Transparency and global resources: Exploring linkages and boundaries

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Abstract

How did the transparency agenda develop in the extractive industries? Why did key actors embrace it? What has been the outcome? The article discusses the rise of the transparency agenda by scrutinising the intellectual paradigms that laid the foundations for the ensuing debates. It examines motivations behind the key actors' decisions to embrace the transparency agenda with a focus on extractive companies. This article also discusses the subsequent creation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and argues that whereas the creation of the EITI has been a significant event, it is nevertheless unlikely to have a far-reaching effect. Corporate actors have utilised the transparency agenda to their own ends while the responsibility for implementing EITI's ambitious objectives was largely left to weak local civil society groups.

Key words: global resources, transparency, intellectual paradigms, and extractive industries

1. Introduction

The rise of the transparency agenda in the oil sector and the more broadly understood extractive industries marked a turning point in the development of modern fossil fuel industries. The oil and mining industries, which until the last decade of the 20th century were secretive and often associated with corruption, perpetuation of neo-colonial relationships and the propping-up of authoritarian regimes across the globe, undertook unprecedented steps towards opening up to much greater public scrutiny in the 1990s. The objective of the drive towards greater transparency was the empowerment of the citizens in resource-rich countries. The general public in the producing countries, armed with necessary information about payments made by companies, would be able to hold them, and their governments, accountable - or so the argument went. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), launched in 2002 under the umbrella of the World Bank, gave those hopes an institutional framework.

This article demonstrates that the development of the transparency agenda in the extractive industries has been a multifaceted phenomenon. Accordingly, any critical analysis has to pay equal attention to intellectual discourses that underpin discussions concerning transparency, changes in the global political environment as well as shifting attitudes of key political and corporate actors. The article contends that although much effort has been spent on promoting transparency in the international arena and building consensus around the issue of transparency, a considerable weakness of the whole process has been its enactment. The bulk of the responsibility for implementing EITI's key goals has been shifted onto weak and largely inefficient civil society groups in the resource-rich countries, whereas international and corporate actors have utilised the transparency agenda to advance their own short-term goals.

How did the transparency agenda develop in the extractive industries? Why did key actors embrace it? What lessons have been learned? The first part of the article discusses the rise of the transparency agenda by scrutinising the intellectual paradigms that laid the foundations for the ensuing debates. It also examines motivations behind the key actors' decisions to embrace the transparency agenda with a focus on extractive companies. The second part of this article discusses why, in its current form, the EITI is unlikely to bring about far-reaching change with regards to how resource-rich states are governed and how they utilise rent obtained from the sale of commodities.

2. Resources, modernisation and dependency theories

The debates in the 1990s concerning the issue of political stability and economic development of resource-rich countries that formed the basis for the emergence of the transparency agenda need to be contextualised within the debates that originated in the 1950s and 1960s. Those debates were important for articulating the view that resource-led development can bring about economic prosperity and political stability. The examples of Canada, the US or Australia were often quoted by proponents of resource-based development (Agnewn 2019). At the same time, past debates pointed to structural and political factors that stifled similar types of development in South American and sub-Saharan African countries. Corruption, the rule of the oligarchy as well as rent-seeking were seen as symptomatic of neo-colonial relationships that developed in the global south and which were perpetuated in turn by major extractive companies (Humphreys 2013; Gavshon 2019). In short, the discussion that unfolded in the 1950s and 1960s communicated clearly that resource-led development was possible only if the practices that shaped the extractive industries were addressed in a comprehensive manner. The key theoretical construct to articulate this was modernisation theory and its key assumptions were utilised and operationalised by the proponents of the staple theory. On the opposite spectrum were proponents of dependency theory.

Modernisation theory, which had its heyday in the 1950s and 60s, promoted a uniform and evolutionary vision of social, political, and economic development (Parsons 1951; Rostow 1960). According to modernisation theory, all societies, once they begin the process of modernisation, must move from the development stage A to B, C etc. The elites of the states that undergo the modernisation process will assimilate Western values and will import its financial, industrial, and most importantly its educational institutions and technology (Solivetti 2005). Modernisation theorists also agreed with economic rationality that underpinned the economic growth models of traditional economic theory (Valenzuela and Valenzuela 1978: 539). The resource-rich countries which had gained independence by the late 1960s were no exception to this rule and were supposed to follow a single trajectory towards modernity. This trajectory was based on the experiences of a few industrialised countries and ignored the realities of newly independent states. It was also assumed that resource-rich countries were in a better position to make a transition to Western modernity due to natural resource endowment. By this logic, resource-rich sub-Saharan Africa but not the resources-poor Asian states were on the fast track to development and modernity.

