CONCLUSION

Journal entry, August 3rd, 2015:

Soon we approached the Rembo (river) Bongo, the mouth of which was dominated by "paille," the leafy plants which traditionally serve as roofs for village meeting houses, known as "corps de gardes." These were to become a key focus in my ensuing studies. Before approaching the mouth of the river, Benjamin, the cantonal secretary, rose and said "2 minutes." He lifted his cap, reached over the boat, and threw sprays of water on his head. Ngoma, my boat captain, did the same, and turned to me: "This is tradition, you can write it in your notebook." Benjamin added, "This is your first pass down the river, so you have to pay respects to the ancestors." I reached over the boat and washed my hands with the saltwater. Benjamin calmly corrected me: "On your head." I patted my head with the water, and they both smiled and nodded affirmatively. If this small gesture didn't give the atmosphere a profound mystical quality, then everything else did. The river ahead was dark but comforting, like entering a tunnel of dreams if it ever existed. The ecology changed rapidly from lagoon to river, and the flora on both sides was so diverse, and the birds so plentiful, and the sounds of far-away creatures and birdsongs so effervescent that I stood up during the ride. The rainforest canopy almost converged on both sides to block most sunlight, allowing just enough in to recognize it was daytime. Fallen trees of innumerable variety intersected the river, causing Ngoma to abruptly shift direction now and then, but also providing habitats for blue, gray, and red birds of all sizes and sounds. Some would take flight as we crossed paths and hover above us for a hundred meters before taking refuge somewhere in the thickest forest I'd ever seen. Some would land in an eddy and paddle to shore, cocking their necks like chickens with each thrust. It was truly magical, and can hardly be described on paper. […][621]

Journal entry, September 5th, 2015:

So here I was in Ingoueka, the night of the 5th. Up the Rembo Bongo, that river of dreams so lost in the rainforest it's a wonder humanity existed there. Ingouéka, the most beautiful and

[621] These personal journal entries and observations were written at the time of fieldwork, and recorded on a Microsoft Word document.

well-maintained village in the Ndougou, and belonging to another canton than those more properly situated in the lagoon. Was that the reason this village was so much better maintained? I'd later asked Benjamin if perhaps it was the differences in leadership between this canton and the lagoon to which the aesthetic differences were owed. He said in vague terms it's the sons and daughters of the village in conjunction with their chiefs which gave it a more pleasant atmosphere, that the people were more invested, communally, in the preservation and upkeep of the village. I'd been told it was the Conseil Départemental which maintained the grass and vegetation (one village notable had told me that), and that one local parliamentarian was responsible for the construction of the plank houses which were both rustic and beautiful. I pressed Benjamin, the cantonal secretary who accompanied me on my visits, on whether it was the differences in leadership, the chef de canton of Ingouéka having been much more welcoming and considerate of his guests than the chef de canton of the lagoon. He didn't seem to agree, shaking his head and questioning my idea that it was a leadership issue. My idea was that since people were so reportedly dependent on chiefs for community life, a change in chieftaincy could make the difference.

I then discussed land tenure with Benjamin and Simplice, an Eaux et Forets employee and researcher who was proudly among the first teams of that ministry to be trained in surveying. Having conducted studies of the lagoon with the WWF and Blaney, a Québecoise lady who published a highly detailed and informative socioeconomic study of the region in 1999, her knowledge must have been valid. I asked whether there was private property. Quizzical looks and efforts at explanation. When you come to a village for land you have to ask the village chief, said Simplice—or any chief for that matter added Benjamin—for the right to establish a residence, and then you can work with the title holders of the property, or the people from whom you'd like to buy the property with the "titre foncier." But they were agreed that it was the state who owned the property of the village and that the villagers have the droit d'usage coutoumier, and I was left unsure as to how that related to titles and private property. That there were differences of opinion between Benjamin and Simplice on these rights was telling of a lack of knowledge of the law, which seemed to me very important. It was agreed, however, that consultation with the village chief or another chief wasn't written into the law, and that it was simply custom which obliged people to

consult with them first. Another example of a clash between tradition and modernity,[622] *and I thought to myself that that kind of ambiguity of rights couldn't be good for predictability and/or development. It might also leave things open to treachery and opportunism. This led me to ask Simplice later on in the morning of the 6th about Shell's arrival and how that transpired. Were the chief's customary duties respected? Kind of an ambiguous answer, as she mentioned one chief near Sette Cama who'd been in contact with them…*

