

THE MEDIA AND THE MILITANTS: CONSTRUCTING THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS

by
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This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics methods to analyse the frequently used lexical items by the Nigerian press to represent the Niger Delta militia groups and their activities. The study shows that the choice of particular vocabulary over other available options reveals value judgements that reflect power, identity and socio-economic marginalization. Concordances and collocational tools are used to provide semantic profiles of the selected lexical items and collocational differences are highlighted. A list of collocates was obtained from the concordances of the 'Nigerian Media Corpus' (NMC) (a corpus of 500,000 words compiled by the author). The study reveals that the negative representations of the ethnic militia are an ideological strategy used to shift attention from the real issues of ethnic marginalization and exploitation of the Niger Delta – a region solely responsible for Nigeria's oil-based economy. Arguably, the over-publicised security challenges in the Niger Delta succeed in creating suspicion and apprehension among the citizenry, whereas the government, which receives abundant revenue from oil, does little to develop the entire country.

Keywords: Nigeria, ethnic militants, Niger Delta, corpus linguistics, ideology, the press

1. Introduction

The conflict in the Niger Delta (ND) of Nigeria has often been attributed to Nigeria's federal structure that groups the country into unequal regions. The north and the west and some parts of the eastern region are the 'majority' ethnic groups with full political and demographic privileges. These groups are said to dominate the 'minority' ethnic groups such as those populating the Delta region.

The quest for self-determination by the 'minority' became a crisis in the 90's and worsened in 2003 with the emergence of armed ethnic militias known in the media as 'militants,' 'miscreants,' 'terrorists,' 'thieves,' etc. The increase in the rate of violence, kidnappings and bombings of oil installations is generally assumed to be a reaction to the institutionalized neglect and poverty prevalent in the Delta Region – a region solely responsible for Nigeria's oil-based economy, accounting for over 95% of Federal Government income. Poverty in the region is linked to degradation of agricultural lands and fishing waters, with over 75% of the people living in rural areas without any form of developed social infrastructure. Despite the escalating violence especially in the last five years, the real issue of underdevelopment, poverty, exploitation and environmental degradation in the region has until recently been systematically downplayed by the Nigerian government, the mass media and the stakeholders in the oil and gas sector. This increasing unrest has provoked a chain of reactions from both local and international mass media.

The power of the media to manipulate opinions, perceptions and attitudes is often reflected in the choice of particular words or grammatical constructions to represent social issues. The choice of one option from available sets of options constitutes a choice of meaning and ideological bias (Fairclough, 1995a). For example, the labeling of all resistance groups in the ND region as 'militants,' 'miscreants,' 'criminals,' 'bandits', 'terrorists,' etc. is crucial to the reading public's evaluation of the news reports and their perception of the identity of the key players in the conflict. Because these lexical items express value judgements, they are ideological and evaluative, rather than factual. The present study applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics methods to show how the choice of a certain vocabulary (as documented in the corpus) reflects ideological positions, and is likely to worsen violence in the region. This study is however an academic research that does not support violence in any region of Nigeria.

2.1. An Overview of the Niger Delta (ND) Crisis

Conflicts in the ND have their historical roots in early perceptions of the people of the Delta region as 'minority' ethnic groups, with huge implications for socio-economic development and political power rights. The minority question was however a colonial legacy, which concentrated power and privileges in the central power-elite which belonged to the dominant ethnic groups. The consequence was the perceived marginalisation of the ethnic minorities and their being blocked from power and access to natural and state resources. This marked the beginning of the minorities' agitation for self-determination, and a demand for exclusive political space in the form of state creation.

The second cause of the conflict is a sequel to the first, being the struggle for resource control in a region that accounts for over 95% of the national income. With the collapse of agriculture as a foreign exchange earner, oil is today the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, contributing over 46.8% of the GDP in 1992, and accounting for about 96.2% of total export earnings since 1996 (Omotola, 2006). With this rise in oil revenues emerged the struggle between the regional elites for control of the new national wealth. Before 1967, the regional governments exercised considerable executive powers; however, the creation of the twelve actual states by the military government amplified the powers of the central government. This had huge consequences with regard to the oil industry, as it signaled the systematic alienation of the local people from decision making. The Petroleum Act of 1969 transferred all oil revenue to the military government, which was expected to disburse the revenue to the various states. It was then hoped that the creation of Rivers State and the then South Eastern State, which partly met the Niger Delta's demand for self determination, would guarantee these states a significant share of control of oil revenue; however, the concentration of power and resources in the Federal Government (FG)

through military decrees further alienated the host oil communities. Omoweh (2006) argues that the case is not just an agitation for the rights to natural resources, but for the right to participate in the decision-making process regarding the exploitation and production/export of the resources, as well as the right to know the size of the income accruing from the production of the resources and how it is spent on development projects based on the needs of the people. At the heart of the ND crisis therefore is the exclusion of the people from the process of democratization, involving the redistribution of power from the state in favour of the people within the context of resource governance.

During the cash crop boom in Nigeria (e.g. cocoa in the West), the majority ethnic groups, whose regions produced the crops, had a near-monopoly controlling the revenue accruing from the cash crop exports. Revenue allocation was based on the principle of 'derivation', which granted at least 50% of the revenue to the regions. However, when oil replaced agricultural exports, the 'derivation' was systematically dropped and replaced by such considerations as population, land mass, fiscal efficiency, terrain and internal revenue efforts of the states. Again, these changes placed the Delta region at a disadvantage compared to the other, 'majority' states. The principle of derivation under the revenue allocation formula of the 1999 Constitution was effectuated at 13%. Under the Abacha government, it was as low as 3% (Omotola, 2006). This directly placed oil revenue in the hands of the FG, which was dominated by the power-elite from the ethnic majority groups, thus leaving the ethnic minorities with the environmental consequences of oil production. This was perceived as blatant injustice. For the people of the oil producing areas located in today's Nigerian South-South geo-political zone, access to, and control of oil embody their historic quest for self-determination. Such access would guarantee social and economic development for Nigeria's oil producing territories, as it is seen to be the case around the world. It would also provide them an economic

base to re-negotiate their relationship with the FG, assert their right to collect taxes and rent and demand compensation for the wanton destruction of the environmental and aquatic life in the region (Obi, 2001; Omotola, 2006). These claims were first articulated by an organized oil rights group known as the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by the late social activist, environmentalist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa who was hanged in 1995 by the military administration along with other eight activists. MOSOP's struggle was the first attempt to radicalize the ND struggle and it hinged on the need to provide social justice for the ethnic minorities, equitable power-sharing in Nigeria, compensation for environmental devastation and the restoration of the environment, payment of lease revenue to oil producing areas, and above all human dignity and self-realization (Obi, 2001). Despite over fifty years of exploitation of its non-renewable oil wealth the ND area is still believed to be one of Nigeria's most under-developed regions.

