

GOVERNING (NON)VIOLENT ENVIRONMENTS:
OIL AND THE HIDDEN PARADOX OF LIBERAL PEACEBUILDING IN GHANA.

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From the intricate, and contentious, machinations that have shaped the geonomics of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf since the turn of the 20th Century, to the grisly detail of armed militancy across the creeks of the Niger Delta, oil resources have always conjured images and imaginaries of violence. Across the developing world, this rendering of an oil-infused perilous environment has ignited a spirited endeavour to extend the 'liberal peace' by nurturing productive capitalism and multi-stakeholder buy-in through 'good governance' reform. A deeper introspection of the scholarly intake of these reforms, thus far, reveals a perplexing gulf between violence and the governance dynamics of oil, thereby, inviting the question; how does violence shape the contours of governance across extractive enclaves where the 'liberal peace' presumably holds sway? Through the combined heuristics of 'scaling democracy' and 'technocratic exceptionalism,' along with an in-depth account of the complex assemblage that has shaped the differential governance dynamics in Ghana after notable discoveries of commercial oil in the Western Region, the article links violence to the instrumental value that powerful actors deploy to negotiate competing claims over oil resources. The main argument advanced here underscores how local and national elites deploy violent potentialities to maintain a depoliticised and technocratic approach to the 'liberal peace', often at the cost of inclusive governance and marginalised voices in oil-rich communities.

The account draws from ethnographic research begun in 2013, including documentary analysis and elite interviews with key actors around Ghana's oil industry. Indeed, Ghana's reputation as a haven for liberal political and economic reform continues to attract plaudits from scholars and policy-makers alike. Following the development of the oil industry, this positive standing as a haven for 'liberal peace' has been further bolstered by the adoption of various citizens' oversight bodies, such as the Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC) and the enhanced Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Nonetheless, while community participation has been deeply etched into the institutional and operational structures of such oversight platforms and other governance institutions, communities in the Western Region often voice discontent with their lopsided nature. Others have advanced added grievances about the failure of these citizens' platforms to address grievances regarding environmental disruptions and the fair allocation of revenues to groups that claim ownership of land near different sites of oil extraction. Through the lens of scaling democracy and technocratic exceptionalism, the article sheds light on a hidden paradox of the idea of liberal peace, where technocratic guises of peace co-locate with power to sustain an expansive network of violent hyper-extraction of oil. These findings will therefore add impetus to the imperative for new interpretative frames that sit at the intersections of peacebuilding, governance, and community-based resource management approaches.

The article will be structured into five main sections. After the introduction, the second will lay out the main currents of the critique around 'liberal peacebuilding,' along with a detailed analysis of the heuristic tools of scaling democracy and technocratic exceptionalism. Of significance to the critique here are the ways violence or the threat of violence are often deployed to render competing multi-scalar governance more governable through an invocation of technocratic interventions of liberal peacebuilding. The third section draws the connection between the previous heuristic tools with the modalities and representations of Ghana's oil industry. The section specifically maps out the main ideas and narratives that sustained the invocation of violent oil in Ghana. The penultimate section

connects the threads at the national level with some of the localised counter-narratives emerging from the Western region in Ghana. The concluding section will connect the analytical and conceptual discussion of the analysis and reflect on some of the paradoxes associated with liberal peacebuilding and how violence shapes extractive environments.