Comparing “Governance” in Africa’s Oil-Bearing Communities: A Historical/Institutional Approach to Understanding the Exercise of Power in SSA

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Abstract

Efforts to rein in oil rentier states in Africa through international governance initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Publish What You Pay are, while well-intentioned, self-consciously insufficient to ensure lasting political accountability. Therefore, the problem of how to exogenously contribute to the development of democracy in Africa’s oil states remains, as efforts to build accountability are presumably frustrated from both above and below. Reflecting the fault lines of recent political theorizing, much of sub-Saharan Africa’s poor performance is attributed to both external forces as well as political cultures which appear indigenous to much of the continent. Defining how each stratum has, over time, engendered contemporary institutional outcomes is critical to not only improving policy at the international level but also to empowering local actors. This paper aims to expand the knowledge of how these two phenomena interact to affect “governance” in African oil states as carried out by key actors. First, and thanks in part to the new "scramble" for African resources, it is argued that the study of oil states capitalizes on a rare opportunity to help resolve the "false" structure-agency debate in African politics presented above, contributing to global political science theory. Second, an innovative comparative study of oil-bearing regions in Gabon, Sudan, and Ghana is proposed to identify explanatory factors for why pre-colonial institutions took different paths both within and between the two states. While variance in governance suggests the power of indigenous institutions, similarities highlight the structural effects of internationally-derived oil rents.

1. Introduction

To what extent do subnational, pre-existing political institutions in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), vis-à-vis both state and international structures, exhibit political agency? Chabal (2009) claims that this approach to the notion of agency, which is “in the process of becoming the new orthodoxy” (Ibid., 11), forces political Africanists to revisit their models and concepts in finding the appropriate balance between historical and environmental factors, such as neo-colonialism and the nature of exports, and political factors which are conceived as processes and events rooted internally (Ibid., 13). This paradigmatic shift from structure to people as mediators of structure will help us understand “the extraordinary ways in which Africans have adapted to rapidly changing international circumstances” (Ibid. 12). In turn, identifying patterns of

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adaptation in Africa has the potential to contribute enormously to our understanding of political change—for better or worse—which has perhaps been too preoccupied with structure in the post-war era.

Locating where agency lies in African politics, whether it be with local systems of government, state bureaucracies, or plutocracies, would not only be a natural response to an epistemological shift in the social sciences but would also be facilitated by today’s changing “international” circumstances, since agency can only be identified in the context of changing conditions. The intense and rapid growth of many developing countries like China has partially caused a boom in world demand for oil, thus depleting global resources, leaving Africa as the last bastion of future oil reserves which remain relatively unexploited (Klare and Volman 2006). Whereas the oil price hikes of the 1970s were largely brought on by OPEC’s oil embargoes, the price hike which began in the mid-1990s and which continues to today is more due to the natural consequences of intense exploitation rather than politics, making Africa’s explored and unexplored oil fields all the more important (Levi and McNally 2012). Factors which had contributed to global interest in African hydrocarbons other than depleting resources in the world’s traditional oilfields and the once-untapped potential of those in Africa include the relatively low pecuniary and political costs to doing business, mostly off Africa’s shores. As John Ghazvinian (2007) recounts in an impressive piece of onsite investigative journalism, offshore proven reserves are attractive to foreign multinationals due to the relative ease with which they allow exploration, production, and distribution to proceed. These “enclaves” (see also Scott 1998; Ferguson 2005) afford MNCs the combined benefits of avoiding the kind of land-based entanglements with indigenous grievances that led to Nigeria’s Biafran war in 1966 as well as obstacles to shipping and distribution exemplified by the Suez Canal and Middle Eastern politics in general.

As a result of these developments, many journalists, politicians, scholars, and commentators of every shade have weighed in on whether the “new scramble for Africa” will bring benefits, in the form of added revenue and developmental opportunities, or costs, in the form of social, environmental, and political degradation. The question cannot be answered without first acknowledging the contributions of actors at all levels to changing governance, however defined. First, the following literature review seeks to identify theoretical shortcomings within certain paradigms purporting to explain governance change in Africa. While most explanations of poor governance in African states are “single-stratum,” I join many new rentier theorists in arguing for an “ecological” approach to identifying the most important components political change at the local level, from international MNCs to local governance both traditional and associational. Second, it is shown how oil, a physical manifestation of Africa’s political and economic extraversion, is most interesting not for its peculiar effects on socio-political developments but for its provision of an “extreme case” of external influences on local realities, possibly offering think-tanks, NGOs, and IOs a new perspective with which to more effectively build “capacity.” Even though resource curse theories in general have declined in popularity, they need not be discarded if one accepts that oil in and of itself does not constitute an independent variable. Third, I propose a comparative program to answer why some oil-bearing communities fare better than others in terms of governance, one which utilizes the methodological advantages of both ethnography and historical/institutional process tracing in order to maximize conceptual validity.
and address the lack of knowledge on how local political systems are able to steer the course of governance from the beginning stages of oil exploration through extraction and downstream activities. As will be shown, the advantages of this approach are in combining those approaches already widely used in political science and anthropology whilst reviving a comparative ethnographic program, a natural next step if one assumes that the modalities of power and process in Africa are vague, informal, and understudied. Variations in local governance may relativize top-down perspectives of African politics, from dependency theory to recent contributions by the “China in Africa” literature, the latter being influenced by recent empirics than deeper theoretical reflection. Lastly, a qualitative comparison which weds the advantages of ethnography and social science methods is proposed to reconcile the theoretical, empirical and methodological shortcomings previously stated. In this way this paper hopes to pinpoint theoretical concerns within Africanist political science whilst proposing an innovative methodology fit for addressing those concerns.

2. Theoretical Expectations

This section reviews the literature on the causes of good (and bad) governance in SSA. For conceptual clarity and at the risk of oversimplification, the section is organised in three parts based on which image, to use Waltz’s famous moniker, or structural level is deemed most “agential” or influential in determining institutional development at the local level. It begins therefore with explanations of poor governance deriving from local or indigenous aspects of African political modes and systems, before touching upon state-centered explanations of governance failures and then finally how international structures and realpolitik considerations have consequences for legitimate, effective, and accountable governance in African communities. While exclusively focusing on one structural stratum by Africanists carries the risk of ignoring inter-strata dynamics as factors of governance, other theoretical shortcomings are identified in the literature, including the excessive focus on formal institutions as central actors in African public spaces, the dearth of empirics employed to engage the relevant political science theory, and the absence of a systematic comparative approach which might arrive at general tendencies utilizable by relevant policy-makers looking to better “fit” their initiatives with realities on the ground.