2.2. The Rise of Armed Resistance in the Delta Region

The rise in today's militancy in the ND is generally believed to represent a resistance against economic hardship, state authoritarianism and environmental degradation. In the early nineties, MOSOP, through integrated mass actions, blocked state/oil companies' access to oil wells in Ogoniland, leading to great losses of revenue to Shell and the FG (Obi, 2001). MOSOP's example spurred the rise of other minority resistance groups/ethnic militias in the region despite the state's organized actions to crush the rebellion.

'You can't take people for granted? They cannot go to school, they don't have access to good water, they don't have access to good roads, no access to good health facilities, no access to anything. Unfortunately, this same Federal Government

organized a rally at Eagle square in Abuja where some of those boys were lodged in posh hotels and they realized that the money made from their area is performing wonders in some places... It was an eye opener and it just exposed them to the world and soon as they went back, they opened fire' (Amitolu Shittu, President of the Committee for Democracy and Rights of the People (CDRP), in an interview with the *Sunday Sun*, July 5, 2009).

The rise of many more militant leaders has also fuelled the emergence of over twenty armed resistance groups in the region. At the forefront are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); the All Ijaw Youth Conference; the Egbesu Boys of Africa; the pan-Niger Delta Youth Movement (the Chikoko); the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF); the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF); the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities; and so on (Obi, 2001; Omotola, 2006). This massive resurgence of ethnic militias has increased the proliferation of arms and heightened the spate of violence, most of which targeted the oil companies operating in the region – through seizure of oil wells, kidnapping and hostage taking of oil workers. In May 2009 however the FG ordered an organized military offensive against the 'militants'. This offensive (also known as 'Operation Restore Hope') was carried out by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF). The JTF has been widely criticized for the excessive atrocities committed against the people of the region, especially its women and children.

2.3. Ideology and Lexical Variation in the Press

The choice of one word over other available (sets of) options is always significant, especially because of the power of words to shape perceptions. According to Hodge and Kress (1993), choices made in

specific contexts may help us understand how social forces influence the text. Fairclough (1995) argues that formal choices constitute choices of meaning, which reveal how media language for example, works ideologically. The ideological work of the media language affects the way individuals or groups, identities and relations are represented. Particular construction of social identities would particularly define how their actions are to be judged or evaluated. The usual direct way of expressing ideology in discourse is the recognition that ideologies organize specific group attitudes; these attitudes are used in forming personal opinions about individuals or groups, their identities and relations: such personal opinions may be finally expressed in texts or discourse (van Dijk, 2005). Ideologies are not limited to the representation and legitimisation of class domination. Dominated groups also require a form of ideology as a basis for resistance (van Dijk, 2005). This will reflect on what they accept as constituting their social identity, group attitude and their social interest. For example, the insurgents reject the label 'militants' and prefer to be recognized as 'freedom fighters', as the latter appears to adequately represent their activities, values and goals with regard to the ND crisis. The main social function of ideologies therefore is 'the coordination of the social practices of group members for effective realisation of the goals of a social group and the protection of their interest' (van Dijk, 2005:24). Very often, 'many group ideologies involve the representation of 'Self' and 'Others', 'Us' and 'Them' leading to idealized polarizations – We are Good and They are Bad – especially when conflicting interests are involved' (van Dijk, 2005:25). Hence, lexical items are often generally selected to reflect these opinions or express value judgements (e.g. 'militant', 'terrorist', 'miscreant' vs. 'freedom fighter'). Journalists are able to influence their readers by producing their own discourses or helping to reshape existing ones. Such discourses or points of view are often shaped by citing the opinions of those in power. However, each newspaper/magazine generally has a political stance, which they then over

time may alter on various subjects (Baker, 2006). Language users or journalists do not just make linguistics choices based on the merits of individual words, but rather on relatively stable combinations of words. Hence, Matheson (2005:22) argues that lexical analysis is 'strongest when it finds something more than choices between words but consistent patterns which suggest preoccupations within the particular discursive context, and which therefore add up to a representation of the world for a culture or for a group which holds status within a culture.' Stubbs (1997) recommends using a large body of data (or corpora) if reliable generalizations are to be made about language choices.

2.4. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics

A number of works have combined the methodologies of CDA and Corpus Linguistics in the study of media discourse. Hardt-Mautner (1995) for instance is a study of the representation of the EU in the British press; the study gives a systematic guideline on how the qualitative method of CDA may be enriched by the quantitative method of Corpus Linguistics using large corpora. Orpin (2005) examines the ideological implications of groups of words semantically relating to corruption in the British press. Using a corpus methodology with elaborate collocational tools and concordance programme, Orpin identifies semantic similarities, collocational differences and the geographical locations that the words referred to. Baker & McEnery (2005) also apply a corpus-based collocation analysis to reveal how minority groups, refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants are constructed in the UK press. With the development of CDA (Fairclough, 1989, 1995a; 2000; van Dijk, 1991; 1995; 2000, Wodak, 1999), which is more or less an extension of Critical Linguistics and its application to social and mass media research, more insights have been gained on the role of popular mass media

in the construction and maintenance of power relations and ideology in discourse (Fairclough, 1995a), racism (van Dijk, 1991; 2000); injustice and social abuse (Polovina-Vuković, 2004); social identity and gender discrimination (Massi, 2007) etc. Van Dijk (2000) shows that 'new racism' – a subtle form of racial discrimination popular among the 'Extreme Right' is prevalent in Europe and North America and that the press has contributed significantly to its increasing practice. Similarly Polovina-Vuković (2004), applying CDA in the study of 'the representation of social actors in the *Globe and Mail* during the break-up of the former Yugoslavia', argues that different ethnic groups were largely portrayed either as 'villains' or 'victims' and that such portrayals contributed to Western actions in the Balkans and Western acceptance/non-acceptance of refugees. Corpus Linguistics – the study of language as exemplified in samples (corpora) – provides the researcher with the opportunity to discover patterns of authentic language use through the analysis of actual language samples from a databank of natural texts. A study of collocates, for example, may contribute to the semantic analysis of a word (Sinclair, 1991), as well as convey messages implicitly and 'even be at odds with an overt statement' (Hunston, 2002: 109). Collocation studies may also be a suitable approach to a discourse study of a group's representation (Baker 2006).

3.1. *The Corpus*

The corpus studied here comprises about 500,000 words distributed over 637 text samples; it is referred to here as the 'Nigerian Media Corpus' (NMC) – a plain specialised corpus compiled by the author (see Appendix 1; unfortunately, a standard corpus of Nigerian English did not exist at the time of this research). The corpus consists of samples from seven national newspapers and from three of the most popular weekly news magazines, namely: *The Guard-*

ian, Daily Trust, Nigerian Compass, The Vanguard, PM News, This Day, Daily Sun, Newswatch, Tell and The News. These newspapers and magazines were selected on the basis of their popularity, their wide coverage of news from the entire country and their significant contributions to Nigeria's socio-political development (Chiluwa, 2005). The magazines in particular are the main news magazines in Nigeria and the oldest in the industry. The text samples comprise daily news, interviews, and editorials under the 'economy,' 'society,' and 'politics' categories. In some broadsheet newspapers (e.g. *The Guardian*), these come under the general heading of 'national.'

