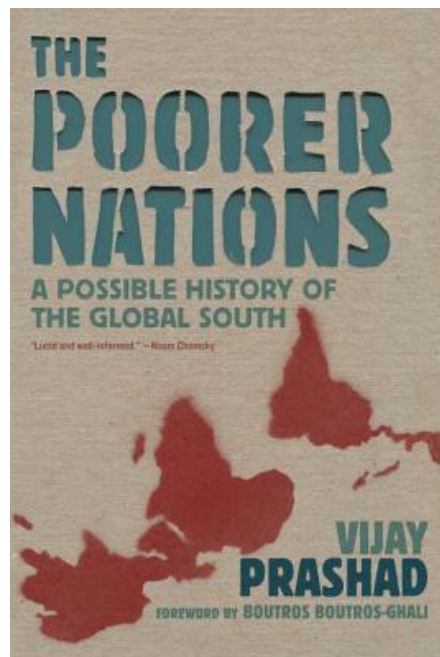




The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South

Vijay Prashad

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In *The Darker Nations*, Vijay Prashad provided an intellectual history of the Third World and traced the rise and fall of the Non-Aligned Movement. With *The Poorer Nations*, Prashad takes up the story where he left off.

Since the '70s, the countries of the Global South have struggled to build political movements. Prashad analyzes the failures of neoliberalism, as well as the rise of the BRICS countries, the World Social Forum, issuebased movements like Via Campesina, the Latin American revolutionary revival—in short, efforts to create alternatives to the neoliberal project advanced militarily by the US and its allies and economically by the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, and other instruments of the powerful. Just as *The Darker Nations* asserted that the Third World was a project, not a place, *The Poorer Nations* sees the Global South as a term that properly refers not to geographical space but to a concatenation of protests against neoliberalism.

In his foreword to the book, former Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali writes that Prashad “has helped open the vista on complex events that preceded today’s global situation and standoff.” *The Poorer Nations* looks to the future while revising our sense of the past.

The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South Details

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Jon Morgan says

I was really excited for this after really enjoying Prashad's The Darker Nations last year. Compared to that, this book is much narrower in scope, focusing largely on the global South's attempts to assert itself since the 1980s in international, multilateral, and regional fora. This can get fairly dry at times - for instance, the second chapter's rehashing of policy making in UN member agencies. That said, Prashad has a lively style, and his writing is always focused on the larger question of how the global South can tackle unipolarity (or pending multi polarity, if the fabled American decline is really in the offing).

Ali Faqihi says

“con su fe veterana
el sur también existe.”

This I think is Prashad's best book (hard choice), this book covers the period of rise and fall of global south from the point of view of global south. The kind of history that is absent in the western narratives of the world political/economic history.

The book covers everything from the movements and proposals by the global south (such as New International Economic Order) that was fiercely resisted by the G7 countries, to the disintegration of North Atlantic liberalism (such as the limitations and failure of Brandt commission), which eventually paved the way for Reagan and Thatcher to set out the neoliberal agenda at Cancun, the agenda that found its way to the south that has fallen weak in the midst of the debt crisis of 1980's.

The book tells the story of the global south's asymmetrical fight for a more just international economic system (which is made by and for the global north rich countries), a lost fight as of yet, against the ideology of neoliberalism which soon happens to become the ideology of the elites in the global south (neoliberalism with southern characteristics). Besides the great history, Prashad offers astute political analysis on the grass roots movements of global south, I particularly learned a lot from his analysis and reflections in the last chapter “A Dream History of Global South”. The book ends with a call for a new 21st century south commission or movement, and provides great framework for an alternative that should be taken seriously by anyone interested in ideas of development and social justice in the global south.

Overall this is a seminal work, the amount of details and research in this book is just mind-blowing. Must read for anyone interested in political economic history of global south/details about the south commission/development in the south. Having read this and his previous book -the Darker nations,I have to say that in my opinion Prashad is arguably one of the best historians of global south today.

Carlos Martinez says

In terms of how much I learned and how thought-provoking I found it, this book gets five stars. The overarching analysis brings the score down a bit, because I feel Vijay falls into the trap of calling everything

he's not too keen on 'neoliberalism'. China's development model (being the most important example) is heavily regulated, planned, and is dominated by state-owned enterprises; it doesn't conform to any sensible definition of 'neoliberalism' that I've come across. A couple of other little quibbles here and there, but honestly it's a very interesting book, well worth reading.

Eric Botorff says

Definitely recommend reading Prashad's **The Darker Nations** before reading this. It works on its own, for sure, but they're best read as two volumes of a possible or people's history of the global south.