The assumptions made by modernisation theory were reinforced and supposedly validated by the staple theory put forward by Canadian economic historians Harold Innis (1956) and W. Mackintosh (1964). According to staple theory, economies with an abundant supply of accessible natural resources have a meaningful advantage in the development process and brisk progress in a state is conditioned upon the discovery and development of raw materials at relatively low cost to the consumer (Mackintosh 1964: 13). The underlying assumption of staple theory was that staples' exports are the leading sectors of the economy and that they therefore set the pace of economic growth. Economic development should be a process of diversification around an export base. Thus, a central concept of staple theory is the spread effects of the export sector, and more specifically, the effects that export activity have on the development of the economy and society more widely (Watkins 1963: 143). Foreign capital and outside technology were considered crucial to kick-starting these spread effects. Staple theory, in its ideal form, saw natural resources as something positive to the overall development and progress and towards co-operation between nations. Staples should permit a country to step firmly on the path of modernisation and to follow other, more developed, countries.

Dependency theory, in striking opposition to modernisation theory, argued that the modernisation process was not universal and, in the final analysis, benefited only a powerful minority within a peripheral country which imposed its development patterns and values on the majority. Monopolist multinational enterprises, in tandem with local oligarchs, pushed for the development of the minerals sector which failed to benefit the larger economy. In other words, the spread effect, as stipulated by staple theory, failed to materialise. It was argued that the minerals industry was only interested in investing and developing the infrastructure (roads, ports, bridges, electric plants), which it needed for its operations and which served the external export sector (Lampa 2019). The service economy that supplied the mineral export sector was a consequence of foreign investment and never became an integral part of the economic structure. The fact that mining took place in isolated enclaves added to the lack of forward and backward linkages (Korinek 2020). Linkages were often established by foreign-owned firms, but in their home states rather than in the host country. What made matters worse was the fact that the rent obtained by the country's elites was mostly spent on luxury items or was reinvested in the economies of the core countries (Cardoso 1977). According to dependency theory, this situation would remain unchanged since governments of the mineral-rich states are in an inherently weak negotiating position with large foreign-owned firms who possess knowledge and significant bargaining power due to their control of savings, money, technology, and access to international markets (Gunton 2003: 70). Thus, developing countries are locked in a cycle of permanent underdevelopment.

The picture presented by dependency theory was shaken by developments in the Middle East in the 1960s and in Latin America in the 1970s. The formation of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the nationalisation of the oil industry, and the formation of the National Oil Companies (NOCs) by once seemingly dependent states, questioned the claim that peripheries are locked into a never-ending cycle of dependency (Marcel 2006; Stevens 2008; Vivoda 2009). The fact that by the end of the 1970s a bulk of oil and mining industries was controlled by national governments of the resource-rich countries underscore this fact. Yet, the nationalisation of the extractive industries did not end debates concerning resource-led development. Rather, driven by modernisation and dependency theories, the issue has returned to the political agenda in a cyclical fashion, albeit often disguised in new concept and frameworks (Mehlum et al. 2006; Haber and Menaldo 2011; Frankel 2012; Andersen and Ross 2014).

3. Activists, the resource curse and transparency

With the end of the Cold War questions regarding political stability, development and resources returned to the political agenda. The key impulse was the disintegration of a number of neo-patrimonial regimes in sub-Saharan Africa (Bratton and van de Walle 1994; De Oliveira 2007, 2015) that closely depended on natural resources and rent for their political and economic survival (Le Billon 2001, 2004, 2012; Kaldor et al. 2007; Kaldor 2013). The collapse of some neo-patrimonial regimes was followed by resources wars in the most extreme cases. Often, these played out as civil wars in which resources were set to play a significant role (Morten Bøås 2001; Watts 2004; Ross 2004a, 2004b; Reno 2011; Rabinowitz 2020). The link between resources and wars also became an object of intense investigation by a new breed of NGOs in the mid 1990s such as Global Witness (based in London), which started to produce influential investigative reports on the role of commodities (most importantly oil and diamonds) in financing post-Cold War conflicts (Global Witness 1998; 1999).

