
Patrick Bond, *Looting Africa: The Economics of Exploitation*, Pietermaritzburg. London, Zed Books, 2006. 172pp.

This new book is well worth reading. It starts off by questioning who was behind the looting in Hurricane Katrina-ravaged New Orleans. Bond writes that two similar photographs elicit two different reactions by the media. Both captions describe photos of New Orleans residents wading through chest-deep flood waters. But one caption says the couple are wading through the water after “finding bread and soda from a local grocery store” and the other caption says the man was in the water “after looting a grocery store.” Needless to say, the “finding” couple was white, and the “looting” man was black.

This description nicely sets the stage for a very interesting and lively book about race, privilege, imperialism and the systematic looting of Africa by “capitalist institutions in Washington and London...” assisted by “junior partners across the Third World ... especially Pretoria.” (p.xiii) Bond makes his case strongly and convincingly.

The request to review the book could not have come at a better time. I had just received an email from the Canadian wing of the Make Poverty History campaign urging me to send a “huge thank you” to the politicians who approved Canada’s Better Aid Bill – C 293 in the House of Commons. This new bill addresses how to spend Canadian foreign aid dollars, and calls for more ‘accountability.’ But the bill in no way addresses the fact that

Canada is still not even halfway to spending the 0.7 percent of its Gross National Product (GNP is the total national income) it has pledged. But no matter, Make Poverty History wants us to thank our politicians anyway.

According to Patrick Bond in *Looting Africa*, this whole campaign is at odds with what is really needed for Africa. In a chili-hot but well-researched book, Bond agrees with critics of the Make Poverty History campaign who insist that the campaign is too reliant on “lobbying, celebrities and the media” rather than justice and empowerment (137). The book argues that the campaign was doomed from the start because it took the issue out of the hands of the grassroots movements of the south, and dropped poverty and ‘development’ back into the hands of the G8, the WTO, and those with corporate and financial power (136).

It is not just the one campaign which Bond critiques. He looks at the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), Live 8 and others as well. In his view, traditional non-governmental organizations have done little to stop the looting of Africa. Though world attention about Africa peaked in the summer of 2005, by the autumn, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had been adopted by the UN. Among other things, these goals include reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half, and implementing national strategies for sustainable development. They also include the privatization of services such as water and electricity. Bond points out that the MDG strategies in reality do “more harm than good” (138).

The key to answering what strategies can benefit Africa lie in the first two pages of the book. Bond takes a paragraph from the report *Our Common Future*, Tony Blair’s Commission for Africa (2005) and re-writes the paragraph to accurately portray the problem (p.1-2).

Bond goes on to describe four serious problems that beset most “underdeveloped” countries, and also the continent of Africa. First, the economy is not allowed to focus on generating growth and raising production for its own people; this is the problem of crops being grown for export at very low commodity prices rather than crops for citizens’ use. Second, there are few connections between sectors such as agriculture and industry. Third, money is sent abroad by a ruling elite whose income is based on “financial-parasitical accumulation.” This creates conditions for capital flight. And finally, the little income that stays in

<i>Commission for Africa report</i>	<i>Patrick Bond's version</i>
<i>"Africa is poor, ultimately, because its economy has not grown. The public and private sectors need to work together to create a climate which unleashes the entrepreneurship of the peoples of Africa...."</i>	<i>"Africa is poor, ultimately, because its economy and society have been ravaged by international capital as well as by local elites who are often propped up by foreign powers. The public and private sectors have worked together to drain the continent of resources..."</i>

the country goes to the rich (p.6-7).

From there, the book looks at each aspect of what he calls "looting" in depth. There are a number of useful charts, including one that ties poverty to free trade and another that looks at commodity price decline over the last twenty years. And, to my delight, Bond uses quotations from critics of capitalism as disparate as Karl Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Frantz Fanon, and Walter Rodney to bolster his arguments.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is the section on the campaign for reparations from South Africa's bankers and financiers. For example, critics claim that Barclays and Citibank must be called to account and apologize for having loaned billions of dollars to the apartheid government – which it spent on its military (144). Bond points out that these struggles are highly political and that now even President Thabo Mbeki no longer supports reparations; this despite the fact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report called for reparations from businesses that benefited from apartheid. How much more difficult is this struggle for justice from the general acceptance of litigation against Swiss and German banks and companies which stole money and property from Jews during World War II?

This book is a must read for anyone interested in the real story of who is looting Africa.

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