exclude people from decision-making process and to prevent them from having any voice in the oil industry. This strategy of exclusion and repression brought about even more violence as resistance converted from pacific demonstrations to armed attacks. The Federal government opted for the use of the Joint Task Force first as at this time the country was under military rule, and the use of force is usually the first option for this kind of government. However, even after that the Democracy came back in 1999, the Federal government waited until 2009 for stopping the use of force and for offering a truce with the militants through the Amnesty programme. The objective of this programme was to temporally bring about stability in order to economically recover from the considerable losses that the government faced because of the violence. The objective of the programme was not to include the militants or to deal with any of their demands, but to shut them up and to gain time to reinforce itself. From this perspective, the Federal government chose the “easiest” way to deal with the problem. Indeed, if the Federal government had decided to include the militants and to empower them, then the Federal government would have lost its full control over them. Yet, as this strategy did not fully work, the Amnesty programme not being joined by all the militants, the Federal government decided to turn to the States. The Federal government considers indeed that the States play a crucial role in the stability of Nigeria as if the State governments are able to maintain democracy and stability at their level it will extent to the whole country. By this the Federal government is actually withdrawing from its responsibility and rather is delegating. There is no cooperation since the Federal government does not provide any frame for the States of how to deal with security and stability, but it is merely giving orders without guidance.

Concerning the development concept, the Federal government has made clear that the economy of the country greatly depends on the foreign investments, which means that it crucially needs to prepare a favourable environment for welcoming them. To achieve this, the Federal government is trying to get the support from the youth as it represents the major group age among the Nigerian population, the median age being in 2011 19.2¹²². The Federal government has then been mentioning the need for empowering the youth as it considers it as the leader of tomorrow who is needed to bring about future change. By getting the youth on its side, the Federal government is able to guarantee more stability within its borders which sounds more appealing to foreign investments. Moreover, by doing this the Federal government is able to improve its image on the international sphere, especially after a long time of committed massacres. Moreover, in order to achieve the youth empowerment, the Federal government has been asking the State governments for more cooperation to provide more jobs and opportunities for the youth, which can be considered again as a new withdrawal from the Federal government’s responsibilities and duties. According to the Federal government it seems that this current situation is not because of its lack of responsibility, the latter is in no way responsible for what has been happening.

¹²² Central Intelligence Agency. (2011), *The World Fact Book : Africa Nigeria*

Likewise, at a lower level it seems that the State governments are neither responsible for the current situation in the region. From the analysis of the empirical data related to the States, two main discourses which are linked have been identified: the '**Ending violence**' discourse, and the '**Demanding cooperation**' discourse. Within these discourses different story-lines have been found out which are related to peace, injustice, poverty, criminality, participation and collaboration.

According to the State governments there is no struggle in the region, but there is a minority of armed groups that are responsible for the tensions. While the latter are claiming that they are fighting for justice and liberation, the States assure that they actually fight for ensuring their own profits. For them, militants are 'criminals' who hide behind a business agenda. There is a part of truth in this statement as not all the armed groups are actually fighting for justice. Yet, it seems that the States are taking advantage of the fact that some militants are using this excuse of justice to make easy money, in order to be able to generalize and to justify their military interventions. Moreover, by calling the militants 'criminals' the States are given the legitimacy to behave the way they do, what can be considered as a form of self-defence. Indeed, if the States had considered the militants as demonstrators or protestors it would mean that they would have to give them the right to express themselves and to voice out their demands. However that is exactly what the States want to avoid. Therefore, from their point of view the States believe that to resolve poverty and injustice they need first to wipe out criminality. To do this, they think that they need to reinforce their military forces and to make harsher the punishment. However, it seems that this is only an excuse to justify their ongoing recourse to the force, and to scare even more people to prevent further protests.

From this discourse, it seems that ending the violence is a precondition for resolving poverty and injustice and for bringing about peace. This will allow participation and collaboration to take place. This leads to their second discourse which is the 'Demanding Collaboration' discourse.

In this discourse, the States do not consider to be responsible for the issues of poverty, criminality and injustice as they believe that there is no problem of bad governance or corruption. Rather they blame for a general inaction from the stakeholders of the oil industry, the local and the States governments along with the oil companies, but do not mention the Federal government. It is possible that they do not dare to accuse the Federal government for not being able to solve the issues as they depend on and take orders from it. On the other hand, they particularly blame the oil companies for not having taken the right measures to ensure the development of the region and for neglecting the host communities. There is here an obvious withdrawing from the States' responsibilities, while they burden the oil companies.

Moreover, still in line with this withdrawal of responsibility, they ask for more collaboration from everyone, that is the international community along with the local, States and Federal government, in order to resolve poverty, injustice and bring about peace. They have high expectations from the international community that they think should provide them with more funds.

Furthermore, it is clear that the States will do whatever they can to protect their oil resources regardless the consequences, whether it is about losing their partnerships or leading to violence struggle. Thus their interest is to favour the oil industry even before their own peoples.

Consequently, from what has been observed it seems that the objective of bringing about peace and ending violence is common to both the Federal government and the States. However their approaches are different: while the Federal government uses a more peaceful discourse making it more acceptable on the international sphere, the States are advocating a more aggressive approach to deal with 'criminality'. These different approaches are the result of the Federal government delegating its burdensome responsibilities to the States either because it has not been able to tackle the problem so far, or because it wants to promote an acceptable image on the international sphere. Therefore it seems that it has been giving the 'green light' to the States allowing them to do what is required to make things done and to achieve the objective. Moreover, there is a same tendency to favour the use of threats and violence as a tool to solve the problems. A final point concerns the environment: because they do not mention anything about the environmental consequences of the oil industry, whereas they have been one of the reasons triggering the conflict, it seems that they are actually avoiding to talk about it, maybe because they do not have available solutions or simply because it is not a concern for them.

