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## Review Article

### Oil and Social Movements

*Timothy Mitchell: Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil, London/New York: Verso, 2011, ISBN 13: 978-1781681169, 288 pp.*

*C. I. Obi/Siri Aas Rustad: Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta. Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence, London/New York: Zed Books, 2011, ISBN: 9781848138070, 255 pp.*

*Michael Lewin Ross: The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations, New York: Princeton University Press, 2012, ISBN: 9780691159638, 312 pp.*

*Brian Black: Crude Reality: Petroleum in World History, Lanham et. al.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012, ISBN: 978-0742556546, 288 pp.*

When I was still in high-school in the early 1990s, a good friend of mine used to surprise us every other week with a new T-shirt bearing a political slogan. On one of them a worker threw a gigantic sledgehammer against the logo of one of the world's largest oil companies and enormous letters claimed that "even the hardest shell" could be broken. The T-shirt suggested that there was a social movement against the practices of large multinational oil companies such as Shell, which, at the time, was attacked especially for its behaviour in Nigeria. Yet, at least in the industrialised world, no such movement existed. While, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the use of atomic energy stirred a massive international protest movement with hundreds of thousands attending demonstrations and putting "Nuclear Power? No thanks" stickers on their petrol-guzzling vehicles, the oil industry has not encountered a comparable social movement in the Western world. There have been some local protests against the negative consequences of oil exploration for natural reserves, against the construction of pipelines, such as the recent Keystone XL project, or against oil spills from Torrey Canyon to Deepwater Horizon. However, there has not been any network of groups and organisations united by a common social or political goal concerning oil to achieve

change by various means of protest over a longer period of time.<sup>1</sup> Considering the much greater importance of oil in the industrialised countries' energy balances and its environmental effects, it may seem surprising that there is a strong anti-nuclear movement but no anti-oil movement in the Western world. Yet, it is exactly the significance and all-pervasiveness of oil and oil products that makes such a movement difficult to conceive, as it would amount to a rejection of the modern way of life. While opposition to the modern world is coeval with its existence and could always gain a number of followers on the fringes of society, it does not seem to have the potential to unite a larger social movement.<sup>2</sup> This, in turn, may be partly attributable to the fact that social movements in themselves are essentially modern phenomena.

In view of this absence of an anti-oil movement, it is no coincidence that social movements are also largely absent from the bulk of literature on the history of oil. In the vein of Daniel Yergin's Pulitzer-prize winning book, the political history of oil is often conceptualised as the epic fight of great men, adventurers, business men and politicians, for money, power, and influence.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, social movements do not assume a natural place in an economic history of oil that emphasises the principles of resource economics, the business logic of firms and the economic considerations of governments.<sup>4</sup> Based on these observations, the following review essay will try to show why social movements are absent from the mainstream history of oil and, on the basis of several recent publications, explain how they might be introduced into the picture and what might be gained from such a change of perspective.

With the rising economic, social and political importance of oil over the last decades, histories of oil have flourished. One of the most recent examples of this fairly general strand of literature is Brian Black's *Crude Reality: Petroleum in World History*. As the popular pun in the title suggests, Black is critical of the high dependence of contemporary economies on oil as he sees our "ecology of oil" endangered by a coming "peak oil" – a theory that Marion King Hubbert developed in the 1950s which acquired many followers in the 1970s and again in the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> According to the environmental

- 1 This is the definition of "social movement" introduced by Harald Roth/Dieter Rucht: Einleitung, in: Roland Roth/Dieter Rucht (eds.): *Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945: Ein Handbuch*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, pp. 9–39.
- 2 Even Ernst Friedrich Schumacher: *Small is Beautiful: Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, London 1978, does not reject an economy based on hydrocarbons altogether. Rather, we would have to look for dropout communities or obscure conservatives like the group around the Bussauer Manifest zur umweltpolitischen Situation, in: *Scheidewege. Vierteljahresschrift für skeptisches Denken* 4 (1975), S. 469–486.
- 3 Daniel Yergin: *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*, New York 1991.
- 4 See for example Peter Z. Grossman: *U.S. Energy Policy and the Pursuit of Failure*, Cambridge 2013.
- 5 Brian Black: *Crude Reality: Petroleum in World History*, Lanham 2012, pp. 1f; Marion King Hubbert: *Energy Resources: A Report to the Committee on Natural Resources of*