Because of the focus of this study, text samples are restricted to news from six topical areas, namely:

1. Militancy Activities (including kidnapping/hostage taking)
2. The Federal Government's Military Intervention and the Activities of the Joint Task Force (JTF)
3. Development Projects and Activities of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)
4. Actions of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and Oil Exploration in Nigeria (including the activities of multi-national oil companies)
5. The Federal Government's Amnesty Program for the Militants
6. General (other news on the Niger Delta Crisis)

Over time, certain lexical items have been observed to occur frequently in the Nigerian press in the representation of the ND 'militants' (or 'freedom fighters'¹) and their activities. These items, which are often viewed as capable of causing further disaffection and conflicts in the troubled region, mostly represent a highly negative characterization of the key players in the crisis, such as 'kidnappers, thieves, criminals, terrorist or restive youths,' etc. (Oladeinde & Ajibola 2008; Asakitikpi, 2007). Table 1 shows the fourteen most

frequently used lexical items (or group of nouns) and the percentage frequency of their citations in the corpus.

Table 1. Frequencies of Lexical items per 1,000,000 words

Rank	Lexical Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Militants	33,411	3.34
2	Kidnappers	2,824	0.28
3	Criminals	2,297	0.22
4	Robbers	682	0.06
5	Hoodlums	427	0.042
6	Terrorists	290	0.029
7	Thugs	287	0.028
8	Miscreants	249	0.025
9	Bandits	234	0.023
10	Thieves	224	0.022
11	Insurgents	219	0.021
12	Cultists	178	0.017
13	Rebels	63	0.006
14	Vagabonds	48	0.005

Due to the limited space available in this paper, only the five lexical items that most frequently occurred in the corpus are selected for analysis. These are: *militants*, *criminals*, *kidnappers*, *robbers* and *hoodlums* (henceforth called 'keywords'); note that in this context, the use of the term 'keywords' merely identifies the words with

the highest frequency counts, obtained from Wordsmith 5.0 (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequencies of keywords in the corpus

Rank	Lexical Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Militants	33,411	3.34
2	Kidnappers	2,824	0.28
3	Criminals	2,297	0.22
4	Robbers	682	0.06
5	Hoodlums	427	0.042

3.2. Methodology

For the analysis of the keywords, the following are examined:

- The semantic profiles of the keywords (including definitions by some dictionaries and possible synonyms, using an online thesaurus)
- How keywords are used in the Native English context, as documented in the British National Corpus (BNC)
- How keywords are used in the Nigerian media corpus (NMC) (i.e. showing their concordances and lexical collocates, using Wordsmith)
- Collocational patterns in the concordance are subjected to a systematic concordance/collocation analysis of samples of the lexical items (also involving denotative and connotative contrasts between British and Nigerian use, as these contrasts highlight ideological standpoints and attitudes)²

4.1. Semantic Profiles of Keywords

Table 3. Definition of Key words (presented here as lemmas)

	Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English	Oxford English Dictionary
Militant	(noun) <i>a militant organization or person is willing to use strong or violent action in order to achieve political or social change</i>	(adj) <i>favouring confrontational methods in support of a course</i>
Kidnapper	'Kidnap:' <i>to take someone somewhere illegally by force, often in order to get money for returning them.</i> Kidnapper (noun)	'Kidnap' (verb): <i>abduct and hold (someone) captive, typically to obtain a ransom.</i> Kidnapper (noun)
Criminal	(noun) <i>someone who is involved in illegal activities or has been proved guilty of a crime</i>	(noun) <i>a person who has committed a crime</i>
Robber	(noun) <i>someone who steals money or property</i>	'robber' (noun) from 'rob' (verb): <i>take property unlawfully from (a person, or place) by force or threat of force</i>
Hoodlum	<i>a criminal, often a young person, who does violent or illegal things</i>	<i>a hooligan or gangster</i>

A manually compiled concordance of the BNC keywords under study provides a general overview of the natural domain and usage environments of the words. The concordance displays not just the lexical collocates of the keywords, but also other lexical items that furnish a wider view of other contexts where they may be used creatively (see Appendix 3). The BNC shows that all the keywords belong to the general domain of crime. However, a word like 'hoodlum' is used mainly in the domain of politics (e.g. political hoodlum; hoodlums attacking a polling station etc.). The corpus also shows that 'militants' occurs with politics and security terms, but is mainly used in the domain of religion and ethnic/territorial conflicts. The corpus often cites Afghanistan, Palestine and Iran as special places of interest where the word mostly refers. Section 4.2 shows the lexical collocates of the keywords in the NMC.

4.2. Lexical Collocates of Keywords in the NMC

Militants: *creeks, camps, killed, arms, suspected, attacks, attacked, military, weapons, Amnesty, soldiers, Nigerian, leaders, rehabilitation, kidnapped, criminals, security, disarmament, kidnapped, criminals, security, police, hostages, hijacked, fighting, Okah, installations, kidnap, offensive, war, crude, disarm, community, communities, killing, confrontation, arrest, onslaught, sponsors, battle, stormed, arrested, battle, operational, operating, illegal, rampage, criminal, invaded, violence, youth, youths, captured, integration, shoot.*

Kidnappers: *suspected, ransom, demanded, Rivers, police*

Criminals: *militants, amnesty, fighters, freedom, Delta*

Robbers: *armed, suspected*

Hoodlums: no significant lexical collocates

Again, the lexical collocates of keywords would be too many to include in this paper, hence the selection of 'key lexical collocates'

(those that appear more frequently in the corpus) for analysis (see section 4.3).

4.3. Key lexical collocates of Keywords

Militants: *community/communities, confrontation, repentant, disarm/ disarmament, rehabilitation, reintegration.*

Criminals: *militants, amnesty, fighters, freedom*

Robbers: *armed, suspected*

5.1. Contending Communities: Main issues in the crisis

The Wordsmith concordance of 'militants' reveals fourteen instances of 'militants' collocating with 'community/communities', but provides no significant discourse information. Reference is made only to 'militants in the communities' (or community) or 'militants from host communities.' However, in order to understand what 'communities' or 'host communities' refers to, the concordance of 'community/communities' was scanned, resulting in 829 concordance lines.

Collocates of 'community/communities' were also identified as follows: (Oil) producing (70), Delta (51), development (32), Gbaramatu (22), oil bearing (19), Okerenkoko (16), problems (8), impoverished (6), compensation (6), attack (5). Again, in order to identify patterns that may reveal significant 'discourse prosody' (Sinclair, 2005; Baker, 2006),³ some of the collocates with higher frequencies were also scanned. Two of the collocates that are considered most significant for our analysis (and that also help explain the other collocates) are 'oil producing' and 'Gbaramatu' (a kingdom in the ND). ('Oil producing' is the same as 'oil bearing' in the context of the ND situation.) 'Delta', the second most frequent

collocate, generally identifies the militants and the communities in question. Fig. 3 and Fig. 3.1 show the collocates of 'oil producing' and 'Gbaramatu.'