On the other hand, according to Shell's statements, the latter has one main discourse, which is the '**Development**' discourse, and within this discourse come different story-lines, which are social responsibility and relations with and involvement of other parties related to the oil industry.

To better understand the concept of 'development' from Shell's perspective as a western representative, it is important to trace back its origins. The current structure of the world's levels has occurred after the World War 2 which aimed to rearrange the world politically through notably the new strategy of 'development'. This structure led to the idea of 'underdevelopment' and 'Third World' in which the global power relations between the West and the East were reflected¹²³. This notion of 'development' has been working as a means for the production, the management of and the intervention in the Third World by the West¹²⁴. By the West using the discourse of development, individuals, governments and communities of the periphery are considered as 'underdeveloped' and then treated accordingly. In the Niger Delta case, Shell appears as the West willing to develop a Third World country that is 'underdeveloped', and uses the idea of 'development' as a pretext to manage the oil industry for the aim to develop the region.

The discourse of 'development' rapidly spread all over the world, and became the reality: multilateral financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, generated an endless number of programmes and interventions in the poor and 'underdeveloped'

¹²³ Escobar. A (n.d), *Power and Visibility: Development and the Invention and Management of the Third World*

¹²⁴ Escobar. A (n.d), *Imagining a Post-Development Era? Critical Thought, Development and Social Movements*

countries which guaranteed their control¹²⁵. Through these programmes and interventions particular forms of knowledge have been created and made possible the exercise of power¹²⁶. In the Niger Delta case, Shell has been fostering and funding development programmes that have allowed it to promote its image, to exercise its power and to control the region.

Shell assures that it is entirely committed to ensure sustainable development and emphasizes its responsibility toward the society. To do this it focuses on developing health and employment and on ensuring safety, security and the protection of the environment. Indeed, SPDC promotes its high involvement in its attempt to protect the environment, notably by the fact that it is willing to bear the consequence of its activities in case of pollution, if the Company is recognized responsible for it. However, when Shell is providing social development to the area in which it operates, it is not for the mere benefits of the local communities, but rather for its own interests as by having a stable and more developed region it will ensure its profits and growth. Indeed, making profits is inherent to any company for its survival. Moreover, by promoting this image of “savour” of the region the company is able to disregard all the accusations it has been victim of. Linked to this idea is the fact that Shell may try to compensate the damages it is causing by promoting and providing minimal social services. Therefore it cannot be accused of taking advantage of or stealing the Nigerian natural resources.

Moreover, concerning its willingness to hire government-employed communities, Shell mentions that it has been creating more than 6,000 direct job opportunities from which 90% were Nigerians. However this does not give any information about what kind of positions these people are given, and if they are able to take part or not in the decision-making process concerning the activities of the Group in the region. Also, in case unskilled positions are mainly designed for the Nigerians it might create even more frustration among the latter. In addition, it is never mentioned if this percentage takes into consideration marginalized people or coming from affected areas, or rather if they come from the main cities.

Moreover, although the Group is working hand in hand with other companies, the government, local and international NGOs, it is important to bear in mind that it actually participates partly to some NGOs’ funding. This might actually have some effects on how the Group is later reported in the media. Indeed, since some NGOs depend on the Group’s funding for carrying out their projects, this might as well influence the quality of their reports and their objectivity.

Concerning the oil spills in the Niger Delta region, SPDC assures that 70% of them are the result of sabotages and ‘thefts’ which discharge it for having responsibility for the pollution which is in line with its sustainable development discourse. Although it assures that it has a very high quality of maintenance, many oil spills have been ongoing since 50 years. The Group justifies these oil leaks by

¹²⁵ Escobar. A (n.d), *Power and Visibility: Development and the Invention and Management of the Third World*

¹²⁶ *Ibid*

blaming the local communities for preventing them from having access to the affected areas. It wants to, but it cannot do anything about it, as it said.

Moreover, SPDC believes that oil companies are the scapegoat for what is happening in the area. Thus, in its attempt to discharge itself from the problems resulting from the exploitation of the oil natural resources in the region, the Group asserts that the current conflict is not the result of its actions but rather is the result of poverty and underdevelopment. Moreover, it seems that the Group keeps withdrawing from its responsibilities when it says that the operating companies are abided by the laws and regulations in force in the country, and that it is not its role to replace the government. Indeed, by doing that it is actually taking advantage of the flawed laws to put forward its own interests.

A last point concerns the trend for the Group and the government to give a general label to the militant groups which makes it easier for the Group and the government to justify their actions and/or inactions. While the Group labels the militants as ‘thieves’ whose aim is to make easy money, the government labels them as ‘criminal’ whose aim is the same. Although these two terms do not have the same connotation, they both believe that the militants are the ones to be blamed for the current conflict.

Consequently, it seems that Shell’s discourse is a strong one, very structured and well supported by strong arguments and its relations with the government and the international community. All of this contribute to strengthen its image and to enhance its public relations.

Moving to the third actor, one main discourse has been identified for MEND, which is the ‘**Justice**’ discourse. Various story-lines come under this one, which are peace, development, environmental degradation, injustice and violence. Yet, although nothing was mentioned about ‘self-determination’ or ‘emancipation’ in the analysed reports, it seems that these discourses are implicitly embedded in MEND’s objectives, especially when knowing that MEND stands for Movement for the **Emancipation** of the Niger Delta. These terms still can come under the discourse of ‘Justice’.