historian at Penn State, Altoona, “petroleum culture has recalibrated global economics and political power” and we live in the “hydrocarbon era in world history”.<sup>6</sup> This suggestive move, from the perception of a world in which oil is an essential element to a world in which everything is essentially related to oil, has already been used by Daniel Yergin and many other historians of oil in order to underscore the importance of their work. However, it is neither fully explained nor theoretically elaborated.<sup>7</sup> In this context, Black refers to Paul Crutzen’s notion of the Anthropocene which is the new geological epoch in which human beings significantly alter the natural resources and climate of the planet. Whereas this concept may be theoretically interesting, offering a new perspective on long-term historical developments, it does very little to explain the concrete history of oil.<sup>8</sup>

The latter is Black’s object of study: in seven chapters he offers a rather conventional narrative on the rise of the oil economy from its modest beginnings in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to its remarkable present. Knowledgeably, yet not surprisingly, Black describes the early usage of petroleum as an illuminant and lubricant as well as the spectacular expansion of the oil industry with the advent of the internal combustion engine and the ascendance of the motorcar in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He identifies the two world wars as crucial periods for the breakthrough of the global dominance of oil. Black describes the rise of modern consumer cultures and automotive societies from the consumer perspective, while advocacy groups or consumer organisations are largely

the National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council, Washington 1962; Kenneth S. Deffeyes: *Hubbert’s Peak: The Impending World Oil Shortage*, New York 2003; Other recent examples of the crude pun include: Sonia Shah: *Crude: The Story of Oil*, New York 2004; Steve A. Yetiv: *Crude Awakenings: Global Oil Security and American Foreign Policy*, Ithaca 2004; Paul Sabin: *Crude Politics: The California Oil Market: 1900–1940*, Berkeley 2005; Thad Dunning: *Crude Democracy: Natural Resource Wealth and Political Regimes*, Cambridge/New York 2008 and the documentary *Crude*, directed by Joe Berlinger, 2009.

6 Brian Black: *Crude Reality*, pp. 6–8.

7 For a historical assessment and critique of the energy-civilisation equation see Karin Zachmann: *Past and Present Energy Societies: How Energy Connects Politics, Technologies and Cultures*, in: Nina Möllers/Karin Zachmann (eds.): *Past and Present Energy Societies: How Energy Connects Politics, Technologies and Cultures*, Bielefeld 2012, pp. 7–41; Rüdiger Graf: *Von der Energievergessenheit zur theoretischen Metonymie: Energie als Medium der Gesellschaftsbeschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert*, in: Hendrik Ehrhardt/Thomas Kroll (eds.): *Energie in der modernen Gesellschaft: Zeithistorische Perspektiven*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 73–92.

8 For a different assessment see Franz Mauelshagen: “Anthropocene”: A Case for a Climatic History of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History* 9:1 (2012), pp. 131–138, available online at: <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/site/40209224/default.aspx#engl> (accessed on 16 September 2014).

absent from his narrative. The fast rise of oil as the most important form of energy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to be driven by its irresistible appeal as well as political and economic decisions – but not by anything that might qualify as a social movement.

At times, Black touches upon questions of social movements. However, he rarely realises their full potential. For example, he addresses the question of control of the Baku oil fields during the Russian Revolution, but he neither mentions Stalin's agitation of the oil field workers nor reflects on the importance of these experiences for the formation of communism.<sup>9</sup> Black refers to the fact that the oil industry relies on a “transient workforce of knowledgeable, well-trained specialists who could be moved to the new hot spots all over the world” but he does not spend much time talking about the concrete working conditions and the potential for workers' organisation.<sup>10</sup> As an exception he presents Robert Vitalis' findings concerning Saudi Aramco, the subsidy of four large American oil companies with exclusive rights to produce Saudi Arabian oil.<sup>11</sup> As Vitalis has shown, the company exported racial segregation to its facilities in Saudi Arabia and suppressed workers demanding improved conditions. Unlike many other histories of oil, Black at least briefly touches on the consequences of oil exploration for local communities and mentions protest movements against companies causing environmental degradation and negative social consequences for local communities – most prominently against Texaco/Chevron in Ecuador or Shell in Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in his concluding chapter on the current oil situation and its future prospects, Black tries to rewrite the history of the ecological movement since the 1970s as a history of the movement against the burning of fossil fuels. Whereas this offers an intellectually interesting perspective on the ecological movement, it captures only parts of its self-understanding, motivation, dynamics and coherence.