Scott Neigh says

Reviewed here.

Nicolien says

"Gerald Ford opened the conversation at Rambouillet with a plea that the main thrust had to be for the leaders "to ensure that the current world economic situation is not seen as a crisis in the democratic or capitalist system." The G7 had to prevent the capitalist crisis from becoming a political one; it had to be handled as a technical economic problem."

(p. 4)

"Disparity and deprivation do not sit well with the commonplace ideas of fairness and justice. The powerful know this. The way they divide the national budgets of their countries demonstrates their values. More goes to the military, police, and prisons than to schools, to the *Mukhabarat* than to the ministry of health, to guns than to bread. Given the social consequences of neoliberalism, it is far more effective and logical for the 1 percent to build a security apparatus, to cage people into devastated cities or to hold them in congested high-security prisons. There is nothing irrational about the prison-industrial complex; from a neoliberal perspective, it is perfectly reasonable."

(p. 8)

"One of the most notable features of this era is that, despite its demographic majority, the states of the Third World Project *petitioned* the global bodies, whereas the North simply *acted*. There is no better illustration of the uneven geometry of imperialism than the mood of international deliberations. The North's wishes are multiplied, the South's pleas are sometimes added, mainly subtracted."

(p. 26)

"In London, in 1975, at a meeting on development, Nyerere thundered: 'I am saying it is not right that the vast majority of the world's population should be forced into the position of beggars, without dignity. In one world, as in one state, when I am rich because you are poor, and I am poor because you are rich, the transfer of wealth from rich to poor is a matter of right; it is an appropriate matter for charity. The objective must be the eradication of poverty, and the establishment of a minimum standard of living for all people. This involves its converse - a ceiling on wealth for individuals and nations, as well as deliberate action to transfer resources from the rich to the poor within and across national boundaries.'"

(p. 91)

"In a handwritten addition to his prepared remarks, Nyerere pointed out, "We do not seek unity as an instrument of domination over others. We seek unity as an instrument of liberating ourselves, and resisting those who dominate us. Comrade Chairman, the Non-Aligned Movement cannot afford to forget that imperialism is not dead.""

(p. 92)

"But what Castro disparaged was the idea that the market was a natural, and not a social, institution. Cuba had fewer resources, so it would be dependent on the outside world for investment; but it could not afford to allow allocation decisions to be left to the "market," which, in the absence of statutory authority, would mean the whims of plutocrats and financiers. The "market" did not make decisions; powerful institutions, hiding behind the anonymity of the "market," made the choices."

(p. 140)

"The force of transnational capital acts in a similar way against states - in each case, it adopts a neoliberal attitude, pushing for minimum state regulation of capital and its business enterprises, and uncomfortable with demand management (stimulus spending, for instance) unless it directly benefits capital itself. States around the world, whether in the advanced industrial zone or not, are forced - on pain of expulsion from the "international community"- to act on behalf of capital and against the interests of the vast masses of the people."

(p. 251)

"It is because cultural change from below is so slow-moving that there is a temptation towards impatience; many might want to be critical of the modesty of the demands by this or that emergent voice. But change does not happen by being right all the time; it comes from the creation of a new set of voices who are able to tackle social brutality and to articulate a path out of it."

(p. 265)

"There are elements in these movements that make a fetish of the *local*, which has a tendency to produce parochialism. Trade across regions, even in foodstuffs, is essential for our cultural diversity and the enrichment of our diets. What is central here is not the local as such, but the capacity of people to control their environment and not be subordinated by the immense power of transnational firms over the production and distribution of food."

(p. 268)

"Kalpana Sharma puts the case from Mumbai's millions: 'They will tell you that they are secure in their neighborhood because everyone knows everyone else, no outsider can enter without someone noticing the person, and at times of need people come out to help. Gadgets like CCTV cameras cannot enhance their sense of security. What they want is "secure" housing, a place where they do not need to worry about the municipality's demolition squads, or the design of a builder wanting to redevelop the land on which they have lived for decades. No one speaks of that kind of "security." They want security from the people who set fire to a slum. That is also terror of a kind. People lose their lifetime of belongings. A builder steps in to redevelop the land. And those who lived there peaceably for generations are told they have to prove their "eligibility" by producing the very documents that have been destroyed. Can there be anything more terrifying than finding yourself homeless and document-less in a city like Mumbai? Everyday life is terrifying for the majority in the city. It is a terror to which you get inured; you do not even think of it as terror.'"

(p. 276)

"To be tolerated is not a sufficient political condition. As Mike Davis puts it, "the future of human solidarity depends upon the militant refusal of the urban poor to accept their terminal marginality within global capitalism.'"