2.1 Local/Indigenous Public Spaces and Systems

The term “indigenous” is relative; in the longue durée, arguably nothing is indigenous, and environmental/structural factors will always prove causative. Therefore, in asking to what extent local political cultures and systems have contributed to present governance outcomes, one is essentially asking about the relative endurance of certain historical components visible in contemporary institutions and the nature of their contributions to good or poor governance today. The task of this section is to identify the relevant characterizations of these innately African institutions, review the purported connections to contemporary institutions, and offer a critique as to why turning away entirely from other strata of governance, i.e. states and international forces, is a mistake.
When discussing indigenous African political systems, it is impossible to avoid the omnipresent descriptor “neo-patrimonial,” a term used not only to describe the state of African politics but also to explain the continent’s persistent lapses in stability, legitimacy, and accountability. “Patrimonialism” was a term first employed by Weber to describe Asian systems, but African systems have differed substantially from their Asian counterparts past and present. Nevertheless, “patrimonialism” has been applied to pre-colonial systems in sub-Saharan Africa and used to explain the region’s relative socioeconomic setbacks.

These analyses, however, tend to ignore the cataclysmic changes undergone during and after the scramble for Africa in the late nineteenth century, which had the effect of superimposing on these indigenous patrimonial institutions the mere architecture of rational-legal bureaucracy. Jean-François Médard (1982) therefore coined the term “neo-patrimonialism” to describe these hybrid systems and explain how the dual rational-legal and patrimonial logics co-exist, compete, and interact to effect the poor governance outcomes we see today based on several indicators. Médard’s seminal work spawned a wide-ranging sub-literature which sought to properly characterize the processual outcomes of neo-patrimonial societies most responsible for SSA’s socioeconomic and political woes, such as “clientelism” and “prebendalism” (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith 1992; Erdmann and Engel 2006; Richard Joseph 1983).

Perhaps the most thorough and widely celebrated attempt to relate neo-patrimonialism to a relative lack of democracy was made by Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle (Bratton and van de Walle 1997) who, in their own words, began by asking “whether regime transitions in sub-Saharan Africa resemble the democratization [seen in] other parts of the world” (Ibid. 61). Bratton and van de Walle theorize that three informal institutions—presidentialism, clientelism, and the ubiquitous use of state resources for legitimation—are indicative of the lack of democracy in SSA. Nevertheless, they adapt Dahl’s famous formulation of democracy as political participation and political participation to distinguish the patrimonial regimes which will compose their independent variables finding that such variations were related to governance outcomes, whereas international forces were merely found to constitute the “conditions under which political change became possible” (272). The conception of international forces in this study was limited, as it included only 1) the cross-border sharing of ideas and 2) the political conditions imposed by international donors and lenders (181-182). No mention is made of the consequences of international competition for African resources, the widely acknowledged causa prima of foreign interaction with Africans among many scholars.

More recently literature in political science has likewise chosen to focus on informal processes as relevant in SSA’s power schemes. Legitimacy in Africa, it is said, comes from the ability to command not territory but people. It follows that “big men” are recognized for their ability to use their offices for the material benefit of their respective clans, ethnicities, or other sub-national groupings to which they belong. Hyden (2006) captures this arrangement through conceptualizing an “economy of affection,” a sphere of exchanges that takes place between the poles of morality and law where informal institutions abound. Depending on the politico-historical development of each state, which is excluded from this typology, states exhibit one of four species of informal institutions between those two poles: clientelism (due to closed and vertical reciprocal relations), pooling (due to closed but lateral relations), charisma (due to open and vertical relations), and self-defense (due to open and lateral relations). Theoretical
justification for this typology comes from a range of Africanist literature such as that touching upon geography (Herbst 2000) and the frequency and duration of contact with other social units over time (Hoon 2002).

The approaches above, whilst providing key insights towards distinguishing African political systems from their counterparts throughout the world, are susceptible to critique for ignoring the international context. Secondly, and with respect to Bratton and van de Walle’s study in particular, institutions are varied according to the same measures used to vary the dependent variables, that is Dahl’s formulation of democratic governance, introducing the risk of tautology. An improvement is offered in Section 5. Thirdly, political theory is often lacking in empirical justifications, as anthropologists and like-minded political scientists contend that only a bottom-up, inductive reasoning can accurately characterize power relations on such a diverse continent. Departure from this recognition of diversity has led to failed policies attempting to deliver aid or other development initiatives to local communities, and thus most authors have reacted by advocating ethnographic approaches to understanding local socio-political relations.

Scholars in political and social anthropology treating post-Cold War decentralization following IMF conditionality and attempts at democratization have attempted to fill the perceived empirical gaps. Most consider these initiatives a failure for the same reasons that aid-backed development initiatives have failed, and that is because at some point an appreciation of “the grain” had not been properly assumed. If development and decentralization have been two central themes in African politics since independence, it would be remiss to ignore the latest driver and factor of political dynamics on the continent: natural resources, and, most importantly, oil. This second group of researchers engages resource curse theory, described in detail below, yet through an anthropological lens whereas typical resource curse studies were conducted first by economists and later by political scientists. In an analysis to follow, it will be shown that a natural extension of recent developments in this literature is a comparative approach utilizing ethnographic and monographic methods which might eventually arrive at generalizations more useful to development practitioners than those currently in operation. There is as yet no attempt to apply such a comparative approach to oil-bearing communities in particular. Such an approach has however been adopted in the literature on development.

The list is long of anthropologists attempting to explain patterns of development and cultural change in Africa. Though the earlier ethnographies by cultural anthropologists had not expressly sought to explain “development” per se, their collective focus on how and why societies, and sub-cultures, transition speaks to political change as well. Here the contributions of Bronislaw Malinowski are so seminal as to perhaps be considered the foundations for understanding and documenting patterns of cultural change. Malinowski’s methods in the early twentieth century relied on extensive use of fieldwork and are thus instructive (Malinowski 1929; 1938; 1945).

Despite Malinowski’s insistence on the appreciation of diversity and the dismissal of all claims to cultural determinism, many anthropologists and sociologists have since conducted fieldwork with the aim of finding institutional patterns across the African continent (Vansina 1990; Evans-Pritchard and Fortes 1994). Vansina’s search for institutional patterns common to all countries in SSA represents a branch of political anthropology devoted to arriving at useful generalizations (see Londsdale 1986; 1994 and Schatzberg 2002). Such a focus is also shared by
authors focusing on development concerns exclusively, and here Chabol and Daloz are most prolific (1999; 2006).

