

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Elaborated and restricted codes of pluralism - Entangled manifestations in natural resource- dependent African countries

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Africa's re-democratization project set in motion more than two decades ago has produced varying outcomes. Factors such as political character of the state, cognitive resources and intervention strategies of core elites, commitment to democratic stewardship, social cohesion, diversity of resilience-resources, tolerance may combine to produce hybrid outcomes. This piece explores the state of democracy and appropriate governance in natural resource-dependent countries in a changing international political environment; examines how incumbents' access to oil revenue creates morbid structures that favour particular groups and undermine operational efficiency of the political system. Insights from country case studies are subjected to frameworks for democratic analysis, the natural resource curse debate, and governance focused analysis. Contrary to the view that politics in oil-dependent African countries is influenced by deep-rooted ethnic loyalties; entangled transitions and transformations that have taken place since the end of the Cold War have resulted in social differentiation that has produced strategic groups interaction and communication networks whose actors have become dominant forces in government, military, industry, in articulating demands on the political system. Hence, research attention should be given to economic study of social structure in order to reveal the political character of new actors and refine our patterns of interpretation of social and political change.

**Key words:** Natural resources, Third scramble for Africa, democracy, strategic groups, social networks, accumulation.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

For almost a millennia Africa has been in the complex entanglement of shifting centers of power configurations

and projections as the continent's strategic natural resources remain the magnetic pull for foreign powers.

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Arab, European, and Asian powers have impacted the continent's social, political and economic structures and hierarchies, and not without devastating consequences. In this connection, Africa has become the epitome of "structural violence" (Galtung, 1969) in the larger part of its political and economic history. Prior to the advent of colonialism - a period of over four hundred and twenty-five years of external powers active involvement in the first wave of globalization (1450-1807) grounded in slave trading and natural resource exploitation in order to sustain the labour cum resource-intensive industries of the time. This abruptly terminated indigenous technological advancement and fleeced the continent of the evolutionary spaces for political and economic development. The slave trade consumed energies and time at the cost of technical innovation. Well established industries such as gold mining and smiting even suffered retardation (Boahen, 1987). By the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, during the heat of the competitive scramble by European powers for Africa at the Berlin Conference in 1884-85 historians coined the term "scramble for Africa" to explain European powers drive for extension of their power and economic influence in far-flung territories. The consensus reached in Berlin in the form of the "Act of Berlin" provided the legal and political framework for colonial policy that run until the 1960s when many African countries obtained political independence (Pakenham, 2001). The first scramble for Africa (1876-1912) was characterized by the quest and acquisition for territories and natural resources, markets, adventure in Africa's pristine natural ecology, and thermal comfort (ibid.). The second scramble in the context of the Cold War era (1947-1989) was marked by a competitive tussle for ideological supremacy between the superpowers on the continent. It was an era in which big powers promoted their ideological preeminence through proxy wars, rampant, and at times violent change of regimes, and supported authoritarian, corrupt and rapacious African regimes instead of institutions for appropriate forms of governance (Tarabrin, 1974).

Under current dispensations, the democratic credentials of many oil-producing African countries are foregrounded by restricted political spaces, a troubling human rights portfolio, paternalism and patronage, "executive hegemony", corruption and cooptation, which operate in close-knit groups and social networks alongside modern, elaborated but morbid state institutions. A system of "petrocracy" has prevailed over democracy. In their frantic search for energy security, established and emerging powers patronise oil producing African states and thus compromise the value formations that have taken place since the end of the Cold War. A steady high commodity prices in the last one decade has also made many natural resource-rich countries more assertive, able to defy domestic and international pressure for adhering to good governance; extractive industries transparency and regulatory mechanisms. The

political posture of those regimes is also in contravention of home-grown values such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) that have been cultivated within the framework of regional integration in Africa (Olympio, 2011). A massive discovery of oil and gas in East Africa and the West African Gulf of Guinea in the last five years is a political challenge in itself. The record shows that there is scanty evidence of transparency in extractive industries, which are also the backbone of African economies (Omagba, 2009).

### **Problem briefing**

Africa's long history of encounters, co-existence, confrontation and cooperation with foreign powers and their close-knit collaboration with local African elites have direct impact on the continent's socio-political hierarchies and governance structures (Molt, 1998: 633-646). The current wave of competition by foreign powers in Africa has attracted commentaries by many prominent Africans and foreign dignitaries. The following quotations vividly depict concerns of prominent Africans and foreign policy establishments of outside powers:

"We have to ensure that this new scramble for Africa benefits the women and men of the continent - and that the agreements which are signed with foreign investors are fair, equitable and stand the test of time", Kofi Annan - in interview with Mike Steere, for CNN.

"The first scramble for Africa was for land, territories, natural resources and slaves. We are still feeling the devastating impact of that period. Let not history repeat itself", Kofi Annan, the U.N. Secretary General at the 7th African Union Summit in Banjul, Gambia, July 2006.

"When the cloth of government is not seen as being stretched to cover everyone in society you tend to have these divisions, so the issue for me is not tribalism, but the way to handle governance, distribution of limited resources ... and equal access to opportunity for all". Kofi Annan - in interview with Mike Steere, for CNN.

"I can tell you that nothing has really taken me aback more as Secretary of State than the way that the politics of energy is — I will use the word 'warping' — diplomacy around the world". Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice remarked in a testimony before U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 5, 2006.

One permanent feature of the above quotations is that since Africa's encounter with foreign powers, the continent's strategic natural resources have remained central focus to the detriment of nurturing appropriate institutions of governance. In the past, outsiders frenzy for Africa; be it in the form of natural resource grab and subsequent colonization, or the ideological tug of war between the superpowers during the Cold War era, which bred dictators with active external support, all impacted

negatively the system of governance and the collective African effort for integrating their interactions and establishing rule-based behaviour among themselves (Tarabrin, 1974). Given the intensification of scramble for the continent's strategic natural resources as well as the multi-agency, cross-cutting nature of partnerships that have surged between many African countries and foreign powers; regional organisations; states and non-state actors; African states must reposition themselves to create transparent mechanisms to make public their contractual obligations with multinational companies engaged in Africa's extractive industries. As the Africa Progress Panel has noted, the amount of money alone lost through non-transparent activities of multinational companies in the form of tax evasion and avoidance can make the continent's dependence on foreign aid redundant; and it is also long overdue that the African peoples become the owners of their strategic natural resources.

Nearing almost two decades of economic and political transformation in Africa, both the beauty of democracy and some of the repulsive aspects of governance have prevailed.<sup>1</sup> Countries such as, Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa are leaving no stone unturned to habituate and consolidate the gains of the last two decades. In another set of countries, especially those in which political power is closely entwined with petrodollars and "strategic interests groups", both old and new breed of "petrocrats" have engineered their governance structures and processes to entrench sectional and group interests. This presents enormous challenges for the wider governance systems in overcoming inefficiencies, exclusions and inequalities. In the past two decades or so some explanations for assigning failure of governance have gained academic credence and become permanent

templates for explaining causal relations in human interaction and conflict situations. Multidimensional factors such as religion, race and ethnicity, power struggle among competing and rivalling elites, imperial ambitions and big power interferences in internal affairs of smaller states, competition for scarce economic resources, corporate greed and exploitation, overt acts of malfeasance and corruption have combined in one form or the other to render many states ungovernable (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001).

In contemporary African political setting, images of political violence from the Niger River Delta region of Nigeria, the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the wider Great Lakes Region; and in the recent past the scramble for diamonds and political power in the Mano River Region (Liberia and Sierra Leone) demonstrate a causal link between natural resources that are poorly managed and the level of political violence (Collier and Bannon, 2003; Alario and Nath., 2006). In recent memories, the spate of political conflicts and outbreak of civil wars, and rebel insurgencies in many parts of Africa, Latin America, and Asia have been attributed to elite competition for not just political power but for control over natural resources such as oil and gas, diamonds, gold, uranium etc. (Ross, 2001). This has been termed "Resource Curse", or the "Political Dutch Disease" in modern political science discourses (Jensen et al., 2004; Auty, 1993; Le Billon, 2006; Collier and Bannon, 2003; Haber et al., 2007; Sachs et al., 1995). The thinking in here is calibrated on the fact that a country's natural resources create incentives for executive pre-eminence, deep-rooted patron-client relations, predatory informal networks and cronyism that undermine existing institutions and result in authoritarian rule of various dimensions (ibid.). This is also suggestive of the fact that competition for access to natural resources plays a wider role in elite interaction, competition and rivalry. The contribution of political science to the "resource curse" debate has been spurred by the general identification of defective decision-making processes, institutional decay, exclusive politicking and endemic preference for "big men", "the president's faithful" and business moguls over institutions in most natural resource-rich countries. The core task for political science research focuses not only on the relationship between oil wealth and democracy, but the wider governance system; human rights, human security, and economic development in general, as well as identifying newly emergent actors and networks that are influencing and shaping politics in a rapidly changing world.

Today, due to high commodity prices such as oil, some natural resource-rich African countries have become more self-confident, assertive, and able to withstand civil society pressure to ensure good governance, promote the rule of law, and habituate appropriate human rights practices. Chad's newfound oil-wealth has been placed under international surveillance via putting in place one of the most innovative institutional mechanisms to avert

<sup>1</sup> The perspectives on 'restricted and elaborated codes' is an attempt to transpose some of the theoretical precepts from language and identity whereby a society's distribution of power, exercise of control, and adherence to its internal principles moulds its communications system and culture of different social classes so that the educational system, for example, is marked by unequal advantages. Those distinctions were first proposed in the 1970s by Basil Bernstein. His differentiations were conceptually classified as 'restricted and elaborated codes'. According to Bernstein, a restricted code occurs when meanings of a particular class become contextualised in a particular local setting so that in an attempt to be explicit and specific the group's meanings are circumscribed by 'shared understandings, values and identifications'. 'Elaborated codes' on the other hand describes situations where there is a clear insistence on 'explicitness and specificity' so that shared understandings, values and identifications are less circumscribed. Codes in this sense mean 'the formal system of communication shared by the participants of a language community'. See, David, Crystal (1997): *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*. pp. 40-48. From a political science perspective, codes are the wider set of rules, norms, and values that shapes interaction and communication among elites (code of conduct) on one hand, and between elites and the governed (code of governance). It is also interchangeably used to refer to the laws and statutes embodied in a national constitution. Thus a democracy that conforms to the laid down rules can be considered elaborated, while those that operate along informal structures and non-harmonious strategic networks in a quasi-democratic environment are considered being restricted in a logical functional sense.

the disaster that had plagued many oil economies. But Chad in its financial wrangling with the World Bank on how to spend oil revenue (BBC Report, 2008) proved that political entrepreneur executes their political duties with their political survival and general security in mind. In Gabon, political power and petrodollars enabled one man to rule the country from 1967-2009 via an unprecedented executive pre-eminence that produced morbid structures of governance at the cost of the people's quest for democracy and good governance. In Angola, the executive and the inner political clique had micro-managed the country's oil wealth during the country's long civil war, and are now using the 'prevailing peace dividend' to establish political structures under the cloak of democracy to serve parochial interests. The ugly head of oil in these countries is revealed when one looks at their rankings in Human Development Index, the state of human rights and inequality, and the rule of law.

But the heart of the matter is that many states including Angola, Chad, and Gabon have gained much international leverage not only because they have strategic natural resources such as oil and gas, but more because they have powerful international patrons in the West or in the far-East who in one way or the other are strategically inclined to give a blind eye to their domestic shortfalls regarding adherence to basic tenets of democracy, good governance and rule of law. In an increasingly competitive world, before Western powers have to reprimand African leaders, or comment on politics in oil-rich African states they first have to look eastwards at China and India than the values, norms, morals, and ethics they stand for.

This posture is a testimony to the emergence of 'Third Scramble for Africa' by the world's major powers, and emerging ones in an environment of 'democratic' or quasi-democratic dispensation (Olympio, 2011). This development now poses a challenge to consolidating the gains of democratisation that had been achieved by the turn of the second decade of the new century. Many incumbents have trespassed, tampered, and twisted their national constitutions to elongate their term of office, or hand-picked their successors to ensure transfer of political power that favour particular 'political cliques' whose goals have been cloaked in elaborated political parties but serving sectional interests. Opposition parties are systematically weakened via crafty stratagems and a significant section of their core leadership bribed with lofty petrodollars in order to serve the interests of dominant ruling parties. The kind of governance system these rulers are delivering is indeed one based on "intra-party democracy" characterised by dominant political parties along the lines of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union (*democraticheskaya centralizatsiya*) (Walter, 1992).<sup>2</sup> One key similarity is that the party in the

former Soviet Union was imposed by revolution, while the African recourse to multiparty democracy is an imposition by leading Western democracies via "political conditionalities" attached to the delivery of economic and development aid.

The system operates via limited debate, but allows a measure of internal criticism among party peers, and views and positions are collectively agreed upon and become policy. In this sense, a solid, uncompromising intra-party cohesion overshadows existing national democratic institutions, which undermines the fundamental "principles of checks and balances", "democratic competitiveness"; obliterates interest representation, and in the final analysis renders inefficient the logical functions of the wider democracy project (Wilson, 1962; Wright, 1971). Ultimately, the system reproduces itself in the form of centralization and insulation of power symbolised in an 'authoritarian-de facto-one-party system' that operates in an alleged environment of multiparty democracy. Given the context of the African case, the almost two decades of economic and political transformations have imbibed a significant sense of value formations such that the role of international and local non-governmental organisations and civil-society based groups have mushroomed in a hitherto enclosed African political systems (Nkwachukwu, 2009). This has brought forth competing roles among political actors and other stakeholders in the African political process. Despite this historical breakthrough, the role of civil society and other non-state actors have not been smooth in the political praxis. Where they had been tolerated they are lectured on how they should behave, think, and act (Pinkney, 2003). Individual and group access to the political centre is only possible via special relationships with the dominant ruling party or the president's extended family, and close-knitted networks of camaraderie.

Favourable demographic factors and access to abundant natural resources dictate the course of dominant ruling party's politics. The relatively low population of countries such as Angola, Chad, and Gabon facilitates and reinforces executive dominance, which is in turn made possible by unfettered access to oil and mineral revenue.

Comparatively, Nigeria with her large population (178,571,721 m)<sup>3</sup> as a ratio to oil revenue will find it difficult constructing a tightly-knitted system of political organisation wheeled on inclusion-by-corruption and co-optation as operates in Angola, Chad, Gabon, whose populations are relatively small (22, 427,928; 13,360,626; 1.65 respectively).<sup>4</sup> Short of that, the Nigerian case has evolved into a "predatory economic enclave" surrounded by some unscrupulous elements of the top-brass of the

<sup>2</sup> Opponents of Intra-Party Democracy include the following: Wright, William E: A Comparative Study of Party Organization. Columbus, OH: Charles Merrill

Publishing, 1971; Wilson James Q: The Amateur Democrat. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1962

<sup>3</sup> World Population Review, 2014. Nigeria.

<sup>4</sup> World Population Review, 2014.

military, influential "big men", the local oil cartel and their external agents, and the ragged-tag army on the ground in the Niger Delta Region, which is mostly constituted by unemployed youths (Sala-i-Martin et al., 2003).

Thus, due to petrodollars and mineral revenue the value formations that characterised the initial stages of the African re-democratisation project since the early 1990s are beginning to crumble in favour of authoritarian regimes in oil-rich African countries. In many of these countries, the problem is further compounded by the fact that (except Chad) they tasted petrodollars before they took steps at experimenting with democratisation/re-democratisation. Hence, on one hand, by their own actions some African leaders are overtly or covertly delaying or derailing the democratic structures and processes which they set in motion at the end of the Cold War. Indeed, their actions contradict some of the home-grown templates for assessing and measuring governance such as within the framework of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance, which they have expressed commitment thereto. On the other hand, some of their external partners are also wavering on their side of the commitments on good governance either due to their quest for energy security and other strategic minerals, or are trampling on the values they stand for due to the "global war on terror". The insights and conclusions from this research are part of the results on selected case studies of oil economies in Angola, Chad, and Gabon where oil has become the main matrix for political decision-making and elite's political survival (Basedau et al., 2006; Olympio, 2011). The current high commodity prices and increasing revenue are filling the financial vacuum created by withdrawal of support by the donor community to many African dictators after the Cold War, which fact also saw the demise of many of those regimes. This work argues among others that the "natural resource curse" debate is a synthesis of an 'entangled narrative of complex internalities and externalities' that make some natural resource-dependent economies reproduce themselves along the lines of ungovernability, inequalities, endemic corruption, poor rights portfolio, general insecurity etc.

