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CONTESTED PATRIMONY: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF GUYANA'S NEWSPAPER
FRAMING OF OIL DISCOVERIES, JOURNALISTIC CHALLENGES NAVIGATING THE
SECTOR AND STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON MEDIA REPRESENTATION

by

CAROLYN WALCOTT

Under the Direction of Patricia Davis, PhD

ABSTRACT

This study is grounded in framing theory and combines thematic and interview analyses to explore how Guyana's four dailies - *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* - framed Exxon Mobil's oil discoveries beginning in 2015 through December 2019. Six key themes-economic, socioeconomic, legal, political, environment and sovereignty, emerged across news texts, columns and letters to the editor. The coalescence of economic, legal and governance themes were particularly prominent as journalists framed the oil discoveries as both a panacea for Guyana's economic transformation and its potential plight based on government's 2016 Petroleum Agreement. Notwithstanding the low coverage of environmental

issues as part of the critical optic of oil exploration, Guyanese journalists are acutely aware of their role in ensuring government and the oil corporations are held accountable. Columnists and letter writers, mainly across the three private dailies, also challenged the legal framework and political governance of the oil contract by repetitively utilizing the attribution of responsibility frame to blame the political administration for its mismanagement of the oil sector. Thus, news coverage and commentary on the oil discoveries converged to establish an engaged public sphere in which the state and its representatives were placed on trial for apparently relinquishing Guyana's oil wealth to Exxon.

Through in-depth field interviews, Guyanese journalists and editors revealed that they are stymied by a lack of training and access to key sources and informants including state and oil company officials. Concomitantly, state officials also interviewed for this study, perceived the private dailies as agenda-driven. These realities, combined with the neoliberal ethos of newspapers and partisanship, conspire against effective journalism and public information on the oil discoveries. They also create the necessity for deliberate media training and inclusion of journalists to better interpret and communicate the state's development agenda to citizens. This study recommends increased focus on the coverage of environmental and ecological issues, holding government accountable for transparency in the management of the oil sector, and periodic training of journalists who cover this new sector.

This study represents the nucleus of future studies on Guyana's ongoing oil development as a new petroleum producer.

INDEX WORDS: Framing, Guyana, Exxon, Newspapers, Oil, Reporting

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CAROLYN WALCOTT

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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Contested Patrimony: A Thematic Analysis of Guyana's Newspaper Framing of Oil Discoveries,
Journalistic Challenges Navigating the Sector and Stakeholders' Perspectives on Media
Representation

by

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August 2020

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Carl and Bernadette Beresford, who supported me immeasurably as I traveled to completion. I'm gratified that I bring you a great sense of pride. To my husband, Brian, who coined the phrase *please help daddy* (Ph.D.) and my children, Jeremy and Jenica, you fueled my drive to reach the finish line. I also dedicate this dissertation to every Guyanese journalist committed to holding all oil stakeholders accountable, and to the ideals of objectivity, transparency, accountability in ensuring that Guyanese benefit equitably from the nation's oil resources.

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The completion of this dissertation would be impossible without the guidance of my four committee members and key allies. I'm especially indebted to my chair, Dr Patricia G Davis for her gentle guidance and unwavering commitment to ensuring that my work was refined. Your pruning and suggestions for revision contributed to a deeper level of critical thinking and improvement beyond my contemplation. Thank you for taking on the task. I'm delighted to have the wisdom of Dr Carrie Freeman as part of my committee. As an environmental advocate, you helped me to grasp the significance of my work to the wider conversation on fossil fuels and environmental damage which remains largely obscured as developing nations bask in the economics of oil discoveries. I shall remain watchful.

I'm extremely grateful to Dr Tillman Russell for his willingness to engage in many conversations on my theoretical direction and progress. Your input, availability and encouragement to keep going even as the COVID-19 crisis hit were motivating. To Dr Uche Onyebadi, my external committee member, thank you for graciously agreeing to join the GSU team and being part of my journey. Your early feedback on my proposal and admonition to look beyond the euphoria of the oil discoveries helped to ground this study. I highly value your input.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		V
LIST OF TABLES		XII
LIST OF FIGURES		XIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		XIV
1 INTRODUCTION		1
1.1 Purpose of the Study		8
1.2 Scope of the Study		10
1.3 Significance of the Study		11
1.4 Organization of the Dissertation		13
1.5 Researcher’s Standpoint		14
1.6 Summary		15
2: LITERATURE REVIEW		16
2.1 Introduction		16
2.1.1 <i>Guyana: Colonization, Newspapers and Nationhood</i>		17
2.1.2 <i>From Socialism to and Nationhood Neoliberalism: Newspaper Expansion and Media Control</i>		23
2.1.3 <i>Media, Communication and National Development</i>		30
2.1.4 <i>Oil Exploration and Discoveries in Guyana</i>		37

2.1.5	<i>Oil's Sociopolitical, Economic and Environmental Contours: A review of related literature</i>	41
2.2	The Framing Perspective	50
2.3	Framing building and frame setting	57
2.4	Media Framing of Oil Exploration in the Developed World	60
2.5	Framing of Oil Exploration in the Developing World	64
2.6	Conceptual and Operational Definitions	70
2.7	Summary	72
3	METHODOLOGY	72
3.1	Introduction	72
3.2	Theoretical link to Research Questions	74
3.3	Data collection and Procedures	77
3.3.1.	<i>Newspaper Texts</i>	77
3.3.2.	<i>Population and Sample</i>	79
3.3.3.	<i>Interview Data</i>	81
3.3.4	<i>Identification and recruitment of participants</i>	82
3.4	Data Analysis	84
3.4.1	<i>Newspapers</i>	84
3.4.2	<i>Interviews</i>	88
3.4.3	<i>Confidentiality and Anonymity</i>	91

3.5	Conclusion.....	91
4	ANALYSIS: NEWS STORIES.....	92
4.1	Introduction.....	92
4.2	The Economic Theme	93
4.3	The Socioeconomic Theme	98
4.4	The Legal/Regulatory Theme.....	100
4.5	The Politics/Governance Theme	103
4.6	The Environment Theme.....	105
4.7	The Sovereignty Theme	106
4.8	Summary	108
5	ANALYSIS: COLUMNS.....	109
5.1	Introduction	109
5.2	<i>Column 1: Oil, Gas and You</i>	111
5.2.1	<i>The Economic Theme</i>	112
5.2.2	<i>The Socioeconomic Theme</i>	113
5.2.3	<i>The Environment Theme</i>	115
5.2.4	<i>The Geopolitical-Economic Theme</i>	116
5.2.5	<i>The Legal/Regulatory Theme</i>	117
5.3	Column 2: The Road to First Oil.....	117
5.3.1	<i>The Legal/Regulatory Theme</i>	118

5.3.2	<i>Political and Economic themes</i>	119
5.3.3	<i>The Environment Theme: Missing Legislation</i>	121
5.3.4	<i>Legislative/Regulatory Theme</i>	122
5.3.5	<i>The Socioeconomic-Political Theme</i>	123
5.3.6	<i>The Political Theme</i>	125
5.4	Column 3: Straight Talk	126
5.4.1	<i>Legal and Political Themes</i>	126
5.4.2	<i>The Political Theme</i>	128
5.4.3	<i>Economic and Political Themes</i>	128
5.4.4	<i>Legal/Regulatory Theme</i>	130
5.4.5	<i>The Legal and Socioeconomic Theme</i>	130
5.4.6	<i>Economic and Socioeconomic Themes</i>	131
5.4.7	<i>The Geotechnical- Economic Theme</i>	132
5.4.8	<i>The Environment Theme</i>	133
5.5	Column 4: Eye on Guyana	134
5.5.1	<i>The Legislative Theme</i>	134
5.5.2	<i>The Recolonization Theme</i>	135
5.5.3	<i>The Political Theme</i>	137
5.5.4	<i>The Socioeconomic Theme</i>	140
5.6.	Frames across the Columns	142

5.7	Departures from Existing News Frames	143
5.8	Summary	144
6	ANALYSIS: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR	145
6.1	Introduction	145
6.1.2	<i>The Economic Theme</i>	<i>146</i>
6.1.3	<i>The Socioeconomic Theme</i>	<i>150</i>
6.1.4	<i>The Legal/Regulatory Theme</i>	<i>153</i>
6.1.5	<i>The Political/Governance Theme</i>	<i>156</i>
6.1.6	<i>The Environment Theme</i>	<i>163</i>
6.1.7	<i>The Sovereignty Theme</i>	<i>165</i>
6.2	Frame-setting.....	166
6.3	Summary	169
7	ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS.....	170
7.1	Introduction	170
7.1.2	<i>News production and Reporting Challenges of Journalists and Editors</i>	<i>171</i>
7.2	Specific challenges journalists face in their working relationship with other oil- sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters.....	182
7.2.1	<i>Access to Information and Informants.....</i>	<i>182</i>
7.2.2	<i>State officials' perception of media misrepresentation.....</i>	<i>188</i>
7.2.3	<i>Less Visible Themes: Threats to the Environment</i>	<i>192</i>

7.2.4	<i>Poor Information and Communication</i>	194
7.3	Summary	195
8.	DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	196
8.1	Introduction	196
8.1.1	<i>News themes: Conceptual and Theoretical Linkages</i>	198
8.1.2	<i>Frames of Columns and Consistency with News Themes</i>	206
8.1.3	<i>Letters to the Editor: Frame-setting</i>	210
8.1.4	<i>Journalistic Challenges: Internal and External pressures</i>	215
9.	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	222
9.1	Introduction	222
9.2	New themes across the four dailies	223
9.3	Framing by columnists	226
9.4	Frame-building across letters to the editor	229
9.5	Journalistic Challenges	230
9.6	Implications for Media Pedagogy and Performance	234
9.7	Future Studies	235
	REFERENCES	236
	APPENDIX	256
	Appendix A	256

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Pre and post-colonial special interest newspapers	19
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Exxon Mobil oil well discoveries, 2015-2019	38
Figure 2 An Integrated process model of framing (de Vreese, 2005, p.52).	58
Figure 3 Oil discoveries from 2015-2019.....	79
Figure 4 The news production cycle of challenges.....	89
Figure 5 Guyana's existential newspaper integrated framing model.....	220
Figure 6 Capacity Building Model for Communicating Oil as National Development	221

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CARICOM- Caribbean Community

CNOOC-China National Offshore Oil Corporation

GC-Guyana Chronicle

GoG-Government of Guyana

GT-Guyana Times

KN-Kaieteur News

OAS-Organization of American States

SN-Stabroek News

1 INTRODUCTION

On May 20, 2015, ExxonMobil, one of the world's leading petroleum corporations, announced its first oil well discovery off the shore of Guyana. The promise of wealth for the small South American country, populated by less than one million people, quickly punctuated news headlines and stories within the weeks, months and early years following the first and subsequent discoveries. "ExxonMobil's second well offshore Guyana confirms world-class oil discovery" (*Kaieteur News* headline, 1 July 2016), read one headline. By December 2019, Exxon confirmed the discovery of 15 oil wells, thus creating growing enthusiasm particularly among state officials. Guyana's Director in the Department of Energy, Dr Mark Bynoe affirmed that the discoveries have "the potential to advance the country's economy and propel it towards impactful and sustained development" (*Guyana Chronicle*, 16 Sept, 2019, para 2), while Guyana's President, David Granger declared the arrival of Guyana's "Decade of Development" (*Guyana Chronicle*, 25 Aug 2019, para 1).

Notwithstanding the euphoria, economic and socioeconomic frames elevated by the private news dailies in particular suggested that the discoveries paved the way for "poverty alleviation projects and infrastructure developments previously beyond the reach of available finances" (*Stabroek News*, 15 August, 2015, para 1). Within stories, counter frames also magnified the view that "oil is no guarantee of economic well-being" (*Stabroek News*, 15 August 2015, para 2). News frames also suggested that the 2016 Petroleum Agreementⁱ represented an "unconscionable contract's plunder and robbery of our oil" (*Kaieteur News*, 18 August, 2019, para 1), based on the volume of the discoveries which one analyst described as "the slavish whip of the 2% royalty" (*Kaieteur News*, 18 August 2019, para 2). Newspaper coverage of the oil discoveries between 2015 and 2019 also amplified the perspectives of columnists and opinion

letters to the editor as part of an actively engaged public sphere. The embeddedness of the economic, legal/regulatory and political/governance themes were especially evident as contributors underscored the perceived impact of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement on Guyana's economy and the management of the oil resources. While the state newspaper framed the oil discoveries as a panacea for Guyana's economic development, the private dailies repetitively elevated governance as inherently problematic. The notion of oil as both a blessing and a curse also resonated. One columnist stated, "There is nothing transparent and equitable about hiding this Agreement and the people's US\$18 million from them. Such behavior by the members of Team Granger more aptly resembles hypocrisy, deceit and executive "cockishness" of the lowest class (*Straight Talk*, December 29, 2017, para 3).

In response to the repetitive politicization of the oil discoveries, another columnist implied that Guyana's political divisions fostered plunder as he stated, "A divided nation opens itself for exploitation by the ethnic entrepreneurs and foreign forces. Exxon and others continue their focused determination to benefit/cash-in on our resources" (*Eye on Guyana*, June 2018, para 5, 7). Like columnists, public opinion letter writers also drew salience to the sovereignty theme with implicit reference to the resource curse by stating, "Though a potential blessing for the country and peoples of Guyana, can and possibly be a curse for us due to the overreaching hand of the American company, ExxonMobil, and our gross lack of experience in oil, period" (*KN*, 18 November 2019, para 1). Another letter writer described the 2016 Agreement as "the worst contract ever agreed upon in the annals of the world" (*KN*, 29 January 2018, para 1). The legal/regulatory and political/governance themes also intersected to form the assertion that the coalition government has failed, and "should never be re-elected" (*GT*, 24 August 2019, para 1). Competing political frames also revealed public opinion perspectives on political leadership as

one writer opines that “Jagdeo [the political opposition leader] is desperate, and with every new oil find, his craving for power and his desperation intensifies” (*GC*, 28 August 2019, para 1, 2).

As I read the unfolding narratives about Guyana’s transition from poverty to wealth, I pondered the prospects of the good life promised to all Guyanese. The arguments presented by columnists and letter writers appeared to question the fair and equitable sharing of Guyana’s inheritance or patrimony, and transparency in doing so, in light of the subterfuge surrounding the Exxon-Mobil contract. I also contemplated the political ramifications of the economics of oil in the country that had already experienced significant polarization at the expense of its citizens. I questioned whether Guyana was, in fact, on the cusp of wealth or whether its oil resources were about to be ravished once more, leaving citizens out of the development. I also considered the experiences of other oil producing developing countries that succumbed to the resource curse and the Dutch disease that have come to be associated with oil wealth. Moreover, it dawned on me that the rhetoric of wealth across headlines and news stories overshadowed the coverage of the environmental effects of a potential oil spill on human life and ecosystems. I therefore moved a step closer to observe how the print media articulated the development for the people. This gaze was particularly necessary as Guyana embraces a neoliberal ethos with the presence of a major transnational oil corporation, Exxon Mobil, which is widely known for securing US economic interests. Aligned to those interests are commodification and financialization, two of the major pillars of neoliberalism that has steadily concentrated on the exploitation of natural resources (Harvey, 2005). The news coverage of how Guyana’s oil discoveries are managed from the context of national development versus private economic expansion therefore stimulated much of my interest in this study.

In this dissertation, I assert that the framing of Guyana's oil discoveries by the four daily newspapers, the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times*, is punctuated mainly by economic, political, and legal themes notwithstanding the presence of socioeconomic, environment and sovereignty themes. The economic, political and legal themes establish salience of the value of the oil discoveries, the legal and regulatory regime and governance of the oil resources. Two major issues that appear repetitively across news, columns and letters to the editor are the 2016 Petroleum Agreement and the US\$18M signing bonus.

Importantly, the themes also reflect the embeddedness of internal editorial policies, media partisanship and newspapers' economic interests. In addition, the themes magnify shifts in the global media ecology where profits are often privileged over people as journalists adapt to the neoliberal practices within their sphere. As Phelan (2014) has argued, journalists function within a habitus or environment imposed by internal power structures which are often influenced by external political and economic considerations. Thus, Guyana's newspaper journalists and editors subscribe to the economic interests of their publishers based on a competitive market place where sales influence media slant. Discernable media partisanship is also a facet of newspaper coverage of the oil discoveries, distinguishing state and private interests among publishers.

While the state-owned *Guyana Chronicle* has historically distinguished itself as a pro-government newspaper, media liberalization in Guyana during the 1980s has resulted in competing economic interests among the private dailies. In the process, economics have become conflated with political loyalties. Although some editors have disavowed political and economic biases by claiming that their role as gatekeepers remain stable, this study also recognizes that the dilemma faced by the daily newspapers in upholding democratic values such as gatekeeping and

government accountability is not unique to Guyana. Media partisanship has impacted media professionalism globally based on increasing media-political coalescence (McChesney, 2001).

Concurrently, news frames reflect political and journalistic orientations based on editorial mandates. News frames also provide an interpretive scheme for public understanding and expression. Like news frames, special columns reveal predominantly political and economic themes expressed through concerns regarding the state's management of the oil revenues. In addition to serving a gate-keeping function, columnists' use of framing can be viewed within the theoretical perspective that finds its roots in political communication scholarship. Entman (2003) defines framing as the deliberate centering of text so as to make a piece of information noticeable. As newsmakers who help to construct social reality, journalists build frames that are largely influenced by internal factors, such as editorial policies, and external factors (de Vreese, 2005). Whether frame building points audiences to general or specific issues, news texts ultimately influence the cognition of audiences (De Vreese, 2005). I therefore argue that the internal editorial policies of Guyana's daily newspapers impact frame-building, while internal political leaning and external political influences tied to funding influence coverage of the oil discoveries and frame-setting.

Notwithstanding the overemphasis on the economics of oil and the minimal inclusion of the environmental impact, there are also noticeable differences in the tone of coverage among the state and private newspapers. Explanations for these distinctions reside in the historical media partisanship of Guyana's state newspaper, and the evolving economic interests of private dailies. In addition, the novelty of the oil and gas sector creates an even greater challenge for journalists as they struggle to understand a complex sector while straddling multiple beats. Such challenges are further compounded by the lack of a communication strategy led by the state and grounded

on the paradigm of development communication that deliberately engages all stakeholders--- media, state and non-state actors--to better articulate the oil discoveries and their implications for Guyanese. Existing studies underscore the significance of capacity building for journalists on which I ground my argument that a collaborative interdependent relationship between journalists and key stakeholders is necessary to effectively communicate Guyana's transition to an oil economy to the public. Slim (1995) posits that development is "about change... change for the better" (p. 143) not necessarily confined to economic considerations. Whether such change invites us to consider the overall wellbeing of citizens, the role of communicating change largely resides with the media in collaboration with policy makers. Concomitantly, Servaes (2013) underscores the importance of media development to traditional communication intervention strategies, while Kakonage (2013) asserts that media are critical to advancing the development goals of a state. Scott (2014) further suggests that media development should be considered in the context of communicative process associated with social change, institutional capacity building to promote "plurality, independence, professionalism, economic sustainability and media literacy, and "media representations of development" (p.4). It therefore stands to reason that media development should coincide with communicating oil as a national development.

By incorporating the experiences of journalists and editors and their interactions with key stakeholders to report on the oil discoveries, this dissertation extends the existing work on framing. It builds on previous studies that have explored how frames function within news texts and letters to the editor by incorporating columns and interviews as critical dimensions. While scholars have conducted extensive inquiry on news framing, few studies have attempted to explore how frames function within news, opinion columns and letters to the editor on a single issue. Da Silva (2012) underscores the value of letters to the editor as a significant forum for

public debate. In congruence, Perkins (2015) and Bowe and Hoewe (2016) illustrate the significance of linguistic devices transported via opinion letters to support particular positions in the public sphere.

In exploring frames amplified in letters to the editors in the Florida Times-Union daily newspaper in 2007 and 2013 around the issue of confederacy, Perkins (2016) observed that letter writers illustrated their support and opposition for particular issues distinguishable through their choice of adjectives. Similarities among letter writers' articulated language use also illustrated that positive and negative frames evolve from letters on a single issue even within the same publication (Perkins, 2016).

Similar studies grounded on morality also reveal variances among letter writers based on news coverage. For instance, Bowe and Hoewe (2016) highlight the salience of word choice among letters to openly convey their stance while transporting moral frames on a single issue. Both studies reveal the importance of discerning public opinion and understanding of the oil discoveries through the language of letter writers. At the same time, linguistic devices within letters reveal whether frames are congruent with news or offer completely divergent views.

Like Perkins (2015) and Bowe and Hoewe (2016), other scholars such as Cooper and Pease (2009) and Soo-Kwang and Hudson (2017) illustrate the limited studies that have attempted to explore how news frames extend outward to influence public opinion by revealing congruence or divergence on a single issue. In addition, the studies cited do not holistically account for frame building as a feature of news, columns and letters to the editors for a simultaneous period of coverage of a single issue across different dailies. They also offer an understanding of frames situated in US (western) contexts to the exclusion of a greater appreciation of framing studies in other global media settings. To address these limitations, this

study extends the scholarly tradition of framing studies to Guyana, a country where media studies remain relatively underexplored.

This chapter introduces the dissertation. First, it presents the purpose of the study and research questions and then provides the significance of the study. The chapter then provides a brief overview of Guyana's socioeconomic and political history and the role of the print media in articulating Guyana's national development priorities. The chapter also highlights the author's standpoint and concludes with a synopsis of the organization of the study.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Following the first announcement of oil discovery in Guyana in May 2015 and subsequent discoveries, Guyana's four daily newspapers have functioned as major sources of education and information for readers. News, special columns and public opinion letters to the editor are packaged daily by journalists, specialists and lay citizens, respectively, to reveal a separate yet interdependent discourse on the oil discoveries. The purpose of this dissertation is four-fold. First, it seeks to discover the salient themes accentuated within news stories to understand what news narratives are constructed around the oil discoveries among each of the daily newspapers. The thematic analysis of news texts is also aimed at discovering similarities and/or differences within the existing theoretical debate on oil and its economic antecedents in developing countries.

The second purpose of this dissertation is to discover how columnists, as media contributors, have framed the oil discoveries via their analyses. Notably, special columns are a feature of Guyana's four daily newspapers. Following the oil discovery, columnists have provided readers with political, social and economic forecasts on Guyana's future as an oil producer. A thematic analysis of opinion letters is also aimed at discovering the level of public

understanding of the oil discovery based on exposure to existing news frames. The third purpose of this dissertation is to discover the salient frames within letters to the editor from the public engaged in the discourse on oil discovery. Conceptually, existing frames on oil as a resource curse has emerged within scholarship particularly, that centered on oil producing, developing nations. Moreover, public attention to media coverage and opinion letters on oil discovery in Guyana position citizens prominently in framing the issue.

The fourth purpose of this dissertation is to understand the challenges of newspaper journalists and their editors, as well as the perceptions of other key stakeholders in communicating the oil discoveries via the dailies. Another area of concern is journalistic constraints to media coverage, including institutional norms, lack of access to information and training, among others. In national development projects, the absence of information and a development communication agenda also undermine effective coverage, public information and participation in national development. Over the years, scholars in development communication including Servaes (2009), Melkote and Steeves (2015), and John and Etika (2019) have underscored the value of communication for good governance and sustainable development in developing countries. Understanding the role of journalists in communicating a national development such as oil is therefore critical to this project to identify existing gaps. In view of the foregoing objectives, this dissertation explores the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the major themes, similarities and differences accentuated across newspaper reports of the Guyana Chronicle, Stabroek News, Kaieteur News and Guyana Times in the wake of the initial oil discovery and subsequent discoveries between May 2015 and December 2019?

RQ2. What are the themes highlighted across special columns in the four daily newspapers? How do columnists frame the oil discoveries? Are there departures from existing news frames?

RQ3. What are the major themes within public opinion letters in the four daily newspapers? Do the themes reflect frame-setting in the discourse on the oil discoveries?

RQ4a. What were the challenges faced by journalists and editors of the four daily newspapers in news production and reporting the discovery of oil in Guyana?

RQ4b. What specific challenges did journalists face in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters?

1.2 Scope of the Study

Oil discovery and exploration in Guyana has garnered the attention of a range of media across Guyana, including state and private establishments that operate print and electronic news outlets. There is also active online debate on the issues surrounding the discovery on sites hosted by both mainstream media entities and social media platforms. However, this study is limited to the coverage provided by the four daily newspapers of Guyana, namely Guyana Chronicle, Guyana Times, Stabroek News and Kaieteur News over the period May 2015 to December 2019. I utilize this time range to fully satisfy my universe of content based on increased oil discoveries particularly between 2017 and 2019. Thematic analyses are confined to texts culled from news, special columns and letters to the editor consistent with the universe of data selected for this study. Interviews are also restricted to newspaper journalists of the four daily newspapers assigned to the oil and gas beat, state officials directly responsible for the sector and non-state actors who are engaged in the development.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Scholars have studied media framing of oil discovery and exploration from predominantly western contexts with focus on oil-producing countries such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Within the scholarship, frames that accentuate the environmental effects of fracking and shale oil and gas exploration are prominent (Metze & Dodge, 2016; Audette-Longo, 2018; Piotrowski, 2013; Beck, 2014; Hedding, 2017; Papineau & Deacon, 2017; Siakwah, 2017). In addition, economic and political frames feature significantly within textual and content analyses of news texts. In the developing world, extant literature on oil discovery has primarily utilized economic theory to highlight the socioeconomic experiences of countries such as Nigeria and Ghana. Oil discovery and exploration are also often discussed in the context of oil as a resource curse and source of the Dutch disease effect (Jack et al, 2016; Phillips, Hailwood & Brooks, 2016; Fasanya, Onakoya, & Adabanija, 2013). Very few scholars have attempted comparative analyses of newspaper framing with an optic on environmental effects of oil extraction, apart from Behrman et al (2012) who compare Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda news texts. While this dissertation acknowledges the importance of previous studies that highlight economic, political and environmental frames in both the developed and developing world, it introduces Guyana as a distinct case study. According to the World Bank 2014 Development Report, Guyana's GDP per capita was US\$3,410, thus positioning the country as one of the poorest in the western hemisphere. Guyana's transition to an oil economy therefore creates equal national interest for citizens and political leaders alike. The fact that Exxon Mobil announced its first oil discovery in 2015 within days of the election of a new coalition administration creates even keener interest in news coverage.

Guyana's ethnically diverse pluralistic society also establishes the framework for exploring implicit and explicit political iterations on the governance of the oil resources via news frames, columns and letters to the editor simultaneously. In addition, this dissertation extends the scholarship on framing beyond news texts. By exploring news, special columns and opinion letters on a single issue-oil discovery- from four distinct daily newspapers, this study fills a critical gap in comparative framing studies. It assembles texts as critical information and conversations around a single issue to determine the salience each newspaper has assigned to the oil discoveries.

Apart from thematic analyses, this dissertation incorporates the experiences and perspectives of journalists and editors to ascertain how they configure themselves in the coverage, existing constraints, and factors that motivate their particular frames. These perspectives are critical as they contribute to better understanding how the frames have emerged over time and provide deeper analytical insights. Given the differences in state-private newspaper orientation, this segment of the study is also critical for comparing/contrasting analytically how and why coverage differs based on the articulated positions of reporters and editors.

Finally, this dissertation includes perspectives of other key stakeholders, including state and non-state actors from major agencies who are engaged directly and indirectly in the coverage. Among the key stakeholders are government, private sector and interest group officials who interact with journalists assigned to cover oil and gas stories. This subset of informants function as new sources and are therefore critical to understanding how existing frames are impacted by the communicative dynamics between newspaper journalists, state and non-state actors. There are no known studies that have taken this approach. Together, the

thematic analysis of newspaper and interview analyses will facilitate theoretical contributions to framing studies by offering two levels of analysis (production and representation) for scholars in the field. The findings of this study also fill an important gap in international communication scholarship in its particular focus on the developing world.

1.4 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of eight chapters. The preceding pages constitute the introductory chapter. Chapter two provides a background to Guyana's socio-political and economic history to set the context for the introduction of newspapers as part of Guyana's development agenda. The chapter also includes literature on the socioeconomic and environmental contours of oil exploration to capture prevailing scholarship on the character of the oil industry and trends in media coverage of environmental issues. An overview of the theoretical framework with grounds this study, framing theory, is also presented. In addition, I discuss related literature on media framing studies that explore newspaper coverage of oil exploration and discoveries in the developed and developing worlds.

Chapter three outlines the methodological approach applied to complete this study. It describes the data collection and sampling procedure employed for selecting newspaper texts and interviewees for the study. A description of data analysis procedures and strategies utilized to situate the key themes found across newspaper and texts are also presented in this chapter, with the key research questions explored. Chapter four provides the analysis of news themes within the four daily newspapers, while chapter five presents the analysis of themes discernable across columns in the four dailies as well. Chapter five analyses themes across opinion letters and also discusses similarities with news themes to establish the frame-setting effect of news on public opinion. In chapter six, I highlight the challenges journalists and editors face in covering the oil

and gas sector, and their specific challenges on their interactions with key stakeholders who function as their news sources. The perspectives of the key stakeholders who help to shape the news coverage as sources of news are also included in this section. In chapter seven I discuss the findings related to Chapters four to six, while Chapter eight provides conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

1.5 Researcher's Standpoint

As a Guyanese citizen by birth, I have been socialized to consider Guyana as poor, underdeveloped and part of the third world based on paradigms espoused by more advanced societies that constitute the developed world. Over the years, academic inquiry has forced me to refute and reject the notion that poverty existed within a resource-rich nation and that we were doomed as a country. I found the announcement of the oil discoveries and accompanying euphoria particularly striking as journalists framed the discovery of oil as a panacea for Guyana's poverty. As a citizen, I too am excited, but as a scholar, I bring a more reasoned stance to the development. My interest in this study stems from a recognition that societies evolve and become aware of their potential only through a re-narration of existing narratives that threaten to keep them impoverished through a lack of information. I developed an abiding interest in Guyana's national development during my years as a journalist, and sensed an urgency to contribute to media pedagogy when I transitioned to academe in 2007. This project provides yet another opportunity for me to revisit journalism practice and performance dispassionately as an insider who understands the existential challenges yet sees the possibilities for doing things better. As a development communication scholar, I am particularly curious about how the national media are interpreting the oil discoveries as it relates to Guyana's future. Further, I'm also interested in how historical social and political undercurrents continue to fuel prevailing

journalistic orientations to ascertain the independence of the print media in Guyana within a democracy. Altogether, I considered these interests, in addition to my familiarity with journalists and state officials, as social and cultural capital as I gathered data. At the same time, I also recognize the need for reflexivity in this purely academic process and as I strived to be objective in building the body of knowledge in this field through accurate and fair representation of the issues and parties utilized in this project.

1.6 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of Guyana's socioeconomic and political history to draw connections to the development of the newspapers within the scheme of national development and media partisanship. Concepts such as media and national development were also discussed to underscore the significance of the press to national development generally, and specifically to Guyana's context as a new petroleum state. I also highlighted the socioeconomic and environmental contours of oil exploration to illustrate their salience and, at the same time, discuss how these are prioritized differently among both media and oil corporations. Importantly, I also introduced the framing perspective to foreground my review of related literature with respect to the current. As such, studies on newspaper framing of oil exploration in the developed world and developing countries highlighted the economics of oil across media frames, while focusing mainly on news texts. In the next chapter I present the methodology that undergirds this study, followed by the findings, a discussion and concluding chapter.

2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The goal of this study is to explore how Guyana's four daily newspapers, Guyana Chronicle, Stabroek News, Kaieteur News and Guyana Times have framed oil discoveries in Guyana within news, columns and letters to the editor in the wake of the discoveries in 2015 to December 2019. This study also seeks to understand the challenges of journalists and editors in reporting the oil discoveries, and the specific challenges they face in their interactions with key stakeholders who function as sources of news on the discovery of oil in Guyana.

This chapter provides an overview of Guyana's sociopolitical and economic evolution encompassing its pre-and post-colonial history that must first be understood to contextualize this study. I open by providing the historical context of colonization as an economic model which shaped the sociocultural and economic features of the colony. I also include the evolution of newspapers in British Guiana as a major facet of colonial and interest group mobilization, to demonstrate its early significance to civic engagement, education and partisanship. Following, I discuss the role of the media in Guyana's post-colonial economic development to establish its salience to nation building as a newly independent socialist country that normalized state media control in response to cultural imperialism. Next, I discuss related literature on media and national development to draw connections to neoliberalism and media partisanship while exploring how these realities are part of the orientation of Guyana's four daily newspapers.

In this chapter, I also provide a brief overview of oil exploration in Guyana before discussing the environmental and socioeconomic implications of oil for nations and citizens. I also briefly contextualize the paradox of resource-wealthy poor oil exporting countries to highlight the complicity of state officials and transnational oil corporation actors in normalizing

corrupt practices. This is followed by a review of literature on framing theory, the theoretical perspective that grounds this study. Importantly, I next provide a review of the extant literature on previous studies that have explored the framing of oil discoveries in the developed and developing world. I do so acknowledging the limited scholarly contributions of Shiffrin, 2012, Behrman, et al (2012), Amenaghawon (2018) and Ileri et al (2019) and to establish this study's articulated focus on Guyana where media research remains underexplored, thus creating an opportunity to bridge the significant gap in literature on media framing of oil discoveries in oil producing developing countries.

2. 1.1 Guyana: Colonization, Newspapers and Nationhood

Guyana is a former colony of Britain situated on the northern coast of South America. The country shares borders with Venezuela to the west, Suriname to the east and Brazil to the south. As part of the Anglo Caribbean and formerly known as British Guiana, it is the third smallest country on the continent of South America and occupies a landmass of 216, 000 square kilometers. The country's major economic activities are sugar, rice, bauxite, gold and diamond, with agriculture, forestry and fishing contributing 12.7 added value to Guyana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2017 (The World Bank, 2019). As such, the country's economy is largely reliant on agriculture and natural resources, which have been exploited by successive colonial administrations including the Dutch and British.

From 1814 to 1966, Britain occupied the colony and, in the process, imported enslaved Africans to participate in its economic expansion project in the West Indies. By 1829, over 80,000 enslaved Africans were spread across 404 plantations to service the growing sugar, cotton and coffee empire (Despres, 1967). Bissessar and La Guerre (2013), who provided a specific account of the growth of colonial plantations, noted that cane sugar harvesting occupied 230

plantations, while cotton and coffee were grown across 174 estates. Sugar was therefore the colony's leading agriculture commodity and export.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1834, between 1835 and 1918, Britain imported 238,960 East Indian immigrants under indentured servitude to sustain mainly sugar production (Despres, 1967; Manley, 1979). Scholars posit that the importation of immigrant populations was deliberately aimed at stemming the growth of native immigrants, particularly those from Africa. Thus, by 1900, Britain imported 210,630 East Indians and a mere 14,060 from Africa (Moore, 1995). As a result, in 1938, the African population numbered 129,648, while the East Indian population was 140,768 (Palmer, 2010). By the time Guyana gained independence in 1966, East Indians and Africans represented 40 and 33 percent of the population, respectively (Despres, 1967).

Given the importance of maintaining a productive labor force, Britain also imported laborers from China, Madeira and Scotland. However, the Chinese, Portuguese and European laborers proved unsuitable for the plantations and moved mainly to urban centers of the country to pursue business interests (Manley, 1979). Thus, Guyana is a diverse and pluralistic society inhabited by six ethnic groups including Africans, East Indians, Europeans, Chinese, Amerindians constitutive of nine indigenous groups, and finally Guyanese of mixed ancestry. East Indians and Africans, called Afro-Guyanese, make up 39.8 and 29.9 percent of the population, respectively and are the country's two major ethnic groups. Guyanese of mixed heritage account for 19.9 percent of the population, while the other ethnicities constitute the remainder of the minor populations. Scholars have argued that the composition of Guyana's two major ethnic groups and subsequent disparities in the distribution of wealth are derivatives of the colonial system that was organised by Britain to maintain its lucrative agricultural plantations

(Abrams, 1997; Gibson, 2003; Gibbons, 2011; Hintzen & Premdas, 1983). Notwithstanding the evidence to support the foregoing argument, it is useful to note that both East Indians and Africans resisted colonization. The culture of resistance grew even stronger with the introduction of newspapers to represent the voices of various interest groups. Newspapers were also considered a major outlet to promote anticolonial sentiments while asserting the collective consciousness of the people to be independent. Table 1 below illustrates their range and orientation with discrete target groups.

Table 1 Pre and post-colonial special interest newspapers

Newspaper	Publication Year	Interest Group/Orientation
<i>The Free Man's Sentinel</i>	1842	Freed African and colored people
<i>The Creole</i>	1856	Freed African and colored people
<i>The Working Man</i>	1872	Portuguese and business interests (ads)
<i>The Watchman</i>	1879	Portuguese and business interests (ads)
<i>Echo</i>	1884	Africans
<i>The Indian Opinion</i>	1926	British Guiana East Indian Association
British Public Information Bulletin	1945	Planters
Public Affairs Committee Bulletin	1946	Sugar workers
Democrat	1950	PPP/Pro Indian
Torch	1955	Indian
PPP Thunder	1955	Pro PPP
Daily Guyana Graphic	1960	Indian
Villager	1961	African
Mirror	1962	PPP

Data culled from Despres (1967)

By 1946, political militancy began to take form in British Guiana. Two key leaders who would change the course of Guyana's political and socioeconomic history also emerged from the

ranks of African and Indian Guyanese. Cheddi Jagan, a US-trained Indian Guyanese dentist, and Forbes Burnham, an African Guyanese British-trained lawyer, collaborated in 1949 to establish the Political Affairs Committee (Manley, 1979). A year later, Burnham and Jagan formed the People's Progressive Party (PPP) as the first mass party in British Guiana.

The PPP was considered a panacea to colonial power based on its strong anti-imperialist ethos (Manley, 1979). The party drew support from East Indians and the black working and middle classes to vie for political office in 1953 and was considered Guyana's first "multi-ethnic, multi-class, mass party movement" (Danns, 2013, p.8). The passage of adult suffrage allowed extended voting rights to all Guyanese (Bissessar & La Guerre, 2013). As a duly constituted party under British legislation, the People's Progressive Party's (PPP) contested national elections in 1953 and won. The party secured 18 out of the 24 seats but soon became politically exiled. After 133 days (Spencer, 2007) Britain suspended the constitution due to Jagan's communist orientations that were perceived as a threat to western strategic and economic interests (Jagan, 1967). The sugar industry was directly threatened as ownership of Guyana's sugar plantations resided in the hands of a British-owned firm, Bookers (Abrams, 1997). Concomitantly, ethnic polarization loomed on the horizon with a shift in internal politics.

In 1955, Burnham and Jagan separated due to ideological differences (Palmer, 2010). Their separation marked a sharp turning point in Guyanese politics that would remain indelible in the country for decades. The former political partners who became contenders contested the 1957 elections as opposing political factions of the PPP. Burnham lost to Jagan and soon after formed his own party, the People's National Congress (Danns, 2014). While Burnham's PNC represented a predominantly African Guyanese base, Jagan's PPP drew a largely Indian following (Abrams, 1997). The PNC won subsequent elections held in 1964 and 1968 under

what was considered dubious electoral processes aimed at securing a PNC victory (Spencer, 2007; Bissessar and La Guerre, 2013).

Ethnic voting became a central fixture of Guyanese politics under the PPP and PNC in the years following Burnham and Jagan's separation. The road to self-governance for Guyana's leadership was therefore racially and politically tumultuous with racial tensions dominating much of its pre-and post-colonial legacy (Gibson, 2003; Gibbons, 2011; Jagan 1967). By the 1970s, Guyana begun to experience steady outward migration of its citizens due mainly to sociopolitical and economic push factors that have stymied nation building (Danns, 2013). Many citizens migrated to pursue better educational and economic opportunities than were available in Guyana; this resulted in a brain drain. Others who left Guyana escaped what they perceived as untenable political leadership and poor governance, further attenuated by the prolonged weaponizing of ethnic politics at successive polls. Thus, the migration of Guyanese to more developed countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and other Caribbean states, has been shaped significantly by a combination of Guyana's poor economic performance and governance.

According to the 2012 population and housing census released in 2016, an estimated 746,955 persons inhabited Guyana (Guyana National Bureau of Statistics, 2019), but the country's population is estimated to exceed 800,000 by 2020. The country's literacy rate is 88.5 percent with close to fifty percent of its population being under age 24 (CIA World Factbook, 2015). More than a third of the Guyanese population resides on the coastland and within the country's capital city, Georgetown, where the seat of government and a majority of commercial centers are located. In its 2018 Development Report, the World Bank Guyana's GDP per capita stood at US\$4,979 thus positioning the country as one of the poorest in the western hemisphere.

The country ranks 123 out of 158 on the Human Development Index (Human Development Report, 2019). Life expectancy of citizens at birth is 69.8 years, with poverty listed as a major indicator (Human Development Report, 2019).

Survey data collected in 2017 classifies 5.8 percent of the Guyanese population as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty based on poor access to healthcare, education, and an overall healthy standard of living (Human Development Report, 2019). Poverty is therefore a reality that has shaped the Guyanese experience, as well as the grand narrative that often prefaces economic and social indexing of third world countries. While international news of the oil discovery in 2015 proclaimed that Guyana was on the precipice of wealth, metaphoric conjectures also suggested that Guyana was a pauper moving from rags to riches, and an unstable house occupied by racially divided tenants (Krauss, 2018). However, some scholars have contended that Western powers have leveraged Guyana's ethno politics to advance their own strategic economic goals (Canterbury, 2016).

Post-colonial Guyanese scholars who have critiqued Guyana's elongated economic and political plight reveal a pattern of Western economic opportunism led by the United States, Canada and Britain. To this end, Gibbons (2011) and Canterbury (2016) have attributed Guyana's sociopolitical transformation and electoral outcomes to Western capitalist machinations organized around the governance of the country's resources. To support this assertion, Canterbury (2016) posited that Guyana's turn toward neoliberalism immediately prior to regime change in 1992 fostered favorable economic interests under PPP/Civic government that was elected to office in 1992. A year later, Cambior Inc., and Golden Star Resources, both Canadian-based companies, established Omai Gold Mines in Guyana. Under the arrangement, the government retained a 5 percent ownership of the mining company. Omai became the largest

gold mining operation in South America (Canterbury, 2016). Over the course its 13-year operation in Guyana, Omai Gold Mines unearthed 3.7 million ounces of gold. Gold was therefore considered a significant boon to the local economy as large gold deposits became Guyana's major source of export income (Canterbury, 2016).

With respect to oil explorations in Guyana, the issuance of oil blocks occurred under the remit of the PPP/C government whose term in office lasted from 1992 to 2015. However, in May 2015, the PPP/C lost the national elections to the political coalition, A Partnership for National Unity (APNU/Alliance for Change (AFC). Less than a week after the elections results, Exxon Mobil announced the discovery of its first oil well off the shore of Guyana. Canterbury (2016) argues that the announcement fortuitously coincided with the shift in Guyana's political leadership, revealing once more that Western intervention played a decisive role in the outcome of the 2015 elections. In essence, it was important that the management of the oil resources favored Western interests (Canterbury, 2016). The oil discoveries in 2015 and beyond have therefore attracted much post electoral controversy around Guyana's political governance, with US intervention reemerging recently in Guyana's general elections held in May 2020.

2. 1.2 From Socialism to and Nationhood Neoliberalism: Newspaper Expansion and Media Control

Studies cited in the foregoing section have established linkages between Guyana's early sociopolitical formation and the tensions that have accompanied the country's pursuit of independence. Following on from Canterbury's earlier arguments, next I discuss the tendentious nature of Western strategic economic interests in Guyana to illustrate the role of political ideology in the country's early economic development. I also situate the functions of the media,

with specific focus on newspapers, as part of the colonial and state's information apparatus, to communicate development values and policies to the people.

In 1970, Guyana became a republic and severed ties with Britain to pursue its own economic model of development (Greene, 1974) and "socialist reforms" (Mistry, Berardi & McGregor, 2009; p.977). At that time, Guyana's economic mainstay included sugar, rice, bauxite, some minerals and specialist timbers, owned mainly by British and US companies (Mistry, Berardi & McGregor, 2009). Over the next fifteen years, the country pursued its own national identity and foreign policy goals, which contributed to its rapid economic decline (Hintzen & Premdas, 1982). In an effort to build support for Guyana's socialist brand of nation building among the population, the Burnham administration utilized the state media, including the newspapers, to disseminate information about the state's policies. In the process, Burnham's socialist orientation and authoritarian leadership style (Brotherson, 1989) became paramount to advancing the government's national development trajectory as an agricultural economy (Thomas, 1982).

The state's control over the media also meant that media operatives became part of the propaganda machinery to the exclusion of alternative voices in the interest of the people (Cuthbert, 1977). Consistent with the government's top-down approach to articulating the state's development agenda to its citizens, the Burnham-led government also took policy positions to dismantle foreign ownership of media to bring every aspect of the media under state control and away from cultural imperialism (Thomas, 1982). Burnham also articulated the government's stance as a prescriptive right to the people of Guyana (Cuthbert, 1977). Thus, The Guyana Graphic and Daily Chronicle became state-owned, while Radio Diffusion, formerly owned by the British, and Radio Demerara merged to form the Guyana Broadcasting Corporation (Thomas,

1982). Concomitantly, newsprint production and the issuance of broadcast licenses became the remit of the state with impositions against imports, resulting in a stifling of alternative voices (Cuthbert, 1977). With respect to media systems and ideological classifications that were used to measure the practices of authoritarian and democratic states during the 1970s, Guyana was considered social-centralist. This was based on its adoption of a top-down model of communication fused with community participation and public ownership expressly for national development purposes (Cuthbert, 1977).