Fig. 3. Concordance of 'oil producing' when it collocates with 'communities'

3 **50 per cent derivation** for the **oil producing** communities.
 4 lking of **10% equity shares** for **oil producing** communities for
 6 **per cent derivation funds** to **oil producing** communities.
 8 ion of **payment of royalties** to **oil-producing** communities in
 11 concede **ten percent equity** to **oil producing** communities in
 12 dustry **Bill for the welfare** of **oil producing** communities. So
 14 tion of **special programmes** for **oil producing** communities in
 16 **opportunities** for indigenes of Ijaw **oil producing** communities in
 19 oteness to **the problems** of the **oil-producing** communities. An
 20 firsthand **the problems** of the **oil-producing** communities.
 21 t steps **to reward** the On-shore **Oil producing** communities for
 23 lwas **an opportunity** for the **oil-producing** communities to
 35 **addressed the need** to involve **all oil producing** communities in
 36 it is **sad that nobody** from the **oil producing** communities in
 40 **little or no consultation** with **oil producing** communities. It
 43 **insensitivity to the plight** of the **oil producing** communities. On
 45 peace process **by developing** the **oil producing** communities. Aw
 46 lled to **the development** of the **oil producing** communities,
 47 oration **for the benefit** of the **oil producing** communities and
 49 rly **packaging the needs** of the **oil-producing** communities to
 50 gave **the royalty rights** to the **oil producing** communities.
 51 ng **the living condition** of the **oil producing** communities.' I
 52 **state of infrastructure** in the **oil-producing** communities, no
 53 ntage of the **just agitation** by **oil producing** communities for

In lines 3, 4, 6, and 8 of the concordance, there is consistent reference to 'derivation', 'equity', 'royalty,' etc., payable to the 'oil producing communities,' which supposedly were not being paid.

This results in the 'just agitation' (line 53), 'the problems' (lines 19 & 20) and 'the plight' of the communities (line 43). Hence, at the heart of the ND crisis is the perceived failure of the FG of Nigeria to recognize the 'rights' and privileges accruing to the 'oil producing communities', and its having failed to do so for such a long time. The amendment of the 1960 Nigerian constitution which gave 50% 'derivation' to producing communities, and the provision of the 1999 constitution which empowers the FG to own the land and all natural resources, reduced the oil communities to 'tenants of the state' (Omoweh, 2006). This according to Omoso (2008) is 'criminal.' The rights of the Delta oil communities to 'equity shares,' 'derivation funds', 'royalties', 'rewards' etc. are patent all throughout the concordance lines. Hence, the press construction of the oil producing communities as 'impoverished', as requiring 'special programmes' (line 14) and 'opportunities' (line 16), and needing assistance and development, is by no means all negative. The 'agitation' for improved living standards is a direct consequence of the current crisis. In addition, a number of intervention strategies have been recommended (including the ratification of the petroleum industry bill); these were hoped to improve the welfare of the people (line 44). Already a 'Bill on the Nigerian Content in the Oil and Gas sector', making it mandatory for all international oil companies operating in the Niger Delta to establish offices in their host communities, is being considered by the Nigerian Legislature. If the Bill is signed into law, the oil companies in the ND will be legally obligated to employ a particular percentage of indigenous youth.

The salient pragmatics of 'oil producing' however has been contested by critics who argue that the ND communities are not to take the petroleum deposits in their region for granted, because they were simply 'lucky' to be endowed by 'nature', and not in any way owing to their own efforts or dint of hard work (Bamaguje 2008).

Fig. 3.1. Concordance of 'Gbaramatu' when it collocates with 'Communities'

1 **the May 13, 2009 JTF attacks** on **Gbaramatu** communities. It was
 2 **mounted blockades** everywhere in the **Gbaramatu** communities. The men
 3 could be **no more attacks** on the **Gbaramatu** communities in Gbaramatu
 4 **deploying the Armed Forces** to the **Gbaramatu** communities without
 5 **court settlement** (111009) The 52 **Gbaramatu** communities of Delta
 7 **defenseless women and children** of **Gbaramatu** community in Delta
 9 ed during **the military raid** of communities in **Gbaramatu** kingdom
 12 at **the continued occupation** of communities in **Gbaramatu** Kingdom
 13 **more attacks** on the Gbaramatu communities in **Gbaramatu** kingdom
 14 tims of **the military attack** on communities in **Gbaramatu** kingdom

The Gbaramatu Kingdom comprises all 52 Gbaramatu swamp communities (line 5) in the Warri South Local Government area of Delta State of about 14 million people. The 'kingdom' was said to be the headquarters of the dreaded 'Camp 5' – a major 'militant' enclave. Another 'militant stronghold' was the Okerenkoko community, also in Gbaramatu. The Federal Government's military Joint Task Force (JTF) attacked these communities beginning May 13th of 2009; during the attack, over 1,500 people were killed and property worth millions of Nigerian naira (NGN) was also destroyed.⁴ 60 of those killed were said to be 'militants' while the rest were civilians, most of whom were women and children. 5,000 others were rendered homeless and evacuated by the local authorities. The concordances of 'Gbaramatu communities' and 'communities in Gbaramatu' reveal significant grammatical patterns that show the nature of the attacks on the communities. The attacks include 'mounted blockades,' (line 2) 'military raid,' (line 9), 'deployment of armed forces' (line 4) and continued 'occupation' (line 12), all of which suggests something in the line of guerrilla warfare. The hostilities represented here, however, are typical of a full-scale war between two opposing nations; thus, the press constructs the situation of a

nation at war against itself. Naturally, too, sympathy is expressed for the women and children who are described as 'defenseless' (line 7). Line 5 highlights a legal battle between the host communities and the FG; the latter had already sued the FG jointly with the Attorney-General of the Federation and the Commander of the JTF, seeking from them a compensation of NGN 100 billion for the displacement, abuse, torture and killing of their co-indigenes (*Daily Trust*, October 11, 2009).

5.1. Activities and Perceived Identities of Militia Groups

Fig. 4. Concordance of 'criminals' when it collocates with militants, amnesty, fighters, freedom

1. that the alleged **militants are criminals** and you don't need
2. Every time the **militants and criminals** successfully strike
3. tackle suspected **militants and criminals** in the area – including
4. attack by **militant youths and criminals**. The NDDC boss answered
5. regarded as **militant activity and criminals** themselves that are
6. perpetrating these acts (**militants/criminals**), they use motorcycles
7. some of **the militants or is it criminals** may be tempted to a
8. and all other atrocities. Only **criminals** take up **amnesty**; re
9. a region. **Amnesty** is meant for **criminals** but **these fighters**
10. **als** but **these fighters** are not **criminals** and they have not d
11. **freedom fighters** and **not common criminals**. There is a reason
12. were **freedom fighters** and **not criminals** as concluded by the
13. y don't need **amnesty**; some are **criminals**. We'll make them ha
14. creeks. 'We are **not militants and criminals** as people say, but
15. not want **Amnesty** as we are **not criminals**. Mr. President we d
16. **amnesty**, or are we **criminals** because we are asking for