Others, however, consider that the authors above have lost touch with the central thrust of ethnography, which is not to find structure but rather to break it down and discover difference and diversity. To this extent, there has been a recent revival of Malinowski’s earlier work by those engaged in explaining the failure of development programs administered by centralized bureaucracies. Implicit in this refocus on indigenous characteristics are relations between local and state institutions, a line of research which has largely remained in the form of monographs despite the limited, but important, contributions employing the comparative method.

Whether authors submit monographs or comparative ethnographies, those contributing to the Africa Power and Politics Program research consortium advocate only that researchers place an emphasis on local differences so that states are better equipped in their development programs to “work with the grain.” According to Booth, “the ‘working with the grain’ metaphor is helpful in so far as it places a question-mark over the false universality of the good-governance agenda and commits the APPP to exploring institutional forms that might have better results by virtue of being better anchored in local social realities” (Booth 2009, 11).

Among those spearheading the movement to revive Malinowski’s ethnographic methods are two contributors to APPP, Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan and Thomas Bierschenk, who are concerned not only with centralized development in general but base their analyses on impact studies of decentralization policies in the 1990s in particular. Others exemplifying this open-ended approach include Jones (2009), Fisiy (2005), and Pantuliano (2010), all perhaps students of Sara Berry’s (1993) seminal work on social and political change at the local level as a result of state-imposed agriculture policies. In a study of local community governance in the Central African Republic, Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk (1998) set out to characterize “public spaces” at the local level and, more specifically, determine the real impact of decentralizing policies on the villages in question. Departing from Vansina et. Al., the authors not only dismiss classifications, but allege that in most African states, the state is hardly present in rural localities, rearing its head only to make infrequent and symbolic gestures of its existence. The imposition of formal democratic features like municipal councils would do nothing for balanced socio-economic development or an extension of rights to peasants, since informal relations like matrilineal relations determine the distribution of resources rather than a few ordinances handed down by a distant state. Local power, in essence, doesn’t mean better governance. Finally, “it is essential in our opinion that the implementation of these policies [what he calls earlier “pressures exerted by financial donors”] be subject to socio-anthropological analysis. All monitoring of decentralisation in Africa ought to include a comparative assessment of its impact on difference local political configurations” (Ibid. 468).

Informality, state absence, and the persistence of local power arrangements clearly remained themes as Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk extended their approach to a more complete study of les arènes locales (public spaces) in contemporary Benin. In Les pouvoirs au village (1998), the authors tackle what they consider to be deficiencies in much of the literature on power structures in Africa in general. While ethnologists had tended to focus solely on traditional power such as chiefs, youth systems and other pastoral power structures, sociologists had tended to analyze these structures through the lente of democratization. In the Francophone and mainstream
political science literature, local authority dynamics are often generalized but betray a notable lack of empirical investigation. Finally, cutting through all these disciplines commenting on a supposed political reality of African politics is a marked lack of historical depth (Ibid. 15-17). The way forward, then, would move away from ahistorical cultural theses and generalizations and towards an approach which is both ethnographic and historical at the same time in order to discover “modes of local governance.” In final analyses, this approach will yield a mapping out of the “micro-variability” which characterizes African political systems and which, according to the authors, predisposes states to favor relative autonomy for local political arenas (Ibid. 20).

Decentralization in Beninois villages was found to result in “fragmentation” of local public spaces and empilement whereby several traditional and associative institutions never really cease to wield influence but merely share it thanks to the fluid nature of social/power dynamics in these spaces.

In short, the autonomie partielle of local political arenas means that national history leaves its mark but that great events at the national level are anchored in specific context which colors, transforms and reorganizes these events (Ibid. 36). Nevertheless, and true to their contention that it is too early to make any generalization for the entire continent, these claims remain specific to villages in Benin, and it is left to subsequent authors to forge ahead with the process of locating continent-wide patterns of local institutional change.

This more open-ended and ecumenical approach has since been revived by a number of scholars, most notably by Ben Jones (2009) who set out to assess the state-led decentralizing reforms of Uganda from the 1990s through to the present. Jones joins Olivier de Bierschenk, Bierschenk and Berry in lamenting “state-centric” approaches by both policy-makers in multilateral institutions and by academics where “any manifestation of social change is regarded as a reflection of that category of [state] policy or legislation being studied. Research is guided by the assumption that the state is the most important driver of development and change in society” (Jones 2009, 5). Rather, a more appropriate rendering of social change would fall between this latter extreme and Hyden, whose economy of affection at the local level serves as the derivation of larger political systems. Jones joins Berry who takes a middle route through the previous two poles of the literature on the relevance of the state in local institutional change. Berry claims the state is both weak in institutional terms and an object of political competition due to its control of land and property. Perhaps informing Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk, Berry prefers to discuss how clans, family networks, and local associations constitute and shape the political space through an analysis of the way state agricultural policies really impacted peasant communities.

In Jones’ monograph, the Ugandan village of Oledai is introduced as one that falls outside the typical Ugandan success story of state-initiated decentralized development, thus hinting at a state-society characterization rather than a state-centered one. At first glance, Jones’ account of how Oledai absorbed state-level changes appears atypical, even unorthodox. In arguing that “externally funded community projects had a short lifespan in the Teso region [which includes Oledai]” because “they failed to link into people’s political or ideological projects,” Jones cites as evidence the money spent on burial societies rather than local government programs or even churches. The villagers clearly attached more importance to an institution which for them was perceived as legitimate and not socially contrived. Here, the robustness of the local made itself felt, but it depended on the apathy, and then the ignorance of the state which failed to
comprehend the contrived social values of rural villages. This portrait of separate spheres, of local reality and a state “suspended in midair,” may not, however, carry its logic in the context of state-society relations in oil-bearing communities, where the state has every reason not to be apathetic and to entangle itself in local politics.

Indeed, when the state is sufficiently interested in land, much of the literature seems to point to a deterioration of state-society relations as well as a breaking down of traditional power relations at the local level. Fisiy (1995) vividly demonstrated this process of traditional demise through an ethnography of customary Fond chieftainship faced with democratizing reforms in the North-West Province of Cameroon, showing that the compromised authority and legitimacy of the Fon chieftancy can be traced to their loss of control over the land, an effect of bureaucratization at the state level and its elective mechanisms. Sara Pantuliano’s work, in an article of monumental thoroughness, is similar in describing the coping strategies of the rural Misseriyya pastoralists to the contestation of the Abyei state’s abundant oil reserves in Sudan. Since the advent of oil exploitation in the Muglad basin, Pantuliano reports an intensifying “leadership crisis” involving a “palpable mistrust both of traditional leaders and Misseriyya political leaders” accompanied by social fragmentation. Particular grievances are directed towards the Native Administration for being “excessively politicized and no longer reflecting tribal structures and interests” (Pantuliano 2010, 19). State-led change thanks to oil exploitation had a measurable effect on governance through inflaming tribal tensions and extraverting, so to speak, traditional and political leaders. Both ethnographic studies and broad-based surveys therefore tend to show widespread deterioration in governance standards as a result of transformations in land-tenure systems, particularly those which are effected by the state for the purpose of capital penetration (see also Yasin Abdalla Eltayeb ElHaday and Franklin Obeng-Odoom, 2012).