For MEND the rampant injustice is the result of the alliance between the Nigerian government and the oil companies which control and are the only beneficiaries of the oil industry revenues. This has thrown the region into a dire poverty which has led it to take the arms as a way to get back people’s ‘rights’ and to fight for justice. For MEND justice means the possibility for the communities to have access to and benefit from their oil natural resources. It believes that the exploitation of the natural oil resources should bring about equal development and prosperity in the region, allowing justice and then peace to prevail. Moreover, unfair distribution of oil industry revenues is not the only reason behind poverty but there is as well the environmental degradation. Indeed, the deterioration of the environment greatly affects the quality of life of people living in the region, especially knowing that these people rely on their environment for their livelihood. As a result of all this injustice, the group has decided to use violence to bring about change.

In order to justify the use of violence and its armed attacks against the oil companies and the military, MEND claims that it does not have choice but to fight directly rather than pacifically. Indeed, first it believes that the Nigerian government is working in collaboration with the oil companies to counter-attack its demands and actions. Second, MEND thinks that the only way the government has been using to deal with the problem so far, is the use of violence or force, even against pacific protests and during the Amnesty programme. Furthermore, it said that it has been disappointed by both the inaction and reaction of the international community on which it was relying for support. Therefore, the group has lost trust in everyone and feels abandoned: it is alone against everyone, so the only remaining choice is to do it its way. Moreover, MEND thinks that the communities see its militants as patriots and messiah, which is considered as another argument to legitimize its actions and to act as the “savour” of the poorest. However, MEND may be actually using violence as the most efficient way to get what it wants.

In contrast to what has been claimed, MEND stresses that the group does not have any affiliation with any movements, whether international or local, and that it is totally independent. Yet, how can it be possible to be that well-armed and well-prepared for attacks without receiving any support or funds? Moreover, the group accuses the Nigerian government of being ‘criminals’ responsible for bunkering and for the ‘theft’ of the oil revenues, and that Nigeria should then get rid of the present government if the country wants peace to be back. Here it seems that MEND using the terms ‘criminals’ and ‘theft’ enables it to legitimize its deeds.

Consequently, from what has been mentioned, it seems that for MEND the number one to be blamed for the current situation is the Nigerian government. It sounds clear that it will do whatever it can to bring about justice as its claimed objective.

Finally, when looking at an outsider’s perspective about what is happening in the Niger Delta region, one main discourse for Amnesty International has been found out, which is the ‘**Human Rights**’ discourse. Within it the main story-line identified is the environmental degradation.

According to Amnesty International, the environment and the ecosystem have been highly damaged by the presence of the oil industry in the region, and this has dramatically compromised people’s life. Indeed, the environment is the main resource for ensuring people’s livelihoods, and by destroying it this deprives them from enjoying their basic rights of having access to food, water, health and the right to gain a living through work. Amnesty International states that the degradation of the environment is mainly due to oil spills which are caused by many different reasons, such as human errors, poor maintenance of the infrastructures, or vandalism and theft. From this, it is not clear who Amnesty International thinks is responsible for vandalism or theft, it might be either some gangs or the government officials as MEND said. Throughout its report it seems that the INGO did not favour any stakeholders involved in the oil industry as it does not have any interest in this business, but it is all about reporting human right violations.

However, Amnesty International blamed the oil companies for first taking advantage of the flawed and weak Nigerian laws, second for avoiding paying compensation by accusing the communities of sabotage and theft of the oil, and third for not being efficient enough to clean-up the oil spills when they occur. The INGO blames as well the Nigerian government for not protecting and fulfilling the human rights of its peoples. Yet, through the empirical data nothing was found about how this organization perceives MEND or any other armed groups as nothing was mentioned about them. It seems that the INGO perceives the Nigerian government and the companies for being responsible for the violation of human rights. Moreover, as Amnesty International is defending human rights it can be assumed that it is taking the side of the communities as being the victims of this violation.

2. Results from the discourse analysis

According to Foucault, “*social discourse which involves a politically generated truth-claim encounters a counter-discourse that challenges the original discourse’s legitimacy*”¹²⁷. Counter-discourse is important as it makes clear what the arguments of the different actors are, highlighting their different interests and the power formula that constrains their relations. There is a **counter-discourse** when the Nigerian government and Shell used the terms ‘criminals’ and ‘theft’ to label MEND, while the latter on its own counters, retorting by using the same labels to identify them, and claims that rather it is patriot and the messiah of its communities. By doing this the actors are able to give legitimacy to their actions, where everyone of them considers its discourse to be the “truth”. This results in a vicious circle of violence as nothing is done to improve the situation, but only to accuse the others.

The Nigerian government believes that MEND is an impediment to bring about peace and development in the region, that is why it has to get rid of it and it needs to reinforce its military power. On the same line, MEND believes that the Nigerian government is an impediment to bring about justice and development, that is why it has to get rid of the government and consequently it needs to reinforce its armed militants. This in general contributes as well to worsen the situation.

The most obvious arguments are between MEND and the government, while it seems that Shell does not really take part to any direct arguments. However the latter constitutes a counter-discourse of MEND. It is for instance quite obvious when Shell assures that it does not have any affiliation with any political party or does not participate in any funding, whereas MEND accuses the latter of having supported armed attacks against it. In addition, MEND is countering Shell’s discourse by accusing the latter of stealing their natural resources. On the other hand MEND is countering the Nigerian government’s discourse when it accuses the latter of bunkering and of supporting some gangs in the theft of crude oil, whereas the other one was actually accusing MEND of doing it. As well it is interesting to see that the government is also criticizing Shell for not employing enough local people and for not involving them enough in its activities, which undermines the development of the region

¹²⁷ Earthpages.ca. (2011), *Counter-discourse*, United States

and creates more disturbances. On the other hand Shell argues that it cannot take the role of the government.