The sorted concordance of 'criminals' shown above provides linguistic/discourse evidence of the interchangeable use of 'militants' and 'criminals' in the Nigerian press and often among politicians to

represent the same group of people. Line 3 for example asserts that 'militants are criminals' while the other concordance lines that follow (up to line 6) read 'militant and criminals' or 'militant youths and criminals.' The controversy that has trailed the amnesty granted to the insurgents by the government stems from the interpretation of the actions of the insurgents, by marking their intentions as 'criminal'. In lines 8, 9, 13-18, the insurgents argue that the 'amnesty' merely criminalizes their intentions, hence they initially rejected the programme. While the use of 'criminals' in the concordance lines represents the value judgement of the press and the politicians on the one hand, it also refers to instances where the militia groups denied that they were criminals. This explains why the insurgents preferred to be called 'freedom fighters' (lines 9-12), rather than 'militants' ('these fighters' in lines 9 and 10 refers to the 'freedom fighters'). Their actions are to be interpreted from the literal sense of 'freedom' and 'fighting' ('fighting for freedom'). By the fighters' own understanding, any means/methods applied to achieve 'freedom' in the ND would be legal. Therefore, when 'criminals' collocates with 'militants' in the Nigerian context, it reflects the general idea that the insurgents are criminals, needing amnesty from the government. But the insurgents construct themselves ideologically as 'freedom fighters' who do not need amnesty. According to them, it is the FG that needs 'amnesty' from the people of the ND who have suffered neglect and injustice for many years (*Daily Sun*, June 28, 2009).

Fig. 5. Concordance of 'militants' when it collocates with 'confrontation'

- 8 **militants** signaled the first direct **confrontation** between the Nigeria Army
- 9 heavily **armed fighters** and the **confrontation** resulted in the **sinking**
- 11 of the **Niger Delta**. But direct **confrontation** with the military
- 12 **14 Militants Killed**. A **confrontation** on Sunday night
- 13 be a **fallout** of the military **confrontation** between **the militants**

- 14 noted that though the growing **confrontation** between **the militants**
 19 **death** of **15 militants** during **confrontation** with men of JTF
 20 Musa, denied any military **confrontation** with **the militants**

Scanning the concordance 3-4 words to the right and 3-4 to the left of the node shows that 'confrontation' appears to refer to the actions of the 'militants' exclusively, and this is discursively significant. Even before the invasion of the Gbaramatu communities, there had been a 'shoot at sight' order given to the police against kidnappers and 'militants' and reports of killings of the insurgents by the police had been recurrent. Some of those killings were often attributed to 'cult clashes'. As shown in the concordance above, the press highlights the doggedness of the insurgents from a negative perspective. The 'direct' (line 11) and 'growing' confrontation (line 14) were not generally expected because the 'militants' were originally viewed as the underdogs. And since their confrontation with the JTF was perceived as foolhardy and suicidal, killing the militants and sinking their boats (lines 9, 12 and 19) were excused. As seen from the concordance, the press deliberately plays around this discourse prosody when it consistently portrays the militants as the aggressors and as 'heavily armed fighters' (line 9). Despite the various killings of the militants, the JTF is never constructed as being confrontational, it's either confrontation 'between' the militants or 'militants attacking'; compare the Army Commander's denial (line 20), according to which the military never confronted the militants. Even when referring to the killing of 14-15 militants (lines 12 and 19), the press views these killings as a result of their 'confrontation with men of JTF' (line 19). In most cases, it is the casualties on the side of the military that are given publicity (e.g. 'an oil worker, 8 policemen dead', *this day* 27th January, 2006; 'the missing soldiers are dead', *this day*, 28th May, 2009, '... 6 soldiers were killed', *PM news* 25th Feb. 2009, '... two officers are among the soldiers killed', *Newswatch*, 22nd June, 2009 etc.). While the militia

groups appeared satisfied that their 'impacts' were publicized, the media was actually concealing the much worse atrocities committed by the police and the JTF, thereby creating the impression that the military were only doing their job.

Baker (2006) observes that concordance lines may contain words that do not occur often enough to be considered as collocates, even though such words may contain 'subtle discourse prosodies' or 'resistant discourses' (Baker 2006:86). These phenomena are worth considering because they have the tendency to reproduce 'hegemonic discourse'. The collocations of other related words in the corpus, such as 'kidnappers', 'robbers', and 'hoodlums', though not significant lexically, are analysed with close reference to patterns in the concordance that reveal significant discourses about the assumed identity, activities and armed resistance of the 'militants'.

Fig. 6. Concordance of 'Kidnappers.'

1. ling for **the death penalty** for **kidnappers**. It is indeed true
2. the **jail term of 10 years** for **kidnappers**. The police boss e
3. **10-year jail term** for **kidnappers** is obsolete, says
4. introduced **capital punishment** for kidnappers'. RIVERS S
5. rnor, really I do, but sending kidnappers **to the hangman** will
6. people who raised alarm but the **kidnappers** responded with **gun**
7. tion by **gunmen** suspected to be **kidnappers**, a construction en
8. y the activities of **gunmen and kidnappers**, who targeted oil
9. such as **armed robbers, rapists, kidnappers** seeking for ransom
10. like **armed robbers, rapists and kidnappers** seeking ransom. MEND
11. **armed gunmen**, suspected to be **kidnappers**, intercepted a vessel
12. **N220 million** as ransom to some **kidnappers** to secure the release
13. ion they give **7 million** to the **kidnappers** and pocket the rest
14. them in a gun battle. Kidnappers Demand **N10m** Ransom
15. yet to be released. His kidnappers are asking for **\$10 m (N1 billion)**
16. demand was made in June when **kidnappers** demanded **N700millin**
17. an offer of **N10 million** to the **kidnappers**. On Wednesday 7 Ma

The Wordsmith concordance presents 125 lines with 'kidnappers', that highlight certain patterns revealing three general areas of discursive importance about the kidnappers, namely (i) the appropriate penalty for kidnapping prescribed by the Nigerian law; (ii) the general ideological linking of kidnappers with militants as belonging to the same group of people (see the 17 concordance lines on 'robbers' presented in Fig. 6); and (iii) the ridiculous sums of money demanded by kidnappers that reflect personal interest and often raise questions about the identity of the kidnappers, their intentions and the overall goal of the armed resistance in the ND. In Fig. 5, concordance lines 2 and 3 represent the opinion of the Inspector General of Police, who appealed to the National Assembly to repeal the 10 year jail term prescribed by the Nigerian Constitution. He recommended a stiffer penalty that supported the controversial death penalty for kidnapping being considered by the Rivers State government. In the concordance, the press uses the phrases 'death penalty' (line 1), 'capital punishment', (line 4) and 'the hangman' (line 5) to describe the same process in order to highlight the different attitudes associated with the crime. 'Capital punishment' is a political term that does not mention 'killing' or 'executing'. The legal term 'death penalty' throws some light on the meaning of 'capital punishment'. The media's use of 'hangman' attempts to describe the process/method of killing that is involved. The author of the article 'Before kidnappers are sent to the hangman' (*The Guardian*, April 16, 2007) argued that the killing of kidnappers, as practised in Guatemala or the Philippines had not eradicated kidnapping in those countries and is hardly the best option. In Nigeria, the punishment for kidnapping remains 10 years' imprisonment, which appears to represent the general opinion, whereas the death sentence for kidnapping prescribed by the Rivers State legislature is felt to be too extreme.