### Investigative questions

This paper will attempt to contribute to the search for methodological, empirical, and theoretically informed insights on the current scramble for strategic natural resources, markets, and diplomatic band-wagoning from the Berlin Conference (1885) to the Beijing Conference (Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, FOCAC)<sup>5</sup>. The rise of Brazil, China, and India, hyper-globalization, explosive population dynamics and consumption-oriented economic

<sup>5</sup> The first ministerial conference of FOCAC was held in Beijing from 10 to 12 October 2000.

growth, and the "global war on terror" have combined to usher in a new era of scramble for Africa's strategic natural resources, rapidly expanding markets, and geostrategic convenience (Olympio, 2011; Carmody, 2011; Southall, 2009; Ghazvinian, 2007). The profile, postures, interests and value portfolios of the international actors involved have of course varying consequences on Africa in multiple domains – governance, human rights, corporate ethics, corruption, legitimacy, national security challenges, sovereignty, and ecological degradation due to unclean and non-safe methods of natural resource extraction. Some of the core questions to be tackled include how and to what extent external actor's resolute quest for energy security and engagement with Africa's "petrocrats" compromises the value formations that have taken place since the end of the Cold War? How do increasingly assertive oil-producing African countries adhere to the home-grown values that have been set out within the framework of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM); African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance?<sup>6</sup> How do newly emergent actors on Africa's changing political landscape interact and make their demands felt on existing wealth distributional patterns and intergenerational transfer of political power? The justification for these probing questions is based on the fact that African states have made binding commitments to democracy and good governance as expressed in the framework of regional and sub-regional projects such as the APRM and the Charter on Democracy. Due to lack of space, readers are recommended to refer to these documents elsewhere/online.

### Approaches to study

As far as methodology of work is concerned, this research is based on country *case studies*, which will be subjected to plausible and generally accepted framework for democratic analysis, elite identification with state and society, the wider "natural resource debate" and governance focused analysis. Thus, the transformations that have occurred in the continent have set in motion key changes, continuities, and innovations that have combined to make the whole process complex. In this sense, in order to trace and identify the multiple processes that are guiding democratization in the selected cases, democratic research will be calibrated on governance issues as well. The problematic of the "resource curse" and the "paradox of plenty" (Gary and Karl, 2003) have brought the debate to the impacts and

<sup>6</sup> African Union "Decision EX.CL/Dec.31(III) adopted in Maputo, Mozambique, in July 2003 and Decision EX.CL/124(V) adopted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 2004 respectively, by the adoption of an African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance"; "The 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU: African Peer Review Mechanism 8 July, 2002, Durban, South Africa, AHG/235 (XXXVIII)".

implications that phenomenon has on governance structures in oil and mineral-rich countries and the state-of-the-art theory. Indeed, such countries are poor performers regarding cultivation, habituation and consolidation of democracy (Olympio, 2011; Ross, 2001). Many of the research work on the subject have however lacked country case studies to reveal the local political narrative of the "resource curse". Lack of institutions and transparency, absence of legal mechanisms and administrative laws, lack of capacity, and prevalence of poor skills in the machinery of government, indiscipline and laxity in the fiscal, monetary, and budgetary system, and the abysmal dialogue between state and civil society, including "absolute presidentialism" (Prempeh, 2013: 209-234; Gould JM and Winters M, 2012) are all the outcome of bad governance. Governance focused analysis enhances comparative studies of politics, "as it offers the opportunity to incorporate into the analysis of political change a larger set of variables that matters for a country's ability to develop; whether this is measured in political, social or economic terms. By focusing on how state/society/market relations at large are constituted and managed, a governance approach provides data that are crucial for understanding the prospects for both democracy and development"(Hyden, et al., 2004). The concept of governance covers areas that are juxtaposed on indicators such as the following: "Civil society and freedom of expression/freedom of assembly; political society and free and fair elections; government and civil military relation; bureaucracy and meritocracy; economic society and absence of corruption; judiciary and impartial judgement" (ibid).<sup>7</sup> In the expanded sense, this entails the capacity of the state to implement its stated goals and policies with optimum effectiveness and efficiency through the judicious application of its administrative and bureaucratic machinery that in turn creates the enabling environment for ensuring transparency and accountability, ability to enact, promulgate, and implement laws crucially needed to run the machinery of government and contain bureaucratic and administrative excesses such as corruption, nepotism, cronyism and other mal-practices. In addition, it enables one to juxtapose the analysis on *political development* in the selected case studies, since it subsumes many other variants of the variables namely, democracy, governance, human rights and the rule of law and the progress made in the respective directions.

On another plane, *discourse analysis* based on rules and norms in *language use*, as well as the terms and arguments used in written or spoken utterances in the political sphere will be applied. The reason here is quite simple, since *language use* is a key constituent in the construction of political reality and how human experience

is acquired and shared among stakeholders interacting in a particular political environment. From the point of view of sociology of language, and for that matter following from the thoughts of Saussure to Foucault, discourse analysis contributes to imputing meaning to existing institutions, economic relations and political processes, events and trends that occur within particular social context (De Saussure, 1986; Foucault, 1990). In the traditional sense, this will relatively include "debates in parliament, speeches by ministers, party programmes and reports from Select Committees", but also in a real discourse sense, this method will draw on "reports from think-thanks related to a political party, the editorials of newspapers and academic writings" (Larsen, 1997). This approach also means close monitoring of country-specific socio-economic and political developments. This provides first-hand insights about developments in individual African countries covering state, politics, culture and international relations. Many of the literature on natural resources and democracy have judged regimes as being non-democratic, neo-patrimonial, illegitimate, and so forth without citing some concrete actions from the countries based on the local socio-economic and political narrative including conditions that make the regimes think and act the way they do – i.e. many of the conclusions lack empirical corroboration.

However, given the broad concept of the "resource curse" and its varying application in different regions, contexts and conditions, the concept and its operationalisation have also attracted debate among peers in this research domain.

In the realm of democratic analysis, however, this study would also focus on key templates for gathering empirical knowledge about functional democracies and divergences from the spectrum to cover other prevailing variants of democratic and authoritarian rule. The task of assessing democratic performance is not an easy one, and many political scientists have in the past chosen to be on the safer side of their vocation by avoiding any such venture. Classical works in the field had most of the time been based on quantitative designs covering several states to determine how pluralistic, liberal or less liberal they are (Bollen, 1991: 4-19).

Some of the many recent attempts at measuring democratic performance have focused on qualitative approaches that are grounded in "robust and defensible conception of democracy, from which specific criteria and standards of assessment" can be derived (Beetham, 1994). One of such enterprises for assessing democratic performance has been called "democratic audit", which is planked on two main political principles, namely, "popular control, and political equality". According to Beetham, popular control "usually takes the form of control over decision-makers, rather than over decision-making itself; and typically, it requires a complex set of institutions and practices to make the principle effective. Similarly, political equality, rather than being realised in an equal, say in decision-making directly, is realised to the extent

<sup>7</sup> The governance approach had been used in a sixteen country comparative study by Goran, Hyden, Julius Court, and Kenneth, Mease (2004): Making Sense of Governance. Empirical Evidence from Sixteen Countries. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder London. p.195.

that there exists an equality of votes between electors, an equal right to stand for public office, an equality in the condition for making one's voice heard and in treatment at the hands of legislators and so on" (ibid.). By way of classification, popular control embraces four domains of political entrepreneurship covering contending political questions such as the right of citizens to elect their legislatures and the head of the office of the presidency as within the confines of the constitution, and the safeguards it provides for ensuring a broad-based electoral system that is free, fair and transparent. Secondly, the prevailing democratic dispensation must provide channels for making representatives accountable to the governed through unhindered access to information relating to the business of government. In addition, the governance system must make provisions for the institutional spaces to uphold basic civil and political rights including all the basic freedoms. Furthermore, the citizens of the country must be guaranteed the right to organise themselves independent of the state but within the confines of the law without any hindrances for the holders of political power (ibid.). The combined qualitative approach will be complemented with corresponding quantitative insights.

The interdisciplinary character of this research has the advantage of filling the vacuum created by some of the inadequacies of the approaches already mentioned above. In the African continent, quantitative indexes pertaining to the performance of governments have steadily gained confidence among many citizens as they see their country's performance being pit against other countries thus directly or indirectly sharpening their horizon in making rational choices about who should rule them. Hence, on-going benchmarks such as the democracy index from Freedom House Survey Index, Afrobarometer, Corruption Perception Index, (CPI), Index of Democratization (ID), and Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) would be given consideration in analysing the state-of-the-art to help make general propositions about Africa's complex democratic path. The UN Human Development Index also offers quantitative and qualitative points of references for determining the functional correlation between society and crucial health indicators. For the first time since 2006, the World Bank also compiled a Comprehensive Aggregate and Individual Governance Indicators (1996-2006) that cover two hundred and twelve countries. All these sources will help make sense of qualitative as well as quantitative analysis of governance in the selected case studies.

In light of the various approaches mentioned above, this research is a methodical combination of rigorous and coherent description, deeper analytical insight, a thorough conceptual sensitisation and contextual articulation designed to assess, evaluate and make conclusive judgements about the state of democracy and good governance in oil-producing African countries in the context of a new scramble for the continent's strategic

natural resources in a globalised world.

Ultimately, however, the core templates for comparing politics and governance in oil-producing African states revolve around the extended arms of the office of the incumbent, control of information and the state media, unfettered access to state resources, prevalence of dominant political parties and entrenched intra-party dynamics, and the politics of distribution of wealth, all of which may in one way or the other determine how democracy and a democratization process takes shape. These are also without doubt critical domains for applying the abovementioned Beetham's "popular control" mechanism to control decision-makers rather than any all-out 'airtight monitoring' of decision-making itself. The issue at stake in the African continent is the complexity of its hybrid, elaborated constellation of institutions, and the resulting combination of formal and informal practices in the day-to-day political entrepreneurship.

### **Exploration of state-of-the-art: Democratic theory natural resource curse and democratic rupture**

This section attempts to throw light on approaches for assessing democratic development as well as highlight the state-of-the-art of the natural resource curse debate, but not a complete review of democratic theory and the natural resource debate. The aim is to shed some thoughts on how and when processes of democratisation are high-jacked by incumbents or other contesting actors foregrounded by the fact that executive access to oil and mineral wealth results in distortions of governance systems (Tilly, 2000). The "resource curse" syndrome is understood not only in terms of countries' loss of sovereign control of natural resources but a country's dependence on foreign aid may equally create distortions in state institutions and political economy. Apart from the regular external credit lines, many African states have also become addicted to annual budgetary assistance offered by the donor community (Olympio, 2012). The contextual variations and impacts of the global political economy places theoretical and methodological challenges in making assessments and judgements about democratic progress and quality in wide temporal-spatial settings (Morgan, 1997). In addition, basic concepts and theoretical precepts of democracy are rooted in socio-cultural and industrial development of Western societies (Smith, 2003).

### **REVIEW OF DEMOCRATIC THEORY**

One of the well-echoed contradictions in the debate has surrounded the liberal conception of the individual, and some of the communitarian views that is associated with so-called developing world. Focus on the individual's pursuit of interests in an environment where basic

freedoms and rights are protected are difficult to be reconciled with socio-cultural and historical experience of many new nations still grappling with fundamental prerequisites of nationhood (Hood, 2004). In classical sense, most discussions on democracy take as its starting point Aristotelian views that emphasises the homogeneity of societies that exhibits a relatively robust middle class. In the contemporary era, attention had been focused on socio-economic and cultural factors grounded in modernisation theory, which gained academic credence in the 1960s and had been rebranded now and then (Lipset, 1959; Dahl, 1990; Smith, 1989; Hartlyn et al., 1986; Huntington et al., 1984; Diamond, 1994). The other side of the debate has also focused on "strategic interaction" among political actors as the causal link for democratisation and not some specific prevailing conditions (Przeworski, 1991; Taylor, 1986).

Consequently, plethora of literature on assessing democratic development had focused on socio-economic and political conditions in capitalist societies with key precepts of the debate rooted in studies of modernisation. In a seminal work on the subject in the 1950s, Lipset concluded that in order for a country to make democratic inroads there must be requisite conditions such as industrialisation, significant level of economic diversification capable of driving social organisation with differentiated levels of literacy, urban growth, professional classes, social communication and interaction, freedom of associations etc. Lipset's initial works on democratic precepts rests on knowledge that even the poor in society have open channels to better their lot by negotiation and persuasion within the confines of the law. Lipset acknowledges the problem of group grievance and tension and its effects on legitimacy of the political system as people struggle for better life (Lipset, 1959). However, his analysis was predominated by economic indicators, which overlooked other contending factors that come to bear on a political system to effect political change (Pinkney, 2003). Thereafter, new breed of author's redirected attention to the need to search for factors that make democracies endure and transform under changing circumstances (Przeworski et al., 1996; Huntington, 1984).

By the dawn of the new millennium, their insights brought wealth distributional methods into the equation, which established that the democratic path taken by a country can only gain some degree of irreversibility after it has attained a per capita income of above US\$ 6,000 (excluding wealth accumulation via point-source resources). This must be propped up by attendant social changes such as high literacy rate, class differentiation and consciousness, the exercise of basic freedoms and significant degree of urbanisation (Przeworski et al., 2000). On the contrary, Huntington believes that the impacts of modernisation are rather the causes of instability as a result of rapid urbanisation, increasing popular expectations due to literacy, education and a growing, 'adversarial'

Fourth Estate (Huntington, 1968). Others following the modernisation trail with twist for intervening variables such as oil wealth and authoritarian rule observed that conditions for socio-economic transformation and occupational differentiation, which oil-dependent countries tend to hinder, are indeed crucial ingredients for democratic growth and development (Ross, 2001). Complexity of the issues and variegating outcomes they evince in many case studies demand that we make in-depth analysis of factorial constellation that takes consideration of socio-cultural and historical peculiarities of not only countries concerned, but regions as well. Influenced by the emergence of new nations after decolonisation, Almond et al. devoted research on role and impacts of political culture in a democratization process as a whole (Almond et al., 1963; Easton, 1975). In this framework, political culture is distinguished from the wider cultural repertoire focusing on attitudinal preferences and value orientation of citizens (Fuchs et al., 2002).

Cumulative evidence has also influenced others to articulate importance of factors that were hitherto excluded from mainstream analysis on democratic development, namely, "self-expression values, social tolerance, interpersonal trust, gender equality, and freedom of the press" (Ingelhardt, 1999); and the role of core elites in steering reform during critical period of transition and transformation (Huntington, 1991).

Contemporary studies on democratic development or regression received new impulses at the end of the Cold War when Gurr et al.'s combined efforts furbished the vocation with indexes for assessing democratic and autocratic regimes. They include competitive levels of participating actors, mechanisms for regulating political participation, competitive levels of recruiting executive branch of government, transparency in executive recruitment and term limits. Their analysis focused on one hundred and sixty-one countries covering the period 1800-2003. Critics identify lack of validity and reliability due to neglect of internal social and political realities of selected cases, excessive reliance on fragmented party systems, and obscured identification of strong parties. Out of this vacuum emerged increasing resort to the Freedom House Index and many other indicators. Though it scarcely gathers information on what the primary boundaries of democracy are, its focus on fundamental freedoms and rights constitute greater part of conceptualising and aggregating democratic practice in the contemporary world.

In another research venture, Pinkney outlines specific conditions that enable the establishment of democratic space. Factors include "economic development, political attitudes and behaviour, inter-elite relations, social structures and interactions between social groups, political institutions, sequences in development and external influences" (Pinkney, 2003). Others such as Linz have advanced the debate to its fringes by arguing that



"stateness" is a basic prerequisite for democratic consolidation (Linz and Alfred, 1996). In the functional sense, the state must be in position to formulate, articulate and implement decisions that protect human freedoms and rights, and genuine participation of citizens in the political system. Such functional efficiency is achieved when the structure of state is propped up by a clear-cut territorial entity; formal procedures for citizens and representative organs; and independence of the judiciary. These are guarantors of sovereignty of the state (Offe, 2003).

