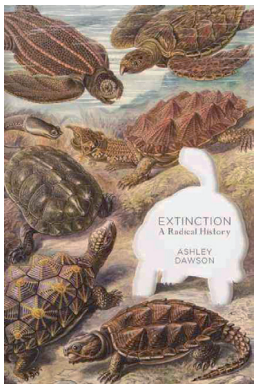
BOOK REVIEWS

BOOKS ON LANDED RESOURCES IN AFRICA

EXTINCTION: A RADICAL HISTORY, by Ashley Dawson, New York: O/R Books, 2016, ISBN: 978-1-68219-040-1 (pbk), 128 pp.



The debate about the role of property in environmental problems is long-standing, but unsettled. Those writers who trace environmental problems to common property also trenchantly defend private property as a solution. Prototypical books in this genre include *Environmental Markets: A Property Rights Approach* (2014) by Terry Anderson and Gary Libecap. Such lines of analyses do not go without question, though. Distinguished among such critics are R.T. Ely's successor as editor of *Land Economics,* Daniel Bromley, whose ground-breaking work, *Environment and Economy* (1991) offers a radical alternative to the mainstream.

Extinction is written in the latter genre, but quite distinct from Bromley's because of its more strongly historical bent. *Extinction* offers a compelling account of the rapid depletion of biodiversity and the mass slaughter of various species of animals, how this mass massacre has occurred, and why. Dawson, the book's distinguished author, acknowledges that others have attempted to unwind and re-write the precipitous fall of nature into a bottomless pit, but he offers a biting critique of such effort to overcome extinction, while positing radical new measures beyond current Trojan Horse Gift of bio capitalism and ecological modernisation.

Dawson gives his readers a frightening – but accurate – picture of what he means by extinction: Since 2011, 70,000 African elephants have been slaughtered by poachers (p.7). Since 2002, the number of the forest elephants, one of two precious and rare species in Africa has declined by 60 per cent and is expected to reduce to zero in 10 years' time at the current rate of extinction (p. 8); and, since 1500, the earth has lost 322 species of land-based vertebrates, constituting a 25 per cent reduction in the total global population of such animals (p. 9). In only a period of three months, more than 9000 animals were slaughtered in the Colosseum in Rome under the watch of Emperor Titus who devoted the Colosseum to games between humans and animals, and games between animals (p.35). Bisons, the staple of the Native Americans, began being slaughtered enmasse in the 1830s during which

time 2 million were killed per year. By 1891, there were less than 1000 bisons on the whole of the continent (p. 59). The poorest regions, including Africa, especially West Africa, are the areas with the growing enclosures of the commons which serves as the habitat for 44 per cent of the world's plant species and more than one third of its species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians (p.90). On the basis of these trends, 50 per cent of current animal and plant species are likely to be lost. This 'tidal wave of extinction' (p.9) is particularly prevalent in the tropics which leading biologists such as E.O. Wilson regard as the world's 'abattoir of extinction' (p. 10).

Why this extinction is an urgent matter for our attention may seem obvious, but the book shows that not all existing reasons should be accepted. Empty mainstream chorus of climate change is not Dawson's answer. Neither is his answer something about the need to avoid the callousness of the human race. It is not even because this mass slaughter also undermines our own existence. All these reasons are important, of course, but Dawson offers a much deeper answer: justice! For Dawson, there can be no talk of environmental justice without social justice. *Extinction,* then, is another story of social justice viewed through environmental lenses. This social science position has important implications for the mass killing.