In the corpus, 'militants' and 'kidnappers' are generally described as 'gunmen'. In lines 10 and 11 of Fig. 5, they are named 'armed

robbers, rapists and kidnappers'. As already pointed out above, it is quite clear that the construction of the insurgents in these terms is meant to criminalize their intentions, since their methods of resistance constituted illegality. Especially with the involvement of certain other groups or 'cultists' who took advantage of the crisis to wreak havoc on women, children and the elderly, it became extremely difficult to differentiate the 'real' freedom fighters from the 'armed robbers' in question. In the concordance above, it appears quite clear that the demands of the kidnappers for ridiculous sums of money like NGN 220 million, 700 million, 1 billion etc (lines 12, 14-16) reflect the selfish purpose of the kidnappers, and have nothing to do with the ND struggle. Line 13 for instance implies that the so-called 'kidnapping' might actually be a collaborative business between politicians, security agents and the kidnappers themselves, because certain people are accused of 'pocketing' some money derived from the crime. There had also been proof that kidnapping in the region lacked specific targets, as all sorts of people, including politicians, academics, legal practitioners, writers, artistes, etc. were abducted. At the beginning of the crisis, the kidnapping of foreign oil workers was said to serve as a protest, in order to attract the attention of the international community and to demand the release of Asari Dokubo, leader of the NDPVF (Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force), who was charged with treason and jailed by the government in 2005, and later of Henry Okah of MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), who was also detained (for 17 months). Due to the methods of these abductions, the general speculation had been that kidnapping was being used by politicians to settle scores with political rivals, as politicians' elderly parents, wives and small children were abducted at different times. This therefore supports the view that the death penalty implemented by the Rivers State House Assembly may not just be an overreaction, but actually reflects a political battle aimed at eliminating certain political opponents.

Fig. 7. Concordance of 'Robbers'

1. is **also a militant** and **armed robbers** are **now militants**.
2. know whether they are **armed robbers** or **members of militant**
3. **kill them** and **claim they were robbers**. **The militants** tasked
4. o **they allegedly branded armed robbers**. Failure to hand the
5. **clashes, they were never armed robbers**. 'In furtherance the

Of the 36 concordance lines on 'robbers' displayed by Wordsmith, 5 are considered to be of particular discourse significance, as shown in Fig. 7. Line 1 reflects the confusion surrounding the identity of the 'militants' and how such identity is rationally worked out: 'armed robbers' are now 'militants'. Line 2 highlights a speculation among the police, whether certain armed robbers were members of militant groups or not, but generally the two groups were treated the same way, as lines 3 – 5 reveal. It is necessary to point out here that armed robbery had been a perennial social pandemic in Nigeria long before the rise of militancy in the ND. The Nigerian law prescribes the death penalty (by firing squad during the military era and by firing squad or other means in the civilian era) for convicted armed robbers. Generally, they are killed instantly by the police, especially during a shoot-out with security agents. Alleged 'armed robbers' or 'thieves' are also often lynched or burnt alive publicly by a mob, especially in Lagos. Hence, the easiest way to get killed in Nigeria is to be branded 'armed robber' (line 4) and often, innocent people have been killed without recourse to the normal judicial process. Line 3 of the concordance is taken from a context where some insurgents were wondering why the police would 'kill them and claim they were robbers' (as it often happens). In line 4, certain 'militants' are actually killed by the police, who labeled them 'armed robbers'. In line 5, some identified Ijaw youths are likewise killed.

Due to the recurrent killings of innocent people in the name of armed robbery, the 'Joint Revolutionary Council' of the ND, including major militia groups, had recommended the prosecution

of the Rivers State Commissioner of Police. As long as the claimed confusion about robbers and militants existed, one wonders why the police would kill 'the robbers' if they were unsure of the latter's identity. It is therefore clear that as far as the police were concerned, the insurgents and the robbers were the same people and were meted out the same punishment. This also proves that the actual number of the 'militants' killed by security agents either as 'armed robbers' or 'militants' (and usually concealed by the media) is quite enormous. The Nigerian press in the above concordance lines is a bit more neutral however, since the reports merely reflect the actual situation, most of them being literal quotations of the speakers in context.

Fig. 8. Concordance of 'Hoodlums'

1. **vehicles recovered** from **the hoodlums**, according to Ogbaudu
2. seater Mitsubishi L300 bus. **"The hoodlums carried out attacks**
3. useful information about **the hoodlums** who have been **unleashing**
4. people of the state that the **hoodlums terrorising the state**
5. uniform. The intention of **the hoodlums** that **engaged the policemen**
6. **fierce gun battle** between **the hoodlums** and the police. They
7. operation and asked me to **call the hoodlums** to **cancel the meeting**
8. JTF also warns that **the armed hoodlums** would **pay dearly** in
9. started about midnight, when **the hoodlums encountered a patrol**

The activities of the 'hoodlums' evident from the above concordance lines reflect activities usually attributable to the 'militants', such as 'terrorising the state', and being engaged in a 'gun battle', or 'engag[ing] the policemen', etc. This further suggests that the 'hoodlums' in question refer to the militia groups. In other words, the corpus provides sufficient textual evidence that 'militants' and 'hoodlums' are used interchangeably by the Nigerian press. In line 8, the JTF warns that they (the insurgents) would 'pay dearly'—presumably for attacks on its (the JTF's) members. In-

terestingly, (in line 8) a crucial 'meeting' was to be held with the so-called 'hoodlums', which was then called off by the authorities; this again proves that the 'hoodlums' were not irresponsible street urchins, as in the picture which the media had always painted of the insurgents.

The BNC was scanned in order to ascertain native speakers' use of 'hoodlums'; the result revealed that 'hoodlum' is a term that belongs to the domain of crime/lawlessness, and also occurs frequently in the context of politics. Some 'serious' words (e.g. those that often appear in 'hard' news coverage) such as 'kill', 'murder', 'politician', 'Mafia' etc. also co-occur with 'hoodlums' in the BNC. This reveals that a 'hoodlum' in England is hardly the irresponsible, mentally 'low' individual that the term denotes in Nigeria. Hoodlums in Nigeria are the 'area boys' or '*agbero*' (a Yoruba word for motor park touts – street gamblers and drunks who usually live under bridges in Lagos). Generally, this group of people cause trouble in society and are frequently used as political thugs, serving to disrupt and rig elections. Particularly, 'hoodlums', 'miscreants' and the associated word 'thugs' (in the Nigerian context) connotes being 'low' both socially and intellectually. Actions taken by this group of people are generally to be considered as unreasonable, since their perpetrators are incapable of organized rational action (which supports the idea that they are usually armed by politicians to cause trouble). Representing the insurgents as 'hoodlums' implies that they are irresponsible and lack a sense of direction, therefore their so-called 'liberation' or 'freedom fight' is not to be taken seriously by the rational society, since this group is good for nothing – only good for the prison. This kind of labeling obviously contradicts the fact that the 'hoodlums' do hold occasional strategic meetings with security agents, confirming that constructing them negatively in terms of being 'area boys' is a form of character assassination aimed at discrediting their struggle.