2.1.1 Towards a Comparative Approach (Without Oil)

The monographs above, lacking in easily-appropriated hypotheses for international organizations looking to deliver aid and advice, demonstrate the need for a comparative approach, which has its potential model in work by Evans who in the 1990s began assembling ethnographies for cross-cultural comparison. The studies above would in this vein be compared to find institutional patterns. Evans’ generalizations have been questioned, however, first for their “too little on the variation around the African norm” (Booth 2009, 21) and second for the perceived superficiality of Evans’ finding that good governance is the result of “a state bureaucracy’s attainment of autonomy from particularistic pressures while remaining or becoming embedded in networks of relationships with private business people” (Ibid. 21).

Without abandoning the latter idea, contributors to the APPP argue that further research should aim to pick up where Evans left off with more studies like those of Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk in which researchers aim to find out why the particular mix cited above comes about in the first place. In order to have synergy between state and society and thus good local governance, the proper mixture of complementarity and embeddedness, i.e. the division of labour between state and local authorities and the enmeshment of public actors in local social relations, must be present. This, in turn, depends on there being proper context, such as history and local
traditional organization, and construction of social relations (Evans et. Al. 1996). Booth believes the APPP should re-launch this line of inquiry and that the proper mix of socio-political conditions favorable to good governance will hinge on a host of factors, including ideas of legitimacy and the prevalence of free-riding in public goods provision (Booth 2009, 25).

2.1.2 Towards an Anthropology of Oil (Without Comparison)

Indeed, the program outlined above should be pursued as an exciting new line of research which aims to reconcile the need for controlled analysis and shared concepts with the demands of conceptual validity offered by onsite fieldwork. The exploitation of natural resources, however, and more particularly oil, of course, has occupied a great number of development scholars through Rentier Theory (see below), and only recently have anthropologists begun to directly engage this body of scholarly work using ethnographic tools. Interestingly enough, there seems to be little to no dialogue between the two anthropological schools of knowledge on local governance in Africa which is unfortunate as the existence of oil offers comparative approaches an ideal control factor.

In an edited volume by Behrends et. Al. (2013), Andrea Behrends and Stephen P. Reyna introduce an “anthropology of oil” whose purpose is to test hypotheses explaining why the external shock of vast sums of petrodollars, normally a positive thing in countries endowed with “institutional capacity,” have led in many places, most notably Africa, to a set of political and economic degradations. As this volume’s focus is on the political effects of the resource curse, the authors present two perspectives on the “paradox of plenty”: the rent-seeking/institutional model with frequent reliance on the work of Terry Karl (1997) who emphasizes weak neo-colonial political institutions made weaker by the nature of rent-seeking, and the neopatrimonialism model where petrostates give rise to new levels of corruption where 1) client enterprises perform poorly because clients lack the qualifications to manage the enterprises (Yates 1996) and where 2) conflict turns violent. The authors contend that no anthropological explanation has been offered to accompany those above which could “bring to the study of oil concern for human experience, in local settlings, in which culture operates” (Behrends and Reyna 2013, 6).

Anthropological approaches to oil in general have grounding in a handful of well-known contributions oil including Suzana Sawyer’s Crude Chronicles (2004), Andrew Apter’s the Pan-African Nation (2005) and Fernando Coronil’s The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela (1997), all of which take to heart James Ferguson’s critique of James Scott’s Seeing Like a State (1998), which refutes Scott’s “general claims and arguments of broad application” (Ferguson 2005, 377) and contests oil enclaves’ homogenizing/standardizing effect on local communities. Neither of the works above had, however, engaged resource curse theory directly, preferring instead to touch upon oil as a case of another phenomenon. Behrends and Reyna aim to address the fact that “while all developing petro-states exhibit the curse, some suffer it more than others,” therefore “any anthropology of oil needs to explain both the struggles for oil rents and the hierarchy of oil’s curse.” (Behrends and Reyna 2013, 20) This statement shares the ambition of this study, thus implicating many of the volume’s contributors who more
directly deal with oil as an analytical fact than the anthropologists working on democratization and decentralization.

In this research program, Behrends, Reyna and Watts are noteworthy for the novelty of their conceptualizations and thus deserve mention. Behrends and Reyna put forward a conceptual framework, based on previous work by Reyna, for an anthropology of oil which is “structural” and explains “why, and how, certain groups regulate other groups and, in so doing, acquire social value, like capital.” (Behrends and Reyna 2013, 21, author’s italics). Both Watts and Behrends, the former known for his extensive work on oil politics the Niger Delta, employ a methodology that takes into consideration local context, culture, and historical factors before drawing any conclusions on oil’s effects on socio-political life. Writing on the Niger Delta and Sudan and Chad respectively, they reach the conclusion that a significant level of social disintegration occurs as a result of pre-existing historical contexts which lack the proper institutional arrangements that would have otherwise smoothly absorbed the fallout of oil rent (Behrends 2013; Watts 2011).

Lastly, the developing corpus on the anthropology of oil has most recently been enriched by Remadji Hoinathy who conducts an anthropological examination of people and social dynamics following onshore oil extraction in the southern Chadian region of Bero. Hoinathy aligns himself with Berry in investigating agrarian change, though as a result of oil’s appropriation of land. Like many before him, Hoinathy finds that Bero suffered a significant “monetization” of its socio-political relations. Once the conditions of access and exploitation of the land changed, the means by which villagers acquired money and sustenance changed, confirming the rent-seeking hypothesis proposed above by Behrends and Reyna. (Hoinathy 2013)

Whether focusing on development, decentralization, or oil in particular, anthropologists have much to offer in the way of explaining political institutional change, such as conceptual validity and the framework for a fruitful comparative program. Such a program utilizing the right design, however, could at once retain the advantages of fieldwork while also engaging structuralist theories from above.

2.2 State Rentiers and State Factors of Governance and Institutional Development

While those focusing on local institutions exclusively as factors in governance do so at the expense of considering state and international factors, over-emphasis on states as the critical agents of African governance at local levels commits the same error of obfuscation. In SSA state formation was conducted exogenously thanks to the European colonial scramble of the late nineteenth century, creating borders that represent little more than diplomatic sleights of hand. To speak of state institutions in Africa, as Bratton and van de Walle do, is to speak not of indigenous institutions prior to colonization but of more or less constructed institutions.