While agriculture extension officers were considered vital agents of change, so too were state broadcasters and public information officers. Thus, training became imperative to enhance their knowledge of the state's policies and their communicative skills. To complement practical knowledge, the University of Guyana Center for Communication Studies (UGCCS) was established in 1975 at the Turkeyen campus of the university. The UGCCS became the hub for state reporters to learn the theoretical conventions of journalism through seminars (Thomas, 1982). Like newly independent states of the Caribbean that considered the development of local content and ownership the preserve of Caribbean citizens to stem cultural imperialism, Guyana's socialist agenda comported with its media education to unveil a continuum of state media control and the growth of interest-group newspapers. Moreover, the seeds of media partisanship and stakeholder interests planted by the colonial establishment and Guyanese indigenous allies decades earlier eventually germinated into a garden of state-centric media, political newspapers and other voices of reason.

Along with the government-owned Guyana Chronicle, a daily newspaper published in Georgetown, the New Nation was introduced as the People's National Congress (PNC) newspaper. The *Dayclean* was established by the Working People's Alliance (WPA) political

party in 1979. The *Dayclean* joined the *Mirror*, which was introduced in 1962 by PPP as a biweekly publication, and the *Catholic Standard*, published by the Roman Catholic Church since 1905. These newspapers revealed the competing nature of political parties to reach the Guyanese public using the print media as their major outlet. Newspapers were also considerably more popular and effective as sources of information in Guyana. At the same time, they were distinctly political, thus setting the stage for media partisanship in Guyana's media landscape even as the country was gearing for an economic shift that would impact the playing field.

Toward the end of the 1980s, Guyana commenced a period of structural adjustment under the leadership of Hugh Desmond Hoyte, who came to power upon Burnham's death in August of 1985. By 1988, the state embarked on an Economic Recovery Program (ERP) due to "mounting external debt" (Mistry, Berardi & McGregor, 2009; p.980). At the same time, Guyana also pursued "a series of neoliberal economic reforms" (Mistry, Berardi & McGregor, 2009; p.980) to facilitate foreign investment in its natural resources, among other sectors, under leadership that embraced neoliberalism (France, 2005). Hoyte engaged in effectively dismantling "austere economic measures" (Abrams, 1997; p.120) imposed by his predecessor who had banned the importation of several commodities including food items, while promoting homegrown manufacturing.

Visible changes in Guyana's neoliberal pathway included the liberalization of its media scene, beginning with the privatization of the telecommunications sector and the establishment of private media representing views alternative to the government's state media. As a result, *Stabroek News* was established in 1986 as an independent outlet (Griffith, 1997), joining an array of small privately-operated news prints but offering critical perspectives that contrasted with the state-run daily *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper. *Stabroek News* has been described as a

model for the press in political and economic transition (Graham-Yooll, 1994). A total of 20,000 copies of its first issue were printed by the Trinidad Express Press on Nov 21, 1986 (Graham-Yooll, 1994). In 1992, Guyana witnessed a democratic transition (Griffith, 1997; Canterbury 2016) that resulted in the subsequent establishment of two other daily newspapers. These include the *Kaieteur News*, established in 1994 and the *Guyana Times*, established in 2008. The state-owned *Guyana Chronicle*, along with *the Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* are available to online consumers apart from their public distribution across Guyana and the diaspora.

As the only state-owned newspaper, the *Guyana Chronicle* has been historically aligned to the state in its reportage and is therefore considered rightwing. Branded as The Nation's Newspaper, the paper's daily circulation is estimated at fifteen thousand in both urban and rural locations, but only around six thousand copies are sold daily. Between ten and twelve thousand copies are sold on Sundays when the paper attracts most of its readers (Interview, Editor, 6 October 2019). The state newspaper also has an online presence and a New York edition that reaches the diaspora and other readers. An estimated one million readers access the newspaper's online edition monthly, while the paper has ninety thousand Facebook followers (Interview, Editor, 6 October 2019).

The three private newspapers analyzed in this dissertation, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* are also differently oriented in their coverage of issues including the oil discoveries. *Stabroek News* is funded through advertisements and subscriptions and circulates both print and online versions. The newspaper attracts an average of one hundred thousand online readers daily (Interview, Editor, 7 October 2019). However, it also enjoys national popularity across Guyana, where an estimated eight to ten thousand copies are circulated daily.

Fifteen thousand copies are circulated on Sundays. *Stabroek News* pivots toward the business-private sector because it is perceived as the most credible source of information by that community (Interview, Editor, 7 October 2019). The newspaper brands itself as “Guyana’s most trusted newspaper” and is considered the main competitor of *Kaieteur News* among readers, a position that both editors have acknowledged.

Kaieteur News is the leading private daily in terms of readership and circulation. It is funded by a mix of private proceeds, advertisements and sales, and brands itself as “Guyana’s largest selling daily and New York’s most popular weekly.” On weekdays, an estimated twenty-seven thousand copies are circulated, while online audiences average just below thirty thousand (Interview, Editor, 3 October 2019). Like the state newspaper, copies of *Kaieteur News* are sold in New York, where a significant concentration of Guyanese migrants resides. The newspaper has gained notoriety among readers over the years for its sensational headlines and stories, which often appear to set the political agenda. Its main aim is to maintain the forefront in popularity and sales (Interview, Editor, 3 October 2019).

Guyana Times, the most recent daily newspaper, established in 2007, is the least popular of the four daily newspapers in Guyana. It describes itself as “The beacon of Truth.” It is perceived as a left-leaning publication, given its support for the policies espoused by the PPP/C government and continued leaning toward opposition narratives articulated under a new political administration. *Guyana Times* is sold mainly in rural locations where the opposition attracts significant political support. Less than five thousand copies are sold in Georgetown (Interview, Editor, 7 October 2019). The distinct state-business-sensational-political orientations of the four daily newspapers make them viable sources of news for textual interpretation. In addition, interviews suggest that Sunday copies attract substantially more readers than weekdays. Sources

vary across the four dailies, as do news frames. Special columns, which feature within each newspaper, also reflect these orientations and therefore provide cues to analyzing how columnists are shaping the conversation on the oil discoveries. In addition, public opinion through letters to the editor provides a range of perspectives from citizens as part of the public sphere.

In Guyana, the last media consumption study conducted in 2010 among a small stratified sample of 711 Guyanese revealed that between 1 and 5% of respondents accessed local newspapers via the web (Mohamed, 2014). Variations across the online readership were also evident. *Guyana Times* attracted 4% of active online readers, followed by *Kaieteur News* with 1.8%, *Stabroek News* 1.4%, and the state-owned *Guyana Chronicle* 1.8% (Mohamed, 2014). Interview data collected in 2019 suggests that *Guyana Times* may have a significantly reduced online readership, while *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News* are leading in terms of online consumption. Interview data also revealed that the state newspaper, *Guyana Chronicle*, lags behind the private newspapers, although it enjoys greater online readership than *Guyana Times*.

In contrast to the developed world, where newspaper circulation has downsized due to media convergence and the prevalence of online media platforms, newspaper copies in Guyana are circulated throughout public offices and serve as a staple among both public officials and employees. One copy often serves multiple readers who have a great interest in public affairs. Thus, Guyana's four dailies are major sources of news on the current oil exploration, with each publication bearing its own orientation and style of reporting. The establishment of a plural media society is considered a benchmark of democracy. However, media education fostered deliberately to build the capacity of journalists is an equally important facet of democracy. In the

next section, I highlight various scholarly iterations on media and national development in the context of states effectively communicating development to their citizens.

2. 1.3 Media, Communication and National Development

News reporters, journalists, presenters and producers all constitute the media ecology. Burke's coinage of the term Fourth Estate, in reference to the media as early as 1787, suggests a central gatekeeping role in the affairs of rulers given that commoners were outside of the political sphere. Years later, it was felt that public discourse contributed to transforming the public sphere beyond the bourgeois society as newspapers became "the public sphere's preeminent institution" (Habermas, 1989; p.181). Moreover, debate in the public sphere helped to promote accountability in governance processes, thus suggesting a historically inseparable relationship between media and politics, with media functioning as the bridge to the electorate. Journalism therefore became a primary facet of the public sphere, but the political economy of the media subsequently undermined its purpose, thereby infiltrating the foundational principles and practice of the profession.

The role of the media in democracies has been a subject of debate for decades. It is believed that the *Four Theories of the Press*, the seminal work of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1956) helped to situate the discourse in scholarship during the mid-twentieth century and beyond. At the time of publication, the *Four Theories* juxtaposed America's model of liberal democracy with the authoritarian model that characterized media systems in communist states of the Soviet Union, Latin America, and China. Further, the liberal democracy enjoyed by the U.S. featured electoral democracy, a free press, and mechanisms to support the efficiency and independence of democratic institutions such as the judiciary. However, in the developing world,

there is an uneasy relationship between the press and the government, particularly in societies that have emerged from authoritarianism (Voltmer, 2010). To support this point, Voltmer (2010) argues that media control is the norm, rather than the exception, for countries in the third world, including the Latin American region, that have experienced democratic transition. It is within this arrangement that the Guyanese media has evolved.

Scholars believe that capitalist interests had contributed to the collapse of the public sphere by the 19th century (Schudson, 2003). Rather than function as a means of enlightenment, the media optic became sensationalism and the packaging of stories that would sell. In the process, cultural commodification replaced freedom of expression, thereby altering the informative role of newspapers. Notably, the turn toward neoliberal ideals by the press did not occur in isolation in the developed world. Cracks in the structure of journalism began to emerge across media establishments globally even before the turn of the century, due to the effects of commercialization (Mc Chesney, 1999). Wealthy interests trumped informed public participation while undermining effective democratic governance (Mc Chesney, 1999). In the midst of sweeping changes, the media had little control as their survival became enmeshed in the grand scheme of neoliberalism (Mc Chesney, 2014).

Despite the challenging market-driven media environment that exists globally, the intermediary and gate keeping functions of the press remain central to the profession. The state's reliance on the press is also irrefutable in both the developed and developing world. Moreover, the role of the media in national development is crucial, particularly for developing countries. Development communication scholars believe that communication is central to national development (Servaes, 2009), which can only be achieved and sustained through community and national participation that involves citizens for whom the development is

intended (Bassey & Etika, 2019; John & Etika, 2019). Media and development appear interdependent, with development interventions and messages largely contingent upon communicative processes facilitated by media. The media, broadly speaking, are therefore seen as facilitators and mediators, collectively serving public information needs.

To address the obvious deficit in education and training for those tasked with informing and educating citizens, Scott (2014) offers some suggestions. He emphasizes the importance of human capacity building based on the value of media operatives in enabling awareness and participation in development processes. Scott (2014) argues that the connectedness between media development and communication development is premised on human efficacy in awareness-raising efforts. In effect, well-articulated messages and development goals are based upon a trained cadre of messengers (Scott, 2014). Although the concept of media development appears more recent (Scott, 2014) in contrast to communication approaches to development, the two concepts are intertwined. To illustrate, Servaes (2013) connects media development to traditional communication intervention strategies, while Kakonage (2013) views media as critical support systems for advancing development goals.

An analysis of scholarship on media development also reveals a lack of conceptual and operational uniformity. There are also very limited studies on capacity building within the emergent scholarship on media. While several attempts have been made to derive a holistic classification (Scott, 2014), a majority of studies assemble communicative processes alongside development goals. Media and media audiences are also noticeably absent from the discourse.

It is important to note that the dominant communication and development paradigms that emerged during the 1970s to 1980s as part of the ontology of Wilbur Schramm (1979) and Everett Rogers (1983) have given way to neoliberalism. Moreover, the state's stranglehold on

the information machinery, in the case of Guyana, reveals a conspicuously authoritarian model that has been maintained despite the state's progression to democracy in 1992. The coalescence of state-centric media control and press pluralism therefor presents an anomaly for journalism practice in societies that have not quite emerged from top-down models of communication.

Conceptually, media and development appear historically rooted in Communication for Development (C4D), a wide-ranging field that claims its origins in the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) agriculture expansion program established during the mid-1960s (Servaes, 2008). Over the years, C4D has evolved to take on a social change component, with the media viewed as facilitators of social change, constitutive of mixed channels and platforms capable of informing action, and integrated across various sectors (Servaes, 2008). Social change, in effect, is achieved through a participatory process in which the media are centrally situated to inform and mobilize citizens at the national, local and community levels (Servaes, 2008). In essence, proponents of communication and development consider communication as the principle remit of media that fuels development (Sosale, 2008).

Blake (1981) notes that the communication and national development interventions that emerged across developing countries, including the African region, were necessary to integrate citizens in the national development agenda. The development model with people at the center was also necessary for communications specialists to instigate their own approach germane to the sociocultural context of developing countries (Blake, 1981). However, much has changed regarding how states consider the utility of information and communication with respect to conveying their development agenda to citizens. Interestingly, the Meriam Webster dictionary offers three classical definitions of development, encompassing “the act, process or result of developing ideas; the state of being developed, or a developed tract of land.” While the

University of London Center for Development, Environment and Policy sees development as rooted in political thought, the institution has also recognized its ambiguity and complexity. For the University of London Center for Development, is best defined as “bringing about social change that allows people to achieve their human potential.” Thus, social change and development thus appear synonymous. On the contrary, Barder (2012) argues that “development consists of more than improvements in the well-being of citizens, even broadly defined: it also conveys something about the capacity of economic, political and social systems to provide the circumstances for that well-being on a sustainable, long-term basis.” Further, Slim (1995) posits that development is “about change... change for the better” (p. 143) not necessarily confined to economic considerations.

The foregoing definitions seem to suggest that development is an active process that leads to change, but they imply different inputs and conceptions in deriving the change. Whether change is politically motivated, economically driven or socially oriented, people appear at the center of the change, which cannot be driven without their involvement, hence the need for communication as posited by Servaes (2013). This point is further emphasized by Scott (2014), who asserts that development is an inherent “right...enabling people to exploit their resources” (p.509). While the nature of those resources, whether mineral wealth, timber or agriculture commodities, are not mentioned, one can argue that resource development has been a historical facet of national development, even for post-colonial societies. Oil exploration is perhaps the pinnacle of this accomplishment.

As a major natural resource, oil is exploited mainly by transnational corporations from the developed world. Resource rich countries in the developing world have also rarely experienced economic and social transformation that should accompany resource exploitation

and development. The World Bank, one of the world's leading financial loan institutions, puts development in two binaries- as an effort and a mission from rich to poor countries, and as a top-down politically-driven void of cultural sensitivity (Mefalopulous, 2008). These conceptions reflect the notion of dependency and underdevelopment criticized by development communication scholars such as Servaes (2013) and Melkote and Steeves (2015), among others. As one development scholar has warned, "If you want development to be rooted in the human beings who have to become the agents of it as well as the beneficiaries.... You have got to communicate the techniques that they need in order that they will decide on their own development" (Colle, 2002, p.6).

Although significant changes have occurred at the national level for developing countries with respect to advancing their own development goals, there is a paucity of theoretical and practical discourses. Moreover, literature on development communication lacks a consistent definition for development (Melkote and Steeves, 2015). Melkote and Steeves (2015) configure development with the widely held modernization paradigm of "improving the living conditions of society," (p.15) which runs parallel to Mefalopulous's earlier construct. Scott (2014) goes a step further by including the media in the development process. Media development is perceived as a unified entity with development, per se, functioning as a corollary of media production, concentration and representation (Scott, 2014).

Rather than appropriate media development to external international aid, Scott (2014) suggests that development driven from within local settings is also worthy of consideration. In defining media development, he first juxtaposes media development with Media for Development (M4D) which he describes as "using the media as a tool or instrument in pursuit of specific development objectives..." (p92). However, Scott explains that "the target of media

development is the development of media themselves...with the media situated as important in their own right” (p.92). The absence of information also robs people of their right to exploit their own resources (Scott, 2014). One of the few authors who address media development as a single theme, Scott (2014) proposes a three-dimensional approach to looking at the field. These include the communicative processes associated with social change, institutional capacity building to promote “plurality, independence, professionalism, economic sustainability and media literacy,” and “media representations of development” (p.4).

Based on the foregoing definitions, it can be asserted that development perspectives are neither constructed in a single context nor operationalized from a single frame. However, despite definitional ambiguity, what seems to be emerging in media and development is social change enabled by media to convey improved living conditions to people. A case of human development through media engagement also appears resonant across the various definitions.

As debate around media development evolved, social change became more prominent as the preferred development model facilitated by media (Manyozo, 2012). It was not until practitioners recognized the relevance and value of people that conceptions of dependency began to fade. In this regard, media channels became available to citizens meeting their communication needs in communities through development messages that included their voices (Servaes, 2013) as part of the modernization paradigm. Although community media remains a central feature in some developing countries, it is not as widespread in 2020. Further, the media, in the broadest sense, are not void of challenges. Media operatives, including journalists, face several obstacles to communicating development to citizens. In developing regions of the world such as Africa, low media coverage of development issues by mainstream newspapers hinders regional development (Kakonage, 2013). Entertainment is privileged, due mainly to consumer

preferences and sales considerations. Thus, the neoliberal tentacles of media commercialization impacts news packaging. The lack of experience by journalists and their disinterest in development-related issues are also blamed for Africa's shortfall in meeting its development goals at the regional level (Kakonage, 2013). In summation, Kakonage (2013) suggests the deliberate involvement of media in the development agenda, aggressive media marketing of development initiatives, use of language that is consistent with the people and increased media-stakeholder partnerships. He sees this four-pronged approach as critical to implementing and advancing Africa's development vision given the scope that resides in media to empower lives, thereby facilitating social change.

In the foregoing discussion, I reference Nigeria to highlight the complexities of national development and media underperformance in an oil-rich nation. As a new oil producer, Guyana faces similar challenges. I discuss these further in chapter 4.

2.1.4 Oil Exploration and Discoveries in Guyana

Studies on exploratory surveys in Guyana reveal that the first oil well was drilled onshore in the coastal section of the Takatu Basin in 1916, while onshore and offshore oil exploration commenced in the mid-to late 1960s (Wenner, Bollers & Hosein, 2018). Other expeditions also occurred in the Takuta basin in 1982 (Braveboy-Wagner, 2019), while subsequent reports of undiscovered oil and gas are also noted by the US Geological Survey (World Petroleum Resources Project, 2012). However, on May 15, 2015, Guyana's economic prospects shifted with Exxon Mobil's discovery of the Liza 1 oil well at a depth of 18,730 feet (5,700 feet of water), 120 miles off the coast of Guyana (Wenner, Bollers & Hosein, 2018). In the current exploration and development, ExxonMobil holds 45 percent interest in the 6.6-million-acre Stabroek Block, while Hess holds 30 percent interest and CNOOC Nexen holds 25 percent

interest (Exxon Mobil, 2016). The Liza 1 was closely followed by the Liza 2, causing experts to predict the presence of 1.4 billion recoverable barrels of high-quality oil (Helman, 2016).

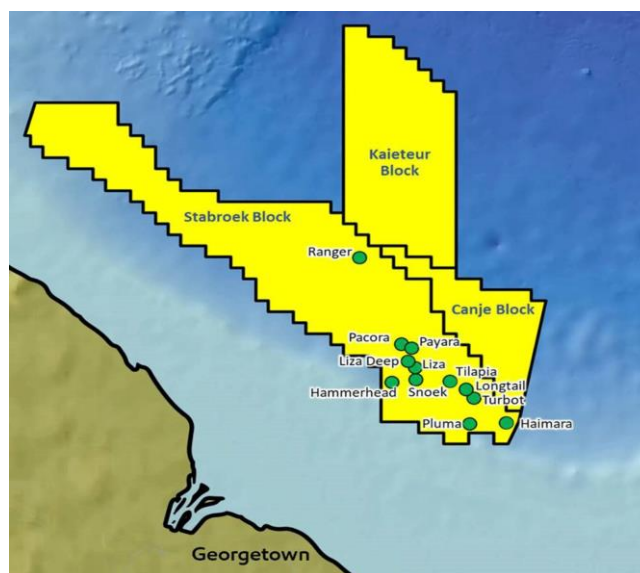


Figure 1. Exxon Mobil oil well discoveries, 2015-2019
Image courtesy of Exxon Mobil Guyana

On December 3, 2018, three years after the first discovery, Exxon Mobil announced its tenth discovery with an estimated gross recoverable resource from the Stabroek Block of approximately 5.5 billion oil-equivalent barrels (Stabroek News, Dec 3, 2018). In announcing the tenth oil discovery, Guyana's Director within the Department of Energy, Mark Bynoe, described it as transformational for Guyana's current and future generations and substantial social and economic improvements (Stabroek News, Dec 3, 2018; para 3). According to the oil giant, the Stabroek Block contains more than the equivalent of eight billion barrels of oil, based on the total discoveries between 2015 and 2020, which include the Liza, Payara, Liza deep, Snoek, Turbot, Ranger, Pacora, Longtail, Hammerhead, Pluma, Tilapia, Haimara, Yellowtail, Tripletail and Mako (Exxon Mobil Guyana Project Overview, 2020).

The oil discoveries have been framed as a challenge for Guyana to manage its natural resources, although enhanced economic activities over the years have been acknowledged (Clegg, 2014). However, the skepticism can be attributed to the development of oil and gas in other developing economies such as Angola, where poverty persists, and neighboring Brazil, which has faced financial and environmental challenges (Munroe & Musaramthota, 2018). In addition to concerns surrounding prudent management, oil discovery offshore Guyana also rekindled a longstanding maritime boundary dispute between Guyana and Suriname and a centuries-old border controversy with its oil-producing neighbor, Venezuela. The border controversy with Venezuela predates the 1899 Arbitration Award, which identified Guyana's current borders. Before Guyana's independence in May 1966, Venezuela reopened its claim to two-thirds of the country's territory, and the claim to the Essequibo region has remained active (Hoyle, 2011).

During the 1980s, Venezuela opposed a proposed hydroelectric project on the Mazaruni River, the largest tributary of the Essequibo River due to an ongoing territorial dispute (Ramraj, 2002). In addition, Venezuela objected to the setting up of a satellite launch station in North Western Guyana by a United States aerospace company and several oil companies exploring in waters off Guyana. Venezuela protested directly to interested businesses and international financial institutions, to dissuade them from investing in the Essequibo region (Ramraj, 2002). Guyana took the matter to the United Nations and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), where the search for a peaceful settlement remains unresolved. The matter is now before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which will make a decision soon, without the participation of Venezuela, which opted out by choice.

Guyana's eastern neighbor, Suriname, has made a territorial claim to the New River triangle area within Guyana's territory. This territorial claim dates back several centuries when the Dutch controlled the county of Berbice, which is the second largest of the three counties; Essequibo, Demerara and Berbice. On June 2, 2000, the Surinamese military evicted a CGX oil drilling vessel from the Guyanese waters adjacent to Suriname (Ramraj, 2002). The government of Guyana actively sought a diplomatic solution through CARICOMⁱⁱ. However, those efforts proved futile. Guyana subsequently took the matter before the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea (UNCLOS) for a peaceful resolution. UNCLOS announced its decision on September 17, 2007 (United Nations, Arbitration), and awarded Guyana more than two-thirds of the maritime space previously claimed by Suriname. The land border claim is still to be settled, although there is some level of peace and stability between the two nations.

Notwithstanding the foregoing challenges which have been litigated at the highest levels, including the United Nations, Guyana's role in Latin America and the Caribbean is considered instrumental and strategic to alliances within the western hemisphere (Clegg, 2014). Since the oil discovery, Guyana has established, and in some cases, renewed diplomatic relations with some countries that have expressed keen interest in economic cooperation. These include oil-producing states such as Nigeria, Ghana and the United Arab Emirates.

Among the measures implemented by the government at the parliamentary level to safeguard its oil wealth is the introduction of the draft Natural Resources Fund Bill of 2018. The Bill is aimed at promoting public accountability in the extractive sector. It proposes, among other things, a 22-member Public Accountability and Oversight Committee responsible for oversight of the management of the Fund, and will include a media representative proposed by the Guyana Press Association (Hamilton, 2019). On January 3, 2019, the Natural Resources Fund Bill was

passed in Guyana's National Assembly. It was subsequently recognized by the Caribbean Development Bank as a mechanism to safeguard the country from the resource curse associated with oil wealth, and the Dutch Disease (Hamilton, 2019). Another safeguard initiative, the Petroleum Resources Governance and Management Project, was established with oversight by the World Bank. The project consists of four major components, including the strengthening of Guyana's legal framework, capacity building, fiscal management and project management of all petroleum-related contracts.

2. 1.5 Oil's Sociopolitical, Economic and Environmental Contours: A review of related literature

Oil and gas production has been the mainstay of industrialized countries such as the United States for decades. The industry has also fueled the economic expansion of both developed and developing states in modern society. Given its significance to global economic development, the petroleum industry has become the subject of academic inquiry over the years based on its environmental impact on national ecosystems. Studies have also suggested that oil is closely tied to national and transnational politics and economics as much as it has attracted disrepute as a sector for its environmental effects on both ecosystems and human life.

Almost five decades ago, Engler (1961), who engaged in doctoral research on the character of oil corporations, highlighted the intertwined relationship between oil production and political state control. In sketching a portrait of oil in the state of North Dakota, for instance, Engler alluded to the political-business contours of oil negotiations between the state and private developers. He linked the proceeds of oil to political campaign funding, thus illuminating the economic reach of oil in national politics. From an international trade perspective, neoliberalism has paved the way for transnational oil corporations to engage exploration in many developing

nations. Based on early indications of the growing syndicates developed by oil giants, Engler described an industry that was purely profit-driven. He stated emphatically, “Oil has brought to its corporate masters the greatest concentration of private wealth and economic power in history. It has also brought them into contact with governments and people in every region of the world... The first principle of this private diplomacy aims for a favorable atmosphere for obtaining and maintaining concessions, contracts, and profits wherever oil may be found and traded” (Engler, 1961; p.182).

Engler’s description of the oil industry and its sociopolitical and economic contours remains as freshly relevant in 2020 as it was in 1961. Moreover, the nature of the petroleum sector and the socioeconomic implications of oil for citizens of Guyana were most lingering as I continued to mull over the political and environmental characteristics of the petroleum industry. But there are also considerable environmental factors that concern the oil sector that often go unmentioned. These include processes involved in onshore and offshore oil production, such as drilling and fracking, to recover oil. Offshore production appears most prevalent.

By the turn of the century, industrialized countries such as Brazil, and developing countries, including Ghana and Angola, joined a growing list of petro states such as the United States, China, Libya, Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is Guyana’s Caribbean counterpart. These states became part of the “Deepwater Club” (Govorushko 2013, p.4), based on sizable discoveries between 2005 and 2009. Oil discoveries in 2009 alone amounted to an estimated 50 million barrels of oil equivalent, thus underscoring the lucrative nature of offshore drilling and production.

Notably, oil exploration entails “planning, drilling, completion, production and abandonment” (Govorushko 2013, p. 17). (<http://www.oil-gasportal.com/upstream/petroleum->

exploration). The goal of exploration is to “identify and locate a prospect, to quantify the volume of hydrocarbon which might be contained in the potential reservoirs and to evaluate the risk inherent in the project itself. A prospect is a viable target evidenced by geological and geophysical indications that is recommended for drilling an exploration well” (<http://www.oil-gasportal.com/upstream/petroleum-exploration>). However, natural disasters such as hurricanes and cyclones tend to disrupt offshore oil and gas extraction. Apart from the inland devastation claimed by Hurricanes Rita and Katrina in 2005, heavy wind damage to over 100 oil and gas platforms has also occurred. Whether on or offshore, oil and gas production sites are also prone to fatal accidents. From 1970-1995, over 1200 people were killed in offshore oil fields, but research suggests that the collapse of the North Sea offshore platform Piper Alpha, which claimed 167 lives in 1987, was the most fatalistic occurrence (Govorushko 2013). Years later, in April 2010, the world witnessed what was considered the largest oil spill in U.S. history when the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig operated by BP Oil exploded in the Gulf of Mexico. Eleven deaths and 16 injuries occurred as a result of the spill, but there was also significant damage to the environment due to the seepage of 5 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico (Castaneda, 2011). In the end, beaches and sea life were directly impacted, resulting in thousands of deaths of animals including water fowl and major injuries (Castaneda, 2011). Other lingering effects of the BP oil spill on humans include severe damage to lung tissue and increased depression among cleanup workers. In addition, juvenile Bluefin and yellowfin tunas that were exposed to the spill experienced heart failure, juvenile mahi-mahi struggled to swim, and the killifish experienced tissue damage (Cranor, 2016).

Other types of oil exploration have also attracted scholarly attention and policy debate. As a process of oil exploration, fracking, in particular, has attracted significant controversy due

to the technique employed in oil recovery. Fracking is essentially designed to recover gas and oil from shale rock using water, sand and chemicals that are injected into the rock at high pressure, thus allowing the gas to flow out to the head of the well (BBC News, 2018). According to the BBC, fracking has significantly boosted domestic oil production and driven down gas prices. In addition, it has provided gas security to the US and Canada for about 100 years, and has presented an opportunity to generate electricity at half the CO₂ emissions of coal (BBC News, 2018). Notwithstanding the security that oil provides to the developed world, concerns revolve around earth tremors and water pollution caused by drilling activities (BBC News, 2018).

Disruption to the world's biodiversity is also a major concern among environmental advocates. Scholars who have explored the impact of fossil fuels on biodiversity bemoan the absence of quantifiable data that confirm the indirect effects of extraction on marine life and other inhabitants. For Harfoot, et al (2018), extraction activities that have occurred in recent years along hydrocarbon reserves increasingly endanger protected areas, thus creating difficulty for the co-existence of extraction and conservation. In their analysis of extraction activities globally, involving on-the-ground oil and gas infrastructure, oil fields, contract blocks and active or exploratory coal mines, the researchers discovered several troubling indicators. Among these were 181 fields classified as high risk, as they posed a significant problem for 28 times more species in locations near the northern Andes, the Gulf of Mexico, the west coast of Africa, Eastern Europe and in North Africa. In response, Harfoot et al (2018) suggest that limitations or prohibitions on exploitation, supported by effective enforcement in the identified regions, as the ideal solution as societies also rely on biodiversity for their existence.

In addition to natural disasters and death, the impact of fossil fuels on climate change is also an emerging concern. Griffin and Myers Gaffe (2018) discuss the role of U.S. fossil fuel

companies such as Exxon Mobil in information gathering to determine economic forecasts, but they question the corporation's failure to engage national stakeholders specifically on risks associated with climate change. The scholars suggest the need for balanced information sharing between US oil companies, investors and primary stakeholders to incorporate the potential hazards associated with climate change. Other studies on the impact of fossil fuels on climate change point to political influence as a mediating factor that influences public understanding and acceptance that extraction produces health and environmental effects (Petrovic, Madrigano and Zaval, 2014). The denial of climate change among political actors featured consistently across media is believed to be responsible for this state of affairs in the United States. This brings into sharp focus the state of environmental reporting, which has been severely impacted by the economic rationality of media establishments caught between commercialization and the preferred economic exigencies of entertainment reporting (Raj & Sreekumar, 2011). Scholars suggest that the decline in environmental reporting is a global phenomenon that became apparent before the turn of the century. Thus, focus on the economic imperatives of issues such as oil exploration has upstaged the ecological factors, thereby limiting public knowledge. In the developed world, for instance, a noticeable decline in the coverage of environmental issues emerged between 1970 and 1982.

By 1982, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time* and *Newsweek* privileged the economic component of environmental issues over preservation and degradation (Howenstine, 1987). Similarly, in industrialized countries such as India and China where environmental issues are controversial, there appears to be a deliberate avoidance and underreporting in favor of economic interests. In the process, commercial interests have significantly veiled journalism performance by undermining journalists' understanding and reporting on issues such as oil

exploration and climate change (Raj &Sreekumar, 2011). In their critical appraisal of the contemporary global commercial media and its coverage of environmental issues, Raj and Sreekumar (2011) implicate the state media in India, in particular, for privileging commerce and politics over the environment. They note that the globalization of media commercialism to the third world has created a glocal contortion of local business and political interests. As a consequence, the environmental beat in journalism, which emerged during the 1960s, has been trumped by neoliberalism in media, with environmental reporting reduced to mere episodic accounts (Raj &Sreekumar, 2011).

The fact that India's state media avoids the coverage of controversial environmental issues, including the impact of climate change on communities, complements the dismissiveness of large petroleum corporations (Raj &Sreekumar, 2011). Exxon Mobil's financing of misinformation regarding climate change is perhaps the most alarming evidence of complicity that they cite. The scholars underscore the importance of general environmental information sharing by scholars, researchers and experts who are often the repositories and are critical to countering irresponsible and ambiguous communication that can erode development gains.

Apart from the attendant effects of environmental degradation on oil producing states, and general concerns with respect to disclosure of information by oil corporations, the issue of corruption has come under scrutiny as a major factor undermining economic development of oil-rich states. Studies also suggest that corruption and economic development are linked to the poor economic performance by oil exporting developing countries. However, some scholars have debunked the idea that corruption is a natural occurrence in African countries where poverty persists alongside oil. To this end, Yates (2012) argues that the African region in particular has suffered from perennial neo-colonization by capitalist states that have enabled corrupt state

practices to secure oil exports. The scholar asserts that the low ranking of all oil exporting African countries on the Corruption Perception Index created by Transparency International illustrates how unbridled corruption has informed perceptions of corruption (Yates, 2012). On a scale of 0-10, with 0 classified as highly corrupt and 10 leaning toward highly clean, Gabon was ranked highest with 3.3/10 while Sudan was ranked lowest with 1.8/10 on the index. Nigeria ranked 2.2, with Cameroon receiving a slightly higher score of 2.4, while Angola scored 2.2 and Congo 2.1. Countries such as Equatorial Guinea and Chad fared worse on the index with 1.9 and 1.8, respectively (Yates, 2012).

Moise (2020) takes issue with the index while suggesting that the subjective nature of the indicators and the orientation of experts who determine a country's status make the results questionable. More recent literature also establishes the origins of state-corporate complicity in corrupt practices in oil producing developing states, and also highlights the growth of scholarly interest in corruption in the oil sector. In addition, the historical context of discourse on the Dutch disease and resource curse also helps to provide a deeper understanding of persistent economic underperformance in developing countries despite being endowed with oil resources.

In an analysis of 184 articles published mainly in energy and economic development journals, Moise (2020) found articles that focused distinctly on the Dutch disease, corruption, accountability in the oil sector, and oil management and energy strategy. While 59 articles examined the Dutch disease, 74 focused on corruption and 39 on oil management and energy strategies. The remaining 12 articles discussed accountability in the oil sector. Although scholars contextualized the Dutch disease as the over exploitation of resources as early as the 1980s, it was not until the 1990s that the term Dutch disease was introduced and subsequently gained popularity to configure the slow growth of resource rich countries (Moise, 2020).

It is believed that the earliest academic discourse on the Dutch disease was based on the work of Warner Max in 1984, while Alan Gelb, four years later, introduced the notion of oil as a resource curse that created socioeconomic problems rather than a blessing. Concurrently, scholars also found compelling evidence to support the argument that slow economic growth ran parallel to countries endowed with natural resources (Moise, 2020). The fact that bad management was identified as a major reason for slow economic growth also reinforced the idea that a country's resource wealth, including oil, does not necessarily guarantee national development.

Moise's search for related literature on corruption in the oil sector revealed discrete references to the resource curse and disparate treatment of corruption and emerging markets. The study traced the first oil cartel to the Scottish castle of Achna formed in 1929 by the predecessors of Exxon, BP and Royal Dutch Shell (Moise, 2020). With respect to corruption, initial complicity between the oil companies and the Mexican government morphed into conflict between oil companies and countries in 1938 when President Cardenas decided to nationalize the oil sector. It would therefore appear that a state's inclination toward nationalism creates tension for the transnational neoliberal interests of developed countries.

As scholarship on the resource curse took off during the 1990s, organizational pressure from groups such as Oxfam, Human Rights Watch and Global Witness, alongside journalistic coverage on transparency, evidence of corrupt practices involving state officials and oil companies also emerged. In 2001, BP Oil revealed that the Angolan government received 111 million dollars as a bonus in exchange for an offshore license (Moise, 2020). That disclosure paved the way for the establishment of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to govern oil companies' disclosure in conjunction with host governments. However, scholarship

suggests that the EITI's broad-based institutional, organizational and development goals have failed to create enhanced national awareness among citizens with regard to the extractive sector. This is due mainly to the technical jargon persons, including civil society and media, are required to decipher.

As Africa's largest economy, Nigeria has also been unable to achieve national development through its vast oil resources as a result of the resource curse. Several factors, including weak institutions, unproductive spending, excessive borrowing and fractionalization, have contributed to this state of affairs (Olayungbo, 2019). In particular, the underdevelopment of the education sector, and poor trade, which is tied to the foreign exchange rate, further undermines Nigeria's economic growth, given that its international economic conditions are controlled by international trade and financial institutions (Olayungbo, 2019). Despite its whistle blowing policy, Nigeria has been unable to stem the tide of corruption (Hossein & Habeeb, 2019).

Other oil-producing developing nations that have faced similar crises of development include Gabon, Libya and Venezuela. Like Nigeria and Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has also experienced significant conflict and underdevelopment despite its long history with oil. The country has also been plagued by corrupt practices fostered through a system of patronage enjoyed by state officials who engage in clandestine practices with oil officials, including signing bonuses (Titeca & Edmond, 2019). The issuance of oil rents also magnifies the level of state-corporate complicity that has occurred in Angola, where government officials have privileged millions in profit over development during their term in office ((Titeca & Edmond, 2019). Production bonuses and exploration rights have also attracted the corrupt transfer of wealth from oil companies to state officials in Angola.

The arguments presented by development scholars Titeca & Edmond, 2019; Yates, 2012; Olayungbo, 2019 and Moise (2020) illustrate the embedded nature of oil and politics and the complicity of transnational corporations in maintaining control of the oil resources of developing countries where real national development remains elusive. In view of the foregoing iterations, there appears to be a deeper function of cooperation among oil companies and primary stakeholders including local media, state actors and other interest groups. Additionally, the economic and political antecedents of the fossil fuel industry create greater complexities for journalists as they navigate economic imperatives alongside fundamental gate keeping, information and education roles. I discuss these issues in more detail later in the dissertation, as I now present the theoretical perspective followed by extant literature on framing theory with respect to oil discoveries.

2.2 The Framing Perspective

Framing theory has emerged across a plethora of scholarship and multiple disciplines particularly over the last two decades (Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2015). The preeminence of the theory within political communication studies with particular focus on news narratives makes it both appealing and conceptually muddled at times (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016; Entman, 1993; 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Notwithstanding conceptual challenges, news and information occupy the main object of study for scholars who continue to utilize framing theory (Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2015). As a media effects theory introduced by Goffman (1974), framing is historically rooted in sociological metaphor “to describe the way that [picture] frames organize information and provide a perspective through which message receivers come to understand the subject” (Shah et al, 2009, p.85). People interpret their spheres through natural and social frameworks, as frames provide schemas for interpretation via mass

media (Goffman, 1974). Apart from its sociological origins, framing is also recognized for its rootedness in the discipline of psychology, based on the pioneering work of Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984). Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016) posit that Kahneman and Tversky's equivalency framing emphasized how the context of words and phrases impacted audience responses based on variations, rather than the actual content communicated.

Moving beyond the equivalency model, framing has endured as a sociological theory that emphasizes the linguistic, textual and visual elements of messages to cue audiences in on what to think about. To put it simply, news makers engage in the social construction of reality through texts, imagery and language (Broersma, 2010; Entman, 1993). As such, there is a growing body of work on emphasis framing, with a specific focus on thematic framing (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016). In addressing the expansion of the framing tradition over the years, Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016) discredit the notion that framing is like priming and agenda setting as a media effects theory. Instead, they argue that framing relies on audiences' recognition of attributes based what is made salient and accessible. On the other hand, priming draws on their cognitive predisposition, while agenda-setting relies on accessible information that has a direct effect on cognitions and the way audiences perceive information (Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar, 2016). As major proponents of framing theory, Cacciatore, Scheufele and Iyengar (2016) also proffered Entman's original emphasis on salience as its distinguishing mark, while acknowledging that there are possible conceptual overlaps between framing and agenda-setting, as journalists often obtain their stories from issues in the public agenda.

Conceptually, frames are configured as issue-specific, given their emphasis on a particular issue by "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to audiences" (Entman, 1993; p.53). Texts function as symbols to coalesce with audiences' belief system, thus

influencing interpretation (Entman, 1993). Frames are also described as “the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization [or a political leader, public relations officer, political advertising consultant, or news consumer] defines and constructs a political issue or controversy” (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997, p.567.) Thus, frames are constructed by the media as news channels, corporate and political interest groups and individuals. The media, in turn, may transport those frames via attribution or even reframe based on their orientation.

Other conceptual definitions of frames allude to their textual significance through deliberate packaging and activation by media to make accessible and encourage a particular interpretation of a given issue (Entman, 2007; Gross & D’Ambrosio, 2004). These definitions suggest that frames bear cognitive and strategic features that are intentionally created to influence interpretive processes (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Additionally, the economic and political antecedents of the fossil fuel industry create greater complexities for journalists as they navigate economic imperatives alongside fundamental gate keeping, information and education roles by media. As a result, strategic media frames have succeeded in shaping public perception by accentuating economic, moral or conflict perspectives (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

In addition to bearing strategic emphases within news stories, frames also signal competing narratives based on how they are constructed around social, economic and political issues. From a political news perspective, frames “register the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text” (Entman, 1993, p.55) thereby accounting for the competing news perspectives on a single issue. Moreover, frames also provide a basis for locating dominant meaning ascribed to an issue and the journalistic stance (Entman, 1993). Given that journalistic slant is often embedded in news content that distorts reality, Entman (2007) suggests that

scholars integrate framing, priming and agenda setting to establish new theoretical directions for understanding how slant and bias are derived.

Other scholars, such as de Vreese (2005), posit that frames are both issue-specific and generic within news coverage. Generic news frames have emerged mainly in the coverage of politics and extends outwards toward “strategic news” that “focuses on winning and losing” (de Vreese, 2005; p.55). Winning and losing frames are located mainly in the coverage of election campaigns. Journalistic frame building is therefore organized around the salience of messages delivered by candidates in their appeal to constituents to gain political power (Entman, 2010). Conceptually, framing bias relies on a combination of factors germane to media practice.

Through a combination of content bias and decision-making bias, framing bias emerges as journalists consistently slant stories to favor political figureheads and interest groups (Entman, 2010). This is particularly evident across U.S. mainstream media, where media content reflects the ideologies of journalists and editors through heuristics (Entman, 2010). To demonstrate the prevalence of slant through frames in the coverage of the 2008 Presidential campaign in the United States to influence political power, Entman (2010) tied the Obama victory to consistent slant by *ABC World News* and *NBC Nightly News* which influenced swing voters. The diffusion of negative assertions and liberal bias by the networks also played a significant role in influencing audience perceptions ahead of the polls (Entman, 2010).

Studies on generic frames have also identified audience-deduced frames based on their emphases on human impact, and economics frames that present game interpretations of political contestations and attribution of responsibility (de Vreese, 2005). In addition, studies support the prevalence of generic news frames across reportage of international conflicts (Daniels, Hughart, & Fabbriatore, 2017) and international trade and trade relations (Ojo, 2016). Considerable

attention has also been drawn to responsibility narratives in news frames (Ethelb, 2016; Sei-Hill & Telleen, (2017) and the contribution of frames to creating a deliberative public sphere (Rinke, Wessler & Weinmann, 2013). In particular, news coverage of conflict, with particular focus on social movements, often deploys frames that attribute responsibility to individuals or groups through language (Ethelb, 2016).

In addition to attribution of responsibility, some frames have also presented solutions to the prevailing problems after highlighting the salience of issues. In this context, frames define issues and attribute responsibility, but also prescribe solutions. In congruence, Ryan (1991) posits that “every frame defines the issue, explains who is responsible, and suggests potential solutions” (p.59). Similarly, Nelson, Clawson & Oxley (1997), who allude to the specificity of frames, note that they focus on “underlying causes and likely consequences of a problem, and criteria for evaluating potential remedies of the problem” (p.567-568). Scholars have also explored the influence of frames on public opinion (Lecheler et al, 215; Perez, 2017) and its representation in gendered discourses (Bouzerdan & Whitten-Woodring, 2018) suggesting that frames continue to play a significant role in the formation of public opinion based on how they are constructed by the media. It therefore stands to reason that frames function as dependent variables in the formation of public perception, notwithstanding distinctions between media frames and individual frames. In explaining these distinctions, Scheufele implies that frames are the creation of journalistic practices upon which audiences rely. However, media frames, as put by Entman (1991), are located in news attributes (Scheufele, 1999). To foster deeper inquiry, Scheufele suggests critical inquiry to establish distinctions between media frames as dependent and independent variables. With respect to frames as dependent variables, questions pertaining to factors that influence frames by journalists or other societal groups are relevant (Scheufele,

1999). Further, Scheufele also suggests that researchers probe for how frames as independent variables influence audience perception.