Moreover, there is an interesting counter-discourse when Shell says that it is only following the laws in force in the country, while on the other side Amnesty International mentions that Shell is indeed abided by the laws of the country but that it is actually taking advantage of it. In this case, counter-discourse is not used to reflect the power relations between the actors, but to show how different objectives can create different arguments and different “truths”, knowing that Amnesty International does not have any interest in the oil industry.

In addition to counter-discursivity, **inter-discursivity** can also help when analysing a discourse. Indeed, according to Fairclough. N (2003), “*Analysis of the inter-discursivity of a text is analysis of a particular mix of genres, of discourses, and of styles upon which it draws, and of how different genres, discourses or styles are articulated (or ‘worked’) together in the text*”¹²⁸. By using inter-discursivity an actor can actually use the others’ arguments in order to build or reinforce their own arguments and then their discourse. It has been noticed that inter-discursivity occurs when the Nigerian government says that MEND’s objective is not justice and liberation as the latter claims, but is to make a maximum of profits. Here the Nigerian government borrows MEND’s arguments so that it can use them in order to reinforce its own arguments and to defend its position. This highlights the idea that discourses are not isolated but embedded into a broader context and are interrelated, regardless of time.

Leaving aside inter-discursivity and counter-discursivity, **language** as well seems interesting to understand the different core discourses, through semantics, -which refers to how meaning is signified by the use of words and concepts-, and through pragmatics, -which refers to how meaning is understood through the context. For instance it is interesting to see that the word ‘**development**’ has been mentioned in different contexts by the three actors, giving it different meanings which depend on the message they want to convey and to whom. Thus in this case, ‘development’ is an **empty-signifier** as it has different meanings for different people. Indeed, empty-signifiers or floating signifiers are “*the signs that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way*”¹²⁹. These empty-signifiers can have different meaning depending on what the interpreters want to give them. Using empty-signifier in discourse analysis enables to understand what the objectives of the different actors are by putting forward their arguments. Moreover, if every word had the same meaning regarding the context and the people, this means that there would be only one meaning for the same word; and therefore by using the same terms there would be no conflicting discourses, as it is the case in the Niger Delta region, where different discourses contribute to the creation of the conflict. In this case ‘development’ for the government means attracting more foreign investments and encouraging

¹²⁸ Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, p.218

¹²⁹ Phillips, L. J. and M. W. Jorgensen (2006). *Discourse Analysis As Theory And Method As Theory and Method*, p.28

economic growth, while for Shell ‘development’ means developing the region and the host community in order to make more profits and to improve their image and expand their network. On the other hand, ‘development’ for MEND refers to having better standard of living by having access to the natural resources and by being able to benefit from them.

It worth mentioning that in the Niger Delta case the three actors are withdrawing from their responsibilities, and this can be explained by the fact that everyone is driven by its own interests.

In conclusion, when trying to understand the **order of discourse**, it seems that the **hegemonic** discourse is the Shell’s one. Indeed, the reason why Shell’s discourse has been successful is its wider approach, in which its discourse has embraced a comprehensive set of issues, which in turn fostered a significant support among political and economic interests. This hegemonic discourse has underlined economic growth, development and other modernistic thinking which are appealing for the Nigerian government and the international communities. On the other hand, as the main opponent of the hegemonic discourse, MEND’s way of tackling the situation is rather aggressive and destructive. Therefore its discourse has been described as giving the way to the opposite outcome¹³⁰. Moreover, when it comes to the Nigerian government’s discourse the latter is rather weak and presents some paradox and a lack of strong arguments, which considerably reduces its influence and legitimacy.

This order of discourse is determined by the power relations. Amnesty International’s discourse is not considered as part of this order as it is not a party into the conflict and is not driven by any interests. Rather its only motivation is to raise the problem of human rights violation and to make it internationally recognized.

The following table shows the content and characteristics of the different discourses, through the discursive cores, arenas, and strategies, which are used by the main actors to promote their respective discourses and bring about their interests.

	SHELL	MEND	The Nigerian Government
Discursive core:	Development	Justice, prosperity	Investment and economic growth
Discursive arena:	Lobbying, partnerships with NGOs, websites, media promotion	The public space, media, press release and interviews	Political institutions and public spaces
Discursive strategy:	Inclusion, modernization	1. Armed attacks 2. Dialogue as a secondary strategy	Exclusion

¹³⁰ Linnros & Hallin (2001), *The Discursive nature of environmental conflicts: the case of the Öresund link*, p.399

Important discourses in the analysis have been identified, which need to be then further investigated and explained. For this, the world-system theory can be used to explain the relations between the different actors and their respective discourses. For instance, as has been shown before, the Western ‘development’ discourse can reflect its attempt of dominating the ‘underdeveloped’ countries through which the power relations between ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ are generated. Concerning the peace and stability discourse, instability in one part of the world can affect the whole system. This may remind in a certain way the “butterfly effect”, which describes how very small variations can have a significant effect on giant systems. The current conflict in the Niger Delta can have consequences on a broader scale, with notably dramatic impacts on the energy security in the rest of the world. Indeed, the lack of it may lead to wars and riots around the world, as it was the case in Iraq. Moreover, kidnapping and killing some foreign citizens from the ‘developed’ countries can affect the relations between Nigeria and these countries, and then may have the same consequences of global instability.

