

GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, AND DEMOGRAPHY

Kristen Reed. *Crude Existence: Environment and the Politics of Oil in Northern Angola*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009. xiii + 323 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$34.95. Paper.

Angola is the second largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa and a major supplier to the United States. A decade ago its brutal civil war ended, following the death of rebel leader Jonas Savimbi. He had been a U.S. proxy during the Cold War, and his rebel movement, UNITA, for a while was the second largest recipient of U.S. covert military assistance (after the Afghan Mujahadeen). At a National Security Council meeting held in 1975, during the Ford presidency, senior U.S. officials discussed which of the various factions in Angola to support, either directly or through allies such as Zaire's dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, once the Portuguese withdrew from the country. In considering the options, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger suggested that "we might wish to encourage the disintegration of Angola. Cabinda in the clutches of Mobutu would mean far greater security of the petroleum resources" (*The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, Oxford UP, 2003, 521). Until today, the main strategic interest of the U.S. has been to keep oil flowing from Angola.

The Cold War is long over, and February 2013 marked the twenty-year anniversary of the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Angola and the U.S. Oil has remained a key part of the relationship since Angolan independence in 1975, and U.S. super majors such as Chevron and Exxon have invested heavily in Angola. With peace, academic research has become possible, and Kristen Reed is one of a younger generation of scholar-activists who decided to commit to the hard slog of conducting field research in Angola: research that was expensive, time consuming, and frustrating, but also ground breaking. *Crude Existence* focuses on Reed's two Angolan fieldwork locations where the oil industry has a significant land-based footprint—Soyo in Zaire province and the oil-rich enclave of Cabinda.

The strength of Reed's book lies in her efforts to interview residents of Soyo and Cabinda and to learn how their lives have been affected by the oil and gas industry. Environmental issues feature prominently in their responses, especially the impact of the oil industry on artisanal fishing and agricultural production through oil spills and waste. Off-shore oil rigs distort fishing grounds, acting as magnets for fish searching for food and seeking refuge. The boats of Angola's artisanal fishers are banned from approaching rigs for safety reasons. (A study I was involved in for the European Parliament in 2011 on the environmental impact of the oil industry in Africa also included fieldwork in Cabinda and highlighted diminishing fishing catches and oiled fishing nets. These problems remain and will only grow.) Reed writes eloquently about the efforts of these communities to seek compensation, the politics involved, and the advantage that multinational oil companies enjoy.

Angola's politicians encourage the growth of the oil industry and benefit greatly from oil rents but remain "sea blind," not seeing the maritime Exclusive Economic Zone or the growth of a sustainable fishing industry as priorities for economic development. With one of the most rapidly growing populations in Africa, Angola needs urgently to diversify its economy beyond oil, and also seek import substitution.

Reed writes in detail about the ineffectualness of the Angolan government and the corruption that plagues it. Her account of tracking oil smuggling from Soyo to the Democratic Republic of the Congo illustrates the complexity of frontiers and how interconnected communities are in these areas. Her trip to a Cabindan post on the border with the DRC, where Angolan border officials are consuming their alcoholic tribute from passing traders, illustrates the challenges that Angola faces in building an efficient postconflict state.

Reed summarizes the history of the oil industry effectively, but her chapter on the separatist cause in Cabinda (chap. 6, "Militant Territorialization") fails to portray the complexity of this issue, which merits a book in itself. Obtaining honest interviewee responses in Angola and especially in Cabinda is extremely difficult. Why are the separatist groups so fragmented, and how have the Angolan security forces so successfully contained the insurgency and contributed to fragmentation of pro-separatist groups and even the Catholic church in the province? Luanda continues to advocate autonomy, but completely rejects independence claims.

At the macro-level, Reed is overly reliant on secondary sources, also reflecting the difficulty of securing official interviews and data from the Angolan government and the oil industry. The frequent citations from Human Rights Watch, Global Witness, and Angolan activists such as Rafael Marques at times distract from the quality field observations, and the author also drifts into writing more as an NGO advocate than as an academic. The concluding chapter is particularly disappointing, more like a last-minute addendum than a true conclusion. Reed missed an opportunity here to spell out what oil companies can do to influence the behavior of Angola's local and national government and how they should work with communities in Cabinda and Soyo. It has been twenty years since Washington recognized the MPLA as the legitimate elected government in Luanda, and relations are still patchy. What leverage does Washington have over the Angolan government and U.S. companies in terms of encouraging them to adopt credible pro-poor strategies?

Alex Vines
Chatham House
London, U.K.

avines@chathamhouse.org

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