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Oiling the Urban Economy: Land, labour, capital, and the state in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana has deployed a wide range of ideas scattered over varied disciplines (i.e. economics, sociology, geography, anthropology and politics) to make sense of the nexus of oil and economic development. Comprising of ten chapters, its objectives are equally ambitious; problematizing the resources curse doctrine at the macro and urban levels, demonstrating the class nature of the expectations and ramifications of oil at the urban level, showing how colonial experiences can shape the nature of present day institutions and how those dynamics constrain the experiences of oil cities, analyzing the various ways in which neoliberalism over the long haul has encountered urban institutions within oil-rich economies and considering and appraising existing and proposed social policies that have been developed to deal with the impacts of oil extraction within the region (Western region of Ghana). By any measure, these are aggressive, important and pertinent admirable objectives.

The discovery of oil, especially in Africa, is often discussed in the context of the Dutch Disease (DD) or resource curse. DD occurs when the discovery of a high demand exportable commodity such as oil, reduces the competitiveness of traditional exports because of the appreciation in the country’s exchange rate. The discovery can also lead to the diversion of development resources away from other sectors to the new sector and consequently the underdevelopment of those sectors. In essence, the discovery of the natural resource can have deleterious effects on the economy because it reduces net exports. At the same time, the new discovery can divert resources away from other sectors of the economy and cause them to decline. For example, some studies have found the presence of DD in Nigeria, but others dispute it suggesting that it is the
result of misguided policies.\textsuperscript{1} Having been born and raised in Sekondi-Takoradi, I was naturally drawn to this new book, which deals with the effects of the drilling of oil on the twin city, with it being the nearest major urban area to the drilling site, about an hour or less away.

Chapters 1 and 2 of the 237-page book provide the background as well as the methodology, and the author subsequently reviews the literature on the various theoretical approaches that link oil (natural resources) and economic development, viz. open access exploitation, factor endowment and resource curse. Chapter 2 specifically considers and rejects orthodox (economic) analysis with its emphasis on private property rights in favor of heterodox property rights but still in the context of the same orthodox analysis. The difference is that the heterodox analysis explicitly includes institutional differences across space and time, and emphasizes that efficiency does not refer to production alone but also to distribution (allocation/equity). Chapter 3 traces the development of the oil industry in Ghana from 1896 to 2007, when the first commercial quantities of oil were discovered, but I am at a loss for the gratuitous inclusion of the tidbit on the corruption case against Tsatsu Tsikata. The point being made is that during his time at GNPC, considerable efforts were made to develop the oil industry. Chapter 4 does a good job of retracing the historical origins of Sekondi-Takoradi.\textsuperscript{2}

Meanwhile, chapter 4 further argues that the decline in the fortunes of Sekondi-Takoradi in the 1970s was part of a general decline (in Ghana) because of military interventions, severe drought and global depression. However, there is also the suggestion in the very next paragraph that, it was the recommendations by the World Bank for the country to adopt more market oriented strategies that caused the general decline and that of Sekondi-Takoradi. The truth may actually be that it was a combination of all those factors. It is arguable whether or not the Black Star Line, Ghana Airways, Ghana Railways and other state enterprises could have continued for long given the way they operated. It ignores the fact that many of the state enterprises were operating in ways which were simply not sustainable. Many railways operate with

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\textsuperscript{1} Budina Nina et al. “Nigeria’s Growth Record: Dutch Disease or Debt Overhang? World Bank Policy Research Paper’s, WPS4256, October 2006.
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\textsuperscript{2} The area identified as being occupied by the Ahantas is actually occupied not only by the Ahantas but also by Nzemas. The Ahanta area extends from Essikado westwards along the coast to somewhere around Cape Three Points. Thereafter the land is occupied by the Nzemas all the way into the Ivory Coast, where they melt into the Apollo, as they are called in the neighboring country (which is also known as Cote d’Ivoire).
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