The role of media ownership in relation to news framing is also central to what the media makes salient (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada & Payton, 2012), thus reinforcing Entman's (1993) assertion that frames register the identity of media actors. To illustrate, Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada & Payton (2012) sampled 365 articles published by Ugandan newspapers, *The Monitor* and *The New Vision* over the period 2000-2004. Both newspapers are the only English language daily newspapers in the country. One of them, *The Monitor*, is a privately-owned independent newspaper, while *The New Vision* is among Uganda's four state-owned publications.

While results indicated a steady decline in the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues in the first two years, and a subsequent increase over the next two years, issue frames differed across the two newspapers (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada & Payton, 2012). Curative medicine emerged as the most prevalent frame, then HIV-related rates, solutions and prevention. The steady use of the HIV prevention frame by foreign journalists who work for *The Monitor*, in contrast to their counterparts from *The New Vision*, revealed how journalists' originⁱⁱⁱ and media ownership nestled with framing. Moreover, the salience of solutions and high-risk- behaviors distinguished framing tendencies among African journalists from the private and state newspapers. Whereas journalists from *The New Vision* were more likely to utilize a solutions frames, their counterparts from the *The Monitor* leaned toward higher-risk behavior frames. The curative-medicine and actions produced similar results.

The study by Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada & Payton (2012) not only registered the identity of actors on a single issue (Entman, 1993), but also highlighted HIV as a problem that is caused by particular actions for which there are solutions. This problem identification and prescriptive

news framing coincides with what Ryan (1991) and Nelson, Clawson & Oxley (1997) present as remedies to existential problems. Implicitly, higher-risk-behavior frames also draw salience to responsibility. In the context of oil extraction, the state and its representatives are considered as responsible agents in resource extraction deals with oil companies. Transparency International and other interest groups also believe that the remedy to state-led corruption resides in a more robust media that will keep governments accountable. In addition, through framing, journalistic stance also cohered with media ownership, which invariably influences journalistic orientation, as noted by Entman (2010).

Additional studies that support the argument of media bias within frames have also incorporated variables such as the national political environment and foreign policy in each country from which the stance is deployed. In two separate war-related studies, scholars found that the political environment of journalists provided interpretive schemas for audiences to understand the 2003 war in Iraq. An analysis of 746 articles published by the elite newspapers in Sweden and the United States indicated more negative tones and stories across the Swedish press than US newspapers (Dimitrova and Stromback, 2008). The US press also utilized more official sources than the Swedish press. Consistent with predictions, the military conflict and prognosis frames appeared consistently across the US newspapers in contrast to the responsibility and anti-war frames accentuated by the Swedish newspaper (Dimitrova and Stromback, 2008).

In the 2003 war coverage, elite voices and the prevailing political environment in Sweden and the United States were attributed to the tone of coverage. Earlier, Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) found similar results across international media coverage of the War in Iraq hosted on the homepages of four online news sites. Sources were classified as government, military, individual, journalists and terrorist group member (Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern, 2007).

In congruence with findings by Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) and (Dimitrova and Stromback (2008), Shoemaker & Reese (1996) posit that frames are often accentuated on the basis of the political orientation of journalists, thereby implicating political suasion as a facet of frame selection and media representation. It is therefore not surprising that consumers perceive the media as biased based on how they frame controversies such as abortion by highlighting partisan arguments that appeal to morality (Kim, 2019). Notwithstanding the conceptual and operational variations that exist within framing analyses (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016; Entman, 1993; 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2015; Matthes, 2009), a majority of studies surveyed within leading media and communication journals indicate the prevalence of issue-specific frames (Matthes, 2009).

2.3 Framing building and frame setting

Several scholars (Entman, 1993; de Vreese, 2005; Johnson-Cartee, 2005) have established that media framing is part of a communicative process with origins in political communication and news. Others have questioned the ethical dilemma that confronts journalists, particularly in developed societies where traditional norms clash with democratic practices aimed at citizen engagement (Allen & Hindman, 2014). Fundamentals such as balance and objectivity are often tested for journalists who function within a culture that rarely facilitates public deliberation. As the epicenter of news production, newsrooms across both developed and developing societies function as manufacturing sites in communicating, informing and educating various publics. Thus, journalists are engineers who help to construct social reality through frames built around the news (Johnson-Cartee, 2005). While communication, via texts, sets up the foundation for news framing, news frames are also inherent in headlines, photos, leads, sources and quotes selected by newspapers (Tankard, 2001). In the current study, normative and

democratic practices collide and distinguish the communicative processes of state and private newspapers. Headlines and quotes vary within the same issue covered, thus frame differentiation is a function of newsrooms based on their institutional norms and practices.

De Vreese (2005) offers a succinct typology of news frames by highlighting the characteristics of frame building and frame setting as an iterative and interactive process within newsrooms and among newsmakers. The typology sets up both the conceptual and theoretical framework for this study and identifies important distinctions between issue-specific and generic news frames. Within that typology, De Vreese (2005) describes communication as a dynamic process that involves frame building or emergent frames and frame setting (de Vreese, 2005). Whereas frame building refers to “the factors that influence the structural qualities of news frames,” frame setting is discernable in “the interplay between media frames and audience predispositions (de Vreese, 2005; p.51). Further, frame building is influenced by factors such as journalists’ interactions with political elites, internal organizational culture of newsrooms, and media partisanship. It therefore stands to reason that media texts reflect frame-building, while frame setting is likely to emerge from public opinion based on perceptions formulated from media exposure. The diagram below illustrates this distinction:

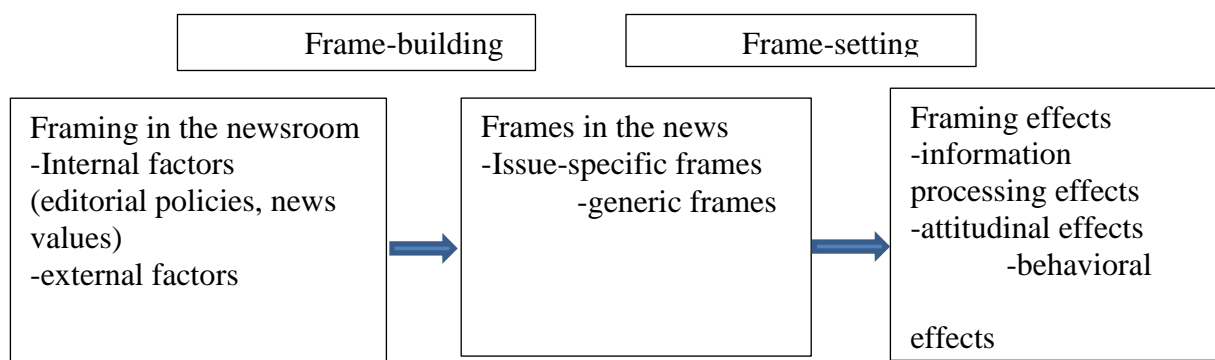


Figure 2. An Integrated process model of framing (de Vreese, 2005, p.52).

Over time, frame-building has also revealed distinctions between what issues are covered and the length of coverage, which sets apart episodic and thematic framing. Aaroe (2011) explains that episodic frames are obvious in issue-specific news frames that focus on specific issues over a period. A typical example de Vreese (2005) cites is the protracted coverage of the Clinton- Lewinsky scandal across US newspapers. Thus, press coverage that is predominantly issue-specific based on recurrent frames can be classified as episodic based on the individual-level attribution. However, coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal not only focused on Clinton episodically, but consistently also highlighted various elements of the scandal as the case progressed. Arguably, this increases the likelihood that episodic news coverage can potentially produce thematic frames.

More directly, generic news frames that are context-specific and structural attribute issues to the wider society, resulting in thematic frames. However, there is a lack of framing studies that explore factors such as the emotional reactions of citizens to test the effect of frames on audiences. Using appraisal theory, Aaroe (2011) argues that the relative strength of thematic and episodic frames depends on the intensity of citizens' emotional reaction. He also notes the absence of studies that explore the relative strength of episodic and thematic frames in news stories, while pointing out that episodic frames register more influence over opinions revealed through their increased reaction to messages. In concurrence with Aaroe, Gross (2008) found that episodic frames produced a stronger influence on audiences by triggering emotional appeal, thus supporting the view that individual context matters.

The arguments organized around the relative strength of episodic and thematic frames provide fertile ground for exploring emergent frame strength among columns and opinion letter

writers based on the salience assigned to news texts. The focus on particular issues over time, with an optic on an individual stakeholder, can reveal the effect of episodes on emergent themes that are arranged to inform public perceptions. Like Gross (2008), Springer and Harwood (2015) also found evidence to support the argument that episodic frames influence public opinion. Whether these issues are centered on complex environmental matters like oil exploration or immigration, framing around a focal point or group clearly impacts public perception and reaction formed on the basis of media representation. This was illustrated by Lawlor and Tolley (2017), who noted the influence of media frames on public perception of immigrants versus refugees among Canadian audiences. Text therefore matters apart from context.

Based on the notion that both episodic and thematic frames are deployed by journalists, it also stands to reason that they may trigger public opinion in the context of this study. Given the prominence of framing in the way journalists construct social reality (Entman, 1993) it is therefore critical to understand how these realities are perceived with regard to issues centered on the object of this study, oil. Oil exploration bears environmental, economic and socioeconomic implications that differ across regions of the world. Concomitantly, the salience of the economics of oil, the environmental implications or policy context also differs. In the next section, I provide an overview of newspaper framing of oil exploration in the developed world to account for variations in framing oil exploration in the developed world. This is followed by an overview of literature on media framing of oil exploration in developing countries.

2.4 Media Framing of Oil Exploration in the Developed World

Oil and gas exploration are considered complex environmental issues due to their policy implications that are often framed differently in the media, public debate and policy, thus impacting how they are understood and discussed (Hedding, 2017). Both local and transnational

oil and gas companies in the developed world have long recognized these complexities and the negative impact of media framing on public opinion. In response, as early as the 1970s, Exxon Mobil launched its own counter attack on major US media establishments and created its own publicity machinery. In more recent years, oil and gas companies have also engaged in framing initiatives by using corporate websites to dispel negative public reaction and build goodwill with the public (Matz and Renfrew, 2015). However, these efforts have not curtailed media framing of the sector with respect to exploration activities.

Theoretically, framing has been extensively utilized by environmental communication scholars to explore the salience newspapers have assigned to oil and gas issues. Studies of newspaper coverage of the industry in the developed world in recent years have focused on hydraulic fracking (Metze & Dodge, 2016; Gearhart, Oluseyi & Huemmer, 2019; Hedding, 2017) and the use of sources in newspaper framing (Papineau and Deacon, 2017). For instance, Hedding (2017) compared news coverage of the debate over fracking for natural gas within state newspapers in New York, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina between 2008 and 2013. There were significant differences between how journalists framed the environmental effects of fracking versus the oversight role of the governing administration. Differences were also evident in use of government officials, framing, sources and assertion of sources (Hedding, 2017).

In North Carolina, the conflict/strategy frame was most used and accounted for 32.4% of the stories covered (Hedding, 2017). This was followed by government administration (28.2%) and the environmental effects frame (13.4%). The environmental effects frame described the salience of environmental concerns magnified in stories, while the administration frame focused on how the administration executed the project. The conflict/strategy frame highlighted the source of conflicts and strategies employed by the administration to address them, while the

economic development frame was utilized to draw salience to the economic benefits of fracking (Hedding, 2017).

In New York, the conflict/strategy frame (36.3%) was also the most prevalent, followed by environmental effects (24.8%), economic development (15.9%), and administration (12.7%). In Pennsylvania, the environmental effects frame (46.3%) was the most prevalent, followed by conflict/strategy (23.1%) and economic development (9.4%) (Hedding, 2017; p.375).

The results of Hedding's study also revealed that elected officials were used most often as sources within stories framed around government administration (Hedding, 2017). This is congruent with studies (Dimitrova & Stromback 2005; Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007) underscoring the significance of official sources to journalists covering issues of conflict. Notwithstanding differences in framing and attribution of sources, in addition to the distinct political, economic, social and environmental frames, centering of the environment in each state facilitated policy change.

Among the analyses of media frames on oil exploration in the developed world, Beck (2014) posits that frames that are congruent with national economic policy undermine public debate and opportunities for public discourse. Beck analyzed stories published in *The Economist* magazine over the period 2008 and 2012 and found that economic frames dominated as salience pointed to the value of fracking as an opportunity to obtain peak oil. In the process, the frames drew attention away from major arguments set forth against fracking as an unwholesome oil exploration method. Thus, media bias toward the industry, and the magazine's economic orientation, was evident, with environmental factors underplayed.

Similarly, other studies have also revealed the prevalence of economic narratives within news coverage of the oil exploration, with focus on the environmental implications of the issue

following closely. In their thematic analysis to ascertain how Canadians perceive the Athabasca oil sands, Papineau and Deacon (2017) examined 289 newspaper stories published between 2003 and 2013 for prominence and spatial and temporal elements. The results revealed significant reference to governance, occurring 101 times in the coverage, with focus evenly split between local/provisional and national/international governance. A total of 54 articles were themed around the economy and addressed issues such as employment and economic development (Papineau and Deacon, 2017). A majority of the latter articles highlighted the economic impact of the project from a national or international context. However, the salience of environmental issues appeared in 61 articles placing the environment as the second most reported issue. Notably, coverage featuring economic themes peaked between 2006-2009 when major expansion and national awareness was occurring, thus highlighting the temporal nature of coverage (Papineau and Deacon, 2017).

The nature of hydraulic fracturing, widely known as fracking, makes it a contentious environmental issue not only in Canada, but also across the United States. As a result, the oil extraction process has produced partisan divisions through public opinions, especially in regions of the United States where companies have undertaken exploration. Cable news networks have also been instrumental in promoting the agenda of companies while framing the various imperatives. In their frame analysis of news transcripts culled from the databases of CNN, Fox News and MSNBC, Gearhart, Adegbola and Huemmer (2019) found that CNN and MSNBC provided audiences with greater information on fracking than FOX News.

Thematic frames also featured more prominently than episodic frames across all three networks (Gearhart, Adegbola and Huemmer (2019)). In terms of episodically framed news, MSNBC led, followed by CNN and Fox, but in reverse order, the percentage of thematic frames

utilized by each network placed Fox in the lead, followed by CNN, then MSNBC. While all the networks focused on the socioeconomic benefits of fracking, Fox News focused least on the environment among the three networks (Gearhart, Adegbola and Huemmer, 2019). While experts from the energy industry constituted the major sources of news, the study revealed that Fox News featured more government officials as sources than did CNN and MSNBC, which featured citizens, celebrities and activists.

Oil exploration has also been analyzed from public opinion perspectives, leading some studies to conclude that framing presents subjective biases and undermines public understanding and debate. In their study on issue framing centered on unconventional oil and gas exploration, Clarke et al. (2015) highlight the associations between framing and public opinion. The results of their national survey, conducted in the US, revealed that people supported energy extraction based on perceptions of negative or positive media frames, regardless of their political ideology. This study is particularly insightful, as it coincides with frame building and frame setting developed by De Vreese (2005), who presents an extricable link between news frames and public opinion. Implicitly, news frames impact public perceptions which are expressed via public expressed in various public spheres, including newspaper letter columns. These connections are discussed further in this chapter.

2.5 Framing of Oil Exploration in the Developing World

There is a paucity of scholarship on media framing of oil exploration in the developing world. This is recognized by scholars (Ireru et al, 2019) who have also alluded to the existential deficiencies across media in the African region, including Nigeria (Behrman et al (2012)), Africa's leading oil producing nation. Within the limited scholarship, studies have

focused on newspaper framing of oil exploration in the wake of oil discovery in Kenya (Ileri et al, 2019) and the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria (Amenaghawon, 2018).

Ileri et al analyzed 307 articles on oil exploration in Kenya in the post-2012 discovery period across two English national newspapers, *Daily Nation* and *People Daily*. Dominant frames involved the attribution of responsibility and economic consequences, while energy security emerged as the third most common frame. Thematic coverage featured significantly across both newspapers with a focus on attribution of responsibility (Ileri et al, 2019). Similarly, Amenaghawon (2018) found that stories published from 1998-2002 by the *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion*, two of Nigeria's national newspapers, relied primarily on government sources, local media agencies and their correspondents. The militant/separatist frame was most commonly accentuated with episodic frames thus excluding critical historical context as the basis for broader public understanding of the conflict (Amenaghawon, 2018). Ethnic, Justice/Human Rights and economic frames were also present. However, frames with reference to Injustice/Corruption and Need for Dialogue/Negotiation emphasized the position of aggrieved militants to report the conflict, thus centering the newspapers' use of the militants' stance as their frame of reference.

Scholars who have noted the complexity of the extractive sector have also acknowledged the limited pool of studies that focus on developing countries. However, very few studies have interrogated the role of the state and extractive sector in influencing newspaper coverage, content and the challenges journalists confront in covering the sector. This is particularly noticeable across oil producing countries in the African region, where earlier studies conducted by Behrman et al (2012) revealed a number of challenges. These include limited training, low remuneration, high attrition and the economic model of the press which conspire to undermine coverage of the

extractive sector. Modest studies have been conducted on the African region, including oil producing countries such as Nigeria and Ghana, located in West Africa, and Uganda and Kenya, located in East Africa.

To explore newspaper coverage, Behrman et al (2012) analyzed 788 articles published in Nigerian, Ghanaian and Uganda newspapers from 2007-2009 and found limited focus on the effects of oil and gas extraction or the policy implications. Journalists relied primarily on government officials and the business community as their sources, thereby excluding environmental advocates or other external sources. A majority of stories were also based on press releases, and lacked critical background information (Behrman et al, 2012). In many instances, single sources were quoted, and journalistic coverage of the publicity events of oil companies was evident in the news content. Pro-government and pro-business sources were most attributed across stories. Paid insertions, classified as news sponsored by the oil corporations to represent a favorable image, also occupied spaces within the newspapers analyzed.

In terms of bias, Behrman et al (2012) found that wire services such as BBC, Reuters, AFP and AP were more dispassionate in their coverage of the extractive sector. Comparatively, stories were openly critical and also included more sources than the African newspapers with respect to reproducing press releases from the oil sector. In addition, African journalists appeared compelled to maintain cordial relations with energy officials, due to economic dependence on the business community for advertising. Newspapers that revealed limited anti-extractive sentiments with respect to news sources included Nigerian and Ugandan publications (Behrman et al, 2012).

More recent discourses on oil exploration in developing countries are centered on good governance as a prerequisite for states to insulate themselves from the resource curse (Phillips, Hailwood & Brooks, 2016). A critical understanding of the notion of resource curse is necessary,

as it presents a less nuanced perspective about the socio-political ramifications of oil wealth and helps to establish its position in this current study and previous studies. Moreover, the use of metaphor to describe oil as a curse implies a dilemma that countries must avoid and from which others must escape (Stiglitz, Sachs & Humphreys, 2007). According to the Natural Resource Governance Institute (NGRI) (2015), the resource curse (also known as the paradox of plenty) refers to the “failure of many resource-rich countries to benefit fully from their natural resource wealth, and for governments in these countries to respond effectively to public welfare needs” (p.1). It is grounded in economic theory, which posits that natural resource abundance may yield both positive and negative results for states, thus producing a paradox of plenty where citizens live in poverty rather than benefit from the wealth of the nation (Deacon, 2011).

As part of the discourse on governance and accountability, it is believed that the role of the media is vital to a state’s accountability for wealth accumulated through the extractive sector. In an analysis of studies that have mapped the legal, regulatory and media experiences in developing countries with extractive industries, Shiffrin and Rodrigues (2014) underscores the role of the media as watchdogs in conducting investigative reporting. The study attributes a lack of resources for specialist/beat reporters to provide in-depth and sustained coverage, and for travel to offshore locations as factors that undermine reporting of this critical sector. It is also believed that transparency may be slowed by deliberate efforts to sustain public ignorance of issues centered on extractive activities (Shiffrin & Rodrigues, 2014). In addition, being under-resourced not only presents a watchdog challenge for media in reporting on the extractive sector, but the potential for succumbing to ethical breaches—such as bribery—to bias reporting in favor of developers is another real challenge (Shiffrin & Rodrigues, 2014).

Scholars such as Miller (2015) have also theorized about the relationship between natural resources and political trust, suggesting a direct correlation between how citizens view their government with respect to the distribution of resource wealth. Opposing notions of wealth as a curse, rather than a blessing, are also resonant across institutional and legal debates that have examined the political and economic impact of oil on producing nations (Stiglitz, Sachs & Humphreys, 2007). In their compilation of legal, political and economic views on the resource curse, Stiglitz, Sachs & Humphreys (2007) highlight several factors that have undermined national oil wealth benefits. These include asymmetric bargaining power, limited access to information, the failure to engage in long-term planning, weak institutional structures, and missing mechanisms of accountability. The analysts recommend as safeguards secure contracts with oil companies and allocating of revenue, guidelines for negotiators, models for optimal auctions; and strategies to strengthen state-society linkages and public accountability (Stiglitz, Sachs & Humphreys (2007).

In the context of wealth transfer, policy analysts have also supported cash transfers to mitigate the resource curse. For instance, Moss, Lambert & Majerowicz (2015) argue that cash transfers reduce poverty and inequality. They cite South Africa's cash grants as an example that led to a 50 percent reduction in poverty and a decrease in the gap between the rich and the poor in both Brazil and Mexico. Although the resource curse has been attributed to authoritarian regimes, the NRGi reframes it as political and economic challenges, recognizing that not all countries, including emerging oil developers, have authoritarian regimes. As a new democracy, Guyana's potential oil wealth has attracted mixed media narratives, which suggest that the country can succumb to the resource curse if the proceeds of oil are not well managed.

Further, news coverage of the discovery and exploration has magnified the role of the media in communicating critical national development ventures to citizens.

Studies on the extractive sector have also revealed local expectations for enhanced social services (Maweje, 2019) communicated via community engagement in the case of Uganda, and the political contests often associated with oil producers, developers and communities within the extractive region. This is certainly the case with the African region, including Kenya, East Africa, where political stability is considered vital for that nation's extractive sector (Orr, 2019). The discovery of oil in Turkana County, Kenya in 2012 raises concerns regarding conflict (Johannes, Zulu, & Kalipdeni, 2015). Moreover, the Turkana experience highlights the emergence of countries and regions once obscured into the spotlight based on oil discovery, existing local tensions and citizens' aspirations around the discovery of oil (Johannes, Zulu, & Kalipdeni, 2015).

In the current study, the role of media ownership in relation to news framing (Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada & Payton, 2012) reinforces Entman's (1993) assertion that frames register the identity of media actors. Frames also ascertain the agendas of newspapers as they are often accentuated on the basis of the political orientation of journalists, thus highlighting partisanship in frame selection and media representation (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Moreover, findings by Behrman et al (2012) and Ileri et al (2019) support Shoemaker and Reese's assertion notwithstanding the limited body of knowledge on the current study in the developing nations. The foregoing review illustrates the plethora of framing studies resonant across scholarship centered on the developing world. Economic salience of oil exploration and production is most prominent across findings. In the developing world where little to no studies exist, the economics and oil and attendant socioeconomic discontents highlight the ongoing complexity of the oil and

gas sector. This study, therefore, seeks to fill the existing gap in scholarship on framing of oil discoveries in the developing world, with a focus on an underexplored region of the world.

Theoretically, the framing perspective is applied to explore the thematic frames present across Guyana's four daily newspapers in the wake of the oil discoveries. In addition to contributing to the body of knowledge on media framing, the current study incorporates the challenges faced by journalists in packing news, which the previous studies cited do not address. This study also contributes to international communication scholarship to address the paucity of studies on the extractive sector.

2.6 Conceptual and Operational Definitions

Using Entman's definition of frames as the act of emphasizing a particular issue by "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to audiences" (Entman, 1993; p.53), I conceptualize framing, in this study, as the manner in which newspaper texts, located in news, special columns and letters to the editors, drew salience to the oil discoveries through noticeable language, sources and structure. Notwithstanding the conceptual and operational variations that exist within framing analyses (Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar, 2016; Entman, 1993; 2007; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2015; Matthes, 2009), a majority of studies surveyed within leading media and communication journals indicated the prevalence of issue-specific frames (Matthes, 2009). I, therefore, consider framing theory most applicable for this dissertation based on the role of the print media in Guyana in constructing various perspectives around a single issue-oil discovery and exploration. There is also precedence in the literature for utilizing framing theory in this study.

To operationalize framing, I rely on the typology of news frames (De Vreese, 2005) to discern how news frames functioned as a bridge to facilitate public opinion as part of the frame-

setting process. I conceptualized frame-building as journalistic practices implicit in internal organizational policies, economic and political orientation, and external influences. To operationalize frame-setting, I considered how news packaging converged with the newspapers' organizational mandate, economic model and external influences to shape the news stories packaged on the oil discoveries. Frame-setting, on the other hand, is conceptualized as the manner in which journalistic news frames are reflected in public opinion letters and special columns focused on the oil discoveries. Thus, I operationalize frame-setting as the visible interdependency of journalists and the public, including key interest groups, in interpreting the implication of the oil discoveries for Guyana's future as a new petroleum state.

Based on the theoretical perspective, conceptual and operational definitions, I developed the following research questions:

RQ1. *What are the major themes, similarities and differences accentuated across newspaper reports of the Guyana Chronicle, Stabroek News, Kaieteur News and Guyana Times in the wake of the initial oil discovery and subsequent discoveries between May 2015 and December 2019?*

RQ2. *What are the themes highlighted across special columns in the four daily newspapers? How do columnists frame the oil discoveries? Are there departures from existing news frames?*

RQ3. *What are the major themes within public opinion letters in the four daily newspapers? Do the themes reflect frame-setting in the discourse on the oil discoveries?*

RQ4a. *What were the challenges faced by journalists and editors of the four daily newspapers in news production and reporting the discovery of oil in Guyana?*

RQ4b. *What specific challenges did journalists face in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters?*

2.7 Summary

This chapter provided an overview of Guyana's socioeconomic and political history to draw connections to the development of the newspapers within the scheme of national development and media partisanship. Concepts such as media and national development were also discussed to underscore the significance of the press to national development generally, and specifically to Guyana's context as a new petroleum state. I also highlighted the socioeconomic and environmental contours of oil exploration to illustrate their salience and, at the same time, discuss how these are prioritized differently among both media and oil corporations. Importantly, I also introduced the framing perspective to foreground my review of related literature with respect to the current study. As such, studies on newspaper framing of oil exploration in the developed world and developing countries highlighted the economics of oil across media frames, while focusing mainly on news texts. In the next chapter I present the methodology that undergirds this study, followed by the findings, a discussion and concluding chapter.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand how Guyana's four daily newspapers, the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* framed oil discoveries in Guyana via texts located in news, special columns and letters to the editor. The study also seeks to understand the experiences of journalists in reporting the oil discoveries while accounting for the perspectives of other key stakeholders who contribute to framing the news. In addition, it is aimed at understanding the challenges journalists and their editors' experience in covering oil

and gas stories, and the specific challenges they encounter with stakeholders who function as their news sources. This study is guided by framing theory and executes a thematic analysis to discover texts within Guyana's four daily newspapers and frames built by journalists, columnists and opinion letter writers.

This chapter presents the methods and procedures that were used to gather and analyze data for the study. It includes an overview of the research design, the research questions, data collection procedures used for selecting newspaper texts and interviews, and strategies used for coding and analyzing the data. Procedures for maintaining interviewee confidentiality are also discussed in this chapter. The Interview Questions can be found in the appendices of this study.

Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.6). As a qualitative method, thematic analysis is therefore a useful analytic tool for both newspaper and interview data because of its central organizing feature. While frames and themes often appear conflated across the literature on framing, Saldana (2009) suggests that frames emerge from themes derived from a corpus of data. Further, as a theoretical construct, framing is not a methodological intervention but, rather, a terminology of inquiry used to describe how texts are situated. This is discernible in studies that have proffered framing analysis (Sturdza, 2018) as their title, thereby contributing to the ambiguities surrounding the conceptualization and operationalization of the theory (Carriatore, Scheufele & Iyengar, 2016).

Methodologically, scholars have utilized both qualitative content analyses and thematic analysis (Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern, 2007; Dimitrova and Stromback, 2005; Dimitrova and Stromback, 2008) to study newspaper text. The present study focuses on thematic analysis to locate the major frames themed in the texts, including linguistic devices, rather than content

analysis. In order to fully understand how news producers construct frames, Pont-Sorribes et al, (2019) illustrate the usefulness of analyzing texts along with interviews. Thus, I also interviewed journalists, editors and other key stakeholders to better understand how they contributed to building frames as content producers and news sources.

3.2 Theoretical link to Research Questions

A review of 50 manuscripts published from 2009-2013 in 26 issues of the *Journal of Communication Studies* revealed the continued theoretical relevance and application of framing theory, particularly in the last decade and mainly in journalism studies despite differentiations in its operationalization (Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2015). In recent studies, scholars have explored the influence of frames on political and public opinion (Lecheler, et al, 2015; Perez, 2017;) and its representation in gendered discourses (Bouzerdan & Whitten-Woodring, 2018) suggesting that frames continue to play a significant role in the formation of public opinion based on how they are constructed by the media.

Frames are the manner that stories are constructed. They influence reception of the message by “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1993; p.53). By selecting specific aspects of a story and excluding other aspects, frames are often constructed within news via syntax, word choice, and the structure of stories or news worthiness (Pan and Kosiki, 1993 as cited by Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007). For instance, Lawlor and Tolley (2017) noted variances in volume, framing and tone across four Canadian national newspapers in the coverage of immigrants and refugees. Cues such as deservingness and ethnicity frames were used to focus on refugees who were framed more negatively than immigrants.

Across news stories, frames situated in texts are also often attributed to sources. Hedding (2017) defines a source as “a specific named person” (p.374). In their content analysis of the coverage of the Iraq War by Coalition media and Arab media, Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) undertook a thematic analysis and found that Government officials were predominantly cited as sources of news across both coalition and Arab media despite differences in tone and frames regarding the war. While Al Jazeera website carried a critical tone in its coverage, the study found that western news values such as objectivity revealed a neutral tone in U.S. and British coverage of the war, with the exception of FOX. Similarly, in a content analysis of stories on the War published by elite Swedish and US dailies, Dimitrova and Stromback (2008) found that both international publications relied on government and military sources. However, US newspapers relied more frequently on official government and military sources than Swedish newspapers

In addition to sources, journalists also engage in frame bias as an antecedent of political power reflected in news coverage (Entman, 2007; 2010). As revealed in the literature (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2005; 2008), sources vary and contribute to how the public understands an issue through frames utilized and attributed to officials in the coverage of issues such as oil exploration. Guyana’s four daily newspapers function in a system of media polarity where politics and coverage have converged over the years. Thus, my first research question explored the major themes, similarities and differences accentuated across newspaper reports of the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times*, in the wake of the oil discovery and subsequent discoveries between May 2015 and December 2019.

Like official sources, columnists who engage in commentary around issues also contribute to public understanding of the issue being discussed. Although studies have revealed

the use of responsibility narratives in news frames (Ethelb, 2016; Sei-Hill & Telleen, 2017) columnists often attribute responsibility to state actors within their arguments as revealed in the oil exploration and discovery. The second research question sought to find out *the themes* highlighted across special columns in the four daily newspapers, and how the columnists framed the oil discoveries.

Rinke, Wessler & Weinmann (2013) argue that frames help to create a deliberative public sphere. In such deliberation, public opinion often highlights responsibility narratives which Matthes (2009) underscores as a function of political news discourse. Within the coverage of oil discoveries, opinion letters reveal how the public interpret prevailing arguments and discuss them in relation to the oil discoveries. As Springer and Harwood (2015) note, public opinion is often influenced by episodic and thematic frames activated by the media. These considerations were particularly important to answering my third research question which explored the major themes within public opinion letters in the four daily newspapers, and how their frames contributed to the discourse on the oil discoveries. Aaroe (2011) hypothesized that “episodic frames should gain more in capacity to influence opinions when the emotional reactions of the receiver intensify” (p.208). Moreover, Aaroe suggests that researchers investigate the relative capacity of episodic and thematic frames to trigger emotional reaction and influence opinion in contexts with various issue salience and issue relevance (p. 222).

Borah (2011) has posited that a comprehensive understanding of framing theory requires the study of frame production. In addition to locating frames via texts, interviews with journalists and editors illuminate the origins of frames (Borah, 2011). These iterations foregrounded my final research questions as I conducted interviews with journalists and editors for this study. The interviews helped me to understand the challenges journalists and their editors faced in

packaging stories in the oil discoveries. Through the interviews, I also discovered the inherent challenges journalists faced in their working relationships with key oil-sector other key stakeholders who are their news sources.

3.3 Data collection and Procedures

This study relied on texts culled from newspaper stories, columns, and opinion letters that were retrieved online. In-depth interviews were also conducted with journalists, editors and key stakeholders from the oil and gas sector and other interest groups to secure data.

3.3.1. Newspaper Texts

Newspapers utilize journalistic structure and form, as well as style to deliver content to readers. Implicitly, texts are part of the performative style journalists execute to illustrate their awareness of the broader context in which they function (Broersma, 2010). Whereas form refers to the “level of textual conversation that structure the presentation of news” (Broersma, 2010; p.21), style is organized around the sociocultural context of the profession. Importantly, news reports and stories are packaged based on journalistic conventions informed by news elements such as timeliness, prominence, proximity and relevance to readers. As such, stories point audiences to current events, situate the place and time of occurrences and identify the people engaged in the events.

To educate and inform audiences, journalists focus not merely on the central issues that make headlines, but also rely on major sources of news to complement stories. Journalists also strive for objectivity, the gold standard of the profession, to produce an unbiased representation of reality (Broersma, 2010). In the process, they garner key quotes from sources they consider critical to validating stories. The attribution of sources via direct quotes also makes stories credible on the basis of facts. On the other hand, columns and opinion letters to the editor follow

a reflective style based on the perspectives of their authors. Thus, the iterations of columnists and letter writers invariably reveal their political or sociocultural stance (Broersma, 2010).

For this study, the ease of access to the four dailies online made them readily available sources of data. In order to discover the frames and situate themes in the news content, columns and opinion letters, the online databases of the four daily newspapers *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* were consulted. The keyword phrase, *Oil discovery* was initiated within the search fields of each newspaper. The keywords returned news stories, special columns and opinion letters written from the time of the announcement of the initial discovery, May 2015, up to December 2019 during which the search was conducted. This period satisfied the universe of content for this study in the wake of the oil discovery in 2015 and subsequent newspaper representation up to December 2019.

Following Exxon Mobil's disclosure of its first oil well discovery in 2015, there was a hiatus in discoveries in 2016. However, between 2017 and 2018, Exxon's exploration efforts yielded substantial discoveries¹. By the end of 2018, Exxon discovered the 10th oil well in Guyana² and an additional five wells in 2019, bringing the total discoveries to fifteen between 2015 and 2019. The peak in the oil discoveries in Guyana also attracted increased news coverage among the four dailies, and gained significant traction among readers. At the same time, columnists and opinion letter writers also contributed to the public conversation on the oil discoveries, and emerged as staples in the daily diet consumers have come to rely on in Guyana and the diaspora

Hess Announces Eighth oil Discovery Offshore Guyana. (2018). *Worldwide Energy*, 29 (7).

Guyana-Energy-Exxon Mobil makes 10th oil discovery offshore Guyana. (2018, December 3). *CANA News*.

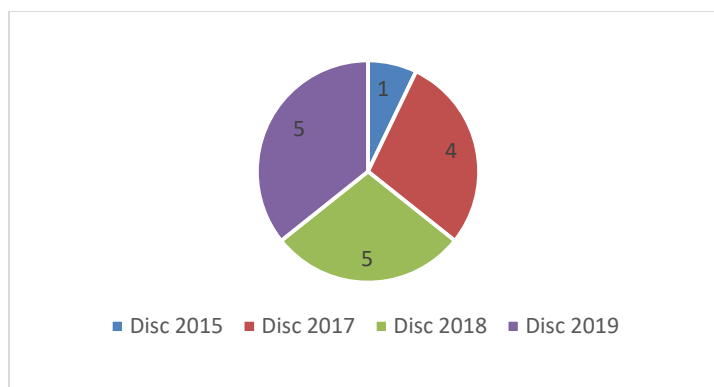


Figure 3. Oil discoveries from 2015-2019

3.3.2. Population and Sample

The *Guyana Chronicle* search returned 320 items, while 413 items matched the *Stabroek News* search. A total of 188 items emerged in a similar keyword search initiated on the *Guyana Times* website, while, surprisingly, *Kaieteur News* online database returned approximately 100 items. A new search was initiated in the online database of *Kaieteur News* with the additional keywords *letters to the editor* to obtain a larger sample. The search returned 100 items labelled as letters. To obtain a sufficient sample of articles for this study to satisfy my universe of content, I separated news stories, columns and letters to the editor returned in each database. The arrangement of news stories by month and year of publication, particularly in the case of *Stabroek News*, allowed me to easily locate stories and letters that were both labelled under Guyana news.

Columns also appeared under a separate banner in the *Stabroek News* under the key word phrase *oil discovery in Guyana*. A total of 82 columns under the title *The Road To First Oil* with an identifiable author were available. On the other hand, the combination of news stories and letters to the editors under the items returned in the *Guyana Chronicle* and *Guyana Times* databases required numeric separation and a subsequent search for columns under the *opinion* tab of the *Guyana Chronicle* and *features* tab of the *Guyana Times* website. To follow a

consistent data selection procedure for columns using the criteria of identifiable authors and their visible focus on oil and development via headlines, over the period under review, I located 72 columns in the *Guyana Chronicle* under the series titled *Oil, Gas and You*. A similar procedure was applied to identify and select suitable columns in the *Guyana Times* and *Kaieteur News*. Fifteen items deemed suitable were returned under the column *Straight Talk*, while the *Eye on Guyana* column, published by the *Kaieteur News* under its features/columnists tab returned 8 columns. Next, I manually tabulated all published letters to the editor initially returned among the news items and the subsequent search conducted on the *Kaieteur News* database for additional letters. *Stabroek News* contained 85 letters, *Guyana Times* 32 and *Kaieteur News*, 29 letters. Only 17 letters were submerged among the items returned in the *Guyana Chronicle* database search.

Finally, I sampled one in every five or 1/5 of the population of the news articles published across the four dailies. Sample sizes for *Guyana Chronicle* and *Stabroek News* were subsequently reduced for numeric consistency across the four newspapers and to obtain a manageable dataset for coding. The final sample consisted of 152 stories represented as follows: *Guyana Chronicle* N=44, *Stabroek News* N=40, *Kaieteur News*, N=31 and *Guyana Times*, N=37. I selected one in every sixth (1/6) or 12 of the 72 columns from the *Guyana Chronicle*, altogether the 23 columns found in *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times*, and 13 *Stabroek News* columns, representing one in every sixth from the total available population, to derive a final sample of 48 columns. My final sample of letters to the editor consisted of 67 letters compiled from all 17 letters returned in *Guyana Chronicle* search, 18 from *Guyana Times* and 15 from *Kaieteur News* representing half of the population, and 17 or 1/5 from *Stabroek News*.

3.3.3. *Interview Data*

In addition to news, columns and opinion letter texts, interviews were important sources of qualitative data for this study. Interviews are considered a conversation with a purpose (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011) and provide scholars with a deeper understanding of how participants make sense of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). As a qualitative instrument for exploring, understanding and analyzing how participants make sense of media content, interviews also provide qualitative depth (Hansen and Machin, 2013) that is issue-specific and consistent with research questions.

Although interviews may be conducted directly via face-to face interaction, by telephone or the internet, in-depth personal interviews are considered most effective as they allow researchers to directly observe and record non-verbal expression (Creswell, 2007). One-on-one interviews are also useful for probing interviewees for clarity and further depth of perspectives in relation to questions posed. Other advantages of interviews include the opportunity for subsequent follow up and ascertaining validity of responses in the context of questions posed.

Despite their strengths, there are also weaknesses associated with gathering interview data. These include logistical costs associated with reaching to the various interview sites, scheduling constraints, interviewee bias and time associated with transcribing data.

Given that all of my interviewees were located in central Georgetown, the logistics of meeting each of them was substantially reduced as most media establishments and agencies are located within a one-mile radius. Transportation costs associated with travel were also secured through the local university. In at least two instances I encountered scheduling challenges with interviewees. This was particularly the case with journalists who are occupied during peak morning and afternoon hours in news gathering and writing. I therefore scheduled most of the

interviews at off peak hours at the work location of most of the participants. Once I arrived at interview sites I recognized the need for bracketing as a former journalist and media educator at the University of Guyana. Rather than leveraging my familiarity with the field site and some of the interviewees to lead the conversation, I allowed interviewees to express themselves freely to reduce my own biases that may have emerged.

Recruiting interviewees to obtain data in an unobtrusive setting during “a protected time” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.188) allowed me to obtain open-ended responses that were useful for “determining what influenced a person to form an opinion or to act in a certain way, classifying complex attitude patterns and understanding the interpretations that people attribute (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p.179). I used an interview guide with structured questions to secure topic responses, but I also probed interviewees and engaged in conversations outside of the questions using a semi-structured questions. In addition, I took notes during each interview and replayed recordings after each interview as part of an initial process of transcribing the data soon after the interviews.

3.3.4 Identification and recruitment of participants

In order to garner journalistic, state and non-state perspectives on the newspaper reportage of the oil discoveries, a total of 18 in-depth interviews were conducted in Guyana from October 1-12, 2019. Interview participants were selected based on their daily newspaper coverage and direct involvement in the oil and gas sector. As such, the overarching consideration in the selection of participants was the “specialist” knowledge (Hansen and Machin, 2013, p.236) each interviewee brought to the study as part of their respective media, state and interest groups.

Media participants consisted of five journalists drawn from the four daily newspapers, the editors-in-chief of Guyana’s four daily newspapers and one business editor. It should be noted

that each daily newspaper has a designated oil and gas beat journalist who has been covering the sector from the inception of the discoveries. In addition, other journalists are also assigned to the sector to support coverage. The selection criteria used for this study was therefore based on the four designated journalists in addition to one journalist who shadows a designated journalist. Rather than rely on bylines to select participants, each beat reporter was identified by their respective editors. Other key interviewees included four state officials drawn from Guyana's Department of Energy, the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency, respectively. They are: the Director, Department of Energy, Dr. Mark Bynoe, the Minister of Natural Resources, Raphael Trotman, the Commissioner of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, Newell Dennison, and the Director, Environmental Protection Agency, Dr. Vincent Adams. The other four interviewees were the Director of Guyana's Department of Public Information, the president of the Guyana Press Association, and president of the Guyana Marine Turtle Conservation. The final interview was closely associated with an oil company. I solicited one representative rather than multiple interviewees from the stakeholder groups based on what Sim et al (2018) describe as the knowledge power of participants.

Interview participants drawn from state agencies were first contacted via email which briefly outlined the purpose of the study. Each participant also received an emailed copy of the informed consent protocol to verify necessary institutional clearances for the study. After two weeks, participants received follow up emails to confirm their participation. All journalists and editors were solicited following my arrival in Guyana through direct telephone contact and referrals. This method of recruitment was preferred due to time constraints that limit availability of journalists and their editors.

Prior to beginning each interview, participants received a copy of the informed consent IRB protocol and were given an opportunity to read and ask questions. Once I obtained signatures from each participant willingly, I reiterated that their signature guaranteed confidentiality. To guarantee anonymity, I applied a numerical code to represent each interviewee and to ensure that no names appeared in the study document. A copy of the code sheet is found in the appendix of this document. Each interview was conducted on the respective worksite of participants with the exception of two reporters who interviewed at the University of Guyana en route to news assignments. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 30 minutes to one hour and five minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

As a qualitative study, this dissertation used an interpretive analytic approach to locate texts, code and theme newspaper and interview data. Following are the data analysis procedures used to present the findings of this study.

3.4.1 Newspapers

News framing is a primarily strategic, not deliberative, form of action. Through generic news framing, journalists try to package the news in a way that is attractive to their audiences rather than trying to fulfill the prescription of theorists of deliberative democracy (Rinke et al, 2013, pp.476-477). This dissertation conducted a qualitative thematic analysis to inductively explore the thematic and conceptual frames that have been utilized by reporters, columnists and opinion letter writers to understand the framing of oil discovery—as a national resource and perception of its economic prospects—in Guyana in the four newspapers.

Among its key strengths as a qualitative approach, thematic analysis allows researchers to delve beyond “semantic and surface content of data and identify underlying ideas, ideologies, and

assumptions” consistent with the research question (Braun & Clark, 2006 as cited by Foley, Ward & McNaughton, 2019; p.5). Its primacy in analyzing text particularly in framing analyses is also underscored by Foley, Ward and McNaughton (2019). Moreover, research has revealed that scholars who utilize this approach inductively without a predefined coding scheme are able to read texts objectively (Foley, Ward and McNaughton, 2019). In addition, coding data fragments is considered more constructive in eliciting the layered nature of frames that are not necessarily discernable in coding entire news articles. Manual coding also enhances the discovery of hidden meaning that may not be discovered using computer assisted programs (Foley, Ward and McNaughton (2019).

As Entman (1993) has stated, frames refer to “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful and memorable to audiences” (p.53). Thus, I analyzed news, columns and opinion letter texts through close reading for issues that appear most noticeable or salient. I then identified emerging patterns within the paragraphs which were categorized into themes and sub-themes. Saldana (2009) describes a theme as “an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection” (p.131). Thus, units of meaning were drawn from texts located in news stories to derive codes and categories.