All in all, Black's global history of oil is an excellent example of the branch of critical histories of oil that resemble their oil-enthusiastic counterparts in not emphasising collective activity and not trying to integrate social movements in the narrative. The great exception to this rule is Timothy Mitchell's stimulating study *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* in which he tries to show how “fossil fuels helped create both the possibility of modern democracy and its limits.”<sup>13</sup> Trained as a political scientist, Mitchell has been working historically on the *Rule of Experts* in colonial Egypt and the emergence of the “economy” as a field of knowledge usually offering broad

9 Brian Black: *Crude Reality*, pp. 67–92; see for example Simon Sebag Montefiore: *Young Stalin*, London 2007, pp. 160–162.

10 Brian Black: *Crude Reality*, p. 83.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 86f; Robert Vitalis: *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, Stanford 2007.

12 Brian Black: *Crude Reality*, pp. 174–178.

13 Timothy Mitchell: *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, London/New York 2011, p. 1.

and counter-intuitive interpretations.<sup>14</sup> In his opinion, not only the oil producing countries but also the main industrialised countries are aptly described as “oil states” that currently face the double crisis of peak oil and climate change. Their prospects appear critical if not apocalyptic: “The political machinery that emerged to govern the age of fossil fuels, partly as a product of those forms of energy, may be incapable of addressing the events that will end it.”<sup>15</sup>

According to Mitchell, modern mass democracy became possible only with the age of coal. Coal provided the energy to facilitate transportation and communication at a formerly unknown speed and scope and both were essential for modern democratic practices. As more and more people depended on the provision of energy by coal, Mitchell suggests, workers were empowered and their potential for collective activity rose. Against a large strand of workers’ history, he argues that

workers were gradually connected together not so much by the weak ties of a class culture, collective ideology or political organization, but by the increasing and highly concentrated quantities of carbon energy they mined, loaded, carried, stoked and put to work.<sup>16</sup>

Their essential position within the economy made the formation of unions reasonable as it gave them comparatively large leverage and their strikes were an effective means to realise political demands. Accordingly, mine workers were more strike-prone than other workers; between 1881 and 1905 American miners were three times more often on strike than their colleagues in other branches.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, fewer workers are needed to extract the same amount of energy in form of oil from the earth than in form of coal.<sup>18</sup> Comparatively few skilled workers and a larger, yet still small, number of unskilled labourers are needed on the oil fields; Mitchell quotes a striking comparison that in the 1940s “a single cotton spinning and weaving plant” in Tripoli employed four times as many workers as “the whole Iraq Petroleum Terminal and Refinery altogether”.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, oil workers were more

14 Timothy Mitchell: *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity*, Berkeley 2002; Timothy Mitchell: *Economists and the Economy in the Twentieth Century*, in: George Steinmetz (eds.): *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and its Epistemological Others* 2005, pp. 126–141.

15 Timothy Mitchell: *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil*, p. 7.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 19f.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

dispersed in global networks and did not collaborate as closely as coal miners which reduced their internal solidarity. Finally, Mitchell observes, the oil economy created a transport structure that differed significantly from the structure of the coal economy:

Whereas the movement of coal tended to follow dendritic networks, with branches at each end but a single main channel, creating potential choke points at several junctures, oil followed along networks that often had the properties of a grid, like an electricity network, where there is more than one possible path and the flow of energy can switch to avoid blockages or overcome breakdowns.<sup>20</sup>

Accordingly, collaborative action by oil workers had a smaller potential to influence the flow of oil and, thus, exert pressure on local governments. While the final point of the argument is questionable, and Mitchell himself admits that, in order to govern the global flow of oil, one needs to control only “a comparatively small number of sites – a few dozen major oilfields, pipelines and terminals, and the handful of bulk tanker fleets”,<sup>21</sup> his basic observation – that the production of coal engendered a different and much stronger form of workers’ unionism and activism than the production of oil – is correct. Yet, Mitchell goes too far in suggesting and insinuating that this was the reason for the switch from coal to oil in post-war Western Europe.<sup>22</sup> Despite the brilliance of his observations, some of Mitchell’s intentionalist formulations do neither account for the complexity of the global energy economy nor for the quite simple and concrete advantages oil has over coal.