The reports pointed to a lack of information about resource revenue flow from extractive companies to the governments as one of the key obstacles in preventing conflicts. It was also quickly noted that this lack of transparency was not in any way unique to countries engulfed in civil wars, but was symptomatic of the ways in which the extractive industries had operated for decades (Bieri 2013). Echoing the main thrust of dependency theory, Terry Karl (2007: 265) argued '[o]pacity is the glue holding together the patterns of revenue extraction and distribution that characterize petro-states as well as the entire international petroleum sector'. The scale of the problem was magnified by that fact that the extractive sectors - in good times - can generate enormous amounts of money. Towards the end of the 2000s, a decade characterized by rising commodity prices, the extractive sectors generated about US$3.5 trillion in annual gross revenue, corresponding to around 5 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP). The oil sector alone accounted for about 65 per cent of this overall figure and rents were estimated at about US$1 trillion for low income and lower middle-income countries (figures quoted in Le Billon 2011: 2). The traces of dependency theory were also visible in the discussion concerning the mining sector; in the late 1980s and 1990s, the sub-Saharan Africa and South American mining sector went through a period of privatization that to some extent saw a return of the transnational corporations (TNCs), and with it the memories of the colonial and post-colonial period. In South America alone, mining investments increased by more than 100 per cent between 2002 and 2012 (Dougherty 2016).

The notion that transparency and disclosure constitute the best way out of a malaise was based on the assumption promoted by modernisation and related theories which stipulated that resources can be an engine of development and stability, if only utilized efficiently. The fact that transparency has been an important element of classical liberal thought further strengthened the argument concerning transparency and it utility (Bauhr and Grimes 2017). Christopher Hood pointed out that ideas about transparency can be traced back to the writings of Immanuel Kant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jeremy Bentham who in his essay 'On Publicity' famously declared that: '[s]ecrecy, being an instrument of conspiracy, ought never to be the system of a regular government' (quoted in Hood 2006: 9). Michel Foucault notes that the turn from secrecy to openness in the late eighteenth century was driven by a desire to 'eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were formented' (1980: 153). In the modern political era, Woodrow Wilson, drawing on some of those earlier ideas (Carr 2001: 28-29), became an initial advocate of open government and a new type of diplomacy conducted in an open manner rather than through secretive agreements (Birchall 2011:10). In 1918, in the first of his 14 points for the post-war political settlement Wilson called for: 'open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view' (quoted in Klabbers 1996: 79). In short, the relevance of transparency has been forcefully argued for throughout the history of modern political thought by liberal and critical thinkers.

Leading on, the trust in the transformational power of disclosure and openness in the extractive industries along the lines promoted by modernisation, and liberal theory was in no small part driven by the emerging academic discourse of the resource curse thesis. This thesis in the 1990s successfully penetrated think tanks, main-stream media and academic journals (Economist 2005; Luong and Weinthal 2010; Morrison 2013; Ross 2013), together with the notion of "good governance" which was heavily promoted by the World Bank since 1989 (Moretti and Pestre 2015). The resource curse thesis essentially pointed to the negative growth and development outcomes associated with minerals and petroleum-led development. In the mid-1990s, influential scholars in decision-making circles in the US began to show that, at least from the 1970s onwards, natural resource abundance was negatively correlated with economic growth (Sachs and Warner 1995; see also Auty 1993; Ostrowski 2013). With time, resource curse proponents began to argue that natural resources abundance increases the possibility that countries will experience negative economic, political as well as social consequences. In some cases those will manifest themselves in a drift towards authoritarianism, political instability - including a danger of a civil war - and very weak economic performance (Rosser 2006: 7; see also Smith 2004). At the same time, some of the cruder interpretations of the resource curse have missed the simple fact that spending during boom times increased employment opportunities, allowed for generous pension plans and improved public welfare payments. It was argued that OPEC as a group of nations showed a spectacular expansion in infrastructure and allocated a larger share of their national income towards health and education than any group of developing countries (Karl 2000: 36).

The rentier state thesis, which is now largely seen as a political component of the resources curse, stress this direct relationship between rent distribution, corruption and regime survival (Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Anderson 1987; Karl 1997; Schwarz 2008). Rentier state scholars point out that the oil industry generates very large rents, which the state can easily capture and distribute in a politically expedient manner. Yet, the whole process is veiled in complete mystery since a) the contracts are kept hidden from the public view; b) the amount of money paid by the companies are unknown and c) money is distributed in secretive ways through a vast system of patron-client ties which are impenetrable to outsiders, rather than through formal institutions (Ostrowski 2010). In order to break the circle of secrecy the companies would have to come clean about the payments that they make to governments of the resource-rich countries. The general public, armed with the information about revenue flow, would keep their leaders accountable - at least in theory (Humphreys et al. 2007).