For Dawson, this mass killing is 'the product of a global attack on the commons' (p.12), 'the baleful legacy of this feckless appropriation and dissipation of the global environmental commons' (p. 41). He continues, '[t]he destruction of global biodiversity needs to be framed, in other words, as a great, and perhaps ultimate attack on the planet's common wealth.' (p.13). This Dawson further links to the emergence of private property and its associated tools of recording and communication: 'As the idea of private property emerged and human society became organized around control over the surplus, writing also became a tool to record the resulting social conflicts' (p. 27). Dawson's investigation into the origins of this destruction, however, leads him to consider the notion of the Anthropocene coined by the atmospheric chemist, P.J. Crutzen in the year 2000, to refer to a definitive destructive impact of human activities since the industrial revolution on the environment that has blurred the boundaries between human society and nature. However, archaeological analysis takes him further back – even beyond the longer period that some biologists of 'defaunation in the anthropocene' linage (who go beyond the industrial revolution starting point) - to 60,000 years ago when the language was developed by humans enabling them of 'conscious intentionality' (p. 21). That is, the ability to will particular changes on nature. The perfection of the art of killing by humans, trade, and travel aided this mass genocide.

Dawson, then, does not locate the destruction of nature in capitalism. Rather, he highlights the idea of private property as coterminous with empire and imperialism and links this empire building to the destruction of nature. He offers the Sumerian (pp. 28-29) and the Roman (pp.32-38) empires building activities, including gladiatal killing games in the Colosseum in Roman Empire as examples. His contention is that the idea of private property begets excessive accumulation impulse and an

epic life of leisure of the elite classes (e.g., eating exotic food – including flamingo - obtained from afar and eating more and more sometime until they vomit only to commence eating again, see pp. 35-36). In turn, this disease of affluence begets a compulsive disorder to appropriate more private property which is satisfied through additional imperialism marked, among others, by huge and growing military expenses (pp. 37-38). The idea of crises of one form or another – economic, social, and ecological – acts as the lubricant for expansionism. So, Roman Empire had to colonise Egypt, indeed North Africa, in order to 'expand their way out of ecological crisis' (p. 33) – although that meant the destruction of sustainable ways of life in pre-colonial Egypt (pp.31-32). In this sense, Dawson is prepared to accept that other economic systems have contributed to this ecocide but capitalism – and with it, imperialism - is particularly distinctive in taking its idea of private property to destructive limits as it seeks perpetual expansion and a life of leisure for the capitalists (p. 42). So, while whales (see pp.53-56), for example, had always been hunted by Indigenous peoples living on the coast, doing so was done sustainably. It is only under capitalism that whales face extinction.

Addressing this problem is not easy. According to the book under review, capitalists see the ominous future of the system and have taken steps which Dawson analyses carefully. These steps use the capitalist process of market expansion and prices to attempt to solve the problems. Such posited solutions include rewilding (re-introduction of species being lost into the ecosystem). Rewilding 'entails the restoration of huge tracts of wilderness through the creation of large-linked core protected areas and the reintroduction of keystone species into such new wilderness' (p. 67). This ecological replacement strategy seeks to restore lost ecological time, space, and species through technological methods (pp. 70-71). Others such as ecological substitution methods seek to provide alternatives to lost species. Some of these are major scientific achievements, including bringing back to life extinct animals (see pp. 76-77). These approaches are limited, Dawson argues, because of three reasons. First, they do not go far enough (they focus, for example, on the prized animals and plants; not on others). Second, analytically they offer technological fixes to what is a socio-economic problem and their scale is Europe when the problem is global. Third, they can and often do create more problems (e.g., evictions of Indigenous peoples to make way for rewilding and ecological substitution and creating ever large markets for new scientific and technological tools). Capitalist de-extinction or bio capitalism is, therefore, no solution.

The preferred solution of *Extinction* is 'radical conservation'. This approach rejects 'capitalist biopiracy and imperialist enclosure of the global commons, particularly when they cloak themselves in arguments about preserving biodiversity' (p. 86). This vision seeks to transcend capitalism itself by drawing on multiple strategies such as universal guaranteed income for those peoples who have suffered climate crisis due to capitalist extractivism, for example (p. 90-91). This alternative can, in fact, embrace aspects of the capitalist credo of de-extinction 'but only if they are framed

in terms of the history of ecocide' and hence their scale expanded (p. 92). They also include 'de-growth' and the emphasis on fossil by the rich (p. 93). As transnational corporations such as oil companies are likely to oppose these measures, *Extinction* recommends: 'We should not expect to negotiate with such destructive entities. Their assets should be seized. Most of these assets, in the form of fossil fuel reserves, cannot be used anyway if we are to avert environmental catastrophe' (p. 95). 'What remains', the book under review argues, 'should be used to fund a rapid, managed reduction in carbon emissions and a transition to renewable energy generation' (p. 95).

