

THE GEOGRAPHY OF AID

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FOREWORD

The role of imperialism, as discussed in the previous paper, in determining contemporary patterns of development and underdevelopment, cannot be overemphasised. The primary motivation was economic, as industrialising Europe needed, firstly, supplies of raw materials, and secondly, markets for its products. Raw materials were exploited in the colonies, processed in Europe, and often returned to the colonies as finished products at a profit. Strategic reasons, religious fervour, idealism, and racism were all secondary considerations but the primary aim and ultimate consequence was the creation of integrated world economy, dominated and controlled by the European nation states. Since the Second World War former colonies have progressively gained political independence, however tenuous, and the blatant domination of the colonial era has been replaced by more subtle but no less effective form of dependency.

The rhetoric which surrounds the transfer of resources from rich to poor countries as sentiments of brotherhood and altruistic love depicts our age as the noblest in all of human history. The reality however, is far from the rhetoric. With few exceptions, the transfer of resources commonly known as economic aid is not undertaken in an altruistic manner but rather to further the commercial and political purposes of the donor country. The stated aim of aid-giving is to reduce global wealth disparities and yet most experts consider that international inequalities have increased in the last few decades. Hensman states that 'the present policy of aid-giving accelerates the process of development and makes the problem of world poverty more difficult than ever before' (Hensman 1971). Hensman is only one of an increasing number of academics who question the effectiveness and the motivations behind aid giving.

Aid has been an integral part of the dependency structure. Since W.W. Rostow provided an economic rationale for aid-giving and made revolution against foreign domination economically irrational, aid has been an accepted facet of foreign policy among former colonial powers (Rostow 1968). It forms part of an intricate web of international economic relations which institutionalise underdevelopment and perpetuate the domination of the poorer world regions by the richer nations. The implicit rationale for aid-giving is the maintenance of an unquitting economic world system and this exceeds any purported moral compulsion to do so.

The policy of aid giving has had as its explicit goal the inducement of economic development in the recipient nations. Prevailing views on modernisation and development in the industrialised nations are ethnocentric ones, and assume that the underdeveloped

countries will emulate closely the structures, institutions and values of the 'Model' country. Development has been seen to be synonymous with the diffusion of the political and socio-economic systems prevailing in the industrialised world, capitalist and communist alike. The diffusionist view suggests global convergence yet Goulding considers that:

"Temperate zone countries will form a belt of increasing homogeneity and affluence, all really much alike in spite of diverse political philosophies, whereas the tropical belt seems likely to collapse into famine, internal war and massive disorganization" (Goulding 1967)

It is only in recent years that Western social scientists have come to realise that the imposition of incongruous modern structures on so-called 'traditional' cultures leads only to alienation, disillusionment and ultimately the rejection of the intrusive ideology.

A further concept underpinning most aid programmes is that of technological determinism. In the West according to philosopher Jaques Ellul (1965) the technological means chosen to achieve ends formulated in the past have been elevated to such a position that the original aims have been forgotten. This process can be seen clearly in the ideology of economic growth, which is pursued for its own sake, without consideration of the wider purposes it is meant to serve. A similar process has occurred in the communist nations. Marx's 'forces of production' have been redefined in a strictly technical sense, purged of their human content. The vision of the future proffered by the industrialised world is a sterile, technocratic one which increasingly alienates third world academics and leaders.

The existence of an integrated contemporary world economy has only in the last decade gained recognition in the social sciences. It is a view that questions the autonomy of the sovereign state, in a world whose economic activities are dominated by a relatively small number of powerful multinational conglomerates. Immanuel Wallerstein is a leading exponent of this view and he proposes a simplified but effective typology of core, periphery and semi-periphery nations (Wallerstein 1974). The core nations are the most wealthy and powerful usually the centres of multinational capital i.e. Western Europe and the United States. The periphery comprises the economically and politically weakest nations, former colonies which are systematically exploited and undermined. Global economic institutions such as the IMF, the General agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the World Bank are structured to the advantage of the core states and their capitalist interests. Underdeveloped nations are forbidden to erect tariff barriers which could protect fledgling industries, they are forced to subsidise multinational companies who often exploit their labour and resources. Loans which are offered are contingent upon the increased export of primary products at prices set by multinational oligopolies and should borrowers default they are threatened by IMF intervention. The world economy therefore operates as a single unit, transcending