The resource curse thesis which looked at the corrupted nature of regimes of the resource-rich states also fitted well with the mantra of 'good governance' promoted by the World Bank since the late 1980s and further enhanced its appeal in decision-making circles. The World Bank, in its 1989 report on sub-Saharan Africa identified the lack of good governance as the major underlying cause of economic problems in the region (World Bank 1989). In effect, a new approach was initiated according to which regimes that were based on dubious legitimacy and conducting poor governmental practice would not be supported. Rather, eligibility for support would depend on institutional reforms being carried out by the potential recipient states, and on how they conducted their governmental affairs (Doornbos 2001: 96-97). Transparency, next to questions about the quality and process of decision-making procedures, became a vital part of the good governance discourse. This ensured that, by the end of the 1990s, transparency found its way into the documents produced by global NGOs and international financial institutions which scrutinized the link between resources, poverty and corruption (Collier 2008). Proponents of transparency argued that it makes markets operate more successfully. In addition transparency was seen as key to enhancing confidence, cooperation and accountability and vital for the reducing corruption and mismanagement. Decisions that were made in an open and transparent fashion had at least the veneer of legitimacy (Haufler 2010: 55).

As established above, from the 1950s until the late 1960s the issue of political stability and economic development of resource-rich countries was discussed within the framework of two well-defined intellectual paradigms: modernisation theory and dependency theory. Modernisation theory posited that a positive correlation between resources and development exists and that such change was therefore possible. Dependency theory, however, stressed that reliance on resources resulted in underdevelopment and the rule of an oligarchy. In the 1990s, in line with modernisation theory it was argued that resources can and indeed should have a positive impact on the country's political stability and on its economic development. However, to achieve this greater transparency in state-company relations was required. Following on some of the key insights from dependency theory, the proponents of transparency emphasised the corrupted and murky nature of the extractive industries as a significant part of the problem.

Nevertheless, there were also number of early, sceptical voices regarding the utility of transparency and its goals. According to some commentators it constitutes a considerable leap of faith to assume that transparency is a vital remedy for the problems of the resource-rich countries and that well-informed, enlightened citizens will be able to hold officials accountable and eventually become an active agent of political change (Shaxson 2009: 8; Fenster 2006: 885). This analysis was strongly supported by existing studies regarding civil society in resource-rich authoritarian and/or semi-democratic states which argued that the ruling regimes tend to successfully control and co-opt independent elements that have the trappings of civil society. If civil society initiatives by NGOs, church groups, trade unions and the like are seen as threatening, ruling parties will go out of their way to crush them (Cammack 2007; Butcher 2014). The situation might look different in the case of countries that went through a period of transition from authoritarianism to democracy and where NGOs and civil society came to play some role in a democratic process. However, this outcome is far from guaranteed.

From the beginning, the focus of the proponents of transparency was on a lack of information about resource revenue flow from companies to the governments. This was certainly a problem in Angola, an issue that was fleshed out in the aforementioned report by Global Witness, which greatly influenced thinking about transparency in relationship to the extractive industries. It was also central to the reasoning about corrupt relationships between corporate elites from the core of the capitalist system and political elites based in the peripheries, which dependency theory stressed all along. Yet, advocates of transparency were largely silent on the issue of how the monies, which ended up in government coffers, were spent and distributed across various sectors of the society (Shaxson 2009: 36; see also: Ölcer 2009; Short 2012). This was an acute problem since by the end of the 1990s most of the oil, and to a lesser degree the mining sector, were in the hands of the national governments and the problem was not so much of how much money companies paid to national governments but how this money was being utilized. The criticism which was voiced regarding the utility of transparency to addressing key problems of the resource-rich countries, became acutely visible once the initiative was put into action and began gaining momentum in the early 2000s.

4. Extractive companies and transparency

The consensus that developed around transparency in the 1990s was given a further boost when the extractive companies and the UK government come on board and began promoting transparency as the best way forward for the extractive sector. The support of those two powerful actors was a tipping point that would eventually lead to the creation of the EITI. However, the path towards recognising and embracing transparency by the companies was far from straightforward. The roots of this process can be traced back to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, which in turn opened up spaces for debate about the actions of extractive companies in the global south. As will be demonstrated, the rise of the transparency agenda in the extractive industries was largely a response to the negative assessment of companies' practices and especially the various scandals that engulfed British and French companies in the late 1990s. While oil companies were at the forefront of mounting criticism, the mining companies were not far behind and by the 1990s they were also forced to be more forthcoming about their relationships with local communities in the resource-rich counties.