Other parts of Mitchell’s study may be of smaller interest for the connection between oil and social movements, yet, they are thought-provoking as they challenge conventional wisdom. He argues that oil has never been scarce but the crucial question of the oil economy has always been the management of abundance by artificially constraining supplies. Moreover, he describes oil as the hidden foundation of the post-war economic order and interprets Keynesian economics in its negligence of natural resources as a form of “Petroknowledge”.<sup>23</sup> Closer connected to a history of social movements is his later claim that the windfall profits from the oil price increases since the 1970s helped to fund the “neoliberal movement” in the United States. According to Mitchell, Richard Mellon Scaife, the heir to Gulf Oil, donated at least 340 million US Dollars to the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hoover Institute, the Manhattan Institute and the Center for Strategic and International

20 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 29f., 41.

23 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–65, 109–143.

Studies while Charles and David Koch helped to found the Cato Institute in 1977.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Mitchell argues that, in the Arab world, oil money helped to fund a version of ultra-conservative Islamism that has become radicalised since the 1980s. The sheer existence of political Islamism and Islamist terrorism, according to Mitchell, cannot be understood without the oil revenues in countries like Saudi Arabia and American military assistance to Islamist governments in the Gulf region in the light of the Cold War and its growing dependence on foreign oil. Thus, he rejects Benjamin R. Barber's description of the present as a global conflict between Jihad and McWorld arguing that Jihad was not simply a local force antithetical to the development of "McWorld"; McWorld, as it turns out, was really *McJihad*, a necessary combination of a variety of social logics and forces.<sup>25</sup> While many of Mitchell's claims are exaggerated or even plainly false, as his assertion that there was no oil crisis in the 1970s but only an orchestrated strategy by the multinational oil companies, and his arguments sometimes run into the vicinity of conspiracy theories, *Carbon Democracy* is still one of the most original, innovative, and thought-provoking publications on the history of oil that have been published in the last years.

While Black and, to a larger extent, Mitchell refer to the realities of oil exploration and production in the producing countries, most of the histories of oil assume a more Western perspective. In recent years, the literature on oil in the Middle East has been growing but other producing countries play a smaller role.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the volume edited by Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad on *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta* is a more than welcome contribution to the field and particularly relevant to this review. Since the 1990s, several oil-related social movements have emerged in the Niger Delta which, in the global discourse on the negative side of oil, features as the "site of oil-related violence par excellence".<sup>27</sup> Nigeria is the largest African oil exporter and produces 10 per cent of the oil that is consumed in the United States. The oil is mainly produced by multinational oil companies and accounts for 80 per cent of the state's revenues and 90 per cent of its exports. Yet, Nigerian oil comes almost exclusively from the region

24 Ibid., pp. 197f.

25 Ibid., p. 213.

26 Robert Vitalis: *America's Kingdom*; Toby Craig Jones: *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia*, Cambridge 2010; Valérie Marcel: *Oil Titans: National Oil Companies in the Middle East*, London 2006; Thomas W. Lippman: *Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership with Saudi Arabia*, Boulder 2004; Aileen Keating: *Mirage: Power, Politics, and the Hidden History of Arabian Oil*, Amherst/New York 2005.