Categories are often used interchangeably with frames, but frames within the literature are also described as “the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization [or a political leader, public relations officer, political advertising consultant, or news consumer] defines and constructs a political issue or controversy” (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997, p.567). Although news stories, columns and letters often carry headlines, I selected texts of the first two paragraphs of news stories and columns and letters in their entirety because headlines are considered often misleading, even though they are meant to offer audiences an

abbreviated version of news stories (Ecker, Lewandowsky, Chang & Pillai, 2014). The rationale for variations in my unit of analysis resided with the fact that newswriting follows an inverted pyramid style with most of the details immersed in the first two paragraphs.

Columns and letters follow a different convention often in the form of feature writing with important details immersed in the body and sometimes conclusion. I relied on Saldana's holistic coding model as an initial process of identifying the corpus of data located in news headlines, news paragraphs, columns and opinion letters to the editor. This method was most appropriate for my study as it allowed me to tentatively assign labels to the texts in search of basic themes (Saldana, 2009).

In analyzing news, columns and letters to the editor, I was particularly mindful of differences in frame building as a distinct function of news producers, and frame setting as a feature of the interpretive processes and feedback of letter writers (de Vreese, 2005). I also recognized that those differences forged an interdependent relationship to form what Shin (2020) describes as a semantic network. I therefore took into consideration how news themes cohered with opinion letters notwithstanding structural differences.

Next, I followed a process of theming the data after a close reading of phrases and sentences in the news, columns and letters to establish categories. As stated by Braun and Clark (2006), "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (p.82). I also read texts for value dimensions or the stance of the newspapers (Hansen & Machin, 2013) consistent with framing analyses to conduct a more thorough level of initial coding. This was followed by second cycle or Focused Coding based on "thematic or conceptual similarity" (Saldana, 2009, p.189) across the four newspapers. To ensure validity and reliability of the

coding process, I read texts before and after the paragraphs selected mainly in the letters and columns to determine contexts and assign labels.

Finally, I developed a code book to assign themes to the texts to guide my analysis. A total of seven themes emerged, but these were subsequently refined to six, namely *Economic*, *Socioeconomic*, *Legal/Regulatory*, *Political/Governance*, *Environment* and *Sovereignty*.

The economic theme refers to the accumulation of wealth with each oil well discovery, and Guyana's economic advancement as a petroleum state. Economics is tied to national development from the perspective of Guyana's progression from being underdeveloped to developed, a classical approach to measuring economic development (Todaro and Smith, 2009). The socioeconomic theme follows closely behind the economic theme, but highlights the salience of the oil discoveries toward improving the wellbeing of citizens. Socioeconomic development assumes that human freedoms encompass not merely material and financial wealth, but the ability to thrive holistically within a system supported by institutional, social and administrative reforms (Guigale, 2017). It also assumes that people are included in the development process, a system that will enable poverty reduction through public information and participation (Votmer, 2010). The political theme refers to the salience of political actors in their decision-making and interactions with the various oil stakeholders in protecting the state's national interest (Hickey and Izama, 2017). Historically, governance of the oil sector has been tied to the state's decision-making apparatus and the political regime that supports transnational investors (Engler, 1961). Political actors are therefore the object of scrutiny in the oil sphere. In the context of governance, social accountability is one of the principal functions of a democratic state. Transparency in the governance of a state's resources and accountability to the people are two main pillars of social accountability (Abdaless et al, 2016). The theme reflects the general

notion that Guyana's state officials are accountable to the citizenry in managing the oil resources.

Legal themes refer to the contractually binding arrangement that governs the relations between two parties for services. Thus, the legal themes reflect the legal and regulatory framework established for the oil exploration and discoveries, and the subsequent oversight mechanism for ensuring that the framework supports Guyana's economic transformation. Like the legal and regulatory themes, the environmental theme emphasizes the salience of strict adherence to and conformity with institutional regulations to safeguard the ecosystem's human and physical environment. The sovereignty theme emphasizes the state's ability to conduct its affairs independent of external threats and interference from other states.

3.4.2 Interviews

The interview data were transcribed using otter.ai, software for transcribing audio data, and then each transcript was manually verified for accuracy and consistency alongside the original interviews and field notes compiled during the data gathering. In the process of comparing the transcripts with field notes, I observed that there were distinct variations in the text transcribed by the software and the actual narratives of the interviewees. I also recognized that as voice recognition software, otter.ai was programmed to detect accents that were audibly American. Data was therefore distorted. For instance, "Guyana" was recognized as "Ghana" in all interviews, "telegraphed to the nation" was transcribed as "calligraph nation", and the average Guyanese emerged as the average guy needs." In some instances, the software appeared to abandon words that were not recognized and produced incoherent sentences. To address the distortions, I returned to the original recordings and manually transcribed each interview.

Transcribing the recorded data manually allowed me to engage in first cycle In Vivo coding to become generally acquainted with participants' perspectives and to subsequently draw on their language for codes (Saldana, 2009). After transcribing the interviews, I isolated them by category, placing journalists, editors and state and non-state stakeholders in separate groups. By grouping the responses, I was able to read the texts several times to understand the bigger picture (Creswell, 2014) and layered challenges faced by journalists covering the oil sector. At the same time, as I read the interview texts, I compared how journalists described their challenges, and also positioned them alongside the perspectives of the key stakeholders who functioned as their news sources.



Figure 4. The news production cycle of challenges

Next, I commenced a process of structural coding to locate quotes, experiences and descriptions, and to discover and compare key themes among the groups of respondents. Saldana (2009) underscores the usefulness of structural coding as a “content-based device for multiple

participants...to gather topics lists or indexes of major categories or themes” (p.67). Given that structural coding is most appropriate for qualitative data such as interview transcripts (Saldana, 2009), I then coded participants’ responses through a process of initial categorization and major themes associated with the interview questions and follow up questions. The list of questions can be found in the appendices of this document.

By assigning similar questions to three broad homogenous groups--reporters, editors and other key informants---structural coding enabled topic categorization for theming the data. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) define themes as “units derived from patterns such as conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs” (p.131). This level of initial coding is recommended by Saldana (2009) as a means of reflecting deeply on the contents to obtain analytic leads. As noted by Leininger (1985), themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (p. 60). Listening to the interviews and reviewing texts collectively therefore facilitated theming across the interviews.

Next, I conducted second cycle coding (Saldana, 2009) to identify patterns across the shared perspectives among homogenous groups including journalists, editors and state officials. A similar process was employed for other interest group participants. Field notes made during the interviews also complemented the coding process as they helped me to recall nuanced responses in analyzing the interviews. Finally, the key themes that emerged from the interviews were analyzed and discussed within the domain of framing theory to understand how the perspectives of interviewees are shaping the narratives on oil discoveries.

3.4.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

For the purpose of confidentiality, interviewees were assigned numerical codes that appear throughout the findings of this study reflected in journalist 1 through 5, editor 1 through 5, state official 1 through 4, media official 1 and 2, environmental advocate and oil official. The audio recordings along with the informed consent forms remain in a secure location known only to the PI and research supervisor.

3.5 Conclusion

This study underscores the valence of framing as a theoretical perspective illustrated across Guyana's four daily newspapers with respect to oil discoveries and their implications for the country. The study also magnifies the role and experiences of journalists and their editors to fully understand how frames are influenced and produced as part of the frame building process. At the same time, the interdependent relationship between other key stakeholders, including state and non-state actors and the media is made visible as I argue that frames are co-created and deployed outwardly to audiences. I argue that journalistic frame building influences frame setting reflected in the public interpretations and opinions expressed through letters to the editor on the oil discoveries. In the absence of an agenda that includes media capacity building, a public-private-partnership of development communication led by the state is therefore a necessary communicative model to build trust through informed reporting. The next chapter presents the findings of this study that captured the thematic analyses of news, columns and letters to the editor. I also present the challenges faced by journalists in reporting on the oil discoveries in Guyana, and the challenges they also faced in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters to build upon,

using a development communication conceptual model. The final chapter of this study presents conclusions, recommendations and directions for future studies.

4 ANALYSIS: NEWS STORIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of news texts and the emergent themes accentuated by journalists in reporting on the oil discoveries in Guyana's four dailies, *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times*. The findings reflect the results of the RQ1 which asks: What are the themes, similarities and differences accentuated across newspaper reports of the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* in the wake of the initial oil discovery and subsequent discoveries between May 2015 and December 2019.

Based on the stories sampled from Guyana's four dailies, the major emergent themes include economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, politics/governance, environment and sovereignty. There are thematic overlaps in some instances and subthemes that emerge from major themes due to an implicit relationship in the salience registered. For instance, news analysts who argue that the 2016 Petroleum Agreement between the government and Exxon represents a poorly negotiated legal framework cite Guyana's self-imposed economic deficit as an outcome. Thus, the legal/regulatory and economic themes intersect. In addition, the socioeconomic theme appears embedded in the economic theme in stories that emphasize the socioeconomic outcomes associated with economic benefits. Subthemes such as corruption also emerge within some of the politics/governance themes identified across the stories analyzed based on allusions to corrupt acts or actions that suggest the corrupt proclivity of government officials with respect to the oil and gas sector.

4.2 The Economic Theme

Stories published by the state newspaper, *Guyana Chronicle*, in the wake of the oil discoveries and ongoing exploration, generally emphasize Guyana's aspirations as an oil producing developing nation. As Exxon continued to search for new wells, its economic investment is registered through the company's articulated plan to "pump more resources in oil exploration – in Guyana" (*Guyana Chronicle*, headline, 1 July 2015). Comparatively, all four dailies privilege the economic theme through repetitive reference to the economic value of the oil discoveries and the constant quantification of the barrels of oil. Despite the lull in oil discoveries between May 2015 and October 2016, the salience of economic rationality is evident as one headline read "No commercial oil found in ExxonMobil's 'Skip Jack' well (8 September 2016). The state, via the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MNRE) and the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) functioned as the major source of information in the latter story. Evidence of the economic theme is also discernable as both state agencies, through a press release, alluded to "undulating fortunes of mining in general and of oil exploration in particular." (*Guyana Chronicle*, 8 September, 2016, para 2).

To fill its existing human resource deficit, Government's hiring of an international consultant to determine the "economic" viability (Marshall, *Guyana Chronicle*, 20 January, 2017, para 1) of a local oil refinery also conveys the economic theme in the context of infrastructure development. Across the reporting period, 2015-2019, headlines in the *Guyana Chronicle* stories that highlight the economic theme metaphorically, include *BREAKING: ExxonMobil makes another oil strike* (16 September, 2019), *Double Oil Strike* (6 February, 2019), *Oil bonanza* (GC, 29 July, 2018), *Exxon strikes more oil* (GC, 28 February, 2018), and *Exxon strikes more oil at Payara* (GC, 25 January 2017). In addition, stories such as

“ExxonMobil on Friday announced its sixth oil discovery offshore Guyana” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 5 Jan, 2018, para 1) also illustrate the quantification of the oil discoveries. Monetary projections are also central to the message readers receive as the following paragraph illustrates:

We predict Guyana’s total oil production to surpass 600,000 barrels per day by the end of the next decade. These volumes could generate total annual revenue of US\$15 billion from the oil and gas industry. After all costs are paid, around US\$10 billion of profit could thus be split between the companies and the government,” Erlingsen said. (*Guyana Chronicle*, 1 June 2018, para 2).

Espen Erlingsen is head of upstream research at Rystad Energy, a Norwegian oil and gas research firm. Guyana’s “Decade of Development” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 25 Aug 2019, para 1) declared by Guyana’s president, David Granger, also draws salience to the economic and socioeconomic development promises that oil will bring. As such, the state has been steadily positioning itself as investor-friendly in a number of areas, including “information and communications technologies” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 14 Aug, 2019, para 2) through its diplomatic missions abroad. Coverage by the private daily *Stabroek News* also reveals the prevalence of the economic theme from a business perspective. For instance, the headline *President plays up business prospects here at UK conference* (*Stabroek News*, 27 April 2017) highlights the president’s overseas mission to attract investors to Guyana to boost the economy. Other headlines that elevate the economic theme through its implicit meaning located in oil discoveries include *ExxonMobil finds more oil at Payara well* (*Stabroek News*, 25 July 2017) and *Tullow finds oil in Orinduik Block* (12 August 2019). *Stabroek News* also makes salient the quantification of Exxon’s “14th find since May, 2015” (16 September, 2019, para 2).

Further, the daily private newspaper reproduces the economic theme from news agencies such as *Reuters* to reveal the magnitude of business investments made by transnational oil corporations in Guyana's oil sector. "France's Total has agreed to pay US\$1 million for an option to buy a 25 percent stake in an oil exploration block offshore Guyana (27 September, 2017, para 1) is an example of one such replication culled from *Reuters*. In another report culled from oil and gas people.com, *Stabroek News* also notes that "ExxonMobil is eyeing western and southern Africa as potential locations for a comparable oil bonanza" (*Stabroek News*, 26 October, 2018, para 1).

Unlike the state newspaper, *Guyana Chronicle*, which attributes a majority of its stories to government and Exxon sources, *Kaieteur News* cites more industry experts as their sources to magnify the perceived deficiencies of the Petroleum Agreement signed between the Government of Guyana (GoG) and Exxon's affiliate, Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited, along with two other companies in 2016. The news coverage suggests that Guyana has negotiated a bad contract, thus undermining the true economic benefits to the nation given the magnitude of discoveries. The newspaper comports the economic theme by utilizing local and Caribbean regional analysts who further argue that Guyana accepted a poorly articulated Petroleum Agreement. Within the economic theme, the rhetoric of recolonization is also evident as one news analyst describes the 2016 Agreement as "the unconscionable contract's plunder and robbery of our oil" (Nigel Hinds, *KN*, 18 August, 2019, para 1). Hinds, a chartered accountant, also registers the salience of the slave-master relationship to transport the economic theme as he states, "The slave masters in the room wax proudly and poetically about their enormous oil discovery in Guyana with no mention of the slavish whip of the 2% royalty" (Nigel Hinds, *KN*, 18 August 2019, para 2). In an earlier report, Hinds insists that 2% is unacceptable and requires

renegotiation. He further argues that “10% royalty on oil production should be Guyana’s top priority” (*Kaieteur News* headline, 25 February, 2018).

Apart from local and Caribbean analysts, *Kaieteur News* also relies on international sources to repetitively negate the 2016 Petroleum Agreement. The newspaper utilizes a report by Chatham House, an international policy institute based in the United Kingdom, which insists “future contracts with oil operators must reflect that the government is aware of the value of its resources” (Wilburg, 30 August 2018, para 1). Moreover, the notion that Chatham House “wants Guyana to get a fair deal from the next crop of billion-dollar oil companies that want in on the country’s black gold” (Wilburg, 30 August 2018, para 2) also conveys the traction that the oil development has attracted from international sources.

Kaieteur News also privileges the views of Caribbean oil and gas expert, Dr. Jan Mangal, who once functioned as Petroleum Advisor to the APNUC/AFC coalition government. Mangal’s contributions, which *Kaieteur News* conveys as expert advice, often registers the economic theme embedded in the legal/regulatory theme due to the perceived ill-advised issuance of oil blocks and the 2016 Petroleum Agreement. In one report, Mangal metaphorically describes the PPP government’s issuance of the Kaieteur and Canje oil blocks as “daylight robbery” (*Kaieteur News* headline, 21 April 2019). Mangal also argues that the PPP administration deliberately issued oil blocks days before national elections in 2015. He further states, “The issue with the Kaieteur and Canje is one of possible corruption” (Wilburg, 21 April, 2019, para 1). Mangal also asserts that the awards were deliberately positioned close to the “highly prospective block like the Stabroek Block just days before the results of a wildcat well are announced (ie Liza 1), and just days before a general election” (Wilburg, 21 April, 2019, para 2). A month later, the *Kaieteur News* headline *Ramotar misled the nation... PPP knew oil was found when it signed away*

Kaieteur, *Canje blocks days before elections* (31 May, 2019) again draws salience to the economic theme, while also illustrating the embeddedness of the politics/governance and legal/regulatory themes. Oil is also described repetitively as “black gold” (30 August 2018, para 2; 13 August, 2019) thus underscoring the globally established value of oil as one of the world’s most important commodities.

Headlines such as *ExxonMobil’s second well offshore Guyana confirms “world-class” oil discovery* (*Kaieteur News* headline, 1 July 2016), *Tullow strikes oil in Orinduik Block...Discovery increases share price by 20%* (*Kaieteur News* headline, 13 August, 2019) and *Exxon makes 15th discovery at Stabroek Block* (*Kaieteur News* headline, 24 December 2019) also reflect a similar pattern of quantifying the discoveries which *Guyana Chronicle* and *Stabroek News* also elevate across their headlines. Although the sample of *Kaieteur News* stories were relatively smaller than the other three dailies, an examination of the wider population of news stories reveal a preponderance of the legal/regulatory and political/governance themes to support the frame that Guyana lost while Exxon gained in the 2016 Petroleum Agreement.

A discernable economic theme that *Guyana Times* registers via its headline is *Less than 12% of oil revenue for Guyanese* (*Guyana Times* headline, 18 October, 2016). While the newspaper withholds its source of attribution, the economic theme also points to the perceived lack of economic benefits to Guyana at less than 12 percent which is concurrent with the thematic orientation of *Kaieteur News*. The economic theme across the sample of *Guyana Times* stories analyzed also reveals a similar appeal to discoveries which *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News* similarly highlight. Among the headlines that point to the quantity of the discovery and economic value are *Exxon pegs recoverable oil at 5.5 billion barrels* (*Guyana Times* headline, 8 March 2019), *ExxonMobil strikes more oil offshore Guyana* (*Guyana Times*

headline, 7 February, 2019), *Guyana can earn as much as US\$18B from Stabroek Block – financial analyst* (*Guyana Times* headline, 6 January, 2019). The economic theme is also evident through the establishment of the American Chamber of Commerce-Guyana with the articulated aim of “enhancing trade and investment relations between Guyana and the United States” (14 July, 2018, para 1). *Guyana Times* moves between Government and Exxon sources, but also privileges the views of the members of the political opposition, PPP, and financial analyst Sasenarine Singh. Singh is also a columnist for the daily newspaper. With respect to his projection of Guyana’s US\$18B earning from the Stabroek Block, Singh also cautions that Guyana’s financial returns will be modest between 2020-2023 as the oil corporation focuses on recovering costs for operation and shipping, among others. By the end of 2019, Exxon’s oil discoveries reached 15 wells. A majority of the announcements are attributed to state officials, including the Director of Energy, Dr Mark Bynoe, whose reflections are captured in the following statement:

“This is another major development for the Co-operative Republic of Guyana which, along with 14 other oil discoveries, has the potential to advance the country’s economy and propel it towards impactful and sustained development” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 16 Sept, 2019, para 2).

4.3 The Socioeconomic Theme

The socioeconomic theme across the news stories published by the four dailies largely reflect human and infrastructure development opportunities that the oil and gas sector is facilitating.

In this regard, reference to “poverty alleviation projects and infrastructure developments previously beyond the reach of available finances” (*Stabroek News*, 15 August, 2015, para 1) as

part of the promise of oil, highlight the socioeconomic theme. This is notwithstanding the attendant empirical evidence that states “oil is no guarantee of economic well-being” (*Stabroek News*, 15 August 2015, para 2). Specifically, *Stabroek News* relies on an Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) study which revealed that the Netherlands, considered more developed, recorded an average decrease in their Gross National Product (GNP) of 1.3%. On the other hand, Ghana achieved a 2.2% increase in its GDP despite being categorized as a less fortunate developing country. This macro level of comparative analysis across states by *Stabroek News* is not discernable in the other daily newspapers, although *Kaieteur News* cites both local and international experts across their stories.

The socioeconomic theme is often an economic subtheme as it registers the salience of the discoveries to the creation of jobs. For instance, the *Guyana Chronicle* headline *Oil jobs soon* (27 July, 2016) is contextualized with the assurance that “Guyanese will also benefit from training in the petroleum industry while direct employment opportunities are imminent” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 27 July, 2016, para 1) which is attributed to the Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, Raphael Trotman. In addition, the narrative of transformation is also comported by United States Ambassador to Guyana, Perry Holloway, who cites “jobs in the manufacturing of value-added agricultural products and the development of its physical infrastructure, while at the same time delivering quality education” (*Stabroek News*, 4 September, 2016, para 1) among the tangible developments. Capacity-building and awareness are also apparent socioeconomic subthemes as they highlight the relevance of human resource training and public engagement to the opportunities made available to Guyanese citizens to participate in the oil and gas sector. According to a *Stabroek News* report, the Department of Energy’s first youth outreach attracted hundreds of participants, and was held with the following purpose:

...to increase the levels of awareness among youth on the oil and gas sector, educate them on the multiplier effects of the sector, and provide an opportunity for young people to participate in the discussion and decision making process with regards to the sector's opportunities and potential challenges. (*Stabroek News*, 13 January 2019, para 2).

Unlike the *Guyana Chronicle* and *Stabroek News* findings, there were no discernable socioeconomic themes in the *Kaieteur News* stories sampled. On the other hand, the socioeconomic theme was discernable once among the *Guyana Times* stories sampled. The newspaper attributes delayed oil benefits to the people of Guyana to former president, Bharrat Jagdeo, who also critiques the coalition government's Sovereign Wealth Fund arrangement as "wrong in principle" (*Guyana Times*, 8 November, 2018, para 2). By the end of 2019, the significance of oil to Guyana's socioeconomic development became even more prominent, as Guyana's president, David Granger stated that it will "stimulate increased employment and expand services" (*Guyana Chronicle*, 21 December 2019, para 2).

4.4 The Legal/Regulatory Theme

The Legal/regulatory theme is made salient across both news headlines and the body of stories that emphasize the importance of regulating the oil and gas sector. Like the economic and socioeconomic themes which often intersect, the legal/regulatory and political/governance themes often converge at times, given the role of government in managing the oil resources while enforcing regulations. Of significance, is the state's remit for contractual agreements with Exxon and other small oil corporations prior to 2015 and subsequent to the discoveries in 2015. A majority of the arguments across the four dailies reflect perceptions regarding the 2016 contract and speculations regarding the terms of the 2016 Agreement. As such, several persons

including columnists and former state officials lobbied for its publicity. Former Attorney General, Anil Nandlall, is among the stakeholders who repeatedly called on government to release the contract for “public scrutiny, which he [Nandlall] says should be done on the basis that citizens have a right to know what’s contained in it” (August 11, 2017, para 2). Thus, the coalition government articulated its position on the 2016 contract which is made salient by the Director of Energy, Dr Mark Bynoe, who states, “Contracts are (placed) on a spectrum and they range from excellent to very poor. What we can say is that the current PSA may not be excellent but it is not very poor either (*Guyana Chronicle*, 9 November, 2018, para 2). The government therefore embraced the contract in principle, notwithstanding the criticisms and concerns regarding the 2 percent royalty and other perceived loopholes.

Although the ‘Guyana oil and gas law training development conference’ (*Guyana Chronicle*, 12 March, 2018, para) can be classified as capacity building for members of the legal fraternity, it also aligns with the legal theme. The regulatory theme is also emphasized as *Guyana joins int’l oil regulators group* (*Stabroek News* headline, 3 November, 2019) to ensure that the International Offshore Petroleum Environment Regulators (IOPER) are part of its oil and gas landscape. According to Executive Director of the Environmental Protection Agency, Dr. Vincent Adams, “The biggest thing is exchange of information and their shared resources and experiences or lessons learned, in terms of building regulations” (Thomas, *Stabroek News*, 3 November 2019, para 3). In addition to the foregoing, the idea that monitoring is necessary as Guyana “can very well end up being a failure” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 18 Dec 2018, para 2) as put by Charge D’ Affaires of the United States Embassy in Guyana, Terry Steers-Gonzalez, also establishes the legal/regulatory theme.

With respect to the legal and regulatory framework governing the oil sector, *Kaitetur News* also relies on the perspectives of industry experts, such as Fitch Solutions, to frame the narrative on oil. For instance, the daily headline *Guyana's oil sector will be inefficient if left unregulated-Industry Analyst* (Headline, 20 October, 2019) proscribes regulation. The story attributes the lack of regulation as a harbinger of corruption to the Fitch Solutions expert who stated, “Guyana’s regulatory weaknesses would lead to the oil sector being underdeveloped and inefficient while leaving it prone to the abuse of power” (*Kaitetur News*, 20 October 2019, para 2). The thematic overlapping of regulatory and governance issues is centered in the quote cited.

Moreover, the fact that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced its plan to invest *US \$500,000to promote transparency in extractive sectors* (Headline, *Guyana Times*, 14 December, 2019) also conveys the significance of regulation. Both *Stabroek News* and *Guyana Times* featured the story. Rather than draw salience to the cost of the investment, the *Stabroek News* headline, which read *US funding project for transparency, good governance in extractive industries* (14 December 2019), highlights both transparency and governance as central elements of the USAID capacity building intervention. It is apposite to note that within the news story, culled from a statement by USAID, the funds were aimed at “streamlining systematic public disclosure of data from the oil, gas, mining, forestry and fishery sectors and raising awareness among citizens about the importance of transparency and accountability in the extractives sector” (*Stabroek News* 14 December 2019, para 2). While the news story does not elaborate on awareness, journalists and stakeholders cite this as an issue, which I highlight in a subsequent segment of the study findings.

In the midst of growing external interests in Guyana as a fledging investment location, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), Guyana’s main revenue collection agency, also

establishes the importance of legal/regulatory mechanisms. As such, the legal/regulatory theme is discernable as economic protectionism “to avoid tax evasion by developed countries (*Guyana Times*, 28 June, 2019, para 1). *Guyana Times* uses the Commissioner General of the GRA, Godfrey Statia, as its source to transport the legal/regulatory theme.

4.5 The Politics/Governance Theme

There was no discernable politics/governance theme among the *Guyana Chronicle* stories as a majority of the sample accounted for the legal/regulatory theme, in addition to the economic and socioeconomic themes. As noted earlier, transparency and accountability have also emerged as a collective subtheme under governance of the legal/regulatory framework which appears across a number of stories. In terms of Guyana’s efforts with respect to engaging in transparent practices, coverage by *Stabroek News* also reveals the legal/regulatory theme as a framework for governance of the natural resources sector. The salience of Guyana’s steps towards joining the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) is made visible in the newspaper’s coverage and reporting of the “first technical working group meeting with stakeholders on the globally recognized governance framework for the natural resources sector” (*Stabroek News*, 22 December, 2015, para 1).

As another subtheme discernable under the political/governance theme, corruption is also made salient through allusions to nepotism which is contextualized as political interference through “a call to hire somebody’s nephew” (*Stabroek News*, 13 January, 2017, para 1). The statement was made by former Minister of Energy of Trinidad and Tobago, Kevin Ramnarine, at a forum organized by the Guyana Oil and Gas Association (GOGA). The US\$18M signing bonus accepted by the government as part of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement with Exxon’s affiliate

emerged as one of the most controversial issues in the news since the oil discoveries. While the signing bonus can be themed as legal/regulatory, salience to the political/governance theme renders the issue as a subtheme of corruption based on the secrecy of the signing. News coverage of the secret account “with the Bank of Guyana (BoG) to facilitate receipt of a signing bonus from ExxonMobil” (*Guyana Times*, 9 December 2017, para1) featured across the four dailies as the issue brought the coalition administration into disrepute. In particular, Transparency Institute of Guyana Inc. (TIGI) noted that “the coalition, while on the Opposition benches, had been vociferous about the transparent management of state finances” (*Guyana Times*, December, 2017 para 2). Thus, TIGI questioned the government’s accountability in managing the oil resources. The only noticeable disparity in *Guyana Times* is reference to US\$20M rather than US\$18M which was reported across the four dailies. *Stabroek News* uses the headline *Total to pay US\$100M signing bonus for stake in Suriname oil block* (*Stabroek News* headline, 24 December 2019) to subsequently compare Guyana’s US\$18M signing bonus and also to register the poor economic decision and “inept negotiating by Guyanese officials” (*Stabroek News*, 24 December 2019, para 2).

A subsequent publication by *Guyana Times* further illustrates the importance of transparency and accountability under the political/governance theme as part of the newly released Extractive Industry Transparency Index (EITI) stipulations. Among the stipulations are “full disclosure of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) payouts” and “in instances where Government spends oil and gas revenues on social services, public infrastructure, fuel subsidies, and national debt servicing” (*Guyana Times*, 8 July 2019, para 3). The views of Guyana’s former minister of natural resources, Robert Persaud, are also made visible with respect to governance of the oil and gas sector. In a *Guyana Times* story, Persaud suggests that Guyana should not

utilize the experience of its Caribbean counterpart, Trinidad and Tobago, as a best practice as it pursues oil and gas development. *Guyana Times* also draws attention to capacity building as a subtheme of governance in their coverage of press conferences hosted by the president who, in April 2018, first announced the hiring of overseas staff for the new oil and gas sector. This was followed by a subsequent announcement by the president, who stated “In due course, we hope to have a ministry responsible for the petroleum industry; it is too large. We are now setting up, we are now acquiring premises, we’re now recruiting personnel, we’re now reviewing legislation” (*Guyana Times*, 1 September 2018, para 2). Guyana’s political opposition leader, Bharrat Jagdeo, has also criticized the coalition administration for failing to adequately prepare for first oil almost five years after petroleum was first discovered offshore (*Guyana Times*, 28 December 2019, para 1).

4.6 The Environment Theme

The environment theme is discernable across a number of headlines, but varies in prominence in the four dailies. From the outset of the oil discoveries, Guyana’s articulated goal to become a green economy appears salient in the state and private newspapers. For instance, Guyana’s Presidential Advisor on the Environment, Gary Best, made it clear that “Greening Guyana’s economy not only facilitates the well-being of citizens but it also reduces environmental risks and ecological scarcity” (*Stabroek News*, 31 October, 2015, para 2). The headline that announces the story reinforces the environment theme as it states, “*Green economy will drive future development*” (*Stabroek News* headline, 31 October 2015).

The president of Guyana also reasserts Guyana’s commitment to pursuing a green agenda in the state newspaper when he states, “Guyana is on the way to becoming a ‘green’ state” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 4 March, 2017, para 2). Further, the planned environmental intervention by Guyana’s

audit office in 2018 to “analyze the capacity of the country’s relevant agencies to protect the environment and endangered species of animals” (*Guyana Times*, 2 October 2017, para 1) also raises the profile on the environment. Another discernable environment theme among the stories sampled assures readers that the country’s focus on possible catastrophes was in full view via the headline “*Guyana zeroes in on oil spill readiness*” (*Guyana Chronicle* headline, 19 March, 2019). The body of the story supports the headline by drawing attention to Guyana’s multi-stakeholder approach to establishing a contingency plan in the event of an oil spill. The *Guyana Chronicle* report quotes the Director General of Guyana’s Civil Defense Commission, who states:

“Evidently, as Guyana advances to becoming an oil-producing country, the risk of an oil spill is very likely,” Director-General (ag) of the CDC, Lieutenant Colonel Kester Craig, said at the opening of the workshop. The director-general shared that it is the vision of the CDC to coordinate and facilitate a sustainable disaster risk management system for Guyana that is primarily aimed at reducing risks and enhancing the country’s resilience to the impact of both natural and man-made hazards. (*Guyana Chronicle*, 19 March, 2019, para 2).

4.7 The Sovereignty Theme

Soon after the first oil discovery in May 2015, the Guyana-Venezuela border dispute was made central to audiences. Rashleigh Jackson, former Foreign Affairs Minister of Guyana, stated, “Guyana must forge ahead with its search for oil in the Stabroek Block, despite recent objections by neighboring Venezuela claiming that Guyana was in violation of its sovereign territory” (*Guyana Chronicle*, 21 May, 2015, para 1). Similarly, *Stabroek News* also records Venezuela’s agitation against Guyana as the following story illuminates:

Venezuela's President Nicholas Maduro has issued a decree claiming sovereignty over Guyana's territorial waters in the Atlantic Ocean off the Essequibo region and Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Greenidge yesterday said the Venezuelan ambassador will be summoned to give an explanation. (*Stabroek News*, 7 June 2015, para 1).

Bipartisan support for Guyana's position was also evident, as the opposition PPP joined with the governing APNU/AFC coalition to "stand firmly as a political party in respect of defense of our territorial integrity and national sovereignty" (*Stabroek News*, 9 June 2015, para 2). In the same vein, *Kaieteur News* draws attention to the United States support, articulated by Chargé d'Affairs of the United States Embassy in Georgetown, Bryan Hunt. Hunt stated, "The United States of America is sticking by Guyana's side as it regards the country's decision to allow Exxon Mobil to continue oil exploration activities in a part of Guyana that has been taken into dispute by neighboring Venezuela" (Rockliffe, *Kaieteur News*, 5 July 2015, para 1). Newspaper coverage of Venezuela's expressed intention to "ask the United Nations to help resolve a border dispute with Guyana over an area where a new oil discovery has been made" (*Kaieteur News*, 11 July 2015, para1) also highlights the significance of geopolitics in the oil discoveries. By pointing out that "Venezuela president asks for U.N. mediation in Guyana border controversy" (*Stabroek News*, headline, 29 July 2015), the news story further demonstrates that both countries are seeking mediation at the level of the United Nations.

Apart from making salient Guyana's strategic relations with the United States, news coverage that register the sovereignty theme also point to Guyana's strategic geopolitical agenda in the context of national security. Headlines such as *Guyana calls for China's support – as Venezuela flexes military 'might'* (*Guyana Chronicle*, headline, 25 September, 2015) reveal Guyana's pursuit of strategic alliances to secure its borders. The body of the story stated, "Prime

Minister Moses Nagamootoo, acting in the capacity of President of Guyana, has called on the People's Republic of China for support of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity" (*Guyana Chronicle*, 25 September 2015, para 1). Three years later, even as the "U.S restates support for Guyana's sovereignty" (*Guyana Chronicle*, headline, 18 December, 2018), readers are reminded that the longstanding Guyana-Venezuela issue lingers. Similarly, a *Stabroek News* story which states, "Fifty years of obstruction is ending" (*Stabroek News*, 3 Feb 2018, para 1), also suggests that Exxon's presence and exploration has disrupted Venezuela's territorial claim. Contrastingly, the sovereignty theme was not discernable across the stories sampled from *Guyana Times*.

4.8 Summary

Notwithstanding differentiated coverage of the oil discoveries and Guyana's developing oil and gas sector among the four dailies, the recurrent themes among the stories sampled included economic, legal/regulatory and political/governance. All four dailies deployed used attention-grabbing headlines to draw salience to the economic theme using metaphor to describe the oil discoveries and frame them as an economic boom. However, the three private dailies elevated the economic theme through consistent reference to Guyana's contractual shortfall based on the 2 percent royalty. *Kaieteur News*, *Guyana Times* and *Stabroek News* magnified the political/governance theme to illustrate government's ineptitude and to comport corruption as a subtheme based on the US\$18 signing bonus. With the exception of *Guyana Times*, the other three dailies also drew attention to Guyana's sovereignty with emphasis on its dispute with Venezuela, and geopolitical alliances with developed countries such as the United States. Similarities and differences were also evident in the sources utilized by the state and private newspapers with respect to the oil discoveries and commentary on their implications for Guyana.

While *Guyana Chronicle* focused significantly on the economic and socioeconomic benefits of the oil discoveries, *Stabroek News* drew salience to the economic analysis of the various discoveries, including investments by all oil companies operating in Guyana. Thus, the business orientation of *Stabroek News* is evident across stories, in addition to the mix of local and international sources. Attention to the environment is less prominent based on the news coverage across the four dailies, but only *Kaitetur News* represents an anomaly based on the absence of the theme from the stories analyzed. In addition to revealing the business orientation of *Stabroek News*, the news stories also elevate the investigative ethos of *Stabroek News* and *Kaitetur News* through their repetitive use of the economic, legal and political themes. Contrastingly, *Guyana Times* takes on a more politically aligned stance by magnifying the shortcomings of the APNU/AFC administration and privileging the views of political opposition sources, notwithstanding its use of government sources as an indication of its effort to account for balance. Contrastingly, *Guyana Chronicle* appears to systematically support the state's development agenda by highlighting all the positive attributes of the oil discoveries. Thus, media partisanship among the four dailies perhaps explains the noticeable absence of the political/governance theme in *Guyana Chronicle* which stands on the side of the state as the three private dailies register their alliances through themes that elevate counter narratives to the state's posture. I develop this argument further in the general discussion.

5 ANALYSIS: COLUMNS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the major themes comported by individual columnists in the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaitetur News* and *Guyana Times*, respectively, to frame the oil discoveries in Guyana. The research question it answers is RQ2: What are the themes

highlighted across special columns in the four daily newspapers? How do columnists frame the oil discoveries? Are there departures from existing news frames? The four columns I analyze in this section are *Oil, Gas and You*, *The Road to First Oil*, *Eye on Guyana*, and *Straight Talk* published between May 2015 and December 2019. *Oil, Gas and You* is published by the state-run *Guyana Chronicle* with the byline “Staff Reporter,” while *The Road to First Oil* is published by the private newspaper, *Stabroek News* and is authored by Christopher Ram, a chartered accountant and attorney-at-law. Lincoln Lewis, a trade unionist, and workers’ activist, authors *Eye on Guyana*, published by *Kaieteur News*, while *Straight Talk*, published by *Guyana Times*, is written by Sasenarine Singh, an economist. The analysis and interpretations that the columnists provide in their contributions largely reflect their professional background and also establish their identities. The range of legislative and economic arguments therefore signify the professional perspectives of the authors of *The Road to First Oil* and *Straight Talk*, respectively, while *Eye on Guyana* represents a holistic appeal to nation building and Guyanese rights. Consistent with its alignment with the state’s objectives, *Oil, Gas and You* reinforces the positive attributes of the discoveries and their impact on national development.

The findings across the columns sampled reveal themes consistent across news stories analyzed, and two additional themes. The major emergent themes include economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, environment, geotechnical, geopolitical and recolonization. Not all themes are present in the four columns. Although the columnists have built their opinions mainly around political, economic, and socioeconomic themes, their infusion of the legal and regulatory framework for the 2016 Petroleum Agreement creates an inextricable link among the themes. Political and legal/regulatory themes therefore intersect at times, as did the socioeconomic and political, and economic and legal/regulatory themes. The salience of

issues registered by the columnists also coalesces with their inherent interests and account for their writing style, which included explanatory and expository arrangements mixed with distinct subjective opinions.

Oil, Gas and You appears to target a general audience, and focuses primarily on the significance of the preproduction investments, contractual arrangement and discoveries, while *The Road to First Oil* and *Straight Talk* appeal to a niche audience based on their technical and legal gaze at the production and contractual contexts of the oil discoveries. However, the contextualizing of oil as a political issue is also evident across both columns, and renders them politically subjective. On the other hand, *Eye on Guyana* is defined by its stance on equitable benefits for all Guyana, and appeals to the political conscience and leadership of Guyana across the political divide to chart a cohesive and transparent course forward for all Guyanese. *Oil, Gas and You* is the least subjective as it offers more news rather than opinions. Following are the major findings:

5.2 Column 1: *Oil, Gas and You*

As the state newspaper column, *Oil, Gas and You* appears to be authored by reporters who cover the oil and gas sector. There is no byline to determine whether the contributor is an individual journalist or multiple journalists. The column supplements news coverage and follows an Opinion Editorial (OPED) style and feature writing structure. Thus, they provide less in-depth analysis of the oil and gas regime and a broad understanding of the sector to a general audience. The column's major emphases include costs associated with oil production, industry reports, and references to Guyana's economic model via comparisons with other oil producing developing countries. The major emerging themes discernable across the columns sampled are economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, environmental, geopolitical and legal/regulatory.

5.2.1 *The Economic Theme*

Consistent with its Op Ed-Feature style, *Oil, Gas and You* makes news of oil discoveries more salient to readers by quantifying their significance to Guyana's economic transformation. One column, which establishes Guyana's readiness for first oil states, "Guyana is set to receive its first share of the oil production from the Liza Phase 1 well and the first installment of Guyana's 50% of profit oil and additional royalties will be delivered" (13 October, 2019, para 1). Columns also signal Guyana's status as an emerging oil producer in the global sphere. The following paragraphs provide examples of those assertions:

The news, last week, that UK-based Tullow Oil discovered oil in the offshore Orinduik Block confirms what many international analysts had long suspected and what many Guyanese had hoped for: that Guyana is truly an emerging oil power (August 25, 2019, para 1); This oil discovery, estimated at more than 100 million barrels, also signals to international investors and oil companies that there is much more to be found beyond the Stabroek Block—where Exxon and its partners have found more than 6 billion barrels so far in 13 separate discoveries (25 August 2019, para 4).

Another column, which alludes to Guyana's strategic position in trade, suggests that Guyana has to determine how its oil will reach international markets. The *Guyana Chronicle* column also focuses steadily on costs and appears to support the notion that the legal framework that grounds the 1999 oil contract between the GoG and Exxon is favorable. For instance, one column states, "Guyana will receive half the profits from the Stabroek wells and an extra 2 per cent royalty out of pre-cost revenues, per the terms of the production-sharing agreement with Exxon and its partners" (Oil, Gas & You, August 22, 2019, para 8). There is also evidence of economic projections as the following paragraph illustrates:

The second and third phases of development in the Stabroek block could add as much as 440,000 additional barrels per day of production by the mid-2020s, on top of the 120,000 barrels per day that Liza Phase 1 will produce. Keeping these developments on track could be critical to lower costs and more revenue for Guyana. (12 June 2019, para 10)

Other columns themed around economics focus on cost comparisons among oil-producing developed and developing countries.

5.2.2 The Socioeconomic Theme

Reference to the benefits of oil for citizens is evident across several columns but the socioeconomic theme is not distinct in every instance. They are prefaced by the economic theme. For instance, one column explains that new investments in the oil and gas sector potentially stimulates “more opportunities for local companies and workers, not to mention the increase in revenue, which is already predicted to be in the billions of US dollars by the mid-2020s (Aug 25, 2019, para 5). Columns with respect to the socioeconomic benefits of oil also appear submerged in the economic salience of oil production. In this regard, another column references the demand for basic material as a driver for “other key ingredients like skilled labor, qualified subcontractors, support vessels and helicopters, which will be in high demand as well” (2 June 2019, para 5).

Perhaps one of the most discernable socioeconomic constructs is the staff writer’s assertion that Exxon’s need for local content will facilitate “Guyanese direct and indirect workforce [which] more than doubled in 2018, to more than 1,000 workers. Local businesses are also positioning themselves to provide more services to the industry” (2 June, 2019, para 9). In an earlier column, there is more specific focus on employment prospects for Guyanese. One

segment of the column establishes the longevity of the sector to future generations the following way:

Based on the size of our reserves and the huge investments being made, ExxonMobil and its partners will likely be in Guyana for the next two to three decades, at the very least.

That means that there's a very real possibility that Guyanese who are not even born yet may grow up and start their adult lives working in one of the most important oil-and-gas plays in the world. (2 September, 2018, para 1)

Within the same published article, the staff writer captures employment benefits as a corollary of new discoveries. The following example stands out:

With additional well sites come a need for additional support and work. Even before this latest discovery, Exxon was already seeking to bolster its Guyanese-born team. Currently, 20 new entry-level workers are set to be trained as operations and maintenance technicians. They will be responsible for maintaining facilities, pipelines, and telecoms. Given the technical demands of these jobs, the learning curve could be relatively steep. Though it will take time for Guyanese who are new to the industry to get the level of experience needed for supervisory or managerial roles, this kind of training is the first step in preparing Guyanese for increasingly specialized and high-paying roles. (2 September, 2018 para 5, 6).

The *Oil, Gas and You* column also underscores the significance of Guyana's low cost of living as an attraction for "foreign businesses" (2 September, 2018, para 9), thus illuminating the emergent socioeconomic benefits of the sector for non-nationals. Overall, the September 2, 2018 column contextualizes the workforce as critical to Guyana's economic development as a new oil producer. Moreover, the development of infrastructure also provides an optimistic view of

Guyana as another column states “from a state-of-the-art deep-water port to storm-resistant sea walls to new hydropower projects and a natural gas fired power plant, the government will soon be in a position to make substantial investments to improve Guyanese lives” (June 3, 2018, para.5).

5.2.3 *The Environment Theme*

Reference to the environment is discernable in the context of Guyana’s pursuit of a low carbon agenda. As part of a think tank panel, which the column cites, one panelist notes that the resource curse is a warning. The panelist also states, “...if the Green State Development Strategy is implemented effectively, Guyana could become a model in the Region and the world for how to balance energy development, economic growth and conservation” (21 October, 2018, para 8). In addition, the environment appears as part of a skills training initiative launched by the Civil Defense Commission (CDC), in conjunction with “ExxonMobil’s Guyana subsidiary, the Caribbean Disaster Risk Management Agency (CDEMA), the University of Guyana, and the Guyana Defense Force (24 March, 2019 para 1).”

There is a noticeable absence of reference to local disasters offshore where Guyana’s oil drilling and production operations are located, as the column states, “The skills that volunteers will take back to their home regions can be readily applied to other areas. Having this kind of trained personnel on the ground helps coordinate a rapid and effective response to any sort of disaster from floods and serious storms, to an industrial disaster spilling over from a neighboring country (24 March, 2019 , para 6). Instead, readers are subsequently drawn to the physical infrastructure of platforms used “to survive hurricanes, massive waves, high winds and the corrosive effects of salt water for decades” (14 June, 2019; para 1), suggesting that the integrity

of vessels are privileged to minimize physical, rather than environmental damage, although hurricanes can lead to environmental damage.