In a path-breaking venture, a team of scholars compiled a "global index of democracy" the methodology of which is "historical", "multidimensional in approach"; "highly disaggregated" mode of data collection, and overall outcome marked by "precision, validity, transparency and legitimacy" (Coppedge et al., 2011). In all, there are thirty-two different indicators including "sovereignty, authority, competitiveness, inclusive citizenship, ethnic equality, and electoral system proportionality" (ibid.). The method is however state-centric and does not account for micro-level events, and the role that natural resource exploitation may play within the broader spectrum.

In the African context we must obviously broaden the spectrum for analytical purposes in order to arrive at comprehensive conclusions that reflect the continent's historical and socio-political realities. At the core of this approach is systematic delineation of "political character" of the state/s under scrutiny. Given the economic and political 'survival' strategies of most states, this implies giving due attention to state of economy, distributional patterns, mode of contestation to political office, elite recruitment, and control of the military. Hence, comparative outcome may vary across countries.

Even in Botswana where democracy has successfully been implanted, only one party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) had won elections since independence from Great Britain in 1966. It is however, interesting to observe that since the "third wave" of democratization the BDP's dominance had remained relatively the same, while minority parties have improved on their aggregate performance (African Elections Data Base, 2004). Even though there is no proven evidence of mineral wealth affecting governance and competitive elections in *negative* way, (except BDP dominance; incumbent supremacy; and parliament serving executive interest), in some other countries where oil wealth has become the bedrock of the governance system the electoral system has become a tool for manipulation and trivialization (Wantchekon, et al., 2004).

The above theoretical precepts have been verified in industrialised societies that hardly bear traits of African realities. Hence, Ake's call for "democratization of development and the development of democratization, that is, the deepening of democratic experience in every sphere", instead of the orthodox conception based on

dichotomous boundaries between economic and political, and development as diametrically opposed to democracy, must be taken in good faith and not necessarily repudiating prevailing mode of thought on democracy (Ake, 2002).

### Review of Natural Resource Curse Debate

In another perspective, the state of democracy in most natural resource-rich countries has generated new strands of debate about increasing correlation between natural resources and fragile governance ecologies (Macartan et al., 2007). Others have cautiously joined the debate by arguing that one should avoid a deterministic view of the relations between natural resources and armed conflict, since it is rather existing resource enclaves and how holders of political power relates to them in particular countries which make countries prone to open conflict. This is particularly the case if institutions are non-existent or weak in natural resource revenue management (Le Billon, 2005). The absence of institutions or their dysfunction creates fertile grounds for the "natural resource-curse".

According to Le Billon (2006), some of the perturbing consequences of resource-dependent countries occur when the overall economy becomes exposed to external shocks thus undermining the potential for economic growth. Concentration of power in particular structures of government such as the executive creates spurious distributional networks presided by the incumbent, thus excluding large section of society and resulting in inequalities, corruption, patronage and paternalism. This creates channels for group grievances that put the country at risk of violent conflict. Critically, the "resource-curse" syndrome is characteristic of countries where poverty is still a major challenge, so that one could argue that it is a "classic poverty trap" (ibid.). Hence, degree of a country's "resource curse" varies depending on history and political economy of the country; the state of institutional development before becoming a major resource producer, and calibre of leadership (ibid.).

However, as far as the wider debate is concerned, the focus has been concentrated on the Middle Eastern oil-producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran etc., where windfall and bonanzas in oil revenue have contributed to authoritarian rentier states.

The term "rentier state" has been applied arbitrarily in political science and other disciplines to depict countries whose source of national income largely depends on export receipts from "point-source" resources on the international market. Of significance to political scientist is how income and wealth is generated with little application of local productive capacities and know-how. Pioneering work in the field was conducted by Mahdavy on Iran, which brought forth insights that abundant oil resources acts as disincentive for political elites to foster broad-

based economic development policies that would in the long term reduce point-source resource dependence to a diversified, manufacturing economy (Mahdavy, 1970).

Others such as Beblawi focusing on the economic aspects of 'rentierism' argued that while the rentier state may not be completely in control of the wealth generating process in upstream ventures, some aspects of the downstream activities such as marketing and "distribution or utilization" may provide channels for participation by a large section of the citizenry (Beblawi, 1987). Another basic characteristic of the rentier state is varying prevalence of rent manipulation, lack of transparency and accountability (Anderson, 1987) made possible by inadequate extractive industry regulative and transparency institutions. Such states exhibit relative propensity to institute weak tax exemption regimes including petroleum subsidies as an assurance of public identification with national wealth (Shambayiti, 1994).

Against this background, in trying to mainstream Africa's new oil boom and demand for other primary commodities into the broader picture we must be cautious not to import some of the conclusions and methodological precepts from the Middle East into the African continent. The situation in the Arab world, relatively revolves around "politics, religion and petrodollars" situated in a complex international political economy that is actively patronised and sustained by powerful state actors. It is a tightly-knitted patronage webbed in the wider national security of powerful actors such as the United States, and many Western countries.

In the African context, economic stagnation, heavy dependence on single commodities without added value, group antagonism and competition, immediate post-Cold War superpower vacuum, combined to prop up new exclusive forms of rule. In his contribution to the subject as regards the African context, Yates posits that a rentier economy is one in which "rent plays major role, and in which rent is external to the economy...more typically, rents comprise ninety-five to ninety-seven percent of gross receipts of low cost oil" (Yates, 2006). Accordingly, at one point or the other, Angola, Chad, and Gabon with their high oil revenue as a percentage of GDP have become rentier states of varying degrees. All have developed enclave onshore/offshore economies controlled by foreign oil companies, which employ small fraction of the local population. They are in one way or the other confronted with fragile systems of governance ranging from authoritarianism to kleptocracy, and par-democracies.

The Dutch Disease (DD) attempts to explain the connection between the exploitation of a country's natural resources and the subsequent collapse of the industrial sector due to unintended macro-economic and fiscal consequences. The term originated in Holland in the 1960s after discovery of North Sea gas, which led to overvalued currency, the Gulden, thus affecting competitiveness of the country's industrial exports.

This means that, a valuable proportion of overall investment, including transportation capacities are redirected into exploration and production in the extractive sector. This also brings pressure to bear on the Central Bank, which struggles to halt the spiralling tendency toward overvaluation of the national currency. In natural resource-rich countries, the basic condition for the DD is the type of natural resource, and oil and minerals have gained notoriety for their detrimental effects on the overall macro-economic environment by retarding growth and industrialisation (Woolcock, et al., 2001).

Measures against this macro-economic malfunction include a generalised tax reduction policy, and creation of future generation fund. While it has been successful in some industrialised, democratic countries such as Norway, its implantation in Africa is still a big challenge in an environment where institutional checks and balances are weak (Gary et al., 2003). The financial gains accruing from increasing commodity prices could also be channelled into sectors such as infrastructure, education and financing structural reform, all of which are good markers of diversification of the economy away from oil. Today, the phenomenon is also observable in many countries that rely heavily on capital imports such as heavy injection of foreign aid, FDI and aid dependency. In Guinea-Bissau, Mali and many others with no real strategic but potential natural resources and heavy dependency on foreign aid and rents the administration of foreign aid devoid of appropriate institutions and stewardship will undermine governance structures in the long run as corruption, red tape bureaucracies, and elite struggle over external rents prevail.

Despite two decades of transformations, Africa's political systems are still fragile and uncertain. In the post-Cold War era incumbent regimes and newly emerged competing political entrepreneurs resorted to alternative sources of financing their political ambitions by seeking access to strategic national resources. In mid-1990s the consequences of wars motivated by access to natural resources brought to the fore the "resource curse" syndrome in Africa.

In their search for causation between natural resources and long-term economic growth in Nigeria, Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian came to the conclusion that colossal institutional failure is at the heart of the problem and that natural resources in themselves "may or may not be a curse on balance,...and the Nigerian experience provides telling confirmation that waste and corruption from oil rather than 'Dutch Disease' has been responsible for its poor, long run economic performance" (Sala-i-Martin et.al., 2003). The authors are right, but institutions alone do not guarantee proper and effective management of natural resources; it requires a committed democratic stewardship in the service of the people. It was lack of political stewardship by the holders of power that led to the outbreak of civil war in 1967-1970. Many post-

independence African countries had the institutions it takes to govern appropriately but lack of consensus and commitment among elites and dominant ethnic groups led to wars across the continent. Current evidence is provided by Chad's state-of-the-art extractive industry management and transparency institutions, which are not yielding expected outcomes.

Juxtaposing oil wealth on institutions and democratic performance, Ross established the causal mechanisms for validating the "oil-impedes-democracy" claim outside of the traditionally understood context of the Middle East. He further posited that, the issue at stake is not just oil but mineral wealth, which has exerted brakes on achieving democratic progress or making it even elusive in countries such as Angola, Chile, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Cambodia, and Peru. His findings were substantiated by identifying key causalities that link oil to authoritarian political systems. This he calls the "rentier effect", by which governments combine liberal tax regimes and at times irrational spending spree as a form of 'appeasement' to the electorate, which in turn "dampens pressures for democracy". There is also the "repression effect", which is characterised by a high tendency for beefing up the national security apparatuses as a bulwark against infiltration of democratic ideals in the wider public. Finally, democratic growth is thwarted by a "modernisation effect" that describes the leadership's failure in pushing the state into the realm of industrialisation and creating service sector employment opportunities that will create conducive conditions for democratic empowerment (Ross, 2001).

In another thought awakening contribution, Omgba argues using regime survival analysis and reveal that there is "a positive link between oil rents and the duration of office of African leaders". Thus, their management of the oil and gas sector leads to a "stabilizing effect" as the regimes surrounds themselves with key strategic stakeholders, and state institutions such as the military and the national security services. The research is based on study of twenty-six African countries during the period 1958-2000 (Omgba, 2009). Nevertheless, the study does take cognisance of negative consequences of executive dominance and resulting distortions in democratisation processes - regime survival at the cost of good governance.

### Conceptual challenges

In the African context, some have questioned the ubiquity of the "resource curse" as a concept by arguing that its application occurs in a "complex and dynamic interplays that include numerous resource variables" (Basedau, 2005) that of course, produces varying outcomes, though not denying the 'dark side' of natural resources in the continent. In their study of a wide range of natural resource-rich countries in Africa, the authors found out that fifteen oil and diamond dependent countries in Africa

have varying outcomes regarding indicators for economic growth, human development, governance, democracy and peace. This observation has convinced some to be more cautious in applying the concept "resource curse". Instead, the term "resource politics" had been recommended (ibid). In this study, the many and varying political character of the actors involved, and how they relate to issues of control and distribution, equity and justice, human rights, environmental sustainability, and their impact on governance, peace and security are of core significance.

Thus, in the domain of political analysis, evaluations and judgements made regarding the positive or detrimental effects of oil/gas/minerals also require knowledge about the political development of the country in question. Whilst Angola's post-conflict challenges may offset any impromptu judgements on the 'quality of democracy' in the immediate transition and reconstruction period, we will be obliged to take a hard look at Gabon's democratic performance given her long period of 'political stability'; a one-man regime from 1967-2009; and a relatively steady oil income since independence, that has only recently began to dwindle. In this sense, the path towards democracy such as the transition period, the processes of transformation, re-democratisation/democratisation, democratic consolidation, national reconciliation etc. must clearly be distinguished in drawing conclusion about the prospects for democracy.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the *context, nature, location* and the application of modern technology in the extraction process all have combined effects on the outcomes that a particular resource might generate. These "resource-specific conditions" are quite crucial in evaluating the potential for conflict and civil war (Basedau, 2005: 329-332.).

Equally important is the distinction between the "degree of abundance and the degree of dependence" by a country on a particular resource as source of revenue. In economies burdened with the "Dutch Disease" with far-reaching crippling effects on the possibilities for achieving diversification, vulnerability to oil price volatility is more likely as compared to economies that are relatively diversified with multiple sources of export incomes. This issue is even more clarified by imputing population figures in the analysis, and is exemplified by Basedau in his contribution on "resource politics" in Africa. Thus, Nigeria's oil and gas exports constituting about seventy-five percent of national income that yielded about US\$59 billion in 2010 if related to her population of about one hundred and seventy-eight million is economically insignificant. In a similar vein, Equatorial Guinea's oil and gas revenue in 2010 of approximately US\$3 billion juxtaposed on her thin population of about six hundred

<sup>8</sup> For such conceptual distinctions see Clark, John (2002): 'Resource Revenues and Political Development in sub-Saharan Africa. Congo Republic in Comparative Perspective'. *Afrika Spectrum*, 37, 1 (2002). pp. 25-41.

million is without doubt far promising in terms of per capita income, and her potential for achieving the MDGs, all things being equal (Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2010)

*Culture, identity* and enduring communal ties may also have an effect on extraction ventures in some regions. Thus in locations where particular identity groups are historically, culturally, and of course, emotionally connected with a resource extraction they would obviously make demands on the central government to give the community its due of the spoil. In southern Chad, and Cameroon where a long oil pipeline had been constructed to connect the Atlantic coast in the Gulf of Guinea, local populations in spite of assurances from both government and company are sceptical about getting their due share of the benefits from oil revenue. Thus, community-based activist in oil-producing African countries are articulating themselves to bring pressure to bear on their governments through the formation of local networks. Historical records have it that some of the bloodiest insurgencies in Africa have taken place in communities or regions bordering on natural resource extraction-enclaves. The cases of the Biafra secessionist war in Nigeria, (1968-1970), the Katanga rebellion in the 1960s, the ongoing crisis in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and the violence and insecurity in many mining communities in Africa are all reminders of how territorial identity and natural resources may rupture into high level political violence and at times bloody civil wars.

Against this background, it must be noted that in cases where oil explorations are mainly based on *onshore drilling* the companies and the central governments are likely to be pressured in meeting such demands as compared to *offshore drilling* which is cut off from local communities. Angola's "offshore oil enclave" remained intact under government's control, while alluvial diamond mining became the main source of a tug of war between government and rebel forces for financing the more than two decades long civil war. Similarly, in Nigeria where about two thirds of oil is onshore from the Niger Delta Region community-based activism has assumed a militant dimension that is challenging the whole oil industry and the wider governance system.

However, the bone of contention in here is the role of ethnicity in shaping politics in oil-rich African countries. Traditionally, within the academia and the news media ethnicity has been identified as the bane of Africa's political and economic woes as it has generally become a "political resource" for regimes facing democratic deficit and progressive erosion of legitimacy. The nature of politics in the petroleum and gas industries, expanding role of both local and international watchdog groups, as well as the broad constellation of the actors involved prompts rethinking ethnicity. The combined effect of globalization, interdependence, information technology, and the far-reaching transformations that have taken place in Africa have resulted in other socio-political and economic spaces. In this sense, ethnicity has become

increasingly 'demutualised' along a line of continuum. In other words, placed on a continuum, ethnicity is adapting to new global realities where day-to-day decisions and choices of individuals and groups are significantly marked by other incentives rather than the ethnic identity they bear and share. This is what the author would prefer to term ethnic 'demutualisation'.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, in attempting to safeguard their interests in a rapidly changing world of globalization, capital, and interdependence, ethnic groups are compelled to embrace or recognise other competing stakeholders. Hence, alternative working concepts such as "strategic group" analysis have been weaved into the debate in order to reveal the true profile, postures and interests of the multi-stakeholders involved in shaping the politics of the petroleum industries in the selected case studies.

In analysing the "resource curse", the key research focus in here is how to identify, interpret and explain in rigorous, systematic and coherent manner how these numerous actors involved relate to each other. In brief, what are the rules of the game? How far do actors conform to or deviate from them? The significance of governance and resource management has become the centrepiece of international institutions now engaging natural resource-rich countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Hyden et al. define "governance as how the rules of the political game are managed", thus giving expression to how actors act and think in formal or informal terms (Hyden, et. al, 2004: 2).

## Country case studies: Explorative Tour d'horizon

### Angola

Angola has most often been described as a "paradox" (Le Billion, 2001). The explanation of this is grounded in interpretations of its rich assets and potential in the areas of socio-cultural diversity, economic and natural resource-wealth that is juxtaposed on alienation and exclusions, war and poverty, mass displacements and social disintegration, among others. In one sense, the country's infant political history has been synonymous with violence and instability that has its roots in the failure of nation-building and social coherence both during the colonial period and after political independence (Lukonde, 2001; Prendergast, 1999; Hodges, 2001; 2004). In another sense, the country has been the object of external ideological rivalry in the context of the Cold War (Gimaraes, 2001). It is a paradox foregrounded by the fact that Angola's foreign dominated oil industry served international markets at a time when ordinary Angolans were caught wedged in a Cold War proxy war, which left more than a million dead, a large section of society decimated and disintegrated, and about an

<sup>9</sup> This does not mean deconstruction of ethnicity.

estimated 2, 6 million internally displaced (James, 2011).

