further one moves from the capital, the more state building and governance become a matter of a lumbering and ignorant state imposing itself upon society: a process of state bifurcation that echoes Mamdani. Even within the state's coastal heartland, where a 'nascent middle class' is kept on board through its aspiration to the lifestyle of the elite, the poor see next to nothing (p. 155). In many ways, Angola's current social and political conjuncture appears as an unsustainable historical moment, the crest of a wave that may already have broken with the recent collapse of the crude oil price.

Although the granular detail of the book's analysis highlights the eccentricity of the Angolan case, its contributions to debates in comparative politics are clear. The book adds to the theorization of the 'illiberal' state that Soares de Oliveira has broached elsewhere: a state that uses the rewards of resource endowment to pursue a trajectory contrary to the liberal democratic norms once favoured by donors. By locating Angola's distinct path of state formation within history and political economy, Soares de Oliveira makes a strong case against the 'empty shell' vision of the African state guaranteed only by respect for its own borders. The extraversion of the Angolan state is structured on its own terms, and forms part of a strategy that is not simply about surviving, but about thriving.

Justin Pearce
University of Cambridge
justin.pearce@gmail.com
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Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, editors, *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*. London: Zed Books (pb £19.99 – 978 1 78360 379 4). 2015, 357 pp.

Located at the heart of the African continent, the Central African Republic (CAR) has witnessed a seemingly endless series of political crises, rebellions and attempted and successful *coups d'état* since its independence in 1960. The last twenty years in particular have been characterized by a constant alternation of periods of relative calm and violent escalations. Despite this troubled history, the country has received comparatively little research attention. So far, only a limited number of publications have aimed to understand and reflect upon the various causes and factors that have been triggering, fuelling and influencing this state of quasi-permanent instability. As a result, when the most recent conflict broke out in 2013, it was rapidly reduced to its religious dimension and frequently portrayed in the media as a civil war – often even a stand-alone war – opposing Muslim combatants and Christian self-defence militia. Deep-rooted social, economic and political problems as well as external and regional factors of influence have largely been overlooked. This one-sided perception is problematic, especially when it comes to finding any long-term solution to the CAR's chronic destabilization.

Against this background, *Making Sense of the Central African Republic*, edited by Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, is a timely volume intended to shed more light on the complexity and dynamics behind the CAR's cycle of crises and conflicts, in particular the most recent one. The main argument is that 'the CAR's history of turmoil and instability can only be understood in the context of its violent history of colonialization, limited political institutionalization and centralization, and position (geographic as well as geopolitical) in the region' (p. 2). Within this framework, the twelve individual chapters deal with different issues

and topics. Taken together, they provide a fairly comprehensive though not always analytical overview of the CAR state, economy and society, with a view to highlighting the root causes of conflict, factors contributing to violence and insecurity, especially outside the capital of Bangui and in the north-eastern provinces, as well as the failure of international and regional initiatives to manage and stabilize the situation.

Its well-written, detailed insight into the CAR's history, politics, political economy and society is one of the book's strengths. By covering a wide range of themes, *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* builds up a multifaceted picture of a generally little known country. Editors and authors emphasize particularly the regional dimension of the CAR's crisis. They acknowledge that it is indeed essential not to limit the analysis to seemingly internal problems but to conceive of the CAR as being 'part of a broader system of states in the region and beyond' (p. 11). In addition to the fact that the CAR is located and embedded in a regional conflict arc, with Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo among its neighbours, and that it is affected by destabilizing spillover effects, this is also about understanding the wider geopolitical context and external influences on the CAR's political (in)stability. In a comprehensive chapter on the CAR's history, Stephen W. Smith outlines how France has continued to remain involved in the CAR, even after its former colony's independence and notwithstanding repeated attempts to reduce its engagement. Focusing on the regional level, Roland Marchal, in his chapter 'CAR and the regional (dis)order', provides a thorough analysis of how regional players and developments have contributed to the emergence of the CAR's dysfunctional state. Particular attention is given to Chad and its interference in its neighbour's internal affairs. This focus on the broader context of the CAR's conflict and crisis gives particular strength to the book. Nevertheless, an even wider perspective – for example, the role of emerging actors such as China or South Africa – would have added interesting details.