(p. 277)

"One of Marx's great prophecies was that the remarkable advance in technology would not necessarily benefit humanity, particularly if it was controlled by those of property, who would use science and machines to protect their gains rather than for the social advancement of all of humanity. That has been the case, machines having been used to displace people into desperation rather than liberate them from work - and intellectual property rights protecting wealth rather than advancing scientific solutions to social and natural problems. Banks deployed their accumulated capital to perform financial wizardry. Mathematics is the lead science, not chemistry, physics or biology. It is no longer necessary to make things in order for profits to be harnessed; it is enough to manipulate numbers. Finance makes its own maps; money takes wide detours around the human imagination. Disposable people are needed to sign the forms for attractively packaged credit that they cannot properly afford; and then they are needed to take the blame for the system's torments. Their hopes and dreams, their visions and needs, are not at the center of things."
(p. 279)

Arthur Vincie says

A fantastic look at the recent history of the conflict between the Global South and Global North, from the point of view of the South. Ends with an inspiring look at the resistance movements to Northern hegemony.

Philip Mckenzie says

This was a great read and essential if one wants to understand and appreciate how the Global North and Western countries have influenced and shaped the development of the Global South. It illuminates connections between soft and hard power and brings to light important policy decisions over the last 40-50 years that are relevant to understanding the current global power structure. It's a great resource and highly recommend it.

Benjamin J. says

I read this book at the start of a three month journey through South Asia. It is engaging and easy to read.

If I were to describe the concepts of the book to a fifth grader:

Many of the world's rich people build really expensive equipment to sell to poor countries, who go to loan sharks/banks to afford it. Sometimes the poor countries can't pay their debts after all the usurious hidden terms in the deal rise to the surface, they are then forced to default on debt or to sell off their state-owned assets to rich foreign investors who partner with greedy people from the poor countries who channel the proceeds from the investments into themselves instead of the poor country's people. Meanwhile, the global loan sharks put enormous pressure on poor countries to export resources to come up with cash as quickly as possible to pay back their loans, of which the principal is spent on equipment that the poor countries could be developing themselves were it not for all their cash being "appropriated" for loan repayments and the unfair intellectual property laws created by some of the world's rich. On top of it, an unjust portion of the aid money that is sent by foreign taxpayers ends up going into the pockets of the planet's rich.

And in the background of all this looms the threat of terrible violent reprisals for getting too far out of line.

This is only what I saw the mechanism of neo-liberalism to be from the author's work. The author also accurately portrays the actual affects of neo-liberalism: slums, hunger, inequality, violence - as this is what I was seeing in my 3 month trip to South Asia.

Anyone taking a heady trip through the developing world should take this with them; it will correctly tint the view of the Taj Mahal sunset ;-)

Peter says

Somehow along the way, I became a diplomatic historian, or anyway passed a comps field in US diplomatic history and have spent a lot of time with the kind of sources diplomatic history uses. There are some real triumphs of diplomatic history out there -- Alfred McCoy, Arno Mayer, etc. -- but diplo can also be some of the most perversely boring historical writing you can find. A LOT of "this dude sent this memo and then that dude sent THAT memo." The old-time "great men" historians could at least jazz things up with completely arbitrary commentary and moralizing- our contemporary historians can't or won't.

Radical diplomatic history is its own thing and comparatively rare, and Marxist historian Vijay Prashad has two books of it charting the Non Aligned Movement, the second of which is "The Poorer Nations." Prashad's diplomatic histories are written in a much more loose sort of way than most, and the subject matter is at least relatively novel- the efforts by the Third World (the leaders of which used to bear the term proudly) to create a power base for themselves in the midst of the Cold War and even perhaps a new basis for international diplomacy. Prashad does his best to make it interesting, but especially as the revolutionary fervor burns down some after the seventies, the point when "The Poorer Nations" begins, it has some unavoidable drag- this conference and then that conference and this paper and that debt negotiation, etc.

The point is reasonably important though also a bit predictable if you're used to this genre of left writing. We go through all the attempts of developing world leadership to forge an independent path, for their countries and the developing world at large. Very smart, ambitious people with serious plans, like Julius Nyerere and Manmohan Singh, appear. Models like Japan's state-assisted development and Venezuela's exploitation of oil combined with bolivarian populism crop up. Numerous international organizations are started to go to bat for the developing world. And they all collapse. The US and its cronies are too strong, and, Prashad argues, real solidarity is impossible because the ruling classes in the developing world don't believe in it. Ultimately, those classes want to advance -- want money, lifestyles, and respect on the world stage -- more than they want their countries to do well or for the international order to change. And so it's the usual lesson- class society will dicker everything up and any force that wants radical change needs to do several impossible-seeming things simultaneously. True enough, probably. ****

<https://toomuchberard.wordpress.com/2...>

Holly Cruise says

I struggled with this book. The idea behind it and the story it was telling were good, and some of the individual details were really interesting. As a polemic and as a spotlight on a situation that needs to be better known in the West, it was covering important ground.