The end of the long anti-colonial war against the Portuguese (1961-1975) was greeted by many Angolans as the dawn of not just freedom but a historical opportunity to improve the livelihood of millions who suffered under the yoke of Portugal's scorched-earth colonial policy. Right from Independence Day on 11, November 1975, Angola had to confront internal power struggle among prevailing nationalist movements;<sup>10</sup> inter-imperialists rivalry for influence in the context of the Cold War, and external aggression at the same time. Barely a year after declaration of political independence did the country get mired in almost a three-decade long civil war that resulted in institutional breakdown and 'dysfunction', social disintegration, and above all, shepherding an enclave oil and gas economy dissociated from the periphery and the wider citizenry. Power and wealth have become conflated creating opportunities and other privileged access to national resources by the few power holders and influential groups and individuals that have connections to the corridors of power in Luanda (Lukonde, 2001; Minter, 1994; Messiant, 2004) and other social networks.

More than a decade after the civil war (which ended in 2002) elite domination of the wider society is gradually becoming a treadmill in Angola's efforts towards restoring democratic order and the rule of law (Le Billon, 2001; Munslow, 1999; Hodges, 2001, Fandrych, 2005; Global Witness, 2002). Having won the civil war, the incumbent Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) 'regime' dictates the pace of on-going democratisation process. The new process has open more spaces for once marginalised social groups while at the same time it has deepened and entrenched interests of already established political actors in the country. Representative democracy is being nurtured along the interests of clients and cronies who profit directly or indirectly from the system undergirded by petrodollars and "executive hegemony". The country's relatively small population also makes it easier for ruling political elites to control and rule via informal structures that co-exists with elaborated but ineffective, inefficient and thereby restricted legal-rational institutions. In the end however, the success of the government's attempt at democratization will also depend on achieving genuine peace and reconciliation after several decades of civil war. Hence, the country's prevailing peace that has been achieved since 2002 through military solution is not sustainable and does not commensurate the basic ideals of democratisation process. Regional pressures such as the struggle for autonomy in the Cabinda province will continue to hunt the central government for some significant span of time (Meijer, 2004; Fandrych, 2005).

The MPLA's military success as the final solution to the over thirty-year nationalist war has emboldened the government to go it alone in its post-war policies with minuscule external interferences from the international community. That the MPLA government could neutralise the influence of the UN and its agencies participation in the country's reconstruction and rehabilitation process raised a lot of suspicion. This particular reason combined with the government's unfettered access to petrodollar will, of course, determine the kind and quality of democracy and governance that will emerge from Angola since the end of the civil war in 2002 (Ricardo, 2007).

But socially disintegrated as it is the very foundation of democracy and good governance had already been severely decimated. The long war had produced and deepened antagonisms, distrust and fear among ethnically different groups. For those mass of people who had been displaced by war and had found new home in shantytowns in Luanda and its surroundings the spectre of squalor and ultimate penury will continue to challenge their democratic aspirations for a long period.

The litmus test of the political challenges facing the country was evidenced by the September 2008 parliamentary elections, and the consequent 2009 presidential elections. In the period between the months of March and June 2008, Human Rights Watch conducted a thorough country research on the current political situation and made sobering revelations. Even though the country is a signatory to some of the international, regional and sub-regional commitments on democracy and human rights such as the international Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, APRM, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, and the Principles and Guidelines Governing Democratic Elections of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), Angola's record thereto makes ridicule of their subscription to those international and regional frameworks (HRW Report, 2008). Crucial domains of the democratic process including freedom of expression and assembly, media access for all political parties are restricted while the existing electoral commission has shirked its independent role and become an extended arm of the executive via a parallel body - the government's Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Electoral Process (CIPE) on which the former depends for most of its "logistical support" (ibid.).

In the last legislative election in early September 2008, the ruling government was accused of large-scale improprieties, which led to a landslide victory. The MPLA won a magnificent 81.73 percent, while its main opponent UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) received 10.38 percent. None of the smaller parties scored more than four percent. The results gave the MPLA one hundred and ninety-one seats in a two hundred and twenty member-parliament. International elections observers concluded that though the elections were peaceful and free, they were not fair (SouthScan.Net, 2008). The opposition UNITA Party cried

<sup>10</sup> The key actors were, UNITA - National Union for the Total Independence of Angola; FNLA - the National Front for the Liberation of Angola; the MPLA - the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola

foul on poor organisation marked by delays in opening of voting precincts, and absence of voters register on elections day at some polling stations. In a swift and unexpected move, the opposition leader Isaias Samakuva accepted defeat and congratulated the MPLA government for their success in a peaceful, but disorganised election, and made a conciliatory call on the government to govern to deepen democracy in the interest of all Angolans. Ten days after the election, the opposition UNITA-Party appealed the decision of the National Electoral Commission in the constitutional court relating to refutation of the election results in Luanda where the alleged malpractices were on a larger scale (Angola Press Agency, 2008). Having accepted defeat with 'unexpected swiftness', may be the 'reluctant' resort to legal measures through the constitutional court is only a camouflage to portray to Angolans and outsiders that the Angolan political system showed a sense of maturity and respect for the rule of law in its recent elections. One could infer from the opposition's goodwill gesture that, may be the lesson from Kenya, Zimbabwe and elsewhere regarding post-elections violence has gone well with Angolans. Also, in a more critical perspective, UNITA has lost its political bases in its strongholds such as Huambo and Bié where it was formerly strong as a rebel group. In a surprise twist of events, the troubled Cabinda region, which is still battling for secession from the mainland voted massively for UNITA. The MPLA's landslide victory has implications for democracy and good governance (The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2005).

Weakened as UNITA might find itself, the only way to secure its political survival is to work closely with the government, and the goodwill gesture shown after the elections is just the beginning of that. Is there an emerging elite pragmatic consensus in Angola? The opposition leader's statement was made at a time when less than eighty percent of the votes casted had been counted. This was also in contradiction of the opposition party's harsh statements and shrilled voice before and in the immediate aftermath of the elections. That apart, this is also an indication of fatigue, as UNITA did not want to use the elections to create any turmoil that might escalate (Angola Press Agency, 2008). Perhaps, it is also Gabon's former President Omar Bongo's crafty stratagem of politics of co-optation and adaptation that is now creeping into the wider Angolan politics, and this is just the beginning. The parliamentary elections and the resulting MPLA majority in parliament have opened the gateway for constitutional engineering, which will determine whether the presidential election is even 'necessary' given the weakened position of the opposition parties after the elections, and the ruling parties open ambitions to establish "intra-party democracy" in Angola. In his new year's address in 2009, the president remained silent on the presidential elections that had been originally scheduled to take place that year. Instead he used extensive part of his time to talk about a new draft constitution that

that ran to about July 2010 (Global Voices, 2009).

To the surprise of many Angolans, however, the Constitutional Review Commission submitted its findings and recommendations to parliament far than expected in January 2010. The new constitution was hurriedly passed through parliament where it enjoyed the ruling MPLA's majority during a voting session where one hundred and eighty-six out of two hundred and twenty voted in favour. The constitution makes provision for a two-five-year term with effect from 2012. It abolished direct presidential elections and empowered parliament to elect the president. The new constitution also scraped the role of a prime minister and empowered the president to appoint his deputy. Should his health cooperate with him President Dos Santos will be at the helm of affairs until the next election of the chief executive by parliament in 2022. In this sense, he would have ruled the country from 1975-2022. Indeed, the new constitution failed to make full commitment to any particular political system, be that presidential or parliamentary system of government, except increasing the powers of the chief executive and strengthening the ruling MPLA's dominance. This targeted engineering of the country's political system was evidenced in the strength gained by the MPLA despite the massive challenge it faced in the subsequent parliamentary election in 2012 whereby it won 71.84 % of votes and one hundred and seventy-five seats. The opposition UNITA won 18.66% with thirty two seats. A new alliance of breakaway stalwarts from UNITA, the Angolan Free Alliance Majority Party, the Angolan Pacific Party, the Party for Democracy and Development in Angola-Patriotic Alliance and the National Salvation Party of Angola – *The Broad Convergence for the Salvation of Angola* could not make full imprints as the political terrain, electoral institutions, access to media resources, party financing, were all in full service of the incumbent MPLA.

Nevertheless, this is also a step toward intra-party democracy, where the opposition UNITA-Party has become a political appurtenance of the ruling MPLA government as it allows its ranks to be divided now and before every election. This has been made possible because of the country's oil economy and the executive's unfettered access to petrodollars, which UNITA also stands to benefit in exchange for loyalty crucially needed by the MPLA. Like their Gabonese counterparts that have succeeded to rule the country for more than four decades due to external support grounded in the Franceafrique relations, political elites in Angola are also today enjoying full support from their Chinese counterparts. Their relations spans across economic, political, and diplomatic spheres in what has increasingly been captioned "Chinafrique" (Adama, 2006)

Ultimately, however, Angola is a post-conflict society that is undergoing multiple processes of political renewal and reconstruction and economic resuscitation. The search for peace and prosperity has however become synonymous with Angola's 'forgotten' national healing,

reconciliation, and social dialogue. Hence, the quests for peace must go beyond the restoration of 'rapport' between just the political parties, and ensure restorative justice among differing communities for sustainable peace and development. This will be in honest fulfilment of the provisions of the Lusaka Protocols, and its addendum (the Luena Memorandum of Understanding signed after the end of war on April 4, 2002 between the MPLA and UNITA), which made solemn references to national reconciliation.

On another plane, China's policy of non-interference on issues regarding human rights and good governance has enabled the government of Angola to steer a path of transition devoid of appropriate institutions and individual rights and freedoms. The Chinese presence has offered alternative sources of investment and oil-backed loans, which had hitherto come from the West with conditionalities attached. Having managed to wean herself from Western pressure, Angola is now shepherding "democracy without the people" (Mattes, 2012: 22-36). The MPLA government, confident of its military victory in 2002 and her recent landslide election victory, has systematically weakened the political space for opposition parties especially the rival UNITA-opposition party, to redefine and resuscitate itself in order to achieve standard political competitive edge. Aware of the financial weakness of all the opposition parties the ruling government has failed to put in place an acceptable legal framework for party financing, and has instead adopted ad hoc measures in the form of subsidies when and where the situation demands (Angola Press Agency, 2007). Within that tacit framework, the government has engineered a system that excludes opposition parties from mainstream political activity thus creating a leeway for the MPLA government, which has become a guardian-autocrat pretending to be leading a transformational process towards achieving political pluralism, peace and prosperity for all Angolans.

Be that as it may, the absence of functioning institutions, parliamentary watchdogs, and coalition partners from constituted political ideologies creates a blind eye, which overlooks issues regarding corruption and other acts of malfeasance. In Angola in particular, institutional growth has been stunted with intent and purpose, with only the military which has enjoyed a steady growth since independence (Hodges, 2001: 64-65). This is especially so in terms of rents the military receives from the government whose existence also depends on the former. From that perspective, military elites have become competing agents for rents and other resources with patronage networks and interest groups and other state institutions (Springer, 1991: 19-31). The military as an instrumental-strategic actor in Angola's political terrain is leaned towards the maintenance of the status quo, and not the traditional custodian of constitutional rule. The national oil company *SONANGOL* and the military industrial complex have become the main arena for seeking jobs and other privileges. They have

become a network for maintaining government loyalty from those members of society profiting from the system.

The victim in this scheme of institutional dominance by the state apparatuses is without any doubt, civil society (AfrolNews, 2007). The government intentionally weakens structures for intra-societal dialogue that may bring pressure to bear on it regarding questions such as parliamentary oversight, accountability and transparency. The political character of the state in turn enables the incumbent to perpetuate its rule for a long period, while paying lip service to institutional reform (Skibble and Vines, 2001: 537-547).

## Chad

Grounded by poverty, harsh geographical environment and diverse ethno-political constellations, the discovery of oil in Chad has raised hopes for improving the social and economic conditions of vast majority of Chadians who lived below the poverty line. However, current social and economic indicators reveal that the country is still tilting against an economy in which poverty indicators are still below average. In 2008 the country was ranked 170th out of one hundred and seventy-seven countries based on their economic and social indicators as published by the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index<sup>11</sup>. By 2013, the country ranked 184<sup>th</sup> out of 187 countries against comparable data. Despite the flow of oil revenue since 2003, the country lost three points compared to the 2004 index. The 2005 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked the country at the bottom of one hundred and fifty-nine. In 2008, the country ranked one hundred and seventy-three with a low regime trustworthiness of 1.5-1.7, and exhibited a high corruption perception index score of 1.6 (Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, 2005 and 2008). The high expectations from within and without the country brought by oil is however, dampened by the chequered political history of the country marked by its colonial heritage, fragile foundations of nation building, lack of internal political cohesion and elite consensus, extreme dependence on a handful of raw commodities (Arditi and Hankey, 1991; Géraud, 2000), and in the recent past, its role as the locus of rivalry by international oil majors. In 2012 the country was ranked 163 as highly corrupt among 174 countries (Transparency International Corruption Perception Index).

However, internally, if one juxtaposes the structure of political power, the state bureaucracy, the armed forces and elite parochial nationalism on the ethno-political and religious diversity of Chad then the root causes of the

<sup>11</sup> See also, Bertelsmann's Transformation Index 2012: Chad Country Report. Bertelsmann's Stiftung, Gütersloh.

crisis that has engulfed the country since independence must equally be examined in seeking knowledge about the trajectory of its political development under current democratic dispensation since 1990. Nevertheless, the search for historical knowledge does not portend to circumscribing the future of the Central African country to its violent political past. The events in Chad, like any other country undergoing transformation, are shaped by the spirit of the time. Notwithstanding, the core of the argument is that in any transformation processes, there are changes and continuities, but there are also vestiges of the past that may recur to affect current political dispensations in one way or the other. As one analyst has noted "to understand states and their world, it is important to take full measure of the grey area, to study state projects that fail as well as those that succeed. Political science cannot content itself with studying the rules and institutions of successful, stable states as its principal vocation" (Nolutshungu, 1996). The biggest political challenge facing Chad is the violent, recursive political character of the state. It is a situation that has been marked in the past and in the present by autocracy, fragmentation and factionalism, insurgency and counter insurgency, Cold War intrigues and external interventions, aid dependency, and mass dislocation of victims of political violence, mostly civilians, women and children (Nolutshungu, 1996; Thomson et al., 1981; Bouquet, 1982; Buijtenhuids, 1978; Reyna, 2002; Azevedo et al., 1998).

The current focus on Chad is not only about ensuring transparency in matters involving oil revenue receipts and expenditures by the government, but also about the quest for appropriate system of governance that would provide the requisite framework for creating the political space for both state and society to relate harmoniously towards achieving economic development, especially in the difficult task of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs; Publish What You Pay, 2004; Republic of Chad National Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, 2001). The two challenges are mutually reinforcing. Landlocked, cash-strapped, factionalised, fragmented, and capacity-feeble, Chad could hardly make any headway towards development without steady flow of cash into national coffers (Massey and May 2009). It is also an issue that borders on the capacity of a country to engage external actors in a proactive manner, attract foreign investment, and coordinate its policies to attain both economic and political development after its 'sovereignty' had been under 'surveillance' by external and regional powers in the larger part of its existence as an independent state (Hagströmer and Eriksson, 2005).

The largest investment in Africa, which took expression in the construction of US\$3.7 billion, 1070 kilometres Chad-Cameroon underground oil pipeline was under the auspices of the World Bank in conjunction with ExxonMobil with forty percent capital shareholding, PETRONAS Malaysia thirty-five percent, Chevron twenty-five percent, and a combined share of three percent for

the governments of Chad and Cameroon secured in the form of loans from the World Bank.<sup>12</sup> Other vital players in the country's oil sector include Total, Shell, and Perenco.

Chad's new found wealth has presented another challenge in trying to chart the course of its national interests pitted against oil super majors such as Chevron and ExxonMobil with a long period of experience and global outreach in the oil industry (Basedau, 2005; Reyna, 2007; Council on Foreign Relations, 2006). The country's nascent national oil company, Société des Hydrocarbures du Tchad (SHT)<sup>13</sup> lacks the expertise to represent her interests closely and monitor big company activities explains how vulnerable the country is positioned in that constellation of competitive actors. The problem is also rooted in 'illusion' of nation building. The reconstitution of the state in Chad like any other process of seeking national consciousness and nation building "depends on whether its people cohere, or can come to cohere politically as a people...and central to it are collective deliberation and action, and the reciprocal recognition by members of each one's entitlement to participate" (Nolutshungu, 1996) which are indeed the foundation for any democratic leap forward.