The book also includes chapters authored by practitioners from the field, such as on different aspects of diamond mining and trading by Ned Dalby, a project manager with a peace-building organization; an illustrative discussion of Bangui's PK5 district and its turbulent intercommunity relations by Faouzi Kilembe, a technical assistant and civil society expert; and contributions from humanitarian aid worker Enrica Picco and former US Ambassador to the CAR Laurence D. Wohlers. To a large extent, authors refer to interviews conducted with local stakeholders and other data collected directly in the field. This experience-based and illustrative approach has the advantage of basing the book on first-hand information, but comes at the expense of more detailed reflection. While the impressions gathered by the authors are original and multifaceted, it has to be noted that all authors, with the exception of Faouzi Kilembe, are either Americans or Europeans.

In summary, *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* provides a unique (so far) and comprehensive insight into the CAR's recent history, deep-rooted problems, challenges and trends, with a view to capturing the complexity of the country's chronic instability. Being mainly empirical and often based on interviews, policy reports and analyses, it is particularly interesting for policymakers and other stakeholders engaged in peace-building initiatives, development cooperation and related activities. Even if not offering any direct policy recommendations, the book, and the conclusion in particular, sum up and discuss what is preventing the country from reaching sustainable peace and stability. The authors make clear that any further international attempt to contribute to peace and stability in the CAR has to go beyond the usual 'quick fixes' and must instead tackle the 'myriad

problems' (p. 337) and underlying systemic questions. Insights from the book may certainly be helpful here.

Angela Meyer
Organisation for International Dialogue and Conflict Management Vienna
angela.meyer@idialog.eu
doi:10.1017/S0001972016000899

Omolade Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*. Bloomington and Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press (hb US$85 – 978 0 253 01569 3; pb US$35 – 978 0 253 01573 0). 2015, 322 pp.

Omolade Adunbi's book engages with one of the most popular themes in the study of contemporary Nigeria: the politics of violence and the contested ownership of the country's oil wealth. His thesis on oil as an 'ancestral promise of wealth' grounds this work in the discipline of anthropology, and takes the discussion of conflict and insurgency in the Niger Delta well beyond conventional explanations that dwell majorly on environmental degradation, economic deprivation and local resource control. While this enables him to construct resource rights as embedded in mythical connections between people and places, the approach also allows for some grey areas of interpretation.

Adunbi's scholarship is profound, as is the analysis of his data. Unlike previous authors who have researched the region, he extends the context of his investigation beyond the core Delta states to incorporate the very margin of the oil-producing areas and to include the Ilaje, a Yoruba-speaking group. This experiment with multi-sited ethnography allows him to establish a parallel in oil consciousness across ethnic and regional borders. Across Nigeria's oil communities, the author explains, activism and insurgency rely on a consciousness of inheritance, depicted in myths and narratives that connect the people with oil.

In the seven chapters of his book, Adunbi treats history, activism, contestations, inequality, violence and negotiation, all in relation to oil wealth, and offers an analytical account of interactions that take place among numerous actors he describes as endlessly engaged in 'claim-making'. The author sheds light on the part played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting human and environmental rights rhetoric among the people of the Niger Delta as a tool for challenging state power and control of the oil wealth. He shows how NGOs and insurgency movements latch on to local narratives of oil as an 'ancestral promise of wealth' to insert themselves into spaces of governance. He further depicts how references to Abuja, the country's capital city, are couched in the image of a predatory state and shows the effectiveness of such constructions in raising people's consciousness and mobilizing large-scale dissent. Adunbi moves on to identify three logics of the Amnesty Programme instituted by the Nigerian state to end insurgency. The trio of co-optation, incapacitation and dispersal, he argues, provides a temporary respite for the state and leaves oil communities of the Delta to contend with the continued degradation of their environment.

The central thesis of this book no doubt offers a deeper insight into the struggle of the Niger Delta people than previous works. However, as strong as the argument of the 'ancestral promise of wealth' appears to be, it lacks sufficient textual evidence. Apart from the Ilaje-Ugbo migration history (pp. 103–9), other narratives on which the author relies refer much less directly to resource wealth as inheritance. In the absence of historical narratives that confirm his