

Petroleum development and environmental conflict in Aotearoa New Zealand: Texas of the South Pacific, by Terrence Loomis, London, Lexington Books, 2017, xvi + 257 pp., index, £60.00 (hardback), £60.00 (ebook), ISBN 978-1-4985-3757-5 and 978-1-4985-3758-2

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Pages 1-2 | Published online: 25 Jun 2017

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The drive to identify and exploit sources of oil and gas internationally has continued apace, despite growing evidence of the associated environmental costs. Technological developments and industry consolidation have pushed exploration into new geographical regions and unconventional sources. This book joins a number of recent publications examining the ways in which natural resource exploitation interacts with and shapes governance at the national level. Terrence Loomis makes the case that 'New Zealand's configuration of institutional relations regarding natural resource development is beginning to show some of the characteristics of the resource curse' (p. 230). Moving the focus beyond the relatively weak systems of governance in developing states and the post-Soviet region, the book opens up underlying processes, including ways in which relatively advanced political systems are also vulnerable to the resource curse. Through a detailed examination of the actors and opponents in the field of oil and gas development in New Zealand, Loomis demonstrates the nature of the threat posed by perceived resource abundance, employing a regulation theory approach to map these threats through consideration of the interrelationship between oil companies and politicians at the expense of public participation.

In Chapters One and Two, Loomis examines the political economy of oil and gas before considering how the boom in unconventional sources has shaped its recent development. These chapters provide a clear sense of how the industry is structured

and outline the range of strategies adopted in advancing its interests. Globalization has greatly increased the influence of Big Oil upon national governments. Concentration of negotiating power puts states at a disadvantage when seeking to manage access, with Loomis arguing that this can lead to 'frontier' countries becoming dominated by the extractive industry. With conventional resources depleting, the push has been to exploit more unconventional resources, at higher risk and potential damage.

In New Zealand, a government eager to develop oil and gas resources for economic purposes increasingly collaborates with industry to achieve this goal. Through a detailed analysis of key developments in policy reform under the National government, Loomis demonstrates the steps taken to smooth the path for development. At the same time, the industry has adopted a number of approaches to promoting and defending exploration by attempting to influence public opinion and policymakers. The core of these efforts involves attempts to disguise or downplay the potential harms in a situation where 'the fossil fuel sector is increasingly viewed as a sunset industry' (p. 117). Appeals are made to 'middle New Zealand' as distinct from trouble-making opponents. Attempts to develop exploration on the economically marginal East Coast illustrate how local and central state actors have supported (or been pressured to support) these developments. In excavating the strategies and relationships between state and industry actors in such detail, Loomis is able to chart the ways ideas are packaged and managed by those involved, in particular the 'Petroleum Industry Promotion Network'. The effects of the network on the attitudes in 'middle New Zealand' could have been developed further to determine the degree of success.

Opposition to the oil and gas development agenda has emerged at multiple levels, from community groups through to established non-governmental organisations. Outlining the actions taken by such groups, Loomis notes that 'before protest and civil disobedience erupts there is typically a gradual build-up of information gathering, meetings and public education, counter-propaganda campaigns, lobbying, organizing, and alliance building' (p. 213). In dealing with this opposition, the state has attempted to further its 'middle New Zealand' approach, working with moderate groups while dismissing 'extremist environmental groups and anti-oil protestors' (p. 228). Focusing at the community level enables Loomis to consider the ways local communities, environmental groups and indigenous people interact in this setting.

Loomis presents a detailed and compelling argument regarding the way pressures to expand natural resource development can distort political, economic and social processes. By focusing on a developed, democratic state, Loomis moves the debate beyond a tale of exploitation of institutionally weak states. In view of the National government's desire to 'catch up' with Australia by emulating their resource extraction practices, greater attention to the latter's experience could have identified possible future trajectories in the New Zealand case. This book will be of interest to academic and general readers in New Zealand and more broadly, given the global character of the issues examined. The identification of the tactics used by state and industry actors to limit and counter opposition provides a useful framework for examination of other countries.