It is worth restating that until the end of the Cold War, oil and mining industries were virtually off limits to any public scrutiny, and debates concerning transparency were only possible from the 1990s for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the Soviet Union, the West's adversary during the Cold War, was self-sufficient in oil and mineral resources whereas Western European companies and to some extent US based companies had to venture abroad in order to feed Western booming economies (Le Billon 2004: 4; see also Russett 1981; Gustafson 1989). Concepts such as energy security, strategic minerals, and resource wars were partly developed in the late stages of the Cold War in order to justify the secretive ways in which the extractive industries obtained access to resources. For example, the term 'resource wars' itself emerged in the US in the early 1980s in reference to perceived Soviet threats over the US access to oil in the Persian Gulf and African minerals (Klare 2002). In order to address those threats, Western governments and their companies argued that they had no choice but to maintain strong political ties with various authoritarian regimes that came to rule over the former British and French colonies (Yates 1996; Stokes and Raphael 2010). South Africa was one such crucial supplier of non-fuel minerals that played a vital role particularly in defense-related industries (Maull 1986: 620; see also Van Rensburg and Pretorious 1977; Haglund 1986). The safeguarding of those interests took precedence over taking a stance against the Apartheid regime. In France the term *Francafrique* was coined in order to describe France's special political and economic relationship with its former African colonies, often rich in oil and minerals resources, which were ruled by autocrats (Taylor 2010: 57).

The end of the Cold War meant that the justifications provided by the Western leaders and oil and mining companies for their cooperation with authoritarian regimes lost their validity. The Soviet Union collapsed and disintegrated and the country's natural resources, which since the late 1970s were the true strength of the Soviet Union and had paid for everything from an elaborate welfare state (Luong 2002) to the war in Afghanistan (Brown 2013), were now up for sale (Gustafson 2012). The biggest problem for post-Soviet leaders was how to attract Western companies to buy or invest into the extractive sectors (Bridge 2004) rather than fighting (real or imagined) 'resource wars' with the West. Another important event not entirely unconnected to the downfall of the Soviet Union (Friedman 2004) was the collapse of commodity prices in the late 1980s (Noreng 2005; Parra 2009). Their collapse to some extent undercut the political and economic power of the extractive industries in Western countries that was reflected in various scandals that had erupted in the 1990s and which would have been unlikely to come under much public scrutiny in the previous decades (Henley 2003; Rowell et al. 2005; Pearce 2007; Vidal 2011; Heilbrunn 2005). Aforementioned activists and savvy networks of global NGOs, which started to openly call for greater transparency in the extractive industries sector exploited growing cracks in the Western oil complex.

Western companies, when pushed on the question of secrecy, initially stated that they were reluctant to publish data on oil revenues from a particular project because of 'confidentiality clauses' that banned the publication of such information. They maintained that disclosure of sensitive information could lead to the expulsion from a project by the host government (Haufler 2010: 60). While during the Cold War period Western companies could count on powerful allies and their respective governments to silence calls for such disclosure, this arrangement could not be taken for granted in the post-Cold War era (Frynas 2010). New Labour, which came to power in Great Britain in 1997, was particularly eager to conduct a new 'ethical' foreign policy in Africa that aimed to supersede the Cold War and neo-colonial mindset (Porteous 2005). The companies' response to the unfolding events demonstrates the extent to which they were unprepared for the scrutiny they were coming under.

For example, only in the late-1990s did large mining companies decide to look more closely into the issue of social problems in the places in which they operated (Humphreys 2013: 44-45). Traditionally, the focus of the mining sector was on environmental issues with little attention paid to interrelated socio-economic issues.

The Global Mining Initiative, put together by nine large mining companies, resulted in the Mining, Minerals and Sustainable Development project, which in its report (2002) duly noted ‘the industry’s failure to convince stakeholders of its “social license to operate” or fully address the challenges of poverty alleviation, job creation, capacity-building and skills creation, governance, gender equity and state holder engagement’ (quoted in Smith et al. 2012: 242). The document demonstrated the extent to which points put forward by long standing critics of the mining industry and proponents of the dependency theory filtered into public debate and gained some acceptance beyond left leaning politicians and scholars. Yet, while the global mining industry was coming to term with its critics, the solutions were never likely to be radical and would inevitably draw on analysis provided by neoliberals and resources curse proponents, which, in turn, build directly on ideas first provided by modernisation theory.