But I didn't get on with the prose. Each chapter was dense with information - too dense much of the time. The flood of events, quotes, and personalities meant it was easy to lose track of what was going on (and I have managed to keep track of some very difficult books in the past). The problem was that a lack of obvious narrative in each chapter meant it was hard to know what was the main point and what was digression.

The best bits stood out and were memorable. The latter half was better than the first half, and the bit about the Zapatistas as an example of the rise of indigenous groups was great, more focused and more readable rather than being an impressive but unengaging collection of notes about everything.

It's worth a look if you want to know something about the global south and its political battles, and don't mind wading through words to get there. I'm glad I got through it, but it was hard work.

Jeff says

I really wanted to like this book, because I'm looking for a good history of global south resistance movements, but I feel like it got a bit too bogged down in details (for my tastes, at least) and lacked much of an overall or within-chapter narrative. Basically, it contains a ton of research and interesting quotes from world leaders at various meetings (lots of Kissinger, the Brandt Commission, the formation of OPEC, etc.) but I had a hard time keeping track of why these quotes were important, in the sense of like "what ideology/movement does this person represent?" or "what country/group of countries is this person referring to with this decontextualized statement?" So yeah, it'd probably be good for someone who already has a good grasp on what all the different Non-Aligned Movement countries were and their coalitions, but without that background I found my eyes glazing over the quotes :(

ka?yap says

In his earlier book "the darker nations", Vijay Prashad traced the story of the third world from its birth in the anti-colonial movements, the formation of NAM to the debt crisis when the resistance to the multinational corporations faded and the third world project died. In this book he continues the story which begins in the 1970's with what the demise of what he calls the Atlantic liberalism and the birth of neoliberalism and traces it to the 21st century where new forms of resistance and possible alternatives to neoliberalism have emerged.

In the first chapter, Prashad analyses the death of Atlantic liberalism and the subversion of the institutional efforts of the third world to promote a new international economic order (NIEO), through coordinated and organised offensive by the G7 powers led by USA. This offensive led towards a neoliberal restructuring of the world economic order.

The second chapter provides a detailed analysis of the work of south commission under the leadership of the Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere. The outcome of the commission's report was the rise of southern neoliberalism with a focus on "growth" taking the centre stage.

The third chapter deals with the notion of the emergence of the notion of the larger nations of the south with high "growth" as the "locomotives of the south" that will lead the smaller nations of the south. The formation of G15, IBSA leading to BRICS takes the centre stage. While the emergence of BRICS that want to play a larger role in the global economy gives new voice to the south, it is however limited by the fact that it has no ideological alternative to neoliberalism and is in fact committed to Southern neoliberalism.

This leads to the fourth part where he shifts from the institutional focus to that of the grassroots anti – globalisation struggles in Latin America. He focuses on the struggles of Women, indigenous people and the slum dwellers. One of the central questions in this section is that of internationalism. While not dismissing the importance of internationalism in the struggle against neoliberalism, he offers a critic of World Social Forum (WSF). My one criticism here is that the author speaks nothing about the discontent and the grassroots struggles in India and China.

I'm also not sure about the author's conclusion here. Does he look at BRICS as a part of a collective transnational programme of the south? Does he think the BRICS will lead to a new economic order for the world? Or does he think of the Bolivarian model as providing a possible alternative to neoliberalism?

This is a very important book that offers a critique of neoliberalism from the perspective of the south and is a must a read for anyone. His focus here once again is mainly on the institutions and the nations of the south but he does provide some view on the people's struggles towards the end.

Malcolm says

The terms we use to describe what we used to call the Third World, or the Empire, or Less Developed Countries, or Developing Countries – that part of the world made up of the majority of the people who have ever lived on this small ball in the galaxy – seem to be endless and never varying ... and when 'The Global South' came along it just seemed too perplexing; much of it was not 'South', but it was disempowered, deprived, made to pay the costs of global capitalism. As the Brandt Commission reported in 1980, to call the majority world the South is to be clear about global relations of power.