5.2. *Actions of the Nigerian Government*

Fig. 9. Concordance of 'Militants' collocating with 'repentant' and 'amnesty'

2 issue of rehabilitation of the **repentant militants**, and reconstruction
 3 sue of the **amnesty** package for **repentant militants** and how
 5 challenge is how to reintegrate the **repentant militants** into the
 6 government **amnesty** programme for **repentant militants**, 'saying
 7 **amnesty** package was meant for **repentant militants** and during
 8 nineteen persons suspected to be **repentant militants** for allegedly
 9 said nefarious activities of the **repentant militants** came to
 10 of the **amnesty** programme, as **repentant militants** would have
 12 implementation of the **amnesty** for **repentant militants**.
 13 applauding the **amnesty** extended to **repentant militants** by the
 15 each other in the delivery of **repentant militants** to Mr. Pr
 18 'General Boyloaf'. The so-called **repentant militants** have already
 19 the symbolic disarmament by the **repentant militants** is ample
 22 caliber of weapons submitted by the **repentant militants**.
 23 that the **amnesty** programme for **repentant militants** in Bayelsa
 25 ng two billion Naira meant for **repentant militants**. He said

Although the word 'repentant' is used in contexts such as law and justice, it occurs more in the context of religion, as a scan of the BNC also shows. Instances in the BNC make reference to God's forgiveness for 'repentant sinners', to 'repentant sons of the church', or to a 'repentant thief', returning what he stole from the mail, etc. In these contexts, 'repentant' implies that someone is sorry for his/her sins and is willing to make amends. This is not different from the traditional understanding/use of 'repentant' or 'repentance' in the Nigerian religious context. In the Nigerian situation, however, the 'militants' have never been sorry for their legitimate demands for socio-economic development, even though they put force behind them, using illegal methods. In the corpus, 'repentant' collocates with 'militants', the latter being viewed as social/political radicals, and

not repentant sinners. Other words that co-occur with 'militants' are 'miscreants' and 'hoodlums' – the latter in Nigerian usage standing for 'irresponsible' or 'illegitimate' persons. Another word that occurs in the same context with 'militants' is 'disgruntled' (connoting an irresponsible person, possibly a 'vagabond').

Since neither the government nor the leading political classes believe in the integrity of the militia groups and their legitimate 'struggle for freedom', the press, in reinforcing this idea (and the leading ideology in which it originates), chooses the vocabulary that best represents the non-legitimacy of the armed resistance. By implication, the 'militants' are sinners needing 'repentance'; consequently, in this context, to resist exploitation and injustice is perceived as a 'sin'. Such an understanding makes the granting of 'amnesty' or state pardon absolutely necessary – amnesty here meaning 'an official order by a government that allows a particular group of prisoners to go free' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English) – but this 'amnesty' was initially rejected by the militia groups on the grounds that they admitted no guilt; according to them, only criminals would need amnesty. An 'amnesty' granted to the insurgents only would reinforce the idea that they are 'criminals' and further necessitate that they disarm. The concordance in Fig. 10 shows that 'amnesty' collocates with 'disarm/disarmament' as well as with 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration'.

Fig. 10. Concordance of 'militants' when it collocates with *disarm/disarmament, rehabilitation, reintegration*

1. Committee on Amnesty and **Disarmament of Militants** in the
2. amnesty programme designed to **disarm** and **rehabilitate militants**
3. Presidential Panel on Amnesty and **Disarmament of Militants**
4. no incentive for **militants to disarm**. Alleged payments to s
5. engagements with Nigerians. The **disarmament of the militants**
6. majority, the symbolic **disarmament by the repentant militants**
7. the **militants** are being asked **to disarm**. He also restated the

8. the Niger Delta **militants to disarm** and embrace the **amnesty**
9. government gave the **militants to disarm**, virtually all the key
10. the **ongoing reintegration and rehabilitation of former militants**
11. slow pace of **reintegrating and rehabilitation of the militants**
12. **orientation, reintegration and rehabilitation of the militants**
13. relocate **ex-militants** from **their rehabilitation** camp at Aluu,
14. iled arms by way of a promised **rehabilitation of the militants**
15. **ex-militants** to go through a **rehabilitation program**, during
16. orting a policy of amnesty and **rehabilitation for the militants**
17. human capacity development and **reintegration for ex-militant**
18. sustainable **rehabilitation and reintegration of the former militants**
19. s of which social and **economic reintegration of ex-militants**

Interestingly, the supposed 'amnesty programme' for the militants was combined with a ceasefire agreement known as 'disarmament'. Subsequently, a 'Committee on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants' was set up by the government to oversee the implementation of the disarmament and 'rehabilitation' of the insurgents. The BNC's top lexical collocates of disarmament are 'nuclear' and 'conference'. Other words are 'treaty', 'agreement' and 'cold war'. In the Nigerian context, 'disarmament' is used as the noun form of 'to disarm'; hence 'disarmament' means 'to disarm the militants'. The BNC's most frequent co-occurrence of 'disarmament' with 'nuclear' (weapons) is completely different from the way the term is used in the Nigerian context, where it is simply used to mean 'taking arms away from the insurgents'. The government appeared not to realize the other heavy implications of the word, such as involving the use of nuclear weapons in a most dangerous situation of the cold war. Again, this may be viewed as a obvious, politically motivated 'escalation' of the ND crisis, which in itself is a matter of internal ethnic resistance and social radicalism.

The representation of the 'militants' in terms of 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration' reverberates the same idea that we saw being propagated above: they were outlaws and hoodlums. As we saw

earlier, 'hoodlum' in the Nigerian context connotes 'disorientation', 'irresponsibility' and in extreme case, 'mental illness'. In the BNC, 'rehabilitation' occurs frequently in the domain of health and medical science, co-occurring with such terms as 'cardiac (arrest)', 'coronary (disease)', 'myocardial infarction', 'centre vs. out-patient', 'disability', etc. Normally, in a group there are only a few cases of members needing rehabilitation. Hence, the use of the terms 'rehabilitation' and 'reintegration' portrayed the insurgents as a group that was totally disoriented from the beginning – people who needed medical care in the first place. Being booked as 'miscreants' and 'hoodlums', their moral and mental sanity were also in doubt. 'Reintegration' further implies that they were out of touch with society and its values, and needed help to be admitted once more as legitimate members of normal society, a process whereby 'they' become part of 'us' (van Dijk, 2005). This is further instantiated by the militants being referred to as 'former' and 'ex', which is based on the presumption that they had accepted the terms of the government's amnesty and rehabilitation programme. By September, 2009, about 2,000 'militants' were reported to have 'surrendered' their arms to the JTF, with mounds of arms and ammunition being on display in Port Harcourt. Unfortunately, MEND announced the expiration of the ceasefire agreement in January 2010, following what they characterized as the government's sluggishness in handling the amnesty programme.