To sum up, towards the end of the 1990s the problem of political stability and economic development of the resource-rich countries was analysed within the new framework of the resources curse thesis which forcefully argued that in order to break the circle of secrecy, companies would have to come clean about the payments that they made to the governments of the resource-rich countries. The Western extractive companies, which in the past were reluctant to expose themselves to greater public scrutiny, were finally willing to embrace and promote the transparency agenda. The reasons for this lay with a changing geopolitical situation, a shifting attitude of home countries towards their activities and the reputational damage inflicted from high profile scandals. Given the secrecy in which extractive companies had traditionally operated since the late nineteenth century, the steps they were taking must be understood as highly significant and that they constituted a potential game changer.

5. World Bank, companies, civil society and the EITI

The intellectual debates that unfolded since the early 1990s onwards provided a framework for thinking about transparency but said little about how the concept could be operationalised in practice. Indeed, the process of constructing those institutions that would enforce transparency principles on the global level was left to the World Bank. The extractive companies and Western governments tasked the World Bank to build an all-inclusive institution that would be acceptable to all parties involved, including the producing states. The ensuing analysis will demonstrate that the new institutions first and foremost have served the interest of the extractive companies and that of the World Bank. Tellingly, the key task of implementing the initiative on the local level in the resource-rich countries was passed onto weak civil society groups, which have largely struggled to fulfill the transparency's initiative ambitious aims, in particular in the authoritarian political environment (Aaronson 2011; Corrigan 2014).

When in 2002 then UK Prime Minster Tony Blair launched EITI together with the World Bank as a multi-stakeholder initiative, it was established as a voluntary initiative, but different partners were expected to take specific steps. The key to how EITI functions are the governments of the resource-rich countries which ask extractive firms operating within their territory to 'publish what they pay'. If such a request is not forthcoming from the host governments, the companies are not obliged to publish anything. In other words, participation by governments is voluntary, but once a country endorses the initiative all extractive industry producers operating in the country are expected to participate. For the transparency initiative to take effect, government officials must record the revenues they have received and assign an independent administrator to compare extractive sales and revenues. The government must also create a multi-stakeholder group (MSG), which crucially includes civil society representatives. The multi-stakeholder group is tasked with evaluating the information provided by business and government and reviews the independent evaluation. Possible discrepancies are expected to lead to a debate and allow country's civil society organisations to hold their government accountable (Lujala 2018; Tskhay 2020).

The EITI was highly appealing to oil and mining companies and was seen as a tool to mitigate reputational risk, as Alexandra Gillies noted: 'when asked what they were doing to help poor countries avoid the resource curse, these actors could hold up the newly minted norm to diffuse criticism and defend their oil sector involvement' (123: 2010). Also the EITI allowed the extractive companies to shift the onus of disclosure from themselves to the producing countries (123: 2010). In short, the problem of transparency brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall in oil prices in the early 1990s was finally being solved in a way that companies found satisfactory (David-Barrett and Okamura 2013; Rees 2014). The World Bank favoured the EITI approach over the issue of transparency since it gave the bank a role to play in the resource-rich countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia and in the Caucasus where foreign oil and mining companies were heavily involved. The EITI afforded the World Bank especially in sub-Saharan Africa with an opportunity for a fresh start after the ill-conceived policies of the structural adjustment programme of the 1980s failed to deliver the desired effects (Ihonvbere 1993; Benner et al. 2010; Chabal 2010). The EITI fitted also well with the new ‘good governance agenda’ since it provided an easy way of evaluating a country’s performance according to clearly demarcated benchmarks. Finally, promoting transparency underscored the utility of the World Bank as it allowed it to cast itself as the chief provider of transparency technical assistance, creating work, attracting funds, and increasing its relevance in countries that became part of the EITI (Gillies 2010: 177). The extractive companies and the World Bank clearly benefited from the institutionalization of the transparency campaign, as did some leading Western politicians and their governments. At the same time, the record of the civil society engagement with the EITI process has been mixed and demonstrates a fundamental problem with the existing approach (Kasekende et al. 2016; Van Alstine 2017; Öge 2017). The unique role that civil society was assigned within the context of EITI was not accidental and has to be understood within the *zeitgeist* of the late 1990s.