V. Theoretical overview: interest divergence and power relations within the world-system

It is believed that global industrialization and trade lead to global economic growth, which in turn results in a global social development. However, from what has been observed so far, it is obvious that the distribution of the benefits from global trade has been significantly unequal among the actors, which has led to unequal growth and development in some areas of the world. Within this global trade, the states and the international corporations have played a key role in the global market¹³¹.

This unequal global trade along with a higher consumption by the Global North actors has had negative effects on the livelihoods and ecosystems of people living in the Global South, and has led to severe and unsustainable depletion of their natural resources. Moreover, it is obvious that the adverse effects from the activities produced by the Global North are usually located out of their geopolitical sphere which in turns affects the less powerful people/actors in the Global South¹³². Therefore, instead of being a two-way win-win cooperation as it meant to be, the world-system becomes more a one-way exploitation.

According to I. Wallerstein, “the world-system is a multicultural, territorial division of labour in which the production and exchange of basic goods and raw material is necessary for the everyday life of its inhabitants”¹³³. Therefore, from this definition it is understood that the world-system is made

¹³¹ Alarcon, C. et al. (2008), Understanding Global Patterns of Production and Consumption

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Chase-Dunn, C and Grimes, P. (1995), *World-System Analysis*, p.389

of culturally different societies that are crucially linked together through the exchange of food and raw materials¹³⁴.

Power hierarchy between core, the “advanced” or “developed”, and periphery, the “less developed”, is one of the most important feature of the world-system, where powerful “core” societies dominate and exploit weak “peripheral” societies¹³⁵.

The Niger Delta case can be linked with the world-system theory as the ongoing conflict occurring there has led to a complex situation with not only local effects but also national and global ones. Nigeria is considered as a peripheral society exploited by the Global North. Indeed, in the wake of Al-Qaeda attacks with the 11th of September 2001 against the United-States, and the Iraq war, West Africa and in particular Nigeria, has emerged as the site of “the New Gulf Oil States”, and since became part of the American strategy to ensure the supply of oil natural resources¹³⁶. Moreover, as may be known the international companies, in particular Shell as an actor in the world-system, are greatly exploiting the Niger Delta’s oil resources whose objectives are guided by their principles of individual profits and growth. This exploitation of the periphery by the core prevents the former from being able to develop welfare and infrastructural programs that could contribute to the general development and growth of the country. This has led to social dissatisfaction, tension and instability in Nigeria that have resulted into a rather low popularity of and mistrust in the Nigerian government¹³⁷.

According to J. Rice (2007), the socioeconomic metabolism of the world-system consists of “*the interdependent flows of energy, natural resources, and waste products between countries*”¹³⁸ as it determines the different processes of “production-consumption-accumulation” at different levels in the global economy. We can link this idea with the fact that the modern world-system, according to I. Wallerstein, is unique because it is capitalist. Indeed, for him the hegemonic structures of the modern world-system are less politically centralized than before, but rather are based on global market and economic system, where capitalist accumulation is promoted¹³⁹. This capital accumulation is highly influencing the ecological system, and at the same time it determines both the social relations of production and the integrity of ecological systems¹⁴⁰. In our case, the exploitation of the natural resources by the core has greatly affected the overall structure of the Niger Delta region, which has resulted into social and ecological disturbances there.

Moreover, fundamental to the world-system theory is the concept of “unequal exchange”, and in particularly the ecological one. This term refers to “*the increasingly disproportionate utilization of ecological systems and externalization of negative environmental costs by developed countries and,*

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p.389

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p.389

¹³⁶ Watts. M. (2004), *Violent Environment, Petroleum conflict and political ecology of rule in the Niger Delta, Nigeria*, p.274

¹³⁷ Chase-Dunn. C and Grimes. P. (1995), *World-System Analysis*, p.396

¹³⁸ Rice. J. (2007), *Ecological Unequal Exchange: Consumption, Equity, and Unsustainable Structural Relationships within the Global Economy*, p. 46

¹³⁹ Chase-Dunn. C and Grimes. P. (1995), *World-System Analysis*, p.390-393

¹⁴⁰ Rice. J. (2007), *Ecological Unequal Exchange*, p.46

*consequentially, declining utilization opportunities and imposition of exogenous environmental burdens within less developed countries*¹⁴¹. Thanks to this concept it can be visualized how the core countries may negatively affect the marginalized countries, Nigeria in this case, in the global economy. It underlines the international unequal flow of energy and distribution of natural resources which deepens the discrepancy in production and material consumption. This is obvious in the Nigerian case when knowing that the annual oil revenues reached \$40 billion in 2004 whereas the majority of Nigerians' living standards did not improve and sometimes became even worse in some parts of the country as a result of this unequal exchange¹⁴². This inequity is one of the story-lines of MEND's discourse of 'justice' when it declares that one of the reason behind its attacks was because of the unequal share and access to the natural resources, which legitimizes its actions.

In addition, the 'zero-sum game' model of development is also applicable to the Nigerian case. By definition this model proposes that "*capitalist growth in core areas is of benefits to their peripheries*"¹⁴³. In the Niger Delta case, the international companies as a powerful player in the world-system, in particular Shell, utilize the Nigerian resources to support financially their own rates of materials production and consumption¹⁴⁴, and this is made at the expense of the Niger Delta's environmental, social and economic development. This 'zero-sum game' model contradicts then Shell's discourse of 'development' as the latter is not all about the development of Nigeria, but rather about developing itself and its home government at the expense of the Niger Delta's community.