international boundaries and as such contain an inbuilt tendency to create areas of relative development and underdevelopment. Underdeveloped nations are trapped into a cycle of economic dependancy, which is perpetuated by the present expenditure which serves the interests of the donor. Hensman (1971) estimated that ninety two percent of American aid is spent in ways which benefit U.S. business and industry. The notion that the rich countries 'give' anything to the poor is a spurious one.

The theoretical framework of the discussion on developmental strategies has been dictated by academics in the industrialised nations, both communist and capitalist. Their diverse conclusions generally have a common ethnocentric bias and a vague Darwinian influence is discernable in the prevailing idea that presently underdeveloped nations must evolve to the higher levels of societal organization of the industrialised world. The implicit assumption is one of the superiority of industrial civilisation over any other social form. While the vastly superior levels of material well-being in the industrialised world cannot be denied, the question whether development can be measured in terms of material affluence alone remains. Increasingly, third world intellectuals view environmental and moral degradation and increasing cultural uniformity as the price of development in the traditional sense. They ask if industrialisation, the nuclear family, a mass consumer orientated culture and uniform value system are desirable or yet even practical goals for these nations. Yet these are aspects of the modernisation process, harbingers of development as defined by Western intellectuals. Political scientist Myron Weiner contends that today modernisation is another word for economic growth or a more palatable synonym for a still more elusive concept, Westernisation? The development strategies formulated by Western academics propose little more than cultural imperialism as a precursor to an even more effective economic imperialism (Weiner, 1973).

It is not inevitable that underdeveloped nations should undergo the traumatic social changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution in nineteenth century Europe in order to secure their material advancement. It is not necessary that they emulate the industrialised nations and in so doing become subservient to them. Instead of the use of intermediate technologies, those suited to their particular level of advancement, would relieve the toil of the agrarian population and increase productivity without displacing labour. The process of industrialisation should not necessarily entail the adoption of the most modern and efficient machinery, imported at high cost, nor does it imply urbanisation. Trade between underdeveloped nations which is at present quite negligible, in world terms, could be greatly expanded, with selective specialisation in various countries. The communal nature of many third world societies could be encouraged rather than suppressed and this would be a step in the creation of co-operative agricultural and industrial enterprises. Many third world leaders have called for solidarity and mutual support, but the blatant interference with and exploitation of various regions within the third world, for geopolitical purposes have made this difficult and it is clear that the Superpowers will continue this exploitation as long as the third world is maintained divided and weak.

This paper argues that the aid policies of the rich nations are self-serving and in no way concerned with any real prospect of advancement for the poorer nations. It is also obvious that the present divergence in economic development has its roots in the imperial exploitation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and that this still occurs albeit in a different form. Aid has been a part of the structure which has replaced direct control of underdeveloped nations by their former colonisers, it helps to maintain the global economic status quo. Prevailing views in the West regarding development are both ethnocentric and technologically deterministic, completely ignoring indigenous socio-cultural conditions. All nation states are to some extent part of an integrated world economy, which allows for the systematic exploitation of underdeveloped nations by multinational conglomerates. Indeed all global economic institutions are constructed in such a way as to benefit the richer industrial nations. The poorer nations are therefore caught in a cycle of dependency which is exacerbated by present aid policies. Due to the fact that development theories are ethnocentric they assure societal evolution in the pattern of European industrialisation. This attitude increasingly alienates Third World intellectuals who reject the imposition of western cultural standards on the traditional cultures of their nations. Development must not be seen to be synonymous with industrialisation and it is only by increasing regional interdependence and third world solidarity that the underdeveloped nations can resist the self-serving exploitation of foreign powers, and ensure that development serves the needs of their people and not a largely foreign elite.

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