5.2.4 *The Geopolitical-Economic Theme*

A majority of the oil discoveries made by Exxon are located in the Stabroek Block, where exploration has come under surveillance due to the longstanding Guyana-Venezuela territorial dispute. In December 2018, the Venezuelan navy interrupted seismic exploration, but the column points out that “Nearly all of the 5 billion barrels discovered at 10 sites in our waters so far has been found in the southeastern part of the block, far from the maritime zone that Venezuela is encroaching upon (27 January, 2019, para 4). While the column does not elaborate on the issuance of the blocks as a strategic geopolitical decision, it pivots to Guyana’s economic “potential to be producing as much as 750,000 barrels per day by the late-2020s (27 January, 2019, para 7). However, in an earlier publication, there is more evidence of reference to Guyana’s growing geopolitical relevance as the following paragraphs illustrate:

Since the discovery of massive oil resources, international attention and investments have been steadily growing. Just this last week, an American think tank turned its focus on Guyana by hosting an event on the prospects for oil revenue to bolster our regional status and the security situation (October 21, 2018, para 1); the panelists emphasized that they believe Guyana is on the right track. “Guyana faces geopolitical challenges, ranging from transnational crime to threats to its territorial integrity. If properly managed, the oil boom can help alleviate these threats and turn Guyana into a model for the Region. (21 October 2018, para 7).

In another segment of *Oil, Gas and You*, Guyana’s growing international profile is also highlighted from the perspective of Rystad, a London-based analytic firm. As part of a Guyana

Outlook Report, articulated by a Rystad representative in Georgetown, Guyana's revenue stream is projected in the billions over the next two decades, which "...would likely place Guyana in the top 30 offshore oil-producing countries globally by the 2020s" (15 July, 2018. para 5).

5.2.5 *The Legal/Regulatory Theme*

As Guyana prepared for first oil which arrived in December 2019, months ahead of projection, *Oil, Gas and You* also focused on the arrival of the floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) vessels and the contracts that support their operation. To provide context, the column explains the design of the vessels, and the layered approval processes necessary for readiness and onboarding of fuel. Readers are also made aware of the FPSO review process contracted to SMB by its partner, Exxon. The column notes:

The signing of these contracts is likely a good thing for Guyana's path to oil production. Exxon estimates that Guyana will be producing more than half a million barrels per day by 2025 and Payara will account for more than a third of that. Bringing in third parties to review plans, train regulators, and apply the lessons learned on Liza Phase 1 and Liza Phase 2 is a natural step forward in managing our oil industry. (24 November 2019, para 6).

5.3 Column 2: The Road to First Oil

The *Road to First Oil* column takes on a direct approach to public information and awareness of the origins of oil, the legal/regulatory framework, and economic elements under its title series *Every man, woman and child in Guyana must become oil-minded*. The major emergent themes across the columns were economic, socioeconomic, legislative/regulatory, governance/political, the environment, neo-colonial/neoliberal, and to a limited extent, the

environment. However, from its inception, the column series establishes how the foregoing themes coalesce to impact oil producing developing countries. Thus, the columnist states:

We only have to think of the Dutch Disease, Resource Curse or Oil Curse, or think of Venezuela, the country with the highest reserves of crude oil in the world based on latest data, to recognize that oil is not a panacea. Indeed, oil countries are more than fairly represented in the list of most corrupt countries. So as we bear the topic in mind, we need to be ever conscious that oil then is neither a good indicator of a country's economic wellbeing, its human capital or a measure of its governance. (Ram, *The Road to first oil*, 30 June, 2017, para. 1).

Ram discredits the idea that information pertaining to the allocation of oil blocks and the tax regime are secret, while noting that they are available online for consumption if anyone desires to read. However, the columnist does not consider consumers' reliance on news for basic information and interpretation. This is notwithstanding the fact that he garnered technical details from industry experts to constrict easily relatable details to readers, which he establishes at the beginning of the series.

5.3.1 The Legal/Regulatory Theme

The contents and terms of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement have gained much traction among journalists and columnists alike. As a legal analyst, Ram spends much time providing critical insights, but appears to do so from a business/accounting lens. He argues that the taxation arrangement and benefits Guyana will receive are not an anomaly and cites arrangements in other oil-producing developing countries such as Kenya. To support his argument, the columnist also observes that government conceded to the Production Sharing clause of the Agreement, as the following example reveals:

The Minister agrees that a sum equivalent to the tax assessed on the oil company will be paid by the Minister to the Commissioner of Inland Revenue on behalf of the Contractor as income of the Contractor. The Government also accepts that its portion of Profit Oil includes payment in full by the Contractor of Contractor's share of royalty, income and corporation tax, and any other levy or charge. (11 August, 2017, para 6)

Throughout his iterations on taxation and the petroleum laws, Ram appears supportive of the external contractors, Exxon, while suggesting that Guyana's oil discoveries were a stroke of fortune.

Before we begin to scream and shout, let us remember that such an arrangement is not particularly unusual among new oil countries and that the first wave of oil operators are usually the luckiest, if we ignore that they took the greatest risks. From the host country's side it is worth noting that in assessing the tax system for oil companies, there are a number of factors to be considered: the first being that we never anticipated our luck! (11 August 2017, para 8).

5.3.2 Political and Economic themes

Political and economic themes appear intertwined and are replete across a number of columns as Ram underscores the importance of prudent management of Guyana's oil resources to ensure the country's economic development. There also appears to be a warning of the fate that can easily beset the nation based also on external factors. Whereas new discoveries are reported numerically across the newspapers, the following paragraph illustrates the analytical context and caution that also appears to be a repetitive theme that the *Road to first oil* highlights:

...since the May 2015 announcement of a huge find we have had four other finds...

Guyana is blessed. All we can hope is that good and intelligent leadership and competent and careful management will ensure that we do not transform this blessing into a curse. Experience shows that nothing can be taken for granted, internationally or in Guyana. (Ram, *The Road to First Oil*, 6 October 2017; para. 2).

Like the *Straight Talk* columnist, Ram suggests that ministerial collusion took place, and he appears to question the competence and morality of the Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment, Raphael Trotman, and the political action by President Granger. Thus, he states:

Over a rather short period, Minister Trotman has displayed a lack understanding of the petroleum laws, incompetence in engaging with the oil companies, poor judgement and ethical standards. He seems unsafely vulnerable and poses a real threat to the interests of this country but given that the standard for ministerial conduct in this Administration has been set so low, it would be naïve to expect any action by President Granger. (6 Oct 2017, para 9).

Another criticism Ram makes in congruence with *Straight Talk* columnist, Sasenarine Singh, is Minister Trotman's lack of competence notwithstanding his accomplishment with respect to transparency.

The APNU+AFC [coalition] was confronted practically from day one with the news of a major oil find. If they were unprepared it would be most natural, even if Robert Persaud, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment had briefed the new Minister. Two years on however, there is no policy, no new primary or secondary legislation and one wonders whether and when Minister Trotman will introduce new legislation. His two major achievements to date are the signing of a new Petroleum Agreement with the

ExxonMobil subsidiary and causing Guyana to become a member of Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. (EITI) (24 Nov, 2017, para 1)

5.3.3 The Environment Theme: Missing Legislation

There is a noticeable limitation in the scope of environmental themes across Ram's columns. These include his implicit reference to costs associated with the effects of fossil fuels on climate change globally. The columnist expresses concern specifically over Article 28 of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement for conflating financial social responsibility with environmental protection. Moreover, he frames the Agreement as generous, and attributes its fluidity with respect to environmental damage to Guyana's lack of negotiation.

With the international debate on the environment having been radically altered by undeniable evidence of climate change since Janet Jagan signed the first Esso Agreement in 1999, it would have been expected that Article 28 would have been substantially strengthened. Alas, that is not the case and the only amendment of any substance to this Article is the insertion of a new 28.7 which requires the Minister and the Contractor to establish a programme of financial support for environmental and social projects to be funded directly by the Contractor to the tune of three hundred thousand United States Dollars per calendar year. (16 Feb, 2018, para 2).

In a subsequent column, Ram pivots once more to the environment as part of his analysis of a potential Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) for Guyana. He recognizes Guyana's 2003 legislative amendment as critical to safeguarding the environment but draws attention to the lack of protections in the context of oil exploration and the country's new realities as an oil producer. Thus, the columnist states:

It is unlikely that the framers of the 2003 constitutional amendments were thinking of a petroleum driven state when it imposed on the state a duty “to protect the environment, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures designed tosecure sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.” At best, this was probably designed with the environment in mind rather than resource exploitation since the then (and now) prevailing wisdom has been to make Guyana an attractive destination for mining and forestry companies. (15 June, 2018, para 4).

5.3.4 Legislative/Regulatory Theme

In his 36th installment, Ram also points readers to the various aspects of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement as legally precarious for Guyana as it guarantees favorable economic conditions for the oil company. He blames the government team and cites its lack of legal competence the following way:

It is still hard to accept that serious, responsible and educated national leaders – including five attorneys-at-law – can sit in Cabinet more than fifty years after Independence, and one year AFTER the Contractor had made the world’s largest oil find, and agree to trade the future of an entire country and generations to come. All its prevention required was a single adult in that Cabinet room who read the text of the Article, understood the language and conscious of its implications to warn her/his colleagues of its grave and practically lasting consequences for the country. (16 Feb, 2018, Para 12).

In a subsequent column, Ram further argues that the lack of legislation to govern the oil sector magnifies the ineptitude of the sitting government as overseers of the oil companies and

revenues. He implies that the government has accommodated the oil companies to the extent that they are above reproach as the following paragraph suggests:

Three years after the announcement of the discovery of petroleum, Trotman and the Government have not been able to take a single action in relation to the emerging sector, pass a single piece of legislation or call out a single oil company. In the process, they have shown themselves wholly lacking in managing a petroleum economy and the country's relationship with the three oil companies. The Guyana Revenue Authority has its work cut out. The country is in for a rough ride. (4 May 2018, para 14)

5.3.5 *The Socioeconomic-Political Theme*

Perhaps one of the strongest socioeconomic arguments the columnist makes is the necessity for government to reflect on its tokenistic approach to improving the lives of citizens as he asks:

...what excuse is there for the leaders, the professionals, the politicians and the middle class to preside over an economy that only widens the income and wealth gap, pays an unconscionable minimum wage and does little to help the poor, the disadvantaged and les miserables? In an emerging sector of any economy, the State has a duty to set the right framework and tone for its medium and long term benefits to the country and its people. While not condoning liming and unemployment, it seems to me much more costly to have caused the country to endure some of the worst forms of incompetence in some of the highest offices in the land. (10 August, 2018; para 11)

Ram imputes blame on the administration for the human condition of citizens. The *Road to first oil* columnist cites the emancipation messages delivered by the president and members of the APNU/AFC coalition as lacking a clear plan to address the economic disparities that

Guyanese citizens, particularly Afro-Guyana, continue to confront years after the abolition of slavery. He likens the contract to neo-colonization and states:

...neither the President nor any of the other Emancipation Day speakers even bothered to acknowledge the legacy of slavery and the savagery of the capitalist system which spawned and nurtured it, nor that many in their respective audiences are from poor and broken homes, lacking basic facilities and earning income which barely allows them to eke out a living (Aug 10, 2018; para 10).; We have always been blessed with great natural resources but have squandered it with poor leadership, weak vision, ineffective managers, a cavalier disregard for good governance, political patronage and downright corruption. Oil gives us a chance to reset and rethink. (10 August 2018, para 12)

The columnist also notes in his August 10, 2018 column that oil will not save the nation as Guyana's neighbor to the west, Venezuela, offers a striking example of economic failure.

In his Oct 5, 2018 publication, the columnist calls for a Commission of Inquiry (COI) into the petroleum sector to publicly address government's contractual agreement with the oil companies, socioeconomic implications of the sector with respect to the livelihood of citizens, and the integration of a green economy within a petro state. The COI is also expected to facilitate public hearings in response to concerns pertaining to the establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund. Like Singh, in *Straight Talk*, Ram expresses concern about the vacuous nature of information sharing by government with respect to petroleum and its impact on citizens. He lists President Granger and the previous president, Donald Ramotar, key state officials under the Granger and Ramotar administrations, and members of civil society as participants necessary for the hearings. Among the terms of reference for the COI are, "political considerations which may have impacted on the issue of any other licenses prior to and after May 2015; The circumstances

leading up to the announcement of the May 2015 discovery; The circumstances leading up to the June 2016 Petroleum Agreement and any opinion on the legality of all the provisions of the Agreement and the Signing Bonus under the June 2016 Agreement” (October 5, 2018; para 8).

Ram later asserts that government’s dissemination of information to citizens is ad hoc, and he states, “too often, we have to glean government policy from some spending document, as in the case of the effective suspension of the office of the Commissioner of Information, or from the announcement of some loan as in this case” (14 December 2018, para 11). The *Stabroek News* columnist also implies that the PPP administration and the APNU government lack the critical governance model to assure economic prudence with respect to the oil and gas sector.

5.3.6 *The Political Theme*

While Ram’s columns appear to target a niche audience capable of understanding the legal and economic parameters of the exploration contracts, they highlight a number of issues that pertain to the governance of the resource. These include the costs incurred by the oil companies, which he questions, and the companies’ nondisclosure of information pertaining to its accrued preproduction costs. The author also appears aggrieved as he continues to chastise the APNU political administration for willful acts of abdication, as the following paragraph highlights:

There is nothing that the Granger Administration has done in relation to the Stabroek Block that suggests anything but the greatest deceit and incompetence that continues to this day. It seems fair to say that the oil companies having been handed a lifetime gift in the form of the 2016 post-discovery contract is being fortified by a dangerously weak oversight. Let us pray. (2 August, 2019, para 9)

5.4 Column 3: Straight Talk

Straight Talk commenced a series in August 2017 with the articulated purpose of explaining “the entire value stream, oil strategy, and recommended action for the Guyana oil sector” (Sasenarine Singh, September 22, 2017, para.1). Over the course of the review period of analysis, between 2017 and 2019, Sasenarine Singh takes readers on a legal and political journey while probing the decision-making of the coalition government and its representatives with respect to its oil contracts with Exxon Mobil. He also dedicates significant attention to the pre- and post- production components of oil production under his contributions in *Guyana Times*. The major themes in *Straight Talk* are economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, geotechnical and environmental. Like the previously analyzed column, *Straight Talk* also fuses issues to reveal an intersection of themes at times. Although the geotechnical theme also emerged in this section, as well as the geo-political theme in *Oil, Gas and You*, these are less prominent across the columns and are therefore not discussed significantly.

5.4.1 Legal and Political Themes

Straight Talk cites Government’s US\$18 million signing bonus with Exxon in 2016 as one of its major missteps since being elected to office in May 2015. The column comports the signing as a legal blunder that renders the government and its ministers complicit with the oil company. The columnist’s allusions to corruption also suggest that transparency is alien to the coalition administration, as the following paragraphs illustrate:

Let me be very clear, Minister Raphael Trotman and Minister Winston Jordan are creatures of President David Granger. They cannot collect GY\$3,780,000,000 (Yes, nuff

zeros! GY\$3.7 billion is the equivalent of US\$18 million) from a Private Sector investor with a track record that is not perfect with respect to relations with third world governments and attempt to hide it from the owners of the cash (the people). They work under instructions from the Ministry of the Presidency. PERIOD! So, this is all President Granger. (15 December, 2017, para 1)

There is nothing transparent and equitable about hiding this Agreement and the people's US\$18 million from them. Such behavior by the members of Team Granger more aptly resembles hypocrisy, deceit and executive "cockishness" of the lowest class (December 29, 2017, para 3)... What Mr. Granger has failed to realize is that the 2011 elections have created a new breed of people who will not tolerate, in any shape or form, any act of financial skullduggery from any Government of Guyana. Thus that foolishness his regime tried by attempting to hide the US\$18 million and the associated Agreement should be a lesson to his entire Team: Guyana is all "awee [our] own", and does not belong to the "Granger cabal. (29 December, 2017, para 4)

Straight Talk also makes repetitive reference to the government's lack of negotiating skills as the underlying reason for Exxon's competitive economic advantage over Guyana based particularly on the renegotiated contract signed in 2016 between the two parties. The author casts blame on Guyana's ministerial representative and the president and suggests that they surrendered the country to the neoliberal control of the oil giant, Exxon Mobil. Thus, Singh stated:

If the current phase of oil exploration in Guyana was handled skillfully in the 2016 Granger/Trotman-led negotiations, it would have offered a unique opportunity to

alleviate poverty... But there is very little that is viable for Guyana from this 2016 Granger/Trotman oil and gas contract. The only people this contract serves in the small Granger cabal are the international contractors. Isn't this almost imperialist plunder with local political poodles to do their bidding. (*Straight Talk*, 2 March, 2018, para1, 2)

5.4.2 *The Political Theme*

Straight Talk rarely distinguishes political action from actors as the columnist repeatedly imputes responsibility and shifts blame between the government and its ministers for acting irresponsibly. Nonetheless, there were instances when the author directs his argument toward state officials. He objectifies the minister of natural resources and the environment, Raphael Trotman, in a number of his columns, but does not exculpate previous political actors as he highlights in the following publication that:

We all know that political corruption in Guyana has been endemic for decades and we must not fool ourselves that it has declined since 2015...All the fundamental problems we are facing in the country in 2018 can and will get much worse if we do not take some critical steps to bring the necessary checks and balance to this oil and gas development. (23 February, 2018, para 7)

5.4.3 *Economic and Political Themes*

The embeddedness of politics and economics appear irrefutable in *Straight Talk*, as the author assigns responsibility to the government for the oil contract as he states “Guyana has now been placed in a situation where the whole framework of good governance is in tatters under Granger, which directly undermines economic development” (15 December, 2017 para 5). Singh also centers his appeal to politics in his gaze toward the 2020 national elections, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness between the management of the oil resources and the

country's political stewardship. He alludes to accountability as critical and accentuates it as a clarion call to all citizens the following way:

I am of the belief that if the ordinary man in the street understands what is happening, then he will hold the feet of whomever wins the 2020 elections to the fire. The bottom line remains that the post-2020 Government must be held accountable by ensuring that the oil revenues are managed responsibly and with the best interests of all the people in mind. (22 September, 2017, para 2)

While Singh appears to absolve Exxon for its role in the infamous 2016 deal with the government, he invokes the trope of political corruption by blaming the major political party, rather than the coalition government, for not publicizing the details. The following excerpt highlights the blame:

EXXON should have known better and they should have publicly declared the payments of the funds when it happened. But upon deeper reflection, this cannot be Exxon's fault since they are a private company that is primarily accountable to their shareholders. This is the PNC's fault who should be accountable to the people; after all, the people elected them. The mere fact that they have now belatedly confirmed this US\$18 million State revenue smacks of financial malpractice. (15 December, 2017 para. 6)

A few months after citing the political misadventures of the government and its representatives, *Straight Talk* continued to focus on the signing bonus. The author frames the signing as a win for government and loss for the people of Guyana by incorporating the socioeconomic outcome of a poorly managed political process.

It is not right and grossly unfair to the people that these finite Guyanese resources are not being put to use so that all sides can win. Guyana saw US\$18 million of that cash

or 0.07 per cent of the new wealth recorded on the contractor books. This certainly is not a win for the Guyanese people, compliments of the Granger Cabinet. (*Straight Talk*, 2 March, 2018, para3)

5.4.4 *Legal/Regulatory Theme*

Although Singh's contribution to the debate on the oil contract and signing bonus bear legal characteristics, at times they do not explicitly connect readers to legal arguments. However, when the arguments are juxtaposed alongside examples of illegality, they illustrate the surreptitious nature of the oil industry. Simultaneously, notions of transparency and accountability artfully magnify cautionary considerations and support the argument for a renegotiation between government and Exxon as the following paragraph illustrates:

The citizens of Guyana need to know how much oil is extracted from the well on a daily basis. In Nigeria, some 40 per cent of the oil production is illegally smuggled and sold into the black market by the very same international companies. This is very easy to do if the well is offshore out of the sight of the citizens. To avoid this, the contract must be amended to give us permanent monitoring and auditing capabilities of the production process and this must become mandatory by Guyanese law so that no Government present or in the future can waive this requirement. (*Straight Talk*, 2 March, 2018, para.5)

5.4.5 *The Legal and Socioeconomic Theme*

As part of its campaign manifesto, the APNU/AFC coalition articulated that all Guyanese will enjoy a good life with the coming of oil. However, the *Straight Talk* columnist suggests that the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement nullifies that political promise made to citizens.

In the final analysis, this Granger Government, and in particular Minister Trotman, has failed to adequately secure the rights and benefits for the local community. For example, enough oil-related jobs, enough training for local workers in oil-related skills, and other targeted projects for poor and the vulnerable. This PSA ensures that the oil will leave our shores and the people of Guyana will remain poorer. So much for the good life (5 Jan, 2018 para 9).

5.4.6 *Economic and Socioeconomic Themes*

Notwithstanding its sustained attention on legal and political themes, *Straight Talk* also appears to canvas for the rights of citizens. As an economist, Singh integrates economic and socioeconomic themes to project the likely burden that citizens will carry in a future oil economy that is subject to the realities of shifts in global oil prices. Thus, the columnist warns:

There will be greater inflation leading to price levels for every shopper climbing in an environment of declining real income as the Granger regime stingily deny workers a living wage. In their quest to starve the workers so that they can feed their greed machine for their friends and family in the Granger cabal, the ordinary man will find life more challenging financially because of the increase in oil prices. (12 January 2018, para 3)

The overarching attribution of responsibility is distinct in *Straight Talk* as the columnist insists in the following paragraphs that Exxon remains the real winners in an uneven playing field:

...the value of the oil at production will be distributed in three ways, but not necessarily evenly – one: to recoup production cost; two: to distribute to the three contractors (as ‘payment’ for their efforts); and finally, a distribution to the STATE on behalf of the people of Guyana (the real owners of the oil) (January 5, 2018, para 2)...The oil

remaining after the royalty and cost oil are divided between the three contractors and the STATE on a 50/50 basis. It is often the case that the STATE's share of profit oil increases as production increases, but unfortunately, the Trotman Negotiation Team dropped the ball on this one. (15 January 2018, para. 5).

In a subsequent column, the *Straight Talk* columnist evaluates Exxon's economic advantage against the backdrop of the 2016 Agreement with the government of Guyana, and comports it as a loss for Guyana and its citizens. He also points readers to the responsible agent—government-- in the following way:

It is not right and grossly unfair to the people that these finite Guyanese resources are not being put to use so that all sides can win. If one reviewed the data on the US stock markets, between the dates when the oil discovery was announced in Guyana in 2015 to the date this contract was signed in 2016, the valuation of the EXXON stocks went up by US\$24,648 million. Guyana saw US\$18 million of that cash or 0.07 per cent of the new wealth recorded on the contractor books. This certainly is not a win for the Guyanese people, compliments of the Granger Cabinet. (*Straight Talk*, 4 March, 2018 Para 4)

5.4.7 *The Geotechnical- Economic Theme*

Consistent with his articulated purpose, Singh dedicates several weeks of his column to explain the upstream, midstream and downstream components of the oil industry. In the process, he provides readers with a general description of the preproduction, production and post-production elements of crude oil and makes the case for an oil refinery for Guyana. Singh argues that Guyana needs to negotiate with Exxon Mobil and proposes the establishment of a technical working group to negotiate to include low cost electricity system to come to fruition by 2022 (22 September, 2017, para 7). He further posits that the oil discoveries secured the economic

viability of Guyana's oil resources which proved low risk for the oil company notwithstanding its exploration costs. The columnist also positions Exxon as economic savior by attributing the success of the oil discoveries to their technological intervention:

Let us not deny the fact that without western technology, the oil in Guyana's waters would have been buried for a long time to come. Therefore, Exxon's presence must be welcomed. Plus their financing was essential to the success of such a project. (29 December, 2017 para 1)

Although the *Straight Talk* columnist acknowledges the importance of Exxon for its groundbreaking role in the oil discoveries, he reiterates the economic advantage of the oil company over Guyana in a manner that suggests a win-lose scenario.

This deal was stacked against the ordinary man from day one and thus the entire project should have been more competently leveraged to the point where Guyana should have sought minority shareholding for the local content element for the entire value stream (downstream, midstream and upstream). (6 October 2017, para 1).

5.4.8 *The Environment Theme*

Although less thematically visible across the series of contributions in *Straight Talk*, the environment eventually captures reader's attention as Singh warns about the potential effects of an oil spill. He cites previous environmental damage and its effects on host countries based on the tendency of oil companies to exculpate themselves from mishaps. He stated:

God forbade, if we are to have an oil spill in the Stabroek Block off the Coast of Guyana, it would annihilate the fisheries industry, all the mangroves that form Guyana's natural sea defense and our entire marine eco-system with implode. Does the Granger

Government or the developer have a system in place to protect Guyana from an oil spill? Not yet, but which developer will run into a loss on a project to clean up an oil spill? Never happened in the history of the oil and gas industry. Big chunks of the burden usually fall on the local governments who are usually too poor to do justice by the affected people. (23 February, 2018, para 3)

5.5 Column 4: Eye on Guyana

Eye on Guyana is authored by Guyanese trade unionist Lincoln Lewis. The columnist appears to advocate for improved living conditions for all Guyanese and expresses his opinions thematically by drawing salience to the economic, socioeconomic, and legislative components of the oil discoveries. Political and socioeconomic themes also intersect across Lewis' columns as he attributes the role of government to Guyana's human development. The column also registers the salience of economic exploitation which I position as the theme of recolonization in this segment of the findings. In addressing issues germane to the socioeconomic wellbeing of the Guyanese and the importance of political cooperation for legislative action to secure Guyana's oil resources, *Eye on Guyana*, through its scripted style, invites a wider audience, unlike *Straight Talk* and *The Road to first oil*, to view themselves in an oil economy. The author also appears more prescriptive as he envisions a more equitable society for all citizens through collective action and a culture of inclusive participation.

5.5.1 The Legislative Theme

In December 2018, Guyana's parliamentary opposition brought a no confidence motion against the government thereby paving the way for fresh elections. As a result, the National Assembly rarely met to discuss and approve critical legislation to govern the oil and gas sector. Lewis attributes the lack of political cohesiveness to increased external interests in Guyana's

resources, and implies that disunity creates unfettered exploitation. He further argues that the politics of legislative action or inaction undermines citizens from realizing the socioeconomic benefits of oil. He states, “We have weakened ourselves by fighting each other, taking our eyes off the prize, and now external interests are moving in for the proverbial kill” (17 Nov, 2019 , para 4). To reinforce his argument, Lewis draws attention to foreign companies that thrive in an atmosphere of disunity. He suggests that their business ethos border on predatory self-interests and undermine Guyanese workers.

5.5.2 The Recolonization Theme

Lewis makes distinct reference to recolonization and forces readers to consider Guyana’s colonial past and post-colonial divisions that developed countries leveraged to pursue economic interests. He therefore warns, “The tsunami taking place, where Guyanese are not discomfited colluding with foreign forces in a form of recolonizing us, economically and politically, must be challenged (14 April, 2019 para 5). The columnist also states, “A divided nation opens itself for exploitation by the ethnic entrepreneurs and foreign forces. It is time we take the opportunity to talk with each other, coming together as a people, to protect and advance our national interest para (24 June, 2018, para 5). He contends that as divisive politics foment, “Exxon and others continue their focused determination to benefit/cash-in on our resources” (24 June 2018, para 7).

In an appeal to nationalism, the *Eye of Guyana* column also highlights the spectre of slavery as a condition that could potentially emerge in tandem with oil. Lewis implies that Guyanese fears are built upon the dichotomy between the two events.

Not since slavery would this nation see such economic movement. Whereas most of our forebears came as slaves and indentured servants, working and living under subhuman

conditions, Guyanese have all reason to be concerned we could become enslaved/indentured in our land. (17 Nov, 2019 para 10)

Notably, the columnist argues that economic dependency continues to undermine Guyana's national development. He asserts that "Openness was never a two-way street" (14 April, 2019) as developing countries have been perennially subject to uneven relations with the developed world, where the seats of international financial institutions reside. He agonizes over corrupt practices of multinational oil corporations and state officials that have deprived citizens and emphasizes the importance of local content legislation to realize equitable benefits to all Guyanese. I believe the oil find can benefit us, providing that we put systems in place – including laws, to manage the industry and ensure we police and make the system work" (24 June, 2018, para 1). He notes too that legislation can be informed by best practices of other societies. Lewis also surmises that Guyana's socialist economic model during the 1970s contributed to the deferral of oil exploration and declaration by oil companies. He asserts that the diplomatic interests that countries have pursued with Guyana following the oil discoveries are not reciprocal. Thus, the columnist states:

"Consequently, the extraction of this resource has to be a responsibility of us, not others. This does not say that Guyana cannot seek advice and technical assistance from other countries, but advice is made to be considered, not taken lock, stock and barrel (24 June, 2018, para 4).

The *Eye on Guyana* columnist further opines that transnational oil corporations are not a panacea for Guyana's poverty, and therefore urges citizens to be guarded:

Let it be understood, Exxon and every oil company operating places the interest of their country of origin first, and makes sure the business makes profit for their

shareholders, who are primarily citizens in their country of origin, and channeling that wealth back. These businesses are not here with the primary objective to create jobs and economic opportunities for us. We have to ensure such benefits accrue to us. Making profit is not bad, but it must not be made to the detriment of the host country and its people. (24 June, 2018, para 5).

5.5.3 *The Political Theme*

The *Eye on Guyana* columnist expressed the view that the economic antecedents of oil have deepened divisions between Afro and Indo Guyanese, and have also created a resurgence of mistrust:

Mistrusts, real or perceived, and the absence of proper systems to ensure all will benefit from oil, must be addressed. Failing to do so will intensify divisions at a time when it requires protecting and advancing our national interest by working collectively. (24 June, 2018, Para 8)

He states in a subsequent column that Guyana continues to witness “a political culture that ignores our collective well-being or conveniently pays lip service, more so at elections time, only to renege on having secured office” (30 Dec, 2018, para 4). The columnist also opined that oil management presages Guyana’s 2020 national elections and the apprehensions felt among citizens regarding opportunities for participate in economic activities. Thus, he underscores the relevance of local content legislation to dissuade discriminatory practices among Guyanese and against Guyanese whom, he argues, should ultimately receive “preferential consideration in employment and business opportunities.... to first benefit from the nation’s resources” (30 Dec, 2018, para 9). Lewis also casts the spotlight on corruption. He states, “Nearly every country in the developing world has seen the benefits from oil wealth disbursed among the oil

companies/shareholders, politicians, their families, friends and cohorts “(12 August, 2018, para 1). The columnist also and asserts that “politicians and multinationals have colluded in having oil and gas flow to a few as the masses live in squalor and remain deprived” (30 Dec , 2018, para 10). The columnist implies that the resource curse is endemic among corrupt state officials and oil corporations, while noting that they are lessons for Guyana. He also cites Angola and Iraq as examples:

These oil-rich countries, given the exploitation of the resource, are considered middle-income, but this wealth has not reached the masses that remain poor, living in conditions of squalor, deprived of access to basic services such as potable water, quality public education and health care. It has been the ugly tale of two cities (30 Dec 2018, para 3,4).

He notes that the promise of oil is attracting increasing interests in Guyana which poses a threat to Guyana’s sovereignty and the ability of citizens to fully benefit. Lewis seeks to assure readers that while oil is a source of personal optimism, it also stimulates concerns. He states, “This fear has to do with whether Guyanese will be allowed premier opportunities in determining our destiny and exploiting our finite resources, foremost for our collective benefit” (April 7, 2019, para 9). The *Eye on Guyana* columnist also cites Venezuela as an example where the poor failed to benefit from the oil wealth, notwithstanding legislation to govern its management. He asserts that in an effort to avoid the resource curse, “Guyana can learn numerous lessons and put systems in place to safeguard our sovereignty, protect our citizens, and ensure our resources are sustainably exploited for the benefit of all” (12 April, 2018, para. 12). Further, the columnist pointed out that Guyana’s ethnic polarity undermines its future stability, and provides fertile ground for exploitation by “ethnic entrepreneurs and foreign forces” (24 June, 2018, para 5). He challenges political leaders to form a bulwark of unity to protect Guyana’s national interest. In

his September 8, 2019 contribution, Lewis repeats his refrain on Guyana's political impasse, and deems the behavior of the leader political opposition, Bharrat Jagdeo, as incendiary:

He couldn't set aside self-interest for the national good. In the face of multinationals and expatriate businesses setting up house here to exploit our resources, we should have been able to demonstrate to the world that we can set aside domestic differences and unite in the presence of these forces. Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan did that during the Cold War. Nothing less should be expected from the interim Government and interim Opposition in a globalized world. Mr. Jagdeo blows it again, proving that though the opposition, which is a government in waiting, he has no plan beyond the media brawls, creating confusion and mayhem. (8 September 2019, para. 2)

In addition to making Guyana's pre-independence political history salient to readers, Lewis captures the post-independence governance of the country under Jagdeo's presidency as a point of conjecture. He posits that Jagdeo's record, and a future PPP administration will imperil the nation based on what he perceives as unrealistic promises. The following paragraphs capture the columnist's iterations:

When pushed on the importance of attending to the issues before First Oil in 2020, beyond the ghetto politics, the best Jagdeo has is a promise that should the PPP be elected to office the entire architecture for proper management of the resources will be completed within six months. This promise is comfort to a fool. The iron fist he has on the PPP will inform what happens in any PPP government. Where presidential candidate Irfaan Ali is clearly not his own man, decisions will not be made unless authored and approved by Jagdeo. This nation has seen and lived through his disastrous track record, which is the worse in the English-speaking Caribbean. (8 September, 2019; para 6, 7)

Lewis appears to offer a rebuttal to the notion that the coalition government is complicit in its oil agreement as he recites the record of former president Bharat Jagdeo in the following publication:

While he [Jagdeo] condemns tax concessions granted in the oil and gas arrangement, we must remember the agreements he signed with many foreign and multinationals such as RUSAL, Bai San Lin, Guyana Goldfields and others were in principle no different. Under his presidency there was no need for experience to be given more than US\$38.4M to build the access road to the failed Amaila Hydropower Project. Government properties were parceled off to friends and loyalists for next to nothing. (8 September 2019, para 14)

The political undertones of oil and Guyana's elections are further revealed among columnists who take opposing political positions. Lewis contends that the political opposition leader lacks the virtue to cite the GoG-Exxon contract as objectionable, given Jagdeo's record with previous investors:

The bad deals he had done as government, when questioned, he did nothing about them. We cannot trust him and/or Irfaan to address any deal when the PPP gets into power. This is a man who would barefacedly and unashamedly tells us we must hold the previous government to account. He is of proven deception and I call on the people to rise-up and stand up against the atrocities committed against this nation by this politician. (8 September 2019, para 16)

5.5.4 The Socioeconomic Theme

The absence of an articulated plan by the coalition government for the expending of oil revenues appears to have contributed to the view that socioeconomic benefits will not be

extended to citizens. This is a key argument Lewis makes as he underscores the lack of political transparency the following way:

As government prevaricates and quietly makes decisions behind closed doors as to how the oil wealth will be treated, it needs to be reminded this resource is not theirs, it is ours. Workers/citizens would like to see the money from oil being wisely spent. We desire the building and equipping of hospitals and research facilities to realize modern and affordable health services. We want money put into schools, creating modern facilities to make education better and accessible to all. Workers want better pay and improved conditions of work. (12 August 2018, para 5)

To lift the Guyanese out of poverty, the columnist proffers the concept of Direct Oil Benefit via cash transfers. He states:

The opportunities and conditionalities are limitless. The benefits to society are bountiful and Guyanese must not allow this opportunity for people's empowerment from Direct Oil Benefit (DOB) be dismissed as encouraging mendicancy. It is a vision any caring, progressive government is expected to explore and have. (6 Oct, 2019, para 2)

In response to the notion that cash transfers will create lethargy and dependency among Guyanese, the *Eye on Guyana* columnist argues that such thinking is elitist. He states, "This is a negative 'class think' and an anti-progressive way of looking at the role of Government to provide additional safety net for those so needing, of spreading wealth and creating development Oct 6, 2019 para 5). He posits that communities and individuals are likely to benefit substantially from DOB, which will also stimulate "investment opportunities- be it for home, education, business, or approved programs to be identified after careful research" (October 6, 2019 para 7).

To illustrate the socioeconomic benefits of cash transfers, the columnist draws on a previous model, which encompassed individual and community development. Thus, he points out:

...with the nationalization of sugar, the Burnham government maintained the Sugar Industry Welfare Fund which was introduced in colonial times. This money went towards loans for workers employed in the industry for the purchase of house lots and home construction. The Fund also provided money for improving and building culverts, bridges and roads in communities adjoining the sugar estates. These were not only of personal benefit they benefitted entire communities. (Para 4).

In addition to providing essential services for citizens, including reduced electricity costs, Lewis envisions DOB as a mechanism to create a healthy environment within a green economy. He posits that cash transfers will also “encourage citizens to engage in more clean energy, for example, solar and or wind energy and other sustainable development programs” (6 October, 2019, para 8).

5.6. Frames across the Columns

Frames comported by the columnists include blame and attribution of responsibility, economic gain and loss, the extant problems inherent in the oil, perceived solutions, and strategic opportunism. Columnists blame the coalition APNU/AFC government for the 2016 Petroleum Agreement and also frame government officials as irresponsible and inept. Particular ministers are also objectified as problematic. At the same time, columnists also frame Exxon Mobil as winners in the oil discoveries based on the significant economic value of oil. Concomitantly, government and people of Guyana are framed as losers, based on what columnists perceive as government’s forfeiture of the country’s patrimony to ExxonMobil. Gain and loss frames run

concurrently across the texts analyzed as columnists dissect the various components of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement. Specifically, *Oil, Gas and You* published by the state newspaper *Guyana Chronicle*, use the economic and socioeconomic themes to frame the oil discoveries as Guyana's salvation. On the other hand, *The Road to First Oil* highlights the perceived shortcomings in the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement between the GoG and oil companies to frame the agreement as egregious for Guyana economically. Both *Eye on Guyana* and *Straight Talk* frame the discoveries as a potential blessing or curse for Guyana, but *Straight Talk* takes political aim at the APNU/AFC government. In contrast, *Eye on Guyana* is less political but more critical in its assessment of the sector as it frames the oil company as exploitative, while holding the government responsible for the socioeconomic development of the country.

5.7 Departures from Existing News Frames

Comparatively, the themes elevated in the news texts across the four dailies and the four columns reveal similarities, rather than departures, with respect to the economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, environment and sovereignty themes. In addition to the similarities, three additional themes, geotechnical, geopolitical and recolonization emerged across the columns. It should be noted that while the additional themes are part of the findings, they do not constitute major additional frames because geopolitics, sovereignty and recolonization coalesce. The geotechnical theme is also less critical to the overall goals of this study and is therefore not emphasized beyond the findings.

The news stories and columns analyzed both highlight the salience of the oil discoveries to Guyana's economic and socioeconomic development, and framed the discoveries as a major impetus for job creation and infrastructure development. Thematically, news headlines also elevated the significance of the oil discoveries to frame them as good fortune. In addition, news

themes and columns presented the 2016 Petroleum Agreement and the US\$18M signing bonus as controversial issues. The salience of the controversy is made visible across the news texts through the economic, legal/regulatory and political/governance themes, while columnists attribute responsibility to government to frame the issues.

There are no discernable differences across the environment news theme and frames comported by the columns apart from its underrepresentation on both platforms. However, news and columns emphasized the importance of mechanisms to safeguard Guyana's ecosystems and human life should any major disaster occur. In addition, the sovereignty theme across news texts and columns both highlight Guyana's ongoing territorial dispute with Venezuela to frame the dispute as a threat to peaceful ongoing exploration. However, columnists presented Guyana's strategic alliance with the United States, and Exxon's presence, a United States transnational oil company, as a deterrent and therefore solution to the Venezuela threat.

5.8 Summary

The four columns analyzed, *Oil, Gas and You*, *The Road to First Oil*, *Eye on Guyana* and *Straight Talk* reveal the utility of the economic, socioeconomic, legal and governance themes elevated by columnists to frame the oil discoveries. Other themes present across the columns include the geopolitical, recolonization, sovereignty and environment. Through their articulated views, columnists used the economic, legal and governance themes to frame the coalition government as inept and corrupt, while framing Exxon as nefarious colonizers who have captured and won Guyana's oil reserves based on government's poor negotiation by its losing team. Although the state newspaper, *Guyana Chronicle*, through *Oil, Gas and You*, frame the discoveries as a panacea for Guyana's poverty, the private newspaper columnists appear more fixated on the legal and political elements of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement between the

government and ExxonMobil. The geopolitical and sovereignty themes elevate Guyana's emergence as an oil producer, which columnists frame as strategic based on alliances, framed as a deterrent to the long-standing Venezuela threat. While the environment theme is not comported by columnists with the same level of emphasis as the economic, legal and governance theme to frame the oil discoveries and contracting parties, its salience to the environmental threat caused by an oil spill elevates the concerns apparent in the news and subsequently expressed in letters to the editor to frame Exxon as complicit and irresponsible based on its history as a transnational oil company. Generally, the findings also reveal similarities across the news themes and frames used by columnists in the discourse on the oil discoveries.

6 ANALYSIS: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the thematic analysis of letters to the editors published in the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* following the initial oil discovery in 2015 and subsequent discoveries up to December 2019. The analysis was critical and necessary for me to understand how citizens articulated their concerns and aspirations about the oil discoveries between 2015 and 2019 as part of the discourse emerging from news coverage. The findings answer RQ3 which asks: What are major themes within public opinion letters in the four daily newspapers? Do the themes reflect frame-setting in the discourse on the oil discoveries? The analysis reveals a similar pattern of emergent themes discerned in the news stories. These include the economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, the environment and sovereignty.

The articulated public opinions of Guyanese citizens via letters to the editors also highlight the intersecting of multiple themes simultaneously as writers sought to address myriad concerns and issues surrounding Guyana's oil discoveries and development. At times, themes also coalesce as part of the argument and rebuttals presented by letter writers, in addition to subthemes, which appear implicit in the major themes elevated in the iterations of writers. For instance, neocolonialism emerged as a subtheme of the sovereignty theme as letter writers challenged the legal/regulatory and political/governance mechanisms established for the post-2015 oil discoveries. The preponderance of views of specific writers is also evident, and in some cases, their views are privileged in multiple spaces across two daily newspapers. Following are the major findings:

6.1.2 The Economic Theme

The economic "wealth" theme has been largely associated with the disclosure of the discovery of 15 oil wells offshore Guyana between May 2015 and December 2019. Like the news stories and columns, letter writers focus significantly on Guyana's transition from a poor to a wealthy nation based on the quantity of oil discoveries and their economic value. At times, letter writers present rebuttals and therefore engage in conversation with each other on the oil discoveries and their implications for Guyana. In the wake of the discoveries, the iterations of letter writers reveal congruent and competing views, as some citizens perceive the oil discoveries as an economic boon for Guyana while others contend that the 2016 Petroleum Agreement robs the country. Early public opinion reflects a dismissive stance by some citizens who felt that the government's economic strategic plan for a SWF based on oil was premature. Notwithstanding the positive outcomes for Guyana, which some letter writers envision as massive economic transformation that will lead to socioeconomic development, there are fears associated with

Guyana's engagement with Exxon. One writer posits that any plan "around future expectations from oil and later gas" was misguided as "there is no concrete guarantee that the oil exploration companies can have a guaranteed return on the capital they will need to employ in the production process" (*GT*, 4 August, 2016, para 4). Moreover, some writers also felt that citizens lacked the necessary information to fully understand the government's articulated vision for the country. The plethora of letters in the wake of the discoveries therefore relied, in part, on news stories and columns for information to form public opinion.

By the beginning of 2017, public opinion on the government's plan for the oil revenues took account of the shifting fortunes of the oil industry. As such, the articulated view that the government should develop "a national economic policy with clear developmental priorities that would utilize oil revenues" was made salient (*GT*, 16 January, 2017, para 8). The letter writer proposed socioeconomic, legal, regulatory and environmental reform as part of a long-term plan to shift Guyana's economic landscape. Other public opinions formed around oil's wealth potential for Guyana include the notion that the establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF), while good based on their establishment in many oil-rich countries, would require prudent management. However, the opinion that "Too often however, these crumble due to human failings in the form of corruption, malfeasance and bad investments" (*GT*, 22 Jan 2018 para 8) elevates the public concern about the government's complicity in mismanaging the oil revenues. Instead, the writer proffers reinvestment of oil revenues from extractive industries to bolster the economy.

Some letter writers who argue that Guyana will not enjoy its wealth posit that unprecedented wealth attracts the exploitative proclivity of developers as "poor countries having grasped and tasted the rewards of oil discovery often become victims of the enricher" (*SN*, 30

July 2018, para 12). Others, who share similar views, shape their perspectives by blaming the coalition government for the 2016 Petroleum Agreement. Thus, questions pertaining to Exxon's economic advantage over Guyana's poor negotiation skills populate the letter columns of mainly the three private dailies. One writer states, "It is clear that Guyana has been shafted by the multinationals and successive governments have played a role in this exploitation and abuse of Guyana's resources" (*KN*, 15 Oct 2019, para 2). To support the argument, the writer compares Guyana's 2 percent royalty as subpar with Brazil's likely 12 percent from oil companies pending substantial discoveries in the South American state. Moreover, inference to the oil company's perceived deception is also conveyed in the assertion that its non-disclosure of details specific to discoveries or barrels of oil reserves practiced initially is "too plentiful for Guyanese to assimilate" (*GT*, 5 March 2018, para 6). The same letter writer also probes Exxon's public affairs officer in a subsequent letter and insinuates that the corporate posture of the company reflects disregard for the country.