Paradoxically, instead of bringing about prospect for development, oil natural resource endowments have led to instability triggering struggle among people to control the resources, or have motivated different groups to take part into armed conflicts in order to make the most benefits of it, and finally have increased the poverty and poor conditions of living. This has been highlighted in MEND's discourse by one of its spokesperson who said in 2009 that "*the region which is the milking cow of the Federal republic of Nigeria is ironically the poorest and the least developed*"¹⁴⁵. In addition to the risk of armed conflicts, this 'resource curse' can as well impede the ability of political institutions to resolve conflict peacefully¹⁴⁶. Indeed, in case of conflict the government does not have the time and the space to plan for social development or to construct strong political institutions that are necessary for the development of the region.

As mentioned previously, power hierarchy is the cornerstone of the world-system theory in which powerful industrial core countries endeavour to keep asymmetric trade relationships through

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p.44

¹⁴² Watts. M. (2004), *Violent Environment, Petroleum conflict and political ecology of rule in the Niger Delta, Nigeria*

¹⁴³ Hornborg. A. (2009), *Zero-Sum World : Challenges in Conceptualizing Environmental Load Displacement and Ecologically Unequal Exchange in the World-System*, p.245

¹⁴⁴ Rice. J. (2007), *Ecological Unequal Exchange*, p.59

¹⁴⁵ H. Prowse. (May 1, 2009). Don't Panic online, "An Interview with MEND - Rambos of the Niger Delta", ¶13

¹⁴⁶ Obi. C. (2009), *Nigeria's Niger Delta: Understanding the Complex Drivers of Violent Oil-related Conflict*, pp.109-110

which they can promote domestic employment, profits, and government revenues¹⁴⁷. This is made possible if their discourse is accepted on a large scale and is able to defeat other competing discourses. When trying to understand the power relations within the world-system, Hornborg's views on the origins of unequal exchange can be referred to. According to the latter (1998), "*the systematic appropriation of energy and materials, and consequent realization of economic value, is the foundation of the industrial infrastructure reproducing cross-national inequalities in the world economy and uneven ecological outcomes*"¹⁴⁸. This unequal exchange generates a formula of power that shapes the relations between core and periphery, and then shapes their discourses. Moreover, since the disparity in social, economic and political power determines the terms of trade that characterize natural resources flow from less developed countries, then power is considered as a key factor that supports the growth or development of industrialized countries. Hence the idea that power over natural resources is interlinked with economic and social power¹⁴⁹. From what has been analysed, Shell along with the Nigerian government have the control over the natural resources in the Niger Delta region which enables them to monopolize all kind of power, in particular the social and economic one. This control of power leaves nothing to the communities and results in a general feeling of marginalization and injustice, then building the ground for potential conflicts.

Moreover, in case some actors feel that their interests are jeopardized, they usually tend to create alliance with other actors with whom they share common interests since they believe that through this alliance they would be able to fulfil their objectives. In the Niger Delta case, the political economy of oil in Nigeria has led the Nigerian government to ally itself with Shell that is considered as the most powerful actor. Indeed the latter is one of the world's wealthiest and most powerful corporation whose role in the world-system is crucial¹⁵⁰. This alliance has faced protests and local resistance which were driven by the willingness to have access to and to benefit from the natural resources, thus threatening the Nigerian government and the international community's interests within oil-rich Nigeria. The Nigerian government has then been supported by oil companies and their home governments to wipe out those threats in particular through the violent suppression of local protests. This threat of the powerful core's interest has led to the recourse of force through a military intervention in order to maintain the power hierarchy, and to ensure the perpetuation of the market mechanisms that will protect their interests¹⁵¹. Therefore the market of the oil industry hides a process of exploitation which is supported by the military power of the Nigerian government and the States, to confront the military power of MEND. It is this interest divergence that leads to the present conflict in the Niger Delta region.

¹⁴⁷ Rice. J. (2007), *Ecological Unequal Exchange*, p.53

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.52

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, pp.51-53

¹⁵⁰ Obi. C (2009), *Nigeria's Niger Delta: Understanding the Complex Drivers of Violent Oil-related Conflict*, p.117

¹⁵¹ Chase-Dunn. C and Grimes. P. (1995), *World-System Analysis*, p.396

Endowed with advanced technology and innovation, the core can assert their economic and political power on the periphery which in turn influences the power and capacity of corporations and States¹⁵². In the Nigeria Delta case, Shell benefits from the ultimate oil-related technology while the Nigerian government is facing industrial and technological backwardness. Obviously it is in the interest of each of them to take advantage of each other in order to bring about their own agenda, with the Nigerian government relying on Shell for exploiting the region. In order to increase their individual profits both Shell and the Nigerian government have then signed agreements that protect their interests.

Consequently, these unequal access to and distribution of power and natural resources have led the marginalized groups to rally in order to challenge the unacceptable status quo¹⁵³. As the situation did not improve but rather worsened creating more and more frustration among the disadvantaged groups, this political stalemate generated the formation of armed groups; with MEND one of the most famous. For reminder, its main interest is to increase local control over the money gained from the exploitation of the natural resources in the region. This interest comes thus into contradiction with Shell and the Nigerian government's interests, hence the conflict.