27 Cyril I. Obi/Siri Aas Rustad (eds.): *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, London/New York 2011, p. 198; For artistic representations see Ed Kashi/Michael Watts: *Curse of the Black Gold: 50 Years of Oil in the Niger Delta*, Brooklyn/New York/London 2010; or the film *Sweet Crude*, directed by Sandy Cioffi, 2009.

of the Niger Delta which is inhabited by 28 million people of 20 ethnic groups.<sup>28</sup> Simultaneously, the Niger Delta is not the poorest part of the country but the region with the highest youth unemployment rate and the most dramatic social inequalities as well as “one of the world’s most severely petroleum impacted ecosystems and one of the 5 most petroleum-polluted environments in the world”.<sup>29</sup>

Since Nigerian independence in 1960 which almost coincided with the beginning of the local oil production in 1958, the Niger Delta region has been the site of social conflicts with various degrees of violence. In 1966 the separatist Niger Delta Volunteer Force started an unsuccessful secessionist campaign which led to the full control of the region’s oil production by the national military government.<sup>30</sup> The conflict over the control of the Niger Delta’s oil reserves intensified again in the late 1980s and early 1990s when the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) under the guidance of Ken Saro-Wiwa issued the Ogoni Bill of Rights. After the brutal repression of the movement by the Nigerian state, most famously the death sentencing of the Ogoni Nine, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists, the Ijaw Youth Council issued the Kaiama Declaration in 1998, claiming the exclusive right to the region’s mineral resources and demanding the oil companies to leave the country.<sup>31</sup> After the repression of the Ijaw Youth movement and Nigeria’s return to democracy, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) emerged, a more violent ensemble of militant groups thriving for regional independence as well as personal enrichment attacking both multinational oil companies and the state.<sup>32</sup> While these movements were all male dominated, between 1993 and 1995 the Federation of Ogoni Women Associations protested against Shell, and a few years later the Niger Delta Women for Justice mobilised support for the Kaiama Declaration issued by the Ijaw Youth Council.<sup>33</sup>

Most of the authors seem to sympathise with the non-violent activists and agree with their complaints if not their aims and methods. Ultimately they want to contribute to a solution for the crisis in the Niger Delta region and find a way out of the impasse. Despite these presentist, political, and normative tendencies – Babatunde A. Ahonsi suggests a Marshall Pan for the region Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad demand a generous amnesty – the authors offer explanations for the rise of various social movements in the region, their connection to oil production and their proclivity for

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 18, 73.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 24.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

33 See Oluwatoyin Oluwaniyi: Women’s Protests in the Niger Delta Region: Challenges and Prospects for Development, in: Cyril I. Obi/Siri Aas Rustad (eds.): *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, pp. 150–166.



violence. In general, they rather simplistically follow the activists' self-explanations and determine ecological degradation of the Niger Delta region and mounting social inequalities as the root cause for the emergence of the social movements for resource control. Oil production, Ukoha Ukiwe argues, forms an "enclave economy" that brings in capital and workers and quickly moves on.<sup>34</sup> Ahonsi estimates that only 15 per cent of the employees in the region are connected to the oil industry and these are predominantly male, as Oluwatoyin Oluwaniyi argues.<sup>35</sup> Yet, considering the extensive literature on social movements, it is recognised that the feeling grievance is a necessary but never a sufficient condition for the formation of a social movement which is why the link between real problems and activists groups appears as much too simple in many of the articles.

More convincingly, the editors summarise the contention of several articles that it was Ken Saro-Wiwa's achievement to have "successfully framed Ogoni grievances in the discourse of indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities and environmental rights" that helped form the movement.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People could not only gain popular support in the region but also the international recognition of its cause. In addition, many authors explain the violent conflicts by long traditions of ethnic tension and violent conflict solution that were "oilified" in the last decades.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, they show that practices of colonial rule continued in the post-colonial state. Engobo Emeseh argues that the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Act of 1979 practically deprived the people of the region of their land who were simultaneously denied access to justice via the judicial system. As a consequence they chose activism as an "alternative means of seeking justice".<sup>38</sup> In particular, Ibaba Samuel Ibaba argues, the change of the derivation principle was perceived as a severe injustice that was attributed to ethnic preferences: In 1960, 50 per cent of the oil revenues flew back to the region where it had been produced. In 1970, this was reduced to 45 and in the 1980s to 1.5 per cent.<sup>39</sup>

Likewise, many authors attribute the emergence of stronger movements and their radicalisation to inappropriately harsh responses by the state as well as the oil companies' security contractors.<sup>40</sup> Generally sympathising with the cause of local ethnic communities, they frame the conflict as a tragedy: "What began as a genuine, insurgent

34 Cyril I. Obi/Siri Aas Rustad (eds.): *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, p. 20.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 150.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 23.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 83, 88, 116.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 91.