6. *Conclusion*

Lexical items have semantic connotations as well as idealised social behaviour associated with them; some of these associations are highly impressionistic and often negative, while others are positive. It is therefore not accidental that the press chooses particular forms of vocabulary (as we have seen in the above analyses) to describe

the insurgents. The ideological nature of these labels is that they express value judgements, especially of the government and of attitudes towards the ND situation that the public is (often indirectly) expected to exhibit. The above analyses show that the ideological strategy mainly employed by the Nigerian government and the media consists in constructing the oppressed as the oppressors. In our case, this is done by applying strongly denotative and connotative labels to the militia groups, thereby sorting them into certain rigid social categories that determine how the oppressor members of society understand and judge the oppressed members' actions. This clearly illustrates van Dijk's concepts of 'Us' (the FG, the press and some members of the public) vs. 'Them' (the militia groups and the ND people); the resulting polarization – 'we are good,' and 'they are bad' – stands uncontradicted. Labels like 'militants,' 'kidnappers,' and 'armed robbers' associate the oppressed with violence; consequently, they are viewed by some members of the public as a violent group (Asakitikpi, 2007). This kind of labeling also tends to legitimize killing the 'freedom fighters' by calling them 'armed robbers', 'militants' or 'terrorists.' Lexical items like 'criminals' and 'hoodlums' also portray them not only as a lawless, criminal group but also as social outcasts, drunks and street urchins whose struggle is not to be taken seriously. In all this, the fear persists that the crisis in the Niger Delta may never end until full justice is done: namely, a justice which reflects itself in a tangible development of social infrastructure, employment, and improved standards of living for the people of the region.

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Notes

1. The 'militants' call themselves (and wish to be referred to as) 'freedom fighters', since they are engaged in an armed struggle for the liberation of their people. The phrase 'freedom fighters' occurs fifty-six (56) times in the corpus.
2. Wordsmith (Mike Scott, 2010, version 5.0) has been used as software tool for the concordance / collocation analysis.
3. Discourse prosodies are those properties of meaning that reflect speaker's attitude and discourse function.
4. 1 USD = 150 NGN; 1 NGN = USD 0.0066 (September, 2010)

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Appendix 1

Table 1. Number of texts and words in the corpus and the percentage of their occurrences

Topics	No. of texts	No. of words	Percentage
1. Militancy Activities	166	121,621	24%
2. FG military intervention and the activities of the JTF	57	50,462	10%
3. Development projects and the activities of the NDDC	43	31,833	6.0%
4. Actions of the NNPC and oil exploration in Nigeria	84	58,156	11%
5. FG's Amnesty Program for Militants	91	83,743	16%
6. General	196	171,629	33%
TOTAL	637	517,444	

Appendix 2

Synonyms of militant, kidnapper, criminal, robber, and hoodlum obtained from a thesaurus

Militant (def. person who fights, is aggressive): *activist, belligerent, combatant, demonstrator, fighter, objector, partisan, protester, rioter, warrior*. **Kidnapper** (def. abductor): *carjacker, hijacker, shanghaier*. **Criminal** (def. person who breaks the law): *bad actor, black marketeer, blackmailer, con, convict, crook, culprit, delinquent, desperado, deuce, evildoer, ex-con, felon, fugitive, gangster, guerilla, , hood, hoodlum, hooligan, hustler,*

inside person, jailbird, lawbreaker, malefactor, mobster, mug, offender, outlaw, racketeer, repeater, scofflaw, sinner, slippery eel, thug, transgressor, trespasser, wrongdoer, yardbird.
Robber (def. person who steals): *bandit, brigand, buccaneer, burglar, cards harper, cat burglar, cattle thief, chiseler, con artist, corsair, crook, desperado, despoiler, fence, forager, fraud, grafter, hijacker, holdup artist, housebreaker, looter, marauder, mugger, operator, pickpocket, pilferer, pillager, pirate, plunderer, prowler, raider, rustler, safecracker, sand-bagger, second-story operator, shoplifter, stealer, stickup, swindler, thief, thug.* **Hoodlum** (def. crook): *bully, criminal, delinquent, gangster, goon, gorilla, hooligan, larrikin, mobster, punk, rowdy, ruffian, thug*

Appendix 3

Militants: *onslaught, conference, hiring, appealed, guns, swords, nightmare, region, Islamic, vulnerable, religious, Afghanistan, Sikh, terrorists, brothers, demanded, killed, diplomat, ambitions, piety, release, party, policemen, destroyed, mosque, Hindu, Muslim, secessionist, plagued, India, aggressive, Palestine, liberation, dominated, political, blustering, crossfire, independent, Islamic, Front, crackdown, foreigners, zones, ethnic, racial, escorts, insurgency, party, veto, anarchist, repression, Iran, severe, conflicts, strikes, labelled, communists, imprison, totalitarian, organizes, labour, death, security, weapon, police, concession, negotiations, agreement, surrender, stolen, extremists, Jews, allegiance, demonstrations, killing, bloodshed, shootout, troops, Middle East etc.*

Kidnappers: *ransom, baby, claiming, liberation, demanded, release, imprisoned, militants, armed, hostages, hideout, killed, night, row, daylight, identify, discover, concern, paid, unspecified, handover, dead, lost, information, package, granting, financial, reward, demand, arrest, secrecy, important, help, condition, arranged, route, broken, terrified, message, coded, offensive, worth, government, sequence, want, money, surrendered, talk, contact, document, deadline, kill, job, Cable News Network, wrong, paying, released, death, abducted, complying, afford, lying, authorities, demand, publicly, letter, fake etc.*

Criminals: *dangerous, lose, society, prison, police, justice, released, activities, working knowledge, deployment, gouger, trouble, potential, war, fight, history, recklessness, scattering clues, authority, exploits, arrest, fugitives, armed, crime, trapped, underworld, pickpockets, burglars, safe-breakers, prostitutes, destroy, innocence, government, stigmatized, unconvicted, commit, profit, questioned, cruel etc.*

Robbers: *police, criminals, pursue; cops, shot, dead, everywhere, intelligence, systems, professional, violent, gang, bank, hide, detected, terrified, guard, stealing, cash, foil, fled, armed, hijacked, officers, houses, street, cutthroat, bandits, beat-up, rapists, murderers, drug dealers, lewd, disorderly, lawless, thieves, Moss-troopers, broken, steal, tomb, caught, convicted, red-handed, scene, cars, stole, jewellery, damaged, masked, ransacked, home,*

thousand pounds, million pounds, escaped, flee, shoot, injured, got away, knife, raid, captured, fired, shop, gun, jewels, etc.

Hoodlums: *killed, miserable, policemen, escaping, reform, drunken, thieving, murder, experience, politicians, journalists, shot, strangled, Mafia, ranks, hired, parties, arms, election, polling booths, judges, gangster, killers, vicious, slums, cocaine, terrorists, bombers, murderers, equipped, underlings, silly uniforms, ready to die, community, crash, street, machine gun, chase, police, knife-wielding, crooked cops, weapons, shot dead etc.*