In the past, Chad's tortuous attempts to overcome its chronic ungovernableness have also been made impossible (among others) by its lack of requisite economic foundation that would have linked the economically buoyant south with the 'desolate' north in order to break the deep-rooted natural ecological inequality between them (Decalo, 1997; Nolutshungu, 1996). Nevertheless, oil revenue could be utilised to offer human intervention in the form of 'affirmative action' for the 'northern poor' in terms of free access to education, health, and other national resources and utilities that would equally contribute to winnowing down the volatile north-south dichotomy. The discovery of oil in Chad has provided the opportunity this time around, but the ultimate goal for economic emancipation and democratic consolidation will depend on the things political and economic entrepreneurs do with power and influence. Hence, policymaking now and in the foreseeable future must be designed to propel the country from its inordinate political past, reduce poverty and disentangle from forlorn towards achieving an equilibrium that would bring all and sundry on board the democratic process.

The case of Chad provides important insights about how to ensure equilibrium between foreign investment in natural resource sectors in Africa and elsewhere, and the internal political ramifications of a natural resource-rich country. This entails the ability of the various stakeholders

<sup>12</sup> Chad-Cameroon Oil Pipeline Project. A study tool and case study. Developed by Dr. J. Paul, Martin, SIPA & the Center for New Media Teaching and Learning with the assistance of Gina, Gagnon and Jamie, Ciesl. Access Resource: <http://www.columbia.edu/itc/sipa/martin/chad-cam/overview.html#project>

<sup>13</sup> Created by legal No. 27/PR/2006 of 23 August 2006



to grasp the realities of the socio-economic, political and historical experience of the host country (Global Policy Forum, 2000; The World Bank, 2003). For the WB to embark on such a gigantic investment in Chad based solely on the 'goodwill' of the country's political entrepreneurs, and even going to the extent of dubbing the project a 'model' is indeed not just a misnomer, but an open disjuncture of the Bank from the political realities in fragmented and factionalised environment such as Chad (The World Bank Group - Inspection Panel Investigation Report, 2002; Gould JM and Winters M 2012). Not surprisingly, the WB in September 2008 took the painful decision to temporarily halt the oil pipeline deal with Chad after the latter has defaulted on its obligations to reduce poverty, invest in education and revamp the deplorable state of the country's healthcare system. Bolstered by high oil prices, Chad was able to offset the outstanding balance of US\$65.7 million being part of a US\$140 million owed to the WB. By late summer 2008, Chad had already earned a record high US\$1.4 billion in oil revenue, and has since enjoyed steady oil revenue.<sup>14</sup> Contrary to dismal revenue prediction of US\$2.5 billion covering a projected lifespan of 25-30 years, oil revenue hovered around US\$10 billion by the second decade thanks to steady oil prices. All that international stakeholders of the oil project could do is to make fresh attempts to prod the Government of Chad back on track in another round of diplomatic negotiations.

Indeed, ruling political elites in Chad have prevailed not just over the WB and the multi-stakeholders of the project but also over democracy, the rule of law, and good governance. As one writer has argumentatively and conclusively opined, the Chad-Cameroon Oil Development Project can be more aptly described as an "experiment" since it is the beginning of a long learning process (Basedau, 2005). Others such as Erikson and Hagströmer (2005) have concluded that oil revenue in Chadian politics is a vehicle for institutionalising "neopatrimonialism, clientelism and authoritarianism" that ultimately weakens civil society and help consolidate the political centre, which is controlled by a clique of elites.

Thus far, the proven political character of the Chadian state since it began to pump oil is evidential of consolidating the ruling dominant Patriotic Salvation Movement (PSM) in the form of intraparty democracy by co-opting opposing political parties and strategic social and economic networks into its fold. This process has been facilitated by the government's unfettered access to petrodollars. Hence, in Chad "Bongoism" as exists in Gabon in the past four decades is gradually taking roots despite the 'hostile' political environment. The case of Chad in its current context also informs us that 'lack of institutions' as an explanation for the 'resource curse' might not be always sustaining. This is because the country's nascent oil industry has been furnished with

state-of-the-art institutions at all levels of interaction among its multiple stakeholders right from inception. Accordingly, the case of Chad also evinces the fact that institutions without committed stewardship are nothing but empty expressions for ordering interagency interaction and micro-macro relations.

Unfettered access to petrodollars has consolidated "executive hegemony" as the distribution of power, structure of power relations, open access to economic opportunities, and even citizenship have become closely wired in the 'DNA' of the country's complex ethnic and religious configuration while the new infrastructure boom benefits the capital N'Djamena to the neglect of oil producing regions in the south (BTI, 2012; Gould and Winters, 2012).

As indicated above, Chad presents a case where external pressure for democratisation and economic reform has succeeded to put in place robust institutions and a reform process towards natural resource development, management and poverty reduction.<sup>15</sup> The country's oil resources have placed under special international and local surveillance where state and non-state actors have interacted to prevent Chad from undergoing a similar fate in most oil-rich countries where natural resource wealth has been more of a 'curse than a blessing'. The agreement establishing the oil development project was passed in 1999 by Chad's national parliament and encoded in the Petroleum Revenue Management Law with the basic goal to ensure transparency in the country's oil industry. The agreement stipulates that the Chadian government's share of 12.5% of the proceeds from oil production will be kept in a London-based Citibank escrow account under the strict tutelage of an independent body - Petroleum Revenue Oversight and Control Committee, also called the *collège*.<sup>16</sup> Only the *Collège* can authorise the Director General of the State Budget's request for withdrawal based on the legal procedures stipulated in the Finance Law. Other regulatory and oversight bodies include the Financial Controller of the Ministry of Finance and Economy, and the Auditor General of the Supreme Court and the Parliament.<sup>17</sup> In addition, a "future generation fund" was created to absorb ten percent of annual revenue to be used in a post-oil Chad economy when

<sup>15</sup> US Congress: The Chad-Cameroon Pipeline: A Model for Natural Resource Development. Hearing before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, One Hundred and Seventh Congress, second session, April 18, (2002). Washington : U.S. G.P.O.

<sup>16</sup> GROUPE DE RECHERCHES ALTERNATIVES ET DE MONITORING DU PROJET PÉTROLE TCHAD-CAMEROON (GRAMP-TC) - Action pour un développement humain et social durable: Pourquoi Le GRAMP/TC. see webpage - [http://www.gramptc.org/Activites/pourquoi\\_le\\_gramp.htm](http://www.gramptc.org/Activites/pourquoi_le_gramp.htm) and GROUPE DE RECHERCHES ALTERNATIVES ET DE MONITORING DU PROJET PÉTROLE TCHAD-CAMEROON (GRAMP-TC) [http://www.gramptc.org/Activites/pourquoi\\_le\\_gramp.htm](http://www.gramptc.org/Activites/pourquoi_le_gramp.htm)

<sup>17</sup> Proclaimed at N'djamena, January 11, 1999. LAW NUMBER 016/PR/2000. AN AMENDMENT TO LAW 001/PR/99 OF JANUARY 11, 1999, REGARDING THE MANAGEMENT OF OIL REVENUES. [http://www.cfr.org/publication/10532/chads\\_oil\\_troubles.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/10532/chads_oil_troubles.html)

<sup>14</sup> BBC REPORT. End to World Bank's Chad oil deal. 10 September 2008

reserves are exhausted. The oil-producing region of Eastern Logone receives five percent of the royalties, while fifteen percent royalties and dividends are funnelled into a federal government treasury including non-regulated taxes. Any remaining funds are to be earmarked for development of "priority sectors" such as public works, health, education, rural development, and environmental projects.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, how just a cash-strapped and rebellion-ridden Chad could keep its commitments to the agreement was a matter of time.

However, current political trends in that land-locked central African state reveal that Chad's political entrepreneurs have failed to learn from the harsh challenges of nature and diversity, and the deleterious consequences thereof. The government of Idriss Déby has engineered the country's constitution and has created a political playing field that is highly inimical to open democratic competition. As already stated, this step was taken to the chagrin of international stakeholders who have committed billions of dollars of investment capital in the country's oil and gas industry. The paradox of Chad is that, while these stakeholders chastise Chad for her democratic and human rights deficit, the same powers have beefed up the security of the regime to defend it from falling into the hands of a possible non-Western pariah regime or even China, which they might not be able to control (Miles, 1995).

Contestation to office at the various levels of state institutions, especially the state bureaucracy and the civil services becomes the main arena for seeking job opportunities for political functionaries and people with special relationships to the central government. In a systematic effort to weaken and neutralise the *Collège* President Déby filled the oil revenue oversight commission, with his trusted allies including his brother-in-law, and even took a farther step to steer the selection of civil society members to the commission. In this sense, presidential interference has weakened the *Collège* to function properly, thus allowing the incumbent to manipulate the budgeting process, avoid investigations into misappropriation of expenditures, and influence the selection and approval of projects, which are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the independent *Collège* (AfricaFocus Bulletin, 2005; Gould and Winters 2012). This is attributable to fragmentation of government and institutional weakness in terms of checks and balances. Weakening opposition parties by intent enables incumbent to shirk their responsibility and the accountability they owe the citizenry. The struggle by civil society in oil-rich Chad for transparency and fair distribution of the nation's resources becomes an illusion. The result is apathy that secludes large segment of the populace from participation in national politics (ibid). As in many 'petrocratic' states the Déby regime has cemented its dominance in Chadian state and society, thanks to

unfettered access to petrodollars that has enabled the dominant ruling party to prevail during parliamentary and presidential elections. During the 2011 presidential election, the ruling Patriotic Salvation Movement (PSM) won a landslide 83.59% while the two main opposition parties obtained less than nine percent. The ability of the PSM to divide and confuse the ranks of the opposition is evidenced by the large number of opposition parties in the country as they are no longer capable of any formidable contest to the highest office of the land. Alternatively, is it the case that institutions in Chad will be allowed to function without the extended arms of the dinosaur executive after the country's fragile security ecology begins to improve? In brief, how will Chadian politics look like when oil reaches its limited life span?

### Gabon

The trajectory of politics in Gabon's post-independence history is characterised by personalities and "big man" ties that systematically smothered the growth of democracy and the rule of law in that central African country. The power wrangling that finally brought El Hadj Omar Bongo Odimba to power in 1967 and his accession to the highest seat of government laid the foundation for the idiosyncratic political character of the Gabonese state. Before then, his rapid rise in several state apparatuses had been facilitated more by his political acumen for seeking personal favours, and his own ability to reward others on both achievement and merit. However, in the main, Bongo's political successes have also been enhanced by the former colonial power France's unquenchable determination to sustain neo-colonial domination in the state, economy and the military (Gardiner, 1993). Even though his predecessor bequeathed a polarised and antagonised state and society, President Bongo had the opportunity of his lifetime to establish a unified state devoid of acrimony and rancour between the rule and ruled. Instead, he took a half-baked step by combining a policy of reconciliation with an authoritarian rule. Thus, his political reforms combined a policy of continuity and change focusing on re-engineering of party and state institutions, and creating a personal affection for society, all designed to prop up his personal rule (Yates, 2005). His more than four decades of rule had ultimately laid the foundation of a Bongo dynasty as power was transferred from father to son after the untimely death of President Omar Bongo in June 2009.

It is undeniable that governance in Gabon has become anachronistic in a rapidly growing world of globalization, complex networking and the increasing challenges posed by political governance (Yates, 2005). The failure of democratic governance in Gabon is also in a large measure the failure to harness the creative energies and talents of Gabonese society, which is to say the foundation of its faceted development (Aicardi de Saint

<sup>18</sup> COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS. Chad's oil Troubles. By Carin, Zissis (Staff writer). April 27 2006.

Paul, 1989). Democracy and governance in Gabon reveals how important the roles of external actors are in shaping events in far-flung territories. We have witness how the withdrawal of external support to authoritarian regimes led to their crumble and dismantle at the end of the Cold War. Gabon's narrow escape from this 'epochal fatalism' thanks to petrodollars does not however mean that all other countries blessed with oil and minerals and are enjoying big power support in the current frenzy for Africa would be immune to the democratic revolution that was set rolling at the end of the Cold War (Yates, 2005).

Gabon's experience is unique, and it is rooted in her socio-political and historical development that has been epitomised in Franco-African relations (Françeafrrique) since political independence from colonial rule. Indeed, Omar Bongo is one of the last doyens of that neo-colonial relation in Francophone Africa (Barnes, 1992). Being well adept with seeking close external allies and patrons, President Bongo succeeded in luring China to the country's large manganese deposits where contracts have been concluded right under the auspices of the president and excluded the already weakened opposition and civil society groups (Gabon News, 2007). The narrow anchorage of the regime within the span of society and politics makes it difficult to predict any radical turn-around in a post-Bongo era. Genuine democratization and the search for good governance in Gabon are yet to be implanted in the country. Omar Bongo's peculiar way of political entrepreneurship that enabled him rule his country for more than four decades is increasingly becoming attractive to many oil-producing countries in Africa. It promotes elitist domination, breeds corruption, and creates a socio-political distortion that undermines the logical functioning of existing institutions (Yates, 2005). "Bongoism" has produced one of the most coherent and enduring intraparty relations in the African continent, of course thanks to petrodollars. The system has also become attractive to many oil-rich African states not only because of the peace dividend it has yielded in the past forty-two years but also more because the dominant ruling party has become a vehicle for promoting and fulfilling elite political and business interests. Society in turn has been moulded to be dependent on presidential philanthropy and largesse thus deepening and strengthening the foundations of a paternalistic and patronage relations. On the other hand, the country's foreign relations and diplomacy with oil thirsty great powers had become increasingly rationalised at the cost of good governance.

More than five decades of French tutelage and patronage helped established a one-man neo-patrimonial rule that enabled Omar Bongo to remain griped on the country's socio-political setting, state institutions, and political processes that were set in motion at the end of the Cold War to promote political pluralism. Without any doubt, this has been made possible by a paternal relationship that has existed between Gabon and France

since the post-independence period (Gardinier, 1993). The incumbent PDG (Gabonese Democratic Party) operates a well-engineered political party machine with the ultimate objective to distort and weaken democratic competition. The PDG and its leadership core interact in the country's political community with all the intent to make state institutions dysfunctional and highjack their constitutional role. The powerful presidency epitomised in the personality and authority of Omar Bongo (and now his son) applies state resources in the form of economic rents to achieve co-optation and corruption of opposition members who might pose a threat to his power base. Modern institutions established to enhance the country's democratic transition and socio-economic transformation are fleeced of their power bases, duties, and responsibilities through government interventions that target their financial and operational independence. Despite media independence as guaranteed by the constitution, the government operates its own censoring council, the National Communication Council (CNC), empowered to arbitrarily ban media operators whose news publications are critical, not only of government policies, but which also directly attack ruling party's functionaries (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2007). The Bongo dynasty democratic style survives under the nose of its influential external actors, who tolerate African constitutional dictators for the sake of their own national interest to the detriment of human rights, democracy and good governance they claim to promote.

### **Crude Entanglements: Democratization Process in Oil-Dependent African Countries - Trespassed Tampered and Twisted?**

The synthesis of the above theoretical and conceptual insights juxtaposed on the case studies could make sense of the fact that two decades of socio-economic and political transformations in Africa have produced a potpourri of results. There are convergences, divergences and contradictions at the same time. Oil rich-African states do hold periodic elections but their results are most of the time contrary to generally accepted standards and norms of democracy and good governance. The discourse on construction of the democratic reality is often confounded by personalisation of power and leadership, and the resulting semantic contagion associated with state-of-the-art description and analyses of the democratic enterprise in Africa. The hard path of democratisation in Africa as warped in conditions of poverty, ethnic and regional tension, and weak government institutional capacities cannot be denied. In one of his series of testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relation Subcommittee on African Affairs, the then Assistant Secretary of State, Barry F. Lowenkron after three decades of service in the Department observed that:

"We fully recognize, however, that democracy promotion is not chemistry. You cannot concoct democracy using a formula. Three interrelated elements are however, essential to any democracy. One element, of course, is elections. Democratic elections are one of the important milestones on the long journey of democratization. But a free election is not a fair election if in the run-up to Election Day the playing field is not level because the political process is manipulated and basic rights are undermined. A second element must be present for democracy to work: good governance, including the rule of law. And the third essential element in a democracy is a robust civil society that can keep government honest, keep citizens engaged, and keep democracy-building on track. In a fully functioning democracy anywhere in the world, all three elements must be present: electoral, institutional and societal" (Lowenkron, 2007).