Extinction has its own failings. Its insufficient attention to African scholarship on protests is particularly problematic. As Africa begins the story of extinction and is laced through the book, it is surprising that the work of Africanists such as Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly's *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change* (2015) is not acknowledged at all. Failing to do so, *Extinction* takes the overzealous stance of advocating renewables without reflecting on the present tensions and contradictions of doing so in Africa (as this special issue of the journal shows). Analytically too, it is unsatisfactory that *Extinction* pays no attention to Garrett Hardin's (1968) 'tragedy of the commons' because it has inspired such a wide body of scholarship but even more importantly because such an engagement would have helped the book to demonstrate concretely that there are major, fundamental rifts in Hardin's so-called 'mutual (market) coercion' supposedly agreed to by all. Besides, although the problem, according to the book under review, is said to be the commons under attack, the solution is not sufficiently engaging of research on the commons (see, for example, pp. 95-96). The book's emphasis on de-growth for example, is useful, of course, but so is an emphasis on *patterns* of growth and the implications for green jobs in Africa.

None of these issues detracts from the book's central thesis – that private property is at the roots of both historical and the current extinctions crippling the world in which we live – which is ably, persuasively, and passionately made in such a way that its call – the need for a new world now - must be taken seriously.

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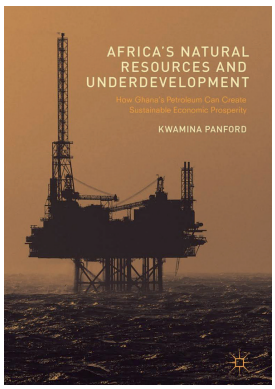
AFRICA'S NATURAL RESOURCES AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT: HOW GHANA'S PETROLEUM CAN CREATE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY, By Kwamina Panford. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.



In spite of the abundance and diversity of natural resources in Africa, the continent remains the least developed in the world. The abundance of natural resources including oil and gas has had a rather negative development outcome for several African countries, a phenomenon often referred to as the 'resource curse'. In *Africa's Natural Resources and Underdevelopment: How Ghana's Petroleum Can Create Sustainable Economic Prosperity* Kwamina Panford examines the ways by which Ghana can minimize the associated negative ramifications of oil and gas extraction. The book draws on extensive empirical data from Ghana's oil and gas industry and the cases of other African countries to provide a nuanced description of the development outcome of oil and gas in Africa. The book deals with whether and the conditions under which the 'resource curse' and other related adverse social and economic outcomes can emerge in Ghana's nascent oil and gas industry and proposes various approaches that can be deployed to mitigate against such threats. The central argument espoused by Panford, the book's distinguished author, is that the 'resource curse' or 'resource mismanagement' is not automatic or inevitable and so also is the positive or desirable development outcomes of oil and other natural resource extraction. This is a fact well documented in the literature on Africa's extractive sector (Obeng-Odoom, 2014). The effective and efficient exploitation, management and utilization of natural resources are essential for the promotion of broad based social and economic transformation of countries. Panford also illustrates creatively the different roles and impacts of neoliberal reforms and Cold War in accentuating the resource curse in Africa. While the former is a thoroughly discussed issue in political economy discourses, the latter is seldom discussed. Additionally, Panford provides a rich historical discussion of gold mining in Ghana and how lessons learnt can shape the management of the oil and gas. The book also highlights various ways by which internal and external linkages can be fostered particularly through local content. Suggestions of ways by which oil and gas extraction can be