States were nevertheless accorded prominence as independent variables throughout the 20th century as decolonization proceeded apace. In addition, the diminution of international political polarity after the Cold War hastened the turn in the literature towards states as agents of chaos and confusion as superpower sponsorship was gradually withdrawn. Bratton and van de Walle follow a tradition of examining the causes of “failed states” in Africa, one based on the concept of neo-patrimonial tendencies. The state-society approach taken by Mamdani (1996) and even
Badie’s imported state hypothesis (2000) may be useful for analyzing states where institutions are so entrenched as to more closely resemble a Weberian ideal. The “imported state” hypothesis, a prominent component of post-colonial theory (Badie 2000), argues that former colonies adopt their predecessors’ modes of governance and thus face lower economic development than those states which altered their institutions to conform to the realities of geographic and other social conditions. Bertrand Badie’s theory differs considerably from dependency analyses in that the continuing external involvement of former colonizers is not neglected but subsumed as a consequence of weak institutions susceptible to foreign penetration.

But when most states in SSA are in large part than “ideas” (Lund 2006), they are nothing more than gratuitous patchworks of fluid, subnational units lying underneath. A more compelling explanation of poor governance in African states might collapse inoperable generalities such as African culture and instead focus on a perfect storm of factors not limited to imported despotism but extending to the contradictions of development states as well as the mise-end-dependence of elites (Bierschenk 2010). The central analytical shortcoming of state failure, civil society, and imported state hypotheses is the assumption of little to no variation in regional and local institutions which may hold the key to understanding governance variations across communities and states.

The over-reliance on states as units of analysis extends to other fields as well, namely the political economy of the oil curse partly introduced above. This study, for reasons to be detailed further down, proposes to analyze oil rentier states in determining the relative importance of local, state, and international forces for a range of levels of governance. Oil itself is said to develop and nurture authoritarian regimes, regardless of context or institutional history. This link between a government’s exclusive dependence on natural resources and its poor accountability to the wider citizenry is well-documented, however incomplete in its theoretical development. Hossein Mahdavy (1970) sought first to explain why substantial oil revenues had not led to development in Iran despite massive public expenditures by the Shah. Mahdavy concluded that since oil revenues flowing to the Iranian government were essentially rent, or money received by virtue of ownership, it need not generate revenue from citizens which in effect renders bureaucracies unaccountable to public demands. Beblawi and Luciani (1987) further developed the postulation of the “rentier state,” refining its definition to those states which receive more than 40 percent of their national income from external oil rents and which accrue to very few hands. The financial autonomy of the state—derived from rents—pre-empts the need for taxation while inflicting on the bureaucratic elite a “rentier mentality,” a condition where pecuniary rewards and prosperity are not linked to work. The rentier mentality thus leads to inefficiency and corruption within state bureaucracies, while lack of taxation results in lack of state legitimacy and diminished political accountability, which in turn curbs democratic participation. Subsequent studies have revealed a host of negative economic consequences as well, such as the Dutch Disease (Gelb 1988) and a lack of backward and forward linkages (Frank 1966), though their importance to this research is limited to their secondary effects on political variables.

The interest in resource dependency resurfaced after a brief hiatus after the end of the Cold War, mirroring the return to states as primary units of analysis. Richard Auty (1993) first coined the expression “resource curse” in an investigation of why parts of the developing world richly
endowed with natural resources were simply not developing and Sachs and Warner (1995) confirmed this paradox in a subsequent study revealing that countries with high ratios of natural resource exports to GDP suffered relatively slow growth from 1971 to 1989. Due to the fact that these studies were conducted by economists searching for economic phenonema, they largely neglected rentier theory as it is described above. Although Paul Collier (2000) was among the first to tie resource dependency in the Third World to conflict exclusively, few intervening variables other than “greed and grievance” were given as explanatory factors for this relationship. Nevertheless, both approaches, oil rentierism and resource curse theory, can be criticized for assuming unicausal and unifactorial explanations for both political conflict and instability. Perhaps no other part of the world warrants more penetrating investigations of how subnational forces interact with state and international agents to produce unique development outcomes.

2.3 International Factors of Governance

Despite more recent interest in the effects of Sino-American competition for resources and allegiance in SSA, international forces have been somewhat relegated to secondary status as explanatory factors of governance since the end of the Cold War period. This is a rather intuitive development, since the collapse of the Soviet Union left in its wake a more stable uni-polar international structure. Within African states, however, instability quickly became the norm and both scholarly and journalistic attention was diverted to intra-governmental and intra-regional struggles. Only recently has Africa again been hurtled towards center-stage as Eastern engagement in the form of mineral exploration and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) continues apace, prompting a re-reading of international political structural theories aimed at explaining underdevelopment, political instability, and conflict. Does international competition for Africa’s limited resources and political allegiance exacerbate developmental pitfalls? And which international factors are important and why for the purpose of analyzing domestic political change?

Although International Relations (IR) theory has no shortage of explanations regarding this question, it has as a whole notoriously fallen short of adequate, all-encompassing theories with predictive power for the behaviour of African states. This is doubtless related to the penchant of IR to produce knowledge for the most powerful actors through a top-down approach (see Mohan and Lampert 2012; Harman and Brown 2013). Central to the assumptions of most IR theory, for example, is the presupposition of states with both internal and external sovereignty. Whereas African states largely feature external sovereignty, internal sovereignty is harder to come by. Angola, Sudan, Kenya, and Mali all serve as more recent examples of juridical states with a conspicuous lack of centralized authority where conflict zones are prevalent and betray an egregious center-periphery dualism. No other region is more dependent (or interdependent) vis-à-vis the world’s major actors than SSA, however one chooses to measure it.

Dependency theorists (Frank; Wallerstein 1979), largely popular for their top-down analyses in the context of the Cold War, are the most outspoken proponents of assigning blame to the international system for Africa’s political and development failures. Walter Rodney’s work in particular is representative of a general approach which has been criticized as holding Africans
passive in the face of Western intervention, itself a product of the logic of international capitalism which, taken to its logical extreme, economically punishes peripheral regions (Rodney 1972). Colonialism, according to Rodney, left a legacy of several dependencies which has caused Africa’s debt crises today. African states depend on the West (and increasingly the East) for manufactured products, reflecting unfavourable terms of trade. As a result of the lack of experience in manufacturing the stunted process of acquiring skills, African states also depend on Western NGOs for job training and other services. African states depend also on Western banks and states for loans and aid to resolve short-term crises. Finally, African states depend on the export of primary commodities which are notoriously vulnerable to international price fluctuations. In short, African economies are not integrated; they are extensions, the periphery, in a world capitalist economy.