I'd heard from Shell people later the night of the 6th that the way Shell came wasn't done properly, and I wondered what Ann, a petrophysicist, meant by that. Ann responded vaguely, but also discussed the case of Cedrick, one of their Shell colleagues who'd routinely railed against Bongo and his government in an open Shell office with plenty of witnesses. She'd recently asked Cedrick how his vacation went, and he was reportedly sad. She'd heard through the grapevine that 5 or so of his cousins who'd been demonstrating against the government were killed in their homes in the Woleu-Ntem, faces burnt. From my angle, a cause for concern. The deaths were likened to "black magic" and that was that. I asked if I'd be ok doing what I was doing, to which Ann responded, "I can't promise you anything."

These two passages, written a month apart, were taken directly from a daily journal I kept during my fieldwork in the Ndougou, which I scrupulously maintained so as to retain my impressions of an eye-opening journey. I chose to reprint them here for two reasons. Taken together, they serve an allegorical function for some of my conclusions to follow. Secondly, they serve to highlight a few key limitations of data collection—personal and environmental—in the rural agglomerations of an authoritarian African state.

Nothing that I had encountered in the Ndougou lagoon conformed to my initial expectations of an African rentier state, at least the kind referred to by authors such as John Ghazvinian, who in *Untapped* painted vivid scenes of debauchery, warlord violence, and public corruption in several oil-bearing communities.[623] The Ndougou lagoon was something much different, where there existed few signs of overt violence or contestation. It was subdued, sleepy, and beautiful. People were rarely contentious, avoided conflict whenever possible, and generally sought to please. Shell-

[622] "Modernity" was a term used by locals to denote Western norms and standards of living.
[623] John Ghazvinian, *Untapped: The Scramble For Africa's Oil*. (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

Gabon's presence was a fact of life, for better or worse, and no one appeared to question the most significant source of structural change to their lives since direct French administration. The only truly excitable issue appeared to be the decades-long *homme-faune* conflict, the mere mention of which was enough to launch farmers into tirades against the animals themselves and those bent on their protection. Other than that, the stale, heavy lagoon with all its natural beauty seemed to absorb whatever tensions may have arisen over the course of decades. My initial encounter with the Rembo Bongo and Ingouéka was therefore two-faced; I saw beauty and tranquillity, and I felt the nagging strain of a doctoral student devoid of theoretically driven facts.

The second passage reveals a process of maturation over the course of fieldwork. The dilemma I faced earlier on forced me to re-evaluate my fieldwork strategy and objectives. I began my stay in Gamba by asking relatively direct questions related to political contestation, somewhat uncareful as to line of questioning, its order, or its register. I was interested in identifying public authorities and the relations between them. Unsurprisingly, this led to plenty of dead ends. There were no explicit confrontations, no obvious power struggles, and no obvious attempts to capture oil rents. What was left unsaid did, however, form an impression as I began to take seriously the ideas of Duval, who suggested that relative silence could indicate the workings of symbolic violence. But as I was not yet ready to concede that the Ndougou had undergone the same process of stateless totalitarianism witnessed by Duval in that small Burkinabé village, I began gaining trust by visiting interviewees two or three times, scheduling a second boat tour of the lagoon and committing myself to long hours of discussion, even building friendships. I also began asking questions altogether unrelated to politics yet wholly relevant to the public sphere. I wanted to know how bonds of matrilinearity had changed and why they had changed. I wanted to know what children pursued as future goals, versus what their parents had in mind for them. I wanted to know about world views, spirits, and life in general. Essentially, and without particularly knowing it at the time, I wanted to know how patterns of interaction were changing, and whether they were caused by forces endogenous or exogenous to local systems. The shift of focus to psycho-social dimensions paid off. It eased the suspicions of many interviewees and even brought to the surface political information that I had previously sought. While I was pleased to gain knowledge on the rule of law by inquiring as to land tenure, for instance, I never expected to learn the apparent and dire fate of certain political opponents.