The EITI in its essence aimed at slowly rooting out corruption and mismanagement that took hold of most of the resource-rich countries. Through dealing with the issues of transparency, which is a significantly but not the only obstacle that the resource-rich counties struggle with, a state would begin to rejoin the path of modernity and transition from one stage to another (Stevens and Dietsche 2008). In the 1990s and early 2000s, this core proposition of modernisation theory became part and parcel of the globalization/neo-liberal paradigm (Brohman 1995). For the globalists, quick modernisation was vital for laying the groundwork for achieving a convergence among national economies and creating the condition for the smooth operation of global markets. Civil society was an unlikely ally in achieving those aims but one that gained significant prominence in the 1990s nonetheless. The faith among policy makers and international financial institutions in changing the power of civil society largely grew out of a) the role that civil society played in Eastern Europe (Solidarity in Poland, Charter 77 in Czech Republic) in dismantling authoritarian regimes and b) a consensus among influential North American scholars in the 1990s who argued that a strong civil society is a defining characteristic of consolidated democracies (Diamond 1994, 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996; O’Donnell 1999). By the mid-1990s, the proponents of dependency theory turned anti-globalists, with their deeply seated skepticism towards global extractive industries and local elites, also favoured civil society as an agent of change whose empowerment they had supported and championed. Hitherto, as already mentioned, the responsibility bequeathed to the civil society by the EITI especially in the oil-rich countries went largely against the existing analysis. Since the mid-1980s scholars working on the phenomenon of rentier state often pointed out that such states would likely have low levels of civil society engagement. The situation might look different in countries that underwent some sort of transition from authoritarianism to democracy but this is by no means certain. Those conceptual points are supported by a number of existing studies regarding EITI and civil society engagement.

Evidence suggests that the process of selecting civil society organizations, which participate in the EITI was often not transparent and that NGOs were not truly autonomous since government officials appointed the stakeholder groups rather than letting NGOs choose their own representation. In a number of cases NGOs were invited too late to the MSG meetings to affect their agenda in any substantial way (Ölcer 2009: 27; see also Van Alstine 2014). In authoritarian Azerbaijan, civil society groups complained that they do not really play an important role in the EITI process and that their ability to control government and company actions directly is marginal (Meissner 2013). In semi-democratic Nigeria, the NGOs involved in the process were described as technically weak with a tendency towards infighting (Gillies in Shaxson 2009: 27; see also Kolstad and Wiig 2009). The World Bank's own study of civil society relationships with the MSG found that the Bank does not appear to be assessing the adequacy of civil society's engagement. Members of civil society groups interviewed by the Bank emphasized the need for the institution to more closely monitor the situation and to ensure compliance with EITI requirements from all sides. Furthermore, civil society organizations complained that they were not well prepared to enter the EITI process and that governments were not treating them as legitimate partners. In some cases, members of the MSG were arrested and imprisoned. The NGOs also argued that their engagement would be significantly improved if the extractive industries revenue data were more meaningful at a local level, especially for the extractive industry-affected communities (Mainhardt-Gibbs 2010; see also Smith et al. 2012; López 2020).

In a similar vein, it has also been argued that most of the NGOs that western donors and institutions engage with are best described as 'briefcase NGOs', with an urban leadership but little following in the rural areas (Cammack 65: 2007; see also: Hoinathy and Janszky 2017; Sturesson and Zobel 2015). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, which has veered between semi-democracy and authoritarianism since its independence, a few parochial networks tend to dominate the NGOs' organizational structure and serve the well-being of their members first and foremost (Furstenberg 2015). At the same time, not all the experiences of the NGOs in the resource-rich countries have been as negative as in the examples quoted above. It has been pointed out that in a number of countries in South America, which underwent a process of pacted transitions in the late 1980s and where a bigger space for civil society participation exists, some big local NGOs managed to make some inroads (Around et al. 2019).

The problems encountered by local civil society groups involved in the EITI process are presented by the World Bank as significant but solvable over a long period of time (Short 2014). Yet, for the EITI process to function properly, the World Bank and extractive industries would need to directly engage with both producing states and civil society. Outside actors, in addition to providing necessary data and facilitating the process, would have to closely monitor the working of the multi-stakeholder group as well as of the government and the civil society relationship. Such direct interference into the affairs of resource-rich countries requires a change in the status of the EITI and might not be accepted by all the stakeholders, in particular the host governments which have been traditionally ambivalent about the real goals of transparency initiative (Richard 2019; Rosser and Kartika 2020). The question related to what is and isn't acceptable also looms large over the long standing controversies about how resource-rich governments spend profits that they gain from the operations of the extractive industries on their territories (Furstenberg 2018). While it is easy to criticize the transparency initiative for not going far enough and for not engaging with the most serious problem - which is rent money allocation - it is equally easy to see that such demands by the outside institutions and state would be seen by a number of politicians as an act of meddling in the business of the state. In short, the room for cooperation between the parties seems to be rather narrow by design.