Based on these perspectives, one might conjecture that increased international competition for African resources could only deepen dependence and militarization of the continent, severely curtailing efforts at improved governance. Indeed, much of the “China in Africa” literature which surfaced in the early 2000s to treat China’s heightened and multifaceted engagements with the continent has in large part assumed these lines of argument before reaching pessimistic conclusions. However, the following regression analysis (Graphs 1-6) attempting to longitudinally relate African oil exports to China and oil states’ performance on the World Bank Governance Indicators is inconclusive as to the influence of China.²

These data serve to demonstrate that the approaches above may have been justly criticized by newer generations of Africanists looking to appreciate Africa’s political diversity. Intense internal insecurity, for example, is said to predispose African political elites to different sets of strategic actions, and identifying the catalysts of these actions—local politics, clan competition, ideology, bureaucracy—is critical for recognizing which components of the international sphere interact most with local institutions. Clearly, many African states have fared better than others, and many communities in turn also perform better than other communities in not only distributing rent but also in staving off conflict. The following section briefly reviews a handful of “ecological” paradigms which better our understanding of governance divergence.

Graph 1. The Change in Voice and Accountability

Graph 2. The Change in Political Stability

² These graphs were first published as an M.A. Thesis with the American Graduate School in Paris (Mangarella 2012). The data are mostly derived from think tank and NGO reports and the Economist Intelligence Unit.
3. Towards an “Ecological” Approach to Explaining Governance in SSA

Neither of the single-stratum analyses above is satisfactory for explaining today’s governance outcomes in SSA since each has failed to account for all cases within the defined universe. More recent literature has, however, aimed to replace these formalized ontologies with an explanatory framework that explains the processes of interactions between actors at different levels in an effort to better identify the true loci of power in African societies. These “ecological” theories, a term borrowed from the new generation of rentier theorists (see below) implicitly believe governance outcomes are the product of interactions not only between actors at different levels but also between those actors and their physical environments. Discovering the causes of conflict in the Niger Delta, for example, entails not just the recognition that the capture of oil rents brings steep rewards, since many places in the world can boast large quantities of proven reserves without conflict over its distribution. An ecological approach demands an examination of socio-political contexts which might allow such a high-stakes struggle to churn on with no end
in sight. Is there a history of ethnic conflict in the Niger Delta? How many people live below the poverty line? Is corruption in the region properly controlled or minimized? How and why do elites react the way they do to situations of extreme external dependence? Headway in this direction has been made by scholars in rentier theory, political anthropology, and a number of Africanists.

The prominence accorded to the state by rentier theorists Mahdavy, Beblawi and Luciani has since been questioned, especially when applied to Africa where weak states predominate while the negative effects of rentierism, such as poor accountability, are still felt. Rentierism was first applied to the context of Africa by Douglas Yates (1996), who argued that African states such as Gabon face a “double-dependency” on both oil and strategic powers, thus exacerbating political variables such as clientelism and low political participation. A newer generation of rentier theorists objected to the “uni-contextual” bent of original rentier theorists, arguing that conflict, corruption, and low accountability in African states cannot be solely explained by oil, a contention of recently branded “resource curse” theorists (e.g. Paul Collier, Le Billon, etc.). Other determining factors such as ethnic cleavages and post-colonial institutions must be explored (Tar 2008), as well as the participation of MNCs and “subaltern groups” who compete with those who have captured the state for a piece of the rent (Omeje 2008). For example, Norway might have fallen prey to the symptoms of a rentier state had it not been for its strong democratic traditions, smart management of oil windfalls, assiduous and progressive taxation, and relative absence of ethnic and class conflict. Poor governance and conflict in rentier states are therefore not predetermined. Only an ecological approach that refuses to ignore contexts and factors at the expense of others can potentially account for, after newly generated theory, all cases of success and failure. While these multi-strata approaches intersect many branches of social science inquiry, those topical studies focusing on oil alone allow a more systematic approach a ready set of control variables linking the international, state, and local spheres.

Catherine Boone (2003) laments what she considers an unwarranted preoccupation with the state as a factor of institution-building in SSA in taking issue with theories and paradigms using the state as a starting point in institutional analysis, including those of Mamdani (1996) and Miles (1994). She opts instead to create an “endogenous model of institutional choice” with the help of several anthropological studies (Moore 1966; Scott 1976) which, like the newer generation of rentier theorists, works towards a “systematic conceptualization of the strategic contexts [which] can help resolve these [theoretical] problems” (Boone 2003, 16).

Boone chooses to classify local community institutions based on the degree to which local elites were dependent on the state at the outset of the study, an approach with solid grounding in political science literature and referred to as the study of agrarian property relations (Moore 1996; Tilly 1975, 1990; Paige 1996; Brenner 1982). The more dependent local elites are on state apparatuses for their privileges, the more power states are able to wield over them. To test her theory that “[state] regimes… pursued institution-building strategies that were designed to in response to situations they confronted on the ground,” (Ibid., 33-34) Boone borrows a classification of state institution-building from Cohen and Peterson (1999) which argues that the state core and its constituent periphery are linked along two dimensions: the “spatial” dimension and the “processural” dimension. Within the spatial dimension, states can either decide to concentrate their administrative presence or pursue “deconcentration.” As for the processural
dimension, states may choose to centralize their operations, that is bestow more power in single officers, or devolution, its opposite. Specific combinations of the four strategies produce unique “institutional configurations” as conceived by Boone (Boone 2003, 32). If rulers chose configurations which were predictable according to the communal structures with which they had to deal, for example if a state ruler or regime “chose” to pursue a highly centralized and concentrated regime to guarantee lasting control because local elites were economically dependent and socially weak, Boone’s theory is corroborated. Here case studies of Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal partially confirm the idea which has often been repeated elsewhere, that “public authority becomes the amalgamated result of the exercise of power by a variety of local institutions, conjugated with the idea of the state. Hence the practice of governance varies from place to place, and even from field to field” (Lund 2006, 686).