This outstanding book traces the emergence of the Global South from the crumbling of the Third World Project, through the struggles over neo-liberal hegemony and dominance and the emergence of new sites and forms of resistance in the slums, among indigenous peoples and those lead by women. Prasad's grasp of the institutions and personalities is excellent while his understanding of the complex politics of regional, multilateral and shifting bi-polar world power means that this institutional focus is tempered by a clear and lucid exploration of political and ideological context and practice.

We could read this as a sequel to *The Darker Nations*, his 2007 history of the Third World project, but there is no need to have read that book to get this one. In this case, rather than the earlier focus on a decolonising opposition to the bi-polar politics of the Cold War as seen in the Non-Aligned Movement, the argument turns around three key strands. In the first, we have the collapse of Northern social-democratic liberalism as seen in the struggles in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s over the push for a New International Economic Order and the multi-lateral politics of structured development we saw in the work of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); these struggles resulted in the defeat of multi-lateralism and the anti-colonial/imperial NIEO in favour of the dominance of the increasingly neo-liberal Washington Consensus in the IMF and World Bank. The final fling of this Northern social-democratic liberalism came in the form of the (former social-democrat FDR Chancellor Willy) Brandt Commission's 1980 report *North-South: A Programme for Survival* that laid out a vision that was largely swept away during the 1981 International Meeting for Cooperation and Development that saw a global policy victory driven by increasingly powerful neo-liberal order fronted by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, but driven by a rich global network (as Philip Mirowski shows).

The second strand of the argument centres on emerging Southern neo-liberalism through struggles within the states and international organisations of the South: the Non-Aligned Movement, UNCTAD and the like.

Despite his great respect for some of the South's elder statesmen, such as Julius Nyerere, Prashad is also clear that the desire for consensus and to hold together the institutions and voice of the South was in effect a victory for a neo-liberal South. The analysis here turns on the South Commission during the 1980s, headed up by Nyerere but drawing in a range of technocrats, politicians and Southern political heavyweights.

Throughout this shift to more powerful Southern neo-liberalism the notion of the locomotives of the South as part of a collective Southern development programme, Prashad's third strand, fades; it is replaced by a focus on these Southern power houses summed up in the acronyms BRICS and IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) not as part of a collectivist South but as states whose goal is to force their way into the neo-liberal order of the G7/G8/G20. This new emerging global order of an expanded neo-liberal grouping and the enforcement of global rules that serve their interests, and not those of the South or its people, he argues, resulted in global resistance during the 1990s resulting from (1) enforced austerity (via, for instance, 'Structural Adjustment Programmes'), (2) growing unemployment as both industry and to a lesser but significant extent agriculture mechanised/technologized, (3) a neo-liberal growth strategy based in the interests of finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) and public sector privatisation leading to asset stripping and a focus on short term gains, (4) growing global hunger as a result of the growth of agribusiness and the displacement of family farmers, and (5) the rapid growth of very high rates of global inequality between and more especially within states.

The significance of this global resistance was that it was grounded in civil society and popular movements, in contrast to the 1950s and 1960s struggles based in state building and national liberation. These new movements are fluid, but centred on three principle sectors – women, indigenous peoples and slum dwellers; that is, they are based in the excluded within the states in the South. This new form of Southern power, Prashad argues, is building strength through emerging institutional forms (such as the World Social Forum, and increasingly regional and international networks based in and across these and other sectors). It is always risky to prognosticate on these kinds of struggle as they are underway, but Prashad's argument that we are seeing power struggles based in neo-regionalism and multi-polarity that are undermining (it is far too early to say destroying) US hegemony 21st century is a powerful one for an analysis **at this stage**. (Crucially, Prashad argues that China's economic power and global dominance is, **at this stage**, overstated.)

The case is both rich and dense, with a close focus on the global and regional multi-state and corporate institutions of both states and social forces – so we, as readers, need to keep on top of these groups. The institutional focus is brought to life by his detailed grasp of the personalities involved, personalities who often shift between groups and roles, as well as a regular reminder of who these characters are and where we last met them.

This is a major contribution to our understanding of global struggles for justice, and is essential reading for new internationalists.

Ervin says

This book is an excellent summary of the struggles of the South to become self-sufficient in a world dominated by the North. It's a call for a new world order. It's a necessary read for everyone who lives in this planet, who want explanations of that immense difference between the rich countries and the poor ones.

It is written with passion. One feels the author ranting, but always providing primary sources to back up his frustration. However, one cannot say the author is biased. He points out the disingenuous, conditional help provided by the world super powers to developing countries. He expands his narrative to also show the lack of coordination of the South, their biggest flaws in organization.

I enjoyed reading it. One of my complaints, however, is the numerous use of acronyms for the myriad of organizations. At points all of them become confusing and the author helps this by not constantly explaining what they mean.