struggle has been hijacked by the elite and oil theft syndicates who now manipulate and deploy some of the militias for the perpetration of diverse acts, most of which tarnish the image of the struggle.”<sup>41</sup>

As Augustine Ikelegbe argues, the “popular violence” of the 1990s that had been “deployed in the course of expressing grievances or making demands, and as a form of popular resistance [...] against exclusion or inequities” had turned into the violence of deviant insurgents and criminal gangs largely working for their own benefit. Ethnic belonging seems to be an essential part of the social movements in the Niger Delta as it establishes a common bond of allegiance that appears to predate the actual conflict and can draw on existing social structures. Even for the women’s organisations which are directed against both their exclusion from the oil economy and patriarchy, Oluwaniyi argues that they were not built up from scratch but based on pre-existing community groups that met on a regular basis.<sup>42</sup> All in all, the essays in the volume are very informative and offer some interesting insights on the formation of social and, above all, militant movements in a highly contested oil producing region. Generally, they disappoint in terms of a more general and theoretical analysis of the relationship between oil and social movements.

By contrast, in his new book on the *The Oil Curse*, the political scientist Michael J. Ross asks “how petroleum wealth shapes the development of nations”. Ross is not concerned with empirical details but offers a broad and sweeping synthesis concerning the effects of oil wealth and oil production on societies and states. Ross nuances earlier theses, formulated by himself and others, that oil wealth makes countries less democratic, impedes their economic development, and leads to civil wars arguing that the “resource curse” (Richard Auty) is essentially an oil curse that has developed only since the upheavals of the oil economy in the 1970s.<sup>43</sup> In a nutshell, his argument is that

[...] since about 1980, oil-producing countries in the developing world have become less democratic and more secretive than similar states without oil. These countries have grown more likely to suffer from violent insurgencies, and their economies have provided women with fewer jobs and less political influence [...] most have not grown as quickly as they should, given their natural resource wealth.<sup>44</sup>

41 Ibid., pp. 135, 115.

42 Ibid., p. 145.

43 Richard M. Auty: *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource Curse Thesis*, London 1993; Terry Lynn Karl: *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley 1997.

44 Michael Lewin Ross: *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*, Oxford 2013, p. 4.

According to Ross, oil wealth does not pose a problem for industrialised countries such as Canada, Norway or the United States but only for not industrialised countries that derive a large portion of their revenues from petroleum. He attributes these problems to the special qualities of petroleum revenues that, since the nationalisation processes in the 1970s, flow directly into the state budgets: their massive scale, which renders the collection of taxes unnecessary; the ease with which they can be kept secret; and their dependence on a highly volatile oil price.<sup>45</sup>

Countries with high oil revenues today are more likely to be ruled by autocrats, because in the 1980s and 1990s they were not to the same extent affected by the global wave of democratisation in the 1980s and 1990s as countries without oil: “In 1980, oil producers constituted just over 25 per cent (27 of 103) of the world’s autocracies; by 2008, they made up over 40 per cent (30 of 74).”<sup>46</sup> If taxes are low, constituting only a small percentage of government spending, because governments can rely on massive oil revenues, Ross argues, this reduces the likelihood of a democratic revolution as it allows low tax levels and taxation usually triggers demands for greater representation and participation.<sup>47</sup> In oil states a comparatively small part of the population produces the wealth of the nation; in Saudi Arabia, 1.6 per cent of the employees work in the oil industry that accounts for 90 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>48</sup> As a result, the oil industry does not necessarily boost other parts of the economy. Moreover, oil revenues can be easily kept secret so that oil states tend to have a lower degree of budget transparency. Oil revenues seem to invite corruption and are easily channelled into the military and security forces which, in turn, discourage or even suppress democratic movements. Latin America seems to be an exception to the rule but even here, according to Ross, democratic regime change was more likely in countries without oil than in those with oil.<sup>49</sup>