Nevertheless, neither Senegal, Ghana nor Côte d’Ivoire exhibits the same weakness vis-à-vis stronger states within the international system, namely their former colonizers and other powers with an interest in doing business in Africa. Both Christopher Clapham and Jean-François Bayart, in writing on African state interaction with the international system, approach the over-emphasis on states from another direction. Reacting to the theoretical missteps of the once-dominant dependency theorists, Bayart dispenses with the notion that Africa “passively absorbs the shock of having been made dependent on other parts of the world” (Bayart 2000, 217). Rather, “Africa may have played an active role throughout this long process of a reduction to a state of dependency” (Ibid., 218). As Bayart claims, this does not amount to a rejection of the assertion that a state of dependency prevails in Africa. It rather amounts to a rejection that, per dependency theorists, African elites have had no agency in their own mise en dépendence (Ibid., 219). In this sense, the importance of external agents should not be reduced entirely but “relativized” to consider the fact that Africans themselves, in a struggle to make the best of a dire situation, or just to maximize gains, have had a hand in the long-term entrenchment of dependence. In a sense, they have specialized in it, and have accelerated the process towards the gross inequalities seen today. How African elites coped with dependence, the specific ways in which they engineered their mise en dependence, was done through strategies of “extraversion” which exploit phenomena such as religion, democratic discourse, war, opposition, and even foreign aid for elite aggrandizement (Bayart 1989; 2000). Furthermore, extraversion can be conceived as a uniquely African phenomenon, thanks to homegrown African civilization, which comprises an “oral culture, a rather weak development of productive forces, extensive agriculture and pastoral activity without use of private-title land tenure, a rather limited degree of cultural and social polarization, and a limited degree of economic accumulation and political centralization,” the latter of which is present thanks to hyper-dependence (Bayart 2000, 231).

Christopher Clapham borrows Bayart’s concept of extraversion to demonstrate that African “big men” and neo-patrimonial characteristics are partly a result of intense international insecurity vis-à-vis major powers,” (Clapham 1996) a view that, as opposed to that espoused by Bayart, seems to lend itself more easily to structuralist conceptions of African state behaviour, tying local outcomes to international developments.

It is hoped that a need for the proposed research below is demonstrated here, since none of the paradigms above, while bridging former theoretical divides, arrives at an approach designed to identify agency while considering all strata—local, state, and international—simultaneously.
Newer generation rentier theorists espouse this ecological approach but have yet to operationalize such an endeavour, while Boone, Bayart, and Clapham, while not mutually exclusive in their approach, each fall on a continuous spectrum of political agency ranging from the indigenous to the international. Their achievements are precisely in their self-conscious aversion to the rigidity of former constructs and structures.

4. Problematizing Governance: The Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of interest in the proposed research design is governance. The term “governance” must be problematized due to the high degree of contestation over its meaning, especially when applied to SSA. It is argued in the end that conventional notions must be discarded in favour of one which is looser and more adaptable to the fluid realities of effective, accountable, leadership in SSA.

Reacting to Schumpeter’s (1942) “minimalist” approach to what is democratic, Robert Dahl (1972) preferred to broaden the definition from “processual” attributes such as free and competitive elections to a “maximalist” one which encompasses the real outcome of those processes. Contestation or competition and participation or inclusion are necessary to have a true democracy. For the purposes of measurement, however, this definition proves inadequate. We need, according to many authors, a notion of democracy which is “sufficiently complex, in its basic dimensions consensual, and empirically well-defined” (Berg-Schlosser 2004). Only something between minimalist and maximalist approaches could overcome the perennial problems of conceptualization, measurement, and aggregation (Ibid.). Although some find the World Bank’s criteria for good governance, which includes concepts like process, capacity, and institutional respect and which relies on expert surveys to measure those with a unique coding system (Kaufmann et. Al. 1999), to be quite valid (Berg-Schlosser 2004), some Africanists contend that measures such as the World Bank Governance Indicators may not have validity for many African spaces (Hyden 2006; Abrahamsen 2000).

In this regard, a study by Dele Olowu and James S. Wunsch deserves attention for asking under what conditions “decentralization reforms bring about viable systems of local governance in Africa,” local governance being loosely defined as “local systems of collective action that manage a locality’s public affairs and are accountable to local residents” (Olowu and Wunsch 2004, 1). What distinguishes this work from the overarching corpus of literature on successful decentralization (see above) writ large is precisely the authors’ problematization and discussion of governance at the local level. The authors found unworkable the World Bank definition of governance which placed disproportionate emphasis on state leaders, as well as another definition which emphasized sharing authority for dispensing public services. Rather, the authors subscribe to what may be termed as an institutional/rational choice-based model (Ostrom 1990; Hyden 1992) which more completely defines local governance as

“a rule-governed process through which residents of a defined area participate in their own governance in limited but locally important matters; are the key decision-makers in determining what their priority concerns are, how they will respond to them, and what and how resources will be raised to deal with those
concerns; and are they key decisionmakers in managing and learning from those responses.” (Ibid., 4)

The conception championed by Oluwu and Wunsch strikes a reasonable balance between objectively applied governance indicators, or minimalist approaches, which bear the risk of imposing one culture’s definitions on another, and complete subjective approaches which run the risk of extreme relativism.

5. Towards a New Empirical Approach

This paper argues for a controlled ethnographic comparison of oil communities designed to identify agents of political change, and relevant institutions, at all levels. The real-life problem introduced in section 1 compels theoreticians and researchers to revisit their approaches to political realities in SSA as governance initiatives in African spaces imposed on localities from above have been met with limited success, and this is in no small part due to a lack of knowledge as to how international, state, and local forces jostle for institutional supremacy and what those outcomes may be. Due to the weakness and relative absence of state apparatuses and also to the questionable application of Western definitions of governance to sub-Saharan African contexts, a knowledge gap requires an ethnographic approach to understanding the structures and processes of public spaces. Though this has been achieved by a great number of researchers, it is most commonly done in monograph form. To maximize the contribution to theory generation, however, a controlled comparison of oil-bearing communities is needed, albeit inductively and with an understanding of processes on the ground.

As demonstrated above, the research question cannot be answered solely using quantitative methods, given the plethora of independent and intervening variables at stake. As such, it is most appropriate to proceed with a comparative case study methodology. Robert K. Yin (2009) remarks that such “how” questions “deal with operational links over time, rather than mere frequencies or incidence” (Yin 2009, 9). According to Yin, the strength of a case study is in the high degree of conceptual validity it affords the researcher (Ibid. 2009). Concepts such as “oil competition” and “institutions,” let alone the “resource curse” and “governance,” cannot be fully extrapolated in a quantitative study and fully accounted for. Anthropologists, and even some political scientists, make a very strong case for ethnographic work which evades strict descriptions of what accounts for local community power and good governance.

