

Myles A Wickstead  
*Aid and Development: a Brief Introduction*  
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*Aid and Development* deals with the following questions: how did the idea of development, and the role of aid in supporting it, evolve historically? And how was this evolution shaped by the economic and political environment?

As the institutions of international development reflect those ideas, the story of this institutionality is told over 7 chapters that compose the first part of the book, going from the Marshall Plan to the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), and then from the G8 to the G20. The narrative is marked by catalytic events, each one triggering fundamental changes on how development was conceived and practiced, such as the end of the Second World War, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 2008 global crisis. The second part works as an in-depth glossary for key terms.

Wickstead argues that within the Cold War logic, aid was a vital tool to recruit allies. The support that began targeting European countries was progressively extended to overseas programs. But because of the political framework, support also reached poor countries dominated by corrupted elites.

But the end of the Cold War made room for a more 'humanized' aid policy, where inveterate aid as a bargaining chip for political support was replaced by conditionalities to economic reforms and social inclusion. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) for example, prescribed for peripheral countries after the oil crisis in exchange for IMF's support, are portrayed as having a rescuer spirit, which deep down intended to 'stimulate growth and protect poor people' (p. 24) from corrupt local elites. The humanization process then is enshrined in the International Development Targets and the MDGs, which also include environmental issues in the agenda.

The author then goes on to argue that in our modern world aid played a diminished role, as the line that divides 'developed' from 'developing' countries gets blurred. This, according to him, became even more evident after the 2008 Crisis. His main policy prescription is that we should all get together in order to deal with mutual interests.

We propose an alternative narrative, which significantly differs from Wickstead's. Our version is based on the idea that the use of aid as an instrument to consolidate hegemonic power did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall. It continues until today, although in a much less obvious way.

To start with, the US was not a distant observer who saw corrupted elites wasting precious resources, but whose hands were tied by the commu-

nist threat. The American support for military coups in Latin America is a good example of that. Those elites opened up the region to a model of modernization linked to foreign capital leadership, which paved the way to a form of domination based on technological and financial dependence (Martins,2004). Whilst this model still had capacity 'to develop underdevelopment', the end of the Cold War and the neoliberal revolution give way to a more hostile domination, which started to be implemented through the SAPs.

Once the losers of the system multiplied, the World Bank and the IMF started to acknowledge that developing countries needed at least a basic form of social security (Chang, 2004) to give legitimacy to a system where inequalities are radicalized. Here lies the genesis of the humanization process addressed by the book. Although very much desirable, it ended up taking away the focus on the engines of development — change in the productive structure — vital for any real intention of catching up (Chang, 2013).

Lastly, the notion that the North-South divide does not exist anymore is very misleading. Although a semi-periphery has emerged (Arrighi, 1997) most semi-peripheral countries will never be promoted to the core. They exist because they play an economic role — they occupy a certain position in the global production chains — and a political role — their existence feeds the dream that one day everybody can get there. Therefore, the idea that these countries are equal enough to 'join the fight' is nothing more than a façade designed to exempt the core from the responsibility of addressing global issues mainly caused by them.

Wickstead's book deconstructs a common sense that instantly associates aid to trucks loaded with food in sub-Saharan Africa. The complexity of the subject is deployed in an accessible language. In my view though, it lacks a critical exposure of the ideologies that shaped aid policies throughout history.

#### References

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