Letter writers also transport the economic theme by alluding to the "volume of oil discovered so far" and "the billions of dollars for both the company and its partners and shareholders, and most importantly, the people of Guyana" (*GC*, 27 Oct 2018, para 6). Of note, the quantification of the oil discoveries follows a similar pattern across the news stories carried by the four dailies. It is also the widely held view of those who support the 2016 contract that opposing views are misleading to the public. One writer argues that it is in "the national interest that we provide accurate information to the population" (*GC*, 11 June 2018, para 15). The opinion came in response to a previous letter published in the *Kaieteur News* that reinforces the claim that government agreed to a bad contract. Economic and sovereignty themes also coalesce to form the argument of economic protectionism as one letter writer states, "the series of

discoveries in the Stabroek doesn't just offer the potential for wealth. If carefully managed and well spent it could mean real security for Guyana" (*GC*, 7 Dec 2018, para 3). The writer also posits that "the size of the block, stretching from the maritime border with Venezuela all the way to the edge of Surinamese waters is an asset in itself—staking a strong and clear claim to our territorial integrity" (*GC*, 7 Dec 2018, para 3). The same letter writer, who debunks a previous letter about the size of the oil block contracted to Exxon Mobil, asserts that the argument is tantamount to an attack against the oil industry. The writer further suggests that everyone should "be working on ways to harness the economic activity this industry brings to create long-term economic growth and a diversified economy" (*GC*, 26 Oct 2018, para 3). Another letter writer earlier describes Guyana as a "fledging financial heaven" (*GT*, 23 August, 2019 para 1) to reinforce the economic theme, thus reinforcing the narrative from poverty to wealth in the context of Guyana's economic transition. Moreover, the view that "Guyana is staring at a level of wealth and development that was unimaginable just a few years ago (*GC*, 7 Dec 2018, para 4) elevates the economic theme by centering the transformative power of oil wealth.

The economic value of the oil discoveries is further promoted by letter writers who cite international projections made by Bloomberg Markets with respect to Guyana's progression to become "the world's newest petro state and potentially the richest" (*KN*, 12 November 2019, para 1). Predictions by U.S. investment bank, Morgan Stanley that the country will occupy a seat "among the world's largest per capita oil producers" also make the economic theme visible to readers (*KN*, 12 November 2019, para 1). Although many Guyanese anticipate the changes that will emerge as a result of the oil discoveries and production, not everyone perceives a bright future. As the preceding commentary suggests, there are positive and negative aspects of the oil development. Altogether, one writer posits about the oil, "though a potential blessing for the

country and peoples of Guyana, can and possibly be a curse for us due to the overreaching hand of the American company, ExxonMobil, and our gross lack of experience in oil, period”(*KN*, 18 November 2019, para 1). While describing Exxon as bearing a nefarious history, the letter writer also asserts that the company is profit driven while “keeping their investors and top executives happy at the expense of the host country”(*KN*, 18 Nov 2019, para 2). Moreover, the subtheme of recolonization as part of the economic theme is present as the writer argues that the GoG-host country’s “relationship must always be that of master to servant wrapped in a neat little package marked greed/profit” (*KN*, 18 Nov 2019, para 3).

6.1.3 The Socioeconomic Theme

The aspirations and concerns of letter writers appear concurrent and also reflect the news themes with respect to benefits citizens will derive from the oil revenues. Thus, the socioeconomic theme draws salience to citizens’ aspirations for a better life. One letter writer articulated that “the find changes everything. Within a decade, Guyana could be completely transformed by the find going from unpaved roads and sporadic power to being a noticeably developed nation (*GT*, 29 June, 2016 para 5). Thus, a majority of the socioeconomic themes also point to the management of revenues from the oil discoveries in a manner that adequately addresses poverty, social services and infrastructure development. Following the initial oil discovery in 2015 and the anticipation that more oil wells were on the horizons describe the prospects as a “windfall” with the promise of “a better future for our country: us and our future generations “(*SN*, 28 Dec 2016 para 1). One writer states, “There is no doubt that we need to see a lot of investment in infrastructure, education and healthcare” (*GC*, 13 July 2018, para 4). As writers consider holistic improvement to the lives of their fellow Guyanese, some express

aspirations for sustainable development that addresses education and the environment. The following excerpt illustrates:

We will have enough money to finally start critical infrastructure projects. We could improve healthcare access for many citizens. We can focus on education and ensure that Guyanese are getting the skills necessary to turn oil revenues into a lasting foundation for a diverse and sustainable economy. We can also implement the Green State Development Plan, bringing renewable energy production to all regions of Guyana... we have an opportunity to provide a very bright future for our children. We cannot let that pass by. (*GT*, 8 January 2018, para 6).

As a result of the oil discoveries, social services appear as a repetitive socioeconomic theme as the same letter writer, Clement Smith, subsequently questions how the state will spend the estimated US\$15B in oil revenue beginning 2030. The following paragraph highlights the way one writer poses both questions and recommendations:

How will we use this blessing? We will have enough money to finally start critical infrastructure projects. We could improve healthcare access for many citizens. We can focus on education, and ensure that Guyanese are getting the skills necessary to turn oil revenues into a lasting foundation for a diverse and sustainable economy. We can also implement the Green-State Development Plan, bringing renewable energy production to all regions of Guyana. (*GC*, 8 August 2018, para 5)

Others, who cite Guyana's mineral resource wealth, including gold and manganese, note that Guyanese do not benefit. As such, citizens perceive cash transfer models as an opportunity for "those who govern to really make the small man a real man in Guyana" (*GC*, 20 August 2018, para 12) based on "checks and balances so that there is no exploitation and that those in

need are the primary beneficiaries” (*KN*, 11 Oct 2019, para 6). Despite converging views, letter writers also differ on cash transfers as another one writer suggests its actualization “on a more economically feasible scale” based on a “a fixed cap of US\$90 million on cash transfers being made to every tax registered resident of Guyana” for “long term investments in oneself like housing, education, transportation assets,” among others (*GT*, 20 October, 2019 para 2). The letter writer supports his argument by proposing a system of transparency and accountability for the cash transfer and revenues expended by citizens.

Across a number of letters to the editors, benefits to the ordinary man appear repetitively as a major concern and aspiration. Another letter writer, who also draws salience to the socioeconomic theme, expresses his aspiration the following way:

I sincerely hope that Guyana’s oil revenue will trickle down to the ordinary man. I also hope money from our oil bonanza goes towards noble initiatives, such as upgrading the University of Guyana to the highest level, to make it a world class institution where people from around the world, even from developed countries, would want to come and study. I look forward to Guyana having modern institutions of technology and top-of-the-line schools with the best laboratories and equipment to produce sterling minds. (*GT*, 30 July 2019, para 4).

Immediate relief for Guyana’s poor citizens is also recurrent theme among letter writers who assert that “there is no reason we should have folks homeless and starving at this point” (*SN*, 13 Oct 2019, para 2). The view that the oil discoveries and accompanying revenues should be all encompassing from a socioeconomic perspective is also comported as “implementation of a robust Local Content Policy that would ensure our local businesses benefit from activities emanating from the oil sector, higher public servant wages, and generous cash transfer to parents and elderly, our economic landscape would surely transform (*GT*, 23 August 2019, para 5).

However, reference to benefits to the poor is magnified most in the following letter, as another writer posits:

Those who will be in charge in the future must be guided by the principle that oil resources must reach the most vulnerable in our country. While international oil companies are sure to get richer, Guyana must ensure all of our people benefit meaningfully from oil and not only a handful. *GT*, 24 Dec 2019, para 8.

With respect to socioeconomic improvement, another letter writer also asserts that investing in education will have a direct impact on the lives of children because “Better teachers, facilities, resources and programs will ensure that the quality of that primary education improves,” (*GT*, 22 Oct, 2019, para 3) rather than cash transfers. “I fear that the idea of targeted transfers is more likely to become a mere euphemism for buying political support with oil money” (*GT*, 22 October 2019, para 6) the writer adds.

6.1.4 *The Legal/Regulatory Theme*

Several letter writers whose contributions to the discourse on the oil discoveries appear in the private newspapers share a common opposition to government’s 2016 Petroleum Agreement with ExxonMobil. One letter writer, whose contributions often enjoy a space and place across the three private dailies, describes the Production Sharing Agreement between Guyana on one side and ExxonMobil, Hess, and CNOOC on the other side agreement as “the worst contract ever agreed upon in the annals of the world” (*KN*, 29 January 2018, para 1). Thus, in elevating the legal/regulatory theme, the same writer states emphatically, “What we need is to renegotiate the June 27, 2016 Petroleum Contract – posthaste” (*GT*, 5 March 2018, para 1). At the same time, the role of the media is scripted as crucial to keeping Guyana’s parliamentarians accountable by garnering their perspectives on the oil contracts for future reference. In articulating his views on

the issue, the letter writer states, “I suspect shame or contrivance will invariably cause them to provide crutch answers, and hide behind the party line if access or answers are obtained” (*GT*, 5 March 2018, para 4). In the latter regard, the legal/regulatory and political/governance theme synchronize to reveal the conjecture that governance of oil resources and contracts are subject to political shifts and not necessarily an issue of morality.

As letter writers continued to lobby, another citizen insisted that all oil contracts be released to reveal the “differences between “pre-oil discovery (CGX was signed in 2013) and the other is a post-oil discovery (the ExxonMobil renegotiated contract was signed in 2016)” (*SN*, 25 February 2018 para 1). The notion that the 2016 Agreement was sealed notwithstanding government’s knowledge of “about 3 billion barrels of oil...of high-quality” also reflects the legal/regulatory missteps which the writer considers, while stating that the government has “failed Guyanese and future generations of Guyanese, therefore, by renegotiating a poor deal for Guyana “ (*SN*, 25 Feb 2018, para 1). Letter writers who oppose the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement also describe it as “unparalleled, egregious, abusive and immoral” (*SN*, 16 September 2018, para 4), given that Exxon’s “Pre-Contract Costs are passed onto Guyana, greatly reducing the benefits we will obtain from the oil find” *SN* (16 September 2018, para 5). Thus, public opinion on Guyana’s economic benefits from the oil discoveries accounts for cost-benefit analyses tied to the oil contract rather than the euphoria some writers have expressed.

Public opinion formed around the oil contract also reveals the repetitive assertion that government must take full responsibility for the terms of the contract. This refrain is comported by letter writers who bring their professional background to their submission, as this letter writer, a chartered accountant, states, “It is clear that Guyana has been shafted by the multinationals and successive governments have played a role in this exploitation and abuse of Guyana’s resources”

(*KN*, 15 Oct 2019, para 2). To support the argument, the writer projects that Brazil's oil contract would reflect at least 12 percent royalty and equal profit sharing which makes Guyana's economic benefit subpar. At the time of the letter, it appears that Brazil, Guyana's neighbor to the South, was in negotiations. The writer also urges government to "consult with Guyanese experts to rescue the bad contracts to increase royalties and profits to Guyana and to release Guyana from billions of dollars in compensation and to guarantee work and business to locals" (*KN*, 15 Oct 2019, para 5).

In another letter published a month earlier in *Kaieteur News*, the same letter writer argues metaphorically that Guyana is entangled in a web from which it needs to free itself, and also pursue a collective political position to obtain "a Royalty in the range of 10-20%" (*KN*, 15 September 2019, para 3). In blaming government for the 2016 Petroleum Agreement, he characterizes it as "putrid and diabolical" (*KN*, 15 September 2019, para 4).

Like its news articles that tend to highlight the state's development trajectory in a positive tone, the *Guyana Chronicle* letters to the editor establish the newspaper's elevation of letters that support for the state's position. As such, one letter writer characterizes the assertion that Guyana is losing money under the 2016 Agreement as "disingenuous" (*GC*, 28 Jan 2019, para 7) and proposes that planning becomes a priority to determine "how the oil revenues will be managed and spent to benefit all Guyanese" (*GC*, 28 Jan 2019, para, 7). The letter writer also challenges the notion that "international companies thrive on instability" *GC*, 28 Jan 2019, para 2), and argues that renegotiating the contract is inimical to Guyana's economic interest and will only facilitate "scaring away investors" (*GC*, 28 Jan 2019, para 3). Similarly, another opinion letter writer later suggests that the 2% royalty should not be compared, but rather, Guyana's Department of Energy should "bargain on our future contracts" (*GC*, 7 July 2019, para 5).

Political rebuttals also imply that those who oppose the oil contract find their motivation in the fact that their “party is no longer in office”, hence “the very deal it negotiated is ‘bursting with flaws’ (*GC*, 27 Oct 2018, para 2).

6.1.5 *The Political/Governance Theme*

Soon after the APNU/AFC coalition government was elected to office in 2015, letter writers presented their aspirations while calling on the government to be accountable to citizens. On the heels of the first oil discovery, one writer states, “Wealth from oil if allowed to mix with crime, corruption, and drugs are but a recipe for more hardship” and adds, “oil rich countries like Iraq, Iran, Nigeria, and Venezuela are not enjoying their oil wealth”(SN, 22 June 2015 para 7). In what appears to be support for the argument that the competitive bidding process for the issuance of remaining oil blocks be embraced rather than the debase open door approach, one writer recommends the independent management of the process. The writer states, “There is a very serious risk of corruption with this method due to the lack of transparency and accountability” (SN, 17 September 2017, para 2). Thus, the inference to corruption draws readers’ attention to the perceptions that some citizens activate as they link oil to governance based on known cases in other oil producing developing countries. At the same time, notions of corruption are activated as a subtheme of the political/governance theme elevated mainly in the private daily newspapers. Another letter writer in the private daily, *Guyana Times*, also expresses concern over the issuance of oil blocks by stating, “The risk of Government’s friends and family members illegally obtaining leases would be significantly reduced if an independently managed and well audited competitive bidding process is used (*GT*, 17 September, 2017, para 5).

In 2017, the signing bonus emerged as a major issue of contention for the coalition government after citizens found out that government received US\$18 million as a signing bonus

and had deposited since Sept 2016 but made the disclosure a year later. Thus, the issue gained significant traction nationally in the newspapers. Opinion writers accused the APNU and AFC ministers of government of having “no regard for public accountability, transparency and disclosure” (*GT*, 18 Dec 2017, para 11) and renegeing on their manifesto about good governance. In calling for transparency, the writer states, “Exxon needs to come clean. The APNU-AFC Government has no intention of being honest and forthcoming with the public, or the Parliament, or the media” (*GT*, 18 Dec 2017 para 14). Another opinion letter ties national trust to “an explanation and an apology from President Granger” (*SN*, 16 December 2017, para 3) to blot out the US\$18M transgression, and with assurances of transparency.

With respect to governance and transparency, letter writers also interrogate the state’s delayed disclosure of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement which emerged a year after it was signed. One writer describes the disclosure as “a great win for transparency” but credits “journalists, civil society and individuals” (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 1) for their lobbying. Notably, the letter was published in both *Stabroek News* and *Guyana Times* simultaneously. The writer also asserts, “When it comes to powerful oil companies and their interest in countries with poor governance and high poverty rates, blind idealism with regard to their interests will do us no good” (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 2). The experiences of other oil producing developing countries are also made salient to readers elevate their plight under Exxon Mobil’s oil exploration and production activities. Following is an excerpt:

We only have to take a look at the examples of how other countries such as Chad, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, have fared with regard to economic instability, social conflict and human rights violations following the discovery of oil. One of the many things these

countries have in common is their predator-prey relationship with ExxonMobil. (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 2).

As letters writers looked outward for examples of economic instability to transport the political/governance theme with an uptick on corruption, the views of international reporters have also helped to further shape their scrutiny of Guyana's development as a petro state. In response to the assertion by a *New York Times* reporter, Clifford Krauss, that Guyana is an underdeveloped, uncivilized and corrupt nation on the cusp of wealth, several letter writers seized the opportunity to correct misconceptions and ask probing questions at the same time. One letter asks:

“Will the leaders mismanage the ‘incoming wealth?’ Will corruption be exacerbated? Will there be the creation of Swiss Bank accounts? Will the money be squandered and stolen? Will the wealth be unequally distributed? Will the wealth be hoarded by only the powerful and influential? (*SN*, 30 July 2018, para 3)

Another letter writer who issues an open rebuke to a subsequent article written by the same *NY Times* reporter, under the headline “The \$20 Billion Question for Guyana,” describes the story as “possessing an undertone of sensationalism with an emphasis of painting a dark and gloomy, left-leaning communist country plagued by tribal rivalry that has made very little social progress since its Independence as a sovereign state” (*SN*, 15 August 2018, para 15). The writer also accuses Krauss of being deliberate in highlighting Guyana's sociopolitical challenges while omitting Exxon's relative economic advantage as a corporate oil giant from the Western world.

Four years after the first oil discovery, letter writers, including Guyanese in the diaspora, continued to elevate the legal/regulatory and political/governance themes by insisting that the government renegotiate its 2016 Petroleum Agreement with Exxon. One writer whose iterations

on poor governance appear several times in *Kaieteur News* states, “Guyana stands to lose hundreds of millions (if not billions) of American dollars annually if it does not demand that the oil contracts be opened for renegotiation” (*KN*, 2 September 2019, para 5). Notwithstanding the economic and socioeconomic themes that register the salience of the oil wealth to Guyanese, some writers are less optimistic. To this end, one writer asserts that revenue generation and the socioeconomic development are contingent upon “good governance” (*SN*, 25 June 2019, para 2).

The awareness of corrupt practices in other oil-producing developing nations among Guyanese citizens remained evident across letters in 2019, as one letter writer expresses the concern that “politicians being in control of our oil revenue” (*GT*, 30 July 2019, para 10). While opining that some politicians crave power and wealth, the writer makes salient the claim that corruption is endemic in some African countries as he states, “Just take a look at Equatorial Guinea, an oil producing nation in Africa that discovered oil about two decades ago. The average citizen is still poor, while the politicians have filled their pockets” (*GT*, 30 July 2019 Para 10).

The political stance of letter writers is also magnified in the letters published, particularly in *Guyana Times*. In the context of governance, letter writers blame ministers of the AFC faction of the coalition government for reneging on their campaign promises. The subtheme of corruption is also evident. In particular, minister Trotman continues to be disparaged for “tremendous ‘blunders’ with the EXXON deal” which the writer frames as “corrupt” (*GT*, 12 July, 2019, para 7). The letter writer argues that the US\$18M signing bonus, over which minister Trotman presided, has created significant losses for Guyana and an elusive dream for Guyanese who wish to experience a better life as a result of the significant oil discoveries. Other AFC ministers do not remain unscathed, as the writer cites corrupt practices as endemic in their respective portfolio ministries. Another writer, who also casts aspersions, accuses the coalition

government of “unforgivable dereliction of duty to the people of Guyana” (GT, 17 July, 2019, para 3) then repeats his refrain in a subsequent letter.

The public opinion that “ExxonMobil is cognizant of its mistakes in Equatorial Guinea and Angola” (GT, 17 July 2019, para 5) also implies that there were missteps by the oil company based on its complicity with state officials of the two African oil producing countries. Further, the opinion letter appears to signal the coalition’s lack of public trust as the writer reminds readers of the No Confidence Motion moved successfully against the coalition administration in December 2018. Thus, the narrative of “caretaker government” (GT, 17 July 2019, para 6) and predictions of Guyana’s risky economic health risk due to delayed election signals partisan views. The writer also posits that the absence of laws has placed the Guyanese at the behest of ExxonMobil, and calls on ExxonMobil to confirm its course of action in the eventuality that “First Oil” precedes the next General & Regional Election (GT, 17 July 2019, para 6).

With respect to governance, citizens also claim that the coalition government has drained the treasury since taking office based on the anticipated revenues from the oil discoveries. The assertion that president “Granger neglected to prepare the nation for oil production” (KN, 20 November 2019, para 1) also registers the salience of political management even as the author establishes the argument that the government lacks economic austerity. The writer labels the minister with responsibility for the energy sector as “a woefully inadequate choice” (KN, 20 November 2019, para 3) for his leadership role in negotiations with Exxon Mobil for the 2016 Agreement and subsequently acceptance of a “US\$18 Million bonus in exchange for a four-year extension of the exploration rights in the 6.6 Million-acre Stabroek block” (KN, 20 November 2019, para 3, 4). The letter writer also posits that Guyana’s future as an oil producer hinges on its leadership and the choice that citizens make between President Granger and the opposition

political candidate. The view that there has been slow progress with regards to preparing the country for first oil resonates among some authors. For instance, one writer states, “There has been too little progress since the initial discovery nearly five years ago. First oil is around the corner, yet, our Government and institutions are scrambling to put frameworks in place to manage the revenues (*GT*, 5 December 2019, para 3).

The legal/regulatory and political/governance themes also intersect to form the assertion that the coalition government has failed, and “should never be re-elected” (*GT*, 24 August 2019, para 1). In addition, the socioeconomic-political/governance themes also mirror the perceptions of Guyana’s political opposition conveyed in letters published by *Guyana Times*. The following excerpt exemplifies the salience of the socioeconomic-political/governance theme:

With all the riches that would likely flow, our citizens have zero chance of benefitting. In fact, things might even get worse because of the gross incompetence by the Government. Our Minister of Finance is absolutely clueless when it comes to managing the economy; our Minister of Legal Affairs is the biggest pettifogger in the entire nation; and our President, well, he is buried in oblivion. (*GT*, 23 August 2019, para 2). Similarities also abound among letter writers in *Guyana Times* who have attributed the success of oil exploration and discoveries to the PPP administration led by Janet Jagan. A majority of the letters writers also elevate the views of the political opposition thereby revealing slant based on the political orientation of *Guyana Times*. But those aligned to the coalition have also challenged critics by linking elections to the oil discoveries. One writer opines that “Jagdeo [the political opposition leader] is desperate, and with every new oil find, his craving for power and his desperation intensifies” (*GC*, 28 August 2019, para 1, 2).

A year earlier, another letter writer who also drew an association between the oil discoveries and political contestation alluded to the geopolitical implications of who leads Guyana. The writer states, “The stakes are too high with oil and a rebirth of big power rivalry in international relations for the West to sit down and allow Jagdeo to govern again...”(GT, 26 April 2018, para 1). Throughout 2019, political contestation among letter writers continued to reveal the embeddedness of oil and public opinion reflected in strongly-held partisan views among Guyanese. The assertion that president “Granger neglected to prepare the nation for oil production” (KN, 20 November 2019, para 1) also registers the salience of political management even as the author establishes the argument that the government lacks economic austerity. The writer also asserts that Guyana’s future as an oil producer hinges on its leadership and the choice that citizens make between President Granger and the opposition political candidate. Public opinion letters also wage indictments against the political administration for its failure to introduce “local content policy directives” (KN, 20 November 2019, para 1) among other necessary legislative elements to regulate Guyana’s oil production, even as Exxon’s oil discoveries continued to increase. Allusions to poor governance are also comported across letters which imply that business investments are stymied due to government’s failure to create an investor-friendly climate. The following excerpt illustrates:

The International Oil Companies do not want to be cozied up by an executive, they want a stable country where the citizens are well informed and satisfied that there is equity. A real partnership where local content grows as the nation develops skills and capabilities. Companies and investors want to know their money is safe and will earn a healthy rate of return, and that they and their money are protected by the rule of law. (KN, 26 Nov, 2019, para 11)

The political battle of ideas via public opinion in the private daily newspapers also borders on character assassination, as one writer, who questions the competence of the president, describes him as “ill-informed, visionless and unable to translate promises into reality”(KN, 22 Dec 2019, para 2). The letter writer, who appears fixated on the shortcomings of the coalition in multiple contributions, also references Guyana’s return “to a state of parliamentary democracy via free and fair elections” (KN, Dec 22 2019, para 4) thereby magnifying the political/governance theme. By the end of 2019, letter writers in the private dailies increasingly criticized the oil exploration contract and elevated the political/governance theme through headlines such as “*Hopefully, a competent Gov’t will be able to extract a more balanced deal from oil sector for Guyana*” (KN, Headline, 25 December 2019).

As 2019 drew to a close, letter writers also appeared to be setting the political agenda for management of Guyana’s oil resources based on Guyana’s general elections scheduled for 2 March 2019, as one writer appeals to readers as he states, “let us vote to see the back of Granger and Shell Western (KN, 28 December 2019, para 8). The notion that “People distrust government to manage oil” (KN Headline, 30 December 2019) further elevates the political/governance theme that saturates public opinion on the oil discoveries. The headline and letter are the result of a survey conducted by the letter writer among the Guyanese diaspora in the state of New York.

6.1.6 The Environment Theme

The sample of letters published by the four dailies bears limited focus on the environment theme. Letters that underscore the importance of the environment register the salience of Exxon’s record of damage and concerns that Guyana may be vulnerable to mishaps given its unpreparedness. One writer highlights Exxon’s engagement in “the active funding of climate

change denials despite being aware of the connection between “the burning of fossil fuels and climate change” (*GT*, 22 Jan 2018 para 5). Moreover, the salience of Exxon’s “major oil spills, caused by ruptured pipelines” and “those have caused lasting effects on ecosystems” (*GT*, 22 Jan 2018, para 5) are also registered as the opinion writer asserts that the oil giant acts irresponsibly with respect to the environment. Additional details made salient include the prevailing environmental effects on plant and marine life caused by Exxon’s release of 11 million gallons of oil as result of damage to one of the company’s hulls. Using the latter reality, the letter writer states emphatically:

That reality, matched with the fact that Guyana’s Environmental Protection Agency currently does not have the capacity to enforce environmental regulations in the oil and gas sector nor monitor compliance with environmental regulations of the State, spells disaster for the future of our green state. (*GT*, 22 Jan 2018, para 6).

The writer also cites Norway as a best practice for its successful offshore wind energy projects and diversification of its fuel holdings. Environmental concerns with respect to damages are also registered by another writer who states, “If there are oil spills or other disasters, Guyana must pay all costs associated with addressing them including cleaning up and compensation. This could cost Guyana additional billions in US dollars” (*KN*, 15 Oct 2019, para 3).

The *Kaieteur News*’s letters to the editor sample highlights the environment once as part of a critical assessment of Guyana’s overall lack of preparedness, including the “development of a National Oil Spill Contingency Plan” (*KN* 12 November 2019). In *Stabroek News*, another critique of the business uptick that overlooks the environment makes salient the fact that “exploiting natural resources usually does incredibly complex damage to the environment (*SN*, 3 Dec 2019, para 9). The writer further states, “Guyanese are yet to hear about a comprehensive

study on the likely impact of oil and gas on climate change and the general natural environment in Guyana” (*SN*, 3 Dec 2019, para 10). He concludes that “any plan for Guyana that does not include the environment as a fundamental element cannot be considered truly transformative” (*SN*, 3 Dec 2019, para 10).

6.1.7 *The Sovereignty Theme*

Questions pertaining to national sovereignty and independent decision-making are also made salient as one writer asserts that “Guyana should determine the necessity for an oil refinery and “not the Americans, or the British or the Canadians” (*SN*, 11 October 2016, para 2). Here, the letter writer also elevates the neocolonial narrative by implying that the Western powers, the United States, Britain and Canada, bear influence over Guyana as an independent and sovereign nation. Thus, he critiques the influence, and also reflects on Guyana’s previous political leadership under the PNC administration who are deemed as more conscious of, and less amenable to, the interests of former “colonial masters” (*SN*, 11 October 2016, para 2). Moreover, the writer calls on government to “first liberate themselves from their colonized minds and stop believing that the so-called experts have all the answers,” and closes by warning the president to guard against Guyana being “exploited and undermined by the tyranny of experts” (*SN*, 11 October 2016, para 3).

In view of the Venezuela threat, letter writers also supported Exxon’s presence in the Stabroek block as strategic positioning, thus magnifying the sovereignty theme with a geostrategic subtheme. Letter writers also underscore the importance of “security, territoriality and our ability to identify appropriately and in a timely manner, the activities of malicious actors in our country is very important” (*SN*, 28 Dec 2016, para 3). By highlighting the salience of Guyana’s national security to its overall climate, the letter also lessens the Venezuela threat to

Guyana's sovereignty as a theme by highlighting assurances of a US army official that Guyana has "solid partners in the hemisphere on its side" and "could pursue the development of its oil industry with confidence" (*SN*, 10 February, 2017, para 1). However, not every Guyanese believes that Guyana's sovereignty is intact, as another letter writer subsequently reminds readers that "our sovereignty is closely tied to our territorial integrity and political independence, i.e. it is an issue of national security" (*SN*, 16 December 2017, para 1). Implicitly, the writer also comports the sovereignty theme while elevating the political/governance theme to highlight the salience of Guyana pursuing its economic transformation independent of external intervention.

Letter writers who felt that Guyana's political divisions also created the conditions for the oil wealth to be absorbed by Exxon, the largest oil company engaged in the oil production, were less tactful about the opinion. The following sentiment highlights the perception formed by a public opinion contributor:

It is a sad testimony that the political impasse our erstwhile leaders are engaged in will not allow them to put personal ambitions aside and consider the wider picture- that of the benefits of our resources for all our citizens and not allow greedy players like ExxonMobil exploit our divisions, both ethnic and political. (*KN*, 18 Nov 2019, para 5).

6.2 Frame-setting

The economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, environment and sovereignty themes that emerged across the sample of opinion letters published by the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* reveal a similar pattern of news coverage by the four dailies to establish frame-setting. Journalists and letter writers both use the economic theme to frame the oil discoveries and development as potentially transformative for

Guyana. Thus, the news stories analyzed appeared to have built the foundation upon which letter writers have formed and set their opinions on the oil discoveries and development.

Whereas news stories frame the oil wealth as transformative by enumerating the oil discoveries, Guyanese public opinions letters writers utilize the cause and consequence frame repetitively. Some letter writers exhibit optimism about the shift in Guyana's economic and socioeconomic condition, and therefore frame the discoveries as exponentially transformative, a panacea for poverty, and a gain for the country's future. To the contrary, other letter writers are less optimistic. They frame Exxon as predatory neocolonizers and the ultimate winners in the oil discoveries and production. The gain and loss frame therefore appear as part of the deliberative process among letter writers based on the repetitive newspaper coverage that made the quantity of the discoveries salient. Public opinion letters also appear to take their cue from news stories that utilize the legal/regulatory and political/governance themes to frame the discoveries. The news stories built by the three private dailies, mainly *Kaieteur News*, to construct social reality about the 2016 Petroleum Agreement and the US\$18M signing bonus, as specific issues, arguably account for influencing public opinion. Sustained news coverage which made the terms of the 2016 Petroleum contract and the signing bonus salient are recurrent across public opinion letters.

As regards the Petroleum Agreement, news narratives, which blame the government for its poor negotiation skills, are also replete across letters as citizens frame government ministers as irresponsible. Thus, the responsibility narrative is evident as citizens blame the government for the agreement and identify the terms of the contract and government officials as the problem. Some letter writers propose a renegotiation of the contract as the solution, in addition to a change of administration. In addition, letter writers frame government ministers as dishonest and corrupt

public officials based on the newspapers' repetitive coverage of the US\$18M signing bonus which remained undisclosed for over a year. They present examples from other oil producing developing countries to support their frame and also cite the lack of transparency to infer government's complicity with Exxon. Several letter writers also cite the lack of transparency as problematic and one writer suggests that the president issues an open apology to the nation as part of regaining trust- the solution.

Letter writers who view Exxon as predatory also present the oil contract as problematic and proffer renegotiation as a solution to the problem. The emergent economic and socioeconomic themes across the news stories therefore helped to stimulate and perhaps increase the public opinion on the oil discoveries and frame setting. The narrative of responsibility to frame the president and his ministers as inept, and therefore wholly incompetent to manage the oil resources, is also visible within the political/governance themes of letters. Thus, letter writers appear to have utilized the blame frame accentuated in the news stories particularly in the three private daily newspapers, to impute responsibility to the government for the lack of progress and capacity to govern the oil resources. Whereas news stories highlight the absence of local content legislation to support oil development in Guyana, letter writers utilize the same issues to frame the APNU/AFC coalition government as incompetent. Opinions also reflect partisanship as citizens frame state officials as the problem, and blame the political administration for poor management. At the same time, some present a change of the political administration as the potential solution to the problem. Yet others consider all politicians as problematic, and consider the role of the media as critical to keeping all political actors accountable.

Although the environment theme was present across both stories and opinion letters analyzed, issues pertaining to the environment are generally less visible across the dataset.

Nonetheless, frame setting with respect to the environment is evident through the refrain of letter writers based on repetitive salience to Guyana's delayed national oil spill contingency plan.

Moreover, letter writers frame Exxon as environmentally irresponsible by citing their history of bad practice to caution citizens about the oil company with respect to Guyana's vulnerability to any potential oil spill.

The four dailies also elevated the sovereignty theme in news coverage, which letter writers have framed as the Venezuela threat. Specifically, news stories highlight bipartisan agreement between the government and main opposition to frame the threat as a national issue, while letter writers activate the national stability frame to comport their arguments. Most letter writers view Venezuela as a security threat and therefore a problem for Guyana's ongoing exploration of oil wells, but some frame Exxon's presence as geostrategic support and therefore the solution to the security dilemma. Other writers, who believe there should be a long-term solution to the Guyana-Venezuela long-standing maritime dispute, frame the US presence and its support as economic opportunism, and underscore the importance of Guyana maintaining its sovereignty. Altogether, news themes and letters to the editors corresponded to establish frame setting.

6.3 Summary

The major frames elevated by letter writers across the four dailies include economic transformation, political corruption and ineptitude and poor legal representation by the government of Guyana. Although a significant number of letter writers expressed strong views with respect to the role of government officials who some blamed for the terms of the contract, the political frames such as ineptitude and corruption separated activists from advocates. A majority of those who were political activities identified state officials as the problem and felt the

solution to the perceived crisis of the oil contract resided in a change in government via the polls. On the other hand, letter writers who advocated for change and felt that Exxon received an economic advantage presented renegotiation as the solution while calling for an open apology from the government to solve the problem of mistrust created through the US\$18M signing bonus. The economic, political, legal, environment and sovereignty themes magnified in news stories were reflected in the frames situated across letters to the editors, thereby revealing the influence of news stories on public opinion which I elaborate on in the discussion of findings in chapter eight.

7 ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter goes beyond text analysis to explore the lived experience of journalists in Guyana who cover the oil and gas sector. In the analysis, journalists and their editors share their challenges to reporting the new sector and the challenges with respect to engaging their news sources upon whom they rely daily to validate, clarify and confirm their stories. I also discuss the views of key stakeholders who function as sources of news, and one environmental advocate engaged in the protection in Guyana. The research questions I explore in this chapter are RQ4a: What were the challenges faced by journalists and editors of the four daily newspapers in news production and reporting the discovery of oil in Guyana? and RQ4b: What specific challenges did journalists face in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters? The novelty of the sector and a lack of training are among the major challenges journalists and editors encounter, while access to sources undermine their ability to thoroughly understand, investigate and report on the oil discoveries and development.

The perspectives of key industry stakeholders about the newspaper coverage and their representation in the coverage further compound an already tenuous relationship between journalists and mainly government officials. In the process of coverage, journalists admit that media partisanship influences their objectivity even as editors say they aim to lead with their stories. As the private newspapers compete, leaving the state media to serve a corrective, mediatory and clarifying role on behalf of the state, they all focus extensively on the economics of oil to frame Guyana as an emerging oil producer, while overlooking the environment. However, the interview findings also reveal an abiding, though not sustained, attention to environmental advocacy in Guyana, and a recognition of the role of Guyana's newspapers in keeping both the oil companies, specifically Exxon, and government, accountable to the people of Guyana.

7.1.2 News production and Reporting Challenges of Journalists and Editors

7.1.2.1 Novelty of the oil and gas sector

Following Exxon's first oil discovery in May 2015, reporting on oil and gas became a central feature across Guyana's four daily newspapers, *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times*. Although the cumulative experience of the journalists interviewed for this study exceeds 20 years, the novelty of the oil and gas sector remains fresh for some. Each interviewee, with the exception of Journalist 4 who works for the state newspaper, functions as the lead journalist on the oil and gas beat and has been covering the sector from 2015. Notwithstanding the fact that their bylines do not appear on all oil and gas related stories, including those thematically analyzed earlier, the journalists emphasized that they

shared a common deficit at the beginning--oil discovery was a new phenomenon for Guyana and their sphere of reporting.

In the absence of a frame of reference, the journalists posit that on -the -job assimilation was necessary through immersion in technical reports to influence preparation for news packaging. One interviewee describes entry to oil and gas as vacuous. Journalist 5 stated, “We started off reporting with basic or zero knowledge. This requires a lot of teaching yourself. As the reporter you’re just pushed into broad coverage.” In congruence, Journalist 1 attested to the utility of journals and industry experts to develop a basic understanding of the sector.

While teaching yourself is certainly common practice within the journalism profession, grasping key concepts and technical terminologies to communicate to the masses requires significant immersion in a deadline-driven industry. Due to the complex nature of the petroleum sector, interviewees disclosed that they are still learning to navigate technical reports and conduct their own research to better understand the range of issues on oil and gas. After five years of developing stories they do not believe they have achieved the level of expertise necessary to be classified as specialist reporters in their field. The following statements illustrate the level of self-reported competence journalists shared with respect to the oil contracts:

My understanding is not 100%. Okay, because there may be the business side of it. I may not be an expert, but I trade on stuff. The percentages since the release of the first contract...I've tried to understand who's benefiting the most, and how the public is benefiting. That's the most important thing. (Journalist 2, Interview, 3 October, 2019).

I have a general understanding...but when it comes to the royalties, statistics...no.
(Journalist 4, Interview, 3 October 2019).

Notwithstanding their challenges to interpreting the technical and legal components of the oil contracts, both interviewees have made the socioeconomic benefits of the oil discoveries a reporting priority. Their focus is also consistent with the coverage provided by their colleagues, and reflects the overarching economic and socioeconomic frames evident across the four dailies highlighted earlier in the findings of this study. When prompted, interviewees self-rated at an average of 3 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 representing excellent and 1 being very poor. In acknowledging that the novelty of the sector has not quite worn off, Journalist 2 said, “A lot of us still don't have the understanding of how to put over certain news stories.” Journalist 1, on the other hand, believes that progress has been made, and confidently stated,

Oil is new and is very complex, extremely complex and I can tell you the things that I understood when I started covering oil in 2015, the understanding that I have of it now...I wish I can go back and teach it to myself...I would have been more effective (Journalist 1, Interview, 5 October , 2019).

At least one interviewee considered oil and gas as contextually political, while another opined that it is a business that requires knowledge of the proceeds that will emerge from oil production. For instance, Journalist 2 stated, “I think you need an understanding of not only what comes out of the out of the ground, but the business side of it. If you don't have the understanding, I don't think you could translate that to the public because the public is looking for you to give that clarity that they don't have” (Journalist 2, Interview, 3 October 2019). These conceptualizations may explain differences in the manner that stories are constructed through political lens, and the business leaning of newspapers that have shaped journalistic perspectives

and themes across stories. More importantly, the journalists have not acknowledged their shortcomings and progress in isolation, but as part of their broader mandate to educate and inform the public. This brings into sharp focus their articulated desire for training to enhance the quality of their stories.

7.1.2.2 Limited training amidst multiple beats

In addition to adopting a learn-as-they-go ethos, three interviewees disclosed that they participated in at least one overseas seminar organized by Exxon Mobil to better enhance their knowledge of the petroleum sector. Topics covered at one of the seminars included the geopolitics of oil, production preparation and equipment. Training seminars were facilitated by the oil company at different intervals. While both state and private newspaper journalists have participated in the overseas training, their perceptions of the sessions and experiences differ. They also questioned the usefulness of their exposure as the training appeared more relevant to existing oil producing countries and aligned with Exxon's corporate publicity strategy. As such, one journalist described her training experience as "good and bad" given that Guyana is a new oil producer. Assimilation was also difficult since 50 percent of the discussion focused on production at a time when Guyana was preparing for the production phase. On the other hand, another journalist shared the following reflections:

We knew before we attended that it was going to be a brainwashing exercise, so we wanted to see how that was going to unfold so we went there. They immediately told us we can speak candidly, but everything stays in the room (Journalist 1, Interview, 5 October 2019).

Although their experiences differed, both interviewees implied that their training provided limited value to their practice and were sponsored excursions rather than targeted training consistent with Guyana's realities and needs. For this reason, their knowledge of the sector remained relatively poor after they had attended the seminars. In an effort to build journalistic expertise on the oil and gas sector, the Guyana Press Association (GPA), the agency that represents the media fraternity and facilitates capacity building, also hosts training exercises. To provide the local media fraternity with an overview of the sector, the GPA drew expertise from experienced Caribbean journalists and other facilitators who are familiar with the industry.

While Journalist 3 felt that the GPA-sponsored training was useful, Journalist 2 said "it was not much of a learning experience, it was more like giving you information and you need to digest that and figure it out," thus discrediting its usefulness. Similarly, Journalist 3 posited that his knowledge of oil and gas was not significantly enhanced although he acknowledged the importance of training. To build on this critique, Journalist 1 asserted that the GPA failed to organize the training around the existing needs of the local media fraternity. Journalist 1 therefore described the content shared as superficial at best.

To address their existing training needs, all the interviewees felt that more effort was required at the level of their respective media establishments to ensure they received the requisite skillset, and to ultimately ameliorate their limited knowledge of the new oil and gas sector. They also consider specialized training as a means to an end as the local media fraternity will be fortified to keep government. Interestingly, Journalist 2, who works for the state media, implied a gatekeeping role which has historically been discouraged internally by editors and the political administration. The following statement captures the thoughts expressed:

Still I do not believe the ordinary man in the street understands what is local content; I don't think they understand how this industry would benefit us in the long run; they[re] just hearing what the news is reporting; most of the time reporters are reporting what is being said at press conferences. I don't think there's an investigative side of it. I think there's a need for specialized reporting ... specialized training for this industry (Journalist 2, Interview, 3 October 2019).

Similarly, Journalist 3 opined that "more capacity building workshops are necessary via government and private sector minus an agenda." The notion that training seminars are agenda-driven is congruent with the perception of secrecy expressed earlier by Journalist 1, who implied that Exxon Mobil has a secret agenda. In addition, it also highlights the journalists' awareness that their training sponsorship may attract an expectation of reciprocity through stories that favor their sponsors. Thus, the source of training for journalists who cover the oil and gas beat appears contentious.

Journalist 2 insisted that all local journalists should benefit from workshops, seminars and conferences, but in contrast, Journalist 4 felt that training should be commensurate with journalists' commitment to the profession. This position is influenced by the fact that journalists receive poor remuneration for long working hours and often transition to more lucrative jobs, including public relations. Training is therefore considered an impetus to stimulate commitment. Journalist 5 shared a different view and believes that training should be the remit of newspaper establishments. The following summarizes those views:

I think the companies themselves, that is, the papers, the management, they have to invest in their staff if they want quality because you can't give limited resources and expect stellar or spectacular headlines for a paper in general to sell.

You have to be supportive...you have to also foster the training of your staff...you have to ensure that they continuously learn (Journalist 5, Interview, 9 October 2019).

Most of the interviewees also stated that while they lacked formal training to fully comprehend the technical jargon associated with the sector, they are committed to personal development. In the case of one particular establishment, Journalist 1 indicated that collaboration with key external stakeholders has contributed significantly to enhancing the quality of stories by clarifying key terms, constructs and concepts associated with the oil contract.

In addition to the novelty of the sector and limited training, the interviewees are also challenged by multiple beats. As a result, at least one journalist expressed a preference for covering only the oil and gas beat, as it has become lost among the multitude of sectors one journalist covers. Notwithstanding the pressures journalists face, these realities of covering multiple sectors that shape their experience is germane to many media establishments. These include the Guyana media landscape where journalists multitask in a profession that has traditionally attracted high attrition rates due to low remuneration. One interviewee who graduated from the UGCCS noted that university graduates receive similar wages as their untrained colleagues. This has caused some journalists to seek alternative jobs while their more committed colleagues have remained for a variety of reasons, including the prestige that comes with the profession, as one interviewee opined.

7.1.2.3 Objectivity: the enemy of partisanship and slant

One of the major tenets of journalism is objectivity and a journalist's responsibility to the public in reporting from multiple angles without bias. Journalists who package stories on oil and gas struggle with tensions between objectivity and adhering to the routines embedded in their

respective news establishments. This has created a thin veil of separation between the performance of both state and private newspapers, thereby blurring the lines of professional journalism standards. Journalist 1, who works for one of the private newspapers, described her experience the following way:

The struggle is to be objective. If I'm speaking with Exxon...Guyana got a fair deal. It is very risky to be objective with companies that are skilled in putting out a particular narrative (Journalist 1, Interview, 5 October 2019).

