approach to Darfur. However, the author pessimistically concludes that "No matter how serious the crisis, whether it is Rwanda or Sudan, the United States is always going to have 'more pressing' domestic and international issues outside of Africa and the media is still going to prioritize European and Middle Eastern foreign policy issues" (182).

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Nicholas Shaxson, *Poisoned Wells: The Dirty Politics of African Oil.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. viii + 280 pp. Notes. Index. $26.95. Cloth.

Nicholas Shaxson's *Poisoned Wells* is on an important topic—and carries an appealing title. But ultimately it is a contentious peep into the deceitful and often volatile political economy of oil-producing African countries, all ironically experiencing varying degrees of societal deprivations despite their oil riches. It takes a very controversial stance: that the control of Africa's oil is now effectively in the hands of their troubled and ruthless potentates, not the multinational oil companies previously believed to be the quintessential flag-bearers of neo-imperialism. The book is confusing as well as controversial. The subtext of *Poisoned Well* is that the position and strength of African oil producers vis-à-vis multinational oil companies (most vividly manifested in recent expressions of "resource nationalism") derive, in part, from new global developments. Most important among these are the geo-strategic designs of key Western countries, especially the United States, to secure control of Africa's oil reserves, against the backdrop of endless instabilities in the Middle East and staunch competition from such "energy hungry" countries as China, India, Japan, and Brazil.

Rather than placing Western oil cartels and their home governments at the hub of Africa's dirty oil politics, however, Shaxson indicts the continent's political leaderships for foisting a "huge, corrupt, and secret globalised system" on the West (3)! In his grand narrative the good guys are the oil merchants and politicians in Western capitals (including, occasionally, anticorruption crusaders of different persuasions), and the bad guys principally were the likes of Omar Bongo, Obiang Nguema, Sassou-Ngueso, at various times leaders of Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Congo, respectively. Granted that much of Shaxson's journalism beats may have granted him privileged access to African "despots," especially in key Francophone and Lusophone oil nations, his fixation with how the oil-politics-corruption nexus is unravelling in French politics and society is matched by his near silence on similarly obvious relationships between the British government and British oil cartels vis-à-vis their African partners.

Thus, whereas *Poisoned Wells* devotes two chapters to Nigeria, Africa's leading oil producer, much of what is presented is rather sketchy—and

sometimes grossly misleading: the claim, for instance, that gas flaring in the Delta Region has not abated because "Nigerian politicians, and the oil companies that *obey* them, are so slow in putting out those polluting flares... amid all the scrambling for short-term cash" (194; emphasis added). In my opinion, blaming African politicians is one-sided, especially bearing in mind that both sides are locked in these opaque and deeply incestuous relationships that are driving poverty, ecological degradation and violence in Nigeria's oil delta region. Also, whereas *Poisoned Wells* offers interesting contrasting perspectives among Africa's oil producers—Nigeria, Angola, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and the twin Islands of Sâo Tomé e Principe—it is uncertain that its conclusions are applicable to all equally.

Throughout, Shaxson reminds us that "it is important to remember that the dangerous effects of Africa's oil are not confined to this continent": its poisonous effects spread far overseas, "to tangle secretly with a globalised financial architecture and with the shadow worlds of western politics" (26). Yet this obscure world of the oil industry so gleefully and overwhelmingly described in the context of un/official relationships between France (business and government) and her former oil-rich colonies in Africa is replicated in the relationship forged by Anglo-Saxon oil interests on the continent. What, for instance, should be made of Shaxson's contention that Elf is not just an oil company but "a parallel diplomacy to control certain Africa states" (71)? Is Elf, in any radical sense, different from what the Anglo-Dutch oil giant, Shell, "that state within a state" and long known to be a veritable arm of British diplomacy (and headquartered in the City of London), represents in its African fields? Anything short of a balanced and nuanced account of the far-reaching consequences of the acclaimed dirty politics of African oil—for both the West and its African oil partners—is undesirable.

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Ruth Iyob and Gilbert Khadiagala. *Sudan: The Elusive Quest for Peace.* Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2006. 224 pp. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $15.95. Paper.

Throughout Sudan's conflicts, the battle for peace has been as intense as the military confrontations themselves. Gathering Sudanese around the table, agreeing on an agenda, and persuading multiple factions to adopt a unified negotiating platform have all posed extreme difficulties to the mediators, and have surely added to the protraction of the Sudan's civil conflicts. There is a long tradition within the academy of using similar modes of analysis to discuss both war-making and peace-making, a tradition