The variation of case study design chosen to answer the research question is the comparative method, and more specifically the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) where Africa oil states are said to be similar. The three falsifiable propositions being tested are that either international, state, or local forces are most responsible for changes in governance. The control variables can only be loosely controlled and include attributes, factors, and contexts common to sub-Saharan African states exporting oil, oil being an excellent factor which has the best chance of limiting governance variations in the case studies thanks to its high degree of statistical association with poor governance and conflict. Since the object of the study is to identify differences at local levels which might account for changed governance over the duration of oil exploitation, any differences between those communities with differing standards of governance will be treated as
potential explanatory variables. Since the theoretical propositions are vague, the twin methods of “process tracing” and Historical Institutionalism are valid to assist in the discovery of explanatory variables which might account for the difference in governance between the African oil states (Falletti 2006).

The design becomes innovative through the particular treatment of units of analysis common to all the cases, making the study an embedded multiple case study. Instead of relying on pure ethnographic forms whereby the researcher might arrive at conceptions inductively and exonerate herself from adherence to prior conceptions and forms, recognized processes and institutions found in the literature will be targeted and compared on a case-by-case basis. In each community, these include both associational and traditional institutions occupying public spaces, including but not limited to trade associations, cooperatives, labour unions, burial societies, chieftancies, councils, youth groups and regional administrators. In each state, NOCs and ministries will likewise be examined for perceptions of change and subjected to historical/institutional process tracing as governance changed. Lastly, multinational oil firms will be assessed for their interventions in both state and local spaces. Again, the particular landscape of local authority in each space is different, meaning only through fieldwork and close inspection can one discern which units of analysis are most relevant. Nevertheless, a thorough examination of each structural level satisfies the requirements of replication.

6. Envisaging a New Comparative Program: Oil-bearing Communities in Gabon, Sudan, and Ghana

The table below represents a schematized work in progress meant to carry out the proposed methodology. Six communities will be examined and divergent governance patterns elicited through ethnographic methods, focusing particularly on the institutions and phenomena identified in Sections 2 and 3. From there it is possible to make conclusions for grander theory (outlined above) as well as to begin searching for general tendencies through analyses of the differences between communities with divergent evolutionary governance paths, i.e. worsening, stable, or bettering governance, all while acknowledging the need for a broader comparative program to replicate studies and refine mid-range theory. To test theoretical hypotheses at all three levels of governance, the communities are Gabon, Sudan, and Ghana, state contexts chosen for their variance in the degree rentierism and length of extraction. Divergent governance paths between states, if governance within communities in fact converged, suggest the influence of state apparatuses and regimes, whereas convergence suggests the influence of international trends.

The first state context, Gabon, like Angola and Nigeria, is among the older and more experienced rentier states on the continent, having first begun exploration as a French colony in 1929, although larger-scale commercial drilling had not begun until after World War II. By 1959 enough crude was pumped to warrant the construction of a pipeline (Yates 1996, 56-7), and by the 1960s Gabon and the chief French operator of its onshore and offshore blocks, state-owned Elf-Aquitaine had made petroleum the Gabonese government’s primary source of revenue. Oil production, however, peaked in 1997 (Yates 2012, 31), making Gabon an interesting case as to how different institutions react when future revenue streams are no longer guaranteed. Furthermore, the decline of French clout and the rise of Sino-American competition,
which has coincidentally prolonged the Bongo regime’s oil lifeline, introduces a dynamic international context.

The second state context, Sudan, cannot be considered among the traditional producers like Gabon, Angola, and Nigeria, but since Chevron discovered crude west of the Muglad in 1979, Sudan, together with South Sudan, have risen to be top producers on the continent. Civil having disrupted further development of the hydrocarbons sector, it was not until the mid-1990s that the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company was formed by a consortium led by the China National Petroleum Company. After the successful construction of a pipeline from the massive Heglig and Unity fields to Port Sudan in the north in 1999, Sudan quickly became oil dependent, so much so that the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with South Sudan in 2005 depended on the North’s securing 50 percent of the South’s oil revenue. Conflict and war have since been unable to deter the engagement of China, Sudan’s most important business partner, largest oil importer, and diplomatic ally when faced with allegations of human rights abuses. Because Sudanese oil comprises roughly 10 percent of China’s total oil imports, Sudanese local communities near the border are extreme cases of international penetration, and evidence of local institutional endurance would provide a strong counterweight to dependency theorists.

The third state context, Ghana, is not a rentier state at all, ranking among the continent’s newest producers along with Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Though most exploration has been offshore, onshore fields are being exploited and thus satisfy the case selection requirements. After oil was discovered in the promising Jubilee field in 2007, it then came online in 2010, and exploration has since proceeded apace. Ghana is interesting to study because the bulk of its oil activities are carried out by Western majors, and the Chinese presence, though felt in other sectors, is not as pronounced here.

7. Conclusion

Resource curse theories, since their heyday in the 1990s onwards, have ebbed in popularity, perhaps due to both over-simplicity and convincing rebuttals from area specialists with more knowledge of institutional legacies and their impact on the risk of conflict. This paper has argued that the logical next step is to dig deeper into the contours of institutional variance to discover what works and what does not in order to improve governance in Africa’s oil states, and that this entails understanding how communities, perennially autonomous in the sub-Saharan context, negotiate and appropriate the process of oil extraction. The extent to which they do so should not only contribute to grand theories on African politics but also aid in efforts to more successfully gear oil extraction and oil rents to more stable outcomes. To this end, a unique methodology hoping to contribute to a broader comparative has been proposed which attempts to blend the strengths of comparative and ethnographic methods. Better policy fits require less conjecturing and more inductive approaches based on an appreciation of Africa’s incredible social and political diversity.
Table 1. Research Design Schematic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Context</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Local Context</th>
<th>Units of Analysis and Replication Design</th>
<th>Case Protocol</th>
<th>Local Governance Comparison Between Communities</th>
<th>Implications of Findings for General Theory and Derived Theory (Explanatory Factors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heightened Competition for Scarce Hydrocarbon Resources: 1970s-present</td>
<td>Ghana: 2007-present, limited rentierism</td>
<td>Comm. X</td>
<td>MNCs, MFAs, NOCs, Energy Ministries, Executives and Clan Politics, Interplay of Associative and Traditional Institutions in Local Public Spaces</td>
<td>Convergence</td>
<td>State/International Structures; Do states converge?</td>
<td>Divergence Local Agency; Differences in state-society relations, local political systems, etc.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sudan: 1980s-present, rentierism on the rise</td>
<td>Comm. X</td>
<td>Community X</td>
<td>Divergence</td>
<td>State/Int. Structures</td>
<td>Convergence State/Int. Structures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Qualitatively determine governance (Olouwu and Wunsch 2004) and political units prior to oil.
2) Determine the quality of local governance in the present.
3) Conduct interviews within identified institutions and ministerial levels and MNCs if possible.
4) Use process tracing to causatively link initial governance with the actual governance.
5) Conclude report on governance change in the respective community.
References


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