On the other hand, the discourse of Ecological Modernization clashes with the discourse of development put forward by the three actors. Indeed, according to Hajer. M (1995), ecological modernization enables to conceptualize environmental problems. It is an international policy discourse which identifies the ecological crisis as a proof of "*fundamental omission in the workings of the institutions of modern society*"¹⁵⁴. He suggests that the ecological modernization is governed by different principles: the principle of win-win economic and environmental situations, of democratic participation, of anticipation and prevention ("*pollution prevention pays*"), of innovation and of efficiency¹⁵⁵. Therefore, according to the Ecological Modernization discourse, economic and environmental aspects can work together instead of conflicting or impeding each other. In the present case, this seems to not be applicable, there is no win-win environmental and economic situation, no democratic participation, no efficient prevention and a lack of innovation and therefore a lack of general efficiency. Indeed the discovery and exploitation of oil natural resources was expected to enhance the general development of the region, however from what has been observed the oil industry activities have massively led to the deterioration of the environment and to the increase in poverty of the region. This has had an adverse impact on the development and growth of the Niger Delta region. It could be linked with the presence of the multinational corporations that have rather promoted the unsustainable use of global natural resources to reduce their costs and make more profits. Yet, this situation cannot be only attributed to the multinational oil companies, but it is a shared responsibility between the three main actors, that is Shell, the Nigerian government and MEND. Indeed, as seen in

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p.397

¹⁵³ Obi. C. (2009), *Nigeria's Niger Delta: Understanding the Complex Drivers of Violent Oil-related Conflict*, p.111

¹⁵⁴ Hajer, M. (1995). *The politics of environmental discourse*, p.3

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*

the analysis, the government seems to not be responsible for anything, especially concerning the environmental aspects, while MEND is ready to bomb the oil infrastructures whatever the consequences on the environment are, to reach their objective. Therefore, the development discourse here is defeating the ecological modernization one, and rather it is brought about at the expense of the environment. Furthermore, the ecological modernization discourse is not applicable in the frame of the world-system theory. Indeed, within the world-system theory is the idea that the core countries can develop themselves at the expense of the periphery countries, notably by depleting their natural resources and environment to satisfy their needs and sustain their growth. In this case then, the economic growth of the core countries does not go hand in hand with the protection of the environment in the periphery countries they exploit.

VI. Discussion: communication, discourse and the world-system

In the case, there is no much verbal communication between the three main actors, which does not help for the resolution of the conflict. Although there were some attempts to communicate between the Nigerian government and MEND, in particular through the Amnesty programme, it did not contribute to bring about stability as they do not share a common understanding of the situation and do not recognize their respective needs.

Between Shell and the Nigerian government there is a direct communication, notably through the formation of joint-ventures, of the joint investigation team (JIT), and of the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) which is sponsored by Shell. This communication is a form of alliance that enables to reinforce the relation between Shell and the Nigerian government and then to avoid conflict with MEND. Moreover, because their interests do not diverge, they have no reason to enter conflict. They are able to reinforce their alliance because they need each other to fulfil their interest. On the other hand, MEND has interests that come into contradiction with theirs, there is no possible common ground between them, and their activities are incompatible, which lead Shell and the Nigerian government to consider MEND as an opponent to tame. These interest divergence and incompatibility of activities are at the root of the present conflict. Indeed, according to Deutsch (1973) quoted in Daniels and Walker (2001), “*a conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur... an action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures, or in some ways makes the latter less likely or less effective*”¹⁵⁶, while Pruitt and Rubin (1986) quoted in Daniels and Walker (2001), says that “*conflict means perceived divergence of interest, or a belief that parties’ current aspiration cannot be achieved simultaneously*”¹⁵⁷. Moreover, another factor that can explain the present conflict is the decreasing trust in the interaction situation. Indeed, conflict can be defined

¹⁵⁶ Daniels, E. and Walker G.B. (2001), *Working through Environmental Conflicts. The collaborative learning approach*, p.28

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28

as “*social interaction during which the actors’ trust to the interaction decreases*”¹⁵⁸. When it happens, the actors may think that they cannot influence the situation and cannot make themselves understood by the other actors. Here there is no trust between the Nigerian government and MEND in their interaction, which contributes to the conflict. Therefore three main factors trigger and maintain the conflict, which are interest divergence, incompatibility and decreasing trust in the interaction situation.

Furthermore, the interest divergence and incompatibility along with the lack of trust directly influence the communication that is going on between the three main actors. In the present case, although there is social interaction, these factors have not fostered much direct verbal communication between the disputants. Indeed, before starting any process of communication, there is the need for setting a basis where the different actors would be guaranteed that their rights will be respected, that the discussion will be opened and equal among the participants, and that nothing will impede any actors to express and to voice out their needs and demands. Then communication can play a major role to ease the conflict, by allowing cooperation or collaboration to occur¹⁵⁹.

Moreover, Cox. R (2010) defined human communication as symbolic action because “*we draw upon language and other symbols to construct a framework for understanding and valuing and to bring the wider world to others’ attention*”¹⁶⁰. It is then a process through which meaning can be given and conveyed in order to create a common understanding. It relates to all the different ways used to communicate, including both verbal and nonverbal messages¹⁶¹. Moreover, this definition shows an interplay between communication and discourse. Indeed, language and symbols can be used to give meaning to the world and to bring people’s attention to it, from which different discourses are formulated and can compete.