The shift to observing psycho-social trends was also a reaction to the difficulty of obtaining theoretically driven data. Beginning with the idea of "good governance" instead of anomie, it became readily apparent throughout fieldwork in the Ndougou that what was good and legitimate was not necessarily what the World Bank and others considered good and legitimate. There may be no rule of written law as occurs elsewhere, but there is a certain rule of interaction and a history to inform it. One is simply expected to pay respects to ancestors at the mouth of the Rembo Bongo, which does not conflict or compete with any written law or other customs. The expectation that one should always ask a chief before appropriating land, however, does. Shell-Gabon is a massive stakeholder, and represents the largest private landholder in the area, while at the same time it commits itself to written rule of law so as to avoid negative reputational costs. Conflicts like this could only be revealed through abandoning the normative project of good governance. The new psycho-social approach also held out the possibility of comparing two polities on this universal, value-free basis of societal adaptation to new shocks.

To collapse the "political" and accept the importance of informal power structures is also to invite "anomie" as a useful concept for evaluation. Working with psycho-social evidence and appropriating it so as to inform models of political change is not easy. Lines of questioning in both the Ndougou and the Western Region avoided political opinions and sought opinions on other spheres of life having no apparent link with politics. Since survey questionnaires are typically direct and rely on a consensus of definitions, such a method was impossible, especially with respect to the Ndougou. Nevertheless, the obtained psycho-social data required a framework to make sense of it, and Merton's anomic structures resonated as capable since anomic structures were theorized to arise with periods of rapid structural change. As explained in Chapter 2, the most difficult aspect of linking periods of social structural change to political structures is determining the extent to which periods of "structural change" were, in fact, due to political processes. Chapters 3, 4, 7.1, and 7.2 took on the laborious process of identifying anomic structures, while Chapters 5, 6, and 7.3 sought to attribute them to political processes whenever possible.

Though both the Ndougou lagoon and the Western Region displayed similar evidence of growing anomic structures as defined by Merton et al. (see Chapters 1 and 2), they occurred at different times and sometimes for different socio-structural reasons, manifested by different patterns of interaction (otherwise known as "interpretive models" or institutions). In neither case

were periods of structural change leading to anomie concurrent with the relative intensity of oil exploitation.

Structural changes were quite rare in the Ndougou until the advent of direct French administration. Before then, the region witnessed changes in the means, methods, and volume of commerce, but neither of these show evidence of having distorted structures at the local level. The centrifugal tendencies of the Loango kingdom only gradually gave way to the growing power of the *Fumu-si* merchant princes from the mid-18th century onwards, before fading to irrelevance with the abolition of slaving in the 19th century. The Maloango in present-day Point Noir retained cognitive importance, however, as the *Fumu-si* continued to legitimize their power by demonstrating matrilineal links to royalty and first-comers. While the growing volumes of trade disintegrated a once-thriving kingdom, it did not ostensibly subvert former structures. Slaving did, however, create an interclan class system which must have had consequences on local populations and which featured as a prelude for things to come. Not until wage labor and direct French administration is it possible to identify evidence of extensive structural change and overturned interpretive models which would lead anomie. In 1875, European concessions began operating on the Loango coast and in Sette Cama, acutely challenging the physical and cognitive integrity of houses, big men (*chefs de terre* and *chefs de famille*), and districts of clans. Passive forms of resistance such as exodus, refusals to work, attacks on the Catholic missions and sometimes violent uprisings were evident until the 1930s, when the first reports of peacefulness and "pacification" were sent to colonial governors. By then, no more reports detailing challenges to administrative chiefs by *chefs de terre* appeared. A significant structural change was complete and a new model was successfully instituted, characterized by the centralized state-company tandem.