However, it should also be noted that the growth of civil society networks worldwide has enabled internal democratic forces to bring some pressure to bear on hitherto impregnable authoritarian regimes to open up for broad-based government that accommodates other competing stakeholders and constituencies. The intensification of relations between local agents and foreign capital has also opened up new spaces for change under current democratic dispensations (Nkwachukwu, 2009). These transformational breakthroughs will not help overcome Africa's internal political contradictions overnight. Some of the existing stumbling blocks may remain down the road for some time.

Generally, ethnicity has been one of the main ideologies and strategic instruments for political entrepreneurs in Africa, who have utilized it in achieving their political ambitions in both manifest and latent ways. This created polarisations and marginalization in many societies, which consequently resulted in crisis of political legitimacy, raised question tags on territorial sovereignty of many countries, and brought hold-ups and functional stalemates in the political systems of many African countries. Africa's external partners have also beefed up their part of the bargain on restoring democratic rule in the continent, of course not without conditionalities. The United States under President George W. Bush made "promotion of democracy abroad" his priority and one of the major pillars of his national security strategy. (U.S. National Security Strategy, September 2002.) However, this has not completely weakened hitherto dominant political forces in the new systems of governance that have so far emerged in many African countries. There is common sense in this scheme of things. Some have embraced democratic reforms not for the sake of any normative claims but as a crafty and meticulous response to the pressures of their external partners who are also in the main their key donors whose assistance they cannot relinquish today or in the foreseeable future (Alex de Waal, 2002). Spurred by their inclination for energy security concerns, external actors may have

enough reason to remain reticence as oil-rich African countries trample on democratic values.

African states are pursuing an intricate labyrinth process of democratisation the course and contours of which are difficult to predict. While some countries such as Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa and Tanzania have made some 'irreversible' achievements, others have taken 'a one-step-forward two-steps-backwards approach' in shaping democratic governance in their countries. Some of the choices made by African elites that have run parallel to the popular will of the governed have taken the form of constitutional amendments by incumbents to elongate their term of office (Chad, Angola) or ruling elites are using calculated transitional tactics and methods to entrench their power bases and create monopolistic centres of power that could weaken opposition groups in any future scheme of genuine democratic dispensation (Angola, Chad, Gabon). These countries have assumed the character of benevolent dictators who utilizes sovereign resources to create personal and clientele ties to win the hearts and minds of some sections of society, create fear and insecurity in others, and then pounces on their fear and anxiety acting as a liberator, a godfather, and a man of peace.

This means that Africa's democracy as it exists in many countries in the continent deviates from basic democratic benchmarks. Key ingredients of democratic growth and development such as free pluralist political parties, bill of rights, free speech and free press, checks and balances, a robust rule of law, and independent judiciary have all in one way or the other become 'atrophied' (Shapiro, 2003) or deviated from standard democratic practices. Symptomatic of the prevailing political structures and process is the exercise of political power that is fleeced of its institutional architectures, as parliaments, the judiciary and other related institutions becomes an extended arena for executive control. Political parties are not broad-based and lack programmatic mission and vision to steer the country out of its social, economic and political woes. Current developments at the global level (insatiable demand for natural resources) have also factored in to shape the already crooked trajectory of democratization in natural resource-rich African countries.

Increasing global population and attendant demand for natural resources by new comers such as Brazil, China, and India have given African regimes with direct access to those resources a new political leverage. This has bolstered some countries to act independently of those external pressures that guided the transition processes in many African countries in the 1990s. The heads of states of Angola, Chad and Gabon have increasingly become 'immutable' in their political citadels. Be that as it may, the fight against global terror, and the scramble for Africa's resources such as oil, gas, and strategic minerals by powerful external actors may also reverse some of the democratic gains that have been achieved so far in some

countries such as Angola and Chad where there are scarcely credible traits of genuine democratic practices in their short but conflict laden political history since independence from colonial rule.

Hence, oil wealth and sustained elite unfettered access to the revenue that accrues therefrom has enabled the 'dinosaur executive' branches of government to micromanage whole country's resources via illegitimate political channels. On another plane, external actors are openly resorting to pragmatism in their engagement with oil-rich African countries that are still at the infant stages of nurturing democratic governance. The crudest version of that pragmatism is symbolised in China's foreign policy towards Africa, whereby political and economic conditionalities for good and appropriate system of governance are far wanting. In this way China is posturing herself as 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, whereby the respective European powers adopted hardnosed stances and denied the colonies basic rights and liberties despite their claims to such values in the metropolitan – for the French for example, the values *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* ended on the shores of the Mediterranean while war, plunder, mass atrocities and killings prevailed in many of the colonies. The risks associated with external actors grab for natural resources are easy to decipher (Alden, 2007). The securitization of energy resources and its integration into foreign policies of external actors may likely evoke military adventurism in protection of their national interests, which also implies beefing up the security architectures of their African allies. However, if increasing securitization is steadily accompanied by institutions, transparent and responsible politicking and respect for the rule of law, strengthening African military capacity will make sense as the challenges of insecurity and acts of banditry are far beyond the reach of many African countries (Olympio, 2011).

But it is also worth questioning how democracy in Africa is evolving in an environment where the number of stakeholders and constituencies in the continent's political landscape has been expanding in the past two decades. As already pointed out, the key investigative goal of this work is to assess how increasing wealth from natural resources are impacting Africa's infant and fragile democracies and governance structures including overcoming the 'overarching challenges' of poverty, exclusions and inequalities. The evidence from Angola, Chad, and Gabon has yielded the conviction that elites are far away from creating the democratic spaces for oil wealth to trickle down to the wider society. Many of the policies of African states since the past two decades or so have been designed with external assistance to reduce poverty, promote political inclusion and social dialogue in fragmented societies, work towards gender equality in government, the workplace and schools, and fight disease. African states have expressed their commitments in several national, regional and interna-

tional fora to implement their part of that deal as enshrined in the MDGs; the APRM; the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance among others.

On the contrary, a close look at the state machinery and the strategies they have deployed in the past two decades are shrouded in secrecy and distortions. Consequently, there have emerged 'islands of states within states' some of whose members enjoys full democratic and human rights, have unhindered access to state resources, could afford expensive education for their families, have easy access to the best health facilities, and last but certainly not least, they are given full protection by the national courts and security systems. The process of this state formation within a state combines well-tooled strategies such as co-optation and corruption, rewards, open access to opportunities such as jobs, contracts, investment credits, and other government related procurements. These are of course, a quid pro quo for unwavering loyalty to the ruling government. For example, provincial and regional governors in most oil-rich African states such as Angola, Chad and Gabon exercise political power according to their personal impulsion and conceit. The political centre condones and connives as this is also informal means of power sharing; and more so because those constituencies are the conveyor belts of a complex patron-clients network.

The poor record of democratic practice and habituation in many oil-producing African countries is a vindication of how ruling elites in these countries have embraced democracy but thinks and acts contrarily and arbitrarily in the political praxis. As one writer has observed "opposition parties are told in effect that they may contest elections, but on terms dictated by their masters. Civil society, for all its growing importance in social and economic life, is similarly told to know its place when it comes to constitutional matters. Some nongovernmental organisations may enjoy influence in high places, but virtually all are required to register their existence, as if groups in society gain their legitimacy from the state rather than the other way round" (Pinkney, 2003). These calculated stumbling blocks have almost virtually squelch civil society action to be circumscribed only to challenging authoritarian regimes, and could scarcely spur any influence to enhance democratic consolidation. In the end, weakened as it is, civil society activity in Angola, Chad, and Gabon has been reduced to community self-help projects and creation of awareness about contending political issues and problems (*ibid.*)

The political consequences of this state of affairs tot up that there is a weakened 'social contract' in the African democracy project as it has evolved to include specific constituencies and strategic stakeholders to the detriment of other competing forces. From its inception, the democratic projects of Angola, Chad, and Gabon have evinced fractures in their respective social contracts that

have been consciously designed to the exclusion of a large section of society. Conscious because the wealth that is accruing to the state in terms of external rents is limited and this puts distributional pressures on governments who are also unfortunately not prepared to ensure equity and social justice in order for all to benefit from the national cake. Their monopoly of political power also logically creates incentives for them to monopolise economic wealth. Dominant elites and powerful social networks in turn form strategic coalitions in order to benefit from the informal distributional system. One of the few remaining options for them within that scheme of things is to seek loyalty and legitimacy via patronage and clientele relations from some sections of society. In West African parlance the game has become a 'one-man-chop', which comes from a popular adage 'one man no chop',<sup>19</sup> while the majority are left in the political wilderness to perish. This adage also conveys the meaning and the reason why African societies are relatively predisposed to patronage relations and networks, which are also spurred by acute scarcity of resources and the complex diversity of lobbying. Indeed, this is one of the fundamental obstacles, among many others, why civil society actors in Africa have in the past succeeded in challenging authoritarian regimes but have performed woefully in influencing the struggle for democratic habituation and consolidation after restoring pluralism. The question however remains - will that change if African states succeed in creating abundant resources and wealth? This is difficult to determine. However, the current state of Africa's political economy marked and at times marred by elite domination, and flanked by pervasive group interests and foreign capital provides adequate knowledge to opine that there is indeed a process of formation of strategic social networks and groups that have also become the underlying forces benefiting from strategic resources. This development is also characteristic of the transitional processes that were set in motion at the end of the Cold War. The transitions to democracy were no collective bargain since even in cases where national conferences were held (Benin) to agree on a common national consensus the processes had from its inception been dominated by elites who later adopted ad hoc measures as a balancing act to include the wider society, however limited. The transitions in themselves, and the measures adopted by dominant elites (formal and informal) for inclusion in the political system have contributed to reconfiguration of actors, and pursuance of their strategic interests using different instruments at their disposal. This has broad implications on how day-to-day political transaction is carried out by

political entrepreneurs and other social and economic agents, actors, and influential constituencies.

### **A Paradigm Shift Towards "Strategic Group Analysis?"**

The kind of governance system or democracy that would be achieved in African countries that have access to large quantities of minerals, oil and natural gas, and are undergoing a process of democratisation would have far-reaching implications for overcoming endemic problems such as poverty, inequality, social exclusions and marginalisation. The socio-cultural, historical and political context of these countries also contributes to shaping the political economy of natural resource exploitation and production, wealth distribution patterns, inter-generational transfer of political power, and in the end the political character of the state and its core elites. The transformations that are occurring at the local, national, regional and global levels have of course, challenged established foundations of social science, which for a long period had been dominated by functionalists, Structuralists, and culturalists research cannons (Wicker, 1997). The spirit of globalisation, transnationalisation and interdependence, including their myriad socio-political appendages have revolutionised the nation-state and how it relates to capital, and instilled new meanings in once static systems of understanding human action. In the not distant past, ethnicity and ethnic coalitions have been one of the many instruments used by political elites in allocating resources and other social benefits in many ethnically diverse states. The rapid transformation of society has however, weakened the ethnic content of social relations as old and new social actors become reconfigured in a rapidly changing world to compete against the established order, in order to address both their immediate and long-term needs. Key concepts such as ethnic group, identity and nation are undergoing an irreversible transformation in a globalised world. As one writer has observed, "there is no such thing as an ethnic, cultural, or national essence; formations which appear as ethnic groups, as cultures, or as nations should no longer be considered as supra-subjective wholes that generate and determine human action. Instead, they should be interpreted as the products of history; therefore as resulting from concrete acts that are motivated by people's interests" (ibid). From this position, ethnicity is placed on a continuum with an inherent recursive device that keeps on transforming itself into adaptable social formations.

Theoretically, therefore, there is a "radical shift from the given to the constructed" as key societal agencies and practices becomes the direct results of human action. On this particular point, the long scientific debate about statism has been "deconstructed", crumbled, and given way to manoeuvrable spaces for social actions and their relations to other equally larger domains of the state

<sup>19</sup> In West African pigeon English that insecurity is summed up in the popular saying, 'one man no chop'. The 'chop' in this lexicalised sentence structure is obviously not the act of cutting by using any sharp tool, but rather the egoistic, peculiar mannerism of appropriating to oneself what is perceived to be public wealth.

(ibid.). Similarly, the notion of identity is also no longer circumscribed or restrained by the individual's socialization, but the results of social interaction and communication during times when social actors pursue and negotiate their interests. This has rendered the notion an 'innate impulsive' character for change. This internal capacity to transform has set rolling a dynamic process that is also affecting our perceptual judgement about reality, as whole systems are reduced to specific domains and fields of enterprise (ibid).

The debate in this work is however, no attempt to dethrone ethnicity. As Rothchild (1981) has warned, it would be wishful thinking to argue that ethnicity is losing its political significance; it has always been with us and it will continue to be with us. At least in the prevailing state-of-the-art one will agree with Osaghae's conclusions that call for among others theorising the ethnic arena as a formal political realm for influencing state decisions and actions, and as a "principle of state organisation and a resource for political competition" (Osaghae, 2004). This has wider implications. From this perspective political institutions involved in day-to-day political entrepreneurship would also have to be re-examined. This obviously brings us to question the role of political parties in the African democracy project. The ethnic question of course, impacts party organisation and competition, which in the end obscure genuine democratic growth, especially if one attempts to study, assess and evaluate democracy using universally accepted benchmarks some of which may repudiate the theoretical precepts of ethnicity and identity. As a matter of fact, we have all talked much about African democracy without having given adequate research attention to the African political party system from a cross-country perspective given its unique contextual characteristics grounded in the socio-cultural and historical experience of African states (Basedau, 2007; Posner, 2005). In an attempt to whip up alternative methodology for explaining ethnicity and its impact on governance structures we have to locate and focus research attention on those aspects of ethnicity that bear a transformative potential for generating new spaces for open competition among competing and rivalling social, economic and political stakeholders in a transitional democratic environment.

The causes of ethnic conflict may be many and varied, cutting through political, social and economic domains of human endeavour. As the Rwandan genocide has taught us, the complexity of the ethnic question was also made clear by the fact that, in the leadership core of the ruling party's Interahamwe Movement during the genocide against minority Tutsi, there were not only Hutus but also Tutsi politicians, namely Robert Kayuga (Strizek, 1996) and Froduald Karamir (International Herald Tribune, 1997), who condoned and connived with the majority Hutu leadership. The core of the problem is that, group identities are not the causes of ethnic conflicts, but the prevalence of political power struggle and distributive

challenges and consequences of economic struggle for resources among competing political actors, different 'identity groups', which are categorised and at times dichotomised along the lines of their ethnic peculiarities. Thus, the multifaceted character of ethnicity renders futile any attempt at generalisations about it.

Hence, in the African continent what one common strand has emerged on the concept of ethnicity is some form of "social pluralism" that has become the main 'spoke' in interest differentiation and representation of the subject matter of which is also at the heart of politics. Thus, ethnic considerations are able to permeate the decision and policy apparatuses of governments when one social group is differentiated or excluded from one another, such that there is in one sense or the other a form of contestation within a particular nation-state. It is this "contested ethnicity that is of particular interest to political scientists" (Thomson, 2003). It is worthy of note that despite the nationalist leanings of the independence movements in Africa a large number of elites did oscillate between nationalism and their ethnic repertoire. This has made ethnicity an enduring concept in African political life. Hence, the "resilience of ethnicity as both a paradigm and politics, ideology and reality in Africa is one of few apparent continental continuities since independence...once ethnicity becomes entangled with the politics of production and distribution, famine and fortune, it moves away from the orthodox definition and agenda as supplementary social relationships into primary political and economic determinants; from nationalism into nations" (Shaw, 1986). A plethora of studies have concluded that political entrepreneurs mobilise political and other resources during national elections by using both structural and ethno-linguistic, and ethno-racial resources to gain access to the political centre. However varying ethnic and racial indicators may be, a cross-national representative survey of political and social values conducted in 1999-2001 in twelve countries in Sub-Saharan Africa revealed that "ethnicity is a significant predictor of party support in most, though not all African societies...and the strength of this association varies cross-nationality, with linkages strongest in societies divided by many languages...while playing insignificant role in African countries where ethno-linguistic groups are more homogenous, (and though)...structural explanation are limited: evaluations of the policy performance of the party in government also influenced party support, even with prior social controls" (Norris and Mattes, 2003).