Then, comes the issue of having different discourses and how to develop and to strengthen the latter. In the present case, MEND has two different approaches in its way to communicate. One is a violent non-verbal communication addressed to Shell and the Nigerian government, in particular through bombs and the kidnappings of foreign workers. This use of violence is a second step to put forward its discourse that was previously expressed in its speeches. The other approach is verbal and more institutional through the use of Internet, the sending of emails and images to the world’s leading news agency and local newspapers, and the ‘tourist’ guidance of journalists in their camps in order to show them the “reality” in the Niger Delta. The latter is addressed to the international community and local people, as MEND is trying to “*embed itself in the people’s consciousness*”¹⁶². However, using violence can weaken the discourse of ‘justice’ it wishes to convey, especially knowing that in the world in general violence is not an acceptable way for getting its demands. On the other hand, the

¹⁵⁸ Hallgren, Lars. Unpublished paper in progress. To “*lugna upp sig*”, p.2

¹⁵⁹ Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (n.d), *Communication*

¹⁶⁰ Cox, R. (2010). *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, p.25

¹⁶¹ Patel. T. (n.d), *What is communication*; & Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (n.d), *Communication*

¹⁶² Obi. C. (2009), *Nigeria’s Niger Delta: Understanding the Complex Drivers of Violent Oil-related Conflict*, p.122

Nigerian government has a poor communication approach, its reports are not active on its website which are poorly updated, and information about the conflict is not clearly mentioned. This poor communication undermines the Nigerian government's discourse of 'peace and development' and does not catch the attention of the international community. Moreover, the Nigerian government's discourse is shadowed by Shell's one which holds sway over the other discourses. Indeed, Shell has a very strong communication approach, with efficient public relations, well-written and updated information, while conveying its messages in a "friendly" way, promoting its missions and image. It mostly addresses its messages to the international community as it is a multinational company that needs to maintain an acceptable reputation on the global sphere. This enables it to reinforce its discourse of 'development', which is the hegemonic one in the conflict. Therefore, the way an actor communicates will determine the strength, the impact, the legitimacy and the popularity of its discourse.

Consequently, communication strategy contributes to the reinforcement of a discourse. In the present case, Shell, as a representative of the core countries which is supported by other developed countries, has managed to develop and to expand its discourse, making it the hegemonic one. This enables it to expand an almost total domination, which reflects the world-system structure, where the core dominates the periphery. This in turn contributes to the perpetuation of the domination of the core's discourse on the periphery's ones. In other words, being a core actor means having the resources needed to allow efficient communicative practices and strategies to take place, which in turns enables to develop and strengthen its discourse. Yet, this domination by the core is only partial since it controls all the oil natural resources, but it does not control local people's mind, as some militants have been challenging its power and control.

Finally, while talking about communication and dealing with natural resources, a last point worth highlighting is **environmental communication**. This term is defined as "*the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and in negotiating society's different responses to them*"¹⁶³. In the Niger Delta case, the issue of environmental degradation is not equally addressed by the three main actors. While Shell's objective is to develop its activities in a sustainable way, MEND puts forward the necessity of protecting the environment as one of the conditions to bring about justice, and the Nigerian government does not mention anything that is related to the environment. Therefore, only Shell and MEND communicate environmental messages to their audiences. Yet, this environmental communication is part of two opposed strategies: while MEND is using environmental communication as a way to accuse the oil multinational corporation's activities of deteriorating the environment, Shell on the other hand uses environmental communication to defend itself and to legitimize its activities. Moreover, using environmental communication enables them to strengthen their discourse on the international sphere,

¹⁶³ Cox, R. (2010). *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*, p.37

especially when knowing that environmental degradation is today a global concern. Nevertheless there is a paradox as each actor is following its own interests at the expense of the environment. Hence the idea that their claimed well-intentions of defending the environment are clouded by the pursuit of each actor's interests, leading us to question if the use of environmental communication is for the sake of protecting the environment and of tackling environmental problems, or if it is rather a marketing tool for promoting the various discourses. In the light of this case, it is obvious that environmental communication does not mean anything by itself, it has to be related to a certain situation, and then need to be analysed case by case. Here, environmental communication is used as a tool to promote and to market the actors' discourse.

Conclusion

Nowadays, oil natural resources are considered to be one of the most strategic resources in the world, but that could at the same time be considered as presenting a great paradox. Indeed, on the one hand, in the oil-rich countries the exploitation of oil natural resources is believed to make possible economic and social development, to wipe out poverty and then to set the ground to bring about prosperity. Yet, the discovery of oil natural resources can turn out to be a 'resource curse', with oil producing countries presenting high level of instability, violent conflicts, low level of education and health services, high level of unemployment and poor economic conditions, which is exactly the case in the Nigeria's Niger Delta region. For two decades, the region has been the theatre of conflicts opposing militants, the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies. At the origin of the conflict lies the problem of underdevelopment, which has been aggravated because of issues related to natural resource control, local people right violation and environmental deterioration.

Throughout this research thesis, our discourse analysis has demonstrated that first the Niger Delta conflict is embedded into a world-system structure where the 'core' dominates the 'periphery' and where the former can develop itself at the expense of the latter. Power relations lie at the core of this system and is crucial for its structure. Nevertheless, this arrangement of power formula can be challenged in case the core faces direct opposition from the periphery, which then threatens its interests. Indeed, interest divergence can be considered as the catalyst for formulating and reformulating this world-system and the power relations that controls it.

Secondly, it has been made obvious that competing interests lead to the creation of different discourses, through which each actor can defend its position and put forward its goals, objectives and values. Then the discourse analysis allows the revelation of the different "genuine" interests and the understanding of the power formula that determines their relations.

Finally, the discourse analysis has made clear that in the Niger Delta the decrease in trust between the different main actors, along with the incompatibility of their interests and opposing needs lead to the creation of clashing discourses which has resulted into a violent conflict, with local, national and international consequences.

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