Rather than challenged, this model was reinforced by COSREG (Shell-Gabon). All accounts throughout the 1960s indicate that locals sought, received, and appreciated work with the consortium. Expectations were raised with the material benefits that came with a large global company. Things changed, however, when in the years following Rabi-Kounga's discovery in 1989 it dawned on local individuals that lofty expectations of social and material advancement would not be met. More jobs went to foreigners, even as the lagunar population fled villages for Gamba so as to provide a better life for themselves and their children. While employment with Shell-Gabon or one of its contractors was becoming necessary to flourish, it became more and more difficult to access. Land speculation began spiked in 1997—the year the decentralization

laws were put into effect—and villagers became accusing one another of witchcraft and sorcery. Finally, the 2000s witnessed changes to cognitive models of interpretation themselves. Despair was evident among all interviewees, expectations decreased, trained *ngangas* were exceptionally rare, jealousy was rampant, and Shell-Gabon discontinued its provision of several public services without a state-sponsored alternative.

For the Western Region of Ghana, Busia provides us with a similar experience for Sekondi-Takoradi throughout the 1950s to that which took place in the Ndougou (see previous chapter). In both cases, monetization brought on by industry, foreign and domestic, led to social anomie, while political disaffection and social anomie spiked rapidly for the Ndougou after decentralization. There was little evidence to suggest that the same spike occurred in the coastal Western Region when decentralization reformed were enacted in 1988. Why the difference?

Political and social patterns of interaction were shown to be very different between the Ndougou and the Western Region. Since both are coastal regions, it is unsurprising that coastal colonization during the Atlantic trade unfolded in similar fashion. For the Ndougou, Vili/Loumbou merchants moved westwards from Kongo and Loango to occupy advantageous coastal trade routes, while the Varama descended from the north to the lagoon for similar reasons. The *fumu-si* (merchant princes) gradually replaced the political functions of hereditary chiefs linked to Loango, even as first-comer ideologies persisted. Similarly, the Ahanta descended from Mankessim and fragmented along the coast, with paramount chiefs taking stools thanks to goods acquired through trade. But unlike the Ndougou, trade volumes in slaves and other goods in the former were much larger. This is just as much a consequence of natural geography as it is a consequence of relative proximity to a large and well-endowed state such as the Asante kingdom. The volume and frequency of marketization via European trade routes in Ahantaland therefore led to a powerful class of merchant chiefs, who were able to naturalize themselves via shared analogies to the Asante stools. Though a similar process had occurred in southwest Gabon, chiefs of Ahantaland clearly had more resources at their disposal; there was much less fluidity of meaning, and therefore fewer instances of incongruity.

The British Gold Coast administration further legitimized nascent lineages by devolving considerable local powers (through the Native Ordinances) to paramount chiefs and sub-chiefs, who also acted as representatives of the District Commissioner. The Native Administrative Bill of 1898 empowered these chiefs to maintain law and order, try "customary" crimes in the Native

Courts, and even dispense with a few public services. In the Ndougou, French administrators instead fully incorporated chiefs into the administrative apparatus, which had the unintended effect of distancing lineage heads further from communal and ancestral prerogatives (and which, in turn, diminished the solidarity created by ancestral cosmologies). The Western Region, therefore, had ample time to adjust to a devolved system where native authorities operated legitimately and side-by-side with DCEs.

