

alongside one another to understand the full texture of biomedicine on the continent. As a person who works at a hospital in Uganda, I also see traces of my own experiences in the book's field notes, car troubles and photographs. *Traces of the Future* offers a thoughtful and thought-provoking excavation of the ambitions and afterlives of medical research in Africa.

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Lori Leonard, *Life in the Time of Oil: a pipeline and poverty in Chad*. Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press (pb US\$25 – 978 0 253 01983 7). 2016, xi + 149 pp.

Oil has assumed a central place in current scholarship on Africa: it makes the contradictions of capitalist development glaringly obvious and, as a result, has become the focus of a number of innovative policy interventions, with uneven success. One such intervention, the Chad–Cameroon Petroleum Development and Pipeline Project, which is the single largest foreign direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa, is led by a consortium of multinational oil companies (ExxonMobil, Chevron, Petronas) and supported by the World Bank. However, in 2008, the project folded as revenues that were supposed to reduce poverty were instead used to purchase arms. Although the World Bank promptly withdrew support, oil extraction continued. Leonard's account adds an interesting twist to this now familiar story: instead of viewing it as a failed attempt to prevent the resource curse in Chad, she argues that '[t]he [World Bank] model did not prevent the resource curse; it helped to produce it' (p. 115).

Leonard's argument pivots on an under-analysed fact: the unusual speed with which Chadian oil came on stream. Government institutions could not keep up with the accelerated pace of oil production and the unanticipated influx of money. Analysts of this so-called 'two-speed' problem have tended to focus on insufficient local technical capacity and governmental inertia. Few, however, have questioned how the project was realized so quickly in the first place. The troubling speed, Leonard shows, was not an unintended consequence of an ill-planned operation. Rather, it was 'the product of work, including efforts the consortium had made to separate itself' from the residents of the oil field region, for example by devolving social responsibilities arising from the project, including the difficult task of distributing compensation payments, 'to others, especially to farmers' (p. 69, 113).

Leonard's compelling insight is derived from more than ten years of ethnographic fieldwork among residents of the region and skilful analysis of the many documents produced by the agencies charged with overseeing the project. This ethnography of 'policy in action' demonstrates how fine-grained empirical research can interrupt official claims. Here, the Chadian state is shown to be not weak or absent, but instrumental in making oil extraction possible. Oil multinationals, the supposed champions of business ethics, directly benefit from people's willingness to shoulder, unwittingly, the project's social costs. The World Bank, for its part, is hardly a neutral guarantor of developmental investment but an unreliable auditor and underwriter of dubious legal mechanisms. The book's strength, however, lies in its nuanced portrayal of what it means to be living with oil in Chad. Leonard is able to show how some people have tapped into the opportunities the project has offered while others are clearly

losing out; and how the project has changed individual subjectivities, relations between people, and expectations of the future.

There are two central themes. First, there are oil's material ramifications, including infrastructures, drill sites, land boundaries, and the countless letters written by aggrieved residents listing acreage lost and trees damaged, as well as the industrial cast-offs distributed among local communities. Packing crates, spent tyres, plastic tape and shipping containers blur 'the distinctions between project and nonproject spaces' (p. 91). Leonard shows how residents found themselves 'in the midst of things' whose status as either property or waste was ambiguous. Such things are feared to attract unwanted attention from police and security personnel, for even when distributed as corporate donations, such cast-offs 'could not be completely transformed, and the people who had [them] in their possession could therefore always be taken as thieves' (p. 109).

A second theme is the consortium's concern with managing residents' affective responses to oil. These are expressed in demands for compensation, protests and low-level violence. Public hearings, often guarded by the police, letters written in response to the project's compensation and resettlement plan and other grievance mechanisms also provide forms of managing expectations. This multi-layered and subtle operation nonetheless has serious effects on local modes of being. People both adopt and creatively modify the project's terms, positioning themselves, for example, as 'eligible' or 'non-eligible' for compensation (p. 45) and as individualized farmer-entrepreneurs, or deploying familial relations and sentiments to negotiate the changing conceptions of landed property that came with the pipeline project.

Leonard's analysis also includes a biting critique of the consortium's deployment of the US anthropologist the late Ellen Brown and her Cameroonian counterpart Jean-Félix Luong. The explicitly 'cultural' knowledge they produced – knowledge claimed to make the project more ethical – reinforced instead a specific type of violence against cultural values and local livelihoods. People's relationship with the land, for example, was portrayed as being characterized by constant movement and a supposed lack of attachment, which meant they would not require 'much assistance once they were forced to leave' (p. 52). While offering a sharp reflection on the uses of (academic) knowledge in extractive sites, it is unclear whether Brown and Luong were given the opportunity to respond to Leonard's assessment of their work, and what kind of relationship existed between these anthropologists and the numerous NGOs campaigning (partly successfully) in the same context and to similar ends.

Leonard's poignant analysis, however, falls somewhat short in situating this ethnography more decisively in relation to the literature on Chad and on oil in Africa, which has emerged in anthropology over the last decade. Leonard suggests that debates in the centres of power carried little meaning for oil region residents (p. 118). But even such apparent irrelevance would seem to warrant a more sustained ethnographic critique than offered here. It is left to the reader to uncover the book's broader theoretical implications and to wonder what 'model' it offers for future anthropological examinations of these issues. Still, *Life in the Time of Oil* is important, providing rich empirical insight organized in an accessible and focused analysis that interrogates the continued promotion of resource-based capitalist development in Africa today.

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