When probed further, Journalist 1 asserted that the contractual arrangement between the state and Exxon was unfavorable to Guyana, but noted that Exxon promotes itself as an equal partner. Given that the contents of the contract have been made public, Journalist 1 stated that her stories often highlight its loopholes, thus creating the allusion of bias rather than gate keeping. For Journalist 2, objectivity implies tilting stories in favor of the state while promoting the interest of Exxon consistent with unwritten policies carried out by editors. Such policies, as articulated by Journalist 1, are critical to maintaining a positive investor climate. Journalist 2 was adamant in emphasizing the importance of listening to "all sides to understand what is really going on and who's calling for what." Journalist 2 also seemed critically aware of following the state's routine and summarizes that awareness as follows:

You don't want to put something into the public and then you would have a lot of questions coming from your editor, or somebody who's on the subject ministry that is the umbrella for where you're working. So I try to have you know, keep that in the back of my head (Interview, 3 October 2019).

Journalistic compliance with the expectations of the state comes from a tradition of state-media control, which editors ensure is intact before a story goes to press. However, editors

do not frame their relationship with the state as control or compliance. Rather, they see their role as guardians of the state. This may explain the absence of gatekeeping even as editors seek to justify their approach the following way:

We always try to put the story to let them know that is our government who is negotiating on our behalf and so because of that we cannot always blame the companies. And so, from an editorial perspective, that is the angle we usually take to educate our audience (Editor 4, Interview, 6 October 2019).

In congruence with newspaper journalists who have acknowledged that formal training is necessary to understand the oil and gas sector, editors also endorsed its importance to their personal development. They also seemed vested in their journalists' training as a step towards building in-house capacity while developing skills, such as a basic vocabulary, associated with the oil and gas sector. While acknowledging the Exxon and GPA-sponsored training initiatives, Editors 1 and 4 alluded to their own efforts to supplement the inherent knowledge gap still prevalent among their charges. Daily reporting on the sector has also created an even greater challenge for editors to be inventive, as captured by Editors 1 and 4 below:

There is need. We did send Reporter A on an Exxon Mobil-sponsored program in California, but that was more or less a lecture where Exxon presented its views. We bought some books looking at Exxon's operations in other countries and we try to pre-judge the issue based on those reports. But you know there is no source as such in Guyana for reporters to go to do oil and gas training. So most of it is done on the job and through reading whatever publications there are or whatever is presented online. The Government of Guyana, to my mind, cannot train every

single source that's going to be looking at the oil industry (Interview, Editor 1, 3 October 2019).

We are now trying to cultivate reporters...There needs to be training for our...the media who will do better reporting on oil and gas in this new exciting and transformative sector if there is education (Interview, Editor 4, 6 October 2019).

Editors themselves find the oil and gas sector complex and have acknowledged that a full grasp would require "somebody who has prior experience in oil and gas information" compounded with the fact that "you have to do it on the run, on the go...every day" (Editor 5, Interview, October 7, 2019). Editor 5 further stated, "We start from ground zero basically with this sector. So when you are starting from that level it takes you a while. I mean I have been on training." Similarly, Editor 3 admitted, "I don't know enough about it, I want to make sure, of course I read continually only because really the particular stories require that." To concur, Editor 2 admitted, "We do not have a thorough relevant understanding of oil and gas. We have not gotten around the learning curve yet."

Irrespective of their level of training or newspaper orientation, the journalists have not lost sight of their role in constructing social reality on the oil discoveries. More importantly, they have resolved to keep government accountable in their coverage of issues pertaining to the oil sector. These include matters of the environment that appear less salient across the local dailies but are considered equally imperative for the nation to grasp. The following excerpts illustrate the commonality of purpose in gatekeeping, and also highlight how differences in the orientation of newspapers that may account for journalistic frames:

I would say we have a critical role to play. Had it not been for the media, coupled with Christopher Ram [a columnist,] we wouldn't have even know that we had an

US\$18M signing bonus. This is on a need to know basis for the public because it is public funds (Interview, Journalist 3, 7 October 2019).

I think it's the role of the journalist to ensure that benefits are actualized through the requisite legislation and not merely vocalized. I believe it is also my role to zero in on how a potential oil spill can affect Guyana's marine life....Even though we're state media we need to hold the government's feet to the fire. There is a lot of concern about the local content policy. This is simply because Guyanese want to know even with all this oil coming to us will we benefit (Journalist 4, Interview, 3 October 2019)?

Journalists also see themselves as gatekeepers in a media sphere characterized by competition, but also believe that greater camaraderie can be forged through information sharing among those who cover the oil and gas beat. Though ideal, information sharing among competing news establishments has not been traditionally embraced by every actor. The interviews have revealed a clear pattern of competition that shapes the production of daily newspapers. Editors have admitted that they are driven by a compulsion to lead with "the most attractive story" (Editor 1) which are often based on economic themes, and to "get there first" (Editor 3) in an effort to help the average Guyanese understand the socioeconomic implications of oil for their lives. These are not colliding interests, but they have set the leading dailies on a collision path with some state and oil company officials as sources of news.

It is apposite to note that the challenges journalists contend with are inherently linked to their low levels of knowledge and preparedness for the oil and gas sector which precedes the coalition administration. Although there were exploratory activities prior to the first oil well

discovery announced in May 2015, news reporting on the sector commenced steadily after the discovery. As journalists sought to understand and report on the growing oil discoveries, Exxon, through its local affiliate, Esso and Hess maintained its own information machinery that appears to be built upon the knowledge of low levels of awareness and an apparent general disregard for the local media fraternity. It is therefore not surprising that journalists have built their frames upon suspicion of the oil company based on their vacuous relationship.

Apart from internal factors, news frames are also organized around external relations, and therefore the media-Exxon dynamic appears central to journalistic practice. The recurrent blame frame is therefore likely to remain repetitive mainly among the private newspaper stories as journalists interpret the silence and responses of state officials as inadequate, guarded and unproductive. Moreover, the posture of state officials appears to complement corporate interests, but to journalists it runs counter to the interests of the state, as editors consider the state as the national interest and patrimony. In the absence of a collaborative mechanism between newspaper journalists and state officials, reporting on the oil and gas sector will therefore require solving the conflict and building trust among journalists and government officials who function as stewards of the state.

7.2 Specific challenges journalists face in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters

7.2.1 Access to Information and Informants

Journalists have described their attempts to obtain information from state officials as futile. Among the key state agencies they engage are the Department of Energy, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency. The heads of each agency have appeared consistently across the headlines and news

stories on the oil discoveries, but variations in newspaper coverage and attribution have created unease for some state officials. The preponderance of economic frames built around government's existing contractual agreement with Exxon Mobil by the press is also a source of unease among some state officials. During our in-depth interviews, state officials expressed displeasure with the hardline positions employed by publications to convey information to the public and that a degree of restraint is necessary to avoid public misperceptions about the oil contracts and discoveries. According to one state official, proprietary considerations with respect to publicly traded companies restrict full disclosure to safeguard investments. Another state official who further explained why the public right to know should be tempered by the press said, "I believe there is a right to know, but I don't believe everyone needs to know everything all at the same time because unless you can control the narrative at every stage there are going to be distortions and mis-communications and misconceptions" (Interview, State official 2, October 3, 2019). Guyanese journalists disagree with the state's information disclosure policy. As gatekeepers, they believe they have a mandate to inform citizens about all aspects of the contractual arrangements that govern the sector. Journalists who take their lead from other sources also insinuate that government accountability to the people of Guyana is essential. The following excerpt articulates the convictions shared by one interviewee:

I would say we have a critical role to play. Had it not been for the media, coupled with Christopher Ram we wouldn't have even known that we had an \$18M signing bonus. This is on a need-to-know basis for the public because it is public funds (Journalist 3, Interview, 7 October 2019).

Allusions to state corruption are replete across stories in the leading private dailies, thereby suggesting that journalists are deliberate in pursuing what they perceive to be fair

reporting. Under the current oil and gas exploration, Exxon Mobil received the most substantial oil blocks for offshore drilling as part of the initial contract engaged with the Government of Guyana in 1999. Successive regimes have offered geopolitical explanations for the assignment of the blocks and have cited Venezuela's territorial claim to a third of Guyana as the strategic rationale for securing the drilling with US-backed interests. Notwithstanding the latter considerations, the previous and current governments both lack[ed] a communication strategy to inform citizens about the implications of becoming a petroleum state. Over time, various interest groups in society, including Guyana's Transparency International local office and environmental advocates, have questioned the level of the state's transparency with respect to oil and gas. Growing skepticism and mistrust have almost emerged among interest group members, who cite the absence of information as a major failure.

Our government should have ensured that we were being informed from the get go [beginning] so that we can be very much part of the engagement and growth of the sector. Which begs the question, do they also feel the more ignorant we remain the less we would hold them accountable? Here you're seeing very clearly some ominous signs of the unaccountability of the oil company, the unaccountability of past and existing governments with the signing of the 1999 exploratory agreement where more blocks than were lawfully allowed [authorized] were allocated, and in 2016, when the agreement was renegotiated before it was due and the dreaded stabilization clause and self-insurance were inserted (Environmental Advocate, Interview, 4 October 2019).

In their quest for clarity and balance, journalists face difficulty obtaining information from sources they consider critical to authenticating their stories. Nonetheless, journalists and

editors have continued to pursue state officials as key informants, and in some instances have resorted to preemptive tactics aimed at eliciting official response. The practice appears more normative among private newspaper establishments, as one interview explains:

That is the type of journalism we have been accustomed to over the years. We put out a story then you expect a response from someone in authority. That could have some things to go with it. For instance, I worked at X newspaper for 5 years and if you do not get the information you want from the government, you put the story out and you say that you tried and you didn't get the information. When that information goes to the public there's usually a response. And the response would try to discredit your report but it shows that you've been trying. It's just that you didn't get the clarity that you needed (Journalist 2, Interview, 3 October 2019).

Although oil and gas exploration commenced in earnest during the 1960s in Guyana, journalists and editors believe state official are unfamiliar with the sector and are therefore unable to function as capable sources. This has created a dilemma for both newsmakers and their sources in an industry already fraught with complexities. News editors posit that when they do manage to receive information it lacks substance. One interviewee explains:

There is no lack of access to these persons, but then when you do get them, that's where you have a difficulty. So you get them. You call up anyone of them on a cell phone and you will get them. But in terms of giving you something substantial, you find that a lot of times the issue is skirt around [avoided] (Editor 5, Interview, 7 Oct 2019).

A major point of convergence among media officials who represent the interests of the state and local fraternity, respectively, is the state's lack of leadership in disseminating updates

on the oil discoveries and other relevant information to the media. One media official contends that Exxon Mobil controls the flow of information to the media via the state's Department of Public Information (DPI) because "they control how the information is released" (Media Official 1, Interview, 8 October 2019). The DPI is therefore an intermediary entity that redistributes press releases packaged by Exxon which prevents journalists from probing the company on its content that bear relevance to developments on the discoveries.

...you don't get a chance to ask them to what extent is this find; compare this 13th find to the 10th find, what is this well, what are your geophysical, geoscientific or geotechnical reports; so we're not getting to ask those bits and pieces of information to assess in our own way what the find [discovery] means (Media Official 1 Interview, 8 October 2019).

While Media Official 2 admits that the government has not articulated a vision for national transformation with respect to the proceeds from the oil revenues, the responsibility for information and education was shifted to the media. The notion that journalists are lethargic and await information from the oil companies also suggested that a critical appraisal of their role was derived perhaps due to a lack of empathy or appreciation of their existing challenges. An aura of disdain for the media was also discerned even as discussions centered on what Media official 2 perceived as media lapdogs the following way:

I think the media is just stuck in this mindset of we will report so when we're invited to an event, when we're sent a press release we'll report on that without seeking to understand the background to this very complex sector so that they could put context to things. They're just dutiful in reporting (Interview, 10 October 2019).

The foregoing iterations further compound the existing challenges Guyanese journalists face in establishing themselves as beat reporters in a novel sector. The absence of updated legislation to govern access to information further exacerbates these challenges that are amplified in Exxon's posture toward the media. Although the oil company has established a presence on social media, and an active WhatsApp group for local journalists, they continue to experience an information vacuum. One interviewee sums up her experiences this way:

Many times you find that the managers or the PRs for the company are very tight lipped. They give you the basic information; they don't give you anything that can make headlines- not just something sensational but new information (Journalist 4, Interview, 3 October 2019).

At least one editor shared a similar experience:

We have some problems getting information out of Exxon. The public relations people would demand or would request something I don't believe in...send your questions and we will get the answer back to you. I don't believe in that. So that is one of the things that is happening. You have the whole question of some of the ministers who are just...the political aspect...They can only tell you what they expect, what they perceive, what they have been doing...all in all we don't have too much access to the people in the oil industry per se. So that's one of the problems we face (Editor 1, Interview, 3 October 2019).

Journalists have noted that the smaller oil companies that have made oil discoveries, such as Tullow Oil, are more amenable and therefore facilitate interviews readily as sources of news. One interviewee opined that the bureaucracies imposed by Exxon in sharing information on the oil discoveries illustrate their disregard for the people of Guyana and local media

fraternity. In addition, there is no obligation to disclose information already packaged and made available to the media and publicized via the company's website. However, another media stakeholder insists that government should exercise its power to convey to Exxon that oil is "a people's resource" for which they should be made "answerable...if ...the press wants information" (Media Officer 1, Interview, 8 October 2019). The interviewee added, "At the end of the day the public has to benefit from the information we're putting out there. And it can't be because it suits a political party or person. They'll be putting information that is generally not useful to the public" (Media Official 1, Interview, 8 October 2019).

7.2.2 State officials' perception of media misrepresentation

While government officials who were interviewed for this study generally agree that newspaper coverage of the oil discoveries has been substantial, they have different perspectives on the quality of coverage. One official described the coverage of the oil discoveries as "a toxic concoction of the media space" based on a strategic agenda. The interviewee singled out *Kaieteur News* for its steadfast reporting but expressed reservations about being misrepresented. However, the interviewee also perceived other private newspapers as biased based on distinct representations of similar issues. The following excerpt highlights the articulated perception shared by the interviewee with respect to the dailies:

When I look at all four print media I haven't been able to see consistency of position even when there is something that is out there in black and white. Whether it's a report from IMF or an interpretive position from some speculating group on anything, I don't see that when that report is analyzed that you get a consistent position. In fact, you wonder if they all read the same document (State Official 4, Interview, 11 October 2019).

While acknowledging that government agencies and their representatives are not conversant with all aspects of the oil exploration and discoveries that have occurred in Guyana, state officials expressed reservations about how stories are framed. All interviewees felt that more negative representation occupy daily coverage mainly in the private newspapers. Due to the orientation of newspapers and their inclination to slant stories in favor of a particular segment of society, state officials are also at variance with stories they claim lack context.

The real context is missing. I have looked at the criticisms and I would say in many cases there is merit to what has been identified as shortcomings, whether it's contracts or policy or whatever. They're legitimate. My observation is, however, when it comes over it comes over as if having identified that position is the only position (singular view) that should or could prevail. There seems to be in absentia in the conversation other parties that make up the theatre of the conversation (State Official 4, Interview, 11 October 2019).

Interviewees who function as news sources also contend that the leading dailies are “pushing a particular agenda” (State Official 1) with stories that lack a balanced analysis of the oil contracts. In likening the contracts to a union, they also assert that “there is no perfect marriage” (SO 1) and by extension “no perfect contract” (State official 2). A major implication of the perceived slant of the dailies is the predictability of headlines and negative reporting that state officials who were interviewed find disconcerting. One interviewee was also adamant about restricting his interactions with journalists out of caution to prevent them from utilizing his comments to legitimize an existing frame. To further explain, the interviewee stated, “I stopped giving exclusive interviews and I started doing just press conferences so everybody will get the

same message at the same time and they don't like that because then they take your word out of context” (State official 1, Interview, 11 October 2019).

Interestingly, not every state official has a negative perception of the newspaper coverage of the oil and gas sector. One interviewee recognized the importance of journalism and asserted that news coverage of national developments is a major function of a democracy. The interviewee also stated, “I think that all the government agencies, we have got to be transparent. And I think we all strive for maximum transparency (State official 3, Interview, 9 October 2019).

Apart from journalists, interest group members also consider the state’s regulatory regime to be weak and subject to Exxon’s existing lack of accountability to the state in its pursuit of Guyana’s oil resources. Despite their challenges, journalists insist that they are not deterred from ensuring that citizens receive the truth. “If (X News) did not expose the history of Exxon Mobil they [Government] would still be thinking that they’re dealing with someone who has their best interest at heart” stated one journalist. Journalists also appear to enjoy the support of major segments of society and those who continue to advocate for transparency.

The media really is the 4th estate and has a humungous role to play in moving forward because however you look at it, *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News*, I don’t think they can be compromised; I really don’t think they can be compromised. And if the politicians avail themselves to answer truthfully....I think the general public would also feel lot less suspicious and distrustful (Environmental Advocate, Interview, 4 October 2019).

Media education also appears vital in the current coverage of the oil and gas sector even as editors grapple with technical jargon and other elements of the sector. This is recognized not

only by reporters themselves but government officials who have underscored the need for a deliberate investment in training reporters to better interpret and report on the sector.

I think a good start for the media acquainting itself either independently going out or looking for sources of information. It might even mean going back to school and or I think the government providing or facilitating scholarships for the large media houses and a select group of journalists and media operatives to learn more and to interact more both at the policy level and at the level of the contractor (Interview, State official 2, 3 October 2019).

Similarly, oil investors also agree that more needs to be done to educate the public. For its part, Exxon has hosted public outreaches but these are not perceived as sufficient. Thematic frames around the existing contract between the government and Exxon Mobil has also attracted criticism from investors. A source close to the oil giants alluded to the frames and comparisons across the daily newspapers, noting that audiences still do not understand the core issues. The source stated,

Sometimes you see a lot of information about the contracts itself where people are making comparisons, like in various newspapers...but people don't even understand for themselves. I feel like people are very concerned about how...they're going to benefit from the resources...I feel like that's largely the responsibility of government or state...a lot of people seem disconnected (Media Stakeholder, Interview, 10 October 2019).

Of note is the state's awareness of the challenges that journalists and the general recognition that training can enhance their understanding of the sector and enhance their relationship with key stakeholders in the oil sector. With respect to formal education, four out of five journalists are university graduates in the field of journalism and education, respectively.

The fifth journalist is currently pursuing formal online education. I therefore surmised that journalists are working within their capacity and available resources, thus discrediting the notion of indolence. The question of assimilation and training therefore point to opportunities extended by state and private officials.

7.2.3 Less Visible Themes: Threats to the Environment

The news stories, columns and letters to the editors revealed a common trend of overwhelming emphasis on the economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory and political/governance themes to frame the oil discoveries. The environment remained largely in the shadows of the discourse. Nonetheless, critical reflection perhaps explains the uptick of journalists, columnists and letter writers in Guyana. Like journalists who recognize the need to focus on the environmental facets of the oil discoveries and subsequent production, several interest groups, including media and environmental advocates have questioned Guyana's preparedness for an oil spill based on the magnitude of offshore explorations occurring simultaneously. Among the major concerns expressed are potential damage to the country's ecosystems and the lasting impact of an oil spill particularly in coastal communities. While Guyana's coastland communities rely on agricultural commodities as staples and cash crops, coastal or riverain communities inhabited mainly by an estimated 27,000 indigenous Guyanese rely significantly on the ecosystems for sustenance. Offshore oil exploration may be considered relatively safe for residents who live on coastland, but the consequences of an oil spill are potentially dire for riverain communities. Among the most vulnerable riverain communities is Shell Beach which became a Protected Area in 2011. Both marine, including sea turtles and fish, and human life will be significantly compromised if an unmitigated oil spill occurs. The following excerpt illustrates the concerns about possible environmental damage by one advocate:

Exxon's own Oil Spill modelling in their Liza 1 Environmental Impact Assessment showed that if there is an unmitigated spill, the Guiana current would take that oil smack bang into the northwestern part of Guyana's only coastal protected area which is the Shell Beach Protected Area (Environmental Advocate, Interview, 4 October 2019).

Guyana's Civil Defense Commission (CDC) is the lead agency responsible for developing a National Oil Spill Contingency Plan in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In addition, the CDC is tasked with ensuring Guyana's vulnerable sea defenses remain intact to protect the country's coastland and other sectors such as agriculture. However, by December 2019, when oil production commenced in Guyana ahead of the 2020 projection, the Commission had not completed the contingency plan which has been in draft for two years. But the CDC does not function in a vacuum. As part of their mandate, oil companies are expected to consult with coastal communities contiguous to exploration sites. The purpose of those consultations includes clearly articulated information about the exploration activities, an opportunity for community members to seek clarification, and demonstrations by the oil company that guarantee the integrity of the environment and communities should a spill occur.

Interest groups have characterized Exxon's local consultations particularly in Guyana's riverain regions as scant and a "complete disregard for free, prior and informed consent" (Environmental Advocate, interview, 4 October 2019) necessary to ensure communities understand the various components of oil exploration and are adequately prepared. Exxon's lack of interactions with key indigenous communities in Region 1 and interest groups across Guyana is also cast as a "culture of evasiveness" (Environmental Advocate, interview, 4 October 2019) within a system further undermined by government's apathy. The following iteration further illustrates how citizen advocates perceive the oil corporations:

I recognize the fact that they [Oil corporations] obviously would have done their homework and realize that Guyanese are highly educated and that we can absorb information very quickly, and I'm assuming that they would be concerned that if we're too informed we would hold them too accountable. That to me is obviously what their game is (Environmental Advocate, Interview, 4 October 2019).

7.2.4 *Poor Information and Communication*

Under the current oil and gas exploration, Exxon Mobil received the most substantial oil blocks for offshore drilling as part of the initial contract engaged with the Government of Guyana in 1999. Successive regimes have offered geopolitical explanations for the assignment of the blocks and have cited Venezuela's territorial claim to a third of Guyana as the strategic rationale for securing the drilling with US-backed interests. Environmental advocates, like journalists interviewed for this project, believe that the state should facilitate an open culture of transparency in the communication process engaged by oil companies. Both groups also believe that a lack of information and a national awareness programme following Exxon's first discovery in 2015 undermines full public disclosure and gatekeeping of Guyana's oil resources.

“Our government should have ensured that we were being informed from the get go [beginning] so that we can be very much part of the engagement and growth of the sector. Which begs the question, do they also feel the more ignorant we remain the less we would hold them accountable??” (Environmental Advocate, Interview, 4 October 2019).

Apart from social media, many citizens have turned to traditional media for their information on the oil and gas sector and have utilized opinion letter columns to vocalize their

concerns. Citizens also believe that distrust permeates the society due to a lack of transparency in the manner that previous contracts were executed through hidden deals.

Here you're seeing very clearly some ominous signs of the unaccountability of the oil company, the unaccountability of past and existing governments with the signing of the 1999 exploratory agreement where more blocks than were lawfully allowed were allocated and in 2016 when the agreement was renegotiated before it was due and the dreaded stabilization clause and self-insurance were inserted (Environmental Advocate, Interview, 4 October 2019).

The notion that "Exxon is here to make money at the fastest time possible for their shareholders regardless as to the readiness of the regulatory institutions speaks volumes as to them caring very little about being accountable to anyone" (Environmental Advocate, personal communication, October 4, 2019) is not confined to private citizens. Journalists who have been covering the oil and gas beat in Guyana have also asserted that the business of oil is geared to benefit the oil companies rather than the citizens of Guyana. "If (X News) did not expose the history of Exxon Mobil they [Government] would still be thinking that they're dealing with someone who has their best interest at heart" stated Journalist 1. Notwithstanding stakeholders' views about the newspaper coverage of the oil and gas sector, the role of the private media is considered an anathema to corruption.

7.3 Summary

Over the years, Guyanese journalists who cover the oil and gas sector have encountered several in-house challenges identified earlier. These include limited knowledge of the sector, which their editors also experience, relevant training and straddling multiple beats as they continue to learn about the industry. In addition, journalists have come to rely significantly on key stakeholders, who function as their news sources from both the state and oil companies.

Specific challenges they face in their working relationships with key sources include limited access to information and informants, and poor quality of information. Some state officials have expressed the view that the quality of coverage by the local dailies is a reflection of an untrained cadre of journalists and the deliberate spin by publications with an agenda. As a result, these perceptions have influenced an uneasy relationship between state officials and journalists, thereby exacerbating the challenges of reporting on oil and gas. To address these challenges, state officials have identified training as imperative to build the capacity of local journalists to transform the level of news coverage on the oil sector.

Given the overarching uptick on the economic, regulatory and governance themes among journalists, like columnists and opinion letter writers, the role of advocating for the environment has resurged with keen attention on possible effects of an oil spill. A common denominator among journalists, columnists and letter writers is the perception of Exxon's deliberate disengagement from the media fraternity and Guyanese public. As put by one journalist, "We are already cursed." I discuss this perception in the next chapter which presents a general discussion of findings.

8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings across the news texts, columns and letters to the editor which drew substantial salience to economic, socioeconomic, political and legal themes to frame the oil discoveries. The research questions which are tied to this discussion are:

RQ1. What are the major themes, similarities and differences accentuated across newspaper reports of the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times*

in the wake of the initial oil discovery and subsequent discoveries between May 2015 and December 2019? RQ2. What are the themes highlighted across special columns in the four daily newspapers? How do columnists frame the oil discoveries? Are there departures from existing news frames? RQ3. What are the major themes within public opinion letters in the four daily newspapers? Do the themes reflect frame-setting in the discourse on the oil discoveries?

RQ4a. What were the challenges faced by journalists and editors of the four daily newspapers in news production and reporting the discovery of oil in Guyana?

RQ4b. What specific challenges did journalists face in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters?

In addition to the economic, socioeconomic, political and legal themes elevated to frame the oil discoveries, environment and sovereignty themes that also emerged across the news texts, columns and letters to the editors are discussed in relation to their inherent frames. In this discussion, I also address the frame building across news that contributed to frame setting in the public sphere through corresponding themes and frames established in opinion letters to the editor. As the major architects who construct news stories to shape social reality, journalists are also central to the discussion in the context of the professional challenges they encounter in covering the oil and gas sector. Throughout the discussion, I integrate the existing theoretical debate on framing, oil discoveries and other related literature to highlight linkages to the current study and to also offer other critical reflections. Importantly, I position the typology of framing developed by de Vreese (2005) to argue that news, columns, letters to the editor and the collective challenges journalists face in covering the oil and gas sector reflect interdependent framing. The interdependence is based on the practices of frame building, which forms a

continuum for frame setting applicable to Guyana's four daily newspapers with respect to the oil discoveries and accompanying theatre of perspectives.

8.1.1 News themes: Conceptual and Theoretical Linkages

The economic significance of the oil discoveries to foster Guyana's transition from poverty to a wealthy oil-producing developing country is unequivocally the most salient theme made manifest across news stories analyzed in the four dailies for the period May 2015 to December 2019. In congruence, Beck (2014) also found a similar pattern of economic frames in articles published by *The Economist* magazine from 2008-2012, which emphasized the value of fracking to audiences while underplaying the environmental implications for the community. As revealed in the findings of this study, news headlines across the four dailies included *ExxonMobil' second well.... confirms "world-class" oil discovery* (KN headline, 1 July 2016), *ExxonMobil finds more oil at Payara well* (SN, 25 July 2017), *Oil bonanza* (GC, 29 July, 2018) and *Exxon pegs recoverable oil at 5.5 billion barrels* (Guyana Times headline, 8 March 2019). Altogether, the four dailies transported the economic theme to frame the oil discoveries as a fortuitous economic development for Guyana, thus coinciding with the assertion that news frames are comported in headlines (Tankard, 2001). However, economic frames also differed to reveal media bias, the political suasion of news sources and journalistic orientation consistent with the norms of the four dailies. These differences align with existing media praxis associated with framing theory.

Despite the overarching economic theme utilized by the four dailies to strategically frame the value of the oil discoveries to Guyana's economic and socioeconomic transformation, the news stories also revealed the distinct problematizing of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement, mainly by the three private dailies. As Entman (1993) has established, frames emphasize particular issues that

are transported by communication sources who utilize language to construct and center issues or controversy. By emphasizing the terms of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement repetitively, *Kaieteur News* in particular created controversy through its news angles and sources by emphasizing the perceived limitations of the agreement.

Two examples in the findings which support the theoretical assertions by Entman (1993) with respect to the role of language in shaping perspectives, include reference to “the unconscionable contract’s plunder and robbery of our oil” (Nigel Hinds, *KN*, 18 August, 2019, para 1). Metaphor is also visible as part of the controversy reinforced by the news analyst who posited, “The slave masters in the room wax proudly and poetically about their enormous oil discovery in Guyana with no mention of the slavish whip of the 2% royalty” (Nigel Hinds, 18 August 2019, para 2). Although the metaphors readily claim a place in colonialization as a distinct theme, the manner in which they are used to problematize the terms of the contract creates sufficient controversy by juxtaposing the oil corporations as masters and Guyana as servant. The notion that Guyana’s oil resources are being plundered mainly by Exxon Mobil appears most salient across a number of news stories. Moreover, the colonization theme conflicts with the accompanying social and economic transformation that resource exploitation should bring about, as articulated by Mefalopulous (2008) with respect to World Bank standards. Instead, the news frames suggest a reinstitution of the dependency model of development from rich to poor countries, as noted earlier by Mefalopulous (2008). By accentuating strategic media frames aimed at influencing interpretive processes (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), *Kaieteur News* has accentuated economic, moral and conflict perspectives simultaneously across its news texts.

In addition to signifying the terms of the 2016 Agreement as egregious to Guyana's economic health, *Kaieteur News*, through its news sources, also framed the oil discoveries and further exploratory arrangements as inherently problematic for Guyana by emphasizing the legal/regulatory and political/governance themes. The newspaper cited international sources, such as Chatham House, to establish that "future contracts with oil operators must reflect that the government is aware of the value of its resources" (Wilburg, 30 August 2018, para 1). As noted by Ryan (1991), frames also define issues, assign responsibility and suggest potential solutions. Thus, the implicit interpretive schema the newspaper has essentially activated is government's lack of knowledge to protect the country's patrimony against oil corporations. Chatham House comports the solution as government's future due diligence. These views also appeared repetitively across other stories that reveal the *attribution of responsibility* frame. Thus, the current study corresponds with existing scholarship (Ethelb, 2016; Sei-Hill & Telleen, 2017) that found a preponderance of responsibility narratives in news frames.

Another named source, Jan Mangal, who the newspaper frequently quoted as an oil industry expert, framed the issuance of the Kaieteur and Canje oil blocks as "daylight robbery" (*Kaieteur News* headline, 21 April 2019). Mangal's perspectives also implied illegality and corruption with respect to the issuance of the oil blocks by the PPP/C administration prior to Guyana's national elections in 2015. Altogether, the *Kaieteur News* stories analyzed across the broader spectrum are consistent with the neoliberal ethos of the daily, which is known for elevating controversy to attract its audience and leads the four dailies via sales based on its proclivity to sensationalize issues as well. After all, controversy sells. The issues elevated by *Kaieteur News* to draw salience, particularly through economic, legal and governance frames, also align with its established norms and editorial stance.

In a similar manner, the findings across *Stabroek News* and *Guyana Times* stories also revealed the implicit controversy created around the US\$18M signing bonus that gained infamy in Guyana due to its secrecy. *Stabroek News*, in fact, extended the controversy through comparison while revealing its business or economic suasion. The headline *Total to pay US\$100M signing bonus for stake in Suriname oil block* (*Stabroek News* headline, 24 December 2019) drew salience to Guyana's political maleficence, and at the same time, appeared to critique the government's legal ineptitude. Clearly, the legal/regulatory and political/governance themes were activated to highlight Suriname's relative economic advantage over Guyana based on prudent legal and governance structures. The textual significance of the headlines is also supported by the theoretical assertion by Entman (2007) and Gross & D'Ambrosio (2004) that frames are deliberately packaged to influence particular interpretations. By reason, *Stabroek News* therefore provided readers with a controversy it framed as the responsibility of the political administration. As seen in the news texts, *Stabroek News* presented itself as less controversial than *Kaieteur News* by appealing to economic logic through its available sources and news stories.

Evidently, the competing dailies deliberately elevated controversy as part of a neoliberal agenda, which McChesney (2014) identified as characteristic of the media ecology in the current global media landscape. In the process, though, *Stabroek News* relied on multiple sources and international news culled from Reuters to provide its audience with wider context from which to interpret the issues. *Kaieteur News* seemed more concerned about protecting its sources at times by withholding their identity, thereby creating increased levels of controversy apart from awareness, and the notion that they are driven by an agenda.

The noticeable absence of the socioeconomic theme across the *Kaieteur News* stories analyzed provided limited scope for discussion in this section. On the other hand, the macro analysis

framework that *Stabroek News* employed to highlight the socioeconomic theme induced both information and education at the same time. While readers are repetitively assured of the job creation opportunities that the oil sector will provide, across stories carried by the state media for instance, *Stabroek News* invited them to consider both the opportunities and threats to achieving a better life as a result of existing examples in OPEC countries. In effect, the wealth and poverty frames are presented together, thus providing readers with both hope and despair as they compare news narratives comported by the state and private dailies.

In elevating the US\$18M signing bonus as both legally and politically controversial, *Guyana Times*, on the other hand, framed the government as corrupt and duplicitous, based on the argument that “the coalition, while on the Opposition benches, had been vociferous about the transparent management of state finances” (*Guyana Times*, December, 2017 para 2). As noted by Entman (2010), frames reveal journalistic slant through content bias aimed at favoring a political side. In congruence, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) also alluded to frame selection and media representation of an issue as a facet of the political orientation of journalists. While it can be argued that *Guyana Times* made the APNU/AFC government’s standpoint salient in the context of gatekeeping, it can also be argued that the use of “Opposition benches” to frame the argument provided readers with a comparative lens to judge the political administration against the main opposition, PPP. Thus, *Guyana Times* applied moral and political judgment implicitly to appeal to its readers. This posture is apparent in other news stories analyzed in this study, and coincides with the media partisanship inherent in the newspaper’s association with the views of the political opposition.

Contrastingly, *Guyana Chronicle* does not elevate the 2016 Agreement as a source of controversy, but has repeatedly signified its economic and socioeconomic benefits to the people

of Guyana. Unlike the three private dailies, the state newspaper utilized the president of Guyana several times as its source to endorse the country's economic development and green state agenda. The director of the department of Energy, Mark Bynoe, is also cited consistently to accentuate the state's perspectives including the notion that "the current PSA may not be excellent but it is not very poor either (*Guyana Chronicle*, 9 November, 2018, para 2). In addition, the newspaper cited the Minister of Natural Resources, Raphael Trotman, several times to authenticate corresponding announcements from Exxon Mobil on the oil discoveries.

The utility of government sources by the state-owned *Guyana Chronicle* is supported by previous studies on journalistic practices in oil-producing developing countries in the African region. Within their coverage of the oil and gas sector over the period 2007-2009, journalists in Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda relied almost extensively on government officials and the business community as their sources of news (Behrman et al, 2012). They also utilized mainly single sources for their stories. The announcement of Guyana's oil discoveries based on press releases from Exxon also corresponds with the practice of African newspaper journalists in Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda. However, across Guyana's two leading private dailies, evidence of background details to connect audiences to the wider economic, socioeconomic, legal and governance implications of the oil discoveries, contradicts the lack of background found across the African region. Notwithstanding the foregoing differences, what certainly corresponds across the African and Guyanese contexts is the general overemphasis on the economic frame to the exclusion of the environment.

Journalists employed by *Vanguard* and *Daily Champion*, two of Nigeria's national newspapers, use single sources from government (Amenaghawon, 2018), but the study does not account for the fact that other newspapers are critical of the government and the oil sector.

Arguably, government sources featured significantly across *Guyana Chronicle*, but a mix of both government and business sources were more evident in *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News*. Like *Guyana Chronicle*, *Guyana Times* often cited single sources as well. While it can be argued that the use of multiple sources at times, by *Stabroek News* and *Kaieteur News*, contradicts the findings by Behrman et al (2012), one can also discern that multiple sources often coincided with the neoliberal orientation of the two dailies. Whereas *Stabroek News* infused business analyses to frame its stories, the critical approach by *Kaieteur News* often fostered views that collided with the state's perspective on the transformative future that awaits the Guyanese as a result of the oil discoveries.

Unlike *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News*, *Guyana Times* often featured single sources by providing a voice for the political opposition to counteract the state newspaper's perspectives. Thus, the tendency by Nigerian, Ghanaian and Ugandan journalists to be primarily pro-government and pro-business in their reportage (Behrman et al, 2012) appears to be split evenly between the practices of *Guyana Chronicle* and *Stabroek News*, thus contradicting any pro-government-business binary among Guyana's private dailies.

Although the findings of this study revealed the prevalence of the economic theme given the fact that Guyana's transformation is predicated upon oil revenues, it is apposite to note that the political/governance theme foregrounded the other themes. Governance of the oil revenues was implicitly connected to Guyana's socioeconomic development and the notion that oil was both a potential blessing and a curse. More directly though, governance of the Athabasca oil sands development was privileged above the economic and socioeconomic themes, while the environment was made salient above both the economic and socioeconomic themes (Papineau and Deacon, 2017). Differences in the national awareness and lobbying, the nature of the oil

exploration between the Canadian and Guyana contexts and their attendant implications may account for the elevation of governance issues, followed by the environment more directly.

However, the low coverage of environmental issues does warrant concern in Guyana's context. In the absence of safeguards both marine and human life are at risk of short and long-term adverse effects. Six years after Deep Water Horizon oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, researchers found that dolphins struggled to swim while persons engaged in the cleanup exercise experienced depression (Cranor, 2016). It is therefore critical that newspaper coverage incorporates critical research to maintain watchfulness with regard to the environment and not merely the economic benefits or mismanagement of the oil revenues. Equally imperative is that Guyanese journalists should actively learn from the experiences of other nations, especially in the developing world, that have been suffering from decades of ecological and environmental damage resulting from oil production, but without any meaningful recourse from the multi-national companies responsible for the catastrophe.

The findings of this study also suggest that Guyana's three private dailies appear to be less concerned about maintaining a favorable pro-oil company image, unlike their counterparts in Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda. This is particularly evident in the economic imbalances that *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News* particularly have elevated in their stories with respect to the 2016 Petroleum Agreement. However, there certainly appears to be a pro-business image that *Stabroek News* portrays as the stories have repetitively magnified the necessity for local content legislation to facilitate opportunities for the business community. Although *Guyana Chronicle*, as the state newspaper, elevates pro-business perspectives, these are shaped mainly by government sources. The general avoidance of controversy in the context of environmental

reporting apparent in *Guyana Chronicle* also coheres with the tendency of the state media in the developing world, including India, as Raj and Sreekumar (2011) have also noted earlier.

The attribution of responsibility and economic consequences as frames elevated by Guyana's four dailies are also congruent with the thematic coverage across Kenyan newspapers in the wake of oil discoveries in 2012 (Ileri et al, 2019). While the findings of the current study also featured energy security, it is less salient than the Kenyan newspaper frames. Despite the state-centric, neoliberal and partisan orientations that explain the obvious differences across Guyana's four newspapers, compared with the study cited, larger issues, such as access to sources mainly by the private newspapers, are also conflated in how stories are framed and what issues are selected. I highlight these issues later on under the discussion of journalistic challenges.

8.1.2 Frames of Columns and Consistency with News Themes

Several theoretical linkages account for the frames columnists utilized to articulate their opinions about the oil discoveries. As observed in the findings, the frames presented across four columns included economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, environment, geotechnical, geopolitical and recolonization. Within the columns, the economic, socioeconomic, legal and governance themes were most prominent. Unlike news conventions which require objectivity and impartiality, columnists were less nuanced in their iterations about the oil discoveries. They were forthright in attributing responsibility to the APNU/AFC government for the 2016 Agreement and their perceived forfeiture of the nation's oil resources to Exxon in particular. In the following paragraphs, I discuss what I consider to be the most critical findings consistent with the study objectives.

Among the four columns, the *Road to First Oil* and *Straight Talk* both identified poor political stewardship of the oil and gas sector as the problem following the oil discoveries. This

frame construction, apparently aimed at creating the public perception that Guyana's political leadership constituted the problem, coheres with the theoretical perspective that frames define the issue (Ryan, 1991). Within the findings, the *Road to First Oil* and *Straight Talk* columns repetitively referenced the terms of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement as problematic. In the process, the *Road to First Oil* column framed the political administration as inept and irresponsible due to the lack of a legislative framework to support Guyana's oil development. The column also cited the signing of a new Petroleum Agreement with the ExxonMobil subsidiary and Guyana's membership in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) (24 Nov, 2017, para 1) as the only major achievements of Guyana's Minister of Natural Resources. Thus, the column placed the minister on trial by elevating the moral perspective (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Relatedly, the economic, moral and conflict perspectives (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) across the columns analyzed seemed strategically aimed at influencing particular perceptions (Entman, 2007; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004) about the government's management of the oil sector. The notion that "there is nothing that the Granger Administration has done in relation to the Stabroek Block that suggests anything but the greatest deceit and incompetence (Road to First Oil, 2 August 2019, para 9) supports my argument.

On the other hand, *Oil, Gas and You* sought to restore credibility to the political administration by drawing salience to the fact that "Guyana will receive half the profits from the Stabroek wells and an extra 2 per cent royalty out of pre-cost revenues, per the terms of the production-sharing agreement with Exxon and its partners" (Oil, Gas & You, August 22, 2019, para 8). As noted by Nelson, Clawson and Oxley (1997), frames identify underlying causes, likely consequences and possible remedies. Having established government's incompetence as a problem, *The Road to First Oil* proffers "good and intelligent leadership and competent and

careful management” (6 October 2017; para. 2) as the possible remedy to avert the oil blessing from transforming into a curse. Here, the narrative of the resource curse, imbued by the government, is made salient.

An equally significant theoretical function across *Straight Talk* is the elevation of economic, moral and conflict perspectives (Semekto & Valkenburg, 2000). By drawing salience to the “sins” of the political administration for concealing the arrangements pertaining to the US\$18m signing bonus, *Straight Talk* appealed to the moral conscience of citizens with respect to trust. Further, the notion that there is “nothing transparent and equitable” about concealing the Agreement and “the people’s US\$18 million from them” appeared to suggest that moral decadence is a major political character flaw of the government. Implicitly, *Straight Talk* not only magnified the perceived flaws as a principled gate-keeping function, but also appealed to his audience to consider the malfeasance in the court of opinion. As the direct cause of the problem, the political administration is further identified as “members of Team Granger” whose actions are described as “hypocrisy, deceit and executive “cockishness” of the lowest class (Straight Talk, December 29, 2017, para 3). Clearly, the *Straight Talk* columnist is unabashed about his anti-APNU/AFC posture.

While the *Road to First Oil* and *Straight Talk* repetitively frame Guyana’s oil discoveries as politically fraught with problems, *Eye on Guyana* presented political collaboration between the country’s two major political factions as the potential solution to what has emerged as a battlefield of political ideas and actions aimed at proving who is best equipped to manage the oil resources. As stated in findings, *Eye on Guyana* drew attention to Guyana’s political division as fertile ground for the oil companies given that “A divided nation opens itself for exploitation by the ethnic entrepreneurs and foreign forces” (*Eye on Guyana* 24 June, 2018, para 5). The column

further urged a “coming together as a people, to protect and advance our national interest” (*Eye on Guyana* 24 June, 2018, para 5). A likely consequence of political disunity in Guyana in the wake of the oil discoveries and consequent wealth is therefore comported as exploitation as “Exxon and others continue their focused determination to benefit/cash-in on our resources” (*Eye on Guyana, Kaieteur News*, 24 June 2018, para 7).

At the time of writing this dissertation, an atmosphere of political uncertainty prevailed over Guyana for several months, following the March 2, 2020 general elections. The uncertainty stemmed from a deadlock between the incumbent APNU/AFC government and the opposition PPP/C over allegations of electoral fraud that both sides levelled against each other. Much of the conflict appeared to be connected to the governance of the oil resources, thus coinciding with iterations by Canterbury (2016) that Guyana’s extractive sector precipitates regime change.

The *Eye on Guyana* perspectives also coincided with Canterbury’s assertions. Following the oil discoveries in 2015 and subsequent discoveries, the 2020 elections were deemed the country’s most crucial elections. Mounting international pressure brought against the coalition government by entities such as the OAS, EU and diplomatic missions in Guyana also corresponded with Canterbury’s assertion that Guyana’s extractive sector has been the subject of western intervention from its post-independence history to 2015. As noted by Orr (2019), political stability is vital for a nation’s extractive sector. The argument presented by columnists that good governance is necessary to protect states from the resource curse also resonates with Phillips, Hailwood and Brooks (2016) who underscored the significance of good governance in oil-producing developing countries. In addition, the notion that Guyana’s oil wealth may emerge as a curse rather than blessing is congruent with the earlier assertion by Stiglitz, Sachs and Humphreys (2007), who noted that factors such as weak institutional structures and a lack of

accountability have conspired to undermine national oil wealth benefits for developing oil-producing nations. By framing the oil discoveries and development as a governance issue, columnists across the three private dailies have established the embeddedness of the economic, socioeconomic, legal and governance frames. Consistencies across the columns with respect to media partisanship and business orientation were reliable across *Guyana Times's Straight Talk* and *Stabroek News's Road to First Oil*, respectively. *Eye on Guyana* appeared to strike a balance through advocacy, while *Oil, Gas and You*, the state newspaper column, provided readers with a less critical appraisal of the discoveries consistent with the counterbalancing role it played in news framing in promoting the state's development agenda. As revealed in the findings, the environment frame is also less conspicuous across the columns, like news texts, although reference to legislative action to protect the country from any potential disaster as Guyana pursues sustainable development are noteworthy.