Third, decentralization reforms in Ghana came both earlier and were in better faith than those introduced in Gabon. Sekondi enjoyed a Town Council as early as 1904, and the evidence suggests that the coastal "creoles" and intelligentsia largely welcomed the devolution of legislative powers, as opposition to despotic chiefs was growing. Industrialization had already commenced in Sekondi-Takoradi with the harbour and railway yards built in the 1920s and later, and by the time Districts were created—itself a reform which can be associated with situational adjustments and incongruity—the negative impacts of urban-rural dualism had run their course. Busia explicitly informs that that the Sekondi-Takoradi Town Council, instituted in 1946, commanded the respect of the local population. By independence, the advance of industrial society in the Western Region was confirmed by a strong labour movement. In the Ndougou, no such movements were able to crystallize. Village and cantonal chiefs, let alone other potential community leaders, were not able to sufficiently accumulate enough capital or symbolic resources to spearhead or lend support to incipient worker mobilization. When the 1996/1997 decentralization reforms were applied, little to no pre-existing institutions of public authority capable of channeling community interests existed to interface with the newly empowered local assemblies. Early industrialization and creolization in the Western Region, on the other hand, allowed for the success of an interpretive model which would favour devolved assemblies.

These patterns of interaction all coalesced to give Sekondi-Takoradi a "head start" when the supposed resource curse was due. Paramount chiefs held mutually beneficial relationships with elected representatives, even if sometimes illicit. District Executives respected chiefs, and vice-versa. The region's popularity, combined with Ghana's favoured status among Western investors, also meant that NGO activity was expected, and a coordinated campaign of information and expectation-management took place. Chiefs, politicians, and NGO workers were all more or less cognizant of the dangers of uncontrolled expectations brought with oil wealth. In Gamba, decentralization was not truly decentralization, and merely added a new layer, or sediment, to the

local public arena. Not only that, but it was one which competed with Shell-Gabon, a losing competition which could only reduce the local assemblies' legitimacy among the public. This was to be extremely devastating to levels of disaffection, because the local assemblies were and have been hailed by their promotors as the true representatives of the local citizenry. This sentiment is not shared by the locals, however, who fear the imminent departure of Shell, the single institution of public authority which has done the most to improve the collective lot.

Oil exploitation has thus had similar effects in both spaces. Social anomie followed limited infusions of foreign currency, a phenomenon known throughout the world. But the resource curse paradigm errs in extending oil's impacts to political anomie and informalization. The starkly different political arenas, with varying degrees of institutional regularization and adjustment, yielded vastly different development outcomes. While the Ndougou suffered incongruence, the Western Region, by contrast, benefited from relative congruence. This relative congruence, though imperfect, owes its fortune to the factors explicated above.

What became clear through both single case study and comparison was that neither rentierism nor Neo-Tillyian approaches could account for anomic trends. That is to say, if political structures were responsible, they did not necessarily follow the logic of either of these frameworks. Corruption in the Ndougou did not coincide with the relative dependence of the state on Shell-Gabon. Even as the state was relieved of its taxation burden and bore little interest in the Ndougou, the *prefectoral state* remained legitimate. Rentier mentalities were aggravated but certainly based on pre-existing norms. Although the decentralized state was entirely illegitimate, its illegitimacy did not coincide with oil production. Likewise, the theoretical application of Boone's Neo-Tillyian state to the Ndougou proved to be unwieldy, as definitions of the "state" and "hierarchy" proved too cumbersome to capture the subtle and fragmented realities of the Ndougou.

Hybrid governance, rather, accurately accounted for anomic structures in the Ndougou, and it likewise accounted for very similar anomic structures in the Western Region, a non-oil-rentier state. But the hybrid governance framework remains unsatisfactory from a positivist perspective, since we do not know in what situations a non-hegemonic/norm-setting state will lead to incongruence, nor do we know when incongruence will be necessarily detrimental and anomic.