The above mentioned example of the exclusion of women from the oil economy in Nigeria is no exception but Ross shows that the benefits of oil-booms usually go to men so that “petroleum perpetuates patriarchy”.<sup>50</sup> Petroleum wealth supports government benefits that make life easier and encourage women to stay at home. Oil wealth also discourages the formation of women’s rights groups, Ross argues, because those groups were often – as for example in South Korea – a consequence of female integration into the workforce outside of the home and the agricultural sector. However, particularly the industries that tend to function as an entry-gate for women into the job market, such as the textile factories, are not only unnecessary in oil-rich countries; they also

45 Ibid., p. 5.

46 Ibid., p. 76.

47 Ibid., pp. 66f.

48 Ibid., p. 45.

49 Ibid., p. 85.

50 Ibid., pp. 111–144.

suffer comparative disadvantages due to the effects of the oil exports on the countries' exchange rates commonly known as the "Dutch disease".<sup>51</sup> Whereas oil wealth seems to hinder democratic and emancipatory social movements in the producing countries, Ross discerns a stimulating effect on militant groups and conflicts. According to his calculations, "since the early 1990s, oil-producing states have been about 50 per cent more likely than other countries to have civil wars".<sup>52</sup> Distinguishing governmental wars for the control of the country and separatist wars, he argues that – as in the case of Nigeria – oil is usually found only in a part of the country and, thus, forms a strong incentive for separatist wars and "greed-based rebellions".<sup>53</sup> While these conclusions are generally convincing and supported by complex statistical analyses, his argument that the economies of oil states do not perform as well as they should relies on the questionable normative assumption how an economy ought to perform given a certain set of conditions and parameters.

Together, Mitchell and Ross offer hypotheses concerning the relation of oil and social movements that challenge conventional wisdom and invite future, more historically specific research. Beyond the traditional, yet very broad energy-civilisation equation, many questions can be asked concerning the relation between certain energy regimes and the possibility of social organisation and, thus, the emergence of social movements.<sup>54</sup> First of all, in the vein of the volume edited by Obi and Rustad, there is a straight-forward need for more theoretically informed research on social movements connected to oil exploration and production in the producing countries. As, so far, much of the literature is produced by scholarly advocates of the movements, a more detached perspective would be fruitful. While these studies could greatly enlarge our knowledge on the social conditions and consequences of oil exploration in the so-called Third World, they are unlikely to modify our conception of social movements.

By contrast, the approach to the industrialised world needs to be more complex and may challenge both our understanding of the oil economy and of social movements. Despite the suggestive force of Mitchell's arguments concerning the negative effects of oil on democratic mobilisation, they only capture part of the story as they are only concerned with traditional leftist emancipatory politics. Yet, the new social movements that emerged especially in the 1970s may also have been propelled by the oil economy which, at least, shaped the forms their protests took. Even the more contemporary anti-globalisation protests rely on the same globalised structures of transport and communication as the economy which they want to overcome. Due to oil's essential

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 117; Terry Lynn Karl: *The Paradox of Plenty*, p. 5.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 154.

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 149–151.

54 See also Alfredo Agustoni/Mara Maretti: *Energy and Social Change: An Introduction*, in: *International Review of Sociology* 22:3 (2012), pp. 391–404.

place in the energy balances of industrialised countries, one might be tempted to say that, today, every social movement is connected to oil. Yet, such a claim would be as generally true as it is meaningless. Only if we succeed in better explaining the effects oil had on the aims, structures or protest forms of social movements, the connection would have explanatory value. Generally speaking, the effects of an oil economy with its potential for individual mobility on the structure and protest of social movements can be negative or positive: on one hand, sociologists argue that the suburbanisation of an automotive culture encourages individualisation and discourages the formation of social bonds. On the other hand, at least, some of the protests of the new social movements such as mass demonstrations at such remote locations as nuclear waste repositories are greatly facilitated by individual mobility. With respect to the aims, the all-pervasiveness of oil makes it easy to connect many social and especially ecological movements to oil, but oil is only rarely at the centre of their agenda. Black's attempt to reconceive the ecological movement as an anti-oil movement fails because oil is so central to the way we live that its general rejection cannot be on the agenda of any significant social movement. This would amount to a fundamental dismissal of the modern way of life. This, in turn, has consequences for our conceptions of social movements themselves: as a modern form of social organisation they criticise certain aspects of modernity and demand change in well-defined areas but, if they are meaningful, fall short of questioning the modern way of life or modernity as such.

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