8.1.3 Letters to the Editor: Frame-setting

Based on the thematic analysis of texts across the opinion letters to the editors published by Guyana's four dailies, the findings revealed that letter writers utilized economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, environment and sovereignty themes to frame the oil discoveries. The salience of economic, legal and political implications consistently reflected frames located in news texts, thus giving credence to the framing typology that journalistic frame building produces frame setting effects on public opinion (de Vreese, 2005). In the following paragraphs, I highlight pertinent examples to support my opening argument that frame-building and frame-setting coalesce across news and letter columns across Guyana's four dailies. The findings suggested that the coalescence reflect interdependence and are supported by

the theoretical perspective that frames influence public opinion and stand as dependent variables (Scheufele, 1999).

Across the texts analyzed the identity of letter writers corresponding across frames and also revealed their subject matter expertise as they functioned as news sources at times. As a result, letter writers were engaged in both frame-building and frame-setting simultaneously as they provided news context and opinions at the same time. In the process, key frames including attribution of responsibility were replicated across news and letters. An example of attribution of responsibility as seen in the findings presented in the previous chapter is the articulated view that “Guyana has been shafted by the multinationals and successive governments [who] have played a role in this exploitation and abuse of Guyana’s resources” (*KN*, 15 Oct 2019, para 2). Rather than attribute responsibility to the coalition APNU/AFC government that held office at the time the letter was authored, the writer generalized his attribution to imply that previous governments also colluded with and authorized the abuse of Guyana’s resources. This perspective also appeared in the news texts analyzed which attributed responsibility to the PPP/C government for the “daylight robbery” and exploitation over which they presided immediately prior to leaving office in 2015.

Letter writers who comported Guyana’s lack of experience in the oil sector as the cause of the contractual pitfalls and a curse being the likely consequence also appeared conversant with the paradox of plenty associated with the failure of oil producing to ensure poor citizens’ benefit from the oil wealth (Deacon 2011). Moreover, evidence to support the framing sequence of cause-consequence-remedy (Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997) is articulated separately by letter writers to reveal how divergent perspectives on the oil discoveries have also facilitated a deliberative public sphere (Rinke, Wessler & Weinmann, 2013). The view that “[oil], though a

potential blessing for the country and peoples of Guyana, can possibly be a curse for us due to the overreaching hand of the American company, ExxonMobil, and our gross lack of experience in oil, period”(*KN*, 18 November 2019, para 1) is juxtaposed with Exxon’s role as savior. As such, another letter writer felt that the United States’ interests provided Guyana with “solid partners in the hemisphere on its side” to “pursue the development of its oil industry with confidence” (*SN*, 10 February, 2017, para 1). While both letters used the sovereignty frame, the first letter framed Exxon’s presence as neoliberal exploitation and therefore a form of neo-colonization, while the second letter suggested that Exxon provided strategic security against the Venezuelan threat. Thus, Exxon’s strategic presence is theoretically the solution to ensuring that Guyana maintains its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Despite the foregoing argument, other letters also underscored the urgency of Guyana protecting its patrimony.

Letter writers comport oil companies as problematic based on the evidence of poverty and corruption that have transpired in some oil-producing developing countries in the African region. The letter writer stated, “We only have to take a look at the examples of how other countries such as Chad, Nigeria and Papua New Guinea, have fared with regard to economic instability, social conflict and human rights violations following the discovery of oil. One of the many things these countries have in common is their predator-prey relationship with ExxonMobil. (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 2). Moreover, letter writers appeared familiar with the character of transnational oil corporations, as the same writer stated, “when it comes to powerful oil companies and their interest in countries with poor governance and high poverty rates, blind idealism with regard to their interests will do us no good” (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 2 (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 2). The notion that the African countries have all shared an ill-fated “predator-prey relationship with ExxonMobil” (*SN*, 22 January 2018, para 2) further highlighted

the problem frame. The problem-solution frame presented across letters also substantiated the theory that frames define issues, elucidate claims about who is responsible and suggest potential solutions (Ryan, 1991), and that letter writers are also capable of articulating problems and solutions. Thus, the argument that the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement between Guyana on one side and ExxonMobil, Hess, and CNOOC on the other side, represents “the worst contract ever agreed upon in the annals of the world” (*KN*, 29 January 2018, para 1) is the implicit problem. The solution also furnished the solution by stating, “What we need is to renegotiate the June 27, 2016 Petroleum Contract – posthaste” (*GT*, 5 March 2018, para 1). As Aaroe (2011) has argued, the relative strength of thematic and episodic frames depends on the intensity of citizens’ emotional reaction. Thus, repetitive thematic episodic news frames constructed around the 2016 Agreement and the US\$18M signing bonus appear to support the argument by Aaroe (2011) that episodic frames register more influence over opinions through their increased reaction to messages. In the context of frame-setting, as noted by Gross (2008), the episodic frames also appeared to produce a stronger influence on audiences by triggering emotional appeal.

The state newspaper letters remained mainly on the side of pro-development by elevating the “volume of oil discovered so far” and “the billions of dollars for both the company and its partners and shareholders, and most importantly, the people of Guyana” (*GC*, 27 Oct 2018, para 6). Letter writers framed the problem of negative publicity as “scaring away investors” (*GC*, 28 Jan 2019, para 3) rather than as a problem. Similarly, another opinion letter writer later suggests that the 2% royalty should not be compared, but rather, Guyana’s Department of Energy should “bargain on our future contracts” (*GC*, 7 July 2019, para 5). Similarly, another opinion letter writer who used the problem-solution frame suggested that the 2% royalty should not be

compared, but rather, be used by Guyana's Department of Energy to "bargain on our future contracts" (*GC*, 7 July 2019, para 5).

Importantly, the selection and privileging of letters that coincide with the stance of government as a gate keeping function is a notable feature across all four dailies. The opinions expressed by letter writers have also revealed how news coverage by Guyana's dailies has influenced public opinion among citizens who share opposing political views. Another opinion letter who suggested that Guyana's president furnish "an explanation and an apology" (*SN*, 16 December 2017, para 3) to blot out the US\$18M transgression, with assurances of transparency illustrated a willingness to forgive the APNU/AFC administration. On the other hand, letters writers who were less forgiving felt that the solution to the political [mis]management of Guyana's oil resources resided at the polls.

As the results have shown, opinion letter writers have also attributed responsibility to the government not only for its lack of prudence in managing the oil resources, but also the environment. One letter writer reminded that "Guyanese are yet to hear about a comprehensive study on the likely impact of oil and gas on climate change and the general natural environment in Guyana" (*SN*, 3 Dec 2019, para 10). He concluded that "any plan for Guyana that does not include the environment as a fundamental element cannot be considered truly transformative" (*SN*, 3 Dec 2019, para 10). The articulated concerns by one letter writer with respect to Exxon's disregard for the attendant effects of fossil fuels on climate also supports bears witness with Griffin and Myers Gaffe (2018) who highlighted the oil company's failure to engage stakeholders. Specifically, Griffin and Myers Gaffe (2018) noted Exxon's elevation of economic forecasts which has also emerged as a feature in the oil discoveries in Guyana. Moreover, the scholars cited the general absence of local engagement on the risks associated with climate

change. Their suggestion for balanced information sharing between oil companies, investors and primary stakeholders on climate change is also noteworthy, but appears elusive given the challenge of access to information and sources that Guyanese journalists already face with Exxon in particular.

8.1.4 Journalistic Challenges: Internal and External pressures

Guyanese journalists who cover the oil and gas sector and report daily on the oil discoveries face multiple challenges. These include a limited understanding of all the technical and legal complexities associated with petroleum exploration and production, limited training, and the struggle to remain objective based on their establishment's partisan and or economic orientation.

In addition to the foregoing challenges, journalists also find it difficult to secure information from reliable sources in the oil and gas sector, including stakeholders who work at key state agencies and the oil companies, mainly Exxon. Editors also face similar challenges.

State officials perceive the daily newspapers as agenda-driven, and argue that journalists misrepresent their views, are untrained and have failed to fully present an objective view of the oil discoveries in their stories. These perceptions undermine interactions between journalists and state officials who function as their sources of news, thereby adding to the existing challenges journalists confront in covering the oil discoveries in Guyana. While oil and gas is a relatively new development for Guyana, compared with more established petroleum exporting development countries such as Nigeria and Angola, reporting challenges are common across the two development contexts. Shiffrin (2014) found that some journalists in developing countries with a fledgling extractive sector are under-resourced and face the dilemma of bribery to slant stories in a favor of the sector. Being under-resourced also extends to a lack of training to

develop specialist beat reporters in the sector, which, in turn, contribute to the quality of coverage and the ability of journalists to sustain issues in the public sphere. Nonetheless, Shiffrin and Rodrigues (2014) maintained that the media's role as watchdogs in conducting investigative reporting remains pivotal to developing countries. In asserting that the absence of transparency deliberately sustains public ignorance of issues centered on the extractive sector, Shiffrin's views resonate with the perceptions of Guyanese stakeholders, including environmental advocates and journalists. They perceive government's nondisclosure and posture of secrecy inimical to transparency and accountability to the public as expressed in the interviews. Corresponding literature also support the salience of accountability and transparency through public disclosure, and the importance of trained media corps to fulfil their role, particularly in developing, oil-producing countries. As observed by Kakonage (2013), a lack of journalistic training stymies their capacity to understand critical national development issues. Clearly, Guyanese journalists face similar challenges with respect to the oil and gas sector, which constitutes Guyana's most significant development in its modern history. The relevance of including journalists around the table of this important development also aligns with Kakonage's suggestion that media inclusivity is critical to advancing the development goals of developing countries.

With respect to capacity building, Scott (2014) also underscored the significance of human capacity building as a necessary communication intervention to empower citizens through information and awareness. He argued too that capacity building advances media literacy and media representations of development. Suffice to say, both Scott (2014) and Kakonage (2013) illuminate the relevance of training for Guyanese journalists to better understand and articulate Guyana's oil development to citizens. Given that journalists are operating on the periphery of the state's petroleum development, Kakonage's earlier argument

for media inclusivity in a state's national development agenda bears strong significance to Guyana's oil development. Importantly, it makes a case for government to consider and be deliberate in its inclusion of the media fraternity in the planning and discourses on oil. As Kakonage (2013) also observed, a lack of experience and disinterest among journalists in developing countries contribute to low levels of reporting on national development issues. Although Guyanese journalists have accumulated five years of personal experience as beat reporters in an environment that requires ongoing training, their enthusiasm reflects growing, rather than diminishing interest in the sector. Further, there was no evidence to substantiate journalists' disinterest in covering the sector despite the challenges they face with their news sources. Given the fact that at least one state official recognizes the need for both training and stakeholder engagements as a critical priority raises the level of hope for deliberate media engagement as a national priority. However, it does not dissipate the inherent biases of the four dailies, which are driven by neoliberal competition, ideological disposition and state-aligned policies, a set of conditions that is consistent with existing scholarship, including McChesney (2001), Entman (2010) and Kiwanuka-Tondo, Albada & Payton (2012), who account for these global media realities.

It is interesting to note that while government officials have acknowledged that Guyana's newspapers serve a significant public good, as sources of news they frown at the manner that journalists are comported and the issues they consider salient. As illustrated through the interviews, journalists recognize their gate-keeping functions within the Guyanese public sphere in congruence with their articulated role to keep government accountable. This conscious approach to coverage by journalists demonstrates an awareness of one of the principal tenets of journalism-gatekeeping, as noted earlier by Schudson (2003). It also challenges the proclivity of

state officials who may be complicit in deals with oil companies, as development scholars Titeca and Edmond (2019) have found in developing oil producing countries.

State officials' allusions to the proprietary nature of information sharing also registered with the asymmetric bargaining power that Stiglitz, Sachs and Humphreys (2007) found to be egregious to developing countries in their relations with transnational corporations. The notion that disclosure of discoveries and information flow from the oil companies are not the exclusive remit of the state, as expressed by one state official interviewed, further demonstrates Guyana's asymmetric bargaining power with Exxon Mobil. This is notwithstanding the national security rationale, embodied in the Venezuela threat, which previous and current governments have comported as their major consideration for the state's contractual arrangement with Exxon. In addition to asymmetric bargaining power, Stiglitz, Sachs and Humphreys (2007) also argued that limited access to information and weak institutional structures hinder the transfer of wealth in resource-rich developing countries.

Throughout the interviews, journalists and editors expressed disenchantment with low to limited access to information and sources of news. The interview findings also suggest that news coverage is interfering with the proverbial elephant in the room. Government's \$18M signing bonus with Exxon Mobil, which remained undisclosed for over a year from the public, cast the spotlight on possible corruption although the bonus is, in fact, part of the 2016 Agreement. The late disclosure and practice also reinforced what Titeca and Edmond (2019) found in Angola where oil companies and state officials engage in nefarious deals. Other development scholars, Yates (2012), Olayungbo (2019) and Moise (2020), also highlighted the embedded nature of politics and oil resources, which helps to inform the politicizing of oil in Guyana. As one editor also theorized during our interview, public perceptions that have been largely informed by media

coverage suggest that the oil discoveries will result in unbridled wealth and prosperity for everyone. Whether those views are captured in news stories, columns or letters to the editors across the four dailies, they magnify the scope of national politics through the articulated messages or lack thereof, to the people of Guyana.

As argued by Sosale (2008), communication, from the standpoint of media, fosters development. This has to be recognized not only by media establishments, including the state newspapers, but by all stakeholders at various layers of society who play a critical role in communicating oil to the people. The technical nature of the petroleum industry and its economic undercurrents also require specialized training and immersion for journalists to fully comprehend the magnitude of information they need to unravel and simplify for audiences. While columnists cater largely to niche audiences from the educated segments of the population, news remains the central mode of education and information to reach all segments of society. Based on the findings of this study, I return to my opening argument that Guyana's newspaper framing of the oil discoveries reflect a combination of the neoliberal orientation of the private dailies *Kaieteur News* and *Stabroek News*, and the media partisanship historically inherent in the state-owned *Guyana Chronicle* and the politically aligned views of *Guyana Times*. These orientations are further manifested in the columns published by the four dailies, although some columnists are less politically adversarial in their apparent advocacy for the people of Guyana with respect to benefits from the oil. Opinion letters also reveal the interdependency of frames, as journalists frame stories that shape the interpretive schema revealed in the letters.

I present the findings of this study holistically in figure 5 to argue that Guyana's newspaper framing of the oil discoveries through news stories, columns and opinion letters to the editors is not merely a function of framing. It is complex and multilayered. In constructing social

reality, journalists face several internal and external challenges. These include access to subject matter experts and the neoliberal and partisan orientation of their newsrooms, which influences frame-building and their attendant effects on public perception through frame-setting. Repetitive coverage of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement and the US\$18M signing bonus in the news, niche columns and opinion letters also revealed how framing occurs at various levels and is not merely a function of newsrooms. Public opinion also reflects different dimensions of framing based on Guyana's oil discoveries. Specific frames also appear to have direct impact on how citizens interpret the issues and rearticulate information that originates from news frames. In the process, journalists who utilize frames to educate and inform citizens may either contribute to providing clarity or misunderstanding in the process of communicating the oil discoveries in Guyana.

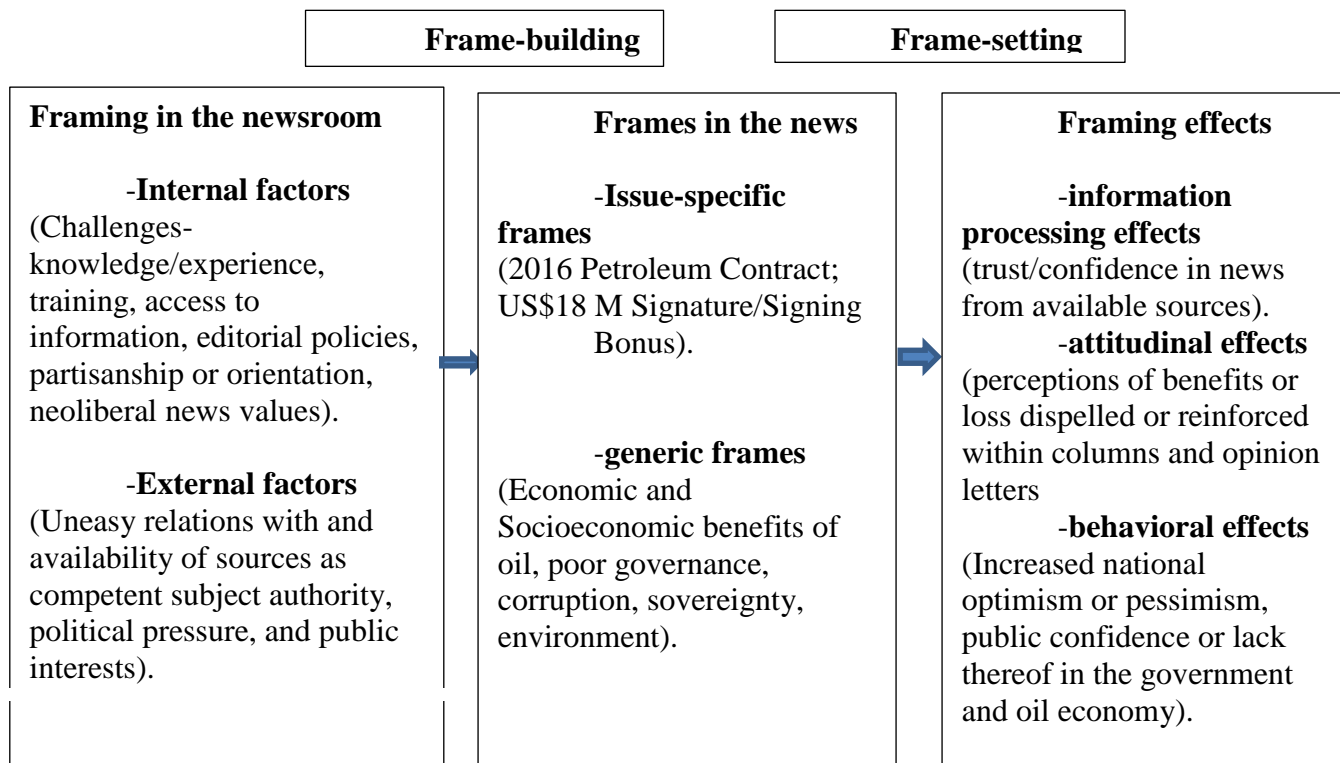


Figure 5. Guyana's existential newspaper integrated framing model

A Capacity-building model for the oil discoveries and development is therefore a practical inclusive approach to securing media partnerships. As figure 4 illustrates, newspapers

form the basis of public education and information. By investing in media education, the Guyana government’s collaboration with journalists across the spectrum of state and private media could potentially reduce the “noise” citizens may be receiving, while strengthening journalists’ gate-keeping functions. This will require a commitment to transparency by the state, and legislative action to facilitate access to information.

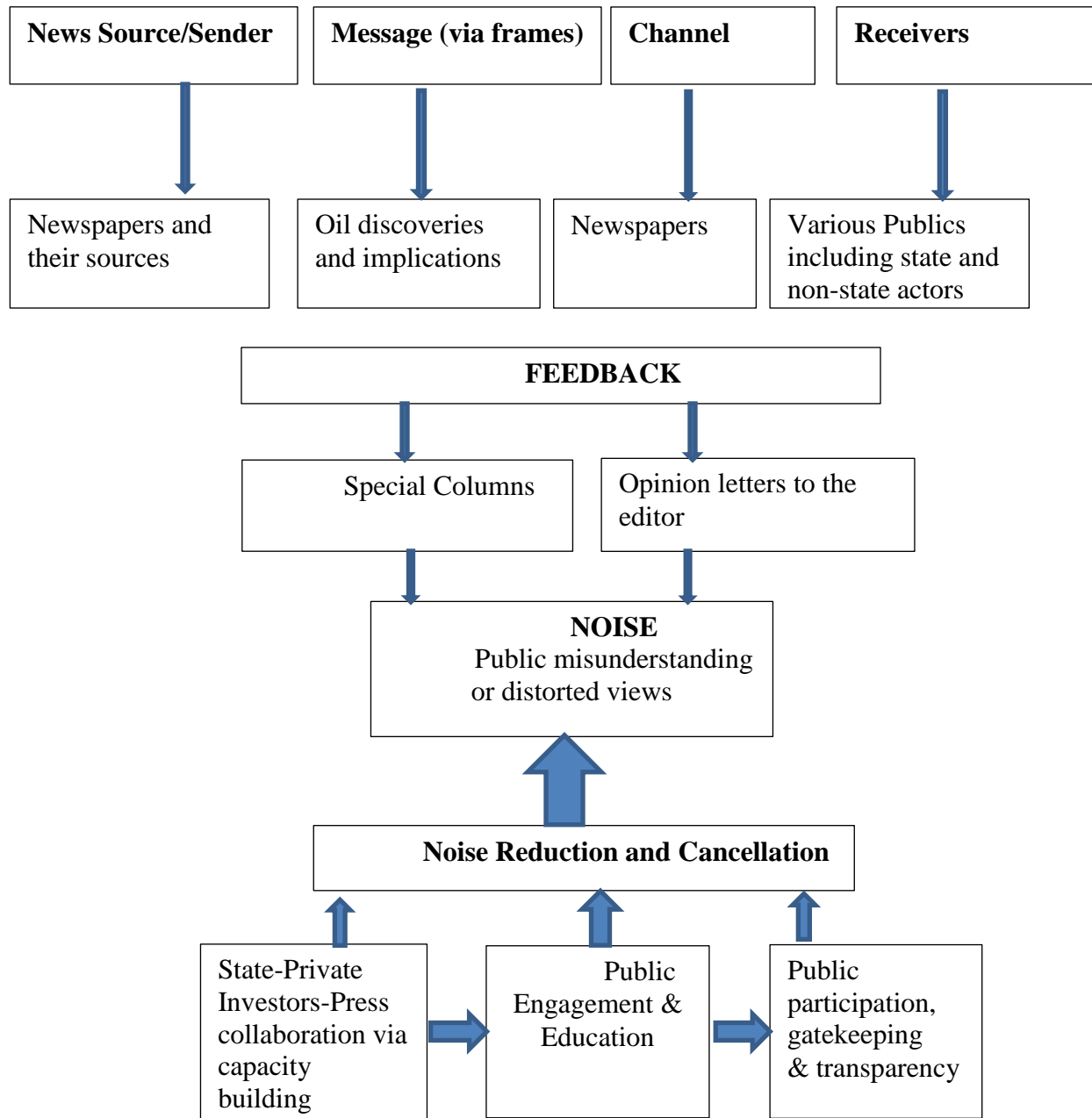


Figure 6. Capacity Building Model for Communicating Oil as National Development

9. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Introduction

This study undertook a thematic analysis of news, columns and letters to the editor to determine how Guyana's four daily newspapers, *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* framed the oil discoveries in Guyana between May 2015 and December 2019. The study also investigated the challenges faced by journalists in reporting on the oil discoveries and particular challenges in their interactions with key stakeholders who function as their news sources in the oil and gas sector. The research questions I explored were: First, what are the major themes, similarities and differences accentuated across newspaper reports of the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* in the wake of the initial oil discovery and subsequent discoveries between May 2015 and December 2019? Second, what are the themes highlighted across special columns in the four daily newspapers? How do columnists frame the oil discoveries? Are there departures from existing news frames? Third, what are the major themes within public opinion letters in the four daily newspapers? Do the themes reflect frame-setting in the discourse on the oil discoveries? Fourth, what were the challenges faced by journalists and editors of the four daily newspapers in news production and reporting the discovery of oil in Guyana, and what specific challenges did journalists face in their working relationship with other oil-sector key stakeholders who also acted as news sources to the reporters?

Altogether, six major themes emerged across news stories, columns and letters to the editor. These included economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory, political/governance, environment and sovereignty. The economic, legal and governance themes were consistently

elevated within news, columns and letters to the editor to frame the discoveries as potentially transformative for Guyana, but equally requiring swift legal attention and prudent management. The sovereignty theme was also prominent in the texts analyzed to position Guyana as an independent developing nation on the path to major transformation as a result of the oil discoveries. Notably, the environment theme was less prominent across the dataset, although journalists, columnists and citizens seem generally aware of the harmful effects of disasters such as an oil spill on Guyana's ecosystems. Holistically, interview findings also revealed the practical challenges journalists face, including lack of training and access to key stakeholders, which further undermine a comprehensive understanding of and reporting on the oil and gas sector.

9.2 News themes across the four dailies

Economic, socioeconomic, legal/regulatory and political/governance themes appeared consistently across the news coverage of the oil discoveries in the *Guyana Chronicle*, *Stabroek News*, *Kaieteur News* and *Guyana Times* between May 2015 and December 2019. The noticeable preponderance of the economic theme observed across news headlines and stories seemed to serve three major elements of news-- relevance, significance and controversy. News stories repetitively underscored the relevance of effective legislative and governance mechanisms to optimize and secure Guyana's benefits from the oil discoveries. Indeed, the relevance of legislation to job creation for the Guyanese is perhaps one of the most salient features of the oil discoveries, but this was not always clearly articulated across stories. Politically themed news that lacked the full context of the issue and its relevance to ordinary citizens at times obscured the true significance of the discoveries and their attendant benefits to the people of Guyana. Questions pertaining to the 2016 Petroleum Agreement populated

newspaper coverage to the extent that it is quite possible that audiences questioned its legitimacy and whether Guyana's patrimony was being contested. It has been established that frames are deployed to stimulate a particular interpretation among audiences (Entman, 2007; Gross and D'Ambrosio, 2004). It is therefore conceivable that the economic frames built around the 2016 Agreement created the allure of unbridled wealth while the legal and governance frames negated that interpretation. I wrestled with those particular issues while conducting this study as I read stories closely to understand the symbiotic relationship between the economic and socioeconomic, legal and governance themes. News stories seemed to suggest that the oil discoveries were not an automatic panacea for Guyana's elongated economic challenges. Instead, socioeconomic development was paired with the oil revenues, while regulatory and legislative structures supported by transparent governance appeared to be unconditional requirements. Thus, economic, socioeconomic, legislative and governance frames functioned inseparably at times as they formed the basis of the controversy and concerns surrounding the terms of the contract. Theoretically, the attribution of responsibility frame (Ryan, 1991) resonated almost throughout stories as sources provided audiences with issues to think about in the context of the oil discoveries. Frames therefore have the potential to produce both euphoria and melancholy reactions based on the manner that stories are packed to construct social reality.

Interestingly, initial news coverage of the oil discovery in 2015 and subsequent discoveries, revealed a maturity in many ways, as stories moved in between enumerating the enormity of the oil wells and contractual negotiations following the first major discovery. Newspaper coverage appeared to provide a balance between informing citizens about the economic implications of the discoveries while holding government accountable for its actions with respect to negotiations with the major oil corporations engaged in the oil exploration and

production activities. As Semetko and Valkenburg noted (2000), frames draw attention to economic, moral and conflict across issues. News themes that signified oil wealth clearly conveyed the impression that Guyana's economic salvation and socioeconomic development resided in its offshore reservoirs. However, across the four dailies, there were notable changes in the timbre of reporting, mainly by the private newspapers to move audiences beyond the gaze of wealth. Whereas *Kaieteur News* consistently questioned the 2016 Petroleum Agreement, *Stabroek News* provided economic analyses to register significant differences through comparison of the value of the commodity for other oil producing states and Guyana. The idea that Guyana was not receiving the full value for its resources repetitively populated stories. *Guyana Times* also probed the existing contractual arrangement by highlighting its perceived deficiencies with respect to the 2 percent royalty captured in the Petroleum agreement. On the other hand, *Guyana Chronicle* emphasized Guyana's human and social development and the precipice of wealth upon which the nation stood as a result of the discoveries.

Issues of morality emerged around the US\$18M signing bonus as stories attributed responsibility to the APNU/AFC government for engaging in nefarious deals with ExxonMobil by withholding knowledge from the public. By focusing on the signing bonus as a single issue, repetitive legal and governance frames themed around corruption brought the APNU/AFC coalition government into disrepute. News stories and analysis also suggested that the government of Guyana, like its predecessor, mismanaged the negotiation process for the 2016 Petroleum agreement and relinquished Guyana's patrimony in exchange for personal favors.

Notwithstanding the collective gatekeeping function of the private dailies to hold government accountable to the people, the inherent media partisanship and neoliberal ethos of the four dailies ultimately influenced slant in news packaging. Implicitly too, the quest to lead

through appealing headlines and news frames resulted in the repetitive framing of the oil discoveries and Guyana's development as doomed before takeoff. The notion that "oil is no guarantee of economic well-being" (*Stabroek News*, 15 August 2015, para 2) stood out from the beginning. At times, new stories published mainly *Kaitour News* and *Stabroek News* emphasized the need for transparency and accountability, while *Guyana Times* trailed behind by including views of the political opposition to question the modus operandi of the APNU/AFC coalition administration. All three private dailies utilized government sources, like the state newspaper, but they also relied on local and international sources to authenticate and, at times, refute existing perspectives on the oil sector. As I examined the news texts across the four dailies, I repeatedly questioned the missing focus on the environment, and the voices of advocates who understood, from a broader context, the negative implications of degradation for marine life and the ecosystems. I further questioned whether the newspapers recognized their role beyond the symphony of frames comported to signify wealth transfer. As Phelan (2014) has noted, journalists function within an existing culture guided by institutional norms and structures that are largely influenced by neoliberal ideals. This reality, coupled with prevailing journalistic challenges such as access to information and officials, clearly combined to inform news framing of the oil discoveries.

9.3 Framing by columnists

The columns analyzed in this study further reinforced existing frames, including an unbridled stream of commentary not afforded in news. Unlike journalists, columnists lacked the restraint necessary to uphold professional journalistic tenets, including balance and objectivity. A high level of critical appraisal of the 2016 Petroleum Agreement was presented across the series

of columns and provided deeper insights that seemed to be absent from the news coverage. Columnists also appeared more innately vested than journalists in their arguments, and were unrelenting in seeking answers from the government and the oil companies. In effect, as independent thinkers, they contributed to educating and informing citizens about the oil discoveries and created an informed public sphere.

A similar pattern of economic frames dominated the four columns, which included *Oil, Gas and You*, *The Road to First Oil*, *Eye on Guyana* and *Straight Talk*. Legal/regulatory and political/governance themes also dominated, as columnists attributed responsibility to the government for agreeing to a poor contractual arrangement. It is clear that columnists who are subject matter experts are more thorough in their approach to discourses on the oil discoveries. This was evident in the level of research some columnists incorporated in their arguments. *The Road to First Oil* Columnist who is a chartered accountant and attorney-at-law argued that government failed to conduct due diligence, and as a consequence Exxon has gained an economic advantage. As a consequence, Guyana is receiving a much lower value for its oil resources. In addition to attributing responsibility to the government for the ill-fated 2016 Agreement, columnists mainly across the three private dailies deployed the moral frame to question the integrity of the government and specific ministers based on the US\$18M signing bonus. The fact that *The Road to First Oil* consistently advocated for the 2016 agreement to be publicized underscores the role that columns have assumed in Guyanese society.

Political and governance frames also permeated the iterations presented in *Eye on Guyana* and *Straight Talk*, but *Straight Talk* openly challenged the political administration's competence by targeting specific actors in government. Like *The Road to First Oil*, *Straight Talk* placed the government on trial for the 2016 Production Sharing Agreement and argued that the agreement

nullified the government's political campaign promise of a better life made to citizens. The sceptre of corruption lingered throughout the articles as the columnist made the Nigerian case of state complicity visible to readers. Together, the 2016 Petroleum agreement and the US\$18M bonus were two major points of convergence in the context of gatekeeping, but political slant was irrefutable across the articles. It is therefore possible that the conflation of politics and gatekeeping was strategic and deliberate with the intent of influencing public perception regarding the government and to convey public trust as inherently undeserving. Clearly, the columns have also provided a deliberative space of contested ideas, as *Eye on Guyana*, contrary to the *Road to First Oil* and *Straight Talk*, identified the oil companies as the problem. Rather than frame government as the problem, *Eye on Guyana* invited audiences to consider Guyana's history of colonization and the protracted political division that has accompanied the country's post-colonial experiences. The columnist felt that the oil discoveries have fueled those divisions and therefore created conditions for exploitation. He proffered a political solution based on unified governance to secure a better future for all Guyanese. History appeared cyclical as Guyana's two major political parties contested national elections on 2 March 2020 and remained in an impasse three months later. As Canterbury (2016) has argued, regime change in Guyana is predicated upon western interests in the country's extractive sector. Evidence to support this assertion became visible as a number of agencies, including the OAS, United States senators and diplomatic missions in Guyana have repeatedly cited democratic transition of a new administration as necessary. The oil discoveries, therefore, have political implications based on transnational economic interests, notwithstanding the salience of Exxon's presence in Guyana as a geopolitical strategy against the Venezuela threat.

It became clearer to me that columnists are not confined by time and space, unlike journalists who function in deadline-driven environments. In addition, columnists are allowed to be artful even as they frame oil corporations as corrupt. They are not subject to the rules of engagement that journalists must follow. Guyanese journalists who struggle to understand how the oil and gas sector functions could therefore collaborate with columnists to provide necessary contexts and clarity to audiences. While the *Guyana Chronicle* column addressed the various development phases of oil exploration and discovery, its neutrality provided a general audience with an overarching perspective of the oil discoveries. The Road to *First Oil* and *Straight Talk* were distinctly aimed at niche audiences who understood the economics of oil, but the frames deployed by the columns reflected partisanship. *Eye on Guyana* was less adversarial in its appeal to national unity through linguistic devices carefully constructed to remind audiences that the oil discoveries belonged to Guyana.

9.4 Frame-setting across letters to the editor

As noted in the findings of this study in chapter 8, letter writers also elevated the economic, legal and political frames to articulate their concerns and aspirations with regard to the oil discoveries. Environment and sovereignty frames were also present though less prominent. Letter writers also repetitively used the responsibility narrative to frame their concerns, which included governance of the oil resources and the absence of legislation to support the development of the oil and gas sector. Like columnists, some letter writers seemed more engaged with the major issues made salient in the newspapers, while others appeared to be influenced by existing news frames as part of the frame-setting process. Based on the thematic analysis, opinion letters also appear to serve a critical gate-keeping function in Guyanese society, while providing citizens with pluralistic views on the oil discoveries. Several letter writers were

privileged with weekly space to frame their arguments broadly around economic themes, including reference to Guyana as a fledging financial heaven” (*GT*, 23 August, 2019 para 1). However, as seen in the findings, others were wary of the oil companies. Letter writers who comported the economic theme felt that the inequities created in the 2016 agreement were symptomatic of neoliberal control, and as one letter writer asserted, the oil agreement is a relationship of “master to servant wrapped in a neat little package marked greed/profit” (*KN*, 18 Nov 2019, para 3).

Letters to the editor generally offered citizens a window through which they could view the oil discoveries from multiple perspectives. The range of views also consistently confronted issues of governance and corruption not noticeable in news texts.

9.5 Journalistic Challenges

Although oil exploration commenced in Guyana decades before the 2015 discovery, journalists who cover the oil and gas industry face a number of challenges. The dilemma of being under informed and untrained and a lack of adequate resources to fully understand the complexities of the oil and gas industry compounds their ability to assert themselves as gatekeepers. Access to information and critical news sources further shape the realities under which Guyanese journalists function. Media partisanship and the economic model of the private newspapers also inhibit a truly functional pluralistic newspaper media. Citizens therefore have to choose between a mix of state-aligned reporting and news that magnify business and political interests. The politicization of the oil discoveries has also seeped into the public sphere, thereby creating the allure that Guyana’s economic transition is imperiled. This calls for a collective shift in the consciousness of reporters and other stakeholders, including state and non-state actors, to work as a team in building the information and education apparatus for citizens regarding what

oil means for national development. John and Etika (2019) have underscored the value of communication for good governance and sustainable development in developing countries. Implicitly, those who are stewards over the oil resources must establish a role for media to maintain a fully functional democracy and public trust. As Kakonage (2013) has underscored, the media are critical to advancing a nation's development goals. The findings of this study suggest that Guyanese journalists require the necessary support to better inform themselves about the issues they are attempting to report. Formal training institutions, such as the University of Guyana Center for Communication Studies can play a role in educating journalists through specialized courses on oil and gas reporting as part of its existing course on science and environmental reporting. Such training could impact how journalists, and by extension, opinion letter writers, interpret and frame their stories using scientific data and expert training which I allude to later under media pedagogy. Columnists may also benefit from the leads provided in news to contextualize their arguments.

Guyana's intractable ethnic politics also makes it necessary for the local press to collaborate to dismantle the prisms through which citizens on both sides of the political divide may be interpreting the country's future as an oil economy. Admittedly, the government of Guyana lacks a comprehensive articulated vision for the nation with respect to the oil revenues. While much has been written about local content and the involvement of citizens as service providers, very few understand specific arrangements for how the revenues will impact their livelihoods directly. The dissemination of information has been left primarily to the media, with the Department of Public Information providing media releases prepared by Exxon. Clearly, media frames are also fueled by competition between the two leading dailies and the umbrella of media partisanship under which *Guyana Chronicle* has historically sheltered for decades. As the

newest daily, *Guyana Times* represents the viewpoint of the political opposition based on its establishment. However, the interests of readers conveyed via information and education support the supposition that editors have not lost their compass. By their own admission, editors exert internal pressure on their journalists to articulate the best story that will sell.

While oil and gas is a relatively new development for Guyana, compared with more established petroleum exporting development countries such as Nigeria and Angola, reporting challenges are common across the two development contexts. Although some journalists in oil-producing developing countries are under-resourced and are subjected to bribery to slant stories in a favor of the sector (Shiffrin & Rodrigues, 2014), Guyanese journalists who were interviewed for this study seem uncompromised and enthusiastic about shaping the narrative on the oil discoveries and development. The relative novelty of the sector and collective desire to also experience and witness Guyana's transformation may account for this posture that bodes well for maintaining transparency, accountability and ethical practice. In addition, the fact that not all journalists enjoy full and open access to oil company officials may also explain the absence of influence. From this perspective, Guyanese journalists should be provided with the necessary state resources to develop their craft. In addition, steps should be taken by the parliament to enact freedom of information legislation consistent with the practices in the developed world to facilitate fair and transparent reportage of the oil and gas sector.

As Slim (1995) has posited, development is “about change... change for the better” (p. 143). Scott (2014) also suggested that media development should deliberately include institutional capacity-building to ensure that multiple voices are heard, and that are given the opportunity to participate in the development. This vision is highly possible through a collective political commitment to transparency and national participation in the discourse and development of

Guyana's oil and gas sector. At the same time, a commitment to environmental reporting is also necessary as intervention and gatekeeping to maintain accountability at the level of the state and oil companies. Journalists must move from awareness to action but would require equal institutional, state and private sector support to investigate and report on threats to the environment.

This study has underscored the significance of framing as a theoretical perspective in the discourse on oil discoveries in a relatively underexplored region of the world. Thus, the findings contribute to communication research with a focus on journalism practice. In this study, I also included development communication research, although to a less extent. As a media and communications scholar, it is my conviction that media practice and performance cannot be fully understood without understanding the factors that undermine their full potential particularly in developing countries.

The questions that lingered in my mind at the beginning of this study persist. As I concluded my analysis I pondered on the economic impact of the oil discoveries for citizens and whether the euphoria felt at the beginning of the discoveries in 2015 was displaced. Moreover, I also considered Guyana's future as a newly minted oil producer caught in the throes of political/governance narratives that made both wealth and poverty conspicuous possibilities. Notwithstanding the foregoing questions, I remain hopeful and optimistic that Guyana will arrive at a juncture of change for the better of all its citizens as the media, not merely the newspapers, continue to engage in gatekeeping by insisting on transparency in the governance of the oil sector.

Importantly, this study fills a critical gap in communication research and provides development communication scholars with fresh insights into existing challenges to media

performance. It is my hope that the findings stimulate future inquiry in media practice and development communication as part of the discipline of media studies that has focused significantly on studying texts in the context of framing while omitting the voices of media practitioners.

9.6 Implications for Media Pedagogy and Performance

The development of an oil and gas handbook for journalists is perhaps one of the most critical needs of the Guyanese media fraternity. This is a project that can be undertaken by Guyana's highest institution of learning, the University of Guyana, in collaboration with journalists and editors, with input from state agencies with responsibility for the oil and gas sector. As an interlocutor, the university's Center for Communication Studies (CCS) has undertaken development projects in the past and also functions as an incubator for practicing and potential journalists. The handbook project can therefore be developed as the outcome of a deeper needs assessment intervention emerging out of this study.

The development of short specialized courses at the UGCCS for journalists and journalism students is also an intervention that may impact performance. This can be best accomplished through the delivery of short courses by invited specialists and journalists from oil producing developing countries with experience in oil and gas. Such people are more likely to share a special affinity their Guyanese professional colleagues and be more forthright about the coverage of this crucial sector of the country's economy. In the past, the center has conducted previous training initiatives for journalists, but their ability to translate knowledge into practice has often been challenged based on institutional norms. The involvement of editors is therefore an important consideration to establish their support and underscore the salience of capacity-building to enhanced performance.

9.7 Future Studies

This study reflects an initial exploration of media framing of the oil discoveries in Guyana across the four daily newspapers. Analyses were confined to news, columns and letters to the editor over the period 2015-2019. Interviews were also confined to journalists, editors and key government stakeholders. Future scholarship to investigate framing effects on audiences should therefore be considered through a combination of methodological approaches to extend the scope of findings. These include a survey analysis to garner citizens' understanding and perspectives on the oil discoveries and to measure oil and national trust given the overt politicization of the oil discoveries. Survey results will contribute to building a critical body of knowledge on framing effects specific to oil discoveries in developing countries, and also provide vital baseline data to inform public education and media engagement. The survey instrument can also be used to replicate future studies for comparative analysis.

Social media platforms have also created significant spaces for public discourse among Guyanese at home and in the diaspora, thus producing rich data for analyzing media frames from a range of perspectives. Thus, content analysis of discourses can provide readily available data. In addition, scholarship in the field of oil discoveries and national development can further science and environmental journalism teaching and research to support existing efforts at the national level among the University of Guyana's media students and the broader media fraternity. Finally, a blueprint for interpreting and reporting on the oil industry among new oil producers in the developing world is also a highly plausible focus for future studies. The environmental impact of oil production on Guyana's ecosystems should also be of central concern, given the implications of climate change for sustainable development particularly as the country advances fossil fuel development alongside a low carbon agenda.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

o	Informant	Code
	Categories	
	Reporters	1-5
	Editors	1-5
	Government Officials (GO) of Ministries	1-4
1	KN-(KW)-Private	Journalist 1
2	GNNL-(AS) State	Journalist 2
3	GT-(JB) Private	Journalist 3
4	GNNL (LH) State	Journalist 4
5	SN-(MFT) Private	Journalist 5
6	KN Editor	Editor 1
7	GNNL Editor	Editor 4
8	GT Editor	Editor 5

9	SN Daily Editor	Editor 3
10	SN Business Editor	Editor 2
11	Minister of Natural Resources	State Official 2
12	Head, Department of Energy	State Official 1
13	Head, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission	State Official 4
14	Head, Environmental Protection Agency	State Official 3
15	Head, Department of Public Information	Media Official/MO 2 -
16	Head, Guyana Press Association	Media Official/ MO 1
17	PR, Exxon Mobil	Private Official
18	Environmental Advocate	Environmental Advocate

ⁱ On 7 October 2016, the Government of Guyana entered into a Petroleum Agreement with Exxon's affiliate, Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited, CNOOC Nexen

Petroleum Guyana Limited, Hess Guyana Exploration Limited. Consistent with Article 33 of the Agreement-Signature Bonus, 33:1 states, “The Contractor shall pay the Government a signature bonus of eighteen million United States Dollars (US\$18,000,000). Such payment will be made within a period of fifteen (15) Business Days after the Effective Date, or such earlier date as agreed amongst the Parties. The Agreement was released toward the end of 2017 thus creating much of the speculation regarding secrecy and corruption.

ⁱⁱ The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is a regional grouping of 15 Caribbean states and 5 associate members. The body of developing countries was established in 1973 to promote regional integration among former colonies of Britain to forge a regional agenda, identity, and common market. CARICOM can be classified as the Caribbean region’s equivalent of the European Union except that all Member States do not use a single currency. Eastern Caribbean countries use the EC dollar while other states recognize their own currency. Notwithstanding, the grouping is moving towards establishing a regime for a single economy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Media operatives tend to frame stories that align with editorial policies and the orientation of publishers or owners. As such, frames that consistently draw attention to good deeds of the state will typically be constructed by state media reporters who will privilege the state’s viewpoint. The perspectives of journalist are largely influenced by their media establishment. Thus, media operatives whose worldviews are informed from outside of the environment from which they report, tend to be more dispassionate in constructing stories.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wilbur Schramm's model of communication emphasized the sender-message-channel and receiver mode of communication, which was complete as a cycle once the sender received feedback. The model worked in traditional societies when mass media was constituted mainly by print and radio, with television subsequently following. As societies evolved, Everett Rogers introduced the diffusion model, developed as the Diffusion of Innovations theory, which emphasized mediated communication to society via a spokesperson or community leader. The advent of the World Wide Web subsequently transformed the media landscape, allowing traditional media to migrate online and providing audiences with quick unmediated access to information. Newspapers have also evolved in this new globalized media environment which has increased competition and the attendant neoliberal monetization of news online.