This is where a synthesis might be proffered. Though rentierism did not work at the local level, its rationale of self-interest is compelling. Many in the Ndougou are self-interested, but are circumscribed by certain realities which preclude social and economic advancement. At the state

level, therefore, rentierism still applies. In states with extraverted regimes, it is almost by definition that actors in capital cities would be non-hegemonic. There is consequently no need to incorporate populations which have no bearing on the success of elite classes. Classes are self-sustaining and oil is far away from the population. Incongruence, then, is much more likely to take place when the state has no interest or accountability link to local settings, and thus is not creating any norms. In many Western countries, the state may not be visibly present in peri-urban and rural areas, but it is indeed hegemonic. It has no serious competition as the highest public and galvanizing authority, and its efforts to rein in lawless behavior in the hinterland is widely met as legitimate.[624] This hegemony is assisted by a long history of institutionalization, war, bureaucratization, etc. Clear lines of authority are drawn such that predictability prevails.

This is decidedly not the case in post-colonial states, which are all disadvantaged and conflicted in this manner. In a relatively short span of time, African states have had to negotiate the introduction of colonial agents, native authorities, new socio-economic classes, NGOs, decentralized assemblies, etc. It is not surprising at first that African states should be so disadvantaged. But what accounts for the differences between post-colonial African states themselves is precisely the lack of competing authorities, as well as the incentive by states to create some form of hegemony which allows congruence and limits sedimentation in local public arenas. Ghana in the 1950s and 1980s (when one can observe anomic structures in Takoradi) was a much more different place than it is today. While in the 1950s Ghana remained under the British Crown, it became extraverted by an IMF austerity plan and reliant on foreign resources; the state felt less accountability to its people.

State-level events in Ghana by the 1990s, however, conspired to allow for more congruence. Democratic transfers of power took place and citizens became proud of their proven "democratic consolidation." There was a relatively hegemonic discourse of transparency and good governance, while a higher density of people in the Western Region also facilitated the state's access to rural and peri-urban spaces. In Gabon, however, no such serious attempts have been made. Rentierism is quite right to state that rentier states tend to lack public vertical and horizontal accountability. Indeed, they are aggravating factors in what many post-colonial states have faced.

[624] As just one example, one can refer to the many successful attempts by United States federal law enforcement agencies to disband opposing extra-judicial frameworks in rural areas, such as in Waco, Texas (1993), the "Manson Family" (1969), the Ku Klux Klan, Rajneeshpuram (1985), etc.

But since rentierism has not and cannot be proven as an unassailable determiner of surprisingly common social and political ailments, its status as an aggravating factor appears confirmed. Rentierism is therefore much better represented by the catchall term "extraversion," and extraversion should be considered as a factor of state hegemony in the hybridity framework. This construct satisfies the theoretical drawbacks of both approaches to the politics-anomie link.

In extraverted or rentier states, institutional incongruence is not only the result of an indifferent or uninterested state, but incongruence is also noxious to livelihoods, leading to social and political anomie. It should not be forgotten that incongruence does not necessarily lead to these pathologies. Incongruence merely means ineffectualness, the failure of institutions of public authority to complement each other's efforts. Those efforts may be deemed objectively immoral or incompetent, leaving citizens and subjects better off than had incongruence not taken place. But in rentier states a rentier mentality can and does indeed permeate all levels of society, and is concordant with older interpretive models in places such as the Ndougou. Though rentier behaviour was found to be only modestly related to oil production in the Ndougou, it cannot be easily refuted that self-interested politicians understand the benefits of political promotions. Energies are therefore more likely turned towards self-aggrandizement and recognition than towards collective projects. This reflects many hybridists' assertions that uncertainty and a lack of accountability will leave local public arenas dependent on the chance philanthropy or good will of local leaders where no structural incentives are in place. Rentier opportunism tends to pit local institutions of public authority against one another, as was seen between Shell-Gabon and the local assemblies. Thus, there is no incentive for the state in Libreville to positively carry out policy detrimental to and exploitative of local populations, as the power of the rentier class does not depend on these populations.