The core programme of current literature that calls for conceptual review of ethnicity does not however, challenge the somehow 'monolithic character' of ethnicity. In the main it has been an attempt to explain, and in that sense reiterate the changing "processes of inclusion and exclusion" (Wicker, 1997) and the dynamics of inter-generational transfer of political power that are now and then being retooled by political entrepreneurs and social

actors in achieving their political interests. In Africa, the turbulent transitions of the 1990s reconfigured economic and political structures, and put social and political hierarchies into disarray, thus bringing forth new actors, displacing some old ones and entrenching others. This act of reconfiguration has been facilitated by the economic policies that had been adopted so far by many African states in liberalising and deregulating their national economies, which has opened new frontiers of endeavour. This makes it imperative to focus on the economic study of social structure (Collins, 1988; Granovetter, 1985; Powel et al., 1994) and its attendant global and local entanglements.

Given the pluralist character of African societies and their inherent tendency for new social formations, economic activity also logically becomes broadened beyond the market to incorporate social structures across different communities that strive for critical information, seek coalitions, access to procurement, finance and production facilities, and discovering and opening up new credit lines beyond the nation state (Pantz, 2006). In an era characterised by such enormous revolutionary changes the ethnic arena alone is far short of accomplishing the task of explaining and giving meaning to such changes, as social and political actors tends to seek alliances with other strategic actors to achieve their interests in an increasingly competitive environment. Economics has always debased social structure as casual, fortuitous and contingent. This theoretical insight has a strategic import on social relations in competitive economic environments. Hence, under current dispensations in the African continent the conceptualisation of social structure cannot be limited to its historical character alone but must be captured as a "strategic phenomenon" that transcends its traditional boundaries (*ibid.*). There is a large number of research works on associations and club formation in urban centres in Africa, though not overtly politically conscious but do articulate their concerns into the political system, especially in times of crisis and change. This had been done by way of penetrating the existing patronage networks that sustain many African political systems. The beginning of re-democratisation in Africa has reenergised those groups, which have realigned themselves into politically conscious movements acting in concert to influence governmental decisions.

"Strategic social networks" thus compensates for the voids created by rapid transformation of national economies, reshuffling of social hierarchies and network structures. The consequences and for that matter the benefits of such relations are however, not always all-inclusive as it brings inexorable distributional pressures to bear on the national economy (Durlauf et al., 2005). Such network structures might be dense or sparse, latent or manifest, depending on the frequency of interaction and shared loyalties expressed by the group at both bilateral and multilateral levels of interaction (Jackson, 2005). The search for explanations on the changing character of

ethnicity and social and economic action has taken another path of conceptualisation that embraces the works of sociologists and anthropologist as well. A brief introduction of "strategic group" analysis will be given here to support the call for a paradigm shift in analysing the articulation of political demands in Africa's rapidly changing political landscape, especially in natural resource-dependent economies in which wealth distributional patterns are distorted and skewed.

Of late political scientists too have joined the debate to shed light on "strategic groups" in countries undergoing transitions and how they are shaping new social, economic and political spaces for distribution of wealth and power (and conflict management) under new and emerging competitive environments (Heberer, 2003). Pioneers of the strategic group theory, (Evers and team, Tillman, Bierschenk, Lachenmann, 1992)<sup>20</sup> its advocates and critics, all do agree that the concept is under-theorized and need more research focus to attain some sense and degree of systematisation and coherence (Berner, 1995). Other authors who have closely monitored the theoretical foundations of strategic groups also argue that there are no convincing arguments to validate its claims for a comprehensive class theory (Neelson, 1989). In addition, the theory had since its inception focused more on South East Asian affairs and had given little or no attention to other developing areas undergoing political transitions (Berner, 1995)<sup>21</sup> and where extended transformations in historical social cleavages are reconfigured and refurbished with novel sense of permanency (Posner, 2005).

In the African context, the quasi 'absence of modern, well-organised, and functioning political parties', political aggregation of interests and articulation of demand must be studied beyond the existing established but anomalous party structures and fluid ethnic boundaries. This has brought into the debate the role of "strategic groups" and how they pursue their interests in a free and competitive political environment (Schubert et al., 1994). The study of strategic groups in transitional societies is not an alternative strand of theoretical thinking on changing societies, but offers an alternative methodological approach to study the process of political change in 'developing societies' via an integrative and cross-cutting tools of analysis to mediate competing structural-objective and specific-subjective factors in

<sup>20</sup> The concept originated from Development Sociologist Hans-Dieter Evers and group of researchers (Tillman Schiel, Thomas, Bierschenk & Gudrun, Lachenman) in Bielefeld, Germany, in 1992. Since then it has been applied in explaining how strategic groups influence politics in countries undergoing socio-economic and political transition as well as in the causes of conflicts and its management.

<sup>21</sup> The concept is only working concept in this work. This work is neither about network formation, how the actors involved interact to achieve their economic goals and maintain stability, nor is it about determining their performance and efficiency. For comprehensive reading of concept see also, Jackson, M. O (2005): 'A survey of Network Formation Models: Stability and Efficiency. In G. Demage, and M. H. Wooders, Group Formation in Economic: Networks, Clubs and Coalitions. Cambridge University Press. pp. 11-57.



social development (ibid.). Evers and Schiel have put forward three basic assumptions for analysing strategic groups.

1. In countries undergoing social transformation, already established political and economic actors erect mechanisms that protect their interests thus denying existing rival groups, emerging or up and coming newcomers the competitive edge to influence the political system in a significant measure (Evers, 1982; Berner, 1995).

2. The political posture of individual groups determines their approaches for making economic and political gains. Carrier-based actors, corporate and other petty entrepreneurs have the innate capacity for competitive politics founded on the principles of parliamentary democracy; bureaucrats and the military strives for a state system which repose in the military supreme powers, or a dominant one party systems, corporate actors, and influential entrepreneurs tend to have a high tendency for network formations that embrace other like groups in the political system (Evers 1992; Schiel, 1988).

3. The key benchmark for assessing efficiency and breakthrough is the size of the group and its members, which in turn determines their political power outreach for exercising influence and imposing themselves on others (Berner, 1995).

Building on the foundations of Evers and other pioneers of the theory, Berner has captured strategic group analysis as an "actor-centred approach to a theory of dominance". Strategic groups then can be defined in a first step as "collective actors striving for participation in the dominance system of a society...they cover a wide range of actors who employ strategies to alter the societal framework to their advantage and, of course, others who try to preserve the status quo for the same reasons. In another dimension, they can be described as organised networks of collective actors; they are not actual groups in the sense that each member knows and has contact with all others" (ibid). In other words, "strategic groups are not a factual, observable object of research but rather an instrument of analysis" (ibid).

These groups apply a wide range of strategies and instruments at their disposal in order to dominate other groups. Evers has identified five fundamental "strategic resources" that are frequently at work in group interaction. These are force or coercions as expressed in the existence of the military and the police; the existing legal arrangements and its key architects such as politicians, bureaucrats, and judges; property owners, covering groups such as industrialists, and landowners; the comparative advantage they have in terms of their high educational qualifications, and their unfettered access to information. These may include media persons, and other professionals; as well as the ideology, tradition

or the belief system they practice. They may also include religious leaders and charismatic leaders. These strategic resources are sine qua non for dominance, at least having access to one of them. Their common goal is the accumulation of power and the establishment of legitimate dominance, either in the society as a whole or restricted to domains like regions or certain fields of activities. The dominant position must be recognised by a large section of society who also benefits from existing arrangements, which in turn creates conditions for legitimising political action. The political system is, consequently, a crucial field of action for all strategic groups, whose interaction occurs in a well "differentiated society". In transitional democratic societies where roles are well-dispersed, and strategic resources are fairly distributed, such that there is no monopoly of any one group the "competition and mutual control of several groups rather ensure societal dynamic" (Evers, 1982).

The role of strategic groups in the transformation process is one of a double-edged sword. In societies and political systems that are undergoing transformations which have resulted in power asymmetries among elite's, conflicts normally erupts among them. On one hand, in their capacity as transmitters of interests and information, strategic groups in the pursuance of their interests have acted as channels for cooperation on many occasions thus making their political role in conflict resolution quite important. Because of their cross-territorial character, strategic groups may constitute a mediation in balancing socio-political pressures that emanates from traditional political allegiances, and the emerging drivers of change whose influence have come to bear on societies undergoing transformation (Berner, 1995). In the long term, the interaction between local political constituencies (religious bodies, Farmers' Co-operative Associations, Youth Association, Market Women Movements, Labour Unions etc.) and new forces of change would create clearly identifiable roles for indigenous leadership structures in aligning to challenges of modern governance systems, while their roles in conflict mediation and resolution through the application of traditional mechanisms could also be enhanced by adapting to innovative methods that creates equilibrium.

The interaction among strategic groups and existing dominant groups, and their cooperative actions facilitate the processes of social, economic and political changes that occur, thus making them the bearers of innovation and technological progress (ibid.). Given their inherent tendency for acquisition of innovative capacity for change, strategic groups would live up to the challenges brought forth by the new democratic spaces, which may in turn transform them to adjust and adapt to modern political organisational apparatuses. This is just a phase in the current transition processes, but its contextual complexities are also a reminder that this mode of political entrepreneurship will remain with us for a long period. On the other hand, Berner has argued further that

strategic groups strive for interests also bring them at the threshold of power structures, which are also the sources of many conflicts (*ibid.*).

The intellectual solace in this difficult scheme of theorizing about the African democracy project and governance structures in the context of strategic groups analysis is the clear demarcation of roles in a predictable framework, which gives a birds' eye view of the prevailing actor constellation, and structural architectures that helps to winnow down some of the inherent obstacles in search of scientific tools for analysing political development in Africa in general, especially on the complex notions of democracy and economic empowerment. This also has implications for policymaking regarding which constituencies should policymakers focus on, why, when and how. In a more explicit term the application of strategic groups will create the enabling environment to fleece ethnicity of the complex identities which clouds the boundaries between political demands and interest articulation in conventional political entrepreneurs (Schubert et al., 1994).

A paradigm shift from the excessive academic occupation with ethnicity and identity or the frequent resort to neo-patrimonialism as a fundamental point of reference (in a rapidly changing world with radical impact on society) will enable researchers to capture new and emerging but influential actors in countries undergoing transformation in the so-called developing world including Africa. Instead of the complex and interwoven situation offered by ethnicity and other traditional modes of analysis, the focus on strategic groups will enable the research community to surmount some of the barriers in identifying what is formal and informal, what is functional and dysfunctional, what is latent and manifest, what is distinct and vague, what is actual and potential, what is dominant and subservient, what is included and excluded; and in the end establishing cross-cutting and scientifically appropriate toolkits for democratic analysis in countries undergoing political transformations and changing wealth distributional patterns in Africa. The need for differentiation has become even clearer because of the steep and deep impact the transformations that were set in motion in the aftermath of the Cold War have had on social structures and social actors in diverse ways.

In the African context, if such a shift is supported by the appropriate methodological considerations, strategic groups would accommodate ethnic pluralism based on limited identity boundaries because of its ability to form coalitions, seek new frontiers, which will then enable stakeholders to create innovative channels for articulating and advancing political demands by competing social and economic forces. Within such a framework, the "developmental and emancipatory" dimensions of democratisation in Africa that have been obscured by precepts and underlying epistemology of some imported theories (as argued in the scholarly works of Ake) will be accommo-

dated and enhanced research work in that direction.

Every now and then many authors have conveniently chosen Southeast Asia as laboratory for testing strategic group analysis because of one reason or the other. However, the complex transitions and attendant political transformation and social differentiation that has resulted in multiple and diverse political spaces equally makes the continent a conducive environment for theorising about the identification, assessment and evaluation of the role of strategic groups in African political structures, processes and practices. The rapidly changing global context, increasing interdependence, free flow of information and investment capital, and subtle networking of transnational and civil society based actors all combine to shift focus away from the ethnic arena as the key determinant of decision-making and political action. The emergence of the African "middle class" and their interconnected local, regional and global presence is a veritable development above the ethnic. In addition, political business in oil rentier economies such as in Angola, Chad, and Gabon are no longer wholly circumscribed by primordial or ethnic imperatives. As evidenced in these countries, regime survival has come to depend on the ability of the executive to steer interaction among a broad set of social and economic coalitions, strategic networks, and political constituencies including the opposition, however limited that may be depending on the prevailing political circumstances. This feeds the wider system with an internalised, diverse, resilient resources and mechanisms foregrounded in processes and practices.

On this particular point, the case of Angola may be illustrative. Under a Marxist-Leninist political framework, the oil industry was 'tamed' contrarily to the centralized mode of planning associated with it. Realising the importance of the oil industry as the sole and viable foreign exchange earner, the MPLA government combined "flexibility, reliability and pragmatism, networks and partnerships to steer the industry to success" (Ricardo, 2007). In this way, by the end of the Cold War, Angola had flirted two separate and diametrically opposing political and economic ideologies. The economic system was not however, impervious to the 'rentier' mechanisms that engulfed both the Marxist-Leninist, and now capitalist ideologies. These pragmatic corporate practices has enable the country's oil company, Sonangol to measure its strength against other competing global oil companies; is able to weather disruptions in the industry (such as in times of low oil prices); capable of accessing innovative strategies and build a feedback loop and compensatory system in an industry that is marked not just by competition but unpredictability as well. In the past, such resilience mechanisms enabled Angola's oil industry to survive the devastations of a long anti-colonial armed struggle, the complex entanglements of inter-imperialist rivalry in the context of the Cold War, and a civil war that decimated

state structures and disintegrated whole societies.

### Perspectives

Since the consensus reached in Berlin and the subsequent adoption of the Act of Berlin by the contending European powers in 1885 to partition the continent along preferred geo-strategic and political calculations the continent of Africa has undergone tremendous transformations and setbacks. At one level of analysis, the territorial, ethnic and identity complexities of the modern African state, the scorched-sun politics of the Cold War, neo-colonial strategies of co-optation, cooperation and confrontation have all combined to create permanent features of the modern African state-system (Burchard, 2006). Until the end of the Cold War, the ubiquitous authoritarian character of the African state, dependency, economic mismanagement and corruption, cronyism, ethnic rivalry and hatred, have had detrimental effects on governance structures, which may take decades to repair or reverse. The current state of affairs of the African state and the growing spirit of entrepreneurship in both political and economic terms cannot be denied despite the flaws and shortfalls that have gripped some states such as Sudan and South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, Chad, etc., including the wider central African region where the challenges of climate change and state incapacity have also factored in to worsen an already fragile situation. The more than a decade of conflicts in many parts of the continent and the international and regional responses they received at conflict resolution have begun to yield positive results as many post-conflict societies now have the historical opportunity to put their bitter past behind them. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Mozambique, Rwanda and Burundi, the Ivory Coast, Madagascar, and even those still engulfed by low-level conflict are not just reaping the benefits of relative peace but making some economic progress as well, thanks to high commodity prices. Also, there is an emergent middle class in many countries such as Botswana, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Angola, Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Mauritius, Mozambique, and Uganda. The new middle class are young, dynamic and full of entrepreneurship and innovation striving to make gains from current economic growth and create pillars for sustainability in their countries and communities. However, the challenge still remains as to how to transform current growth into social wealth and opportunities to overcome the bane of deepening economic inequalities and social injustice, and diffuse the perilous state of youth unemployment that is gradually culminating in a sub-proletariat in many urban centres in Africa.

Notwithstanding these achievements, the current waves of democratization going on in many African countries are not without blemish, and may even compro-

mise the successes achieved so far. Apart from countries such as Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Senegal, the Seychelles and Tanzania, almost all re-democratising countries south of the Sahara are far from democratic consolidation. Access to wealth and power had been at the heart of elite power struggle in the above case studies. In Gabon in particular oil revenue provided a safe haven for elites to be far less responsive to the emerging economic dependency on oil and the attendant crisis, including the acute governance deficit. In Angola, the struggle for access to petrodollar prevented elites from creating a common nationalist platform against colonial rule and became the ultimate incentive to fight till the 'last man' in the country's twenty-seven-year civil war that ended in April 2002. In Chad, the discovery of oil in Doba, Doseo and Lake Chad Basin in the mid-1970s by Conoco fuelled the civil war in the country and protracted until 1990 when President Déby finally ousted the Habré regime in a coup d'état. During the ideological scramble for Africa in the Cold War era all three countries became enmeshed in the ensuing superpower rivalry in one way or the other. Gabon, given her relative stability was the doyen of French military presence in Africa, while Angola and Chad became battlegrounds for ideological pre-eminence by the two superpowers and Libya.

