

REFERENCE

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The Petro-Developmental State in Africa: Making Oil Work in Angola, Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea by JESSE SALAH OVADIA

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In *The Petro-Developmental State* Jesse Salah Ovadia offers a fascinating account of how oil-rich countries in the Gulf of Guinea are making strategic attempts at creating state-centred capitalist development. Based on extensive fieldwork in the Gulf of Guinea, particularly in Nigeria and Angola – the two top oil producers in Africa – Ovadia argues compellingly that there exists a new moment of opportunities for the establishment and institutionalisation of state-led development and capitalist transformation through local content policies. This new moment has the capacity to restructure how states in Sub-Saharan Africa create state-led development that works and functions within the global capitalist system. Such a developmental state would produce a new set of elite whose interest might be tied to creating a real capitalist state that functions properly within the international capitalist system. This is a fascinating and refreshing argument that shifts our attention away from the resource curse argument that has dominated much of academic literature for years. Seeking an alternative in policies that would lead to ‘real capitalist economic development instead of the further underdevelopment brought about by peripheral capitalism’ (p. 11), *The Petro-Developmental State* ‘is intended to capture the possibilities and historical specificity of the current moment for oil extraction in the Gulf of Guinea’ (p. 14). The current moment is defined by the local and national content policies recently put in place by the governments of Angola and Nigeria. These policies – local content and national content – are aimed at creating a new class of elite that moves away from primitive accumulation to creating a new form of capitalist development that can kick-start an industrialisation process that dramatically transforms the economies of these countries. If the local and national content policies are well managed by the governments of Angola and Nigeria, Ovadia argues, oil and gas can be at the centre of this new form of industrialisation.

Local and national content represents a policy shift towards a new form of elite accumulation that is aimed at moulding capitalist development. Local and national content is envisaged as a form of deliberative development that is shaped by elite accumulation with a duality of purpose. First, it may have the mechanism for elite accumulation with a wider and more transformative political and economic strategy such that it can replace the rentier economy with a functional real capitalist economy (p. 95). Second, the rentier economy can be replaced because local content would aid the formation of

an indigenous capitalist class that could bring real capitalist transformation to Angola and Nigeria in particular and the entire Gulf of Guinea in general. While this form of capitalist transformation is novel in oil-rich countries, International Oil Corporations may see such as a threat to their business model. Thus, IOCs may show support publicly while at the same time continuing to oppose such policy initiatives because of their perceived potential at jeopardising IOCs production.

In the case of Nigeria, Ovidia contends that local content means domiciling of services and economic activities. This form of domiciling does not necessarily translate to the transfer of ownership of oil companies and oil servicing businesses to Nigerians as the indigenisation decree of the 1970s attempted to do. While there has been an increase in the number of Nigerians owning stakes in the extractive industry, that increase has not in any way elicited changes in the structure of oil extraction in Nigeria. Angola presents a much more precarious situation than Nigeria. The pursuit of overall economic growth in Angola also results in huge elite accumulation such that it increases the power, wealth and influence of a few elite at the expense of the generality of the population. The closed nature of the Angolan state, having recently transitioned from many years of civil war and coupled with running a pseudo Marxist-Leninist state, 'Angolans are largely unaware of the issue of local content and its location at the centre of questions of oil, development and elite accumulation' (p. 144).

The outcome of more than five decades of oil exploration in Nigeria, Angola and the entire Gulf of Guinea has been high levels of poverty, environmental degradation and huge infrastructural deficit in the specific regions where the oil is extracted – the Niger Delta and Cabinda in Nigeria and Angola, respectively. The outcome has been the emergence of large-scale social movements ranging from groups advocating for corporations and the state to leave the oil in the ground to those who want greater benefits of the oil wealth to the people of the oil-region in particular and the countries in general. While these campaigns are mostly influenced by the interest of the organisation's funders, the campaigns, Ovidia suggests, 'are unlikely in the short time to halt the centrality of oil to the functioning of the world system or to the economies of underdeveloped countries that possess significant petroleum resources' (p. 11). Despite the prevalence of environmental and other advocacy NGOs in the Gulf of Guinea, there appears, Ovidia reasons, not to be any interest by these organisations to push for local content in Angola and Nigeria because these organisations do not have more ability to influence the state to promote positive change and better use of state resources (pp. 162–3).

As with every book, *The Petro-Developmental State* has its own drawbacks. The book presents an overly optimistic view of global capitalism and the rise of a particular variant of it in the Gulf of Guinea as the solution to elite greed and underdevelopment. Ovidia presents a nuanced argument about the importance of local and national content policies to the capitalist form of industrialisation in Angola and Nigeria by giving a lot of agency to the political and economic elite as having the will and desire to shape such development because they have realised it is in their interest to revert from primitive accumulation. However, hidden in this narrative of African elite capitalism is the

prevalence of elite accumulation that is largely responsible for Angola and Nigeria's underdevelopment after many years of petro-capitalism. How a change in policy towards creating more spaces of accumulation would change that dramatically is beyond imagination. More importantly, the chapter on Civil Society Organisations ought to have been given more attention. For example, why is it that CSOs are not advocating for local content? What role did trade unions, particularly the senior staff associations, play in the campaign for local content? What effect do local content policies have on the struggles against state ownership of natural resources by members of the oil-rich communities in Cabinda and Niger Delta? Could local content have been used as a carrot by the state against the insurgents in Nigeria and Angola? Beyond this, *The Petro-Developmental State* is a great addition to the growing literature on the politics of oil and development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Its unique take on how capitalism can make important contributions to the development of an industrial economy in a petro-state sets it apart from other books on oil and its complex global politics.

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Moral Economies of Corruption: State Formation and Political Culture in Nigeria by STEVEN PIERCE

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Corruption is bad news, both for developed and developing economies because 'it benefits the few at the expense of the many; it delays and distorts economic development, preempts basic rights and due processes and diverts resources from basic services, international aid, and whole economies' (Johnston 2010, p. 1). Such debilitating consequences of corruption motivate the constant attempts, specialist and non-specialist, to come to grips with the phenomenon in order to curtail it. Pierce's book is one such recent and intriguing attempt to comprehend the dynamics of corruption using Nigeria as case study. Rather than see corruption as 'one phenomenon that variously manifests itself around the globe, or that represents a particular developmental conjuncture' (p. 19), the book conceives of corruption as 'a political performative' (p. 21), a discourse performing political work (p. 20). It is thus a history of the 'political work corruption has done in Nigeria' (p. 21).

The book reveals that the discourse of corruption, or a 'corruption-complex' in Nigeria, emerged from a specific conjuncture: a practical and material administrative reorganisation (in colonial northern Nigeria) in which (indigenous) officials in rural areas, who had new powers and a real shortage of money, confronted an ideological context in which the use of office to personal ends counted as corruption (p. 37), and the selective prosecution of corruption by the British colonial administration. The prosecution was selective in the sense that when corruption was prosecuted, it was done not for corruption per se but as a means of settling other scores that had little to do with corruption. Simply put 'the contemporary Nigerian state emerged from institutions