This thesis demonstrates that local politics are likely to become detrimental to livelihoods in African peri-urban/rural spaces when structural changes take place under a context of both extraverted state elites and local institutional proliferation. If institutional proliferation is absent in rentier states, as it was in the Ndougou before the 1996/1997 decentralization laws, the state will not seek to incorporate the local public arena. As was demonstrated in Chapter 5, the local assemblies were the fruit of the Paris Accords, where Libreville's rentier class raised no serious objections to the creation of local assemblies. This is because there was nothing to lose; it was a case of relative non-incorporation. Once the local assemblies were exercising new powers, 7 years

after Rabi-Kounga began production, there was little norm-setting by the elites in Libreville. Senator Fouity is a case in point, but also the Secretaries-General of the City Hall and the Departmental Council who appear powerless to rein in informalization of the local public sphere. The prefect as well appears unconcerned. Inversely, if institutional proliferation coincides with a relatively non-extraverted "Neo-Tillyian" state which wields local government strategies so as to maintain itself, objectively good congruence is more likely. The efforts by authorities in the Western Region to control rising expectation linked to the recent oil discoveries was possible due to a pre-existing and popular discourse of transparency and a central state keen to satisfy the populace. In this framework, it should be noted that oil extraction weighs in at the state level, perverting any attempts at state hegemony. In other words, it does affect local politics, but the lines of causation follow a hybrid logic. In turn, hybridity now has a basis for linking state hegemony and norm-setting to relative incongruence and congruence at the local level.

This thesis has hoped to contribute to a program of de-relativizing hybrid governance approaches, to shift them from ontological stasis to explanatory tools of positive evaluation of local political performance. The ontology of resource realism is demonstrably justified when and where units of analysis are state elites operating key ministries, alongside rentier mentality—easily conflatable with past rent-seeking—which makes its way to even the most remote locations. But only relativism and a relaxation of key concepts can reveal a story with internal logic and validity, such as that which unfolded in the Ndougou. Only by spanning ontological planes, or by making use of informed constructs such as hybridity which allow for flexibility in data collection and contextualization, can our understandings of local (and perhaps regional) political change be improved. There is, of course, a danger of *non sequitur* in assuming hybridity was the cause of social and political pathologies in both spaces, but the concluding hybridity was not just arrived at by process of eliminating competing theories. It was arrived at based on a preponderance of evidence, and after identifying the approach as a compelling one grounded in sound sociological conceptualizations.

The Ndougou Department and the Western Region were chosen as case studies due to their experience with oil production, which was for a long time cast in mainstream and academic literature as the paragon catalyst of all forms of anomie. Unfortunately, the premature movement to form a structural understanding of social and political pathologies resulted in shifting academic focus from communities and people to culture-centric abstractions: conflict, greed, corruption,

autocracy, etc. In addition to a lack of consensus as to their precise definitions, they were concepts borne of state-level behaviors (ignoring for the moment what exactly constitutes the "state."). These approaches indeed had their value in supplying researchers with objectively structural antecedents, but the studies of the interactions of people and groups of people were prematurely aborted. The proverbial horse trailed the cart.

The most important lesson is that oil merely represents quick, easy, and substantial cash flows. It is almost always centrally managed from above, and often easily disrupted from below. This is the chief reason for why analysts paint damning forecasts of state corruption and corporal violence. But what we rarely acknowledge is that topical oil studies are also *de-historicizing*. Other, equally impactful narratives are overshadowed by the dominant discourse of oil as cause and effect, e.g. the existence of overtly peaceful extractive zones and the supposed banality of everyday experience in these localities. These are often overlooked not only because of attention-grabbing media images of gas flaring, bunkering, or profligate ruling families, but also because it is assumed that—absent oil's visibly negative effects—oil can only be a boon to local and national economies. Unfortunately, such oversimplification and either/or fallacies have helped obscure other forms of violence and anomie which often arise when heavy industry transforms once-agrarian dynamics. Unless history and institutions are taken into account, theorizing the politics of African polities is a perilous venture. Communities behave in a variety of ways and are influenced by a number of factors, even when billions of dollars are at stake.