Thus, prior to the resurgence of democracy in the early 1990s oil had determined the political and economic history of the three countries (except Chad) leaving an indelible mark thereto. Hence, the countries elites embraced democratisation not for the sake of democracy and the rule of law, but with the intent and purpose of establishing new mechanisms and strategies that would ensure their hold on to political power and economic wealth. One fact has now emerged clear in almost two decades of democratic dispensation in the three countries, and that is lack of tolerance and predictability, rule of men instead of rule of law, executive dominance and lack of institutional checks and balances. This is also due to the fact that the national constitutions are mere documents without the voice and popular will of the people. The resurgence of constitutional rule in the early 1990s, as already indicated, have been embraced under harsh conditionalities imposed by external actors who strived to create a new world order by the end of the Cold War. They were motivated and spurred in many ways by geo-strategic and political interests than the expressed commitment for supporting democracy and development (Die Zeit online, 2006). This is borne out by the contradictions of development aid and the wider international political economy that is still bereft with rules and practices detrimental to growth and development for Africa and other developing countries. Indeed, many African states responded to this given the deep-rooted dependency on their external partners. But the little momentum gained on the democratisation front until the events of 9/11; and the global price hike for commodities such as oil, minerals and precious metals have given

many African states a form of leverage to openly or passively challenge the conditionalities that have so far been in place to safeguard the ideals and principles of good governance and sustainable development. Angola, Chad and Gabon are no exception.

The irony of fate is that the institutional resuscitation carried out in the 1990s to salvage many African states from four decades of social, political and economic decay via expanding political spaces for democratisation and the rule of law; promotion of human and minority rights, and improving the welfare of many Africans - the current systemic changes are now threatening the freedom that greeted many Africans by the end of the Cold War. As pointed out already, even those external partners that have upheld the ideals of good governance are reconsidering their strategies in the face of keen competition from new actors such as Brazil, China, India and a handful of east "Asian Tigers" all of which are scrambling for their share of scarce natural resources crucially needed to propel and maintain their economic growth and prosperity.

Some of the key conclusions of this analysis are encapsulated in points of references that are both international and domestic, and combine to influence outcomes that might be detrimental to governance. Big power promotion of national interests and access to natural resources such as oil and gas; and the quest for power, domination, influence and access to wealth by local political entrepreneurs are increasingly creating a stranglehold on good and effective governance in Africa south of the Sahara, especially in oil-producing countries such as Angola, Chad and Gabon, as well as in countries that have become strategic allies on the global war on terror namely, Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Chad and countries in the wider Pan-Sahel region.

Today, the recognition given to oil-rich regimes in Africa depends on the strategic calculations of Africa's external partners spanning across Brussels, Berlin, Beijing, Delhi, Washington, London, rather than the regimes credentials for good and effective governance. Gaddafi's Libya, a once pariah state and sponsor of international terrorism found its way into the corridors of power of great powers symbolised in its participation in high level conferences such as the G8 meeting in Italy in 2009 till the man became irrelevant to the powers that be during the so-called "Arab Spring" in Libya in February 2011. The losers in this game are ordinary Africans whose voices for freedom, emancipation and improvement of their social conditions are traded for by incumbents bent on maintaining their hold on political power, and external powers dead set on securing their energy security.

The active involvement of many African states in the global war on terror and its 'inherent contradictions', as well as the seemingly strategic dependence of Western countries on African oil, gas, and minerals has produced a perilous outcome for good governance. Indeed, the leeway many oil-producing countries have gained is gradually fleecing those countries elites of stewardship

for democracy and good governance. In Angola, Chad and Gabon, petrodollar has slowly but surely created and bolstered dominant ruling parties reminiscent of former communist states of Europe. These parties have created strategies for co-opting new political forces into their fold through rewards and deprive others of the resources they need to survive thus weakening the effectiveness of opposition groups and political parties.

It stands out that the bottom line for oil-producing African countries experimentation with democratisation is demarcated, and potentially decimated by the projected life-span of oil. As the withdrawal of development assistance by the donor community in the early 1990s resulted in the demise of most authoritarian regimes in Africa, so will the depletion of oil reserves reveal the lack of programmatic mission and vision of Africa's constitutional dictators who live on indolent rents from oil, gas, and strategic minerals.

### Concluding Remarks

This contribution on the wider consequences of the transformations that are occurring in Africa in the context of complex web of external and internal entanglements have combined to mould a process that is increasingly beginning to adapt itself to local conditions that are at times difficult to comprehend root and branch. This provides enough grounds for us to rethink the traditional paradigms for understanding the African context and condition. Ethnicity may remain one of the key pivots around which much of the processes taking place could revolve. But it is also noteworthy to realize the role of new and dynamic forces, structures, processes and practices that are gradually displacing old actors in both open and competitive environments alongside local tendencies that still influence political action and decisions. In many oil producing countries, the formal aspects of the transformations taking place, such as, its institutions, the electoral systems, and the party systems that have emerged have developed their own internal peculiarities that may be beneficial or perilous to democracy in the continent. This combines formal and informal, idiosyncratic features that bear hybrid traits such as personalised authority, clientelism and patronage and restricted civic spaces (Bratton, 2007; Lemarchand, 1972).

In view of the almost two decades of transformations that have taken place the intensity and degree of these features might vary across countries. In some countries these have been manifest, while in others they have remained latently grounded in a complex matrix of relations. It is worthy to point out at this juncture that the extent of how pervasive or restricted informal structures are, and how they engulf the political system is more often than not due to the duration of the existing regime. Hence, in countries such as Angola, Chad, Gabon, where some personalities and figures have dominated the

political arena for significant number of years or even decades politics is obviously bound to be grounded in informalities whereby 'Big Man' roles and patronage are comparatively deeper than in situations where the leadership structure is being changed periodically in a "legal-rational framework". The difficulty for making clear distinctions and identifying between what is formal and informal makes the African democratic project an irksome task for analysis. It is however; also, clear that politics and political behaviour in many African countries are also at the same time becoming more and more grounded in constitutional arrangements than in the past. The reasons that may create incentive for extension of term of office may also vary across the board ranging from instrumental rational purpose, greed or even fear of the executive and its family living normal life outside of politics 'after causing pain and agony to others'.

Hence, Africa's democratic project that was launched at the end of the Cold War has 'consciously or unconsciously' taken a path that is marked by exaggerations, "atrophies", anomalies, and at the same time conformities of varying degrees. As indicated by the situation in many natural resource-dependent countries, a democratisation process that is situated in a context of such a combustible mix of power, oil, deep rooted internal inequalities, widespread poverty, and external powers 'frenzied' scramble for a share of the pie is obviously bound to be antithetical to conventional precepts of governance as pertained in established Western democracies. The period of high prices of natural resource has bolstered many African elite's confidence to question the system of governance that is based on 'foreign values' and reiterated their calls for a "home-grown political dispensation of democracy and economic development" (Agencia de Informacao de Mozambique, 2007). This call has been heard in the past and even pursued by some self-styled Africanist such as Mobutu Sese Seko, who however, never adopted policies to that effect. Indeed, the call for inculcation of African values into Africa's political systems is in many ways problematic. The continent's complex heterogeneity and diversity makes it difficult rallying around some common values to the detriment of others. In the past, some basic trans-boundary values such as Africa's sense of communitarianism, solidarity, and innate capacity for consensus building and inclusiveness have been manipulated and instrumentalised by dictators in pursuit of their own political ambitions and creating wealth for themselves. That said, the survival of a people has in the past and present become synonymous with their social resilience.

### **Debriefed**

Hence, in the real political praxis, evidence from oil-dependent economies of Angola, Chad, Gabon has vindicated the negative consequences of natural

resources if found in the hands of non-transparent and unaccountable regimes and self-interested strategic actors. From a political science perspective, the leading actors involved in shaping the transitions in natural resource-rich African countries are not acting in a vacuum, but in an interactive and communication-based network that incorporates other strategic actors. This may have negative consequences for the quality of democracy and governance if such relations are not harmonised. A classic example is Gabon.

The forty years of "Bongoism" symbolized in the personality of the late president of Gabon, Omar Bongo Ondimba has become a model with a riveting domino effect in many parts of Africa, especially among oil-producing countries. His posture for peace and stability, his open inclination for inclusion of political opponents via cooptation instead of exclusion; his spurious strategies of distributing national resources; and finally his image as peace broker made him a doyen in the eyes of many African rulers, and external partners alike. Conflict ridden countries turned to him on many occasions to seek his 'wisdom and advice'. State dignitaries from Chad, Angola, the Ivory Coast, The DR of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, Ethiopia, and many others at one point or the other travelled to the Central African country to secure his intervention in their own countries. "Bongoism" is indeed a growing ideology that embraces pluralism of its own kind, and attracts foreign capital, creates conducive environment for the latter to thrive, while it applies cunning strategies for entrenching executive supremacy that micro-manages and exercises authority over the country's natural resource revenue. Opposition and civil society groups are given incentives to join the ruling government or they are placed under the scorched-earth policies and surveillance apparatuses of the security services; intimidated, and at times persecuted for alleged acts of treason, or are blatantly conceived as national security threat. Their clientele networks also give the government easy access to unemployed youths, who are mobilised to cause political turmoil, intimidate opposition forces during elections in the form of state-sponsored 'acts of terrorism'. These strategies are no doubt facilitated by the government's access to oil revenues and control over the country's natural resources and security services. The outside world saw in Bongo a man of peace, not just for his country but for the rest of the Great Lakes region and the wider world. In summer of 2007 he was awarded the Manhae price for peace during a state visit to South Korea. According to *Gabonnews* "ce grand prix lui décerné en reconnaissance et en recompense de sa grande contribution à l'instauration de la paix au Gabon, en Afrique et dans le monde" (Gabonnews, 2007). The awarders justified the gesture for Omar Bongo's policy of "evolution rather than revolution" and his leanings for free enterprise for economic development of his country, and also for his direct involvement in mediation efforts in Angola, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville, The DR of Congo, the Ivory

Coast, and Togo. At the same ceremony, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka was honoured with the Manhae International Award for Poetry and Peace by Seoul National University and the International Foundation for Peace. In 2004, the former South African president, Nelson Mandela received the same award. So, instead of international disapprobation for Bongo's democratic deficit and his offensive posture on democracy and the rule of law he was given international approbation for his policies at the cost of the people of Gabon struggling to achieve human rights and dignity, the rule of law, transparency and accountability.

In the end, the key beneficiary of the peace and stability dividend in Gabon for example, is international capital that operates outside parliamentary control, is able to secure long tax holidays by bribing key members of the executive and bureaucracy, and parliamentarians. The bribery scandal of Elf Aquitaine, the French oil company in the 1990s is a clear testimony to this, and just the tip of an iceberg. Many international companies collude with corrupt politicians to deprive many resource-rich countries of crucial foreign exchange needed to fight poverty and disease. This unequal relation between oil-dependent countries, the oil corporations and major importers from the industrialised countries is becoming more of a peril than a profit and a peace dividend. In this case studies, lack of institutional capacity, transparency and accountability makes oil discovery a bane for corruption and disaster. Without the requisite regulatory regimes in these commodity dependent economies, intergenerational transfer of political power will always mean intergenerational transfer of conflict, economic stagnation and mismanagement. Even though countries have expressed commitments to Extractive Industries Transparency mechanisms, the problem remains "enforcement". Since the inception of democratisation in oil-rich African countries we have witness how incumbents have used not only state institutions to establish their own power bases but also using oil wealth to influence the outcomes of elections. The Independent Electoral Commission ends up being an extended arm of the executive branch of government. The unique role of the electoral process in countries undergoing democratisation has been articulated in many academic research works and policy circles. The organisation of first elections is the embryo of a long democratisation process. Today, Botswana, Ghana, Mauritius, Namibia, Senegal, Tanzania, and South Africa have made irreversible strides in their democratisation projects despite some inherent obstacles. So where elections are despised, democracy could hardly survive. At least in the African context periodic elections are being organised, which might not conform to modern democratic standards and norms. However, the internal logics of elections and its psychological impact on the electorate on one hand, and political elites on the other hand, will lead not only to conscious civil society groups but elite transformation that will ultimately produce genuine stewardesses for

democracy to accommodate, tame, or curtail the tentacles of self-interested strategic groups. As Lindberg (2006), has concluded in an empirical study of elections in several African countries, "the power of elections is self-reinforcing and self-improving and causes democratic qualities in society to expand and deepen".

Ultimately, however, African leaders are in large measure in control of their national sovereignty, and for that matter their own natural resources. The democratic wind of change since the end of the Cold War has also furnished many political systems with "impartial", elaborated, accessible, and participatory new political spaces and an unprecedented new sense of realism and grass-root consciousness in many African countries. In oil producing countries, however, pro-democracy forces and human rights groups are still battling against social inequities, restricted political spaces, corruption, lack of transparency, wanton dissipation of oil revenue; while elites remain bystanders to environmental catastrophe caused by natural resource exploration and exploitation. The benefit of oil still remains in the corridors of power, and bearers of new loyalties offered by moribund strategic groups and networks, some of them 'accumulating by default'.<sup>22</sup> In other words, without active intervention in the operations of the industry, as their strategic group statuses and loyalties give them automatic privileges from the political centre. These groups are the products of socio-economic and political transitions and 'logically' owe their existence to the system that gave birth to them.

Hence, the privileges and benefits that accrue to them are close-knitted to the political system and its underlying socio-economic trappings. In the case of Angola, the main actors of the long liberation struggle, the army and its political elites have pre-established strategic groups and social networks that operates in their interest as long as genuine democratic structures and acquisition of new values fail to prevail in the transformation process. They attempt to promote reform, which in fact they are not committed to in order to maintain the stability of the emergent accumulation 'structure' that serves sectional interest. The political system and its attendant wealth accumulation and distribution patterns are said to be 'defaulted' as it operates according to the 'whims and caprices' of dominant strategic groups in government, the judiciary, legislative, industry and the army without much political pressure from civil society groups. They strive to maintain the system via corruption and co-optation of potential competitors, and in the real world 'suffocate' dissenters from both civil society and the state machinery. Existing state institutions becomes deformed

<sup>22</sup> The meaning of default in this particular case is a transposition from computer Science, which is defined by the Farlex Online Free Dictionary as a "particular setting or value for a variable that is assigned automatically by an operating system and remains in effect unless cancelled or overridden by the operator. In other words it refers to "a situation or condition that obtains in the absence of active intervention".

in their logical functions, except serving the parochial interests of those groups that be. In the prevailing, restricted political context of many oil-rich countries, election periods have become synonymous with exhibition of largesse of the state where millions of dollars is disbursed to lure the electorate. Such an electorate is indeed a "democracy in waiting".

The irony is that such accumulation also takes place in an environment of dissipation as wealth is scarcely reinvested into the local economy and rechanneled into offshore tax oasis and financial safe havens in other parts of the world. Transparency, accountability and impartiality thus become an enduring democratic deficit in many oil-rich African countries despite elite's embrace and open profess to a new democratic dispensation more than two decades ago.

Notwithstanding, it must also be pointed out that, the insights gathered from the theory on strategic groups also informs us that strategic groups, which harmonises their interaction are also the bearers of innovation and new technologies; act as cultural brokers, mediation and reconciliation experts whose socio-economic, political and managerial capital could be marshalled to launch transitioning and transforming countries on the path of genuine, irreversible democratisation process. In this equation, leadership, the cognitive resources and intervention strategies of core elites, unflinching commitment to democratic habituation and consolidation, trust and social cohesion, diversity of resilience-resources and compensatory mechanisms, and the level of tolerance of a political system may be crucial for democratisation to succeed and flourish in countries where petrodollars may override human conscience. The litmus test of commitment of political entrepreneurs vis à vis their democratic stewardship will be demonstrated by their ability to steering the 'triadic incendiaries' - the barrel, the bullet, and the ballot box. In other words, a state oil company that operates independent of interferences by the top brass of the military and political party apparatus; an enlightened military that is conscious of its duty as custodian of the national constitution; a polity that is conscientious and well-informed; and an electoral commission that executes its constitutional duties independent of the extended arm of the executive, i.e. in a political ecology foregrounded by elaborate code of governance and code of conduct.

### Conflict of interest

The author has not declared any conflict of interest.

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