Leading on, the oversized role that was assigned to the weak civil society within the framework of the EITI should not be viewed as a direct attempt at weakening the institution from the start but rather as an outcome of well-meant but ultimately misguided thinking about the politics of authoritarian and semi-democratic states in the post-Cold War world. It is one thing for a regime to join an institution such as EITI, but quite another to start sharing power with groups that want to operate outside the realm of the regime's formal and informal political structures. Furthermore, as some recent historical studies demonstrate, in most instances civil society was not responsible for changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s but was rather an outcome of those changes (Kotkin 2010). Hence, the key example on which globalists and their allies rested their faith in civil society's political power was a mirage in the first place. Nevertheless, the deed was done and the weakest link in the EITI process was largely left with the responsibility for the successful implementation of the initiative. What is more, some recent studies have suggested that the effects of EITI are strongest while a country is in its candidate stage - before it becomes a full member of EITI and before civil society becomes involved in the process (Villar and Papyrakis 2017).

To recap, the EITI cannot be qualified as an outright success, nor as complete failure. It represents a vital institution responsible for spreading transparency as a global norm. Over the years, the UN General Assembly, the G20, and the G7/G8 have all endorsed the EITI. Nevertheless, its contribution to reducing corruption, improving governance or promoting inclusive forms of social and economic development is difficult to measure and to quantify (Rustad et al. 2017). The problem at the heart of EITI is in no small measure due to the tension that has developed between modernisation and dependency theory in the 1950s and 60s which on the one hand gave an impetus to the advance of the transparency agenda and on the other hand also created its limits. Modernisation theory, through its boundless beliefs in the possibility of change and progress successfully fuelled the process, but far too often underestimated dissimilarities between different countries and their experiences while its neo-liberal heirs overstated the power of civil society (Adunbi 2019). Dependency theory, with its scepticism towards global extractive industries, local elites and the state, also favoured the power of civil society and inevitably contributed to the problem.

Notwithstanding the issue of civil society it would appear that it is safe to conclude that the EITI in its current form will most possibly operate for years to come but that it is unlikely to further advance the issue of transparency in the extractive industries on the global or local level. It also should be recognized that since the end of the 2000s the question of transparency and of missing funds has been further complicated by the fact that non-Western companies from Asia which heavily invest in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia are only peripherally, if at all, concerned with the issue of governance or revenue management. The new 'hybrid' National Oil Companies and various mining companies provide producing states with options that did not exist in the 1990s, allowing governments to downplay the importance of global norms (Benner et al. 2010).

6. Conclusion

The rise of the transparency initiative in the extractive industries has altered these industries operate, but has thus far failed to change how resource-rich regimes are governed. Evidently it was much easier to force oil companies such as Exxon, Chevron, BP, Total, Shell, which account for 11 per cent of daily oil global production to sit at the table when the Cold War was over and the price of oil hovered at $10 per barrel, than to reconfigure the regime structure of quasi- or fully-fledged authoritarian regimes. The EITI, with its focus on the promotion and empowerment of civil society at the local level chose to indirectly challenge existing power structures, an enterprise that had slim chances of success from the start. Not only have civil society groups been historically weak in the post-colonial resource-rich states, they have also constantly been undermined by governments and in recent years campaigns against local civil society groups in the oil-rich countries have intensified rather than diminished (Crotty et al. 2014).

The transparency agenda was advanced by a group of global NGOs, which in turn were enabled by international and state actors. While today the transparency agenda in the extractive industries still ranks high on the list of global civil society advocates, their commitment will most likely gradually wane in the years to come. This development will be largely due to the fact that the conversation around the issues of resources and development has moved on in the last decade towards climate change, the transition to a low-carbon society, sustainable cities and a retreat from fossil fuels-based development (Giddens 2009; Mann 2013; Klein 2014). Thus, we are heading towards a situation in which we still overwhelmingly rely on fossil fuels for the foreseeable future, yet fail to still debate the political and economic consequences of their extraction in these countries.

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